

# Translating Theory in the Perspective of Daoism\*

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## Abstract

This paper aims to explore the translating theory with the terms in the *Dao De Jing* such as *Dao*, *De*, Being, Non-being, *Yin*, *Yang*, Integrated, Harmony, Form, Spirit, *Qi*, Emptiness, Tranquility, Inspiration, Sitting Down, and Forgetting. The translating process is to deconstruct *Dao* in the SL (source language) and the TL (target language). Numerous translation approaches or techniques all can hug their counterparts in the Daoism, revealing the underlying position of the first Chinese philosophy, whose ontology is *Dao*, following the way of nature, the self-way. The great *Dao* is of abstract metaphysical theory, and the I-being is the self experience and conscientiousness of translators, both of which invite open-mindedness, selflessness, balance, and ongoing initiative. Being and non-being are antitheses. Being comes from non-being, whose revelation is being, *De*. SL is of being, the translating of which is non-being. Non-action proclaims that one's conduct shall be natural, spontaneous, and balanced. The translating process reflects the harmonies of *Yin* and *Yang* in the two versions. *Qi*, a force or a momentum in the two texts, the flowing thoughts, undergoes with infinitesimal of purposed involvement but effortless job. Your translating product attributes to your nature, and your self-cultivation of the two languages.

## Keywords

Translating theory, *Dao De Jing*, *Yin* and *Yang*

*Dao* that can be *daoed* is not the eternal *Dao*; name that can be named is not the eternal name. “Tao can neither be spoken nor written. Tao, the way, the path, can only be experienced” (van Rijckenborgh and de Petri 1996: 16). Translators are just to experience the journey of the mind of the writer as well as their own brain travel in appreciating the flow of the words and the movement of the information. The *Dao* of translation, the eternal way, is hard to define, which is of non-being; individuals can interpret it in different terms, which is of being. Non-being in being is non-being, and being in non-being is being; this is the mystery (Gao 2013: 44). The Daoism, full of profound murky expressions, proclaiming the Gnosis of the Universe, can play an important part in the translating practice.

The deconstruction of the Daoism is the interpreting of the *Dao*; the deconstructive operation of one language into another is the translating process, an appreciation of the *Dao* of rendering games.

## DAOISM AND TRANSLATING

“See the path—Tao, follow the path—Te, understand the path—Ching” (van Rijckenborgh and de Petri 1996: 84). Keep working hard, and we will gradually understand the truth of it. In another word, Ching,

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experiencing it, is to embrace it with your inner heart, viewing it outside. A wealth of key terms in the Daoism are the cornerstones in understanding the Daoist philosophy, such as *Dao*, *De*, Being, Non-being, *Yin*, *Yang*, Integration and Harmony, Form, Spirit and *Qi*, Vanity, and Stillness and Lightness. Varieties of scholars offer multitudes of interpretations on these milestones. The underlying principles bear leading functions in rendering one text into another. The translating theories, East or West, can find their shadows in the Daoism, which demonstrates the guiding role of the first Chinese philosophy, whose ontology is *Dao*, following the way of nature, the self-way.

### **DAO, DE, BEING, NON-BEING, AND TRANSLATING**

Originally, *Dao* means the path for walk, and it carries crafts, methods, reason, rules, standards, harmony, order, and others. Such usages were common for the Pre-*Qin* philosophers and still popular nowadays. Lao Tsu is regarded as the ancestor of the Chinese philosophy owing to his philosophical transfer of the above-mentioned cultural *Dao*, i.e., the upgrading of *Dao* into the origin of the cosmos and all things. Such originality reveals its humanity in two aspects, the human's mechanism, or the value of people and things, as well as the ideal scheme, norms, and harmonies between and among people and things. This is the manifestation of the Way (Chen 2011: 34). The Chinese *Dao* is greatly mysterious, which cannot be rendered, whose name cannot be named, and such mystery of the mysteries leads to the gate to all mysteries. This discloses the spirit of the antithesis (Sima 2003: 26). *Dao* is on-going, which is a changing one in a dynamic process (Chen 2015: 25).

The Chinese character for *dao* (rhymes with "how") is made up of two parts: step, movement, *chou* (rhymes with "low") and head, *shou* (rhymes with "low") that come

together as 道... In English, it has been translated as the Way, Nature, nature, mind, reason, logos, God, undifferentiated aesthetic continuum, general cosmic course, and my favorite, the gerundical *dao*. (Rainey 2014: 49-50)

It holds true to the *Dao* of translation. If only we are honest, true to life, following the *Dao*, we will attain it, a master of *Dao*; if only we are true to the heaven, no cheaters, no unreal dualist approach, we are just integrated, having a knowledge of the essence, following the very way, undertaking the virtue, winning more followers, and a sage is coming (Sima 2003: 31). As a translator, if only we bury ourselves in the study of the source language (SL) and the target language (TL), highlighting the acquisition of the languages, hardworking and sticking to the ongoing research, concentrating on the academic virtue, pursuing no fame or status, enjoying the profound subtlety of different expressions, day by day, we will become the owner in such a field. The great *Dao* is a kind of abstract metaphysical theory, and the I-being is the self experience and conscientiousness of every translator, which involves open-mindedness, selflessness, balance, ongoing initiative, and open to all studies.

