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## Sustainability retainable only in the heart (a case study of Lao-tzu: Dao De Jing, 1<sup>st</sup> - 9th chapter)<sup>1</sup>

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### Abstract

Based on hermeneutic uncovering of the content of Dao De Jing using semantic analysis of the constituent components of Chinese characters (cf. Fellner 2010a,b) an effort to find the roots of the original myth of the Old Master (Lao-tzu) has been initiated. In the case of an archaic character 恒 héng an alternative interpretation has been proposed referring to the concept of "sustainability". This sustainability, derived from the constant cycle of months in the sky, is - in terms of the constitutive elements of the mentioned character - viable only in the heart. The identical concept of sustainability can be assumed also from the Old Master's postulate that sustainable vision is not a realised vision. This concept that is implicitly expressed already in the first chapter of Dao De Jing can also be found as a cohesive element all through its following chapters. Furthermore, it serves as a logical justification for keeping to the principle 無爲 wú wéi, so typical for the Old Master.

**Key words:** *sustainability, Chinese characters, semantic analysis, contextual linguistics, cultural semantics, language semantics, Laozi, Dao De Jing*

### Introduction

Currently, the present decade of sustainable education proclaimed by the United Nations has influenced the curricula in many places around the world. It has encouraged the rise of many educational projects directly aimed at sustainability. When searching for the first efforts to educate in the field of sustainability, we find the name of the Chinese philosopher Laozi (Lao-tzu) 老子 – the Old Master, and supposedly his work Dao De Jing 道德經, one of the masterpieces of Taoist philosophy. How do we understand what he thought about it? And what did he think of sustainability himself? Was it for him a concept worth teaching about?

It is hardly possible to search for the number of translations of Dao De Jing. Some sources quote about 300 translations (cf. <http://www.daoisopen.com/DDJTranslations.html>), other sources state an exact number of 643 (cf. e.g. Zhang 2010). By all means, the translators' interest in Dao De Jing is exceptional and seems to grow all the time. Readers' interest in the world is also quite high, but not enormous. The reason appears to be the complexity of the archaic text that works as a thrown gauntlet for translators, but is sometimes a little confusing for readers. Despite this, the Old Master's Dao De Jing continues to appear and sell in bookshops all over the world. Why is it so?

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Neither its origin, covered by many legends<sup>2</sup>, nor its assumed old age seem to be the decisive reason for the unusual popularity of this work. The reasons may include the multidimensional aspect of the message brought by Dao De Jing that makes both translators and readers try to find the essential meaning. This is the aspect that inspired the question hidden in the title of this statement: What role did „sustainability“ play in the Old Master's message? And to what extent is searching for the concept of „sustainability“ in the Old Master's message plausible?

## Material

The so-called Wang Bi's edition of Dao De Jing (王弼 Wang Bi, 226-249 AD) is commonly used as the primary material for translations of Dao De Jing. It is the version which is broadly respected and in fact codified by broad consensus and serves as the basis for most of his translations and interpretations. The possibility of providing older versions of the texts obtained from the newer discoveries of manuscripts from Mawangdui or from Guodian is a new contribution to the debate (cf. e.g. Čarnogurská 2009, Klaus 2009, etc. from European authors). It plays an important role even for the concept of "sustainability", as presented here, and its possible interpretation in the context of Dao De Jing.

As it is known, in the "pre-Wang Bi's tradition" the following versions or commentaries of Dao De Jing are currently used: Yan Zun, Heshang Gong, Mawangdui and Guodian<sup>3</sup>. But only the Mawangdui and Guodian versions are of primary importance for the contextual analysis in relation to the term "sustainability" in Dao De Jing.

## Methods

All relevant Chinese characters contained in Dao De Jing were analyzed in their components as a basis for their semantic or genealogical analysis, and for developing hypotheses about the possible original meaning of the characters. The components of characters in the Chinese seal script (篆文), or archaic script (古文), in the script on bronzes (金文) and also on turtle shells and bones (甲骨文) were constantly taken into account.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Sima Qian: *Records of the Grand Historian: Qin Dynasty*. Current Translation, 1993, by Burton Watson. Columbia University Press, New York. ISBN 0-231-08169-3.

