We already know several facts concerning Heidegger’s interest in Daoism at the beginning of the 1930s. For instance, in the first version of his celebrated “On the Essence of Truth” he cited one line from chapter 28 of the *Lao Zi*: “Der seine Helle kennt, sich in sein Dundel hüllt” (The one who knows his brightness hides himself in his darkness).1 This was to illustrate the interdependent relation between truth (disclosing, opening) and untruth (covering, concealing). On October 8, 1930, Heidegger gave a lecture in Bremen with the title “On the Essence of Truth.” The next day a seminar was held in Kellner’s house, in which Heidegger asked for a copy of the *Zhuang Zi* from his host and read to the audience the last part of chapter 17, a dialogue between Zhuang Zi and Huishi about the possibility of knowing the happiness of the fish under the bridge on which they were standing.2 Using this dialogue, Heidegger was able to explain successfully how a person could put himself in another’s position.

In spite of this evidence, however, what we can find among Heidegger’s own published materials that relates directly to Daoism has until recently been limited to his writings from the late 1950s and to the product of his later thought.

The newly published volume 75 of Heidegger’s *Complete Works* (*Gesamtausgabe*, Band 75) changes this situation radically. In the 1943 article “The Uniqueness of the Poet,” Heidegger appealed to the *Lao Zi* to make possible a genuine understanding of the uniqueness of the poet, in this case Hölderlin. In his pointing to the significance of the *Lao Zi* to an understanding of Hölderlin, and from his interpretation of the whole of chapter 11 of the *Lao Zi*, we can see clearly that this ancient text held great meaning for Heidegger, and not merely in his later writings; it was also central to the important issues of his *Being and Time* (1927). The 1943 article is actually the earliest published writing by Heidegger on Daoism that is available to us now, predating all other writings by at least fourteen years. The purpose of the present essay is to inquire into Heidegger’s views on Lao Zi’s similarity with Hölderlin and Heidegger’s rendering of the eleventh chapter of the *Lao Zi*, and to analyze their relevance for understanding Heidegger’s early and later thought.

**From Hölderlin to Lao Zi**

The title of this article expresses the main issue: what is it about the poet that is unique? To Heidegger, the answer cannot be found in any way “vorhanden”
(being-ready-made, objectifiable). For instance, comparing all the poets in actual history (Historie) or uncovering the essence of poetry, or both, will do little to solve the problem. Only through a lively historical process (Geschichte) experienced (erlebt) by the poet, is something authentically poetic revealed or constituted. Heidegger writes: “The poet himself says what poetry is; he says it ever according to the essence of what he creates [when he writes a poem].” There is a hermeneutic circle or an initiating “nothingness” in it: the poet must say according to the essence of poetry; but at same time, the essence of poetry must be formed during the saying. To avoid a vicious circle, the poet can only petition for the existential time process of Dasein (historical, ecstatic, or situational human being). This time is essentially the interplay among the past, present, and future, which are ecstatically experienced, thus allowing a productive circling. Hence, we read:

If a poet has to expressly poeticize the essence of poetry, and indeed poeticize the essence as the original historical and calls the essence “coming” (Kommendes), then the poetizedness of this poet in regard to time is treated with distinction, so that the uniqueness of this poet enters directly into light.

This paragraph shows that the timely Kommende or “coming” is the key to discovering the essence of poetry and the uniqueness of the poet. It is this coming or becoming that transforms the actual present history (Historie) into the original history (Geschichte). Corresponding to the “future” or what is “to-come” (Zu-kunft) in Being and Time, the coming is a thorough “not yet (noch nicht) but be-come” and thus elicits happening. Heidegger emphasizes the primacy of the “to-come” dimension of time in Being and Time, since it manifests most readily the non-being-ready-made (zu-handen) and “to-be” (zu-sein) essence of Dasein. For the same reason, the future, or to-come, is not something substantial or independent, but must be interweaving and interrealizing with the past (having-been, Gewesen) and the present (Gegenwart), so as to constitute the time phenomenon in mutual transforming, or the “‘out-of-self’ for itself.”

According to this perspective, comprehending the poet’s activity through the time-horizon of coming (future) that interweaves inherently with the past, we will find his speech to be both “pre-saying” (Vorsagen) and “after-saying” (Nach-sagen). The “after-saying,” radically interplaying with the “pre-saying,” does not mean “to speak after something exists somewhere already,” but rather “to say after the word of Being,” or, more precisely, “the pre-saying that says after the word of Being” (das dem Wort des Seyns nach-sagende Vorsagen). “The unique poet [who can pre- and after-say at the same time, or in the meantime] is Hölderlin.” This is because his poems come not out of his subjectivity but from “the coming time” (die kommende Zeit) and thus poeticize or create “the poet’s vocation or calling.” “Uniqueness,” therefore, “is sent (geschickt) to him from the Sending [or Providence] (Schickung), which decides thereto his Saying in the after-saying Pre-saying of Being’s issued calling.” In the coming time, which can never be measured as an object, there is nevertheless an original Measure (Mass) and rhythm, which Heidegger calls “measuring and self-measured Measure.”

