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*Rethinking the Relationship between Confucianism and Daoism: A Thematic Comparative Analytical Study*

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**Abstract**

*The relationship between Confucianism and Daoism has long been interpreted through two competing frameworks: one emphasizing fundamental opposition and the other proposing unity within difference. This paper evaluates these interpretive models through a comparative thematic study of shared philosophical categories, including Dao, De, Ren, Wu Wei. By analyzing classical sources alongside major modern scholarly interpretations, the study argues that Confucianism and Daoism represent divergent yet internally related developments within a shared intellectual tradition. Their differences arise primarily from levels of discourse and philosophical orientation rather than structural contradiction. The paper concludes that the “unity in difference” model provides a more coherent explanatory framework for understanding the historical and conceptual relationship between the two traditions.*

**Keywords:** Confucianism, Daoism, Dao, Wu Wei, Tian, Intellectual Continuity.

## Section One: Introduction

The origins and differences between Confucianism and Daoism among other schools of thought have been studied since the Han dynasty (206 BCE–220 CE). Today as the only two living indigenous schools of thought of the Chinese traditional culture, it is always important to question the relationship of these two schools of thought in order to better understand Chinese culture and philosophy.

The contemporary scholarship still pays attention on the question. Scholars including Toshihiko Izutzu (1914–1993) are of the view of the oppositional relationship of the two, as formal rational via mystical experiential, while others like Rene Guenon (1886–1951), Feng Youlan (1895–1990) would conclude on the intellectual continuity of the two schools of thought as two dimensions of practical and speculative, and different levels in spirituality and knowledge. The current study is to rethink about the subject relationship, in light of carrying out an analysis of their common themes to help understand the philosophical relationship between the two schools of thought.

## Section Two: Conception of Dao in Confucianism and Daoism

### 2.1 The Theme of Dao in Confucianism

Although Confucianism defines the ultimate meaning of life by realization of Dao, but unlike Daoism, it did not elaborate the reality of Dao. Dao in Confucianism is considered so exalted that even a sage may not know some of its aspects. However, Dao the exalted one has another aspect which is obvious and easy to understand even for ordinary people in order to put into practice.

Confucius said: “If enlightened by Dao in the early morning, it is not regrettable to die in the evening.”<sup>1</sup> So, Dao in this sense can only be defined as something in which the ultimate meaning of life lies because it is the ultimate and final basis of the world. Confucius did not elaborate how the existence of the world related to Dao, but he highlighted that the meaning and goal of life is bound to realization of Dao.

In the Confucian classic *Zhong Yong* (The Doctrine of Mean), it is said: “The Dao of Jun-zi (superior man) is immense and hidden.”<sup>2</sup> Zi Si<sup>3</sup> explained: “the immense Dao can be understood and practiced by ordinary people but the ultimate reality of the hidden Dao is not comprehended fully even by Sheng Ren the sages.” So, Confucian Dao as defined by Zi Si has an essence which and remains unknown. We may safely compare this aspect of Dao of Confucianism with that of Daoist Dao which is exalted from any description that it does not even have a name.

Dao according to Confucius is found in man’s self. Zi Si in his *Zhong Yong* narrated the saying of Confucius: “Dao is not away from man; if Dao has been performed separately from man, do not consider it as Dao.”<sup>4</sup> Confucianism recognizes transcendence of Dao, the transcendence does not conflict with human being. In contrast, Confucius said: “once the root has been established, Dao will take place (or emerge).”<sup>5</sup> This “root” has been interpreted as faithfulness and forgiveness.<sup>6</sup> So, Confucianism believes that morality leads to transcendence. It seems Confucianism seek for transcendence through man not by natural world.

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<sup>1</sup> Confucius, *The Analects* (Liaoning: Liaoning National Press, 1996). 36.

<sup>2</sup> Zeng Zi and Zi Si, *Da Xue and Zhong Yong* (Bei Jing: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2006).70.

<sup>3</sup> Zi Si, grandson of Confucius. He is considered to be author of *Zhong Yong*.

<sup>4</sup> Zeng Zi and Zi Si, *Da Xue and Zhong Yong*, 73.

<sup>5</sup> Confucius, *The Analects*, 2.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*38.

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Confucian Dao is extremely exalted in the sense that it could not be completely comprehended even by a sage. Confucius believes that if man cultivates himself properly, Dao will be realized in turn, as Feng Youlan said, “Confucianism in moral practice seeks for the highest spiritual realization.”<sup>7</sup>

Confucius did not emphasize the perspective of Dao in relation to generation of the universe. To him, the universe had always existed. Unlike Lao Zi, Confucius accepted the fact of the existence of the universe without asking about its origin. Confucius did not elaborate Dao from cosmological and ontological perspectives, but he emphasized the role of human beings in relation with it. Philosophers interpreted this differently.

### 2.2 The Conception of Dao in Daoism

Although Dao cannot be talked about according to *Dao De Jing*, Lao Zi still talked about it more than Confucius did. However, Lao Zi hesitantly named Dao just for purpose of introduction not because it actually could be named. Lao Zi gave ‘Dao’ as its name and used ‘Da’ (the great) for its literary name that shows respect.<sup>8</sup>

Dao is the ultimate base and the source from which all things came into being. Dao itself is totally independent, and it existed before even Heaven and Earth. The world depends depending on it. As Lao Zi said: “Men models himself after the Earth; The Earth models itself after Heaven (Tian); The Heaven models itself after Tao (Dao); Tao models itself after Nature (self-so not material world).”<sup>9</sup> “Dependent on nothing, unchanging.”<sup>10</sup>, “Dao follows self-so.”<sup>11</sup>

In further explaining the nature of Dao, Zhuang Zi interpreted as “The one existed before Heaven and Earth, the one who made things as they are is not same as the things made.”<sup>12</sup> This is to say there is no positive description of Dao, but through negation, we can say about Dao that it is different from things made out of it.

“Dao, rooted in itself, dependent on itself.”<sup>13</sup> If origin and ultimate base of Dao is questioned, Zhuang Zi’s response is that Dao is its base not anything else.

All things of the world come into being from Dao just as continuously being taken out from a never-ending store. Lao Zi said, “Dao is the ‘Ao’ (奧) of all things.”<sup>14</sup> ‘Ao’ is interpreted by He Shang Gong<sup>15</sup> as ‘storehouse.’ “Dao is store of all things, there is nothing outside of Dao.”<sup>16</sup>

All things came from Dao, so Dao is the source of the world. However, Dao is not only the source of the world in the sense of origin or past of the world, but all things and events at all times may be correctly attributed to Dao, because “Dao does not take possession when its work is

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<sup>7</sup> Feng Youlan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Zhi Jing Shen)* (Bei Jing: China Youth Press, 2005). 20.

<sup>8</sup> Lao Zi. Ch. 25.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Lao-tse*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1948) , 146.

<sup>10</sup> Lao Zi.Ch. 25.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi*, trans. Wang Rongpei (Chang Sha: Hunan People's Publishing House, 1999). 168.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid.94.

<sup>14</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.62.

<sup>15</sup> He-shang gong (Duke of Upper River), his biography is unknown, lived in the time of King Wen (203B.C-157B.C) of Han dynasty. He was Daoist recluse famous for his *Commentary on Dao De Jing*.

