

AI-Based Mysterious and Mathematical Reformation of *Dao* of Water in the Perspective of International Communication

WANG Tongjun

Beijing International Studies University, Beijing, China

This paper aims to interpret the international communication under the Daoist philosophy, particularly the image of water in *Daodejing*, with a mathematical analysis and reformation thanks to the use of artificial intelligence (AI). The study holds that Daoist thoughts like “Dao keeping as it is” and “non-coercive action” offer a theoretical framework for harmonious global interaction. It argues that AI, as a transformative tool, can be a helping hand in revealing water’s adaptability and ethical neutrality, while mathematical abstraction can model systemic balance in communication. This essay focuses on the water’s virtues, truthfulness, goodness, and beauty, which can be employed as effective international communication, advocating for audience-centered, flexible approaches that prioritize authenticity over coercion. By linking ancient Chinese philosophy with modern science and technology, the article puts forward a “water-like” communication model stressing on inclusivity, resilience, and sustainable global cooperation, challenging the traditional power-driven styles.

Keywords: Daoist philosophy, Lao Zi, water symbolism, international communication (IC), AI

Introduction

Artificial intelligence (AI), a type of human-like intelligence, is coming into being as a transformative force reconstructing almost every aspect of our daily life. Its role covers diverse domains, from accelerating scientific discovery to redefining industrial processes, with its functions giving birth to challenging questions about ethics and morals, society, and human identity.

AI’s role is ultimately a reflecting of human decision-makings, which can either amplify inequality and fragmentation or foster global cooperation and sustainability. Like water in Daoist philosophy, the power lies in its adaptability, its impact relying on *Dao* (“ways or paths”) we provide for it. Taking it as an instrument for human blooming implies integrating technical advancement with ethical wisdom, wishing that its functions act as not just efficiency but also the broader goals of justice, creativity, and ecological balance.

And how about mathematics? This discipline, being the foundation of science and the basis of our further scientific discovery and technological advancement, is a discipline steeped in abstraction with vast practical implications. The abstraction of mathematics and its importance in all things practical is what has me mystified and curious about mathematics (Su, 2020, p. 33). The abstract nature of math as the base and tower of science contrasts with its profound role in driving the technological progress. Mathematics can be a pragmatic tool in the mystical and mystified realm as a science or an art, which also is a driving force interlinked with human

innovation and exploration. Its ability to bridge the abstract and the practical mirrors the integrative thinking entailed in Chinese philosophy, much like water open to form while retaining its born nature.

Water-Like International Communication With Mathematical Analysis

Lao Zi hopes that the national governance can be well manifested in the essence of the *Dao* and internalized it as the intellectual virtue of governing. The water imagery of *Daodejing* has the long-lasting charm of time and space, which is of great benefit to help the leaders as the backbone of the government to improve the realm of administrative ethics and shape the “leadership of water goodness” (Zhou & Wang, 2023, p. 29). The core of Daoist culture, and also the center of Chinese philosophy, “*Dao*”, is embodied as water, which radiates everything and covers everything. *Dao*, *De*, and water can be “painted” from multiple dimensions and levels, where water can be metaphor of people and things. They are following the similar laws and rules, and political management can also be like water, with non-coercive action. There can be like policies in national and international communications (ICs).

Watery traits reveal the Daoist philosophy of life, of which water has the noble character of selflessness, no quarrel with the world, kindness to others, modesty and low, honesty and trustworthiness. She is the teacher and “mother” of the sage to learn from and respect for. The ordinary people should also lower their position and learn from her open-minded and nobility. To be like water, it is embracing softness and weakness, kind to others, treating others sincerely, willing to tolerate hardships. It learns to accumulate energy, giving full play to their strengths, seizing the opportunity, softness to overcome rigidity.

The Watercourses of International Communication, Formlessness of Adapting to Circumstances, Opening to All

It is well known that argumentative thinking in Chapter 8 of *Daodejing* is an argument for water. Rigidity and softness, virtual and real refer to “counting”, containing mathematical components. Such opposites can be interpreted in the mathematical term of variable, ratio of the two things, real and virtual being the size of the capacity (Sun, 2024, p. 67). The paradox of the two features of water can be good brothers, complementing each other. Water droplets are wearing the stone. Water, H₂O, humility, harmony and openness, gentle and supple, are argumentative and scientific, emphasis on logic, focusing on the process of arguments and argumentation.