<sup>3</sup> **Yan Zun** (嚴尊, c. 80 BC - 10 AD) was a Taoist West Han philosopher. Out of his commentaries, however, only the commentaries "De Jing", i.e. to the 38th - 81st chapter (the second part of the Dao De Jing in the common order of its chapters) survived. **Heshang Gong** commentaries (河上公, 179-157 BC?) were supposedly based on a manuscript of Dao De Jing from the year 579 BC, but there is a lack of any evidence for this assumption and the so-called Heshang Gong's version differing from Wang Bi's version only in details does not support that thesis as well. **Mawangdui** (马王堆, archeological find from 1973, labeled by the name of the site of the tomb dated to the year 168 BC) includes two texts of Dao De Jing written on silk (text A and text B, representing two slightly different versions), while the chapters are sorted in reverse order, i.e. first "De Jing" followed by " Dao Jing", and used characters are very archaic. **Guodian** (郭店, archeological find from 1993, labeled by the name of the site of the tomb probably dating to the 4th century BC.) covers only selected chapters from Dao De Jing written on bamboo strips (partially in "incorrect positions", partially damaged) and used the characters are so archaic that for many of them there is not a full consensus as to their equivalents in contemporary Chinese. The original Chinese texts referred to as a version of Wang Bi, Heshang Gong, Mawangdui (A, B) and Guodian are easily accessible such as at: [http://home.pages.at/onkellotus/TTK/\\_IndexTTK.html](http://home.pages.at/onkellotus/TTK/_IndexTTK.html).

<sup>4</sup> Complete results of this analysis, most often incorporated into the "sinogram" (for this term cf. Bellassen & Zhang 1997), are part of textbooks "Chinese taught via Dao De Jing", prepared during 2006-2011 at St. John's

This analysis of the material from Dao De Jing is based on the assumption that on the way of the "hermeneutic circle", leading from the pre-understanding to one's own understanding of this highly archaic Chinese text, it is desirable to break intentionally the integrity of the unity of Chinese characters on their compositional level (cf. Fellner 2008b). This procedure was even used in the analysis of the characters and the statements built upon them in revealing the concept of "sustainability" in Dao De Jing and of the message contained in the first nine chapters of Dao De Jing (for details see Fellner 2010, 2012).

## Results and discussion

The term "sustainability" is already significantly integrated into the text of the first chapter of Dao De Jing (in the current order of chapters). In traditional Wang Bi's version it looks as follows:

道可道非常道名可名非常名  
dào kě dào fēi cháng dào míng kě míng fēi cháng míng  
無名天地之始有名萬物之母  
wú míng tiān dì zhī shǐ yǒu míng wàn wù zhī mǔ  
故常無欲以觀其妙常有欲以觀其微  
gù cháng wù yù yǐ guān qí miào cháng yǒu yù yǐ guān qí jiào  
此兩者同出而異名同謂之玄  
cǐ liǎng zhě tóng chū ér yì míng tóng wèi zhī xuán  
玄之又玄眾妙之門  
xuán zhī yòu xuán zhòng miào zhī mén

In the English translation of Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English the first chapter is following (cf. Feng & English 1972):

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.  
The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
The nameless is the beginning of heaven and Earth.  
The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.  
Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.  
Ever desiring, one sees the manifestations.  
These two spring from the same source but differ in name; this appears as darkness.  
Darkness within darkness.  
The gate to all mystery.

The above translation has been published for the first time before the manuscripts in Mawangdui and Guodian were discovered. Moreover, it is characterized by relatively high fidelity of translation in relation to the original, in this case, especially to the Wang Bi's edition, and it can therefore be described as an example of a **standard** English translation of Dao De Jing.

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College; the sinograms relating to individual chapters of Dao De Jing were also published separately (cf. Fellner 2007, 2008a, 2009, 2010a, c, 2011a).

"Tao" 道 *dào* is used there as a term which is in principle impossible to translate<sup>5</sup>, there's **nameless** recognized as **the beginning of heaven and Earth** 無名天地之始 *wú míng tiān dì zhī shǐ*, while **the named** is the **mother of all things** 有名萬物之母 *yǒu míng wàn wù zhī mǔ*. And the **darkness within darkness** 玄之又玄 *xuán zhī yòu xuán*, is considered **the gate to all mystery** (Feng & English 1972). It seems that "sustainability" is not explicitly mentioned here.

