TAOIST PHILOSOPHY AND “FEMININE STYLE”:
ON THE NATURE OF FEMININITY

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to illustrate the uniqueness and the sophistication of femininity and to expand the array of communicative options available to the rhetor. For the purposes of this study, I have selected Taoism’s classic, Lao-Tzu or Tao-Te-Ching, to argue that Western scholarly views of femininity are generally incomplete, if not inaccurate. The discussion is grounded in the Taoism principles of wu wei (spontaneity) and bu zheng (noncontention). These principles emphasize the path of spontaneity and noncontention as a virtuous basis for speech and argumentation, and then provides communicative modes such as xi yan and wu ming. Drawing on these discussions, this study finds several commonalities shared by Taoism principles and the nature of femininity. In particular, they advocate similar values on which an alternative rhetorical system can be developed. They also concur in the purpose of communication as an offering of individual perspective to increase mutual understandings and denouncing the usefulness of assertive and argumentative communication.

Keywords: Feminine style, femininity, Taoist philosophy, Tao-Te-Ching, wu wei, bu zheng, xi yan, wu ming.
Scholars in the communication discipline indicate that women and men speak differently. Generally speaking, female communication is characterized as concrete, participatory, cooperative, and oriented toward relationship maintenance. Nevertheless, male communication is characterized as abstract, hierarchical, dominating, and oriented toward problem-solving (Maltz & Borker, 1982; Treichler & Kramarae, 1983). Although scholars have increasingly tended to treat feminine style of speaking as an alternative mode to patriarchal communication (Spitzack & Carter, 1987), public communication, primarily produced by males, has served as the model for “good” speech and women have been perceived as ill-suited to the competitive, task-oriented, or deliberative behavior of the public sphere (Campbell, 1989; Kramarae, 1981).

Consequently, feminine mode of communicative patterns is often treated as an inferior variant of a dominant male model and is also associated with weakness. To become more effective rhetors while speaking to primarily male audiences in public contexts, thus, women are often advised either to adapt to masculine mode of communicative patterns or to use masculine style while simultaneously incorporating characteristics typically considered to be “feminine” (Campbell & Jerry, 1988). Overall, while the study of women’s communication has become a part of the communication discipline in the 2000s, women’s communicative experiences and styles tend to be devalued and misunderstood. In particular, the inadequacy of current approach becomes especially clear when a female speaker cannot or is unwilling to adapt her speaking style to obstacles posted by the patriarchal perspective.

A rhetoric of patriarchy, as Foss and Griffin (1995, pp. 3-4) notes, is characterized by “efforts to change others and thus to gain control over them, self-worth derived from and measured by the power exerted over others, and devaluation of the life worlds of others.” But values of change, competition, and domination are not the only values on which a rhetorical system can be constructed. As we know, changing
and controlling others might not always be the rhetor’s goal. Therefore, scholars in communication, especially feminist scholars, start to question female experience as defined within an androcentric framework and to revalue women’s experience in its own terms (Mathison, 1997).

In this study, I offer a critical review of these literature and then elaborate on the philosophical as well as strategic value inherent in femininity by drawing upon Taoist philosophy. I seek to revise paradigms that view feminist rhetorical action simply in terms of its adaptation to obstacles posed by patriarchy and more in terms of its potential to offer a better alternative to patriarchal modes of communication. For the purposes of this study, I have selected Taoism’s classic, Lao-Tzu or Tao-Te-Ching (Classic of the Way and its Virtue), to argue that Western scholarly views of femininity are generally incomplete, if not inaccurate. In sum, my goal in offering this study is to illustrate the uniqueness and the sophistication of femininity and to expand the array of communicative options available to all rhetors.

