

## Revisiting Ancient Linguistic Worldview: East vs. West; Dao vs. Logos

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The paper revisits the ancient Chinese philosophical discourse of Dao (the Way) and the Western philosophical discourse of Logos in order to discover the relationship between language, reality, and the world, and the role language plays in the creation of reality and the world in the East and West. Dao in the East and Logos in the West are both considered to be the most fundamental and important philosophical concepts related to language and the world and both of them view language as playing an important role in the creation of reality and the world. However, even though both Dao and Logos advocate that language is the origin of the world, they hold different linguistic worldviews.

Worldview refers to “. . . a set of more or less systematized beliefs and values in terms of which the group evaluates and attaches meaning to the reality that surrounds it” (Kraft, 1978). By extension, we presume, linguistic worldview may refer to a set of more or less systematized beliefs and values in terms of how a group evaluates and attaches meaning to the world, reality, thought, and the relationship between language and reality and the world.

To study the tradition of the relationship between language and reality and the world, and the role language plays in the creation of reality and the world or the linguistic worldview in the East and West, we must trace back to, among others, the discourse of Dao in the East and Logos in the West, as they are considered to be the most fundamental and most important philosophical concepts related to language and the world, and both of them view language as playing an important role in the creation and formation of reality and the world. However, even though both Dao and Logos advocate that language is the origin of the world, they hold different views of language and different beliefs in the performative force or power of language in its creation of reality and the world.

### Similar Belief in the Signifying and Performative Force of Language

Both the *Bible* in the West and *Dao De Jing*—which was written by Lao Zi, (6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC) one of the most influential philosophers in ancient China—regard ontology, cosmo-genesis and the relationship between language and the world as the most important issues. Both discuss the relationship between language and the world in the very beginning of their works. However, the Chinese and the Westerners use different terms to represent language. Originally, the Chinese use the term *name* to generally represent language while the Westerners use the term *word* to generally represent language.

Both the Chinese and the Westerners regard language as the origin and mother of the world and this view is reflected in the very beginning of the first chapters of these two classic works. The following are quoted respectively from the Genesis in the Old Testament of the *Bible* and the very beginning of the first chapter of *Dao Te Jing* (Lao Tzu, 6<sup>th</sup> cent. BC): “In the beginning was the *Word*, and *Word* was with God and the *Word* was God” (John 1:1). “The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth, *Name* is the mother of myriad things” (Lao

Tzu, Chapter 1). Obviously, these definitely show the Eastern and Western philosophical view of and belief in the signifying and performative force language may perform in relation to the world. Both the East and West regard language as the origin and mother of the universe. The East and West definitely recognize the importance of the signifying function and performative act of language in the creation of the world (Jia, 1997).

#### *Ontology and Cosmo-Genesis in the West*

It is very interesting that, ontologically and cosmo-genetically, both East and West undergo almost similar process in the creation of the world.

In the West, according to the ancient Greek philosophers such as Thales, Anaksimandros, Anaksimenes, and Herakleitos, who lived in the 6<sup>th</sup> century BC, cosmo-genetically the formation and creation of the world seem to follow the following model:

Apeiron (water, vapor, fire, or chaos) → the world

In this way, the origin of the world is sort of absolute objective entity. According to Thales, the famous ancient philosopher, water is the origin of the universe and the world exists on water. According to Anaksimenes, the infinite vapor is the origin of the world and vapor exists before water does. And the myriad things on earth are the product of the expansion and condensation of the vapor. Other scholars claim that fire is the origin. However, what Anaksimandros says seems to be most representative, that is, the origin of the world is apeiron or the *indefinite*. Apeiron means sort of entity which is indefinite not only in time and space (what infinite means) but also in shape and nature. It is not made up of water or vapor, etc. It is sort of naturalness or something between or among water, fire, earth and vapor. It is on the basis of this apeiron the world is created and developed and life and death come to repeat. And what is more, ancient Western philosophers believe that apeiron transforms according to Logos, which is regarded as the universal principle that operates in the transformation of apeiron (Zhao, 2001).

It is during about the same period (roughly between 479-338 B.C.) that Ancient Greek philosophers showed their concern about language, especially in terms of its performative force in relation to the world. It is in this context that the concept of Logos became the focus of philosophical research. In ancient Greek, the verb form of logos is *legein* meaning speaking or word. The root of this word is *leg-*, from which derives the meaning of rationality and logic. The most systematic research on logos has summarized eleven meanings for logos, of which the most fundamental is *speaking* and *rede*.

According to Herakleitos, all the movements in the world abide by the general principle of logos, which is prior to heaven and earth. However, in the search for the origin and the general principle for the transformation of the world, Lao Zi holds a dialectical worldview, in the sense that things in the world are made up of two inseparable opposing parts and these two parts are intertwined like the movement of day and night. According to his view, the myriad things on earth originate from fire and then the myriad things return to fire. It is very interesting that this dialectical view is similar to Lao Zi's worldview in the theory of Dao (to be discussed on page 73). And both Lao Zi and Herakleitos believe that the world is transforming and changing cyclically.

The ancient Greek scholars tend to think that language constitutes an important part of Logos and Logos was the incarnation of God. Thus logos become the unity of God and the world, the unity of nature and spirit, the unity of mystery and transcendent ration.

This idea finds expression at the start of the gospel of St. John in the New Testament: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God and the Word was God. The same was the beginning with God." The creation and formation of the world seems to undergo the following process:

Logos (God / Word) → the universe

However, the process that the formation and creation of the universe undergoes is one from what may be called concrete to abstract. Logos is now an abstract concept and the indefinite or what is called apeiron is a most concrete entity. And the process from concrete to abstract is accomplished through personification or what is called anthropomorphization.