Based on the intentional contextual analysis of the compositional components of Chinese characters and on statements of the first Dao De Jing chapter built upon the results of this analysis, an alternative interpretation of some characters in this chapter (for details see Fellner 2010a) has been proposed.

For example, in the first sequence of the first chapter it was proposed to interpret "Tao" 道 *dào* as "vision", i.e. in the sense where the "head" "aims", because the character 道 *dào* is a combination of elements 辵 and 首, i.e. a combination of elements "walk" or "go" and "head" or "leader"; the first element is indivisible, but the second contains the compositional subelements eyes 眮, or even nose 白, and on the top even a scalp with hair, cf. 首. In the script on the turtle shell and bones (甲骨文) the character 道 *dào*, specifically his right part 首, takes the form of a totem head or of an animal mask 獭 (cf. e.g. Wang 1997, 2010 Sears etc.). Based on its structure the character 道 *dào* possibly indicates that it should be a "head wandering" (perhaps originally "wandering of the totem leader"), therefore it means "where the head is directed," i.e. "where the mind is directed." The leader is logically the one who determined where to go next, so what is his "intent" or "intention". A leader is one who should know what his "vision" is.

Based on this identification of the character 道 *dào* with the term "vision" the alternative translation of the first sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter would look like this (we put lines in the following order: Chinese characters first, their pronunciation using the transcription in *pinyin*, the standard translation by Feng and English (1972) and the alternative translation proposed here in English and in Czech):

道 可 道 非 常 道 名 可 名 非 常 名  
*dào kě dào fēi cháng dào míng kě míng fēi cháng míng*

The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao.  
 The name that can be named is not the eternal name.  
 (Feng & English 1972)

The sustained vision is not a vision which may be seen.  
 Likewise the sustained name is not a name which may be inquired.  
 Trvalá vize, to není vize, kterou lze uvidět.  
 I trvalé jméno, není jméno, na něž se lze doptat.  
 (Fellner 2005a,b)

In our **interpretation** (cf. also Fellner 2005a,b, 2007, 2010a) it is suggested that the sustained vision, the one we carry in our heart, cannot be seen, showed, published, or even realized, because it would be thus almost certainly lost. After all, how often we find that our dream, idea, vision which we nurture, grows in us that we are full of it, while in the moment of its "disclosure" or its "realization" turns into something completely different, foreign, even

<sup>5</sup> Cf. for example the discussion of Zhang (2010) on this topic.

hostile, when it is released into the world, it slips between your fingers and we have empty hands and hearts?

In the second sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter it was proposed to interpret the character 始 *shǐ* not only in its common meaning "beginning". The character 始 *shǐ* is a combination of elements 女 *nǚ* and 台 *yí*, i.e. "woman" and "be satisfied", "be pleased", "be happy". The first element is indivisible, the second contains the compositional elements of "private" 亼 *sī*, meaning also "secret" or "hidden", and "mouth" 口 *kǒu*, meaning also the "hole", "estuary" (of a river), "throat" (of a pitcher). But what could be interesting for our alternative interpretation is that the entire second part of the character 始 *shǐ* (i.e. 台 *yí*) in conjunction with such radical as a "body" or "meat" 月 (used instead of 肉) occurs in a composite character also in the meaning of "embryo" 胎 and such as the radical "grass" ("plant") 艹 also in the meaning of "cryptogams" (mosses) 苔 (i.e. "plant" and to be "wedded" in the case of "moss" 苔, and similarly the "body" and to be "wedded" in the case of "embryo" 胎). For this reason that the meanings "conception" or "to be conceived" are proposed as an alternative translation of the character 始 *shǐ* taking into account the meanings of its components, i.e. the meanings "woman" and "be pleased" ("pleasure" for "women"), but also meanings to be "wedded" and the result of it for "women". And moreover it is likely that the "conception" might be the meaning of the character 始 *shǐ* in its original sense.

Similarly, it was proposed to interpret the character for "mother" in the second sequence not only as "mother", but directly as "nursing mother", i.e. taking into account the pictographic nature of the character 母 *mǔ* as "a woman with highlighted breast nipples" (ipple - in the script on the bronzes, but also on the turtle shells and bones), or directly with threads outlining breast milk illustrating the ability to suckle (milk - in the seal script).

