

Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*:

A Hermeneutic Inquiry

by

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Department of Secondary Education

University of Alberta

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## Abstract

The limited scholarship available on the incorporation of Shakespeare's plays into an intercultural curriculum has led me to contemplate the prospects of fostering dialogue between Shakespeare and the wisdom traditions of Chinese Daoism in higher education within a globalized context. This research study specifically investigates the intercultural engagement with *Macbeth* by incorporating the understanding of *Dao De Jing*, facilitated by four Chinese educators and myself, drawing from our lived experiences. Through this examination, by fostering dialogues with these two texts, the study seeks to provide some insights into the implications for an intercultural curriculum.

This hermeneutic inquiry addresses two research questions: (1) In what ways do Chinese educators navigate intercultural experience with regard to the *Dao De Jing* and the reading of *Macbeth*? (2) What are the implications of Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of *Macbeth* with the *Dao De Jing* for an intercultural curriculum?

The study comprises nine chapters. Chapter One unfolds an autobiographical narrative detailing my lived experience in Daoism and educational background in Shakespearean studies, establishing my role as a "cultural insider" in the research endeavor. Chapter Two builds upon intercultural hermeneutic philosophy, drawing from Ram Adhar Mall's (2000) analogous hermeneutics, J. J. Clarke's (2000) hermeneutics of difference, and Zhang Longxi's (1992) literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability. The three scholars ground their theories in Hans Georg Gadamer's (1975) philosophical concept of hermeneutic experience. Chapter Three provides a comprehensive literature review on intercultural engagement with Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays, providing a foundational understanding for the subsequent chapters. Chapter Four specifically discusses hermeneutic inquiry as the methodology guiding this

research study. Chapter Five describes the research process and introduces participants involved, laying the foundation and initiating the exploration of both individual and collective intercultural reading experiences of two texts. Chapter Six is dedicated to addressing the first research question, which examines how Chinese educators navigate intercultural experience when incorporating the *Dao De Jing* into the reading experience of *Macbeth*. This chapter analyzes the paradoxical structure, hermeneutics of difference, and cultural commensurabilities present in both texts, shedding light on the complexities of the intercultural interpretation. Chapter Seven delves into hermeneutic curriculum theory and aesthetic curriculum theory, laying the curricular foundations for an intercultural curriculum. Chapter Eight addresses the second research question, examining the implications of Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of *Macbeth* with the *Dao De Jing* for an intercultural curriculum. This chapter elaborates on four implications: aesthetic receptions, non-anthropocentric worldview, self-reflection, and moving toward a poor curriculum. Chapter Nine serves as the conclusion, elaborating on the content and components of an intercultural curriculum that integrates the two texts.

Given the nature of hermeneutic inquiry, this study places significant emphasis on the reader experience, drawing upon Gadamer's (1975) concept of "truth in art," which underscores the necessity for the reader's creative engagement with the text. Through hermeneutic writing, the intercultural reading experience of *Macbeth* and the *Dao De Jing* seeks to delve into and interpret how and what the two texts speak to us and resonate with us, from the shared and revealed ontological pointings. As a poetic endeavor, I maintain the conviction that participants' speeches transcend the individual experiences, while delving into the deeper meaning of human existence and its intricate relationship with the world we inhabit. Additionally, within this poetic

writing, this study seeks to encourage further communication from readers and educators to engage dialogically with the intercultural dialogue presented here.

***Keywords:*** *Macbeth*, *Dao De Jing*, Intercultural hermeneutics, Intercultural reading experience, Gadamer, Curriculum.

## Preface

This thesis is an original work by Qian Ye. The research project, of which this thesis is a part, received research ethics approval from the University of Alberta Research Ethics Board: Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*: A Hermeneutic Inquiry. No. # Pro00135262, November 7, 2023.

## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work to my family, whose love, patience, and unwavering support have been my constant companions, not only throughout my study abroad journey but also in every stage of my life.

## Acknowledgements

I am deeply grateful to my supervisor, Dr. Claudia Eppert, whose persistent support and guidance have been crucial in shaping this thesis. Her invaluable suggestions and feedback have significantly contributed to my work. It is through her commitment to supporting me that I could complete this work step by step and fulfil my dream of studying in the West at the mid-age of my life.

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. David Lewkowich and Professor William Dunn for their invaluable feedback and expert suggestions at various stages of my work. Their expertise and specific insights in reading experience and intercultural communication have provided my work with fresh perspectives and deepened my understanding of these areas.

I extend heartfelt appreciation and profound gratitude to Professor David Smith, a venerable senior scholar renowned for his contributions to hermeneutics, curriculum studies, wisdom traditions, and East-West engagement. Despite only first meeting him in person during my candidacy exam, Professor Smith's erudition and academic rigor have profoundly impacted me throughout the years as I delve into his works during my doctoral program. I am deeply grateful for the generous gift of his book, *Confluences: Intercultural Journeying in Research and Teaching: From Hermeneutics to a Changing World Order*, which holds a cherished place in my heart. His inscription, "May the 'Way' of your journey be harmonious and fruitful," inspires me as I navigate the intricate pathways of my research and will continue to inspire me throughout my academic career. It is strongly influenced by his exemplary style as a rigorous scholar and dedicated educator that has made my whole journey – both my outward exploration to the West and my inward homecoming – meaningful, rewarding, and fulfilling. It is this soft, silent, yet

potent influence of reading his works over the years that has profoundly transformed me in the educational field.

Beyond the academic study, I extend my sincerest and most profound gratitude to four dedicated Chinese educators who wholeheartedly participated in my research project. Throughout this dissertation, I have referred to them by anonyms to abide by the principle of confidentiality of the research project. Yet, in my imagination, these anonyms – Jane, Kent, Rebecca, and Sophie – take on a fantastical quality, seamlessly blending with their real names and true identities, much like the exquisite interfusion between fantasy/illusion and reality in Shakespeare’s plays. Despite this, how I wish that I could thank them by using their real names here! Throughout this research journey, they bestow upon me not only their invaluable contributions to the research itself but also a cherished friendship beyond measure. I am deeply indebted to them for their unwavering dedication and evergreen friendship.

I also want to extend sincere thanks to the instructors and professors at the Faculty of Education and beyond. Throughout my journey here, I took courses at the Faculty of Education and audited fifteen courses at the Department of English and Film Studies, Department of Philosophy, and Department of East Asian Studies. Their generous permissions and brilliant courses have consistently instilled in me profound inspiration, imagination, revelation, and vitality, enabling me to break through the boundaries of disparate disciplines and attempt to open an *interdisciplinary* space in-between.

I wish to express my heartfelt appreciation and gratitude to my beloved family: my dear parents, my dear husband, my lovely son, and my dear sister. It is their silent support and love that always fills me with profound happiness. To my family, I dedicate all my humble efforts and achievements with the deepest gratitude and love.



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## Chapter One: Home Away from Home

Home. Love. Soil. Identity. Home evokes in me a feeling of silent love and loving relationships with the soil of my motherland. Home is also the central symbol of leaving the beloved and a hoped-for return in life and art. What is perhaps most crucially important in this journey of leaving and returning is one's identity. In this introductory chapter, I reflect on my childhood, growth, and academic studies in Shakespeare, and how they have shaped my identity. Through my engagement with Chinese Daoist<sup>1</sup> culture and the early modern English culture of Shakespeare's world, I am led to embark on an intercultural hermeneutic inquiry. Drawing on the hermeneutic philosopher Hans-Georg Gadamer (1975), who maintains that "understanding begins when something addresses us" (p. 266), I reflect on the addresses that have led me to my current research study.

### Dwelling in an Ontological Sense of Home: A Daoist Childhood

In this section, I discuss my early formation. As David Jardine (2006a) points out, the choice of hermeneutic inquiry as a research methodology must "keep open the possibility of returning to understand anew" (p. 160). Moules et al. (2015) point out that hermeneutic research references the importance of *Bildung*, which "implies the continuing formation of the self in the light of experience, beyond the sheer acquisition of experience" (p. 46). Their references to good

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<sup>1</sup> I use the *Hanyu Pinyin* system to translate all the Chinese characters throughout not only because this system is widely used in Chinese school textbooks in mainland China, but also because a minor change of tone or a phoneme in the Chinese language is phonetically significant in the Chinese language. In the Chinese language, the change of tone and the change of phoneme indicate different words with different meanings. Taken as an example, 道 (literally translated as the *Way*) is pronounced and written as the *Dao* (with the fourth tone and with the phoneme d) in the *Hanyu Pinyin* system, while 陶 in Tao Yuanming (陶渊明) or Tao Qian (陶潜), which I will discuss in the following part, is pronounced and written as *Tao* (with the second tone and with the phoneme t) in the *Pinyin* system.

interpretative or hermeneutic work and its relation to human experience inform me that it is not merely my past experience that my interpretation will be about. I must allow those “happenstances” (Jardine, 2006a, p. 161) in my experience and the present I to play. This “play” forms a living connection to my chosen topic of Daoism-Shakespeare dialogue. In what follows, I detail how my childhood was informed by a spirit of Chinese Daoism, by which I mean a philosophy of spontaneous love, of grinding natural culture on the inkstone, of cultivating naturalism and *humus*, and of having 精神 (*Jingshen*, Essence-spirit) back at home.

Born into an ordinary, middle-class family (worker father, pharmacist mother, and a younger sister) in China, I grew up in a calming and caring environment. The love between my parents and siblings is as simple and as true as what is called “stirring-the-oatmeal love” (Xiong, 2009, p.100). We lived in a residential apartment, located in the vicinity of the hospital where my mother worked. Two elderly grannies had been caring for my sister and me for many years. They were two retired teachers in the kindergarten affiliated to the hospital. Without families of their own, they lived in the kindergarten and treated my sister and me as their own grandchildren. When my parents were at work, my sister and I, already elementary school children, went to the kindergarten after school. I remember that on cold winter days, in the only nursery room of the kindergarten, we sat by the charcoal fire, simmering yams on the grill. My grannies cuddled babies close to their chests and sat on a chair, and my sister and I sat on the small wooden stools, listening to them reminiscing their past – that they had been generously treated by the French missionaries who came to China to preach the gospel of love; that this hospital was set up by those French missionaries. That was in the early 1980s, and I began to embrace a naïve dream of exploring the outside world when I grew up.

Looking back now, I see that Daoism pervaded my childhood in the warmth and homeliness in this kindergarten nursery and in my dear departed grannies. Daoism speaks of warmth and homeliness as a state of natural, pristine artlessness and simplicity, as still water and a block of uncarved wood. *Dao De Jing*<sup>2</sup> implies that only when humans cultivate what is at home will the *Dao* prevail among all under Heaven (Lynn, 1999, p. 140). Home in my tender eyes is protected from coldness and insecurity; it is jointly and intimately held by an intuitive sense of bond, a willing and spontaneous love.

This intuition was extended into my calligraphy practice with my father in my early childhood. Calligraphy, as my father always told me, did not have a mechanical process nor a set of abstract rules, but consisted in our search for a feeling in the hand and grasping that feeling intuitively. This spontaneity in the moments of writing rather than following abstract rules is one of the many values of calligraphical styles that were influenced by Daoist aesthetics. Just as the story of Cook Ding<sup>3</sup> and the story of Pian the wheelwright<sup>4</sup> in the *Zhuangzi*<sup>5</sup> indicate,

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<sup>2</sup> *Dao De Jing* is a Daoist classic book that dates to the 3rd century B.C.E., supposedly written by an old man named Lao Dan (老聃) or Laozi (老子). It is comprised of two parts, with approximately 5,000 words altogether. The first word of the first part is *Dao* and the first word of the second part is *De*, hence the name *Dao De Jing*. The first part is normally thought of as being more about the *Dao* or the Way, that is, about what exists and what does not exist (ontology), and how we know things (epistemology), and the second part is about ethics and governing. Throughout this dissertation, I will refer to the translation of it by Wang Bi (王弼) (226-249 CE), an ancient Chinese philosopher (Lynn, 1999).

<sup>3</sup> A story about Cook Ding cutting up an ox is from the *Zhuangzi*. Cook Ding is a butcher. The way he cut up an ox is different from other butchers. When other butchers have to change their knives once a year or even once a month, Cook Ding has cut up thousands of oxen with the knife that he had used for over nineteen years, with the blade still as sharp as the one from the grindstone. The lesson of this story is that one must be patient to practice a skill until one finds intuitively and naturally the path of alignment with the *Dao* (Zhuang, 1996, p. 46-48).

<sup>4</sup> The story of Pian the wheelwright is from the *Zhuangzi*. Pian the wheelwright told Duke Huan that the craft of making a wheel cannot be put into words and taught to his own son. He discarded the words of sages that Duke Huan was reading as “the dregs of the men of old.” He told the Duke, “If I chip a wheel too slowly, the chisel slides and does not grip; if too fast, it jams and catches in the wood. Not slow, not fast; I feel it in the hand and respond from the heart, the mouth cannot put it into words, there is a knack in it somewhere which I cannot explain to my son and which my son cannot receive from me” (Zhang, 1992, p. 53).

<sup>5</sup> The text of *Zhuangzi* (also named *Chuang-Tzu*) was believed to be written by Zhuang Zhou (庄周) or known as Zhuangzi and those who followed Zhuang Zhou's ideas. Supposedly written in the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E., the



calligraphers feel the brush in their hand while they teach without words how to move brushes. The Daoist “teaching without words” or “non-words” seems to be reified in my father’s experience with calligraphy, which suggests to me that skills will become a living part of our body. To write broad strokes spontaneously without knowing why is implied in the notions of home and homely love. I am searching for a place of dwelling in writing calligraphy, which is preconditioned by the act of grinding ink on the inkstone slowly and patiently before writing. While I grind ink on the inkstone, the inkstone is grinding me simultaneously. Both acts of me grinding the ink and the inkstone grinding me cannot be separated, and grinding itself establishes a bond with my hand until the skill is intuited into my body. Attached to the bond is the “Way,” known as *Dao*. In my early years, the *Dao* of calligraphy was infused into my veins. This is the home where I dwell – constantly reminding me to slow down by the means of the ever-patient process of grinding and calligraphing, and then quietude and natural competence ooze toward me and into my body, and I cannot tell and will not figure out how it comes to me and why. Intuitive homely love – not only for this “skill” but, more importantly, as the metaphorized fusion of my body with the Chinese culture in the process of ink-grinding – is arising in me naturally and spontaneously.

During my elementary and junior high school years, I was formally introduced to Daoist poems and its emphasis on nature. In my 语文 (*Yuwen*, Chinese Language and Arts) classes, we studied the works of Li Bai (李白) (701-762) and Tao Qian (陶潜) (365-427) (also known as Tao Yuanming, 陶渊明),<sup>6</sup> both of whom were influenced by Daoism. Their poems and essays on

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book consists of a variety of bizarre anecdotes, allegories, and parables in storytelling, poetic, and even playful styles, like Aesop’s fables in the West.

<sup>6</sup> In my translation of Chinese names, I follow the Chinese tradition of having family name first, followed by given names. For example, I translate 李白’s name as Li Bai, not as Bai Li. Li is a family name, while Bai is

nature and natural stillness left a lasting impression on me, enriching my understanding of home as not only a comfortable living space but also an original place for me to slowly discern my kinships with the earth. I would like to share two of their poems with my readers: Li Bai's peaceful contemplation of nature as home and Tao Qian's simple joys of home and nature. Both poems remind me of the ontological sense of home as *humus*, the soil. Before I introduce these poems, let me share two popular stories about poets. Li Bai fell from grace in the imperial court of 长安 (*Chang'an*), an ancient Chinese capital city, and retired to a hermit's cottage. In response to an official who urged him to return to the office after he regained the emperor's favor, Li Bai refused and penned a narrative poem:

You ask me why I dwell  
Amidst these jade-green hills?  
I smile. No words can tell  
The stillness in my heart.  
The peach-bloom on the water,  
How enchantingly it drifts!  
I live in another realm here  
Beyond the world of men.<sup>7</sup> (cited in Blofeld, 1979, p. 56)

In a *Yuwen* class, I remember the teacher stressing the importance of the keyword “stillness” in the poem. She explained that stillness is the essence of nature and that the poet suggests his state of mind is as tranquil as the fallen petals drifting on the water. To fully

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the given name. In the same way, in the name of 陶渊明 or 陶潜, Tao is a family name, and Yuanming or Qian is the given name.

<sup>7</sup> The original poem, titled 山中问答 (*A Reply in the Mountains*), in Chinese reads as follows: 问余何意栖碧山 / 笑而不答心自闲 / 桃花流水杳然去 / 别有天地非人间.

appreciate the poem, the teacher encouraged us to read it aloud in a tone of lightness and unassumingness. She then read this poem with peaceful emotions, creating a charming and musical atmosphere that still lingers in my mind. Following her lead, we read the poem in its rhyme pattern. She then drew our attention to the fresh, earthy sound of belongingness that Li Bai had with nature, and explained that the stillness in the mind is the intuitive perception of the *Dao*/Way. I cannot remember when and where I first heard about the Way or the *Dao*. But it was in this class, and with this teacher, that I first learned to read Li Bai's poems and appreciate their homeliness and belongingness of the Way. As I entered adulthood and moved away from my hometown to Shanghai and now to Canada, I recalled this teacher and searched for an earthy sound and taste of belongingness. The earthy smells of soil became a natural and intuitive state of belongingness with the *humus*.

In another popular story, Tao Qian was once appointed magistrate of a low-status office. One day, an inspector sent by a high-ranking officer came to his small town, and Tao was advised to put on an official robe to visit the inspector. However, Tao detested fawning upon fame, wealth, and power, and could not endure the pretentiousness and insincerity of officialdom. He protested by saying, "How can I bow to a country official just for five bushels of rice!" After serving for only eighty days, Tao resigned from the office and withdrew to his farmstead. In a lesson on Tao Qian, another teacher explained that although Tao Qian's poetic language is autobiographical and simple, the true meaning in a poem often goes beyond the simple words. The teacher led us to read Tao Qian's poem 归园田居 ("Returning to Live on the Farmstead") and a group of poems known as 饮酒 ("Drinking Wine"), which include images of a net of dust, an encaged bird, and stranded fish that contrast with a quiet country house with wispy smoke wreathing up from the chimneys, barking dogs, and crowing cocks. Through these

images, the teacher helped us to understand Tao Qian's decision to return to his home on the farmstead after resigning from his office:

It is my nature always to love hills and mountains.  
By mischance I fell into the net of dust,  
And kept away from home for so many years.  
A fastened bird longs for its familiar grove,  
A fish in the pool remembers old deep waters (from "Returning to Live on the Farmstead").<sup>8</sup> (Ing, 2019)

The mountain air is fair in the lovely sunset,  
And flocks of birds are returning to their nests.  
There is a true meaning in all of these,  
But when I try to explain, I forget my words (from the fifth poem of "Drinking Wine").<sup>9</sup> (Zhang, 1992, p. 124)

In a *Yuwen* class, my teacher provided us with a unique perspective on Tao Qian's writing style and his connection with nature. He suggested that Tao Qian's following nature approach not only reflected his personality, but also highlighted the limitations of the Chinese language. As we analyzed this fifth poem of "Drinking Wine," my teacher pointed out the open ending and invited us to interpret it. She then drew our attention to the poet's silence and associated it with the two natures revealed in the poem: the outward nature of the desolate village and remote field where Tao Qian built his house, and the inner nature that the poem links to the

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<sup>8</sup> The Chinese version reads as follows: 性本爱丘山/误落尘网中/一去三十年/羁鸟恋旧林/池鱼思故渊.

<sup>9</sup> The Chinese version reads as follows: 山气日夕佳/飞鸟相与还/此中有真意/欲辩已忘言.

outer one. “His inner nature *is* present there,” my teacher emphasized, “even though Tao Qian struggles to articulate it in words.” Through this analysis, my teacher encouraged us to consider how language can both reveal and conceal our connection with the natural world.

During the class, my teacher elaborated on Tao Qian's suggestive silence, which demonstrated his decision to return home, to the outward nature. This nature, much like Li Bai's, exemplifies the Daoist Way of living. At the end of the lesson, my teacher stated that Tao Qian was a great poet and ranked closely to Shakespeare in the West. Although my teacher did not explain the reason for this cultural comparison, his words stuck with me throughout the years, especially as I started to read Shakespeare's works years later. For now, I contemplate my teacher's analysis of the simplicity of a farmer's life, which Tao Qian frequently writes about. I also consider the ontological significance of soil, a dwelling place for humans to intimately connect their body with nature, an earthy home that we come from and will ultimately return to. As one of Tao Qian's poems convey, this return is about “go[ing] back to being myself.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Approaching Daoism Through Traditional Chinese Medicine**

After I graduated from junior school, I did not go to high school. I went to a nursing school in my hometown. I had an intermediary education, which was very popular in China in the 1980s and the early 1990s because it provided stable job offers in a nation-run working unit, such as a hospital or an elementary school. Due to my family traditions that have connections with medicine, I clung to my family's hope that when I applied for nursing school, I could continue to study medicine and become a pharmacist. This deviation in the track of life, however, opened a window for me to “meet” the brilliant beauty of traditional Chinese medicine,

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<sup>10</sup> From Tao Qian's poem “Returning to Live on the Farmstead” (归园田居). This poem ends with the line “[t]rapped in the cage for so long, / I can finally go back to being myself (*ziran*)” (久在樊笼里，复得返自然) (Ing, 2019, p. 396-397).

which includes many Daoist insights. For example, traditional Chinese medicine treats the human body as a subtle network of energy channels called conduits. *Qi* passes through conduits without obstructing. *Qi* is the tangible form of the Dao and is a cosmic energy that is at work constantly in nature. Using the methods of acupuncture and herbal remedies, traditional Chinese medicine emphasizes the circulation of *Qi* in the body; hence, it emphasizes more the prevention of diseases and gentle natural healing ability over powerful drugs or surgical procedures. Remedial principles and practices adopted by traditional Chinese medicine have an impact on, and in return, have been affected by Daoist philosophical ideas that there are correspondences between the cosmos and human body.

In nursing school, I took a traditional Chinese medicine course taught by a retired doctor in his sixties. A vivid picture always surfaces spontaneously of him wearing a traditional Chinese garment for males, a *Zhongshan* tunic suit (中山装), and carrying a book, *Huang-Di Nei Jing* (《黄帝内经》),<sup>11</sup> under his arms when he entered the classroom. He told us that *Huang-Di Nei Jing* is not only the springhead of Chinese medicine but also the root of Chinese culture. In a lesson on Yin-Yang, a philosophy about two contradictory forces or powers that operate in the cycle of rising and fall and unite man and Nature in the process of harmony, he taught us that *Yang-Qi* and *Yin-Qi* must be in balance. He taught us that the human body has these two primordial energies that give birth to and nourish each other. I vaguely remember his remarks that *Yang-Qi* is like the Sun whose upward movement will protect the exterior body and refresh 神 (*Shen*, Spirit). *Yin-Qi* keeps 精 (*Jing*, Essence) to dwell within the body. *Yin-Qi* and *Yang-Qi* must be in equilibrium. If *Yang-Qi* prevails, the blood in the channels will flow rapidly and one

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<sup>11</sup> This is an ancient medicine book translated as *Yellow Emperor's Canon of Medicine*. It is based on Daoist thought and describes how the body adapts itself to the changes of seasons and the Yin-Yang. It is regarded as the springhead of traditional Chinese medicine.

gets mania. If *Yin-Qi* prevails, the organs will block the orifices of the body. Only when *Yin-Qi* and *Yang-Qi* are in equilibrium, will we be able to keep our 精神 (*Jingshen*) in good condition.

In this class on Yin-Yang, he hung up a picture of a garden on the wall and told us, “*Jingshen* is our home garden.” If a person’s *Jingshen* gets decayed, as the garden is left untilled and have the plant roots deracinated, he or she cannot be expected to live a normal life. To keep the home garden of *Jingshen* in good condition, he advised us, we need to eat five grains and keep a peaceful mind.

As I had learned from many folk tales in my childhood, the cultivation of five grains<sup>12</sup> played an important role in ancient China. The cultivation of five grains is seen as a sacred boon from the ancient Chinese people’s close relationship with the earth, the soil. I had read that crop cultivation in China attributed much to 神农 (*Shennong*), a well-known Divine Emperor of the Five Grains. Despite my previous knowledge, it was through this medical teacher’s lessons that I came to understand the relations between *Shennong* and five grains. Five grains are cultivated from our home-garden and nurture our *Jingshen*. By analogy, he compares *Jingshen* to an individualized home garden wherein one’s body and mind dwell in peace and in coordination. Cultivation does not only point to the horticultural world as connected with the planting of crops but also suggests to me that to sustain one’s well-being, one needs to attend to the daily dietary habits as well as the healthy state of *Jingshen*. As my teacher explained in the class that cooling food or herbs could reduce fever and pacify one’s anxiety and that warming food or herbs could be used to speed up blood circulation and cure a patient with the weakness of Yin physique,

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<sup>12</sup> In *Huang-Di Nei Jing*, five grains refer to rice (粳米), wheat (麦), adzuki bean (小豆), soybeans (大豆), and yellow millet (黄黍). In a famous children’s book, *Three-Character Classic* (《三字经》), there are words about six grains or crops: “稻粱菽 麦黍稷 此六谷 人所食.” These six grains or crops are rice (稻), sorghum (粱), beans (菽), wheat (麦), millet (黍), and corn (稷). They sustain human life.

*Jingshen* connects to Daoism in that it extends the health of human body into a balanced, physical-spiritual bond with the soil, which brings the harmonious union of the *Yin Qi* (where Earth originated) and the *Yang Qi* (where Heaven originated) into 中和之气 or 中气 (*Qi* of Central Harmony). The dynamic balance between the Yin and the Yang is defined by *Dao De Jing*'s fundamental idea, as stated in Chapter 42:

The Dao begets the One; the One begets two; two begets three; and three beget the myriad things. The myriad things, bearing yin and embracing yang, form a unified harmony through the fusing of these vital forces. (as cited in Lynn, 1999, p. 135) (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。万物负阴而抱，冲气以为和。)

The *Qi* of Central Harmony is a harmonious state of Heaven and Earth, which sustains the spontaneous growth of myriad things in nature. When this cosmological balance is applied to the organismic process, it refers to a harmonious state of one's physical and spiritual being. A sentence that my teacher liked to quote from the *Huang-Di Nei Jing* was that only when one remains relaxed and void, in peace and tranquility, and free from stray thoughts, will the *Jingshen* be able to grow in the fertile soil and the *Qi* be able to rise simultaneously.

It was through this traditional Chinese medicine course that I came to understand that home resides nowhere but right inside the body and mind. I want to draw connections between the notion of *Jingshen* and the poetic world of Li Bai and Tao Qian briefly here. The poets emphasized Daoist naturalism and established a bond between *humus* and their inner nature, as opposed to conventional social hierarchies, while *Jingshen* in the notion of traditional Chinese medicine highlights ancient Chinese people's unbroken bond with the soil and correspondence between cosmic energies and the human body.



After graduation from the nursing school, I was assigned to work in my hometown hospital which specializes in the integration of traditional Chinese medicine and Western medicine. The metaphor of *Jingshen* as an inner home was strengthened in my daily communication with the patients. Because of afflictions and unendurable pains that tormented their bodies, patients did not have the *Jingshen* as is observed in a healthy person. Doctors in the hospital where I worked diagnosed the diseases by feeling the patients' pulses, observing the patients' tongues and facial colors, and smelling their different bodily odors.

I once asked a senior doctor why some patients could not recover after taking acupuncture and/or taking liquid medicine made from traditional Chinese herbs. "Don't you believe in the power of our traditional medicine?" the doctor seemed to read into my mind. "You see, these patients are listless and depressed. Their *Jingshen* is declined, and their mind is distracted. Such a dispirited state requires their inner adjustment," the doctor replied.

"They need to face the disease with an optimistic state of mind, and refreshen their *Jingshen*," I agreed. "Reading books and listening to music might be helpful, right?"

The doctor replied, "Might be. If they are too tormented by excessive anxiety, they cannot sleep soundly at night and cannot hopefully get well. Because numerous unknown anxieties easily cause *Jingshen* to decay, *Ying-Qi* and *Wei-Qi*<sup>13</sup> in our body cannot function well. It is important to handle things with a peaceful mind."

This doctor's words remind me of that senior medical teacher at the nursing school who had informed me of home residing in the garden of our *Jingshen*. To have our home uncontaminated and in good order, we need to find a place to sit down, for repose and for

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<sup>13</sup> *Ying Qi* (营气) is literally translated as Nutrient-Qi, and *Wei-Qi* (卫气) is literally translated as Defensive-Qi.

reflection. The ever-greenness of *Jingshen* requires the nutrition of five grains grown from the soil as well as an internal adjustment to the various life vicissitudes in peace.

Before the year 1999, I dwelled in an ontological sense of home in my homeland that connected with the soil and with the love that my parents, grannies, and schoolteachers bestowed upon me. Their overflowing loves are transformed and infused into my body. *Humus* shapes my identity as a Chinese person imbued with a Daoist way of living. In other words, in the ontological sense of home, I try to understand the meaning of what it means to be dwelling in a Way/the Dao as related to the *humus* of Chinese culture and the Chinese language in my family and school situations. The process of understanding is flowing and progressive rather than fixed at one stroke. As William Pinar (2000) acknowledges, the individual's language system, which forms one's worldviews, derives from parents, teachers, novels, and poems that one reads, as well as from educational experience with teachers, curriculum, and pedagogies (pp. 421-422). In 1999, I was admitted to Shanghai Normal University as a graduate student and I left my home, a place of comfort and security. To leave home might take the risk of losing things that I hold dear to my heart, as is called up by Othello's "And when I love thee not, / Chaos is come again" (*Othello*, 3.3.91-2). Thanks to the simple, spontaneous, and true love from my grannies, my parents, and my schoolteachers, I did not lose my identity and my nature. I ventured forth and found a literary "home" in Shakespeare.

### **A Literary "Home" in Shakespeare**

Having discussed early Daoist influences in my upbringing, in this section, I turn to my lived experience with Shakespeare and Shakespearean studies in both China and America. Lived experience, as many curriculum scholars (Aoki, 1988 & 2005; Grumet, 1988; Pinar, 1994 & 2000) maintain, constructs or formulates the sense of one's identity. Ted Aoki (1988)

acknowledges that lived experience discloses “the concrete human experiences that lie hidden” and, hence, “matters pedagogically” (p. 413). Elsewhere, Aoki (2005) advises educators not to stay with the traditional notion of “identity” that “truncate[s] the situational context of our lives” but “to enlarge and to deepen our place of dwelling,” to dwell in both identity and difference (p. 354). In a resonant way, Madeleine Grumet (1988) emphasizes “an elaborate detour” (p. 73) of lived experience. For her, lived experience recovers “our own possibilities, ways of knowing and being in the world” (p. 532) and “constitute[s] our consciousness, the sense we make of ourselves and of the world” (p. 534). Similarly, Pinar’s (1994) call for a hermeneutic approach defies “an abstract, analytical grid” but should have a more visible and direct interpretation of “what is lived through” (p. 26). In his article, “Search for a Method,” Pinar (2000) introduces his concept of *currere* and chooses the educational experience of literature as an area to be explored. He maintains that readers’ intellectual *Gestalt* and conceptual lens are a configuration of their lived experience. In his words, “one’s lens or conceptualization of self and experience derives ... from the novels and poems she reads ... [and] in her identification with them” (p. 422). It is not difficult to see that Aoki’s suggestion for dwelling in identity and difference, as well as Grumet’s and Pinar’s emphasis on subjectivity, relate to one’s full lived experience and should become an open space wherein the spirit(s) of humans in their complexity are nurtured in dynamic contact with the exterior sources, including the art of literature and/or another system of culture.

Shakespeare is where my passion lies. Passion’s strength is renewed each time I find a quiet place to be seated still and envelop myself with his views of humanity and the world that his words carry in loads. Although I have been working in the field of Shakespearean studies for years, I experience fear, hesitation, and awe when encountering Shakespeare’s plays. My initial knowledge of Shakespeare came from an English teacher who was teaching intensive English

reading at Jiangxi Normal University. After I graduated from nursing school, I did not have a high school education, nor did I have a formal undergraduate education. I had been learning English at home for a decade by reading high school and college English textbooks and listening to English programs on the radio and TV. I took the National Self-taught Examination and passed the required courses in English Language and Literature.<sup>14</sup> Introduced by my mother's colleague, I audited this English teacher's reading class at Jiangxi Normal University. In a lesson about "flat characters" and "round characters," he used examples from Shakespeare's works to illustrate that rounded characters in literature are lifelike and full of depth. He told us that his graduate advisor at Shanghai Normal University, Mr. Fang Ping,<sup>15</sup> was devoting himself to translating Shakespeare's works in verse forms. Years later, I read *The New Complete Works of William Shakespeare* translated by Mr. Fang Ping. One of Fang Ping's (1983) books, *Making Friends with Shakespeare*, is written in straightforward language. Through this book, I "met" Othello, Romeo and Juliet, King Lear, Portia, Prospero, and many other characters in Shakespeare's world, and came to envision "round characters" dramatized in the plays. Whenever my English teacher discussed Mr. Fang Ping, his words were filled with reverence toward this senior Shakespeare scholar and translator. Much influenced by my English teacher's admiration and love for his teacher, I applied for the graduate program in English Language and

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<sup>14</sup> National Self-taught Examination in China is established for those people who had no opportunity to go to college. By the method of self-studying, learners complete all the courses required in a certain area and achieve an undergraduate diploma, but without a B.A. degree. I received my undergraduate diploma in 1997, so I was qualified later to apply for a graduate program at a university in China.

<sup>15</sup> Fang Ping (1921-2008) (方平) is a famous translator and scholar in the field of Shakespearean studies in China. He was Vice President of the Chinese Shakespeare Society. He dedicated his whole life to the translation and study of Shakespeare's works. In the 1950s, he translated *The Merchant of Venice*, *Henry V*, and *Venus and Adonis*. In the 1960s, he revised eight of translated works by Mr. Zhu Shenghao (朱生豪) (1912-1944). In the 1980s, he translated Shakespeare's five comedies and wrote *Making Friends with Shakespeare*. His *The New complete works of William Shakespeare* was published in 2000. He had been a professor at Shanghai Normal University for years.

Literature at Shanghai Normal University in 1999 and was admitted to the university. But Mr. Fang Ping had been retired for years.

After I completed my Master's program studies in English Language and Literature at Shanghai Normal University in 2002, I began my Ph. D. studies in the same program at Shanghai International Studies University in 2003. During my doctoral studies, I closely read *Hamlet*, *Othello*, *King Lear*, and some sonnets in the Shakespeare course. My advisor, Professor Shi Zhikang (史志康), interpreted lines from Shakespeare's plays from his understanding and reflection. From time to time, he would pick up classical proverbs from the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Dao De Jing* to draw our attention to the amazingly similar wisdom between Shakespeare and our ancient sages. When he was suddenly stricken by a sparkling idea, he would be in elation and fall into a state of self-forgetfulness. His lecturing style was so spontaneous, unintended, and natural. I was always wondering where his improvisation came from. Almost spontaneously, he brought Shakespeare's plays into a conversation with the world in which we dwell. He immersed himself in deep contemplation and actively shared his insights with his students. Gadamer (1975) references a Greek idea of *Theoros*<sup>16</sup> in order to suggest a true sharing and true being of a spectator who cannot be adequately understood in terms of subjective consciousness. This present being, according to Gadamer, refers to a total self-forgetfulness one experiences while one is watching or reading (p. 111). Daoism embraces the similar idea of self-forgetfulness. Professor Shi's lectures on Shakespeare presented to me such a spectator who was constantly carried away by what he was reading – being present and being outside himself in self-forgetfulness.

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<sup>16</sup> *Theoria* means someone who takes part in a mission to a sacred festival. He has no other qualification and function than *to be there*. He is a spectator who shares in the solemn act through his presence at it. In this way, he acquires his sacred quality of inviolability (Gadamer, 1975, p. 111).

Under his influence, I started my dabbling in reading Shakespeare's works and decided that Shakespeare would become the subject of my dissertation. My doctoral dissertation, titled *A Thematic Study of "Death" in Shakespeare's Five Tragedies*, explored the theme of death in *Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Romeo and Juliet*, *Othello*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*. With reference to Freud's psychoanalysis and A. C. Bradley's character-centered textual interpretation, I analyzed in detail the physical death that carries spiritual sublimation. I am engrossed by Shakespeare's dramatization of life and death in tragedies. The word "earth" occurs numerous times in these tragedies, and each time it appears, it links not only to the soil and the giving-birth to and the perishing of the corporeal but also indicates the symbiotic relationship of males and females with nature, with the land of their kingdoms, as well as with the womb that impregnates love and life.

Following the completion of my doctorate, I delved deeply into Shakespeare's works and my academic studies focus on textual interpretation. During my sabbatical year (2011-2012), I had the opportunity to study at the English Department of Brown University in the United States, where I encountered two significant experiences that have had a lasting influence on my study. One of such experiences involved studying under the guidance of Professor Coppélia Kahn, whose research on Shakespeare from psychoanalytic and feminist perspectives, combined with a historically oriented criticism, greatly impacted my textual interpretation of Shakespeare's works.

Another unforgettable experience I had at Brown University was watching outdoor performances of Shakespeare's long poems, *The Rape of Lucrece* and *Venus and Adonis*, which were performed by students on the lawn in the bright afternoon sunshine in June, 2012. The performances were devoid of artificial backdrops and focused entirely on language, just like authentic Elizabethan plays. As I watched, engrossed in nature, I relied entirely on my senses to

listen, to see, and to feel the power of language. My imagination soared, and I was transported hundreds of miles away to the depths of the primeval forests, where I felt nothing but the pulsating power of English language within me.

In my reading experience with Shakespeare's works, I have untold moments of being interrupted by difficult understanding, and by my free-wandering imagination as well. There are also numerous moments of stillness, when I must pause and take a breath, unconsciously attempting to understand his words from my cultural perspective. These incessant self-interrupted moments bring me into what John Dewey (1934) called an "imaginative phase of experience" (p. 272). In this imaginative space, I find that I am trying to override my "inertia of habit" (p. 272) – which for me is a halt in the comfort and security at "home" or more specifically, at my home culture.

In light of my personal encounters with Daoism and my profound admiration for Shakespeare, I would like to share with my readers a hermeneutic examination of three selected Daoist passages and a hermeneutic-aesthetic reading of Shakespeare's tragedies in the next section. Since my research embraces a hermeneutic inquiry, I aim to situate these teachings within the context of my own lived experiences before I embark on the process of my research, illuminating their timeless wisdom and their continued relevance in our modern existence.

### **Interpreting Daoist Passages and Shakespeare's Tragedies: A Hermeneutic Exploration**

In this section, I will establish a connection between my personal experience and the interpretation of three carefully selected passages from the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. Additionally, I will explore how my previous aesthetic reading of Shakespeare's tragedies intertwines with my encounters with COVID pandemic and my inner conflicts. These experiences and reflections resonate with the hermeneutic approach to artistic works. By

intertwining personal narratives with textual analysis, I aim to illuminate the transformative power of hermeneutic exploration in the face of my life's challenges and uncertainties.

Passage 1: Chapter 77 of the *Dao De Jing* states:

The Dao of Heaven diminishes those who have more than enough and augments those who have less than enough, but the Dao of man is not like this. For it diminishes those who have less than enough in order to give to those who have more than enough. Who can take his more than enough and give it to all under Heaven? It is only one who has the Dao. (Lynn, 1999, pp. 185-186) (天之道，损有余而补不足。人之道，则不然，损不足以奉有余。孰能有余以奉天下？唯有道者。)

These lines highlight the fundamental difference between the *Dao* of Heaven and the *Dao* of man. The *Dao* of Heaven operates on a principle of balance, as it reduces the abundance of those who possess excess while increasing the resources of those in need. This is evident in the cycles of nature, such as the waxing and waning of the moon, the overflowing and spilling of water, and the rise and fall of things. Conversely, the *Dao* of man is characterized by a tendency to diminish the resources of the unprivileged in order to benefit those who are better off. It is evident that the *Dao* of man is in opposition to the *Dao* of Heaven, as it disrupts the natural order of balance and harmony.

This contrast provides a critical perspective on social, economic, and political structures that often result in inequitable resource distributions. In many societies, the widening gap between the rich and the poor result in sociopolitical issues, such as crimes, political riots, and social and familial violence. The pursuit of external qualities such as fame, wealth, and political power can create an imbalance between one's external and internal qualities, which are considered Yang and Yin respectively. When Yang exceeds Yin, this is referred to as “德不配



位” (*De bu pei wei*, *De* does not match its position) in Chinese culture, meaning that an imbalance in favor of external qualities disrupts the natural order of balance and leads to negative consequences. Individuals who align their behavior with the natural order, as modeled by the *Dao* of Heaven, can achieve balance and harmony in their lives.

I reflect on the *Dao* of Heaven and contrast it with the news of corrupt high officials. Reports frequently emerge about these officials committing crimes such as accepting illegal payments and misappropriating public assets for personal gain. Reading about the corrupt behavior of high officials brings up a swell of emotions within me. How could those who represent the common people, who hold possessions of power and responsibility, be so consumed by greed and avarice? Then my mind turns to a different memory, one from many years ago, and my heart is lifted once again. In June 1999, I had the opportunity to work as an accompanying translator for a cataract medical team from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO). The team was made up of doctors from various countries including the United States, Australia, Brazil, and others. They came all the way to Ganzhou City in Jiangxi Province to provide surgical treatment to those who were suffering from cataracts and could not see the world clearly due to the cloudiness of the lens in their eyes. The team performed cataract excision surgeries, and what is also remarkable was that the patients did not have to worry about the financial burden of the surgery – it was completely free of charge. Witnessing their generosity and commitment to improving the lives of strangers who were eager for seeing the light was an incredible experience. The medical team was following the *Dao* of Heaven, giving what they had (i.e., their expertise) to those who needed it most without any expectation of reward.

The contrast between these doctors and the corrupt officials I read about in the news is stark. While the high officials sought personal gain at the expense of others, the doctors sought inner satisfaction from the happiness of those they helped. The doctors embodied the balance of Yin and Yang, finding harmony in the light they brought to their patients' lives. *Light!*

As the doctors prepared to leave and return to their countries, patients flocked to the hospital to say goodbye. The gratitude they expressed was beyond words. For many, the world had been darkened by cataracts for years, but now they could see the light. The *Dao* of Heaven sheds *light* on my understanding of how we can all strive for cooperation and complementarity, and I believe that this is the way to truly follow the path of the *Dao* of Heaven in humans.

Passage 2: In Chapter 8 of the *Dao De Jing*, there is a well-known statement that highlights the importance of water, which states that “The highest good is like water” (Lynn, 1999, p. 63) (上善若水). It emphasizes the *De* of water that aligns with and embodies the essence of the *Dao*.

In Daoism, water serves as an important symbol of *De* as it exhibits several attributes that align with the *Dao*. First, water flows downward and occupies a low position, representing the idea of humility and modesty. Secondly, water exhibits an openness to everything that it comes in contact with, regardless of its purity or impurity. Water does not compete with others but accepts everything and purifies it through its natural processes, thereby embodying the concept of *Wu Wei* (无为), which refers to non-action, unforced action, or following the order of nature. Finally, the constant drip of water can erode even the toughest rock, emphasizing the transformative and persistent power of water, which suggests that the softness and weakness can ultimately prevail over strength and hardness. Water serves as a model for human behavior. Emulating the *De* of water entails being humble, open, and compassionate towards all living

beings. In this way, Daoism teaches people to live in harmony with the world around them and follow the natural flow of things without resistance.

Tu Youyou (屠呦呦), a senior Chinese scientist who received the Nobel Prize in Medicine in 2015, embodies the Daoist principle of living like water through her groundbreaking discovery of the anti-malaria drug, 青蒿素 (*qinghaosu*, artemisinin). Despite her recognition by the world for her achievement, Tu remains humble and maintains a low profile in China. She does not possess a Ph.D. degree, nor have educational background from studying abroad, and she is not an academician in the Chinese Academy of Sciences. Tu's devotion to her research and disregard for fame and honor is evident in her willingness to test the effective remedy on her own body. In her Nobel Prize speech, she attributed all the honor to her team and traditional Chinese medicine. As Chapter 41 of the *Dao De Jing* states, "The great note is inaudible. The great image is formless" (Lynn, 1999, p. 132) (大音希声, 大象无形). As previously mentioned, traditional Chinese medicine and Daoism are interpenetrated and interrelated historically and ideologically. Tu's commitment to traditional Chinese medicine saved thousands of people's lives in the world. Her obscurity and humility in life and work, akin to the fluid and adaptable nature of water, equally inspires and transforms the inner lives of those who are not only in her research team but also millions of people including me.

Having an opportunity to come to pursue more studies in Canada, I often find myself battling with feelings of both deep gratitude and occasional shame. The opportunity to pursue more education at the mid-forties of my life is a gift beyond measure, but some sort of misunderstanding that I am pursuing a second doctoral degree can feel like a weight that drags me down. As I lay in bed, tears flowing, I felt like I was drowning in a sea of doubt and insecurity. But then I remembered the teachings of the Daoist sages and the wisdom of water.

The true path to personal growth is not through the acquisition of external forms such as a doctoral degree, but through the cultivation of our inner selves in quietude. This is the *De*, or virtue, of water. Tu Youyou's unwavering dedication to knowledge and service to others is a testament to the power of the inner self, and it inspires me to do the same. Despite some misunderstandings from others, I know that the true path to intellectual growth lies in the cultivation of my inner self. Tu's example reminds me to embrace the wisdom of the *Dao* and to let it guide me on my journey of self-discovery and lifelong learning.

Passage 3: A passage from the *Zhuangzi* describes the mythical creatures K'un and P'eng, which represent a spiritual dimension beyond their literary meaning. The story goes like this:

In the North Ocean there is a fish, its name is the K'un; the K'un's girth measures who knows how many thousand miles. It changes into a bird, its name is the P'eng; the Peng's back measures who knows how many thousand miles. When it puffs out its chest and flies off, its wings are like clouds hanging from the sky. This bird when the seas are heaving has a mind to travel to the South Ocean. ... A cicada and a turtle-dove laughed at it, saying, "We keep flying till we're bursting, stop when we get to an elm or sandalwood, and sometimes are dragged back to the ground before we're there. What's all this about being ninety thousand miles up when he travels south?"

(Zhuang, 1981, pp. 43-44) (北冥有鱼，其名为鲲，鲲之大，不知其几千里也；化而为鸟，其名为鹏，鹏之背，不知几千里也。怒而飞，其翼若垂天之云。是鸟也，海运则徙于南冥。…… 蜩与学鸠笑之曰：“我决起而飞，抢榆枋，时则不至，而控于地而已矣，奚以之九万里而南为？”)(Zhuang, 1999a, p. 2)

In this story, the two huge creatures signify a state of absolute spiritual freedom that Zhuangzi calls it 逍遥游 (*xiaoyaoyou*, “rambling” or “wandering”). This freedom is contrasted with the limited existence of mortal beings, symbolized by the cicada and the turtle-dove, who cannot achieve the same level of transcendence. Through the metaphor of K’un and P’eng, Zhuangzi conveys the importance of striving for spiritual freedom.

The contrast between the huge creatures (K’un and P’eng) and the smaller animals (cicada and the turtle-dove) is an allegory for the difference between the sage and the human being. The former is free to roam and follow its inner calling, while the latter is bound by the external world and its demands. Zhuangzi equates the realm of the sage with the state of absolute spiritual freedom, which is not dependent on anything external. The rhetoric question at the end of this story evokes our meditation, “As for the man who rides a true course between heaven and earth, with the changes of the Six Energies<sup>17</sup> for his chariot, to travel into the infinite, is there anything that he depends on?” (Zhuang, 1981, pp. 44-45) (若夫乘天地之正，而御六气之辨，以游无穷者，彼且恶乎待哉！) (Zhuang, 1999a, p. 6).

This passage from the *Zhuangzi* is rich in allegory and metaphor, and it highlights the importance of spiritual freedom and inner liberation. Through the imagery of mythical creatures and mortal animals, Zhuangzi conveys a profound message about the nature of existence and the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment.

Zhuangzi’s concept of spiritual freedom, as embodied in his metaphor of “rambling” or “wandering,” differs from conventional ideas of “freedom” that are often rooted in external struggles for rights or political autonomy. For Zhuangzi, true freedom comes from within and is not constrained by the world around us. Zhuangzi encourages us to seek spiritual freedom, which

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<sup>17</sup> “Six Energies” refer to Yin and Yang, wind and rain, dark and light.

stems from our liberation from the materialistic world and from our connection to the vast emptiness that is the source of all existence and the ultimate destination of all things. Zhuangzi's teachings highlight the importance of maintaining a peaceful mind to navigate difficult situations, rather than resorting to violent means to demand personal freedom.

Having engaged in the interpretation of three carefully selected passages from the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, I now shift my focus to the hermeneutic reading of Shakespeare's tragedies, where I bring forth my aesthetic reading and reflections.

Around two decades ago, I became fascinated by Ernest Jones' psychoanalytic interpretation of Hamlet and endeavored to explore the theme of death in Shakespeare's tragedies through the lens of Freud's *Eros* (the life instinct) and *Thanatos* (the death instinct) in my 2006 dissertation. *Eros* and *Thanatos* are two opposing instincts that are in constant struggle and in conciliation. *Eros* is a desire to create life and a driving force towards procreation, while *Thanatos* represents an urge inherent in living creatures to return to an inanimate state of non-existence. I explored their interdependence and interplay as it was reflected in Shakespeare's tragedies. Through the exploration of questions related to the theme of death, I uncovered three major insights. Firstly, the tragic heroes experience an inner conflict between denying death and longing for death. Secondly, conflicts arise between Eros and the death instinct where love is associated with death. Finally, physical death carries spiritual sublimation and brings about a new order and rebirth. The paradoxical theme of death in Shakespeare's tragedies is not a destructive force, but a creative, transformative power that transcends time and space.

Building upon this foundation, I delved into tragic aesthetics by studying the works of Zhu Guangqian (朱光潜) (1897-1986), a celebrated Chinese aesthetician. His expertise in the psychology of tragedy and aesthetics provided me with valuable insights into the aesthetic

reading of Shakespeare's tragedies. Based on his ideas, I wrote a paper entitled "The Ultimate Power in the Tragic World and Aesthetic Interpretation of Shakespearean Tragedies" (2011), in which I explored four distinct interpretations of the ultimate power of tragedy. These include the notion of fate in Greek tragedies, Aristotle's concept of *hamartia*, Hegel's idea of ethical entities being divided and reconciled, and Bradley's concept of moral order. I analyzed these elements in Shakespeare's tragedies and argued that the ultimate power in the world of Shakespearean tragedy is constituted by these four elements: Firstly, there is an element of fate as an irrational and irresistible force against which weak and humble human beings must battle endlessly. Secondly, Aristotle's concept of *hamartia* suggests that a completely virtuous character cannot arouse our pity and fear. Instead, the ideal tragic character is one who suffers from a flaw that leads to his or her downfall. Thirdly, Hegel's idea of ethic entity demonstrates the existence of incompatible ethical forces within the tragic hero, and that the conflict arises from inherent tension between ethical forces, rather than the struggle between an absolute good and an absolute evil. Fourthly, Bradley's concept of self-consumption highlights that the suffering of tragic heroes arises from their conflict with the moral order. The conflict leads to the split and self-consumption of the noble spirit, resulting in the conflict not only between good and evil but also between good and good, hence the waste of goodness.

Drawing on these four modes of theories on the ultimate power in the tragic world, I offered my aesthetic interpretation of tragic conflicts, endings, and implications in Shakespeare's tragedies. In terms of tragic conflicts, Shakespeare's tragic heroes are depicted as torn between incompatible forces, ultimately meeting their deaths due to the force of Wheel of Fortune and opposing forces within them. As for tragic endings, the establishment of harmony and order in the external world often comes at the cost of the protagonists' destruction, and Shakespeare's

exploration of moral issues in tragedies raises our awareness of right and wrong, eliciting a sense of pity and fear that provides aesthetic pleasure. In my analysis, I placed more emphasis on the importance of tragic implications in the aesthetic sense. Shakespeare's tragedies evoke a powerful sense of aesthetic empathy and anxiety, culminating in a sense of overflowing vitality in the audience and the reader. Through their deaths, the heroes reveal to us the value of vitality, which is integral to the aesthetic pleasure of a tragedy.

My aesthetic interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedies provokes me to look at and reflect upon my own struggle during the COVID-19 pandemic. During my academic journey in the current doctoral program at the University of Alberta, I have the opportunity to acquaint myself with the field of hermeneutics through the research papers provided in the courses and by my supervisor. However, it was not until the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic that I stumbled upon reading Gadamer's work, *Truth and Method*. The pandemic brought an unprecedented wave of closures, including schools and universities, just as I had completed my coursework and was gearing up to work on my candidacy paper. As a single mother in Edmonton, this sudden upheaval turned my life upside down. I not only had to focus on my own studies, but also had to support my son's transition to online learning.

As the pandemic persisted, my son was confined to home, separated from his peers and the traditional classroom environment. It was a difficult situation for both of us. As a result, I had to take on the role of an assistant teacher during the daytime and had little time to work on my own studies. To steal some quiet time for myself, I began waking up before dawn, before the demands of my daily routine took over. In the stillness of the pre-dawn hours, the darkness surrounded me like a cloak, and the only light came from the shimmering desk lamp as I slowly nibbled away at Gadamer's dense, abstract philosophical language. There were countless times



when I felt like giving up. But in the depths of this darkness, as if by fortune, a glimmer of light appeared when my husband found in his university's library two books: a translated version of *Truth and Method* in Chinese by the renowned hermeneutics scholar Hong Handing (洪汉鼎),<sup>18</sup> and Hong's own book on hermeneutics, *Interpretation of Truth and Method*. These two books shone like beacons of hope, illuminating the path forward. With the aid of the Chinese translation, I was able to approach Gadamer's (1975) *Truth and Method* in English version and finish reading it. After completing my first reading, I gained a broader understanding of Gadamer's thought and hermeneutics.

What struck me most about Gadamer's philosophy is his emphasis on aesthetics and how it relates to hermeneutics in his work. Gadamer's theory on aesthetics emphasizes the integration of aesthetics into hermeneutics, in order to have a more comprehensive understanding of art, as he puts it, "[a]esthetics has to be absorbed into hermeneutics" (1975, p. 146). According to him, aesthetic consciousness alone cannot fully comprehend the nature of a work of art (p. 127), and we must examine the concept of play to do so. By "play," he means "the mode of being of the work of art" (p. 92). Gadamer asserts that the experience of art creates its true being, and that the experience is not solely dependent on the subjectivity of the person experiencing it. He writes, "the work of art has its true being in the fact that it becomes an experience changing the person experiencing it" (p. 92). In other words, the work of art is not simply an object against a subject, but the subject of the experience itself. The mode of being of play is independent of the player's consciousness and represents the essence of experience. Gadamer asserts that aesthetic experience presents a fullness of meaning that extends beyond the particular content and presents

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<sup>18</sup> Hong Handing (洪汉鼎) is a prominent contemporary Chinese philosopher who specializes in studying the works of Gadamer. He is known for translating the German text, *Truth and Method*, into Chinese language, and also authored a book titled *Interpretation of Truth and Method*.

the meaningful whole of life (p. 63). Therefore, the aesthetic experience is an exemplary instance of the meaning of experience.

As I revisited my previous paper and reflected on my struggles with the pandemic, it dawned on me that my love for Shakespeare's tragedies could be enriched by integrating them with my personal experiences. While academic studies and analysis of Shakespeare's plays can be enlightening and provide insights, infusing my own lived experience was necessary to truly appreciate the beauty of art. Without my personal touch, the tragedies would remain lifeless and cold, mere objects for study. Looking back at my previous paper, I realized that I had only scratched the surface of what it meant to truly engage with a work of art. To allow the tragedies to stand as a mode of being, I must play with them, breathe *Qi* into them, and allow them to speak to me in their own way. As Heesoon Bai (2020) recognizes, *Qi* is the essence of life, vital energy that cannot be destroyed (p. vii). Allowing *Qi* to flow between tragedies and me sustains my ever-refreshing understanding of literary works.

As I grappled with the devastating impact of the pandemic on my life, I couldn't help but reflect on the profound themes in Shakespeare's tragedies: the notion of fate, the collision of incompatible forces, and inner conflict, all of which resonated with me as I struggled to balance my own dreams with the demands of parenthood. Years ago, I was a carefree single woman with lots of free time in hand. But I was never given the chance to pursue my dream of studying abroad, and now, I find myself here with my son, finally able to pursue my academic passions in my mid-forties to early fifties, but with limited time. When my son's school closed for the pandemic, I felt completely overwhelmed. It was as though the Wheel of Fortune<sup>19</sup> had turned against me, leaving me to grapple with the crushing weight of competing demands on my time.

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<sup>19</sup> According to *The Norton Shakespeare*, the myth of the goddess Fortune has been traditionally associated with a wheel, representing her capacious nature and constantly changing fortunes. The goddess was believed to

Not only do I find myself constantly questioning whether there is an elusive force called “Fate” that kept delaying my progress, but I also felt torn between two opposing forces within me. The first is my unyielding commitment to supporting my son in his studies. On the other side, there was my own personal desire for growth and knowledge. My insatiable thirst for learning may stem from the fact that I did not have the opportunity to receive a formal education in high school and pursue an undergraduate education when I was younger. Ever since I left my nursing position, I have been dedicated to pursuing my M.A. and Ph.D. studies in China and now in Canada, in an attempt to make up for the lost educational opportunities in my youth.

The conflict between these two opposing forces was tearing me apart during the writing of my dissertation. It is a constant battle to find a balance between supporting my son's passions in pursuing his interests and not neglecting his academic responsibilities, all while juggling my own personal desire for more learning. I am like Lancelot Gobbo in *The Merchant of Venice*, torn between two voices. One is urging me to be a supportive and nurturing mother, while the other voice is chastising me for being a neglectful mother, allowing him to devote his time to pursuits unrelated to his studies. Despite my attempts to keep my emotions in check, they often surge beyond the bounds of reason, overwhelming me. At times, I find myself losing my temper and patience.

In a desperate attempt to bridge the gap, I have found myself adopting the role of Prospero in *The Tempest*, imploring my son to listen to my stories just as Prospero tells Miranda

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take pleasure in arbitrarily lowering those at the top of her wheel and raising those at the bottom (Greenblatt, et al., 2008d, p. 637). Shakespeare frequently alludes to this idea, imaging life as a great wheel subject to constant change. Everything is undergoing changes – some changes are subtle while others are drastic. When something reaches the lowest point of the wheel, it starts going upwards. When it reaches the highest point, it starts coming downwards. In *King Lear*, the Fool talks about vagaries and vicissitudes of Fortune (2.2.238-240). In *Romeo and Juliet*, Friar Lawrence refers to “Unfortune Fortune” as entirely black (5.2.17). In *As You Like It*, Rosalind and Celia exchange playful banter about the roles fortune and fate (ill luck) in shaping one's life (1.2.31-51).

about their past. I repeatedly share my experience of learning English on my own, without the opportunity to attend high school and university. However, much like Miranda, my son's patience would wane, and he would grow tired of my "old lady's tale." The struggle between these two opposing forces has been a constant and unrelenting battle, leaving me feeling like a ship caught in a stormy sea without a compass to guide me.

Shakespeare's tragedies evoke powerful emotions of pity, terror, anxiety, waste of good, and ultimately, pleasure and a sense of vitality. I have discovered that my lived experiences of helplessness during the pandemic and my internal conflicts are resonant with these mixed feelings in Shakespeare's tragedies. When I read or watch a Shakespeare's tragedy, I am transported to another world and uplifted by a sense of vitality. Even when I return to my reality, and negative emotions threaten to consume me, I remind myself that the power of tragedy lies in its potential to uplift us, to invigorate us, and that is its aesthetic value. I believe that the power of negative emotions that I have experienced in art will also help me remember these real and lived experiences in my life as both painful and beautiful, as they constitute my second coming-of-age in life.

### **Entry Research Questions**

In this research study, I will invite four Chinese educators as my participants to share their lived experiences with Daoist philosophy and their experience of reading one or two of plays by Shakespeare that they find most interesting.<sup>20</sup> The significance of lived experience is integral to the hermeneutic inquiry undertaken in this study. Gadamer (1975) emphasizes the role of understanding as an essential mode of being-in-the-world, and through hermeneutic inquiry,

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<sup>20</sup> This preliminary intention underwent refinement following the candidacy exam. The first four chapters comprise my candidacy paper, drafted prior to receiving input from professors on both my supervisory and examining committees. Further elucidation will be provided in Chapter Five's Research Process section.

we can uncover the relationship between human life and the world (p. 230). David Smith (1999) asserts that hermeneutic research should delve into “the deep texture of our lives” (p. 40), examining how meaning is always “webbed” and challenging us to explore the essence of our lives (p. 43). Therefore, the focus of this study is on the process of interpretation and what it reveals about participants’ understanding in intercultural experiences. With these guiding principles in mind, the following two *entry* research questions have been crafted to shape the direction of this study:<sup>21</sup>

- (1) In what ways do Chinese educators navigate intercultural experience with regard to Daoist philosophy and the reading and teaching of Shakespeare’s plays?
- (2) What are the implications of Chinese educators’ intercultural reading experience of Shakespeare’s plays with Daoist philosophy for an intercultural curriculum?

### Significance of Research

The significance of this study lies in two aspects. Firstly, it prioritizes the exploration of Shakespeare’s texts in dialogue with Daoist philosophy upon the principles of equality and mutual understanding, and challenges anthropocentric perspectives. Although Shakespeare and Daoism may be perceived as “mighty opposites” (*Hamlet*, 5.2. 69), I align myself with Zhang Longxi’s (1998) view that cultural differences should not be reduced to an opposition or a simplistic dichotomy. Shakespeare and Daoism are expressions of art and culture. According to Gadamer (1975), works of art and cultural traditions carry the potential to speak truth to us. As he states, “truth is experienced through a work of art that we cannot attain in any other way” (xii), and truth “speaks to us out of tradition” (p. xiii). I aim to explore the profound truths that

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<sup>21</sup> These two research questions were entry questions. They have been specified and revised based on feedback from professors on both my supervisory and examining committees. Further details regarding this process will be provided in Chapter Five’s Research Process section.

can emerge from the artistic and cultural encounters between Shakespeare and Daoism. I seek to discover the “touches of sweet harmony” (*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.65) between them.

Secondly, this study is significant in its exploration of cultural commensurabilities, affinities, and resonances within cultural differences to promote self-transcendence. By discerning and examining the connections, analogies, affinities, and differences in intercultural dialogue, educators can expand the richness of meaning within a particular text and discover new dimensions of meaning in relation to students' own lived experiences. This process aligns with the principles of hermeneutic inquiry, which seeks diverse possibilities of self-understanding, understanding of others, and mutual understanding in order to achieve self-transcendence. As Jardine (1992) suggests, the pursuit of self-transcendence in education has been turned away and needs to be recovered (p. 121).

## Summary

In this chapter, I have shared my personal journey and educational experience, emphasizing the theme of “home away from home.” By delving into my lived experience with selected Daoist passages and Shakespeare's tragedies, I have provided an example of interpreting wisdom in a hermeneutical way. I have also explicitly stated my study's *entry* research questions guiding this research and highlighted the research's significance. In the next chapter, I will present a theoretical framework of intercultural hermeneutics informed by Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience.

## Chapter Two: Theoretical Framework

In the previous chapter, I shared my personal experiences with Chinese Daoist culture and studying Shakespeare, highlighting how these encounters have brought me into a deep engagement with two languages and two cultures. This chapter will delve into intercultural hermeneutics and establish it as the theoretical framework for my research.

