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The Philosophy of *Wuwei* in Self-Cultivation

淺探無為的修養工夫

A dissertation submitted to the University of Wales Trinity Saint David

In fulfilment of the requirements for BA (Hons) in Sinology Degree

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Abstract

The *Daodejing* is regarded as an ancient classic in the world's cultural masterpieces. The philosophical thoughts embedded have withstood for thousands of years and are still present in modern life. By observing the context of *Wuwei* in *Daodejing* and the results of previous studies, the concept of *Wuwei* is often involved and applied in the fields of politics and management. However, the origin and meaning of *Wuwei* are derived from the practice of self-cultivation. Hence, this paper aims to explore the philosophy of *Wuwei* in the practice of self-cultivation through related explanations and will analyse the ways to achieve the state of *Wuwei*, giving a practical meaning to today's spiritual guidance.

Key Words: *Daodejing*, *Wuwei*, nature, self-cultivation

摘要

《道德經》為世界文化名著中，譯本流傳甚廣、普及於世的古本經典。其中的哲學思想，歷經數千年的考驗，在現代生活中依然處處可見。觀察《道德經》的「無為」語境與前人研究的成果，常涉及並應用於政治和管理領域。然而，若追尋「無為」的本源與意涵，仍不離開心性的修養。因此，本文旨在探尋「無為」的修養工夫，並透過道家相關解說，分析如何達到「無為」的境地，賦予當今心靈引導的現實意義。

關鍵詞：道德經,無為,自然,修養工夫

Table of Contents

Abstract	1
摘要.....	2
1. Introduction.....	4
2. The Difference Between Youwei and Wuwei.....	4
2.1. The Meaning of <i>Youwei</i>	5
2.2. The Definition of <i>Wuwei</i>	7
3. The Characteristics of <i>Wuwei</i>.....	9
3.1. Decreasement and Contentment.....	10
3.2. Humility and Obliviousness	12
4. The Causality of <i>Wuwei</i>	16
4.1. The Wisdom Behind <i>Wuwei</i>	16
4.2. The Outcomes of <i>Wuwei</i>	18
5. Conclusion	21
Bibliography.....	23

The Philosophy of *Wuwei* in Self-Cultivation

1. Introduction

Daodejing is a world's cultural masterpiece that is widely known and has been researched and reinterpreted from many perspectives. Although it is considered as Chinese philosophy, however, it also acts as a source of inspiration and guidance among governors, managers, architects, gardeners, carpenters, painters, etc, and the wisdom within it, transcending time and space, is still profoundly applicable.

This paper focuses on Wangbi's edition of *Daodejing* and uses Heshang Gong's edition as an auxiliary. The annotations used in addition to the two mentioned, are mainly based on Hanshan Deqing, Zhu Qianzhi, and Chen Guying, while the translations are derived from Lin Yutang and Roger T. Ames. In the context of *Daodejing*, there are some terms and topics that are widely discussed, such as *dao* 道, *de* 德, quietude, *qi* 氣, *tian* 天, nature, water, *Youwei* 有為 and *Wuwei* 無為. Among these, the term *Wuwei* is in contrast with *Youwei*, and the concept of *Wuwei* also exists in other Daoist texts such as *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子. *Wuwei* is commonly used in relation to leadership and shows an ideal form of government, including the conduct of the emperor.

According to ancient Chinese philosophy, self-cultivation is the fundamental basis of all things. In the fifty-fourth chapter of the *Daodejing*, it is said: 'Cultivate it in your person, and the character you develop will be genuine. Following this, only can our family, village, state, and the world be all-pervading.'¹ Evidently, self-cultivation is vital among all, and it can be contended that within it, only may the concept of *Wuwei* be established. Although this statement and the terminology 'self-cultivation' are not widely used in the discussion and in related theories of *Wuwei* in modern society, there are a few articles such as *Congshijianxing fansi Laozi Wuwei sixiangdeyiyi* 從實踐性反思《老子》「無為」思想的意義, translated as 'the reflections on the significance of *Wuwei* from the perspective of practice', written by Chen Xiumei, and books about effortless action by Edward Slingerland who stressed the conceptual metaphor about *Wuwei*.

However, what exactly is *Wuwei*? If *Wuwei* can be used in governing and related to the conduct of the emperor, how can we use it to manage our surroundings and implement the state of *Wuwei* to ourselves in daily life? Are there any ways or steps to reaching the stage of *Wuwei*? Such questions lead to the focus of this paper.

2. The Difference Between *Youwei* and *Wuwei*

The term *Wuwei* appeared in *Daodejing* in a total of nine chapters and repeated eleven times. *Wuwei* consists of two Chinese characters: *Wu* 無 and *Wei* 為. There are many interpretations on *Wuwei*, and it is translated into different phrases such as non-action, effortless action, inaction, non-doing, and noncoercive action which

¹ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 212.

are in accordance with the *de* 德 of things. To know more about *Wuwei*, the opposite expression, *Youwei*, should also be clarified.

2.1. The Meaning of *Youwei*

In the second chapter of *Daodejing*, it is said that as soon as everyone knows that the beautiful is beautiful, there is already ugliness. There are some examples such as the able and ineptness, determinacy (*you* 有) and indeterminacy (*wu* 無), high and low, long and short, refined notes and raw sounds which shows contrast and thus there will be a name given to each of these oppositions. In these oppositions and names, its purpose and intention will follow, which is *Youwei*, as chapter one stated: ‘The *dao* that can be told of is not the absolute *dao*; the names that can be given are not absolute names.’² It is because that names can be of false reputation, and many things arise within them, while faults follow, and leads to reoccurring problems. The thirty-eight chapter of *Daodejing* shows the different stages between *Wuwei* and *Youwei*:

It is because the most excellent (*de* 德) do not strive to excel (*de* 德)

That they are of the highest efficacy (*de* 德)

And it is because the least excellent do not leave off striving to excel

That they have no efficacy.

Persons of the highest efficacy neither do things coercively

Nor would they have any motivation for doing so.

Persons who are humane (*ren* 仁) do things coercively

And yet are not motivated in doing so.

Persons who are righteous (*yi* 義) do things coercively

And indeed do have a motive for doing so.

Persons who are exemplars of ritual propriety (*li* 禮) do things coercively

And when there is no response,

They will roll up their sleeves and threaten you.