As to *Lao Tzu*, *De* is the manifestation of all things in terms of *Dao*, which can be viewed as their personalities. *Dao* produces the myriads, while *De* nurtures them, just as *Lao Tzu* said, "*Dao* makes it, *De* brings it up, the outside forces grow it and the utensil forms it". We can say, *Lao Tzu*'s philosophy is just to "respect *Dao* and value *De*". In the *Dao De Jing*, all non-actions are regarded as *De*, such as "keep hungry and stillness", "stay weakness and undisputable", and "be simple, honest and poor". *De* is gaining something, tries to get something in practice (Chen 2002: 66). The translating practice is to accumulate *De*. Any kinds of tries are all reflections of *Dao*. Thus, to gain more, we must put into more practices, which will create the true knowledge.

Being and non-being are the forms of *Dao*, which demonstrate the growing and developing process of

transfers of *Dao* and *De*, and the birth of all things. Non-form and non-name are called non-being, form-being, and name-being being (Sima 2003: 23). The myriad of things are from non-being as well as being (*The Simplified Version by Lao Tzu*, Chapter 40) (Chen 1998: 56). The *Dao* of translating is of non-being, whose being is just based on the mastery of SL and TL with some certain techniques or the tuition. Being is out of non-being, whose manifestation is being, *De*. SL is being, while its translation is non-being. Being and non-being are antitheses; being is of non-being, and vice versa. There is a SL, such being requires us to do the rendering job closely adhered to the SL; with the understanding of the SL, the translator shall forget the form of the SL, and undertake the transfer naturally, which is called non-being. Such non-being of the form goes along with the process of transferred text coming; this is one path from non-being to being, where they are integrated.

From the *Dao De Jing*, Chapter 25, we can enjoy the popular words: Man goes along with Earth, Earth after Heaven, Heaven after *Dao*, *Dao* after Nature. Here Nature, our living world, which *Dao* follows, actually indicates the way Nature goes; it goes naturally, as it is. It is quite the opposite of the human action. *Dao* is a good brother of Nature, where the *Dao* of translating underlies the natural way. The mastery of the two languages to be rendered resembles the dominating place, without which the version transformed cannot be considered a good one, to say nothing of naturalness. Doing it as it goes is just the very job, which involves the very emotion of a translator. The former can be regarded as *Dao*, the latter *De*.

Non-action acts all, the King acting nothing with the subordinate acting all. In translating, the writer acts nothing, and the translator acts all; or we can say, the translator remains still, non-action, leaving the essence of the source language intact. In truth, non-action proclaims that one's conduct shall be natural, spontaneous, and balanced.

Furthermore, translating for the special or particular purposes requires the translator to be skilled at the specialized knowledge, which is a must to such transfer. This is like a professional sportsman; without such a physical training, just some techniques or methods are like drying waters, or dying trees.

### **YIN, YANG, INTEGRATED, HARMONY AND TRANSLATING**

*Lao Tzu* said, "*Dao* produces One, One with Two, Two with Three, Three bringing up the myriads of things. All things embrace *Yang* carrying *Yin* at the back, gaining the harmony with the burst of *Yin* and *Yang*". The union of *Dao*, through its split, gives birth to *Yin* and *Yang*, whose intertwining produces myriads of things. The SL is *Yin*, and the produced version is *Yang*; the translator reaches the harmony with the breaking out of energy owing to the hugging of *Yang* with *Yin* on the back. With the clarification of the text given, the logics included, the translation will witness the harmony; every context has its harmonious relationship. In English, notional words are of *Yang*; function words are of *Yin*. The translating *Dao* is balancing the variety of relations of *Yin* and *Yang* in the two versions.