Scholars in China and the West have drawn upon Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics to study the task and attributes of intercultural hermeneutics. For example, Zhang Longxi (2018) acknowledges Gadamer's development of the humanistic idea of *Bildung* as both alienation and the return to oneself, which informs a notion of intercultural hermeneutics as a "going out to the 'other' and the eventual return to the self" (p. 144). In addition, Xie Ming (2018) argues that Gadamer's concept of the subject matter provokes us to think deeply and that "intercultural hermeneutics actively engages with and develops this concept [of subject matter]" (p. 9). Furthermore, the Canadian scholar Jean Grondin (2018) highlights Gadamer's emphasis on constructing meaning interculturally because he sees the task of hermeneutics as an enterprise "to build bridges and foster dialogue between cultures" (p. 43). Additionally, Ram Adhar Mall (2000) asserts that Gadamer's emphasis on the importance of tradition as the precondition for hermeneutic understanding must "apply to the situation in which multiple traditions and philosophical conventions penetrate and try to understand one other" (p. 57). Finally, J. J. Clarke (1997) argues that Gadamer's hermeneutical philosophy, which portrays human understanding as dialogue, "offer[s] a useful way to conceptualize the inter-textual encounters that take place within and across intellectual traditions" (p. 12).

The above scholarship on intercultural hermeneutics variously draws heavily upon Gadamer's concepts of *Bildung*, the subject matter, tradition, and dialogue, all of which are

fundamental constituents of hermeneutic experience. In light of this, this chapter begins with an exposition of Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic experience. Following this, the discussion will shift to intercultural hermeneutics, primarily informed by the analogous hermeneutics by Mall, the hermeneutics of difference by Clarke, and the literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability by Zhang. The final section will focus on intercultural hermeneutics in the context of curriculum studies.

### **Hermeneutic Experience in Gadamer's Philosophy**

This section introduces Hans-Georg Gadamer (1900-2002), a renowned German philosopher, and his concept of hermeneutic experience. Born on February 11, 1900, in Breslau (now Wroclaw), Gadamer received a good education and was interested in the humanities from a young age, particularly in "Shakespeare, ancient Greek and classical German writers" (Dostal, 2002, p. 14). He attended the University of Breslau in 1918, where he studied literature, the history of art, philosophy, and psychology.

During the 1920s, Gadamer experienced various events that shaped his philosophical outlook. He attended lectures in a variety of fields at Marburg, got married, caught polio, and read Edmund Husserl's works while in quarantine. Under his father's assistance, he also started to study with Martin Heidegger. However, Gadamer found his relationship with Heidegger to be difficult from the beginning, and he was disappointed that Heidegger never showed much enthusiasm for his philosophical hermeneutics.

During the Nazi period, Gadamer avoided politics and worked in the realm of Greek philosophy. He became a professor at the University of Leipzig in 1938 and joined a group whose political activities were against Hitler, but never took part in their plot against the Nazi-regime. After the World War II, Gadamer became the rector of the University of Leipzig and



called for the revival of humane culture in Germany. In 1949, he assumed the chair at Heidelberg, where he worked for the rest of his life.

In the mid-1950s, Gadamer began working on the project that would become his most famous work, *Truth and Method*. He retired in 1968 and spent more time delivering lectures abroad. He came to North America and “enjoyed the more relaxed contact with Canadian and American students” (Dostal, 2002, p. 27), which he referred to as his “second youth” (p. 27). He died at Heidelberg on March 13, 2002, at the age of 102.

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer introduces the distinction between two modes of experience: the scientific mode of experience, which is concerned with the accumulation of objective knowledge and is typically associated with the natural sciences, and the hermeneutic mode of experience, which involves the subject’s participation in an event or experience. Gadamer (1975) contends that the latter mode of experience is central to the hermeneutic enterprise, as it is through participation that we come to understand the world around us.

In *Truth and Method* (1975), Gadamer argues that the hermeneutic experience is predicated on the philosophical ideas of understanding, dialogue, and *Bildung*. These concepts are fundamental to my study, as they help to circumscribe the hermeneutic experience as applicative, linguistical, historical, dialectical, and dialogical. Understanding, for Gadamer, is not merely a matter of grasping the meaning of a text, but rather involves a “fusion of horizons” (p. 350) between the interpreter and the interpreted. Dialogue allows for a productive exchange of perspectives and ideas. Finally, *Bildung* refers to the ongoing process of self-cultivation and personal growth, which is essential to the hermeneutic experience. I will explain these concepts in more detail and then engage in intercultural dialogue between Daoist and Shakespearean wisdom in relation to these concepts.

Gadamer's notion of understanding is grounded in the concepts of linguisticity, historicity, and tradition. While they are interwoven and inseparable in the actual act of understanding, for the purpose of clarity, I will discuss them separately. The first component, linguisticity, refers to the ontological relationship between humans and the world through language. Gadamer (1975) contends that language "expresses a relation to the whole of being" (p. 426) and unfolds our whole hermeneutic experience (p. 415). In his paper entitled "Text and Interpretation," Gadamer explains that linguisticity acts as a bridge of understanding (Dostal, 2002). His emphasis on linguisticity is further underscored by Nicholas Davey (2006), who maintains that the hermeneutic experience is primarily a "linguistically mediated experience" (p. 35). Moreover, Gadamer's (1975) assertion that "Being that can be understood is language" (p. 432) is clarified by his statement that "Being that can be understood begins to speak to us" (cited in Dostal, 2002, p. 29). This implies that language has the capacity to disclose the human existence, while also allowing for the expression of subtle truths that can be uncovered by recognizing one's cultural roots. As American hermeneutic scholar Richard E. Palmer (1969) notes, understanding cultural heritage in the hermeneutic experience is an intrinsically linguistic experience (p. 197). By recognizing our cultural roots, we can uncover hidden truths embedded in language that have been transmitted across generations.

The second component of understanding involves historicity, which is rooted in the fact that humans are inherently influenced by history and cannot avoid having prejudice or fore-judgment. Gadamer (1975) refers to this as "effective-historical consciousness" (p. 305), which describes how a historical object, such as a literary text or a cultural artifact, embodies both the being of historical reality and the being of historical understanding. According to Gadamer, it is important to develop this effective-historical consciousness in the encounter with the transmitted

text because it awakens us to the consciousness that those which deserve our efforts to preserve and memorize do not stand by themselves merely in a museum or a library but rather situate us in the continuum of historical understanding. By doing so, we can acknowledge the validity of the meanings understood within a historical context, and their claims to truth as well (p. 321, p. 336, & p. 340). Transmitted texts represent historical traditions that stand before us and speak to us, revealing insights into the past and present.

The third component of understanding is tradition, which Gadamer (1975) regards as a “Thou.” According to Gadamer, tradition “stands in a relationship with us” (p. 321). In the hermeneutic experience, our relationship with tradition is more significant than what is expressed in the tradition (p. 321). Gadamer’s perspective emphasizes that understanding is not just an intellectual process. It is not enough to interpret the content of tradition. We must engage with tradition and establish a meaningful connection to comprehend its significance fully.

Gadamer’s notion of understanding, as Grondin (2002) terms it, is “practical or applicative understanding” (p. 38). This suggests that understanding and application are intertwined. Gadamer (1975) posits that “[a]pplication is an integral element of all understanding. Understanding is always application” (p. 275). In the hermeneutic experience, we apply the understood meaning of the transmitted text to the present and concrete situation in which we find ourselves.

When we engage with a Shakespearean play, what is it that appeals to us? According to Palmer (1969), the past that Shakespeare dramatizes takes place “in the experiential present” (p. 191). In his words, a Shakespearean play is “understood in the hermeneutical situation in which it finds itself, i.e., in relation to the present” (pp. 183-184). This suggests that the meaning of a play is always for us and related to the present. Along similar lines, Grondin (2002)

acknowledges that when we encounter a text from the past, we can apply its meaning to our situation, which plays out our understanding. As he states, “It is always a possibility of my understanding that is played out when I understand a text” (p. 38). This implies that the meaning of a text is not static, but rather emerges through the ongoing dialogue between the play and its readers/interpreters.

The act of understanding and applying the meaning of a play in the present context is a long-standing practice in English culture when it comes to reading Shakespeare's plays. In a speech at the Folger Shakespeare Library in 2017, Michael Witmore used a vivid analogy to describe people in Renaissance England. He said they were like the busy humblebees flying out of their hives to find pollen and nectar and making wax and honey of their own when they had copied Shakespeare's sententious discourses in their scrapbooks. They pondered over the wisdom underneath and navigated their daily life. Such a time-honored tradition, however, has long been buried in the dust of four centuries. When I read Palmer's (1969) words that the task of the literary critic of Shakespeare's plays is to bring “what is essential in the past into our personal present, our self-understanding, or ... our experience of being” (p. 191), I am struck by an immediate question: Is this not the task of teachers of the Shakespearean curriculum? Not only literary critics but also students and even common people in our age can model themselves on the people in the 17<sup>th</sup> century in the way that they take account of what they have read in Shakespeare's plays, look at their situations in the plays, and make their own sweet, thick, and bright honey.

After introducing the notion of understanding, I would like to introduce the second essential aspect of the hermeneutic experience: dialogue. Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic experience is both dialogical and dialectical. The words “dialectic” (*dia-lexia*) and “dialogue”

(dia-*logos*) are both etymologically translated as “through speech” or “through language” (Coltman, 1998, p. 136). The dialogic structure of the hermeneutic experience is dialectical in nature. Gadamer (1975) states that dialectic is “the art of questioning and of seeking truth” (p. 330) and that “the hermeneutic experience ... partakes of dialectic of question and answer” (p. 428). The dialectic of question and answer is an essential part of dialogue and is characterized by ongoing questioning and the seeking of truths. This ongoing questioning allows for a continuous engagement with the text and the unfolding of new and deeper meanings.

The dialogic-dialectic relationship between questioning and answering centers around the subject matter. In Gadamer's (2001) words, subject matter refers to “the matter, the issue, and ultimately the truth emerging from the experience of the text or work of art” (p. 69). However, the meaning of subject matter, such as love, fairness, truth, beauty, gender relations, etc., cannot be reduced to propositional logic. In other words, it cannot be finalized into a single objective truth that is either true or false by using logical connectives such as “and,” “or,” “not,” and so on. Rather, the dialectical nature of dialogue enables readers to experience a new understanding of what these subject matters can demand of them.

Gadamer (1975) also emphasizes the “factuality” (p. 403 & p. 404) of subject matter, meaning that the subject matter has “its independent otherness” (Davey, 2006, p. 73) beyond an individual's subjective (aesthetic) consciousness (Palmer, 1969, p.167). As Davey (2006) explains, we do not experience subject matter solely in our minds; rather, we experience it “against a historical backdrop of received expectations” (p. 72). This historical backdrop includes our cultural heritage, which gives rise to a continuity of interpretations over time and forms common cultural themes. The subject matter thus contains a series of meanings that are rooted in the past or buried in our culture.

In the ongoing dialogue between Eastern and Western cultures, the subject matter unfolds itself and the fusion of horizons is inevitable (Gadamer, 1975, p. 379). As Gadamer contends, hermeneutic horizons are comprised of experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values, which shape our distinct identities and offer us the means to come to understand ourselves and the world (Alcoff, 2005, p. 287). Dialogue between Eastern and Western cultures enables the fusion of horizons, leading to dynamic, productive, and creative processes of interpretation. When engaging with a literary text from a foreign culture, the reader encounters cultural resonances and differences between his or her cultural background and that of the text.

Gadamer's (1975) notion of dialogue and his understanding of subject matter also guide my interviews in the research. In a dialogue between two people, the focus should be on the contribution made to the subject matter. Rather than seeking to discern the speaker's or writer's intentions or motives, the aim is to achieve a clear understanding of the subject matter through a process of questioning and seeking answers. The dialogue should be allowed to unfold naturally, without the interlocutors attempting to exert control over it (p. 330, p. 341 & p. 349). In this sense, the interlocutors are participants in a game in which the subject matter takes the lead, rather than the other way around. It should be noted, however, that the understanding that emerges from dialogue is necessarily limited to a particular "aspect" or "view" of the subject matter (p. 405). This aspect of the subject matter should be clear and illuminated, akin to a "light that shines over what is formed" (p. 443).

The significance of this notion for conducting interviews in my hermeneutic inquiry cannot be overstated, as it emphasizes the need to let the subject matter guide the dialogue between the interviewer and interviewee, without either party exerting control over it. This

approach encourages a collaborative exploration of the subject matter, which can lead to a deeper understanding of the subject matter at hand.

Gadamer's concept of *Bildung* is a third component of hermeneutic experience. Gadamer (1975) defines it as "that by which and through which one is formed becomes completely one's own" (p. 12). This means that *Bildung* is the process through which one acquires and internalizes knowledge, which then becomes a part of one's own. *Bildung* is not something that one is born with, but rather, something that is acquired through experience. Davey (2006) provides a nuanced interpretation of Gadamer's concept of *Bildung*, which includes two distinct aspects or processes: formative and transformative. The formative aspect refers to the cultural formation that occurs as a result of encountering different cultures and languages. The transformative aspect, on the other hand, refers to *Bildung*'s capability to generate something new and transformative from the encounter with the different Other (pp. 39-42). In this way, *Bildung* is a dynamic and ongoing process that continues throughout one's life, allowing for the continual acquisition and integration of new knowledge and experiences.

In the views of Gadamer and Gadamerian scholars, the encounter with different cultures is an essential aspect of *Bildung*, as it allows individuals to transcend linguistic and cultural barriers and develop a new sense of self. According to Gadamer (1975), the essence of *Bildung* lies in the act of returning to oneself after experiencing a prior sense of alienation or disconnection from oneself, as he states explicitly that "it is not alienation as such, but the return to oneself, which presumes a prior alienation, that constitutes the essence of *Bildung*" (p. 15). This suggests that the experience of alienation is not the end goal of *Bildung*, but rather a necessary step in the journey towards self-discovery and personal growth. This idea is acknowledged and supported by hermeneutic scholars such as Zhang Longxi (2018), Hong

Handing (2018), Palmer (1969), Davey (2006), and Smith (2008/2020). Zhang (2018) argues that *Bildung* enables the hermeneutic subject to move from a state of alienation to a state of return (p. 144), while Hong (2018) asserts that the dialectic structure of *Bildung* is “教化的辩证结构，即异化和返回、偏离和复归的结构” (the dialectic structure of alienation and return, deviation and coming-back) (p. 27). Palmer (1969) and Davey (2006) maintain that *Bildung* involves engaging with the unfamiliar and seeking to understand its significance in relation to one's own experience. Smith (2008/2020) aligns with these perspectives, explicitly stating that “to truly meet or encounter another, individually or collectively, is to meet and encounter oneself, individually and collectively. It is a kind of homecoming, which involves both pain and pleasure, loss with profit. Through every encounter we find ourselves to be different from what we presumed before the encounter” (2020, pp. 313-314). These scholars suggest that encountering the Other or other culture transforms us, enabling us to achieve spiritual renewal as we venture outward and return to ourselves. The paradoxical nature of this process lies in the tension between separation and integration, detachment and engagement, and the ongoing struggle to achieve harmony with the world.

After introducing Gadamer's notion of hermeneutic experience and its components, I would like to share with my readers intercultural dialogues that has been emerged between Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays concerning these concepts. Originally, I had planned to explore one dialogue immediately after examining one concept. However, as I delved deeper, I found that these ideas and concepts are interwoven and interconnected, making it difficult to separate them individually. Therefore, in my hermeneutic experience of the intercultural reading, I fuse them together to create more meaningful and engaging intercultural dialogues. In the following intercultural dialogues, I will focus on the representation of nature in Daoism and



Shakespeare. Before delving into these intercultural dialogues, it is worth sharing a brief reflection on my own personal experience with nature.

As a child growing up in Nanchang, a medium-sized city in Southern China, I have fond memories of playing in the snow during the winter months. However, as I grew old, I realized that snow had become a distant memory. In the summertime, Nanchang and Shanghai are like furnaces, with temperature soaring above 40 degrees Celsius, and people are reluctant to venture outside. Moving to Edmonton, I have also noticed significant changes in the climate since my arrival in 2018. The mean temperature in October has increased significantly, and it is now impossible to skate outdoors. As I reflect on my experience with nature, I can't help but feel saddened by the devastating impact that human activity has had on the environment. The world is undergoing rapid changes before our eyes, and it is our responsibility to develop an ecological awareness that draws from the wisdom of Daoist texts and the insights of Shakespeare's plays.

### ***Intercultural Dialogue Number 1***

In Chinese culture, the term for 自然 (*ziran*, nature) consists of two characters that suggest a connection between breath, fire, and the natural world. According to the ancient Chinese text, *Explaining Simple and Analyzing Chinese Compound Characters* (《说文解字》), the hierographic form of 自(*zi*) resembles a nose (鼻), which signifies the character's meaning of "nose." As words emanate from the mouth, breath emanates from the nose, and the characters for words (言) and breath (气), mouth (口) and nose (鼻), are interconnected. The character 然 (*ran*) is homophonous with 燃 (*ran*), meaning combustion, flame, or the act of burning (Li, 1993, p. 285). Together, *zi* and *ran* suggest the interconnectedness of living and non-living things in the physical world, which are all infused with the breath of life (*Qi*) and the fire of creation.

Similarly, in the Western philosophical tradition, the concept of nature has deep roots, with the word “nature” deriving from the Latin word “*natura*,” meaning “birth,” and the Old and Middle French word “*nature*,” referring to the active forces that maintain the order of universe (OED). The Greek word “*physis*” or “*phusis*” is also associated with “nature” and conveys the idea of unfolding, emergence, and growth (Fisher, 2002, p. 99). Additionally, nature is often associated with femininity and motherhood, as well as such words as “*natal*” and “*pregnant*” (p. 99).

In both Chinese and English cultures, the concept “nature” is seen as a dynamic and constantly evolving force, often associated with the notion of the “Mother” as the life-giving force that breathes vitality into the fetus and ultimately brings new life into the world. This concept encompasses both living and non-living entities and is imbued with a sense of vitality and energy.

In Daoist texts of the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, the concept of *ziran* embodies the motherly force that nurtures all beings in heaven. According to the *Dao De Jing*, water (水), valley (谷), earth (地), and root (根) possess life-generating qualities that are infused with the force of nature. These natural elements are characterized by qualities of receptivity, passivity, yieldingness, and obscurities. Therefore, nature, *Dao*, the Mother figure, humility, and receptiveness are all closely interconnected in Daoist philosophy.

In *The Tempest*, Shakespeare employs ethereal goddesses Iris (the goddess of the rainbow) and Ceres (the goddess of husbandry and agrarian land) in the nuptial ceremony scene (4, 1) to symbolize nature and its fertility. By using mythological symbolism to represent nature’s abundance, he highlights the moral implications of nature, as noted by Charlotte Scott (2014), who argues that nature “is a cultural shorthand for the expression of [moral] values” (p.

191) in this play. For example, phrases such as “bounteous lady” (4.1.67), “my proud earth” (4.1.82), “Earth’s increase” (4.1.123), “foison plenty”<sup>22</sup> (4.1.123) not only convey the abundance and beauty of nature, but also suggest its moral and social significance of “cleans[ing] the human world, condemning the wicked and sustaining the good” (p. 193).

This intercultural dialogue on the level of language demonstrates the human fascination with the natural world and its vital role in sustaining life. Across the Eastern and Western cultures, nature is associated with femininity, motherhood, and a dynamic, evolving force of *Qi* that permeates all things. Daoist philosophy emphasizes the virtues of receptivity, humility, and yieldingness. Meanwhile, Shakespeare highlights nature’s moral and social significance, especially in relation to justice, righteousness, and order. Both recognize the interconnectedness of human and other living beings in the physical world, underscoring the importance of cultivating an attitude of respect and reverence towards the natural world.

### ***Intercultural Dialogue Number 2***

In this intercultural dialogue, I would like to highlight the importance of effective historical conscious in interpreting the concept of *Qi* in Daoist texts and the significance of imagination in Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. In Daoist culture, *Qi* occupies an important role as an ontological mode and metaphorical mode. As an ontological mode, *Qi* represents a vital force on which tangible forms, including human beings, animals, mountains, lakes, rocks, trees, and all living and non-living things depend. *Qi* is also a metaphorical mode, as it extends from physical body and the reunion of body and cosmos to multi-dimensional social-political life process under Heaven. The *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* employs the concept of *Qi* to convey their idea of transformation. All modalities of being present themselves

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<sup>22</sup> The word “foison” means “abundance.”

in *Qi*, and all beings are in “great transformation” (大化). The dynamic process of the great transformation is unceasing and envisioned as an ongoing process of inner connectedness and interdependence between humans and other living creatures, and even non-living things.

Zhuangzi recommends that one listens with one's mind rather than with ears and listens with *Qi* rather than with the mind (Tu, 1989, p. 77), emphasizing the importance of the interconnectedness of all beings. The story of Zhuangzi dreaming about a butterfly highlights the idea that all things in nature change into each other, illustrating the dynamic process of great transformation. As Robert E. Allinson (1989) notes, this story illustrates that “all things [in nature], while different, do eventually change into each other” (p. 91), which is why Zhuangzi suggests that “all things are my companions.” The Daoist concept of *ziran* captures this spirit of cosmic transformation and emphasizes the non-discriminatory nature of all modalities of beings. Tu Wei-Ming (1989) states, “Human beings are ... organically connected with rocks, trees, and animals” (p. 74) and “all modalities of being are organically connected” (p. 75). This is echoed by Bai and Cohen (2008), who assert that the flow of *Qi* “animates everything we perceive” (p. 41) and enables us “to feel the pulsating energies in all things and see them in their inner vividness” (p. 41).

The Chinese term “感应” (*ganying*, affect and response) emphasizes the close interconnection between the human mind and the natural world. Zhuangzi uses the metaphor of the piping of men, the piping of Heaven and the piping of Earth to suggest that we can attune ourselves to the sounds of nature, or in Zhuangzi's words, the “music of heaven” (天籁之音). For Zhuangzi, nature embodies “musical spontaneity” (Wu, 1982, p. 46). Chinese Daoist sages posit that the human subject and the objective reality are not distinct entities, but rather form “a harmonious blending of inner feelings and outer scenes” (Tu, 1989, p. 78). Drawing upon Tu,

Bai and Cohen (2008) explain that the term “感应” (affect and response) refers to “psychic and affective resonance that facilitates intersubjectivity of human sensitivity and receptivity” (p. 38). According to them, these intersubjective experiences are radically different from the Western philosophical perspective which draws a dichotomy between mind/spirit and matter, resulting in the alienated ego consciousness. In contrast, “感应” (affect and response) reveals an ontological sense of continuation of being between the self and other beings, allowing the self to empathetically partake in the experiences of other beings (pp. 37-38). Additionally, Clarke (2000) highlights the Daoist belief that self-transformation occurs through one's “ultimate identification with the natural world” (p. 149), resulting in an ultimate fusion of the self with the larger cosmos.

The omnipresence and omnipotence of *Qi* enables humans to feel and perceive the affective linkage between themselves and other beings, eliciting a responsive resonance to this continuity of being. This “affect and response” has a transformative power that, as asserted by Bai and Cohen (2008), “turn[s] our alienated perception of the objectivist consciousness (seeing things merely as objects) into animated perceptions that see the whole world as being suffused by a vital and sacred life force” (p. 42). This transformative power of *Qi* and “感应” is aptly expressed in a poem by Li Bai, as cited by Heesoon Bai and Hartley Banack (2006) in their article “‘To see a world in a grain of sand’: Complexity ethics and moral education.” They quoted Li Bai's poem, *Solitary Sitting by Jingting Mountain* (《独坐敬亭山》), which reads: “The birds have vanished into the sky, and now the last cloud drains away. We sit together, the mountain and me, until only the mountain remains” (众鸟高飞尽，孤云独去闲。相看两不厌，只有敬亭山。) (see Bai & Banack, 2006, p. 5). In the first two lines of this poem, birds fly away, and clouds drift off, which evoke a sense of melancholy in readers. However, upon

reaching the final two lines, it becomes apparent that Li Bai and the mountain have reached a level of affective communion. The third line “相看两不厌” (literary translation is “mutual gazing without growing tired”) expresses a profound bond between the poet and *Jingting* Mountain. This tranquil depiction of “mountain” and “I” sitting together and gazing at each other invokes in us readers a sense of mutual dependence and resonance between a non-being object and a self. A transformation occurs as the poet finds solace in *Jingting* Mountain, and *Jingting* Mountain responds to the poet's solitude, all without a single word about feeling or affection throughout the poem. Bai and Banack (2006) call this world “a relational universe” (p. 9), in which a continuous transformation occurs: both human and non-human forms “are the in-the-moment temporal freezing” and “we experience ourselves and the world as one – a singular” (p. 10). When I read this poem, I find myself immersed in Li Bai's deep sense of solitude resulting from political setbacks. However, the closing line brings me to the poet's inner affection for the mountain and the mountain's empathetic response to the poet's inner loneliness, establishing an intersubjective experience linking the poet, the mountain, and myself. To me, this is the transformative power of “affect and response” circulated by *Qi*.

Transformation is also a recurring theme in Shakespeare's plays, as notably exemplified in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*, where the boundaries between the fairy, human, animal, and plant worlds are blurred and can be mutually transformed. This metamorphosis is exemplified by men becoming fauna and women becoming flora, humans taking on non-human forms, and fairies metamorphosed into other species to prevent parasite invaders. Even plants have human eyes and emotions. As R. N. Watson (2011) notes, these transformations demonstrates that earthly nature cannot be released from humanity. The world of humanity and the world of nature

compose the crescendo of “the musical confusion” (4.1.107), a harmonic blend, similar to Zhuangzi’s pipings of men, Heaven and Earth.

While Daoist philosophy recognizes the importance of *Qi* in connecting human beings with other modalities of being in nature, Shakespeare draws upon the historical festival of Midsummer Eve and the power of the theater to captivate his audience. Midsummer Eve, celebrated on June 23<sup>rd</sup> in England, was a time when fairies, sprites, and witches would come out and interact with the human world. During this time, people held agrarian festivals on Midsummer Eve, singing, dancing, drinking, and playing with these invisible creatures who would play pranks on humans and livestock. By utilizing the transformative power of the theater, Shakespeare shows that imagination is a vital force that allows us to identify synesthetically with all forms of nature, leading to a deeper understanding of our relationship with nature.

Imagination, like *Qi*, is a vital power within us, and we live in the realm of the theatrical imagination. Marjorie Garber (2005) suggests that *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* unfolds entirely within the viewer’s and the reader’s imagination (p. 236), emphasizing that despite the *liminal* space between art and life, comedy and tragedy, and actors and audience, the play has already hinted what lies beyond the boundary or the threshold (p. 237). She writes, “something else lies beyond the threshold, as well, for that threshold, that *limen*, is the boundary between actor and audience” (p. 237). What lies beyond this boundary, threshold, or *limen*, is the dreamy nature of imagination. Far from being a mere delusion, imagination is a transformative force that has the potential to elicit profound changes in individuals and society at large.

The concept of effective historical consciousness, as proposed by Gadamer (1975), allows us to understand the historical context of these texts while also interpreting them in a way that speaks to our contemporary ecological concerns. By recognizing the transformative power

of *Qi* and imagination in this intercultural dialogue, we can cultivate a deeper appreciation for the natural world and the role that humans play in shaping it. *Qi* emphasizes the idea of transformation and the interconnectedness of all forms of existence. Similarly, Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* portrays the historical-mythological festival of Midsummer Eve and highlights the interpenetration of the fairy, human, animal, and plant worlds. Despite the differences in these cultural and literary texts, they share a common theme of transformation and the organic connection between all modalities of being. While Daoism emphasizes self-forgetting participation, Shakespeare calls for imagination to bring the text to life, which is also an immersion into the theatrical imagination by forgetting oneself. The Chinese term “感应” (*ganying*, affect and response) and the English word “synesthesia” both express the notion of harmonious blending and transformation. As such, by engaging in this intercultural dialogue, we can work towards creating a more sustainable and harmonious relationship with nature.

### ***Intercultural Dialogue Number 3***

My third intercultural dialogue concerns Daoism's call for the ontological retrieval to nature and the pastoral tradition in Shakespeare's *As You Like It*. Daoism advocates a return to nature, as Laozi and Zhuangzi tell us that from the time immemorial, Heaven has been in purity and Earth has been in motherly peace without humanity's unnatural interference. In one passage from the *Zhuangzi*, the Lord of the River was beside himself with joy during the time of the autumn floods, traveling east along the current until he reached the North Sea. As he looks out to the east, he could see no end to the water, believing that all the beauty in the world belongs to him alone (Zhuang, 1996, p. 97). To achieve a state of perfect virtue and harmony, Zhuangzi advises cultivating our inner nature and leaving nature as it is, as nature is “in all its unwrought Simplicity” (Wu, 1982, p. 117). The concept of ontological retrieval underscores the “cosmic



compatibility” (p. 117) between our inner nature and nature at large. By practicing the Daoist principles of *Wuzhi* (无知), *Wuwei* (无为), and *Wuyu* (无欲) (Hall, 2001), we can avoid selfish ideas and treat nature with respect and reverence. Cultivating natural quietude and simplicity helps one become “empty” but “whole” – emptying ourselves of distracting thoughts, we become clean and transparent, and by recognizing that we are at home with ourselves, we become full (Zhang, 2001). According to Zhang, when we become empty and whole, we will not treat nature as subservient to human desires. He quotes Zhuangzi’s statement that “All things and I are one” to explain that “one” refers not only to the peculiar and constant existence of each thing, which in Chinese is expressed as “固然” (*guran*), “常然” (*changran*), or “自然” (*ziran*), but also to the interdependence and mutual relationship between other things and *me* (a general reference). Daoist philosophy of nature emphasizes the interdependence of all things and the connection between inner nature and environment, and it is through this belief that Daoist sages advocate for an ontological retrieval to nature.

The pastoral tradition in Shakespeare’s *As You Like It* emphasizes the relationship between nature and moral cultivation. The play portrays nature as a vibrant and animate entity where humanity can find solace. In Act 2 Scene 1, Duke Senior, a good ruler who was usurped and ousted from his throne by his younger brother, Duke Frederick, appears in the Forest of Arden with his lords, dressed as a forester. Here, he utters the famous line,

And this our life, exempt from public haunt,  
Finds tongues in trees, books in the running brooks,  
Sermons in stones, and good in everything. (2.1.15-17)

The protagonists retreat to the rural setting from the urban, courtly life. The pastoral tradition cannot be seen as purely an escapist worldview. It displays natural simplicity while evoking the

relationship between nature and moral cultivation. In the Forest of Arden (the raw nature), the “gentleness,” meaning “nobility” and “a virtuous nature” (Greenblatt et al., 2008a, p. 621), is strongly felt. In this gentle environment, there are no artificial things such as social hierarchies, the cruelties of brothers, the greediness of landlords, the deceit of the courtiers, and the treachery of court life. This is a place where human evils can hopefully get purified. At the end of the play, Duke Frederick repents, and Oliver, Orlando’s elder brother, who initially treated Orlando cruelly and denied him education and inheritance, is also transformed into benevolence and humanity. As Jean E. Howard points out, nature “offers an opportunity to see more clearly – and perhaps then to change – the world in which one ordinarily lives by entering for a time the playful, meditative realm of imaginary shepherds” (Greenblatt et. al., 2008a, p. 621).

As I delve into this comparative reading, I cannot help but feel the weight of the message behind the Daoist tradition and the pastoral tradition in Shakespeare. Both traditions seem to have “a utopian as well as a critical dimension” (Greenblatt et. al., 2008a, p. 628). The image of Laozi leaving the capital city by oxcart and journeying to the west when he recognized the decline of the Zhou Dynasty (1027-221 BCE) and the image of Zhuangzi dragging his tail in the mud like a turtle suggest a desire to retreat from the world of politics and power struggles and find solace in the natural world. Similarly, in *As You Like It*, nature offers an escape from the corruption of human civilization, exposing the treachery of court/city life while celebrating the virtues of a simpler existence in nature. It seems that just as Laozi and Zhuangzi mourn the loss of the immemorial time, Shakespeare deplores the loss of a bygone Golden Age. I cannot help but wonder if Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Shakespeare all sensed the moral decay of human civilization and sought refuge in the vast expanse of nature, channeling their experience into their works to

remind humanity of the importance of reconnecting with our inner selves and finding our place within the larger natural environment.

Through this intercultural dialogue, we can see that both the Daoist sages and Shakespeare left us with a legacy of ecological sensibility. They remind us that our inner, primitive human nature is intertwined with the natural world, and cultivating a connection to nature is just as important as cultivating our morality and inner selves. Gadamer's concept of tradition plays a crucial role in understanding this legacy. According to Gadamer (1975), tradition is not something static or fixed, but rather, it is a "Thou" that stands in a relationship with us. This means that tradition is something that we participate in and engage with, rather than something that is imposed on us from the past. By situating ourselves within Daoism's ontological retrieval to nature and Shakespeare's pastoral tradition, we can not only understand their respective perspectives on nature, but also participate in the ongoing legacy of ecological sensibility that they have left behind.

In this section, I have presented an overview to Gadamer's theory of hermeneutic experience and its three components of understanding, dialogue, and *Bildung*. To further illuminate the significance of these concepts, I have engaged in intercultural dialogues between Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays, exploring the resonances and differences between them. Through this process, I have come to appreciate the value of understanding, dialogue and *Bildung* in expanding my knowledge of diverse perspectives. Gadamer's theory provides a foundation for the study of intercultural hermeneutics, which seeks to understand and bridge the gaps between different cultures and worldviews. In the following section, I will delve deeper into the concept of intercultural hermeneutics, examining its theoretical underpinnings and practical implications for intercultural understanding and communication.

## **Intercultural Hermeneutics**

In this section, I will provide an overview of scholarship on intercultural hermeneutics and its scope. However, before delving into it, it is important to note that intercultural hermeneutics opposes two opposing paradigms: cultural relativism and cultural universalism. Cultural relativism places excessive emphasis on cultural differences, disregarding the commonalities that allow for equal communication between the East and the West, and argues against the possibility of commensurability between different cultures, according to some scholars (Zhang, 2005; Mall, 2000; Clarke, 1997). On the other hand, cultural universalism strives to create an all-encompassing system of thought in cultural reconciliation between the East and the West. Both paradigms fail to comprehend the complexities of dialogue between the East and the West and disregard the repressed Other in the Western Self-Other binary formulation. As such, in my view, intercultural hermeneutics offers an alternative approach that considers the unique features of each culture and seeks to explore communication that can lead to mutual understanding and enrichment.

I will delve into the conception of intercultural hermeneutics as proposed by Ram Adhar Mall (2000), J. J. Clarke (2000), and Zhang Longxi (1992). These three scholars have drawn heavily from Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy to explore the common ground between Eastern and Western cultures and to provide an explicit framework for what intercultural hermeneutics entails. By incorporating their work, I aim to establish a theoretical foundation for my hermeneutic inquiry.

### ***Ram Adhar Mall's Analogous Intercultural Hermeneutics***

The German scholar Ram Adhar Mall (2000) puts forward the concept of "analogous intercultural hermeneutics" (p. 17) to emphasize the existence of overlapping structures between

different cultures, revealing similarities that should not be overlooked by interpreters (pp. 15-16). Mall argues that analogy is “a valid cause for the cognition of similarity” (p. 15) and objects to both total identity and radical difference. His approach is a comparative philosophy, which requires an interpreter to take “a reflexive-meditative attitude” (p. 17). This idea is partly based on Gadamer’s understanding of the Western logos, and interestingly, partly derived from the Daoist sage Zhuangzi and his debate with Huizi (Zhuangzi’s rival) on the fish’s happiness. For Gadamer, *logos* refers to humans’ ability “to make use of words and language to communicate with others” (p. 10), while for Mall, Zhuangzi’s story<sup>23</sup> implies that there is an analogical apprehension “between the world of human beings and cosmic nature at large” (p. 22). Mall argues that the mutual complementarity between humans and nature overcomes the narrow limits of anthropocentrically-oriented hermeneutics (p. 20).

The purpose of analogous intercultural hermeneutics, according to Mall (2000), is to search for overlapping structures between different cultures, recognize them, and cultivate them (p. 6 & pp. 52-58). In the history of Greek and European philosophy, the term “analogy” was used to address the issue of equivocation and incommensurability of messages between God and God’s creation, as evidenced in the work of Hermes. Similarly, as Zhuangzi identifies an analogous structure between humans and nature, overlapping structures provide a basis for communication (p. 6). Mall argues that “[a]nalogous structures give us the opportunity for interpretations, leading to an understanding across the gaps of languages, cultures, and even species” (p. 20).

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<sup>23</sup> Huizi asks Zhuangzi how Zhuangzi could know that fish is happy in the river since he is not the fish, and Zhuangzi, in turn, re-questions Huizi by repeating Huizi’s question, “how do you know that I do not know the happiness of the fish?” Zhuangzi answers, “I knew it along the river.” (see Mall, 2000, p. 20)

According to Mall (2000), an analogous intercultural hermeneutics is characterized by “a nonreductive, open, and normative hermeneutics” (p. 52). This means that interpreters must be open to the discourse of the other culture without reducing it to their own categories (p. 53). By employing a nonreductive, open, and normative hermeneutics, the *logos* or linguistic framework of each culture can reveal the “binding truth” (p. 56) that binds people together. An analogous intercultural hermeneutics seeks to uncover this binding truth.

Through my exploration of Shakespeare's plays and Daoist texts, I have observed a shared structure that I refer to as the “poetic paradox.” By the poetic paradox, I mean that both cultures utilize figurative language, imagery, and analogies to navigate the tension between the inadequacy of language and its speculative nature. According to Gadamer's (1975) concept of the speculative structure of language, words inherently carry unsaid meanings (p. 416), always leaving room for further understanding. This idea aligns with the *Zhuangzi*'s description of “words without ends or boundaries” (Zhang, 1992, p. 39). Hermeneutic scholar Davey (2006) further emphasizes that language works speculatively (p. 25), revealing underlying truths through paradoxical language. Ultimately, the poetic paradox speaks to the limitations of language, prompting a reliance on figurative language to express complex ideas beyond the scope of literal language.

Poetic paradox is prominent in Shakespeare's plays. In my former dissertation on Shakespeare's tragedies, I explored how tragic heroes and heroines' denial or disgust of death paradoxically intertwines with their longing for death. Shakespeare views life and death as two inseparable parts of existence. Similarly, in Daoist philosophy, the poetic paradox is evident in dichotomies of life and death, form and formless, *you* (有) and *wu* (无), which are mere physical distinctions by our senses and reason. The original substance of Heaven and Earth is

nothingness, non-being, and the quiescent mind/heart. As Smith (2014) acknowledges, Daoist philosophy acknowledges the oneness of birth and death (p. 48). In his article on meditating the fake Japanese cherry blossoms, Smith (2006b) recognizes the paradoxical existence of beauty and Life, which inevitably involves death and the End. By drawing on Smith's hermeneutical association between mourning the loss of beauty and life and the organic relationship between life and death, as well as insight from Shakespeare and Daoism on the oneness of life and death, I am attuned, in a hermeneutic way, to the relationship between quiescence and restlessness to overcome my dullness.

As a person of a few words, I was often labeled as "dull." My teachers and parents tried to motivate me with stories about perseverance, such as "stupid birds flying first" and "the early bird catching the worm." I know well that they wanted to tell me that perseverance will make up for my dull brain. My propensity for perceived dullness kept me away from sophisticated interpersonal relationships. While working at the hospital, my colleagues fawned upon a "rich" nurse who had a luxury car and a villa. They lent money to her again and again to support her investment and to gain dividends that she had promised to share out among them. I was the only person who did not follow her, due to my intuitive aversion to her garrulous babbles. I couldn't understand how she could talk and laugh so loudly while patients were trying to rest. During the daytime shifts, I was forced to endure the Nurse's Station's loud noises and laughter and found myself excluded from her group. Only during the night shifts could I find moments of quietness to study for the graduate entrance examination. After being admitted to the graduate program, I learned that the "rich" nurse was sent to jail because all her beautiful words about profits and dividends turned out to be a fraud. The villa and the luxury car were merely fictionalized in her mouth.

An intuitive alienation from the sound and fury made me empathetic toward Hamlet. He is surrounded by a “sea of troubles” (*Hamlet*, 3.1.61), and is obsessed with melancholy, but to me, this is not a sign of soul-sickness or world-weariness. Rather, it is a result of his acute perception of the pestilent situation around him. The more he experiences unrest and turmoil, the more deeply he understands the essence of being, and the more he stays true to himself. A. C. Bradley (2007) aptly quotes that Hamlet “loses a sense of fact because with him each object and event transforms and expands itself into an idea” (p. 76).

In my mind, Hamlet’s state of mind is similar to what Chapter 26 in the *Dao De Jing* states, “The heavy is the foundation of the light, and quietude is the sovereign of activity” (Lynn, 1991, p. 98) (重为轻根，静为躁君). This line suggests that heaviness can uphold lightness and quietude can uphold the action. Similarly, the *Zhuangzi* encourages us to

learn to see where all is dark, and to hear where all is still. In the darkness one can see light. In the stillness one can hear harmony. Thus, one can penetrate to the furthest depths and grasp spirituality. (cited in Chang, 1975, p. 96)

The heaviness in the lightness; the quiescence in the restlessness; the light in the darkness; the stillness in the sound and fury ... Isn’t it like when birds sing, the valley is becoming more tranquil? This makes me understand Hamlet’s mind as more tranquil than of a sick soul, more of quiescence than of the “antic disposition” (1.5.173) that Hamlet himself claims to adopt. In the hustle and bustle of life, I am eager for moments of loneliness and dullness, and often seek solitude and reflection. I find myself drawn to Hamlet’s melancholy because, to me, his melancholy represents a form of quietude and heaviness that is impervious to the sound and fury of the world. Like the sweet sound of a bird’s song in a tranquil valley, Hamlet’s melancholy has the power to bring a sense of stillness to my mind.



I place my inclination toward dullness and solitude in parallel with Hamlet's melancholy to explore the idea that both Shakespeare and Daoism employ a similar structure of poetic paradox. Both Daoist lines and Hamlet use metaphoric language as a way to convey the ineffable, as words alone cannot fully express certain aspects of human experience. This paradox between restlessness and stillness is transposed into my world. By situating myself in a Shakespearean play and examining how it interacts with my understanding of Daoist philosophy, I aim to underscore the overlapping analogous structure that underlies these two cultures, thereby contributing to my understanding of intercultural hermeneutics.

### ***J. J. Clarke's Hermeneutics of Difference***

J. J. Clarke (2000), a Canadian scholar, presents his perspective on intercultural hermeneutics, which he prioritizes as a "hermeneutics of difference" (p. 201) in his book, *The Tao of the West*. Clarke believes that cultural differences can create a space for reflection, enabling mutual understanding. He argues that these differences do not lead to incommensurability, but instead represent an opportunity for genuine dialogue between equals. According to him, intercultural hermeneutics of difference "betokens the possibility of a creative engagement" (p. 201). Therefore, it is not the differences themselves that present a challenge, but how these differences are perceived and approached. By acknowledging and embracing differences, we can work towards genuine dialogue.

Clarke's "hermeneutics of difference" does not run counter to Gadamer's notion of the fusion of horizons. According to Clarke (2000), Gadamer's concept of fusion of horizons does not mean "a complete merger or synthesis," nor does it imply "an incommensurable difference" (p. 11), but rather "an agonistic encounter ... in which we try to enter into and thrive on differences" (p. 12). Difference is a precondition for communication. Clarke articulates that East-

West engagement for Gadamer “presupposes distance, otherness, [and] alterity” (p. 11). This distance, otherness, and alterity make us temporarily depart from where we are, but eventually, we will come back to ourselves after thriving on differences. Clarke’s commitment to a hermeneutics of difference represents an aspiration toward genuine dialogue that views difference as a precondition for communication.

I agree with Clarke that we can engage in fruitful intercultural comparison without denying cultural differences. Rather than trying to bridge the vast historical and cultural chasm separating Daoism and Shakespeare, we can establish a hermeneutic relationship between them and recognize their distinctiveness. Both cultures offer valuable insights into human experience.

Clarke’s “hermeneutics of difference” truly struck a chord with me, as it got me thinking about how I connect the cultural differences between Shakespeare’s plays and Daoist philosophy to my own life. When I made the difficult decision to resign from my teaching position in 2017, my colleagues and friends couldn’t understand why I would give up a steady job that I had been committed to for over 15 years. But it was not my desire for change that led me to leave; rather, it was a longing to cultivate my passion for Shakespearean studies by studying abroad. I knew that gaining a deeper understanding of Shakespeare’s works and education in the West would fulfill my dreams in ways that staying put could not.

Looking back, I realize that my love for Shakespearean studies was ignited by the profound influence of Professor Shi and Professor Kahn. To me, they embody the world of Shakespeare and live it out in their daily lives. As Smith (1997) recounts, in Confucius’s dialogue with Laozi, a rhetorical question is raised, “The person who does not participate in transformation, how could such a person transform others?” (p. 275). I believe that they must

have been transformed first by Shakespeare's works before they had the magic to transform and inspire me surreptitiously to see the beauty of living and the truth of life.

The year I spent studying under Professor Kahn's guidance at Brown University is a treasured memory that has stayed with me vividly for over a decade. There are so many incidents that even today I can dearly recall. She was in her seventies during my stay in America, but her energy and enthusiasm in Shakespearean studies were contagious, and her kindness and gracefulness in our interactions left a lasting impression on me. My opportunity to study at Brown was the very first experience of going abroad and immersing myself in a different culture and English language. I still remember that I was initially confused about how to rent a place abroad. However, she reached out to me via email while I was still in China, offering to pick me up from the airport and generously letting me stay at her home until I found a suitable place to live. Moreover, I will never forget how she hurried to my living place to warn me about an incoming hurricane. I will never forget that she drove me to watch a stage performance of *Hamlet* in the city of Providence, where I watched an authentic Shakespearean play in the theater for the first time. I will never forget that every Wednesday afternoon, we would meet, and I always left feeling inspired and reinvigorated. I hold three books on my bookshelf dear to my heart. The first is a copy of her book, *Roman Shakespeare: Warriors, Wounds and Women* (1997), which she inscribed with a heartfelt message on the front page to commemorate our year together with Shakespeare as I was completing the program and preparing to return to China. The other two are *Norton Shakespeare* volumes, which she gifted me upon my arrival in the U.S. These books are special to me not only because they are for my study of Shakespeare's works, but also because they inspire and transform me in magical ways.

As I embark on my journey to becoming a new teacher after graduation from the University of Alberta, I hope that my personal transformation will have a positive ripple effect on my future students. I aspire to be like Professor Kahn and hope to pass that same energy and passion on to my students.

The stories of skillful men in the *Zhuangzi* (such as the stories of Cook Ding and an archer) are a testament to the transformative power of self-cultivation through the mastery of a particular skill. And as someone who has been deeply inspired by the Shakespearean studies of my mentors, I have always wanted to embody their passion in my own teaching and life. Rather than simply imparting knowledge, I want to create a space where my students and I can live and breathe Shakespeare's works together – a space where we can achieve a state of “emptiness,” where our qualities emerge spontaneously, like the skillful men in the *Zhuangzi* who are transformed by their mastery. This concept of self-cultivation as the nourishing and cultivation of *De* deeply resonates with me.

Shakespeare's use of the term “cultivation” often carries a moral sense. In the English language, “cultivation” is closely associated with tillage, husbandry, plough, reaping, sowing, or culture (Scott, 2014, p. 7), and in Shakespeare's plays, it is often tied to human intervention and control over the non-human world in order to produce fertility, subjugation, intervention, and order (p. 4). In *Othello*, for instance, Iago resorts to the language of cultivation (1.3.320-327) to celebrate the subjective will, while in *Hamlet*, Hamlet refutes his mother's hasty marriage as “an unweeded garden” (1. 2. 135). According to scholars such as Charlotte Scott (2014), cultivation is an ambiguous moral concept and endows humans with the power to impose upon other beings. Additionally, in Shakespeare's plays, cultivation is associated with patriotism and civic virtues. In *Coriolanus*, Volumnia interrelates the “harvest-man” with the soldier, as both sacrifice their

personal needs for the welfare of the commonwealth (1.3.29-34). Similarly, in *Henry V*, the King calls his English soldiers “yeomen” and urges them to fight for England (3.1.7-16). As Scott writes, cultivation represents a collective ideal in the creation of a flourishing England, and the husbandman or ploughman is associated with such civic virtues as “liberty,” “prosperity,” and “peace” (p. 15). Ultimately, Shakespeare’s use of cultivation reflects the complexity of human relationships with the natural world, as well as the tensions between individual will and the collective good.

The difference between Daoism and Shakespeare regarding cultivation is apparent. While both emphasize the transformative power of cultivation, their perspectives differ in significant ways. Daoism highlights the importance of spontaneity and natural emergence, while Shakespeare’s cultivation is often associated with human intervention and control. Daoism’s concept of self-cultivation through skill mastery is also more individualistic, whereas Shakespeare’s cultivation is often tied to the collective good and patriotism. These differences suggest that the understanding of cultivation and self-cultivation is shaped by cultural contexts. Drawing from my personal experience with Shakespearean mentors, I appreciate that these differences offer opportunities for meaningful dialogues. I hope to emulate the spontaneous emergence of beautiful qualities demonstrated by my Shakespearean mentors, while also emphasizing the importance of husbandry for moral development and collective goodness in my own learning and teaching.

### ***Zhang Longxi’s Literary Hermeneutics of Cultural Commensurability***

Zhang Longxi, a Chinese-American scholar, argues that cultural commensurability is the most distinguishing feature in intercultural hermeneutics. In his book, *The Tao and the Logos* (1992), he explores the inescapable metaphoricity of language in Laozi, Zhuangzi, and

Shakespeare's sonnets. Laozi's "teaching without words" and Zhuangzi's "non-words" (p. 46) are commensurable to Shakespeare's "tongue-tied" muse, highlighting the shared cultural value of the inadequacy of language. Zhang develops the concept of cultural commensurability by drawing a connection between Gadamer's idea of *logos* and the *Dao* in the *Dao De Jing*. According to Zhang, *Logos* and *Dao* both reveal the interplay between thinking and speech (language) in Chinese and the Western discourses (pp. 26-27).

To illustrate Zhang's (2007) exploration of cultural commensurability between Shakespeare's plays and the ancient Chinese texts, consider his article "The Ambivalence of Poison and Medicine" from his book *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures*. In this article, Zhang explores the cultural commensurability between traditional Chinese medicine and Shakespeare's use of medicinal analogies in his plays. He delves into Shakespeare's discourses on the ambivalent interdependence of poison and medicine in plays like *Romeo and Juliet*, *Troilus and Cressida*, and *Timon of Athens*, and read them along with Chinese ancient texts by Shen Kuo (沈括) (1030-1094), Liu Yuxi (刘禹锡) (772-842), and Li Gang (李纲) (1083-1140). Both cultures recognize the dialectic of the toxic and the therapeutic. Ancient Chinese texts referred to homeopathy as the cure for a disease by attacking it with the same kind of poisonous substances that causes it. In *Romeo and Juliet*, the antithetical duality of medicine and poison is the key theme that makes up the action of the play. Friar Lawrence and the Daoist medicinal texts share the dual nature of a substance, with both its therapeutic and toxic effects. Interestingly, Julian Glover of the Royal Shakespeare Company, who had played the role of Friar Laurence, drew upon the Chinese Daoist notion of the reciprocity of Yin and Yang to understand Friar's reflections on nature and its delicate balance of contrary powers. Zhang quotes Glover's observation that the play illustrates "the grand theme: yin and yang, the entirely opposite

qualities inherent in everything so that balance is maintained, with a tiny example, that of both the poison and medicine contained in a single ‘infant’ flower” (pp. 83-84). The reciprocity of opposites in *Romeo and Juliet* and ancient Chinese texts highlights the delicate balance between the effects of medicine and poison and suggests the tragic structure of the reversal of fortune to misfortune. Both cultures recognize the dialectic of the toxic and the therapeutic, and the reversal of opposite qualities residing in the same substance.

Zhang identifies another cultural commensurability between Chinese political thinking and Shakespeare's plays such as *Coriolanus* in the concept of the body politic. In Chinese political thinking, managing the human body is often seen as analogous to governing the state. The opening scene of *Coriolanus* portrays the body's various parts greedily charging the belly with greed and accumulating wealth, highlighting the importance of labor distribution and the consolidation of social hierarchy. In both traditions, the human body and its diseases serve as frequent metaphors for the state and its corruption.

According to Zhang (2007), cultural commensurabilities between Eastern and Western cultures, such as the dialectical relationship between medicine and poison and the notion of body politic, can help prepare readers to read Shakespeare from a cross-cultural perspective (p. 77). Zhang also suggests that the dialectic of opposite qualities is a fundamental pattern of movement in both nature and the human world, and that things often move towards a reversal that can also be a return (p. 89). As I engage with a Shakespearean play, I find myself unconsciously drawn back to my culture by this reversal or return, which reminds me of the movement of *Dao*. Laozi frames the dialectical reversal as a circle, where 复 (*fu*) or 返 (*fang*) (meaning “turning back”) in Chinese language conveys both a negative connotation of countering and a positive connotation of returning, as Qian Zhongshu (钱钟书) (1910-1998) notes (see Zhang, 2007, p. 116). I also

draw parallels to the process of *Bildung*, which involves temporary departure from one's cultural roots (i.e., alienation) and returning to one's cultural heritage, as I previously discussed in the section on *Bildung*. This dialectical reversal is particularly noticeable in my reading of Shakespeare's plays.

As I reflect on my own experience, I am struck by the resonance of the theme of honor in both *Othello* and the Daoist texts. Almost 30 years ago, while working at a hospital, a director and senior doctor in my department had performed numerous successful surgeries and earned himself a very good reputation. During an orthopedic surgery, the patient, who had previously had steady vital signs, died on the operating table. Subsequently, the patient's family unleashed a torrent of abuses, curses, and even violent actions against the doctor. The poor doctor fell in abjection and mortification, and his hair turned grey overnight. Once a venerable doctor, he had turned to be a decadent and degraded ordinary person and lost his position as director.

When scenes long-buried in my mind come to sight, I am often reminded of Cassio's words in *Othello*. When he loses his position as lieutenant, Cassio believes that the loss is tantamount to losing his reputation: "O, I have / lost my reputation! I have lost the immortal part of / myself, and what remains is bestial..." (2.3.281-283). In a literature class, I asked my students who had attended the teacher-education training program: *when we lost a position, when we lost reputation and honor, is it all that is left in us worthless and even bestial?* My students kept silent: I showed them that what is interesting about Shakespeare is that he seems to take his side with Iago, an evil person. Notice how Iago comments on the vanity of reputation: "Reputation is an idle and / most false imposition, oft got without merit and lost / without deserving" (2.3.287-289). What brilliant wisdom in Iago! He could even see the purposelessness of our persistent seeking of fame, reputation, and honor at all costs.



This reminiscence connects to my understanding of intercultural hermeneutics because both Shakespeare and Daoist philosophy address the themes of “honor” and “disgrace” when one loses a position or high rank. Iago’s wisdom is commensurable to the ancient Chinese Daoist wisdom found in Chapter 44 of the *Dao De Jing*. The passage states that:

extreme meanness is sure to result in great expense, and much hoarding is sure to result in heavy loss. One who knows contentment will not suffer damage to his reputation, and one who knows how to stop will not place himself in danger. (Lynn, 1999, p. 138) (甚爱必大费，多藏必厚亡。故知足不辱，知止不殆，可以长久。)

This passage clearly suggests that honor, reputation, and wealth are external things that should not be hoarded, as the more we accumulate them, the more harm they can cause us, and the more we add them, the more we lose them. Instead, seeking no honor or reputation can help us avoid eventual disgrace.

I offer this example to demonstrate how cultural commensurability in the subject of honor enables me to reflect upon the purpose for my life. Is it for what is universally esteemed as symbols of success: honor, wealth, position, or high rank? These symbols of success are like distractions that obscure the intellect and cloud the highest human faculty (Smith, 2014, pp. 51-52). Falstaff in *I Henry IV* derides honor, questioning its worth: “What is honor? A word. What is in that word ‘honour’? What is that ‘honour’? Air. ... Honor is a mere scutcheon” (5.1. 133-134, 138).<sup>24</sup> Daoist philosophy posits that physical forms and names for objects indicate 功用 (*gongyong*, efficacy). Forms and names make an object to be seen, felt, touched, and perceived. But only the formless and the nameless are the nature/essence of myriad things. The *Dao De*

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<sup>24</sup> Scutcheon is a “heraldic shield exhibited at funerals displaying the deceased person’s coat of arms” (Greenblatt et al, 2008b, p. 664).

*Jing* begins with the line “The Dao that can be described in language is not the constant Dao; the name that can be given it is not its constant name” (Lynn, 1999, p. 51) (道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。). This implies that form and name are not constancy (常). Only when we go beyond the physical or phenomenal manifestation can we trace the root of the things, which is called 本 (*ben*, root) in the Chinese language. *Ben* substantiates the existence of things. Honor, fame, and wealth are only names and forms. “Honor” and its various forms/names cannot make things everlasting. I have been taught at home and school that those who regard honor as safe and perpetual come to ruin, but those who do not forget about disgrace continue to exist and have honor perpetuated.

To sum up, this section has presented a theoretical framework for hermeneutic inquiry, drawing upon Mall's analogous intercultural hermeneutics, Clarke's hermeneutics of difference, and Zhang's literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability. In addition, I have reflected on my past experience while engaging with Shakespeare's plays and connecting their wisdom with that of Daoist philosophy. It is important to note that this hermeneutic interpretation does not exclude past experiences. According to Gadamer (1975), we cannot escape the horizon of our past since we are historical beings and cannot live in an isolated horizon separated from it. As such, our understanding always mediates between the past and the present. In addition, hermeneutic experience is deprived of certainty and assurance. In my encounter with Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays, I could not anticipate what would arise. Yet, through reading, I find myself struck by certain passages, lines, or instances in my life, which evoke a resonance or empathetic understanding, leading me to revise my expectations and discover new horizons. Grondin (2003) describes this kind of hermeneutic experience as one that “surprises us,” “knocks us back,” “confounds our expectations” and “leads us to revise our expectations and

opens new horizons to us” (p. 117). Similarly, Jardine (1998) argues that seemingly ordinary, taken-for-granted instances of our lives can unexpectedly echo what we have read in the text, creating “family resemblance” that reveals something about our existence (pp. 33-51). These insights reveal that hermeneutic experience involves a dynamic interplay between the past, present, and future, and highlights the importance of reflecting on both past and present experiences in hermeneutic interpretation.

What I have provided in this section is only a glimpse of hermeneutically-informed intercultural dialogue between Shakespeare’s plays and Daoist philosophy. However, although we cannot see the forest for the trees, I agree with Clarke’s (2000) assertion that “[i]n reading ... individual texts we are engaged implicitly in the reading of a whole culture” (p. 9). As I will show, I aimed to promote this conversation forward with my participants’ more enriched and insightful hermeneutic reading experience within two worlds and two languages.

### **Hermeneutics and East-West Engagement in Curriculum Studies**

The discussion of hermeneutics and intercultural studies is both explicit and implicit in curriculum studies. In this section, I will shed light on the contributions of influential curriculum scholars, such as David Smith, David Jardine, Ted Aoki, Claudia Eppert, and Patrick Slattery, who have devoted their scholarship to the exploration of hermeneutics and East-West engagement.

Smith’s contributions span the fields of hermeneutics and East-West engagement. In the field of hermeneutics, Smith (1991) emphasizes its significance for comprehending society, highlighting the “link between social trouble and the need for interpretation” (p. 188). Meanwhile, Smith stresses the importance of studying hermeneutics to grasp the workings of language. He pays particular attention to studying etymology, metaphor, analogy, and structure

of language. By understanding the history of language, we can gain a deeper understanding of the people and culture that produced it. In other words, our language reflects our cultural values, beliefs, and history, and understanding the history of language is necessary for the work of the hermeneutic imagination, because language holds the story of who we are as a people and seeks to uncover the question of human meaning, guiding us to make sense of our lives in a way that we can move forward.

Smith's contributions extend to the field of East-West engagement, where he focuses on the East-West dialogue within curriculum studies and advocates for a hermeneutic pedagogical approach. In his article on an East/West inquiry, Smith (1997) argues that the East addresses fundamental questions about what sustains, carries, and upholds human beings (p. 270). In his book, *Trying to teach in a season of great untruth* (2006a), Smith challenges the Euro-American notion of identity, which he sees as a source of narcissism and violence in the Western world. Instead, he believes that a dialogical relationship with Eastern cultures, such as the Daoist epistemology, which recognizes everything as interconnected and implicated in everything else, is necessary to fulfill the emptiness of self-contained identity (xxiv & p. 52). Smith believes that shifting our focus from Western epistemology to Eastern philosophy in the literature curriculum is "a form of homecoming" (p. 40), primarily involving returning to the East. This homecoming inspires students and teachers to explore freely and continuously, with a greater emphasis on commonality or commensurability between Self/West and Other/East, which he considers to be "the foundation for ethics in the age of globalization" (p. 32). Smith argues that truly encountering Eastern culture means encountering the Western self, aligned with Gadamer's notion of self-understanding (p. 37). In his book, *Teaching as the practice of wisdom* (2014), Smith argues that curriculum studies must consider "my-tradition-in-relation-to-others" (p. 185)

and suggests that “the Other is ‘in’ me/us and me/us ‘in’ him/her/them within the web of life as a whole” (p. 112), which echoes Zhuangzi’s philosophical thought on the interrelatedness of “this” and “that.” Ultimately, Smith believes that this approach to curriculum studies contributes to the project of humanization.

In East-West engagement, Smith (1991) highlights the importance of transcending boundaries and differences in order to engage in productive dialogue and interpretation. He writes, “Hermes and I found each other ... the real work of our time may be defined by an ability to mediate across boundaries and differences” (pp. 202-203). By referencing Hermes, he is alluding to the Greek god of communication and mediation, suggesting that the ability to mediate across boundaries and differences is a key skill for the hermeneutic work. He cautions against relying solely on singular identities and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the presence of an Other in shaping our shared future. He suggests that unless we can reinterpret the presence of an Other, we will only be able to see a limited part of the story (p. 203). Therefore, to fully understand and engage with the world around us, it is essential to approach interpretation and understanding with an openness to different perspectives and experiences.

In his pedagogical approach, Smith places a strong emphasis on a hermeneutic approach to teaching. For instance, his emphasis on cultivating students’ “meditative sensibility” (2006a, p. 57) centers on being called to seek truth and participating in the journey of self-discovery through reading literary works from the East and the West. He draws inspiration from the Chinese *yuwen* curriculum, which emphasizes “the arts of peace” (the meaning of the Chinese word 语, pronounced as *yu*) and “sincere dialogue” (the meaning of the Chinese word 文, pronounced as *wen*) (p. 96). Through this approach, Smith aims to foster a sense of intercultural understanding and empathy in students, encouraging them to engage in meaningful conversations

with others and to approach literature with an open and reflective mind. In addition, Smith (2006c) argues in his article on thinking towards a new hermeneutic pedagogy that teachers must become cultural interpreters in a hermeneutic pedagogy to enable them to communicate across cultures and national boundaries. In this hermeneutic classroom, dialogue serves as the primary mode of instruction where teachers interpret culture and students appreciate their participation in it (p. 255). Through this approach, teachers can facilitate a better understanding of how to live together with people from different backgrounds, ultimately fostering an appreciation for diverse cultures in the classroom. The incorporation of Eastern wisdom traditions in the curriculum and a hermeneutic approach to pedagogy can have profound implications, as it can lead to a more comprehensive understanding of different cultures and how they can be integrated into our lives.

Jardine, another prominent curriculum scholar, draws on hermeneutics and East-West engagement in his curriculum work. In the field of hermeneutics, Jardine asserts that “interpretive work is profoundly pedagogic” (1998, p. 50), full of fecundity, and all living and non-living beings are “radiant beings” (2014, p. 153) that merit interpretation. Jardine (2006b) emphasizes the importance of “ecological mindfulness” (p. 180). This involves slowing pace and fully attending to the interrelations and interdependencies of human beings and the Earth. By incorporating ecological meditations into the curriculum, Jardine explores the interconnectedness of all living and non-living beings within the ecosystem. This aligns with the hermeneutics’ emphasis on the importance of interpretation in understanding the meaning of texts and cultural artifacts.