Thus, only we have lost sight of *dao* 道 is there excellence,

Only when we have lost sight of excellence is there humanness,

Only when we have lost sight of humanness is there righteousness,

And only when we have lost sight of righteousness is there ritual propriety.³

² Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Lao-tse* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.45.

³ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 173-176.

It is seen from the above mentioned, that there is an order within these virtues. In the highest efficacy, it includes humaneness, righteousness, and ritual propriety, but never acts with an ulterior motive. The stage behind it is about being humane, which acts but has no motive, and contains the other virtues except the highest efficacy. Following it is righteousness, which acts and has an ulterior motive, and within it, the qualities of the highest efficacy and humaneness are lost, but still consist of ritual propriety. However, when it comes to those who are exemplars of ritual propriety, if no one pays them any heed, they roll up their sleeves and force it on others. When ritual propriety itself is focused and valued but has lost its essence, which are the former qualities stated before it, ⁴then it will cause chaos and even decay.

From this perspective, in Daoism, morality which is pre-planned is seen as a kind of hypocrisy, as one who has true morality will not use power and influence to control and force others. By enforcing others, it will cause pressure and at the same time, it also shows the thinning out of loyalty and honesty and thus is also the beginning of trouble. Behaviours gradually slide down from natural and unconscious spiritual inspiration to becoming self-conscious and acting rationally. The finer these codes of conduct are, the more it shows the decline of morality, as when one acts, especially with an ulterior motive, fame will follow. If people do things coercively and use their power to force others, being blinded with fame and fortune, it will only diminish and destroy the possibilities of many affairs, which is inhumane.

If we see the bad effects of *Youwei* from a governing perspective, a government that is mainly concerned with fulfilling its own desires will ignore its administrative duties and focus on the accumulation of wealth and power. When indulging in corruption and luxury, the people will suffer from starvation and poverty, and the government will reveal its weapons, ⁵which will not bring any peacefulness and happiness to the country, but instead lead to tyranny or war. The seventy-fifth chapter in *Daodejing* stated: 'The people's hunger is because those above are eating too much in taxes. ⁶Therefore the unruliness of hungry people is due to the interference of those above.' ⁷All these results are because of unlimited greed and discontentment, which requires endless effort to pursue desires and ends up as a vicious cycle.

It is also easy for people to become contentious when compared or opposed to those of superior character, and will have the intention to steal or become thieves when rare objects or property is prized, besides becoming disgruntled or having their minds disturbed when seeing the things they desire. ⁸ It is because that

⁴ Dao 道, de, 德, ren 仁, yi 義, li 禮.

⁵ Hans-Georg Moeller, translated by Liu Zengguang 劉增光, *The Philosophy of the Daodejing* (Beijing: Beijnglianhechunbangongsi, 2018), p. 123-124.

⁶ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 263.

⁷ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.884-885.

⁸ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 93.

promoting, prizing, and showing is *Youwei*, which is to do things with effort, intention, and inference, and within it includes the pursuit of fame, wealth, and desires. Just like what *Zhuangzi* mentioned, ‘People lose their character through the desire for fame, and knowledge leads to contention. People crush each other in the struggle of fame, while knowledge is used as an instrument for scheming and contention.’⁹ The more people do things in a coercive and cumbersome manner, the spontaneous sense of morality will become hollower and thinner.

2.2. The Definition of *Wuwei*

There are many arguments about the definition of *Wuwei*. In the book *Effortless Action* written by Edward Slingerland, he proposed the statement of *Wuwei* as a paradox and starts from conceptualizing the state of the Self. It is because that he thinks that the metaphor of *Wuwei* is strongly tied up with a metaphoric conception of the self and agency, which can help in defining its patterns of thought. However, if things were done effortlessly, it refers figuratively to a state which is after a certain extent and has no progress in putting effort to learn to do something. The activity is running but without force, such as dancing or riding a bicycle, also known as the ‘flow’.

Slingerland used some concepts, such as families to classify some terms, especially from Daoist classics, to represent the subject that surrenders dominance and physical momentum to the ‘self’. The ‘Following’ Family and the ‘At Ease’ Family were used to conceptualize the lack of endeavor stated in the first stage of *Wuwei*. The ‘Following’ Family includes terms like *cong* 從 (to follow), *yin* 因 (adapting to), *yi* 依 (leaning by) and *shun* 順 (flowing along with), while the ‘At Ease Family’ has phrases like *an* 安 (at ease), *shu* 舒 (relaxed), *xian* 閒 (relaxed), *jing* 靜 (still), *xi* 息, *xiu* 休, *she* 舍 (rest), *xiaoyao* 逍遙, *panghuang* 彷徨 and *you* 遊 (wandering). Moreover, the second metaphor about *Wuwei* refers to an unselfconsciousness, which, according to Slingerland, categorized it as a ‘Forgetting’ Family. This encompasses *wang* 忘 (forgetting), *shi* 失, *yi* 遺, *sang* 喪 (losing), *buzhi* 不知 (not knowing) and *le* 樂 (joy, or other overwhelming feelings).¹⁰

Hanshan Deqing pointed out in his annotation of *Daodejing* about the relationship between *dao*, *de*, the nameless, and *Wuwei*. He said, ‘*dao* is the body (*ti* 體) while *de* 德 is its function (*yong* 用), and *dao* honours the nameless, while *de* values *Wuwei*.’¹¹ As *dao* is the origin and the body of everything which is also known as oneness in the thirty-ninth chapter of *Daodejing*, all things are rooted by

⁹ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.90-91.

¹⁰ Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei As Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 27-33.

¹¹ Original text: *Daowei ti erdewei yong. Gudao zun wuming, dezong wuwei. 道為體而德為用。故道尊無名，德重無為。*

Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozidaodejing Hanshanjie Zhuangzineipian Hanshanzhu* 老子道德經憨山解·莊子內篇憨山註 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubangongsi, 2015), p. 97-98.

dao. In Chinese Natural Cosmology, oneness can be referred to as the concept of non-dualistic nature (*yiduobufenguan* 一多不分觀), which is stated by Tang Junyi and Roger T. Ames ¹²and shows undifferentiated absolute and infinite potential. Being the basis and underlying essence of everything, *dao* gives rise to the continuity of things, and with an existing cognition, it contains the opposites of each other. Although *dao* provokes difference, interdependence follows between the contrary of two concepts, thus it is the cause of plurality and inclusiveness, which produces the manifold of everything. ¹³Therefore, the sages who attained *Wuwei* are in the harmonization of object and ego and recognizes all as one entity. They are like nature who nourishes all beings without intention and do not think of themselves as virtuous, not to mention the intention of putting effort or to claim anything in return. The sages understand the effect within *Youwei*, so they use the *dao* of *Wuwei* to manage affairs, which can be roughly translated as to manage affairs effortlessly (*Wuwei*) and naturally.