Besides the *Dao* of the origin of life, *Lao Tzu's Dao* refers to the universal things of myriads, going forth and back, changing all the time, a harmonious family and wholeness of varieties. Such ongoing process, unity and integrity render the infinite view of macrocosm (Chen 2011: 36). The individual microcosm and the macrocosm of the universe are in themselves integrated. The Daoist philosophy, from *Lao Tzu* and *Chuang Tzu*, in terms of *Dao*, stresses the harmony and rheological properties. The Daoist harmonious relationship in all things is distinct from the harmony in the West. Harmony in the ancient China fulfilled in the dialectical movement and a state of total conflicts, carrying the comparison of the identical of consistency with distinction, harmony by

the coalescing of *Yin* and *Yang*, while the Western athletic harmony emphasizes the outside form compared with the ancient Chinese focusing on the essence revealing the mechanism of beauty making. All sorts of contradictions will create harmony. *Yin* and *Yang* are opposite and complementary, which invites the artist to incorporate some conflicting factors into the state of integration, attaining inexhaustible and infinite harmonious links (Tu 2003: 282). The Daoist harmony between man and nature applies to the heavenly *Dao* as well as the human activities. The translating *Dao* also follows the integration and harmony. Being one of the Daoist theories, the translating way requires interactions, neutralization, and integration, which is an ongoing process, a growing development with the contradictions between the SL and the TL. As we know, there will be no absolute agreement between these two versions, with distinct cultures, various understanding and handling leading to more renderings. If only they are agreeable to the receptors, they have their values, coexistence with other elements. Harmony concentrates on nothingness, transcending, and no translationese, with the emphasis on the exchange of information and transmission. Harmony, on the other hand, is an adaption, an appropriateness, strictness, and flexibility. Such an agreement can refer to words manipulating exposed to the different logics and even conflicts, achieving equilibrium.

### FORM, SPIRIT, *Qi* AND TRANSLATING

In the classical philosophy, the connections between and among form, spirit, and *Qi* are illustrated in the original lecture of *Huainanzi*: the form, the human body, is the shelter of the life; *Qi*, the energy, is the passage of spirit changing into form; and spirit, the soul, is the master of the life. With one being misplaced, the wholeness will be missing. In comparison of the form and spirit, *Chuang Tzu*

thinking of the inside spirit and the outside form breeds the positive role of heart and soul, enhancing the spirit, with some concepts of spiritual meeting, spiritual walk, and spiritual moving. The famous spirit reflection and spirit rhythm in the athletics and the art originate from such spirit over form and form subject to the spirit (Chen 2009: 55). Translating is just the manifestation of spirit full of *Qi* over the form. Translating is on such dynamic process of ignoring the original form; full of the energy in the SL; recreating the very force and momentum by means of the semantics, grammar, and pragmatics; giving rise to the very ideas and spirit, a natural flow of thoughts. The Daoist of *Jixia Academy* emphasizes the wholeness of the form and the spirit, the entirety of the soul within and the form outside; anyway, with the whole spirit on the top (Chen 1995b: 10). The spirit refers to the heart inside, the idea; the form speaks of the superficial level outside. In translation, it is the best policy to reproduce the spirit with the similar form to the original; if not, ideas are good above the words.

The study of the heart and soul and *Qi* study are two significant factors in the Daoist philosophy. One of the virtues is the concentration of the mind and the convergence of *Qi*, which is the common feature in any territory and period in the pre-*Qin* Daoist Schools (Chen 1995a: 60). Mencius thought that it was the best way to serve the heaven to maintain kindness and cultivate human's nature. Being kind and honest urges the translator to do the hardworking job, and be faithful to the SL. The mind just lays the theme and thoughts in the original. As to the form, the letter, the collocations, and the meanings, we must tackle them wholly.

To *Zhu Xi*, an eminent philosopher, educator, and poet in China's *Song Dynasty*, *Qi* is on the flow, moving without the end. It takes up the features of converging and diverging, rising up and falling down, and static and dynamic. The birth of man and things begins with *Qi*'s flowing, then the form changing (Yang 2004: 184). *Qi* means changing, *Yi*. *Wang Fuzhi*

pointed out that *Qi* is the component and etheric force of myriads of things, which are converged with *Qi* and its manifestations. Convergence and divergence are two normal forms of *Qi*, which is a wholeness on the going of *Yin* and *Yang*, static and dynamic antithesis (Yang 2004: 380, 381). The *Dao* of translating is a dynamic and ongoing process, where the translator is required to enrich themselves in all fields, specialism in particular. The translating theory is just the form; specialized knowledge is *Qi*, full of which and through which the doer breaks up with all the barriers of knowledge for special purposes, achieving the balance with the agreeing *Qi*. It entails a process philosophy, whose *Dao* is out of the translating practice, the transcultural pragmatic explorations.

Every word is full of *Qi*; it is the same with every clunk, every phrase, every sentence, and every paragraph. They are different masses of *Qi*; with types of *Qi* belts, they are following the *Qi* path. *Qi* can be *Dao*, the paving way, through which the heart of the information can be obtained.

*Qi* can be recognized as a force, which can do work like those in physics. Such a momentum in the texts of SL and TL reflects the flow of the key and critical thoughts, whose interpretation requires infinitesimal of purposed involvement but effortless job.