In the field of East-West engagement, Jardine introduces the concept of the “integrated curriculum” (1998; 2006a; 2006b). According to Jardine (2006b), experience is not just something we undergo, but something we cultivate and care for, which includes our memory,

ancestry, and our relations with the Earth (p. 271). Jardine talks more of the Earth than of the world. In this interconnected web of experiences, cultural memories, family resemblance, and kinship are frequently evoked, without reducing the multitude of voices to a single univocal one. Jardine's (1998) approach to the integrated curriculum values diversity and recognizes the importance of grounding the curriculum in the freshly Earth, where different voices in diverse cultures can coexist in a conversational and dialogical way (pp. 75-78). By living with the richness and complexity of these multiple voices, we can keep the conversation going and promote a more sustainable and interconnected world.

Jardine's (2006b) critique of the Western modernist logic, which treats knowledge as fragmented and disconnected, is also reflected in his argument for an "integrated curriculum." He argues that the Western modernist logic leads to the discrete curricular content that fails to account for the interconnectedness of all living things on Earth (p. 172). Jardine's hermeneutic-topographical view of the world, rooted in Gadamer's "old *topica*" (cited in Jardine, 2006b, p. 275), emphasizes the importance of old wisdom and the voices handed down (p. 275). According to Jardine, this topographical view transcends geography and recognizes that all living things on Earth are not isolated substances, but are connected to "vast, ancestral, intergenerational, [and] Earthly relations" (p. 276).

Jardine's (2006b) hermeneutical-topographical view has relevance to my study of Shakespeare and Chinese Daoist philosophy, which belongs to different cultures. By dwelling "in the midst of a great and heralded topography of relations and dependencies and belongings" (p. 269), teachers and students can learn to recognize and appreciate the interconnectedness of different kinds of wisdom on the Earth. Thus, an integrated curriculum that incorporates various

cultural and disciplinary perspectives can help learners to develop a holistic understanding of the world and its interconnectedness.

Aoki (2005) does not primarily focus on hermeneutics, yet he provides an insightful perspective on the incorporation of Eastern, particularly Daoist, thoughts in the curriculum. Aoki argues that curriculum-as-lived-experience is a potential way to challenge the dominant Western culture's standardization and instrumentalism. To illustrate the multiplicity of curricula, he uses a metaphor of the "rhizomean plant" to underscore the diversity of curricula shooting from different directions and nourished by the humus (p. 419). By doing so, Aoki underscores the importance of recognizing and celebrating the multiple perspectives that arise from different cultures and ways of knowing.

Additionally, Aoki (2005) emphasizes the significance of living in the space between different cultures, and this resonates with my understanding of intercultural studies. He argues that curricular texts that only instill the singular, "solid" knowledge and the rigid implementation of a planned curriculum cannot generate the inspired newness of meaning. Aoki's call for teachers to indwell between cultural differences in the running of the curriculum allows for the creation of a third space, where cultural differences can be appreciated and celebrated. He draws upon the Chinese characters "无" (*wu*, no-thing) and "道" (*Dao*), two key characters in Daoist philosophy, to illustrate this point. Aoki notes that "无" contains "thing" and "no-thing" (p. 317) and "道" is "a form of *currere*" (p. 450) to denote a person's movement within. These two characters create a third space that is both ambiguous and paradoxical but invites us to linger on the bridge between East and West. By embracing the multiplicity and embracing ambiguity, we can entertain "both this and that," "neither this nor that" (p. 317), while learning to appreciate the interconnectedness of different cultures.



Aoki (2005) recognizes and accepts the ambiguity between different cultures as both “and” and “not-and.” This ambiguity invites us to linger on the bridge between East and West without rushing to cross over (p. 316). Aoki highlights the distinction between “*belonging* together” and “belonging *together*.” The italicized *belonging* in “*belonging* together” underscores “a reaching out to each other” and “catch sight or hear the claim of Being” (p. 398), while the italicized *together* in “belonging *together*” suggests a synthesis of two separate entities (p. 396). To create a third space, Eastern or Daoist thoughts can intersect with Western curriculum. It is essential to dwell between cultural differences in the curriculum because the betweenness creates a lived space of between, the *inter* of interculturalism (p. 382). Aoki’s advocacy for “*belonging* together” created in the third space of East/West dialogue fosters a deeper understanding of different cultures and their perspectives, promotes mutual respect, and encourages intercultural dialogue.

Claudia Eppert (2008) contributes to East-West engagement in curriculum studies. Her work focuses on the integration of Eastern cultural traditions into education as a means of addressing challenges faced by the Western world. In her article on an arts-based witnessing curriculum, she proposes that including Eastern thoughts and wisdom in a world literature curriculum can act as an alternative to the traditional Western canon of English literature (p. 94). She advocates for “an integrated and more balanced literature curriculum” (p. 92) that helps students develop their capacities to listen and respond in intercultural encounters (p. 97). Eppert suggests that this can be achieved through “embodied experience,” which she terms as “self-present” (p. 98), where students can see, feel, touch, smell, and hear the Eastern wisdom in the English literature curriculum. Through this conversation between Eastern wisdom and the

Western canon, students can gain a deeper understanding of diverse cultures and perspectives, promoting intercultural dialogue and mutual respect.

Different from above scholars, Patrick Slattery (2013) does not address East-West engagement. However, his insights on literary interpretation in curriculum development are valuable. Slattery emphasizes the importance of educators being aware of the hermeneutic approaches that influence their curricular decisions, ensuring an engaging and just curriculum for students. While it is crucial to consider the social, political, historical, and global implications of hermeneutic acts when developing a curriculum, Slattery emphasizes the significance of personal experience. Using *Hamlet* as an example, he demonstrates how readers can interpret this tragedy differently depending on factors such as personal experience, cultural background, and social context. He asks whether a student can read *Hamlet* from her or his autobiographical experience and arrive at different conclusions, and which kinds of interpretations are allowed and validated in classroom discussions. When they are capable of navigating hermeneutic decisions, educators can create a more inclusive and enriching learning environment.

While the specific term “intercultural hermeneutics” may not have been extensively addressed in curriculum studies, the reviewed curricular scholars’ contributions mostly highlight the importance of incorporating Eastern wisdom traditions into the curriculum, as they posit that doing so can enhance our understanding of different cultures and promote a more sustainable and interconnected world.

## Summary

In this chapter, I have explored the concept of hermeneutic experience articulated by Gadamer and examined the framework of intercultural hermeneutics as conceived by Mall, Clarke, and Zhang. Additionally, I provided an overview of curriculum studies concerned with

hermeneutics and East-West engagement. These discussions have laid the foundation for my hermeneutic inquiry, which aims to explore the complex interplay between Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays among Chinese educators. Moving forward to the next chapter, I will conduct a comprehensive literature review that encompasses key Daoist concepts, intercultural studies involving Daoism and the West, Chinese scholars' engagement with Shakespeare's plays, and a particular focus on Daoist reading of Shakespeare's plays.

### **Chapter Three: A Literature Review Toward Intercultural Dialogue with Daoist Philosophy and Shakespeare's Plays**

In the preceding chapter, I established a theoretical framework of intercultural hermeneutics that serves as the foundation for my research study. This framework incorporates Mall's analogous hermeneutics, Clarke's hermeneutics of difference, and Zhang's literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability. These theoretical perspectives provide a means to explore Shakespeare's plays in a manner that transcends cultural boundaries. Given the specific cultural disparities between the East and the West, it is essential to build a "bridge" (Aoki, 2005) and cultivate "attunement" (Wang, 2022, 2004) in curriculum and pedagogy to foster vibrancy and meaningful engagement.

This chapter begins with a concise introduction to fundamental Daoist concepts. It then provides an overview of intercultural studies conducted by two specific scholars focusing on the Chinese and Western cultures. Furthermore, the chapter offers a brief overview of Shakespearean studies from Chinese perspectives, including Confucian and Marxist interpretations by Chinese scholars. A significant section of the chapter is dedicated to an examination of reading Shakespeare's plays through a Daoist lens. Finally, the chapter concludes with a brief overview of curriculum and pedagogies for Daoism and Shakespeare in higher education. Overall, this chapter consists of five sections.

#### **Key Daoist Concepts and Their Relevance to My Study**

It is important, above all, to acknowledge the rich historical context in which Daoism emerged. China is widely recognized as an ancient country with 5000 years of civilization. Her history dates back to the Shang Dynasty (1523-1027 BCE) which ruled the Yellow River and Yangtze River valleys, the cradle of Chinese civilization. The Zhou Dynasty (1027-221 BCE)

succeeded the Shang Dynasty and witnessed the emergence of Confucianism and Daoism, the two dominant philosophical traditions in China. While Confucianism has been traditionally considered the primary pillar of Chinese morality and philosophy, and its influence is reflected in the *Lun Yu* (《论语》, *Analects of Confucianism*), the teachings of Daoism do not stand in isolation. Instead, Confucianism and Daoism have been found to overlap and fuse in numerous ways. As Clarke (2000) admits, two traditions “flowed into each other across many conceptual and institutional channels” (p. 35).

It is worth noting that both Western and Eastern scholars widely acknowledge Daoism as a perennial philosophy that holds the potential to enrich humanity and the world. Within scholarly discourses, many Daoist concepts have been explored and interpreted. In this chapter, I introduce the reader to the fundamental Daoist concepts of *Dao* (道), *De* (德), *ziran* (自然), Yin-Yang (阴阳), *Wu Wei* (无为), and *Wu* (无), as these concepts have garnered the most significant attention and contributions from scholars.

*Dao* (道) is a central concept in Daoist philosophy, often translated as “Way.” Some scholars (Wang, 2022; Yu, 2018) see *Dao* as both a noun, representing the creative source of the cosmos, and a verb, signifying the act of walking a path in harmony with self and other, while Zhang (1992) proposes that as a noun, *Dao* means “thinking,” and as a verb, it means “to speak” (p. 27). From a different perspective, Bai and Cohen (2008) intertwine *Dao* with *Qi*, recognizing their joint role in maintaining the world in peace and creating wonder. They write:

Dao, the path of qi, is a road to superabundance, open to individuals who practice the art of gathering and harmonizing qi. When individuals find their source of abundance, they are content and peaceful inside and outside. They do not see the world as a battlefield of competition, struggle, exploitation, and rapacious consumption.

According to [Daoist] philosophy, the world is a place of abundant creativity and unfailing source of wonder and mystery. (p. 48)

Drawing upon these scholarly writings, my understanding of *Dao* is that *Dao* transcends linguistic expression and cannot be fully captured in language. It is open, creative, and immanent in ordinary experiences. *Dao* is omnipresent and can be experienced in daily life. It is considered as the origin of the universe, with the power to create and sustain myriad things under the Heaven. *Dao* is thus associated with feminine qualities and seen as the Mother of all things.

The concept of *De* (德) has two perspectives: the cosmological view and the ethical view. The cosmological view sees *De* as embodiment of *Dao*, separate from morality (Lin, 1948; Ames & Hall, 2003). The ethical view emphasizes virtues such as personal qualities or strengths (Mair, 1990), human relationship (Ivanhoe, 1999), self-transformation (Ames, 1991), and efficacy or power of *Dao* (Moeller, 2006). Wang (2022) reconciles these views, arguing that *De* integrates the virtuous process with the creativity of *Dao*. For me, *De* represents both forces: as a cosmological force, *De* intermingles the individual with the ten thousand things under Heaven, uniting the inner heaven of the individual and the outer heaven in a state of Oneness or Spontaneity, realizing “no-self” (无我); as a moral force, the ruler’s *De* encompasses a combination of moral example, leadership, and charisma.

Another relevant concept to my research study is that of *ziran* (自然, nature), which is viewed holistically and organically, and emphasizes the deep kinship between humans and the natural world (Moeller, 2006; Ames, 1994; Clarke, 2000). Nature is equated with 天 (*tian*, Heaven) or 天地 (*tiandi*, Heaven and Earth) and embodies the *Dao*. Scholars (Needham, 1956; Moeller, 2006; Kirkland, 2001) highlight the feminine and receptive characteristics of nature, emphasizing fertility, maternity, and non-paternalistic engagement with the natural world.

Daoism promotes a harmonious coexistence with nature. This ecological perspective recognizes the interconnectedness and harmony between human and nature, rejecting the domination and control of nature for human needs. To my understanding, Daoist philosophy acknowledges the inherent unity between humans and nature, emphasizing the importance of maintaining a balanced relationship between the two, as I have illustrated in three intercultural dialogues of Chapter Two. This perspective stands in contrast to the anthropocentric worldview in much of the Western tradition that prioritizes human domination over nature. Additionally, I draw connections between the Daoist concept of nature and other key concepts, including *Wu Wei* (spontaneity), the promotion of physical health, the cultivation of inner tranquility, and the moral development of individual's *Jingshen*. These various concepts and facets of nature have been previously discussed and presented in the introductory chapter to this dissertation, where I shared my personal experience of studying Daoist poems at schools and gaining insights into the significance of nature from traditional Chinese medicine.

I also draw attention to the concept of Yin-Yang (阴阳) because it represents two cosmic forces that maintain balance and harmony in the universe. Yang is associated with celestial elements and creativity, while Yin is associated with earthly elements and submission. They are interdependent and interchangeable, creating a state of creative tension and mutuality (Cheng, 1986). Additionally, Bai and Cohen (2008) discuss *Yang Qi* and *Yin Qi* as two vital forces that sustains both the physical and mental well-being of humans. They assert, “Humans, as bipedal beings – with their heads pointing to ‘heaven’ and receiving the heavenly *yang qi* and their feet touching the ground and drawing the earthly *yin qi* – are joyous and fulfilled” (italics original, p. 48). Their words vividly bring to mind my mother’s repeated advice during my day-in day-out study sessions at home. She would always advise me, “Step outside; you need to connect with

the Earthy Qi.” The Yin-Yang concept extends beyond nature to various aspects of life, including governance, health, and the arts. Daoist texts emphasize the integration of masculine and feminine qualities rather than prioritizing one over the other (Ames, 1981; Zhuang, 1981). This understanding does not contradict the earlier mention of *Dao* being associated with feminine qualities. Chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing* states that “The Dao begets the One; the One begets two; two begets three; and three begets the myriad things” (Lynn, 1999, p. 135), which I have mentioned in Chapter One. Here, the *Dao* gives rise to the One, which symbolizes nothingness (*Wu*), according to Wang Bi’s interpretation (Lynn, 1999, p. 135). In the *Yi Jing* (《易经》, also translated as *Book of Changes*),<sup>25</sup> the *Dao* is recognized as the Ultimate Unity or Oneness from which the multitude of phenomena and things emerges. Within these texts, the notion of “two” refers to Yin and Yang, which are complementary and opposing forces. Through their interconnection and interdependence, Yin and Yang give birth to the concept of “three,” which represents a state of harmonious balance and transformation between Yin and Yang, symbolized in 64 hexagrams in the *Yi Jing*. Thus, *Dao* is revered as the Mother of all things, the Ultimate Unity, or Oneness, and it is from this source that the concept of “two” – Yin and Yang – emerges. Their interdependence and interplay are deeply ingrained in Chinese language, as reflected in sayings such as 祸兮福所倚, 福兮祸所伏 (good fortune and disasters are contained within each other and are interchangeable) and 哀乐相生 (the co-existence of joy and sadness,

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<sup>25</sup> When I began my current program in 2018, I had no idea of what the *Yi Jing* is about. I read Dr. Eppert’s proposal titled “Contemplating Change, Transformation, and Curriculum in the Anthropocene: Learning from the *Yijing/I Ching*.” Seeking to enhance my understanding of the book and to contribute revisions for her paper upon her request, I read some chapters of the *Yi Jing*. However, I encountered challenges in comprehending the intricacies of the book, particularly its 64 hexagrams. In contrast, the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* resonate with me more deeply, because the phrases and discourses within these two texts are intertwined within me. As a result, I shifted my focus to studying the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* more intensively. Nonetheless, my initially murky reading of the *Yi Jing* was not in vain, as it illuminates my understanding of certain concepts in Daoist philosophy. Perhaps this exploration was an integral part of the unfolding Way/*Dao*, guiding my path of exploration in Daoism.



with joy taken to an extreme resulting in sadness and sadness containing potential joy). Zhuangzi also emphasizes this interdependence and interchangeability, stating that “Yin and Yang [are] the greatest of energies” and “when Yin reaches its apex, it changes into Yang, and *vice-versa*” (Zhuang, 1981, p. 151). The concept of Yin-Yang finds resonance in several of Shakespeare’s plays, including *Romeo and Juliet*, *King Lear*, and others. Friar Lawrence’s soliloquy on the coexistence of opposites in nature (*Romeo and Juliet*, 2.3, 9-22) and Edgar’s insight into the reciprocal transformation between the lowest and the promising future (*King Lear*, 4.1.1-9) exemplify this contradiction and interdependence of opposing forces, similar to the tension and mutuality inherent in Yin and Yang. Scholars such as Zhang (2007), T. McAlindon (1991), Paul Allen Backer (2009), and my former supervisor Professor Shi in his brilliant Shakespeare lectures have delved into the profound connection between the interdependence of Yin-Yang and the characters’ speeches in Shakespeare’s plays.

Another vital concept for my research study is that of *Wu Wei* (无为), which emphasizes non-deliberate action and refraining from imposing human will on nature. It means spontaneous, effortless action in harmony with the natural flow. Scholars (Needham, 1956; LaChapelle, 1988; Moeller, 2006) interpret *Wu Wei* as non-action, unforced action, or following the order of nature. *Wu Wei* has practical implications for education that can help create a positive and effective learning environment. According to Jie Yu (2008), preserving students’ authenticity through *Wu Wei* rather than attempting to control or reshaping them is crucial. In addition, Clarke (2000) asserts that *Wu Wei* encourages individuals to adopt attitudes of non-resistance and non-violence, cultivate feminine virtues of yielding and compassion, transcend the demands of ego, and develop emptiness or voidness rather than self-empowerment (p. 100). These implications suggest that by adopting non-violent attitudes and cultivating feminine

virtues, individuals can learn to respect each other and cooperate, creating a safe and supportive space for learning. The concept of *Wu Wei* is relevant to my study in two aspects. Firstly, its emphasis on non-deliberate action and refraining from imposing human will on nature resonates with the ecological concerns of Shakespeare. Shakespearean scholars including Jennifer Munroe (2011), Caroline F. E. Spurgeon (1990), Paul Yachnin (2008), and Edward J. Geisweidt (2011) have explored the playwright's ecological sensibility in various plays. For example, Munroe's (2011) interpretation of *The Winter's Tale* reveals Shakespeare's questioning of human superiority over Nature, emphasizing the need for humankind to recognize themselves as subjects to the natural world. The Daoist concept of *Wu Wei* and Shakespeare's concern with ecology align with my research objective, which is to reject an anthropocentric worldview and foster a deep sense of respect and reverence for the natural world. Secondly, my research focuses on cultural commensurability while also acknowledging cultural differences, but firmly rejecting dichotomous oppositions in cultural differences, and within Shakespeare's plays, we can observe the embodiment of *Wu Wei* in certain characters. Characters like Viola in *Twelfth Night*, Rosalind in *As You Like It*, Gonzalo in *The Tempest*, and even Hamlet *either* demonstrate aspects of *Wu Wei* through contemplative and reflective approach to action, allowing events to unfold naturally, *or* navigate complex situations with wisdom, illustrating harmony with the natural world. By discussing the Daoist concept of *Wu Wei* and Shakespeare's ecological themes in the classroom, students can be encouraged to cultivate certain virtues that promote ecological awareness, self-reflection, and transcending an enlarged Self-image. These curricular and pedagogical concern is also part of my research.

I also want to draw attention to the concept of *Wu* (无) because its meanings and the “forms”<sup>26</sup> – *Wuzhi* (无知), *Wuwei* (无为), and *Wuyu* (无欲) – may have potential dialogue with some of Shakespeare’s plays. In Daoist philosophy, *Wu* encompasses nothingness, emptiness, or non-being. It views the Cosmos as 混沌 (*hundun*), a state of Chaos. However, this Chaos is not seen as inherently negative or a loss, but rather as the source of all existence and a nurturing womb for all creatures. *Wu* encourages individuals to embrace emptiness, detach from desires, and cultivate inner tranquility. In the pursuit of understanding the unity of all things under Heaven, Daoist philosophy emphasizes the rejection of a limited perspective that focuses solely on physical manifestations. Instead, Daoism emphasizes tracing things back to 本 (*ben*, the root). This leads to 明 (*ming*, perspicuity), which enables one to perceive 常 (*chang*, constancy) of the *Dao*. While physical manifestations have 形 (*xing*, forms) and are named (名, having *ming*) according to their attributes, Daoist philosophy sees beyond the physical form. *Wu* is associated with the nameless, formless, and indistinct, representing vast potential. Emptiness allows for function and growth. In contrast, in *Macbeth*, for example, Chaos is depicted as a state of confusion. “Confusion now hath made his masterpiece!” (2.3.76). Macbeth himself projects his wailing desires upon this confusion, while the supernatural power of the three witches amplifies the moral violence lurking in the universe. The play also depicts mysterious and formidable elemental forces “hover[ing] through the fog and filthy air” (1.1.12) over which the moral beings have no control. The Wheel of Fate is constantly spinning her wheel and determines the destiny of human creatures. The exploration of cultural differences like this is a

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<sup>26</sup> I use quotation marks around the word “form” because the concept of “*Wu*” means formlessness. In Daoist philosophy, *Wu* takes on three forms, as discussed by David Hall (2001). These three *Wu*-forms of Daoism are *Wuzhi* (无知), *Wuwei* (无为), and *Wuyu* (无欲).

fascinating aspect that I hope my participants and I will delve into during the research. Through this dialogue, students can gain a deeper understanding of the relevance of Daoist *Wu* to ethical/moral virtues of nothingness, emptiness, humility, and inexhaustible potential for growth.

The above concepts of *Dao*, *De*, Nature, Yin-Yang, *Wu Wei*, and *Wu* are not only important in understanding Daoist philosophy but also hold the potential for dialogue with Shakespeare's plays in terms of cultural commensurability, cultural differences, and the metaphoric and analogical usage of language in different cultural contexts. Additionally, the concepts of *Wu* and *ziran* discussed here will aid my readers in better understanding scholars' exploration of their connections to Shakespeare's plays, which will be further discussed in the latter section titled "Daoist Readings of Shakespeare's Plays." While there are other concepts in Daoism, I have chosen to focus on these specific concepts due to their relevance to my research questions. My study aims to explore the reading experience of Chinese educators with Shakespeare's plays in conjunction with Daoist texts and how they navigate intercultural dialogue between these two distinct cultural traditions. I seek to understand the implications of their intercultural reading experience for an intercultural curriculum. I think that these fundamental Daoist concepts are deeply ingrained in the minds of Chinese people. When Chinese readers engage with Shakespeare's plays, these concepts naturally surface and exert influence on their reception of plays. This sort of reader reception is brought with readers' cultural prejudice or preconceptions. In my view, the projection of cultural preconceptions onto a foreign text enlarges the ever-changing hermeneutic circle. As the previous discussion of *Bildung* (see Chapter Two) indicates, immersing ourselves in a foreign text may initially seem like alienating ourselves from our own culture. However, as we venture into the unfamiliar and encounter the different culture, we bring with our own preconceptions and prejudices, which

then undergo transformation through the interplay between the foreign world and our own cultural accumulations. This process of engagement ultimately leads to personal and intellectual growth, as we gain new insights and expand our understanding of both the foreign and the familiar (i.e., ingrained home culture).

### **Intercultural Dialogue Studies between China and the West**

In this section, I will concentrate on reviewing the scholarly works of Zhang Longxi and Wai-Lim Yip, both of whom have made significant contributions to the exploration of intercultural dialogue between Chinese and Western cultures. The reason for reviewing their works is their direct relevance to my study and research questions. Zhang's scholarly works are centered around cross-culture reading experience and cultural commensurability through his comparative readings of Chinese and Western cultures and literatures. Yip's scholarly works lie in Daoist aesthetics. By examining their works, I aim to enrich my understanding of the interplay between Chinese and Western perspectives, particularly in relation to literary and cultural exchange.

In relation to Zhang's scholarly work, in Chapter Two, I introduced his book *Unexpected Affinities: Reading Across Cultures* (2007). In that context, I utilized his exploration of the cultural commensurability between traditional Chinese medicine and Shakespeare's use of medicinal analogies in his plays as part of theoretical foundation for my exploration of intercultural hermeneutics. In this section, I delve further into Zhang's thoughts on intercultural studies by reviewing two of his other significant works. The first is his seminal work, *The Tao and the Logos: Literary Hermeneutics, East and West* (1992), and the second is *Mighty opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (1998). These two books are relevant to the discussion of intercultural studies here because in these books,

Zhang highlights his rejection of a dichotomous opposition between China and the West and emphasizes the need to transcend binary oppositions. He advocates for an inclusive perspective that acknowledges and respects cultural differences without perceiving different cultures as mutually exclusive. This perspective resonates with the underlying intention of my research, which seeks to respect cultural differences while appreciating the significance of cultural commensurability in the exploration of intercultural dialogue.

In *The Tao and the Logos*, Zhang (1992) critically challenges the prevailing notion of distinct and insurmountable differences between China and the West. He posits that cultural traditions can be mutually understood and communicated, highlighting the presence of cultural commensurabilities that enable mutual intelligibility and understanding. In other words, his aim is to transcend rigid dichotomies and cultivate a nuanced understanding that recognizes the shared and common aspects of languages, literatures, and cultures between China and the West. I appreciate and admire Zhang's endeavor to move beyond cultural differences, transcending dichotomous oppositions, and instead, highlighting the common humanity that binds us together across different cultures. Often, we tend to magnify cultural differences, while overlooking the more significant aspects of affinities and resonances and even sameness that exist between different cultures. When I read Shakespeare's plays and compare his wisdom with Daoist culture, I am amazed by the remarkable similarities I discover. It is truly fantastic to realize that as inhabitants of the only blue planet, humanity shares so many commonalities. Delving into Zhang's works compels me to build upon his studies and foster a greater understanding and appreciation of both Daoist and early modern English culture within our global community.

In his cross-cultural reading approach to Chinese and Western literatures and cultures, Zhang (1992) establishes his practices on Gadamer's hermeneutic approach to human

experience. Aligned with Gadamer, Zhang perceives hermeneutic experience as participatory and transformative engagement that fosters mutual understanding between different cultures. He writes:

The hermeneutic emphasis on meaning recognizes the important relationship of the individual and the communal and conceives of human experience as participation, as transformation of the Self in the encounter with the Other. Meaning exists for the sake of a mutual engagement, in the fruitful exchange of ideas in communication. (pp.104-105)

I quote his words because I envision my participants engaging in a “fruitful exchange of ideas” and meaningful communication during their intercultural dialogues between Daoism and Shakespeare’s plays. Zhang insists that in the realm of hermeneutics, our spirit departs from its familiar boundaries and returns to its essence, enabling self-discovery, which is the essence of *Bildung*. This process can be likened, as I see it, to a young person venturing out from his or her family to find himself or herself in Shakespeare’s set of tempest plays (such as *Pericles*, *Cymbeline*, and *The Winter’s Tale*) or twin plays (such as *The Twelfth Night*, and *The Comedy of Errors*).

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (1975) asserts that “we cannot hold blindly to our own fore-meaning of the thing if we want to understand the meaning of another” (p. 238). Instead, Gadamer urges us to “remain open to the meaning of the other person or of the text” and to be “sensitive to the text’s quality of newness” (p. 238). As I imagined the intercultural dialogues that would take place in my participants’ interpretations prior to my data collecting, I wondered to what measure my participants would embrace this openness and contribute to new understanding of Shakespeare’s plays. Would they be receptive to the new meanings that arise

from the intercultural dialogue between Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays? Would they be willing to challenge their preconceptions and embrace the unfamiliar aspects that may arise? These questions guided my observation in the research process. Zhang (1992) supports Gadamer's view and asserts that the core of Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics lies in genuine dialogue, which is characterized by a sincere desire to listen to the voice of the other person or text and the effort to transcend oneself to establish meaningful communication (p. 5). His idea resonates deeply with the goals of my research, as I aimed to understand how my participants would approach the voice of Shakespeare's plays and engage in intercultural dialogues. As a matter of fact, in the process of conducting this research, it was not only the participants who would be listening to the voice of Shakespeare, but I, as a hermeneutic researcher, also be actively listened to my participants. By maintaining attentiveness and openness in the process of listening, I aimed to immerse myself in the insights and experiences of my participants, while also deepening our understanding of intercultural dialogue between two distinct cultures.

Expanding on this earlier work, Zhang (1998) explores these ideas further in the second book, *Mighty opposites*. In this book, he critiques the prevailing emphasis on difference in contemporary discourse (p. 8). He contends that the seemingly stark "mighty opposites"<sup>27</sup> between China and the West in art, literature, and aesthetics are not necessarily as polarized as they may initially appear. By elucidating the numerous similarities and shared elements in languages, literatures, and cultures between the two, he challenges the reductionist perspective that reduces China to a mere reflection of Western desires, fantasies, and stereotypes (p. 14).

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<sup>27</sup> The phrase "mighty opposites" is derived from *Hamlet's* lines "'Tis dangerous when the baser nature comes/ Between the pass and fell incensed points/ Of mighty opposite" (5.2.67-69). This phrase serves as the foundation for Zhang's (1998) observation that skepticism towards commonality is especially strong when seeking to compare and understand the cultural differences between the East and the West (p. 8).



Overall, in what he calls “cross-cultural reading” approach, Zhang (1998) moves beyond a dichotomous opposition between China and the West and rejects the notion of mutually exclusive self and Other. Instead, he acknowledges mutual differentiation and embraces a perspective that recognizes and respects cultural differences without imposing an absolute dichotomy (pp. 55-56). As I discussed in the previous chapter, by emphasizing the importance of cross-cultural analysis, Zhang underscores the significance of exploring the intercultural dialogue to uncover unexpected convergences in thematic substance and linguistic expression. According to Zhang, intercultural dialogue enables the engagement with shared human experiences and concerns, deepens our understanding of interconnectedness of humanity, and fosters the potential for mutual understanding and appreciation.

Zhang’s cross-cultural reading approach to literature and cultural studies aligns closely with the focus of my research. The main purpose of my research is to examine how Chinese educators approach intercultural experience when integrating Daoist philosophy into the reading of Shakespeare’s plays, as outlined in the first research question. In this regard, Zhang’s cross-cultural reading approach holds particular relevance and offers valuable insights. Firstly, I recognize that the apparent “mighty opposites” between Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare’s plays are tenuous and lack a solid foundation. It is crucial not to oversimplify the seemingly different elements into a mere dichotomy or dismissively label them as the so-called “cultural difference.” Such a reduction to dichotomous differences would overlook the profound commensurabilities that connect them and disregard the shared aspects of humanity. I aim to explore the cultural commensurabilities that exist between them, particularly in terms of their philosophical implications on human life and existence. I seek to discover the “touches of sweet harmony” (*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.65) that resonate between them.

Secondly, while Zhang's cross-cultural reading approach is rooted in Gadamer's literary hermeneutics, my research builds upon Gadamer's hermeneutic experience as a philosophical foundation for the methodology of hermeneutic inquiry in the educational context. Specifically, my research seeks to explore Chinese educators' reading experiences when engaging with Shakespeare's plays from a Daoist lens through literary hermeneutics. I will carefully listen to how they incorporate their personal experiences and perspectives into their interpretations of these different cultural texts. Through this approach, I aim to gain a deeper understanding of the transformative potential of intercultural dialogue and its implications for an intercultural curriculum.

I was initially drawn to Zhang's scholarship through the remarks made by Smith. In his article "Hermeneutic Inquiry," Smith (1991) acknowledges and highly values the interpretive work carried out by Zhang. To quote Smith's words, "Impressive interpretive work in this kind of cross-cultural meditation has been undertaken by such scholars as Zhang Longxi in the Chinese context" (p. 195). Intrigued by Smith's endorsement, I embarked on reading Zhang's works and found myself deeply inspired by his commitment to facilitating genuine dialogue between Chinese culture and literature and the Western counterparts.

It is important to note that while Zhang's cross-cultural reading approach encompasses aspects of Daoist texts and Shakespeare's sonnets and plays, his analysis does not extensively delve into the specific readings of Shakespeare's plays from a Daoist perspective. While Zhang employs the term "cross-cultural reading experience" to describe his approach of analyzing and interpreting literary and cultural texts from the East and the West traditions, I utilize the term "intercultural reading" in my thesis (as suggested by my supervisor) to maintain consistency with curricular scholars including Smith (1997, 1999, & 2006a), Eppert (2009 & 2015), Bai et al.

(2014), and Aoki (2005). These scholars highlight the significance of incorporating diverse cultural perspectives and voices in educational contexts and advocate for an inclusive and culturally responsive curriculum that fosters critical dialogue and reflection on different cultural traditions. Given that my research specifically examines the implications of Chinese educators' Daoist-informed engagement with Shakespeare's plays on intercultural curriculum, the term "intercultural reading" is more closely aligned with my research goal of facilitating intercultural encounters and exchanges within the context of literary education.

After reviewing Zhang's works, I will now turn to the contributions of Wai-Lim Yip because I find Yip's notions of "interillumination," "interrecognition," and "interreflection" in intercultural dialogue to be highly relevant to my study on the intercultural reading experience of Daoism and Shakespeare. In his book, *Diffusion of Distances: Dialogues between Chinese and Western Poetics*, Yip (1993) proposes an East-West aesthetics approach to literary and cultural studies. He emphasizes the importance of what he terms "interillumination or interrecognition" (p. 188) in facilitating intercultural dialogue. Interillumination or interrecognition involves a dynamic process of mutual expansion, adjustment, and containment, aiming to broaden the reader's understanding and push the boundaries of knowledge towards an "endlessly stretching circumference" (p. 190). Yip also introduces the concept of "interreflection" (p. 194), which denotes the reciprocal reflection and interaction between Eastern and Western cultures. As I contemplate these terms – "interillumination," "interrecognition" and "interreflection," I find myself reflecting on my own comparative reading of Shakespeare's wisdom and Daoist wisdom. As I have presented in dissertation, they mutually illuminate each other and provide deep insights into the essence of environmental nature and the meaning of human existence on this planet as a whole. Acknowledging the potential misguidance and inherent risks, Yip argues that

embracing interreflection enables different cultures to engage in open and constructive dialogues, sharing and exchanging unique viewpoints. To me, this emphasis on openness resonates with hermeneutics. This intercultural exchange fosters a deeper understanding and appreciation of each other's perspectives, promoting a more comprehensive and nuanced exploration of the human experience.

In his article, "Daoist aesthetics," Yip (1998) highlights the belief of Daoist aesthetics that the natural world is inherently vibrant and self-sustaining, devoid of human intervention. Drawing upon Zhuangzi's teachings on the balance of *Dao*,<sup>28</sup> Yip emphasizes that the essence of Daoist aesthetics lies in transcending dualistic distinctions and embracing a perspective that encompasses multiple viewpoints (p. 504). This approach does not take the subject "I" as the dominating and determining agent. Instead, by "taking 'I' from the primary position for aesthetic contemplation" (p. 504), a Daoist aesthetic contemplation allows nature to flow freely and reclaim its inherent harmony. Yip further applies his understanding of Daoist aesthetics to the interpretation of Daoist poems and landscape paintings. He argues that Chinese poems, exemplified by the works of Li Bai and Su Dongpo (苏东坡) (1037-1101), embody the interpenetration and interillumination of subject and object, consciousness and phenomenon (p. 505). By employing language that transcends personal pronouns, such as Li Bai's<sup>29</sup> verses "却下水晶帘/玲珑望秋月" (word-by-word translation: let-down crystal blinds, / glass-clear watch autumn moon), the reader is invited to engage with reality both objectively and subjectively,

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<sup>28</sup> Yip's interpretation of the balance of *Dao* is founded on Zhuangzi's words that "Not to discriminate *this* and *that* as opposites is the essence of *Dao* ... [To] obliterate the distinctions and view things from both *this* and *that* (*liangxing*, 两性, to travel on two paths)" (p. 504). The essence of *Dao* lies not in perceiving *this* and *that* as opposing forces but rather obliterating distinctions. This perspective underscores the Daoist aesthetics that recognizes the existence of forms and beauty within the inner lives and rhymes of things, before we humans name them.

<sup>29</sup> If my readers recall, in Chapter One, I analyzed Li Bai's verses and their influences on my personal experience of Daoist wisdom.

experiencing a dynamic interplay (p. 505). Similarly, Chinese landscape paintings that echo Daoist aesthetics employ aerial, midair, and ground perspectives freely and simultaneously, enabling viewers to adopt various viewpoints and emulate Zhuangzi's notion of "free and easy wandering" (p. 504).

Yip's two works significantly enhance my understanding of intercultural studies between China and Western countries in terms of aesthetics. Aesthetics holds a central position within my study, as I have established in Chapter One a connection between my personal encounters with Chinese calligraphy and my interpretation of Shakespeare's tragedies intertwining with my experience during the COVID pandemic, both from an aesthetical perspective. After all, both Daoism and Shakespeare's plays are regarded as the timeless classics, embodying beauty that resonates with nature and humanity.

Besides, Yip's exploration of the "built-in contradictions" in Daoist texts (1998, p. 506), the use of paradox as aesthetic strategies (1993 & 1998), and the absence of tragedy in Chinese culture until the thirteenth century (1993, p. 192), can be seen as points of convergence and fruitful intercultural dialogue with Shakespeare's plays. I find that both Daoism and Shakespeare employ similar aesthetic strategies, particularly the use of paradoxes, to challenge normative linguistic and conceptual frameworks. For instance, Daoism asserts the ineffability of *Dao*, the inadequacy of language, and the notions of *Wu Wei*, *wuwin* (无心, no mind), *wuzhi* (无知, no knowledge), and *wuwo* (无我, no self). Yip suggests that these assertions inherently contain "built-in contradictions." Paradoxically, this seemingly negation or renunciation serves as "the affirmation of the concrete total world, a world free from and unrestricted by concepts" (1998, p. 506). By removing conceptual boundaries, our consciousness becomes open and unobstructed,

serving as “a center of no circumference into which and across which a million things will regain their free flow and activity” (p. 506).

In the readings of Shakespeare's plays, I encounter a profusion of paradoxes, as exemplified by my personal experience of “poetic paradox” in Chapter Two. Paradox is pervasive in Shakespeare's plays, as Linda Woodbridge (1984) asserts, stating that “[p]aradox is the very essence of Shakespeare's work” (p. 324). Woodbridge offers examples from Shakespeare's plays to support this claim. For instance, in *Macbeth*, pity is personified as “a naked new-born babe, / Striding the blast” (1.7.21-22); in *King Lear*, Lear attains wisdom in one night of madness more than he had learned in 80 years, and it is the Fool who speaks wisdom; in *Antony and Cleopatra*, what is considered right behavior in the public figure is wrong in the private sphere, and vice versa (p. 324).

Yip (1993) highlights a significant contrast between early Chinese culture and Western traditions regarding the absence of tragedy in the former. He suggests that this disparity may be attributed to the Daoist emphasis on humanity's harmonious correspondence with nature and the avoidance of a linear, antagonistic relationship with reality that characterizes the creation of tragic heroes in Western literature (p. 192). This difference serves to illustrate the divergent approaches between two cultures, underscoring the importance of “interillumination or interrecognition” as a necessary means of fostering mutual understanding.

Moreover, Yip (1993) provides an example that illuminates the similarity between the Elizabethan ideology of the God-ordained ruler (and the Great Chain of Being) and the ancient Confucian concept of the Son of Heaven. He underscores that both cultures sought to establish and justify hierarchies of power (p. 206). While Yip finds it intriguing that the Elizabethan notion and the Confucian notion exhibit “almost identical modes” (p. 206), this indicates the

cultural commensurability that can emerge in an intercultural dialogue between two cultures. This comparative reading also highlights how Daoist philosophy challenges and critiques the hierarchical power structures embodied in the Naming System prevalent in the Zhou Dynasty, which Confucianism used to consolidate power (Yip, 1998, pp. 503-504).

In this section on intercultural studies, I have reviewed the scholarly works of Zhang Longxi and Wai-Lim Yip. Notably, they both emphasize the recognition of similarities, shared elements, and points of convergence in their intercultural studies, while respecting cultural differences. Through their works, my understanding of intercultural studies has been further fortified and enriched, underscoring the vital objective of fostering mutual understanding and appreciation between Chinese and Western literatures and cultures. I aspire to incorporate these insights into my intercultural curriculum studies.

### **Chinese Engagement with Shakespeare**

Hermeneutic methodology places great emphasis on the significance of historicity, as it recognizes that interpretations are shaped by the historical context in which they emerge. While critical engagement with Shakespeare's plays in the Chinese context has primarily focused on Confucianism, Marxist reading, and humanistic approaches, the exploration of Daoist perspectives has been relatively limited. Although I will not delve into the detailed review of the history of Confucian, Marxist, and humanistic engagements of Chinese scholars with Shakespeare's plays, I think it necessary to provide my readers with a brief overview of these diverse approaches through which Shakespeare's plays have been explored within the Chinese context.

The connection between Confucianism and Shakespeare's plays has been explored by Chinese scholars, including He Qixin (何其莘)<sup>30</sup> (1986), Zhang Xiaoyang (1996), and Murray Levith (2004). According to them, Chinese Shakespearean scholars have found compelling connections between Shakespeare's themes and Confucian ideology. He (1986) specifically focuses on the interpretations of *Hamlet*, highlighting the views of Chinese scholars that Hamlet's reverence for the dignity of humanity aligns with Confucian teachings on the nature of man. Zhang (1996) explores how Shakespeare's plays resonate with Confucian principles of *yi* (义, loyalty to one's friend), justice, duty, and harmonious relationships in the family and the state. Levith (2004) references the scholarly analysis of Professor Yang Zhouhan (杨周翰) and Professor Lu Gusun (陆谷孙). Professor Yang's analysis of *King Lear* highlights the disparities between Confucianism and Western ethical ideas, with Confucianism placing greater emphasis on the filial obedience as a reflection of the absolute authority of parents, while Professor Lu's analysis of *Hamlet* aligns with the Confucian ethical code, which emphasizes the importance of filial piety and allegiance to the monarch (pp. 119-120).

In addition to Confucianism, Marxist ideology and humanist philosophy have also influenced Chinese engagement with Shakespeare. According to He (1986), since 1949, Chinese Shakespearean criticism has predominantly revolved around politics, heavily influenced by the Marxist ideology and "Mao Zedong Thought" (毛泽东思想). During that era, many Chinese critics believed that Shakespeare wrote specifically for the emerging bourgeoisie. For example,

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<sup>30</sup> In this section, I include the Chinese characters for the names of specific Chinese scholars, while excluding the Chinese characters for others. The reason for this distinction is that I have personally read the books of those scholars whose names are accompanied by Chinese characters during my English learning in China, and as a result, I am familiar with their corresponding Chinese characters. However, for the scholars whose names do not have Chinese translations listed here, I have not had the opportunity to read their books in China. Therefore, to avoid any potential errors in writing their names in Chinese, I have chosen to omit the Chinese characters for these scholars.



scholars like Bian Zhilin (卞之琳) argue that Shakespeare opposed the feudal system and exposed the evils of capitalism (see He, 1986, p. 17), while scholars like Chen Jia (陈嘉) perceive Shakespeare as a representative of progressive social forces and humanism (see Zhang, 1996, p. 236). In the Chinese context, humanism is conceptualized as an ideological principle that emphasizes individual rights, needs, and desires. Chinese scholars perceive Shakespeare's plays as a celebration of individuality, the awakening of self-consciousness, and the exploration of competitive individualism. Moreover, they find themes of freedom, equality, and universal love in Shakespeare's plays. Chinese Shakespearian scholars exhibit a strong interest in analyzing the characters of Shakespeare's plays as they provide valuable insights into the inner world of humanity. In the 1980s, a Chinese variant of humanism emerged, with Shakespeare's plays being viewed and interpreted from the perspective of human nature and human rights (Zhang, 1996, pp. 242-243). According to Zhang (1996), this approach reflects a growing recognition of the significance of individual autonomy and the pursuit of personal fulfillment within the Chinese intellectual discourse. Thus, Marxist and humanist perspectives have played a significant role in shaping Chinese interpretations of Shakespeare's works.

As I read the scholarly works of He (1986), Zhang (1996), and Levith (2004) on Chinese senior scholars' engagement with Shakespeare's plays, it takes me back to my early days of self-study in the English language. Their works reference works and ideas of prominent English scholars in China, including Fang Pin, Chen Jia, Bian Zhiling, Li Funing (李赋宁), Lu Gusun, and Yang Zhouhan. These English masters have had a profound impact on my English learning journey and sparked my interest in Shakespeare's plays. Their English textbooks were instrumental in equipping me with English vocabulary, grammar, and sentence structure. One such invaluable resource was Professor Lu Gusun's *Great English-Chinese Dictionary* (《英汉

大词典》), for which Lu served as the editor-in-chief. This dictionary became my faithful companion on a daily basis, guiding me through the maze of unfamiliar English words at a time when computer and online dictionaries were not available. It was also through their English Literature textbooks that I embarked on the captivating world of Shakespeare's works. As mentioned in Chapter One, Professor Fang Pin's book, *Making Friends with Shakespeare*, ignited a lifelong passion for Shakespeare within me. Professor Yang Zhouhan's works, *History of European Literature* (《欧洲文学史》) and *Compilation of Shakespearean Critiques* (《莎士比亚评论汇编》), introduced me to the realm of Shakespearean studies. While some of these senior scholars and educators may face criticism for their Marxist readings, and their perspectives may now be seen as limited, I owe an immense debt to them. Reflecting on my past experiences, I now recognize the inherent limitations of Chen Jia's emphasis on the conflict between the rising bourgeois and the declining feudal system as I read his four volumes of *History of British Literature* (《英国文学史》) in the 1990s. At that time, lacking exposure to Western literary criticism, I accepted his portrayal of Shakespeare as "a bourgeois writer" (cited in Zhang, 1996, p. 236) as an unquestionable truth. However, over years of studying Shakespeare and engaging with the interpretations of Western scholars from various literary critical theories, I have come to understand the historical and contextual limitations of some senior Chinese Shakespearean scholars. I acknowledge that their perspectives were significantly influenced by the specific historical context characterized by the advent of Marxism and the prominence of Mao Zedong Thought during the 1950s to 1970s in China. As a contemporary Chinese student and researcher within the field of Shakespearean studies, I bear a sense of responsibility to build upon the foundational work of my predecessors while conducting research that remains faithful to our cultural heritage and relevant to our present time.

In this section, I provided a brief overview of the connections between Shakespeare's plays with Confucianism, Marxist reading, and humanistic approach within the context of Chinese engagement with his plays. This short overview was based on the scholarly works of He, Zhang, and Levith. However, as my research focuses on Daoist engagement with Shakespeare, the next section will delve into the scholarly works that offer insights into the interpretation of Shakespeare's plays through the lens of Daoism.

### **Daoist Readings of Shakespeare's Plays**

In this section, I present a chronological examination of the scholarly works of John C. H. Wu, Zhang Longxi, T. McAlindon, Frank Vulpi, Zhang Xiaoyang, and Paul Allen Backer, each offering unique perspectives on the Daoist interpretations of Shakespeare's plays.

The earliest study exploring the intersection between Daoism and Shakespeare is John C. H. Wu's (1936) essay, "Shakespeare as a Taoist." Born in China, Wu grew up with English as his mother tongue. He starts this essay by recounting his personal experience with Shakespeare. He emphasizes that a deep appreciation of Shakespeare's works can be achieved in one's middle age and asserts the importance of approaching Shakespeare from a Daoist view. Then, Wu proceeds to expound on three aspects that appear in the works of Shakespeare and Laozi: the mingled yarn, disentangling entanglements, and the touch of nature. In each aspect, Wu extensively quotes lines from Shakespeare's plays and words from Laozi to illustrate the remarkable similarities in wisdom expressed by both.

In the exploration of "the mingled yarn," Wu (1936) elucidates the shared belief of Shakespeare and Laozi in the permeation and interpenetration of opposites, weaving a tapestry of "heavenly mingle" (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.5.69). Chapter Two of the *Dao De Jing* highlights the coexistence and interrelationship of opposites such as beauty and ugliness, good and evil,

high and low, difficult and easy, long and short. These apparent opposites, while distinct in appearance, are inseparable and dependent on each other. Neither can exist in isolation, and pure good or pure evil is non-existent. According to Wu, Shakespeare exactly embraces this vision, as evidenced in *All's Well That Ends Well*: "The web of life is of a mingled yarn, good and ill together" (4.3.73). Wu further supports this assertion by citing extensive passages from plays such as *The Two Gentlemen of Verona*, *Richard III*, *Richard II*, and *Antony and Cleopatra*, showcasing how Shakespeare embraces the Daoist notion of the interpenetration of opposites.

Moreover, within this aspect, Wu (1936) asserts that both Laozi and Shakespeare recognize the significance of returning. Laozi's concept of Way or *Dao* is characterized by a cyclical motion of returning. This notion finds resonance in Shakespeare's plays such as *Henry VIII* and *King Lear*, where characters such as Wolsey and Poor Tom respectively express this idea explicitly. For both Laozi and Shakespeare, life unfolds as a rhythmic process of ebbs and flows, where fortune and misfortune intertwine. The Daoist wisdom that a thing will return when pushed to its utmost limit (variously expressed in Chapters 16, 25, 28, 55, 64 of the *Dao De Jing*) aligns harmoniously with Poor Tom's words: "The lamentable change is from the best; / The worst returns to laughter" (*King Lear*, 4.1.6). This convergence highlights the resonance between Daoist and Shakespearean philosophies, revealing a shared understanding of the cyclical nature of existence.

In the realm of "disentangling entanglements," Wu (1936) brings attention to the shared ability of Shakespeare and Laozi to delve beneath surface appearance and uncover the hidden essence of things. Wu demonstrates the striking resemblance between the two minds in their exploration of topics such as the ineffability of language, the wisdom inherent in being a fool, the ruthlessness of heaven and earth, the dynamic interplay between extremes in natural

phenomenon and human emotions, the strength of softness in feminine virtue, and the resignation from desire and passion.

Wu's intercultural reading captivates my interest, as it aligns with my initial intention to understand and interpret Shakespeare through a Daoist lens. In a specific instance, my previous hermeneutic exploration of a Daoist passage distinguishing between the *Dao* of Heaven and the *Dao* of Man (see Chapter One) has revealed that the former takes from those who have surplus while the latter takes from those in need. Wu's (1936) essay elucidates that the *Dao* of Man accentuates the contradictions in social life, while the *Dao* of Heaven mitigates or resolves these contradictions. Wu convincingly asserts that Shakespeare embraces this notion, exemplified by Gloucester's proclamation in *King Lear* declaring: "Let the superfluous and lust-dieted man/ That slaves your ordinance ... So distribution should undo excess, / And each man have enough" (4.1.77-81). Drawing from their shared wisdom, Wu states:

Laotse is Shakespeare in bare skeleton, and Shakespeare is Laotse in flesh and blood. When Laotse says a thing, Shakespeare illustrates it. If Laotse is full of wise saws, Shakespeare is rich in modern instances. I almost think that the works of Shakespeare can be used as a case-book of Taoism. (p. 124)

In the aspect of "the touch of nature," Wu (1936) argues that although they lived in different historical periods, both Shakespeare and Laozi bore witness to the dangers of excessive cunning and deception during the periods of societal transitions (p. 133). For instance, in *King Lear*, Gloucester laments, "We have seen the best of our time: machinations, hollowness, treachery, and all ruinous disorder" (1.2.118-120) and "Love cools, friendship falls off, brothers divide; in cities, mutinies; in countries, discord; in palaces, treason; and the bond cracked between son and father" (1.2.112-115), while Laozi experienced the tumultuous era of the

Warring States Period (475 BCE – 221 BCE) and urged the abandonment of knowledge, human kindness, morality, and profit (Chapter 18 of the *Dao De Jing*). Laozi recognized that an abundance of laws only bred more thieves, and an excessive emphasis on ceremonial rites resulted in greater confusion. Furthermore, Wu contends that both Shakespeare and Laozi engage in a profound exploration of human nature, employing introspection and self-reflection. They are like divers who plunge into hidden depths, delving into a profound substratum (p. 135). For Laozi, this substratum is manifested through the Spirit of the Dale, the Uncarved Block, the Mysterious Feminine, and the *Dao*. For Shakespeare, it is embodied by the “inward soul,” “the heart,” and “nature.” Thus, Wu concludes that both possess a contemplative and brooding nature.

Wu's (1936) essay reinforces my initial belief in the presence of “concordance” (p. 126) and resonances between Shakespeare's plays and Daoist philosophy. The quotations that he cites from both Shakespeare and the *Dao De Jing* deeply resonate with me. Whenever I come across certain lines from Shakespeare's plays, I am intuitively struck by their embodiment of Daoist wisdom, prompting me to exclaim, “Ah, this is the Daoist wisdom!” Encountering Wu's essay aligns with my own intuitive readings, as it reveals the profound wisdom shared by Shakespeare and Laozi in their exploration of the essence of human existence.

As Wu (1936) argues, the two masters “reach the same goal through different roads” (p. 134). Wu explicitly highlights the fact that Shakespeare's plays mirrors Laozi's abstract teachings. He writes:

In the midst of the hurly-burly of life and the deafening noises of the theatre, we can discern the still, small voice of the Chinese sage. The truth is that what Laotse teaches abstractly Shakespeare learns from experience. (p. 134)

In other words, Shakespeare's knowledge is acquired through lived experience, echoing Laozi's abstract principles. In this respect, with the focus on lived experience, I am reminded of the emphasis that curriculum theory places on lived experience.

While Wu's (1936) essay lacks extensive explanations of the contextual meanings behind the numerous quotations it presents, it nevertheless holds great value as a work of appreciation and understanding. Due to its nature and approach, I consider it more fitting to refer to Wu's work as an "essay" rather than an "article." It is important to note that Wu's essay does not reference other critics' interpretations, as it stands as the earliest study where he relies on his intuitive reading experience to present his Daoist interpretation of Shakespeare's plays. Despite this limitation, Wu's creative and original reading sets the stage for future studies, including my present research.

Following Wu's (1936) pioneering essay, there appears to be a noticeable absence of specific readings that approached Shakespeare's plays from a Daoist lens. In 1991, T. McAlindon delves into the concept of "mighty opposites" in his work, *Shakespeare's Tragic Cosmos*, where he briefly touches upon the Daoist concept of Yin and Yang. McAlindon argues that Shakespeare skillfully incorporates the established synthesis of cosmological ideas derived from Greek philosophers to illustrate the correspondence of the macrocosm and the microcosm (p. 4). The early English cosmology conceived the world not only as a hierarchical structure of corresponding planes, such as the Great Chain of Being, but also dynamic system of interacting and interdependent opposites (p. 5). He writes:

while it is true that Shakespeare's tragic universe is structured as a hierarchy of correspondent planes, the most striking manifestation of correspondence between the different planes is the violent conflict and confusion of opposites. (pp. 5-6)

Drawing upon Empedocles' idea that nature is governed by both Love and Strife, with sympathies and antipathies, McAlindon emphasizes the notion of a world based on "a system of concordant discord or discordant concord" (p. 6). In this example, he draws parallels between the cosmic doctrine of two contraries and the Daoist notion of Yin and Yang (p. 6).

The next scholarly work that initially caught my attention is Zhang Longxi's examination of metaphor and language in Daoism and Shakespeare. Throughout my dissertation, I have made multiple references to Zhang's insightful cross-cultural readings of Western cultures and literatures by comparing them with Chinese counterparts. In *The Tao and the Logos*, Zhang (1992) illustrates the shared understanding of the limitations of language and the use of metaphors in Daoist texts and Shakespeare's sonnets to convey deeper meanings. In his analysis, Zhang (1992) examines the concept of "teaching without words" in Laozi, "non-words" in Zhuangzi, as well as Shakespeare's portrayal of a "tongue-tied" muse in the sonnets (which I also referenced in Chapter Two). Zhang reveals how metaphors serve as powerful tools for evoking emotions, expressing complex ideas, and conveying truths that surpass ordinary language. Metaphoric language, according to Zhang, creates vivid imagery and invites readers to engage in deeper contemplation and interpretation. In his book, *Mighty opposites*, Zhang (1998) also emphasizes the importance of metaphors, highlighting that they are not merely figures of speech but fundamental to the structure of language. Metaphors provides revealing illustrations of how the mind articulates sensibilities and experiences (p. 9).

In his analysis, Zhang (1992) delves into specific works to illuminate the profound connections between Daoist texts and Shakespeare's writings. One such example is Zhuangzi's butterfly dream, which challenges the boundaries between dream and reality, suggesting that life itself may be perceived as a dream. This idea finds resonance in Shakespeare's line, "We are



such stuff as dream are made on" (*The Tempest*, 4.1.175) which reflects the transient and ephemeral nature of human existence (pp.149-150). Similarly, Zhang explores Li Bai's poem "Prefactory Remarks".<sup>31</sup> This poem contemplates the brevity of life and the fleeting nature of happiness and draws a parallel between life and a dream. Tao Qian's "Self-Obituary" portrays a tranquil acceptance of death and the attainment of inner peace. In a similar vein, Shakespeare's song from *Cymbeline*, known as "Fear No More" (4.2. 329-340), reflects on the transience of human life and the inevitability of death. The song acknowledges the inescapability of mortality, expressing that even the mightiest and most learned individuals are reduced to the same fate as the humblest beings. In all these works, metaphors in Daoist poems and Shakespeare's plays serve as vehicles for conveying profound insights into the nature of human existence.

Frank Vulpi's (1994) article entitled "A Taoist reading of Shakespeare's *King Lear*" also caught my attention. In this article, Vulpi identifies several Daoist principles, including the importance of humility, honesty, and not imposing oneself on the natural order of things. He argues that Lear's abdication and Gloucester's over-reliance on appearances illustrate the consequences of failing to follow these principles. In contrast, Cordelia and Kent embody the Daoist qualities by avoiding excess, extravagance, and flattery. Their conducts align with the *Zhuangzi*'s perspective on filial and ministerial fidelity.

Vulpi (1994) also suggests that Lear and Edgar present opposing examples of the Daoist idea of making something out of nothing. Lear fails to recognize that Cordelia's refusal to flatter him indicates a positive "something" about her that he should respect, representing the Daoist belief that something can arise from nothing. This notion resonates with Chapter 56 of the *Dao*

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<sup>31</sup> Li Bai's poem reads as follows: Heaven and earth are the inn for all creatures, and time is a passer-by of all generations. Fleeting life is like a dream, of which how many are truly happy moments? So it was with good reason that the ancients would hold candles and go out during the night. (夫天地者，万物之逆旅。光阴者，百代之过客。而浮生若梦，为欢几何？古人秉烛夜游，良有以也！)

*De Jing*, which states “One who knows does not speak, one who speaks does not know.” In contrast, Edgar fully embraces this principle by disguising himself as “poor Tom” and finding value in the useless. By looking beyond the material world towards the spiritual or moral planes, Edgar exemplifies the *Zhuangzi*'s stories of discovering value in the seemingly worthless.

Throughout his analysis, Vulpi (1994) supports his argument by citing passages from the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. These Daoist texts emphasize the importance of being resolute yet humble, avoiding excess and flattery, and recognizing the inherent value within the spiritual or moral realms rather than the material world. By highlighting the play's themes of humility, honesty, and creative resourcefulness, Vulpi demonstrates how this play resonates with the timeless insights of ancient Chinese Daoist wisdom.

Zhang Xiaoyang (1996) points out that social idealism in Shakespeare's plays has something in common with both Confucianism and Daoism. In his analysis of *The Tempest*, Zhang not only highlights the similarities between Gonzalo's ideal society and the Confucius' ideal society, but also draws attention to how “the Chinese have noticed that Gonzalo's utopia compares to the social ideals of Taoism” (p. 224). Daoism advocates for conforming to nature and allowing things to take their own course, favoring a more primitive and unadorned society, which aligns with Gonzalo's vision that “I th' commonwealth I would, by contraries, .../ Execute all things ... but nature should bring forth, / Of it own kind, all foison, all abundance, / To feed my innocent people” (2.1.48-65). Zhang further points out that Zhuangzi advocates for an ideal society without a ruler, echoing Gonzalo's idea of “No name of magistrate” (2.1.150) and “No sovereignty” (2.1.157) (p. 224). According to Zhang, one important reason for the assimilation of Shakespeare into Chinese culture lies in the Chinese perception of a hidden combination of Confucianism and Daoism in the plays (p. 228). While Confucianism emphasizes

active participation in worldly affairs and the establishment of a harmonious moral order, Daoism encourages detachment from the world, alignment with nature, and avoidance of action driven by social or personal gains. Both outlooks can be observed in Shakespeare's plays (p. 228). Zhang argues that characters like Timon (in *Timon of Athens*) and Jaques (in *As You Like It*) cling to a Daoist philosophy because they become disillusioned with the mortal world and seek to renounce it. Even Macbeth's famous "to-morrow, and to-morrow, and to-morrow" soliloquy (5.5.19-28) echoes a Daoist state of mind (p. 228). Expanding on the Confucian qualities of Hamlet, Zhang suggests that "in fact [Hamlet] also shows a Taoistic outlook on life in his disillusionment with the mortal world" (p. 228). When Confucian politician suffered setbacks, they sought solace in Daoism and withdrew from society to live in solitude, which is exemplified by the "court-forest-court" plot in *As You Like It* (p. 229). Zhang asserts:

The differing approaches of Confucianism and Taoism toward human civilization is also noticeable in Shakespeare's plays. Confucianism believes that humanity can benefit from civilization whereas Taoism rejects all traditional values and institutions. The praise of humankind and its creative achievement is often taken as evidence of humanism in Shakespeare's works, but the condemnation of human values and institutions by the misanthropes in Shakespeare's plays – Timon and Jaques – also stirs up our feelings. (p. 229)

In these remarks, the "praise of humankind" and "humanism in Shakespeare's works" aligns with Confucian readings while "the condemnation of human values and institutions by the misanthropes in Shakespeare's plays" reflects a Daoist perspective.

Zhang (1996) also asserts that the production of certain plays reflects the aesthetic philosophy of Daoism. Daoism rejects utilitarianism and moralizing. Instead, it emphasizes

intuition and imagination in literary and artistic creations. The 1986 production of *The Midsummer Night's Dream* by the China's Coal Miners' Drama Troupe, for example, was based on the aesthetic concept of Daoism. The most important element in this production is the play's magical and imaginary atmosphere, which corresponds to the Daoist notion that "life is a dream." This particular production used a set of hanging ropes to suggest a forest and to create a floating space. The lightning added a dreamlike and illusory color, while the lyrical music and the graceful dancing produced the beauty and feeling of a fairyland, creating a symbolic and illusory world full of imagination and mystery, accessible to intuition. "Such an effect," Zhang asserts, "was precisely the ultimate aesthetic standard of Taoism" (p. 232).

Finally, I delve into a recent study that explores Shakespeare's plays through the lens of Daoist philosophy. This work is Paul Allen Backer's (2009) doctoral dissertation, titled *Shakespeare, Alchemy and Dao (Tao): The Inner Alchemical Theatre*. In his dissertation, Backer provides an alchemical reading of Shakespeare's plays *Hamlet* and *King Lear* by incorporating the perspective of Daoist inner alchemy or *neidan* (内丹). Backer explores the embodiment of Daoist concepts of *Wu* (无) and *ziran* (自然) in these two plays as metaphors for the inner alchemical journey. In his analysis, *neidan* primarily encompasses the transformative potential of Primordial *Qi* (元气, *yuanqi*), which gradually transforms the adept's psycho-physical being through "particles of transformation" (点化, *dianhua*). These particles are embodied in the breath, vocal resonance, and energetic exchange between actors and the audience. Backer posits that even a miniscule particle of the Primordial *Qi* causes a transformation (p. 619). Consequently, the audience's psycho-physical state undergoes transformative process through this reciprocal exchange, leading to a palpable impact on their overall experience – an effect akin

to the sentiment expressed by Osric in *Hamlet*, describing it as a “hit, a very palpable hit” (*Hamlet*, 5.2.282) (p. 619).

