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A Translation of Chapters 59 and 63 of the *Daodejing* 道德經 and their Annotations by Shi Deqing

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1. Original text and translation of chapter 59 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

1.1 Original text

治人、事天、莫若嗇。夫惟嗇，是謂早復。早復，謂之重積德。重積德，則無不克。無不克，則莫知其極。莫知其極，可以有國。有國之母，可以長久。是謂深根固蒂，長生久視之道。

1.2 Translation

In cultivating and maintaining the virtue, there is no better way than to be sparing. Only the ‘sparing’ is the quick recovery. The ‘quick recovery’ is to strengthen power and merit. And everything can be overcome if merit accumulated and power strengthened. There is no limit if someone to be undefeated. Then one can govern a country when he has infinite capacity. Because the mother of the country—Dao, the country can be enduring. It is the way to be firmly rooted to have deep strength so as to get immortality and enduring vision.

2. Original text and translation of Shi Deqing’s 釋德清 annotation of chapter 59

2.1 Original text – Part A

此言聖人離欲復性，以為外王內聖之道也。嗇，有而不用之意。老子所言人天，莊子解之甚明。如曰，不以人害天，不以物傷性。蓋人，指物欲。天，指性德也。言治人事天莫若嗇者。然嗇，即復性工夫也。謂聖人在位，貴為天子，富有四海。其子女玉帛，聲色貨利，充盈於前。而聖人以道自守，視之若無，澹然無欲，雖有而不用。

2.2 Translation of Part A

That sages recover their innate nature by keeping unspotted from greediness is the principle for ruling oneself and governing the country, according to the chapter. The character *se* 嗇 indicates being abundant but sparing. Zhuangzi has clearly explained Laozi's human—nature relationship. For example, we shall neither disorder the principle of nature by human desire nor damage one's virtue by external matters. Human desire means material desire, and nature means innate nature. Here says 'In cultivating and maintaining the virtue, there is no better way than to be sparing'. Being sparing is the way for innate nature recovery. The sage is privileged to govern the country and owns an ocean of wealth and offspring, but still disciplines himself by Dao to regard external matters as worthless and to desire for nothing, which indicates a spirit that possessing a lot but being sparing.

2.3 Original text – Part B

所謂堯舜有天下而不與，此以嗇治人也。聖人并包四海，智周萬物。不以私智勞慮，而傷其性真。所謂毋搖爾精，毋勞爾形，毋使汝思慮營營。蓋有智而不用其智，此以嗇事天也。復性工夫，莫速於此。故曰是謂之早復。此復字，是復卦不遠復之意。言其速也。又如一日克己復禮，天下歸仁之意。

2.4 Translation of Part B

'Cultivating and maintaining the virtue by being sparing' could be embodied in Yao and Shun who possessed the country but didn't appropriate any property. Sages govern the country and their wisdom benefits all things. With the consideration of vigor conservation and physical relaxation, they do not damage their innate nature out of selfish desire, let alone tax their mind and strength for fame and wealth. That is the principle of owning wisdom but not playing tricks, maintaining innate nature by being sparing. It is fastest to recover innate virtue, thus to say 'It is the quick recovery.' As saying goes, 'It will be recovering soon', here 'recover' means

something returns to its state quickly. As the *Analects of Confucius*, there is saying ‘If a man can for one day subdue himself and return to propriety, an under heaven will ascribe perfect virtue to him.’

2.5 Original text – Part C

莊子曰，賊莫大於德有心。然有心之德施於外，故輕而不厚。復性之功，天德日全，不期復而自復，所謂復見天地之心。故曰早復謂之重積德。能重積德，則無不克矣。此克字，乃克敵之克。即顏子克己之克。以性德日厚，則物欲消融。而所過者化，無物與敵。則其德高明廣大，民無得而稱焉。

2.6 Translation of Part C

There is saying in Zhuangzi, ‘The biggest scourge is to cultivate virtue out of selfish intention.’ Therefore, externally doing good with selfish intention is shallow and insincere. The merit of innate nature recovery is completing the virtue day by day without deliberateness, because virtue shall return to be real and simple naturally, which is same to ‘Return to see the real nature of universe’ in *The Book of Changes*. That’s why Laozi said that ‘The ‘quick recovery’ is to strengthen power and merit.’ Everything can be overcome if merit accumulated and power strengthened. Here overcome means defeating enemy as well as ‘subduing oneself’ mentioned in *The Analects of Confucius*. With the accumulation of merit, material desire fades away, people around are influenced and even nothing could rival with it. The virtue is noble and praised by the public.