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A crucial question arises here: namely, how can we pay attention (achten) to the uniqueness of the poet? Or, how can we “listen to his Saying and the Said-ness of the Saying,” so as to experience the coming time itself or the timely truth disclosed by the poeticized Saying of the poet? Heidegger writes: “The unique problem is if we remain inattentive (achtlos) in respect to the time that is continuously and authentically the coming, or if we learn Attention and from it obtain the primordial memory (Andenken) of thinking (Bedenende).” So long as we confuse actual history with original history, time in the sense of measurable with time in the sense of measuring, or poetry as an object of literary investigation with poetry as pre-saying, we cannot have Attention. Metaphysics since Parmenides and Plato has refused to admit any authentic connection between truth itself and time. From the time of Descartes, the main trend in modern Western philosophy has been to take human nature as a reflective subjectivity. Whether the subject is considered to be a priori or empirical, timeless or being-in-time, it has covered up or missed “the coming time.” The Christian God took time as a form of his world-creation and made it a projected timetable for salvation. So the supreme God cannot pay genuine attention to the life-or-death relation between poetry and thinking, poet and coming time. Hölderlin is the poet, but his uniqueness has generally been unknown to most people. His poems have long been neglected. Half of his seventy-three-years were spent in a darkened state of madness. Even after he was rediscovered at the beginning of the twentieth century, achieving a proper understanding of him has always been a challenge.

Given this unfortunate situation, Heidegger asks: “How do we, the belated-born ones of non-Attention for centuries, learn Attention?” At this crucial moment, Heidegger first turns to the ancient Lao Zi for help.

Quoting and Interpreting the Lao Zi

In answer to the question “How do we learn Attention?” Heidegger says:

In terms of looking at unpretentious simplicity (Einfache), appropriating it more and more primordially, and becoming before it more and more fearful, we learn Attention.

Indeed the unpretentious simplicity of the simple things moves us to what we from the old way of thinking call “Being” (das Sein) as different from “beings” (Seienden).

Lao Zi speaks of Being in this difference in the eleventh epigram of his Dao De Jing. Here Heidegger asserts that chapter 11 of the Dao De Jing 道德经 is directly related to the celebrated ontological difference that he has pointed to in Being and Time; that is, it is necessary to distinguish Being from beings. In other words, what Lao Zi means in chapter 11 is Being in this difference! This is a really fresh and quite remarkable assertion. Heidegger, however, does not connect the two without a mediating “unpretentious simplicity.” The word “simplicity” (Einfache) often appears in Heidegger’s late works, indicating a pre-theoretical, non-dichotomous form of existence, and, in relation to his interpretation of Hölderlin, an inquiry into the essence.
of language and a criticism of modern technology-based culture. It may be most appropriate here to apply this interpretation to Lao Zi’s thought since the Dao De Jing highly praises simplicity (pu 朴 or su 素) (see, e.g., chapters 19 and 28), and most German translations of the Dao De Jing that Heidegger was able to find rendered pu or su as Einfachheit or Einfalt.\(^{19}\) Translators often single out its “simplicity” or its “‘one’ (Einheit) in ‘many’ or ‘twofold’” character as the distinctive feature of the Dao De Jing when comparing Lao Zi with other classical thinkers.\(^{20}\) To Heidegger, Einfache, Einfalt, and Einheit may have an etymological or other conceptual link with the Einzigkeit (uniqueness) of the poet. He believes that by experiencing simplicity more and more primordially and becoming before it more and more fearful (which may be compared to “weak” \([ruo]\) in chapters 40 and 55 of the Dao De Jing) and “not daring to act” (bu gan wei in chapters 3 and 64), we are able to learn the crucial Attention paid to the existential time. Further, the unpretentiousness of simple things (compare with Lao Zi’s “things of Dao” in chapter 21) can get us going to where “Being” is, as different from “beings.”

Observing “simplicity” in this way, Heidegger brings his readers to “the eleventh epigram of the Dao De Jing.” He renders this entire epigram or chapter as follows:

The words run thus:

**Thirty spokes converge in a hub,**

*But the emptiness between them grants the Being of the cart.*

**Out of the clay grow the utensils,**

*But the emptiness in them grants the Being of the utensil.*

**Walls, windows, and doors produce the house,**

*But the emptiness between them grants the Being of the house.*

**The being yields the utility.**

*The Non-being grants the Being.*\(^{21}\)

The philological discrepancies between the German version and the original Chinese text can be attributed to linguistic-cultural incommensurability, to the published German translations of the Lao Zi on which Heidegger’s own translation depends, or to what Heidegger is intending to say.

Among several German translations of the Lao Zi available to Heidegger, then, it is apparent that Heidegger’s own version of this chapter is closest to that of Alexander Ular.\(^{22}\) Considering the fact that Heidegger himself did not know Chinese and that he composed “The Uniqueness of the Poet” in 1943, earlier than his cooperative effort with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao in 1946, by which he obtained a kind of direct contact with Lao Zi in its original Chinese,\(^{23}\) we can assume that his own version of chapter 11 depended most on Ular’s translation, although we might refer to other versions such as those by Strauss and Wilhelm.