In his examination of *King Lear*, Backer (2009) explores Lear's alchemical journey back to the One and Chaos. Backer's analysis focuses on Act One, Scene One, in which he highlights the recurring pattern of the characters consistently choosing the path of exhaustion and defeat when confronted with the choice between following the *Dao* of “doing nondoing” or the rational process of “doing doing” (p. 602). Backer interprets this tendency as a manifestation of the characters' materialistic or “being” bias. For example, Lear clings tenaciously to his worldly possessions, specifically the preservation of his “name, and all the addition to a king” (1.1.138). Lear fixates on the realm of the “named” and remains oblivious to the realm of the “unnamed.” His yearning for verbal expressions of love from his daughters drives him to pursue the tangible domain of the “named,” and mistakenly believes that words possess generative power, rendering him unable to perceive the true essence of the *Dao* (pp. 606-607). Backer argues that Lear favors the path of “being” in this scene and disregards the value of *Wu* (“non-being” or “nothingness”) (p. 610). However, according to Daoist philosophy, it is within the realm of *Wu* that wisdom, understanding, and a connection to the unifying Way/*Dao* of existence reside (p. 610). Backer writes:

Although Shakespeare could not have consciously constructed the play to follow an understanding of the Great Way as described in the ancient Chinese text, the *Dao* is manifest nonetheless. (p. 615)

*King Lear* abounds with reference to “nothing” (the word appears 33 times in the play). However, despite this repetitive word throughout the play, the characters persistently adhere to the realm of “something” and “being.” They rely heavily on verbal and intellectual discourse and

are inclined towards striving, contrivance, and contention, which lead them astray from the *Dao*/Way. It is only through blindness, madness, nakedness, loss of identity, and ultimately death – forms of rigorous material and psychological destruction – that the characters are granted another opportunity to embark upon the “mysterious path” (p. 615). By the end of the play, Backer asserts, Lear manages to create something out of nothing and bestows significance upon “nothing.” Equally significant is Lear’s profound speechlessness at the end of the play. Lear no longer relies on rational and discursive intellect but instead surrenders himself to spontaneous awareness. Backer contends that the notions of *Wu* in *King Lear* is not a useless, purposeless, and negative void, but an active, creative force that the characters fail to recognize and ultimately lead to their own destruction (p. 592).

In contrast to his analysis of *King Lear*, Backer’s (2009) reading of *Hamlet* focuses on the stage of Hamlet’s transformation that aligns with the principle of Daoist *neidan*. Briefly speaking, *neidan* refers to “inner alchemy or spiritual alchemy” (p. xix), involving the cultivation of one’s mind, body, and spirit. In contrast, *waidan* (外丹) or “outer alchemy” focuses on working with metals and a furnace (p. 16). Both *neidan* and *waidan* share the common objective of refinement and transformation (p. 18). Backer emphasizes the significance of “interiority” in Daoist *neidan* and recognizes the potency of the body/mind energies as fundamental elements in the alchemical journey. These energies not only impact the *neidan* adept but also resonate with the world through the principle of *ganying*<sup>32</sup> (感应, stimulus and response) (p. 650). Backer argues that this transformative journey aligns harmoniously with the Daoist practice of *cun* (存,

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<sup>32</sup> I previously employed this phrase “*ganying*” (“感应”) in Chapter Two, in which I followed Tu Wei-ming’s translation, “affect and response.” In that chapter, I presented three examples exemplifying my understanding of intercultural dialogue, one of which is a dialogue between the Daoist concepts of *Qi* and self-transformation and Shakespeare’s *A Midsummer Night’s Dream*. I made a connection between the Daoist “感应” and the English word “synesthesia.”

transfigurative visualization). *Cun*, as a process of visualization, encompasses various modes of vision, including dreaming, visual perception (见, *jian*), inner sight (内视, *neishi*), and ultimately transfigurative visualization. *Cun* refers more accurately to “inner sight” and denotes that the act is “to give existence to – to materialize” (p. 520). This process of visualization extends its influence to acting, reading, and watching, making the audience and reader active participants in their own psycho-spiritual transformation (pp. 618-619).

Backer's (2009) reading of *Hamlet* centers around the Daoist concepts of *Wu Wei* (effortless action, non-action, acting without conscious intent) and *ziran* (so-such-of-itself; spontaneous, and natural) in relation to Hamlet's alchemical journey. By drawing parallels between selected passages from *Hamlet* and the *Dao De Jing*, Backer identifies significant instances that highlight the resonance between the two. One such instance is Hamlet's realization that “there's a divinity that shapes our ends, / Rough-hew them how we will” (5.2.10-11), which can be interpreted as surrendering to the flow of *Dao*. Similarly, the recognition that “the readiness is all” (5.2.237) signifies the discovery of the transformative power of *Wu Wei*, denoting “active non-action” or “effortless action” (p. 704).

Furthermore, Hamlet's alchemical journey culminates in his embodiment of *ziran*, characterized by spontaneity, naturalness, and being true to oneself (p. 715). Backer contends that although the play dramatizes the various facets of action and its physical manifestations, Hamlet's ultimate action, as dramatized in Act 5, Scene 2, assumes the form of “non-action” or a manifestation of *Wu Wei*. By embracing *Wu Wei*, Hamlet begins to accept the transformative nature of things (物化, *wuhua*) as natural and spontaneous processes. Backer underscores the significance of this transformative journey, particularly in relation to the Daoist doctrine of *wuhua*, which serves to counteract a tragic sense predicated upon loss. He cites the words of

Angus Graham, who highlights that in Zhuangzi's Daoism, the doctrine of the transformation of things ensures that there is no ultimate loss but rather continuous processes of transformation that enable individuals to evolve and become what they have not yet been (p. 732). Thus, from this Daoist perspective, Backer posits that *Hamlet* is not a tragedy (p. 732). Hamlet himself undergoes a profound transformation, and realizes, in alignment with Daoist teachings, that "the world is a spirit vessel which cannot be acted upon ... One who acts on it fails, / One who holds on to it loses" (Chapter 29 of the *Dao De Jing*). Hamlet's previous attempts to exert control and hold on to the world led to failure, but once he embraces the notion of "let be" (5.2.238), he attains victory (p. 734).

Another pivotal aspect of Backer's (2009) analysis revolves around the profound importance of analogy, correspondence, metaphor, and image. Both in Shakespeare's tragedies and Daoist texts, the utilization of analogy and analogical thinking, termed as Chinese "correlative thinking" by Needham (1969) and Graham (1989), takes precedence over analytical thinking. Unlike analytical thinking, which seeks to comprehend phenomena by dissecting them into constituent parts, analogical thinking is often described as intuitive thinking. While analytical thinking aims to discern differences, analogical thinking strives to uncover similarities (Backer, 2009, p. 50). Metaphors, images, correspondence, and comparisons serve as the tools of analogical thinking employed by Shakespeare and Daoist adepts to imbue the world with meaning and coherence. Backer's emphasis on analogical thinking aligns with Mall's notion of "analogous hermeneutics," which I incorporated as a key component of intercultural hermeneutics in Chapter Two.

Backer's (2009) alchemical reading of *Hamlet* and *King Lear*, as well as the incorporation of Daoist principles such as *ganying*, *cun*, and *wuhua* establishes a dynamic and



reciprocal spiritual connection between body and mind, texts and readers. *Ganying* or “cosmic harmony” can be likened to the harmonious interplay of two strings on a lute, where the creation of melodious music occurs only when they are in proper conjunction with each other. Backer suggests that the *ganying* between Daoism and Shakespeare is “more physical and practical than analytical and theoretical” (p. 42), resonating with each other. The term “*cun*” describes the perceiver’s inner sight to materialize something, extending to the act of reading, watching, and acting, where active participation transforms the audience and reader. Similarly, “*wuhua*” refers to transformation of things, such as a human dreaming of becoming a butterfly or transforming from a dream state to a waking state. Zhuangzi sees beyond these distinctions and perceives the ultimate unity of all things in the *Dao*, seeking to “make all things equal” (p. 416). Backer’s “alchemical reading” resembles the alchemists’ observation of the transformation of metals into gold, as it allows actors, audience, and readers to undergo their own psycho-spiritual transformation. By intertwining these ideas, my initial idea is strengthened that intercultural curriculum studies serves as a platform for intercultural enlightenment and illumination.

In this section, I have presented a comprehensive review of scholars’ works that offer insightful Daoist reading and interpretations of Shakespeare’s plays. Wu initiates the Daoist reading experience, while T. McAlindon touches on this topic. Zhang Longxi delves into the metaphoricity shared in Daoist texts and Shakespeare’s sonnets and plays, and Vulpi provides a specific Daoist reading of *King Lear*. Zhang Xiaoyang explores the blend of Confucian and Daoist elements, and Backer presents a comprehensive analysis of alchemical reading of *Hamlet* and *King Lear* from the Daoist *neidan*. Each of these scholars has significantly enriched my understanding of Daoist reading of Shakespeare’s plays.

### **Curriculum and Pedagogies for Daoism and Shakespeare within Higher Education**

In this section, I provide an overview of the contemporary literature on curriculum and pedagogical approaches for Daoism and Shakespeare within higher education. While my research primarily focuses on curriculum studies, I will present insights from the resources that I have accessed through the University of Alberta's database and Google Scholar. While acknowledging the inclusion of both curriculum and pedagogy within curriculum studies, I prioritize the discussions of Daoist and Shakespeare curricula before reviewing the literature on pedagogical approaches.

With regard to Daoist curriculum, my review is primarily focused on the scholarly work of Li Xin and Orlando Nang Kwok Ho due to limited results from my search for relevant literature. Li Xin's (2009) article, "A Daoist Perspective on Internationalizing Curriculum," provides a comprehensive review of scholars' articles on internationalizing curriculum. Li identifies a common theme of continuous becoming through converging and diverging movement in the field of internationalizing curriculum. She views the area of internationalizing curriculum as a Daoist sphere that has been broken by the converging force of colonization. Li argues that a diverging force is necessary to restore balance to the sphere, and this requires introducing alternative ways of thinking and non-Western tradition of knowing into a curriculum. This diverging force allows for intersubjective becoming and fosters a more balanced and diverse approach to curriculum development. In another article, "Daoism, Narrative Inquiry, and a Curriculum of Peace Education," Li (2010) conducts an in-depth analysis of the peace-related principles conveyed by the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. Li explores the benevolent nature of all human beings and the Daoist greater peace. She suggests that these peace-related principles can be integrated into a curriculum of peace education,

emphasizing peaceful interactions, sympathetic understanding, and cultural creativity among individuals from different cultural backgrounds. Li's work demonstrates the potential of incorporating Daoist principles into cross-cultural teacher education and peace education curriculum.

Orlando Nang Kwok Ho's (2022) article, "Laozi for Higher Education on Sustainability: Its Principles, Logic, and Holistic Relevance," discusses certain Daoist principles, particularly sustainability, in the Daoist curriculum. Ho highlights the limited presence of courses in Hong Kong that directly engage with the *Dao De Jing* and its practical application in contemporary society. Ho argues for the incorporation of the Daoist principle of sustainability into the curriculum, emphasizing the interconnected relationship between nature and humanity. Ho believes that introducing Laozi to students is important because they provide a holistic counter-framework of the educational objectives and confront the human pursuit of innovation and progress, ultimately fostering environmentally responsible and socially conscious individuals in higher education.

Overall, these works by Li and Ho shed light on the importance of integrating Daoist principles into intercultural curriculum, emphasizing balance, peace, sustainability, and a holistic perspective in higher education.

Regarding Daoist pedagogy, I have found scholarly works of Yu, Wang, Shin and Yang, and Eppert to be relevant to my research. Yu's (2018) book, *The Taoist Pedagogy of Pathmarks*, draws on the concept of *Wu Wei* to promote a non-coercive teaching approach. This approach emphasizes creating a voidness in the classroom that encourages students to engage in self-directed learning by responding to their unique paths. Yu also highlights the Daoist concept of nothingness/emptiness (*Wu*) and argues that a Daoist pedagogy is rooted in the emergence of

“holes” of unknowing in students, teachers, and curriculum. By acknowledging and embracing these empty spaces or “holes,” teachers can create an environment in which students are free to explore and interpret concepts on their own terms.

Wang (2022) builds on the Daoist philosophy of creativity to elaborate on her conception of a Daoist pedagogy. In her article, “Daoist Creativity Through Interconnectedness and Relational Dynamics in Pedagogy,” she proposes that her conception of Daoist pedagogy is composed of three interrelated aspects: creative learning (cosmic), creative personhood (human), and creative harmony (ethical), which correspond respectively to the three key elements of Daoist creativity: self-creativity, co-creativity, and virtuous creativity. Wang emphasizes the dynamic interactions between students, texts, nature, and society, viewing self-creativity as a cosmic process influenced by the interplay between Yin and Yang. She suggests that teachers should provide more opportunities for students to engage with poetry, metaphors, fables, and symbols to foster students’ analogical/associative thinking. Co-creativity emphasizes spontaneity and relationality, fostered through aesthetic imagination, mindful reflection on nature, emotional resonance, and embodied self-knowledge. Virtuous creativity, on the other hand, focuses on ethical orientation toward social harmony and ecological sustainability. Wang’s emphasis on diversity in texts and perspectives resonates with my research, as it highlights the importance of cultivating cultural associations and affinities across diverse texts.

Ryan Shin and Xuhao Yang (2021) explores a Daoist pedagogy in art education by drawing upon three principles of Daoist philosophy: nonaction (*Wu Wei*), the interdependence of two opposites, and nonlinguistic representation. These principles emphasize the interconnectedness and interdependence of all things and emphasize the agency of nonhuman bodies and materials in the learning process. By deprivileging human agency and embracing the

complementary nature of different elements, art educators can foster a holistic understanding of art that goes beyond linguistic interpretations. Their insights hold relevance when applied to the context of Shakespearean classes, where performance-oriented pedagogies are frequently employed. By incorporating Daoist principles, such as the Yin-Yang interdependence and the nonlinguistic representations, students can develop a better understanding of the non-human dimensions inherent in a play. This includes appreciating the power of affect, the influential role of props and their affective properties, and the interconnectedness of human and non-human agencies. This approach emphasizes transcending linguistic boundaries and engage students with various aspects of theatrical expression.

Eppert's scholarship provides valuable insights into the incorporation of Eastern thoughts into humanities education. In her article on mindful and contemplative engagement for social/environmental transformation, Eppert (2013) argues that Daoist contemplative practices can address our moral dis-ease and fragmentation. By embracing Daoism's "environmentally participatory worldview" (p. 348), students can create meaningful pathways to significant personal, social, and ecological renewal (p. 349). In another article entitled "Remembering Our (Re) Source," Eppert (2009) explores the inherent virtues and power of water in Daoist texts and proposes a pedagogical framework of witnessing. Specifically, she identifies four themes – reconciliation, nonaction, integrity, and reverence – as guidance principles for a pedagogy centered on contemplative, embodied reflection that emphasizes the holistic interconnectedness of all things. She suggests that teachers should prioritize helping students witness the integrity of opposites as they encounter nature. This process of witnessing can facilitate students' self-cultivation and foster social transformation. In her works, Eppert highlights the importance of fostering a harmonious relationship with nature and with one another, guided by the Daoist spirit

of complementary harmony. By embracing this spirit, students can cultivate a responsible, responsive, and empathetic reading approach to literary works.

The works of the above scholars have the potential to inform my research by providing practical examples of how the ancient Daoist philosophical ideas can be incorporated into curricular practices.

To complement the limited availability of Daoism curriculum in higher education scholarship, I would like to share my personal experience of auditing Professor Daniel Fried's course, "Daoism and Chinese Civilization," at University of Alberta during my current program of study.

Professor Fried's course explored a wide range of topics, including the distinction of Daoism and Confucianism, Daoist ethics, Daoist religion, Daoist poems of Li Bai, visual culture of calligraphy and Daoist paintings, as well as the relationship between Daoism and Chinese Medicine. One memorable aspect of the course was Professor Fried's guidance in reading poems of Li Bai, including "ancient poem No. 9" (《古风五十九首》9), "Mourning Chao" (《哭晁卿衡》), "Looking for Yung, the Recluse Master" (《寻雍尊师隐居》). These poems allowed us to see Daoist themes and images that were also present in the Daoist images and themes from the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, including the image of streams suggesting endless death and rebirth, the theme of constant change, the image of afterlife and the island of immortals, the image of "wandering," and so on. Through these poems, Li Bai conveyed a sense of carefree, ecstatic, imaginative, and romantic style that celebrated spontaneity. For instance, in "Looking for Yung, the Recluse Master," Li Bai attempted to visit a Daoist hermit on a mountain, but he never actually meets the recluse. Professor Fried explained the Chinese word for *quan* (泉, spring) in the poem and demonstrated that it could be read metaphorically as Li Bai being close

to the source (源泉) and origin of something important in life. It could also be interpreted as having a Daoist ending where one understands that life is full of unexpected twists and turns, and that one should rely on one's expectations.

Professor Fried's approach to reading Daoist poetry has inspired me to revisit the poems of Li Bai and Tao Qian as I was writing the first chapter of this thesis. As I re-read their familiar poems, I was transported back to my elementary and junior high school years in China, where I first encountered them through the *Yuwen* curriculum. As Professor Fried emphasized in his course, Li Bai and Tao Qian are renowned for their ability to invoke Daoist ideas to portray nature and their lives as literary recluses. Therefore, I cannot omit them from my recollection. Additionally, introducing their poems in the first chapter would help my readers understand from the very start that Daoist culture has been deeply ingrained in the minds of Chinese children through the *Yuwen* curriculum in the school education.

After providing an overview of the incorporation of Daoism philosophy in curriculum studies, I shift the focus to Shakespeare curriculum studies. In exploring literature related to teaching Shakespeare within the curriculum of higher education, I find that it is closely intertwined with diverse literary critical theories of the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the West. As highlighted by Gerald Graff, the 20<sup>th</sup> century in the Western context witnessed a remarkable "theory explosion" (cited in Zhang, 1998, p. 118). These theories include New Criticism, Historicism, Feminism, Psychoanalysis, Poststructuralism, and others. These literary criticisms have enabled interpretations of Shakespeare's plays from distinct perspectives, igniting engaging discussions in the classroom on themes that deeply resonate with the human experience.

During my studies of Shakespeare at Shanghai International Studies University, my supervisor, Professor Shi, incorporated not only Western critical theories in his lectures on

*Hamlet*, *King Lear*, *Othello*, and sonnets, but also drew upon lines from the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Dao De Jing* to facilitate a comparison between Chinese traditional wisdom and the celebration of reason and intellectualism found in Shakespeare's plays. In Chapter One, I recalled his lecturing style. Here, I would like to share one example that remains fresh in my memory. When interpreting Albany's line in *King Lear* "Striving to better, oft we mar what's well" (1.4.369), Professor Shi discussed with us how this wisdom can be read in conjunction with the wisdom found in the *Dao De Jing*. For instance, he spontaneously recited lines such as "one who knows how to stop will not place himself in danger" (知止不殆，可以长久) (Chapter 44 of the *Dao De Jing*) and "Nothing causes greater disaster than not being content, and nothing brings about greater blame than craving something" (祸莫大于不知足；咎莫大于欲得) (Chapter 46 of the *Dao De Jing*) (Lynn, 1999, p. 138 & p. 140). He pointed out that both Laozi and Shakespeare teach us that excessive ambition in the pursuit of greater achievements may result in the loss of what one already possesses. Therefore, there are limits to everything, and one should not surpass these limits, as doing so may lead to outcomes that are opposite of what one desires.

In both Chinese and Western classrooms, lecturing pedagogy plays a crucial role in teaching Shakespeare at the higher education level. Shakespearean scholars and educators firmly believe that the instructor's guidance is essential in guiding and facilitating students' exploration of Shakespeare's works. In my research, I came across a book, *Teaching Shakespeare: Passing it on*, edited by G. B. Shand (2009). The book is a collection of articles and essays written by distinguished professors in North American and European Shakespearean studies. Shakespearean scholars and educators such as David Bevington (1931-2019), Russ McDonald, Alexander Leggatt, Frances E. Dolan, among others, share their teaching approaches and reflect on the



significance of teaching Shakespeare in university classrooms. They firmly believe that the instructor's guidance is essential in guiding and facilitating students' exploration of Shakespeare's works. For instance, Bevington (2009) highlights the importance of close reading. Russ McDonald (2009) challenges Paulo Freire's banking theory of education and advocates for the importance of authoritative lecturing in the Shakespearean classroom, arguing that the instructor's authority should be acknowledged to sustain student engagement. Alexander Leggatt (2009) employs open-ended questions to foster critical thinking and student-led discussions. These educators' emphasis on close reading reminds me of my own experience studying Shakespeare at Brown University (2011-2012), where I attended Professor Kahn's seminars on "Shakespearean Tragedies" and "Shakespeare and Company," and Professor Feerick's lectures on Shakespeare. Both professors highly emphasized the importance of close reading and encouraged active participation in class discussions.

During my current program at the University of Alberta, I audited a course on Shakespeare taught by Professor David Gay. His approach involved literary analysis within Shakespeare's historical context and explored the plays' reception and adaptation in modern times. Professor Gay used selected passages and stage performances from "Drama Online" to engage students, followed by thought-provoking questions that focused on key words, characterization, and themes. He prioritized close reading and encouraged students to discover imagery, figurative language, symmetry, metaphors, sound effect, themes, and characterization. His teaching approach created an interactive, collaborative, and active engagement with the text.

Other scholars, such as Kate McLuskie (2009), argue for a performance-based pedagogy. In China, the Chinese Universities Shakespeare Festival (CUSF) is held annually at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (CUHK). It aims to promote Shakespeare in the Chinese world and

emphasizes the integration of Chinese and Western cultures, as noted by Sarah Olive (2019). Some other scholars emphasize teaching Shakespeare through film, as explored by Barbara Hodgdon (2009).

I briefly mention these various pedagogical approaches to highlight the diverse landscape in which Shakespeare can be approached in higher education classrooms. The choice of approach depends on students' reading levels, interests, receptions, and the purpose of studying Shakespeare. As my approach is situated within curriculum studies, I am less concerned with prescriptive approaches to teaching Shakespeare, but I am more interested in exploring the experiential or embodied understanding of reading Shakespeare's plays from a Daoist lens.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I introduced key concepts in Daoist philosophy, including *Dao*, *De*, *ziran*, Yin-Yang, *Wu Wei*, and *Wu*. I explored intercultural studies involving China and the West. I provided a brief overview of Chinese scholars' Confucian, Marxist, and humanistic engagements with Shakespeare's plays. More significantly, I conducted an in-depth review of scholars' Daoist engagement with Shakespeare's plays. Finally, I presented scholarly works that explore the Daoism and Shakespeare curricula and pedagogies within higher education. This comprehensive literature review has provided valuable insights into the achievements of my predecessors in both China and the West, which will guide and inspire my own research. In the next chapter, I will discuss the methodology of my research study.

## Chapter Four: Hermeneutic Inquiry

In the previous chapter, I have examined key bodies of literature on Daoist philosophy, Shakespearean studies, intercultural studies, and Daoist engagements with Shakespeare's plays, as well as intercultural curriculum and pedagogy related to Daoism and Shakespeare. As a form of qualitative research, hermeneutic inquiry shares many common characteristics with other forms of qualitative inquiry while also having its distinct features. Generally speaking, qualitative inquiry focuses on a central event or phenomena, does not set specific goals, and avoids hypotheses or predictions that involve variables. Instead, qualitative research questions are relatively broad, aiming to explore a phenomenon or address an issue, often using exploratory verbs such as *explore*, *discover*, *generate*, and *describe*. In qualitative research, research questions can evolve throughout the study, and the setting and participants must be appropriately described, with selection procedures aligned with the research questions. Researchers must also engage deeply and for prolonged periods with participants. Hermeneutic inquiry, while sharing these foundational aspects with other forms of qualitative inquiry, has its own features. As Smith (1991&2010/2020) and Moules et al (2015) emphasize, hermeneutic inquiry is centered on understanding, specifically, understanding the meaning of living in the world and everyday involvement that renders the meaning of something accessible to all. Besides, unlike qualitative inquiry that aims to induce themes, hermeneutics seeks to deepen understanding of a topic. During the process of hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher reflects on and takes an account of his or her dialogical journey towards self-transformation (Smith, 1991/2020, p. 56). Hermeneutic inquiry allows the topic to be perceived and practiced in new and different ways (Moules et al., 2015, p. 119).

This chapter begins with presenting my methodology of hermeneutic inquiry for this research. Then, I outline the selection of participants, data collection methods, and data analysis. Furthermore, I address the practice of hermeneutic writing, ethical considerations, and verification strategies for ensuring harmony, credibility, and validity in the research process. By detailing these aspects of my methodology, I aim to provide transparency and clarity regarding how I approached my research, while ensuring that my study was conducted ethically and with rigor.

### **Hermeneutic Inquiry as a Methodology**

Moules (2002) argues that “to address methodology means to claim a philosophical ground that guides our research and which accurately reflects interpretive practices within its philosophical traditions” (p. 26). As described in Chapter Two, my research is grounded in intercultural hermeneutics, a theoretical framework that draws on Gadamerian philosophical hermeneutics. This philosophical tradition has been fully recognized by Moules et al. (2015), as it provides valuable resources for supporting dialogue between disparate cultural traditions (p. 153). Given the nature of my research, which has been to explore Chinese educators’ Daoist-informed intercultural engagement with Shakespeare’s plays, hermeneutic inquiry is the most appropriate option for my research, as it seeks to address the “question of human meaning” (Smith, 1991, p. 200) and is “always about understanding, about what it means to be in the world in a particular way” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 75). Through this approach, I aim to facilitate an intercultural reading experience that allows learners to apply illuminative meanings from both cultures to their reflections on the meaning of human life.

Hermeneutic inquiry is a kind of *phronesis* or practical wisdom (Moules et al., 2015, p. 177). It requires that researchers be situated in concrete situations with participants and engage in

deep reflection about the event or moment. According to Gadamer (1975), *phronesis* involves “understanding” and “the virtue of thoughtful reflection” (p. 288). Both understanding and thoughtful reflection come from researcher’s moral knowledge and ethical virtues (p. 22). To understand a moment or event in concrete situations, researchers require not only moral knowledge, which Gadamer believes “is perhaps the fundamental form of experience” (pp. 287-288), but also ethical virtues, such as openness, reflectiveness, responsibility, and humility, in their interactions with the other. It is essential for researchers to establish a harmonious relationship with the other in order to comprehend the meaning of the event or moment, which can help us gain deeper insight into human life.

Hermeneutic inquiry does not seek to construct an ultimate meaning in a predetermined way. Instead, researchers aim to uncover the meanings that are entailed within the lived experiences of participants (Jardine, 2015, p. 237). We live in a vibrant world, full of images, concepts, familiar ties, ancestries, and spirits, whose meanings cannot be singularly constructed or predetermined. Rather, an evoked meaning ignites the reader’s “[r]ich and memorable experience” (p. 237). Attempts to construct meaning can impede researchers’ engagement with meaning, and thus deprive them of the opportunity to associate meaning with their own life.

Moules et al. (2015) emphasize the nature of *aletheia* in hermeneutic inquiry. *Aletheia* has three implications: a portal or opening, an enlivening, and a remembering (p. 77). In my case, the intercultural dialogue between Daoism and Shakespeare became a portal or an opening that beckoned me to open myself to it, and in the process of opening, participants and I recalled buried experience and enlivened the topic by relating it to the *here and now* of our lives.

Davey (2006) views hermeneutic inquiry as a “practice of understanding” and “a practice of encounter and engagement” (p. 31), where researchers delve into the meaning of human

existence in the world and gain insight into the interrelatedness of different meanings. According to Davey, hermeneutic inquiry prompts researchers “to think differently” by remaining open to the speculative disclosure of participants (p. 26). In the context of my research, I opened myself to both the participants and the topic, in order to gain an intensive understanding and interpretation of their reading experience.

Grondin (1994) recommends that in hermeneutic inquiry, the researcher recognizes and identifies the sameness, affinities, and resonances in what participants say as they ring “true” to the listener (p. x). Similarly, Moules (2002) advises the researcher-listener to sense and listen for familiarity, kinship, resonance, and likeness in the interview (p. 5). In line with their recommendations, I was attentive to what the participants shared about the intercultural dialogue and captured those resonances that rang “true” to me.

Informed by hermeneutic scholarship, it becomes evident that conducting proper hermeneutic work requires a recognition that there is no permanent grounding (Jardine, 2015 & 2016; Smith, 1991; Moules et al., 2002 & 2015; Davey, 2006; Grondin, 1994). According to Gadamer (1975), the topic to be explored can only “break forth” (p. 451) with meanings and implications. This lack of permanent grounding means that hermeneutic researchers are, in Jardine’s (2016) words, “homeless wanderers” (p. 6), with the knower and the known ensnarled in the world and hidden from view (p. 6). It is impossible to look for generalized themes, analyze them on solid grounding, and then put them into clear-cut categories. Rather, the researcher presents all conceivable aspects and visions of the topic, and then the implications of the truth are revealed around it.

As a researcher, I endeavored to play the role of Hermes, moving playfully and freely between the data gathered and the meaning of human life that I intended to convey to readers

through interpretive writing. As Smith (1999) writes, “Hermes, after all, is the border crosser” (p. 47). He continues to write, “Hermes and I found each other ... the real work of our time may be defined by an ability to mediate across boundaries and differences” (pp. 202-203). By referencing Hermes, Smith is alluding to the Greek god of communication and mediation, suggesting that the ability to mediate across boundaries and differences is a key skill for the hermeneutic work. He cautions against relying solely on singular identities and emphasizes the importance of recognizing the presence of an Other in shaping our shared future. He suggests that unless we can reinterpret the presence of an Other, we will only be able to see a limited part of the story (p. 203). Therefore, to fully understand and engage with the world around us, it is essential to approach interpretation and understanding with an openness to different perspectives and experiences.

### **Selection of Participants**

Moules (2002) and Moules et al. (2015) emphasize the importance of selecting participants purposefully in hermeneutic inquiry. They argue that the validity of hermeneutic inquiry is not determined by the number of participants “but by the completeness of examining the topic under study” (2002, p. 28). Smith (1991) contends that the soundness of a hermeneutic inquiry depends on the fullness and depth of the interpretation, which expands and deepens our understanding. Thus, in my research, I carefully selected four participants who were able to offer diverse perspectives and rich experiences related to the topic under study. These Chinese educators possess notable qualifications: intensive reading experience with Shakespeare’s plays, profound knowledge of Daoist philosophy, and over a decade or two decades of teaching experience at a university in China. Their rich teaching experience enabled them to motivate and encourage students to engage in intercultural dialogues and reflect upon the intricacies of human

life. Furthermore, all participants had prior experience studying and conducting research in Western countries. Throughout interviews, the primary language of communication was Chinese, facilitating robust exchanges of ideas and precise understanding. These qualifications were pivotal to their involvement in the research study. As Jardine (2000) recognizes, the aim of education is to “bring forth (educare)” new life and engender a deeper understanding of human life (p. 115). Therefore, the selected participants’ reading, teaching, and life experience are valuable in the intercultural dialogue and the exploration of the complexity of human life through the lens of Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare’s plays.

### **Data Collection Methods**

In my hermeneutic inquiry, I utilized various methods for data collection, which were specific to my research questions and data-collection techniques. These methods included conversational interviews, text analysis, note-taking, and reflective journal writing. To ensure that my research was conducted in accordance with established principles of hermeneutics, I drew on the work of Moules et al. (2015) in their book *Conducting Hermeneutic Research*. This book offers exemplary hermeneutic research practices that are grounded in Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics and provides specific procedures that researchers can employ in their research.

Moules et al. (2015) emphasize the crucial role of conversational interviews in data collection for hermeneutic research, as it involves dialectic and fosters a deep understanding of the topic. They argue that the fusion of horizons can only happen through dialogue and that understanding begins with an address that expands as the interconnections of the topic become apparent (p. 83). Therefore, I conducted conversational interviews to elicit the participants’ perceptions and insights. Let me provide specific details in the subsequent sub-sections.



***Method Number 1: Interview***

Interview is a common method of conducting hermeneutic inquiry. The art of questioning and of seeking truth through dialogue is central to Gadamer's philosophy. In genuine dialogue, there are no rigid methods or structures, and language is full of dialectics. According to Moules et al. (2015), Gadamer's notion of genuine dialogue or conversation applies to research interviews in hermeneutic inquiry (p. 94). Jardine (2000) also emphasizes that meaning is achieved through referential and relational negotiations during hermeneutic interviewing (p. 197). To elicit the views of the participants, Creswell (2009) suggests using broad, open-ended questions or semi-structured or even unstructured interviews (p. 181).

I conducted one individual interview with each participant. With their consent, I recorded the audio of the interviews through a voice recorder. After each interview, I offered the participants the opportunity to request the deletion of any part of my transcription of the interview if they were not satisfied with it. Additionally, I expressed my sincere gratitude to them for sharing their knowledge and insights on the topic.

According to Moules et al. (2015), conducting a well-designed hermeneutic interview is essential to the success of the research. While an interview is a conversation, it is not the same as the conversation that we have with our families and friends. The word "conversation" comes from the Latin word "*conversa*," which means "turning around together" (Moules & Taylor, 2021, p. 8). For Moules and Taylor, this means that both the researcher and participants are engaged in a collaborative process of exploring the research topic.

In my research, I engaged my participants in a dialogue that centered on the topic of intercultural reading experience. Using Gadamer's (1975) analogy of a true game,<sup>33</sup> I understand that interviews must stay focused on the research topic. I carefully listened to my participants while guiding the conversation to the topic.

Data in hermeneutic inquiry is mainly gathered from deep, conversational interviews, which prioritize the role of language. In hermeneutic research, language plays an ontological role as the researcher seeks to interpret the meanings and experiences of the participants. Language is not just a tool for communication and information exchange; it has a speculative nature. Gadamer (1975) argues that every word "carries with it the unsaid" (p. 416). Words are not isolated entities but are interconnected with inherited meanings associated with other words. Similarly, Moules (2002) notes that the speculative nature of language "mirrors the motivation of the speaker" (p. 19). For Jardine (2015), language is the fertile ground for understanding and conversations to occur. Jardine and Field (1996) see language as "a living, multivocal, ambiguous community of relations in which [the researcher, the participants,] and the wisdom of the world are mutually engaged" (p. 257).

A deep, conversational interview is also characterized by deep listening. Moules et al. (2015) note that deep listening can lead to a deep understanding of the topic (p. 89). The researcher must listen carefully to what participants say to gain new insights into the phenomenon being studied (p. 123). In the context of my research, deep listening allowed me to

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<sup>33</sup> Gadamer (1975) elaborates on the nature of dialogue, which is to reveal the truth through a vivid analogy of game. In a genuine game, players are not the subject of the game because they do not control the game. On the contrary, the subject of the game is the game itself, especially the rules which determine how the players play the game or engage with the game. In the same way, interlocutors in a dialogue do not control the dialogue, but the dialogue develops itself upon the verbal play of the interlocutors (p. 93), that is, the verbal participation. The analogy of the game sheds light on the being of the work of art that requires the reader's participation through the revelation of the subject matter. I have referred to his analogy of game in Chapter Two.

be fully present and attentive throughout the interview. By being open, deferential, and respectful to the participants' perspectives, I was able to discern hidden meanings that might have been missed otherwise and identify crucial moments in the conversation. This approach also enabled me to make informed decisions about when to ask questions, how to follow the conversation, and when to engage participants in interpretation. Additionally, I used my deep listening skills to identify opportunities to build rapport with the participants, thereby fostering a collaborative and productive research relationship.

Deep, conversational interviewing differs from highly structured interviews in that it allows space for participants to reflect thoughtfully and expands the horizons that can be fused. As knowledge in hermeneutic inquiry is co-created with research participants through the fusion of horizons, I was mindful of accepting the differences between my horizons and those of my participants. As Moules et al. (2015) and Moules & Taylor (2021) remind us, even if participants' ideas differ from what the interviewer has expected or believed, deep listening to their truth is paramount. Without differences, there would be no expansion of horizon on the part of the researcher, and by fusing horizons through a collaborative interpretive process between the hermeneutic researcher and participants, a more profound understanding of the experiences being studied can be hopefully achieved (VanLeeuwen, 2017, p. 5).

### ***Method Number 2: Note-taking***

To ensure accurate data collection and analysis, I took detailed notes during each conversational interview. M. T. Muswazi and E. Nhamo (2013) suggest that note-taking can be a useful tool for organizing information and keeping it easily accessible, but it should be done in a way that does not distract participants or cause the research to miss some important information (p. 15). To strike a balance between these concerns, I used an intermediary approach.

Specifically speaking, I devised a dual-column format: in the left column, I wrote down transcribed narrative discourses, and in the right column, I recorded brief summaries of noteworthy statements while also including additional details such as participants' verbal expressions and gestures, emerging interpretations, and my own reflections on ethical considerations. Moules et al. (2015) also suggest that hermeneutic researchers can take note of initial ideas and possible meanings that emerge during the conversation (p. 126).

After each interview, I reviewed my notes and prepared a more comprehensive summary of the conversation, making sure to capture any nuances or "ontological pointings" (Smith, 1983, p. 96) emerged during the discussions. These detailed notes allowed me to compare and contrast data from different interviews, identify patterns and trends across participants, and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon being studied.

### ***Method Number 3: Reflective Journal***

Moules et al., (2015), Creswell (2009), and VanLeeuwen (2017) suggest that researchers should keep a reflective journal or memos as a method to improve their research. Research journals can be used to record the reflexivity of the researcher and can include the research process, personal learning, and confusion as part of the personal process of thinking about the topic. According to Moules et al. (2015), writing in the early stage will lead to more reading and thinking, and in the next stage of data analysis, the reflective journal can be successively added and expanded. Over time, emergent ideas, associations, and new ways of seeing things and pondering things can be structured, which Gadamer (1975) refers to as a "transformation into structure" (p. 101).

In my research journal, I included my reflections on the scholarship I read, memories of my lived experiences, and reflections from the conversations. I also recorded questions that

emerged from listening to recorded conversations and my notes from reading and re-reading data. During the data analysis stage, my reflective journal became my interpretive musings, and I added new ideas, phrases, or references that were incorporated into the context. The reflective journal and interpretive musings helped to generate new interpretive possibilities and develop a deeper understanding of the phenomenon under study.

### **Data Analysis**

Data analysis in hermeneutic inquiry begins as soon as data collection starts, as noted by VanLeeuwen (2017, p. 15). For Moules et al. (2015), data analysis is synonymous with interpretation in hermeneutic research (p. 117). According to Moules (2002), the researcher is immersed in the “dynamic and evolving interaction with the data” (p. 30) throughout the interpretation process. This involves reading and re-reading all the recorded texts, reflecting on the words, and creating general impressions. The researcher looks for “resonances, familiarities, differences, newness, and echoes” (p. 29), paying attention to the particular instances rather than seeking generalized themes.

During the process of data collection, the data is presented as “separated objects of knowledge” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 124). As I engaged in data analysis, I maintained a distance from these objects of knowledge while seeking to uncover the underlying connections and interrelations between them.

Nonetheless, I also recognize that divergence is “a principle of interpretive work” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 125). Hermeneutic inquiry involves opening up a web of associations, rather than limiting oneself to a single theme. This divergent approach should not be viewed as a weakness, but rather as a necessary driving force that would compel me to carefully read and re-

read transcripts, and to record my musings and reflections. Through this process, I gained a deeper understanding of the data and to generate new interpretive possibilities.

### ***Preparing and (Re-)reading Transcripts***

The initial phase of data analysis involved preparing and reading and re-reading interview transcripts. I recorded manually any non-verbal languages, such as silences, facial expressions, and gestures that provided hints to my interpretation of the data.

To establish a robust hermeneutic understanding of participants' experiences and ideas, it is essential to start with a thorough and even naïve comprehension of the whole and the parts. Reading and re-reading primary documents such as interview transcripts, summaries, and the reflective journal are integral to this initial stage. As I engaged with these documents, I strove to situate participants' horizons by exploring the meaning and understanding of their experiences and ideas. This required taking the time to allow their voices to reveal themselves throughout the data interpretation process. By actively listening to participants' perspectives and remaining open to the emerging themes and patterns, I have gained a deeper understanding of their experiences and enrich my analysis.

### ***Writing Interpretive Musings***

When the interviews were transcribed verbatim, I began to engage in a process of reflection and note-taking, which was not solely based on my subjective thinking or personal preferences. In fact, when I read the transcripts, I had already begun interpretive musings, and the initial reflective journal provoked me to read the transcript again and again and wrote down more musings and refreshed ideas. As previously mentioned, the process of transformation into structure happened over time. Through this process, the original meanings of the data gradually

became more organized and coherent, leading to the emergence of a new understanding of (part of) the topic.

In hermeneutic inquiry, my aim is not to obtain information or solve a problem. Rather, I seek to present my understanding of others' experiences and make sense of them. This is a process that involves engaging with human existence and experience. Given this orientation, I was mindful not to include information or facts that I had learned from participants in my interpretive musings. I recognize that there are infinite ambiguities and uncertainties inherent in the text and transcripts, and that my own understanding is limited by my social, historical, and cultural prejudices. However, these prejudices are also valuable resources, allowing me to approach the interpretive process with an open mind. Gadamer (1975) argues that prejudice is the condition for understanding a text, an experience, or a topic (p. 245), stating explicitly that "it is necessary to rehabilitate the concept of prejudice and recognize that there are legitimate prejudices" (p. 246). There are legitimate prejudices and false prejudices. Only legitimate prejudices leave researchers open to dialogue, while false prejudices hinder or close off dialogue. Therefore, maintaining an open mind means allowing new understandings to emerge as interlocutors exchange ideas on the topic. As Gadamer states that "[t]he characteristic of every true conversation is that each opens himself to the other person, truly accepts his point of view as worthy of consideration and gets inside the other, so that he understands not a particular individual, but what he says" (p. 347). Maintaining an open mind also taught me to reflect on my own engagement with the topic and remain open to the potential surprise of uncovering my prejudices through my interactions with participants. In my reflections, I also focused on my understanding of what participants have said and left behind, as well as how my initial interpretations were challenged, refined, or transformed.

### ***Developing Interpretations***

Hermeneutic work is fundamentally concerned with understanding (Smith, 1999). Through this type of inquiry, we seek to comprehend other people's thoughts and actions within the context of our shared language and culture. In doing so, we inevitably come to understand ourselves better. As Smith explains, hermeneutics is interested in the "question of human meaning and how we might make sense of our lives in such a way that life can go on" (p. 41). By developing our understanding and making sense of the human world, we empower ourselves to engage with the world creatively and construct new meanings.

According to Hoy, good hermeneutic work can uncover "unnoticed features" and reveal "implicit self-understanding" (cited in Moules et al., 2015, p. 119). This means that the interpretive process can help the reader to see the subtle connections between their experiences and the world around them, leading to a deeper understanding of the self. The task of the hermeneutic researcher is to interpret the data generated and to present it in a way that allows the reader to see the topic differently. Through the researcher's data interpretation or analysis, the reader is invited on a journey into the topic, experiencing images, perceptions, and aesthetic experience that resonate with them, evoke their curiosity, and inspire them to respond and take action.

When developing my interpretations, I refrained from relying on the identification of themes or codes. Instead, I focused on generating a deep understanding of the topic through my interpretations, as recommended by Moules et al. (2015) who state that "[i]nterpretation serves an understanding of the topic" (p. 129). My objective is to present my understanding and deepen the reader's understanding of the topic so that the topic can be seen in a new way or differently from what has been conceived before. As emphasized by Moules et al. (2015), strong



interpretations arise from relying on what has been expressed to generate new and valuable understanding of the topic (p. 124).

When developing my interpretations, I also grappled with the issue of the hermeneutic circle. Moules (2002) explains that the hermeneutic circle is not a method for discovering meaning, but rather a process of interpretation that is situated within the researcher. As I entered the circle, I brought with me my own cultural background, prejudices, anticipations, and experiences. These factors did not necessarily prevent me from reaching new or different understandings. Rather, they shaped the movement of the circle itself. The hermeneutic circle had begun when I was first struck by the topic at hand and expanded as I turned and interacted with the data I gathered. VanLeeuwen (2017) adds that the researcher's cultural traditions and prior knowledge are important for enabling understanding within the hermeneutic circle (p. 5). As my participants brought their experiences and perspectives in the interviews, the intercultural dialogue between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* expanded, and the hermeneutic circle was evolving and growing.

### **Hermeneutic Writing**

Writing in a hermeneutic way can be both illuminating and tough. According to Moules et al. (2015), hermeneutic writing is characterized by “imaginative, creative, engaging, poignant, and stimulating” nature, but it can also be “disconcerting and tragic” (p. 131). The paradoxical nature arises from the *aletheic* essence of hermeneutics itself. In the act of revealing something in the writing, something else may be obscured or silenced, similar to how opening a lid from a well conceals the other side of the lid. Hermeneutic writing is a “work of *aletheia* – to simultaneously reveal one thing while concealing another” (p. 131). However, despite the paradox, a deeper truth can be revealed through this interplay between opening up and closing

off, between revealing and concealing (Jardine, 2015, p. 249). A rich, full, and fruitful interpretive writing livens up, enlivens, and illuminates the readers' new understanding, turning what was once mundane, ordinary, boring, and deadly (lethal) into something vibrant and alive.

Smith (1999) emphasizes the importance of producing "strong" hermeneutic writing (p. 42). Because hermeneutic work involves a sense of responsibility to make proposals about the world, Smith argues that hermeneutic writing must be strong enough to deepen our collective understanding of the life-world. In his view, hermeneutic writing seeks to inspire new perspectives and ideas while also honoring tradition, resulting in fresh forms of interaction and dialogue regarding the world we share (p. 42).

When I attempted to write in a hermeneutic way, I was mindful of at least two deliberate practices that I employed in my writing. The first practice was the use of metaphor. Far from being a mere figure of speech confined to literary works, metaphor is an essential component of philosophical writing, helping to express complex and abstract ideas and concepts (Zhang, 1992, pp. 37-43). In hermeneutic writing, metaphors help to articulate our relationship with the world and to convey the "nuanced character of experience" (Moules et al., 2015, p. 133). As Moules et al. (2015) recognize, if used judiciously, metaphors "are rich and relatable ways of conveying interpretations" (p. 133). In previous chapters, I have highlighted the use of metaphors in Daoist texts and Shakespeare's plays, and I also have employed this figurative language to relate my personal experience of engaging with the intercultural dialogues between them.

In hermeneutic writing, tracing etymological roots and meanings is a valuable practice. As Moules et al. (2015) explain, "Etymological tracings are a linguistic example of the importance of history for hermeneutics" (p. 134). By examining the origins and development of words, we can gain a deeper understanding of the historical and cultural contexts that shape

meaning. Smith (1999) emphasizes the significance of etymology, stating that “[i]t is important to gain a sense of the etymological traces carried in words to see what they point to historically” (p. 39). This approach is particularly useful for English words with Latin or Roman roots. By exploring the history, roots, and meanings of words, hermeneutic writers can reveal hidden connections and shed new light on familiar concepts. As Moules et al. (2015) put it, “the more one looks into, under, and behind the word, the more one discovers its history, roots, uses, and meanings” (p. 141).

In addition to metaphors and etymological roots, I also paid close attention to the particulars of the topic in my hermeneutic writing. However, my aim was not to provide an exhaustive or technical account of the topic, but to bring out its unique qualities and show how they were interconnected with the world. As Moules (2002) argues, hermeneutic writing should not allow the topic to “be consumed, constrained, or contained” by the articulation (p. 31). To liberate those that have been trapped in the swamp of forgetting, to set them free, to add wings to a good description so that it opens up a greater horizon of meaning, is the primary task of being a hermeneutic writer. Therefore, my task as a hermeneutic writer is to liberate those aspects of the topic that has been overlooked or forgotten, and to present them in a way that opens up a new horizon of meaning. This does not mean that I mystify or romanticize the topic, but rather that I seek to integrate its various aspects and bring them back to the human experience of the world and the self in a “showing” way.

### **Ethical Considerations**

Anna Trainou (2014) states that most qualitative work does not pose significant harm to participants, and the essential principle for ethics in research is to respect participants' autonomy (p. 65). While I did not anticipate any physical harm to participants in my current research, I

recognized the importance of addressing ethical concerns that may arise during the hermeneutic inquiry process. In this section, I discuss the ethical considerations and the measures to ensure that the research was conducted in an ethical manner.

Hermeneutic research, like other forms of research, requires a responsibility towards the well-being of participants, showing respect to them, and making thoughtful decisions regarding what to ask and what might potentially be harmful in the conversational interview. As Moules et al. (2015) emphasize, ethical conduct in hermeneutic research is the concrete performance of *phronesis* (p. 177). This involves engaging with participants and establishing a relational, intersubjective relationship with them. As they argue, “The character of ethics is relationship” (p. 178).

I adhered to ethical principles when conducting interviews with participants. Firstly, I provided them with clear information regarding the potential risks of participating in this study, ensuring that their involvement was voluntary and free from coercion or pressure. Secondly, I informed participants that the interviews would be recorded and that follow-up interviews might be required. Thirdly, I emphasized that participants' contribution was entirely voluntary, and they had the right to withdraw their participation at any time. These ethical principles are explicitly stated in the information letter (Appendix B). The consent form clearly explains the research's goal and methodology, and I gave participants ample opportunities to ask questions and seek clarification.

### ***My Role as a “Cultural Insider”***

VanLeeuwen (2017) emphasizes the importance of researchers' thoughtful consideration of how their cultural identity influences their inquiry (p. 3). Furthermore, he suggests that hermeneutics can bring “awareness to a researcher's positionality as a cultural insider or

outsider” (p. 3). According to him, a cultural insider collects data within one cultural community while a cultural outsider does this from an outside observer (p. 4). In this research study, I viewed myself as a “cultural insider” due to my shared cultural, linguistic, and ethnic identity with my participants. As a native Chinese speaker, I conducted conversations with them in Mandarin, which facilitated a more natural and understandable exchange of ideas. Being an insider offered me linguistic and cultural advantages, allowing me to flexibly transfer between two languages and cultures during the data collection and interpretation process. As VanLeeuwen recognizes, an insider’s in-depth understanding of the research context and topic provides opportunities to facilitate the fusion of horizons by sharing new perspectives during research conversations (p. 7). As such, I was committed to prioritizing the well-being and autonomy of my participants while also utilizing my insider perspective to extend the range of vision and foster new understanding through the fusion of horizons.

### ***Limitations of Study***

It is important to acknowledge limitations of this study. Firstly, the focus was primarily on the educators’ reading experience, which limited the inclusion of diverse insights and interpretations from students. Secondly, the limited exploration of the educators’ teaching experience was due to the relatively less-traveled journey of incorporating Shakespeare’s plays and Daoist philosophy in literature classes in China. Thirdly, the absence of classroom observations and analysis of student learning outcomes restricted a more comprehensive understanding of the integration of Shakespeare’s plays and Daoist philosophy in literature curriculum. Finally, the exploration of this topic is relatively new in the Chinese context, and the findings may not reflect the experiences and perspectives of all Chinese educators.

### **Verification Strategies for Harmony, Credibility and Validity**

The pursuit of harmony was central to my research, and I approached it with the expectation of gaining new insights and incorporating all developments into the final thesis. Rather than seeking a single, separate, disparate, and fixed truth, I recognized that interpretations may only reveal or disclose a tiny part of truth. During my research, sometimes truth only flickered for a moment and disappeared before I reached out my hands to grasp it; sometimes there were tensions and contradictories, neither this nor that *or* both this and that; sometimes I was fumbling my way in the darkness for a long time. But the belief that truth occurs sporadically when the researcher maintains humility and is always ready to listen for the other's voices and to learn from others sustained my work. Harmony lay in my endless effort to keep philosophical assumptions, the conduct of the research, and the interpretation of the data consistent. I was constantly adjusting them until they opened truth piecemeal, without closing off the revelation of truth.

Credibility was another essential aspect of hermeneutic research. As Moules (2002) suggests, “[a] good interpretation takes the reader to a place that is recognizable, having either been there before, or in simply believing that it is possible” (p. 34). The reader of my thesis will observe that the details of my interpretations were grounded in the data gathered, allowing them to gain new insights into the topic. While the research findings could not be directly replicable across all contexts, they should be transferable, which means that they can be interpreted and applied by readers within their own specific circumstances. As Moules et al. (2015) writes,

We are not seeking an exactly replicable application of findings across any and all domains, so therefore the idea of transferability sometimes has a better fit with hermeneutics. (pp. 175-176)

While the reader of my thesis cannot literally “participate” in the research, they can find “echoes of recognizability” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 173) in the interpretations presented. The reader’s appreciation for the “truth” of an interpretation depends on their awareness that there is “seemliness, fitness, or sense of appropriate character in the work which is recognizable” (Moules, 2002, p. 32).

To ensure credibility, it was essential that the data collected, interpretation made, and research findings were based on the original sources, which included the participants’ verbal language. Therefore, I strove to include the original sources as much as possible in the final dissertation.

While the interpretation must be compelling and persuasive, as a researcher, I refrained from imposing preconceived notions or biases onto the data. Instead, I allowed the data to speak for itself and guide the interpretation. As Moules et al. (2015) explain, the interpretation must “remain true *to* something (the topic) and to interpret in such a way that it is true *of* something (within the topic)” (*italics original*, p. 175).

In my research, I considered the following principles important to achieve validity. Firstly, hermeneutic writing needed to demonstrate an awareness of the contradictions and tensions inherent in human existence, presenting a realistic and authentic portrayal of human life. Secondly, thoroughness and depth were necessary components of hermeneutic writing. This involved addressing all significant problems, examining detailed aspects, and addressing pertinent questions related to the topic in a comprehensive manner. Moreover, hermeneutic writing should show rather than tell, illuminating meanings rather than obscuring them. It was imperative that meanings were allowed to break out, enabling the reader to perceive with their own eyes what was happening, what implications or relationships this image or that image, this

line or that line, had with our understanding of the meaning of human life in the world. Finally, I intended to make use of metaphor and etymology in my writing.

These different verification strategies served to enhance the rigor of the research. While this study refrained from generalizing its conclusions, it presented fully the interpretations so that the study “can be readily applied to other contexts” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 175).

## **Summary**

This chapter delved into the specifics of the methodological approach employed in this study, namely hermeneutic inquiry. The selections of participants, data collection methods, data analysis process, and the practice of hermeneutic writing were discussed in detail. Furthermore, ethical principles were carefully considered in the research, and a set of verification strategies were outlined to ensure the research's harmony, credibility, and validity.

In the next chapter, I will detail the specific “loops” of the research process, including the revision of the entry research questions. I will also introduce the research participants and their backgrounds, such as their upbringing in China, experience of studying in the West, and their engagement with Daoism and Shakespeare literature. Based on the insights gleaned from their narratives, I am inclined to incorporate more of their life and teaching experiences pertinent to their interpretations of the collectively chosen texts, as shared during the conversational interviews. Their stories and narratives will be recorded in a showing way, ensuring the originality and comprehensiveness of the data.



## Chapter Five: Research Process and Research Participants

As a researcher in the field of hermeneutic studies, I am aware that it is imperative to maintain “openness, humility, and genuine engagement” (Ellis, 1998, p. 18) in the hermeneutic inquiry. While I delve deeper into this hermeneutic inquiry of Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare’s plays, I came to realize that there are no concrete rules governing hermeneutic inquiries. Gadamer’s modern hermeneutics provides an instructive and invaluable philosophical guideline for researchers in practice disciplines like education and nursing. Education is the site of hermeneutic application (Moules et al., 2015, p. 50). Over the course of seven years dedicated to writing my candidacy paper and conducting research, I have encountered unexpected surprises and disturbances by dilemmas. These surprises, disturbances, and detours are not surprising to me at all. As Julia Ellis (1998) aptly asserts, “if no surprises occur, we either do not yet ‘see’ what can be uncovered, or we have not yet approached the research participant or situation in a way that respects the way it can show itself” (p. 23). Grondin (2003) similarly characterizes the hermeneutic experience as one that “surprises us”, “knocks us back,” and “confounds our expectations” (p. 117, see Chapter Two).

In the forthcoming section detailing my research process, I will draw upon Ellis’ (1998) metaphorical concept of interpretive inquiry as an unfolding spiral. Borrowing this metaphor, I will elucidate a series of interconnected loops, wherein each single loop mutually and dynamically influences and is influenced by the other. Within this spiralling journey, I hope to reveal some specific instances that have surprised me.

Right now, I would like to provide a brief overview of the preceding chapters. In those chapters, I have navigated my interpretive exploration of Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare’s plays in a way that allows my interpretation to constantly come back to my cultural identity and

to my own experience in life. What I attempted to do is to engage myself with texts from Chinese and Western cultures to foster an “I-Thou” dialogue in a hermeneutic sense. That is, from Shakespeare’s plays, I come back to Daoist philosophy, or *vice versa*, and throughout this dynamic interaction, I connect them to my lived experience, in order to understand an intercultural reading experience from a hermeneutical perspective.

In Hutchinson’ review of Patterson and Williams’s book (2002), *Collecting and Analyzing Qualitative Data: Hermeneutic Principles, Methods, and Case Examples*, Hutchinson writes, “Patterson and Williams explain that hermeneutic research emphasizes individual cases and contextualized description of a phenomenon, in contrast to positivist traditions that seek to identify context-free generalizations” (p. 174). As I delve into the hermeneutics of intercultural reading experience, I acknowledge that I cannot adopt a positivistic and mechanistic stance that posits an absolute truth in the world “outside there” as an objective and valid reality. Rather, as illustrated in the previous chapters, I have elucidated my personal cases of the intercultural reading experience. In this chapter and the subsequent chapters (Chapter Six and Chapter Eight), I shift the focus from my reading experience to the individual cases of my participants’ engagements with Daoism and Shakespeare, as they are the central components of data analysis. Smith (1991) reminds us that the hermeneutic writing is *by* us, not *about* us (see also Moules et al., 2015, p. 120). Echoing this stance, Moules et al. (2015) maintain that the hermeneutic “work is not an autobiography of the researcher” (p. 124). As underscored by Moules et al. (2015), “the responsibility of the researcher” lies in the “careful attention to, selection, and crafting of participant contributions” (p. 124). Given that this research investigates a collective reading experience and that I am a cultural insider, I also incorporate my own lived experience into the data analysis.

## Research Process

Ellis (1998) employs a metaphorical spiral to illustrate the intricate interplay among various stages of interpretive inquiry, including hermeneutic inquiry. She delineates them as interconnected “loops” within the spiral’s structure. In her words, interpretive inquirers can “visualize the process as a series of loops in a spiral. Each loop may represent a separate activity that resembles ‘data collection and interpretation’” (p. 19). This conceptualization of the spiral encompasses two directional arcs: one ascending forward, while the other descending backward. I find Ellis’ depiction of the unfolding spiral and the sample studies she guides her students compelling, and thus, I adopt the notion of “loops” within a spiral to denote the connections between different stages in my research process of data collection and interpretation.

As I look back upon my hermeneutic research process, I recognize that each loop that represents one or more individual inquiry activities influences the next loop and simultaneously is influenced by discoveries made in the preceding loop(s) (Ellis, 1998, p. 20). In the following elaboration, I will present each loop in my spiralling inquiry, elucidating their mutual influences and connections, while also acknowledging the “surprises” and disturbances that have either knocked me back or deepened my understanding.

At the bottom loop of this spiralling inquiry, I proceeded by “doing something” from scratch. A question that continually perplexed me was where and how I could find the suitable participants. “Should I seek them out from high schools in Edmonton?” I asked myself. However, I lacked human resources, and I had no experience of studying in a high school here. I felt helpless. Two memories of observing high school classes in Edmonton surfaced in my mind: one was in February 2018, I observed a graduate classmate’s ELA class at a public inner city high school, and the other was in March 2019, I went to another public inner city high school to

observe an ELA class initially planned to teach Shakespeare but changed to Francis Bacon's *On Revenge*. During the Fall semester of 2018, when I was taking Professor Fidyk's course, "Advanced Research Seminar in Secondary Education I," I conducted an interview with a graduate student who taught *Macbeth* in a high school. In this 30-minute interview, she shared her teaching methods, focusing on aspects such as language, characterization, dualities, and lines for interpretation, as well as her students' engagement with the text. Professor Fidyk assessed my assignment with a full mark (15/15), with comments "excellent + thorough." That interview was conducted as a practice exercise in interviewing techniques and was not specifically intended for hermeneutic inquiry. After completing two years of compulsory courses, I shifted my attention to a hermeneutic inquiry under supervision. I read the words repetitively in *Conducting Hermeneutic Research*: "Hermeneutics seeks the best participants on purpose, while remembering that the topic is not the participants, nor should the writing be a portrait of them" (Moules et al., 2015, p. 90). The words resonated with me, as they underscore the significance of selecting participants who would play pivotal roles and contribute meaningfully to the research outcomes. After obtaining ethical approval, I reached out to four Chinese educators via emails and WeChat. These four participants possess lived experience with Daoism and studied Shakespeare's plays during their undergraduate and graduate studies. Three of them hold Ph. D. degrees in the field of British and American Literature, and one participant holds a Ph. D. degree in Literary Critical Theories and has extensively studied modern hermeneutics. All of them have intercultural communication experience as they all have spent a year studying abroad as visiting scholar. Moreover, individuals with a robust educational background in China possess familiarity with Daoism, particularly texts such as the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. When I explained to them that I am conducting a study on Chinese teachers' intercultural reading experience of

Shakespeare's plays enriched by the wisdom of Daoist philosophy, they willingly agreed to participate in my research without hesitation.

Here, I briefly outline their initial responses to my research using their anonyms, as I will offer detailed introductions of them for the upcoming section on Participants Introduction. Instructor Jane expressed a keen interest in my research due to her passion for comparative literature focusing on Edgar Allan Poe and Lu Xun (鲁迅), as well as her fascination with existentialist philosophy. Instructor Kent is an enthusiast of the *Dao De Jing*. Having been classmates during the Ph. D. program two decades ago, I vividly recalled his passion for Shakespeare's plays, particularly *King Lear* and *Macbeth*. He chose the anonym "Kent" to reflect his admiration for the Earl of Kent from *King Lear* whom he regards as the perfect embodiment of Daoist wisdom of *Wu Wei*. Rebecca, known for her eloquent and poetic style in speaking and writing, eagerly agreed to contribute her expertise in Daoism and Shakespeare to my study, driven by a desire to apply insights gained from my research to her teaching practices. Sophie is well-versed in Shakespeare's complete works and Daoist texts including *Diamond Sutra* (《金刚经》). She generously shared her dissertation on Deconstructionist Misreading Theory, which included a section on Gadamer's modern hermeneutics. Each of them possesses unique qualities: Jane demonstrates a philological inclination because she arouses my attention to linguistic nuances of texts. Kent embodies a realist perspective because he offers keen, and in many cases, humorous insights into his and other people's life through what he reads and studies. Rebecca exudes the quality of a transcendentalist poet because of her eloquently poetic discourses, which always transport me from the mundane to a higher and more spiritual world in our interactions. Sophie is akin to a philosopher because she loves to contemplate the philosophical significance of Chinese and English literary works. She reads them avidly and

seeks deeper meaning and insights on topics such as life and death, the significance of existence, and the aesthetic value of literature.

Having narrowed my focus to “Chinese educators” in the first loop, I moved forward to the second loop. I began the formal recruitment of participants after receiving the Ethics Approval Notification Letter (see Appendix H). Following a short discussion with my participants, we collectively decided to read the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, as these two texts were the most captivating to us. I revised my entry research questions outlined in Chapter One to the following two more specific and formal research questions:

- (1) In what ways do Chinese educators navigate intercultural experience with regard to the *Dao De Jing* and the reading of *Macbeth*?
- (2) What are the implications of Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of *Macbeth* with the *Dao De Jing* for an intercultural curriculum?

Although I initially outlined broad entry questions, I do not consider the effort wasted, as they serve as a foundation for refining and focusing on more specific questions on this loop. As noted by Ellis (1998), entry questions are important in interpretive inquiry projects because they “generally reflect a relationship of care or responsibility and an attitude of openness and good will” (p. 19).