<sup>16</sup> He-shang Gong, *Syntactic and Semantic Analysis of Lao Zi Dao De Jing* (Bei Jing: Chung Hwa Book Co., 1993).241.

accomplished,”<sup>17</sup> and “Dao does not ever do anything.”<sup>18</sup>, but “yet through it everything is done.”<sup>19</sup> Dao models itself after Nature, that’s why its work or participation is not felt.

“There are things created by others; there is one that is not created. Those created have to be under creation and changing, like Yin, Yang and four seasons. However the one that is not created is independent and everlasting Dao.”<sup>20</sup> Lie Zi described Dao in contrast with things created by it. All things that are created are always under creation and changing; that which is not created does not change, but is independent and eternal.

Zhuang Zi defines Dao negatively by saying the creator of things is not a thing<sup>21</sup>. This is to say that the maker of things is different from things made. Lao Zi also employed adjectives such as “empty.”<sup>22</sup> “invisible, unbearable and impalpable”<sup>23</sup> to describe Dao.

Dao is extremely exalted but it is the ontological background of all things, therefore, Dao is also not only the principle or law of the universe but also an entity. Zhuang Zi said: “Dao is everywhere, even in lowly things such the ant.”<sup>24</sup> For Zhuang Zi, it is not possible for anything to be separated from Dao. In describing the body or reality of Dao, Lao Zi said: “within Dao are the forms and entities.”<sup>25</sup> Some take this description of Lao Zi for their materialist view. But since Dao in Daoism is explicitly introduced as different from all things of forms, forms and entity of Dao are different from things which are produced from Dao. The reality of Dao is summed up in word “hun”<sup>26</sup> which means “vague” and “whole”. Wang Bi<sup>27</sup> and Zhang Dainian<sup>28</sup> understood “hun” to mean “unknown”.<sup>29</sup>

For Confucianism and Daoism in some of its aspects, Dao is unknown and indescribable. Confucianism considers Dao from the perspective of its significance to human being while Daoism puts Dao in the universe as a whole for consideration, whereof man is just one part. For Confucianism, it is man who makes Dao great, but for Daoism, Dao is already the greatest one to be followed. As Wing-Tsit Chan asserted, the saying of Confucius “it is the man that can make his religion or the principles he professes great; and not his religion or principles which he professes, which can make the man great”<sup>30</sup> is the chief spiritual and moral inspiration of the Chinese.<sup>31</sup>

### **Section Three : The Conception of Tian (Heaven) in Confucianism and Daoism**

Lao Zi introduced the concept of Dao and then it became the utmost central theme in Daoism while Confucius also takes reference of meaning of life from Dao. The concept of Heaven was given a place

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<sup>17</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Laotse*, (New York: The Modern Library, 1948). 186.

<sup>18</sup> Lin Yutang, 194.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Lie Zi, *Lie Zi*, ed. Jing Zhong (Bei Jing: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2007).3.

<sup>21</sup> Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi*, Translated by Wang Rongpei, (Chang Sha City: Hu Nan Ren Ming Press,1999), 381.

<sup>22</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.4.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid. Ch.14.

<sup>24</sup> Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi*, (Chang Sha City: Hu Nan Ren Ming Press,1999), 360.

<sup>25</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.21.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.Ch.25.

<sup>27</sup> Wang Bi, *Lao Zi Dao De Jing* (Shang Hai: World Book Bureau, 1935).14.

<sup>28</sup> Zhang Dainian (1909-2004), a modern Chinese philosopher and professor.

<sup>29</sup> Zhang Dainian, *A Deep Study of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Fa Wei)* (Tai Yuan: Shanxi People's Publishing House, 1981).23.

<sup>30</sup> Gu Hongming, 467-468.

<sup>31</sup> Hu Shih Wing-tsit Chan, and T'ang Chün-i etc, *The Chinese Mind* (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, University of Hawaii Press, 1967).32.

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secondary to Dao in Daoism, while Confucius considered it the ultimate dominator of the universe and man as well.

### Literal Meaning of Tian (Heaven)

Tian (Heaven) is explained in bone inscription as: “that indicates a man with big head.” Head was highlighted indicating its highest position i.e. that there is nothing above Tian. However, this was not agreed by Lao Zi. The philologist Xu Shen explained: “Tian is constituted of ‘一’(one) and ‘大’(great) meaning the highest which there is nothing above.”<sup>32</sup> So, according to the etymology of the word, Tian is the *highest heavenly greatness*.

### Meaning of Tian before Confucius and Lao Zi

Tian is mentioned in *Shi Jing* many times, in combination with different adjectives. “oh remote dark blue Heaven, what kind of person is this!”<sup>33</sup> Here in *Shi Jing*, Tian has been described as sky above our heads. We can hardly equate Tian in meaning with God. “Oh! Tremendous Tian, you did not sustain your kindness for longer, but you dropped and released famine!” Tian here means God because it is not only great or tremendous, but it also determines the destiny.

Tian was also called “Shang Tian” which means Heaven highly above men. “Bright Shang Tian is shining on earth.”<sup>34</sup> Another of its names “*Shang Di*” meaning *King above*. “Oh mighty Shang Di (Topmost Emperor), having insight into all under him”<sup>35</sup> Tian and Di are one the same. “when worshiped at sacrificial altar at open place, it is called Tian, when worshiped under roof through deity, it is called Di.” Zhu-Xi<sup>36</sup>(1130CE-1200CE) explained.

So, Tian appears with different colors in different seasons, but it is that to whom mankind appeal because man’s destiny is in his hand. Therefore Tian in this sense has a religious meaning. This traditional religious meaning of Tian is also accepted by Confucius.

### 3.1 Conception of Tian (Heaven) in Confucianism

When Yan Hui, one of his disciples died, Confucius cried in an outburst of grief: “Oh! Oh! Tian has forsaken me! Tian has forsaken me!”<sup>37</sup> Confucius when facing accident of life and death, behaved differently from Zhuang Zi who upon his wife’s death cried but then stopped crying at once and started celebrating. When asked by his friend, he replied that: “there was once no her, then by chance she came into being, now how can I cry while she takes rest in between Heaven and Earth? One will cry only when he does not understand this.”<sup>38</sup> Confucius expressed his feelings of normal men. Confucius also did not feel any hesitation to attribute fortune of life to Tian as others normally do. Zi Xia a disciple of Confucius in consoling his colleague said: “Life and death are governed by Ming (fate); wealth and honor are determined by Tian.”<sup>39</sup> ‘Ming’ literally means ‘command’, so ‘Tian Ming’ means ‘command of Tian’. Therefore, fate and fortune are commands of Tian. This sort of

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<sup>32</sup> Xu Shen, *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* (Bei Jing: Jiu Zhou Publishing Houses, 2001).1.

<sup>33</sup> Zhou Zhenfu, *Commentary on Shi Jing* (Bei Jing: Chung Hwa Book Co., 2002).95.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.338.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.412.

<sup>36</sup> Zhu Xi was a Confucian philosopher, educator and poet of Song Dynasty (960-1279).

<sup>37</sup> Confucius.115.