WOMEN AS COMMUNICATORS

Increased awareness of the patriarchal bias that undergirds most theories of rhetoric has led communication scholars to explicate alternative communicative modes that are grounded in non-patriarchal values (e.g., Edson, 1985; Elshtain, 1982; Foss & Foss, 1991; Foss, Foss, & Trapp, 1991; Foss & Griffin, 1992; Gearhart, 1979; Griffin, 1993; Kramarae, 1989; Shepherd, 1992). In many cases, although the concepts, theories, and methods used to analyze women’s rhetoric result in so-called “great speaker” studies (e.g., Campbell, 1989, Chapters 6, 7, 8, 9; Dow, 1991; Japp, 1985), much of the feminist research recently done in communication starts to appreciate the
spirit of difference, “the politics of woman as other” (Spitzack & Carter, 1987). In other words, “Within the politics of woman as other paradigm, researchers promote a critical female voice that speaks on behalf of its own complexity” (pp. 410-411).

Various approaches have been taken by scholars in communication to reinterpret male-biased theory in communication and to develop the conceptualization of women as communicators (Griffin, 1993; Mathison, 1997). According to Mathison (1997), two approaches have emerged from current feminist scholarship. The first approach is read by Mathison as “assuming there is such a thing as a feminine nature” (p. 153). The second one is read as “assuming a biological determination of experience” (p. 153).

Feminine Style as a Female Nature

The first approach argues for a feminine nature. For example, Foss and Foss (1989), drawing from multiple feminists sources, points out several characteristics that often attributed to women: “interdependence, emotionality, a sense of self-questioning or vulnerability, fusion of the private and public, wholeness, egalitarian use of power, focus on process rather than product, multiplicity and paradox” (p. 67). As Campbell (1989) explains, women developed these capacities for concrete and contingent reasoning, for reliance on personal experience, and for participatory interaction in the process of craft-learning. In a rhetorical situation, consequently, these attributes produce speech contents that display a personal tone, use personal experience, anecdotes and examples as evidence, exhibit inductive structure, emphasize audience participation, and encourage identification between speaker and audience (Campbell, in Dow & Tonn, 1993, p. 287).

The goal of this approach is to insert women’s voices into the conversation regarding communication. There are many ways that have been undergone to
accomplish the goal. According to Mathison (1997), a woman’s voice is constituted by the following research: (a) a voice of caring (Wood, 1992; 1994), (b) a feminine style (Dow & Tonn, 1993), and (c) a particular form of communicating (Foss & Foss, 1990). In terms of the voice of caring, Wood (1992; 1994) locates her feminist stance in Gilligan’s work (1982). Specifically, women are assumed to have what Gilligan (1982) called a voice of care, a moral sense that is relational, that is, more sensitive to contexts and responsive to human needs.

Drawing on Campbell’s (1989) work on what she has termed “feminine style” (1989, p. 12; see also Campbell, 1973), Dow and Tonn (1993) focus on the rhetoric of female politician Ann Richards in her keynote address at the Democratic National Convention in 1988. According to Campbell (1989), feminine style is marked by “particular capacities for concrete and contingent reasoning, for reliance on personal experience, and for participatory interaction” (Dow & Tonn, 1993, p. 287). The authors conclude by claiming that “feminine style is a reflection of the conditions of female existence, … feminine style reveals the potential, in the public sphere, for reproducing positive elements of those conditions” (p. 298).

A third example, reinforcing the notion of women as particular kinds of communicators due to their nature as care givers, is characterized Foss and Foss (1990). To construct a more accurate description of women’s eloquence, these authors focus on the types of communication that “creates worlds of immense richness for them and for those around them” (p. 2). Several types of communication are presented by these authors, including baking, children’s parties, costume design, gardening, holiday greetings, and motherhood. In this study, however, as Mathison (1997) suggests, “Women’s communication, once again, is defined by relational contexts” (p. 154).
Feminine Style as Gendered Experience

The second approach assumes there is a biological determination of experience. In this approach, women are not only assumed to share a uniquely gendered experience but also granted a particular rhetorical privilege through women’s connection to nature and reproduction. The goal of this approach is to identify ways in which the masculine framework “limits our understanding of rhetoric” (Foss & Griffin, 1992, p. 330). The research of Foss and Griffin (1992; 1995) is a typical one of its kind.

