

标题: [Heng and Temporality of Dao: Laozi and Heidegger](#)

子标题: 论文库

作者: 王庆节 (转载自“思问”网站《王庆节文集》)

日期: 02月20日

网址: <http://www.cnphenomenology.com/modules/article/view.article.php/c7/711>

摘要: In this paper, I shall do a comparative study of the understanding of temporality in Laozi 老子 and Heidegger. First of all, I shall start from a newly discovered fact that in the book of the Laozi, the word “heng” 恒, a key word in understanding Laozi’s concept of temporality of dao 道, was missing during the past 2000 years. In most editions of the text, a synonym, “chang” 常, was substituted, which may refer to a totally different understanding of the temporality of dao. Second, based on an etymological study of the origins of the Chinese word “heng” and its philosophical use in the Laozi, I shall claim that heng explores the temporality of Laozi’s dao as heng dao. Unlike chang, which asks more for constant extension, and invariable and non-changeable movement, heng in Laozi’s heng dao focuses more on “living longer” 咬生 of the myriad creatures, and on the concept of “never dying” 不死 of dao as a natural way of giving birth. Third, in light of this understanding of Laozi’s heng dao and comparison with Heidegger’s preliminary thinking of temporality of Dasein as anticipatory resolute “being-towards-death” in Being and Time, I would like to argue that Laozi’s philosophy of dao is grounded on “coming-from-birth.” Thus, it is life-oriented rather than death-oriented. Because of this, I propose that Laozi’s heng dao as temporality of dao implies the concepts of “other-ness” and of “yielding,” which lead to “co-living longer” of human beings and “co-existence” between human beings and nature.

I.
Heng
:

A Missing Word in
The Laozi

Let us begin by looking at the temporality of Laozi’s dao in the opening sentences of the current and the most popular version of the Laozi. This well-known sentence of the book says: The dao that can be told of (dao-ed) is not the constant dao; The name that can be named is not the constant name. (Laozi: ch. 1). 1 Here, Laozi seems to use the term “constant” to describe his authentic dao, which cannot be told of and named. However, if we follow the ordinary understanding of

the Chinese word "chang" as "invariable," "everlasting," or "unchangeable," we will question whether Laozi really wants to tell us that the authentic dao is a "constant dao." This problem seemed to be solved when the two silk manuscripts of the Laozi, the Mawangdui Laozi 《熹王堆老子》, were unearthed in 1973 in the suburb of the city Changsha 长沙, China. These two manuscripts of the Laozi are the second oldest version of the Laozi and could be dated as early as 186 BCE. In these manuscripts, the "chang dao" 常道 was written as "heng dao" 恒道. We confirm again the substitution of the word "chang" for "heng" in the oldest version of the Laozi, the Guodian Laozi 《郭店老子》, which was discovered recently in Guodian, City of Jinmen, Hubei 湖北 Province, China, and could be dated at least as early as 278 BCE. As we know now, this substitution was most likely due to the fact that heng was the personal name of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty, who reigned from 180 to 157 BCE. After the emperor's death the word became taboo in China, and "heng" was replaced by its near synonym "chang" in most texts during the time.² Since the discovery of the silk manuscripts of the Laozi, many Laozi scholars have noticed the historical significance of the substitution of the word "chang" for "heng." However, very few have paid attention to the philosophical importance of the re-discovery of the word "heng" in Laozi's philosophy.³ In another place, I tried to argue that the term is not simply a missing word in the Laozi, but also one of the most important philosophical concepts in Laozi's thought as well as in the whole ancient Chinese philosophy.⁴ For example, among the some five thousand Chinese characters in the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi, the word heng appears more than 30 times. Apart from grammatical particles, that word frequency is exceeded only by those of the key concepts in the Laozi such as dao 道 (67 times), wu 无 (85 times) and de 德 (41 times). Besides in the Laozi, in Confucius's Analects we find that heng was understood as an important moral virtue of a Confucian gentleman. And in the Book of Change (Yijing 《易》) and Commentaries on the Book of Change (Yichuan 《易传》), as many of us know, heng is a key hexagram and one of the most important philosophical categories in the whole 64 hexagram Yijing system. Because a comprehensive discussion of the historical and philosophical meaning of heng is not the primary purpose of this paper, I will only focus on heng's meaning as temporality of dao in the Laozi.