<sup>38</sup> Zhuang Zi, *Zhuang Zi*, Trans.by Wang Rongpei (Chang Sha: Hunan People’s publishing House, 1999),288.

<sup>39</sup> Confucius.12.

religious thinking or belief of Confucius and his disciples was succeeded the religious connotations of Tian from the previous prevailing ideology.

Confucius accepted traditional Tian. He also taught his disciples to respect Tian. Confucius taught: “Jun Zi is in awe of three things, of Command of Tian, of Great Man (Senior) and of words of Sheng Ren (Wiseman)”<sup>40</sup> Jun Zi is in awe of command of Tian, because it is out of man’s control, but even beyond his understanding as Qian Mu has explained<sup>41</sup>.

Tian wills and its willing is absolutely free. It is the highest authority whose resolution cannot be influenced or controlled by anyone. Even the so-called deities cannot ask Tian for favor (intercede) once Tian is defied. “Once you sinned toward Tian, no prayer can help”<sup>42</sup> Confucian Tian is also the highest authority to be obeyed and even those who were generally worshiped deities cannot help if one goes to them for prayer.

Tian is also the source of virtue. “It is Heaven who bestowed upon me with virtue (De)”<sup>43</sup> Virtue here is translation of De, the same Chinese word appearing in the title of *Dao De Jing*, the classic of Lao Zi. It is rendered differently because De can hardly be understood in Confucianism in the same way as Daoism defined it. In Daoism De may be properly understood in the sense of ontology. So, De is the ontological ground of all individuals of the world. Zhuang Zi defined De as that which gives birth to everything.<sup>44</sup> Dao however, in Confucianism (early Confucianism), ontological question was neither their starting point nor their main concern. Confucius accepted the universe as a fact already existing without questioning how it came into being, i.e. without cosmological or ontological query. Confucian De is bestowed by Tian, so, it has an ontological base, but its fundamental meaning is Ren (benevolence) in Confucianism not the reality of individuals of the world that makes things as they are. So, based on different philosophical concerns, Daoism advises man to follow Dao and De through Wu Wei (non action). Confucianism teaches man to enlarge Dao through moral cultivation.

Zhang Dainian thinks that Tian of Confucius in his term Tian Ming (command of Tian) has religious connotations. So Tian wills, knows and is dominant over the universe.<sup>45</sup> This religious conception is considered by Feng Youlan as simple as graphical. That means that the conception of Tian in Confucius is relatively simple, not philosophically profound enough because it is religious.<sup>46</sup>

### **3.2 Tian (Heaven) in Daoism**

Tian repeatedly appears in the Daoist texts in combination with ‘Earth’. In the combination, ‘Tian-di’ means the whole universe. So, Tian in this context only indicates the material heavens and their belongings. This is not the concern for the present study. However, Tian also appears in combination ‘Tian-dao’. In this phrase, Tian is the subject being described by Dao which literally means ‘way’. In other words, in this phrase, Tian gives philosophical meaning, while Dao only indicates its literal meaning. Although for Daoism, Dao is the ultimate reality and principle to be followed, but Tian has also been referred to for the same purpose. While bringing forward his own philosophical concept,

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid.186.

<sup>41</sup> Qian Mu. 313.

<sup>42</sup> Confucius.26.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid.75.

<sup>44</sup> Zhuang Zi.183.

<sup>45</sup> Zhang Dainian, General Outlines of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Da Gang), (Bei Jing: China Social Sciences Publisher, 1994).2.

<sup>46</sup> Youlan, *The Spirit of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Zhi Jing Shen)*.27.

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Lao Zi also elaborates the way of Tian (Tian-dao), most probably for taking the most popular and authentic conception of Tian for the reference.

One of the ways of Tian is to inhibit stronger and nourish weaker. Lao Zi said: “Heaven’s way is like the bending a row. When a bow is bent the top comes down and bottom-end comes up. So, too does Heaven take away from those who have too much, and give to those who have not enough”<sup>47</sup>This principle of Tian is in sharp contrast with the way of man. The way of man is “taking away from those that have not enough in order to make offering to those that already have enough,”<sup>48</sup>as Lao Zi further said. This way of Heaven is like Dao’s quality of reversal that when things reach the poles of their development or decadence, revert to the opposite direction. So, it is always advised by Lao Zi to be cautious when you are in status of confidence or satisfaction.

Another way of Tian is to withdraw when work is done. Lao Zi said “When your work is done, then, withdraw. Such is Heaven’s way.”<sup>49</sup> This way of Heaven is also described by Lao Zi as ‘Xuan De’, rendered differently as ‘mysterious power’ and ‘deep power’ etc. Lao Zi said: “Dao gave them birth, the ‘power’ of Dao (De) reared them...rear them, but not lay claim to them; control them, but never lean upon them; be the chief among them, but do not manage them. This is called the mysterious De.” The way of Tian is very similar to Dao that they accomplish things, and then withdraw.

From above discussions, it becomes clear that in Daoism, Tian looks like Dao but is in reality different from Confucian Tian. Zhang Dainian thinks that in virtue of transcending all things, the Daoist Dao does not have will, emotion and consciousness, unlike Confucian Tian.<sup>50</sup>

All things come from Tian. But there are also things coming from man. It is ultimate human knowledge to know how to differentiate between them in order to avoid harm of man-made things, and to have a complete life determined by Tian. This is termed by Zhuang Zi ‘years of Tian’. Zhuang Zi said: “To know that Heaven can do and to know what man can do---that is the ultimate human knowledge. To know what Heaven can do is to know that everything comes from Heaven. To know what man can do is to use one’s knowledge of known to nourish his knowledge of the unknown against premature death until his natural death.”<sup>51</sup> Things done by Tian are like having four feet of cattle and horse; that done by man are like headstall for horse, nose ring for cattle, as Zhuang Zi illustrated.<sup>52</sup>

Anyway, Dao in Lao Zi is the more fundamental even than Tian, because, Dao is prior to it, though Tian is also fundamental because referring to it helps in expounding Dao.

### Section Four: The Conception of De in Confucianism and Daoism

The word, ‘De’ is normally understood to mean ‘virtue’ and ‘moral’. However, as suggested by René Guénon, De in Daoist context should properly be rendered as ‘rectitude’. Actually in the Chinese language, there is another ‘De’ (得) which means ‘to obtain’ and ‘that which is obtained’.

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<sup>47</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.77.

<sup>48</sup> Ibid.Ch.77.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.Ch.9.

<sup>50</sup> Dainian, *A Deep Study of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue Fa Wei)*.17.

<sup>51</sup> Zhuang Zi.88.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

The second 'De' has been explained by a modern Confucian thinker Qian Mu<sup>53</sup> in his *new commentary on the Analects* as the acquisition of Dao. Though it is acquisition of Dao, it is still Confucian, because according to him Dao indicates Dao of Ren, which is different from connotation of Dao in Daoism.<sup>54</sup>

### ***Literal Meaning of De***

De written in simplified Chinese as 德, is as difficult to be translated into English word as any other Chinese philosophical concepts. It has variety of meanings in Chinese language such as 'virtue' which is result of cultivation, idea, grace and power endowed by Dao to all individuals of the universe as their reality etc.