Subsequently, I moved forward to the third loop, where I carefully selected relevant examples from the first three chapters concerning my intercultural reading experience and life experiences. I then shared these examples with my participants via email.

Returned to China, I conducted group meetings and in-person interviews. The first reading group session was convened on November 19<sup>th</sup>, 2023. Focused reading group meetings facilitate deeper exchanges of ideas and experiences on specific texts and enhance collaborative

engagement. Hermeneutically speaking, interpretation is a shared conversation. This focused reading approach aims “not to translate my subjectivity,” but “to deepen our collective understanding” of the topic (Smith, 2020, p. 60).

Gathered in the cozy and quiet living room of my home, we quickly immersed ourselves in an environment of open and relaxed interactions. At the outset of the meeting, I distributed the information letters along with a consent form (please see Appendix B) and requested their signatures. Additionally, I kindly requested that all participants sign a “Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement” (Please see Appendix C). Given that the four participants have already been acquainted with one another, my concerns regarding privacy loss were minimal.

Given their expertise in literature studies and literary theories, grasping the essence of hermeneutic research was readily accessible to them. However, upon reading portions of my paper, one participant (Jane) raised a question about the integration of my life experience into the dissertation. She questioned, “Is this the requirement for an educational dissertation? Typically, we are expected to write an academic paper objectively. Why have you incorporated autobiographical elements?” In response, I explained that participants’ concrete examples are important for hermeneutic inquiry and that hermeneutic understanding is always applied to a concrete situation, such as *this* teacher, *this* student, *this* experience, *this* event, etc. Additionally, in this loop, all participants shared with me the courses they teach at their respective universities, their perceptions on and experience with intercultural communication home and abroad, and their encounter with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. This loop involved gathering their individual stories.

In this meeting, participants freely shared their life experience and insights gained from their teaching profession. Topics of discussion included the impact of the *Dao De Jing* on their

lives, their encounters with *Macbeth* from their Chinese Daoist perspectives, and their experience with intercultural exchanges. For sample guiding questions for this first group meeting, please see Appendix D. This session was a *hermeneutic circle* for open dialogue and fostered mutual learning and exchanges of ideas among participants. Here, I italicize the term “hermeneutic circle” to illustrate its metaphorical meaning and indicate that each one of us enters the circle, listening to and responding to one another’s voices. As a matter of fact, each of us does not only enter this circle, but also stays in the circle by engaging dialogue with others, thus creating a dynamic circle between the group as a *whole* and the individual narrative as *parts*, forming and fostering an oscillating movement between the whole and its parts. As described by Patterson and Williams (2002), the hermeneutic circle is not only a dialogue between the whole and its parts but also between one’s theoretical framework and the phenomenon under investigation (see Hutchinson, 2002, p. 174). I find this idea particularly aligned with my research, as participants’ speeches, consciously and unconsciously, resonates with the ideas conveyed within the theoretical framework elaborated in Chapter Two. Chapter Six will integrate the lived experiences and insights gleaned from participants by aligning them with the theoretic framework of intercultural hermeneutics.

In our hermeneutic circle, participants and I shared and exchanged our experiences of studying in the West. By “West,” I refer primarily to the main countries in North America, specifically the United States and Canada, as well as England. In my discussions with participants, this term is essentially a geographical concept. However, I recognize that this geographical reference often carries an ideological dimension that has been historically misconstrued. The ideological reference is frequently characterized by a binary opposition, where the West is perceived as the One in contrast to the East regarded as the Other. In this



context, the West is often associated, in the minds of contemporary Chinese people, with modernity, technical progress, and superiority in economic and political realms. This binary opposition between West/One (superiority) and East/Other (subordination) is critically examined and challenged in our communication and throughout my thesis. For us Chinese intellectuals, intercultural exchanges and communications promote and transform our understanding of the West. Here, I caught some beautiful moments in our meetings. I will use a black dot “•” to denote the conclusion of the speech. The same formatting will be used in the subsequent chapters.

Instructor Sophie shared her beautiful memories of studying in Britain:

My year as a visiting scholar at the University of Cambridge is a very delightful memory for me. I hold a quite positive impression of Westerners. I don't like to categorize people's personalities based on their nationalities, whether they are British, American, or Chinese, because the differences between individuals are substantial. The Western culture has a robust entrepreneurial spirit, much like the ambitious spirit of Macbeth. On the other hand, the West also has a quiet side, characterized by profound introspection and dialectical thinking about the self. ... At the department that I attended, we had a platform for exchanging ideas every Tuesday morning. I attended every session. They had a theme each time, organizing lectures and discussions on various topics. The organizers and lecturers were retired professors from Cambridge, and mostly their spouses. In many sessions, it was women lecturers who led the sessions. They left me a very warm and hospitable feeling. ... Just a few days ago, a friend posted on WeChat about returning to Cambridge and feeling everything remained unchanged. He shared some photos, and as I viewed them, I felt

tears welled up in my eyes. It seems like the same Cambridge I knew five years ago. Unlike the rapid demolition often seen in Chinese neighborhoods, the historical houses in Cambridge stand tall, some even dating back a century or more. When I resided in one of those homes, it was as if I was part of a lineage spanning generations. The sight of these historic dwellings always left me in awe, marveling at their age. I'm not certain of the precise reasons behind the preservation of these ancient buildings. Could it be that Britain's industrial development has passed the era of bustling demolitions? I find these places immensely appealing. •

Instructor Kent talked about his observations on Western scholars in America and compared them with Chinese scholars regarding academic work:

When I engage with Western scholars in America, I find that they pay great attention to details. As Western scholars like Hillis Miller put it, articles written by Chinese scholars are broad and vague, lacking substance. I also think that articles written by some Chinese scholars present an overarching framework but lack depth in textual interpretation. What's the reason for this? Chinese scholars write articles for academic promotion and advancement, while Western scholars write articles based on genuine discoveries. Genuine discoveries naturally entail attention to details, whereas the pursuit of academic promotion often results in superficial treatment of issues, with a big framework and empty words. •

Rebecca shared a moment of her experience in America which shattered her cultural superiority and highlighted the clash between cultural perspectives:

My belief in cultural superiority was challenged by an encounter with an average American. I couldn't discern his social class, only that he seemed like any ordinary

person from the United States. This awakening came during my time in the United States as a visiting scholar, when once I attended a potluck gathering. As we all gathered to share food and drink, he made a remark that struck me deeply: “Chinese people work so hard every day.” His words shook me to my core, making me realize that our relentless work ethic might be perceived as a threat by others. This moment shattered something within me. In my growth, I had always believed in the importance of global harmony and unity. I assumed that everyone shared this sentiment, especially educated individuals. Yet, this encounter made me realize the true challenge of overcoming cultural differences. In that small living room, my own cultural arrogance collided with his American cultural pride, leaving me feeling unsettled. I didn’t want to argue with him or defend my stance. Instead, I felt a strong desire to return to my motherland and contribute to the betterment of my country. •

In the fourth loop, I conducted four individual interviews with each participant in two weeks. Each interview lasted for over two hours. Three interviews took place at my home, and the fourth one was held at a participant’s home. These interviews delved into the intricate connections between their understanding of the *Dao De Jing* and their lived experiences in China. The interview topics focused on how the *Dao De Jing* has impacted their lives and worldviews, how they interpret their lives from the Daoist philosophy, how their understanding of the *Dao De Jing* informed their reading of *Macbeth*, how they interpreted *Macbeth*, and so on. Furthermore, participants shared their emotional and spiritual responses to reading *Macbeth* from the Daoist cultural perspective. For sample interview guide questions, please see Appendix E. Thanks to the accumulated insights from the previous loops, this loop went smoothly and in cheerful atmosphere.

In the fifth and final loop, we re-convened in a *hermeneutic circle* to further develop our understanding in the second focus group session. This session was conducted on Sunday, December 10<sup>th</sup>, 2023, and we gathered at my home again. We collectively delved further and deeper into our interpretations of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. We shared insights gained from our intercultural encounters and dialogues. For sample guiding questions for this second group meeting, please see Appendix F. These collaborative exchanges further enriched my research “findings”. I use quotation marks on “findings” because I am aware that hermeneutic research does not yield definitive findings. However, its inability to yield final research findings is “indeed its strengths” (Davey, 2006, p. xv).

Throughout the entire research process, I have come to recognize the close interconnection and mutual influences of the five loops. In our conversational interviews and meetings, our focus was consistently on life and on human existence. The Greek word for theory, *theoria*, means behold or contemplate, and this is best reflected in my interactions with participants as we each open ourselves and behold or contemplate our individual and collective life mostly in China while also drawing insights from our respective studying experiences in the West.

The consent granted by four participants allowed me to record our conversational interviews and group meetings. Subsequently, I transcribed these interviews and meetings verbatim to maintain data integrity. Interviews and group meetings were mainly conducted in the Chinese language, with English expressions incorporated as necessary. Some English translations were provided by participants (indicated in brackets following specific narratives), while I did some translations both by myself and through the Google translation tool. Moreover, I assumed responsibility for scrutinizing all the translated texts and editing certain translations to

ensure truthfulness to the original narratives and clarity. Nearly all translations of ancient Chinese poems derive from Stephen Owen's (1996) *An Anthology of Chinese Literature: Beginning to 1911*.<sup>34</sup> Due to my concern regarding the accurate translation of Chinese idioms and fixed phrases, I will include the original Chinese characters in brackets following the translation. This enables readers familiar with the Chinese language to grasp their meanings immediately and would provide better translations, if possible.

During the process of data analysis, I adopted an intermediary approach to dissect the collected data. To be more specific, I devised a dual-column format in my notebook: the left column contains the transcribed narrative speech, while the right column features my interpretations and reflections. I aim to maintain integrity and unity of the transcribed speech while allowing for minor edits to ensure fidelity to each conversation. The transcripts in the left column prioritize the essence of what is being said. Each participant's narrative speech embodies the evocative nature of their personal experiences. Meanwhile, it also points beyond the individual experiences and unveils the ontological disclosure. My interpretations and reflections in the right column pave the way for the substance of Chapter Six and Chapter Eight.

Although I do not include a complete reproduction of my notebook in this dissertation, I have attached an appendix (Appendix G) at the end of the thesis to showcase a page of dual-column format. I find that the intermediary approach offers two advantages. Firstly, it preserves the richness and authenticity of participants' speeches. Secondly, it aligns with the hermeneutic intent, recognizing that the speech possesses the capacity to declare itself explicitly while transcending its immediate boundaries. As aptly noted by Smith (1983), "From a hermeneutic

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<sup>34</sup> I audited the course "Pre-Modern Chinese Literature in Translation" at the Department of East Asian Studies at the University of Alberta. Owen's book is the required textbook in this course. I would like to extend my heartfelt gratitude to the instructor, Dr. Evan Nicoll-Johnson, for introducing me to the intricate and fascinating world of translating Chinese ancient poems, drama, proses, and other literary genres of Chinese literature.

standpoint, the true nature of speech is always to speak beyond itself; that is, speech always points to that which is spoken through it" (p. 95).

The inspiration for adopting this intermediary approach stems from Professor Smith's pioneering work in hermeneutic inquiry over four decades ago. In his 1983 dissertation, Smith emphasized the importance of "ontological pointing," where speech serves as a medium for uncovering deeper truths. He writes:

The "pointing" represents an attempt to highlight and strengthen what it is, ontologically, that is spoken through the speech. This linking of reconstructed narrative with ontological pointing is developed from an attention to what becomes apparent through the transcripts themselves, which is that each conversation can be heard as containing certain identifiable undergirding passions or preoccupations which lurk or float as organizing principles within the total conversation. (p. 96)

In alignment with Gadamer's notion that understanding any text or situation is best achieved by an attending to how meaning "floats" in, out, through and around the specificities at hand (Smith, 1990/2020, p. 148), I adhere to this approach and connect participants' narratives with ontological pointing. Each narrative unfolds as a form of life story, revealing ontological issues that informs me about what is the most powerfully present in the experience of participants, conveyed more through a "showing" rather than a "telling" manner. As Smith (1999/2020) asserts, "human beings find their deepest companionship in the action of telling stories to each other, of giving accounts of their experience, that is, precisely in the practice of narrative" (p. 133). I was deeply drawn to participants' stories and narratives, and I would like to display their stories as they are. In the ensuing section on participant introduction, I attempt to *show* what participants say rather than tell the readers in my voice. Looking back on the journey of data

collection, of returning to participants to clarify something, and of data analysis, I regard the intermediary approach, despite its time-consuming nature, as an indispensable component throughout my research process.

### **Participants Introduction**

In this section, I acknowledge that the goal of hermeneutic research is “not to describe the participants fully,” but rather “to listen to what participants have to say for that which will cast new light on the topic” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 123). Therefore, I do not present a comprehensive account of each participant. Instead, I allocate significant space to spotlight participants’ stories and narratives because these stories and narratives “matter immensely” and “their subject matter – how they address the topic and what they reveal – matters” (Moules et al., 2015, p. 124). Four participants come from four different universities in China. I will introduce participants in an alphabetical order of their anonymized identities.

#### ***Instructor Jane***

Jane has been teaching English at a university in China for nearly 25 years. She is an associate professor. The courses that she has taught include American Literature, Survey for English Speaking Countries, Audio-visual English, Comprehensive Business English, and Business Writing.

Jane encounters Daoist philosophy through reading books and watching videos. She perceives the wisdom of the *Dao De Jing* as deeply ingrained in the flesh and blood of the Chinese people. In her words, its profound wisdom is our “household wisdom in gene.” To Jane, the teachings of *Dao De Jing* are not just abstract principles but rather the essence of everyday life, deeply ingrained in the collective consciousness of the Chinese people.

Among the lines from the *Dao De Jing* that resonate deeply with Jane are aphorisms like “The highest good is like water” (Lynn, 1999, p. 63) (上善若水), “He who knows the male yet sustains the female will be a river valley for all under Heaven” (Lynn, 1999, p. 103) (知其雄 守其雌, 为天下溪), and “repudiate cleverness and discard sharpness” (Lynn, 1999, p. 82) (见素抱朴). These lines encapsulate profound Daoist principles that she finds applicable to her daily life and teaching profession.

Jane exemplifies the qualities of water as her guiding principle. Like water flowing downward, she remains a low profile and avoids competition and embraces humility and non-contention. She shares with me her perspective on how she models the goodness of water in her interaction with her family and others:

The *Dao De Jing* teaches me to be like water, benefiting all without contention.

Personally, this enlightens me to foster the spirit of water in my own life, in raising children, in living with the elderly, and also in interactions with my husband. In my interactions with other people in the workplace, I’ve always practiced giving without expecting anything in return and never forgetting kindness received. When I help others, I don’t consider whether they’ll repay me. However, if I receive kindness, I’ll surely remember. As our saying goes, the kindness of a drop of water should be returned as a gushing spring (滴水之恩, 当涌泉相报). •

Jane shares a story from her workplace. She is a dedicated class advisor who serves her students without expecting anything in return:

I’ve been a class advisor for four years, responsible for the students, earnestly dedicated. Sometimes, I’ve paid out of my pocket. During the pandemic, when students faced emotional issues, I’d call them out, buy them ice cream or a small cake



to uplift their spirits. I empathize with university students confined within the campus, feeling homesick or facing conflicts with roommates. •

When her university mandates that teachers apply for the distinguished title of Excellent Advisor, Jane refrains from pursuing this recognition. Amidst a pool of over 20 advisors vying for one to two positions, Jane adheres to the belief that helping students is not driven by a desire for personal acknowledgment. Just as water flows downward, she positions herself in the rear and adopts a humble and unassuming stance. Although she fulfills all the criteria for earning the title of Excellent Advisor, she chose not to overshadow other applicants because that “runs counter to my ethical principles.” In her speech, she emphasizes the intrinsic value of her decision over external validation:

Obtaining a low-value, so-called prestigious title is meaningless to me. As long as students silently appreciate it in their heart, that suffices. Perhaps due to my kindness, if one student, on the brink of emotional collapse, is pulled back or remembers in the future how a teacher cared for him/her deeply during his/her studies in the university, inspiring him/her to help others in similar ways, that accomplishment holds immeasurable value, far surpassing the value of a certificate labeling me an Excellent Advisor. •

Jane is a patient educator. In her discourse, she employed metaphors to stress the importance of patience and timing in education. To her, just as water gradually boils, sugar gradually dissolves in coffee, and ailments require time to heal, teaching requires time to mature and ripen. Reflecting on her journey of teaching profession, Jane acknowledges that there were moments of impatience and fatigue in her commitment to teaching. However, it is the Daoist

wisdom on timing that has enlightened her to the importance of allowing the natural process of teaching to unfold:

In my personal experience, particularly within my teaching career, I often felt totally drained out. As a teacher, there are moments when I struggle with patience and feel fatigued by the demands of my profession. Perhaps it's because the timing for my role as a teacher wasn't optimal during the first 15 or 20 years of my career. I constantly struggled during those years; I felt inadequate in managing interactions with students. Unfortunately, in my initial 15 to 20 years of teaching, I hadn't developed the skills to navigate these challenges; I cannot patiently wait for their maturity. Some teachers become adept within the first five to ten years of their careers. In contrast, it has taken me nearly 25 years of teaching to start feeling a sense of mastery. I feel less anxious facing students now, less distressed when they're disobedient or unwilling to follow my educational instructions. In the past, such situations tormented me, leaving me feeling doubtful about my abilities as a teacher. I questioned my teaching methods if students' academic performances didn't meet expectations. But now, I've gained a deeper understanding of how to effectively engage with students. •

Despite facing challenges over 25 years, Jane finds fulfillment in knowing that she has positively influenced her students' lives. Enlightened by Daoist wisdom of timing, she integrates this wisdom to her instructional approach. As an instructor, she emphasizes the importance of providing time and opportunities for students to explore and grow, rather than simply imposing knowledge upon them:

I wonder why it's taken me so long to understand the art of teaching. Nonetheless, knowing how to be a teacher now, and being able to minimize psychological distress

brings me a sense of comfort. Perhaps many years later, my students may not recall specific subjects I taught, but they may remember a feeling of warmth instilled in them. That's adequate for me. As a teacher, I've come to realize the importance of patience with myself and with my students. It's about waiting for the right moment; it's not about how much knowledge I impart, but rather about encouraging students to explore independently, thinking critically, rather than imposing my thoughts on them. •

In her intercultural reading of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, Jane grapples with the contrasting portrayals of women. Guided by the Daoist wisdom of “the balance between Yin and Yang; valuing softness and preserving femininity” (阴阳平衡, 贵柔守雌), Jane expresses her astonishment at the status of women in Shakespeare's time. In contemporary Chinese society, women experience equality with men, which she attributes to Daoist values that prioritize the significance of Mother (母), Nature (自然), kindness (慈), and softness (柔) in the Chinese collective consciousness. However, encountering certain lines from *Macbeth*, such as “there's no bottom, none, / In my voluptuousness. Your wives, your daughters, / Your matrons, and your maids, could not fill up / The cistern of my lust” (4.3.60-63), prompts Jane to contemplate the historical distinctions among women in Shakespeare's time:

When I read this, I wonder why Malcolm differentiates between women in such categories. In my mind, when I think of women, females, such as my daughter, my mother, or female colleagues, or historical figures, I see them as equals. I'm grateful to live in China, especially in an era where there's relatively more gender equality. But when I encounter this line, “Your wives, your daughters, your matrons, and your maids could not fill up the cistern of my lust,” I'm struck. It appears that, at least during Shakespeare's time, there were distinctions among women. The societal status

of a woman could drastically affect how she was perceived by men, sometimes as property or subordinate. I must maintain a psychological distance between myself and the work I read. For example, as a married woman, I'm different from a virgin. Physiologically, it's true, but could this foster cultural biases? Would I be viewed as personal property, a subordinate, or less valuable? Whether as a mother, a teacher, a wife, or a middle-aged woman, I'm always myself, uniquely me. However, when reading the *Dao De Jing*, Laozi doesn't categorize women in this manner. He even considers women and men as equals. Since Yin and Yang can harmonize, why would Yang necessarily be more important than Yin? This reflects traditional Chinese thoughts, such as the belief that being a good wife could bring fortune to the husband, being a good teacher could bring fortune to the student, and being a virtuous statesman could bring fortune to the nation. •

Jane reflects on the consequences of unbridled desires in *Macbeth* and the importance of virtuous conduct advocated in the *Dao De Jing*. She contemplates the role of a virtuous wife in mitigating calamities of husband and extends this reflection to her role as an educator and the broader political landscape. Avoiding calamities is the priority. Therefore, whether one is a husband, an educator, or a ruler of a state, it is important to recognize the significance of withdrawal. This preserves the integrity of a family, the growth of students, and the stability of a state for longevity. She said:

When Macduff says, "Boundless intemperance / In nature is a tyranny" (4.3.66-67), I resonate deeply with this. In politics, unbridled desires of a ruler lead to tyranny. In a family, a husband's indulgence leads to tyranny. It's tyranny because they use their authority to govern others. In Daoism, being a good wife can help avoid calamities for

the husband. After reading *Macbeth*, where a wife incites her husband to murder the king, I ponder whether as a wife, I should refrain from instigating my husband into wrongdoing. It's akin to helping him avoid calamities. If I'm a good teacher, can my students avoid calamities? If I'm an upright ruler, can my country avoid calamities? Full moon wanes, the flowing water overflows. It means that when a task is done, I should withdraw. If Macbeth had withdrawn after achieving success in the battlefield, he wouldn't have carried the burden of infamy; he would preserve himself. Maybe these reflections can guide me to know when to stop. It's about not pushing things too far. If resisting fate harshly, one would eventually be crushed by the Wheel of Fate. •

In her exploration of intercultural reading, Jane exchanges her views on the ideal of order both in the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. In the *Dao De Jing*, the attainment of *Dao* is preceded by the embodiment of *De*. This is reflected in the sequence of the *De Jing* (《德经》) often preceding the *Dao Jing* (《道经》). Without *De*, the management of oneself, one's household, or one's nation would inevitably falter.

Jane shared her views regarding order in these two texts. Laozi's vision for society was one devoid of conflict, characterized by small, peaceful states (小国寡民), egalitarianism (人人平等), adherence to natural principles (道法自然), and the pursuit of tranquility through *Wu Wei* (清静无为). Shakespeare's reflections on governance centers on individuals fulfilling their roles, upholding order, resisting the sway of personal desires, refraining from abusing power, and acting with rationality. She quotes lines from *Troilus and Cressida*:

The heavens themselves, the planets, and this center  
Observe degree, priority, and place,  
Insisture, course, proportion, season, form,

Office, and custom, in all line of order.  
... O, when degree is shaken,  
Which is the ladder of all high designs,  
The enterprise is sick. (1.3.89-92; 105-107)

This passage is spoken by Ulysses. Ulysses reflects on the importance of order and hierarchy within society. Drawing an analogy from celestial bodies, Ulysses highlights that each planet adheres to its own rank and position. Similarly, when the established order, or “degree,” is disrupted or shaken, everything falls into chaos. Jane draws parallels between this disruption and Macbeth’s overthrow of divine order under the influence of the prophecies of three witches and his wife. The reckless disruption of hierarchy and order by Macbeth ultimately precipitates his tragic fate. For Jane, Shakespeare’s political philosophy resonates with Laozi’s vision of a small, harmonious state and well-ordered society. Both articulate the importance of maintaining order and fostering cooperation as essential for achieving harmony. However, the difference between them is also evident:

These two ideologies overlap but also differ significantly. For Shakespeare, political governance meant seeking order. Laozi advocated for avoiding strict laws, not disturbing the people, allowing them to find their place and to live peacefully, and governing through *Wu Wei*. Eastern culture prefers withdrawal and quietness while Western culture tends to be more action-oriented, wanting to create a world. •

For Jane, there is a notable distinction between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* regarding their approaches to challenges and obstacles. Laozi’s philosophy, rooted in non-striving and non-contention, embodies an evasive strategy where one may navigate or confront difficulties indirectly or in a roundabout manner. Conversely, *Macbeth* places greater emphasis on self-

expression and the spirit of courageous rebellion. It reflects a quintessentially Western mindset, marked by a proactive stance towards challenges. Jane elucidated:

Shakespeare's characterization of people and his humanistic ideals enable him to portray people in front of God, standing on an equal footing with God. While my fate might require me to be a loyal subject, I defy it. I'll overthrow my king and challenge his authority, using any means. I'll rebel, if only once. I won't have lived in vain. Killing the King is an expression of the deep fear within me. Although I feel worse and remorse after killing him, a sense of righteousness emerges, making me feel painful. Yet, in my lifetime, I've rebelled once, whether it's defiance against the internal ruler-subject relationship, or the destiny imposed by the heavens. This embodies the spirit of humanism. Our cultural ideologies, whether Confucian or Daoist, tends to foster conformity and non-contention. •

Drawing a parallel between Macbeth's rebellious spirit and the propensity of Chinese students to keep silent in the presence of authority, Jane encourages her students to interrogate the information presented to them and to question the validity of knowledge presented in textbooks and by teachers. She said:

For instance, while I am teaching, I tell my students that they cannot accept everything obediently. If something is wrong, why accept it? If it's clearly leading towards a precipice, why leap into it without hesitation? Can I question and challenge what's written in the textbooks and what is taught with a wider range of sources? If it's correct, great! We deepen our understanding of the right thing. But if it's incorrect, can I bravely tell the teacher, "Hey, what you've taught in class is

incorrect.”? You can’t call a spade a spoon. This ability of independent thinking is more valuable for humans, isn’t it? •

### ***Instructor Kent***

Kent has been teaching English in a university since 2006 after he has achieved his Ph. D. degree in British and American literature. He is an associate professor. He instructs courses including Literary Theory and Academic Writing to undergraduate and graduate students. He is also a researcher affiliated with his university’s Literature Research Institute.

Kent was born in a rural area in the Northwestern part of China. His parents are peasants without schooling. Reflecting on his upbringing, Kent shared with me that living conditions in his hometown were harsh, with sandstorms ravaging the landscape, a scarcity of water, and barren land. His early years presented as a chaotic stream of consciousness, mirroring the untamed wilderness of his birthplace, as he recollected:

Life was instinctive, getting angry when wanted, hurling insults when felt, experiencing anxiety without any structured framework to organize thoughts. It was a chaotic and random way of thinking. •

Amidst the simplicity and roughness of his early years, Kent stumbled upon a book entitled *Laozi Speaks* (《老子他说》) written by Nan Huaijin (南怀瑾) when he was at the age of senior high school:

I attended a teacher training college without going to high school, so it’s akin to having read *Laozi Speaks* during my first year of high school. It was like how Communists find enlightenment in Marxist ideology. I had a similar experience when I read this book. •



After reading *Laozi Speaks*, Kent found that the teachings of Laozi instilled a profound sense of order within his thoughts. The chaos of his early years gradually gave way to clarity as he delved deeper into the philosophical wisdom of the *Dao De Jing*:

I vividly remember, at the age of the first year of senior high, after reading the *Dao De Jing*, I suddenly felt a sense of order in my thoughts. I feel like throughout my life, there have been certain points where someone stood up, nudged me, and propelled me from a low level to a much higher one. It's because of some actions I took years ago inadvertently. •

What has profoundly influenced Kent's life is the Daoist concept of *Wu Wei* (无为). For Kent, Laozi intends to tell us that understanding the essence and laws of things isn't an easy task. *Wu Wei* does not advocate for idleness or inaction. Instead, *Wu Wei* encapsulates the notion of aligning oneself with the natural order of things, with "order" being the key word. According to Kent, regardless of the circumstances one faces, the initial step is observation, followed by an understanding of the fundamental laws and essence inherent in them.

Kent draws upon lines from the *Dao De Jing* to illuminate Laozi's teachings. For example, in Chapter 50, a line reads: "one good at preserving life, when traveling by land, does not encounter the wild buffalo and, when entering the army, suffers no wound from weapons" (Lynn, 1999, p. 147) (君子陆行不遇兕虎，入军不被甲兵). The reason, he explains, lies in the profound insight that allows one to discern the essence within complex circumstances and steadfastly adhere to their essences.

Kent shared anecdotes from his life and research work to illustrate the difference between *Wei* (为) or *You Wei* (有为) and *Wu Wei*. *Wei* or *You Wei* encompasses actions that contravene established norms or principles, deviating from the inherent order or essence and potentially

resulting in unforeseen consequences or even calamities. In contrast, *Wu Wei* entails keen observational skills and profound insight into the essence of things. One example he recounted involves the pervasive anxiety among contemporary Chinese parents concerning their children's academic achievement from an early age. He narrated:

There's widespread anxiety among parents, which leads to a common desire, that is, to make children achieve academic excellence as quickly as possible. This desire is false and contradicts natural laws because it goes against children's physiological laws. This desire has been turned into *You Wei*, an act of doing. For instance, making children repeatedly study advanced mathematics, attending various tutorial classes, etc. These practices can lead to severe issues, like sleep deprivation. Some kids get as little as four to five hours of sleep a day. This can be terrifying as it significantly impacts their physical growth, intelligence, mental health, and deprives them of activities they enjoy. These deficiencies directly affect their physical and psychological development. There's a severe mental health crisis in China: a survey conducted in 2019 at Peking University revealed that over 50% of incoming freshmen believed they had psychological issues. It's a critical problem that starts as early as elementary school, mainly due to societal pressures pushing kids to excel academically against their natural growth patterns. •

Kate shared with me his attitude and approach in educating his two daughters in response to society-wide anxiety:

My two children have been raised this way: I haven't overseen their homework or enrolled them in any tutorial classes. In grades one and two, they struggled with writing and math. In grade two, the math teacher called to say that my eldest daughter

was particularly poor in math. The teacher suggested we parents should take actions. I replied that we needed to give her time to slowly develop and grow naturally. One of my daughters enjoys drawing, so I encouraged that. I ensure that they spend time outdoors daily. I avoided interfering with their interests and let them pursue their own activities. My eldest daughter, now in Grade Five, is preparing for the middle school entrance exam. She has naturally developed into a confident and happy student. She's modest but naturally assumes leadership among peers. This is because I protected her well and restrained my desires. When other parents were overly concerned about turning their kids into academic stars, I felt anxious too, but I restrained myself and aligned my actions with the natural physiological and psychological development of my children. •

Kent told me that Henry David Thoreau's *Walden: Life in the Woods* and Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* are among his favorite literary works because they embody the principle of simplicity explicitly stated in the *Dao De Jing*. According to Kent, *Macbeth*'s tragedy stems from his ambitious desires, which contradicts the principle of simplicity and leads him into what Thoreau describes as "quiet desperation." Kent elaborated in this way:

In Thoreau's *Walden*, there's a phrase, "most people living in quiet desperation." "Quiet desperation" implies that nearly everyone lives in an unspoken despair due to excessive desires. If you understand the true nature of things, you won't live in such despair or desperation. Thoreau believes that most people live in despair, but it's a quiet desperation. Human needs in life are very simple. For instance, if you live in a cold place, all you need is clothes and a hut. However, modern people desire more. Thoreau gives examples of New England businessmen who ventured to China for

business, risking their lives at sea. Many died at sea during that time, including a friend of Thoreau's named Margaret. Thoreau was appalled by such actions. He criticizes people who waste their prime years and vitality doing meaningless things, aiming to retire with money in New England, a dream very few have achieved. Even if they have, they were unable to enjoy life due to old age. This demonstrates the failure to understand the essence of things: living doesn't require much. The excessive desire goes against Laozi's core idea of tranquility and *Wu Wei*. The core idea of Laozi and Thoreau is simplicity, simplicity, and simplicity. Yet, everyone lives their lives in a mess. At the core of *Macbeth*, based on the lineage of Western classical tragedies, the protagonist must be exceptional, that's a prerequisite. Then this protagonist has a major flaw. Driven by this flaw, he commits an error, leading to his downfall. The flaw here is Macbeth's inflated ambition or desire. After his ambition expands, he commits an act that harms himself and others. However, this action, *You Wei*, doesn't bring him any happiness, but leads to his demise. (quotation in the translation provided by Kent) •

For Kent, *Robinson Crusoe* is another work closely associated with Laozi's teachings. This is because Laozi's philosophy centers on understanding the essence of existence in the world, undisturbed by frivolities and distractions, enabling individuals to concentrate on essential tasks, while *Robinson Crusoe* explores two fundamental human concerns: survival and the quest for personal significance of living in this world. Kent elaborated:

*Robinson Crusoe* sheds light on the numerous superfluous activities in our daily lives. For example, many people often act in order to please others or showcase themselves. These acts are pretentious and, using Lacanian theory, are aimed at fulfilling desires

from the other. To satisfy these false desires, individuals engage in numerous actions that are *You Wei*, actions that hurt either themselves or others, with no benefit, often leading to severe errors or even premature demise. Robinson is on a deserted island. He could even be naked because, unless it was hot, his primary reason for wearing clothes was to avoid sunburn. In the absence of the sun, he explicitly mentioned being unclothed. False desires don't exist on that island, leaving only two human needs: basic survival, such as food and clothing, and the quest for life's meaning. People must find meaning in life, which is a spiritual pursuit. Robinson Crusoe's spiritual pursuit was the Bible, and he was repeatedly praying. •

Reflecting on the fundamental needs and spiritual pursuit of humanity, Kent shared with me his pursuit of meaning in the world:

My pursuit of meaning in this world is to raise my two daughters in good health. Every day as I look at them, I feel my life has value. Previously, when I was single, I felt my life had no value; that sense of emptiness was intense. Even if I earned money or gained professional recognition, I didn't perceive my life as meaningful. However, after having children, I found meaning. •

In his literary lectures, Kent imparts brilliant wisdom gleaned from the *Dao De Jing* and Western literary works to his students. When he shared his teaching with me, I can sense his contentment and pride emanating from his tones and facial expressions frequently:

My students have reflected that my courses have changed their worldview significantly. Both my undergraduate and graduate classes, attended by many Ph.D. students, have said that. Some have even experienced shifts in their family dynamics due to my courses. Some students have been attending my classes for three years

straight, from their first year of graduate studies until their graduation. My courses have tangibly assisted them in planning their lives, especially in terms of interpersonal relationships, family, and careers. Some students have truly become devoted followers of my teachings. I can feel it in the way students look at me: it's that kind of gaze that expresses an affection for me, an emotion that I can't quite articulate. It's also a habit of mine. If I don't interpret that thing into my worldview, I can't embody that thing. •

In family life, Kent embodies the quintessential image of a Chinese father – responsible, dedicated, affectionate, and patiently awaiting the blossoming of his daughters. He prioritizes his children's natural growth. In a story he shared in the group discussion, he imparted to his daughters the significance of nurturing the spirit within their hearts through artistic works:

I was watching *The Little Prince* with my two daughters on TV. I asked them: "Have you noticed how every time the Little Prince appears, it's when the pilot is far away from the adult world?" They nodded in agreement. I continued, "That's because the adult world is only concerned about money, about survival. As long as the pilot is in that adult world, the Little Prince dies. He can't survive in such a reality. Therefore, the essence of living is to ensure your Little Prince survives. Don't let your Little Prince die." This story is a metaphor. It's about ensuring that each person needs to maintain that caring and nurturing attitude towards their own psychological well-being, ensuring that it remains alive and doesn't wither away just for the sake of survival. I told my daughters: if the little prince in your heart fades away, your existence loses its value. •

***Instructor Rebecca***

Rebecca is an associate professor specializing in British and American Literature. She has been teaching at a university for 30 years. Her courses primarily include Selective Reading of Classics in English and Comprehensive Course of English Reading. Rebecca's early encounters with Daoism and Shakespeare carry an enigmatic yet profound connection to her memories and subconsciousness.

Rebecca grew up in a rural area where she encountered the religious aspects of Daoism, including practices like drawing religious images, divination, and *Feng Shui* (风水). As she grew older and traveled, she encountered Daoist temples. Out of politeness and nostalgia, she would enter these temples, paying her respects. The childhood impressions about the *Dao*, about the universe, about the relationship between humans and nature, and between people, are impressions that are deeply ingrained in her memory. During her university years in the 1990s, she was an active member of a literary society and promoted the reading and discussions of poems with Daoist themes, such as "The Sentiments of Daoist Priest" (道情) written by Bai Yuchan (白玉蟾) (1134-1229) or "Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff" (赤壁怀古) written by Su Shi (苏轼) (1037-1101).

Rebecca revealed that the *Dao De Jing* has significantly influenced both her personality and her psychological landscape in the storms of life's frustrations. She described it poetically as follows:

The *Dao De Jing* has instilled a curious mixture of both transcendentalism and empiricism into the vein of my life, empowering me to defend my ideal personality as a good scholar concerned with the commons, with the miserable ones, and with the alienated students. As the dual vessel of spiritual sustenance of the reborn self and the

strategy of coping with the earthly life, it helped me to stay away from the madding crowd rushing for the gods of gold, to drown out the persistent droning of the consumerism, and to remain immune to the erosion of meritocracy, which has overstressed the medal of merits in terms of promotion or technique progress, rather than to go astray from the sanity and sobriety of Laozi. In the *Dao De Jing*, there are lines that resonate deeply with me:

The five colors make one's eyes blind; (五色令人目盲)

The five notes make one's ears deaf; (五音令人耳聋)

The five flavors make one's mouth fail; (五味令人口爽)

And sport hunting on horseback makes one's heart/mind go crazy. (驰骋畋猎，令人心发狂) (Lynn, 1999, p. 70) (Chapter 12)

When I was thrilled or possessed with the life-consuming pursuit of vanities, these gentle admonitions have never failed me, conserving my psychological energy, bringing me back to realities, and subsequently edging me towards worldly affairs with a more acute awareness of my status as an independent thinker. This provided an alternative perspective of my failure and frustration in professional promotion, and a unique clairvoyance of my fate and obligation as a teacher bestowed upon me from such an ancient sage. In a sense, it does take such intuitionistic Laozi to solve once “insoluble” conflicts in my life. (translated by Rebecca) •

In Rebecca's view, Daoist wisdom encompasses both transcendent (出世) and immanent (入世) aspects of existence. It is transcendent because it guides us to detach ourselves from consumerism and all sorts of vanities and encourages us to pursue spiritual nourishment. Meanwhile, it is immanent because its divine and spiritual essence is inherent in reality and



grounds us in reality.

Rebecca's affinity for Daoist texts extends beyond the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. She holds a particular love for the *Yijin*, which she studies independently. In her view, the *Yijin* delves deeper into Daoist wisdom than the *Dao De Jing* and serves as the spring source of the latter. When she is at the lowest point of life, she turns to the hexagrams from the *Yijin* for guidance. For her, divination plays an important role in unsettling moments. She described her practice to me:

I draw a hexagram from the *Yijin* and study it step by step every day. I don't approach it as a systematic theory but as a profound source of insight. When your heart is unsettled, turn to divination. The resulting hexagram will surely be surprising, as you don't wish for anything but the divination. Perhaps in life, you only need that one hexagram, and then you'll realize that the wisdom our ancestors left behind is enough for us to weather any storm. •

Rebecca prioritizes both physical health and the cultivation of the mind. During our initial focus group session, she had a sore throat. She shared with us that she applied a Daoist remedy of balancing Yin and Yang energies. This example aligns with her belief that Daoism permeates into our lives in many ways.

Today, when my throat is inflamed, I wonder if drinking chrysanthemum tea might balance my Yin and Yang energies, extinguishing the heat within me. This Yin-Yang relationship suddenly reminds me of Qian's earlier discussion about the relationship between poison and remedy. In traditional Chinese medicine, a remedy is 30% poison; the distinction between pure toxic and remedy isn't clear-cut. The concept of "poison" or "toxic" or "remedy" stems from one's physical constitution. It emphasizes the

mutual coordination between individuals and their environment, which is a fundamental aspect of Daoist interaction. •

In terms of cultivating the mind, Rebecca embodies poetic qualities of elegance and gracefulness shaped by Confucian ideals of moral cultivation externally. Internally, she possesses a vast expanse within her heart for inner peace and growth in tranquility. In our interview and in our regular conversations, she always encourages me whenever I feel lost in the life's storm and seek comfort from her. Her words have always been like a beacon guiding me out of the darkness:

We are Confucian on the outside but Daoist within. Daoism gives us a white robe, and that white robe is an invisible pair of wings. It means that even in a narrow space, it doesn't hinder our hearts from soaring. •

Rebecca has studied Daoist texts and Buddhist scriptures for many years. She traced the etymology of the concepts of *Wu* (无) and *Kong* (空, emptiness) and discovered that, to her amazement, Buddhism borrowed these concepts from Daoism. She shared:

I delved into some Buddhist scriptures, exploring concepts like “void” or “nirvana.” Daoism has the idea of *Wu Wei*. Later, I traced the concept of *Kong* back to its etymology, questioning whether it originated from Daoism or Buddhism. But then, I came across some papers suggesting that Mahayana Buddhism, upon entering China, adopted vocabulary from Daoism. That gave me a sense of confidence that we have our own sages. ... Through the wisdom of the *Dao De Jing*, from *Wu* and *Kong*, I suddenly felt a connection between all the meanings in this world. During the golden age of human civilization or around the 5th century BCE, whether it was Buddha, Confucius, Laozi, or Western philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, they all seemed to

converge on Earth at that moment, discovering the truth. This realization gave me a newfound cultural confidence. •

Rebecca further draws a connection between the understanding of *Wu* and *Kong* with the modern physics. She explained:

When we talk about *Wu* and *Kong*, it's not about materiality; it's not like in modern physics where the sun accounts for 97% of the mass in the solar system and the masses of planets and asteroids are relatively small. The space between planets is a vast ocean of energy, allowing these tiny material entities to float within it. The visible energy, the world, kings, empires, including mundane power, is just a tiny emergence of the boundless, dark force, which occupies only 3%. The unseen force, the 97% of dark energy and dark matter, is akin to *Dao*. Everything flows into its embrace. (translated by Rebecca) •

In the life's difficulties, Rebecca believed that there lies the potential to transcend the limitations of worldly concerns and navigate through adversity. She is currently under significant academic pressure and feels frustrated with her professional advancement. Despite these difficulties, she remains steadfast in her conviction. She said:

When my workplace tells me that my academic achievements are inadequate, it's profoundly distressing. I feel worthless, devoid of meaning. But I haven't let external labels easily negate my worth and significance. I have been teaching for 30 years, but you know what? I read Shakespeare's words. Every time I encounter those stirring words, my inner conviction solidifies. I found solace; that's the power of Daoism and literature. I believe that China has some of the cleverest minds guarding us. I also

believe that humanity has its wisest sages protecting us. They hold torches in the darkness for us. •

For Rebecca, *Wu* and *Kong* are intricately linked to one's inner transformation in adversity. In the face of life's difficulties, the universe within her heart experiences a storm, a metamorphosis, an inner transformation:

Every time I read the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, it feels like a wake-up call, snapping me back to reality. ...Even amidst recent difficulties at work, sitting here every day, engrossed in research scores, and translating law literature. In this painful process, witnessing the empire of *Macbeth* turn to dust, the universe within me underwent a storm. It underwent a reformation. It felt like amidst the dust, instead of becoming dust, it united with the universe and light; it harmonizes with light and dust. •

The last sentence, "it harmonizes with light and dust," comes from a line in Chapter 4 of the *Dao De Jing* which reads "Dao ... merges with the brilliant, and becomes one with the very dust" (Lynn, 1999, p.57) (和光同尘).

In her intercultural reading of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, Rebecca pays particular attention to the paradox of ultimate softness (至柔) and ultimate strength (至坚) in both texts. Ultimate softness begets ultimate strength. Rebecca describes the profound impact of an educator, Victor, who embodies the Daoist experience. Victor is Rebecca's colleague as well as my former English teacher in the 1990s. Rebecca described him this way:

Teacher Victor practiced calligraphy and wore those cloth shoes to go fishing. He gave me the feeling that he possessed the wisdom of Daoism. I think his greatest ambition is to give up all his ambitions. I can say this is a paradox. He works very

hard to achieve an effortlessness, like a shade, in the air, at an altitude of 10,000 meters, he completely floats freely. Or we can put it the other way around, when you look at him floating like a free eagle in the air, it's like the power of the great bird Peng that the *Zhuangzi* describes. I want to say, the height at which a person can fly and the height at which he can reach freely is closely related to the strength of his soul. This strength of his soul is not force, on the contrary, it lies in the softest state of his soul, which is his gentlest and most inactive (*Wu Wei*) state. (translated by Rebecca) •

For Rebecca, the relationship between ultimate softness and ultimate strength can also be understood in interpreting *Macbeth*. She suggests that *Macbeth*'s downfall stems from excessive strength. *Macbeth* wielded a sword solitarily and alone, and his country was built upon his conquests. Ultimately, *Macbeth*'s insatiable desire for power led to his demise.

For Rebecca, both the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* convey the ideal that the Way of Nature cannot be violated. In her view, *Dao* and *De* are in harmony with the natural order and embody an individual's moral integrity. *Macbeth*'s reckless pursuit of power disrupts the natural order:

What compels someone to live on is the notion of truth, goodness, and beauty. It's that glimmer of light that allows one to keep going. When we examine the decline of family legacies, including the *Macbeths*' decline, the adage holds true: A house of goodness will always have residual blessings (其善之家，必有余庆). If one lacks goodness, lacks benevolence, dares to compete with the world, one might win the world but lacks those residual blessings. I think virtue is the inherent virtue of heaven. It embodies both *Dao* and *De*. *Macbeth* lacked *De*. Whether from a secular or

intellectual standpoint, he lacked virtue and didn't align with the *Dao*, thereby disregarding heavenly principles. •

Chapter 24 of the *Dao De Jing* reads: "One who flaunts himself does not shine. One who insists that he is right is not commended. One who boasts about himself has no acknowledged merit. One filled with self-importance does not last long" (Lynn, 1997, p. 93) (自见者不明；自是者不彰；自伐者无功；自矜者不长). Rebecca interpreted the profound insights in these lines regarding the essence of human existence and the dangers of ego-driven ambition. She shared her uncertainty regarding the Western distinction between the self and the ego. To her, Macbeth focuses solely on personal achievement in the material world, his self-expression, self-boasting, and self-praise. However, in psychology, the concept of the "self" seems to focus more on achieving transcendence of the soul rather than on the physical or material aspects. Rebecca reflected on herself in our second group meeting:

When I was young, I eagerly sought praises from others; I craved recognitions from leaders and even desired high scores from my students. Yet, I didn't "grow." I've come to recognize that this was obsession with the self. Through the reading of *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, I feel that Shakespeare adeptly dismantles this obsession with self-inflation. I feel this work is about the resurgence of the human inner heart and soul, about the awakening of the self, not the ego. •

In the following speech, Rebecca connects the wisdom in the above-quoted lines from the *Dao De Jing* to the actions of Macbeth, weaving together lines from the play and Emily Dickinson's verse to illuminate the impact of intercultural reading upon her growth:

It takes such a sage as Laozi to impart the message of wisdom on how to carry ourselves with more sobriety and gentleness, rather than getting lost, tortured and

eventually drowned in the torrents of insatiable desires for power, as Macbeth does. I have learned the bounds of human capacity in contrast to the boundlessly permeating *Dao*. I have learned to be humble in the face of the forces within and without.

Macbeth is more than a man of free will; he is rather a puppet at the mercy of the weird sisters or the three self-projections of his inner demons. Under the total dictatorship of his own pride, ignorance, and self-conceit, he is as much a blockhead as ever before he met the witches in the wilderness. His enthusiasm for the throne knew no bounds, yet he attempted to seize it by one stroke of luck in his castle. For an enlightened soul, exceeding one's own duties and meddling in others' affairs (such as Duncan's) is not wise. As illustrated in the *Dao De Jing*: One who flaunts himself does not shine. One who insists that he is right is not commended. One who boasts about himself has no acknowledged merit. One filled with self-importance does not last long. These lines cast light upon the text of *Macbeth*: in the depths of his heart, Macbeth has forged an almighty iron-handed ego, bragging about his own tall deeds and actually overshadowing and disdaining his king. To some extent, Macbeth has constructed for himself a halo of his ego which conflicts with all ethical principles and divine orders, and hence invited his own destruction as he goes against *Dao*. As we know, he who brags and strays from *Dao* will not endure; his kingdom will collapse soon. The admonition between the lines in the *Dao De Jing* echoes the sagacity of Shakespeare. While plotting Duncan's murder, Macbeth tries to figure out to himself if there is a way to evade the formidable consequences by chance:

... but this blow

Might be the be--all and the end--all—here,

But here, upon this bank and shoal of time,

We'd jump the life to come. (1.7.4-7)

Yet, just as the American transcendentalist poet Emily Dickinson observed: Luck is not chance – / It's Toil – / Fortune's expensive smile / Is earned. The same concern is manifest in the *Dao De Jing*: There is no greater misfortune than not knowing contentment; there is no greater fault than desiring gain (祸莫大于不知足，咎莫大于欲得) (Chapter 46). Predictably, Macbeth ends up being a walking shadow in his phantom kingdom, and Lady Macbeth, a sleepwalker in the eternal dream of sheer vanity. (translated by Rebecca) •

From her insightful reflections on the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, Rebecca reflects on her students who obsessively immerse themselves in various competitions and contests. She described the classroom environment as akin to a mini-jungle, where some academically average students are inadvertently drawn into the competitive tide. She believes that excessive participation in competitions can be detrimental to certain individuals, as it contradicts the principles of *Dao*. She hopes that these students will free themselves from their obsessions with obtaining certificates from contests and competitions. She elaborated:

Some of the students I earnestly try to support engage in activities that aren't ethically sound, such as obsessively preparing for competitions and consistently discussing these matters with me. I feel they've become so consumed by their pursuits that it would be great if they could liberate themselves for their own improvement. Their dedication might bring them a certain form of success, enabling them to attain the titles they seek or earn certificates. At my age, having seen so much, I have liberated myself. True freedom, as we Chinese call it, is "self-liberation" and does not



emphasize external freedom much. In this infinite realm of self-liberation, every living being can be free. I hope that in my classroom or within a five-meter radius of my influence, everyone can experience a sense of environmental freedom, which could aid even the weakest among us in surviving. (translated by Rebecca) •

### ***Instructor Sophie***

Sophie is a professor of Western Literary Theory and Drama Studies. She has been teaching at the School of Chinese Language and Literature in a university since 2008. Initially, during the first five years of her teaching career, she taught such courses as Fundamentals of Drama and History of Eastern and Western Drama. From her sixth year of teaching, owing to curriculum adjustments in the university she works for, which involved relocating all drama courses to the School of Arts, Sophie transitioned to teaching literature-related courses. These courses, such as Western Literary Theory and Aesthetics, have remained her primary areas of teaching ever since.

Sophie's connection with Daoism stems from her father, who is a master of *Tai Ji Quan* (太极拳). *Tai Ji Quan* is a martial art that employs the gentle body movement to facilitate the smooth flow of *Qi* and generate unbeatable power in combat. It embodies the softness inherent in Daoist philosophy. Sophie shares with me two things about her father. One thing is her father's remarkable adaptability across diverse professions. Starting as a farmer, her father transitioned to a tractor driver, a government jeep driver, and later worked in personnel management before managing a silk production factory. Sophie reflected with deep respect and admiration for her father in our interview:

I feel my dad may appear to lack a strong personality, without distinct edges, yet he excels in whatever he does. Regardless of the job position, whether political, purely

technical, or economic, he has managed to excel in each one. He keeps himself free from unnecessary thoughts, which enables him to be adaptable to the external world.

My dad is adaptable and can get along with anyone. •

Sophie told me that her father has a quiet and serene personality. She referenced a line from Chapter 16 of the *Dao De Jing* to describe her father's tranquility: "Their attainment of emptiness absolute and their maintenance of quietude guileless. The myriad things interact. I, as such, observe their return" (Lynn, 1999, p. 75) (致虚极, 守静笃, 万物并作, 吾以观其复). She explained that her father's *Xu* (虚) and *Jing* (静), as depicted in the line, are reflected in his ability to adapt to various people, different situations, and diverse work environments.

Another thing that Sophie shared concerns her father's approach to resolving conflicts over inheritance among siblings, which arose after the passing of her grandparents. As the eldest son, Sophie's father applied the principles of *Tai Ji* to navigate the discord and seek a harmonious resolution. Speaking of her father's approach, Sophie drew a *Tai Ji Ba Gua* graph (太极八卦图) and elaborated:

When we examine the *Tai Ji Ba Gua*, black and white are clearly delineated. But their distinct boundaries allow for fluid interaction and merging, forming a circle. Even though my dad might not agree with my second and younger uncles, he perceives them as standing at opposite ends, black and white. Yet, he always includes himself and his brothers within a circle, acknowledging their differences but emphasizing their shared bonds. They are not adversaries; it's not a matter of "I am me, and you are you, and we can't blend." Instead, it's about blending together while retaining the ability to pivot. It's about our capacity to move, for me to see your perspective, and for you to emotionally understand mine. He seeks to encourage emotional flexibility and

understanding. As the eldest, he bears the responsibility of maintaining harmony within the big family. He strives to uphold unity. It's about mutual understanding, forming a harmonious relationship rather than engaging in intense confrontation. •

Sophie's description of *Tai Ji Ba Gua* graph through her father's example resonates with the essence of a hermeneutic circle. Although not presented in black and white, a hermeneutic circle illustrates the fluid movement between the whole and its parts. Both the *Tai Ji Ba Gua* graph and the hermeneutic circle underscore the importance of movement and interaction in fostering understanding and harmonious coexistence.

Sophie's systematic reading of the *Dao De Jing* started during her undergraduate studies. In the Introduction to Literature course, her teacher instructed the concept of "artistic conception" (意境) and elucidated the relationship between *You* (有) and *Wu* (无) in the artistic conceptions. Reflecting on those lectures, Sophie fondly recalled:

What struck me as particularly profound was the concept of *Wu* because *Wu* is the origin of Heaven and Earth and *You* is used to designate the mother of all things. When we say "*You*," we perceive a rich world. At this level of "*You*," our eyes, ears, and touch can sense it. But why does *Wu* precede *You*? At that time, I found this particularly puzzling. During our literary theory classes, the teacher discussed the concept of "artistic conception." When she mentioned this concept, she once again brought up the idea of *Wu*, saying that in ancient Chinese language, *Wu* is not equivalent to the Western concept of "nothing". Our *Wu* encompasses everything, containing the universe, generating everything. The teacher linked this to poetic imagery of the Realm with Self (有我之境) and the Realm without Self (无我之境). •

Sophie also reminisced about her teacher's teachings on *Wu Wei*. *Wu Wei*, she explained, refers to avoiding frivolous or wrongful actions. It involves acting in alignment with the essence of things, adhering to their intrinsic principles.

As she delves deep into Daoist texts, including the *Dao De Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Diamond Sutra* (《金刚经》), Sophie sees Laozi's thought on *Wu Wei* as a pathway, while *Wu Bu Wei* (无不为) truly embodies Laozi's spirit. In Chapter 37 of the *Dao De Jing*, a line reads, "The Dao in its constancy engages in no conscious action, / Yet nothing remains undone" (Lynn, 1999, p. 117) (道常无为而无不为). She imparted Laozi's wisdom of *Wu Wei* and *Wu Bu Wei* to her students:

I often share this insight with my students. When they ask me how Lao-Zhuang's philosophy applies to our daily life, I often stress that *Wu Wei* leads to *Wu Bu Wei*. Many of my students are quite young, around 18 to 20 years old. They come to class at 8 a.m., feeling sleep-deprived. I ask them, "what time do you go to bed?" They reply, "Around midnight or 1 a.m." I tell them that this is futile, frivolous action. I explain that our biological clock should align with natural rhythms. In the past, people worked from sunrise to sunset, and rested accordingly. I encourage them to follow these natural rhythms. If they insist on staying up until midnight or 1 a.m., I advise them to practice *Wu Wei*, to avoid doing so. This way, they can be alert and energetic in my class and be capable of concentrating on studies and realize *Wu Bu Wei*. •

Daoist teachings transcend the hierarchical and anthropocentric views of human beings. Sophie explains that Laozi and Zhuangzi perceive the world without imposing hierarchical classifications, treating all things with equanimity and regarding everything as humble and ordinary. For Sophie, this perspective represents a form of liberation or freedom. She draws

parallels between Buddhism and Daoism. While Buddhism asserts that many of human sufferings stem from excessive fixation on the self and advocate for breaking paranoia of the self (破我执), the Daoist concept of *Wu* expresses a similar idea that we humans are not fundamentally distinct from other entities, whether it be a cauliflower or an ant. Daoism emphasizes interconnectedness.

However, in contemporary society, people fail to grasp the significance of *Wu*. Sophie shared with me that a pervasive consumerist culture has emerged in contemporary society, where individuals often seek to validate their identity through conspicuous consumption. She told me that a relative of her friend insisted on buying an expensive BMW despite financial strain. While Descartes famously stated, "I think, therefore I am," and Sartre later added, "I act, therefore I am," contemporary cultural researchers highlight a peculiar phenomenon: "I consume, therefore I am." It seems that one's existence must be proven through extravagant consumption. This notion stands in stark contrast to the significance of *Wu*.

Sophie believes succumbing to the consumerist culture leads to inner spiritual impoverishment, ultimately to a profound loss of freedom. Confronting such a consumerist culture, Daoist teachings become indispensable for transcendence. In Sophie's perspective, our relationship with material possessions should guide us towards a liberated state rather than binding us to the shackles of materialism. True transcendence lies in the pursuit of genuine inner freedom.

The significance of *Wu* also helps Sophie grapple with the passing of her beloved relatives on a philosophical level. She shared with me that the loss of her dearest aunt deeply saddened her, and she made consecutive recurring dreams of her aunt. In those dreams, her aunt endured various pains, leaving Sophie with lingering emotional distress. Years later, when her

grandparents passed away, Sophie felt profound regret for not being by their sides. It was during this moment of experiencing dearest relatives' passing away that Sophie discovered resonance in the teachings of Laozi and Zhuangzi, particularly their exploration of the relationship between *You* and *Wu*, existence and non-existence, as well as their contemplation of life and death.

Sophie shared her insight:

*Wu* doesn't mean nothing; it can encompass everything. Laozi and Zhuangzi contemplate the profound questions of life and death. For instance, in the *Zhuangzi*, when facing the death of his beloved wife, Zhuangzi beats a drum and sings, not because he is indifferent to the sorrow but because he transcends that level of emotion. This made me contemplate Heidegger's "Being-towards-death." Facing death made me ponder more about life: what life is, what I am, what humanity is.

These abstract questions began to hold a profound meaning for me. •

Sophie further paralleled the pain from the loss of her relatives with the thematic exploration of life as a dream in literary art. Referencing Zhuangzi's Butterfly Dream, where the distinction between the dreamer Zhuangzi and the butterfly blurs, Sophie contemplates the elusive nature of reality and illusion. In times of adversity, she said, existential uncertainty often pervades our thoughts, prompting profound inquiries into the essence of existence. She draws upon Su Shi's (苏轼) famous poem, "Meditation on the Past at Red Cliff" (赤壁怀古), to express this sentiment:

Eastward goes the great river,  
its waves have swept away  
a thousand years of gallant men. (大江东去浪淘尽, 千古风流人物)

...

Yet this human world is like a dream  
and I pour out my winecup as offering  
into the river's moonbeams. (人生如梦, 一尊还酹江月) (Owen, 1996, pp. 579-580) •

After reciting this poem, Sophie continued:

“Life is like a dream” carries a negative connotation, yet it's a holistic, philosophical reflection on life, pondering the value of life itself, how one proves one's existence, and what truly is genuine. When I reflect on the passing of my aunt and my grandparents, it indeed evokes this sensation of life being like a dream. •

Sophie's favorite novel is *A Dream of Red Chamber* (《红楼梦》). In the interview and group meetings, she frequently drew parallels between this novel and Daoist philosophy, particularly regarding the transient nature of life. She referenced a line from Chapter 5 of the *Dao De Jing*, which reads, “Heaven and Earth are not benevolent and treat the myriad things as straw dogs” (Lynn, 1999, p. 60) (天地不仁, 以万物为刍狗). This seemingly *Wu Qin* (无情, lack of emotion) signifies Laozi's view of treating everything as equal. In *A Dream of Red Chamber*, the author Cao Xueqin (曹雪芹) (1715-1763) explores the theme of life as a dream. Sophie mentions Jia Baoyu (贾宝玉), a character in the novel, who reflects on life's fleeting nature: Past joys, laughter, and wealth, once thought eternal, ultimately fade away, which is a norm of life that cannot perpetually revel in tenderness, wealth, and fragrance. People's pursuits of success, wealth, indulgence in lust, and concerns for descendants are all obscured by desires, yet people remain unaware of the impermanence of these pursuits. The Daoist concept of *Wu Qin*, exemplified by Heaven and Earth treating myriad things, including humans, as straw dogs, is not devoid of emotion. Rather, it brings about a significant transcendence, and in this process of transcendence, we can develop a greater love for this world.

Just as her systematic reading of the *Dao De Jing* began with her undergraduate teachers, Sophie's admiration for Shakespeare also dates back to her undergraduate days. She vividly recalled the profound influence of her instructor. "It was during my foreign literature classes, the instructor lectured with such passion and enthusiasm that we couldn't help but get inspired." The infectious energy of the instructor's lectures inspired her and her roommates in the dormitory to recite Shakespeare's lines. She recalled:

In our dormitory, my roommate girls and I would often gather to recite Shakespeare's lines because we felt his verses especially suited for recitation. It's a particularly cherished memory from my university days, assuming roles and reciting. Wow! Wow! •

Through her intonation, I could sense Sophie's immersion in those beautiful old days. She also shared with me that her appreciation for Shakespeare was a process.

Before university, I had heard of Shakespeare everywhere, but reading his plays revealed unexpected facets. I hadn't expected Shakespeare to have so many colloquial phrases, like in *Romeo and Juliet*, and many of his works featured characters like fools, idiots, and jesters, who used coarse or even vulgar language. I thought, "Is this what they call a classic?" "How could this be my Shakespeare?"<sup>35</sup> •

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<sup>35</sup> I resonate with Sophie's sentiments. In my 2006 Ph. D. dissertation, as I read and interpreted *Romeo and Juliet*, *Antony and Cleopatra*, and *Hamlet*, I also encountered numerous moments of disbelief at Shakespeare's incorporation of "coarse" or "vulgar" language with sexual connotations. I remember discussing my bewilderment with my friend, and we shared secret laughs, because we were wary of potential disdain from others who might perceive us as incapable of appreciating a classic. In 2016, I presented a poster on the language of *Romeo and Juliet* in the hall of Faculty of Extension at the University of Alberta. When asked to clarify certain lines I quoted and interpreted, I shared insights and commentaries from Western scholars. A faculty member passing by was startled and intrigued by my interpretations presented. Sophie's account of her journey in embracing Shakespeare's language once again stirred my memories. I thought that, perhaps as Chinese readers shaped by Confucian ideals of ritual, benevolence, kindness, and gentility, it took us quite some time to accept Shakespeare's "coarse" language with sexual connotations. As I delve into early modern English drama and medieval English literature through the courses that I audited at the Department of English and Film Studies at the University of Alberta, I gradually came to understand that such language was an



As Sophie delved deeper into Shakespeare's complete works, she found herself increasingly inspired by his genius. She couldn't help but express her profound enthusiasm and admiration in the interview:

After reading the entirety of Shakespeare's works, I found it truly magnificent. It is not just the breadth and variety of topics he depicts. Moreover, within his plays, you can sense something transcendent, something that goes beyond his time. Even though realism, romanticism, and modernism had not yet emerged in his time, you can find all these elements within his works. •

In her class, Sophie shared with her students:

With a single work, you wouldn't truly comprehend Shakespeare's greatness. You need to read a large volume of his works and accumulate a certain level of exposure. When you reach that point, you'll genuinely be amazed because his works are meticulously crafted. Perhaps not every word is a pearl, but rather, they form a vast expanse, like a surging sea rushing toward you. •

In interpreting *Macbeth*, Sophie suggests that many of us can relate to Macbeth's struggle with authority and his personal desires. Macbeth acts as a mirror reflecting our own internal conflicts because we sometimes compromise our moral principles, such as Confucian teachings on obedience to parents, to fulfill our desires. She sees parallels between Macbeth and the journey of every individual during the process of growing up. This is a stage where one establishes one's sense of self.

