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The "Way" in Daodejing and Shobogenzo

Hua Zhenzhou

The “Way” in *Daodejing* and *Shōbōgenzō*

By; Hua Zhenzhou

As can be seen from the title, I aim to examine the issue with the term Dao 道 or the Way in *Daodejing* [Laozi, *The Daodejing of Laozi*, Transl. Engl. by P. J. Ivanhoe, Boston University 2002.] and *Shōbōgenzō* [K. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (The Enclosure of the Vision of the True Dharma), transl. Eng. by G. W. Nishijima and C. Cross, Wisdom Books, London 1997.], that is, the discussion on the shared subject of Daoism and Buddhism, and the analysis of their relationship beginning with the Dao. As is generally known, the texts that the “Buddha” spoke contend with the hundreds of writings that the Dao dictated. But what exactly is the Dao? Where is it? How can the well-known Way difficulties that are entangled in these two sectors be resolved?

The Dao could be translated as Way, in addition to being in a verbal sense, the “moving”, it is the “process”, but it is also the “proceeding”. The Chinese character for the Dao 道, which is sometimes referred to as the Way, is composed of two parts, the foot 辵, and the human head 首: this relates to a “human walking”, it also means “to speak” or “to say”; for this reason, it also

has a rich meaning. Just as it said in *Shuōwén Jiězì* 說文解字 [*Shuōwén Jiězì* is a Chinese dictionary compiled by Xu Shen during the Eastern Han (25-206 CE).]: «Suǒ Xíng Dào Yě cóng chǒu cóng shǒu 所行道也从辵从首», which means that the Dao is composed of walk and head. As a result, we can understand the relationship between the concept of Way (which if it could be traversed, practiced entirely, or accomplished, would not be the true Way, the authentic Way). However, we cannot just focus on the semantic aspect; we also need to think about it more deeply.

Daoism is the native religion of China, as is evident, whereas Buddhism a foreign religion from India, comes as a younger brother of Daoism. However, the stream quickly became stronger, and with it, Buddhism’s independence from the local religion was established. It is possible to say that the absence of a definition is the primary aspect of Chinese religion. Such a trait has been necessary since ancient times. The Dao cannot be defined by a conception. It can only be continuously learned in all its varied facets and multiple aspects endlessly. Everyone’s



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屋角東春風多杏花小齋容膝
度年華金梭躍水池魚戲彩鳳
栖林澗竹斜壺清溪霏玉屑
蒲白髮岸烏紗而今不二韓
康價市上懸壺未足薛甲寅三
月四日榮軒翁復携此畫來索
銀時贈寄仁仲醫師且錫山
弄之故鄉也容膝齋則仁仲燕
居之所也日將歸故鄉登斯齋
持危獨處斯處為仁仲壽當
遂吾志也雲林子識



perspective on the Dao is valid, both readers and thinkers.

French Léon Wieger's translation of this idea is "Principle". The first opening line of Daodejing, in which Laozi's most well-known testimony: "Dào Kě Dào 道可道，非常道." to "The constant principle is not the principle that can be stated." [Lao-tzu, *Les Pères du Système Taoïste* (The Fathers of Daoism), Transl.it. by L. Wieger, Luni Editrice, Milan 1994, p. 21.] Furthermore, Wieger explains the Dao

in the synthesis of comments, where this phrase is interpreted as a state in which there was not yet a sensible being. When we human beings experience something, it means that this thing stimulates us, which implies that we can only perceive sensitive things.

According to Lao Zi, the Dao is unspeakable and unmentionable, making it impossible to be known. I find this to be admirable, yet the Dao cannot be regarded as a mere state spiritual.

The transformation of many aspects must, nevertheless, be the core of this. This essence had the *yin* 陰, or concentration, and the *yang* 陽, or expansion, immanent qualities. Contrary to popular belief, the Dao itself is neither moving nor keeping silent. For instance, just because the color of the leaf changes from green to yellow in autumn does not mean the green itself has changed, rather, it just signifies that the leaves' color has changed. To clarify the notion of Daoism, we can also analyze the dialectical relationship between the two polarities (*yin* and *yang*) through the image of *Bagua* 八卦, in which the black part and the white part transform into each other. The cycle is the place where the movement oc-

curs. This movement in Chinese is called *Bianhua* 變化. The Dao is such a place that is both outside and beneath the transformation.