Wuwei is not indifference, passivity, laziness, or complete inactivity, but is conduct without imposing or coercing. ¹⁴It lets everything be at ease and never interrupts their activities. Those who practice *Wuwei* are aware of the natural tendencies of *dao*. Besides, by knowing the ways of nature and the truth that *dao* is everywhere, they let it work through life. Just like one sleeps when tired and eats when hungry, this cycle works automatically and has a natural start and end. Or else, there could be something wrong. It is the same among everything, which is proposed in *Zhuangzi* that the reliance upon the arc, line, compass, and square to make correct forms injure the natural constitution of things. In their original nature, things are bonded without glue and held together without cords. Since immemorial, all things do not know how they grow in their places naturally with abundant life. It has been like this and should not be tampered with. Hence, if the doctrines of humanity or justice act like glue or cords in the domain of *dao* and *de*, it will give rise to confusion and doubt, which changes the purpose and nature of people. ¹⁵Following this statement, the perfectly correct path is to preserve the original nature of all things, which is *Wuwei*.

To go against *dao*, is just like treating the excrescences and tumours, which grow naturally from the body on a person. By using unnatural actions and additions, it will cause suffering and can even bring negative effects, which is unnecessary. Instead, the effect or result should not be focused on without eliminating the contrived cause. If *Wuwei* is not accepted, it is easy for misfortunes and disasters to arise, which is also a form of nature (*dao*). Just like the legs of a duck are short, but will cause dismay to the duck if lengthened; whilst the legs of a crane are long, but will cause misery to the crane if shortened. So, one should not

¹² Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 176-180.

¹³ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 185.

¹⁴ Ranie B. Villaver, *Wuwei in the Daodejing: Understanding Daoist Ethics*, *Phavisminda Journal*, Vol. 6, (2007), pp. 33.

¹⁵ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.92-97.

worry about changing nature. ¹⁶When humanity and justice are stressed, it seems that they are not a part of human nature, and lead to the opposing side, thus causing the world in commotion. From this perspective, *Wuwei* does not only refer to effortless action, but the principle behind it is also vast.

3. The Characteristics of *Wuwei*

Wuwei signifies an effortless action which is an action performed with ease. However, if *Wuwei* seems so easy and spontaneous, why should it be emphasised repeatedly in the classics, and told as to ‘do *Wuwei*’ (*weiwuwei* 為無為)? ¹⁷Before finding the answer to this question, the steps to the stage of *Wuwei* should be discussed. In the forty-eight chapter of *Daodejing*, there is a description of the way to *Wuwei*:

In studying, there is a daily increase,

While in learning of *dao*, there is a daily decrease.

One loses and again loses

To the point that one does everything non-coercively (*Wuwei* 無為)

This leads to the focus of daily decreases and losses, as it is inevitable that *Wuwei* is something about letting go and has a deep interconnection with *dao*. In fact, there are also different opinions to the term ‘study’, which can be understood in two aspects. The first interpretation is about gaining knowledge and experiences and can be comprehended as *Youwei*. Just like the modern society, it is obvious that although the gains and increase of knowledge boost a significant impact on the economy and seem convenient compared to the past, it has also led to many problems and even cause disasters to the Earth. These include war, oil spills, nuclear power plant explosions, the greenhouse effect, and different kinds of pollutions. *Zhuangzi*’s comment about the disadvantages of contrivance can support this argument, as those who have cunning implements have a contriving heart and mind, and they will be impure. Being impure, their spirit will be impetuous, and the way (*dao* 道) will not carry someone whose spirit is impetuous. ¹⁸So, the main idea of this theory is to stress the issues about the affliction caused by knowledge.

However, there is another explanation about ‘study’ which indicates that the daily increase and decrease are not contradictory. In Feng Youlan’s literary work about Chinese Philosophy and Chen Guying’s annotation, it is argued that daily loss refers to desires, emotions and etc, whilst increasing refers to the problem of

¹⁶ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Lao-tse* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.96-97.

¹⁷ Appeared in the third and sixty-three chapter of *Daodejing*.

¹⁸ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 200.

accumulating knowledge. ¹⁹They are not mutually exclusive, because the gains and losses indicated by Laozi are about different things. ²⁰As when something is determined as true, there are concealed mistakes in it. Hence, while accepting the truth, we must recognise and abandon the false at the same time. ²¹This statement shows that on top of studying, there is a more fundamental existence of the learning of *dao*. Or else, why did *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* use words, names, and metaphors to explain and spread their realization of the *dao*?

To summarize, it can be highlighted that *dao* is the basis of everything, and experiences and knowledge accumulate and acquires over time, which occurs naturally and cannot be discarded. The awareness of the drawbacks of knowledge will increase intrinsically when one focuses on reducing. Only when one understands this, then it may be known as true wisdom.

3.1. Decreasement and Contentment

When describing the character *sun* 損, which means to decrease, Laozi used the analogy of a drawing bow as the *dao* of nature. When archers draw their bows, they pull the string down to hit something high in the air. If they want to hit lower, they pull the string upwards. When the string has been drawn too far, they let some go, while if it has not reached a certain extent, they pull harder. The control of its force should be just right and adjusted to a way that is to let some go when there is excess and to extend where it is inadequate. ²²Balance and harmonization are needed to have a smooth process, no matter when it is about a finished product or project, or even when getting along with others. Nevertheless, Laozi pointed out that human beings act on the contrary by taking away from those who are insufficient and giving more to those who have too much. This is true, as income and wealth inequality are still common, even nowadays. So, who can be able to draw on the excess and to spare to give to the world? It is only those who comply with *dao*. This leads to the viewpoint of contentment, as those who are content feel sufficient. If a person is contented, desires will be eliminated. In chapter forty-six in *Daodejing*, it is stated:

There is no crime more onerous than greed,
No misfortune more devastating than avarice.
And no calamity that brings with it more grief than insatiability.
Thus, knowing when enough is enough

¹⁹ Feng Youlan 馮友蘭, *Zhongguozhexueshixinbian* 中國哲學史新編, (Beijing: Renminchubanshe, 2001), p. 343.