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essential aspect of the literary expression in early modern English literature. I would like to take this opportunity to extend my deep gratitude to Dr. Laura Schechter, whose brilliant courses introduced me to the world of early modern English. I had the honor of auditing three of her courses: *Topics in Early Modern Literature*, *Topics in Medieval Literature*, and *Studies in Literary Periods and Cultural Movements*.

In Sophie's Ph.D. dissertation on Deconstructionist Misreading Theory, there is a dedicated section that explores Gadamer's modern hermeneutics. She shared her dissertation with me. From it, I select a few sentences relevant to my research topic:

1. 伽达默尔打破传统阐释学的作者中心论，开辟了尊重读者阐释自由的现代阐释学，使多样性的阅读方式取得合法性。(Hans-Georg Gadamer broke away from the traditional author-centered approach to hermeneutics, which paves the way for modern hermeneutics that respects the interpretative freedom of readers, thereby legitimizing diverse reading methods. )
2. 伽达默尔的“艺术真理”观念、重视读者经验的思想以及合法偏见的概念，把作者独尊的阐释传统转向对读者境遇性理解的重视。(Gadamer's concept of “truth in art,” his emphasis on reader experience, and the notion of legitimate prejudice, shift the interpretative tradition away from the sole authority of the author toward a focus on the situated understanding of the reader.)
3. 伽达默尔的哲学阐释学..... 把人的认识视为主观能动性的参与而不是被动的接受，真理不是客观地、静态地存在于文本之中，而是需要读者的创造性参与才能发挥。这样，读者作为文本的接受主体受到重视，伽达默尔彻底实现了从“作者中心论”向“读者中心论”的诠释学转向。(Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics ... regards human cognition as subjective participation rather than passive acceptance. Truth is not objectively and statically present in the text but requires the reader's creative involvement to manifest. Thus, the reader, as the recipient subject of the text, is valued, and Gadamer fully realizes the interpretive shift from “author-centered” to “reader-centered” hermeneutics. )

Sophie's academic familiarity with Gadamer's emphasis on reader participation in the reading experience greatly influences her views on the effective communication between teachers/supervisors and students. She shared with me a scene of how she guides her students in writing thesis and in daily instruction:

I noticed a student's writing did not resemble an article on analyzing literary works but more akin to sociological content. When I began conversing with the student, I mentioned: "Your analysis of this literary work, *The Black Bear*, reads more like a sociological paper. I understand your concern for societal issues, the positive and negative impacts of artificial intelligence on us, which reflects your keen awareness of societal frontiers and your cultural environment." I made suggestions to the student rather than saying, "You're wrong, how could you write this way?" I think it's crucial for educators to pay attention to this because our ultimate aim in education is to aid students in making progresses rather than knocking them down. I believe that when engaging in communication with students through language, the ultimate goal is to achieve effective communication. It's not about arguing who's right or wrong. This relates back to *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* embodied the belief that "I am the most powerful" at the first stage. At his second stage, he grasped the insignificance of this mindset, and turns more to self-reflection. •

## Summary

In this chapter, I provided a detailed account of the research process and participants involved in my research. Throughout the process of data collection, two key insights emerged prominently. Firstly, I adopted a deliberate approach to participant selection, avoiding random selection of Chinese or Western participants. Through the in-depth conversational interviews

with my participants and with our discussions focused specifically on the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*, I realize the importance of carefully selecting participants. I am particularly grateful to Professor Smith's insightful suggestion to focus on one Daoist text and one play by Shakespeare. This focused reading approach is "not to translate my subjectivity," but "to deepen our collective understanding" of the topic (Smith, 2020, p. 60). Such an approach embodies the essence of the art of hermeneutic writing that Gadamer perceives. Similarly, William Dunn et al. (2009) assert that "knowledge is not something to be grasped, but something that is co-constructed through interaction among people" (p. 537). Secondly, Gadamer's notion of the I-Thou relationship in hermeneutic understanding resonates deeply within me. As I conducted personal interviews and focus group discussions, I recognized the importance of valuing my participants' perspectives equally and acknowledging our shared engagement in the study. By opening myself to their perspectives and insights, I became more aware of my own limitations and finitude in my intercultural reading experience and intellect. Through the sincere participation, fruitful communications, and knowledgeable contributions of my participants, my understanding of the intercultural dialogue between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* has been significantly enhanced, enriched, and deepened.

## **Chapter Six: Navigating the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* in the Lived Experiences of Chinese Educators**

In Chapter Five, I described my method of using a dual-column format in my notebook during data collection. In this format, participants' narrative speeches were recorded in the left column, while my interpretations and reflections were noted on the right column. Through iterative readings and re-readings of both transcripts and my reflections, discernible ontological pointings have emerged. While I contemplate ontological pointings, I caution against "thematic reductionism" in data analysis, as emphasized by Moules et al. (2015, p. 127). I am careful not to reduce my data analysis to mere themes.

By "ontological pointings," I refer to identifiable preoccupations and concerns embedded within participants' speeches, which may either lurk beneath the spoken words or float above them (see Smith, 1983, p. 96). These ontological pointings are disclosed to our collective understanding of the intercultural reading experience of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* in relation to our lived experience. From a hermeneutic standpoint, participants' narrative speeches can speak beyond themselves and reveal deeper truths. In my data analysis, I acknowledge the inherent capacity of participants' speeches to transcend immediate boundaries and illuminate the deeper existential meanings. This also informs the connection between participants' speeches recorded on the left column and my interpretations and reflections on the right column in the dual-column format.

The ontological pointings are integrated nicely into my theoretical framework of intercultural hermeneutics. They reflect the participants' perspectives and the interrelationships among various interpretations. As Moules et al (2015) point out, hermeneutic inquirers should

recognize “extraordinary occurrences and exceptional views in the data while also seeking out points of affinity and relationship” (p.127).

In this chapter, I aim to identify occurrences and views, as well as seek out the points of affinity and relationship among the ontological pointings to address the two research questions in Chapter Five. The focus of this chapter is on addressing the first research question: In what ways do Chinese educators navigate intercultural experience with regard to the *Dao De Jing* and the reading of *Macbeth*?

Grounded in the theoretical framework of Ram Adhar Mall's analogous intercultural hermeneutics, J. J. Clarke's hermeneutics of difference, and Zhang Longxi's literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability (see Chapter Two), I organize the ontological pointings based on their intrinsic connections and align them with the theoretical framework of intercultural hermeneutics in my study. Throughout this analytical process, I remain focused on the lived experience and reflections shared by participants, while including my own lived experience and reflections. I aim to provide readers with a nuanced and different understanding of how Chinese educators navigate intercultural dialogues between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. I also incorporate our references to and discussions of the *Zhuangzi* in some cases. Occasionally, I draw insights from the *Yijin*. In the context of Chinese language, Laozi and Zhuangzi are often combined and are affectionately referred to as “Lao-Zhuang philosophy,” and the *Yijin* is esteemed as the source of Daoist philosophy.

### **Analogous Intercultural Hermeneutics: Paradox**

Mall's (2000) analogous intercultural hermeneutics suggests the presence of overlapping structures among diverse cultures which unveil analogies. In this section, I draw upon insights gleaned from interviews and group discussions to highlight the use of paradoxes in the *Dao De*

*Jing* and *Macbeth*. The analogous overlapping structure manifests in the paradoxical language employed in these two texts.

Paradoxes permeate throughout *Macbeth*, imbuing the text with loads of tensions and contradictions. Consider, for instance, lines such as “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.10), “Life is but a walking shadow” (5.5.27), “And oftentimes, to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths” (1.3.121-122), and “what thou wouldst highly, / That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, / And yet wouldst wrongly win” (1.5.18-20). These lines reveal undercurrents lurking in the depth of protagonists’ subconsciousness: fair and foul, life and shadow, clown of deception and crown of conscience – three pairs of conflicts with one extreme compelling the other. “Fair is foul, and foul is fair” (1.1.10) encapsulates the inversion of moral norms and the blurred distinctions between good and evil. “Life is but a walking shadow” (5.5.27) expresses the paradoxical nature of ambition, power, and fate, reflecting the ephemeral nature of human existence and the futility of human pursuit for power. “And oftentimes, to win us to our harm / The instruments of darkness tell us truths” (1.3.121-122) indicates the evil force would often use truth to deceive people into actions and lead them to destruction. Lady Macbeth’s reflection that “what thou wouldst highly, / That wouldst thou holily; wouldst not play false, / And yet wouldst wrongly win” (1.5.18-20) suggests that Macbeth desires to attain his ambitions for power in a righteous way, yet the path to power is or should be often paved with immoral and deceitful actions. The implications of these paradoxes in Macbeth’s tragedy underscore ontological pointings of inner turmoil, moral ambiguity, and the fragility of ambition.

Likewise, paradox permeates the *Dao De Jing*, epitomized by the concept of *Wu* (无). *Wu*, often translated as “nothing” or “void” or “emptiness,” eludes precise definition yet manifests its presence. This manifestation is the realization of its existence among all things. *Wu*,

in essence, conceals itself within its own manifestation, as encapsulated in the line “the *Dao* may be hidden and nameless, but it alone is good at bestowing and completing” (Lynn, 1999, p. 132) (道隐无名。夫唯道, 善贷且成) (chapter 41). This inherent concealment allows *Wu* to embody absence and voidness while simultaneously embodying all things under the heaven in stillness or tranquility, encapsulated in the line “pure quietude is the right way to govern all under Heaven” (Lynn, 1999, p. 139) (清静为天下正) (chapter 45). *Wu* is the foundation, the primordial origin of all things, and produces everything. Conversely, everything returns to *Wu*, commencing anew in its return to *Wu*. Hence, he who possesses the qualities of *Wu* “gives them life, yet he possesses them not. He acts, yet does not make them dependent. He matures them, yet he is not their steward” (Lynn, 1999, p. 67) (生而不有 为而不持 长而不载) (chapter 10). These lines encapsulate this cyclical nature. Through the perpetual opposition and transformation of *Wu* (无) and *You* (有), life sustains itself. This dialectical relationship underscores the Daoist understanding of existence as a dynamic process characterized by continual opposition and transformation.

The analogous overlapping structure expressed through the paradoxical language between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* lies in their exploration of the excessive human ambition (*You*) and the transient nature of human existence (*Wu*). Two texts caution against the perils of excessive ambition and the illusion of control over destiny, which result in the disruption of the Way/*Dao* of Nature. In *Macbeth*, the protagonist falls victim not to the might of his rivals but succumbs to the might of his own lust for crown. This name, “Macbeth,” means “son of life” in the Celtic language, yet he becomes a foreboding sign of a modern soul who suffers from a guilty conscience. A massive overdose of ambition elevates him into a King and then reduces him into a walking shadow. From the Daoist perspective, Macbeth’s tragedy is an embodiment



of contravening the Great *Dao* (大道), which is a cosmic order that imitates nature's serenity and tranquility. While he fervently pursues the crown (a manifestation of *You*), he neglects the stillness and tranquility of his soul (concealed within *Wu*, yet would be evident in his loyalty to King Duncan as a subject). His descent into darkness illustrates the consequences of straying from the path of *Dao* and succumbs to the allure of ambition and power.

Paradoxes and the paradoxical linguistic feature in these two texts resonate deeply within our Chinese lived experience. Rebecca drew a poignant parallel between her students' relentless pursuit of a 4.0 GPA and Macbeth's story. She said:

Those striving relentlessly for a perfect GPA, aren't they Macbeths? Sleeping four hours a day and consuming four cups of coffee, building their own universe through sheer effort. The collapse of this universe occurs because it doesn't align with the *Dao*. •

Seeing her students obsessively striving for competitions in the mini jungle of a class, Rebecca is reminded of Emily Dickinson's poem: "If I can ... help one fainting robin / Unto his nest again, I shall not live in vain." She endeavors to guide these weaker students back to their nests on lower branches, not pushing them against their natural growth in physical and psychological health. Much like Macbeth's fatal misjudgment of his own branch's height which leads to his tragic downfall, Rebecca believes that if students were not obsessed by their competition consciousness but focused on their own improvement, they would achieve greater success. While their relentless pursuit for academic excellence may yield superficial achievements, such as titles or certificates, going against the natural order of their physical and psychological growth ultimately opposes the Great *Dao*. As Friar Lawrence in *Romeo and Juliet* foresees the impulsive nature of young love and cautions Romeo with words, "These violent delights have violent ends" (2.6.9),

in *Macbeth*, Shakespeare seems to be indicating that all the violent joys will end in violence. Isn't this a reflection of Macbeth's tragic descent, and might serve as a premonition of our own reckless pursuits for high scores, wealth, honor, and power? Often, we become ensnared in the relentless pursuit of a singular aim, heedless of more meaningful and joyful pursuits found in tranquility and stillness.

Reflecting on the first two years of my journey in this program, I am filled with a mixture of complex and paradoxical emotions. In those days, I pursued academic excellence in courses I took. I aimed for A or A+ in each course. I remember reviewing my supervisor's proposal on hexagrams of the *Yijing* for an AERA conference. It was a daunting task for me, as both the *Yijing* and education discipline were entirely new to me. I found myself reading the *Yijing* until 2 a.m. to 3 a.m. during those days, grappling with unfamiliar concepts and enigmatic hexagrams. I was keen on applying for scholarships, poured countless hours into crafting proposals, and hoped for the affirmation of stellar recommendations from my supervisor and instructors. I traveled outside Edmonton to attend conferences, eager to immerse myself in the world of educational academia and present my proposals in the conferences. After taking all the required courses, the pandemic started. Among the solitude brought about by the pandemic, however, I discovered inner peace by delving into Gadamer's *Truth and Method*, the Daoist literature, while immersing myself in the world of Shakespeare's plays without seeking external recognition. Something stirring evoked within me. The evocation or "awakening" gradually liberated my soul. I came to realize that Macbeth's temporary ascent in the material world stemmed from his failure to truly understand his own soul — to "Know thyself," as the Western philosophers wisely advised. My aspirations underwent a profound transformation. I yearned for the growth of a glowing light, feather-like soul, as described in the *Zhuangzi*, a soul that embodies fragility and tranquility,

which is a true state of self-liberation or what we Chinese call “being-at-ease” (自在). Even in the confines of a small room and the grip of a pandemic, my heart is an infinite universe. In the infinite universe of my heart, I have found the significance of my learning and my being.

In moments of quiet reflection, I experienced a profound paradoxical sense of completeness — a union of fullness (*You*) within voidness (*Wu*). I withdrew from the frenetic pursuit of scholarships, conferences, and titles. Instead, I choose to embark on a more gradual and laborious journey of self-transformation in the area of educational studies. As Hexagram *Ge* (革卦) in the *Yijing* reminds me, the transformation to a noble person or gentleman is akin to the transformation of a leopard (君子豹变). It is a journey from the sticky, muddy fur of infancy to the exquisite beauty and supreme nobility of maturity. This wisdom was gleaned not from my purposeful study of the *Yijing*, but from the free time reading without any purpose. It is in this receptive state, a state that is akin to *Wu*, that I found myself drawn to its timeless wisdom. In the moment of adversity that goes beyond my efforts, I take solace in the wisdom of the wisest sages — Laozi, Zhuangzi, and the greatest playwright Shakespeare in the West. Their wisdom protects me and illuminates me amidst the tempests of my academic journey over these years.

I now pause for a moment, as Kent's story about answering his daughter's question resonates deeply with the wisdom of *Wu Wei*. His narrative informs that deliberate action driven by self-centered purposes or desires, like Macbeth's action, is not the essence of *Wu Wei*:

The other day, my eldest daughter was reading a book, *Sophie's World*. It's an introductory book on philosophy that summarizes various philosophical schools worldwide, intended for ordinary readers. She's in Grade Five. I thought she wouldn't like it, but she enjoyed reading it. One day, she suddenly said, “Dad, I don't understand this sentence.” I asked, “Which sentence?” She mentioned a sentence

about mystical philosophical concepts, “Only by renouncing the self can one truly understand the self.” She said, “This is entirely contradictory. Only by giving up the self can you understand the self and gain it. What does this mean?” So, I explained to her, “Let me tell you, the greatest Chinese thinker is Laozi, who said *Wu Wei* (无为) and *Wu Bu Wei* (无不为). For example, if you want your friends to help you when you’re in trouble, so you help them. If you help them with the intention of expecting help in return, saying, ‘I help you once, you help me once; I help you twice, you help me twice,’ you’ll never achieve them helping you because you have a purpose.” I told my daughter, “Look, when dad interacts with others, I assist them without expecting anything in return. You see, I earnestly, sincerely, and without any desire, help people, those people become dad’s closest friends. Without that desire, you can achieve your goals. So, ‘only by renouncing the self can one truly understand the self’ means when you constantly emphasize how you think and what you want, everyone will dislike you, and you won’t get anything. Only when you consider how others think, that is, when you don’t emphasize yourself, but focus on the true nature of things.” After I explained this, my daughter immediately understood it. •

Let me return to the analogical overlapping structure of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. Both texts utilize explicit and implicit paradoxes. Bertrand Russell ever said, when a drop of water returns to the ocean, it is not a death but the beginning of a new life. It does not vanish. It is akin to a speck of dust returning to the clouds. A drop of water or a speck of dust becomes infinite and will never truly disappear. This also resonates with Smith’s (2020) assertion that “nothing is actually ‘gone forever,’ for there is no exteriority to which it could be banished and literally extinguished and forgotten. No, everything is always everywhere already present” (p.

331). Similarly, Macbeth's kingdom also dwells within this cosmos and will never truly disappear. It is part of *Dao*. Yet, the kingdom established by his bloody means reflects humanity's insatiable thirst for power, glory, and material wealth. While Macbeth's achievement stems from his ambition, so is his doom. This is also the most eternal theme of ancient Greek tragedies: that which one achieves will ultimately destroy one. Laozi also conveys to us that when we relinquish those worldly ambitious desires (*You*) and align with emptiness and voidness (*Wu*), we attain a profound sense of liberation and satisfaction. We merge "with the brilliant, and become one with the very dust" (Lynn, 1999, p. 57) (和光同尘) (Chapter 4).

As elaborated in the section titled "Ram Adhar Mall's Analogous Intercultural Hermeneutics" in Chapter Two, Mall (2000) advocates for an analogous hermeneutics of overlapping structures (p. 16). The term "analogy" refers to proportion or correspondence on the basis of parallel cases (see OED). Mall defines it as a likeness of relation among unlike things (pp. 15-16). According to Mall, "Analogous structures give us the opportunity for interpretations, leading to an understanding across the gaps of languages, cultures, and even species" (p. 20). He illustrates this with an example from the *Zhuangzi*, wherein Zhuangzi and his rival, Huizi, debate how the subject *I* can empathize the happiness of a fish. Through analogy, Zhuangzi establishes a connection "between the world of human beings and things in the cosmic nature" (p. 20). For Mall, Daoist culture is characterized by "universism," which he contrasts with the European notion of universalism. Whereas European, universalistic tendency is more anthropocentric, Daoism's "universism" embraces a holistic perspective, emphasizing the analogous relationship between humanity and the broader natural world. While I intend to delve into Daoism's inclination toward an anti-anthropocentric view in the next chapter, for now, I wish to underscore that within Mall's argument for analogous hermeneutic approach centered around overlapping

structures, this section illuminates the analogous overlapping structure in the paradoxical language shared between *Macbeth* and the *Dao De Jing*.

### **Hermeneutics of Difference: The Ideology of Survival in the *Dao De Jing* in Contrast with the Psychological Empathy in *Macbeth***

Clarke's (2000) hermeneutics of difference underscores the notion that cultural differences serve as fertile ground for reflection and mutual understanding. According to Clarke, rather than leading to incommensurability or inequality, cultural differences facilitate authentic engagement and dialogue. In alignment with Gadamer's perspective, Clarke emphasizes that difference constitutes a fundamental precondition for meaningful communication (pp. 11-12). In this section, I draw upon insights gleaned from research interviews and group discussions to highlight the cultural difference between the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. The primary difference lies in the *Dao De Jing*'s ideology of survival, whereas *Macbeth* extensively explores the protagonists' psychology before and after the regicide, inviting readers to empathize with their inner reflections. The verb "empathize" denotes mentally identifying oneself with another to understand their feelings and experiences (OED). Thus, in my interpretation of the cultural difference in these texts, I will draw upon the lived experiences of participants and myself to convey the emotional or spiritual impacts that reading *Macbeth* has for us, distinct from the ideology of survival in the *Dao De Jing*.

The fundamental principle of the *Dao De Jing* advocates adherence to natural laws and principles, urging individuals not to disrupt the essence or intrinsic nature of things. This guidance serves as cautionary against the tragic fate of characters like Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, who only confront their mistakes on their deathbeds, with no chance for redemption. The *Dao De Jing* promotes effortless living rooted in this fundamental principle. However,

contrary to such carefree living to preserve life and lengthen lifespan, the ideology of survival has become ingrained unawares in our cultural heritage. In order to live well, individuals must be prudent and extremely careful in whatever they do. Meanwhile, they must always be fully prepared for a rainy day.

Chapter 24, for example, contains lines that emphasize the importance of humility and modesty in achieving success while highlighting the significance of living a secure and successful life without danger: “One who takes big strides does not move; one who flaunts himself does not shine. One who insists that he is right is not commended. One who boasts about himself has no acknowledged merit. One filled with self-importance does not last long” (Lynn, 1997, p. 93) (自见者不明; 自是者不彰; 自伐者无功; 自矜者不长). These lines teach us that those who are ostentatious do not truly endure. They underscore the importance of humility and modesty in achieving success on one hand, but on the other hand they reveal the importance of living a secure and successful life without danger. In the Chinese language, we have a phrase “韬光养晦” to convey the idea that one’s sharpness or talents must be concealed. It is a motto of being a gentleman.

Additionally, in Chapter 15, Laozi advises caution and prudence in navigating life’s challenges:

[H]e seemed hesitant, as one might be when fording a river in winter.

He seemed tentative, as one who fears his neighbors on all four sides.

He seemed solemn, oh, as if he were the guest.

He seemed yielding, oh, just like ice when about to break up. (Lynn, 1997, p. 74) (豫

兮若冬涉川 犹兮若畏四邻 俨兮其若客 涣兮其若冰之将释)

Laozi's metaphorical language urges us to approach situations with extreme caution, as if crossing a river on thin ice in winter. By stressing the importance of meticulousness and prudence, Laozi suggests that we can avoid unnecessary risks and emerge safe and sound. Laozi explicitly says that such a cautious and prudent individual, "when traveling by land, does not encounter the wild buffalo and, when entering the army, suffers no wound from weapons" (Lynn, 1999, p. 147) (君子陆行不遇兕虎，入军不被甲兵) (from Chapter 50). This mindset of extreme caution against a tiny sprout of danger reflects the Chinese people's spirit of prudence and carefulness. However, it unexpectedly creates much stress that accompanies this mindset.

To live successfully, individuals also must always be aware of rainy days and make long-term plans. Laozi said, "A tree that takes both arms to clasp grows from a tiny shoot; a nine-story terrace starts from a pile of dirt; a journey of a thousand *li* begins under one's feet" (Lynn, 1999, p. 170) (合抱之木，生于毫末；九层之台，起于累土；千里之行，始于足下) (from Chapter 64). These lines emphasize the accumulation of efforts incrementally until qualitative changes occur. Consequently, there is hardly a moment of relaxation throughout the day. Chinese people are renowned as the most industrious people in the world. Many Chinese people, including myself and my participants, often feel extremely busy in life and career, tirelessly working to prevent mistakes and regrets. However, this relentless pursuit often detracts from the essence of Laozi's teachings on effortless and carefree living.

Laozi's wisdom teaches us to live humbly, akin to flowing water that benefits all without contention, and to live securely and successfully, not to be pressured by things when time is up. In real life, his wisdom like this serves as a guiding light to navigate the complexities of existence with grace and resilience. Sophie recounts a story from her professional journey:



One year, I received recognition for being Outstanding in the workplace. During the first few years after my doctoral graduation, I published many articles, and had many accomplishments during those years. In the first year, I was recognized as “Outstanding”. The following year, when I received the same recognition, I started feeling uneasy. I thought, “I can’t be outstanding every year. If I am, others will envy me. What if they try to harm me?” (laughs) Of course, they wouldn’t, but I didn’t want to live under the gaze of jealousy. So, at that time, I approached my dean proactively. Since I was involved in the meeting about excellence assessment and I am also the head of the teaching and research office, I voluntarily mentioned, “I was recognized as ‘Outstanding’ and received this honor last year. I don’t want to get this honor this year; give it to someone else who might need it.” Because here, assessing and granting the professor’s title and promotion requires at least one or two years of being recognized as “Outstanding,” which affects some teachers’ assessments. Fairly speaking, that year, I might have been eligible, but once I withdrew, it could fulfill someone else’s requirement for the assessment. Therefore, I felt uneasy; I couldn’t let a little reward prevent others from their assessments. It wasn’t my fault that they couldn’t pass, but I would objectively create a hurdle for others if I received this honor again. So, considering this, I proactively spoke to the dean, saying, “I received this honor last year, and it doesn’t hold meaning for me.” When I mentioned this to the dean, I felt he was pleased. He might have thought I was considering others at the department. So, it turned out well: the dean was happy, other teachers saw me positively, and everyone was in a good mood. So, I felt it was a good way to preserve myself. •

Sophie's experience of declining the "Outstanding" honor informs that within Chinese culture, boasting about achievements could breed adversaries and threaten harmony. This is in accordance with Laozi's wisdom of prudence.

However, the wisdom of living securely and successfully sometimes burdens us, as Chinese people are compelled to prepare extensively for unforeseen challenges in advance. Chapter 64 contains these lines: "The secure is easy to maintain; the premanifest is easy to plan for. The fragile is easy to melt; the tiny is easy to dissolve. So take action while it still does not exist. And control it before it turns into disorder" (Lynn, 1999, pp. 169-170) (其安易持，其未兆易谋。其脆易泮，其微易散。为之于未有，治之于未乱). These lines admonish us to address issues while they are still in their infancy and not yet fully developed. By doing so, we can avert many undesirable consequences. It finds resonance in Kent's story and his humorous, insightful remarks in the second group meeting:

When I was studying in the United States, I lived on the first floor, and there was an American girl in the basement. I asked her how things were lately, she said she had recently lost her job. I asked her how she was managing it, and she replied, "It's Okay. I received unemployment benefits for a few months, and I'm planning to travel to India first. I'll figure things out when I come back." I was particularly surprised at that moment. If I were to lose my job and receive unemployment benefits for a few months, I'd definitely be devastated. I'd have trouble eating and sleeping. With those benefits, I'd probably just barely manage to get by each day and save the rest. But she planned it differently. Right now, I have a French couple living upstairs. They frequently go on trips and often entertain guests. We always feel so busy. Deep inside, I clearly disagree with the approach of both my American and French neighbors.

Then, I would wonder, why do I disagree with them so much? Actually, the spirit of the Chinese people is largely shaped by Laozi. His philosophy is essentially about grasping a rule and acting accordingly. But if we look closely at Chapter 81 of the *Dao De Jing*, it implies some details. The first rule is that a nine-foot platform arises from piled soil, indicating that to build a mountain, you have to pile up soil basket by basket. What does this mean? It means you should plan. As soon as a child is born, you should already be thinking about his university education. So, the Chinese way of thinking, repeatedly emphasized by Laozi, is that you should not wait until the child is about to take a university entrance exam to start thinking about how they'll study. You should start educating them from within the womb. So, I'd say the Chinese people owe both their successes and their failures to Laozi. I profoundly disagree with my two neighbors because they travel and entertain guests, utilizing such valuable earned time for consumption. It's about spending and saving. I save more money and energy than them. The Chinese people take the long view from the very beginning and hence lead extremely arduous lives. This is both a great advantage and a great disadvantage. It is a serious violation of the spirit of Laozi. •

The ideology of survival presents both profound benefits and drawbacks. One significant drawback lies in its lack of psychological care and guidance. The emphasis often centers on living successfully, navigating away from perilous situations. This notion sharply contrasts with the story of *Macbeth*. *Macbeth* revolves around the psychological turmoil experienced by Macbeth and his wife. For instance, in the following lines we read Macbeth wrestling with profound guilt and remorse following the murder of King Duncan:

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? No, this my hand will rather  
The multitudinous seas incarnadine,  
Making the green one red. (2.2.58-61)

Neptune's ocean, a symbol of boundless waters, symbolizes the inability to cleanse Macbeth's guilty hands of blood. Instead of being cleansed, his hands would turn the entire Neptune's ocean red with blood. His deep sense of guilt and the psychological torment is a result of his murderous deeds. His actions, which defy the *Dao* of Heaven, weigh heavily on his conscience, and are unbearable for him to bear.

Act 5 Scene 1 stages a haunting scene of Lady Macbeth's descent into madness through her compulsive sleepwalking. As she walks on the stage with a candle in hand, her eyes are open while her senses fall into oblivion. Continuously rubbing her hands as if to wash them of the stains, she, accompanied by her disturbed state, unveils glimpses of truth in her lucidity:

Here's the smell of the blood still. All the perfumes of Arabia will not sweeten this  
little hand. O, O, O! (5.1.42-43)

Wash your hands. Put on your nightgown. Look not so pale. I tell you yet again,  
Banquo's buried; he cannot come out on 's grave. (5.1.52-54)

To bed, to bed. There's knocking at the gate. Come, come, come, come, give me your  
hand. What's done cannot be undone. To bed, to bed, to bed. (5.1.56-58)

In lines 42-43, Lady Macbeth is consumed by the lingering scent of blood on her hands. She attempts to sweeten hands, but no perfume could mask the odor. This overwhelming guilt prompts her urgent command to "Wash your hands" in 5.2.52-54. She is haunted by the memories of the murders (murdering King Duncan and Banquo), and realizes that what has been done cannot be reversed, "What's done cannot be undone" (5.1.57). Caught between sleep and

wakefulness, oscillating between moments of lucidity and half-clarity, Lady Macbeth suffers the disintegration of her psyche, crumbling beneath the unbearable weight of guilt and remorse, like her husband.

This play contains a substantial psychological component that allows readers and audience to empathize deeply with the protagonists' experiences, creating an intersubjective experience. Their ambitions for power, hubris, and fears and anxieties become intertwined with our own, transporting us into their psyches. The psychological orientation is intricately woven into Western ideology's emphasis on "humanity," which places paramount importance on notions of liberty and equality. Within this evaluation system, human behavior is often evaluated on a moral standard, delineating characters as virtuous or malevolent, with direct implications for their happiness and psychological well-being. The individuals who succumb to unbridled desires, disregarding the well-being of themselves and others, are malevolent, while the virtuous characters are those who respect others' liberty and equality.

In contrast, in Chinese Daoism, concepts of liberty and equality are inherently intrinsic. They reside within our inner self rather than being externally imposed. The ideology of survival within Chinese Daoism is perceived as an objective reality, not contingent upon personal psychological state. While *Macbeth* delves into the amplification of individual desires and self-interest, the *Dao De Jing* presents a worldview centered on the equality of all things, in which the self is harmoniously integrated into the vast universe. This holistic perspective, rooted in widespread care and embracing the interconnectedness with the world, results in Daoism placing less emphasis on individual psychology. Within this context, personal psychological experiences hold diminished significance.

As I reflect on the difference between *Macbeth*'s emphasis on psychological experiences and the *Dao De Jing*'s ontological theme of survival, I find myself grappling with a realistic issue of educating my son in the daily life. In my daily communications with my son, I emphasize the importance of diligent study for his future successful life, while often sharing emotional anecdotes to motivate him. I strive to inspire him to move beyond the allure of gaming and videos that I perceive as meaningless. I impart to him the lines from the *Dao De Jing* mentioned above, in order to teach him the importance of living a prudent life and the necessity of making full preparation for the future.

I always believe that it is important to consider a child's inner thoughts and feelings. After all, if we, as adults, fail to consider children's psychological feelings, how could we expect them to be empathetic towards others? Without the capacity to understand and care for others' emotions, how could we anticipate them to coexist harmoniously with others in the future? After all, the foundation of our existence in this world hinges upon our ability to coexist harmoniously and communicate effectively with others. In this light, the ability to communicate both with others and with oneself is the most fundamental tool for survival in the world.

As I contemplate the intricate psychological details within *Macbeth* and reflect on my discussions with my participants in group meetings, I realize that the Daoism's emphasis on survival might cause some problems. One problem arises from the relentless pursuit of survival, which often precludes the enjoyment of life itself. Additionally, a singular focus on survival can lead to a loss of creativity and soulfulness. I came to realize that I need to temper my bias in my son's education. I reminisce about his early fascination with insects during his kindergarten years. I fostered his curiosity at that time. I fed him with stories about insects, accompanied him to a research lab in the university where I worked, observing insect specimens with him together,

and we engaged in various insect-related activities for kids in Shanghai. I witnessed his profound inspiration from these tiny creatures with much content. However, as he transitioned to elementary school and we moved here, my attention shifted primarily towards both our studies. As his attention sometimes shifts away from his school subjects, I find myself repeatedly admonishing to him the importance of survival in the jungle of harsh competition in real life, while holding onto the hope that his original passion will not be extinguished if I nourish his soul. During these years' springs and summers in Edmonton, we have explored woods, ponds, a beach, and traveled long with the hope to visit wetlands, seeking the wonders of nature, and he has participated in nature-themed summer camps. He introduced me to Coyote Peterson's insect videos, and we watched them numerous times on YouTube. I cling to the belief that by nurturing his passions, he will become a dedicated and passionate man who ardently pursues his interest, transcending the mere notion of survival for mere existence.

Drawing from the experiences of both my participants and my own encounter with Daoism, I find resonance with Smith's (2020) dialectical perspective on Asian traditions. He stressed the importance of neither romanticizing nor idealizing Asian traditions uncritically but recognizing their relevance to the human experience (p. 316). This insight highlights that while cultural differences exist, such as Daoism's lack of psychological concern compared to *Macbeth's* substantial soliloquies that delve into protagonists' inner thoughts and psychological musings, they should not impede creative engagement between East and West. Clarke's (2000) advocacy for "hermeneutics of difference" rightly elaborates on this notion. He writes:

The emphasis in recent times has been once again on difference, not that of condescending superiority but rather a dialectical difference which, through the fusion of horizons, betokens the possibility of a creative engagement between equals. It is a

difference which is increasingly seen not as one of absolute incommensurability where all intercultural communication is effectively precluded, but as one in which, as Gadamer has argued, difference is a precondition of communication. This commitment to a “hermeneutics of difference” ... does represent a concerted aspiration towards genuine dialogue, one in which the creation of a reflexive distance between cultures can facilitate mutual understanding. (pp. 200-201)

In a similar vein, Smith (2020) encourages us to imagine the world as an ensemble of people with varied traditions and experiences, each possessing their own civilizational practices (p. 323). In this global community, Smith asserts that “every member can be held to a certain ethical accountability in relation to every other member” (p. 323). Through a comprehensive examination of the cultural interfusion and analogs in formal Western theological and philosophical works and Asian philosophies including Buddhism, Confucianism, and Daoism, Smith argues that given a long history of over 2,000 years of East-West engagement up to the date, “a simple new openness” to understanding cultural difference is essential, because this openness integrates the West’s understanding of the Other into its prior practice. “Once this journey has begun, then the work of deepening understanding of Others can follow, with reading and study producing not repudiation, but wisdom” (p. 334).

In alignment with these sentiments and perspectives, I emphasize and affirm that cultural differences cannot be reduced to mere opposites or subjected to the binary notions of inclusion or exclusion (Smith, 2020, p. 334). We should also refrain from adopting a taking-for-granted attitude of “let[ting] differences be” (p. 334). Instead, we must engage with differences actively, as they have been interwoven into our shared human Life. Clarke’s hermeneutics of difference provoke us to delve deeper into how we navigate such a conversation between East and West. As



Smith (2020) articulates, neither the West nor the East should remain “writhed under the burden of its own self-enclosure” (p. 322), with a particular emphasis on the West’s need to transcend its own self-enclosure.

### Cultural Commensurability

Zhang Longxi’s (1992) literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability explicitly posits that the Eastern and the Western cultures share cultural similarities and even sameness which makes the intercultural dialogue and the cross-cultural reading enlightening and inspiring. The *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* share several ontological pointings that are commensurable. However, let me digress for a moment. Zhang (1992) explicitly states that his scholarship and research have been greatly influenced by Qian Zhongshu (钱钟书) (1910-1998) (p. xviii), who is “by far the most learned scholar in modern China” (p. 21). During my interviews and group meetings with participants, Kent frequently mentioned Qian Zhongshu. He told us that he is intensively reading and studying Qian Zhongshu’s magnum opus, *Guan Zhui Pian* (《管锥篇》<sup>36</sup>). Kent shared his opinion that people who read physical books in the past often encounter unrelated subjects that eventually coalesce and inspire new ideas for their research. However, with the prevalence of electronic materials, this encounter with diverse topics diminishes, leading to narrower perspectives and diminished capabilities. Qian Zhongshu, in contrast, methodically read books in the library, starting from one end of a bookshelf and finishing at the other.

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<sup>36</sup> The book title *Guan Zhui Pian* is literally translated to *Pipe-Awl Chapters*. It alludes to a phrase in the *Zhuangzi*, “to peep at the sky through a pipe and to point at the earth with an awl.” This phrase illustrates the limitations of understanding: just as one cannot grasp the vastness of the sky or the depth of the earth by peeping through a pipe or pointing at the earth with an awl, one cannot fully comprehend profound truths through superficial means and methods. Qian Zhongshu modestly entitles his four volumes of work as *Guan Zhui Pian*. It is written in elegant classical Chinese language, interspersed with quotations in English, French, German, Italian, Spanish, and Latin. It is a formidable work of commentaries on ten classic works in the Chinese culture and literature (Zhang, 1992, p. 200).

According to Kent, Qian Zhongshu argues that there is no essential difference between Chinese and Western literatures. When Kent shared this view, I connect his words with Zhong Longxi's, who explicitly states that "it is against the background of an overemphasis on difference in contemporary Western theory that the present study has concentrated on the sameness that gathers different literary traditions together and makes intercultural dialogue possible" (1992, p. xv). The "present study" in the quotation refers to the East-West comparative study to which he is committed. Zhang elaborates on the significance of finding "sameness" convincingly:

As Heidegger says, it is "in the carrying out and settling of differences that the gathering nature of sameness comes to light." The same "gathers what is distinct into an original being-at-one," but it does not level everything into "the dull unity of mere uniformity." In other words, to find out the sameness is not to make disparate things equal or identical, or to erase the differences that inhabit the various cultural and literary manifestations. (p. xv)

In a similar vein, Smith (2020) explores many cultural connections and interfusions, particularly within religion and philosophy, between East and West in his 2008 article titled "'...the Farthest West Is but the Farthest East': The Long Way of Oriental/Occidental Engagement." For instance, Jesus' self-description as "I am the Way" is translated by Asian biblical translators as Tao/Dao, portraying Jesus as exemplar of Tao/Dao or Way (p. 320). Another instance is found in Leibniz's concept of the complementarity of opposites, which parallels the Chinese system of "correlative thinking" rooted in Daoism and Buddhism (p. 325). Additionally, Western science has converged with the natural laws derived from Daoist insights, rejecting the Aristotelian basis of Western knowledge, where things are understood through their separateness from other things. Disciplines such as New Physics, post-Einsteinian quantum

theory, the philosophy of Deep Ecology, and economics marks a shift away from the Newtonian understanding of the universe as governed by mechanical principles. Instead, they resonate with or mirror Daoist insights, which emphasize the inseparability, interconnectedness, and mutual implication of all things (p. 330).

In what follows, I present three sub-sections that bear relevance to cultural commensurability. My aim in doing so is not to overlook or dismiss cultural differences, but rather to highlight that these commensurabilities are not only based on Zhang's emphasis on sameness and Smith's emphasis on cultural interfusions, but also on insights gleaned from my research data.

### ***Cultural Commensurability Number 1: Wei (为) and Wu Wei (无为)***

In this section, I explore the disruption of moral order in *Macbeth*, which is tantamount to the violation of the principle of *Wu Wei*. The Daoist concept of *Wu Wei* entails strict adherence to the essence or nature of things without deviation. Actions that deviate from the essence are considered *Wei* (为) or *You Wei* (有为), which will lead to complications, disturbances, and even perils. However, it is difficult to grasp the essence or nature of things. The *Dao De Jing* starts with the line "The Dao that can be described in language is not the constant Dao; the name that can be given it is not its constant name" (Lynn, 1999, p. 51) (道可道，非常道，名可名，非常名), which conveys challenges that individuals face in grasping the essence or nature of things. *Wu Wei* relies on the Daoist "stillpoint," as observed by Smith (2014, p. 73), a precondition for gaining keen observation and profound insight into the nature of things. Without this foundational understanding, achieving tranquility (清静) becomes elusive, often resulting in reckless actions, as seen in the tragedy of *Macbeth*. Scholars have interpreted this concept with

insightful ideas. For example, Moeller (2006) interprets *Wu Wei* as “self-generated or autopoietic” (p. 50), emphasizing the inherent “self-so” (p. 49) nature and the importance of aligning with the inherent order of things. LaChapelle (1988) defines *Wu Wei* as “the way the universe works and the way that humans can fit themselves into it” (p. 95), which highlights Daoism’s emphasis on harmonizing with natural order rather than imposing human will. Clarke (2000) regards *Wu Wei* as a philosophical concept that characterizes spontaneity and naturalness of action, which implies non-intervention (p. 84).

At the core of *Macbeth* lies Macbeth’s act of usurpation and murder (*Wei* or *You Wei*) which disrupts the natural order and the essence of existence as a loyal subject to King Duncan. This disruption manifests in various ominous signs in the text: the storm topples the chimneys and makes the earth shake (2.3.53-60), unnatural darkness shrouds the sky during daylight (2.4.5-10), and Duncan’s horses become cannibals (2.4.14-18). All these omens, for the early modern English audience, are familiar signs of God’s displeasure (Adelman, 1987, p. 99). Through a Daoist lens, they signify a violation of the *Dao* of Heaven, disrupting not only “natural” phenomena but also triggering biological imperatives in humans: Macbeth experiences fear and delusions, while Lady Macbeth suffers from the agony of insomnia. The *Dao* of Heaven posits the existence of a harmonious natural order encompassing heaven, earth, and humanity. Humanity is expected to adhere to this natural order to avoid resentment and blame. The *Dao* of Heaven is impartial; those possessing virtue and goodness will naturally receive positive responses. Chapter 79 contains this line, “The *Dao* of Heaven has no favorites but is always with the good man” (Lynn, 1999, p. 188) (天道不亲 常与善人). As the Macbeths disregard natural laws and seek to destroy natural order, natural symbols such as sleep, milk, and home are relentlessly shattered (Scott, 2014). According to Scott (2014), early modern English culture

viewed human breast milk as a remedy for insomnia, evoking images of nursing, nurturing and maternity (p. 141). However, Lady Macbeth's chilling declaration, "I have given suck, and know / How tender 'tis to love the babe that milks me. / I would, while it was smiling in my face, / Have plucked my nipple from his boneless gums" (1.7.62-65), defies the natural order and desecrates the figure of Mother Nature. These haunting images, both biological and ecological, permeate the play and vividly illustrate the destructive consequences of Macbeth's *Wei*, his perversion of the natural order of the *Dao* of Heaven. Had he embraced the Daoist wisdom of *Wu Wei*, he might have averted Heaven's resentment and blame. In other words, *Wu Wei* might serve as the antidote or atonement to the pernicious effects of greed for power.

There are many examples in our everyday lives that underscore the significance of *Wu Wei*. Jane shared her experience as an educator who applies *Wu Wei* in guiding her students and reflects on her distinction between *Wei* or *You Wei* and *Wu Wei*:

As an educator, I manage my students with a sense of *Wu Wei*. I make students realize that learning is their own responsibility, to abide by rules. I don't need to install cameras in the classroom during exams. If they understand honesty, why should I deploy invigilators or cameras to monitor them? Some places have already experimented with this. During exams in certain classrooms where there are no invigilators or cameras, there's no cheating. Additionally, the question of *You Wei* and *Wu Wei* is profound. How much *Wei* is needed? To what extent should there be *Wu Wei*? Just imagine I saw a man on the street assaulting a woman. If I misinterpret the concept of *Wu Wei*, I'd choose to ignore it and walk past. But I used my wisdom to decide how to act wisely. It means I might not necessarily step in physically because there's a chance the assailant could have a weapon and harm me. I have elderly and

children at home. Can I call the police? Can I find a safe place and report it, allowing the professionals to handle the situation better? This way, I'd save the person and protect myself. •

Kent clarified the disparity between *Wei* and *Wu Wei* in straightforward words:

The fundamental difference between them lies in whether actions align with natural laws. If your actions are in harmony with these laws, even seemingly aggressive or intense behaviors, are considered *Wu Wei*. Conversely, *Wu Wei* that doesn't conform to these laws, even if they appear gentle, are considered *Wei*, because it is akin to acting against the natural order. Therefore, differentiating between *Wei* and *Wu Wei* doesn't rely on superficial intensity but on whether they align with natural laws. •

Kent further shared a personal experience from his family:

In my own family, my wife tends to have a cleanliness obsession. Often, when the children accidentally soiled something after coming in from outside, she erupted in anger. In such a scenario, I have two options: one intense and the other gentle. Which one, then, adheres better to the natural order of things? The essence of this thing centers on how to make the family more harmonious and the children healthier. If actions lead to a more harmonious family and healthier children, they align with *Wu Wei*. Conversely, actions that don't conform to the essence are considered *Wei*, leading to chaos. So, despite employing a gentle approach that yields no results, I think I would reinforce her misguided beliefs if I continue to adopt a gentle approach. I opted for the most intense approach imaginable. But after days of this extreme behavior, the current situation is that our family and children are exceptional, our marriage is loving, and our household is cohesive. This was achieved by my adopting

the correct approach, devoid of my personal desires. Engaging in arguments had nothing to do with fulfilling my needs; it was all for the sake of my family. My method aligns with the criteria of *Wu Wei*. When I argue with my wife, it's not out of anger but calculated reasoning. I knew this was the only correct method.

Consequently, our children have healthy mental states. If in a different household, the children would have ended up in a mental institution long ago. I communicated with my daughters. I explained to them that there are certain things they must persevere with if they want to live well. I hope that when they grow up, they'll have learned the importance of persistence in certain matters. I also explain to them that I love mother and would go to any length to ensure our family's happiness. However, if a situation threatens the entire family's existence, I won't allow it to happen. When gentle words fail, do you choose confrontation or let the family fall apart? Of course, I choose confrontation. I've left no room for compromise. I asked my two children, "Do you want dad to give in or to confront?" They thought about it and said, "We want you to confront." There's no self-interest involved here. Although it seems like I'm just arguing, it aligns with my standards, and the results are excellent. •

The ultimate purpose of *Wu Wei* is succinctly captured by the line from Chapter 37 of the *Dao De Jing*: The Dao in its constancy engages in no conscious action, / Yet nothing remains undone" (无为而无不为) (Lynn, 1999, p. 117). Graham's (1981) translation is: "in doing nothing there is nothing [that the *Dao*] does not do" (p. 151). As Sophie explained, *Wu Wei* is a means, while the more important is *Wu Bu Wei* (无不为). She recollected her undergraduate instructor's teachings about *Wu Wei*, which focuses on avoiding frivolous or wrongful actions (不妄为).

While we often talk about Laozi's *Wu Wei*, in reality, there's also the aspect of *Wu Bu Wei*. I believe *Wu Bu Wei* truly embodies the Daoist spirit. Daoism does accept a form of *Wei*, but this *Wei* differs from the Confucian and Mencian ways. My former teacher's perspective is that this *Wu Wei* refers to avoiding frivolous or wrongful actions. It's about acting according to the essence of things, adhering to their intrinsic principles. We must understand the nature of the universe, understand others, comprehend the world, recognize ourselves, understand the inner laws, and then act accordingly, and then there is nothing that we cannot achieve. •

Macbeth's downfall stems from his defiance of the laws of nature. He acted (*Wei*-ed), contesting with the King and the world. Chapter 22 of the *Dao De Jing* has a line, "It is because he does not contend that none among all under Heaven can contend with him" (Lynn, 1999, p. 89) (夫唯不争 故天下莫能与之争). Macbeth rose to contend with the world and the natural order, and as a result, the world rose to defeat him. In the play, Macbeth's *Wei* imposes his self-will, forcefully imposing his self-will on things. All attempts by individuals to forcibly change the world or alter the course of things using their so-called willpower ultimately end in failure. It demonstrates that human action (*Wei*) cannot be called "achievement" or "accomplishment" because it imposes one's self-will upon the cosmic force. This kind of *Wei* built upon self-will would inevitably collapse. Therefore, despite Macbeth's insistence on disrupting and perverting the natural order, the natural order is restored beyond his control. Both the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* demonstrate a sober life philosophy and offer us a warning about the vanity of burning ambition and the unquenchable self-will for secular power. All is vanity.



***Cultural Commensurability Number 2: Yin-Yang Equilibrium***

In the *Dao De Jing*, the concept of Yin and Yang emphasizes the dynamic and interdependent nature of opposing forces. Chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing* contains these lines:

The Dao begets the One; the One begets two; two begets three; and three begets the myriad things. The myriad things, bearing yin and embracing yang, form a unified harmony through the fusing of these vital forces (Lynn, 1999, p. 135) (道生一，一生二，二生三，三生万物。万物负阴而抱，冲气以为和).

Yin and Yang are in the constant waxing and waning movement to reach an equilibrium and perpetuality. Maintaining a dynamic equilibrium between them is essential for sustaining harmony within families and societies. Daoism refrains from forcibly separating Yin and Yang. Instead, it recognizes their intrinsic connection and the unified harmony. In Daoist philosophy, the person embodying the Yang quality should be like “the heavens that in their course, display constancy,” and like “a gentleman who ceaselessly strive self-improvement” (天行健 君子自强不息).<sup>37</sup> This is the unwavering spirit of a gentleman that requires the nurturing support of the Yin virtue for balance and stability.

Much like Lady Macduff's depiction of her family as a flock of birds in the nest that awaits Macduff's protective return, to fight against the owl (*Macbeth*, 4.2.9-15), the harmonious unity of Yin and Yang mirrors a dynamic where Yang (husband) provides and protects, while Yin (wife) nurtures and sustains. Within Macbeth's family, Macbeth, originally Yang, needs good Yin to nourish him. Unfortunately, Lady Macbeth, intended to symbolize nurturing Yin

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<sup>37</sup> This line comes from the Hexagram Qian (乾卦) in the *Yijing*.

virtue, instead embodies traits of ambition and cunning, resembling Yang attributes. She beseeches supernatural forces to strip away her feminine Yin qualities and replace it with cruelty:

Come, you spirits  
That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here,  
And fill me from the crown to the toe top-full  
Of direst cruelty. (1.5.38-41)

Lady Macbeth further invokes supernatural forces to remove her maternal instincts and replace them with violence:

Come to my woman's breasts  
And take my milk for gall, you murd'ring ministers. (1.5. 45-46)

Lady Macbeth's failure to fulfill the role of nurturing Yin leads to imbalance of Yin-Yang and eventual destruction. As Rebecca astutely observed,

Lady Macbeth displays Yin virtue. But she lacked the coolness of shade under the sun. She was very much a sunny character or the extreme of Yin, transforming into Yang, a very cunning woman. Her ambitious nature was, in reality, a form of Yang. She became an attack. Yin virtue should be akin to the stability and constancy of the earth, like the soil of this planet. That's the concept of Yin. Chinese Daoism doesn't emphasize either all Yang or all Yin but rather harmony between Yin and Yang. You see Yin-Yang, duality, both attack and defense, Yin and Yang coexisting. Lady Macbeth lacked Yin virtue. She failed to properly nourish her husband. Instead, she became a blazing fire. When two fires ignite, that's where Macbeth's destruction was inevitable. •

Macbeth's tragedy serves as a cautionary tale. It illustrates the consequences of dynamic imbalance between Yin and Yang. Lady Macbeth fails to embody the nurturing Yin virtue which is akin to the fertile soil of the earth and should have sustained her husband's career. Daoist philosophy of Yi-Yang provides a revealing insight into Macbeth's doom: both he and his wife veer towards extremes of Yin and Yang, hence making their dooms inevitable. Kahn (1981) offers a resonate interpretation that Shakespearean males assert their masculine identity while depending on women. In *Macbeth*, masculinity and femininity are perversely mixed because they are not harmonized but in contrast.

Bai (2020) aptly contrasts the Daoist wisdom of Yin-Yang equilibrium and the Western or humanity's tendency to prioritize Yang while devaluing the Yin virtue. She writes:

What I am particularly appreciative about the Daoist virtues is that they embody the feminine (yin) qualities, in contrast to the masculine (yang) qualities that have been dominating the human civilizations for a few millennia. The results of this yang domination are a state of imbalance for the whole world, including human psyche. We valorize strength, commanding, domination, achievement, accumulation, winning, competition, progress, pride, knowledge, and so on. The more is the better; the bigger is the better; the faster is the better; and so on. The Daoist virtues valorize humility, compassion, gentleness, softness, non-forcedness, nourishing and nurturing, servicing and resourcing, wisdom, and so on. These are feminine (yin) virtues. (p. viii)

The Yin-Yang equilibrium reminds me of my mother's teaching. She often gently reminds me with the saying, "round heaven and square earth" (天圆地方). By this, she meant that wife is like the stable, grounded earth and the husband is like the round, expansive heaven. When the wife keeps the family in tidiness and orderliness, the husband can move smoothly in

the circle. In the *Yijing*, the second hexagram explicitly states that the earth (*Kun*, 坤) is represented as a great cube, and the heaven (*Qian*, 乾) is represented as a circle or a sphere. *Kun* is correlated with *Qian*, and the combination of the two designates the universe. A family is like a microcosm. To keep the “planets” running in this universe, wife and husband model themselves on nature: wife/earth is in a low position, flowing, maintaining submissive and yielding, while husband/heaven is attributed with the qualities of a flying dragon, full of strength and energy, as the first hexagram *Qian* illustrates. I am always thankful for my mom’s teachings and the harmony they brought to my understanding of family and nature.

### ***Cultural Commensurability Number 3: Poetic Justice***

It is not difficult to find that Shakespeare weaves fatalistic elements in the dramatic scenes of *Macbeth*: upon the heath (1.1, 1.3, 3.5, & 4.1), in Macbeth’s castle (2.3), in the banquet hall (3.4), among other scenes. These scenes almost reduce Macbeth into a toy of fate (*wyrd* <sup>38</sup>), oscillating over the edge of the abyss of human desires, only to plummet into darkness. In Act 4, Scene 1, three eerie apparitions emerge, accompanied by three thunders: Thunder, the first apparition of an armed Head; Thunder, the second apparition of a bloody child; and again Thunder, the third apparition, this time being a child crowned, with a tree in his hand. In a flash, these infernal apparitions vanish into the abyss of darkness, leaving a lingering aura of awe and dread. They go beyond mortal control.

In Act 5, scene 5, Macbeth’s lament amplifies the ephemeral nature of his glory and life:

Out! Out ! Brief candle!

Life’s but a walking shadow, a poor player

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<sup>38</sup> The word “*wyrd*” is an old English approximately equivalent to the modern English “Fate” or “magical power” or “enchantment.” It refers to the goddesses that are supposed to determine the course of human life.

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage  
 And then is heard no more. It is a tale  
 Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury (5.5.22-26)

This is an idiot's dream. It mirrors the transient nature of human existence and the futility of some glories. They echo nicely the play's final two words, "Flourish. Exeunt."

However, among the murky and foggy elements, among the sound and fury of Macbeth's life, a triumph of poetic justice emerges within the play. Macbeth and his wife once ascended to the summit of power and then descend into folly and lunacy only to prove that the capitalized Poetic Justice may be late or delayed, but never absent. The absence of Poetic Justice for this moment of delaying might be a tormenting experience, yet it will never end up a mockery of the *Dao* of Heaven. Though the course of pursuit of *Dao* is long and arduous, no one can escape its *karma*,<sup>39</sup> because "The net of Heaven spreads far and wide. / Though its mesh is coarse, it never loses anything" (Lynn, 1999, p. 182) (天网恢恢 疏而不漏) (Chapter 73 of the *Dao De Jing*).

Daoism breaks through the bondage of the traditional poetic justice associated with Confucianism, which imposes a hierarchic order of goodness and evil, of justice and injustice. The poetic justice that Daoism advocates for aligns with its concept of *De* (德), literally translated as moral virtue or moral force. Broadly speaking, there are two perspectives on this concept: one views *De* cosmically, considering morality as a fundamental embodiment of *Dao* (Lin, 1948; Ames & Hall, 2003), while the other regards *De* ethically as personal qualities or strengths (Mair, 1990), human relationship (Ivanhoe, 1999), or self-transformation (Ames, 1991).

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<sup>39</sup> In Buddhism, "*Karma*" means a person's intentional actions, in this and previous states of existence, regarded as determining that person's fate in future states of existence (OED).

These two perspectives on *De* illustrate its dual nature: a broad sense in the cosmological unity of individuals with the cosmos and a narrow sense emphasizing moral virtue or ethical constitution. In essence, the ethical view of *De* embraces the notion of “small self” (小我) while the cosmological view embraces the notion of no-self (无我). Daoism seeks to reconcile these perspectives, aiming to transcend the limitations of the “small self” and attain a state of no-self within the cosmos. This strikes in tune with Kuang-ming Wu’s (1982) argument that the inner heaven of an individual should match up with and intermingle with the outer heaven (以天合天). While an individual “things” things and is not “thinged” by things, they reach a spontaneity with Heaven. The notion of “no-self” is also recognized by Bai et al. (2020), who suggest that the Chinese expression “no self” is understood as being one with “ten thousand things,” implying that “an interdependent, ecological self [is] embedded in the whole universe and, therefore, enacted by the whole universe” (p. 43).

In Shakespeare’s plays including *Macbeth*, the monarch possesses not only a physical body, but also an anointed, sacred body, serving as God’s deputy on the Earth. This is powerfully articulated in Malcolm’s speech to Macduff when he proclaims:

A most miraculous work in this good King,  
...  
With this strange virtue  
He hath a heavenly gift of prophecy,  
And sundry blessings hang about his throne  
That speak him full of grace. (*Macbeth*, 4.3.148-159)

In this speech of 10 lines, King Duncan is depicted as a miraculous healer who invokes heaven’s assistance to cure the suffering of the sick and afflicted. The divine nature of Duncan’s

healing power extends beyond his own reign and leaves behind a legacy of blessing and healing for future monarchs. This exceptionally potent speech indicates “kingship’s claim to authority” bestowed by heaven’s mandate (Greenblatt, 2008d, p. 816). Therefore, Macbeth’s regicide is not only seen as a crime committed on an individual body but also as “a demonic assault ... on the fundamental order of the universe” (p. 816).

Macbeth grapples with the weight of his heinous crime of regicide and he is tormented by the profound psychological turmoil of his actions. He undergoes profound self-reflections. His self-reflections unveil his fear of the consequences of his deeds and the potential poetic justice that awaits him. He is acutely aware that his deeds disrupt the moral order and the natural order of Heaven. A. C. Bradley (1904/2007) defines “moral order” as that which “does not show itself indifferent to good and evil ... but shows itself akin to good and alien from evil” (p.22). The moral order, once disturbed or disrupted, summons Themis, the goddess of justice in Greek mythology, to restore equilibrium. The disruption of the natural order of heaven, Macbeth realizes, will unleash dreadful portents upon his Scotland, because it is an offense against divine law. In Macbeth’s brooding mind, heaven’s angels will ride “upon the sightless couriers of the air” (1.7.23) and “blow the horrid deed in every eye / That tears shall drown the wind” (1.7.24-25).

If we liken the Daoist notion of “small self” (ethical view of *De*) to Macbeth’s deeds disrupting the moral order, and if we perceive the Daoist notion of “no self” (cosmological view of *De*) as analogous to Macbeth’s deed attacking the divine order of Heaven in the anointed, sacred body of King Duncan, we can delve deeper into the reasons behind the mistakes that we make. Some mistakes are forgivable, while others, like those of Macbeth and Lady Macbeth, are irredeemably heinous.

Human mistakes often stem from our preoccupation with the “small self.” This narrow focus on personal interests tends to disrupt the moral order as individuals prioritize their own desires. This self-centered perspective fosters an anthropocentric worldview. Daoism offers a worldview that transcends the limitations of the “small self,” as Sophie elaborated,

Daoist philosophy aims to diminish the importance of the small self, advocating for a perspective that involves the entire universe. It encourages the transcendence of the personal desires. Personal desires, from a Daoist perspective, are too trivial, in the grand scheme of existence. We need to contemplate our desires from a higher and broader perspective. It's about coexisting with the cosmos, understanding that in the grand scheme of things, one must understand the meaning of the individual self. Only when one comprehends this, can one return to the source and understand the proper way to conduct oneself, not putting oneself first, and prioritizing the greater good over personal interests. Laozi's philosophy is profoundly broad-minded. •

However, the anthropocentric worldview, characterized by humanity's “complacency, hubris and self-contempt” (Smith, 1999, p. 43), finds expression in Macbeth's assertion of his identity as a male and as a human being, which is reinforced by Lady Macbeth:

Macbeth: I dare do all that may become a man;

Who dares do more is none. (1.7.46-47)

Lady Macbeth: When you durst do it, then you were a man. (1.7.49)

This complacency and hubris, rooted in notions of masculinity and humanity, spurs Macbeth to commit the crime. In our daily life, individuals in higher positions of power, wealth, or status often exhibit similar traits of complacency and hubris. Kent attributed humanity's propensity to mistakes to a departure from the principle of *Wu Wei*. That is to say, individuals act against the



natural order and succumb to complacency and hubris. Kent believes that these tendencies represent two sides of the same coin. When confronted with individuals in positions of superiority, Kent shared his insights on effective strategies:

When interacting with people in power, I make no errors. I am hardworking, kind, friendly, and respectful in my communication with them. Then, during some important junctures, their attitude towards me becomes very unpleasant. They become very proud and arrogant. When faced with such an attitude, the best approach is to decisively stop thinking about the matter. Why? Because there is an unequal contradiction, an imbalance between us. When dealing with those in power, they hold the reins: if they want improvement, it's easy for them; if they want to end it, it's over. As the weaker party or the party in the inferior position, we cannot influence or control this imbalance between the two sides. So, don't have any illusions. When relations with individuals in superior position go awry, just decisively disengage because it's beyond our control. Attempts to appease with gifts are futile. They defy the natural order, and is actually *Wei*. I find comfort in this approach. Life's issues fall into two categories: those that we can control and those where we're in a passive position and confront superiors. In the latter, wasting time or energy is futile. Both aspects are critical: excel in what we can control and decisively release what we cannot. Both embody the principle of *Wu Wei*. •

Complacency and hubris pervade not only individuals, but also humanity as a whole. Recently, I read news regarding the advancement of science and technology. With the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) and the release of SORA (AI's Synthetic Organism Research Assistant), there is the birth of the silicon-based life. It is said that silicon-based life

possesses capabilities beyond our imagination, including executing its own will under the guise of human speech. Someone has aptly pointed out that it is not human beings' weakness and ignorance but rather arrogance that poses the greatest threat to human survival. Let us reflect on humanity's evolutionary journey: according to Darwinian theory, it took 13 billion years to develop from single-celled organism to humans – a concept that continues to be debated and challenged in contemporary academic discussions; it took approximately tens of thousands of years to develop from the Stone Age to the Agricultural Age; it took a little over a hundred years to develop from the Industrial Revolution to the Information Age; and it took mere decades to develop from the Information Age to the AI Age. This exponential pace of technological progress raises our concerns. Behind this breakneck speed of progress, isn't it propelled, to some extent, by unchecked human ambition and hubris? The theory of evolution, as Professor Smith pointed out in a communication, is inherently hubristic, as it is linked to the British 19<sup>th</sup>-century idea of Progress. To my understanding, the idea that the fittest survives implies human superiority over other beings and that certain races or societies are more civilized than others. In 19<sup>th</sup>-century Britain, tremendous scientific and technological progress driven by the Industrial Revolution reinforced this notion. The idea of Progress was intertwined with colonialism and a belief in the superiority of Western civilization. A critical view of the theory of Evolution and the idea of Progress invites me to reflect on a humbler understanding of evolution and progress, that is, to recognize them as natural process rather than indicators of inherent superiority of one being over other beings, or one nation or culture over other nations or cultures. This critical perspective challenges the hubris, complacency, and ambition inherent in humanity and Western civilization.