In *Daodejing*, *Lao Zi* used “water” to symbolize *Dao*, integrating his own philosophical ideas into the image of water, so that “water culture” became a microcosm of China’s excellent traditional culture. “Xunzi • You Sitting” (荀子 • 宥坐) also mentions the story of Confucius’s view of water, and Confucius proposed that water has “nine virtues”: virtue, righteousness, *Dao*, courage, law, fairness, observation, goodness, and ambition, which are similar to *Lao Zi*’s views (Han, 2024, p. 42). The great *Dao* is of simplicity, easy to understand, softness overcoming hardness. Political soft news is softening the “blood vessels” of the audience and facilitating the flow of views. Tenderness like water, *Dao* is changeable like water. The morality of water and the image of water provide ideas for the flexible strategy of international communication.

Lao Zi believes that water is the embodiment of “nature”, as only water can reflect the authentic nature. All things in the world, from “dew” and “streams” to “rivers”, “seas”, and “valleys”, must follow their inherent laws and emulate nature (Chapter 81 of *Daodejing*). Thus, water possesses the characteristics of authenticity and innateness. ... He urges people to pursue the spirit of water, return to simplicity, purify their minds, and merge with *Dao*, allowing the natural beauty of human nature to be freely expressed (Wei, 2014, p. 127). The beauty of

Dao is of greatness, like the beauty of water being supremacy. The resembling of water interprets *Dao*. They embrace simplicity, purity, and the beauty of naturalness. In international communication, the subjects, objects, audiences, and acts of communication should all be as natural as water. Only through sincerity and authenticity can harmony be achieved.

The idea of “non-coercive action” (*wuwei*) represents the highest realm pursued by *Dao*... It can be seen as a necessary extension of *Dao* doing as it is. Another characteristic is as calm as still water. Therefore, attributes such as “indifference”, “humility”, and “non-competition” can be regarded as specific manifestations of water’s “*wuwei*”. The beauty of water often manifests in such posture: It does not oppose heaven to seek “action”, yet it can “nourish all things without claiming dominance”, requiring no gratitude from them. This brings about the positive result of “accomplishing all through no more intervention—overcoming the strong with the soft, advancing by retreating, and controlling movement through stillness” (Wei, 2014, p. 128). The virtues of water are abstracted as *Dao* and concretely manifested in water’s various features. *Wuwei* is a specific expression of its naturalness, while its softness, humility, and non-competition are further concrete embodiments.

International Communication Integrating With Water’s Virtuosity of Truthfulness, Goodness, and Beauty

Lao Zi’s philosophy of governance consists of two aspects: internal governance of the people and external diplomacy with other states. Chapter 66 of *Daodejing* reflects his idea of “not competing with the people” in internal governance. Water and valleys appear together, one low and one high, yet the low can overcome the high because water resides in an absolutely low position, thus able to embrace all rivers and become the king of valleys. Chapter 61 embodies his thought of “not competing with other states” in foreign diplomacy. On one hand, major powers should “gain superiority through humility”, as water accumulates greater power as it flows downward—hence why rivers and seas become rulers of valleys. On the other hand, smaller states should “control movement through stillness”, similar to how femininity achieves dominance by staying low and receptive in union, thereby “assimilating” the superior (Han, 2024, p. 43). Both internal and external management share some principles: modesty, using stillness to handle movement, respecting and embracing others. Humility and non-competition, the combination of softness and strength, learning from water, and pursuing goodness—these underlie water’s truth, goodness, and beauty; water is supremely true, good, and beautiful.

With the explosive growth of information, audiences are increasingly distracted, preferring concise, interesting, and relevant content. Micro-level communication focuses on conveying touching feelings and emotions through micro-stories, personal experiences, and emotional expressions to enhance audience empathy and resonance, for example, sharing the life story of an ordinary person, personal experiences, or a traveler’s insights (Yu, 2024, pp. 105-106). As the saying goes, “The enlightened Buda speaks in simple words”. Communication should be concise, scientifically precise, interesting, and powerful; adopt micro-narratives and a grassroots perspective, telling ordinary people’s stories and reflecting groups through individuals, and government management through public experiences. Daoism prioritizes the people as supreme, regarding them as the foundation of *Dao*; rulers should embody virtue, value, and closeness to the people. Micro-communication is like water—intimate, fluid, and all-pervasive.