²⁰ Chen Guying 陳鼓應, *Laozipingzhuan* 老子評傳, (Nanjing: Nanjingdaxuechubanshe, 2001), p. 142.

²¹ Fang Dongmei 方東美, *Yuanshirujiadaojiazhexue* 原始儒家道家哲學, (Beijing: Zhinghuashuju, 2012), p. 176.

²² Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 266.

Is really satisfying.²³

It is necessary to make a distinction between simple expectations, which is what we need, and unsatisfied desires, which is what is wanted. The former is an appropriate form and a natural state of human experience, whilst the latter is an endless spiral which is a cycle of desire and acquisition which goes deeper and further from the *dao*. When pursuing desires, it is easy to be blinded by our senses,²⁴ thus it will be hard to reflect and know what is really needed by getting satisfaction from what is already obtained. Therefore, true satisfaction has little to do with what we get, as it is just a feeling of conviction. According to this argument, Roger T. Ames concluded that being content is to make the most of what we have.²⁵ However, being content is not limited to the physical realm. If observed closely, those who are content, including the sages of all times and countries, are rich in the spiritual realm. In other words, it is because that they focus on the spiritual realm and thus let go of material desires and possessions, which happens naturally. This theory can be supported in chapter forty-four of *Daodejing*, as Laozi asked some questions which are worth pondering:

Your reputation or your person—which is dearer to you?

Your person or your property—which is worth more?

Gaining or losing—which is the greater scourge?

It is discernible that the term ‘person’ is proposed in both questions stated above, and that ‘reputation’ and ‘property’ are classified as external things that are not physically connected with oneself, or also known as mere worldly possessions. This results in the fact that the reputations and properties of oneself can easily be changed with the person relevant to it. So, the answer to the first two questions is apparent. Fame and fortune are things that people are eager to chase and often talk about while giving up their own happiness and comfort. Evidently, the possession of goods may lead to the loss of self, as one may become a slave for one’s own pursuit. The attachment to something shows that one is owned by the same thing at the same time. Hence, it gives rise to the principle that those who have something they like the most are willing to spend the most on it. However, Laozi highlighted that the hoarding of wealth or possessions is certain to lead to heavy losses, which can also be seen as causality and indicates the significance of moderation. These losses do not only include materialism but also comprise the loss of health, time, energy, etc, which could bring even more trouble than expected.

From this statement, Laozi then concluded: ‘Those who know contentment avoid disgrace, and those who know where to stop avoid danger. They will be long-enduring.’²⁶ It is in nature’s form that gains will have losses, and there will be separation from meeting together. So, when one values *dao* and concentrates on

²³ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 194-196.

²⁴ Stated in chapter twelve from *Daodejing*.

²⁵ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 194-196.

²⁶ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 190-191.

improving themselves in the spiritual realm, they are content due to foreseeing the illusory appearance of gains and losses, thus they know when to cease.

The thirteenth chapter in *Daodejing* says: 'Favour and disgrace are cause for alarm.'²⁷ This is another description of the attachments to fame, as it is due to the desire for fame that may cause one to have emotional ups and downs having listened to good and bad reputations. Laozi explained that the reason why we have grave anxieties are because that we are embodied persons. Therefore, by withdrawing ourselves from contention, and putting ourselves out of mind, Laozi indicated that it will result in finding ourselves being in front and taken care of.²⁸ As some may surprisingly find this theory to sound like a paradox, but the notion of it is simply because the decrease in desires helps one to be unselfish, and by being selfless, one can be easily contented. It is also about the *dao* and oneness mentioned before, as the world is a process built internally by everything that realises its own perfection.²⁹ There is supporting evidence in *Zhuangzi* about this:

If exemplary persons unavoidably have to oversee the world, no policy is better than governing non-coercively (*Wuwei*). By *Wuwei*, only can they peacefully fulfill the natural instincts of their lives. Thus, those who value the world as themselves may be entrusted with the care of the world.³⁰

In conclusion, the idea about decreasing is the decrease of greed, which is the root cause of unhappiness. By examining and recognising oneself, one can stay away from vexations and excessive burden by letting go of the redundant. This decreasing process goes on with the understanding of the essence of life, as the more it is realised, the more it is to let go. Letting go helps to be contented, and the path of decrease and contentment supports selflessness, which causes *Wuwei*, and complies with the *dao*.

3.2. Humility and Obliviousness

From the above stated about the concept of decreasing and being content, it can be related to humility as well. Just like Zhang Erqi proposed in his annotation about *Daodejing*: 'When people are sufficient and content, there is no deficiency, and thus will be free of competing.'³¹ In *Daodejing*, there are five chapters³² that use water and the ocean to resemble the qualities of *dao* and *Wuwei*, whilst the term *buzheng*

²⁷ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 111.

²⁸ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 112-113.

²⁹ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 101.

³⁰ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.100-101.

³¹ Zhang Erqi 張爾岐, *Laozi shuolue* 老子說略; Edited by Jiyun, Yongrong and others 紀昀、永瑤等編纂, *Jingyinwenyuange Sikuquanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taiwan: Shangwuyinshuguan 商務印書館 2013), Volume 1055, p. 503.

³² The eighth chapter and seventy-eighth chapter states about the virtues of water, while the qualities of the ocean can be found in the twentieth, thirty-two and sixty-sixth chapter, respectively.

不爭 which means ‘no contend’, appeared eight times correspondingly.³³ So, what are the relationships between humility, no contend, the qualities of water and *Wuwei*? The eighth chapter stated:

The highest efficacy is like water.

It is because water benefits everything, and does not compete with them.

It dwells in places loathed by the crowd,

Wherein it comes near to the *dao*.³⁴

In dwelling, the question is where the right place is.

In thinking and feeling, it is how deeply.

In giving, it is how much like nature's bounty.³⁵

In speaking, it is how trustworthy.

In governing, it is how effectively.

In serving, it is how capably.

In acting, it is how timely.

