

Materials, Language, and Definitions: On the Differences and Causes of Opinions Regarding the Dating of Laozi in Chinese and Western Academia

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The exact dating of Laozi and his work has long been a topic of scholarly interest. Since the 1920s, traditional views on Laozi's dating have been widely questioned in both Chinese and Western academia. In the latter half of the 20th century, as the "Trust Antiquity" trend gradually emerged in Chinese academia, the view that "Laozi did not exist" became the most influential mainstream perspective in Western academia. This paper first reviews the process of unification and differentiation of opinions between Chinese and Western academia. Then, by analyzing and comparing representative papers from Chinese and Western scholars, it explores the reasons for the differences in mainstream opinions. Additionally, it briefly discusses the implications of these differences to provide insights for future research.

Keywords: Laozi, *Tao Te Ching*, Doubting Antiquity and Debunking Forgeries

Introduction

The issue of the true historical identity of Laozi and the specific dating of the composition of the *Tao Te Ching* has always garnered scholarly attention. The traditional view, based on Sima Qian's *Records of the Grand Historian*, posits that Laozi was contemporaneous with Confucius and authored the *Tao Te Ching*. Skepticism towards this traditional view began as early as the Northern Wei period with Cui Hao. During the Song dynasty's "Doubting Antiquity" trend, literati and scholars such as Chen Shidao, Ye Shi, and Huang Zhen further explored and refuted the traditional perspective. By the Ming and Qing dynasties, figures like Bi Yuan, Wang Zhong, Cui Shu, and Mou Tingxiang argued that the *Tao Te Ching* should be dated to the Warring States period and also discussed the person of Laozi (Xiong, Ma, & Liu, 1995).

Although scholars throughout history have proposed new insights on this issue, these new viewpoints did not challenge the mainstream traditional view. It was not until the 1920s, with the reemergence of the "Doubting Antiquity and Debunking Forgeries" trend, that the true historical identity of Laozi and the dating of the *Tao Te Ching* became a focal point for mainstream academia. The debate began with Liang Qichao's critical article on Hu Shi's 1919 publication, *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, where Hu Shi posited an early date for Laozi. In his article titled "On the *Tao Te Ching* Being Written at the End of the Warring States Period", Liang Qichao refuted Hu Shi's early dating of Laozi and presented six points of suspicion. This article sparked extensive discussion, with many renowned scholars such as Qian Mu, Gu Jiegang, Luo Genze, Feng Youlan, Tang Lan,

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Sun Zizhou, Gao Heng, Zhang Dainian, and Tan Jiepu joining the debate. The collected research articles in volumes four and six of *Debates on Ancient History* alone amounted to 350,000 characters. However, despite prolonged debates, scholars remained divided on the dating of Laozi. By the early 21st century, various mainstream viewpoints still had their supporters.

Notably, since the debate became a hot topic in Chinese academia in the 1920s, overseas scholars also quickly paid attention to and actively participated in the discussion and research on this issue. Interestingly, although overseas scholars' interest was initially influenced by contemporary Chinese scholars and early research was closely linked to Chinese scholarship, by the 1980s and 1990s, the view that "Laozi was not a real historical figure" gradually replaced the traditional assertion and became the new mainstream perspective in Western academia.

This article aims to analyze the differing opinions between Chinese and Western scholars on the issue of Laozi, the process through which these differences emerged, and, by exploring the reasons behind these differences, to provide a deeper understanding of Western studies on Laozi and aid future research.

Synchronized Skepticism: Early Sino-Western Convergence

Western scholars' questioning of Laozi's dating can be traced back to the early 20th century with the work of British scholar Herbert Allen Giles. However, similar to the pre-Doubting Antiquity trend in Chinese academia, traditional views still dominated Western academia at that time. The debate on Laozi's dating truly gained momentum in the 1940s. The first to pay attention to the debates in China was British sinologist Homer H. Dubs, who published a paper in 1941 expressing his views on the dating of Laozi and the *Tao Te Ching*.