In Jin Wen<sup>55</sup> De is written as 𠄎 combination of Chi(𠄎) and De(惠). 𠄎 means 'ascending' as in 'ascend on a horse or vehicle'; 惠 means De in question. The component 惠 itself gives meaning of obtaining. It means to obtain from both inside and outside, inside from one's own heart, outside from others.<sup>56</sup> "De" literally means 'ascending' as interpreted by Shuo Wen Jie Zi.<sup>57</sup>

According to *Shi Jing, the Classic of Poetry*, De also means nice, melodious and grace. "For a long time, my husband did not speak with me in melodious tone."<sup>58</sup> A wife complained that her husband after marriage does not placate her with nice tone and kind words. In this context, De is used to describe the manner the husband used to speak to his wife before they got married and when they were just falling love. In another place of *Shi Jing*, De means 'grace' "Oh, immense Tian (Heaven), your grace has not lasted longer."<sup>59</sup> People begged for grace of Tian to last forever whenever disaster happened.

### **4.1 De in Confucianism**

One of the most fundamental concepts in Confucianism is 'Ren'. According to Confucius himself, his whole teaching is connected by one (thing or principle). This one is explained by his disciple as connotation of Ren, which is moral. However, Confucius attributed the roots of human morality to Heaven.

The basic connotation of De in Confucian context is Ren, but since it originated from Tian it has got ontological ground. In terms of professor Song Zhiming<sup>60</sup>, Daoism emphasizes ontological objectivity of Dao, while Confucianism highlighted ontological subjectivity of Dao. Confucius Said: "God (Tian) has given me moral and intellectual power (De)."<sup>61</sup> De in Confucian context basically means Ren. Since it originated from Heaven, it got an ontological basis. However, in this ontological basis, Confucius emphasized man's subjectivity.<sup>62</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Qian Mu (1895-1990), Chinese modern historian, thinker, educator.

<sup>54</sup> Qian Mu.8.

<sup>55</sup> Jin Wen is one of the historical systems of Chinese language inscribed into the metal items such as bells and cauldrons before Qin dynasty consolidated other vassal states (888B.C-207B.C).

<sup>56</sup> Xushen, "Shuowenjiezi."603.

<sup>57</sup> Ibid.105.

<sup>58</sup> Zhou Zhenfu.41.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid.303.

<sup>60</sup> Song Zhiming (Born 1947), Professor in department of philosophy of Renming University of China.

<sup>61</sup> Hongming.394-395.

<sup>62</sup> Song Zhiming, "An Ontological Thinking of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue De Ben Ti Lun Si Lu)," *Chuan Shan Xue Kan Journal*, no. 1 (2004).6.

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Heavenly originated De is also described by Confucius as the doctrine of mean, which means middle and the best way, not undue and not insufficient. Confucius say: “The doctrine of mean is the utmost De”<sup>63</sup>

However, Confucius himself lamented that De is not easy to understand and practice persistently. Confucius said: “You<sup>64</sup>, those who know De are few!”<sup>65</sup> “Rarely, people persist in it (the doctrine of mean)!”<sup>66</sup>

### 4.2 De in Taoism

De is sometimes translated as ‘virtue’ which has moral meaning. Guénon prefers ‘Rectitude’ rather than ‘virtue’ keeping in with the outlook of Daoism. For him, De is the ‘specification’ of Dao with respect to individuals. In other words, any single thing of all things including humankind is a specific manifestation of Dao. According to Guénon, De is the direction which a being “must follow in order that its existence in its present state shall be according to the Way (Dao), or, in other words, in conformity with the Principle.”<sup>67</sup>

In his translation of Dao De Jing, Lin Yutang rendered De as ‘character’ mostly and at one place as ‘virtue’. Unlike Guenon, he considers De a moral principle.<sup>68</sup>

There might be many other translations of De as per different understandings, like ‘Power of Dao’ translated by Waley, but they all may fall into only two categories of meaning as just discussed: moral and non-moral of Daoist De.

When discussing De, Lao Zi always prefers “superior De”, “mystic De”, “ultimate De”, sometimes in contrasting with “inferior De.” According to Lao Zi, superior, mystic and ultimate De is true and real De because the man with this kind of De is not aware of it and never acts. In sharp contrast, the man of inferior De is intent on not losing De therefore he does not have De, i.e. real De. So, Lao Zi tries to lead from normal perceiving of De to some other meaning of it which is superior to Ren and leads to Dao. “After Tao was lost, then came the ‘power’ (De); after the ‘power’ was lost, then came human kindness.”<sup>69</sup>

As Dao is the origin and the end of all things and provider of ontological ground to them, De is also defined in the same way in Daoism. Lao Zi said: “Dao gave them birth; De reared them”<sup>70</sup> This ‘rearing’ of De is explained by Zhuang Zi as: “From Oneness (Dao) came everything, each receiving what is called its own ‘virtue’(De).”<sup>71</sup> De, the virtue as translated by Wang Rongpei has ontological meaning not moral, because everything came from Dao, and what they have received from Dao is called De of each thing. That is why Guénon defined De as ‘specification’ of Dao within every individual of all things including humankind.

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<sup>63</sup> Confucius.66.

<sup>64</sup> You here refers to Zhong You(542-480 B.C), one of top ten disciples of Confucius.

<sup>65</sup> Confucius.171.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid.

<sup>67</sup> Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Oriental Doctrines*.422.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.38.

<sup>70</sup> Ibid.Ch.51.

<sup>71</sup> Zhuang Zi.182.

De in both schools has ontological meaning. Confucianism highlights subjectivity of the ontology, while Daoism emphasizes its objectivity. In other words, according Confucianism, man plays leading and active role in making Dao great, but Dao cannot make man great; As per Daoist outlook, Dao is 'unconditioned', what-is-so-itself, while man is conditioned by Dao, man has its direction of De to follow in order to conform with the supreme Principle, Dao. In words of Feng Youlan, it is not correct to say that Daoism does not advocate morality of Ren and Yi, rather, they are not sufficient, there should be something more to be given priority.

Looking from moral perspective, the basic meaning of Confucian De is moral, i.e. Ren (benevolence) of man, while fundamental meaning of Daoist De is ontological, i.e. the reality of all things including man. Whereas, Daoism pays attention to man from the standpoint of high position of Dao and Tian, while Confucianism starts from men and looks forward to Dao and Tian.

### **Section Five: The conceptions of Ren (Benevolence), Yi (Righteousness) and Li (Ritual)**

Ren, Yi and Li are the core concepts of Confucianism, just like Dao and De are in Daoism. Confucius did not put 'Ren', 'Yi' and 'Li' together when teaching them, but mentioned and discussed them in different occasions and contexts separately. It is his later follower Meng Zi who put them together with 'Zhi' (wisdom) and named them 'Si Duan' (four clues).<sup>72</sup> Since 'Zhi' (wisdom) is not discussed in the most primary text of Daoism, *Dao De Jing*, so, in this section study, only Ren, Yi and Li will be considered.