Based on this identification sign 始 *shǐ* meaning "conception" and the character 母 *mǔ* meaning "nursing mother" would then be an alternative translation of the second sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter looked like this (again, in order: Chinese characters, their pronunciation, the standard translation by Feng and English (1972) and the alternative translation proposed here in English and in Czech):

## 無名天地之始有名萬物之母

wú míng tiān dì zhī shǐ yǒu míng wàn wù zhī mǔ

The nameless is the beginning of heaven and Earth.

The named is the mother of the ten thousand things.

(Feng & English 1972)

Should anything on heaven or earth be conceived, it is nameless.

Only after being born does everything get its name.

Vždyť je-li co na nebi či na zemi počato, nemá to jméno.

Všechno své jméno dostává, až když to matka začne kojit.

(Fellner 2005a,b)

In our **interpretation** (cf. Fellner 2005a,b) we talk about the fact that whatever is conceived as either the idea or vision, or even as a growing fetus in the woman's body, it is without a generally known name: it just gets a shape, contours and details, and nobody else knows about it, though we can be fulfilled with it. Even the official name commonly is given

only at the moment when the named sees the light of day: when the "ready" vision is published or when the mother gives successfully birth to the "full term" baby (and he or she starts to suckle). But is it the name that we used when we still had worn only the conceived in the heart? But is it the vision of how we imagined it and gradually composed, though it had been just sprouted? Is the process of publication, delivery, and implementation, more important than the period, when our vision only grows and matures? Is it necessary to start each day with Ferlinghetti from San Francisco or New York or to be still with Jack Kerouac on the road in the truck just so that we can really live? Is it essential how we struggle in our lives or where we run, or what germinates, grows and matures inside of us? Is it the translated text about this alternative? And especially is it not an acceptable and factual explanation of what was said in the previous sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter (and what will be built in the next sequence)?

Similarly, in the third sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter it was proposed to translate the character for "desire" 欲 *yù* by some more emotionally tinged expression, because the character 欲 *yù* is a combination of elements 谷 *gǔ* and 欠 *qiàn*, i.e. in the left "gully", "small valley" an in the right "to miss". The right part of the character 欲 *yù* is usually interpreted as a "yawning man" (recognizable already in 甲骨文 as 𧔽 or 𧔽, i.e. "a man with open breathing mouth"), and if we combine both parts of the character (i.e. 欠 *qiàn* with 谷 *gǔ*) the character can be interpreted literally as "a man eager for a dell". In combination with radical "heart" 心, i.e. 慾 *yù*, that character is also directly translated as "a lust" (i.e. literally emotion hankering after the dell). It is the reason that the meanings "covet" or "hanker after" are proposed as alternative translations of the character 欲 *yù* taking into account meanings of its components.

On the basis of the identification of the character 欲 *yù* with some more emotionally colored meaning like "greedy" or "hanker after", the alternative translation of the third sequence of the first Dao De Jing chapter looks like this (again, in order: Chinese characters, their pronunciation, the standard translation by Feng and English (1972) and the alternative translation proposed here in English and in Czech):

故 常 無 欲 以 觀 其 妙 常 有 欲 以 觀 其 徽  
*gù cháng wú yù yǐ guān qí miào cháng yǒu yù yǐ guān qí jiào*

Ever desireless, one can see the mystery.  
 Ever desiring, one sees the manifestations.  
 (Feng & English 1972)

That is why we see the hidden mystery, when we do not hanker only after it.  
 And watch only the outer facade, when we are still only greedy for it.  
 To je důvod, proč zhlédneme skryté tajemství, když po něm stále jen nedychtíme.  
 A zhlédneme jen vnější fasádu, když po ní pořád jen prahneme.