Liu Xiaogan summarizes academic understandings of *Dao* into categories: ontology, realm, holistic interpretation, and synthesis. Though debates persist on the *Dao*’s essence (e.g., as law, idea, nature, truth, path, or spirit), there is consensus on its qualities and functions. This is due to *Lao Zi*’s method of associating the metaphysical *Dao* with the physical water through “observing objects to extract symbols and using them to

explain *Dao*”, making the lofty and mysterious *Dao* specific and vivid (Zhou & Wang, 2023, p. 29). Like water navigating obstacles, communication must adapt to changing rhythms and channels, integrating challenges into the process. *Feng Youlan*, a famous Chinese great thinker, divides life realms into four levels: natural, utilitarian, moral, and cosmic. If the utilitarian realm is self-serving and the moral is altruistic, the cosmic realm is altruistic without competition—the realm of water (p. 29). The highest state of understanding is that of water, an idealized state, representing an ideal pursuit in international communication. The ancient Daoist philosophy can be applied to the modern international communication theory, highlighting the timeless relevance of water’s virtues of humility, flexibility, and naturalness in contemporary global talk. By framing communication channels as “watercourses”, the author emphasizes the need for adaptability and inclusivity, avoiding forced persuasion and instead embracing organic, audience-centric approaches. The integration of micro-narratives (e.g., ordinary people’s stories) aligns with water’s “all-pervasive” quality, illustrating how grassroots perspectives can foster deeper emotional connections in an age of information overload.

Demonstrating Weakness in International Communication: Embodying the Humility of Water

Softness and weakness are characteristics of water and also attributes of *Dao*. Weakness is the function of *Dao*, which is primarily characterized by adapting to nature. It is the highest law of both the natural world and society. *Dao* goes through “weakness”: It creates and nurtures all things by conforming to nature with softness, without any force or artificiality. Like water, it nourishes all things while willingly remaining in a lowly position, never boasting of its merits (Shen & Ma, 2012, p. 4). The essence of weakness lies in flexibility: outwardly soft but inwardly resilient. The path of international communication must also embody this softness; otherwise, it may evoke fear in others, making them reluctant to approach or engage. Protecting the weak is inherent to human nature; thus, showing vulnerability is not a negative act. It allows us to be sympathized with, collaborated with, and cared for. This section highlights a counterintuitive yet profound insight: In international communication, embracing “weakness” (i.e., humility and vulnerability) can foster deeper connections, mirroring water’s strength through softness. By invoking *Lao Zi*’s principle that “weakness is the function of *Dao*”, the text challenges the conventional narrative of power and dominance in global discourse, proposing instead a model based on flexibility and mutual care. In an era often defined by geopolitical tensions and ideological rivalry, this perspective offers a refreshing approach: By acknowledging shared vulnerabilities, communicators can build trust and create space for collaboration rather than confrontation.

We can model these qualities using abstract mathematical concepts, treating “goodness” as a function that maps philosophical attributes to mathematical properties.

Humility (处下): Monotonicity and lower bounds. Mathematical analogy: A function that minimizes its own “value” (e.g., a constant function at a low value or a decreasing function).

A constant function $f(x) = c$, where c is a small positive constant (represents humility by “staying low”).

A decreasing function $f(x) = -x + k$ (gradually “sinking” to lower values, avoiding dominance).

Key property: Avoids maximizing its own output, embodying “non-assertiveness”.

Benevolence (善利万物): Subjectivity and universality. Mathematical analogy: A function that “benefits” all inputs by covering a wide range (subjective) or interacting universally. Example: A linear function $f(x) = x$, which maps every input to itself (neutral support without bias).

A constant function $f(x) = k$, where k is a positive value (consistently providing benefit to all x).

Key property: Universality of impact; no exclusion of “things” (inputs).

Perseverance (攻坚): Asymptotic behavior. Mathematical analogy: A function that gradually overcomes “hardness” (high values) through persistent, gentle action.