II. Chang and Temporality of Dao in Mozi

The meaning of temporality of Laozi's dao can be seen first of all in a comparison between the etymological meanings of the word heng and that of chang in the Chinese language. In consulting several of the oldest Chinese dictionaries and historical documents, I find that the origins of the words "heng" and "chang" are different. One of the oldest meanings of the word "chang" was a unit of measurement for length. It equals two "xun"; (

) (79. 64 cm). 5 In the Shuowen Lexicon 《说文解字》, one of the oldest Chinese dictionaries in ancient China, “chang” is interpreted as “skirt” (xia qun 下裙) and its meaning is similar to that of “clothes.” The connection between these two meanings might be that chang was a standard measurement for a tailor to make a skirt and other clothes. A similar concept can be seen in the word “ink” (mo 墨), which is often used by a carpenter and thus becomes a unit of measurement for length during the pre-Qin 先秦 period. 6 The original meaning of chang as a unit of measurement or as a standard of things later attains its important philosophical significance. As a philosophical concept, chang may appear for the first time in Moism, one of the most important philosophical schools in Confucius’s and Laozi’s time. Mozi and his followers introduced the term chang as a constant standard of dao in order to solve the problems of “right” (shi 是) and “wrong” (fei 非), “beneficial” (li 利) and “harm” (hai 害), “admissible” (ke 可) and “inadmissible” (bu ke 不可). It is thus interpreted and translated as “constancy.” 7 I think that this philosophical understanding of chang dao as constant dao is grounded in Mozi’s understanding of the nature of time and space. For example, in the Moist Canons and Expositions, we can see one of the oldest interpretations of space and time in ancient China. There, Moists use “enduring” (jiu 久), “place” (suo 所), and “movement” (dong 动) to define and explain their understanding of temporality and spatiality. Mozi said: Canon: Enduring includes all particular times. Exposition: The former times and the present times, the morning and the evening, are all combined together to form enduring. Canon: Spatiality includes all the places. Exposition: East and west, south and north, are all enclosed in space. (Mozi: 1) As for movement, Mozi said: Canon: Movement in space requires enduring. The reason is given under “earlier and later.” Exposition: In movement, the motion must first be from what is nearer, and afterwards to what is farther. The near and far constitute space. The earlier and later constitute enduring. A person who moves in space requires enduring. (Mozi: 2) As Hou Wailu 侯外[^] pointed out, the concepts of space and time in Moist Canons and Expositions are “scientific” and “mechanical” (Hou: 496-497) and “they belong most likely to the category of geometry” (Hou: 496). That is to say, space and time in Mozi should be understood as something close to what we today called the universal space-time continuum within which an infinite number of local space-time units co-exist. Just like an infinite and endless line, the extension of this quantitative and mechanical space-time is objective and runs forever. Following this reasoning, Moists reached their conclusion on the nature of time and space. Canon: Spatiality: the boundaries of space are constantly shifting. The reason is given under “extension.” Exposition: There is the South and the North in the morning, and again in the evening. Space, however, has long changed its place. (Mozi: 3) Clearly then, according to Mozi and his followers, time should be defined and explained by geometrical space and its nature should be nothing but “constantly shifting” and “extension.” It is constantly passing from one moment to another while a thing’s particular locations in space are constantly changing. As we know, in the history of Chinese philosophy, this Moist quantitative and mechanical understanding of the nature of space and time met a strong challenge from the ancient Chinese Dialecticians and Taoists of the time. For example, one of the famous paradoxes developed by the school of Hui Shi 惠施 says, “The sun at noon is the sun declining, the creature born is the creature dying” (Zhuangzi: ch. 33. see

Guo); and another one says: "Going to the State of Yue today, one arrives there yesterday" (Zhuangzi: ch. 33). Needless to say, Hui Shi here challenges the Moist objective conception of space and time from a relativist position. If we don't assume a universal and quantitative nature of space and time, and if we take time and space as belonging to each of the concrete and specific things in the world and allow the different perspectives of seeing them, we will have some totally different or even "contradictory" pictures of the things in the world and in life. In the brief moment of noon (for me), if observed from different places on the Earth's surface by other people, the sun is declining. By the same token, to be born can be seen as the beginning of life from one perspective, but from another, the beginning of death, etc. A Daoist may not agree with Hui Shi's relativist view of space and time, but he or she won't agree with a Moist either. For a Daoist, neither the Moist nor Hui Shi's idea of space and time can reach the level of dao because both are still on the level of the particular things. On the one hand, the Moist view of time and space of dao cannot be the real "constant" or "standard" one. It merely assumes one of the many perspectives, very often the one that the majority in a society or that powerful men take to be the "constant" or "standard" as the absolute one. Because of this, as the author of the last chapter of The Zhuangzi said, the Moists after Mozi's death, argued with each other, and each condemned the others as "the traitor of Moism" (see Zhuangzi: ch. 33). On the other hand, although Hui Shi saw the problem of Moism, his way of overcoming Moism is to replace the Moist single perspective with a relativist perspective. It is still an anthropocentric perspective. In this way, he lost himself in the superficial "many" and was also blind to the temporality of dao (see Zhuangzi: ch. 33). If both Moists and Dialecticians like Hui Shi failed to catch the real nature of temporality of dao, what is the Daoist solution to the problem? The way for a Daoist to solve the problem, I think, is to make a distinction between the temporality of particular things and the temporality of dao. Philosophically speaking, the latter cannot be reduced to the former, but it is the latter which makes the former possible. This idea can be seen in Zhuangzi's definition of time and space. "Space exists, but it cannot be reduced to locations; time is enduring, but it cannot be reduced to the temporal beginning and end" (Zhuangzi: ch. 23). Zhuangzi's idea of space and time, I think, is derived from Laozi's understanding of the nature of time. And that should be found in "heng," the missing word in the Laozi.