This creative power or the performative power of language and the signifying function of language are clearly manifested in the chapter of Genesis of the Old Testament:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth...And God said , Let there be light: ...And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And God said, let the waters under the heaven be gathered together...and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called the seas; and God saw that it was good. (Genesis 1:1-13)

This passage shows that God uses language to name the primitive state of the cosmos. In fact, language is not only used to name all the things but is also used to create the myriad things in the world. By uttering some imperative sentences God creates heaven, earth and all the things in the world. To God, speech is action and words are power, both carrying perlocutionary force:

And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them; and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof. (Genesis 2:19)

This passage very well demonstrates the belief in the performative force and creative function of language in the creation and formation of the world.

In the Old Testament, God creates the world through imperative sentences to perform perlocutionary act. And the view of the relationship between language and the world held by the ancient Hebrew is restated in the New Testament, which claims that in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God. However, in the Old Testament, God and Logos or the Word exist as two separate entities before the creation of heaven, earth and all the things in the world while in the New Testament, God and Logos have merged into one.

The implication is clear: language is innate in God and it is an integral part of God. Through language, which is part of him, God creates the world. Or the existence of world wouldn't have been possible. Throughout the whole New Testament, God is Logos or Logos

is God. Thus it is said, “Logos is God.” In this light, the transcendent and rational (rather than social) nature of language is most obvious.

### *Ontology and Cosmo-Genesis in the East*

Many scholars in the East and West believe that the only concept that is compatible to Logos in the East is the concept 道 *Dao* advocated by Lao Zi (6<sup>th</sup> cent. B.C.), even though they are not exactly equivalent in meaning.

道 *Dao* is one of the most important concepts in Chinese philosophy and is often translated into English as the Way, which obviously carries the Western religious meaning.

In the main, three philosophical systems dominate traditional Chinese culture and Chinese life. They are Confucianism, Daoism, and, Buddhism. Confucianism plays the leading role in the field of philosophy, society, politics, and education, and so on, while Dao represented by Lao Zi and his follower Zhuang Zi transcends Confucianism in many aspects of philosophy as well as in human life so that it also plays the most important role in establishing the foundation of Chinese philosophical tradition. Lao Zi is the great prophet of his age. He taught men to return good for evil and to look forward to a higher life. He professed to have found the clue to all things human and divine. And this clue is what is called Dao (道). His view of language is part of his worldview and it not only embodies his philosophy but also has great impact on the people's life and the rhetorical practice even today. The impact is such that we must trace back to Lao Zi and his concept of Dao before we can well understand Chinese philosophy, the relationship between language and the world, and why the Chinese behave and communicate the way they do in the society even today.

The philosophical meanings in today's China have developed far beyond the original significance of the concept of Dao and scholars both ancient and contemporary may have defined Dao in different ways. Nonetheless the original image of Dao is never wholly lost.

Ontologically and cosmo-genetically, the most important discourse for understanding Dao is *Dao De Jing*. It portrays Dao as prior to heaven and earth and heaven is regarded as God, therefore the concept of Dao is different from the concept of Logos, though both are transcendental in nature. Dao is the absolute beginning. It is believed to be the origin of the universe.

Then, ontologically, what is Dao? According to Lao Zi, Dao is neither being nor beinglessness. It is both being and beingless. It exists as the transcendental Nothingness. However, it is also a unique form of existence and Lao Zi also indicates that the Dao is an objective entity just as the ancient Western philosophers believe the absolute beginning of the world is Apeiron (water, vapor, fire, or chaos).

As a 'thing' Tao is vague and unclear;  
Unclear and vague, yet within it is a symbol;  
Vague and unclear, yet within it is a thing;  
Obscure and dark, yet within it is an essence.  
Its essence is truly authentic and within it is what is reliable. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 21)

However, Dao is vague and unclear, so vague and unclear that it cannot be spoken of:

The Tao that can be spoken of is not an eternal Tao;  
 The Name that can be named can not be an eternal Name.  
 The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;  
 The Name is the mother of all the things.

...

These two things issued from the same mould, but  
 Nonetheless are different in name.  
 The same mould we can but call the Mystery. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 1)

It cannot be visualized, nor can it be found:  
 We look at it and cannot see it, it is elusive.  
 We listen to it but cannot hear it, it is rarefied.  
 We touch it and we cannot find it, it is minute.  
 These three cannot be ascertained, hence merged into one.  
 This is called the shape without a shape, the image of what is not a thing.  
 This is called unclear and vague. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 14)

According to Lao Zi, the Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth and Name, yet the name or language has creative force. It is the mother of myriad things in the world. However, this transcendental nameless being exists long before Heaven and Earth, even before God. (Heaven is believed to play the role of God), as the myriad things grow out of nothing.

Then, Cosmo-genetically, what in fact is the function of Dao? According to Lao Zi, “Dao exerts an all-pervasive function, exerting powerful energy by existing in the transcendental realm of Nothingness and progressing in a dynamical process of transformation. Dao is the all-embracing, spontaneous generative principle of the universe” (Chen & Holt, 2002). Dao, though abstract as a general principle governing the transformation of Heaven and Earth, is regarded by Lao Zi as an objective essence, even though it is mysterious and profound, infinite and everlasting.