After comparing Heidegger’s version of this chapter with the original, it may be found that the most significant differences between them are as follows. (1) Heideg-
ger renders yong 用 (utility, usefulness), which appears four times in the chapter, as “Being” (Sein), while other German versions except Ular’s follow more literally the original and hence translate it as Gebrauch (usage) (by Strauss) or Werk (performance) (by Wilhelm). Ular’s rendering is Wesen (essence), echoing the past participle of Sein: gewesen. (2) After Ular, Heidegger renders wu 无 as Leere (emptiness). Others translate it as Nichts (nothingness) or Nicht-sein (non-being). (3) Zwischen (between) appears two times in Heidegger and one time in Ular, but is absent in other versions. From these differences, it becomes understandable why Heidegger basically relies on Ular’s translation. By the same token, Heidegger’s special way of laying out the chapter is disclosed as well. It is distinctively shown in his subsequent exposition and implied in some of his later works.24

Now let us see how Heidegger interprets the chapter as a whole:

This citation implies: When the betweenness (das Zwischen) of all things is first held open in itself, and extends in the extension of the time-staying and region (weitet in die Weite der Weile und Gegend), it may look to us too easily and frequently as the null (Nichtige)... [However,] the meanwhile (Indessen) is the gathering that gathers and stretches itself out in moment and time.25

It may seem somewhat strange to certain readers that Heidegger’s interpretation primarily deals not with “emptiness” or “nothing” or “Being,” but with “the betweenness of all things.” “Betweenness” is taken as the origin of emptiness and Being, actually as a subtle perspective through which phenomenological time is comprehended. It lets us pay attention to the lively time between what has just passed and will come, among the genetic moments or time-stayings. It is always the “in-between” or the “meanwhile.” Therefore, for Heidegger, what Lao Zi says about the emptiness in utensils does not signify, as some interpreters believe, merely a useful space, but bears certain features of a phenomenological horizon, especially of the appropriating structure of the existential time in Heidegger’s discourses. It is so dynamic, being unable to be immediately presented or objectified as any entity directly capable of being expressed, while never departing from the phenomenal world, and therefore has to manifest itself as the purely transitive as well as genetic “between.” This springy emptiness is neglected by those who pay attention to its effects only, rather than to the unfolding and extending of itself.

In terms of the “between,” Heidegger links his understanding of chapter 11 of the Lao Zi with his disclosure of time in Being and Time and with a series of topics in his later thought, including the “cleft” (Riss) in techne and language that renders possible the comprehension of the human existential condition; the appropriation (Ereignis) from among the “fourfold” (heaven, earth, deity, and human beings); the ontological significance of the “turning” (Kehre); complementariness; the “way-opening” implications of the “Way” (Weg); et cetera. This linkage also points to Heidegger’s view, mentioned above, that the uniqueness of the poet can be recognized only in poetizing rather than in any external relation, and poetizing must be constituted in between what the poet speaks and hears. In sum, it is a genetic “between” in a methodological sense, obtained, from Heidegger’s reading of Lao Zi’s dang qi
wu 当其无，at the emptiness between them, that is extremely helpful in understanding the fabric of his entire thought.

Heidegger subsequently wrote:

From the between of the opposing time-staying, which exists as the time-staying region (verweilenden Gegend), every in-between (Inzwischen) receives its essence (Wesen) and the possibility of its differentiation in two senses: that of “in the midst” (Inmitten) and that of “meanwhile” (Indessen). The “in the midst” is the gathering that gathers and stretches itself out in place and space, while the “in-between” is the gathering that gathers and stretches itself out in moment and time.²⁶

The “time-staying” suggests what opposes but complements, and thus must maintain itself or themselves in appropriate happening. So, genuine “time-staying” cannot be anything present-at-hand, whether subjective or objective. It is a “region” in the sense of genetic phenomenology, manifesting itself as the existentially coming time whose three dimensions interplay with each other. In this sense it is also an “empty” space that elicits happening. Thus, a region cannot be conceptualized as either physical field or primary material, nor can it be taken in a psychological sense, but should be understood to be “the between opposing time-staying[s],” that is, what is between past and future, here and there, yin and yang. As William James, who profoundly influenced Husserl, writes: “The attempt at introspective analysis in these cases [of dynamic relation-feeling] is in fact like seizing a spinning top to catch its motion, or trying to turn up the gas quickly enough to see how the darkness looks.”²⁷ Further, James does not consider the experience of betweenness to be mystical. Rather, this experience exists everywhere in our life. For instance, “what we hear when the thunder crashes is not thunder pure, but thunder-breaking-upon-silence-and-contrasting-with-it.”²⁸

Taking the “between” as the point of origin, Heidegger distinguishes the “in the midst” from the “meanwhile.” The former indicates the existential way of beings, or the unprimordial way of treating the between as a physically spacial relation, such as “the chair is between the ceiling and the floor.” The latter, the “meanwhile,” is the existential way of treating the between through temporalizing, which precedes the “in the midst,” opens possibilities for all beings, and thus provides an existential measure for human beings. This distinction is actually another version of Heidegger’s “ontological difference.”

