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***TRANSCENDENT DESIGN***  
**an alternative design**  
**approach inspired by *wu-wei***

# Abstract

This dissertation attempts to bridge *wu-wei*: a spiritual, philosophical idea from Daoism; and design: a secular, practice-based discipline; with an aim to discuss how genuine good design can be achieved. With a focus on theories related to service design and autoethnography, it explores the possibilities of marrying the two ideas to land on a new design ideology: transcendent design. In realising the transcendence of design and human being, designers can make the world a better place.

**Keywords:**

*wu-wei*, Daoism, design ethics, service design, participatory design, actor-network theory, posthumanism, design manifesto

# Contents

## List of Illustrations

<b>Introduction</b>	1
<b>Definitions</b>	4
What is design	
<i>Wu-wei</i> and Dao	10
<b>Design and <i>wu-wei</i></b>	15
the apparent possibilities	
<b>The Dao of Design</b>	21
Let go of egocentricity	22
Awareness beyond the human-centred	25
Be, like water	30
<b>Transcendent Design</b>	32
A quiet manifesto	
<b>Conclusion</b>	33
<b>Bibliography</b>	35

# List of Illustrations

Fig 1 Neri Oxman, Krebs Cycle of Creativity, 2016	6
Fig 2 Syllabus of the Weimar Bauhaus (adapted), 1923	7
Fig 3 Design Council, Double Diamond Design Process, 2012	9
Fig 4 Design Council, Systemic Design Framework, 2021	9
Fig 5 Chen Darui, Butterfly Coffee Table, 2013	16
Fig 6 Wu Wei, Lingkong Side Table and Ming Armchair, 2012	16
Fig 7 Hong Wei, Jian Chair, 2014	17
Fig 8 Song Tao, Rong Stools, 2011	17
Fig 9 Zhu Xiaojie, Couple Tea Table, 2004	18
Fig 10 Wallace Chan, Secret Abyss, 2014	19

# Introduction

The world is full of problems, and we all know that. These are enormous in range: from climate change, societal divisions, inequality, poverty, hunger, to digital power concentration, fragile economy and the current ongoing pandemic of infectious disease<sup>1</sup>. We are living in crisis, although in certain times, certain places, this is more obvious than others.

Designers are often known as problem solvers. Each year at the Royal College of Art, we have the 'Grand Challenge' project, calling all students from the School of Design to attempt to solve the world's biggest, most pressing problems (the 2020's theme being 'Design for Safety'<sup>2</sup>). While this might be a good vision for what design can do, in reality, designers sometimes are the ones that add fuel to the fire.

Design is ubiquitous, ranging in an incredibly broad spectrum, as Paul Rand exclaimed, 'Everything is design. Everything!' Coming from a background with a Bachelor's degree in probably the most superficial category of design, fashion; I moved to study Service Design for my Master's, probably the most practical type of design with the very aim to save the world. The reason, in short, is that I am tired of the artsy nonsense of design that causes more problems than it solves. But the abundance of bad design is inescapable, even presenting in a more intangible form, design thinking can be used to create capital-driven products that cause harm to us – social media systems that make us depressed<sup>3</sup>, algorithms that push delivery drivers to a deadly speed<sup>4</sup> – to name a few.

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<sup>1</sup> 'The Global Risks Report 2021 16th Edition', *World Economic Forum*, 2021.

<sup>2</sup> 'RCA Grand Challenge 2020/21: Design for Safety', *Royal College of Art* <<https://www.rca.ac.uk/news-and-events/news/rca-grand-challenge-202021-design-safety/>> [accessed 11 February 2021].

<sup>3</sup> Mike Monteiro, *Ruined by Design: How Designers Destroyed the World, and What We Can Do to Fix It* (Mule Books, 2019).

<sup>4</sup> Lai Youxuan, '外卖骑手，困在系统里 (Takeaway Delivery Drivers are Trapped in the System)', *Zhihu* <<https://zhuanlan.zhihu.com/p/225120404>> [accessed 27 April 2021].

We come to value ‘human-centred design’ as service designers, which indeed helps in producing more user-friendly designs. Yet the sound of it, putting ‘human’ in the centre, which is perhaps already a common tendency in how we think, could have the potential risk of ignoring the non-human, everything generally referred to as ‘nature’. And as climate change is probably at the top of our existential crisis, we might need to pause the momentum of putting humans first, our egos, our drive to develop, compete and succeed.

As a designer, I began to wonder – is there an alternative way to design, that creates true values and makes the world a better place? Or even, not to design?

What inspired me was an intriguing concept: *wu-wei*. It is pronounced ‘ooo-way’, and had its origin in Daoist<sup>5</sup> writings that emerged in ancient China – also at a chaotic time, around 400 BC. I rediscovered it on my spiritual exploration journey during the on and off lockdown in the past year (what else can you do?). Somehow I have a feeling that this might be the cure for the current world’s design problem.

In this dissertation, I will start by clarifying the definition of design and *wu-wei*, which are both huge concepts. For *wu-wei*, I will base my examination on the original script of *Laozi* (also commonly known as *Dao De Jing*), with the aid by the reinterpretation mainly from Fu Peirong<sup>6</sup> who has extracted and compared a rich source of materials from the past thousands of years related to *Dao De Jing* and added his reflection on modern life. For design, I will take an overview of the history and analyse a series of critical design theories, with a focus on service design. I will also compare design and *wu-wei* to related theories that encourage thinking beyond norm, such as Actor Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology and Posthumanism. Autoethnography will be used as part of my research methodology. As a Chinese immigrant that has studied design and worked in the United

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<sup>5</sup> The translation of Chinese terms in this dissertation follows the *hanyu pinyin* romanisation system (for example, *Dao* instead of *Tao*), except for a few proper names and quotations.

<sup>6</sup> Fu Peirong is an acclaimed scholar in sinology and Professor at Department of Philosophy, Taiwan University.

Kingdom, I hope to bring an alternative point of view to the often Eurocentric design discourse.

With this dissertation, I aim to present an alternative approach to design that I called Transcendent Design. I will conclude it in a few principles that correlates with my findings. These principles might not be in great detail but more of a high-level view, in a novel attempt to bridge a spiritual, philosophical idea to a secular, practice-based discipline. I hope to illustrate a new way of design that does not smell like the stench of money, but to truly care about human beings, the planet, and the reality of life.

Let the journey begins.

# Definitions

## What is design

The conventional meaning of design, as found in the dictionary<sup>7</sup>, both the noun and verb form emphasis on a 'plan' of the 'look' and 'functioning' of something (a building, garment, or other objects) prior to it being made, and usually involve producing a drawing. This immediately draws out the two conventional elements of design, form and function. The weight of the two has been debated, and reached to a consensus nowadays, with the maxim goes 'form follows function'<sup>8</sup>, which I am sure every design student has heard of.

Extended meaning of the word finds that design is doing something 'with a specific purpose in mind'. This indicates that design is intentional, purposeful, thoughtful.

Throughout history, design has played an important role in all human activities. You find quote from Victor Papanek: 'All that we do, almost all the time, is design, for design is basic to all human activity'<sup>9</sup>; or from Herbert Simon: 'Everybody designs who devises courses of action aimed at changing existing situations into preferred ones.'<sup>10</sup> From prehistoric tools we made, to exquisite furniture and skyscrapers we have today, design is embedded in human existence.

Design as an academic subject, on the other hand, has a comparatively short life. As the industrial progress goes, design has been narrowed down to each highly specialised discipline performed by professionals, be it

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<sup>7</sup> 'Design | Definition of Design by Oxford Dictionary on Lexico.Com Also Meaning of Design', *Lexico Dictionaries | English* <<https://www.lexico.com/definition/design>> [accessed 6 February 2021].

<sup>8</sup> This dictum is coined by Louis Sullivan (1896)

<sup>9</sup> Victor Papanek, *Design for the Real World: Human Ecology and Social Change*, 2nd ed. compl. rev., repr (London: Thames & Hudson, 2011), p.3.

<sup>10</sup> A famous quote by Herbert Simon (1969)



fashion, graphic, product, textile... Evolved to today, this has become so well-established that we almost accept it as a norm, as if this is what design is about all along. Design often centres around a designer who makes things look prettier and works a bit better.