Lao Zi’s discourse on Dao discusses cosmo-genetical function of Dao. It creates and forms the world:

Dao generates the One; the One generates the Two;  
 The Two generate the Three; the Three generate the myriad things.  
 The myriad things carry *yin* on their backs and *yang* in their arms  
 And take *qi* to be their harmony. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 42)

We can see that, according to Lao Zi, Dao is prior heaven and earth (Zhang, 2002). It generates Heaven and Earth (what the *two* indicates). And Heaven is an important concept in ancient Chinese philosophy. It contains two aspects: on one hand it is an objective infinite reality, the *sky*, on the other it is *God*, or the supreme concept. Confucius also holds to this view of heaven as the supreme lord or God:

If heaven wished to destroy this culture, it would not have  
 Given the said culture to a being who will die like me. Since  
 Heaven has not destroyed this culture, what can the people of

## Kuang do to me? (Analects 9, Zi Han)

“The rise and fall of cultures and the peace and peril of human beings are all decided by Heaven” (Confucius, Analects 9). However, in Chinese culture, it is Dao rather God that is regarded as the greatest and most supreme. Dao creates the universe Heaven or God, Earth, and myriad things in the universe.

Dao is authentic and present (as objective entity in this light) but it has no will of its own, no shape or image. However, it is itself the root and trunk and precedes heaven and earth, and the Holy God. Dao is also beyond the reach of human senses as it is formless and soundless, and it is beyond language and conceptualization. It cannot be identified or named. It exists in the state of chaos:

There is something formed inchoate;  
Generated before heaven and earth;  
Silent, hush, void, ah!  
Standing alone and not changing,  
Turning round and round and not tiring.  
It may be the mother of all under heaven.  
I do not know its name so I shall call it Tao (the Way).  
If pressed I would name it ‘great.’  
(Lao Tzu, Chap. 25)

In the above quote, great means ultimate or the absolute beginning. Looked at in this light, Dao is believed to be Chaos. Then until it is able to be named and when it has a name, it becomes the mother of the world. In this way, Dao generates the universe, heaven and earth, and the myriad things under heaven just as Lao Zi says, “Namelessness is the origin of Heaven and Earth; Name is the mother of all things” (Lao Tzu, Chap. 1).

Very interestingly, cosmo-genetically, the creation and formation of the world in the East somehow follows almost similar process as it is believed in the West. The following model may justify this statement:

East: Nameless ( Dao as transcendent and objective entity ) → Name / Language  
Heaven (or God) and Earth  
West: Apeiron (water, vapor, fire, or chaos) / Logos (God /Word) → the universe

However, differences exist. Dao or the nameless existed before the action of Name. Name comes from and after Dao. Very likely, Name may have existed either before the existence of heaven and earth or at the same time and it, however, is surely the mother of the myriad things in the universe including human life. Name or language in this way exhibits its performative force through creating all the things in the world (Feng, 1985). In fact Lao Zi believed the performative force of language. When talking about the relationship between language and reality. He vaguely implies the possibility that even in the nameless Dao, the substance of name exists which are the seeds breeding all things on the earth. The names and the objects they signify appear and exist inseparably without changes from old times till today.

Due to the natural appearance of objects and their names and the eternal stability, humans can categorize, conceptualize, and identify all the things through their names.

So, it may be justified in saying, name or language possesses the homooousia of God, as it, through its signifying function and performative acts of language, creates everything in the world just as Logos does in the West. Dao in the East and Logos in the West advocate almost the same belief in the creative power of language.

However, differences exist. The essential feature of Dao, which is advocated by Lao Zi and Confucius to be prior to God, is unspeakable while the basic meaning of Logos is speech and *rede* itself. The Word is with God and the Word in God and the Word is God while Dao is not with Name and Dao exists before Heaven, or what is called God, and language as well. That is why God in the West always speaks and through words God creates everything while in the East, Dao is speechless. It doesn't speak at all. It is this speechless Dao that generates Heaven and Earth including Name which comes from and after Dao and it is Name that becomes the mother of everything. Even though Word in West and Name in the East perform similar creative force and create the world, the East and West hold divergent views of and different attitude to language.

### Different Philosophical Views of Language

#### *Different Attitude towards Language: the Unspeakable Dao and the Speakable Logos*

Some scholars translate Dao into English as Logos because they think that these two terms are not only compatible but also equivalent in meaning. In fact, there are similarities as well as differences between these two concepts.

Differences exist in the attitude held by Lao Zi and God towards language or towards the performative force of language. This difference can be found in the very beginning sentences of the Old Testament and *Dao De Jing* as stated earlier. Let us have a second look at the following statements regarding language and the world in terms of cosmology.

The Old Testament:

In the beginning, God created the heaven and the earth...And God said , Let there Be *light*: ...And God called the light Day and the darkness he called Night. And God said, let the waters under the heaven be gathered together...and it was so. And God called the dry land Earth; and the gathering together of the waters called the seas; and God saw that it was good.

In the Old Testament, word seems to be compared to light that brings life to the world. However, while talking of Dao, Lao Zi has the following to say:

Its rising brings no light;  
Its sinking, no darkness.  
Endless the series of things without name  
On the way back to where there is nothing. (Lao Tzu, Chap.14)

Lao Zi seems to imply that name cannot bring light and the nameless will eventually

return to where it comes from and where it comes from is nothing. In his saying “Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth; Name is the mother of all the things.” He in fact lays emphasis on the first part, that is, it is the Nameless that creates the universe. In this way, Dao is unspeakable as name stands for language as mentioned earlier.

Logos in the West indicates that the Word is with God and Word is in God and the Word is God. And the Word or God creates the world. Dao in the East, however, precedes Heaven or God. More than that, Dao is unspeakable and it is the Nameless that is the origin of Heaven and Earth. And the Nameless exists before Name or language. The formation of Heaven and Earth and myriad things in it undergoes a process from beingless to being from Wu (nothing) to You (everything) or from the *Nameless* to the *Name*. Even though Lao Zi states that Name is the mother of myriad things in the universe but this view is obviously different from the way Word is regarded in the West. The difference in the view of language results in different views of and different attitudes toward language in the East and the West.

Obviously, Lao Zi holds a negative attitude towards language and this runs counter to the Western view that Word is with God and it is God.