Similarly, it was suggested in the fifth and sixth sequences to alternatively interpret the sign for "mystery" 玄 *xuán*. The character 玄 *xuán*, commonly translated as "dark", "black", "mysterious", "profound" or "fantastic", it is a combination of elements ト *tóu* and 𩫑 *yāo*, i.e. "cover" + "tiny". Since the element 𩫑 *yāo* (or 𩫑 - graphic version) is sometimes interpreted as a pictograph of the fetus or infant (Harbaugh 1998), the character 玄 *xuán* then could evoke the meaning of "fetus, which is still completely hidden", and therefore the meaning of

"mysterious" seems to be logical. This interpretation, although it might seem to be very inspiring, is not the only one possible. Another alternative interpretation of the character 玄 *xuán* is a hunting weapon usually known by the term "bolas" (cf. Wang 1997). "Bolas" is an archaic term for a throwing weapon with two rocks tied to a single rope (cf. in seal script 篆书 the form of character 玄, that is the hand holding the rope above and two stones down, or on the bronzes the form of character 𩫔, i.e. two connected stones), which could entangle the legs of a hunted animal.

Therefore, it was suggested to try an alternative to interpret the character 玄 *xuán* as "bolas" or possibly "to catch (with a bolas)".

However, is such "contextually fundamental" interpretation of the archaic text still bearable at all? Based on this identification of the character 玄 *xuán* with the meaning "bolas" (or "catch with bolas") the alternative translation of the fourth and fifth sequences of the first Dao De Jing chapter might look like this (again, in order: Chinese characters, their pronunciation, the standard translation by Feng and English (1972) and the alternative translation proposed here in English and in Czech):

此兩者同出而異名同謂之玄  
*cǐ liǎng zhě tóng chū ér yì míng tóng wèi zhī guán*

玄之又玄眾妙之門  
*xuán zhī yòu xuán zhòng miào zhī mén*

These two spring from the same source but differ in name; this appears as darkness.

Darkness within darkness.

The gate to all mystery.

It's like two stones united in throwing, just as when we call these two things the same way.

The named is something so different, even though it has the same origins!

Stone pulls the stone, when bolas is zooming by –

is not this gateway that hides a lot?

Je to jak dva kameny v hodu spojené, když říkáme stejně témto dvěma věcem.

Pojmenováváme přece něco tak rozdílného, i když to má stejný prapůvod!

Kámen táhne kámen, když prosviští bolas –

není tohle brána, která skrývá mnohé?

Although the standard translation of the first Dao De Jing chapter was quite significantly changed by these alternatives, at this stage of uncovering the text using the "hermeneutic circle" way, we still haven't explicitly reached the concept of "sustainability". Could the opportunity to analyze the text in the Mawangdui version bring a new possibility?

This version is different from the Wang Bi's edition in several characters. These differences are clearly visible graphically by lining up the sequences of the first chapter below them in both versions (in the first line the Wang Bi's version - WB and in the second line the Mawangdui version - MWD) and marking them by color (characters, which are different or in addition in Mawangdui version in comparison with Wang Bi's one, are red; characters occurring only in Wang Bi's version, i.e. with no equivalent in any version Mawangdui, are blue):

WB 道可道 非常道 名可名 非常名  
MWD 道可道也 非<sub>恒</sub>道也 名可名也 非<sub>恒</sub>名也

WB 無名天地之始 有名萬物之母  
MWD 无名萬物之始也 有名萬物之母也

WB 故常無欲 以觀其妙 常有欲 以觀其微  
MWD 故<sub>恒</sub>无欲也 以觀<sub>元</sub>眇 恒有欲也 以觀<sub>元</sub>所噓

WB 此兩者同出而異名同謂之玄 玄之又玄眾妙之門  
MWD 兩者同出 異名同<sub>胃</sub> 玄之又玄眾眇之門

Used abbreviations:

WB – Dao De Jing text in the Wang Bi's version  
MWD - Dao De Jing text in the Mawangdui version

First the MWD version contains the character 恒 (恒) *héng* consistently in places where in the WB version the character 常 *cháng* occurs. Both characters have some very similar lexical meanings - "constant", "stable" etc.; yet in terms of the original pictographic components the character 恒 *héng* evokes "stability" in conjunction with the absolutely unchanging cycle of moon in the sky, i.e. between the phases of its waxing and waning (in the script on turtle shells and bones, and similarly in the inscriptions on bronzes, the crescent moon 月 was limited by two boundaries, and appeared in two forms: waxing 月 or waning 月, that is even without an explicit indication of the component 月; in the seal script both components are together 𠂔), while the character 常 *cháng* refers to a social norm or a human product (巾 a scarf or a flag rising up like a smoke from a window of a dwelling 𠂔, i.e. by this way: 尚, in archaic Chinese that character was the expression for a "sovereign battalion" which was probably supposed to flutter incessantly, just like in our time the President flag flies at the White House or at the Prague Castle). In what could be the significant shift in meaning in this case?