2.7 Original text – Part D

故曰無不克，則莫知其極。極，至極，猶涯量也。此內聖之德既全，雖無心於天下，乃可以託於天下。故曰莫知其極，可以有國。此內聖之道，真以治身，其緒餘以為天

下國家。故曰可以有國。此道先天地不為老，後天地不為終。故曰可以長久。古人所言深根固蒂長生久視之道者，如此而已。結句蓋古語。老子引證，以結其意耳。

2.8 Translation of Part D

Therefore, there says, ‘There is no limited if someone to be undefeated.’ Capacity means the amount or limitation. Without the thought of possess the whole country, sages cherish abundant and complete virtue and it is feasible to entrust the country to them. That’s why here says ‘Then one can govern a country when he has infinite capacity.’ This is Dao for cultivating oneself, of which essence of ‘Great Dao’ is for self—cultivation, while the rest of it are for governing the country, thus to prove the saying ‘Then one can govern a country when he has infinite capacity.’ Dao have no age or end regardless of it born before or after the universe, thus Laozi consider it as enduring. As ancients said, ‘It is the way to be firmly rooted to have deep strength so as to get immortality and enduring vision.’ Laozi quoted the saying as the conclusion of this chapter.

3. Original text and translation of chapter 63 of the *Daodejing* 道德經

3.1 Original text

為無為。事無事。味無味。大，小。多，少。報怨以德。圖難於其易。為大於其細。天下難事，必作於易。天下大事，必作於細。是以聖人終不為大，故能成其大。夫輕諾必寡信。多易必多難。是以聖人猶難之。故終無難。

3.2 Translation

Act without intention. Work without desire. Taste without flavour. Big or small. More or less. Like the things that returning good for evil. Deal with the difficult while yet it is easy; deal with the big while yet it is small. The beginning of the tough thing is the simple one and the great thing is started from the small one. So that sages never tend to solve the problems from the tough or big one, accomplishes their greatness. One who lightly makes a promise, will find it often hard to keep his faith.

The easier things be thought, the more difficult it will be. So the sages regard things as much more difficult. That is why there is no difficult in the end.

4. Original text and translation of Shi Deqing's 釋德清 annotation of chapter 63

4.1 Original text – Part A

此言聖人入道之要妙，示人以真切工夫也。凡有為，謂智巧。有事，謂功業。有味，謂功名利欲。此三者，皆世人之所尚。然道本至虛而無為。至靜而無事。至淡而無味。獨聖人以道為懷，去彼取此。故所為者無為。所事者無事。所味者無味。故世人皆以名位為大，以利祿為多而取之。然道至虛微淡泊無物，皆以為小少，故棄而不取。

4.2 Translation of Part A

The chapter illustrates the subtlety of sages' internalization of Dao as well as shows readers real methods of it. Act with intention means ingenuity; affair means achievement; flavor means fame and desire. These three things above are what people chasing for. But Dao is empty and without any intention, placid and uneventful, tasteless and flavorless. Adhering to Dao, sages abandon the three things. Given this, sages' action is non—action, affair is no—affair and desire is no—desire. Being empty and indifferent, Dao is also invisible and small. People despise it and put fame and money at first.

4.3 Original text – Part B

聖人去功與名，釋智遺形，而獨與道游。是去其大多，而取其小少。故以至小為至大，至少為至多。故大其小，而多其少也。試觀世人報怨以德，則可知矣。何也。且世之人，無論貴賤，事最大而難解者，怨也。然怨之始也，偶因一言之失，一事之差。遂相構結，以至殺身滅名，亡國敗家之禍。甚至有積怨深憤，父子子孫，累世相報而未已者。

4.4 Translation of Part B

Getting rid of fame, possession and ingenuity, sages rove alone in the world with Dao, which is removing the material desire valued by people but obtaining Dao that misunderstood as small and rare by people. We can see that sages consider the smallest as greatest, the slightest as richest, thus to say that small is big, less is more. We can understand many truths if we observe things that returning good for evil. The reason is that whoever you are, the knottiest thing is resentment. People feel resentment just because someone incidentally said or did wrong things, thus to lead to fatal disaster or even bring calamity to the country and the people. Some even pass on the hatred from generation to generation because of the deep resentment.

4.5 Original text – Part C

此舉世古今之恆情也。豈非其事極大且多哉。惟聖人則不然。察其怨之未結也，本不有。始結也，事甚小。既結也，以為無與於己。故無固執不化之心，亦無有我以與物為匹敵。其既往也，事已消之，求其朕而不可得。以此觀之，則任彼之怨，在我了無報之之心矣。然彼且以為有怨，在我全無報復之心，彼必以我為德矣。

4.6 Translation of Part C

This is really common in all ages, and they are caused by being great and intricate. Only sages never think much of it. Since the resentment shall not exist naturally, they have perceived it before the resentment formed; while at the beginning of resentment, it's still not a big deal; even if sages have incurred hatred, they are not obsessed by it. Therefore, they will not harbor stubborn hatred, let alone to be the enemy of it. The resentment will be naturally dispelled when things passed, and there will be no any trace of it to be found. From this perspective, one who doesn't have any thoughts of revenge, other people will consider him as a virtuous man even if they harbor resentment to him.

