

"There was only vacant space which is intact and still, obscure without any differentiation." The word "only" suggests the totality before any separation. After the awakening of cosmic awareness in ancient Chinese thought, the first task was to affirm the totality of the universe, and the priority of this totality of the universe to particular things. As Chapter of Commentary Words Interpretations says, "It is as broad as the sky and the earth, and is undifferentiated and simple, bringing up things without any actions, so it is known as *taiyi* 太一 (the Great One). With all coming out of the same one but behaving their own ways and classified as birds, fishes and animals, that is known as differentiation" (Zhang 1997, p. 1469). These lines stress that the particular things come from *taiyi*'s characteristic of totality, and that *taiyi* precedes all the particular things.

The words "*meng meng* 梦梦 (obscure)" describe a state of obscurity and vagueness, which is stressed by the repetition "there had been no light yet" immediately after it. Likewise, *Daoyuan* also says that "sluggish and obscure, there were no light or darkness" (Mawangdui 1974, p. 74), which means the same as in *Hengxian*.

The expression "*jing tong*" describes the situation before any particular things were generated and could be distinguished from each other, and it is emphasized by the expression "there was no life procreated." In a word, the cosmology in *Hengxian* clearly follows the general Daoist thought of cosmic generation.

4 Passage 3 of Hengxian

Qi shi zi sheng 气是自生 (*Qi* originated for itself). *Heng mo sheng qi* 恒莫生气 (*Heng* did not generate any *qi*). *qi shi zi sheng zi zuo* 气是自生自作 (for *qi* begot and moved by itself). *Heng, qi zhi 2nd sheng* 恒之气, *bu du* 不独, *you yu ye* 有与也? (Neither *heng* nor *qi* solely depended on itself to beget, and there were some other participants in their occurrence). *Yu, heng yan* 或, 互焉 (Space was another source for the generation of the universe). *Sheng, yu zhe tong yan* 生, 或者同焉⁶ (Space took a part in the occurrence of *heng* and *qi*).

⁶ Liao Mingchun says, "Now that 'Heng did not generate any *qi*,' 'heng' should be a category parallel with 'qi,' and it would be improper to interpret 'heng *qi*' as 'the *qi* of *heng*,' instead, it should be comprehended as 'heng, *qi*,' that is, 'heng' and 'qi'" (Liao 2004, p. 86).

⁷ Li Ling reads this line as "*hengqi zhi sheng, bu du you yu ye* 恒气之生, 不独有与也" (Ma 2003, p. 290). Liao Mingchun punctuates the expression "*hengqi zhi sheng*" as "*heng* (and) *qi zhi sheng*" (Liao 2004, p. 85), and Pang Pu punctuates the expression "*bu du you yu ye* 不独有与也" as "*bu du, you yu ye*" (Pang 2004, p. 21). This is its revision according to Liao and Pang.

⁸ Li Ling punctuates the line "*Sheng, yu zhe tong yan*" as "*sheng yu zhe tong yan*" (Ma 2003, p. 290), so now we add a comma after the word "*sheng*" in reference to the meaning of this line.

书, 悲生悲, 哀生哀 (For example, amazement originated amazement, fears originated fears, *wei* originated *wei*, sadness originated sadness, and grief originated grief). *Qiu yu zi fu* 求欲自复¹⁰ (Such originated things pursued to return to where they came from). *Fu* 复, *3rd sheng zhi sheng xing* 生之生行 (To return to the source of their origin is a rule for the growth of living beings).

This passage is about the stage of "species" in the cosmic genesis. The first expression, "surging ceaselessly," compares the pervasive rising and rolling of *qi* with a dashing flow. In this description, *qi* is still in a state of obscurity in which there was no differentiation. But it was in that state that life began, and, more importantly, "everything tried to originate itself from *qi* and to be what it is to." Here, such a pursuit simply means the impulse to "become that X which is to be what to be." Scholars have not come to an agreement yet on what the words *yi* 异, *wei* 畏, *wei* 书, *bei* 悲 and *ai* 哀 mean exactly, but even though there is still dispute about their exact meaning, one can still be certain that *Hengxian* asserted that "what it is, what it produces," in other words, concrete procreation is the production of its same kind. No words such as "types," "species" or "class" can be found in *Hengxian*, but it certainly contained the idea that a species procreates things of its types, or otherwise there would not have been the syntactic pattern "X originated X" or the idea that "turbid *qi* begot the earth" and "fresh *qi* originated the sky" in a following passage.