#### **Literal Meaning of Ren, Yi and Li**

Ren is written in simplified Chinese as '仁' (Ren) constituted by '人' (Ren) which means human being and '二' (er) which means two. It means when there are two persons, Ren arises, that is to prefer for another what one wants for himself. However, it is interpreted by *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* as: "blood relation."<sup>73</sup> In this sense, the primary meaning of Ren is blood relation which was extended later to wider society and the universe. Before it was taken by Confucius as the kernel of his teaching, conception of Ren was generally taken to mean 'kindness.' *Shi Jing* the Chinese classic of poetry said describing a man: "The man is good looking and kind."<sup>74</sup>

Yi is written in simplified Chinese as '义', and in Jin Wen as '義' (yi) constituted of '羊' (yang) which means 'blessed' and '我' (wo) which indicates 'war'. So, Yi primarily means 'blessed war', but later it was extended to include justice. Tian does not bless unjust war. Then, Yi became symbol of justice in everything. However, it is interpreted in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* as "dignity of self."<sup>75</sup> This shows that justice embodies 'dignity of self'. Before Confucian appropriation, Yi generally meant good and things that should be done, but sometimes it also meant 'powerful' in negative sense. King Zhou Wen after overthrowing the previous Shang dynasty once blamed the kings of Shang

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<sup>72</sup> Yang BoJun, *Commentary of Meng Zi* (Bei Jing: Chung Hwa Book Co., 1988).88.

<sup>73</sup> Xu Shen.448.

<sup>74</sup> Zhou Zhenfu.142.

<sup>75</sup> Xu Shen.744.

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Dynasty “You appointed Yi (powerful) people”<sup>76</sup> King Zhou Wen said: “Indulgence is not Yi (right, appropriate).”<sup>77</sup> So, if things are not in accordance with Yi, one should not do them.

Li is written in simplified Chinese as ‘礼’, and 禮(li) in Jin Wen, constituted of ‘示’ (shi) which means sacrifice and ‘豊’ which means a utensil used in sacrificing. It is interpreted in *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* as “sacrifice to deity for blessings”. The deity mentioned here in Chinese language is ‘Shen’, which according to *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* is not Tian or Dao, but merely what brought things out into being.<sup>78</sup> The deity mentioned here is interpreted by the author of *Shuo Wen Jie Zi* as heavenly deities that brought things into being. Defined thus, they seem like mediators between the Ultimate Reality and all created things. To celebrate good harvest, people used to say: “In accordance with hundreds of Li (ceremonies), please prepare wine (normal) and sweet wine”<sup>79</sup>

Ren, Yi and Li were not Confucian creations, on the contrary, they were very common and well-known concepts in the time of Confucius and even before him. This might have been because these traditional teachings were the central themes in the tradition before Confucius. Therefore, Confucius focused his teachings on them, because he did not claim originality but to have elaborated ancient teachings.

As literary study of the characters of these themes has shown, they all somehow were related to worship and sacrifice. However the way Confucius followed ancient teachings is interpreted differently. Feng Youlan is of the view that Confucius produces creatively though narration. This production seems like highlighting the reason, rather than faith. Liang Shuming<sup>80</sup> believes that Confucius promoted spirit of rationality instead of preferring religious thought in Xia (2070B.C.-1600B.C.), Shang (1571B.C.-1046B.C.) and early Zhou (1046B.C.-256B.C.) dynasties.<sup>81</sup>

### Ren, Yi and Li in Confucianism

As discussed above, Ren, Yi and Li are not original Confucian themes. Rather, these were traditional concepts of Chinese philosophy. Confucian teachers were most familiar with them. This was later confirmed also by Zhuang Zi in the chapter of ‘All under Tian’ of his book where he discussed all prominent contemporary schools.

In the society, there are ranks of nobility. People strive for the highest one, but the truly highest nobility is ignored. Meng Zi said “Ren is an honorable nobility from Tian, and a peaceful home for man.”<sup>82</sup> According to Meng Zi, man’s home is not where he bodily lives, not in the universe but in Ren which belongs to realm of Tian.

This Heavenly bestowed nobility of Ren results from practicing Dao. “Seek Dao; hold fast to De; live in Ren; and enjoy the pleasures derived from the pursuit of Li (the fine arts)” Ren is rendered by Professor Gu Hongming as ‘morality’. According to professor Qian Mu, Ren is all that is obtained by

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<sup>76</sup> Zhou Zhenfu.451.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.452.

<sup>78</sup> Xu Shen.3.

<sup>79</sup> Zhou Zhenfu.508.

<sup>80</sup> Liang ShuMing (1893-1988), Chinese thinker, educator and social reformer. 1917-1924. He was professor in BeiJing University.

<sup>81</sup> Liang Shuming, *The Essentials of Chinese Culture* (Shang Hai: Shang Hai People's Publishing House, 2011). 102-110.

<sup>82</sup> Yang BoJun.81.

practicing Dao.<sup>83</sup> As Professor Song Zhiming pointed out, Confucianism highlighted the subjectivity of man in the ontological what of Dao, Daoism emphasized the objectivity of Dao.<sup>84</sup>

‘Ren’ can be understood either for a person’s relation to himself or his relation with other persons. ‘Ren’ to one’s self means that it is like men’s home where his heart can ‘live’ easily and peacefully. Confucius said: “it is satisfactory to live in Ren.”<sup>85</sup> Man will find peace in his own heart which itself is Ren. It seems that for Confucius ‘Ren’ is almost like Dao because both, being the meaning of life can satisfy heart. Ren is not only home of man’s heart, but it is man’s very heart. It is likely that according to Confucianism the meaning of man’s life is Ren. Therefore, man’s heart is defined by it. Meng Zi said: “Ren is the heart of man.”<sup>86</sup>

The meaning of Ren can be understood also in social life, because Ren does not remain within one’s self, rather it naturally inclines to be expressed in feelings and actions. Confucius said: “Ren is to love others.”<sup>87</sup> Loving others starts with loving the closest one which is one’s own self. You love yourself, so, you only want good for yourself. Thus, Ren means just to apply this principle to others. Confucius said: “A moral man in forming his character forms the character of others; in lightening himself he lightens others.”<sup>88</sup> Ren is not only to love, but also to serve. Confucius said: “the root of Ren is to show filial piety to parents and respect to elders (elder brothers).” Meng Zi said: “The content of Ren is to serve parents.”<sup>89</sup>

The love and service that are emitted from Ren are not exhausted in close relatives rather it is taught by Meng Zi that: “Treat you aged kin as the elderly should be treated, and then extend it to the young children of others.”<sup>90</sup> On this extension of Ren is based political thought of Confucianism that if all members of the society extend Ren (love and serve) to others, then the society will be in order. Meng Zi took reference from *the Classic of Poetry* (Shi Jing) “An exemplar in treating his wife, and extending to his brothers, thus he rules the family and the state.”<sup>91</sup>

Yi is usually mentioned along with Ren in Confucianism, so, Yi is also one of the key themes in it. Yi is that according to which man should perform his all actions. Anything without Yi is considered as getting far away from Dao. Yi is the way of Jun Zi (noble man) for keeping Dao. The meaning of life consists in keeping Dao even on the price of living a tough life. Just as Ren is innate quality of man which naturally and spontaneously motivates him to doing good, Yi is also the inherent quality of man that makes him avoiding evil. Yi as inner inherent quality manifests in form of ‘shame’, just as Ren does in form of compassion. Meng Zi said: “shame on evil is clue of Yi”<sup>92</sup>

Li is related to external behavior whether personal etiquettes or collective ceremonies. Confucianism advocated Li for its containing inner meanings of Ren and Yi. Otherwise, Li is criticized by Confucianism also. Confucius said: “if a man is without Ren (empty of “moral character”, rendered by professor Gu Hongmin), what good can the use of Li (the fine arts translated

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<sup>83</sup> Qian Mu.123-124.