In recent years, the boundaries between design disciplines, or even design and other disciplines have been shaken up. Design seems to go back in trend, drifting away from an individualist profession to an inclusive human activity. It is almost like how everything else works in history – it is a circle. Karl Lagerfeld, who has passed away two years ago, was referred to as the last ‘star designer’ of the fashion industry<sup>11</sup>. Indeed, looking at the brands lately, you see less and less of a dominating figure representing the brand and its style, but rather a collective effort. If fashion, that arguably value individualistic creative ‘stars’ the most, has moved on, we might expect to see more of a change in other design disciplines.

The feeling of this change came on strongly when I arrived at the Royal College of Art (RCA) and began my study of a Master’s programme. From the first day, I became aware of the strong encouragement of interdisciplinary thinking. The boundaries that are once clear are now continuing to dissolve. Anthony Dunne, former Head of Design Interactions at the RCA, has stated: “New hybrids of design are emerging. People don’t fit in neat categories; they’re a mixture of artists, engineers, designers, thinkers.”<sup>12</sup>

This emerging hybrid can be illustrated in the ‘Krebs Cycle of Creativity’ by Neri Oxman from MIT Media Lab, where she place design alongside art, science and engineering in the matrix based on parameters such as of culture and nature, production and perception, applied and non-applied, to describe the ‘perpetuation of creative energy’<sup>13</sup>. Another circular graph that was created several decades ago by the Bauhaus, on the other hand,

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<sup>11</sup> ‘Karl Lagerfeld, the Last Star Designer’ <<https://www.themds.com/back-stage/karl-lagerfeld-the-last-star-designer.html>> [accessed 11 February 2021].

<sup>12</sup> Anthony Dunne, quoted in Paul A. Rodgers and Craig Bremner, ‘The Concept of the Design Discipline’, *Dialectic*, 1.1 (2017) <<https://doi.org/10.3998/dialectic.14932326.0001.104>>.

<sup>13</sup> Neri Oxman, ‘Age of Entanglement’, *Journal of Design and Science*, 2016 <<https://doi.org/10.21428/7e0583ad>>.

shows the importance of understanding individual material and craft to become a designer while demonstrating a holistic view by the format of a singular circle<sup>14</sup>. As the Bauhaus was arguably the most crucial movement to influence contemporary art and design education, a similar agenda can still be found in today's curriculum to study the foundation of art and design.

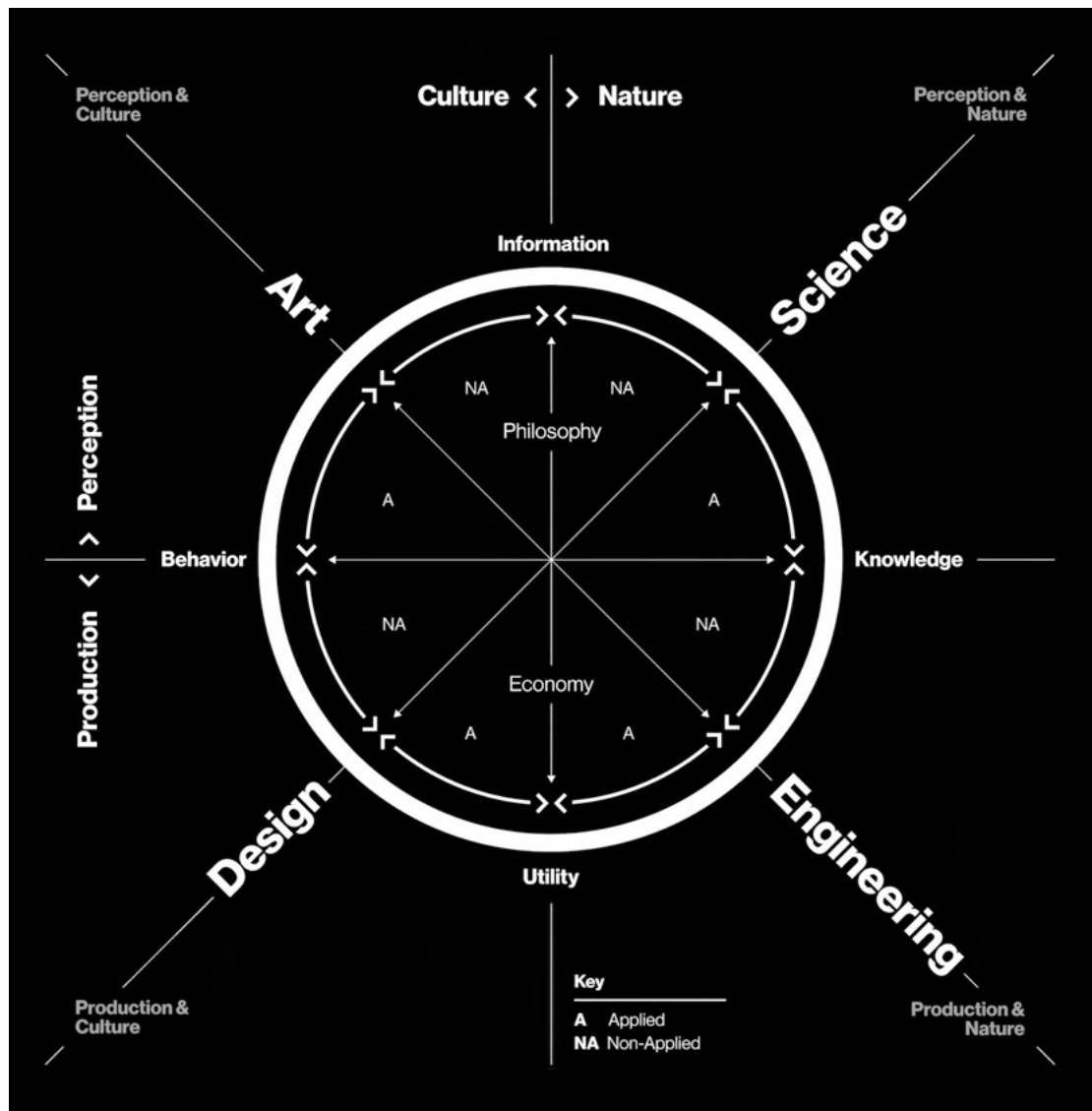


Fig 1 Neri Oxman, Krebs Cycle of Creativity, 2016

<sup>14</sup> 'Principles and Curriculum', *Bauhaus: Building the New Artist* <[https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions\\_events/exhibitions/bauhaus/new\\_artist/history/principles\\_curriculum/](https://www.getty.edu/research/exhibitions_events/exhibitions/bauhaus/new_artist/history/principles_curriculum/)> [accessed 22 April 2021].