It is worth noting that Michelangelo Pistoletto, the renowned Italian artist, also created a symbol that represents the contrast between two opposite polarities. This symbol is called "The Formula of Creation" and it differs from the infinite mathematical symbol. In this system, the central circle is formed as a result of the other two elements that are in opposition. Pistoletto defines his concept as the "Third Paradise": "By the Third Paradise we mean the third stage of humanity, in which the first paradise, the natural one, and the second paradise, the artificial



one, merge to proceed towards the regeneration of civil society.” [M. Pistoletto, *La formula della creazione* (The Formula of Creation), Cittadellarte Edizioni, Biella 2022, p. 313.] Thanks to the third paradise, the two polarities can find a state of balance. The root of his thought originally derives from traditional Western Ontology, the so-called third paradise plays the role of foundation that supports collisions. For Laozi, the Dao has never been generated, it is thoroughly one original form, everything is, in a way, the Dao itself. Ergo, in the Daoism non exists such a third element, all of them are a unity.

Therefore, in *Bianhua*, the Dao is not merely a concept like that of the “Third Paradise”, The process of change moves from one condition to another it indicates the relationship between mobility and immobility, it could be also described as the “continuity of discontinuity”.

The relationship between *yin* and *yang* is also set; however, it does not exclude changes in ownership from developing. In a mathematical sense, *yin* and *yang* can be viewed as 0 and 1, which are not only the basic modes of things but also permeate all phenomena and manifestations. Like a piece of paper having a forehead and reverse that are in contrast but inseparable, there is a visible aspect

and an invisible aspect present here. Another illustration is the body of a young lady, which is the *yin* for a young man's body while also being the *yang* for an old man's body; consequently, the two features are not clearly defined, but each aspect has a plurality of forces or a variety of forces. Because *yin* and *yang* co-exist simultaneously and for the same purpose in the system of *yin-yang* which is not a system of two dualistic objects in which there is, it would be appropriate to see this system as one of indeterminacy, representing a relationship of transformation. The so-called principle between them is at the same time transcendent and immanent of the universe, the Dao is unnameable, and ineffable, despite this, it is always present in everything. It goes far beyond being a “principle” in the sense of the philosophy of ancient Greece, for which there exists one principle that never changes. According to Daodejing: “Dào Shēng Yī, Yī Shēng Èr, Èr Shēng Sān, Sān Shēng Wàn Wù. 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。” [Laozi, *The Daodejing of Laozi*, Transl. Engl. by P.J. Ivanhoe, Boston University 2002, Cap. XLII, p. 45. In this chapter, Laozi dedicates to show his cosmological view.] This means that the Way produces the One. The One produces two, two produces three, and three produces the myri-

Zhang Lu 张路, Laozi riding a buffalo 《老子骑牛图》





ad creatures. Although the Dao may produce the One, it is the form original of the One itself. It has the potential to be One, and it can then fragment this unity, and divide it. Because the One is behind the Oneness of the innumerable beings, or in other words, for Laozi, it must be the absolute of the absolute and no exists an aspect contractional in the Dao or the True Way in this sense. However, it doesn't mean that the Dao produces or gives birth to another thing, according to the Ancient Chinese philosopher, the One corresponds to Dao, it is just another form of Dao, the Everything is formed but lacks any kind of support, so, the absence of definition constitutes the whole world itself, and everything emerges from which it is, therefore, the Dao is active and dynamic. This quality enables Buddhism and Daoism to converge.

Let's examine the growth of Buddhism in China, from the second half of the Tang dynasty to the eleventh century, Confucianism and Daoism worked in tandem to prepare for the great Song dynasty Renaissance (960-1279). Together, they continue to criticize Buddhism. In a certain sense, it was the end of traditional Buddhism's peak in China. However, a Buddhist-inspired response has been planned for a while. A new current that opposed grandeur, ceremonies,

and parasitism, a new currency called for a return to simplicity, pure intuition, and *Ziran* 自然 [nature]. Is the *Chan* 禪 (in Japanese *Zen*), which departs from the Great Vehicle's scholasticism and draws from Daoist mysticism for its explosion of ideas, verbless instruction, and spontaneity. During this time, the famous Buddhist master Dōgen (1200-1253) arrived in China in 1223 and left for Japan in 1227. Meditating Chan, a conducive environment for contemplation of the True Way in the sense of Buddhism, said in *Shōbōgenzō*:

The Buddha-way, at the time of the first establishment of the will, is the Buddha-way; and at the time of realization of the right state of truth, it is the Buddha-way. The beginning, the middle, and the end are each the Buddha-way. It is like someone walking one thousand miles: the first step is one in a thousand miles. Though the first step and the thousandth step are different, the thousand miles are the same. [K. Dōgen, *Shōbōgenzō* 正法眼藏 (The Enclosure of the Vision of the True Dharma)], transl. Eng. by G. W. Nishijima and C. Cross, Wisdom Books, London 1997, III, p. 55.]

The aforementioned Way serves as a metaphor for a life's journey. The relationship between universality and particularity



Liang Kai 梁楷, *Singing and walking along the river* 《泽畔行吟图》



is practically discussed by the Buddhist master in this paragraph. Both are the questions as the essentials of the practice experience. On the one hand, in the usual sense, a step typically consists of a part of the whole travel because there is a particular step compared to the entire path; therefore, it is absurd to say that a part includes the entire path. On the other hand, the view of Buddhism differs from what ordinary men think: The entire path is not simply the sum of all juxtaposed steps; rather, each step has the end already involved, and every detail is identified with the entirety of the path as well as the end. A step as such becomes inclusive of every specific step and becomes universal. A step, however, remains unchanged; only the experience has made its “simplicity” richer. In this sense, a single step includes a thousand miles, just as a thousand steps include the entire travel might be said. Nirvāṇa [This a Buddhist terminology that means freedom from suffering.] or enlightenment can be thought of as the culmination of the Zen Buddhist path; in fact, it is just as much the aim as the Way itself. The Way, then, is the act of walking itself, not a path to follow nor a person who is walking. We must live and forget happiness if we want to achieve real happiness, forget the goal of the jour-

ney, and arrive at it, just like the attitude of life. Chan or Zen has generally accepted the Daoist concept of Way or Dao, whereas it is incorrect to assert that the two Ways are identical in every aspect.

As we’ve seen, Dōgen’s Buddhist Zen thought, in particular, is very much like a religious doctrine that emerges from the actual or real historical world, enhancing men’s inner lived experience and progressing to the point of “self-awareness”, which becomes thoroughly communicable with this actual or real world. In other words, according to Dōgen, the evolution of one’s experience of life and so-called self-awareness increases one’s capacity for understanding and the state spiritual [R. Ōhashi, *Zen e filosofia*, «Simplegadi», 10, XXVI, Padova 2005, p. 126.]. His goal is not the explanation of the real world but the attainment of a pure state of mind in which all explanations become superfluous [R. Raud, “Place” and “being-time”: *Spatiotemporal Concepts in the Thought of Nishida Kitarō and Dōgen Kigen*, «Philosophy East and West», University of Hawaii Press, 54, I, 2004, p. 33.]. It is not what Laozi had in mind, in contrast to the Buddhist Zen of Dōgen, the Way in sense Daoist in its original form begins in daily life or the real world and moves toward the universal, immersing itself

everywhere, and reduces in daily life, whereas the only “constant principle” is the transformation. It is possible to think of the Way of Experience and the True Way (Dao) itself as having a paradoxical relationship – “continuity and discontinuity”.

In the final analysis, the word Dao which is used very frequently in Daodejing has two senses: one is a concept absolute that goes beyond experience, and the other one is the practical world itself, we cannot recognize it concretely, but we need also to practice and experience it. In other words, the Dao is as transcendent as immanent, the explanation dialectical for the world where we live is necessary for Daoism and, consequently, the original theory of Daoism could not be merely considered as a production of religion. Although Daoism and Buddhism have reached their full potential in two distinct ways, however, no distance cannot be overcome. We may say that Buddhism allows the Daoist Way’s flower to bloom while enhancing its beauty.