A logarithmic function $f(x) = \log(x)$, which grows slowly but indefinitely, eventually surpassing any finite bound.

Limitations of reductionism: Reducing water’s virtues to functions risks oversimplifying their depth (e.g., “不争” transcends mere non-competitiveness in mathematics).

Daoist paradox: The *Daodejing* emphasizes that “*Dao* that can be spoken is not the eternal *Dao*” (Chapter 1). Similarly, mathematical models cannot capture the ineffable nature of *Dao*.

This exercise highlights the interplay between abstract thought and symbolic systems. While mathematical functions lack the poetic and ethical richness of *Daodejing*, they offer the mind a framework to visualize how qualities like humility, flexibility, and perseverance might “behave” systematically. Ultimately, the “goodness of water” remains a timeless philosophical metaphor, inviting reflection on harmony, patience, and virtue—lessons that transcend the boundaries of mathematics.

The above excerpt from the prompts “Give an analysis of mathematical function for ‘the goodness of water in *Daodejing*’” via the AI of 豆包.

Natural and Free Communication: Confidence Through Self-Assured Talk With Simple Mathematical Functional Analysis

The term “spontaneity” (*ziran* 自然) is not explored in the *Analects*, *Mencius*, *Great Learning*, or *Doctrine of the Mean*. Only Daoism makes it as a core, “keeping as it is”. Composed of the characters “self” (自) and “so” (然), it denotes “being so of oneself” or “naturally so”. *Ye Xiushan* notes that in the philosophy of *Lao Zi* and *Zhuang Zi*, “naturalness” is synonymous with “freedom”, and vice versa. Such concepts of *Dao*, non-being (无), simplicity (朴), unpretentiousness (拙), stillness (静), and emptiness (虚) are similar expressions. Unlike Western traditions that often confine freedom to the realm of thought, Daoism integrates freedom into the essence of naturalness (Chen, 2018, pp. 144-147). In Daoist culture, naturalness is freedom, the authentic state of all things. *Wuwei* (无为) serves as a managing principle, while naturalness forms the ontological foundation. Communication should be sincere, authentic, and natural: free from affectation, artificiality, or melodrama. It requires truthful narration that does not shy away from shortcomings, offering an honest voice. Just as no human is perfect and no gold is pure, Chinese traditional culture and philosophy are fundamentally rooted in truthfulness, and so too should be our international communication. Our development is not yet perfect; we still face numerous challenges to address and tasks to complete.

In our practical work, there are many areas requiring improvement. Nevertheless, we are not short of scholars and thinkers who courageously uphold justice. Our governance is increasingly focused on procedural fairness and humanistic considerations. Social relief channels such as the 12345 hotlines for citizens, disciplinary inspection and supervision, anti-corruption campaigns, and accountability mechanisms have all significantly improved governance. While the fight against corruption remains a long journey, we have taken encouraging first steps, with steady progress to follow.

We should be grateful to our rivals, for they make us stronger and keep us humble, ensuring we never become complacent or stagnant. We are not afraid of rivals; the stronger they are, the more they stimulate and motivate us to advance. This requires confidence: belief in ourselves and in others, recognizing that we are complementary and mutually beneficial. Without rivals, we would not be who we are today, nor could we aspire

to a better tomorrow. Fearing that rivals may surpass us and attempting to restrict their development are a sign of insecurity. To unleash our own potential, we must first grant rivals the freedom to grow.

Here's a simple analysis of the concepts "*Dao* keeping as it is" and "non-coercive action" using minimal mathematical notation, focusing on intuitive ideas.

Dao, keeping as it is, consists with natural order. "*Dao*" (universal law) works by following nature's inherent patterns, like a river flowing with the landscape instead of resisting it.

Simple analogy to math can be as follows:

(1) Think of nature as a function where inputs (e.g., seasons, ecosystem changes) naturally produce outputs (e.g., plant growth, animal behavior).

(2) The *Dao* acts like an identity function: It does not change the input. If "nature" is x , then "*Dao*" is $y = x$. This means the law of the universe simply reflects what's already happening, without forcing changes.