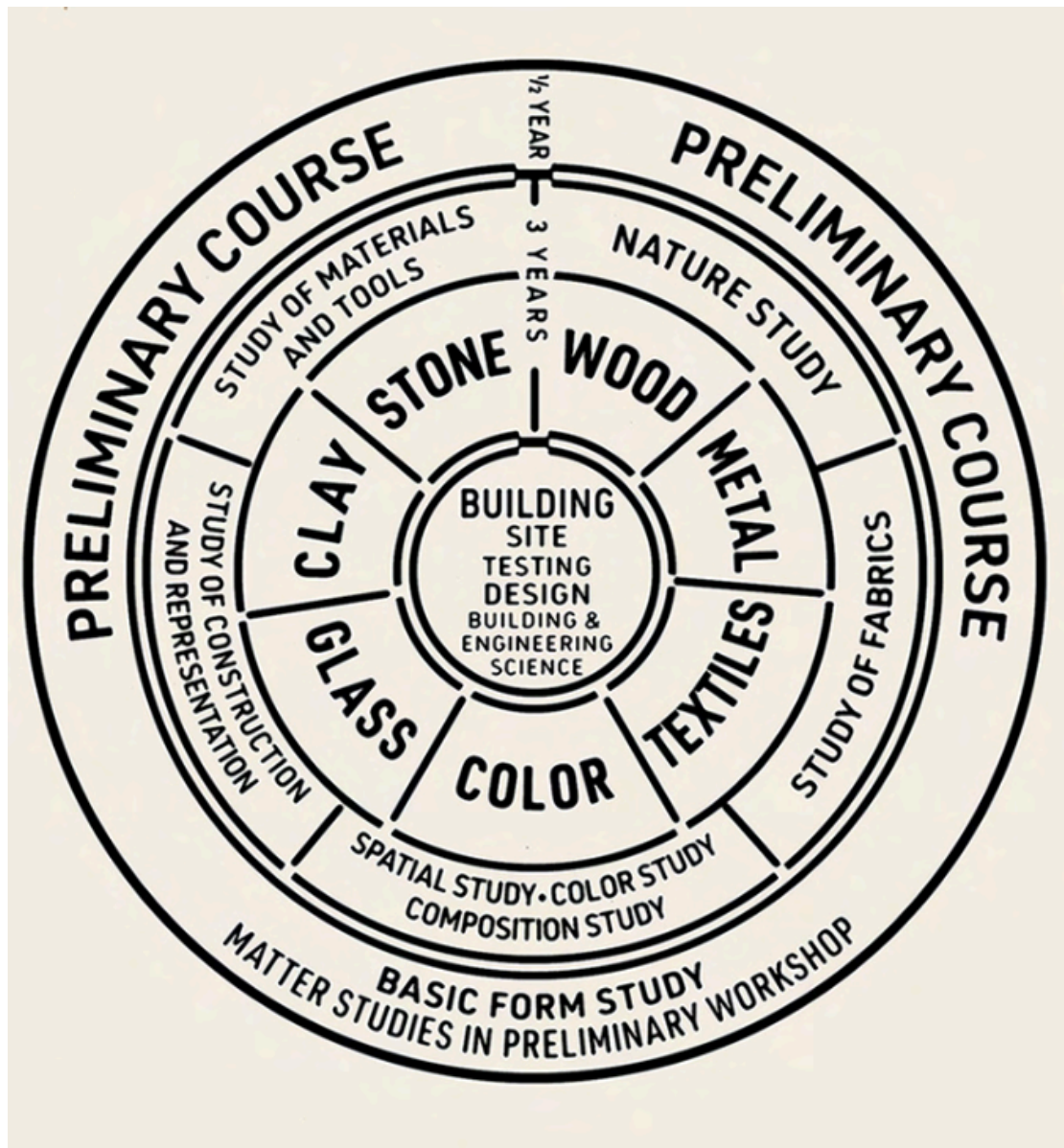


Fig 2 Syllabus of the Weimar Bauhaus (adapted), 1923

Over the years, it appears that the outcome of design has shifted from tactile, material-based objects to more abstract, intangible systems; and the process of design changed from the handcrafted, to the mass-produced, and now the thinking and strategy.

Service design, a relatively new discipline, has emerged in adapting to this change. The basic principles are similar – design needs to imagine a better solution for current situation, and now the problems happen to lie in experiences, services and systems. The essence of it stays the same –

design reflects the social, economic, political and technological change<sup>15</sup>. It is not a brand new idea, but built on a fusion of existing realms such as human-centred design, interaction design, business and marketing. In service design, we see the design practice has become more open than ever.

As a result, it is hard to give a fixed definition for service design. It is said that, if you ask ten service designers what service design is, you might get eleven different answers. Taking from the RCA website, what service design does is to 'solve problems and transform the human experience of businesses and industry as well as developing impactful solutions for complex social issues, better public services and citizen centric policy'<sup>16</sup>.

It can be argued that one of the dominating values of service design lies in the process. At the Design Council UK, design's basic roles are itemised as 'framing', 'problem solving', 'form and function' and 'style'<sup>17</sup>. The same organisation also contributed to the Double Diamond<sup>18</sup> diagram to explain the design process, which is used as the main framework in the Service Design programme at the RCA. Although the reality of design might look considerably messier than this elegantly simple graph, it is especially useful for educate design process to people that work outside of design. Very recently, the Design Council has expanded the classic diagram to reflect a systemic approach for design to achieve the its potential for real change<sup>19</sup>, responding to the climate urgency. It has acknowledged design's position in a wider social context.

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<sup>15</sup> Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *The Story of Design* (Carlton Publishing Group, 2018), pp. 10-11.

<sup>16</sup> 'Service Design', *RCA Website* <[/study/programme-finder/service-design-ma/](https://www.rca.ac.uk/study/programme-finder/service-design-ma/)> [accessed 24 April 2021].

<sup>17</sup> John Mathers, 'Defining Design: Going beyond Disciplines', *Design Council*, 2015 <<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/defining-design-going-beyond-disciplines>> [accessed 6 February 2021].

<sup>18</sup> Jonathan Ball, 'The Double Diamond: A Universally Accepted Depiction of the Design Process', *Design Council*, 2019 <<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/news-opinion/double-diamond-universally-accepted-depiction-design-process>> [accessed 24 January 2021].

<sup>19</sup> 'Beyond Net Zero - A Systemic Design Approach' (Design Council, 2021) <<https://www.designcouncil.org.uk/resources/guide/beyond-net-zero-systemic-design-approach>>.