Heidegger continues:

In this [genuine] in-between dwells the human if its dwelling is the memory (Andenken). The memory remains in remainness, and its remainness is preserved (verwahrt) in the testament of Being in regard to truth or pre-serving (Wahrheit).²⁹

This paragraph, in terms of “memory,” “truth” (or pre-serving), “testament,” “preserving,” and “Being,” bridges what Heidegger writes about chapter 11 of the Lao Zi and the uniqueness of the poet. Further, it expresses a view of human nature, namely “[i]n this in-between, dwells the human,” that is one of the major topics in his later thought. According to this view, what distinguishes humans from other
beings is not some attribute such as "reflective reason," "self-consciousness," "will," et cetera, that presumes a dichotomy of subject and object, but the original in-between. Humans live between heaven and earth, past and future, brightness and darkness, subject and object, and exist as the final measure of the in-between's maintaining itself. Taking Heidegger's description of "temporality," we may designate the nature of human being as "the primordial 'out-side-of-itself' in and for itself." In the last sentence of the paragraph cited above, Heidegger inserts a hyphen into the German word for "truth"—Wahrheit. The verbalizing of its first half, wahren, means "to keep up," and the modification of the verbalized wahren signifies "to last" or "to exist," linking up with the "to grant" (gewähren) that appears repeatedly in Heidegger's translation of chapter 11. In this way, he shows that truth is existentially temporal or time-related. It is not merely enlightening, opening, or discovering; it also needs hiding, covering, or preserving. Humans live primarily in the preserving opening, or the becoming preservation.

In the light that presumes the dark, Heidegger ends his article with the following paragraph:

The in-between—the opposing time-staying—the remembrance (Gedächtnis)—, the opposing time-staying in the extension of the testament (dessen entgegenende Verweilen in der Weite des Vermächtnisse) is the "innerness," —"the emptiness" of humans, from which the dimensions of spirit, soul, life, and their unity (presented metaphysically) receive their essence (Wesen). Most of the terms here, interposed or connected by long dashes, have been discussed above, and the things that they express as being accounted for are also connected with each other. Heidegger mentions "the emptiness' of humans." This "emptiness" comes from his interpretation of chapter 11, and indicates the in-between or opposing time-staying. For Heidegger, this is the very essence of what it is to be human. This view differs from the previous Western understandings of human being and especially from the metaphysical conceptions of it. Heidegger's later discourse on human nature in the Letter on Humanism (1946) already had its beginnings here, where the full tension of the in-between is maintained. Herein lies the answer to the problem of the "uniqueness of the poet." The non-being-ready-made "between" is an "unpretentious simplicity," through the experiencing of which we are able to pay genuine attention to the coming time and therefore understand the uniqueness of the poet as well as the original meaning of Being itself.

The Uniqueness of Heidegger's Interpretation of the Lao Zi Chapter

Before his expounding on the material presented above, we know that Heidegger cited or discussed the Lao Zi and the Zhuang Zi four times in his published works, all in the essays of 1957 to 1960. In the first publication, "The Principle of Identity" (1957), the Chinese guiding word dao is compared to the Western guiding word logos and to Heidegger’s Ereignis (appropriation). It is pointed out that the new terms are so original that it is extremely "difficult to translate" them; nonetheless they hint
at the way of overcoming technology’s dominance over human beings.34 The second publication, “The Essence of Language” (1957/1958), interprets Lao Zi’s dao as an originating Way (Weg) or way-opening (beweegende), whose implication is more primordial than that of “reason,” “spirit,” “meaning,” et cetera. In it lies hidden the “the secret of all secrets” (comparable to Lao Zi’s xuan zhi you xuan 玄之又玄) of language or “thinking Saying” (Sagen).35 In the third publication, “The Basic Principle of Thinking” (1958), Heidegger cites “The one who knows his brightness hides himself in his darkness,” from chapter 28 of the Lao Zi, to indicate that modern technology pursues “brightness” without recognizing the necessity of the “darkness” that hides the secret of human being, and therefore carries the threat of the deadly light that is “brighter than a thousand suns.”36 The fourth and last publication comes from “Traditional Language and Technical Language” (1960). Here Heidegger quotes, from the end of the first chapter of the Zhuang Zi, a substantial paragraph that expounds on “a huge tree that is useless,”37 arguing that “uselessness” is rather the “significance of the thing” and thus more fundamental and important than the usefulness of consummation, which prevails in our technology-oriented culture.

From the brief introduction, we may observe that Heidegger’s interpretation of Daoism involves almost all of the important topics of his later period—for example, the nature and threat of modern technology and the way of coping with this threat, the nature of language and its appropriation, and the relation between East and West. These have no direct relation to Heidegger’s earlier thought and the key words that are expressed mainly in Being and Time (1927). Numerous scholars have treated Being and Time as Heidegger’s main contribution to philosophy and have neglected his later works as “poetical” or “non-philosophical.” Consequently, Heidegger’s contact with Daoism was taken to be a by-product of non-philosophical thinking and thus undeserving of serious attention (an opinion with which I completely disagree). This understanding has unfortunately had a substantial impact. At least partly for this reason, Heidegger’s connection with Daoism has not been a subject of serious concern among the majority of Heidegger scholars, and the biographical studies of Heidegger completely neglect this connection.