(3) Scale consistency: Just like basic arithmetic rules (e.g., $2 + 3 = 5$) work the same for small numbers and large numbers, the *Dao*'s rules apply equally to tiny details (e.g., a single leaf falling) and big systems (e.g., a whole forest). Good governance or management avoids micromanaging. It lets systems (like societies or ecosystems) adjust on their own, like a campfire that burns steadily without constant poking.

(4) Mathematically, we can say the system stays near a "happy point" (called an equilibrium) when left alone. Intervention effect: The more you interfere (u), the further the system moves from its happy point. So, the best approach is to keep u as small as possible, like using a light touch instead of a heavy hand.

Key insight: Just like simple math formulas (e.g., $a + b = b + a$) work because they are based on natural truths, *Dao* suggests that simplicity and trust in natural processes lead to balance.

(The above excerpt from the prompts: Given a simple analysis of mathematical function for "*Dao* keeping as it is, and non-coercive action", the fewer mathematical signs, the better, via the AI of 豆包.)

Effectively Promoting the Dissemination of Beauty and Upholding Communication Aesthetics

How to enhance the transfer of beauty while upholding communication aesthetics is a vital endeavor in our interconnected world. It demands a harmonious blend of diverse beauty forms. This approach not only enriches cultural dialogues but also nurtures a global community that values depth, creativity, and emotional resonance in every narrative.

Transmission of Beauty and Communication Aesthetics

There is a proposal to explore the integration of "humanistic perspectives and aesthetic thoughts into the theoretical and practical framework of international communication (IC)". The "turn" toward communication aesthetics should have two meanings:

First, we should integrate aesthetic ideas into the theoretical research and practical activities of IC as soon as possible; second, through Chinese-style communication aesthetics and the dissemination of beauty, we should influence Western communication circles to pay attention to and apply communication aesthetics. Meanwhile, the proposition of communication aesthetics also serves as a correction to the often-criticized utilitarianism and social effect-oriented approach in modern communication studies. (Jiang & Zhang, 2022, p. 102)

Does the spreading of beauty encompass science communication? Is it a form of transferring beauty? Does science contain beauty? The beauty of science, the beauty of mathematics—their supreme beauty lies in their

truth and simplicity. The great *Dao* is supremely simple; great virtue is beautiful; supreme goodness is aesthetic. Does communication aesthetics include the communication of science? Meanwhile, both science communication and the communication of science should be integrated into communication studies. IC emphasizes audience-centric approaches, localization, communication effectiveness, and soft communication to avoid abruptness—like water nourishing things silently, or peach and plum trees that need no words yet draw paths beneath them.

Truth, goodness, and beauty are interconnected: Only the truthful can be good and beautiful. Truth itself is a form of beauty, and the pursuit of truth is also a pursuit of beauty. Thus, truth is the foundation, the x-axis, the independent variable, while goodness and beauty are the y-axis and z-axis, dependent variables that change with the x-axis. The origin of this coordinate system is the *Dao*, and *Dao* in motion is virtue (de), which is the manifestation of *Dao*. The origin of *Dao* remains unchanging, while virtue evolves; yet the origin, the reference point, and foundation of *Dao* can also shift, causing virtue to change accordingly. Non coercive action means not acting arbitrarily or intervening coercively, but rather allowing things to develop naturally. However, this non-interference does not mean inaction or lack of supervision; instead, it is like an invisible thread—an omnipresent yet subtle “net of heaven” that represents *Dao*. The visible thread allows freedom of movement, while the invisible constantly guides all things. The invisible is *yin* (soft), and the visible is *yang* (strong); their interweaving forms a grid that governs every individual, object, family, and society.

Antagonism and Complementarity in Communication: A True Embodiment of Truth, Goodness, and Beauty

The concept of complementarity has proven immensely useful for 2,500 years, as seen in the ideas of *yin* and *yang* (Capra, 2012, p. 123). “The interplay of *yin* and *yang* is *Dao*”, which tells us that all things arise from the unity of *yin* and *yang* and must change according to their laws (Zeng & Liu, 2022, p. 74). In international communication, nations and differing ideologies exist in a state of both opposition and complementarity. Good and evil are complementary—one cannot eliminate the other, for the absence of one deprives the other of its value or foundation. There is complementarity between East and West, time and space, male and female, north and south, heaven and earth, humanity and nature. Hard propaganda and soft communication complement each other, as do popular culture and high culture. Confucian and Daoist cultures are complementary, as are the humanities and natural sciences, speculation and analysis, and even stones and water.