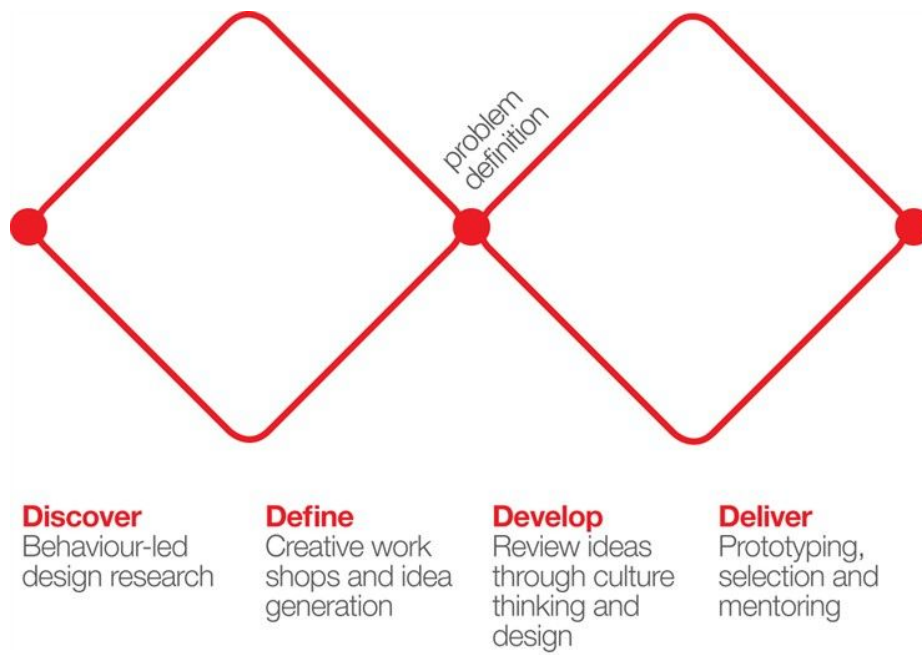


Fig 3 Design Council, Double Diamond design process model, 2012

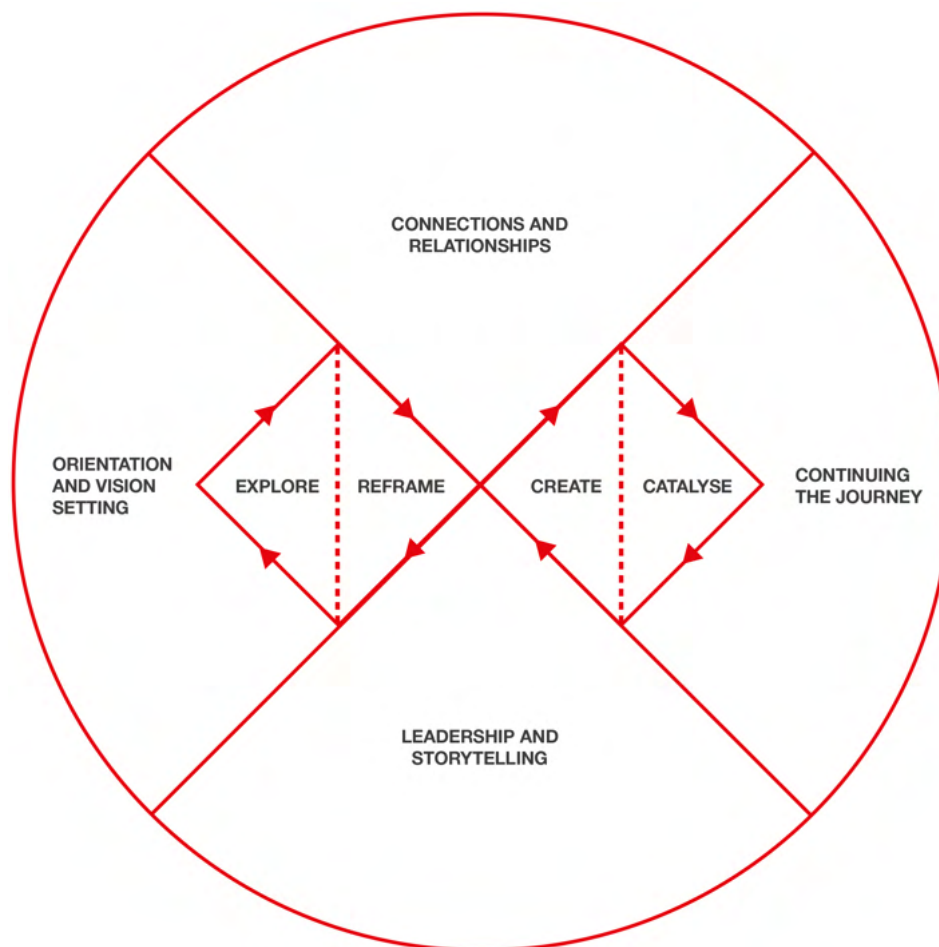


Fig 4 Design Council, Systemic Design Framework, 2021

Service design is also closely tied to the trend of ‘design thinking’ booming in recent years, thanks to IDEO’s Tim Brown. Design has been increasingly adapted by many businesses that are not necessarily associated with design. It might seem like design has expanded its meaning and application to a wider audience, but for many, it is merely another business buzzword or an initiative for generating more profits.

To summarise the definition: design is situated in culture, utilising technologies to change the existing situation into preferred ones, and carried out by a series of methodologies that involves creativity. Designers are the people who participate in such activities, either as a full profession, hybrid with other disciplines, or part of human nature that seeks a better future.

## ***Wu-wei* and Dao**

Growing up in China, I have always heard of *Dao De Jing* (道德经) as one of the classics, and Laozi as one of the sages<sup>20</sup>. Nevertheless, the details of them were rarely touched on in my early education in Chinese schools. Compared to Confucius’s pragmatic, logical, secular way of explaining good manners and kindness – for example, to be humble, respect teachers and the elderly, Laozi on the other hand, cast a vaguely mysterious, otherworldly, obscure feeling in my memory. I never bothered to know more about the *Dao*.

During the lockdown period in the UK due to the COVID-19 pandemic starting in 2020, I have gone on a journey of spiritual discovery, an unsurprising act out of boredom and occasional anxiety. Attempting to figure out what the meaning of life is, I went very far, from basic Western philosophies, to mindfulness, then to the Hawaiian *Ho’oponopono* and even *A Course in Miracles*. The most recent stop for me was Daoism, an important thought that was originated from somewhere closer to my home.

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<sup>20</sup> Whether Laozi is one person is debatable. Some believe Laozi was a group of intellectuals.

I realised that all these mystical theories actually have something in common, that is they aim to explain the transcendence of the common dualism in the material world. There is something bigger outside our daily routine, black and white judgement and dilemmas, that might be the ultimate truth of being. It could be named as 'emptiness' in Buddhism, 'zero' in Ho'oponopono, or 'Dao' in Dao De Jing. Maybe names are not even important here, as in the very first chapter of Dao De Jing it says:

Dao called Dao is not Dao.

Names can name no lasting name.<sup>21</sup>

(道可道非常道 名可名非常名)

After getting a somewhat hint from that 'enlightenment', I found the Daoist ideas slightly easier to understand. Dao (道) literally means and has been translated into 'way', although its real meaning might be far from this. Rather, it is something unnameable as it exists before the first name was ever created, and it was attempted to be called Dao by Laozi for the ease of explanation. We can say that Dao is the origin and destination of 'everything', or *wanwu* (万物) in Laozi's language – the myriad things, heaven and earth, that includes us human. Between the poetic and succinct lines of Dao De Jing, Laozi has demonstrated what Dao might be like and how to realise it. Under the context of chaotic wartime, it might have been intended as a guidance for political leaders, and this application has been later expanded by Zhuangzi to individuals.

Among all the profound ideas raised in this classic work, I am particularly fascinated by the concept of *wu-wei* (无为). It literally means 'non-action', or 'non-doing', again signifies a not-so-literal meaning which has been elaborated into phrases include 'effortless action', 'not to force anything'<sup>22</sup>, and 'not to try'<sup>23</sup>. *Wu-wei* could be Bruce Lee's 'be water', could be a drunk

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<sup>21</sup> Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo (Shambhala Publications, 2007). Modified by author. All later translation of Laozi, *Dao De Jing* in this dissertation will be referenced to this.

<sup>22</sup> Alan Watts, '1.2.11. – Taoist Way – Pt. 3' <<https://www.alanwatts.org/1-2-11-taoist-way-pt-3/>> [accessed 6 February 2021].

<sup>23</sup> Edward Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try: The Ancient Art of Effortlessness and the Surprising Power of Spontaneity* (Canongate Books, 2014), Kindle eBook.

person maintaining balance, could be ‘the Force’ in the Star Wars series although you would rather ‘be with the Force’ than ‘use the Force’, and there should be no binary – no light and dark side of the ‘Force’.

One of the reasons that a modern man might reject this idea is the common misconception of that it indicates to do nothing. Fu Peirong has emphasised in his lectures that *wu-wei* should be understood as an abbreviation of *wu-xin-er-wei* (无心而为)<sup>24</sup>, which means ‘doing without intentions’. *Xin*(心) here is a common notion in Chinese language, which combines the meaning of the physical heart as well as the mind. The ‘intention’ here that should be left out, is more about the unnecessary extrinsic drive and the toxic ego, which I will explain in the following chapter.

*Wu-wei* could be seen as similar to ‘flow’, a modern psychology concept raised by Mihály Csíkszentmihályi, as *wu-wei* in action could be very similar to that amazing performance of an improvising jazz player or an NBA basketball player. This type of skilful spontaneity is best demonstrated by the tale of Butcher Ding in *Zhuangzi* as an example of *wu-wei* in action:

When I first began cutting up oxen, all I could see was the ox itself. After three years, I no longer saw the ox as a whole. And now – now I meet it with my spirit and don’t look with my eyes. My senses and conscious awareness have shut down and my spiritual desires take me away. I follow the Heavenly pattern of the ox, thrusting into the big hollows, guiding the knife through the big openings, and adapting my motions to the fixed structure of the ox. In this way, I never touch the smallest ligament or tendon, much less a main joint.<sup>25</sup>

Edward Slingerland, in an attempt to interpret *wu-wei* in a modern way that could be accepted by our scientific mind, discusses recent studies in cognitive science in relation to *wu-wei* in his book *Trying Not to Try*. There

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<sup>24</sup> Peirong Fu, ‘傅佩荣讲《道德经》 | 解读老子思想 (Fu Peirong on Dao De Jing)’, Ximalaya.

<sup>25</sup> Originally from *Zhuangzi*, translated in Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*.



are two distinct systems in our brain: System 1, or hot cognition is fast, tacit, automatic, effortless and mostly unconscious; System 2, or cold cognition is slow, deliberate, effortful and conscious<sup>26</sup>. This idea was famously introduced in Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*, although pivoting to a different argument of people often do not use System 2 to make better decisions. In Slingerland's interpretation, *wu-wei* is an alternative to this system division: 'For a person in *wu-wei*, the mind is embodied and the body is mindful; the two systems – hot and cold, fast and slow – are completely integrated.'<sup>27</sup> Thus apparently, the two selves in Butcher Ding were smoothly and effectively working together.

Setting aside the mystical effect of *wu-wei*, to better understand *wu-wei* and its original position in Daoism, two key concepts need to be introduced: *de* and *ziran*.

*De* (德) is the embodiment of Dao. In fact, the word is so important that it constitutes the title, as Dao De Jing is literally the classic of *Dao* and *de*. *De* literally means virtue, and *dao-de* (道德), evolved to today, also has become a common expression of morality in Chinese. One aspect that clearly distinguish 'flow' with *wu-wei*, is that the skilful spontaneity emerged like someone in the flow state is only one surface result of *wu-wei*, while the aim of *wu-wei* is primarily a metaphysical pursuit: to act according to Dao, and have *de* in return<sup>28</sup>. Whether *de* equals to ethics in Laozi is questionable, but it can be used to represent any of the value one holds in a modern context. According to Slingerland, we can substitute *de* with our own belief or value, and a true act of *wu-wei* should have the backings of this ethic.