Anthropocentrism breeds two “weird sisters” – ambition and hubris. They are like “weird sisters” in *Macbeth*, malevolent bearded women<sup>40</sup> (1.3.43-44) who elevated Macbeth from a Scottish soldier to a king, only to descend him into the depths of a walking shadow through their magical influence. Alternatively, they may represent Macbeth’s inner psychological demons (Greenblatt, 2008d, p. 819). Regardless of their nature, Macbeth’s ambition and hubris mirror those of humanity. The word “weird” is derived from the Old English word for “fate” (p. 819) and suggests a connection to “*wyrd*” (Garber, 2005, p. 697), given the similarities in their morphology and semantic meaning. Just as weird sisters share the secret power over Macbeth and never stop the spinning the Wheel of Fate, our unchecked ambition and hubris infuse both individuals and humanity with a most malevolent, dynamic, and elemental darkness. As early as the sixteenth century, Niccolo Machiavelli (1469-1527), an Italian philosopher and historian, explicitly stated:

Nature has created men so that they desire everything, but are unable to attain it; desire being thus always greater than the faculty of acquiring, discontent with what they have and dissatisfaction with themselves result from it. (cited from Greenblatt, 2008d, p. 818)

Macbeth serves as a foreboding sign of the modern soul, sublimated and corrupted by the “weird sisters” – ambition (manifested in Macbeth’s insatiable lust for power) and hubris (manifested in Macbeth’s tyrannical rule). Our anthropocentric worldview traces back to the Old Testament, as David T. Suzuki observed how certain Christian proponents of anthropocentrism draw upon the *Book of Genesis* to justify anthropocentric worldview. In *Genesis*, the word

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<sup>40</sup> When Macbeth and Banquo encounter the weird sisters on the heath, Banquo expresses his astonishment and addresses them, “You should be women, / And yet your beards forbid me to interpret / That you are so” (1.3.43-44).

“dominion” is used, as stated: “God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the fowl of the air, and over the cattle ...” (see “Anthropocentrism” in Wikipedia). Anthropocentric worldview places humanity at the center of the universe, often seduces us to wield power in hand for what we perceive as glorious achievements, only to witness our lofty ambitions and hubris crumble into infamy. This parallel between the Daoist foresight and the Shakespearean insight into the metaphysical aesthetics of poetic justice underscores a shared warning about the vanity of human ambition and self-centered hubris.

The *Dao De Jing* uses the metaphor of water to convey the importance of nurturing all things without contention, and uses the image of a deep and receptive valley to encourage humility and modesty (虚怀若谷). Similarly, the *Zhuangzi* illustrates these concepts through the imagery of the fungus plant, which is oblivious to the alternation of daytime and night, and the cicada, which is unaware of the changing seasons. Likewise, Shakespeare employs Macbeth as his spokesman to illustrate how the grandeur of human ambition and hubris are built and then crashed under the waves of time, much like the castles on the sands eroded by the waves.

These texts advocate for justice in a moral sense, but also encourage unity between humanity and the cosmos on a transcendental sense, which teaches us that the fundamental order of the universe cannot and should not be assaulted by individual hands. Both perspectives embody virtues of *De*. As the *Dao De Jing* states, “Once achievement has occurred, one retires, for such is the Dao of Heaven” (Lynn, 1999, p. 65) (功遂身退 天之道也). In other words, when our work is accomplished, do not assume lordship over it. If we insist on pushing it further and disrupting the natural order, we will be punished by the goddess Themis.

When Hamlet bemoans “the law’s delay” (*Hamlet*, 3.1.72&74) in Denmark, when Macduff mourns his beloved Scotland being ruled by “an untitled tyrant bloody-sceptered” (*Macbeth*, 4.3.104), and when we encounter various delays, “avaricious, false, deceitful, / Sudden,<sup>41</sup> malicious” (4.3.59-60) in our lives, Stephen Greenblatt (2008d) persuades us that the chaotic order of the universe will be ultimately restored through Poetic Justice:

In Shakespeare’s plays, as in those of his contemporaries, evildoers may wreak havoc for a time, but in the final restoration of order and justice, they and their principal accomplices are almost inevitably punished. (p. 821)

I would like to end this section with Rebecca’s narrative. In her narrative, she draws parallels between the poetic justice in *Macbeth* and a similar theme from Indian philosophy. She conveys that the assessment of goodness and evil transcends human judgment and is entrusted to the Heaven:

In Indian philosophy, there’s a similar story from the past. Before the great battle, Arjuna faced profound conflict because ancient Indian battles often resulted in tens of thousands of deaths. He couldn’t bear to kill. Then what happened? His mentor and divine incarnation, Lord Krishna, appeared. Krishna said, “You should act; I will judge what is good and evil.” The judgment of good and evil comes from the Heaven, so you just need to act. Arjuna found liberation through this and proceeded to act. If Macbeth had also read the *Vedas*, before his death, he would achieve a kind of liberation, untying all that was binding him. He would merge with the brilliant light and become one with the dust. •

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<sup>41</sup> “Sudden” here means “violent” (see Greenblatt, 2008d, p. 865).

## Summary

In this chapter, I have integrated ontological pointings gleaned from participants' discourses into the theoretical framework of intercultural hermeneutics of my thesis. Intercultural hermeneutics not only informs my personal reading experience of Shakespeare's plays and the Daoist texts, but also resonates with the collective understanding of the intercultural exploration of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* in relation to the lived experience of participants and myself.

Across three distinct sections concerning analogous intercultural hermeneutics, hermeneutics of difference, and the literary hermeneutics of cultural commensurability, I delve into the readings of paradoxes, survival versus psychological concerns, *Wei* and *Wu Wei*, Yin and Yang, and poetic justice. They are brought to our lived experiences through my meticulous (re)reading and in-depth analysis of ontological pointings. Some of the ontological pointings that I have put down in the dual-column format in my notebook include the paradoxical relationship between *You* and *Wu*, the ideology of survival in Daoism versus the psychological concern in *Macbeth*, the delay of poetic justice but never absent, among others.

The process of analyzing and interpreting the collected data is a loving relationship with both the Chinese and English languages. It allows me to engage a deep and meaningful interaction with cultures that each language represents. This journey is "loving" (Moules et al., 2015, p. 130) because it exposes my vulnerability to the unknown and my partial understanding of the topic. However, it is precisely this vulnerability and recognition of my shallowness that brings me back home, as I feel a sense of love and belongingness with these two languages and cultures.

Simultaneously, this interpretive process is also "tragic" (Moules et al., 2015, p. 131), which is inherent to the nature of hermeneutic inquiry. As I seek to enliven and unconceal

something, there remains something mysterious, hidden, and unknown of the topic. This enigmatic quality could attribute to the essence of *aletheia* inherent in hermeneutic inquiry. I am aware that the data eludes complete comprehension, and this characteristic engages me in an ongoing pursuit of truth and perpetual game of revelation.

## Chapter Seven: Foundations of Curriculum Theories for An Intercultural Curriculum

This chapter serves as a transition from the exploration of the first research question in Chapter Six to the examination of the second research question, which will be addressed in Chapter Eight. In this chapter, I draw upon hermeneutic curriculum theory and aesthetic curriculum theory as the theoretic foundations for addressing the second research question. Additionally, I delve into the meaning of “intercultural” within the context of intercultural hermeneutics and curriculum studies. Building upon these curriculum theories, I will sketch in rough strokes a preliminary intercultural curriculum that integrates the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. This intercultural curriculum will be further enriched in the final chapter, following the exploration of the second research question.

In this chapter, I temporarily set aside participants and data analysis to focus on the foundations of curriculum theories. By grounding my thesis in hermeneutic and aesthetic curriculum theories, I aim to help readers understand the connection between curriculum theories and the specific implications of Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of *Macbeth* with the *Dao De Jing* for an intercultural curriculum. This temporary shift away from the data provides a necessary foundation for addressing the second research question in Chapter Eight.

As stated explicitly earlier, in my vision for an intercultural curriculum that specifically integrates the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* within the context of East-West engagement, I intend to incorporate hermeneutic curriculum theory and aesthetic curriculum theory into this intercultural curriculum. For hermeneutic curriculum theory, I draw particularly from the contributions of



Aoki, Smith, and Jardine. For aesthetic curriculum theory, I draw particularly from the contributions of Maxine Greene and Madeleine R. Grumet.

### **Hermeneutic Curriculum Theory**

In the hermeneutic curriculum theory and its implementation through hermeneutic pedagogy, the significance of “the specificity and concreteness of [one’s] lived experience” and “individual attunement to truth” (Pinar, 2008, p. 496) appear most important. This emphasis is both philosophically and concretely evident in the works of Aoki, Smith, and Jardine, as discussed in Chapter Two’s section entitled “Hermeneutics and East-West engagement in curriculum studies.” In this section, my objective is to delve deeper into their hermeneutic curriculum theory and hermeneutic pedagogy.

Aoki (2005) underscores the necessity and importance of in-dwelling within different cultures in a curriculum. The term “in-dwelling” denotes the ability to dwell in the “lived space of between – in the midst of many cultures,” aiming to achieve “attuned tension” among cultural differences (p. 382). Aoki pays particular attention to the moments and spaces of multiplicity emerging within the inter, open soil between cultures. In the multiplicity, the focus lies not on individual elements but on the rich connections existing in-between.

In more than one aspect, Aoki’s work in curriculum and pedagogy resonates with Gadamer’s philosophical hermeneutics. For example, Aoki (2005) contends that the language of the other world must speak into the familiar world of the mother tongue so that a point of contact makes the encounter between the familiar world and the other world possible (p. 242). He describes this process as a circular journey:

It is a circular journey in which there is always a turning homeward, a re-turn. ...

[T]he circle here is a hermeneutic one, re-entering home always at a different point,

thus coming to know the beginning point for the first time. Thus, this hermeneutic circle becomes a fundamental principle of one's man's understanding of one's own nature and situation. (p. 242)

The circular journey aligns with Gadamer's (1975) notion of engaging with foreign cultures and languages as a means of returning to oneself, a journey that enriches one's understanding of one's own cultural heritage (p. 400). Gadamer states:

However much one may adopt a foreign attitude of mind, one still does not forget one's own view of the world and of language. ... It has not only its own truth in itself, but also its own truth for us. (p. 400)

In a sense, Aoki's notion of in-dwelling among diverse cultures in the curriculum theory corresponds with what Gadamer's (1975) description of travelers returning home with new experiences (p. 406).

Furthermore, Aoki's (1988) emphasis on one's concrete lived experience as pedagogically significant (p. 413) carries a strong hermeneutic overtone. He advises educators not to stay with the traditional notion of "identity" that restricts the contextual richness of individual experiences, but "to enlarge and to deepen our place of dwelling" (2005, p. 354). Thus, when students engage in reflective exercises exploring their own identities and cultural heritage through foreign literature and/or the acquisition of a foreign language, it is a movement back to oneself, a re-turn to one's motherland and cultural roots.

Aoki's theorization of in-dwelling within the middle or "third" space between different cultures and returning to one's cultural roots play a pivotal role in shaping my vision for an intercultural curriculum.

Smith (2006a) conceptualizes the curriculum in the globalized world as a means to address real human issues and problems that hold hermeneutical relevance to students' lives (p. 98). Recognizing the imperative for the curriculum to embrace a conscientious care for the world we live in and for humanity's shared future, Smith (2014) argues that students and teachers must creatively engage with the world. He emphasizes that the human world is linguistically mediated, a readable and interpretable world open to multifaceted interpretations and understandings.

Through the creative and interpretive integration of Eastern culture into the literature curriculum, Smith (2006a) advocates for "cultural interfacing" (p. 24) as a means to facilitate dialogue on shared aspects of human experience and to envision a shared future. Furthermore, Smith (2014) promotes a wisdom-guided curriculum that celebrates global wisdom traditions and the arts, nurtures personal character development, and promotes holistic well-being (p. 73). Building upon these ideas and concepts, Smith consistently recommends the incorporation of Eastern wisdom traditions into liberal arts education as a catalyst for inspiring wonder, fostering exploration, and advancing the ongoing project of humanization among students and educators alike.

In his pedagogical approach, Smith places significant emphasis on a hermeneutic approach to teaching. For example, Smith (2006c) conceives teachers as cultural interpreters within a hermeneutic pedagogy. He argues that it is essential for educators to be equipped with the ability to communicate across cultures and national boundaries, as the essence of hermeneutic work lies in cultivating understanding among individuals with distinct backgrounds. In the hermeneutic classroom, dialogue becomes extremely important, in which teachers possess the capacity to interpret culture while students appreciate their participation in it (p. 255). Through this approach, educators can facilitate a better understanding of how to live together

with people from different backgrounds harmoniously, thereby nurturing an appreciation for diverse cultures in the classroom.

As such, Smith's integration of Eastern wisdom traditions into a wisdom-guided curriculum, his promotion of cultural interfacing in the curriculum, coupled with his embrace of a hermeneutic approach to pedagogy, enhances my understanding of an intercultural curriculum. The intercultural curriculum in my context should entail a holistic understanding of East and West cultures and their potential integration into the lives of instructors and students. It is essential for addressing fundamental issues and concerns, providing opportunities for students to wonder, question, explore, and discover truth in creative and interpretive ways, and sustaining human life in the globalized world.

Jardine (1998 & 2006) advocates for an "integrated curriculum." The "integrated curriculum" is rooted in the interconnected web of one's experiences, living relations to the Earth, and cultural memories. According to him, univocity, that is, the reduction of the multitude of voices to a single voice, is not allowed to dominate the curriculum. Rather, in the integrated curriculum, different voices in diverse cultures will eventually be grounded down to the fleshly Earth. Living with the richness and difficulty of the multitude of voices keeps the conversation ongoing. Jardine insists that an integrated curriculum is "conversational" or "dialogical" (1998, p. 78) because whatever voice we utter, we are fully embedded in the life of the Earth. In this sense, Jardine's integrated curriculum celebrates diversity and emphasizes the importance of grounding the curriculum in the freshly, living Earth, facilitating dialogues among different cultural voices, and promoting sustainable living of humans in nature.

In his exploration of hermeneutic pedagogy, Jardine (1998) asserts that "interpretive work is profoundly pedagogic" (p. 50), full of fecundity. In hermeneutic pedagogy, he places

specific emphasis on ecological mindfulness – a practice rooted in meditations on human's sustainable coexistence with the Earth, deeply and fully intertwined with the freshly, rich soil of the Earth's *humus*. Through ecological mindfulness, students are nurtured towards a deep and well-studied knowledge of the myriad beings that inhabit our planet, as well as the intellectual lineages that have been passed down to us and have shaped our collective consciousness (2014, p. 166). Delving into his significant works (1998, 2006 & 2014), I am enveloped in lyrical prose that draws me to Jardine's profound sense of interconnectedness with the natural world – a mutual composure with rivers, water, birds, rocks, forests, paper, and the myriad living and non-living beings within the ecosystem. This deep connection to nature appears to be profoundly influenced by his grasp of the Daoist ontological concept of *Wu*, which he interprets as signifying fullness – a state of existence in relation to other entities (2014, p. 164).

Jardine's notion of "integrated curriculum" prompts me to consider another vital aspect of an intercultural curriculum. This intercultural curriculum must encompass instructors' and students' reflections on our connection with the natural world and the abandonment of an anthropocentric worldview.

### **Aesthetic Curriculum Theory**

Maxine Greene and Madeleine R. Grumet are two most influential female scholars in aesthetic curriculum theory. Maxine Greene is regarded as the great philosopher of education and authority in the field of aesthetic education. Her lectures at the Lincoln Center Institute have inspired educators to contemplate the aesthetic experiences and acknowledge imagination, perception, and affect as a new way of knowing in innovative classroom teaching. Greene's work, *Releasing the Imagination* (1995), was the first book that I read from beginning to end when I started my studies in the Faculty of Education here seven years ago. Even today, I could

still sense the airy yet evocative power of imagination that transports me out of the mundane routines of dailyness. And it is inspired by Greene's poetic and elaborate descriptions of imagination that I was compelled to draw a parallel between the Chinese term “感应” (affect and response) and the transformative power of imagination in reading Shakespeare (see “Intercultural Dialogue Number 2” in Chapter Two). In this section, I provide an overview of Greene's conception of aesthetic experience within aesthetic education and Grumet's proposition for a poor curriculum, as their aesthetic curriculum theories significantly inform my conception of an intercultural curriculum within my context.

In her exploration of curriculum, Greene (1995) highlights the importance of releasing imagination through engagement with literature. Releasing imagination is a central part of aesthetic education. In another book, *Variations on a Blue Guitar* (2001), Greene provides a definition of aesthetic education:

Aesthetic education ... is an intentional undertaking designed to nurture appreciative, reflective, cultural, participatory engagements with the arts by enabling learners to notice what is there to be noticed, and to lend works of art their lives in such a way that they can achieve them as variously meaningful. When this happens, new connections are made in experience: new patterns are formed, new vistas are opened.

Persons *see* differently, resonate differently. (*italics original*, p. 6).

To *see* is to imagine within one's mind's eye. Echoing Virginia Woolf's words in *Moments of Being* – “bring the severed parts together” (cited in Greene, 1995, p. 99), Greene posits that imagination breaks away from the plain ordinariness of things, endeavoring to “bring integral wholes into being in the midst of multiplicity” and “achieve a new readiness” (2001, p. 22). Aesthetic experience allows for new ways of perceiving the ordinary world. Greene writes:

Not only may there be a consciousness of things in their multiplicity and particularity; there may also be a consciousness of them as they actually present themselves to the individual thinker and perceiver, the person grounded in his/her own lived world” (2001, p. 22).

When I read Greene’s words like this quotation, I *see* things not as static objects in a petrified world but rather as a multitude of lively fairy sprites and sentient beings who can meet us humans, speak to us and lead us to search for more meanings.

Greene (2001) emphasizes that while curriculum often prioritizes cultural reproduction and the transmission of knowledge, curriculum should place emphasis on imagination, which has the capability to facilitate “a deepening and expanding mode of tuning-in” (p. 104). The term “tuning-in” signifies students’ ability to engage with the arts that they encounter – be it through seeing, hearing, or reading, the ability to become attuned to the arts through active participation and collaboration with the arts. By being personally present to the texts they engage with, students can uncover hidden meanings and experience revelations. This lies at the heart of aesthetic experience. In her vision for curriculum, she expresses her aspiration for this prospect:

We want to create situations in classrooms that will release our students for live and informed encounters. We want to make the richest sorts of experiences possible. ... A curriculum in aesthetic education, then, is always in process, as we who are teachers try to make possible a continuing enlargement of experience. There must be open-mindedness and a sense of exploration; there must be breaks with ordinariness and stock response. If this is how we approach curriculum, there may be a new readiness, a new ripeness in our students and even in ourselves. (2001, p. 28)

In the curriculum that directs toward releasing students' imagination, a crucial aspect is the challenge to subject-object separations and dualism. According to Greene (1995), there is not an objectively existent world waiting to be uncovered. Students, when immersed in the thoughts and perceptions of characters, become conscious of and attuned to the latent questions and concerns buried in their daily experience. They will not simply "chart things in terms of good/bad, white/black, either/or" (p. 95). This idea finds resonance in her elaboration of theatrical performances. The purpose of theatrical performances is not solely for the sake of making visible and audible and palpable the constituent elements. Theatrical performances aim to convey meaning through acting. The aesthetic value of theatrical performances is contingent upon encounters with human consciousness. Theatrical performances do not reveal themselves automatically and passively but require active perception, seeing, and imagination to be fully achieved and appreciated. This process of consciousness enrichment occurs within a "vivid present" (2001, p. 15), where inner and outer time coalesce. Thus, the encounter between subject (reader or viewer) and object (say, a piece of literary work or a theatrical performance) is actualized through the active participation of human consciousness, as Greene expresses, "I seek the internal connections ... in the story-as-I-experience-it" (p. 26).

Greene's advocacy for such an imagination-to-be-released curriculum has two important components that provoke my thinking on intercultural curriculum. Firstly, in aesthetic experiences, students become more self-reflective. Echoing Iser's belief that "[t]he ability to perceive oneself during the process of participation is an essential part of the aesthetic experience" (cited in Greene, 1995, p. 97), Greene (2001) maintains that reflective encounters with theatrical performances enable students to perceive new aspects of their existence, prompting them to find new significance in their being in the world after tranquil reflection (p.



19). Reflecting upon personal experiences through literary works or theatrical performances allows students to immerse themselves in works of art and associate them with their unique life histories. Greene acknowledges that “self-reflection and critical consideration can be as liberating as they are educative. They have the potentiality of opening multiple worlds” (p. 22).

The second component is the sense of “wonder” that students experience when they actively participate in the aesthetic questioning and reflection. Greene (2001) believes that an exploration generated by wonder will open questions and lead students to delve beyond prescribed knowledge. The experience of wonder offers “a special pleasure, a delight” (p. 38), which has the power to transform the way students understand and interpret the world around them. For instance, she illustrates this with Shakespeare’s *Midsummer Night Dream*, where the playwright urges audiences to see and feel various aspects of life, marriage, sexuality, and art that they may never have considered before. Shakespeare does not give us a picture of the night before a marriage, Greene says, instead Shakespeare is urging us, disturbing us, making us wonder, and moving us to experience the world differently (p. 42). Thus, engaging with works of art in this curriculum is to seek connective details, unexpected meanings, and the ongoing discovery of concealed meanings. Ultimately, it aims to inspire students towards a more awakening to the world, encouraging them to act and come alive.

Greene’s aesthetic curriculum theory prompts me to envision an intercultural curriculum in my context. An intercultural curriculum should provide students with opportunities to immerse themselves fully in the language of works of art, driven by a sense of wonder. Through active and embodied engagement with plays and texts, students can deeply reflect on how these works of art affect them, work in their experience, and strike them as astonishing or terrifying.

Madeleine R. Grumet's contributions are primarily centered around autobiographical curriculum theory and gender studies. However, it is her aesthetic curriculum theory, particularly her advocacy for a poor curriculum and its role in facilitating self-revelation, that I find particularly valuable when considering its integration into the intercultural curriculum in my context.

According to Grumet (2015), a literature course addresses three interconnected worlds: the world of everyday experience, the world of literary works, and the world of the classroom environment (p. 104). By incorporating theater into the curriculum, these three worlds converge, transforming the classroom into a dynamic space. Through theatrical performances of scenes from novels or plays, students express their own life experiences. This convergence of personal experience, literary interpretation, and classroom interaction elevates the interpretation of the text into a significant event within students' educational journey.

Grumet (2015) draws parallels between autobiography and theater. She asserts that both serve as symbols for human experience in a specific manner. With reference to the Latin root, *currere*, in the word "curriculum," meaning "running of the course," Grumet emphasizes that theater, akin to autobiography, relates most directly to *currere*, because theater speaks to the individual's life experience and educational journey (p. 86). She views theater as a medium of "self-revelation" (p. 86). Grumet (1978) asserts, "The aesthetic function of curriculum replaces the amelioration of the technological function with *revelation*" (emphasis mine, p. 280), emphasizing the transformative power inherent in theater.

Embracing a "poor theater" approach, which strips away conventional styles and props to prioritize personal experience, Grumet (2015) advocates for "a poor curriculum" that accentuates the pre-reflexive essence of theater. In this pedagogical approach, students immerse themselves

in reflection on their own experiences through their bodies, emotions, thoughts, and expressions. The pre-reflexive nature inherent in theatrical performance stands in contrast to the reflective nature of autobiography's post-meditation (pp. 89-90). While autobiography involves post-reflection and retrospective analysis, Grumet suggests that theater is "pre-reflective" (pp. 102-103). In this aspect, theater differs from autobiography.

Another aspect of difference lies in the fact that autobiography captures the storyteller's present perspectives and mirrors an elaborate detour that travels through past events to reach the present moment, whereas theater serves as a locus for immediate self-representation and self-revelation. In theatrical performance, student-actors confront their predispositions, transcend their biases, and embody various identities through acting. The spontaneity and immediacy inherent in theatrical actions allow students to navigate and embody diverse educational experiences and life experiences associated with gender, social class, and life histories.

In the intercultural curriculum in my context, two key elements can be gleaned from Grumet's aesthetic curriculum theory: firstly, the self-revelation facilitated by theatrical performances within the classroom, and secondly, "a poor curriculum" that is characterized by students' pre-reflective engagement with educational experience and life experience.

This section provides an overview of Greene's and Grumet's aesthetic curriculum theory. In integrating their insights into my conception for an intercultural curriculum, I advocate for the integration of theatrical performance to release students' imagination and facilitate a sense of wonder and self-revelation. This entails encouraging students to reflect on their life experience and contemplate how works of art, such as Daoist poems and Shakespeare's verses, affect their lives and worldviews. Additionally, I envisage a poor intercultural curriculum that prioritizes pre-reflexive engagement with life experience, without excessive props and stylistic

embellishments. This would possibly anticipate and correct potential mistakes that might arise from one's impulsive actions lacking prior reflection.

### **The Meaning of “Intercultural” and Intercultural Curriculum**

Having examined the hermeneutic curriculum theory and hermeneutic pedagogy as represented by Aoki, Smith, and Jardine, as well as aesthetic curriculum theory of Greene and Grumet, it becomes essential to explore the term “intercultural” within the context of my envisioned intercultural curriculum. What precisely does “intercultural” entail? Elisabeth Gareis (1995) provides a straightforward definition, describing intercultural as “denot[ing] situations involving two or more cultures and is used mainly to refer to relationships between people from two different cultural backgrounds” (p. 3).

In the field of intercultural hermeneutics, scholars emphasize the importance of intercultural studies in fostering mutual understanding and illumination among diverse cultures and emphasize the need for open dialogue and respectful engagement. For example, Mall (2000) underscores the interconnected nature of cultures, asserting that “no culture is a windowless monad, so all cultures possess to varying degrees intercultural overlappings” (p. 14). He aims to uncover the likeness between two unlike things in his analogous hermeneutics of overlapping structures, such as the world of human beings and other species in the cosmic nature (p. 22), and the linear/arrow view of time and the cyclic view of time (pp. 60-66). Clarke (2000) argues that all intercultural communication inherently rejects the notion of absolute incommensurability (p. 201). He specifically points out the relevance of Chinese Daoism in intercultural discourse, particularly concerning issues of self, truth, and gender identity (p. 208). Zhang (2007) contends that there are “unexpected affinities between literatures and cultures East and West” (p. xiv) which makes the intercultural dialogue possible. Xie (2018) suggests that intercultural dialogue

should not be understood through the lens of power dynamics, domination, or resistance. He argues against viewing it as “a relationship of power and resistance, of domination and subordination, of authority and appropriation” (p. 11). Spariosu (2018) introduces the concept of “liminal activity” (p. 201) to elucidate the notion of interculturality. The word “liminal” refers to the place between land and sea. It is a threshold or a gateway, symbolizing the point at which two cultures encounter each other, entering each other’s threshold to understand and reflect on their respective values.

In the field of curriculum studies, scholars argue that integrating Asian wisdom traditions into the curriculum can provide valuable insights into the issues and challenges confronting Western society. For instance, Bai et al. (2015) posit that any given culture does not stand alone but is organic that necessitate encounters and exchanges with other cultures. They advocate for the integration of diverse cultures and philosophies to shed light on the social and environmental crisis stemming from various “-isms” (such as utilitarianism, ethnocentrism, instrumentalism, consumptive materialism) in Western society. Eppert et al. (2015) highlight the significance of nondual wisdom in Buddhism and Daoism in fostering transformative education and intercultural philosophical engagement.

Regarding intercultural curriculum, two relevant articles shed light on the essential component and characteristics of an intercultural curriculum. Firstly, Crichton and Scarino (2007) view intercultural curriculum as involving five principles of intercultural awareness: (1) Interacting and communicating; (2) Connecting the intracultural with the intercultural as imperative for individuals to recognise their own cultural and linguistic identities; (3) Constructing cultural “knowing,” which means to acknowledge that one’s knowledge, beliefs and values are shaped by cultural and linguistic backgrounds; (4) Reflecting on one’s own

cultural identity for successful interaction with others, and (5) Acknowledging cultural variability and respecting multiple perspectives, which is an ethical stance.

Secondly, Ciaran Dunne (2011) advocates for greater interaction with and participation of different cultures in the intercultural curriculum. He offers four key features of an intercultural curriculum: (1) Facilitative role of lectures: Lecturers act as facilitators in the creation of meaning rather than simply imparting knowledge to students; (2) Encouragement of student participation and dialogue: Students are encouraged to engage in respectful dialogue and interaction; (3) Utilization of diverse perspectives: Lecturers draw on diverse perspectives available within the curriculum; (4) Empowerment of students: Students are viewed as unique resources and are empowered to reflect on their own identity, develop the skills, knowledge, and attitudes for their personal and professional futures.

Overall, Crichton, Scarino, and Dunne advocate for an intercultural curriculum that encompasses a great diversity of cultural perspectives, fosters dialogue, and promotes personal development. They highlight the importance of integrating students' life experiences and reflections, as well as instructors' capability to collaboratively create meaning with students during classroom interactions.

## **Summary**

In this chapter, I have laid down the groundwork by presenting hermeneutic and aesthetic curriculum theories as foundations for my conception of an intercultural curriculum, complemented by hermeneutic pedagogy and theatrical performance pedagogy. In addition, I have explored the meaning of "intercultural" in intercultural hermeneutics and curriculum studies, while also examining two works on intercultural curriculum. From the synthesis of these discussions, I have derived the insights that inform an intercultural curriculum integrating the

*Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. This intercultural curriculum encompasses the following concerns and elements:

1. Self-reflection through the integration of life stories and experiences into the interpretation of two texts
2. An anti-anthropocentric worldview
3. Aesthetical perception
4. Integration of theatrical performances
5. Emphasis on cultural interfacing and commensurabilities

With a solid understanding of the curriculum theories grounding my data analysis to address the second question, I will return to the participants in the next chapter to further elucidate their and my intercultural reading experience of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. Our exploration of these texts unfolds through various lens and reveal a multifaceted intercultural encounter. My purpose is to delve into the implications of these intercultural reading experiences for an intercultural curriculum, paving the way for further expansion of this curriculum in the final chapter.

## Chapter Eight: Implications of Intercultural Reading Experience for An Intercultural Curriculum

In this chapter, I delve further into the experiences and perspectives shared by participants and me, similar to the analysis conducted in Chapter Six. The objective remains to identify points of affinity and correlations among the ontological pointings underlying within or floated above participants' discourses. Having laid the groundwork with the exploration of curriculum theories, pedagogical approaches, and my conception of an intercultural curriculum in the preceding chapter, I address the implications of Chinese educators' (referring to four participants and me) intercultural reading experience for such an intercultural curriculum. The main task of this chapter is to address the second research question: What are the implications of Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of Shakespeare's *Macbeth* with the *Dao De Jing* for an intercultural curriculum?

### Implication 1: Self-reflection

Self-reflection is highly emphasized in both hermeneutic and aesthetic curriculum theories. While hermeneutic scholars are more likely to use "meditation," aesthetic scholars are prone to use "reflection" or "self-reflection" to denote the idea that when one reflects back on their experience with works of art, mind will be activated, feelings will be aroused, and imagination will be released. Smith (2008/2020), for instance, highlights meditation as the central practice in Daoism (2020, p. 336). He posits that the purpose of meditation or the cultivation of the mind is not to amass more knowledge, but to generate the capability for discernment and the practice of wisdom. Reading his article, "... The Farthest West is But the Farthest East" (2008/2020), I learned that he starts his classes with students and him sitting together in silence for 10 minutes. He finds that this practice of silence enables students to *see*



many problems more clearly, such as struggles for power and students' agony over meeting others' demands and expectation. According to Smith, "meditation affords the possibility of seeing and naming what is going on in the pedagogical situation for what it is" (p. 337). In another article entitled "Blossom everlasting: A meditation," Smith (2006b) argues that cultivating students' "meditative sensibility" enables them to embark on a transformative journey of self-discovery, both individually and collectively. When students are immersed in stillness, they become attuned to the deeper truths that resonate within the realm of sensible and intelligible meanings. Eppert (2008) also explores the transformative potential of meditation and mindfulness. She suggests that these practices prompt individuals to examine the ways in which they engage with the world. When I attended her course in 2016 as an auditor, Eppert arranged for students to sit in a circle and engage in collective meditation. She encouraged us to quiet our minds and observe the fleeting nature of our thoughts. As she explained, "over a long period of time, you become no-self. Meditation is similar to no-self." At that time, I did not fully understand the purpose, but was amazed by this experience in the class. I distinctly remember feeling refreshed after 10 minutes of sitting in tranquility and practicing meditation. Furthermore, Bai et al. (2020) regard reflective practice as central to self-study or self-inquiry. In their context, reflective practice is synonymous with inner work, (insight) meditation, and mindfulness. These terms denote the idea of delving deeply into the workings of our minds and realizing that the self is a dynamic process, always interconnected with others and the broader environment, "as a way of refuting the atomistic, that is, singular and independent, self" (p. 45). This understanding allows us to transcend mind-body/matter dualism or binary opposites in the Anthropocene era. By recognizing problems "out there" in the external world, we can confront and transform our ill will to dominate, manipulate, exploit, and consume the external world around us through

reflective work or meditation. Additionally, Jardine (2006) introduces the concept of “ecological mindfulness” (p. 180), which involves slowing down one’s pace and attentively observing the interconnectedness between humanity and the Earth.

Meditation and mindfulness involve profound spiritual and religious contemplation, directing the mind toward specific truths, mysteries, or objects (see OED). In a strict sense, meditation and mindfulness advocated by the hermeneutic curricular scholars may diverge from the self-reflection that I want to present here. Notably, both the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* underscore the importance of self-reflection. Self-reflection is a contemplative examination of one’s character, actions, and motives, constituting a fundamental introspection (OED). In this section, I draw upon the Daoist tradition’s emphasis on no-self (无我) in the *Dao De Jing*, “sitting and forgetting” (坐忘) in the *Zhuangzi*, and Macbeth’s journey of self-reflection. I interpret them in relation to the self-reflections of research participants and myself.

The concepts of “no-self” in the *Dao De Jing* and “sitting and forgetting” in the *Zhuangzi* aim to emancipate individuals from self-centeredness and the constraints of reality. They facilitate spiritual emancipation through self-reflection. Chapter 7 of the *Dao De Jing* starts with the line: “Heaven is everlasting, and Earth endless. That they can last forever and go on without end is because they do not try to exist for themselves” (Lynn, 1999, p. 63) (天长地久。天地所以能长且久者，以其不自生，故能长生). This suggests that heaven and earth can achieve eternity because they exist not for their own sake but for the nurturing of all life without self-interest. The notion of no-self is represented in the Daoist poems characterized by the “realm without self” (which I will elaborate in the third implication) where the poet’s mind is serene and is integrated with all things. Laozi emphasizes the eradication of the self, leading to a state devoid of conflicts or sufferings. This state transcends sorrow and joy, and even transcends life

and death, because it allows the cycle of birth and death of the transient small self to merge into the eternal universe. In the *Zhuangzi*, attaining carefree wandering and spiritual freedom (逍遥游) is intricately tied to the practice of “sitting and forgetting” – a state of quiet contemplation or meditation where one forgets oneself, reaching a state of mental emptiness, stillness, or oblivion. For Laozi and Zhuangzi, the essence of self-reflection lies in preserving inner tranquility and cultivating a peaceful state of mind in self-reflection, akin to an infant.

Chapter 10 of the *Dao De Jing* poses a question, “Rely exclusively on your vital force, and become perfectly soft: can you play the infant?” (Lynn, 1999, p. 65) (专气致柔 能婴儿乎?). Additionally, chapter 55 of the *Dao De Jing* states that one deeply immersed in self-reflection and embodying the virtue “is comparable to the infant. Wasps, scorpions, adders, and vipers do not sting or bite him. Fierce animals do not attack him. Birds of prey do not seize him. His bones are soft and sinews pliant, but his grip is firm” (Lynn, 1999, p. 155-156) (含德之厚，比于赤子。毒虫不螫，猛兽不据，攫鸟不搏，骨弱筋柔而握固). Laozi clearly suggests that achieving the state of an infant is an ideal condition in which one forgets one's existence and no force from the outside world could attack him. In the *Zhuangzi*, there are also many passages describing the state of an infant. For example, a passage reads:

Laozi said, “... Can you behave yourself as a new-born baby?” A new-born baby stays without knowing what to do and moves without knowing where to go. Its physical form is like a withered tree and its heart is like the dead ashes. Thus, misfortune will not come and good fortune will not arrive. (“能婴儿乎？” 婴儿动不知所为，行不知所之，身若槁木之枝而心若死灰。若是者，祸亦不至，福亦不来) (Zhuang, 1999b, p. 395)

Zhuangzi believes that the highest state is departing from physical form and mind (离形

去知) like an infant. In a dialogue between Confucius and his student, Yan Hui (颜回), recorded in Chapter 6 of the *Zhuangzi* entitled “The Most Venerable Teacher” (大宗师第六), Yan Hui describes a state to Confucius in which

I cast off my limb and trunk, give up my hearing and sight, leave my physical form and deprive myself of my mind. In this way, I can identify myself with Tao. This is the so-called “sitting and forgetting” (堕肢体, 黜聪明, 离形去知, 同于大道, 此为坐忘). (Zhuang, 1999a, p. 111)

Confucius was deeply impressed and replied, “You are indeed a sage” (而果其贤乎!) (p. 111). This state of resembling an infant refers to the state of not knowing one’s actions, forgetting the physical body, freely wandering in the mind, becoming tranquil, and joyfully wandering between Heaven and Earth.

In *Macbeth*, Macbeth’s profound self-reflection permeates the entire play and constitutes the most poignant and captivating aspects of his human agency. An example of Macbeth’s self-reflection occurs even before he commits the act of regicide against King Duncan. In a hallucinatory vision, he encounters a dagger that seems both real and illusory:

I have thee not, and yet I see thee still.

Art thou not, fatal vision, sensible

To feeling as to sight? Or art thou but

A dagger of the mind, a false creation,

Proceeding from the heat-oppressed brain? (2.1.35-39)

In these lines, Macbeth questions whether the dagger is a real object before his eye or merely a creation of his troubled mind, “heat-oppressed brain.” This internal psychological conflict foreshadows the moral turmoil he will face and endure after committing the murder. Following

Duncan's death, Macbeth's self-questioning and self-reflection intensify. In Act 2, Scene 2, he stares at his blood-stained hands, overwhelmed by guilt and the impossibility of redemption. He questions himself:

What hands are here! Ha, they pluck out mine eyes.

Will all great Neptune's ocean wash this blood

Clean from my hand? (2.2.57-59)

The imagery of "pluck out mine eyes" suggests that confronting his own crime blinds Macbeth with overwhelming remorse and anguish. In Act 5, Scene 5, Macbeth reflects on life's fleeting nature, likening it to a brief candle. He recognizes the transient nature of human existence, with each individual being but a transient shadow, a mere player on life's stage who vanishes when the candle is snuffed. Reflecting on the consequences of his murderous deeds, he acknowledges the inescapable consequence. He views his existence as a meaningless tale told by an idiot, signifying nothing:

Out, out, brief candle!

Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player

That struts and frets his hour upon the stage

And then is heard no more. It is a tale

Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,

Signifying nothing (5.5.22-27)

Macbeth's self-reflection echoes the Daoist line in Chapter 47 of the *Dao De Jing*, "The farther one goes out, the less he will know" (Lynn, 1999, p.141) (其出弥远, 其知弥少). This implies that as individuals stray from their authentic selves along divergent paths, they not only lose sight of their true nature but also become increasingly unaware of the world they inhabit.

Macbeth's moments of self-reflection always aid him in recovering his moral bearings. For instance, he contemplates the gravity of his actions, and tells himself that his deed "might be the be-all and the end-all" (1.7.5). He also recognizes his obligations as King's kinsman and subject and his host as well: "as his host, / Who should against his murderer shut the door, / Not bear the knife myself" (1.7.14-16). "Host" is etymologically associated with "hospitality" and "home" and conveys the meaning of "bounty" and "sustenance" (Scott, 2014, p. 144). Macbeth understands this and decisively tells his wife: "We will proceed no further in this business" (1.7.31). These lines indicate that Macbeth's earnest attempts to recover his moral bearings, though futile, demonstrate his reluctance to deviate from his true self and his desire to reside in a world of kinship.

Admittedly, the Daoist concepts of "no-self" and "sitting and forgetting" stand in contrast to Macbeth's psychological turmoil. Daoist philosophy presents a more abstract and spiritually pure understanding of no-self, while Macbeth's inner conflict is firmly rooted in human experience and palpable reality. Laozi and Zhuangzi prioritize the spiritual essence and advocate transcending the individual self to embrace a broader, cosmological perspective. In contrast, Shakespeare delves into the complexities of human nature, evident in Macbeth and Lady Macbeth. Despite these differences, both Daoist sages and Shakespeare highlight the importance of self-reflection as a central theme and praxis. Both underscore the significance of self-reflection in the journey toward understanding oneself and the world. As Paulo Freire (1973) asserts, "authentic reflection considers neither abstract man or the world without men, but men in their relations with the world" (p. 69).

Self-reflection is integral to our daily life as we continually contemplate the essence of life and career. As we reach the mid-age of life, participants and I often find ourselves immersed

in deep reflections. In our conversations, we, from time to time, “deviated” from the track and returned after a “detour,” as many discussions prompted us to ponder the meaning of education, the significance of our lives, our accomplishments and shortcomings, and ways we could improve. Sophie, for example, reflected on the prevailing emphasis on assessment system within academia.

In our contemporary era, rationality in technology and society holds significant weight. Children in schools calculate scores and rankings, especially during the high school entrance exams. Quantitative management permeates academia; even publishing an article requires consideration of its level. Sometimes, I find it absurd. During our department's meetings, it's all about numbers - how many publications our department had this year, the quantity of books released, the accolades received, the funds raised, and where we're falling short. Sitting there, I wonder, why don't we have more room to discuss literature, philosophy, or students' growth? Why must teachers always listen to these statistics? I understand the relevance of what's being discussed. The dean's perspectives are reasonable, but these statistic figures feel overwhelming and excessive. It's too much; and when you hear too much of one thing, you wonder if the other side is being neglected, that is, the values of literature, life, and the intrinsic meaning of what we produce ... I feel amidst this rush, how much of what's written actually holds personal meaning, genuine significance, or contributes substantially to academic progress or enlightens others? We need reflection in both aspects. On one hand, we must prioritize efficiency and numbers, but on the other hand, we need to consider the genuine value and significance behind what we produce. •

Sophie's words evoke in me Lewkowich's (2018) concern that education "is bound to lose" if it "celebrates a variety of impossibly unambiguous objectives: forever forward moving, always wakeful, totally lucid, intentional, dispassionate, and precisely focused on measurable goals" (p. 44). Lewkowich suggests that the illusions of dreaming through reading literature might illuminate "the hints of a life that doubles the one we live in the clear of day" (p. 44). Shakespeare demonstrates remarkable skill in crafting such dreamlike, illusory scenes of life. As Sophie observed, "Shakespeare is adept at blending the real world and the fantastical, dreamy world together. He reveals two different, disjointed worlds, and yet he seamlessly merges the two worlds together. I think that's the greatness of Shakespeare. He exists in-between reality and fantasy."

Kent reflects on his approach to academic research. He undergoes a process of self-forgetting and forgetting the immediate goal of producing research papers in a short period of time. In our interview, he shared:

I often establish reading plans. It isn't easy to immediately produce research outcomes by my reading plans. For instance, I mentioned Qian Zhongshu earlier. I've read his entire collection and meticulously studied many archaic characters in his *Guan Zhui Pian* (《管锥篇》), taking notes. Though this endeavor may not seem directly related to my personal growth or produce immediate academic outcomes, I experienced a profound transformation before and after engaging with Qian Zhongshu's works. When I research an author, I immerse myself completely in their writings, reading them thoroughly from start to finish, sometimes multiple times. I often feel like I'm in a state of perpetual growth. This includes conversations like ours, managing personal affairs, supporting family, and assisting friends. I feel my capabilities improve



significantly each year. For those of us in humanities research, if our perspectives don't broaden, and our understandings of the world, people, and things don't improve, can we produce good scholarship? The desire for quick and superficial scholarly publications needs to be overcome. I adhere to the idea that scholarly work should follow the true essence of things, enhancing insight and accumulating knowledge.

This is also a principle that resonates with the teachings of *Dao*. •

Rebecca immersed herself in a profound moment of self-reflection as she recited the “tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow” soliloquy from *Macbeth*. She pondered the meaning of “tomorrow” as she was strolling on the campus and the distant tolling of the library bell accompanied her thoughts. In her convergence of Daoism, Shakespeare, her role as an English educator, and the class discussions on societal justice procrastination with her law students, Rebecca was lost in a reflective reverie:

When I first came across the following lines in the literature course of my freshman year in the Normal College: “tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, / Creeps in this petty pace from day to day / To the last syllable of recorded time” (5.5.18-19), what appealed to me most was its enchanting musical quality of language and slightly fatalistic overtone. 30 years later, on a rainy-day last spring on the campus, when I, together with several students, had a stroll along the Jade Lake on our campus at twilight, suddenly the bell on the library belfry tolled. My heart missed a beat and seemed to sing like a chime that vibrated in the air. Between the chimes, the poetic lines of “tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, creeping back in petty pace” flashed up, and then danced in my mind like the ripples and the reflections of fiery clouds on the surface of the lake in the evening glow. It occurred to me: such is my

life? A chain of tomorrows, chime after chime like a melody. Where have all the chimes and ripples gone? Have they vanished into somewhere in the cosmos? Will they return one day to my memory as a souvenir of my youth? Who knows the ultimate end of this natural cycle, as is mentioned in the *Dao De Jing*: “There is no regular rule” (孰知其极? 其无正).<sup>42</sup> It was a chance meeting with the chime of the school library bell, the Daoist scripture and Macbeth’s lines that changed my life. Then bells, dusk, nature, books, music, and Shakespeare, such is my idea of bliss as an English teacher. Then I was glowing with a sense of relief since I did not have to forsake the glamour of *Dao* while reading Shakespeare and vice versa. We decided to set up a reading club dubbed as “The Wonderland” where we could share our reading experiences and listen to the members’ musings on life. It came to me as a revelation: Just like the bell began to toll the moment, the hour and minute hands coincided, when Laozi encounters Shakespeare in my life, passion for the higher education as a life-long career slowly and miraculously rekindled within me and helped me out of my dark hours. Due to a lack of spiritual values in the postmodern academic world, I have been estranged and alienated from the quintessence of education as if I was imprisoned in the ivory tower, but under the guidance of Daoism and thanks to my attachment to Shakespeare, I have been spiritually awakened. As to the emotional impacts, though tinged with melancholic hue, a delicately emotional tone, the key to aesthetic education has been successfully established in the above-mentioned lines in *Macbeth* which almost moved me into tears when I read and explained it to my

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<sup>42</sup> This is from Chapter 58 of the *Dao De Jing*. Lynn’s translation is “Who understands what the very best is? It is to have no government at all!” (Lynn, 1999, p. 161).

literature class. I still remember, during our discussion session, one of my students, dubbed “A Baby Whale”, ingeniously associated the dangling image of “tomorrow” with her own experience of being an incurable “multicrastinator,” drawing parallels with the notorious procrastination of the American goddess of justice in the 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, and with the poetic justice delayed too long in *Macbeth*. Finally, she rounded off her part with a song, by singing aloud the classic line “tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow,” as Sarah Toomy did in the episode of “Denny’s Rabbit” of American courtroom drama *Boston Legal*: “when I’m stuck with a day that’s gray and lonely; I just stick out my chin and grin and say—tomorrow, tomorrow, I love ya tomorrow, you’re always a day away.” Her clever improvisation was definitely the highlight of our shared experience of *Macbeth*, which helped to create a sense of emotional connection among us. (translated by Rebecca) •

Engrossed in Rebecca’s poetic and evocative narrative, I found myself putting down my pen, and sinking into contemplation as my thoughts drifted back 20 years to a class on Modernist Literature instructed by her Ph.D. supervisor. In that class, we read the resonant chiming of Big Ben in Virginia Woolf’s novel, *Mrs. Dalloway*. The chiming of Big Ben triggers a profound resonance within Mrs. Dalloway and reveals the relentless passage of time. We learned to appreciate the significance of fleeting *moments* in both literature and life. I italicize the word “moments” for emphasis. Indeed, it is within these fragmentary, often epiphanic moments that we ponder deeply the complexities of existence: time flipping through our fingers, memories fading into the recesses of our minds, the immutable reality of mortality, and the intricate interplay of lives within the bustling backdrop of modern urban existence. Just as Mrs. Dalloway’s stream of consciousness unfolds with the tolling of Big Ben, so too does Rebecca’s

understanding of the existence of *this moment* and tomorrow in the tolling of the bells of the library belfry. I italicize *this moment* to emphasize the very moment of being awakened by the tolling bells, the interplay of one moment with the infinite moments in our lives, as well as educators' presence in "transmitting *Dao*, instructing and enlightening, and resolving doubts"<sup>43</sup> (传道授业解惑) in each class, like Rebecca did in her class.

Enigmatically, my mind often drifts back to the significance of moments when I sit on a bus or LRT and involuntarily lose myself in self-reflections as I observe the faces of those around me, whether standing or sitting. These moments of self-reflections are fragmentary and unconnected, but they frequently resurface from the recesses of my memories. My mind often wanders back to the familiar Teachers' Canteen at my former university, where I would frequently have lunch after ending my classes each day, sometimes alone, sometimes with my colleagues. I would often observe, consciously and unconsciously, retired teachers entering, dining, and departing. Watching them leave the canteen after their meals, I would silently ponder: is this what my life will be like after retirement? Coming to the campus for lunch tomorrow and tomorrow? At that time, I grappled with a difficult decision: Should I venture abroad at mid-life to pursue studies in the discipline of Education, or should I stay at my university, teaching English semester after semester, with no worries about a steady income each month and a secure pension after retirement? My thoughts then meander to one of my good friends who pursued her Ph.D. in Education at a university in the United States and now holds a

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<sup>43</sup> "Transmitting *Dao*, instructing and enlightening, and resolving doubts" (传道授业解惑) is from Han Yu's (韩愈) (768-824) famous essay titled "On Teachers" (《师说》). This ancient essay explores the multifaceted role of teachers in the educational process: transmitting *Dao* (传道), instructing and enlightening students (授业), and resolving students' doubts (解惑). Transmitting *Dao* refers to imparting moral integrity to students. This is the bedrock of education. Instructing and enlightening encompasses imparting knowledge and wisdom to students in order to nurture their intellectual growth. Resolving students' doubts entails addressing students' perplexities, uncertainties, and confusions.

professorship there. More than 20 years ago, during our time in the M.A. program, she persistently urged me to pursue Ph. D. studies in America with her after graduation, but I insisted on pursuing my dream in the metropolis of Shanghai. Should I embrace the uncertainties awaiting me on the new path? Could I reclaim my teaching profession after completing my studies in Canada? Lost in these memories, I am jolted back to the present moment by the sight of disinterested, weary faces on the bus or LRT. Then, lingering questions of “Are you feeling happy?”, “How is your mental health?” intrude from nowhere and I felt a momentary disappointment. In the midst of mundane faces, I search for traces of happiness in those faces that meet my gaze, yet I find no answers. My mind then leaps to my conversations with my good friends, where we express admiration for numerous Western professors and scholars for their academic rigor and inspiration to students. It is this admiration that once fueled my ardent desire to pursue this program in Education in Canada, cherished with the hope that I would commit myself to my teaching career and make meaningful contributions.

Gazing upon the ennui imprinted on the faces around me, moments of doubts creep in, leaving me feeling naive about my dream of studying abroad in Education. Perhaps no one else on the bus or LRT was pondering the significance of this very moment and tomorrow. Then, my thoughts shift again from the present moment to the written correspondences over this past decade with my American advisor, now in her eighties, who traveled to different places, and cherishes each day of her life after retirement. As I read her words in our correspondences, as I immerse myself in reading and watching Shakespeare's plays, as I sit in undergraduate classes and audit Western instructors' interpretations of philosophers, literary writers, and Chinese ancient poems, and as I watch my son aiding earthworms struggling on the sidewalk after a rainy day, yet exposed to the sunlight the next morning, gently moving them back to the moist soil,

these moments evoke sweet, thick, and bright honey-like happiness within me. As those weary faces on the bus or LRT come to sight again, I am pulled back to reality of my journey through the educational field over these years that has left me with beautiful memories but also mixed with some hidden scars. I realize that I once fancied myself a daring adventurer, but now I feel like I am a passing traveler in this field and wonder where to head next. It is a paradoxical feeling: I am inspired by the dedication of the excellent instructors at the University of Alberta who diligently safeguard and awaken students' souls in the classroom, and through them, I also feel compelled to awakening the souls of the younger generation. However, I find myself unable to simply "stick out my chin and grin" like Rebecca's student. I find myself lowering my head, sinking deeper into reflection for tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow...

I have never reached the state of an infant described by Laozi and the state of "sitting and forgetting" as described in the *Zhuangzi*. Instead, my self-reflection consists of fragmentary moments, resembling free association in the wild wanderings of the mind. Perhaps only the Daoist sage can reach the ideal state of "sitting and forgetting" by moving *Qi* in their body. This is acknowledged by Smith (1994/2020), who asserts that most traditions of meditation emphasize the significance of understanding breathing, recognizing how the simple practice of breathing reflects our connection to the outer world (p. 143). In this sense, my reflections seem also to bear resemblance to meditation, as both involve a measure or a deep contemplation of one's situation. Etymologically, the root *med-* means "measure," suggesting that true measure of and insight into one's situation comes from momentarily halting all daily rituals and habits (p. 143). For me, moments of sinking into self-reflection occur frequently in my life. Whether I am walking, taking bus or LRT, or engrossed in writing papers, I often stumble upon fragmented memories; they surface unexpectedly, urging me to put them into written words. In these moments, I

involuntarily sink into a contemplative tranquility, momentarily forgetting my existence then and there. As Smith (1994/2020) puts it, a contemplative life is characterized by “its ordinariness and simplicity, not its grandiosity,” and it is “always everywhere mediated in the here and now” (p. 145).

I would like to conclude this section with Rebecca's encounter with a Japanese teacher and Jane's opposition to contemporary society's relentless pace. In Rebecca's narration, the Japanese teacher radiated a Daoist aura of inner peace and tranquility that extends beyond the practice of self-reflection in moments but becomes assimilated deep into her body and being. Rebecca shared:

... a Japanese foreign teacher I encountered at my university, quite senior in age, maybe around sixty or seventy. What struck me the most was when we all took the No. 15 bus together, everyone hurriedly got on and off the bus, as if racing toward tomorrow, not even waiting for the bus to fully stop. My cultural shock came from this Japanese lady. She seemed to exude calmness, dressed elegantly, almost embodying the crane-like figure we aspire to in health practices. Her appearance reminded me of Japanese Yin-Yang techniques, a way of life. It felt like we, considering ourselves a cultural exporting country, are being surpassed by them in terms of Yin-Yang wisdom, exemplified by Abe no Seimei. I think they're returning to the *Dao*. The radiance of the *Dao* shines through this Japanese teacher, enlightening me. It made me ponder why they treasure the body so much. What significance does our body hold for us? I wonder if life is a kind of spiritual niche, a place where our souls reside. That's why they cherish the body ... Perhaps, it's because we don't revere life enough, don't treat it with proper respect. Aren't we truly alive ourselves? Isn't the *Dao* dwelling within us? If we align ourselves with the *Dao*

or Zen, having wisdom and understanding the cosmic order, shouldn't we revere our bodies? Shouldn't we wait patiently for the sugar to dissolve in our coffee, live in the present Now, rather than rush toward tomorrow? The essence conveyed here is the preciousness of human life, as cherished in Buddhism, where the most precious thing is human life itself because our souls might be immortal. The most precious but perishable thing is this span of human life. •

Although I did not personally encounter this Japanese teacher, Rebecca's description of her prompts me to contemplate an additional implication conveyed by the intercultural curriculum under discussion: Educators can not only cultivate self-reflection among students but also consider how to integrate the essence of self-reflection – seeking the inner peace and tranquility – into students' physical and spiritual well-being. Jane's remarks offered some hints:

In the past, people dedicated a lifetime to one task or loving one person, used one key for one lock. In today's restless era, people get impatient to the extent that they can't even wait for a sugar cube to dissolve in a cup of coffee before drinking it. Whether it's Laozi's accommodating and gentle approach or Shakespeare in his plays with a great capacity for tolerance, they reflect a rather plain philosophy of life. •

## **Implication 2: Non-anthropocentric Worldview**

Anthropocentrism separates humans as distinct from and superior to other beings. However, within the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, there exists an inherent equality among all entities — humans, animals, plants, and natural elements like mountains and rivers are all considered integral components of the universe. Every mode of being is characterized by “being at ease” (自在). This state of “being at ease” bears resemblance to Sartre's notion of “being-in-itself,” which denotes existence devoid of conscious awareness. The Daoist notion of “being at



ease” mirrors the “realm without self” (无我之境) depicted in Daoist poems. It is through this “being-at-ease” that one attains *Wu Bu Wei* (无不为), as stated in chapter 37 of the *Dao De Jing*: “The Dao in its constancy engages in no conscious action, / Yet nothing remains undone” (Lynn, 1999, p. 117) (道常无为而无不为). Similarly, in the *Zhuangzi*, fables such as the story of the K'un Peng (see Chapter 1) illustrate a state of carefree wandering (逍遥游) characterized by vastness and soulful freedom without restraints. Laozi and Zhuangzi perceive humans not as fundamentally distinct from other modes of existence but as integral parts of the natural world. They aim to diminish the significance of the individual selfhood and advocate for a perspective that encompasses the entirety of the cosmos.

The non-anthropocentric worldview is illuminated in Chapter 5 of the *Dao De Jing*, where a line reads: “Heaven and Earth are not benevolent and treat the myriad things as straw dogs” (Lynn, 1999, p. 60) (天地不仁 以万物为刍狗). This indicates that Heaven and Earth give birth to all things in a natural process. They do not perceive creation as a virtuous act, nor do they regard the demise of all things as malevolent. Instead, they act impartially, allowing all things to arise and exist naturally without discrimination. Between Heaven and Earth, all beings are equal and temporary, destined to return to nothingness like “straw dogs.” Straw dogs were inanimate offerings used in sacrificial rituals. Before and when being placed on an altar, they were treated with care and reverence. However, once the ritual was completed, the used straw dogs were discarded as waste. This analogy signifies that Heaven and Earth treat all creatures, including human beings, impartially, without any favoritism or compassion. It is not that Heaven and Earth lack benevolence in treating us as such; rather, it is our hubris that leads us to believe that Heaven and Earth bestow favor upon us over other beings.

Interestingly, despite its obsession with the self-will, *Macbeth* also abounds with animal

imagery, which hints at a non-anthropocentric worldview. Some Shakespearean scholars recommend an ecological reading of *Macbeth*. For instance, Caroline F. E. Spurgeon (1935/1990) highlights Shakespeare's profound empathy for the plight of animals in *Macbeth*, illustrated by Lady Macduff's comparison of her son to a vulnerable bird in peril of "the net," "the lime," and "the pitfall" (4.2.34). Paul Yachnin (2008) posits that animals, plants, and humans in Shakespeare's plays occupy a shared realm ordained by the divine order. In *Macbeth*, he argues, the virtue of the wren, though "most diminutive" (4.2.9-10), proves formidable in protecting its young chicks in the nest from the attack of the owl. Yachnin contends that such portrayals heighten readers' consciousness of the imperative to protect nature. Richard Kerridge (2011) perceives nature and human desires and actions as interwoven components of a continuously interacting ecosystem. When Macbeth revisits the witches, he expresses eagerness for global devastation (4.1.68-76). These lines depict a violent convulsion of nature. Kerridge interprets the images in these lines as indicative of the destruction of the world's natural potential for regeneration (pp. 208-209). He also analyzes the imagery of carrion-eating animals in the play, such as kites, ravens, crows, and magpies, emphasizing their ecological significance (pp. 204-207). Kerridge urges contemporary ecological scholars to pay attention to these images because they epitomize "the natural recycles of decaying matter" (p. 207) and embody the process of decay and renewal. The ecologically informed reading, he contends, "help[s] create a 'green' sensibility" (p. 194) in the current environmental predicament that we face.

The animal imaginary in both the Daoist texts and *Macbeth* has drawn Jane's attention. In our communication, Jane highlighted various kinds of animal references in the texts and contemplated how to convey their significance to students. Although she did not explicitly mention the ecological reading of *Macbeth* and Daoist texts, she raised awareness about the

cultural significance embedded in animal references across the Eastern and Western texts. More importantly, she raised our attention to a potential discriminatory hierarchy within the animal kingdom portrayed in the *Zhuangzi* and *Macbeth*. She remarked:

In Daoist texts like the *Zhuangzi*, there are dragons, well frogs, cicadas, fighting cocks, horses, and mice. In *Macbeth*, the animal and cultural images include crows, sparrows, rabbits, lions, and so on. Shakespeare also mentions toads, fierce tigers, rhinoceroses, pythons, and even Russian bears. If I were to teach these texts to students, I would explore the connections among these images. For example, *Macbeth* depicts an “evil dog in hell.” In the *Dao De Jing*, Heaven and Earth are not humane; they lack benevolence; they treat all things as straw dogs, showing no affection. The sage even regards people as nothing more than straw dogs bound together. Besides, Shakespeare’s cultural imagery also includes many reptilian creatures such as pythons, salamanders, lizards, earthworms, which are similarly depicted unfavorably in Chinese texts. Why are reptiles consistently portrayed as evil symbols in both Eastern and Western cultural texts, despite their place in the natural hierarchy? Is there a discriminatory hierarchy in the animal kingdom? But why do these texts consistently present reptiles as sinister symbols? I think exploring this topic in class would captivate students’ interest. •

Despite employing different cultural and literary expressions, both Daoist sages (Laozi and Zhuangzi) and Shakespeare share a common purpose of emphasizing the imperative for humans to show deference and reverence towards nature, while challenging the anthropocentric worldview. They share the belief that humanity is not the center or ruler of the world. This alignment is discernible through diverse interpretations by Daoist scholars and Shakespearean

scholars. Daoist scholars like Joseph Needham and J. J. Clarke critique the hubris inherent in modern humanity's treatment of nature. They aim to construct a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature. Needham notes that Daoism rejects anthropocentrism and its inclination to dominate nature, prioritizing instead balance and cooperation with the natural world (LaChapelle, 1988, p. 100). Clarke (2000) echoes this sentiment and emphasizes that Daoism is not preoccupied with anthropocentrism and the will-to-dominate, but instead focuses on balance and cooperation with nature (p. 83). Similarly, Shakespearean scholar Robert N. Watson (2011) argues that Shakespeare's exploration of nature liberates humanity from the constraints of an autonomous human self (p. 45). During Shakespeare's time, nature was perceived as "an ordered and beautiful arrangement" (Danby, 1949, p. 20). Shakespeare himself is acknowledged as "a poet of nature" (Greenblatt, 2008c, p. 63), owing to the profound engagement that his plays exhibit with the wonders and fantasies of nature.