Foss and Griffin (1992), for example, identify the limitations of a masculine rhetoric through its comparison with Starhawk’s perspective on rhetoric. Specifically, Starhawk’s notions are contrasted with major rhetorical concepts developed by Burke because Starhawk’s philosophy toward nature exposes a lack in masculine rhetoric. The comparison of the two perspectives suggests that Burke’s perspective is potentially adversarial and controlling, whereas that of Starhawk is serene and benevolent. In other words, the main limitation of the masculine rhetoric is its overemphasis on the values of contention and domination.

More recently, Foss and Griffin (1995) extend their discussion on the feminine rhetoric through the metaphor of offering. To question the dominant values inherent in the traditional conception of rhetoric, including values of change, competition, and domination, they propose invitational rhetoric as an alternative rhetoric. Foss and Griffin (1995) argue that the purpose of invitational rhetoric is not to persuade but to offer an invitation to “an understanding -- to enter another’s world to better understand an issue and the individual who holds a perspective on it” (p. 13). Specifically, it grounds in the feminist principles of equality (i.e., the elimination of the dominance and elitism), immanent value (i.e., every being is a unique and necessary part of the pattern of the universe and thus has value), and self-determination (i.e., a respect for
As the literature review shown above, while feminist scholars have explored the various aspects of the notion of women as communicators, the general purpose of these studies, especially studies under the first approach, has been to identify women’s unique or distinctive forms of communication. Scholars who work in this area, for the most part, continue to attempt to understand and evaluate women’s communication from traditional frameworks. The critical point here is that this privileging of the masculine over the feminine does not necessarily occur at a conscious, intentional level, but is so embedded in everyday practices of social culture that both men and women have been socialized to accept it as truth (Gray, 1994).

A noteworthy exception to this generalization is the research of Foss and Griffin (1992; 1995). In these studies, women are granted a particular rhetorical privilege through their connection to nature. As Mathison (1997) notes, their conception of feminine rhetoric “naturalizes women’s ability to be in harmony with their environment, … , reinstating the belief that women are closer to nature because of biology” (p. 156). While Foss and Griffin’s conclusions are a major theoretical contribution to the study of women’s communication, I believe that the potential of this contribution has thus far been limited in two ways. First, there has been little attempt to elaborate on the philosophical as well as strategic value inherent in the ideas of the feminine connection to nature. Second, and more important, invitational rhetoric primarily has been viewed as simply an alternative to the rhetoric of patriarchy.

Drawing upon Taoist philosophy, this paper extends the application and the implications of invitational rhetoric. The primary text for this analysis is Lao-Tzu or Tao-Te-Ching, the most well-known Taoist text written by Lao-Tzu. The reason for Taoist philosophy to be selected is that the female is used directly as an analogy of tranquility, modesty and meekness in many verses (i.e., verses 10, 20, 25,
28, 52, 59, 61) in *Tao-Te-Ching*. And more important, the principal teaching of *Tao-Te-Ching* is the privileging of the feminine nature over the masculine nature. Lao-Tzu makes his point very explicit in verse sixty-one, which observes: “The female always overcomes the male by her tranquility and her tranquility comes from her modesty.” Since femininity is embodied in Taoist philosophy, this connection makes Taoism particularly useful for illustrating the uniqueness and the sophistication of femininity. In the next two sections the role of Taoist philosophy in clarifying the philosophical as well as strategic value inherent in femininity is explored in more depth.

**PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWS OF TAOISM**

The text of *Tao-Te-Ching* (Canon of Way and Virtue), also known as *Lao-Tzu* or *The Book of 5000 Words*, was written at the request of a Zhou official before Lao-Tzu left Zhou to live the life of a hermit (Ssu-Ma, in Lu, 1998, p. 227). The text has eighty-one chapters and is divided into *Dao Jing* (Canon of Way) and *De Jing* (Canon of Virtue). Although only five thousand words in length, it is not only the most translated of all the Chinese book (Lin, 1942) but also one of the deep and fundamental roots of Chinese thinking.