In the procreation of things of the same species, we maintain that the word "*qiu*" in the expression "*qiu yu zi fu*" refers to the impulse of "life" that wishes to "become that X which is to be what to be," while the word "*fu*" should be viewed as "to return to its source" in *Laoshi* instead of "to practice" or "to fulfill." As *Laoshi* says in Chapter 16, "Push far enough towards the Void, hold fast enough to Quietness, and of myriad things none but can be worked on by you. I have beheld them, whither they go back. See, all things, howsoever they flourish, return to the root from which they grew. This return to the root is called Quietness; quietness is called submission to Fate; what has submitted to Fate has become part of the always so." This passage speaks about the *fu* (return) in the *Laoshi*, and there are many other lines that mention the concept of *fu* (return), for example, the "return to non-being" in Chapter 14, the "return to the state of infants...return to the limitless...return to the state of simplicity" in Chapter 28, and "return to its innerlight" in Chapter 52. Fundamentally, a Daoist theory about cosmic genesis stresses that the universe did not look like the present at its beginning, but it required an evolutionary course for it to develop into such a state of evolution. Daoists conceive in detail that the totality of the evolutionary

¹⁰ Liao Mingchun interprets "*qiu yu*" as "*yu qiu* 欲求 (desire)," and "*fu*" as "practice" or "to fulfill" (Liao 2004, p. 86), but I think of it differently. See below.

"There was *qi*" involved in the stage of cosmic genesis, and the passage is most notable in its clear assertion that "*qi* originated for itself" and "*qi* begot and moved by itself." The first passage mentioned that *hengxian* is self-fulfilled, and here again it emphasizes the word "self," the "self" in the expression "begot and moved by itself." Once again, it indicates a fundamental characteristic of Chinese thought: no emphasis on external causes.

The generation of *qi* by itself leads to an important question, that is, *qi*'s relationships to "*yu*" and "*heng*." This passage claims that "*heng* did not generate any *qi*," but at the same time it specifies that "*yu*" and "*heng*" took part in the origin of *qi*. Here, we agree with Liao Mingchun, who reads "*heng qi zhi sheng* 恒气之生" as "the origination of *heng* and *qi*." That is, he thinks of *heng* as one concept, and the generation of *qi* as another, and thus views *qi*'s relations to "*yu*" and "*heng*" as both were distinct and connected. To distinguish between them, neither "*yu*" nor "*heng*" was a matrix of *qi*, for *qi* did not depend on either of them, but from itself. But with regards to connection, the origin and actions of *qi* by itself would become impossible without the participation of *yu* or *heng*. In modern terms, we can say that both space and time are conditions for the existence of material, or to say, *qi* has its own extensiveness although it is not measurable. Because the generation of *qi* would have been impossible without the participation of *yu* or *heng*, *Hengxian* emphasizes that "neither *heng* nor *qi* solely depended on itself to beget, and there were some other participants in their occurrence. Space was another source for the generation of the universe. "*Sheng, yu zhe tong yan*." Here, a little more explanation is necessary for the line "*Sheng, yu zhe tong yan*." In my opinion, the "*sheng*" here still refers to the origin of *qi*, while the "*yu zhe tong yan*" stresses the participation of "*yu*" in the generation of *qi*. Due to such a comprehension, we separate the word "*sheng*" from the expression "*yu zhe tong yan*."