III.
Heng
and Temporality of
Dao
in Laozi

In the ordinary Chinese language the word heng and the word chang are always treated as synonyms. However, when we study the origins of these two words, we find that they are different. Etymologically speaking, the original meaning of "heng" may be traced to two other ancient Chinese characters: geng (𠄎) and gen (𠄎). Geng means "to wax full" and "to navigate." In the oracle bone inscriptions, it is written as 𠄎 and 𠄎. The primordial image evoked by these variant characters may be the moving of the moon across the sky, or the path of a boat on a river. Gen means "to flow through" and "to spread everywhere." Originally gen might be connected with another word xuan (𠄎). Xuan evoked an image of whirling water and was written in oracle bones as 𠄎 or 𠄎. These two different but related meanings of heng can be found in the two verses of The Book of Songs 《𠄎》: "like heng-ing (waxing) of the moon and like rising of the sun" and "Ju and Pi are heng-ing (spreading) everywhere in the field" (see Ruan). These two meanings of the ancient word heng are clearly related, directly or indirectly, to the movement of water: a boat moves on an earthly river or the moon moves across the celestial "river." Thus understood, the original meaning of heng does not seem to have much to do with chang, if chang means only "constancy." Heng as movement on water suggests a range of differentiated and even conflicting elements such as a new moon and a full moon, or fast eddies and tranquil pools, shallow and deep water, movement forward and backward, up and down, slow and rapid, and so on. Given this original meaning of heng and the complicity of the world that the Laozi seeks to characterize, it is not surprising to see why Laozi favors heng over chang in expressing dao. 9 In the book of the Laozi we will find other philosophical discussions of the meaning of heng as temporality of dao. In what follows I would like to pick up three key terms of Laozi to illustrate. First, as many texts do in Laozi's time, the Laozi interprets heng as "jiu (enduring)." Defining heng as jiu, Laozi calls dao "heng dao" (ch. 1, 32, 37, etc.), and it is said that "being in accord with dao, one is jiu" (ch. 16). As we have mentioned, Mozi defines temporality as jiu, too. However, unlike Mozi, whose "jiu" is the "constantly shifting" and "extending" of spaces, Laozi understands "jiu" as "living longer" (ch. 7 & 59), and as "[being] free from danger throughout one's whole life" (ch. 16), etc. Here, Laozi's idea behind "jiu" is to live one's life naturally without a premature death. That is to say, if one lives one's life or realizes one's existence naturally, in using a Daoist word, "ziran 自然" or "it-self-so-ing," one not only survives, but also flourishes and lives longer. If one does otherwise, one is in danger of losing one's life. Because of this, Laozi always warns against "danger (dai 殆)" (ch. 16), "disaster (yang 殃)" (ch. 52), "perishing (yi 已)" (ch. 30 & 55), etc. According to Laozi, dai, yang, yi, etc. are contrary to jiu as "enduring" or "living longer," because they are conditions which damage life and will lead to death, and thus they will be against dao as heng dao. That is why Laozi said, "To avoid danger to one's life is called following chang/heng" (ch. 52); and "Whatever is contrary to dao will not live out its natural life" (ch. 30). The Laozi's first meaning of heng as jiu provides a