*Wu Wei*

Many scholars regard the notion of *wu wei* is one of the cardinal concepts of *Tao-Te-Ching* (e.g., Lu, 1998; Oliver, 1971). It is also the most misunderstood concept of Taoist School. As Lu (1998) notes, in proposing *wu wei*, Lao-Tzu is not advocating
that people do nothing. It was Lao-Tzu’s belief that deliberately interfering with the 
natural order of things, rather than allowing things to run their course, would bring 
about the opposite effect to the one desired. Unfortunately, it is common for people to 
misinterpret the principle of wu wei as doing nothing. In fact, it means to “do nothing 
purposive.” In other words, it is not the act but the intention behind the act that 
Lao-Tzu denounces. What Lao-Tzu denounces is the intention to dominate others, to 
regard others as one’s possession and to maneuver others.

The notion of wu wei comes from Lao-Tzu’s observation of the relationship 
between the universe and all things living in it. That is, the attitude held by the universe 
toward everything living in it is wu wei. Several related verses appear in Tao-Te-Ching. 
For example, “[Tao] produce them but does not take possession of them. It acts, but 
does not rely on its own ability. It leads them but does not master them” (verse 
fifty-one), “All things depend on it [The Great Tao] for life, and it does not turn away 
from them. It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it. It clothes and feeds 
all things but does not claim to be master over them” (verse thirty-four), “No purposive 
action is undertaken, and yet nothing is left undone” (verse forth-eight), and “The sage 
has no personal opinion. He always listens to what people think” (verse forty-nine).

Bu Zheng

After her comparing Confucian philosophy with Taoist philosophy, Lu (1998) 
concludes “While Confucian philosophy advocated success through contention and 
competition, Taoist philosophy considered the opposite strategy more powerful and 
virtuous” (p. 232). Generally speaking, Lao-Tzu encourages people to embrace the 
spiritual notion that noncontention is the best way to accomplish one’s goals. He 
argues that “what appears weak and soft in forms may possess true strength, while
what appears strong and hard may have certain inherent weaknesses” (p. 232). Using water as his analogy, Lao-Tzu, in verse forty-three, points out, “the softest thing in the world overcomes the hardest things” and he continues in the same verse, “the strong are companions of death and the weak are companions of life.”

Lao-Tzu also advocates the virtue of lying low in several verses such as, “The great rivers and seas are kings of all mountain streams because they stay below them” (verse sixty-six), “I have three treasures… and the third is not to dare to be ahead of others” (verse sixty-seven), and “He who is brave in daring will be killed. He who is brave in not daring will live” (verse seventy-three). The advantages for those people who are lying low include “he [the best man] does not compete that no one will resent him” (verse eight) and “The Way does not compete, and yet it skillfully achieves victory” (verse seventy-three). One should not be misled by its ideals of weakness and lying low into thinking that Taoism is a philosophy of negativism or one of withdrawal. Man is to follow Nature but in doing so he is not eliminated; instead, his nature is fulfilled (Chan, 1963). As Lao-Tzu points out in verse sixty-six, “It is precisely because he [the sage] does not compete that the world cannot compete with him.”

In sum, the principal teaching of Tao-Teh-Ching, according to the Sinologist H. G. Creel (1953), is that we “should be in harmony with, not in rebellion against, the fundamental laws of the universe” (p.88). In other words, human’s behavior should be natural, untrained, and unsophisticated. However, either wu wei or bu zheng should not be interpreted as the philosophical acceptance of whatever must be, whether it be good or evil. Rather, these two notions are much like “a spirit of passivity, a flowing into and becoming one with nature” (Oliver, 1971, p. 240). Therefore, the recipe that Lao-Tzu recommended is as simple as “avoid purposive action, empty your mind, and be passively receptive to spontaneous insight” (p. 241).
RHETORICAL IMPLICATIONS OF TAOISM

When applied to the field of communication, as Lu (1998) suggests, the Taoism principles of *wu wei* and *bu zheng* imply that direct and effortful persuasion may not bring about the desired effect. On the contrary, Lu points out, “More often than not, trying too hard to persuade leads to failure in persuasion … effective persuasion may occur when one keeps silent or says as little as possible” (p. 232). Basically, Lao-Tzu advocates *xi yan* (talking less) and *wu ming* (namelessness).