The differences in the meanings of the characters 眇 *miǎo* (MWD) and 妙 *miào* (WB) seem to be more substantial. The character 眇 *miǎo* carries the meaning of "tiny, distant, hidden" etc.; the character 妙 *miào* carries the meaning "secret, wonderful, great" etc. In terms of original pictographic components the character 眇 *miǎo* implies something that is only hardly visible whereas the character 妙 *miào* implies something tiny in a woman. That leads to a logical possibility to interpret the character 妙 *miào* as "something tiny in a woman that is deeply **hidden**" (fetus) that makes it close lexically to the meaning of "hidden" in the character 眇 *miǎo*, that is as something that is only hardly visible. Despite this, there is a notable shift in the meaning of „being hidden“ as something still very tiny and therefore also wonderful and secret in a woman, as it is implied in the character 妙 *miào*, or as something that is hardly recognizable with our eyes, as implied in the character 眇 *miǎo*. Can this shift of meaning be essential?

Finally, there is a swap of characters 嘣 *jiào* in MWD and 徵 *jiào* in WB, and in addition to this, the character 嘣 in MWD is introduced by the character 所 *suǒ*. The dictionaries present the character 徵 with the meaning of „do one's rounds, go around; border“; the character 嘣 is associated with the meaning „shout, cry“ etc. In terms of the original pictographic components, the character 徵 implies the meaning „turn around the light“ whereas the character 嘣 introduced by the character 所 *suǒ* refers to something vigorously lit (by the mouth)“. It appears that the lexical meanings of both characters are rather different. What conclusions could it have for the alternatives of translation?<sup>6</sup>

Let us again turn the hermeneutic circle and approach the text in MWD version with a new perspective. The deletion of characters 之玄 *zhī xuán* at the end of the penultimate line of our text, which in the WB version induced attributive relations between the character 玄 *xuán* and the previous predicative structure, makes us question the basic sentence elements of two final segments of the first chapter. The key question may be, for example, what is actually the predicate in the fourth and fifth sequences, and what role can play the short, but very well-known sequence of characters 玄之又玄 *xuán zhī yòu xuán*<sup>7</sup>, translated mostly as “darkness within darkness“ (Feng & English 1972) or „the mystery upon mystery“ (Lynn 1999).

But is the nominal (or adjectival) interpretation of the character 玄 *xuán* in the expression 玄之又玄 *xuán zhī yòu xuán* the only and the most potential one in our context? There is for instance the question of why do interpreters commonly translate the similarly designed combination of characters 損之又損 *sǔn zhī yòu sǔn* from the 48th Dao De Jing chapter by verbal constructions such as "having less upon having less" (Lynn 1999) or "subtracting and yet again subtracting" (Waley 1934) etc.?

But how can we translate the combination of characters 玄之又玄 *xuán zhī yòu xuán* using a verb? We would probably have to omit the well-known dictionary meanings of "dark", "mysterious", "obscure" or "enigmatic" and turn to the forms of the character 玄 *xuán* (possibly genealogically older) for their semantic inspiration. For this purpose we can use the form of the character known from the sealing script 𠀤, i.e. the shape of the hand throwing two stones - that is bolas (cf. Wang 1997). If we seek a verb form, then the connection 𠀤 𠀤 𠀤 𠀤 literally means "to throw bolas and to throw them again". Or "to catch bolas and to catch them again". Thus, even "to grab something by bolas and to grab it again." Thus, even "to take something and to take it again". And when "re-grab" then finally perhaps to "grasp" as well.<sup>8</sup>

There is a subsequent question: What should we grab again and again, so that we can finally grasp it and therefore understand? Answer: The fact that we use one name 同胃 for two things 两者, to which a different name 異名 belongs, even though they originated from the same 同出. This is the gateway 門 to everything hidden to our eyes 眇眇. And this is - it seems - the main message of the first chapter of Dao De Jing.