5 Passage 4 of Hengxian

Hun hun bu ning 昏昏不宁⁹ (Surging ceaselessly), *qiu qi suo sheng* 求其所生 (everything tried to originate itself from *qi* and to be what it is to). *Yi sheng yi, wei sheng wei, wei sheng wei, bei sheng bei, ai sheng ai* 异生畏, 畏生畏, 书生

⁹ *Hun hun* 昏昏 is interpreted as "*hun hun* 混混," Lilou Xia 离离下 (Lower Part of Lilou Chapter) in *Mencius* says, "*Yuanquan hun hun* 源泉混混 (Fountains gush out day and night)." The chapter Yuan Dao in *Huainanzi* says, "A fountain gushes out torrentially at its source, and it becomes slow when the pool is full. The flow *hun hun hua hua* 混混滑滑 (runs torrentially), and the turbid water becomes clean slowly" (Zhang 1997, p. 1). And according to the chapter Chu Zhen in *Huainanzi*, "*Qi* is thus fully connected to the deep and profound...nourishes myriad things and connects itself well with *hun ning* 混冥 (something torrential in deep)."

course produced particular things. In such a conception, Daoists point out that the genesis of the universe resulted in "things are classified in light of their species" (Zhang 1997, p. 1469) on the one hand, but meanwhile, they also put forth a demand to return to the source and destiny on the other hand. Such demands came out of a certain Daoist thought: as X became X in the course of cosmic genesis, it had been trapped by the limitations of that X, and therefore was separated from the totality which it used to belong to. To break through the limitations of a certain X, it has to continuously return to the *taiyi* from which it originated. This is a constant theme in Daoist thought, so we conclude that the expression "*qiu yu zi fu*" means that the impulse of living beings reverses after they become particular X, and it was considered as the certain course of life. That is why the last line of this passage concludes, "To return to the source of their origination is a rule for the growth of living beings."

6 Passage 5 of Hengxian

Zhuo qi sheng di, qing qi sheng tian, qi shen shen zai 浊气生地, 清气生天, 气信神哉¹¹ (Turbid *qi* begot the earth, and fresh *qi* originated the sky, so *qi* was miraculous indeed). *Shen ying tian di* 信盈天地 (It was pervasive all over the sky and the earth, and myriad things procreated thereby). *Tong chu er yi xing* 同出而异性 (All the things came out of the same *qi* but differ in essence; therefore they procreate what they want to). *Cha cha tian di* 察察天地¹² (Among the clear sky and earth), *fen fen er*¹³ *fu qi suo yu* 纷纷而復其所欲 (All the things contest to become what they want to be). *Ming ming tian xing, wei fu yi bu fei* 明明天行, 唯復以不廢 (The natural evolution is notable, and only by means of going back can it remain its course).

¹¹ Li Ling says, "I suspect that the word *xin* 信 should be read as *shen* 伸... This line seems to say that the ascending and descending of *qi* are very miraculous" (Ma 2003, p. 291). Liao Ming reads this word as "*shi* 矣," and interprets the sentence the same way as Li Ling does (Ibid., p. 293). But as with the character "信" in the next line "信盈天地," Liao agrees with Li Ling, reading it as *shen* 伸 (Liao 2004, p. 86). In my opinion, both *xin* 信 can be read as *shen*, and it is not necessary to treat them respectively.

¹² Li Rui and Liao Mingchun unscramble the words "*cha cha*" again in the expression "*Cha cha tian di*" as *ye ye* 业业, thinking that "*ye ye tian di*" just means *lang lang tian di* 朗朗天地 (clear Heaven and Earth) (Li 2004, p. 93). Li Ling reads it as "*cha cha*" (Ma 2003, p. 291), and he also refers to *Shi Xun* in *Guang Ya* 广雅, saying "*xian xian* 显显 or *cha cha*: notable" (Ibid.). So the expression "*cha cha tian di*" can also be interpreted as "*lang lang tian di*."

¹³ Pang Pu thinks that immediately after the 4th should be the 8th and 9th slips, and then the 5th, 6th, 7th ones and the 10th slip (Pang 2004, pp. 21–23). But I think the previous sequence is smoother, so I chose the previous one.