general picture of heng as "keeping oneself alive and flourishing" while the second connotation of heng is fan (反). This word provides insights into how heng as jiu of dao is possible. According to traditional interpretations, the Laozi's concept of fan has two intertwined meanings under the same name (see Qian: 446). The first implication of fan is "dui fan 反," which should be understood as either "pairing" (xiangdui 相) or "being opposite" (fan dui 反). It refers to mutual opposition and thus differentiation, and to the co-relativity or complementarity of this differentiation. As we shall see, this characteristic makes Laozi's heng dao distinguished from Mozi's conception of temporality, which is undifferentiated extension or linear, constant movement. In chapter 2 of the Laozi, we can see how the Laozi defines heng in the sense of fan as "pairing" and "being opposite." When the people of the world all know beauty as beauty, there arises the recognition of ugliness. When they all know the good as good, there arises the recognition of evil. Therefore, heng is how being-a-thing (you 有) and not-being-the-thing (wu 无) produce each other, the difficult (nan 难) and the easy (yi 易) complete each other, the long (cang 苍) and the short (duan 短) contrast with each other, the high (gao 高) and the low (xia 下) are distinguished from each other, music (yin 音) and song (sheng 声) harmonize with each other, the pre- (qian 前) and the post- (hou 后) accompany each other (ch. 2).¹⁰ In comparison with this first aspect, the second aspect of the term fan is "fu fan 复返," which refers to either a way of "returning (hui fu 回复)" or that of "repetition (fan fu 反复)." It is the "interactive" relation between the above mentioned two levels of fan that constitutes the temporality of dao as heng dao. For Laozi, those mutually oppositional and mutually complementary interactions are possible only because of a deeper level of "interaction." Laozi calls it "gushing forth" (chong 冲) of dao. This "gushing forth" of dao is the root, origin, or "mother" of all existing things. This movement of gushing forth is always and by its nature "renewing" and "repetitive." For example, in chapter 4 of the Laozi, the author says: "The dao gushes forth (chong 冲).¹¹ It may be used but its capacity is never exhausted. Profound! As if it were the first ancestor of the myriad things. . . . Abysmal! It sometimes appears to exist. I don't know whose child it is. It seems to be prior to the ancestral lord. And in chapter 42: "The myriad creatures carry the vital force yin and embrace the vital force yang. However, it is by virtue of "gushing forth (chong 冲)" that these forces reach their harmonized consummation. Chong as "gushing forth" of dao is the first "ancestor" of the substantive myriad things and it, in the words of the Laozi, "appears to exist" "prior" to substantive myriad things and even to the substantive ancestral lord. Obviously, the latter exists in the ordinary world of space and time while dao seems to go beyond it. That is why we do not know and may not be able to ask "whose child it is." The only way we may approach it is to use metaphors such as "the gateway toward all the subtleties" (ch. 1), "the root of heaven and earth" (ch. 6), "the ancestor of the myriad creatures" (ch. 4), "the empty center" (ch. 16). Thus understood, heng dao as fan is actually the "heng-ing" of dao. This "heng-ing" of dao expresses itself through opposition and differentiation in space and time. Because of and through this way of heng-ing, everything in the world is becoming itself, and keeps being itself. With these concepts of returning and gushing forth, we may reach a new level of understanding of the first meaning of heng dao as "jiu."

Here “jiu” is not only “living longer” (chang sheng 咬生), but also “never dying” or “being immortal” (bu si 不死). As Laozi said in chapter 6: The mystical giving birth and nurturing, Never dying, It is called the subtle and profound female. The gate of the subtle and profound female, The root of Heaven and Earth. It is continuous, and seems to be always existing, Use it and you will never wear it out. This mystical giving birth and nurturing is the differentiating and repetitive “gushing forth” of dao. That is heng-ing of dao. The heng-ing of dao will be never dying. However, you, I, and myriad things, who exist in this world of time and space, will die. We are mortals and have beginnings and ends. But dao does not. Here, Laozi seems to lead us to the understanding of two kinds of time. One is heng-ing of dao while the other is heng-ed in dao or the dao-ed. One is never dying while the other is living, dying and coming to birth again. We are mortals in space and time. Thus, the best we can do is to “live longer.” But, how can we live longer or live without an early death? The answer to this question will lead us to the third meaning of heng as “pu” (朴). Literally, the word pu refers to a block of wood which is not yet “carved.” The Laozi uses the term philosophically. According to Laozi, pu is to stay in and to keep oneself in the primordial status of dao. We will find this interpretation of heng dao in the chapter 32 of the Laozi, Dao is heng-ing (on the appropriating way of being itself). It has no name and it is pu. 12 The word pu here could mean either the primordial way of dao itself or the authentic way in which one responds to or follows dao. When it is understood in the second sense, it reveals to us how to preserve heng dao, so that one can live longer and live without danger or disaster. In the four of five chapters (see ch. 19, 28, 32, 37 & 57), where the word pu is used in the Laozi, it is always associated with “no name” (wu ming 无!名) (ch. 32 & 37) and “no desire” (wu yu 无!欲) (ch. 19 & 57), etc. That suggests that heng dao as pu in the Laozi is prior to and resists any kind of artificial interventions. Any new or different way of being or doing things must not only be tolerated, but also be appreciated and respected because it is out of heng-ing of dao. Such an interpretation of heng dao as pu leads us thus to the Laozi’s other important concepts such as “it-self-so-ing (ziran 自然)” and “non-coercive action” (wu wei 无!p). 13 Positively, the Laozi’s heng dao as pu suggests that everything should follow its own natural and unique way of being born, growing, flourishing, ripening, declining and dying. That is its natural way of existence or being, its ziran. Negatively, dao of everything, in its way of heng-ing, opposes any kind of interference, whether it is repressive coercion, arbitrary intervention, or even well intended care. It calls for acting “without a purpose (wuwei 无!p),” “without desire (wuyu 无!欲),” “without heart/mind (wuxin 无心),” “without struggle (wuzheng 无!r-),” etc. Otherwise we will mess things up and go to an early death. That is why the Laozi says: “Violent and fierce people do not die a natural death” (ch. 42); “the sage is heng-ing himself in a way of having no heart/mind. He regards the people’s heart/mind as his own” (ch. 49); and “if I (the ruler) desire non-desiring, my people will keep being pu themselves” (ch. 57). Although the Laozi’s heng dao as pu is prior to and resists any attempt of “naming (ming 名),” “forming (qi 器),” “desiring (yu 欲),” “purposeful acting (wei 为),” it does not invite an interpretation of Laozi’s doctrine of dao as an absolute laissez-faire philosophy. The concept of “pu” does suggest some “active” roles of man and of the worldly creatures in responding to the heng-ing of dao as