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<sup>26</sup> Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, Location 485-488.

<sup>27</sup> Slingerland, *Trying Not to Try*, Location 515-516.

<sup>28</sup> Weigang Wan, 'Wu Wei (5 lessons)', Wanweigang-Jingyingriki Season 1.

*Ziran* (自然) is used to describe the workings of Dao<sup>29</sup>. It refers to a state of 'as-it-isness'<sup>30</sup>, being of oneself in its original, truest state from Dao. Interestingly, this term has become a common word meaning 'nature' in modern Chinese language. Indeed, although human can also be *ziran*, but the quality is often lost in our socialising interaction, whereas the nature today still mostly keep its form of *ziran*. Combined with *Zhuangzi*'s fantastic tales of man being happily with nature, the connection and attention to nature has made Daoism popular again among the West in recent decades due to the rising awareness of environmental issues.

To sum up, *wu-wei* is not doing nothing, but doing without force and deliberateness, that is aligning with Dao, attaining *de*, and being *ziran*. In doing so, nothing is left undone<sup>31</sup>. It represents a state of spontaneity, unselfconsciousness, effortless and genuineness.

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<sup>29</sup> Alan Chan, 'Laozi', in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, ed. by Edward N. Zalta, Winter 2018 (Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2018) <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/win2018/entries/laozi/>> [accessed 9 February 2021].

<sup>30</sup> Fu, C. W. (2000). "Lao Tzu's Conception of Tao", in B. Gupta & J. N. Mohanty (Eds.) *Philosophical Questions East and West* (pp. 46–62). Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers. Quoted from 'Ziran', *Wikipedia*, 2021 <<https://en.wikipedia.org/w/index.php?title=Ziran&oldid=1007971349>> [accessed 21 April 2021].

<sup>31</sup> *Laozi*, 48

# Design and *wu-wei*: the apparent possibilities

At a first glance, *wu-wei* and design seem to be in a naturally contradictory position. For one, *wu-wei* signifies unintentional action, where design stresses on intentional doing. *Wu-wei* is selfless. Laozi sees everything in universe as a wholeness, a similar view to Spinoza's Pantheism. The thought is contrary to the common 'user-centred', 'human-centred' thinking we value today, especially in service design.

Yet I believe that there are still ways that we can use *wu-wei* as a lens to reevaluate design, for the aim of producing real good design. Many aspects of Laozi's words of wisdom that worked as enlightenment to ancient leaders, philosophers, poets and artists may still be applicable and valuable to today's designers.

One of the most apparent applications of *wu-wei* on design is the aesthetics. For three years, before I came to study at the RCA, I was working at the China Design Centre<sup>32</sup> sharing the stories of contemporary Chinese design to English-speaking audience. I can hardly remember how many times I had to abandon the overly poetic, Daoist-inspired designer work description or artist statement, and substitute it with something more concrete – for example, explaining the materials and the working process, so that it can be understood by the non-Chinese readers. Designers, especially Chinese designers, have been inspired by *wu-wei* to create design pieces that flow with the effortless aesthetics. Examples include the elegantly balanced form of Chen Darui's Butterfly Coffee Table coming out from the designer's Daoist outlook on life; smooth surfaces and rounded corners of Wu Wei's furniture design to prevent injury to children and the elderly and pleasant for people to touch; and the utterly beautiful designs by Hong Wei and Song Tao who both have said that Daoist thoughts were part of the inspiration<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>32</sup> A London-based company that promotes Chinese designs to the West. <https://www.chinadesigncentre.com>.

<sup>33</sup> Charlotte Fiell and Peter Fiell, *Contemporary Chinese Furniture Design: A New Wave of Creativity* (Laurence King Publishing, 2019), p. 30, 184, 66, 166 (the examples are listed in this page order).



Fig 5 Chen Darui, Butterfly Coffee Table, 2013



Fig 6 Wu Wei and design team of Thrudesign, Lingkong Side Table and Ming Armchair, 2012



Fig 7  
Hong Wei,  
Jian Chair, 2014

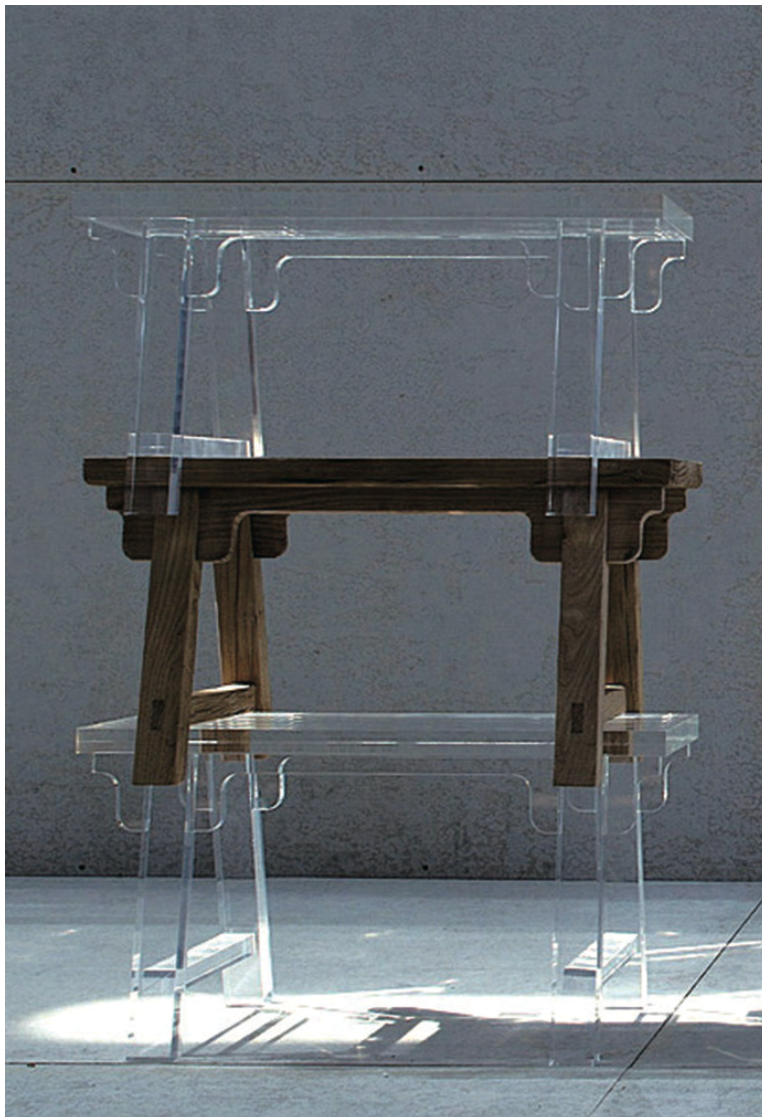


Fig 8  
Song Tao,  
Rong Stools, 2011

Apart from aesthetics, another characteristic that might be related to *wu-wei* that I found in these Chinese designers is the concern of design ethics and the respect to nature. Chinese designers often favour the use of natural materials, such as wood, bamboo, rattan and lacquer. The designers carefully use what nature has given, cherish the materials and create pieces that last as long as possible, as suggested by Jerry Chen<sup>34</sup>. Renowned designer Jeff Dayu Shi has chosen bamboo as his main material for the consideration of sustainability, and was also fascinated by its resilience and durability<sup>35</sup>. Zhu Xiaojie, also nicknamed as ‘the Laozi of design’, loves to use thick slabs of timber and embraced the unexpected events of life<sup>36</sup>. His Couple Tea Table was designed from an incident of a broken wood piece, to an intriguing, organic form resembling the yin and yang – what an example of *wu-wei* in design.



Fig 9 Zhu Xiaojie, Couple Tea Table, 2004

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<sup>34</sup> Author interview with Jerry J.I Chen, furniture designer, 30 January 2020 <<https://www.chinadesigncentre.com/works/interview-with-jerry-chen-from-antique-connoisseurship-to-contemporary-chinese-furniture-design.html>>.

<sup>35</sup> Author interview with Dayu Shi, designer, 16 January 2020 <<https://www.chinadesigncentre.com/works/jeff-dayu-shi-bamboo-furniture-master-who-designs-with-kindness.html>>.