Lao Zi is the first person that voices philosophical views of language in the Chinese history and both his positive and negative attitude towards language and the discourse of his ideology is penetrating, insightful, and significant. His view of language has great impact on the formation of the foundation of Chinese culture and Chinese philosophy, as well as Chinese rhetoric. Lao Zi’s holds a dialectical view of language in relation to the world and his views can hardly be judged in black and white terms, that is, exclusively in positive or negative, right or wrong. It is this dialectical view that forms the foundation for Chinese philosophy including the rhetorical foundation both in the positive and negative aspect.

His positive view of language in relation to the world lies in the fact that he considers that language is poorly inadequate to fully express meaning. However, he overstates the limitation of language and even belittles the function of language. He holds that meaning of things, just like Dao, is mysterious, profound, and too great to be expressed by language. Meanings are greater than words that are used to express them. Meanings are above Names and Conceptualization. According to Lao Zi,

The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao;  
The Name that can be named is not the eternal name.

To Lao Zi, language cannot be used to express the full meaning of Dao and if the names or words that can be used to express the full meaning of Dao, the names or words are not true names or words. To Lao Zi, Dao as symbol of knowledge can only be expressed metaphorically or can only be intuitively sensed or acquired through personal experience in human interaction with their environment. Lao Zi further elaborates on the limitation of language: Those who know do not speak and those who know do not speak. To Lao Zi, knowledge as well as meaning cannot be talked about or cannot be expressed fully by language.

The view that the unspeakable Dao and unspeakable knowledge can only be intuitively experienced formed the foundation of Lao Zi’s mystic subjective experiential philosophy. This demonstrates that meanings and experiences transmitted by language are not complete and perfect. They must have limitations, inaccuracy, and hence lack reliability. So much so



that words or language can be misleading in transmitting knowledge and experience. It is this mysticism that prevents Dao from being developed into objective rationalism.

Lao Zi's heavy emphasis on meaning and positive and negative attitude towards language find expressions in Lao Zi's ideas on language. Wang Bi, (in the Wei-Jin period) used the example of the bait and the trap from the Zhuang Zi to argue that symbols express ideas, but once one has grasped the idea one can forget the symbol:

Symbols produce ideas. Language clarifies symbols. For fully expressing ideas nothing can rival symbols and for fully expressing symbols nothing can rival language. Ideas are expressed fully by symbols and symbols are expressed fully by language. Thus language is able to clarify symbols. Once the symbols is grasped then the language can be forgotten. It is just as the *raison d'être* of the trap is to catch rabbits and once the rabbit is caught one can forget the trap or the *raison d'être* of the bait is to catch the fish and once the fish is caught one can forget the bait.... (Book of Changes 4)

This further shows Lao Zi's attitude towards language: Language is used by people as a tool just like a trap or bait that are used to catch a rabbit or fish and when meaning is arrived at, it can be forgotten. This again implies the notion that personal experience is most important thing in the acquisition of knowledge. Personal experience is more important than getting knowledge from books, so much so that Dao and knowledge are unspeakable. Knowledge in this light is regarded exclusively as a result of personal experience rather than the summary of theories and so on. Obviously, mystic experientialism is exhaustively expressed and logical reasoning is almost completely ignored. Dao is fully profound, mysterious, and spiritual and hence knowledge cannot be penetrated. That is one of the reasons why experience rather than pure rationality or reason has been preferred and stressed in Chinese philosophical tradition.

Language does have limitation. Dao and knowledge are mysterious and profound, so mysterious and profound that they are above Names and conceptualization. However, overstressing the limitations of language Lao Zi went as far as to believe that Name or language confines human thinking and limits imagination and therefore he advocated communicating without language.

*The Philosophy of Wu Wei (Non-Action) and Wu Ming (Namelessness): Lao Zi's View of and Attitude Towards Language*

Lao Zi's worldview resulted from and in, on the one hand, the political view called the philosophy of Wu Wei (无为), non-action and, on the other, his epistemological view called the philosophy of Wu Ming (无名), namelessness, both of which are the integral part of his worldview. His linguistic worldview is a result of his worldview.

Lao Zi advocates non-action or naturalness. "Dao never does, yet through it all things are done" (Lao Tzu: Chapter 37). In this light, a divine man ignores action and rulers should do nothing actively in ruling his subjects because "When non-action is undertaken, nothing is left undone. An empire is often brought into order by having no activity." There is advantage in non-action as he believes that action, in the political sense, as well as in others is the source of

social disorder. Social disorder, contradiction, and conflict are caused by all the opposing and contradictory factors, such as social, political, personal, behavioral, historical factors and so on. To solve social problems, he advocates the philosophy of non-action,

What is non-action then? There are natural occurrence of things and the forced striving of human agents. Non-action means we must do things, conduct ourselves, govern the country, and communicate with each other in accordance with the natural occurrence of things. If we respect spontaneity or follow the law of nature, everything we do will naturally fall in order and everything will take care of themselves. We should not act actively. Then how can we act spontaneously? The answer finds expressions in the second chapter of the *Tao Te Jing*:

Difficult and easy complete one another,  
Long and short test one another;  
High and low determine one another,  
Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.  
Front and back give sequence to one another.  
Then, accordingly, the best way to teach is to teach without words:  
Therefore the Sage relies on actionless activity; carries on wordless teaching.  
(Lao Tzu, Chapter2)

The best way for us to respect spontaneity or follow the doctrine of non-action is to model after nature as Lao Zi points out:

Humans imitate the earth; the earth imitates heaven; heaven  
Imitates Dao; Dao imitates what is so of itself. (*Tao Te Jing*, Chap. 25)

By saying that Dao imitates what is so of itself, it means that Dao just is as it is and not that there is something else beyond Dao.