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<sup>6</sup> However, it is important to take into account that at that time China was facing the loosening of the written system through phonetic principle, that is writing of the characters „without the radicals“, possibly „by borrowing“ (cf. Boltz 1994 etc.).

<sup>7</sup> This, almost a magical expression 玄之又玄 at the end of 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Dao De Jing, usually translated as the “depth of the depths” or “mystery of the mysteries”, but also as e.g. “darker than the dark” or “more mysterious than the mystery”, has become a 玄學 *xuán xué*, that means “dark teaching” or “mysterious teaching”, a motto and basis of neotaoists’ teaching with the leader Wang Pim and his contemporaries and followers.

<sup>8</sup> It is remarkable that we know a similar analogy from the European Latin language: "capio, capis, capere" meaning "to grab, to seize, to snare, to receive" and the subsequent Italian word "capire" meaning "to grasp, to understand".

If this is all true, then it is really crucial to identify and specify the difference of that double 两者, which is spoken about here. How different is a vision, which can be seen 道可道, from one which cannot be seen? How different is a name, which we can inquire about 名可名, from one which we cannot inquire about?

In both cases, we can respond simply: when they see the light of day. Or should we say in today's speech: when they are implemented. If a name is implemented in its new bearer (if there is a public naming of a newborn), the bearer can be inquired about using this name. Just as it is the implementation of a vision (if it is realised or made public) what allows one to speak about it.

The trouble is, however, that this vision is not the point 非恆道. The author is paradoxically concerned with a vision that cannot be seen because only such a vision is a vision **sustainable in the heart** 恒 héng. The epithet of continuity carries for 道 dào a fundamental meaning. In sharp contrast to the western way of thinking, a realised vision means emptying the vision itself!

The sustainability that is beyond doubt meant here is not attainable by any human intervention (however brilliant) into the external world. The **sustainability** is according to Lao-tzu's text **retainable only in one's heart**. Is this not the authentic reason why to observe the principle 無 爲 wú wéi (interpreted mostly as „non-interference“) which taoists were so renowned for?

Let us present here in summary the current interpretation of the **1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Dao De Jing** in Ma-wangdui version declaring the concept of sustainability in the Old Master's interpretation:

## 1. ABOUT SUSTAINABLE VISION

道可道也 非恆道也

Trvale udržitelná vize,  
to není vize, kterou lze uvidět

A sustainable vision  
is not the vision to be seen

名可名也 非恆名也

tak jako trvale udržitelné jméno  
není jméno, na něž se lze doptat

likewise a sustainable name  
is not the name to be asked for

無名萬物之始也

Vždyť je-li cokoliv počato,  
nemá to jméno

After all, anything that is conceived  
does not yet possess a name

有名萬物之母也  
Všechno své jméno dostává,  
až když to matka začne kojit

It does not get its name  
until its mother brings it into the world

故恆無欲也以觀元眇  
Proto: když nebudeš po trvale udržitelném dychtit,  
pak možná zahledneš v čem vlastně spočívá;

Therefore: if you do not lust for what is sustainable,  
you might catch a glimpse of what it really takes;

恆有欲也以觀元所噉  
leč když si umaneš, pak jenom zjistíš  
to, co se o něm navenek hlásá

however, if you hanker after it, you will only find out  
what it is proclaimed to be

兩者同出異名同胃  
Jsou to dvě věci, které vycházejí ze stejného,  
ale i když pojmenovávají něco odlišného,  
my jim přesto říkáme nestejno

Two things springing from the same source  
each referring to something else,  
yet we call them the same

玄之又玄眾眇之門  
Tohleto uchopit a postupně i pochopit —  
to jsou dveře ke všemu pro naše oči skrytému

Once this is grabbed and gradually grasped  
the door is open to all stuff barely visible for our eyes

What are the Old Master's conclusions in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Dao De Jing in Ma-wangdui version? He argues the only thing that endures is what we permanently keep in the heart. Otherwise sooner or later (usually very quickly) both the content as well as the name of what was at stake is emptied. However, the sustainable vision cannot be enforced; namely because to bring this vision to light means to enter space we can't directly see.

The sustainability is the key concept not only of the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter of Dao De Jing. In a way, the complete Dao De Jing seems to be all about „sustainability.“ The following is a brief summary of examples from the 2<sup>nd</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> chapter referring to sustainability directly or indirectly.