differentiating "gushing forth." Laozi calls it "positive" responding activity "fu" (辅), meaning "to help" or "to supplement." For example, when Laozi explains the meaning of "non-coercive action," he says that a Daoist sage "helps all things in their natural state but does not dare to take any coercive action" (ch. 64); and that a Daoist sage does not abandon all actions, and he is only "to discard the extraordinary, to get rid of the extravagant and to avoid the excessive" (ch. 29). IV.

Temporality of Life and Death: Laozi and Heidegger Laozi's concept of heng as temporality of dao has an interesting resonance with Heidegger's philosophical thinking of temporality of Being and that of Dasein. 14 For example, we find first that both Laozi and Heidegger refused to give priority to the traditional "objective" and "linear" concept of time. This tradition, as we know now, could be traced back to either Mozi in the Eastern Asian or to Aristotle in the European West worlds. According to this conception, which Heidegger calls the "now-time" (Jetzt-Zeit) and a Daoist may call "chang": Time shows itself as a sequence of "nows" which are constantly "present-at-hand," simultaneously passing away and coming along. Time is understood as a succession, as a "flowing stream" of "nows," as a "course of time." (Heidegger 1962: 474) Second, both saw that primordial temporality must present itself through the ecstatically finite-ness (Endlichkeit) (Heidegger) or the "gushing (heng-ing)" (Laozi) of concrete existing things in the world. That is to say, things always temporalize (zeitigen) themselves or get temporalized in between their "beginnings" and "ends." Because of this, both Laozi and Heidegger thought that a study of the true meaning of life and death could provide the key access to the very nature of temporality of being and dao. Third, both of them took, or inclined to take, the original form of temporalization of being or dao as cyclical rather than chronological. As Heidegger said of the eternity of time later in his *Beitrag zur Philosophie*: "The eternal is not what ceaselessly last, but rather that which can withdraw in the moment, in order to return once again. That which can return, not as the same but as what transforms unto the new, the one-only be-ing, such that in this manifestness it is at first not recognized as the same." (Heidegger 1999: 259) We may continue to list more similarities. However, a question of the difference between these two thinkers seems more interesting because it will force us to think the nature of temporality to a deeper level. One of the topics worthy of further investigation might be the temporality of death. Very clearly, death is at the center of both the Heidegger's early and Laozi's thoughts on the temporality of human existence. But their approaches and conclusions seem quite different. As we know, in *Being and Time*, Heidegger's existential analysis of the temporality of Dasein (Zeitlichkeit) starts from his analysis of the phenomenon of death of Dasein. According to Heidegger, if we agree that death means the end of everyone's possibility of life and no one can escape from it, then we seem to have no hope to exist authentically. Authentic existence means to live with all possibilities as a whole, but death in its very nature seems to destroy it, because death is the impossibility of all possibilities of Dasein. Heidegger's way out of this problem is to redefine the concept of temporality of Dasein. According to Heidegger, our understanding of the phenomenon of death is still grounded in the traditional concept of time. That is to say, if we stop understanding time as a linear sequence of "nows" and if we understand authentic temporality as ecstatic of Dasein's existence toward all dimensions of a timely being such as future, past