The philosophy of non-action finds expressions in what Lao Zi said:

The more prohibitions there are, the more ritual avoidances. The more laws are made, the more thieves and bandits there will be, therefore, as I do nothing, the people will of themselves be transformed. ...So long as I love quietude, the people will of themselves go straight. ...So long as I have no desire, the people will of themselves be simple and honest. So much so that... through Non-action in governing, all things will fall into place and take care of themselves. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 3)

In this light, "Cosmos was perceived as one of the harmoniously functioning organism consisting of an orderly hierarchy of interrelated parts and forces, which, though unequal in their status, are equally essential for the total process. (Wei, 1980) Based upon this way of thinking and worldview, epistemologically, knowledge was primarily gained through intuition with emphasis on synthesis through configurable logic as well as introspection and contemplation of unity between man and nature, the subjective and the objective, the inner-world and the outer-world. Above everything else, all knowing is about the illustration of Dao and about closely following it. And to follow Dao spontaneously. All this finds best expressions in the Chinese word *xuexi*, meaning 'learning,' which means: (a) to copy and

imitate and (b) by extension, to understand or to acquire moral consciousness or simply to learn how to be a good person in the moral sense.

Wu Ming (无名), Namelessness, which is regarded as the origin of all things by Lao Zi in fact carries the same meaning as Wu Wei, non-action, as Names (名) or language in terms of speaking and talking themselves are actions. According to Zhuang Zi, “To act without taking an action means nature. To speak without any action means virtue” (Zhuang Zi: Heaven and Earth). Like Wei (action), Ming, (Name), as a signifier of objects, as well as performative act, is also regarded as the source or cause of contradiction and disorder, especially in terms of argument or debate. Lao Zi’s bias against language and its use is clearly expressed in what he said, “Much talk is doomed to a dead end.” He disregards books, articles, and speeches as “the greatest sound sounds faint; the greatest form looks formless” (Lao Tzu, Chap. 41).

Zhuang Zi, closely following Lao Zi, naturally holds a negative attitude towards argument as he considers argument and debate are the source of disorder: “The Dao of Heaven does not compete, and yet it skillfully achieves victory. It does not speak, and yet it skillfully responds. It does not invite, yet everything comes by itself. It seems slow, yet everything is well planned” (Lao Tzu, Chapter 73).

According to Lao Zi, the sage should not compete. Zhuang Zi further expounds this negative attitude towards language and argument by saying:

Suppose that you argue with me....Is the one of us right and the other wrong? Or are both of us right and both of us wrong? Both of us cannot come to a mutual and common understanding, and others are all in the dark. (*Zhuang Zi: Qi Wu Lun*)

According to Zhuang Zi, argument is something like this and this kind of argument “would all be unable to come to a mutual and common understanding.”

Lao Zi’s general attitude towards language, argument and debate is well summed by Zhang Zi:

Great Dao does not admit of being spoken.  
Great argument does not require words.  
...  
Speech that argues falls short of its aim.  
Humanity that is constantly exercised does not accomplish its object.  
Purity, if openly professed, meets incredulity.  
Courage that is purposely violent must itself fail. (*Zhuang Zi: Qi Wu Lun*)

Lao Zi claims “For speech is not merely the blowing of wind. The speaker has something to say, but what he says is not final” (*Zhuang Zi: Qi Wu Lun*).

All of this conforms to the thinking that meaning and thought are above names or language and conceptualization. Lao Zi’s linguistic worldview originates from his philosophy:

The world values Dao when it is written in a book. A book is no more than speech.  
Speech has value. What is valuable in it is thought. Thought is about something.  
What thought is about cannot be transmitted by words. (*Zhuang Zi, 13*)

To Lao Zi, meaning is a mystery, too great to be expressed by language. Form, sound, and symbols can not express the formless and soundless Dao. And more than that, the greatest eloquence seems to stutter and debate, argument, confrontation all seem to be inferior to silence. Meaning and thought can only be sensed and experienced in human interaction with the surrounding environment.

#### Lao Zi's Dialectical Worldview and its Impact: Paradoxical Rhetoric

Ontologically and epistemologically, Lao Zi holds a dialectical worldview. This worldview finds best expression in his saying “反者道之动” (In Dao, the only motion is returning) and this dialectical view also finds expression in his linguistic worldview “正言若反” (Outright words mean the opposite) (Xiao, 2002).

In his rhetorical discourse, Lao Zi is inclined to use negation and especially obscure paradoxes such as “Non-action leaves everything done,” “Bright Dao seems dark,” “Advancing seems retreat, the smooth Dao seems rough,” “The great note is inaudible,” “The great image is formless,” “In Dao the only motion is returning,” and “Outright words mean opposite.” His follower Zhuang Zi follows his dialectical linguistic worldview and has the inclination of using this obscure paradoxes such as “There is beginning, there is no beginning. There is being, there is no being,” “There is nothing which is not ‘that’; There is nothing which is not ‘this’....When there is life, there is death, and when there is death, there is life. When there is possibility, there is impossibility, because of the right there is the wrong, and because of the wrong there is the right.” (Zhuang Zi: All things are one), etc. The employment of these paradoxes in terms of contrasts make the expressions appear to be especially unique. However, it reflects Zuan Zi's dialectical and cyclical epistemological view of Heaven and Earth.