It is only because there is no contend,

That it incurs no blame.³⁶

Referring to the qualities of water, Laozi pointed out that it nourishes everything discriminately. Water seems to be the weakest and softest thing in the world,³⁷ but it is unfathomable and limitless, as it moistens the Earth and rains from the sky, nurtures all beings, and succeeds in many ways.³⁸ It can be shaped and used in different forms when needed, such as freezing it into ice, sprayed through a hose, or poured into any container and adapts to it automatically. If it is unused or left, water will evaporate by itself. Besides, water stays in places that are low, and these can be understood as statuses that people look down on. It goes wherever it can, no matter

³³ They are in the third, eighth, twenty-two, sixty-six, sixty-eight, seventy-three and eighty-first chapter.

³⁴ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.136-137.

³⁵ In Wangbi's version of *Daodejing*, it is *yushanren* 與善仁, translated by Lin Yutang and modified as appropriate as: ‘In relations with others, they love kindness.’

Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.136-137.

³⁶ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 101-103.

³⁷ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 267-269.

³⁸ Wenzi, *Wenzi* 文子; Edited by Jiyun, Yongrong and others 紀昀、永瑤等編纂, *Jingyinwenyuange Sikuquanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taiwan: Shangwuyinshuguan 商務印書館 2013), Volume 1058, p. 310.

how insignificant or small space there is, or how far it can be. Water does what it is in nature and does not mind even when it is disdained.

Water is described in *Wenzi* as unwounded when hit, unhurt when stabbed, uninterrupted when cut, and unburned when ignited. Flowing through the valleys, it returns to the wild. For the excess and deficiencies, it takes it from the sky and earth, while giving it to all beings equally at the same time. It is selfless and does not think of itself as for the public, thus it accommodates all beings. This is known as the utmost excellence.³⁹Based on the quoted passage above, to think and feel deeply is used as an analogy to illustrate the way of the mind as a deep pool, which is *xinshanyuan* 心善淵. As Zhu Qianzhi indicated in his annotation, the ‘deep pool’ besides being deep, also has the definition of being still. The causal link between them is made apparent when the mind is quiet and thus undetectable.⁴⁰As the mind is calm enough, the things done by the person will be clear and reasonable, just like when water is still, all things can be clearly reflected. Therefore, the attitude in giving, kindness, and trustworthiness occurs naturally and is demonstrated by the efficacy, ability, and punctuality when administering and managing affairs. However, it is hard to come by that though being kind, it does not claim credit and has no contends, so there is nothing to blame.

Laozi’s concept about ‘the soft and weak vanquish the hard and strong’⁴¹ should be noted when mentioning the qualities of water, as it is stressed five times throughout the classic itself.⁴² Live people and plants are compared with the dead and the withered as metaphors for the soft and weak versus the hard and strong in the seventy-sixth chapter of *Daodejing*. It is also the same that weapons and trees that are rigid will not prevail and will snap easily instead. Despite being soft and weak, it can withstand external forces. For instance, grasses can sway with the wind without breaking, and the tongue stays longer than the teeth.⁴³Such phenomena can be observed in daily life. It indicates the importance of not being coercive and violent, as those who do so will not meet their natural end, and Laozi takes this idea as his precept.⁴⁴To give a more detailed explanation about the argument of being soft and weak, chapter twenty-two clarifies:

Those who are not self-promising are distinguished,

Those who do not show off shine,

Those who do not brag have lots to show,

³⁹ *Wenzi*, *Wenzi* 文子; Edited by Jiyun, Yongrong and others 紀昀、永瑤等編纂, *Jingyinwenyuange Sikuquanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taiwan: Shangwuyinshuguan 商務印書館 2013), Volume 1058, p. 310.

⁴⁰ Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之, *Laozijaoshi* 老子校釋, (Taipei: Lirenshuju, 1985), p. 32.

⁴¹ Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 170.

⁴² They are in chapter thirty-six, seventy-six and seventy-eight.

⁴³ Liuxiang 劉向, *Shuoyuan* 說苑; Edited by Jiyun, Yongrong and others 紀昀、永瑤等編纂, *Jingyinwenyuange Sikuquanshu* 景印文淵閣四庫全書 (Taiwan: Shangwuyinshuguan 商務印書館 2013), Volume 696, p. 87.

⁴⁴ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 185-186.

Those who are not self-important are enduring.

It is only because they do not contend

That none are able to contend with them.⁴⁵

It is just like the vast oceans and great rivers who are good at staying low, which is the cause that enables them to become the king of all valleys. According to Hanshan Deqing, sages are humble in all ways and embody it in speech and actions by putting themselves behind the people. They set a good example themselves preferably, as action speaks louder than words, and influences others naturally. They know the inadequacy of speaking too much to disseminate the teachings. Using words to teach is a deed, and deeds will lead to the self-assurance of one's intelligence, which will then result in boasting of one's capability and the motive of liking to do or act, which is *Youwei*. It is easy to fail for those who like to act,⁴⁶ as they focus on the branches and leaves but forgot the root cause, which is *dao* and *de*, and is represented by *Wuwei*.

It can be evaluated from the above mentioned that those who achieved *Wuwei* are in corresponding to *dao*. To know *dao* is easy, but not to say so is hard. By knowing and saying it out is already putting effort and appertains to the artificial.⁴⁷ So, they prefer coordination and integration to forced suppression. Besides, they are oblivious of themselves and their surroundings, so they never see themselves as noble. This makes them tranquil and free from desires and likes, thus they will not harm the world by cultivating or developing the things that they favour.⁴⁸ They do not overdo, have no desires to control whatsoever, and do not speak much, as they have a peaceful and calm mind. Regarding this, the people do not feel that the sages are detrimental or a burden although dwelling before or above them. On the contrary, they tirelessly take delight to promote them. These are the excellences without contend, which is the ultimate of selflessness.

Nevertheless, the meaning of 'no contend' is not limited to not combating, but also includes the control of the heart and mind for not chasing and competing. This is to be in accord with the attitude towards nature, as the state of becoming altogether oblivious of the world is easier than to cause the world to be unconscious of one's influence upon it.⁴⁹ It is discussed in *Zhuangzi* that those who are great do not think so. Knowing the truth about greatness and all-sufficiency, they seek nothing, lose nothing and abandon nothing. They do not allow their nature to be affected by material things and seeks everything within themselves whereas find

⁴⁵ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 135-137.