*Xi Yan*

In his study, Jensen (1987) concludes that speech and argumentation are deprecated in the Taoist tradition. It is easy for people to come to the same kind of conclusion as Jensen’s if we read *Tao-Teh-Ching* literally. Indeed, many isolated passages from the *Tao-The-Ching* seemingly renounce rhetoric—and even communication itself. For example, we are advised in verse five, “In much talk there is great weariness. It is best to keep silent.” In verse forty-five we are warned that “the greatest eloquence is like stuttering.” We again are told in verse two, “Wise is the man who teaches without words.” It is for this reason that Lao-Tzu claims in verse fifty-six, “One who knows does not speak; one who speaks does not know.”

However, it is not possible for us to interpret these passages correctly unless we put them in Taoist worldview and epistemology, the manifesting of *de*, or virtue, in terms of *wu wei* and *bu zheng* (Lu, 1998). In other words, Lao-Tzu considers the path of spontaneity and noncontention a virtuous basis for speech and argumentation. As a result, Lao-Tzu did not totally denounce speech and argumentation, but only in those
instances where they failed to conform to the virtues of spontaneity and noncontention. Thus, I concur with Lu (1998) and argue that the denotative meaning of *xi yan* (i.e., talking less) is misleading. A better way to interpret the notion of *xi yan* is to explore its connotative meaning within the framework of Taoist philosophy.

It is Lao-Tzu’s assumption that those who are not modest and humble in their speech and argumentation are against the natural course. The primary business of life, Lao-Tzu believes, is to live, not to influence others. Therefore, as verse seventy-two points out, “Although the wise man knows everything, he does not show off his knowledge.” “A good man,” verse eighty-one advises, “does not argue.” For Lao-Tzu, speech aiming to make truth so self-evident needs no explanation or argumentative supports for the truth to be accepted. What speakers have to do is relaxing into one’s own essential nature. Assertive and argumentative communication could only prove to their audience the opposite of whatever they intend to prove. As Lao-Tzu warns in verse twenty-four, “He who brags does not endure for long.” With this in mind, it is useful to note that it is inappropriate to interpret *xi yan* as restraining any talk. In contrast, to Lao-Tzu, “the purpose of communication is communication. The aim is to establish an identity with what is being talked about and with those who are listening” (Oliver, 1971, pp. 243-244).

**Wu Ming**

Another rhetorical implication of the Taoism principles of *wu wei* and *bu zheng* is *wu ming* (namelessness). Lao-Tzu’s notion of namelessness is directly related to his understanding of the tao. Consequently, for Lao-Tzu, as he declares in verse nine, “Withdraw as soon as your work is done. Such is the Way.” This point is emphasized again and again. For example, verse two praises the deeds for those who “…
accomplishes his task, but does not claim credit for it. It is precisely because he does not claim credit that his accomplishment could last forever.” Verse seventy-seven also says that “the sage accomplishes his task, but does not claim credit for it.” Again in verse sixty-eight, Lao-Tzu reminds us that “One who is skillful in leading people puts himself below them.”

By following these rules, Lao-Tzu believes, as shown in verse thirty-four, “The sage never strives himself for the great, and thereby the great is achieved.” That is, the very method is what appears on first encounter to be the renunciation of method, but ultimately people can attain the goal of both the individual and his society. Since the principle of the Tao is spontaneity, according to Welch (1957), spontaneity cannot be achieved, “until you have erased the aggressive patterns etched by society into your nature … When you discard some of your wishes, you will have them all” (p.83).

Overall, the rhetorical contribution derived from *Tao-Te-Ching* is its insight concerning the futility of argument and contention and its recognition that he who appears to win actually loses more than he gains. According to *Tao-Te-Ching*, although Lao-Tzu renounces the methodology of crushing opposition through strength, the *tao* may well influence and carry more persuasive power than strategies involving contention and confrontation in a given situation. The major reason is the ways of nature are inscrutable. In contrast to Lin Yu-tang’s (1945) referring Taoism as a philosophy of camouflage, the message of Lao-Tzu is: avoid purposeful action, empty your mind, and be passively receptive to spontaneous insight (Oliver, 1971).