### **EMPTINESS (VOID), TRANQUILITY (STILLNESS, PEACE), INSPIRATION (GNOSIS, ENLIGHTENEDNESS) AND TRANSLATING**

Emptiness, stillness, and Gnosis, the great notions in Chinese philosophy, originate from the book *Lao Tzu*. Since then, the first two terms became the core concepts in the Daoist mind cultivating academy, while the third, inspiration, a metaphor of the state of mind and the thinking awareness, dates back to *Chuang Tzu*. *Xu Fuguan* said, “Void and Tranquility are two supreme revelations of the Daoist cultivation,

they are the lifelines of the Daoism”. Anyway, he failed to provide more detailed explanations. Such life virtues initiated from *Lao Tzu*, and were polished and developed with *Chuang Tzu* (Chen 2010: 37). *Lao Tzu*’s view is to be empty and void, killing all desires and emotions, remaining still (When the utmost vacancy has been reached, imperishable tranquility is maintained). Emptiness requires our inner mind to ponder nothing, whereas the word tranquility reflects our actions confronting the forces outside. Hence, the void within breeds purification of the mind; stillness outside makes nothing of knowledge and desires. Such a mindset aids us in the concentration of the mind, achieving a mysterious condition, so that it can refer to an appreciation of the beauty carrying the properties of choosing, orientation, and centeredness. Emptiness and stillness draw great attention to the mind purification and sit still and think of nothing. Nevertheless, the concentration of the mind and soul exerts a kind of creativity for the understanding of void and tranquility. Just as *Chuang Tzu* said, “Being vacant is of non-actions and nothing to be left”.

*Lao Tzu* argued that non-being and being live together; the intangible and tangible are mutually entailed, and the static and dynamic support each other. One of his thoughts is to observe things not just from one aspect, whose dialectical thinking mode claims to go to the deeper structure from the superficial level. Just as he said, possess power but keep gentleness (Chapter 28, *Dao De Jing*). *Yan Fu* smartly remarks that nowadays people only emphasize the latter part ignoring the lifeline of the former part. *Lao Tzu* surely stresses the stillness and gentleness, however, his major concern is that the weakness is well above the strong. Russel once admired *Lao Tzu*’s words in Chapter Two, giving birth to something but no possessing of it, helping others without showing off one’s virtue, making others successful without being their master, and this is the supreme *De*.

Void, tranquility, and inspiration are also of the state of mind and condition for a translator. We can

appreciate the Gnosis of the translation, embracing the translating *Dao* by means of such mindset, highly concentrated, oblivion of fame and name, without any desire, holding the very spirit and *Qi*.

Being and non-being can be explored in a host of perspectives, such as mind-*Qi*-spirit, emptiness-stillness-inspiration, form-content, logics, and semantics-grammar-pragmatics-culture.

## SITTING DOWN AND FORGETTING (ZUO WANG)

As *Guo Xiang's* commentaries on the *Chuang Tzu* rightly observes, *Chuang Tzu's* "forgetting self" means to do away with the distinction between other and self, thing and person. "Once forgetting self (*wo ziwang*), what thing is left in the world for cognition?" *Chuang Tzu's* teaching of "sitting down and forgetting" as "casting off form and doing away with knowledge" points to the same thing. "casting off form" means forgetting the physical distinction between self and other. "Doing away with knowledge" means forgetting the self as knowing subject and the thing as known object. Once self is forgotten, what object is there left for grasping, and who is the subject of privileging and craving? (Wang 2003: 43). At a given period of time, the translator, having a seat and forgetting all, *Zuo Wang*, which is similar to be of emptiness, embracing no desires, only bearing SL and TL in mind, setting mind on the flow of the passages, smiling or crying with the writers.

## CONCLUSIONS

"*Dao* follows *ziran*, self-so, spontaneity" (Rainey 2014: 51). Nothing can beat the naturalness of *Dao*, violating of which shall be doomed to failures.

Being and existence is one of the concerns in the Daoism, while non-being and uncertainty, emptiness, is another major concern. Knowledge and certainty can be seen as good brothers, and ignorance and no

desires are one contributing factor in attaining *Dao*.

The sages keep hearts empty of desires. The perfect translator should have an empty mind, keeping nothing in mind but the SL, valuing the SL, following its path; put it in the TL, which means understanding it. This is the translating *Jing*.

More deconstructing theories of the Daoism will create more translating games. The translating process is the deconstruction of the *Daos* of the SL and TL.

To practice translating is to return to one's nature; your product is subject to your nature, your self-cultivation of the two languages. The translation of *Dao* is to liberate the self nature, embracing the whole nature of all things.

## Notes

\* The Chinese Pinyin such as *Dao*, *De*, *Yin*, *Yang*, *Qi*, etc. is capitalized and italicized in this paper (excluding those in the references); those not are quotations.

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