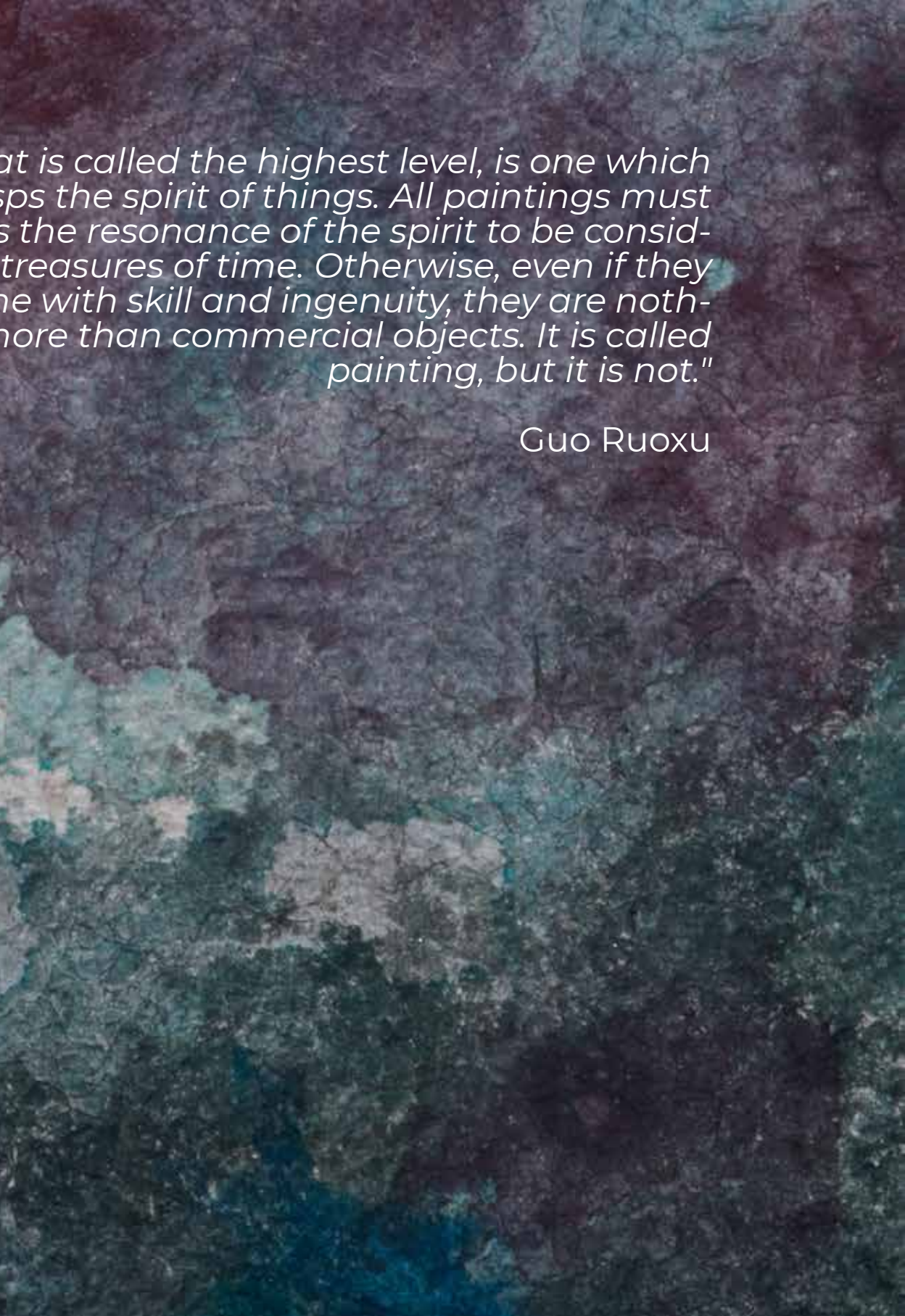
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In 2011, he graduated with honors from the University of Art of Nanjing. Degree thesis with excellence, with an art project entitled “COLD”, part of the permanent collection of the Institute of Art of Nanjing. In 2015, he graduated from the Academy of Fine Arts in Rome. He developed a quinquennial experience in teaching Figurative Arts, Drawing and Painting, and Theory of Art in secondary school.

His research can be broken down into four sections: traditional Far Eastern aesthetics (Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism), particularly that of China and Japan; Nishida Kitarō’s formation; the study and critique of Nishida’s aesthetics-related ideas; the philosophical contrast between Nishida and Merleau-Ponty.



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painting, but it is not."

Guo Ruoxu