<sup>84</sup> Zhang Zhiming, "Ontological Way of Thinking of Chinese Philosophy (Zhong Guo Zhe Xue De Ben Ti Lun Si Lu)," *Chuan Shan School Journal*, no. 1 (2004).7.

<sup>85</sup> Confucius.34.

<sup>86</sup> Yang BoJun.267.

<sup>87</sup> Hongming.439.

<sup>88</sup> Ibid.389.

<sup>89</sup> Yang BoJun.183.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid.16.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.80.

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by Professor Gu Hongmin) do him?”<sup>93</sup> In defining the fundamental principle of Li, Confucius gave example of funeral ceremonies by saying that “in rituals (Li) for the dead, it is better that there should be heartfelt grief rather than minute attention to external observances”<sup>94</sup> Daoism criticized Confucian teachings of Ren, Yi and Li generally, and Li is much more severely criticized by Daoism. Lao Zi said: “Now Li (ritual) is the mere husk of loyalty and promise-keeping and indeed the first step towards brawling”<sup>95</sup> It seems that Lao Zi is not criticizing Li itself, but Li when it becomes empty of inner meanings. Confucius and Lao Zi both have noticed negative side of Li. Confucianism therefore stresses unity of external Li and interior Ren.

### Ren, Yi and Li in Daoism

In criticizing the notion of Ren, Lao Zi refers to Tian, Earth and Sage. He says that “Tian and Earth (nature) are unkind...the Sage is unkind”<sup>96</sup> Unkindness of Tian, Earth and Sage is learnt from Dao. Lao Zi said: “Man models himself after the Earth; the Earth models itself after Tian (Heaven); Tian models itself after Tao; Tao models itself after the Nature that is so by itself (Zi Ran).”<sup>97</sup> To model after ‘Self-so’ is to let all things be as they are rather than interfere with them. “Giving them birth does not own them...being superior does not control them”. The real Ren is named by Lao Zi ‘superior Ren.’<sup>98</sup> It is real and superior because the ‘superior Ren’ acts but without an ulterior motive.<sup>99</sup> The real Ren is titled by Zhuang Zi ‘perfect Ren’ (Zhi Ren) and ‘great Ren’ (Da Ren).<sup>100</sup> It is real and perfect because it is not close to anyone, but treats all equally.<sup>101</sup> Zhuang Zi gave an example of King Yao and King Shun to explain the perfect Ren which is not Ren (benevolent). He says that King Yao and King Shun left virtue behind them, and let people act according to their own natural bent, thus bestowed benefit and grace to them without their consciousness.<sup>102</sup>

Daoism redefined traditional concept of Ren in its philosophical framework, but it did not completely reject Ren and Yi, because ancient kings also used to advocate them, but they took them just like inns in which they did not stay for more than one night. Perfect man of ancient times took Ren and Yi just for the time being in order to travel in the world of the absolute freedom. Daoism criticized Ren and Yi on their leading to disorder, advising to let people keep their purity and simplicity.<sup>103</sup>

According to Daoism, Ren and Yi are secondary to Dao and De. Lao Zi said in 38<sup>th</sup> chapter of *Dao De Jing*: “After Tao is lost, then Ren; After Ren is lost, then Yi.”<sup>104</sup> Professor Feng Youlan says that Daoist critique of Confucian notions of Ren and Yi does not mean that Daoism advocates Ren-less

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<sup>93</sup> Gu Hongming.360.

<sup>94</sup> Ibid.361.

<sup>95</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.38.

<sup>96</sup> Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Lao-tze* (New York: Ransom House, 1948).63.

<sup>97</sup> Ibid.145-146.

<sup>98</sup> Yutang.198.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid.

<sup>100</sup> Zhuang Zi.224-225.

<sup>101</sup> Ibid.

<sup>102</sup> Zhuang Zi.225.

<sup>103</sup> Ibid.235-237.

<sup>104</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.38.

and Yi-less living. Rather, they think that the spiritual realm of Ren and Yi is lower than that of Tian and Earth.

Ren, Yi are criticized not only because they belong to a lower spiritual realm, but also because of their harm to man's nature. Zhuang Zi said: "King Shun started advocating Ren and Yi, since then, people ran after Ren and Yi. This is to let Ren and Yi change man's nature."<sup>105</sup> Because ordinary men started sacrificing their life for profit, scholars for fame, and even Sheng Ren for the sake of mankind. None of them is following his own nature.<sup>106</sup>

Daoism criticizes Ren, Yi and Li not really because they are fundamentally false but because they are misunderstood and misused by people: they are misunderstood because they are limited to close relatives; they are misused because if you "create benevolence and righteousness to assure honesty and even in this instance benevolence and righteousness teach them to steal."<sup>107</sup>

The negative side of Li in Confucianism as discussed previously is also criticized by Daoism. Lao Zi said: "Li is the thinning out of loyalty and honesty of heart and the beginning of chaos."<sup>108</sup> Confucius pointed out that Li does not help if it is empty of Ren, Lao Zi attributed chaos to Li when it lacks inner meanings like loyalty and honesty.

To Confucianism, Ren, Yi and Li are central teachings which are of highest moral value, but they are at most secondary in Daoism and some of them are harmful therefore they are criticized. Confucianism focused on these moral teachings that emphasized the proactive role of man in practicing them, however it does not stop here. Rather, it aims at higher spiritual realization of state of Tian and Earth. In the other words, Confucianism believes that Dao to which Confucianism attaches the ultimate meaning of life can be realized through man's practicing of these Confucian moral teachings. These teachings are considered the very fundamentals of man. Once the fundamentals are realized, Dao occurs. Daoism though does not overlook man's social life and social relationship, but it makes its way of life in the light of its philosophy of Tian, Earth and the way of ancient sages.

### **Section Six: Wu Wei (Action-less Act)**

Wu Wei the Chinese phrase has been translated in various ways, such as 'effortless action,' 'inactivity', 'no-government' and 'non-action' etc. Despite its rich connotations, when translating, we might be sometimes in confusion whether follow its literal meaning or try to explore its basic technical meaning as it is shown in the just mentioned translation. Effortless action is to explore its basic meaning, but it may lose its other connotations. Non-action and inactivity are to follow its literal meaning without touching its real meaning. We may suggest "Actionless Act" to indicate its basic meaning without going far away from its literal meaning.

Wu Wei is a way of life and wisdom of politics learnt from Dao. It is usually considered the key theme unique to Daoism. However, Wu Wei is also discussed by Confucius in *the Analects*. Some scholars even hold that Wu Wei was originally a Confucian theme, taken over and developed by Daoism.<sup>109</sup>

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<sup>105</sup> Zhuang Zi.128.