In this passage, the genesis of the universe came into the stage of "differentiated forms," which meant the real initiation of the evolution of myriad things. The differentiation of forms first began when the turbid and fresh *qi* were separated into the sky and the earth. The Chapter of Astronomy in *Huainanzi* says, "*Qi* has its own confines and limits, that fresh was thin and active, and thus became to be the sky, and that turbid was heavy and sluggish, and thus to be the earth" (Zhang 1997, p. 245). Similarly, *Tianrui* 天瑞 (Chapter of Heavenly Auspices) in *Liezi* 列子 (Works of Liezi) says, "Oneness means the initiation of differentiated forms. That light and clean ascended to be the sky, and that turbid and heavy descended to be the earth" (Liezi 2002, p. 10). Similar words are also found in *Yi Wei · Qianzaodu* (Anju 1994). Only after the sky and the earth were shaped did it enter the stage in which myriad things existed together.

All particular things come from the same source, but they are respectively what they are, and there are distinctions between each other. That is why *Hengxian* says that they "came out of the same *qi* but differ in essence." Meanwhile, the very reason for differences between all things is all things "procreate what they want to." Liao Mingchun explains this line as "different inherited qualities thus generate different desires" (Liao 2004, p. 86), but we understand it as myriad things want to be what they are because they all have their own impulses to be themselves. Or in other word, myriad things become that *X* they want to be because of what the myriad things have desired.

But we soon meet some problems with regards to how to explain the word "*fu*" in the line "*cha cha tian di, fen fen er fu qi suo yu. Ming ming tian xing, wei fu yi bu fei.*" In the passage above, we explained the word "*fu*" in the line "*qiu yu zi fu, fu, sheng zhi sheng xing*" as "return" in reference to the meaning of "*fu*" in *Laozi*. But the "*fu*" in the 5th passage, especially the "*fu*" in the line "*fen fen er fu qi suo yu*," clearly does not mean "return." Instead, it means to "become oneself," and the word "*fu*" here implies a move forward instead of backward. That is different from the "*fu*" in the expression "*fu fan*" (to return) in *Laozi*. Liao Mingchun paraphrases this line in *Hengxian* as "all the living beings are fulfilling their own desires" (Liao 2004, p. 86), explaining the word "*fu*" as to "fulfill" or "realize." His explanation stands if merely judged from the literal meaning of the context, but I still feel it is questionable if the Daoist theory of cosmic genesis lacks the "return" link. Daoist theories about genesis always contain ideas about repetition and returning, which is a fundamental formula. For example, the Chapter of *tian di* in the *Work of Zhuangzi* says:

At the very beginning of the universe, only nonexistence existed, and there were no beings or names. Nonexistence was a source where the oneness came from, but the oneness was formless. Things thus originated, so it is named virtues; what had their forms were differentiated but connected, therefore it

wei you 有非有, 无谓有 (beings cannot be named beings, for their essence is non-being); *wu wei xing* 无谓性 (nature cannot be named nature, for its essence is non-being); *yi fei yi, wu wei yi* 意非意, 无谓意 (meanings cannot be named meanings, for their essence is non-being); *yan fei yan, wu wei yan* 言非言, 无谓言 (words cannot be named words, for their essence is non-being); *ming fei ming, wu wei ming* 名非名, 无谓名 (names cannot be named names, for their essence is non-being); *shi fei shi, wu wei shi* 事非事, 无谓事 (and events cannot be named events, for their essence is non-being).

Not a few people think the line "*zhi ji er huang si bu tian*" is difficult to understand. But in light of the interpretation by Li Ling and the commentaries by Liao Mingchun and others, I think it is simple and clear. *Zhi* means knowledge; *huang si*, profound thought, or the thinking of something great. Such a thought or thinking is not about trivial things, but about the ultimate sources. Only such thought can be called "thought" or "profound thought." In my understanding, this line can largely be paraphrased as "knowledge is limited, but thought is endless and will never come to an end."

In addition, this line is open to its following words, for it introduces a new topic, leading from the natural genesis of the universe into the world of the words of human beings.