The appearance of the new material discussed here changes the situation greatly. The time of its writing precedes everything else mentioned here by at least fourteen years. Moreover, it seems to demonstrate that Heidegger’s interest in Daoism is reflected not only in his later writings, but also in the central themes of Being and Time as well, for example in his concern with the difference between Being and beings, the meaning of Being itself, and the original meaning of time. Heidegger writes: “Lao Zi speaks of Being in this difference” (i.e., “Being” [das Sein] as different from “beings” [Seienden]) “in the eleventh epigram of his Tao-Te-Ching.”38 Earlier in this discussion we observed that one important reason for Heidegger’s reliance on Ular’s translation is that Ular’s version of chapter 11 makes it possible to render Lao Zi’s yong 用 as “Being” (Sein). Consequently, in Heidegger’s version of this chapter, “Being” appears four times, and the last stanza reads: “Being yields utility, / Non-being grants Being.”39 In this way, he decisively combines his ontological differentiation and his understanding of Being with Lao Zi’s thought and terminology,
revealing a strong motivation to build a bridge between Being and dao. This suggests that non-being, or Lao Zi’s wu (emptiness), offers an opportunity to understand Being and pay “attention” to the “coming time” (die kommende Zeit).

Now the problem is this: what excellence does non-being or wu have, so that through it existential time, a horizon for the understanding of Being, can be opened and attended by us? Here the key is Heidegger’s subtle interpretation of wu as a “betweenness” (Zwischen) or “in-between” (Indessen). According to this interpretation, wu is not a bare nothing, a logical negation, but a thorough negation of all beings-ready-made (Vorhanden), and thus non-being or wu can be expressed as “non-being-ready-made.” Taking this perspective, Roger Ames and David Hall translate wu as “indeterminacy.” So wu neither abandons being absolutely nor is reduced to being at hand at the present moment, but situates itself in the betweenness of beings, between front and back, left and right, subject and object, et cetera. As Heidegger’s version states: “Thirty spokes converge in a hub, / But the emptiness between them grants the Being of the cart.” The “emptiness between [beings]” is what makes beings possible. Betweenness, if understood in a lively or genetic sense, will lead us to existential time, since it is a formal as well as immanent indication of time. “The meanwhile (Indessen) is the gathering that gathers and stretches itself out in moment and time.”

Can we find some reason for Heidegger’s dynamic and temporal reading of chapter 11, especially his reading of wu, that seems to contrast itself to the comprehension that is usually static and spatial? Quite a few chapters of the Lao Zi render wu and dao (which is characterized by wu) in the sense of the “non-being-ready-made” mentioned above and therefore lay out a dynamic connection between wu and you (being). For example:

Therefore let there always be non-being [wu] so we may see their subtlety,
And let there always be being so we may see their outcome.
The two are the same. (chap. 1)

Being and non-being produce each other. (chap. 2)

This implies that when being (you, Seiende) is treated as an independent entity, it is an isolated object that must be denied by wu. However, when it is observed through the perspective of wu, it enjoys an interplay, (a differentiating identical) relation with wu. In this way, wu and a large number of words associated with it are bestowed upon dynamic meanings explicitly or implicitly:

Attain complete vacuity,
Maintain steadfast quietude.
[Thereby] All things come into being,
And I see thereby their return. (chap. 16)

The dynamic connection between wu and you has a temporal significance also:

We look at it and do not see it;
Its name is The Invisible.

Xianglong Zhang
We listen to it and do not hear it;
Its name is The Inaudible.

............................
It reverts to nothingness [wu 无物].
This is called shape without [wu] shape,
Form (hsiang) without [wu] object.
It is the Vague and Elusive.
Meet it and you will not see its head.
Follow it and you will not see its back.
Hold on to the Tao of old in order to master the things of the present.
From this one may know the primeval beginning (of the universe).
This is called the bond of Tao. (chap. 14)

Through the horizon exposed by the wu-group—“not,” “Invisible,” “Inaudible,” “nothingness,” “without,” “Vague and Elusive”—the “old” is intimately interwoven with the “present” and therefore lets us know the Origin (the primeval beginning) and “the bond of dao.” To understand this dao, we do not need “to increase [our objectifiable knowledge] day after day,” but rather “decrease [it] day after day” (chap. 48):

It is to decrease and further decrease until one reaches the point of taking no action [wu wei].
No action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone [wu bu wei]. (chap. 48)

Based on all these reflections, Heidegger’s interpretation of wu and chapter 11 is at least partially defended.

Quite a few philosophers, including Husserl to a certain extent, take time as “the extension of the present.” But how can we find a “present” being-ready-made? Every present, even an instant, is the interwoven of a just past and an immediate coming. In other words, it exists between past and future. By the same token, any past or future wins its existence by interweaving with present and another dimension of time. From the standpoint of isolated you, the interweaving or dynamic between- ing is nothing at all. However, from perspective of existential time, although the “between” exceeds all being-ready-made, including all discrete time dimensions, it can be understood and experienced directly. Actually, it is the very root of our consciousness and of the world. In the light of the time-betweenness, our thinking gets rid of metaphysics while resisting nihilism and relativism, since it denies merely the self-sufficiency of the being-ready-made while disclosing the constituting origin of all beings as well as a life-form that is more natural and productive than under the rule of metaphysics in the broad sense. It is the very Origin that “grants Being” and thus makes our comprehension of Being and human nature possible. So it is quite logical that Heidegger tried to expand his treatment of the core issues in his early thought by applying the betweenness obtained from his reading of the Lao Zi.