⁴⁶ Original text: *Fanhaoweizhe biyibai* 凡好為者必易敗

Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozidaodejing Hanshanjie Zhuangzineipian Hanshanzhu* 老子道德經憨山解·莊子內篇憨山註 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubangongsi, 2015), p. 104-105.

⁴⁷ Modified as appropriate, translated by Herbert A. Giles, *Chuang Tzu*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889), p. 427.

⁴⁸ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozidaodejing Hanshanjie Zhuangzineipian Hanshanzhu* 老子道德經憨山解·莊子內篇憨山註 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubangongsi, 2015), p. 131-132.

⁴⁹ Modified as appropriate, translated by Herbert A. Giles, *Chuang Tzu*, (London: Bernard Quaritch, 1889), p. 176.

infinity there. Great sages enrich their character (*de* 德) by following the ancients and are indelible.⁵⁰ Such are the characteristics of *Wuwei*.

4. The Causality of *Wuwei*

Having mentioned the definition and characteristics of *Wuwei*, to further understand more specific aspects, the reason and wisdom behind this mindset and its outcomes are also worth exploring. It will be interpreted in the following sections.

4.1. The Wisdom Behind *Wuwei*

The characteristics stated in previous sections are the causes for the sages to have the foresight to know the harmful results brought by *Youwei*, which, on the contrary, is intricate and troublesome. Hence, they prefer to go back to basics and live in accordance with nature. *Youwei* gives on to many problems, as it is easy for one thing to lead to many things. According to the commentaries of Heshang Gong, there are a few versions of the context, but the definition of it is almost the same. Taking laws and regulations, for example, its original purpose is intended for people to be good, but when it is displayed, interested parties will exploit legal loopholes within it. The same principle applies to prohibitions and taboos, as it possible that because of superstition, people will have a lot of uncertainty out of doubts, and act as scrupulous out of fear. When people are afraid, the first intention that comes to mind is to be protective. Therefore, the people will deceive and be suspicious of each other out for their own benefit.⁵¹ It will result in the people being poor, which is not limited to the physical realm, but in the spiritual realm as well. Moreover, Laozi took instruments, weapons, skills, and knowledge into concern, as these will activate the desires of fame and fortune, which will then end up in a vicious cycle that is hard to be detached. From *Daodejing*, it is known that *dao* is the source of all powers, and its original state is quiet, tranquil, and noncoercive. Just like stated in the thirty-seventh chapter:

The nameless pristine simplicity

Is stripped of desire.

By stripping of desire, quiescence is achieved,

And the world would be at peace of its own accord.⁵²

To support the claim, it is indicated by *Zhuangzi* that the sage is naturally calm, just like water when it is still. Apart from having the ability to reflect objects, it also maintains an absolute level. Their minds are like a mirror, which reflects everything

⁵⁰ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, edited by Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚, *Zhuangzijishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1997), Vol. 4, p. 856.

⁵¹ Edited by Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozidaodejing Heshanggongzhangju* 老子道德河上公章句, (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 2019), p. 220-223.

⁵² Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.596-597.

but does not take anything to their heart and mind, hence nothing in the world can disturb them. This refers to the self-cultivation of not conducting and not anticipating anything, which is related to obliviousness stated in the section before. *Zhuangzi* emphasises the significance that *xujing* 虛靜 *tiandan* 恬淡 *jimo* 寂寞 and *wuwei* 無為, which can be roughly translated as vacancy, calmness, quiescent, and non-coerciveness, represent the root of all things. However, the annotation of *Zhuangzi* stated that although these four conditions are expressed in different names, they have the same reality.⁵³ In fact, it can also be divided into stages, which shows that to take rest is to be vacant and to be vacant results in truth, while truth leads to perfection. Being vacant then leads to calmness, and when calmness was followed by movement, it accomplishes everything. Calmness leads to *Wuwei*, and everyone does their duties accordingly. Subsequently, this accompanies contentment and harmony, as everyone is not bothered and burdened by the mundane affairs caused by *Youwei* in their heart and mind. There is no space for anxieties, sorrows, and fears in the state of being content and peaceful, which longevity occurs.⁵⁴ From these statements, it can be clear that results do not equal the amount of energy we spend but is the consequence of our actions instead. Hence, the significance of quietude is related to the effects of *Wuwei*.

Just like Edward Slingerland expressed the opinion in his discussion of *Wuwei*, it is important to realise that *Wuwei* does not refer to what is or not happening, but rather to the state of mind of the actor.⁵⁵ When coercion is used, quietness is lost, and thoughts of opposing are the arise of desires. For instance, normally, we do not deliberately control our bodily processes like our heartbeat, digestion, respiratory system, or metabolism as it happens naturally. Nevertheless, if our mind is disturbed, or when having emotions, especially negative feelings such as anxiety, it affects our health, which includes the immune system, the hormone balance, heart rate, etc. This shows the influence of the mind on the body. Without a quiet mind, it is impossible to understand ourselves and our surroundings, not to mention the causality of nature, which is the way of the *dao*. This is why Laozi told us to extend the utmost vacantness and preserve the quietude genuinely.⁵⁶ Just like stated in the fifteenth chapter:

Muddy water, when still, slowly becomes clear;

Something stilled, when activated, slowly comes to life.

Those who preserve *dao* do not seek fullness;

It is only because they do not want to be full

⁵³ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩, edited by Wang Xiaoyu 王孝魚, *Zhuangzijishi* 莊子集釋 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 1997), Vol. 2, p. 457-459.

⁵⁴ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p. 600-601.

⁵⁵ Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action: Wu-wei As Conceptual Metaphor and Spiritual Ideal in Early China*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003), p. 7.

⁵⁶ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 119-122.

That they are able to remain hidden and unfinished.⁵⁷

The annotations in the version of Heshang Gong analysed the reason for being hidden and unfinished, as those who are humble conceal glory and do not value fame, which is also about self-cultivation. It is illustrated that the sages take account of the difficult while it is still easy, and deal with the large while it is trivial. They never promise lightly and belittle things, which is associated with the qualities of water and the wisdom behind *Wuwei*. So, they never deal with great problems as they have self-awareness and are cautious about the source. Chapter sixty-four further explains:

Those who would do things ruin them;

Those who control things lose them.