<sup>106</sup> Ibid.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid.144.

<sup>108</sup> Lao Zi.Ch.38.

<sup>109</sup> Qian Mu.287.

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The phrase ‘Wu Wei’ was not created by Confucius and Lao Zi. It was mentioned in *the Classic of Poetry (Shi Jing)*, the most ancient Chinese work. In “Wu Wei Kua Pi” (do not be soft)<sup>110</sup> Wu Wei here means ‘do not be’. In “Wu Mei Wu Wei” (it is useless to sleep or to be awake, the thinking of someone at all time goes on)<sup>111</sup>, Wu Wei means ‘no help’, ‘useless’. In “Wo Sheng Zhi Chu, Shang Wu Wei” (In my early life, I had no work)<sup>112</sup> Wu Wei means ‘no work’, ‘no career’. It is child’s life. It is thus clear that Wu Wei literally means to negate action while it is philosophically interpreted differently.

### 6.1 Wu Wei in Confucianism

Wu Wei technically means ‘inactivity’ neither in Confucianism nor in Daoism. Rather, it is considered as very important wisdom through which both schools explain how things work and get done. However, the operation side of Wu Wei is explained differently by the two schools.

Confucius said: “The ancient Emperor Shun was perhaps the one man who successfully carried out the principle of no-government (Wu Wei)”<sup>113</sup> Professor Gu Hongming translated ‘ordering through Wu Wei’ as ‘the principle of no government’. It means that the Emperor Shun formulated for the first time a way of politics through Wu Wei. Edward Slingerland in his work *Effortless Action* is of the view that the ideal of Wu Wei was discussed widely in early China by different schools, especially by Confucianism and Daoism. According to his point of view, Wu Wei is perceived by Lao Zi as ‘So-of-Itself’ while Confucius understand it as ‘at ease in virtue’<sup>114</sup>. In the other words, Wu Wei of Lao Zi is Wu Wei of ‘Zi Ran’ (self-so) and Wu Wei of Confucius is transformation through moral influence.<sup>115</sup> Therefore, the Emperor who carried out the principle of no-government in his governing was doing nothing but “to be earnest in his personal conduct and to behave in a manner worthy of his position”<sup>116</sup>

Regarding the meaning of Wu Wei in Confucianism, Professor Qian Mu<sup>117</sup> summed up three opinions. The first is that King Yao and King Shun appointed appropriate officials to do work and the king himself was not personally involved in any work. The second is that the King Yao and King Shun got their kingship through abdicating and not through competition. The third is that as Kings, they handled the state affairs with such ease that their hearts were just like not involving in anything.<sup>118</sup> The basic meaning of Wu Wei is summed up by Slingerland is in two kinds: lack of exertion and unself-consciousness. Confucius realized this spiritual state at age of seventy. He said: “at seventy, I could follow whatever my heart desired without transgressing the law.”<sup>119</sup> For this spiritual stage, Confucius started his long journey of study and self-cultivation. According to

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<sup>110</sup> Zhou Zhenfu.447.

<sup>111</sup> Ibid.200.

<sup>112</sup> Ibid.101.

<sup>113</sup> Gu Hongming.463.

<sup>114</sup> Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).43,77.

<sup>115</sup> Chen Lei, "Discourse on 'Ordering of Wu Wei' in Confucianism and Daoism," *New West of China* 24 (2009).142.

<sup>116</sup> Hongming.463.

<sup>117</sup> Qian Mu, was a famous Confucian Scholar.

<sup>118</sup> Qian Mu.158.

<sup>119</sup> Hongming.355.

Confucianism, man has to take this long journey of self-cultivation with traditional teachings of Zhou Dynasty.

Meng Zi thinks that moral cultivation of man is spontaneous because man by his nature inclines towards Ren just like water inclines flowing down.<sup>120</sup> Meng zi's "Flood-like Qi" is cultivated from this natural tendency of inclining towards Ren. So, it is also Wu Wei in the sense of lack of exertion.

In opposition to Meng Zi, Xun Zi was of the view that man's nature is not good but evil<sup>121</sup>, so highlights the significance of self-cultivation. That is why Wu Wei in the sense of lack of exertion will be realized after arduous and long bitter training, as Confucius did realize it in his age of seventy.<sup>122</sup>

## 6.2 Wu Wei in Daoism

Wu Wei (Action-less Act) in Daoism is also not inertia, but implies fullness of activity. Lao Zi in chapter 37<sup>th</sup> of *Dao De Jing* said: "Dao never does (never take action), yet through it all things are done."<sup>123</sup> Wu Wei is discipline of Dao through which we understand the action of Dao.

The action of Dao is summed up in the chapter 40<sup>th</sup> of *Dao De Jing* by the word "Fan"<sup>124</sup>(Returning). "Fan" (Returning) being the action of Dao is one of the characteristics of Dao. "(Dao) Changes not, eternally revolves without fail." So, Dao's action of 'returning' and 'revolving' just illustrates that all things are done by Dao. Dao does everything without taking any action, because "Dao never does" and Dao is unnamed and unchanging one. Thus described action of Dao can be understood as Aristotelian "unmoved mover" that itself is 'unmoved' but it 'moves' others. For instance, 'pivot of the wheel' does not move, but it works for revolving of the wheel by just seating in the very center in union with the Principle (Dao).<sup>125</sup>Therefore, Daoist Wu Wei seems like no action at all. Thus, we find Edward Slingerland and the translators of work of René Guénon rendered Wu Wei as 'non-doing'<sup>126</sup> and 'non-action' totally<sup>127</sup> negating action, rather than doing things without effort and self-consciousness.

Wu Wei, the way of Dao thus defined operates in the universe as strengthening the weak and weakening the strong through its action-less act of "returning" and "revolving". Learning the way of Dao from Wu Wei, man "return" back to "Su"素<sup>128</sup> (your simple self) and "Pu"朴 (original self) which are "what they can depend on"<sup>129</sup> through negation of excessive "desire"<sup>130</sup> that is motive of action, "intelligence and knowledge" which cause great artifice<sup>131</sup>, and "culture" of Zhou Dynasty

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<sup>120</sup> Meng Zi, *Meng Zi* (Beijing: Zhong Hua Publishing House, 1960).206.

<sup>121</sup> Xun Zi, *Xun Zi*, (Bei Jing: Zhong Hua Publishing house, 2007).266 There is one whole chapter discussing evil nature of human.

<sup>122</sup> Edward Slingerland.217-218.

<sup>123</sup> Lao Zi.75.

<sup>124</sup> *ibid.*83.

<sup>125</sup> René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Oriental Doctrines*.423-428.

<sup>126</sup> Edward Slingerland.77.

<sup>127</sup> René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Oriental Doctrines*.422.

<sup>128</sup> Su 素 : the unadorned, the uncultured, the innate quality; originally "plain silk background" as opposed to superimposed colored drawings.

<sup>129</sup> Yutang.120.

<sup>130</sup> Lao Zi.7.

<sup>131</sup> Lin Yutang.119-120.