Lao Zi believes that the universe including myriad things in it moves in endless cycles without development or intrinsic change just like the exchange of day and night and the exchanges of the four seasons. In the understanding of Lao Zi, the movements of nature and human life including political systems are in continuous circulation, following the law of nature or what is called Dao and all the things should merge with nature harmoniously. When a man is at his zenith of his life, he at the same time begins to move downward, just like the rise and fall of waters in the oceans, the rise of the water means that its fall is returning. This is typical of Chinese dialectical ideology, which is close to what is called mutual dependence of two opposite things or what is called paradox. In fact, Dao itself is a product of paradox, sort of existence of being and beingless, existence and non-existence, everything and nothing, etc. We can find numerous expressions like this in *Dao De Jing* and these contrasting elements combine together and generate meaning and thought implicitly and indirectly so as to make what is stated consistent to the nature of the profound and mysterious Dao. As Xiao points out, these explanations catch some of the spark and insight contained in Lao Zi's wisdom:

For truly Being and Non-being grow out of one another;  
Difficult and easy complete one another.  
Long and short test one another;

High and low determine one another.  
 Pitch and mode give harmony to one another.  
 Front and Back give sequence to one another.  
 Therefore the Sage relies on Non-action;  
 Carries on wordless teaching. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 2)

What is written in Chapters 78 and 41 of *Dao Te Jing* may best express his dialectical view:

Outright words mean the opposite. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 78)

The largest square has no corners,  
 The greatest vessel takes the longest time to accomplish,  
 Great music has the faintest notes,  
 The Great Form is without shape.  
 For Tao is hidden and nameless.  
 Yet Tao alone supports all things and brings them to  
 Fulfillment. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 41)

The dialectical view such as “the only motion is returning” and “Outright words mean the opposite” permeates almost all the aspects of *Dao De Jing*. What is more, “The largest square has no corners” in fact reflects Lao Zi’s view of space and time. Traditionally, our ancestors believe that Heaven is round and the Earth is square which has corners called East, South, West, and North. However, here Lao Zi seems to believe that Earth does not have boundaries such as East, South, West, and North just as Dao is most infinite. And it is close to today’s belief that the Earth is round. As such, Dao cannot but be above names and language.

“The greatest vessel takes the longest time to accomplish” is also a paradoxical expression. The greatest vessel obviously refers to Dao and the understanding and acquisition of Dao needs a spontaneous effort. The implication is that in the day time, nobody can see the symbols (the sun, the moon, and the stars). People have to wait until night falls to be able to see them. Here it refers to the idea that the image of Tao (represented by symbols in the sky) can be visualized spontaneously or without effort. The only thing people can do is to wait until night falls.

Another paradox is “Great music has the faintest notes” refers to the fact that when the music is too loud, people can hardly hear it clearly and people may be puzzled by it. Its meaning is the same as ‘people listen to it but cannot hear it.’ It is a good example of paradox.

“The Great Form is without a shape” is the most important example of Lao Zi’s paradoxical expression delineating the meaning that “Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth.” According to Lao Zi, “We look at it and can not see it. We listen to it and cannot see it. We touch it and we cannot find it.” This paradoxical expression best describes the nature of the elusive, unspeakable, and inaudible Dao. It is profound and mysterious, too profound and mysterious to be given a Name. “Tao is a thing impalpable, incommensurable. Incommensurable, impalpable, yet latent in it are forms, impalpable, incommensurable, yet within it there are entities. Shadowy it is and dim, yet, within it there is a force a force that though rarefied, is nonetheless efficacious” (Lao Tzu: Chapter 21). This best reveals the

nature of Dao which has a shape but is shapeless, which has a form but it is formless. Tao is a thing that is unnamable and unspeakable.

As mentioned earlier, the employment of the paradoxical device reveals Lao Zi's dialectical and cyclical view of the world. However, this dialectical worldview is different from the traditional dialectical worldview in the West, which advocates analytical and atomistic philosophy, and the cultural preference of dichotomy. In the East, however, it is the holistic view that prevails, that is, everything and anything consists of two opposing elements. Everything has the side of Yin and the side of Yang. This holistic view of the world makes Eastern culture different from the Western culture which divides things into two parts and it only adopts the positive part. Things in the eye of Westerners are and should be analyzable and dividable, such as man and nature, body and mind, self and others, spirit and material. Man and nature are separated and hence man can stand by in a distance from nature and study nature objectively, and then conquer it. And in so doing man can reach out to nature and society and impose their will on them. In analyzing and dividing things they tend to look at things in terms of good vs. evil, right vs. wrong, etc. This, according to Stewart (1972), predisposes Westerners to the habit of judging and evaluating things by comparison. This way of perception is the reflection of the Western pattern of thought, which can best be characterized as linear, logical, analytical and abstract. And in regard to knowledge and knowing process, Westerners tend to start from postulations with an emphasis on analysis through linear logic by syllogism and dialectic processes. Regarding the study of language, in the Western tradition, language and its users, language and context are separate and the result is that the study is concentrated on the analysis of language alone.

While in the East, following the dialectical and cyclical way of thinking, knowledge was primarily acquired through intuition with emphasis on synthesis through configural or cyclical logic, as well as introspection, and contemplation of unity between self and the world. The purpose of knowing was to establish oneness or unity between the two opposites: man and nature, the subjective and the objective, the inner-world and the outer-world because all things in the world are one and 'that' is in 'this' and 'this' is in 'that.' This certainly has impact on the way of communication which is closely relevant to the way of thinking in the East. And regarding to the study of language, the Chinese tradition stresses the unity between language and men, language and context, language and the society. The study of language in relation to context in the West is quite a recent thing.