Hence because the sages do things non-coercively (*Wuwei*)

They do not ruin them,

And because they do not try to control things

They do not lose them.

The common people always ruin the things they do

Just on the very brink of success.

By being careful at the end as at the beginning,

You will be free of failure.⁵⁸

This passage shows a strong contrast between the ideas behind *Youwei* and *Wuwei*. As Roger T. Ames indicated, the ability to distinguish the cause of matters and to anticipate the development of things helps to eliminate the experience of breaking the flow to be single and isolated. Besides, it can help us to have a comprehensive perspective instead of being one-sided or having an exclusive judgment.⁵⁹ From another point of view, everything changes momentarily and there is nothing truly constant. Therefore, the sages are not attached and do not intend to control or possess anything. Evidently, the relation between quietude and humility links to the wisdom behind *Wuwei*.

4.2. The Outcomes of *Wuwei*

Although this paper has roughly mentioned the results of *Wuwei*, as it is not obvious enough, so there is a need for it to be collated and discussed. As characterised before, the main concept of *Wuwei* shows a spontaneous effect and relates to three stages, namely: to follow nature, to be at ease, and be oblivious. The

⁵⁷ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 117-119.

⁵⁸ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.238-241.

⁵⁹ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.240.

steps that lead to *Wuwei* can also be classified into three phases, which includes decreasing excessive activity (*wuwangwei* 無妄為), ⁶⁰eliminating the contriving heart and mind by acting according to nature (*wuyiwei* 無以為), and the third is known as *weiwuwei* 為無為, basically interpreted as to use *Wuwei*. The term ‘*Weiwuwei* 為無為’ is shown in the third and sixty-three chapters in *Daodejing*. Besides, there are also terms like ‘*wubuwei* 無不為’ which means that nothing is left undone, ⁶¹and ‘*wubuke* 無不克’ which is explained as all obstacles are overcome. ⁶²Using *Wuwei* while accomplishing everything is the key point that is going to be explored in this section.

From an individual perspective, as the sages are cautious and clear about the causalities of affairs, they deal with it when it is still easy and tiny. *Zhuangzi* also stated that the outcomes of *Wuwei* are vacancy, calmness, quiescent, and non-coerciveness, and leads to a worry and stress-free mind. This relates to contentment, which results in happiness and longevity. The manifestation of nature and *Wuwei* develops through the heart and mind from the concentration and practice in self-cultivation. Chapter forty-three in *Daodejing* supports this statement by highlighting that the least resistant is often the most penetrating. It is said:

The softer substance of the world goes through the hardest.

That which is without form penetrates the seamless. ⁶³

This is how we know that doing things coercively (*Wuwei*) is beneficial.

Rare are those in the world who reach an understanding of the benefits of teachings that go beyond what can be said, and of doing things non-coercively. ⁶⁴

According to the annotation by Hanshan Deqing, the softest and most penetrating substance is like water which goes through the mountains and grounds, whereas it infiltrates the rocks and minerals. However, by using an object to go through another, there will be gaps and collisions with each other. If it is formless, there is nothing that cannot be entered. Just like vacantness which permeates all tangibles, even if it is as fine as dust or something unrecognisable and elusive, there is nothing inaccessible because it is empty. By realising the usefulness of being vacant, the benefits of *Wuwei* can then be understood. ⁶⁵Those who reach this understanding are uncommon as it is very inconspicuous and subtle, as most people act according to their habits by chasing desires, without paying attention to stop and contemplate by weighing the true consequences. Hence, because of the impetuous heart and mind, the truth revealed in natural phenomena is not easily noticed and understood. The connection between the individual and bringing proper order to the people can

⁶⁰ Such as the context in chapter two and thirty-seven of *Daodejing*.

⁶¹ Seen in chapter three, thirty-seven and forty-eight of *Daodejing*.

⁶² Seen in chapter fifty-nine of *Daodejing*.

⁶³ Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.654-655.

⁶⁴ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 188-190.

⁶⁵ Hanshan Deqing 憨山德清, *Laozidaodejing Hanshanjie Zhuangzineipian Hanshanzhu* 老子道德經 憨山解·莊子內篇憨山註 (Taipei: Xinwenfeng Chubangongsi, 2015), p. 104-105.

be elaborated through the fifty-ninth chapter of *Daodejing*, which states the importance of husbandry (*se* 蓄)⁶⁶ and the accumulation of character (*de* 德).

For bringing proper order to the people and living according to nature (tian 天),

None is better than husbandry.

It is only through husbandry that *dao* is attained early.

And being early to attain *dao* is named as to keep growing and accumulate character (*de* 德).

If the accumulation of character (*de* 德) is growing, all obstacles can be overcome,

And if all obstacles can be overcome, limits cannot be discerned.

When limits cannot be discerned, the realm can be presided over.

By understanding the mother (*mu* 母)⁶⁷ of presiding over the realm, it can be long-enduring.

This is called the *dao* of setting deep roots and being long-lasting.⁶⁸

From the above context, it is evident that the relationship with self-cultivation and governing the country with *Wuwei* cannot be separated. Self-cultivation in Daoism and *Wuwei* includes keeping the body and mind in a conserved manner by eliminating from desires and the intention to find or do something, which includes all wandering thoughts. This will help to maintain the unity between our spirits⁶⁹ and body, besides returning to quietude and vacantness, and within it arises wisdom, which then all obstacles can be overcome. In Traditional Chinese Medicine, it is also indicated that conserving mental energy has a huge impact on health and helps to rejuvenate our well-being.⁷⁰ The principle of chapter fifty-nine illustrates that self-cultivation is like a deep-rooted plant that absorbs nutrients well and grows fruitfully throughout the process of accumulating character (*de* 德) whilst last a long

⁶⁶ The character *se* 蓄 has different interpretations. According to the annotations by Wangbi, Roger T. Ames and Chen Guying, they have a similar understanding which is related to husbandry. As Chen Guying proposed, the definition of *se* 蓄 in *Shuowenjiezi* 說文解字 originally means to store, as it is related to farming, and has an extended meaning of to love and cherish but not to use. In this context, it means to keep the unity of form and spirit in a conserved manner, to return to *Wuwei*. Chen Guying 陳鼓應, Wang Yunwu 王雲五, *Laozi Jinzhujinyijipingjie* 老子今注今譯及評介 (Taipei: Shangwuyinshuguan, 2018), p. 247-249.