<sup>36</sup> Fiell, *Contemporary Chinese Furniture Design*, p. 230.

I recalled another story of *wu-wei* from my time at the China Design Centre. Wallace Chan, a jewellery artist who created the 'Wallace Cut' that brought him worldwide fame, has described his creative process:

Through the process of perfecting a piece over and over again, I forget about the original colours, forms, and my knowledge from the past. When I reach a state of almost memory loss, some incredible imagination will appear. And that can be a source of inspiration. At that time, there's no me, and there's no gemstone. When coming back to real life, the piece would probably be a representation of myself.<sup>37</sup>

In this high level incorporation of intuition, spontaneity and 'forgetting about himself', he treated the gemstone just like Butcher Ding treated the oxen. One of the exemplar of his work is the 'Secret Abyss', which took ten years to finish. Chan inserted 1,111 emeralds into a single piece of quartz through an opening only 6.5 mm in diameter, an almost impossible job that probably nobody had ever thought of or dared to attempt.



Fig 10  
Wallace Chan,  
Secret Abyss, 2014

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<sup>37</sup> Author interview with Wallace Chan, jewellery artist, 15 February 2018 <<https://www.chinadesigncentre.com/works/wallace-chan-i-never-stop-seeking-change.html>>.



By now, I hope that I have sparked some imagination of how *wu-wei* might inspire design practice. Through the appreciation of the philosophy, designers have: explored the aesthetics of simplicity, elegance, balanced and harmony; considered design ethics especially in the appreciation of nature; developed a wisdom to situate oneself in the creative process as well as a way of encountering life. However, I am aware that my examples so far only fall in the applied arts category, the more artistic approach of design. Although this type of design-art also enrich our human existence and cultural experience, it focuses on serving the privileged and not fully uncovers the real value and potential of design: for social good, which is crucial in service design. In the following chapter, I will set off an unexplored discourse of *wu-wei* in relation to service design – the new, less apparent possibilities.



# The Dao of Design

Throughout the years, design thinkers have attempted to create design principles that clarify their position and challenge the status quo. One of the most famous is Dieter Rams' ten principles of good design in 1976, advocating the qualities such as 'environmentally friendly, innovative, honest, long-lasting'<sup>38</sup>, which is still valid for product design today. In one of the first books about service design, *This is Service Design Thinking*, Marc Stickdorn has raised five practical principles of service design thinking that are: user-centred; co-creative; sequencing; evidencing; holistic<sup>39</sup>. And in the more recent *Good Services* by Louise Downe, she drew from her rich experience in working for the United Kingdom government to summarise fifteen principles for good service design<sup>40</sup>, which turns a seemingly intangible service to a tangible asset that can be easily evaluated according to these insightful principles.

Nevertheless, in my research, most well-known principles are all around the assessment of 'good design'. There has been little authoritative analysis of how to be a 'good designer', except that David B. Berman has manifested 3 pledges for designers to 'not just do good design, do good'<sup>41</sup>. Therefore, I wish to close the gap and discuss designer's role in achieving good design. I will marry *wu-wei* from *Dao De Jing* with concepts relevant to design, in order to come up with new principles that add value into the existing discourse.

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<sup>38</sup> "Dieter Rams - 10 Principles for Good Design", *IF WORLD DESIGN GUIDE* <<https://ifworlddesignguide.com/design-specials/dieter-rams-10-principles-for-good-design>> [accessed 25 April 2021].

<sup>39</sup> Marc Stickdorn and Jakob Schneider, *This Is Service Design Thinking: Basics, Tools, Cases* (Wiley, 2012), p.34.

<sup>40</sup> Louise Downe, *Good Services: Decoding the Mystery of What Makes a Good Service* (Laurence King Publishing, 2020).

<sup>41</sup> David B. Berman, *Do Good: How Designers Can Change the World* (Berkeley, Calif: AIGA: New Riders, 2009), p. 147.

## Let go of egocentricity

Block the passage  
Blot the gate  
Blunt the sharp  
Untie the knot  
Blend with the light  
Become one with the dust –  
This is called original unity.

*Laozi, 56*

If trying to rate design disciplines on a spectrum of egocentricity, service design would probably be sitting on the minimum end while fashion on the other. Yet as people come from all other disciplines to join service design, and not to mention our innate preference of ego, to let go of egocentricity is not so easy. But it is especially crucial for service designer to realise the autonomous drive of egocentricity in human, to be able to deliver good design. This is especially true when working in a complicated social situation, where real value of service design could be delivered.

In *Dao De Jing*, the phrase 'blend with the light, become one with the dust' (和其光，同其尘) has appeared twice in chapter 4 and 56. The prior one is used to describe what Dao is like, and the latter one is to illustrate how a sage, that is enlightened in Dao, behaves in real life. The sage does not strive to shine bright amongst the crowd, nor are they sharp or arrogant. So are the sage being with the magical unity, they cannot be 'embraced, escaped, helped, harmed, exalted or despised' – the external factors can no longer influence them. Therefore, they are 'revered under Heaven'<sup>42</sup>. Wonderful, right?

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<sup>42</sup> Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, 56, trans. by Stephen Addiss and Stanley Lombardo.

Not only in the chapter 4 and 56, throughout *Dao De Jing*, explicitly or implicitly, an ideal state of being is demonstrated with minimum amount of ego and desire of becoming stronger, faster, better – which I guess it is the current norm of society, at least in the ones I have experienced. It is overall too hard a concept for the general egocentric public to accept.

Before drifting into a spiritual talk, I would like to stretch Laozi's idea on service design to emphasise the importance of a selfless behaviour in the design process. We all like the stories of heroes, being the saviour of the world, singlehandedly. And in real life, we have heard stories of the successful geniuses being egocentric and just do whatever they want – think about Steves Jobs or Elon Musk – and they are admired, mostly. Some designers, even service designers, could fall into the trap of thinking they are the saviour of the world, that they are smarter than everyone else, because they do have some advantages in some skills and knowledge. But to solve a real issue, especially a complicated social one, a single person's imagination is just not enough. How might one think of a solution for hunger in Africa by merely staring at a shiny new model of MacBook?

As explained earlier in Definitions, *wu-wei* means 'doing without intentions', whereas design means 'doing with intentions'. So how are we going to incorporate *wu-wei* in design? This intricate paradox can be resolved by a further clarification of the meaning of 'intention' in both cases. The 'intention' in *wu-wei*'s definition is a translation of *xin* (heart-mind), which refers to our thinking mind that is full of extrinsic motivation. This inner chatter that is often driven by our ego, could appear obviously or operate discreetly in our unconsciousness background, but it hardly stops by itself unless you do something about it, such as meditation. Conversely, a person in *wu-wei*, is performing to the point of 'forgetting himself, the passage of time, as well as extrinsic goals of the action'<sup>43</sup>. On the other hand, the 'intention' in design, should serve a purpose of making the world a better place, rather than the designer's own desire of becoming rich and famous. Design must be meaningful<sup>44</sup>. Therefore, it is clear that the intention that is lacking in *wu-wei* is different from the one in design, and it

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<sup>43</sup> Mario Wenning, 'Daoism as Critical Theory', *Comparative Philosophy*, 2.2 (2011), pp.50–71.

<sup>44</sup> Papanek, *Design for the Real World*, p.6.

can be argued that the reduction of the former will benefit the gain of the latter.

One example that incorporates the dissolving of ego of designer in the design process is participatory design. The concept originated in Scandinavia in the 1970 – 80s with an aim to study people's tacit knowledge<sup>45</sup>. Participatory design is a human-centred approach engaging users and stakeholders throughout the process<sup>46</sup>. It has become increasingly popular, especially in service design with co-creation being a core aspect of its philosophy<sup>47</sup>. It can be used in all phases of design, with diverse forms of activities such as culture probes and co-design workshops. This methodology that involves users from the beginning refrains the designer of putting their ego first, but encourages the designer to immerse in the context of who they are designing for, and often results in truly meaningful projects. This collaborativeness, transparency and openness, to me, feels like *wu-wei*.

A more radical suggestion of participatory design, also one closer to *wu-wei*, can be found in a talk by Don Norman, one of the most famous advocator for human-centred design. While in the traditional participatory approach, designers are still expected to design something from the observations or collaboration of the participants, Norman claimed that he does not believe designers should design, and one of the great skills of a designer is not knowing anything (about the domains)<sup>48</sup>. Instead, designers are facilitators, coordinators and partners, to bring the experts and local people together, to aid and provide platforms and tools for the community to design for themselves. It should be noted that in the talk he is specifically referring to complicated social challenges as case studies, which are also the real problems worth solving for a good designer.