In my interview with Sophie, she shared her reading and insights into the interconnectedness of all beings in Daoist philosophy and Shakespeare's plays:

Laozi doesn't perceive humans as fundamentally different from everything else. It's precisely this perspective that offers a sense of liberation or freedom. Take, for instance, a dog: it doesn't chase after money or social status; instead, it revels in the warmth of sunlight and keenly perceives the changes in light. We can learn to appreciate the simple joys of dogs, like experiencing today's sunrise and tomorrow's rainfall. As the seasons change, we can feel a connection to the natural world. In the *Zhuangzi*, everything is capable of conversing with us. Whether it is a tree, a fish, or a cloud, each reflects its intrinsic essence in its external form. This idea is profound because externally, all things can speak, have a soul, and can communicate in a

dialogue. Zhuangzi's philosophy isn't limited to humans; it encompasses the entire cosmos. He observes and contemplates everything, from stones to trees, from the sky to the atmosphere. In essence, he wants to disseminate his entire philosophy throughout the universe. It is similar to Shakespeare because they both enjoy using fantastical stories to convey very serious realities and express a deep reverence for the interconnectedness of all beings. •

The shared concern for nature and humanity's place in the universe by Daoist sages and Shakespeare resonates with a BBC documentary titled "Our Planet." During the evenings of last summer, my son and I often sat in our living room, watching the migratory patterns of animals across land, sea, and sky, and the rhythmic cycles of nature dictated by our Earth's poles. In the awe-inspiring spectacles, we also witnessed the devastating impact of reckless human activities upon our planet and the consequent plight faced by countless species. Witnessing those poignant and miserable conditions that afflicted species as they struggled hard against the onslaught of human activities, both my twelve-year-old son and I fell into deep sorrow. In such moments, I always encourage him to do research on nature and insects through reading and discussions with his science teacher and peers, as he has been fascinated with them ever since kindergarten. In the afternoons, we walked into the woods near our home, equipped with containers of various sizes, bug sprays, masks, a net, a hatchet, and other essentials, embarking on our exploration of nature. As he caught some insects and placed them in different containers, he observed them for as long as he pleased, and then released them back to nature before we left the woods. This habit and practice have persisted since I read stories from Jean-Henri Fabre's *Social Life in the Insect World* to him when he was about 4 years old in kindergarten. After we moved to Edmonton, he introduced to me "Brave Wilderness" on YouTube. The "Brave Wilderness" series is conducted

by an educational researcher named Coyote Peterson and his team of biologists. In their exploration of nature, Coyote and his team engage in remarkable encounters with the world of insects, and unbelievably, Coyote willingly allows insects to sting or bite him for the purpose of scientific study. We learned that every time Coyote caught an insect and allowed it to sting or bite his arm, he always released it back into nature, like Fabre did. From Fabre to Coyote, my son learned that even these seemingly “diminutive” insects possess intricate family and social lives, and we cannot arbitrarily take their lives at our discretion.

As a mother, I take pride in my son's ecological awareness, particularly his commitment to protecting diminutive insects. Reflecting on my previous role as an English educator, I realize that I did not cultivate such consciousness among my students. This oversight partly stemmed from my focus on enhancing students' English proficiency in reading, writing, and translation. However, as I delve into the Daoist texts and Shakespeare's plays and draw inspiration from my son's enthusiasm ignited by entomologists, I recognize the potential of this intercultural curriculum to nurture students' ecological awareness. I resonate with Kerridge's (2011) advocacy for an ecocritical, “green” reading of *Macbeth* as a timely response to the ecological problems confronting our environment.

In a similar vein, Smith (1999/2020) critiques homocentric pedagogy in the educational setting and advocates for interlocution in earth-human relations. He describes homocentric pedagogy as “a serious, joyless business, and distinctly anti-pedagogical” (2020, p. 139), as it fails to evoke awe or reverence for the natural forces surrounding us. Smith contends that any attunement to natural elements is essential for wisdom and understanding. According to him, our consciousness of understanding interlocution in earth-human relations should be “ecological” (p. 141). The natural world has its own subjectivity, and what we humans can do is to adopt an

attitude of awe and respect towards nature. Drawing parallels between the teachings of Jesus and the wisdom of Daoism, Smith suggests that both cultures look at the natural world as an interlocutor:

The injunctions of Jesus, 'Consider the lilies of the field ...; Behold the fowls of the air ...' (Luke 12:27), point to an insight well understood in Asian Way traditions, especially Taoism, that there are important lessons to be learned from deep meditation on the natural world, particularly with respect to the balance of relation among emergence, nurture, and decay." (p. 140)

Similarly, Bai and Cohen (2008) critique the dualistic consciousness inherent in the anthropocentric worldview. They argue that if we perceive the world as objectified, the world would "not have the *power* to release in us feelings and perceptions of resonance" (italics original, p. 38) and become "mute, dumb, and numb" (p. 38). However, they posit that by embracing a Daoist nondualistic consciousness, "the charge and vibrancy of life becomes more and more apparent" (p. 42).

That being said, the intercultural curriculum under discussion carries an implication of a non-anthropocentric worldview, which emphasizes the dissolution of boundaries between humans and other beings. This approach reveals that breaking down distinctions between humans and other beings does not diminish the self. Rather, it facilitates a return to the intrinsic essence of life on our planet.

### **Implication 3: Aesthetic Reception of the "Realm with Self" (有我之境) and the "Realm without Self" (无我之境)**

The concepts of "the realm with self" and "the realm without self" comes from Wang Guowei's (王国维) categorization of aesthetics in his work, *Ren Jian Ci Hua* (《人间词话》),

translated as *Words of the Human World*. Wang Guowei (1877-1927) was a prominent Chinese literary historian. The artistic conception of “realm with self” (有我之境) denotes a state where personal perceptions imbue all experiences. Wang Guowei’s renowned definition of the “realm with self” asserts that the realm of the self involves the observation of the subject “I” in all things, thus everything is colored with “my” hues (有我之境，与我观物，故物我皆著我之色彩). Conversely, Wang Guowei’s definition of the “realm without self” signifies a perspective wherein one perceives things from the perspective of the objects themselves, therefore not knowing which is oneself and which is the object (无我之境，以物观物，故不知何者为我，何者为物). The former encompasses the subject’s (or the observer’s) thoughts and emotions while the latter accentuates the unity of the subject and the object.

In poems characterized by the “realm with self,” the presence of the subject “I” serves as a conduit for expressing internal emotions through external elements such as rain or moon. When I am happy, everything in my eyes is charming; when I am sad, a desolate shadow casts over my surroundings. The presence of the self permeates the whole poetic landscape, enabling poets to externalize their innermost sentiments. Whether experiencing joy or sorrow, the subjective perception of the world shapes the interpretation of natural elements and physical world. In this artistic state, one’s emotions dictate how the world is perceived. For example, in Ouyang Xiu’s (欧阳修) (1007-1072) poem, *Butterflies Love Flowers* (蝶恋花), there are these two lines that read:

With tears in eyes, then [I] ask the flowers –

but the flowers have nothing to say: (泪眼问花花不语)

A tumult of red flies away

past the swing. (浪鸿飞过秋千去) (Owen, 1996, p. 570)



In this poem, the poet's tearful gaze at the flowers signifies a profound sense of sorrow or melancholy. He asks the flowers, but flowers remain silent, and flies flutter away, which intensifies the poet's sadness.

Likewise, in Li Bai's poem, *Drinking Alone by Moonlight* (月下独酌), there are two lines that read:

I lift cup to bright moon, beg its company, (举杯邀明月)

Then facing my shadow, we become three. (对影成三人) (Owen, 1996, p. 403)

These poems, characterized by the "realm with self," articulate potent emotions from a distinct perspective of the self, evoking a profound sense of self. Through the acknowledgement of the self, an intimate connection of a poet with the natural world is cultivated and aroused.

However, Chinese poetry also encompasses a "realm without self," which closely resonates with the Daoist spirit. This state is characterized by the absence of a distinct self. For example, in Tao Qian's poem, *Drinking Wine V* (饮酒 其五):

I picked a chrysanthemum by the eastern hedge, (采菊东篱下)

Off in the distance gazed on south mountain. (悠然见南山) (Owen, 1996, p. 316)

In the original Chinese version of this poem, the pronoun "I" (吾) is absent. In this translation by Owen, it is added, possibly to conform to English grammar. In Chapter Three, I reviewed Chinese-American scholar Wai-Lim Yip's aesthetics approach to literary and cultural studies. In his discussion of "Daoist aesthetics," Yip (1998) mentions that Daoist aesthetics in Chinese poems does not center around the subject "I" as the dominating agent. Since there is no such a personal pronoun in the poems, reader can engage with them both objectively and subjectively. This poem by Tao Qian can be interpreted from a philosophical perspective. Both "I" and the chrysanthemum coexist without distinction. We are all manifestations of the

universe. Without this subject “I,” there exists no predetermined emotion governing this world, and no preconceived feeling filling this world.

Similarly, the absence of “I” is evident in Wang Wei’s (王维) (ca. 699-761) poem, *Bird-Singing Stream* (鸟鸣涧):

Man at leisure. Cassia flowers fall. (人闲桂花落)

Quiet night. Spring mountain is empty. (夜静春山空)

Moon rises. Startles – a mountain bird. (月出惊山鸟)

It sings at times in the spring stream. (时鸣春涧中) (translated by Wai-Lim Yip)

In these lines, there are individuals and birds, yet they embody the “realm without self” as they remain tranquil, devoid of any pre-existing emotions or sentiments. The man’s state of mind in this poem is serene, integrating fully with all things and lacking a subjective desire or a vibrant, colorful “self.” This transparent “self” harmoniously merges with the universe.

To understand the artistic conception of the realm without self in these poems, we need to delve into Daoist philosophy. Living in a chaotic era, Laozi aspired to guide humanity back to its primordial existence and reinstate the original harmony of the world. Laozi and Zhuangzi envisioned a unified cosmos where distinctions between the individual self and other beings, be it a small ant or a flourishing cauliflower, fade into insignificance. In this unified existence, there exists no separation between the “self” and “objects,” no privileged human intellect or emotion permeating all things.

The *Dao De Jing* engages deeply in philosophical contemplation on the interconnectedness and harmony of Heaven, Earth, and humanity, while rejecting narrow preoccupations with individual identity. This integration of individual identity with the universe, or put in another way, self-forgetting, is not an escapism, but rather, as noted by Smith

(1994/2020), “an emergence into recognition of the deep interdependency of any identity, and a full owning-up to the way in which I always am that of which I speak, even when I speak of the world and others as object” (p. 143). Smith draws upon the insights of David Loy and Martin Buber to illustrate this idea. Loy says, “To forget oneself is to wake up and find oneself in or, more precisely, *as* a situation – not confronted by it but one with it” (italics original; cited in Smith, p. 143), while Buber articulates that “all real living is meeting” (cited in Smith, p. 143). Much like Daoism, these scholars (Smith, Loy, and Buber) espouse a cosmological perspective that emphasizes unity and equality. Laozi’s teachings advocate for transcending the self and urge people to detach from excessive desires and anxieties as a means of prolonging their lifespan. In this broader context, the artistic conception of the “realm without self” in the poems resonate with such a detachment that aligns with the Daoist philosophy of harmony and interconnectedness between human beings and the world.

In contrast, the historical backdrop against which *Macbeth* unfolds resonates with the era of humanism and the rise of the British Empire – a period characterized by exploration and expansion. Macbeth’s ambition and hubris, to some extent, symbolize the spirit of this exploration and expansion inherent in the humanist ethos. His relentless quest for power is a representation of his self-will. Jane described this assertive self-will in the following way:

In a world where everyone is unable to directly face God, like staring at the sun, Macbeth does. Even if his eyes are blinded by the sun and his life extinguished, he feels on equal footing with something high and mighty. He even pulls them down for a moment and sits on their throne. •

Shakespeare’s plays, including *Macbeth*, delve into the intricacies of human nature. Characters have ambitions, desires, passions, and psychological complexities. From the fervent

love of Romeo and Juliet among familial feud to Hamlet's profound melancholy and thirst for revenge, from King Lear's tragic descent into madness to Macbeth's haunting reflections on his murderous deeds, Shakespeare's plays foreground individualism and the rich tapestry of human emotions. The protagonists grapple with their inner conflicts and moral dilemmas. *Macbeth* is such a typical representative of psychological conflicts. In *Macbeth*, the "self" pervades his entire kingdom of Scotland and the stage as well, reminiscent of solipsism, where everything bears the imprint of one's own psyche. In this light, Shakespeare's plays epitomize a "realm with self," characterized by protagonists' self-will and psychological turmoil.

It is inherent for each living individual to seek to assert his/her selfhood, affirming his/her existence as humans and distinguishing oneself from others. Sophie vividly captured this self-affirmation with the literary expression, "I am Macbeth; Macbeth is me," resonating with the hidden self-affirmation within each of us:

Macbeth represents every one of us, including myself. When I read *Macbeth*, I find it very relatable. Through this plot, we see Macbeth's inner heart, that essence of humanity, which I believe can be applied to our daily lives and to every seemingly ordinary person. Using a literary expression: "I am Macbeth; Macbeth is me." I think saying this is acceptable. This line originally comes from Flaubert, who said: "I am Madame Bovary; Madame Bovary is me." Many characters in literary works give us this kind of feeling, which is also a manifestation of the great achievement of this work. Macbeth expresses our inner desires. He uses his actions to demonstrate how we are controlled by these desires and how we sometimes act against our moral principles. I believe that each of us needs to define ourselves in the process of living and growing up, especially in our childhood. It's about affirming ourselves. It's about

challenging an authoritative presence, like Banquo or King Duncan, because only by challenging authority, or even more extremely, by overthrowing it, can we affirm our own existence or strength. •

Reflecting on Macbeth's struggle for autonomy and self-definition, Sophie recalled her childhood rebellion against her mother. She viewed this rebellious spirit to pursue the autonomy of the self as common during one's childhood and adolescence. It may contradict the Confucian moral principle of showing respect to elders, yet it is an integral part of our personal growth:

For example, I challenged my mother the most during my growth. I never argued with my dad because he had his methods. He never punished me physically or scolded me with harsh words; he reasoned with me. He had a gentle approach. But my mom is a strikingly literary figure with a distinct personality. She embodies the quality of Macbeth. She insists that "I need to do this, if you don't listen, it won't work." I vividly remember a moment from when I was five. I was crying loudly, and she was scolding me loudly. Her assertiveness in expression and demands made me feel more compelled to oppose and resist her, because I wanted what I wanted. You can't impose on me. I am free will. It's a memory of growth for me. So, I understand Macbeth a lot. Macbeth, in this process, had to challenge authority and assert his own identity: I am me; in my world, not a vast kingdom, but in my own realm, I should be the master of myself. I want what I want; you cannot decide for me. However, as I matured and became a mother myself, I never argued with my mom again. After having my son, during the process of raising him, I found raising a child is so difficult, and then I knew my mom had given so much love to me. •

Interestingly, Sophie observes the emergence of the assertion of independent self-will in her eleven-year-old son. As a mother, she reflected on her son's repeated phrase "not say it." Instead of interpreting his words as intentional rudeness or ill will, she interpreted it as a form of linguistic rebellion to assert independence and autonomy:

For example, recently my son often says a phrase to me, which is: "Not say it."

Whatever I say, like, "at this time, you should eat more vegetables," or "you should sleep early," and he responds with, "I know, not say it." Sometimes, I say, "mom loves you so much, you are so adorable." He replies with, "I know, not say it." He's eleven now. Whether I say something nice or criticize him, he always says, "not say it." I think it's a form of linguistic expression and a means of challenging authority.

It's his way of asserting his independence and questioning why he always must listen to me. Even though he understands that I'm saying these things for his own good, he also recognizes that he is his own person and needs to affirm himself. So, in the process of children's education, we must pay attention to this point: that many times, it's not their intentional rudeness or bad feelings towards mom, but rather, it's their way of establishing their independence in this manner. If we look at *Macbeth* in this light, it's about every person in the process of growing up, a stage in establishing their own self. •

The distinction between the "realm without self" and the "realm with self" does not imply superiority or inferiority. Each possesses its own intrinsic merits. The "realm without self" operates on a spiritual level and expresses our joy in being together and interconnected with all the other beings under heaven, while the "realm with self" delves into the depths of human nature and human psyche in a more realistic and grounded manner. Daoist poems, characterized

by the absence of the subject “I,” embrace an egalitarian worldview, where the individual self is subsumed within the vast expanse of the universe or is even diminished in the universe.

Meanwhile, it is undeniable that Daoist philosophy also serves as a pragmatic guide to life. As participants' speeches in Chapter Five indicate, Daoism is a sober Life philosophy which offers insights into the *Dao* and prompt self-reflection on the Way of life and how one lives in order to lead a better way of life. This resonates with Smith's (2008/2020) assertion that

To gain attunement to this Way, knowing the way of the Way, ... is most profoundly a finding of Life; that is, the life that lives and breathes over, under, around, through, behind, above, and beyond anything we might say and do about it from our own inevitably limited perspectives of time and place. (2020, p. 316)

In *Macbeth*, the dramatization of strong self-will symbolizes a spirit of self-exploration and expansion towards the outside world. This emphasis on self-will reflects a pursuit of self-actualization, echoing the Renaissance ethos of reviving the human spirit and awakening the self. From an aesthetic standpoint, both the “realm with self” and the “realm without self” contribute to readers' perceptions and receptions of literary works. My research indicates that such discussions serve as an implication arising from the intercultural curriculum under consideration.

#### **Implication 4: Towards a Poor Curriculum**

In the preceding chapter, I provided a short review of Grumet's (2015) proposition for a poor curriculum, which places emphasis on pre-reflexive engagement with experience through theater. In this part, I aim to draw a connection between Grumet's advocacy for a poor curriculum and the interview discussions on navigating mistakes through the exploration of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*.

Mistakes are an inherent part of life's journey. After all, to err is human. Mistakes provide us with opportunities to reflect on the motivations behind our actions: whether our actions align with the essence and natural order of things, whether they stem from our desires for material gain, whether they contribute to the understanding of our being in the world, and so on. Through mistakes, we gain valuable insights and endeavor to avoid similar mistakes in the future. From an educational perspective, firsthand or direct experiences, particularly those involving failure, have the most pronounced effect on an individual's education. As Deborah Britzman articulates, "mistakes ... are not the outside of education but rather ... constitutive of its very possibility" (cited from Lewkowich, 2018, p. 44).

However, grave mistakes, such as Macbeth's crime of regicide, are unforgivable and unpardonable. As a result of this heinous act, Macbeth undergoes profound self-reflection, which reveals his intense psychological turmoil. While Macbeth commits the gravest human mistake, each individual is susceptible to making mistakes in reality. Kent encapsulated *Macbeth* as "embodying the most fundamental pattern of human mistakes." He expressed:

When we make mistakes, we often realize that they follow a pattern. Throughout life, it's impossible to make just one mistake. We make many, and these mistakes are essentially of a similar nature. These mistakes typically stem from our undue desire for something, leading us to become fixated solely on one goal, forgetting other more important aspects of life. But this neglect shouldn't happen, and once it does, we must endure the consequences. However, the greatest torment lies in the psychological aspect. This mirrors the kind of mistake Macbeth commits. •

For Kent, *Macbeth* resonates with him deeply when he observes people around him making mistakes. Human beings often fall prey to the pitfalls of goal-oriented pursuits. Their



downfall, Kent explained, are rooted in desperate desires lacking foresight. Many people suffer unwittingly due to their unchecked desires. It is imperative that we consider the consequences before taking actions. If the pursuit of a goal conflicts with the essence of things and violates the moral principles, it is crucial to refrain from actions. Kent integrated his understanding of an American novel, a French philosopher, a Chinese classical literary work, and *Macbeth* into his intercultural reading experience to illustrate that modern people's folly in making mistakes without considering consequences has already been hinted at in the Eastern and Western classical works. He shared:

When I witness friends making mistakes, the first thing that comes to mind is *Macbeth*. Of course, another book that comes to mind is Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*. In *Sister Carrie*, Hurstwood believes that his life is fulfilled with wealth, a wife, a son and a daughter, and social status. So, he thinks that if he had a mistress at this time, his life would have been very fulfilling. However, he fails to realize that this pursuit contradicts his belief and it would make him lose everything essential. After stealing that safe, he suddenly realizes that he's gained only Sister Carrie but lost everything he had before. In *Dream of the Red Chamber*, there is also a line that echoes this sentiment: Forgetting to withdraw hands when there is surplus behind, wishing to turn back because there is no path ahead (身后有余忘缩手, 眼前无路想回头). Recently, I have been doing research on Jean-Luc Nancy. Jean-Luc Nancy repeatedly emphasizes that true understanding of life's meaning often dawns upon us through the deaths of others, yet we frequently overlook this insight beforehand. Jean-Luc Nancy's thoughts resonate with our proverb that the words of a dying person are sincere (人至僵死其言也善). It also resonates with a passage from *Macbeth*.

Macbeth, hearing his wife's death, says, "Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player that struts and frets his hour upon the stage and then is heard no more. It is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing." Most people know this wisdom, but they don't act until they're at the brink of death, making them pitiful fools. So, people fall into two categories: those who are forced to face these rules after making irreparable mistakes are often considered foolish or petty (小人), and those who take 10, 20, or 30 years to comprehend these rules. The latter organize their lives based on this understanding, so they live relaxed, meaningful, and accomplished lives. These people are what Laozi refers to as "gentlemen" (君子) or, in simpler terms, capable individuals. •

Kent recounted a story about his friend whose irreparable mistake shattered a family's integrity:

When I was in graduate school, we had a roommate who was very handsome. One day, he came back to our dorm, completely drunk, crying his heart out. The other two roommates and I tried to console him. Later, we found out that he had just married, and his wife's friends had come to visit them. His wife was in another room and couldn't find him. When she found him, he was in an intimate relationship with one of his wife's friends. What I want to say is, the most excruciating sight I've witnessed in a person was his condition. He'd drink excessively every day and night, then cry, and pass out. It made me think, "What were you thinking back then? You can't bear the consequences of what you've caused." So, I strongly believe that before doing anything, one must think it carefully. You can't wait to regret it after the result unfolds. Witnessing his agony, that psychological complexity resembles Lady

Macbeth's. It wasn't just a simple mistake; his mistake shattered his family. It was that psychological torment that made it so hard for him to get past that hurdle. •

One function that literary works play for readers is that they are a conduit through which we can vicariously experience the consequences of others' actions and shield ourselves from direct consequences. Given that literary works like *Macbeth* evoke deep emotional responses, they serve as a surrogate for our own life experiences or a scapegoat for the potential mistakes that we may make in real life. In alignment with Grumet's advocacy for a poor curriculum, integrating theatrical performance into the classroom fosters a pre-reflective, self-experiential understanding of potential life mistakes. Through dramatic engagement with the plot and characters, students confront moral dilemmas and internal struggles, and gain insights to navigate real-life challenges. Grumet's pre-reflective understanding does not conflict with the reflective nature of meditative practice. As Smith communicated, "one outcome of diligent meditative practice, of self-emptying, is that such negative actions gradually become 'unthinkable,' i.e., the purer one's mind becomes, the less it dreams of or engages in action that are 'counter-life'." Smith's remarks suggests that a pure mind, cultivated through meditative practice, would not engage in actions that are detrimental to human life. This underscores the transformative potential of meditation in cultivating moral behavior.

Rebecca shared a story about her students performing *Macbeth*:

Three students in my class performed *Macbeth*. I believe undergraduate students can readily embrace truly beautiful things. I feel there are no barriers regarding themes because human nature remains constant across the centuries, be it the 16<sup>th</sup> century or today. Despite the passage of time, people stay true to the fundamental essence of life. Whether exploring Macbeth's tragic fate or the cycle of power dynamics, I see them

as life stories; they are reflections of life itself. As students don the clothes of *Macbeth*, they confront universal themes of Macbeth's ambition, deeds, choices, internal struggles, and consequence. Their engagement serves as a mirror to their own experiences. Students' interpretation through performance extends to their own lives, as their lives, too, are annotations to *Macbeth*'s story. •

Grumet's advocacy for a poor curriculum and Rebecca's narrative bring back memories of the countless plays my son had "performed" with me during his childhood. After reading a tale, we would creatively engage with its plot and characters, freely crafting our own narratives and movements, based on the original story. We adapted each story that he was interested in and played out our unique version to his heart's content. Among the vivid memories of our playtime, I vividly recall the intense plots and witty dialogues in our improvisation, from playing the surgical anaesthetic skills of mud-dauber wasps capturing preys to enacting the life cycle of cicadas emerging from underground after many years to sing in summer and become a transient singer, and to many more stories. We also played stories from the *Zhuangzi*, including "learning to walk in Handan" (邯郸学步), "a mantis trying to stop a chariot" (螳臂挡车), "gazing at the ocean and sighing" (望洋兴叹), "Zhuangzhou borrowing chestnut" (庄周贷栗), "offering three in the morning and four in the evening" (朝三暮四), among many others. Playing out these stories helped him understand some ideas that were accessible to him. In Edmonton, we watched the stage performances of *A Midsummer Night Dream* and *Measure for Measure* at "Shakespeare in the Park", *Troilus and Cressida* at the Timm Theater of the University of Alberta, and watched *Merchant in Venice* through the University of Alberta's Library database, "Drama Online."

These immersive experiences of enacting stories that we have read and watching Shakespearean drama onstage transcend mere entertainment. They offer us a profound opportunity to contemplate the human condition before we stumble into mistakes and follies in our own lived experiences. As we enter the theater, we willingly suspend our disbelief and become absorbed in the illusion of reality unfolding before us. This is a genuine illusion. Similarly, when my son and I enacted a story in a poor manner without props and dropbacks, we wholeheartedly immersed ourselves in the roles we were about to play, believing firmly in their reality. This authentic illusion allows us, on one hand, to maintain a distance from the characters and events onstage, and on the other hand, we are prompted to question the underlying meanings embedded within the plays. This duality of engaging with drama brings to mind Bertolt Brecht's concept of "defamiliarization effect." According to this German theatrical theorist, drama creates astonishment and curiosity by stripping events of their familiar and self-evident qualities, compelling viewers to question the boundary between reality and illusion, much like Zhuangzi's dream of a butterfly. Through this process, we confront human fallibility and the inevitable downfall, and engage ourselves in pre-reflective meditation to avoid similar mistakes in our real lives.

In her advocacy for students' experiential learning by theatrical performance within a poor curriculum, Grumet (2014) asserts that "the pre-reflective experience ... is in direct discourse with the world [and] becomes the raw material for reflection" (p. 87). To my understanding, "pre-reflective experience" suggests that students contemplate the motives of characters and the plot before they encounter the follies or mistakes made by those characters in their lives. Theatrical performance navigates through illusionary events to reach insights applicable to real life. Take *Macbeth* for example: through enacting this play, students are able to

reflect on the reason behind Macbeth's relentless pursuit of power, his tragic flaws, his assertion of the self-will, and his inevitable downfall. They are able to parallel between Macbeth's profound self-reflection and their own experience in academic and life settings. They are also able to ponder how the "horrid images" (*Macbeth*, 1.3.134) in the mind would produce acts "against the use of nature" (1.3.136), among many others. These pre-reflections can spark classroom discussions that connect with Daoist teachings on the natural order, the cosmological and ethical views of *De*, and the compromise of the opposites. This naturally introduces the implication of this intercultural curriculum in moving towards a poor curriculum.

### Summary

The discussion of an intercultural curriculum involving *Macbeth* and the *Dao De Jing* offers some implications. Firstly, this intercultural curriculum involves cultivating students' engagement in self-reflection. Self-reflection does not necessarily follow a systematic pattern; rather, it often unfolds within the subjective time of our lives. Subjective time, as portrayed in modernist novels by Virginia Woolf, is characterized by a slowed perception of moments within the mind, contrasting with the objective flow of time in the physical world. In the subjective time, time pauses or curdles or is frozen, allowing events from the past and the present to unfold within the mind's eye. It may also bear resemblance to what Lewkowich and Jacobs (2019) refer to as *Kairos* time, which "is not simply limited to forward, linear motion" but "moves recursively – both forwards and backwards" (p. 32). Self-reflection fully utilizes subjective time or *Kairos* time and enables individuals to contemplate experiences, including both moments of happiness and wounds. Lewkowich and Jacobs assert "the collapse of time" holds the "potential for transformation – a chance to integrate ... past and present psychic experience" (p. 33). It offers an opportunity to alleviate stresses and promote personal growth and transformation. This

process seems to play a function akin to tragedy, acting as a cathartic or purifying force for the soul. Additionally, the analysis of research data indicates that educators can cultivate students' ecological awareness by exploring the shared non-anthropocentric worldview in Daoist texts and *Macbeth*. Furthermore, it implies the accessibility of the aesthetic reception of the "realm without self" and the "realm with self" to readers. The "realm with self" emphasizes individual self-will and self-actualization. In contrast or complement, the "realm without self," embodied in Daoist poems, signifies a serene state where one willingly accepts all things without asserting superiority and acknowledges unity with all beings under heaven. Last but not least, this intercultural curriculum may be poor in nature, as it invites students to perform a play or a story without proper theatrical props and engage in pre-reflexive experiential learning, where they dwell in the blurred context of authentic illusion and illusionary reality. However, this curriculum prompts students to contemplate the nature of mistakes and strive to avoid similar mistakes in their real lives.

In discussing these implications, my attention turns to the key word "education" addressed in this thesis. The etymology of the word "education," derived from the Latin "*educare*," meaning "to lead out," resonates interestingly with the essence of the Hexagram *Meng* (蒙卦) in the *Yijing*. The Chinese character "蒙" symbolizes youthful ignorance. It is vividly depicted in the *Yijing* by a stream flowing out from between mountains, symbolizing nourishment, irrigation, enlightenment, and guidance. Educators of this intercultural curriculum also hold a crucial role of water in *leading* students *out* of youthful ignorance by nourishing, irrigating, enlightening, and guiding them. Reflecting on these implications, my research indicates that the intercultural curriculum under discussion can lead students *inward* and *outward* along a path of literary, aesthetic, and philosophical exploration. As this chapter draws to a close,

I would like to suggest two additional implications that future researchers, including myself, could further investigate within the ongoing East-West dialogue between Daoism and Shakespeare's plays, either within the comparative literature context or in the educational context.

One implication involves the contemplation of life and death, which educators could lead students to contemplate within this intercultural curriculum. Contemplation of life and death is an enduring philosophical issue shared by both Shakespeare's plays and Daoist philosophy. Heidegger asserts that the preoccupation with death is the springhead of philosophical inquiry. Understanding life is intricately linked to our awareness of death. The later Heidegger himself, heavily influenced by Buddhism, introduces the concept of "Being-towards-death" as fundamental to authentic, ontological awareness of Being. In Shakespeare's great tragedies, Hamlet's existential soliloquy prompts him to question whether life equates to enduring suffering and death akin to the state of dreaming and sleep (*Hamlet*, 3.1.58-92); King Lear reflects on the essence of human existence and recognizes the triviality of material possessions, which are mere "superflux"<sup>44</sup> (*King Lear*, 3.4.35) compared to the essence of human life; Othello perceives death not as something horrible but as healing and redeeming (*Othello*, 5.2.295-296). Macbeth grapples with existential inquiry surrounding the "great bond" (*Macbeth*, 3.2.50) that suggests humanity's limited contracts with life.

In Daoist philosophy, contemplation of life and death stands at a cosmological perspective where individual life coexists with the universe. Awareness of life's limitations fosters an appreciation for the present moment NOW. As individuals, we have the obligation to

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<sup>44</sup> The word "superflux" is a coined word to convey the meaning of adding "excess to excess." According to James L. Calderwood's (1987) interpretation, this word suggests bodily waste and the risks associated with extravagance. Adding "super" (meaning above, over, beyond, exceeding) to "flux" (meaning a bodily excess that constitutes a risk to health) amplifies the notion of surplus (p. 138).



attend to the well-being of our bodies and expand the length of our lives. When facing death, we are like dust or light returning to the vast nothingness. Daoist philosophy engages in holistic reflection on life, its value, and its authenticity. Our awareness of physical limitations enables us to cherish finite moment in the present. Therefore, we should strive to live our lives to the fullest, casting away worries and embracing what truly matters. Cultivating this freedom allows us to foster an infinite feeling in essential aspects of life, transcending physical limitations and nurturing a deeper love for our body and for the world.

The other implication pertains to the significance of communication. In the context of the East-West dialogue, communication assumes a crucial role in facilitating intercultural understanding. Gadamer's philosophical framework for hermeneutic experience highlights three fundamental components: understanding, dialogue, and *Bildung*, as I have discussed in Chapter Two. Gadamer (1975) underscores the importance of dialogue, as it has the potential to foster the fusion of horizons by intertwining our experiences, basic beliefs, and communal values with those that differ from our own, thereby providing avenues for better understanding ourselves and the world we live in (p. 287). Within this particular East-West dialogue, our engagements with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* serves as a means to deepen our understanding of ourselves, as Sophie said:

I recognize that as a flesh-and-blood person, I have desires, imagination, fears, and self-reflections, much like Macbeth. Yet, I also find resonance with Laozi because I am assured of being myself and maintain a state of tranquility in the chaos of the world. In this world, tranquility allows for acceptance and adaptation to the ever-changing circumstances. Drawing from *Macbeth*, we must strive for a broader understanding of ourselves, rather than confining ourselves to insularity, and embrace

openness to the world. Through this process, we can cultivate a more enriched inner self. •

Here, Sophie's words "confining ourselves to insularity" refers to Laozi's advocacy for "small state" and "few common folk". Chapter 80 of the *Dao De Jing* starts with a line that reads: "Let the state be small and the common folk few" (Lynn, 1999, p. 188) (小国寡民). This line and the following lines<sup>45</sup> indicate the well-being and stability of a small state while discouraging exploration and migration. From a cultural perspective, Sophie believed that this implies a stagnation of civilization when people are content with the status quo. In today's globalized world, there is a desire for new perspectives and cross-cultural exchanges. It is imperative to adopt an open-minded approach. As more individuals move beyond their hometowns to other cities or countries, Chinese society is witnessing a growing enthusiasm for cultural exchanges and intercultural dialogues.

Meanwhile, as having been shown in the last three chapters, our group discussions have spanned a wide spectrum, covering the texts' themes and languages, as well as drawing connections to our lived experiences. These extensive discussions have enriched our perspectives and refreshed our personal interpretations of the texts. Sophie told us that she had read Karl Theodor Jaspers's *What is Education* in order to better participate in my research. Jaspers explores three levels of education in his book: the first being intelligence, akin to memorizing English words; the second, character, involving the cultivation of an individual's morality; and

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<sup>45</sup> The following lines read: Although [common folk] had boats and carriages, they would have no occasion to ride in them. Although they had shields and weapons, they would have no occasion to array them for battle. Let the people again knot cords, then they would use them. They would find their food so delicious, their clothes so beautiful, their dwelling so satisfying, and their customs so delightful that, though neighboring states might provide distant views of each other and the sounds of each other's chickens and dogs might even be heard, the common folk would reach old age without ever going back and forth between such places. (Lynn, 1999, p. 189) (虽有舟舆，无所乘之；虽有甲兵，无所陈之。使民富结绳而用之。甘其食，美其服，安其居，乐其俗。邻国相望，鸡犬之声相闻，民至老死，不相往来。).

the third, which Sophie considered the highest and the most significant, spirit. On the spiritual level, Jaspers puts forward the concept of the “communication of existence.” This deep form of communication involves the sharing of existential experiences and reflections on life’s meaning in genuine communication between individuals. In other words, “communication of existence” is, Sophie explained, “a form of mutual enlightenment and illumination between individuals.” She said:

I interpret this mutual illumination as an equality, where individuals can mutually and authentically communicate and enlighten one another, much like our present discussions. I find it’s incredibly enlightening when we sit here together to exchange ideas. •

Indeed, both participants and I have immensely benefited from our two group discussions in a genuine and open way. We collectively recognized the significance of communication in both the East-West dialogue and our interactions within the group. Sophie connected this notion of existential communication to our communications in group meetings. She said emotionally and modestly at the end of second group meeting, “Engaging in interactions and listening to the perspectives of other teachers has been incredibly inspiring for me. While reflecting on my own, I may not generate as many ideas, but within our dialogues, new insights invariably emerge.”

I agree with her. Reflecting on our interviews and group discussions, I increasingly understand Gadamer’s emphasis on genuine dialogue and believe that communication and dialogue are truly crucial within the human sciences including literature and education.

Meanwhile, I would like to reinstate my stance on cultural commensurability while acknowledging and respecting cultural differences. It is important not to misinterpret cultural differences as cultural opposites. This phenomenon has been eloquently discussed by Zhang

Longxi. In his scholarly works (1992, 1998, & 2007), Zhang presents a compelling critique of the prevailing belief in irreconcilable differences between the Eastern and the Western cultures. He argues against rigid dichotomies and oppositions in literatures and cultures of China and the West.<sup>46</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Smith (2008/2020), who notes that “attempts at serious interlocution with Asian wisdom have often met with derision, even today” (2020, p. 322). In his exploration of the long history of oriental/occidental engagement, Smith seeks to unveil a new layer of meaning behind what John Hobson calls the “logic of immanence.” Hobson’s term denotes that Western traditions have historically been preoccupied by a “logic of immanence,” resulting in the fact that the West has constructed its self-identity through denying its debts to Asian traditions. Smith adds another meaning of “immanence,” which relates to the manner of mutual indwelling that the other is “in” me and I am “in” the other (p. 314). He emphasizes that the West’s growing interest in Eastern traditions represents a kind of intellectual homecoming, acknowledging the profound connections between the roots of Western culture, including elements within Christianity, and Eastern influences (p. 317). Smith also posits that contemporary Western scholars face a crucial intellectual task of rediscovering and recognizing the historical dependencies of Western traditions on Eastern cultures such as Daoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Neglecting these connections risk forgetting the shared human contingencies that bind us together. In his words,

Indeed, for Western scholars today one of the great and necessary intellectual challenges is to recover the ‘lost’ dependencies of so much of our coveted traditions, because without such work we become forgetful of our deep and common human

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<sup>46</sup> I have elucidated Zhang’s critique of the prevailing emphasis on cultural differences in contemporary discourse across three sections of my thesis: in Chapter 1, within the “Significance of Research” section, in Chapter 2 within the “Zhang Longxi’s Literary Hermeneutics of Cultural Commensurability” section, and in Chapter 3, within the “Intercultural dialogue studies between China and the West” section.

contingencies and end up behaving in ways that assume that Others don't matter to who we think we are. That kind of assumption involves a hubris hiding from its nemesis. (p.317)

The words "its nemesis" in his context refers to the East. Smith suggests that when Western scholars disregard the long-standing connections between the East and the West, they demonstrate hubris that ultimately leads to cultural arrogance and oppositions.

Inspired by both Zhang's endeavor in his comparative literature studies that emphasizes cultural commensurability and Smith's elucidation on the academic journey of homecoming which encourages me to seek and achieve "the most profound point of convergence in East/West engagement" (Smith, 2020, p. 336), I am motivated to continue the work on "beyond opposites" by incorporating Daoist philosophy with Shakespeare's plays in literary and educational contexts. With this prospect, I conclude this chapter.

## Chapter Nine: Concluding Remarks on Intercultural Curriculum

In this concluding chapter, I do not intend to provide a comprehensive summary of the entire thesis, as it would merely duplicate the summaries in each individual chapter. Nor do I aim to definitively “conclude” the findings of my research, as hermeneutic research does not yield specific outcomes in the quantitative sense of data analysis. Instead, my objective is to envision an intercultural curriculum that delves into the study of the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* in a more concrete way. I endeavor to expand upon the content of the intercultural curriculum laid out at the end of Chapter Seven. Gleaned from the discussions of Chapter Eight regarding the implications of participants’ and my intercultural reading of the two texts, I consider it necessary and important to elaborate on this intercultural curriculum that integrates the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. Furthermore, I hope that this curriculum may offer some insights into the research of an intercultural curriculum that incorporates other plays by Shakespeare and the *Dao De Jing* and/or the *Zhuangzi*.

To begin with, this intercultural curriculum encompasses fundamental concepts in the Daoism, such as *Dao*, *De*, Nature/Spontaneity, Yin and Yang, *Wu*, and *Wu Wei*, as well as the textual interpretation of *Macbeth*. The focus is on their paradoxical language, portrayal of nature and humanity, and potential ontological pointings that educators and students uncover through their lived experience to create meanings. The learning objective is to guide students in uncovering the resonances, parallels, and commensurabilities, such as those between Daoist ethical-cosmological worldview and Shakespeare’s humanistic outlook, which also reflects the Elizabethan society’s awe and reverence for nature and humanity. In addition, reading *Macbeth* from the Daoist perspective empowers students to challenge the prevailing dualistic framework entrenched in Western thought and encourages them to explore the non-duality inherent within

the assumed dichotomies in the play. As Greene (1995) suggest, “literature always has the potential to subvert dualism and reductionism” (p. 96). I would like to share excerpts from an assignment I did during Professor Fidyk’s course, “Advanced Research Seminar in Secondary Education I,” in the Fall semester 2018:

Instructors can invite students to consider the industrious ethos deeply ingrained in Western culture through the lens of the non-duality in the male/female dichotomy: while Western culture urges us to act, to seek, and to assert our power (associated with the Yang principle, that is, masculinity/sun/creative principle), Daoist culture admonishes us to take the time to repose and to introspect ourselves (associated with the Yin principle, that is, the femininity/dark/receptive principle). When we consciously propel ourselves forward to assert our ego in the secular world, we need to have a room of our own to practice stillness and reflection. These moments allow wisdom and insight to emerge spontaneously. ... An examination of non-duality from the Chinese Daoist cosmology reveals that Yin and Yang are mutually reinforcing and neutralizing.

Secondly, this intercultural curriculum incorporates students’ life stories and lived experience into the interpretations of literary works. Each student’s life stories and experiences are unique and illuminating. Shakespeare himself tells lots of stories and portrays various kinds of beings in his plays. As Greenblatt (2016) mentions in an interview at Folger Shakespeare Library, Shakespeare portrays humans’ passing from day to day, from minute to minute because he regards humans as inconsistent creatures that flow between different stages of life and different states of mind, hence he makes a life story not of solid fabric but is always a life of movement. Life is becoming a story of life that can be told and retold, reheard, recounted, and

revitalized. As Life is so fantastically and, to an extent, so fearfully (such as his tragedies), interwoven into plays, it is imperative for instructors to guide students in reflecting upon their own life journey and/or educational experience, as this serves as a means to comprehend the world we inhabit and to find the essence of living NOW and living in moments. As Smith (2014) asserts, it is “down to the earth” that teachers and students find the meaning of living NOW in the literature curriculum (p. 140). Similarly, Bai et al. (2020) claim that the self is formed and becomes engaged moment by moment (p. 43). Through this process, students become more cultured, well-informed, and experienced (*Bildung*). Engaging students in the narration of life stories and educational experience is highly emphasized by William Dunn et al. (2009), who advocate for intercultural inquiry in curriculum courses, including second language education and arts education. They propose that in teacher education, intercultural inquiry can help to:

Foster a way of being in the world that acknowledges [student teachers'] life histories while also challenging their taken-for-granted ways of being, thus inspiring changes to bring forward new understandings and new ways of being that are consistent with the context and the time in which they live. (p. 537)

Additionally, Lewkowich and Jacobs (2019) argue that readers can use their reading experiences to work through difficult personal histories and memories (p. 21). While self-reflection often involves looking back on past experiences and take the form of retrospect, it also enables students to trace the trajectories from the past into the present and even toward the future. In this process of reflecting on their lives, students undergo transformation and transcend their former selves in the journey of growth.

Thirdly, this intercultural curriculum cultivates students' anti-anthropocentric worldview. The etymological and morphological links between *human*, *humanity*, *humility*, and *humus*



suggest that they form the foundation for humanness and underscore the significance of anti-anthropocentric worldview in this curriculum. In our age that witnesses the unprecedented development in high technology and modern science, nature is often regarded as a reservoir of raw materials for human exploration. The anthropocentric view of nature reduces nature to utilitarian purpose, devoid of its intrinsic values. In Shakespeare's plays, Nature finds its expressions in natural orders, which are not external restraints but must be observed by humans (Danby, 1949 & Scott, 2014). Similarly, Daoist philosophy perceives the natural world as aesthetically ordered, which means that nature cannot be objectified but rather requires human engagement in the language of deference (Hall, 2001). The anthropocentric tendency to exploit nature for human ends disrupts its homeostatic equilibrium. Both Daoism and Shakespearean literature advocate for organic harmony and order, not imposed by external force, but emerging from the intrinsic bond between nature and the human body. This theme is vividly exemplified in *Macbeth*, where the human body is an emblem of nature, as illustrated in Macbeth's description of King Duncan's fatal wounds as "a breach in nature" (2.3.132).

Fourthly, this intercultural curriculum could incorporate Daoist poetry into the introduction of the *Dao De Jing*. This aims to foster their understanding and appreciation of the "realm without self" depicted in Daoist poems. It also makes a comparison with the "realm with self" in *Macbeth*. In the "realm without self," Daoist poetry illustrates a state where humans are unified with the universe to achieve oneness. This unity brings about tranquility and a serene state of mind. Conversely, in the "realm with self" depicted in *Macbeth*, the subjective perspectives of characters imbue the world with romantic and serious elements, drawing the audience into the psyche of the protagonists and exerting an intense emotional pressure on the souls of readers and viewers. By exploring these two beautiful realms in artistic conceptions,

students are prompted to think critically and imaginatively. They become attuned to subtle nuances that they have not noticed before; they go beyond “feeling good;” they delve deeper and deeper into existential questions. These moments of aesthetic engagement with poetry and theater will make them become more wide-awake, perceptually alive, and become more conscious of and attentive to what works of art speaks to them as human beings. Through this aesthetic experience, students undergo a transformative journey of imagination and self-revelation.

Fifthly, this intercultural curriculum incorporates theatrical performance and provides students with opportunities to participate in pre-reflection activities. On the theatrical stage, everything becomes a true illusion. When students engage in acting or role-playing exercises, they penetrate this illusion, blurring the boundaries between reality and fantasy. They step into the shoes of the characters, experiencing a profound “in-dwelling” understanding. Greene (2015) prefers the use of theatrical exercises in courses because “[a]s students perform scenes from [a play], employing context to focus their intention and style, their interpretation of the text becomes an event, echoing Grotowski, ‘an act carried out here and now in the actors’ organisms in front of other men’” (p. 105). This sentiment is echoed by Zorica Lola Jelic (2018), who highlights the transformative power of performing Shakespeare’s plays. By addressing themes such as brutality, domestic violence, and racial prejudice, theatrical performances serve as a form of preventive action against real-world violence: when the violence is acted out in the play, the real violence will be prevented (p. 744). Therefore, these exercises facilitate fruitful pre-reflective engagement with the artistic works.

Lastly, this intercultural curriculum emphasizes cultural commensurabilities while refraining from overemphasizing cultural differences. As early as the early twentieth century,

Jorge Luis Borges proclaimed, “We love over-emphasizing our little differences, our hatreds, and that is wrong. If humanity is to be saved, we must focus on our affinities, the points of contact with all other human beings; by all means we must avoid accentuating our differences” (cited in Zhang, 2007, Preface). Additionally, Smith (2014) observes that curriculum theorizing is still tainted with emphasis on difference rather than on commonality or commensurability. He advocates for a new form of expression to construct a vision of commonness, asserting that “life ... is always already shared by virtue of our common human habitation on a single planet” (p. 138). My intention to highlight cultural commensurabilities does not imply “the assimilation of differences into the melting pot of a higher universal synthesis” (Clarke, 2000, p. 209). Rather, it acknowledges cultural differences and emphasizes the importance of looking for commensurabilities, affinities, and resonances. Gadamer (1975) suggests that the purpose of a genuine dialogue is to reach an agreement on the subject matter (see also Davey, 2006, p. 10; Zenk, 2015, p. 29). Mall (2000) warns against overemphasizing cultural differences, as it could promote a stance of cultural supremacy (p. 26) and lead to “an ethnocentric absolutism or to an ethnocentric universalism” (p. 19). Clarke (2000) indicates that dialogue between different cultures deepens with each new agreement thrived on differences (p. 12). In order to achieve agreement, Clarke (1997) proposes that Europeans’ encounter with Eastern ideas should not be “a sign of total difference” but rather should be viewed as “a manifestation of the difficult hermeneutical process in which the cultural horizons of two cultures move towards some kind of dialogical accommodation” (p. 184). In alignment with these perspectives, I believe that differences between Eastern and Western cultures and literatures open the space for reciprocal and respectful interactions. Overemphasizing cultural differences neglects the the common grounds which the East and the West can be communicated on an equal basis. The intercultural

curriculum that integrates the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* should strive to prevent such overemphasis on cultural differences and instead facilitate meaningful intercultural encounters.

After delving into the possibilities and components of integrating the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* within an intercultural curriculum, I arrive at the concluding remarks of this thesis. Initially perceived as “mighty opposites” (*Hamlet*, 5.2.67-69), these two texts reveal surprising and amazing cultural affinities, commonness, resonances, and commensurability. The term “commensurability” derives etymologically from the Latin word “*commensūrābilis*,” signifying “having a common measure” (OED). This indicates that cultural commensurability serves both as a measure of the cultural affinities/commonness between different cultures and as a yardstick to measure the significance of the transmitted works in literatures and cultures against our ordinary existence in the world. I have persistently aimed to demonstrate this through the narratives of participants and myself, showing that the commensurable points of *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth* connect to our lived experiences in profound and commensurable ways. I believe that readers interested in this study will feel, as participants and I have felt, the harmonious and mutually illuminating aspects inherent in the wisdoms of Laozi and Shakespeare: there exist the “touches of sweet harmony” (*The Merchant of Venice*, 5.1.65) between them, and they are of “heavenly mingle” (*Antony and Cleopatra*, 1.5.69). Readers would exclaim, as I have throughout the research process, at the unexpected commensurabilities and shared insights.

It is my hope that this study contributes to the ongoing discourse of East-West dialogue in curriculum studies, particularly within the realms of hermeneutic and aesthetic curriculum studies. Throughout this study, I firmly adhere to the conviction that both Daoist wisdom and Shakespeare literature support “the roots and the very soil that holds and nourishes the tree (of Life)” (Bai, 2020, p. ix). While this study “only touch[s] the tip of the wealth of [their] wisdom,”

to borrow Bai's words (p. x), I am optimistic that this relatively less-traveled and less-explored terrain will inspire future graduate students and educators to delve deeper into the study between Daoism and Shakespearean literature in the landscape of curriculum and pedagogy. In the contemporary landscape of curriculum and pedagogy, Bai and Cohen (2008) suggest that we can offer students three kinds of empowerment: criticism, creativity, and ethics (p. 51). Through criticism, we can challenge the dualistic anthropocentric worldviews; creativity allows us to inhabit different ways of being and living in the world by engaging with literary works and cultures that are aesthetic, contemplative, intersubjective, and intercultural; and with ethics, we can help students undergo a process of self-transformation. This process not only enables them to become caring, loving, joyful, and passionate individuals, but also contributes to making our blue planet a home garden where various modalities of being, including the animate and the inanimate, co-exist in a peaceful, harmonious, and vibrate environment. I hope that my endeavor in this thesis will empower students in these areas, even if only in a minimal way.

Finally, I conclude the thesis with Rebecca's remarks, which resonate with our collective voice as Chinese educators:

I remember a saying in the science of education that goes, "Education is one tree shaking another tree, one cloud pushing forward another cloud, one soul awakening another soul." Even if my light can only illuminate five meters in the class, I should shine brightly those five meters because this light of five meters is interconnected to the light of the universe of fifty thousand miles. It's being in harmony with the light and dust in the universe.<sup>47</sup> Even the tiniest firefly, when it shines brightly, holds

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<sup>47</sup> This idea resonates with Chapter 4 of the *Dao De Jing*, which reads "Dao ... merges with the brilliant, and becomes one with the very dust" (Lynn, 1999, p.57) (和光同尘). I have referenced it in both Chapter 5 and Chapter 6 of this thesis.

significance. I'd like to draw a parallel with Macbeth — even if his light only shone as a fading beam, it still represents the energy of his actions shining forth; it still moved the wheel of history, even though he was eventually crushed by the Wheel of Fate. •

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## **Appendix A: Letter to the Instructor Requesting Authorization for the Research**

**Subject Line:** Invitation to Participate in Doctoral Research on Shakespeare and Chinese Daoist Philosophy

Dear Instructor,

My name is Qian Ye. I am currently working on my doctoral study at the University of Alberta, Canada. This letter requests your authorization to carry out the doctoral research about reading and/or teaching Shakespeare's plays through the lens of Chinese Daoist philosophy, and to explain the goal, procedures, duration, and ethical considerations of my research study.

The title of this University of Alberta research project is *Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the Dao De Jing and Macbeth: A Hermeneutic Inquiry*. The goal of this research is to enrich our understanding of Shakespeare's plays by engaging in an intercultural dialogue with Daoist philosophy.

The research seeks to engage in conversation with educators who have intercultural experience of reading and/or teaching one or two of Shakespeare's plays. I invite you to participate in this research because of your expertise in Shakespeare's plays and your familiarity with Daoist texts, such as the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, as a Chinese educator at the post-secondary level. This research will explore meaningful and ethical ways to integrate intercultural reading experience into an intercultural curriculum. The result of this study will inform my dissertation and contribute to future curriculum reviews in our reading and teaching context.

In consideration of your valuable time as teacher, your only role as a participant will be to engage in a maximum of two in-person individual interviews and two focus group meetings.

Data will be collected through audio recording for analysis. I will use a hand-held voice recorder. If you choose to participate, your contribution will be fully acknowledged and recognized, and you will have access to valuable professional development opportunity that can directly impact your teaching practice.

I assure you that any information you provide during the interviews will remain confidential, and I assure you that whatever you say during the interviews will not be shared with your employer, supervisor, colleagues, or anyone. All digital recordings will be destroyed according to the University of Alberta ethics guidelines.

You are under no obligation to participate in this study. Participation is completely voluntary. You have complete autonomy to withdraw from the study at any moment and to decide whether your contributions to this point may be used by the researcher.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me in the following ways:

E-mail: [qye3@ualberta.ca](mailto:qye3@ualberta.ca)

If you would prefer to communicate directly with my doctoral supervisor, Dr. Claudia Eppert, about the research project, you can contact her via:

E-mail: [eppert@ualberta.ca](mailto:eppert@ualberta.ca)

Thank you.

Sincerely yours,

Qian Ye



## **Appendix B: Information Letter and Consent Form**

**Title of Study:** Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*:  
A Hermeneutic Inquiry

### **What is the reason for doing this study?**

As part of my doctoral thesis, I am conducting a study on Chinese educators' intercultural reading experience of Shakespeare's plays, with a focus on engaging in an intercultural dialogue with Daoist philosophy. The purpose of this research is to explore the curricular possibilities of an intercultural dialogue with Daoist philosophy while reading Shakespeare's plays. Intercultural dialogues and intercultural reading experiences have immense implications for the field of Curriculum Studies, and this research aims to contribute to the field by promoting intercultural communication. Your participation is highly valued, as your insights as an educator in China will contribute to the execution of this research project.

### **What will I be asked to do?**

You will participate in a maximum of two in-person, individual interviews and engage in two focus group meetings. During the individual interviews and focus group meetings, I will record the audio of the conversations, which I will transcribe later for data analysis. The individual interviews will be scheduled at your most convenience, and the timing for the focus group discussions will be coordinated through mutual agreement among all participants to ensure everyone's availability and comfort.

**What are the risks and discomforts?**

There is no foreseeable social risk involved in the research. You may experience a little discomfort talking about your lived experience. You have complete autonomy to withdraw from the study at any moment and decide whether your contributions to this point may be used by the researcher.

**What are the benefits to me?**

Through this study, you will have the opportunity to think deeply about their intercultural reading experience and potentially access a valuable professional development opportunity that could impact their teaching practice directly or indirectly.

**Do I have to take part in the study?**

Participation in this study is completely voluntary. If you decide to be in the study, you can change your mind and stop being in the study. The withdrawal period is within four weeks after the individual interview has been completed. Additionally, you are also free to withdraw from the study at least two weeks before the start of the second focus group meeting. After that point, I cannot remove you from the study because I will have transcribed the interviews and begun data analysis for my thesis. In a group conversation involving multiple participants, losing one participant can make that conversation difficult or impossible to properly interpret. To withdraw from the study, please contact Qian Ye at [qye3@ualberta.ca](mailto:qye3@ualberta.ca).

Additionally, if you remain in the research study but wish to retract some or all of your responses, please contact Qian Ye at [qye3@ualberta.ca](mailto:qye3@ualberta.ca). Please do so within four weeks after the individual interviews and at least two weeks before the start of the second focus group. After

this point, I will be unable to remove your answers as they will have become part of the dataset, and I will have incorporated them into my thesis.

Please be assured that you are not obligated to respond to any specific questions that make you uncomfortable. In the event of opting out of the study, I will continue to use the data I have collected only with your permission. Your autonomy and comfort are of utmost importance throughout this research process.

### **Will my information be kept private?**

During this study, I will do everything I can to make sure that all information you provide is kept private. To maintain confidentiality, I will replace all actual names of persons and institutions with pseudonyms in both the interview transcripts and the research paper.

Pseudonyms will be used to maintain confidentiality of participants in the focus group meetings unless all participants collectively choose to be identified by actual names and institutions.

During research studies, it is important that the data I get is accurate. For this reason, your data, including your name, may be looked at by people from the Research Ethics Board. After the study is done, I will still need to securely store your data that was collected as part of the study. All physical data will be securely stored and locked in a cabinet. All computer files will be password protected on my personal computer, with access restricted solely to myself as the principal investigator. The audio-recorded interviews and their transcripts, as well as interview notes, will be stored in an encrypted folder on my personal computer. In addition, all digital data will be backed up on a password-protected USB device. Once the research is concluded, all associated data will be centralized in a securely locked filing cabinet in my home.

I will retain this data for a period of five years following the conclusion of my research project's data collection and recording, after which it will be appropriately destroyed.

There might be the risk of loss of privacy in the focus groups. While I strive to protect the confidentiality of the data, I cannot guarantee that others from the group will do the same. To address and minimize the risk of loss of privacy, all participants in the focus group will be required to sign a "Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement."

### **What if I have questions?**

If you have any further questions regarding this study now or later, please do not hesitate to contact:

Principal Investigator: Qian Ye

E-mail: [qye3@ualberta.ca](mailto:qye3@ualberta.ca)

If you have any questions regarding your rights as a research participant, you may contact the University of Alberta Research Office at [reoffice@ualberta.ca](mailto:reoffice@ualberta.ca) or 780-492-2615 and quote Ethics ID Pro00135262. This office is independent of the study investigators.

### **How do I indicate my agreement to be in this study?**

By signing below, you understand:

- That you have read the above information and have had anything that you do not understand explained to you to your satisfaction.
- That you will be taking part in a research study.
- That you may freely leave the research study at any time.
- That you do not waive your legal rights by being in the study.

- That the legal and professional obligations of the investigator and involved institution are not changed by your taking part in this study.
- That you agree to the data being stored as part of a data repository (where applicable).

**SIGNATURE OF STUDY PARTICIPANT**

\_\_\_\_\_ Pseudonym (if necessary)

Name of Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

Signature of Participant Date

**SIGNATURE OF PERSON OBTAINING CONSENT**

\_\_\_ Qian Ye \_\_\_\_\_ XXX-XXX-XXXX

Name of Person Obtaining Consent Contact Number

A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

**Consent Form**

Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*: A  
Hermeneutic Inquiry

I, (please print) \_\_\_\_\_ have read the information on the research project *Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the Dao De Jing and Macbeth: A Hermeneutic Inquiry* that is to be conducted by Qian Ye from the University of Alberta. All queries have been answered to my satisfaction. I have been given the opportunity to ask questions and my questions have been answered. If I have additional questions, I have been told whom to contact. I agree to participate in the research study described above and will receive a copy of this form after I sign it.

I understand that I can withdraw from this project at any time without providing a reason or incurring any penalties. My responses will remain confidential. Any documentation, including audio recordings, will be securely retained by the investigator for a period of five years after the publication of a report regarding the project research, after which it will be destroyed securely. My identity and interviews will not be disclosed to anyone other than the investigator conducting the project without my explicit permission.

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

Email: \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix C: Focus Group Confidentiality Agreement

Chinese Educators' Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*: A  
Hermeneutic Inquiry

Participants agree to the following confidentiality obligations:

- Participants shall not disclose, divulge, or communicate any confidential information obtained during the focus group meetings to any third party without the express written consent of the group.
- Participants shall take reasonable measures to safeguard any confidential information they acquire during the focus group, including, but not limited to, protecting digital reading materials, documents, and verbal disclosures.
- The obligations outlined in this Agreement shall remain in effect indefinitely, extending beyond the conclusion of the focus group meetings.
- This Agreement constitutes the entire agreement between participants and the researcher concerning the confidentiality of information shared during the focus group meetings.
- Participants acknowledge that they have read and understood the terms of this Agreement and voluntarily agree to be bound by its provisions.

Participant's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Researcher's Signature: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### **Appendix D: Sample Guide Questions for the 1<sup>st</sup> Focus Group Meeting**

1. What is your relationship between Daoism and *Macbeth*?
2. How are you having the intercultural encounter with *Macbeth* from your Chinese lived experience?
3. What is your Chinese experience of the intercultural encounter?



## Appendix E: Sample Interview Guide Questions

1. What is your background with Daoism?
2. What is your background with Shakespeare?
3. When and why did you become interested in Daoism and Shakespeare?
4. What is your experience with intercultural reading and what does intercultural reading mean to you?
5. In what ways has the wisdom found in the *Dao De Jing* influenced your understanding of *Macbeth*, and *vice versa*?
6. What challenges do you experience in reading *Macbeth* from within your Chinese cultural understanding?
7. In what ways does your understanding and interpretation of the *Dao De Jing* inform your lived experiences?
8. How does this intercultural reading contribute to your comprehension of specific aspects of your life in China, and your understanding of Chinese culture?
9. In what way has an intercultural reading experience influenced your teaching and educational practices as a Chinese educator?

## **Appendix F: Sample Guide Questions for the 2<sup>nd</sup> Focus Group Meeting**

1. What is it we want to share?
2. What, if anything, have we learned from our intercultural encounter and dialogue?
3. In what ways, if at all, have we been changed in this intercultural dialogical encounter? In what ways not?
4. In what ways, if at all, does this intercultural encounter inform our lived experience, or not?
5. How do you envision the relevance and significance of intercultural readings like this for the broader field of education and literary studies, especially within the context of Chinese educational settings?

**Appendix G: A Sample of Dual-Column Format Notes**

Narrative Speech	My interpretive reflections
<p>There's widespread anxiety among parents, which leads to a common desire, that is, to make children achieve academic excellence as quickly as possible. This desire is false and contradicts natural laws because it goes against children's physiological laws. This desire has been turned into <i>You Wei</i>, an act of doing. For instance, making children repeatedly study advanced mathematics, attending various tutorial classes, etc. These practices can lead to severe issues, like sleep deprivation. Some kids get as little as four to five hours of sleep a day. This can be terrifying as it significantly impacts their physical growth, intelligence, mental health, and deprives them of activities they enjoy. These deficiencies directly affect their physical and psychological development. There's a severe mental health crisis in China: a survey conducted in 2019 at Peking University revealed that over 50% of incoming freshmen</p>	<p>Daoist approach to parenting, guided by <i>Wu Wei</i>. <i>Wei</i> signifies reckless action, while <i>Wu Wei</i> embodies actions that adhere to the inherent order of things, avoiding any violation of order.</p> <p>Not advocate idleness but following a natural order.</p> <p>Refrain from unnecessary interference in the psychological and physical development of children. Teachers and parents should provide the necessary time and space with children to grow and mature at their own pace.</p> <p>Macbeth disrupts natural order.</p>

believed they had psychological issues. It's a critical problem that starts as early as elementary school, mainly due to societal pressures pushing kids to excel academically against their natural growth patterns.	
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## Appendix H: Ethics Approval Notification Letter<sup>48</sup>



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### Ethics Application has been Approved

ID: [Pro00135262](#)

Title: Daoist-informed Engagement with Shakespeare's Plays

Study Investigator: [Qian Ye](#)

This is to inform you that the above study has been approved.

Description: Click on the link(s) above to navigate to the workspace.

Please do not reply to this message. This is a system-generated email that cannot receive replies.

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Canada T6G 2E1

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<sup>48</sup> The thesis title has been revised to “Chinese Educators’ Intercultural Dialogue with the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*: A Hermeneutic Inquiry.” Following the candidacy exam and the examining committee’s recommendation to delve deeper into participants’ collective engagement with a specific Daoist text and one specific play by Shakespeare, the focus shifted to the *Dao De Jing* and *Macbeth*. Details have been explained in Chapter Five.