4.7 Original text – Part D

是所謂報怨以德，非謂曲意將德以報怨也。孔子以直報怨，正謂此耳。斯則怨乃事之至大而多，人人必有難釋者。殊不知有至易者存焉。是所謂為無為，事無事，大其小，而多其少也。天下之事，何獨於怨，而事事皆然。

4.8 Translation of Part D

This is the real sense of returning good for evil instead of literally interpreted it, which corresponds to ‘Recompense injury with justice’, said by Confucius. Things that generate resentment are great and intricate, and everyone could meet tough problems. Actually, the toughest thing could be solved in the simplest ways, which reflects the principle that accomplishing nothing, attending to no—affair, disguising the big trouble as a minor one and then to reduce it to nothing. The principle could not only apply to the resentment but all the rest of things in the world.

4.9 Original text – Part E

故天下之事至難者，有至易存焉。至大者，有至細存焉。人不見其易與細，而於難處圖之，大處為之，必終無成。苟能圖之於易，而為之於細，鮮不濟者。以天下難事必作於易。天下大事必作於細，故也。作者，始起也。是以聖人虛心體道，退藏於密。跡愈隱而道愈光，澤流終古而與天地參。此所謂終不為大，故能成其大也。

4.10 Translation of Part E

Therefore, the toughest thing has its simplest side, and the biggest thing owns its smallest way. Without discovery of the simple and small side, people tend to cope with things from the tough or big one, thus to lead to failure. It would be successful if things were coped starting with simplest or smallest aspects, because the toughest thing was started from the simple one as well as the biggest thing was started from small one. Here the character *zuo* 作 means originate. Instead of showing off, sages are humbly realizing Dao, but more sages hidden, more brilliant Dao it is. Dao is benefit to everything and leave a good name forever. Therefore ‘sages never tend to solve the problems from the tough or big one, accomplishes their greatness.’.

4.11 Original text – Part F

老子言及至此，抑恐世人把易字當作容易輕易字看。故誠之曰，夫輕諾必寡信，多易必多難。謂世人不可將事作容易看也。且容易許人，謂之輕諾。凡輕許者，必食言而寡信。見事之容易而輕為者，必有始而無終。是故易字，非容易也。世人之所難，而聖人之所易。世人之所易，而聖人之所難。

4.12 Translation of Part F

Being afraid of misunderstanding by posterity, Laozi regards the character *yi* 易 as lightly, and said that ‘One who lightly makes a promise, will find it often hard to keep his faith. The easier things be thought, the more difficult it will be.’ The saying is warning that people shall not treat everything lightly. Lightly making promises is equal to despise promises. People who lightly make promises are sure to lightly break them. People who lightly treat everything they met are bound to begin well but end badly. Hence, here the ‘lightly’ is not easily. Things that people think easy are difficult for sages, while things that sages consider as easy are hard for people.

4.13 Original text – Part G

故曰聖人猶難之，故終無難。猶，應作尤。古字通用。更也。謂世人之所甚易者，而聖人更難之，故終不難耳。觀夫文王兢兢，周公業業，戒慎恐懼乎不睹不聞，皆聖人之所難也。余少誦圖難於易為大於細二語，只把作事看。及余入山學道，初為極難，苦心不可言。及得用心之訣，則見其甚易。然初之難，即今之易。今之易，即初之難。然治心如此，推之以及天下之事皆然。此聖人示人入道之真切工夫也。志道者勉之。

4.14 Translation of Part G

That’s why here saying ‘So the sages regard things as much more difficult. That is why there is no difficult in the end.’ The character *you* ‘犹’ shall be the character *you* ‘尤’ because these two Chinese characters are interchangeable for each other, which refers to much more. The saying refers that sages regard things people thought easy as much more difficult, and for that reason they never meet

difficulties. Looking back, King Wen of Zhou and Zhou Gong were careful and cautious. They were behaving timidly and overcautiously whether in the places other people noticed or not, which is the embodiment of sage's attitude towards difficulties. When I read the sentence 'Deal with the difficult while yet it is easy; deal with the big while yet it is small.' in a very young age, I just regard it as an ordinary thing. However, I got to feel so tough and bitter in my heart when I entered the mountain for Dao, but I found it was really simple after I learned the secrets by heart. The original difficulty turns to be the present simple. We shall conclude that everything is same to the learning of Dao from mentality cultivation. These are the real methods taught by sages for internalization of Dao, and I wish these methods shall encourage the like-minded people.