The *Nine Chapters on the Mathematical Art* (*Jiǔzhāng Suànrshù*), a collection of applied problems, highlights the innate connection between mathematics (the crown jewel of science) and art in ancient China. Science and art were inseparable, as were literature, history, and philosophy. The book contains 246 practical problems related to production and daily life, presented in a question-and-answer format with “methods” (steps to solve problems, but no proofs). Problems are categorized into nine chapters: *Fangtian* (fields), *Sumi* (grains), *Cuifen* (proportional distribution), *Shaoguang* (area and volume), *Shangong* (engineering), *Junshu* (equal transportation), *Yingbuzu* (surplus and deficiency), *Fangcheng* (equations), and *Gougu* (Pythagoras). Original editions included illustrations, but only the text survives today.

In international communication, content is king. Mainstream media should prioritize content innovation to transmit Chinese voices, tell the real Chinese stories, and convey Chinese values. They must gear to China’s development, the foreign audiences’ needs, and global communication environments to enhance quality. Key principles include: (1) It must be truthful and accurate, free of falsehoods or misinformation; (2) it must be objective and fair, devoid of subjective bias; (3) it must address audience concerns and focus on hot topics (Yu,

2024, pp. 106-107). Success makes the man; failure makes a bad boy”—content is paramount. The heart of traditional Chinese culture, Confucianism and Daoism, has deeply influenced national consciousness. Chinese-style modernization is rooted in their essence. Content innovation, therefore, must build on these cores: pursuing truth through factual accuracy, objectivity, and audience-centric approaches; integrating goodness and beauty. Daoism, with its emphasis on critical thinking, naturalness, and freedom, prioritizes truth as the foundation for all actions. “Governance through non-coercive action” advocates minimal intervention to maintain objectivity. Both the presence and absence of content, along with objective, legal, and logical truths, must be presented honestly. Acknowledging shortcomings is not a weakness but a step toward improvement.

Here’s a simple analysis of the “Beauty of Water” in *Daodejing* using minimal mathematical language, focusing on intuitive analogies to natural laws and systemic balance:

Water naturally flows to the lowest elevations, embodying a minimum principle like how a ball rolls to the lowest point in a valley. This reflects the physical law of minimizing potential energy. Its power comes from fluid dynamics—gentle persistence (e.g., a stream carving through rock over time) mirrors the mathematical concept of integration—small, consistent actions accumulating to create large effects. This is similar to how mathematical systems (e.g., feedback loops in control theory) maintain stability through balanced inputs and outputs.

Water is a universal solvent (like an identity element in algebra), supporting diverse systems without imposing the own will. In set theory terms, it’s a “superset” that contains all life within its ecological functions (e.g., hydration, climate regulation), much like a universal set encompassing all subsets.

The above excerpt from the prompts “Give a simple analysis of mathematical function for ‘Beauty of water in *Daodejing*’, the fewer mathematical signs, the better” via the AI of 豆包.

Conclusion

The holistic thinking of the *I Ching* (*Book of Changes*) can be encapsulated in the term “harmonious integration” (和合). “Harmony” (和) means unity in diversity, while “integration” (合) implies differentiation within unity. “Unity in diversity” suggests that while there is a greater commonality, minor differences must be respected, and uniformity should not be imposed by force. “Differentiation within unity” means that globalization should respect localization to preserve global diversity, aligning with the needs of ecological development. “Harmony is precious, integration is fundamental” serves as the general principle for world unity (Zeng & Liu, 2022, p. 74).

We seek rationality, while the West emphasizes legality (p. 80). Rationality here encompasses consistency with emotions, logic, and common sense. The emphasis on “unity in diversity” and respect for localization resonates strongly in today’s globalized world, where cultural homogenization and fragmentation coexist. By framing this as an ecological imperative, the text links ancient wisdom to modern sustainability goals, suggesting that preserving cultural and biological diversity is essential for long-term harmony. This aligns with earlier discussions on water’s adaptability and Daoist non-coercive governance, forming a cohesive narrative about the power of soft integration over rigid uniformity.

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