After careful reading, we may discover that Heidegger’s translation and interpretation of chapter 11 are intimately related to his later thought as well. He writes: “In this [genuine] in-between dwells (wohnt) the human.” As stated above, since
the in-betweenness exceeds all being-ready-made, the original human dwelling or human nature cannot be found in any objectifiable or “useful” being except within that in which prevails the “great usefulness of the useless”—about which Heidegger later remarked in his comment on Zhuang Zi concerning “a huge tree that is useless.” In this way, Heidegger’s discussion on chapter 11 is related to his criticism of modern technology: the “cart,” “utensil,” and “house” appearing in his translation of chapter 11 serve as manifestations of simple techniques in contrast to the framing (Gestell) of modern technology. The dao of Lao Zi, being set in parallel by Heidegger with Hölderlin’s poetizing (Dichtung), implies a sense of “Saying” (Sagen) and so relates to his discourses on the essence of language. Certainly, the apparent discussion of the connection of dao with Saying had to wait until after Heidegger entered into a collaboration with a Chinese scholar (Paul Shih-yi Hsiao) to translate the Lao Zi into German, so that he could more firmly grasp the sense of “saying” (dao shuo 道说) embedded etymologically in the dao. It was therefore only afterward, in the 1950s, that he dared to assert in his later article that the dao contains “the secret of all secrets” of language or “of thinking Saying (Sagen).” Moreover, the genetic betweenness is the pivot of his later discussion of Appropriation (Ereignis), meaning that the interplay and mutual activity between the two distinctive features is prior to the identity of either of the two features themselves.

In sum, Heidegger’s exposition of the Lao Zi in “The Uniqueness of the Poet,” written in 1943, which offers evidence of a connection between his early and later thought, sheds considerable light on both his interest in Daoism and our understanding of his philosophy as a whole.

Notes

1 – I received a color photocopy of the first version of Heidegger’s manuscript of “On the Essence of Truth” from Professor Walter Biemel. In a letter sent to me dated May 15, 1997, he transcribed the paragraph that contains the quotation from the Lao Zi, indicating that it occurs in the sixth part of “On the Essence of Truth”: “Untruth as Concealing.” After discovering considerable differences between this version and the published version in Wegmarken, I wrote to Biemel again to inquire into the relation between them. In his subsequent letter of July 3, 1997, Biemel sent me the color photocopy of Heidegger’s manuscript, which he obtained from Mrs. Heidegger, and the rendering of the manuscript into printed letters made by himself. Biemel explained to me in his letter that the paper was published in 1943, twelve years after the first version; by that time Heidegger had made quite a few changes, including the abandoning of the quotation from the Lao Zi. All the information relating to the especially important quotation (we know from Heidegger himself that “On the Essence of Truth” marked his “turning” [Kehre] to his later thought) was included in chapter 12 of my Chinese-language book 海德格尔传 (Biography of Heidegger) (Shijiazhuang: Hebei Renmin Chubanshe, 1998). The revised edition of this book


3 – Martin Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75 (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 2002), p. 36. The second part of the quote in German is: “er sagt es je nach dem Wesen dessen, was er dichtet.” The word dichten means “create,” “writing a poem,” and “fiction.”

4 – Ibid., pp. 36–37.

5 – “This phenomenon has the unity of a future which makes present in the process of having been; we designate it as ‘temporality.’” “The ‘essence’ of this entity [Dasein] lies in its ‘to be’ (Zu-sein)” (Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson [New York: Harper and Row, 1962], p. 374 and p. 67).

6 – “Temporality is the primordial ‘out-side-of-itself’ in and for itself. We therefore call the phenomena of future, the character of having been, and the Present, the ‘ecstasies’ of temporality. Temporality is not, prior to this, an entity which first emerges from itself; its essence is a process of temporalizing in the unity of the ecstasies” (Heidegger, Being and Time, p. 377).

7 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 37.

8 – Ibid.

9 – Ibid.

10 – “Die Einzigkeit ist ihm geschickt aus der Schickung, die sein Sagen dazu bestimmt, im nachsageden Vorsagen des ergangenen Rufes des Seyns . . .” (ibid.).

11 – “Messenden und selbst gemessenen Mass” (ibid., p. 38).

12 – “Seine Sage und deren Gesagtes zu hören” (ibid., p. 41).

13 – “Attention pays attention uniquely to the saying Word of poetry” (Die Achtsamkeit achtet einzig auf das sagende Wort der Dichtung) (ibid., p. 41).

14 – Ibid., p. 42.

15 – Descartes’ ‘I’ in “I think, therefore I exist” is essentially an isolated presence that relies on an eternal present only. And the empirical “being-in-time,” according to Heidegger, has also lost sight of the interplay of future with past.
and present, and so cannot reach the phenomenon of the coming time (cf. the quotation indicated by note 26).

16 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 42.