⁶⁷ From the annotation of Heshang Gong, *mu* 母 means *dao* 道.

⁶⁸ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing 'Making This Life Significant', A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p. 226-228.

⁶⁹ Known as *wushen* 五神, found in the annotation of Heshang Gong, which the term itself is explained in *Huangdineijing* 黃帝內經. It consists of five mental elements which associates with *wuzang* 五臟 (translated as the five organs): heart and mind with *shen* 神 (spirit), lung with *po* 魄 (related to the Yin 陰 side of the soul), liver with *hun* 魂 (related to the Yang 陽 side of the soul), spleen with *yi* 意 (intention), and kidney with *zhi* 志 (will).

Modified as appropriate, Sabine Wilms, 'Benshendiba' 本神第八 (Ling Shu 8), <https://static1.squarespace.com/static/59dbb748e5dd5b5a1b458923/t/5bc249969140b74027ab93dc/1539459478940/Lingshu+8+%E6%9C%AC%E7%A5%9E.pdf>, accessed 20 March 2021.

⁷⁰ See footnote sixty-nine.

life. By having such a stable basis, when *Wuwei* is applied in situations like governing and management, it provides a paradoxically powerful effect. Chapter fifty-seven in *Daodejing* provides an analysis of the outcomes of *Wuwei* by the sages:

Do things non-coercively (*Wuwei*), and the people develop along their own lines;

Cherish quietude, and the people are righteous of themselves;

Non-interfering in governance (*wushi* 無事), and the people prosper themselves;

Objectless in desires (*wuyu* 無欲), and the people are simple and honest by themselves.⁷¹

Based on the quotations in this section from the perspective of *Wuwei*, it can be observed that the way we face our surroundings depends on our inner self. If it is well-managed by *Wuwei*, surroundings will naturally change, and everything is achieved through *Wuwei*. On the contrary, if self-cultivation is neglected while pursuing outwards,⁷² it will cause contention and confrontation, which naturally result in trouble, fights, and wars.

5. Conclusion

This paper actively promotes the importance of good causes. If the factors mentioned in the previous sections are not implied, there will be no results with *wuwei* 無為 (inaction),⁷³ not to mention the governing of countries. It is like a plant without roots or flowers in vases, even though they look beautiful, and people try to preserve them by using external factors and multiple ways to extend its life, but they still cannot last long. Therefore, if the origin and development of *Wuwei* are understood, it is not superficial. The paradox seen is due to the fact that the ‘appropriate language seems contradictory’⁷⁴ and the context in *Daodejing* is kept simple. Although *Daodejing* has only around five thousand characters (depending on different versions), but it has spread so widely. This contrast truly authenticates the principle of less is more. So, what is the philosophy of the self-cultivation of *Wuwei*? *Wuwei* is the natural manifestation of the body and mind after a certain level of quietude and calmness. It is not about doing something deliberately, nor is ‘do *Wuwei*’ (*weiwuwei* 為無為) its’ aim. As Laozi indicated, *dao* itself cannot be told, let alone being labeled. Laozi also upholds the principle of simpler is better, which can be seen throughout the text and the concept in *Daodejing*.

⁷¹ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.219-222.

⁷² Which is mentioned as ‘desires’ in this paper.

⁷³ Referring to *wu* 無 and *wei* 為, which is inaction.

⁷⁴ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.268.

In fact, Laozi tells us that the heart and mind that pursues outwards is contrary to the *dao*. This is against the laws of nature. Therefore, Laozi mentioned the concepts of reducing desires and that ‘the heavy⁷⁵ is the root of the light, quiescent is the lord of impetuosity’. ⁷⁶From these theories, the terms to ‘embrace simplicity’ (*baopu* 抱樸), ‘each again return to its root’ ⁷⁷ and that sages grasp the principle of oneness in everything ⁷⁸can provide an aspect that Laozi used different words to explain the mystery of *dao* to us. Moreover, it shows the importance of oneness in the idea of Laozi. Oneness can be understood as *dao* and is in relevance with the concentration and conserving of one’s energy. This is the basis that supports the growth and nurtures all things, and only with it then can one accomplish everything without coerciveness (*wubuwei* 無不為). These principles are inseparable from the philosophy of *Wuwei*.

From *Daodejing*, it is seen that the context is consistent. No matter how it is arranged, its connotation and spirit are in oneness. This proves that Laozi’s view of unity and *Wuwei* is completely integrated into *Daodejing*. It also confirms that *Wuwei* is a value of *de* 德. *Wuwei* is to conform to nature, be dutiful, and being able to let go of all kinds of desires ⁷⁹so that the innate nature can be truly recuperated. The self-cultivation of *Wuwei* impacts the accomplishment in the environment. However, the sages do not feel as they had done anything. In other words, nothing can affect their quietude and calmness. The gains and losses of reputations and profit do not fluctuate their minds, because they are free from desires. As everything comes from nature and is attributed to nature, so are they, which are non-coercive from beginning to the end.

This paper can just discuss the scriptures from Laozi and some related texts. To fully understand *Wuwei*, it should be done by practice. If the aspects of self-cultivation which attempt to explain the philosophy of *Wuwei* can provide some inspiration, then it is the significance of this paper. Nevertheless, the specific experience of the philosophy of *Wuwei* in self-cultivation needs to be verified by ourselves.

⁷⁵ In Chinese, ‘heaviness’ or ‘thickness’ of character, has the meaning of being honest, generous, which associates with the idea of stable fortune and endurance.

Modified as appropriate, Lin Yutang, *Lin Yutang Chinese-English Bilingual Edition, The Wisdom of Laozi* (Taipei: Zhengzhongshuju, 2009), p.342-343.

⁷⁶ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.147.

⁷⁷ Modified as appropriate, Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, *Daodejing ‘Making This Life Significant’, A Philosophical Translation*, (Beijing: Xueyuan Chubanshe, 2004), p.119-120.

⁷⁸ My translation, Wangbi 王弼 (226-249), Lou Yulie 樓宇烈, *Laozi Daodejingzhu Jiaoshi* 老子道德經注校釋 (Beijing: Zhonghuashuju, 2008), p. 55-57.

⁷⁹ See chapter fifty-two in *Daodejing*.

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