#### *Dao De Jing* as Foundation of the Chinese Experiential Philosophy and Rhetorical Tradition

Criticism from Western scholars and even Eastern scholars claims that Chinese culture does not have a rhetorical tradition. Quite a number of scholars even today believe that this is true. However, some scholars in language and communication studies have begun to reconsider this issue and have provided new perspectives for exploring *Dao De Jing*, especially from the rhetorical perspective and hence have contributed new insight into the nature of communication (Chen & Holt, 2002, p. 154). They claim that that Chinese did have rhetorical practice over two thousand and five hundred years ago and the traditions started with the discourse of *Dao De Jing* written by Lao Zi. We may tentatively assume that Chinese rhetorical practice can be characterized as moralistic and implicit (Chen & Holt,

2002; Garrett, 1993; Jensen, 1992). Persuasion can only be carried out indirectly and implicitly and through metaphors, apart from negation and paradox as mentioned earlier. Hence being indirect and implicit seems to be one of Lao Zi's most effective persuasive means in preaching his doctrine. *Dao De Jing* in fact reflects the fact that Lao Zi endeavors to understand and conceptualize his experience in his interaction with the environment through metaphor and this finds expression in his way of writing this book.

Lao Zi preaches that he finds the key to all things human and divine. And the key is Dao and Dao is above Name or language and conceptualization. What can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao and what can be named is not the eternal name. Meaning is mysterious and profound, so mysterious and profound that it can not be directly or clearly expressed by Name or words. It can only be sensed or experienced in human interaction with the environment or context. It seems that Dao can only be implicitly and indirectly expressed, sensed and experienced. According to Lao Zi it can best be explained and understood through personal experience. Dao and meaning can best be sensed from the environment or context rather understood through words.

What calls for attention is the fact that analogy or metaphors Lao Zi employs is not at all merely literal or rhetorical devices. It is the unique way of Lao Zi's thinking, experiencing, understanding and conceptualizing, and reasoning about the universe. Finding language is inadequate enough to express meaning fully and directly, Lao Zi resorts to analogous or metaphorical device, which helps him and people to experience and understand, conceptualize and reason about the unspeakable Dao governing the transformation of Heaven and Earth. More than that, he uses analogy or metaphor to understand, explain, conceptualize, and reason about the society as well. It is through metaphor he unfolds to the people his theories regarding ontology, epistemology, and philosophy of human life.

The intuitive thinking evoked by the concept of the unspeakable Dao advocated by Lao Zi in fact forms the foundation for analogous or metaphorical and imagistic thinking and paves the way for the development of the experiential philosophy in China.

*Dao De Jing* may be considered to be the first rhetoric book of in ancient China. This book lays the foundation for the rhetorical practice of the Chinese and has its impact on communication in the East today. In ancient China, analogy is regarded as metaphor and this finds numerous examples in *Dao De Jing*, which is only about 5000 words long. In fact the implicit, indirect or analogical or metaphorical projections find expressions almost in every chapter of the book.

In Chapter 8, Lao Zi maps his preaching of the moral meaning of the social Dao onto water activity in order to transform the society. He did achieve the most possible result in his persuasion by this metaphorical projection. (Chen & Holt, 2002, p. 155). In doing so, Lao Zi is a skillful rhetor and through the use of water metaphor helps the people perceive the entangled circumstances of society, where language works inevitably to imprison communicators (Chen & Holt, 2002, p. 155).

Let us review the water metaphor used by Lao Zi:

The highest good is like that of water. The goodness of  
Water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself  
Does not compete, but is content with the places that all  
Men disdain. It is this that makes water so near to Tao.

And if men think the ground the best place for building a house upon,  
 If among thoughts they value those that are profound,  
 If in friendship they value gentleness,  
 In words, truth; in government, good order;  
 In deeds, effectiveness; in actions, timeliness—  
 In each case it is because they prefer what does not lead  
 To strife,  
 And therefore does not go amiss.

According to Chen & Holt (2002), “water, as an analogy for Dao, patterns these conceptual schemes at social and socio-behavioral levels. Thus...water invokes a structure that helps people come to grips with the thought in *Dao De Jing*. People should live and conduct like water does, that is, live and behave without competition. Only by doing so can they acquire fine quality and social order.”

In the very beginning, the namable, speakable and absolutely abstract of Dao is personified and mapped onto ‘Mother,’ the origin of Heaven and Earth, in this way, Dao is personified as a mother who gives birth to everything and through this metaphor, the creative and generative force of Dao is easily advocated and understood. In Chapter 2, the opposite concepts such as beautiful and ugly, being and non-being, difficult and easy, long and short, high and low, pitch and mode, front and back, etc. are in fact formed on identity or similarity of opposites, which is formed according analogous logic. In Chapter 4, the unspeakable and abstract Dao is mapped onto progenitor, which is compatible to the mother metaphor mentioned above. And this metaphor again helps people understand the nature of the ‘bottomless’ Dao. In Chapter 5, Dao, the Valley Spirit is mapped onto a mysterious ‘Female’ and then the ‘Doorway’ of the mysterious Female, from which Heaven and Earth were born. In this light, Dao is further metaphoricalized, so much so that the absolute abstract concept is easily comprehensible. In Chapter 8, kindness or goodness is compared to flowing water, which according Lao Zi, seldom compete but content with all places that all men disdain. In this way, non-action and non-competition is preached as most virtuous. In Chapter 10, self-cultivation is mapped onto the naturalness of a small child, which, according to Lao Zi is the symbol of vitality and purity, and hence people can be best educated. In Chapter 11, non-action is mapped onto wheel spokes, vessels, houses, so much so that its function is best described. Very interestingly, in Chapter 12, the Sage’s virtue is mapped onto the five senses, which is a very good example of what is called metonymy:

The five colours confuse the eye,  
 The five sounds dull the ear,  
 The five tastes spoil the palate,  
 Excess of hunting and chasing  
 Makes minds go mad.  
 Products that are hard to come by  
 Impede their owners’ movements.  
 Therefore the Sage  
 Considers the belly not the eye.



Truly, “he rejects that but takes this. (Lao Tzu, Chap. 12)

In Chapter 14, however, the nameless Tao is mapped onto a state of arbitrary attributes that include greatness, abstruseness, vacuity, invisibility, inaudibility, namelessness, shapelessness, and fathomlessness. (Chen & Holt, 2002, p. 157) All of this derived from personal and intuitive experience and judgment hence subjective in nature.