17 – Ibid., pp. 42–43: “Wir lernen die Achtsamkeit, indem wir in das unscheinbare Einfache blicken, es je und je ursprünglicher aneignen und vor ihm scheuer und scheuer werden. // Schon das unscheinbare Einfache der einfachen Dinge rückt uns Jenes zu, was wir aus alter Gewohnheit des Denkens das Sein nennen im Unterschied zum Seienden. // Genannt ist das Sein in diesem Unterschied bei Lao-Tse im elften Spruch seines Tao-Te-King.”

18 – Heidegger states this difference at the beginning of Being and Time: “The Being of beings (Seiende) ‘is’ not itself a being…. Accordingly, what is to be found out by the asking—the meaning of Being—also demands that it be conceived in a way of its own, essentially contrasting with the concepts in which beings acquire their determinate signification” (Being and Time, Macquarrie and Robinson’s translation, p. 26; I alter the rendering of “Seiende” from “entity” to “being”). Basically, Heidegger takes “being” (Seiende) as any kind of object, or the objectifiable, regardless of being physical, intellectual, or spiritual. “Being” (Sein) itself, on the contrary, is never an object but that which makes beings possible in an original or genetic sense. It is through the non-objectifiable Da (there and here, “since” and “therefore”) of the Da-sein (i.e., the factual life of a human being), and its temporality, that we begin to understand the meaning of Being itself.

19 – For example, Victor von Strauss’ translation, Lao-tse: Tao Te King (Manesse: Conzett and Huber, 1959), p. 79 (this translation was first published in Leipzig in 1870); Richard Wilhelm, Laotse: Tao Te King—Das Buch vom Sinn und Leben (Düsseldorf and Köln: Eugen Diederichs, 1978), p. 59 (the first edition of this version was published in Jena in 1911); Alexander Ular, Die Bahn und der Rechte Weg des Lao-Tse (Leipzig: Insel, 1921), p. 34.

20 – For example, Richard Wilhelm, Laotse: Tao Te King—Das Buch vom Sinn und Leben, pp. 34–36, 164.

21 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 43. Heidegger’s rendering in German is: “Dreissig Speichen treffen die Nabe, / Aber das Leere zwischen ihnen gewährt das Sein des Rades. // Aus dem Ton ent-stehen die Gefäße, / Aber das Leere in ihnen gewährt das Sein des Gefäßes. // Mauern und Fenster und Türen stellen das Haus dar, / Aber das Leere zwischen ihnen gewährt das Sein des Hauses. // Das Seiende ergibt die Brauchbarkeit, / Das Nicht-Seiende gewährt das Sein.”

To indicate certain differences between Heidegger’s translation and the usual ones, here is a translation by Wing-tsit Chan: “Thirty spokes are united around the hub to make a wheel. // But it is on its non-being that the utility of the carriage depends. // Clay is molded to form a utensil, / But it is on its non-being that the utility of the utensil depends. // Doors and windows are cut
out to make a room, / But it is on its non-being that the utility of the room depends. // Therefore turn being into advantage, and turn non-being into utility” (A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, trans. and comp. Wing-tsit Chan [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963], pp. 144–145).

22 – Ular, Die Bahn und der Rechte Weg des Lao-Tse, p. 17. Ular renders the chapter as: “Dreissig Speichen treffen die Nabe, / aber das Leere zwischen ihnen erwirkt das Wesen des Rades; / Aus Ton entstehen Töpfe, / aber das Leere in ihnen wirkt das Wesen des Topfes; / Mauern mit Fenstern und Türen bilden das Haus, / aber das Leere in ihnen erwirkt das Wesen des Hauses. / Grundsaetzlich: / Das Stoffliche birgt Nutzbarkeit; / Das Unstofflich wirkt Wesenheit.”


24 – For instance, Heidegger’s essay “Das Ding” (Thing), written in 1950, was influenced by his interpretation of chapter 11. In this essay, he interprets the “thingness” (Dinghafte) and the “capacity” (Fassende) of the utensil (Gefass) and jug (Krug) in terms of “emptiness” (Leere). Therewith he lays bare the appropriate “simplicity” (Einfalt) of the fourfold: Heaven, Earth, deity, and humans. These are all related to his criticism of modern technology and his exegeses of Hölderlin: from out of the jug flows wine, and in the flowing-out remains the simplicity of the fourfold (see Gesamtausgabe, band 7 [Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 2000], p. 170 and below).

25 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 43.

26 – Ibid.


28 – Ibid., p. 159.

29 – “In diesem Inzwischen wohnt der Mensch, wenn sein Wohnen das Andenken ist, das im Bleibenden verbleibt, welches Bleibende verwahrt is im Vermächtnis des Seyns an die Wahrheit” (Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 43).


31 – This is Heidegger’s view of truth following his writing of “On the Essence of Truth” (1930), which, according to his “Letter on Humanism,” marks his “turning” from his earlier stage to his later one (Heidegger, Basic Writings, ed. D. Krell [Harper and Row, 1977], p. 208). Unlike Being and Time, this essay asserts that “truth” (opening, dis-covering, brightness) essentially presupposes “untruth” (concealing, covering, darkness) (Basic Writings, p. 132), and therefore they in a sense “belong together” (ibid., p. 130). To illustrate this
strange view, he cited one sentence from chapter 28 of the Lao Zi. (See note 1 above.)