Already in a world of words, this passage deals with two issues. One is the train of thought about the genesis of the universe, which is arranged in an originating sequence from *yu* (space) to being, life, meaning, word, name, and event. In such a sequence, the preceding thoughts are the foundations for the subsequent ones, and what succeeds come out of what precedes. And thus, through the existence (life) of human beings, the events, names, words and meanings of human beings are connected with a much broader world: a world represented by the natural universe. In *Hengxian*, this world is disclosed through concepts such as "space" and "being." And with the layered originating sequence available from "space" to "events," the most direct life of human beings, that is, "events," can be connected by layers with the endless universe, and thus become full of layers.

In this sense, this passage handles its second issue: a series of "*X fei X, wu wei X*." Then how are we to understand this series of "*X fei X, wu wei X*"? From the point of view of logicians in ancient China, Pang Pu paraphrases it as "Once you know '*yu*' is not '*yu*', do not call it '*yu*' anymore" (Pang 2004, p. 22). In contrast, Liao Mingchun explains it from the point of view of Daoists, asserting that "This passage says that 'non-being' is the nature of *yu*, being, life, meanings, words, names and events, and that the differences between *yu*, being, life, meanings, words, names and events are merely presentational" (Liao 2004, p. 86). According to Pang Pu, the expression "*wu wei X*" in the line "*X fei X, wu wei X*" means "do not call it *X*," while according to Liao Mingchun, "only '*wu* 无

was known as fate; as it moved, it produced things, and laws became available when beings were fully developed, that was called forms; physical forms held spirit and followed different laws, that was regarded as nature. With nature cultivated, it would go back to virtues, and when virtues were gained, it would become identical with that at the very beginning. The identity meant vacancy, and vacancy suggested ultimate.

Zhuangzi starts with the beginning of the universe, but as it comes to the stage in which all things are shaped and have qualities, it still stresses that "With nature cultivated, it would go back to virtues, and when virtues were gained, it would become identical with that at the very beginning." It shows that Daoist theories of cosmic genesis are always accompanied by the thought of return. But it is really difficult to explain the word "*fu*" in *Hengxian* in a single way. If it is paraphrased in two ways, that is, if it is interpreted as "to return" on one occasion, and as "to fulfill" (to become oneself) on the other, then another problems will occur with how to connect these two meanings. These issues have to be further contemplated.

7 Passage 6 of *Hengxian*

Zhi ji er huang si bu tian 知既而荒思不殄¹⁴ (Knowledge is limited, but thought is not, and will never come to an end). *You chu yu yu* 有出于或 (Beings come out of space), *sheng chu yu yu* 生出有¹⁵ (human beings come out of beings), *yi chu yu sheng* 意出于生¹⁶ (meanings come out of human beings), *yan chu yu yi* 言出于意 (words come out of meanings), *ming chu yu 5th yan* 名出于言 (names come out of words), *shi chu yu ming* 事出于名 (and events come out of names). *Yi fei yu, wu wei yu* 或非或, 无谓或 (Space cannot be named space, for its essence is non-being); *you fei yu, wu*

¹⁴ *Zhi* 知 (knowledge), originally *zhi* 智 (intelligence), Li Ling reads it as *zhi* 知. *Ji* 既 is interpreted as *jin* 尽 by Li Ling. These two interpretations are acceptable. *Huang* 荒 means vastness in reference to *Shuowen* 说文 (Explanation of Scripts), but Li Ling says, "here it possibly means obsolescence," the latter interpretation is unacceptable, and it would be better to interpret it as its original meaning. In addition, Li Ling says, "*Bu tian* means 'not to exterminate' or 'not to end'" (Ma 2003, p. 292), here Li's interpretation is accepted.

¹⁵ Li Ling reads "*sheng chu yu yu*" as "*xing* 性: *chu yu yu*" (Ibid.). But Liao Mingchun asserts, "*sheng* refers to human bodies...here it is amplified as human beings (Liao 2004, p. 87). Here Liao's interpretation is accepted.