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<sup>45</sup> Clay Spinuzzi, 'The Methodology of Participatory Design', *Technical Communication*, 52.2, pp.183–174.

<sup>46</sup> Bella Martin and Bruce Hanington, *Universal Methods of Design: 100 Ways to Research Complex Problems, Develop Innovative Ideas, and Design Effective Solutions* (Rockport Publishers, 2012), p.128.

<sup>47</sup> Stickdorn and Schneider, *This Is Service Design Thinking*, p.198.

<sup>48</sup> Don Norman, '21st Century Design' (presented at the interaction 19, Seattle, WA, 2019) <<https://interaction19.ixda.org/program/keynote--don-norman/>> [accessed 20 January 2021].

Therefore, to be truly human-centred, is to care sincerely about other people. Design with people, or guide them to design for themselves. Let go of your ego, blend with the light and the dust, be a realist.

## Awareness beyond the human-centred

Humans follow earth  
Earth follows heaven  
Heaven follows Dao  
Dao follows its own nature (*ziran*).

*Laozi, 25*

Laozi is probably the least human-centred philosopher ever. In the previous section, I encourage designers to let go of their own ego, and now I would like to expand that to loosen up the ego of all humans.

There is no doubt that human-centred design is a valid point. It revolutionised the previous situation of human exclusion in the design process, making it possible to deliver better, more inclusive designs. However, as the climate urgency arose, we slowly began to realise that the non-humans in the world will greatly affect the life of humans. In order to improve our life, or shall we say, to keep surviving, we must take them into account. This is especially true for designers, who have been accused to do more harm to the environment than good. Human-centredness is not good enough.

For this reason, more and more claims of design that is ‘centred’ around other nouns have been raised recently, such as ‘Earth-Centred design’<sup>49</sup>, ‘Life Centered Design’<sup>50</sup>, and Planet Centric Design<sup>51</sup>. Design agency *Impossible* has written articles about how customer-centric design thinking is killing our planet, claiming that what it does is ‘reducing our humanity to individuality’<sup>52</sup>. Design that only aims at feeding consumerism has to stop. The culture of lean startup, ethos like the notorious ‘move fast and break things’ in Silicon Valley, have also been criticised. We cannot afford to break things anymore. Instead of ‘minimum viable products’, ‘minimum virtuous products’ should be presented<sup>53</sup>. I suppose we should try to ‘move slow and fix things’ now. The conversations around design ethics – the consideration of the impact beyond the current moment, the awareness of others beyond the human-centred – are more relevant than ever.

One of the key Daoist views is that all things in the universe all come from Dao. Dao is the so-called me-ontology – it is the ‘existence’ itself before any other ontologies. The implication here is that, if humans and non-humans are from a same origin, then the division does not make sense, thus we are all equal. There should not be a power dynamics of human-over-nature. Zhuangzi’s famous quote ‘Heaven and Earth are born together with me, and the myriad things and I are one’<sup>54</sup>, expressed the interdependent relationship between human and non-humans, and a wonderful unity state of Dao.

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<sup>49</sup> Tamsin Smith, ‘Earth-Centered Design Manifesto (Beta)’, *Medium*, 2019 <<https://tamsina.medium.com/earth-centered-design-manifesto-beta-451e657697ed>> [accessed 25 April 2021].

<sup>50</sup> Johnathyn Owens, ‘10 Principles of Life Centered Design’, *Medium*, 2019 <<https://medium.com/the-sentient-files/10-principles-of-life-centered-design-3c5f543414f3>> [accessed 28 April 2021].

<sup>51</sup> ‘Planet Centric Design’ <<https://planetcentricdesign.com/>>.

<sup>52</sup> Kwame Ferreira, ‘Design Thinking Is Killing Our Home Planet’, *Impossible* <<https://www.impossible.com/planet-centric-design/a-mindset-shift-ab285>> [accessed 26 April 2021].

<sup>53</sup> Hemant Taneja, ‘The Era of “Move Fast and Break Things” Is Over’, *Harvard Business Review*, 22 January 2019 <<https://hbr.org/2019/01/the-era-of-move-fast-and-break-things-is-over>> [accessed 26 April 2021].

<sup>54</sup> Zhuangzi, *Qiwulun*.

This interrelationship that decentres human resembles ideologies such as Actor Network Theory, Object Oriented Ontology, and Posthumanism. Interestingly, these ideas have been discussed in relation to design.

Actor Network Theory (ANT) argues that all types of things are entangled together in constantly shifting networks in the making of the world<sup>55</sup>. To be applied on design, it can show that every feature of an object accounts for 'a social, psychological and economical world'<sup>56</sup>. ANT was also suggested to combine with participatory design. Nonhumans can be participants in the design process, as 'maintaining, strengthening or weakening alliances' in the network-building process of design<sup>57</sup>. ANT had also inspired an element of an approach in service design called AT-ONE<sup>58</sup>, where the first letter A is for Actors who collaborate in value networks to provide the service. In this methodology, the Actors is used as one of the five critical lens to create holistic service concepts.

While ANT was developed in the science and technology background, Object Oriented Ontology (OOO) which shares some similar properties with ANT found its origin in the arts and humanity<sup>59</sup>. As the name suggests, it is a study of the being of 'objects', with a belief of one object should not be privileged more than another<sup>60</sup>. This idea has been popular among the art world, using the object as a subject to create a dialogue. It also has

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<sup>55</sup> O. Jones, 'Nature-Culture', in *International Encyclopedia of Human Geography*, ed. by Rob Kitchin and Nigel Thrift (Oxford: Elsevier, 2009), pp. 309–23 <<https://doi.org/10.1016/B978-008044910-4.00716-1>>.

<sup>56</sup> Albena Yaneva, 'Making the Social Hold: Towards an Actor-Network Theory of Design', *Design and Culture*, 1.3 (2009), 273–88 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2009.11643291>>.

<sup>57</sup> Louis Rice, 'Nonhumans in Participatory Design', *CoDesign*, 14.3 (2018), pp.238–57 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/15710882.2017.1316409>>.

<sup>58</sup> AT-ONE is short for Actors, Touchpoints, Offering, Needs and Experience. Simon Clatworthy, 'AT-ONE: Becoming AT-ONE with your customers', in *This Is Service Design Thinking*, ed. Stickdorn and Schneider, pp.136–43.

<sup>59</sup> Graham Harman, *Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO)* (Oxford University Press, 2019) <<https://doi.org/10.1093/acrefore/9780190201098.013.997>>.

<sup>60</sup> Paul Coulton and Joseph Galen Lindley, 'More-Than Human Centred Design: Considering Other Things', *The Design Journal*, 22.4 (2019), 463–81 <<https://doi.org/10.1080/14606925.2019.1614320>>.

certain relationship to Posthumanism that was emerged in the 1960s, which is about 'humans sharing centre stage with nonhumans'<sup>61</sup>.

A rather dramatic term, *hyperobjects*, was coined by Timothy Morton who drew inspiration from OOO and posthumanism to describe things that are 'viscous', 'nonlocal', 'phased', 'inter-objective' and 'massively distributed in time and space', such as radiation, hydrocarbons and global warming<sup>62</sup>. It is huge, collective concept of objects, yet intangible. Morton claimed that the *hyperobjects*, the nonhuman beings, are responsible for 'the end of the world' and 'the next moment of human history and thinking'. A strange thought, it may be, is that Dao might have similar attributes to the *hyperobjects* but more – it is where the world begins and ends. Design can be seen as *hyperobjects* as well, as they transcend time and space, and some of them will be very likely to stick with us forever.

It is interesting to see how ANT, OOO and posthumanism challenged the norm of perception, especially in the West, that often consists of dichotomies such as the object and the subject, nature and culture, body and mind. This holistic view is somewhat close to Daoism, however none of these theories has reached the level of transcendence that was pondered by Laozi.

Moreover, the discussions of ANT and OOO in design has been mostly limited to realms of technologies and artefacts. It would be a good opportunity to incorporate the natural environment into the 'actors' of network in design; for instance, placing environment as a default stakeholder in a service ecosystem map. Posthumanist thoughts could also be integrated with practices such as critical design or speculative design, which are excellent tools for opening up critical inquiries about design ethics. These alternative approaches that carry the history of

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<sup>61</sup> Ron Wakkary, 'Nomadic Practices: A Posthuman Theory for Knowing Design', *International Journal of Design*, 14.3 (2020), pp.117–28.