32 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, pp. 43–44.

33 – There is a difference between Heidegger’s view of human nature and Aristotle’s that relies on rationality or rational wisdom. Although the Aristotelian middle-way interpretation of virtue is similar to Heidegger’s notion of “betweenness” in a certain significant sense, it does not take on a coming-time ontology. Furthermore, unlike Aristotle, Heidegger rejects distinguishing practical wisdom (phronesis), to which the middle-way virtue belongs, from theoretical wisdom (sophia) in favor of the latter.


36 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 79 (Frankfurt am Main: V. Klostermann, 1994), p. 93.


38 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 43.

39 – Ibid.

40 – Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall, in Dao De Jing: “Making This Life Significant”—A Philosophical Translation (New York: Ballantine Books, 2003), p. 80, state in the “Philosophical Introduction” of their book: “These three wu-forms—wuwei [无为], wuzhi [无知], wuyu [无欲]—all provide a way of entertaining, of deferring to, and of investing oneself in an objectless world” (p. 44).

41 – Heidegger, Gesamtausgabe, band 75, p. 43.

42 – Chan, A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy, p. 139.

43 – Ibid., p. 140.

44 – Ibid., p. 146 (my italics).

45 – Some scholars may find fault with Heidegger’s “violent” interpretation of the Lao Zi, and thus deny the dialogue nature of his engagement with Daoism. They may insist that Heidegger willfully uses the Lao Zi to advance his own project and that his Daoist connections thus do not deserve serious academic concern. One of the goals of this article is to mitigate this kind of criticism somewhat by attempting to defend Heidegger’s Daoist exegesis and disclose the significance of his interest in Daoism. Does this interest signify a genuine dialogue? The answer in part depends on how one understands “dialogue.”
No one really has a monopoly over the definition of this word. For his interpretations of Greek terminology as well as philosophy, and of some modern philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, Heidegger has been charged by some scholars with “distortion” or being “unfaithful” to the original. Should we likewise deny, due to these complaints, that there was any meaningful dialogue between Heidegger and these Western philosophers? I doubt that anyone will make this denial. A paragraph from Heidegger’s preface to the second edition of his *Kantbook* can provide help in clarifying this issue. To answer the criticism of his interpretation of Kant’s *Critique of Pure Reason*, Heidegger writes:

Readers have taken constant offense at the violence of my interpretations. Their allegation of violence can indeed be supported by this text. Philosophicohistorical research is always correctly subject to this charge whenever it is directed against attempts to set in motion a thoughtful dialogue between thinkers. In contrast to the methods of historical philology, which has its own agenda, a thoughtful dialogue is bound by other laws—laws which are more easily violated. In a dialogue the possibility of going astray is more threatening, the shortcomings are more frequent. (Martin Heidegger, *Kant and the Problem of Metaphysics*, 4th ed., trans. R. Taft [Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1990], p. xviii)

With this, we may understand better Heidegger’s way of holding dialogues with the thinkers whom he considers important, and so lessen the worry about the dialogical nature of Heidegger’s involvement with Daoism.


47 – Perhaps the idea of the “useless” is one of the things that motivates Heidegger to render *yong* 用 as “Being” rather than “usefulness” or “utility,” as most translations do. He wants to avoid the superficial understanding of *wu* merely as a useful space for utensils, forgetting the “great usefulness of the useless.” “Being” for him, in contrast to individual beings, internally involves both being and non-being (*wu*) and so is closer to the meaning of “great usefulness.”

48 – Martin Heidegger, “Vielleicht verbirgt sich im Wort ‘Weg,’ Tao, das Geheimnis aller Geheimnisse des denkenden Sagens,” in *Unterwegs zur Sprache* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1959), p. 198. The fact that Heidegger gained full confidence in his understanding of *Lao Zi* only after his cooperation with Paul Shih-yi Hsiao accounts also for his delaying the publication of the 1943 article.

49 – “What determines both, time and Being, in their own, that is, in their belonging together, we shall call: *Ereignis*, the event of Appropriation…. We now see: What lets the two matters belong together, what brings the two into their own and, even more, maintains and holds them in their belonging together—the way the two matters stand, the matter at stake—is Appropriation. The matter at stake is not a relation retroactively superimposed on Being and time. The matter at stake first appropriates Being and time into their own in virtue of their relation, and in the gift of opening out” (Martin Heidegger, *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper and Row, 1972], p. 19).
“We must experience simply this owning in which man and Being are delivered over to each other, that is, we must enter into what we call the event of appropriation…. The words event of appropriation, thought of in terms of the matter indicated, should now speak as a key term in the service of thinking. As such a key term, it can not [any] more be translated than the Greek λογος or the Chinese Tao…. The event of appropriation is that realm, vibrating within itself, through which man and Being reach each other in their nature, achieve their active nature by losing those qualities with which metaphysics has endowed them…. We dwell in the appropriation inasmuch as our active nature is given over to language” (Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, trans. Joan Stambaugh [New York: Harper and Row, 1969], pp. 36–38).