In the 2<sup>nd</sup> chapter we find for example that **an authentic man** 聖人, one that is intentionally concerned about the sustainable vision, brings to the world something that does not primarily lie in realisation 居亡爲之事, and that is why an authentic man **does not lose**

**anything** 是以弗去也 (see in detail Fellner 2008a, 2010a). The approach usually referred to as 亡爲, or more often as 無爲, is a logical conclusion of the already mentioned point that a realized vision is not a sustainable vision.

In the 3<sup>rd</sup> chapter, this topic is addressed by the therapy applied by an authentic man 聖人之治, a therapy aimed against too many lures of politics, which has been blown up by media 不尙賢 (Do not glorify celebrities!), exaggerated consumption advertisement 不貴難得之貨 (Do not promote things that are hard to get!) and a continuously fomented hunger for sex 不見可欲 (Do not present what stimulates desires!): a therapy aiming at the elimination of certain information stimuli. Only then this therapy becomes **sustainable** 恒使民無知無欲也 (see in detail Fellner 2009, 2010a).

In the 4<sup>th</sup> chapter it is declared that an emptied vision 道沖 can never bring satisfaction 弗盈, not even if it works 而用之. After all **the source of sustainability is inside** where the vision was conceived 渊呵始万物之宗! 濛呵始或存! Certainly not outside. Even its potential functioning is irrelevant from this point of view (cf. Fellner 2010c).

In the 5<sup>th</sup> chapter the authentic man **dissociates himself from the transience** of all creation by declaring that he does not intentionally build on such relationships that exist between two people 聖人不仁. In this respect, he follows heaven and earth 天地不仁 which do not take part in the mad rush of permanent giving more and more from oneself 虛而不屈動而愈出, which is well represented for example by the crazy bagpipes and their bellows 裳管 (cf. Fellner 2011a).

In the 6<sup>th</sup> chapter „sustainability“ is not spoken about directly. In contrast, there is **temporary sustainability of all creation** commonly based on sexual instinct 谷神, whose general functioning is beyond doubt 用之不堇 (cf. Fellner 2011b, 2012).

The 6<sup>th</sup> chapter forms a counterpart to the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter which directly talks about permanent heaven and earth 天长地久 that do not have to bring themselves into the world again and again in contrast to all other creation 不自生 and which are **eternally life-giving** at the same time 能长生. How it is possible for us to keep a sustainable life if our body is so fundamental for our life 身先? That is the question (cf. Fellner 2011b).

In the 8<sup>th</sup> chapter a new aspect of „**reportability**“ of sustainable vision is introduced by adding the attribute of „**the blessed**“ 善 – as something that is its permanent added value; disregarding the attempts to call it in question as people commonly do with respect to water 而有争居众人之所亞 which is also blessed for its benefit for everybody 水善利万物 (cf. Fellner 2011b).

In the 9<sup>th</sup> chapter it is openly stated that our body eventually departs this life 身退 simply because it is a **vision of Heaven** 天之道<sup>9</sup>. That makes us descend in our longing for sustainability from heaven to earth. If we cannot hold it in our hands, how can it be sustainable for us? We are coming back to the topic presented right in the 1<sup>st</sup> chapter (cf. Fellner 2011b).

It follows from this that in all 9 chapters of Dao De Jing that were chosen to illustrate our hypothesis, the concept of sustainability is not insignificant.

On the contrary! In the Old Master's interpretation this topic is crucial, no matter whether sustainability is explicitly expressed. Its authenticity is always innermost in Dao De Jing.

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<sup>9</sup> The question of "a vision of Heaven" is very openly discussed also in the 16<sup>th</sup> Dao De Jing chapter, which revolves around the concept of "returning again" 復 fù (cf. Fellner 2011b for details).

Shouldn't the education for sustainable life keep also its **innermost** aspect when taking into account that the United Nations have declared this decade a decade of education for sustainable development?

Whether the sustainability from the Old Master's point of view is rather its paraphrase (as some current critics will surely object) or on the contrary it is **the only retainable sustainability**, that is a question which anyone interested has to answer by themselves.

In this respect the Old Master certainly rejected to be easy to spoon-feed. And not only in that.

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