<sup>62</sup> Timothy Morton, *Hyperobjects: Philosophy and Ecology after the End of the World*, Posthumanities, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).



rejecting the norm of design as a helper for capitalist consumer society since the 1950s<sup>63</sup>, continue to be relevant in today's problematic world.

The awareness of design's impact beyond human, space and time will hopefully make designer slightly more cautious when making decisions on what to design, and what not to design. In fact, what not to design could be an even more important, critical question than what to design. In *The Social Dilemma*<sup>64</sup>, we saw designers and engineers expressing their regret of unleashing technologies that have destructed our society forever – in the future, I hope to see less of that, but more *wu-wei*.

To end this section, I would like to share an interesting revelation I had during the process of thinking about design beyond humanism: the best service is designed by nature. Think about this: we have earth to live on, air we can breath in, adequate temperature (although soon might not be), humidity, sunshine, water, food... all there for us. If we should learn from the best, we should really do service design like nature does, we let things be *ziran*.

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<sup>63</sup> Matt Malpass, *Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices*, ed. by Matt Malpass, 1st edn (London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2017), Bloomsbury Design Library <<https://www.bloomsburydesignlibrary.com/encyclopedia?docid=b-9781474293822>> [accessed 13 April 2021].

<sup>64</sup> Jeff Orlowski, *The Social Dilemma* (Exposure Labs, Argent Pictures, The Space Program, 2020).

## Be, like water

Best to be like water,  
Which benefits the ten thousand things  
And does not contend.  
It pools where human disdain to dwell,  
Close to the Dao.

*Laozi, 8*

Water, as a metaphor, has appeared in Dao De Jing many times. For Laozi, water is almost certainly one substance he liked the most, which is also closest to the Dao. Other early Chinese thinkers, such as Confucius, praises water too: ‘the wise enjoy the waters’<sup>65</sup>. In the same chapter after the one of the most celebrated quotes, ‘best to be like water (上善若水)’, Laozi introduces seven traits of how to be like water: ‘reside in a good (suitable) place, keep your mind deep, treat others well, stand by your word, make fair rules, do the right thing, work when it’s time.’

Water is also a great example of *wu-wei*, as *wu-wei* is how Dao performs – seems like it does nothing yet nothing is left undone<sup>66</sup>. Water is so soft, yet it can penetrate stone over the course of time. Water is formless, yet it can change into any shape that is meaningful. It is resilient. Water does not mind going to a low place, always – it knows where it needs to be. Water does not contend, so it has no rival. Water appears to be flat on the surface, yet it can be extremely deep underneath. Water takes care for countless things, yet it does not ask for return. Water is clear, and it reflects whatever that faces it. It is trustworthy. Water follows time – it knows when to work. Therefore, water is the best form of good.

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<sup>65</sup> *Analects of Confucius*, 6.21, trans. by Confucius Publishing <<https://www.confucius.org/lunyu/ed0621.htm>> [accessed 20 April 2021].

<sup>66</sup> *Laozi*, 37.

So water is good, but how to be a good designer like water? This time I did not go on researching books and papers, but went on a self exploration. I documented the experience in the following paragraph.

I try to imagine I am water. In stillness, I feel the flow of water in my body. I recall that more than half of our human body actually consists of water. I wonder why day by day, stiffness takes up most of my sensation? I realise that if I let go of all the usual constraints, ego included, I am naturally almost like water. Then I walk to the canal, to observe what real water is like. I see the calm surface of water reflecting the dimming lights of the night. But when I go closer, I see that the surface is made of countless ripples. The water is flowing, constantly. I wonder how something moves so much appears so still? I spend some time standing by the water. I gaze and feel, the breeze, the night sky, the trees, and the ducks. I sense that the water runs under the ground I am standing on, and may continue to appear above the ground somewhere else. I recall that more than two-thirds of the earth is covered by water. I wonder if the water in my body is connected to the water on the earth? How many years has the water been on the earth? And how many years has the water been in my body? Or in any human body? Are we all from the same source of water? I don't know. But as I feel the connectedness, I am at peace. And I am free.

And the epiphany is here. To be like water is, simply, to be. To be, in the most genuine, purest state. The rest of the deduction is even simpler: to be good is to be like water; to be a good designer is to be good; to do good design is to be a good designer.

This true sense of 'being', is completely different from the being of ego that was discussed earlier. It requires a certain level of awareness of the transcendence. You do not have to be a Daoist; you can draw inspiration from Buddhism, Confucianism, or other types of philosophies and spiritual practices. But you acquire a certain understanding of values, the meaning of life, and often an abandoning of dualism. You can feel the interconnection of everything in the world. You realise design itself is a form of transcendence, as it can span across time and space. You design from your sincere being, the transcendence. Human-centred, double diamond, co-creation, speculative design – these are still useful to come next, and you may use them flexibly to suit your vision – a vision of 'good' for everyone and everything in the universe. And this is what I would call: transcendent design.

# Transcendent Design

## A quiet manifesto

Transcendent design is an ideology that embraces the possibilities of transcendence in design and designers.

It transcends ego.

It transcends numbness of daily life.

It transcends discipline.

It transcends job description.

It transcends text-book methodology.

It transcends competition.

It transcends Capitalism.

It transcends superficiality.

It transcends human-centricity.

It transcends boundaries.

It transcends dichotomy.

It transcends space.

It transcends time.

In transcendent design, designer is a human first. Their priority is to be aware of the transcendence.

Design comes naturally from this transcendence.

Design comes from depth, stillness, interconnection, being.

For that, design can only be good.

Transcendently good.

# Conclusion

Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, the pioneers of critical design, have once said: 'We need more pluralism in design, not of style but of ideology and values.'<sup>67</sup> For that, I have embarked on an endeavour to open up a new possibility in design that is for the greater good.

The journey started with my curiosity of contemplating the Daoist idea *wu-wei* as a new approach to design that does not damage the world. I clarified the two key terms: *design*, although is constantly evolving as disciplines, is a basic activity embedded in our human existence with intentions to change the status quo; while *wu-wei* signifies an effortless behaviour with the alignment of Dao without forcing intentions. The marrying of the two concepts seemed to result in a paradox initially, however it was solved by understanding the difference of *intention* in both concepts. I have listed some possibilities of *wu-wei* in design in the applied arts field, and went on to explore more abstract opportunities for Laozi's wisdom to inspire a genuine good design. Three principles have been discussed: the first layer is to minimise egocentricity and combine with participatory design, to deliver a truly human-centred solution; the second layer is to let go of the human-centricity to look at the bigger picture, and was compared with theories including ANT, OOO and Posthumanism to draw out the transcendent quality of design; the final layer is the awareness of transcendence of being and to design from it. Towards the end, I have pivoted my discourse from design methodologies that mobilises different theories, to design ethics that is connected to spiritual revelation. I have attempted to deduce that being a good designer, or rather, being a good human, is the premise of doing good design. Finally, I proposed a new framework of design approach inspired by *wu-wei* and Daoism: transcendent design.

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<sup>67</sup> Anthony Dunne and Fiona Raby, *Speculative Everything: Design, Fiction, and Social Dreaming* (MIT Press, 2013), p.9.

While the novelty of the topic brought me much excitement, I have encountered a few challenges. I am aware of the grandness of the concepts of design and *wu-wei*, and there is much more wisdom from Dao De Jing that can be applied to design thinking that has yet to be discussed in detail.

In the research process, I have also identified that most discussions of design ethics were about how to do good design but rarely touched on how to be a good designer. Therefore, my final revelation is based on an auto-method of self-discovery. Moreover, although design for spirituality is not news throughout the human history, there is a lack of discourse on incorporating spirituality into today's design practice, especially in practical design areas like service design. I realised that there are still quite a few ambiguities and uncertainties in how *wu-wei* can be integrated, and how transcendent design is achieved. But again, this might be the truth and beauty of life. As designers, we need to have the sensibilities of the 'nuances'. I will look forward to further research into this area, including practice-based work, so that there will be more case studies and proven methodologies that can show the evidence. In the current world full of crisis, design needs to call for more meaningful action, and we need designers with a bigger mind.

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