We look at it and do not see it;  
 Its name is Invisible.  
 We listen to it and do not hear it;  
 Its name is Inaudible.  
 We touch it and do not find it;  
 Its name is Subtle.  
 These three cannot be further inquired into;  
 And hence merge into one. (Lao Tzu, Chapter 14)

Hence, the invisible, inaudible, and unspeakable Dao cannot be described by words. It can only be perceived and personally experienced.

However, Lao Zi’s metaphor of the universal rule governing Heaven and Earth finds best expressions in his saying “Dao generates One; One generates Two; Two generates Three; And Three generates All the things.” In this saying, the omnipresent Dao and its genetic and performative function are mapped onto Mother, who gives birth to Heaven and Earth.

What is more interesting is the fact that the fathomless and unnamable Dao is rewritten as Dao or Way or Road (道), along which people walk. In this way the absolute abstract Tao is mapped onto most concrete thing. As a matter of fact, Dao (道) or the way people walk along exists before Lao Zi does. Lao Zi must have borrowed this character on purpose to show that Dao is something too abstract, elusive, and vague, one can only acquire it through personal perception and personal experience in their contact with the environment. Etymologically, the formation and structure of the character 道 proves this idea. This character is made up of two elements, and the association of these two elements originally means a person *walking* along a path. The person is personally and bodily experiencing something. This bodily activity in the natural environment is borrowed to define the abstract concept of Dao. And later it is extended to mean truth, method, or principle, rules, etc. Hence, Daoism is a thorough experiential philosophy in nature. The mapping of the abstract Dao onto the concrete Way, Path, or Road hence suggests the embodied nature of not only the metaphor but the Chinese traditional philosophy as a whole.

### Conclusion

Dao, the most important tenet in Chinese philosophy, constitutes China’s metaphysical essence and hence bears the greatest impact on Chinese philosophical world and the world of people’s lives including their way of thinking and communication even today. Lao Zi seems to be at the same time a paradoxical person. On the one hand he extremely disregards the creative and performative function of language, claiming the nameless and most mysterious Dao generates Heaven and Earth. Dao, meaning, and knowledge are too profound and

mysterious to be described by language, hence he becomes a thorough critic of linguistic determinism. However, on the other hand, he claimed that, since language come into being, it becomes the origin of the universe and the myriad things in the universe. On one hand he seems to be an upholder of linguistic determinism. However, on the other hand he emphasizes the idea that it is the nameless Dao that is the true origin of Heaven and Earth and Dao is above Names or language and conception.

While in the West, the creative and performative force as well as the signifying function of language is clearly manifested in the Holy Bible as well as in other philosophical works. In the very beginning of the book, language is metaphoricalized as God and God uses language as light to generate all the things in the world. Word becomes God's tool to originate life. Simply by uttering some imperative sentences, God creates heaven, earth, and all the things in the world. To God, speech is action and words are power, carrying perlocutionary force. And God and language in the Old Testament exist as two separate entities before the creation of the universe. However, Logos and God merge into one. God is Logos and Logos is God. The implication is clear, language is innate in God, and it is an integral part of God. And it is through language, God creates the world.

Confucius shares similar view of and attitude toward language with Lao Zi and in fact applies them to social life and daily communication. To him, language is inseparable from one's behavior and moral character and it is an integral part of moral integrity. According to Confucius, "One who has accumulated moral power (virtue) will certainly also possess eloquence; but he who has eloquence does not necessarily possess moral power." If a gentleman is too eloquent, he will lose the respect of his inferiors. "A gentleman should be cautious in word but prompt in deed" (The Analects). A gentleman should consider the consequences of his words. He encourages wordless teaching because he thinks that Heaven doesn't speak and the four seasons fall into place. Prudent talk is preferred as "Words often cause troubles." According to him, "fancy words and embellished styles do not bear virtues" and it seems as if these words were taken out of the mouth of Lao Zi. Almost at the same time in history when Lao Zi and Confucius were teaching the futility of words in the East, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle asserted the importance of reasoning and logical persuasion on the other side of the World. In the East, rhetoric has been implicit and holistic. That is words are only part of, and are inseparable from, the total communication context, which includes the personal characters of the parties involved and the nature of the interpersonal relationship between them (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984). Metaphorical or implicit persuasion rhetoric rather than clear and explicit speech and talk is the norm. Hence, Lao Zi seems to follow what is called an implicit reasoning or what is called analogous and metaphorical logic. The speaker's job is to create a favorable condition in which the interlocutors may deduce meaning depending on what is called analogous and metaphorical reasoning.

The Chinese culture as well as many other cultures in the East thinks that the purpose of speech is for social integration and harmony, rather than for the well-being of a specific speaker and this naturally tends to disregard assertion and confrontation and lack logical argument and debate. While in the West:

This rhetorical tradition reflects in a profound way Western cultural pattern of logical, rational, and analytic thinking. A primary function of speech in this tradition is to express one's ideas and thoughts as clearly, logically, and persuasively as

possible, so the speaker can be fully recognized for his or her individuality in influencing others. (Gudykunst & Kim, 1984)

However, Lao Zi could hardly know what consequence he would have brought about on the way people after him would think, live, learn knowledge, behave, and communicate due to the influence of his philosophical viewpoints.

In how and why people behave or communicate the way they do today we may very well find his influence. The encouragement of the cyclical or configurable way of thinking, the preference of implicit, indirect, and non-confrontational way of communication, and the preference of non-argumentation and non-debate, and so on so as to develop harmony has long been the norm governing the process of communication and interaction in the society.

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