In the opening of this paper, Dubs stated,

THE DATE of Lao-dz, the author of the famous *Dao-de-jing*, has traditionally been set in the sixth century B.c., both by Chinese and Occidental writers. Recently, criticism in China has been directed against this as well as other traditional datings, and there has been a vigorous debate concerning it. Occidental opinion (and much Chinese) has for the most part been content with the traditional dating (Dubs, 1994, p. 215)

Dubs himself, based on his research on Laozi's Lineage, believed that Laozi should actually be dated to the 3rd century BCE. This paper quickly drew attention in sinology circles, and American sinologist Derk Bodde soon responded. The two engaged in a series of debates on this issue, but no consensus was reached. Nonetheless, in Bodde's final response on this issue, he also acknowledged that Dubs' attention to the research findings of Chinese scholars was something other sinologists should emulate. At the end of his paper, he additionally noted,

The whole affair, however, furnishes yet another striking illustration of the need for greater attention on the part of western scholars to the results of native Chinese scholarship, especially in such fields as textual criticism or historical attribution, if they are to avoid for themselves occasional needless duplication of effort. (Bodde, 1944, p. 215)

Renowned American Daoist scholar Livia Kohn, in her 1998 book *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth*, provided a brief review of 20th-century Western studies on Laozi. From this, we can more precisely understand that, similar to the situation in Chinese academia, Western academia in the first half of the 20th century also failed to reach a consensus on the dating of Laozi (Kohn, 1998). The discussions between Dubs and Bodde indicate that this similarity was not coincidental but was closely related to the interaction between Chinese and Western academic circles during this period. In fact, the discussion on Laozi's dating in the first half of the 20th century transcended national boundaries from its inception. We not only see Western scholars like Dubs

paying attention to Chinese academia but also see Chinese scholars citing overseas research in their works. For instance, in the collection *Debates on Ancient History* alone, we can find many examples of Chinese scholars referencing related overseas research. Zhang Shoulin, in his paper, mentioned the works of Japanese scholar Saitō Setsudō and praised them as “His Theory is Very Precise”. Su Chi (2003) also noted in his article that his belief that the extant *Tao Te Ching* dates later than the *Huainan Zi* originated from British scholar Herbert Allen Giles’ research over 20 years ago. Similarly, we see Chinese scholars rebutting foreign scholars’ research, such as Huang Fanggang’s refutation of Japanese historian Tsuda Sōkichi’s discussion on Laozi.

Based on the above content, we can make a basic summary of the characteristics of 20th-century research on the issue of Laozi in both Chinese and Western academic circles: (1) Both Chinese and Western scholars questioned the credibility of the traditional view. (2) Both Chinese and Western scholars engaged in prolonged debates on the issue of Laozi’s dating. (3) Both Chinese and Western scholars closely followed research beyond their own countries, and the discussion on Laozi’s dating, to some extent, transcended language and national boundaries. (4) Neither Chinese nor Western academia reached a consensus on this issue. During this period, the issue of Laozi’s dating remained a subject of diverse opinions and inconclusive debates.

Diverging Paths: Traditionalism vs. Skepticism

Despite the similarities in the discussions on the dating of Laozi between Chinese and Western academia in the first half of the 20th century, by the 1980s and 1990s, these commonalities had significantly diminished. During this period, major divergences began to emerge between the mainstream views of Chinese and Western scholars. At this time, while various views on the dating of Laozi still existed within Chinese academia and had considerable support, widespread skepticism towards the traditional view had gradually waned. Some authoritative scholars in Laozi studies re-expressed their support for the traditional view. For instance, the compilers of *History of Laozi Studies in China*, such as Xiong Tiejie et al. (1995), expressed support for the traditional view that “Laozi was contemporaneous with Confucius and the *Tao Te Ching* was written by Laozi” and elaborated on this issue in a special section of their book. Additionally, Taiwanese scholar Chen Guying (1992) also wrote a paper highlighting the numerous flaws in the evidential methods used by earlier scholars to argue for “The Theory of Laozi’s Late Emergence” and attempted to find new evidence for “The Theory of Laozi’s Early Emergence” by comparing the core ideas of *Mo Zi* and *Tao Te Ching*. Livia Kohn, in her review of 20th-century studies on Laozi, also noted this phenomenon, stating, “Recently, (1990s), scholarship has gone back to crediting the historicity of the early accounts. They place Laozi again in the lifetime of Confucius and make him indeed the author of the *Dao de jing*,” (Livia Kohn, 1998, p. 2) citing the research of scholars like Liu Xiaogan as an example.