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which is external and inadequate.<sup>132</sup> In other words, man should “empty the container of the Self of all human elements, filling it with the Heavenly ones in order to follow along the natural tendencies of things”<sup>133</sup> rather than acquisition of knowledge and cultivation of Confucianism. “To follow along the natural tendencies of things” is the way of Dao, i.e. Dao follows “Self-so” that which is so by itself, therefore, Dao taking Wu Wei as its discipline leaves all things to their natural tendencies. In the words of Lao Zi “treat things as straw dogs” without applying your subjective attitude of “Ren” (benevolence)<sup>134</sup>.

Man’s subjective attitude is narrow in contrast to look at things from the stand point of Dao or Tian. The narrow views cause the conflict of good and bad, ugliness and beautifulness.<sup>135</sup> Therefore, man should see things from higher position of Dao in order to transcend the difference and the conflict. That is, to pass beyond all the distinctions and make all contrary opinions equally relative. It is Daoist ‘Equilibrium’. Confucian “invariable middle” (doctrine of mean) is said by René Guénon to be just a theoretical expression of Daoist equilibrium.<sup>136</sup>

In his famous article “Yue Yang Lou Ji” (Yue Yang Building Note) man of letters and thinker Fan Zhongyan<sup>137</sup> had an famous motto “I am not pleased by external gains, never saddened by personal losses” (Bu Yi Wu Xi, Bu Yi Ji Bei)<sup>138</sup>. This is an expression of equilibrium to some extent, because the writer was not concerning with his personal gain but much concerned about mankind. However in Daoist philosophy, nothing is at all important to be concerned about, but one should just follow Dao. Fortune and misfortune are also way of Dao, which has its own routine. Good fortune follows upon bad fortune; bad fortune rest on good fortune.<sup>139</sup> Masses only consider fortune as fortune, they don’t understand fortune is also misfortune. It is only sage who knows it.

This Daoist view of interdependence of fortune and misfortune is expressed through a famous story. The story is read as following:

There was an old man living in the border areas of China. Once, he lost a horse, but he did not seem worried. He was asked why he was calm, he replied that how can you know if this is not a fortune? After some days, the lost horse came back with some horses. The old man was not delighted. In replying the same question, he said that how do you know that this is not a misfortune? One day, when training those horse, his son fell down from the horse and got injured. When asked, he said that how do we know that this is not a fortune. After time late, the invaders from neighbor state came to the village for military conscription, but his son was exempted, *thanks to his broken leg*.<sup>140</sup>

In this story, the old man understood Wu Wei, the way of Dao. For him, things in the world have their rout to follow, and men are also part of the world. To be happy when obtaining something or to be sad when lossing something is not wisdom. Man definitely seeks happiness, but the correct way is not to

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<sup>132</sup> Ibid.

<sup>133</sup> Edward Slingerland.210.

<sup>134</sup> Lin Yutang.63-64.

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.47.

<sup>136</sup> René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Oriental Doctrines*.423.

<sup>137</sup> Fan Zhongyan (989-1052)was minister of Song Dynasty, thinker, litterateur and social reformer. His theory of poetry was influenced by Meng Zi’s concept of “Flood-like” Qi.

<sup>138</sup> <http://baike.baidu.com/item/岳阳楼记#1>.

<sup>139</sup> Lao Zi.119.

<sup>140</sup> Liu An, *Huainanzi 淮南子 (Collected Works of Liu an and Others)* (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1997).118.

let your happiness repose on interchange of fortune and misfortune. However, it is “equilibrium” with which man transcends relative differentiation of good and bad, right and wrong and sees unity in diverse things. He then, by his detachment becomes mater of all things and is not affected by things even like life and death.<sup>141</sup>

### **Section Seven: Conclusion**

Through exploration and analytic study of the selected common themes between the two schools, we may conclude that the view of “the unity in the difference” relationship between Confucianism and Daoism is more accurate than the oppositional relationship between them based on the following observations:

1. Being the successors to the same tradition, the two schools have different perspectives. Therefore, they are essentially not in conflict. Most of the themes in both the schools such as Dao, De, Ren, Yi were borrowed from ancient traditions. Both schools emphasize the continuity of the tradition, and their different ways of continuing the tradition have been noted. Confucius promoted the spirit of rationality instead of preferring religious thought of Xia (2070 BCE-1600 BCE), Shang (1600 BCE-1046 BCE), and Zhou (1046 BCE-256 BCE) dynasties. Whereas Daoism developed the mystical and metaphysical aspect of the tradition. Their different approaches to the key themes of the tradition show their different perspectives on the same thing.
  - a. The two schools approach Dao in different ways. Instead of relating Dao to its ontological and cosmological aspects, Confucius accepted the fact of the existence of the universe without concerning about its origin. Rather he emphasized the proactive role of men in making Dao great. According to Daoism, Dao is not only the principle or the law of the universe but it is an entity which is different from all things.
  - b. Their different understandings of Wu Wei show their different approaches to morality. This also proves that their philosophies belong to different levels of understanding. Wu Wei, non-action in Daoism means absolutely not taking any action, yet leaving nothing undone. Since it leaves nothing undone, therefore, it is still action. But this action is different from that of Confucianism. It is self-transformation in Daoism, because things possess within themselves the correct direction which is De, while action of Wu Wei in Confucianism means a way of politics which means that the kingship is obtained not through competition, rather through abdication or that the King should not get personally involved in dealing with court affairs.
  - c. Confucianism considers itself a successor and reformer of traditional civilization. Despite its rationalization, it also accepted religious connotations of Tian from the previous ideology. Here we find out the difference of Tian in Confucianism from Dao in Daoism. Dao in Daoism transcends all things and all things depend on it and it does not have will, emotion and consciousness, unlike Confucian Tian. Lao Zi has described the reality of Dao as it is experienced, while Confucius accepted the traditional concept of Heaven (Tian) without paying as much attention to its reality.

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<sup>141</sup> René Guénon, *Introduction to the Study of the Oriental Doctrines*.423.

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3. The differences between Confucianism and Daoism maybe more than their similarities as noticed in many studies on the topic, but they may not be considered as contradicting each other. Rather the continuity among the teachings of both the schools must be noticed. Lao Zi criticized Confucian teachings by ranking them in the hierarchy of the traditional values as he understood them. Obviously, the fact that Daoism views Confucian teachings as inferior to its own should not be considered their denial. On the contrary, they have been accepted and given a place just after Dao and De.
4. The different ways of thinking do not necessarily imply conflict between the two schools as it is shown by the relationship between the masters of the two schools. Only their late followers criticed each other when they claimed exclusive possession of the tradition. However in excluding the other from comprehensiveness of the whole tradition, they admitted the value of the other.
5. Though ethics is the prime concern of Confucianism, Daoism did not just ignore it. It rather pointed to the higher values or the primordial teachings. Focusing on the moral teachings Confucius emphasized the proactive role of man in practicing them, but he aimed at higher spiritual realization or the state of Heaven and Earth rather than the state of morality. Here we find Daoism not concentrating on Dao or Tian (Heaven), but also concerned about men; Confucianism focusing on men, targets higher spiritual realization as well.

Thus, we may safely conclude that Confucianism and Daoism although differ markedly in their modes of thought and areas of focus, are not fundamentally in conflict, but bound together by a deeper internal unity.

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