5. Commentary

The first is the analysis of the original text of Daodejing. The original sentence in chapter 58 says 'In cultivating and maintaining the virtue'(治人事天) and there is a difference between the Venerable Master Hanshan's annotation and the understanding of mainstream academics. In the ancient text, the word 'rule men' (治人) was also written as 'govern people' (治民). For example, Lu Xisheng used 'govern people' in his annotation¹, and Wei Jiasun said the emperor remarked the 'men' as 'people'². From these, we can see that the mainstream scholars tend to explain 'rule men' as 'govern people', that is, govern the state. And for 'serve heaven'(事天), there are two mainstream explanations. One believes that the Character tian 天 means 'nature'³, as said by Gu Bencheng. Another one views the Character tian as 'human body'. Ho-Shang Kung commented that 'those who manage the body should cherish the vital essence'⁴, and Wang Chunfu said 'serve heaven means to preserve the talent

¹ Wei Yuan 魏源 *laozi benyi* 老子本義 [The original meaning of Laozi] (Shanghai, Huadong shifan university chubanshe, 2010), p.120.

² Zhu Qianzhi 朱謙之 *laoz jiaoshi* 老子校釋 [The Proofreading and Interpretation of Laozi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 2000), p.239

³ *Ibid.*

⁴ Chen Guying 陳鼓應 *laozi jinzhuyi* 老子今注今譯 [The modern annotation of Laozi] (Beijing Shangwu yinshuguan, 2006), p.288

given by heaven, that is, to self-cultivate’⁵. Besides, Mencius wrote that ‘to preserve one’s kind heart and one’s nature is the way to serve heaven’⁶, which also can be used as circumstantial evidence. Therefore, most scholars think that ‘serve heaven’ means preserve health, and the original text is interpreted as ‘govern the state and keep in good health’.

However, Master Han Shan had a very different interpretation. He clearly pointed out that ‘Human desire means material desire, and nature means innate nature.’ His interpretation was quoted from Zhuangzi, as he said that Zhuangzi has clearly explained Laozi’s human—nature relationship. For example, we shall neither disorder the principle of nature by human desire nor damage one’s virtue by external matters.’ This text is quoted from Zhuangzi - Qiushui ‘Do not use man power to destroy nature, do not deliberately kill a life, and do not seek fame out of greed.’⁷ In the preceding paragraph, it explained the relationship between men and heaven by metaphor, that is, ‘a cow and a horse are four-legged, which is called nature; those who pull the horse and pierce the cow nose are called men.’⁸ And there is an ancient note saying, ‘the cow and horse are born naturally and nothing concerned with men, which is called heaven. Pulling the horse and piercing the nose of cow is the behavior of human, which is called men.’⁹ Consequently, Zhuangzi believed that ‘heaven’ is the nature, and ‘men’ is the intervention by human. And some modern scholars have pointed out that ‘the heaven here means the existing order and law, which is called nature or origin’¹⁰; ‘the man is referring to the state that destroys the nature of things.’¹¹ It can be seen that the ‘men’ here refers to the acquired intervention or material desire, which can also be proved in the post text ‘do not deliberately kill a life’¹². Zhuangzi is always

⁵ *Ibid*

⁶ Yang Bojun 楊伯峻 *mengzi yizhu* 孟子譯註 [The annotation of Mengzi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1988), p.301

⁷ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 *zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [The connection annotation of Zhuangzi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p.591

⁸ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 *zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [The connection annotation of Zhuangzi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p.590

⁹ Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 *zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [The connection annotation of Zhuangzi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p.591

¹⁰ Liu Jiancheng 劉建成 *zongjiao yu shengsi* 宗教與生死 [Religion between Life and Death] (Taipei, Xiuwei chuban, 2011), p.294

¹¹ *Ibid*

¹² Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 *zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 [The connection annotation of Zhuangzi] (Beijing, Zhonghua shuju, 1985), p.591

considered as the commentary of the Daodejing and its knowledge system is inherited from Laozi, so the interpretation of ‘men’ and ‘heaven’ by Master Han Shan is more appropriate and can better explain Laozi's original intention. Therefore, according to Master Han Shan's annotation, ‘治人事天’ should be interpreted as ‘In cultivating and maintaining the virtue’. Although the mainstream understanding has its merits, this translated text adopts the notes of Master Han Shan in order to get closer to the original meaning of Laozi.

As for English translation of the character *wei* 味 in ‘Taste without flavour.’ Seasoning and flavour conform to the Chinese meaning of the taste, but by making a comparison on English dictionaries, the English meaning of seasoning in LEXICO is ‘salt, herbs, or spices added to food to enhance the flavour’¹³, showing the explanatory range of flavour is larger. This character *wei* not only contains the taste of spices, but also gets involved in all tastes. Hence, the author selects ‘flavour’.

¹³ LEXICO < <https://www.lexico.com/definition/seasoning> > [accessed 14th February 2020]

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