Accordingly, when the *tao* is applied to a theory of rhetoric, it takes on a moral quality because it involves concern for and action on behalf of others. As Lu (1998) observes, the theory of rhetoric advocated in the *Tao-Te-Ching* is “a rhetorical strategy in that it invites one to ‘act’ in order to realize one’s potential in harmony with one’s opponents or environment” (p. 233). Oliver (1971) also argues that, Taoism is not a
philosophy of camouflage because the rhetorical ideas in the *Tao-The-Ching* is “much like the modern concept of empathy” (p. 241). In other words, the purpose of communication is to establish an identity with what is being talked about and with those who are listening.

As shown by these findings, the nature of femininity shares several resemblances with Taoist philosophy. First, rather than dwelling on the values of change, competition, and domination, alternative values such as noncontention (the one similar to equality advocated by feminist scholars) and spontaneity (much like the spirits of immanent value and self-determination advocated by feminist scholars) are celebrating. Second, both of them regard the purpose of communication is not to persuade others but to offer individual perspective to increase mutual understandings. That is, to be in harmony with others and their environment. Finally, they both denounce the usefulness of assertive and argumentative communication because these communicative modes could only prove to their audience the opposite of whatever they intend to prove.

**CONCLUSION**

In this study, the classic text of Taoism, *Tao-Te-Ching*, is selected to demonstrate the uniqueness and sophistication of femininity in general and feminine rhetoric in particular. The discussion is grounded in the Taoism principles of *wu wei* and *bu zheng*. These principles emphasize the path of spontaneity and noncontention as a virtuous basis for speech and argumentation, and then provides communicative modes such as *xi yan* and *wu ming*. Drawing on these discussions, this study finds several commonalities shared by Taoism principles and
the nature of femininity. In particular, they advocate similar values on which an alternative rhetorical system can be constructed. They also concur in the purpose of communication as an offering of individual perspective to increase mutual understandings and denouncing the usefulness of assertive and argumentative communication.

I believe that this analysis illustrates the potential for an alternative perspective on feminine style, one that includes its philosophical as well as its strategic value. If feminine style is a manifestation of the Taoist philosophy, then perhaps feminine style reveals the potential, in the public sphere, for reproducing positive elements of tao (the Way). To say that feminine style reflects a Taoist standpoint is to recognize an intimate relation between femininity and the laws of nature. As a result, feminine style becomes a more powerful rhetoric in the context of public discourse because complying with the laws of the universe always leads to final victory. As Lao-Tzu states in verse thirty-four, “The sage never strives himself for the great, and thereby the great is achieved.” Therefore, my analysis carries both theoretical and practical implications to communication problems and issues.

Theoretical Implications

First, as argued by Foss and Griffin (1995), standard theories of rhetoric embody patriarchal perspectives. The result is that every communicative encounter has been viewed as primarily an attempt at persuasion or influence, or as a struggle over power. Although an equation of rhetoric with persuasion seems natural for scholars of rhetoric, this conception is only one perspective on rhetoric and one embedded in the patriarchal bias. To expands the scope of rhetorical theory and enhances the discipline’s ability to explain diverse communicative phenomena successfully, communicative modes that are grounded in alternative values need to be identified. I
did exactly that in this study. In particular, analysis in this study has been undertaken by exploring the values of spontaneity and noncontention as a virtuous basis for speech and argumentation, which previously have not been recognized.

Second, by providing philosophical grounding to justify the immanent value of feminine style, this analysis demonstrates that feminine style is more than an alternative to patriarchal modes of thought and reasoning. From the Taoist standpoint, while being compared with the patriarchal modes, feminine style should be the better one because of the intimate relation between femininity and the laws of the universe. According to *Tao-Te-Ching*, what appears weak and soft in forms may possess true strength, while what appears strong and hard may have certain inherent weaknesses. Therefore, once the values embodied in feminine style are similar with those of Taoism, even though change is not the purpose of the rhetor, feminine style could lead to change in the audience or rhetor or both as a result of the exchange of ideas.