and present, we will cease to see the death of Dasein as the "demise" of an entity. In its authentic temporality, Dasein is being toward its death in all moments of its existence. Death understood in this sense is not necessarily an absolute end of a biological life, but moments of existence of Dasein. That is why Heidegger says, [J]ust as Dasein is already its "not-yet," and is its "not-yet," constantly as long as it is, it is already its end too. The "ending" which we have in view when we speak of death, does not signify Dasein's Being-at-an-end [Zu-Ende-sein], but a Being-towards-the-end [Sein zum Ende] of this entity. Death is a way to be, which Dasein takes over as soon as it is. "As soon as man comes to life, he is at once old enough to die." (Heidegger 1962: 289) As long as I exist, I am always dying and I die at all moments. Thus, "to die" should be understood here philosophically and symbolically. It designates the "end" and "beginning" of moments of Dasein's finite existence. The phenomenological analysis of our death experiences by Heidegger from section 46 to section 52 of Being and Time reveals a full existential-ontological conception of death: "death, as the end of Dasein, is Dasein's ownmost possibility—non-relational, certain and as such indefinite, not to be outstripped" (Heidegger 1962: 303). That is to say, the anxious experience of my being toward death reveals the truth of my existence as being totally individualistic and free. The death is my own death. No one can die for me. There is no one I can seek out and depend on in this issue. Thus, this experience of being toward death, toward the impossibility of the possibilities of my existence reveals my inauthentic falling into das Man and thus also opens my own greatest possibility of existence as the true self. Be thyself! The call of conscience exhibits an existential attestation of Dasein's own most potentiality-for-Being. Heidegger calls the disclosedness (Erschlossenheit) of Dasein in wanting to have a conscience, i.e., wanting to be myself, "anticipatory resoluteness (Entschlossenheit)." Therefore, any moment of Dasein's existence is Dasein's being toward its death, i.e., its own most possibility of being as a whole. Only in this way, Dasein can go to its authenticity, that is, "to bring the whole Dasein into our fore-having (Vorhabe)" (Heidegger 1962: 279). Surprisingly, when Heidegger talks about the authenticity of Dasein as "Being-towards-the-end" [Sein zum Ende] in Being and Time, he rarely mentions another "end" of Dasein, which is "to be born," or the "beginning" of Dasein. I think if we really want to explore Dasein's authenticity of existence, we also have to ask for a phenomenological and existential analysis of "to be born" of Dasein. A careful reader of both Heidegger and Laozi may notice that it was Laozi who first opens this philosophical dimension. As we have discussed above, Laozi's dao as heng dao focuses on "living longer (chang sheng 长生)," and "being immortal (bu si 不死)" rather than on "being-towards-death." Therefore, we may say that Laozi's philosophy is a philosophy of life rather than a philosophy of death, though Laozi also sees human existence as a way (tu 徒) from birth to death. In chapter 50 of the Laozi, Laozi gives us a picture of the human way from life to death: [Man comes] into life and goes out to death. Three out of ten are on the way coming to life, three out of ten are on the way already into death, while three out of ten are living, that means, moving towards death. If the heng dao is a "cyclical/repetitive returning" (fu fan 复返) between life and death, we, as the living people or Dasein, belong right now to those one-third who are "moving towards death." According to Laozi, human existence as moving from

birth towards death is a descending way of losing possibilities of existence. That is a way from dao to dao-ed. If we also understand "birth" and "death" symbolically and philosophically rather than merely biologically, we may say that, at any moment of my existence, I am a creature not only "being-towards-death," but also more, "being-from-birth." There is no doubt that Heidegger won't deny that I am "being-from-birth." However, in *Being and Time*, his understanding of "birth" or "re-birth" arrives only through his existential-ontological analysis of Dasein's "being-towards-death." That is to say, only through "anticipatory resoluteness" (*Entschlossenheit*) of "being-towards-death," can I reach the "disclosedness" (*Erschlossenheit*) of Dasein and Sein, of the truth of my authentic self or my "existing as a whole potentiality-for-Being" (Heidegger 1962: 309). Here, I myself and myself only, not anyone else, should be the "mother" who gives my "birth" and "re-birth." As Heidegger says: The certain possibility of death, however, discloses Dasein as possibility, but does so only in such a way that, in anticipating this possibility, Dasein makes this possibility possible for itself as its own most potentiality-for-Being. (Heidegger 1962: 309) There seem to be two implications we can derive from the comparison between Laozi and Heidegger. I believe that these two implications will make Laozi's "coming-from-birth" to be distinguished from Heidegger "being-towards-death." First, human existence as "coming-from-birth" will not lead to "whole-ness," as Heidegger's "being-towards-death" does. Rather, it implies concepts of "given-ness" and "other-ness." I cannot be my own "mother." Instead of being scared of death, I joyfully accept and celebrate my birth. We celebrate our birth by saying thanks to mother or mothers. This celebration indicates ontologically the finite or limited nature of the authentic human existence as "being-in-the-world-with-others." That is to say, if Heidegger's "being-towards-death" reveals an absolute, free and non-relational individual Dasein, Laozi's "coming-from-birth" indicates that Dasein as a "given" in time and space cannot be absolutely non-relational and individual. Its very existence assumes an "other" or "others." Of course, the first and the most important "other" is my "mother" or "parents," and then, possibly, my "siblings." Thus, the possibilities of my existence opened by my birth and re-birth cannot be the possibility of all possibilities, or the Dasein as a potential whole. Rather, these possibilities are only possibilities of my finite and concrete existence as "being-in-the-world-with-others" at this specific moment (*Augenblick*) of *heng-ing* of dao, i. e., at the moment of this specific time and space. Second, related to the acknowledgement of "given-ness" and "other-ness" in the very nature of human existence, Laozi's "coming-from-birth" implies also an attitude of "being soft" and "yielding." This is almost opposite to the "anticipatory resoluteness" which is implied in Heidegger's "being-towards-death." In chapter 67 of the book, Laozi explains this attitude of "yielding" with the idea of "not to dare to be ahead of the world," and that of "to set a step back." I have three treasures. Guard and keep them: The first is deep love, The second is frugality,