¹⁶ Li Ling reads "*yi chu yu sheng*" as "*yin* 音 (voice) *chu yu sheng*" (Ibid.). Liao Mingchun recites *dashu zazhi* 读书杂志 (Miscellaneous Notes of Reading) by Wang Niansun (Ibid., p. 88), pointing out that *yin* should be read as *yi*. Here, Liao's interpretation is accepted.

(non-existence)' can be called *X*." As shown above, this passage has arranged a sequence of genesis for space, being, lives, meanings, words, names and events, and thus each item can be linked to the preceding one and directly or indirectly to non-being as an origin. Moreover, *Hengxian* is a piece of Daoist literature, so it would be better to explain it in light of Daoist thought. In a train of Daoist thought, this series of "*X fei X, wu wei X*" is not intended to establish certainty in terms of the relationships between names and reality, but to trace back to the origin in terms of the sequence of genesis. It is simply a fundamental train of thought in the Daoist theory about cosmic genesis.

8 Passage 7 of *Hengxian*

Xiang yi li zhu 祥义利主¹⁷ (Rites and righteousness are designed to benefit rulers), *caiwu chuyi zuo* 彩物出于作¹⁸ (and the objects used to indicate ranks are out of factiousness), *zuo yan you shi, bu zuo wu shi* 作焉有事, 不作无事¹⁹ (factiousness invites troubles, and without artificial things, there would be no troubles). *Ju tian xia zhi shi* 举天下之事²⁰ (All troubles in the world), *zi zuo wei shi, yong yi buke geng ye* 自作为之, 庸以不可更也²¹ (are made by people themselves, and once the troublesome things become established, they would become unchangeable). *Fan 7th shi caiwu xian zhe you shan, you zhi wu huan* 凡多采物²² 先者有善, 有治无乱 (All the objects designed to indicate ranks) are

¹⁷ According to Liao Mingchun, "The words *xiang yi* were original *yang yi* 祥宜, and Li Ling reads them as *xiang yi* 祥宜. Note: *yang* 慈 can be used as *xiang* 祥, while *yi* 宜 means *yi* 义 (righteousness), therefore *yang yi* can be read as *xiang yi* 祥义...the words *xiang yi* 祥义 should refer to rites and righteousness, and *zhu* 主 refers to rules. So the expression *xiang yi li zhu* can be paraphrased as 'Rites and righteousness are designed to benefit rulers'" (Liao 2004, p. 88). Here I agree with Liao.

¹⁸ According to Liao Mingchun, "The words *caiwu* 彩物 were originally *cai wu* 采物, which are read by Li Ling as *cai wu* 采物. Note: *cai wu* 采物 should be read as *caiwu*, which refers to banners, costumes and utensils showing ranks, that is, the objects indicating the institution of rituals" (Ibid.). Here, Liao's interpretation is accepted.

¹⁹ Liao Mingchun says, "The word '*zuo*' in the expression '*zuo yan you shi*' was originally missing in the unscrambled text by Li Ling, now it is added" (Ibid., p. 90).

²⁰ The word *xia* 下 is added according to Pang and Liao.

²¹ Li Ling punctuates these lines as "*yan you shi bu zuo wu shi ju, tian zhi shi, zi zuo wei, shi yong yi buke geng ye* 焉有事不作无事举, 天之事, 自作为之, 庸以不可更也." Now it is revised in light of Liao's opinion.

²² Li Ling punctuates these lines as "*Fan duo cai wu xian zhe you shan, you zhi wu huan* 凡多采物先者有善, 有治无乱" (Ma 2003, p. 294), and now, I punctuate it again according to Liao Mingchun. In addition, Liao says, "*caiwu* 采物 (彩物) is a special noun and cannot be divided into two parts. It is suspected that the word '*zhao*' should be read as *shi* 施, interpreted as equipment or application...so '*shi caiwu*' means to supply *caiwu* or apply *caiwu*" (Liao 2004, p. 88). Here Liao's interpretation is accepted.