**Practical Implications**

Using feminist critique, Gray (1994) shows the pervasiveness of the male-gendered bias that undergirds negotiation theory. In other words, researchers often use terms and concepts traditionally understood as masculine characteristics (e.g., autonomy, rationality, objectivity, competitiveness, and efficiency) to describe the nature of negotiation (Lewicki & Litterer, 1985; Murnighan, 1991). As a result, the values of characteristics socially constructed as feminine (e.g., subjectivity, dependence, emotionality, and connectedness) has been depreciated (Gray, 1994). Furthermore, some researchers even openly question women’s negotiating competence, arguing that men are more likely to profit from negotiation than women (Brock-Utne,
1989; Gerhart & Rynes, 1991; King & Hinson, 1994; Neu, Graham, & Gilly, 1988; Stevens, Bavetta, & Gist, 1993).

Given the intimate relation between femininity and the laws of the universe found in this study, the strategic values of feminine style in negotiation is made clear. Specifically, most research of the weak actor's strategic choices in asymmetrical negotiations has based upon the Western definition of power. By the definition, the best the weak actor can do to escape from their structural inferiority is utilizing strategies (behavioral power) to alter the issue power balance, which also is partially determined by aggregate structural power. In other words, to win a negotiation is to compete with the strong actor for more power. However, the inadequacy of current approach becomes especially clear when the weak actor cannot or is unwilling to confront with the strong actor.

An alternative framework can be developed around the notion of wu wei and bu zheng which renounce the methodology of crushing opposition through strength. Thus, the major implication of the philosophy of Taoist for the weak actor is that the weak actor needs to avoid pitting one's strength directly against one's opponent's. Since efforts to break down the other side's resistance usually only increase it, the weak actor needs to try to go around their resistance. When people observe the ways of nature, consequently, the natural processes of nature, without any effort from people, assure advantage. In other words, the Tao-followers will accomplish their goals without putting into any effort. As Ury (1993) advises in his 5-step strategy to breakthrough dilemma of negotiation, using the Japanese martial arts of judo, jujitsu, and aikido to illustrate his points, a skillful negotiator should avoid pitting his strength directly against his opponent’s. To break through the negotiating obstacles, Ury says “efforts to break down the other side’s resistance usually only increase it, you try to go around their resistance” (p. 11).
Limitations inherent in this study, however, need to be acknowledged. The first limitation is more ideological matter in its nature. The points made by Lao-Tzu and feminist scholars are alternative values to the traditional, but dominant, conception of rhetoric. It is not a matter of right or wrong, but a matter of sharing power. As Gray (1994) notes, the privileging of the masculine over the feminine does not necessarily occur at a conscious level, but is so embedded in everyday practices of social culture that both men and women have been socialized to accept it as truth. Consequently, although the results of adhering to Taoism, as Ssu-Ma Ch’ien suggests, are impressive, for the populace at large, observing the Taoism is too difficult because “bodies have delighted in ease and comfort, and hearts have swelled with pride at the glories of power and ability.” (Ssu-Ma, in Oliver, 1971, p. 236). In fact, Lao-Tzu already foresees the difficulties while he was writing verse forty-three: “few in the world can understand teaching without showing off oneself and the advantage of taking no intentional action.”

The second limitation is the interpretation of the words of *Tao-Te-Ching.* The difficulty of grasping the meaning of *Tao-Te-Ching* has to be acknowledged. On the one hand, there are various editions of it. The words of each verse are not exactly the same. On the other hand, a very wide range of interpretations of specific passages exist among scholars, both Chinese and Western scholars. As Watson notes, every translation is an interpretation, since the translator “must choose one of a number of possible meanings before had can produce any kind of coherent version” (1962, p. 158). Consequently, my interpretation of *Tao-Te-Ching* is subjected to my subjective reading of the text and possible disagreements with my interpretation are expected.
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