And the third is not to dare to be ahead of the world. …... If one forsakes setting a step back and is ahead of the world, One dies. And in chapter 76 Laozi said: When man is born, he is tender and weak. At death, he is stiff and hard. …. Therefore, the stiff and the hard are companions of death. The tender and the weak are companions of life. Therefore, if the army is strong, it will not win. If a tree is stiff, it will break. The strong and the great are inferior, while the tender and the weak are superior. It should be noticed that this “being soft” and “yielding” do not mean absolutely giving up. On the one hand, by not daring to be ahead of the world and setting a step back, we fully acknowledge the limited and the finite nature of our own existence. That will give us more possibilities to live and to live longer. On the other hand, by doing this we will acknowledge the existence of others and thus will allow others more possibilities to co-live and to co-live longer. For Laozi, this idea does not apply only to human co-existence with each other, but also to our human being’s attitude toward the natural world, i.e., to our co-existence with nature. As we have mentioned before, Laozi calls it “fu”, meaning to help all things to live according to their natural possibilities but not to dare to take coercive action (ch. 64).¹⁵ That also reminds us of the well-known chapter 25, where Laozi mentions four “greatnesses” in the universe: Dao is great, Heaven is great, Earth is great, And the king is also great. There are four great things in the universe, and the king is one of them. If we take “king” here to be the greatest man or a Daoist model for all human beings, we will see that in this passage Laozi tries to define the unique place of human beings in the universe. On the one hand, human beings are not worthless creatures. We contribute to the “birth” and the “living” of the universe as one of the “greatness.” On the other hand, we should always remember that there are three other “greatnesses.” The co-existence of these four “greatnesses” and their yielding to each other allow the universe to “live forever,” or to be “immortal” (bu si 不死) and allow us human beings to “live longer.” That is the “heng-ing” or “temporality” of dao. Some of us may wonder why many of these ideas sound very familiar to us as if we listen to Heidegger’s talking about Being, truth, Ereignis, clearing, four-fold, etc. during his later period of thinking after the famous “Kehre.” But if we know the historical facts that Heidegger was attracted by “the origin of eastern thoughts,” especially by the thoughts of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which were his favorites from the middle of the 1920s, we may not be surprised to hear some scholars (see May: 1996) talking about the “hidden sources of Heidegger” today. But my last question is: would this “hidden source” help us not only to understand the so-called Heidegger’s “Kehre,” but also expose some radical changes of Heidegger’s way which are still hidden in the “Kehre”? 16

Dao

:

A Journal of Comparative Philosophy
December, 2001, Vol. I, No 1, pp XX-XX.

Notes 1 As for the translation of the Laozi in this article, I follow Chan 1963: 139-176. In several places I have modifications when necessary. 2 The substitution of the word of “chang” for “heng” in pre-Qin texts after Emperor Wen of the Han should be very common. For example, it happened in the Analects, e. g. , 7:26, as Kong Yingda 孔伋 mentioned in his commentary of the text. It also happened in the “Outer Chapters” of the Zhuangzi 《庄子》 (see Wu 1963: 314). The other examples were the change of the name of Mountain Heng (恒山) to Mountain Chang (常山) and the change of the name of the legendary girl in moon from “heng’ e “ (恒娥) to “chang’ e “ (嫦娥), etc. 3 D. C. Lau might be the first one in the West who has discussed this change in the new introduction of his translation of the Laozi. But his discussion focuses more on its philological aspect rather than philosophical meaning. Zhang Songru 张松如 says that heng is an adverb and thus has no substantial meaning in the Laozi. This saying ignores the fact that heng, at least in some cases in the Daodejing 《道德经》, is used definitely as a noun, e. g. , in ch. 2. It could be also read as a noun and/or as a verbal noun in many other cases, such as in Yijing 《易经》 and Yi Zhuan 《易传》. Rau Zhongyi 禔宗, so far as I know, is the first one who discusses the philosophical meaning of heng after the discovery of the silk manuscripts of Yijing and of The Great Appendix. 4 See Wang 2000: 149-163. 5 According to Wu Chengluo 1967, a zhou chi (周尺) is 19. 01 cm. A chang (常) is two xun (寸) and one xun is eight zhou chi. For example, in the Book of Rites 《礼记》, we read, “A short spear should be one chang and four chi while a long spear should be three xun. ” 6 For example, a mo 墨 is five zhou chi 周尺, and a zhang 丈 is two mo, see Guoyu Zhouyu B 《周易周语下》. 7 Chad Hansen discusses Mozi’ s concept of chang (常). Although Hansen cautions us that chang is a “more pragmatic concept” and cannot be appropriately understood without a general philosophical context of “dao” as a guiding discourse in China, it is by its nature a realistic term. See Hansen: 110-112. 8 In this section I revise section IV of Wang 2000, in order to expose the philosophical significance of temporality of Heng Dao. 9 There is no doubt that “heng” and “chang” have been synonymies since the early time of the history of Chinese language. However, they are still two different characters and each, as I have discussed above, has a unique etymological root. People often ignore the difference between them because they use them as synonymies in ordinary language. But that does not mean that these two words are philosophically the same and a philosopher like Laozi cannot use one of them in a special and a more primordial way. As for an analysis of the ordinary use of the word “heng” in the pre-Qin documents, see Wang 2000: 150-151. 10 All traditional editions of the book after Han Dynasty missed the word heng except the Silk Manuscripts of the Laozi. My translation is based on the latter. 11 See the definition of chong in the Shuo Wen Lexicon 《说文解字》: “Chong means to gush forth and to wave interactively.” 12 It should be noted that my reading of chapter 32 of the Laozi is different than the traditional ones. As I interpret heng in some other places, I read heng as a verb rather than as an adverb. 13 As for more details of my discussion of Laozi’ s concept of zi ran and wu wei, see Wang 1997: 291-321. 14 It is commonly believed that the later Heidegger’ s thought was greatly influenced by East-Asian thoughts, especially by those of Daoism and Chan Buddhism. See May 1996 and Parkes 1987. 15 For an additional interpretation of “fu” see Genesis of Water From the Great One, Guo-dian Chu-jian, in Li 1998. 16 This paper was published in

Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy, winter issue, 2001, pp. 55-71. I would like to thank Yong Huang, Robert Davies, Roger Ames, Michael Zimmerman, Lik Kuen Tong, Curtis R. Naser for their help and valuable suggestions in revision of the paper. My gratitude also goes to Dao: A Journal of Comparative Philosophy for its permitting me to reprint my article here.

References:

- Chan, Wing-Tsit. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.
- Gou, Qinfan 郭藩. 1986. *Collected Interpretations of Zhunagzi 《庄子集解》*. In *Collected Works of Masters 《庄子集成》* (reprints), vol. 3. Shanghai上海: Shanghai Shudian 上海三联书店.
- Hansen, Chad. 1992. *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1962. *Being and Time*, trans. by John Macquarrie & Edward Robinson. New York: Harper & Row.
- Heidegger, Martin. 1990. *Contribution to Philosophy (From Enowning)*, trans. By Parvis Emad and Kenneth Maly. Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press.
- Hou, Wai-lu 侯外庐. 1957. *General History of Chinese Thoughts*. Beijing 北京: Renmin Chubanshe 人民出版社.
- Laozi 老子. 1963. *Laozi 《老子》*. In Chan 1963: 139-176.
- Li, Ling 李零. 1998. "Exegesis of Guodian Chujian"; 『郭店楚简校读记』. In *Research of Daoist Culture 《道家文化研究》*, vol. 17. Beijing 北京: Sanlian Shudian 三联书店.
- May, Reinhard. 1996. *Heidegger's Hidden Sources: East Asian Influences on His Work*, trans. Graham Parkes. London & New York: Routledge.
- Mo Zi 墨子. 1965. *Mozi 《墨子》*. In Needham, Joseph. 1965.
- Needham, Joseph. 1965. *Time and Eastern Man*. London: Royal Anthropological Institute of Great Britain & Ireland.
- Parkes, Graham, ed. 1987. *Heidegger and Asian Thought*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii.
- Qian, Zhongshu 钱锺书. 1978. *Limited Views 《管篇》*: Beijing 北京: Renmin Wenxue Chubanshe 人民文学出版社.
- Rau, Zhongyi 禔宗. 1993. "On the Idea of 'Da Heng'" in the Silk Manuscript of the Great Appendix; 『帛书《周易》中的“大恒”』. In *Research of Daoist Culture 《道家文化研究》*, vol. 3. Beijing 北京: Sanlian Shudian 三联书店.
- Ruan, Yuan 阮元. 1963. *Commentaries and Exegeses of the Thirteen Scriptures 《十三经》* (reprints). Beijing 北京: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局.
- Sun, Yirang 孙裔嫫. 1986. *Interpretations of Mozi 《墨子哲夹》*. In *Collected Works by Masters 《庄子集成》*, vol. 4. Shanghai 上海: Shanghai Shudian 上海三联书店.
- Wang, (James) Qingjie. 2000. "Heng Dao and Appropriation of Nature—A Hermeneutical Interpretation of Laozi," in *Asian Philosophy*, 10. 2: 149-163.
- Wang, (James) Qingjie. 1997. "On Laozi's Concept of 'Ran,'" in *The Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 24: 291-321.
- Wu, Chengluo 吴承洛. 1976. *History of Measurement in China. 《中国度量衡史》*. Beijing 北京: Shangwu Yingshuguan 商务印书馆.
- Wu, Zeyu 吴震. 1963. "Huai Nan Zi Shu Lu"; 『淮南子』 in *Wen Shi 《文史》*. Beijing 北京: Zhonghua Shuju 中华书局.
- Zhang, Songru 张松如. 1978. *Laozi Xiaodu 《老子校》*. Jilin 吉林: Jilin Renmin Press 吉林人民出版社.
- Zhuangzi 庄子. 1986. *Zhuangzi 《庄子》*. In Guo 1986.
- Qingjie (James) Wang, Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy, The Chinese University of Hong Kong. E-mail: jqwang@cuhk.edu.hk.