The shift in Chinese academia regarding the Laozi issue in the 20th century was not unrelated to the “Trust Antiquity” trend that emerged during this period. The turn from “Doubting Antiquity” to “Trust Antiquity” in Chinese scholarship may have been influenced by several major archaeological discoveries in China since the 20th century. In fact, as early as 1928, the archaeological excavations at the Yinxu site in Anyang, Henan, supported by Fu Sinian, had already introduced different voices into the “Doubting Antiquity” trend. American sinologist Edward Shaughnessy particularly noted in his paper that:

when these excavations unearthed a mature and literate Bronze Age culture dating to the late Shang dynasty, well over half a millennium earlier than the time of Confucius, Hu Shi for one was persuaded to withdraw some of his earlier doubts regarding the antiquity of China's history. (Shaughnessy, 2005, p. 436)

However, due to the Japanese invasion in 1937, the impact of Yin Xu did not form a new trend. It was not until after the founding of the PRC, with the successive excavations of the Han tombs at Yinqueshan and Mawangdui, that the “Trust Antiquity” trend finally emerged under various influences. In 1992, Professor Li Xueqin of the History Department at Tsinghua University proposed the slogan “Walking Out of the Era of Doubting Antiquity”, and in 1994, his well-known book *Walking Out of the Era of Doubting Antiquity* was officially published, marking the rise of “Trust Antiquity” as an undeniable voice in Chinese academia. However, during this period, Western scholars overlooked this trend.

In contrast, Western academia during this period showed an opposite trend to Chinese academia. The early intense debates that claimed Laozi did not exist gradually became the mainstream view in Western academia. Chad Hansen (1992), in his book *A Daoist Theory of Chinese Thought*, stated that he “accepts the mainstream view that Laozi did not actually exist” (Chad Hansen, 1992, p. 210) and that the *Tao Te Ching* is merely a collection of beautiful and poetic fragments. William Boltz also noted that the accounts of Laozi in *Records of the Grand Historian* include almost no verifiable facts, and we have no choice but to recognize the fictional nature of the figure of Laozi. (Boltz, 1984). Many collections and textbooks related to Daoist studies conveyed this view as well. For example, James Robson, in the introduction to the *Tao Te Ching* section of his compiled anthology of Daoist texts, wrote, “Most scholars consider Laozi to be a fictional character and believe the *Tao Te Ching* was gradually compiled based on oral traditions around the 3rd century BCE.” (Robson, 1965).

In 1993, the excavation of the Guodian Chu Tomb Bamboo Slips marked a point where the views of Chinese and Western scholars on the dating of Laozi and his work began to diverge significantly. In 1998, the book *Guodian Chu Tomb Bamboo Slips* was officially published. That same year, the “Guodian *Tao Te Ching* Academic Symposium” was held at Dartmouth College in the United States. Although scholars basically reached a consensus on the dating of the Guodian Chu Tomb, agreeing that it should be dated to the mid to late Warring States period, around 300 BCE, the debate over the dating of Laozi and his work did not cease but intensified. In the subsequent published conference proceedings, Dartmouth College Professor Sarah Allan stated, “The number of differing views is as many as the number of scholars attending the conference.” In subsequent papers, many scholars regarded the Guodian Chu Tomb Bamboo Slips as direct evidence supporting the traditional view, while Western scholars still did not consider it as strong evidence. More recent research indicates that the mainstream view among Western scholars on the dating of Laozi and his work has not significantly changed since then. For example, American scholar Gil Raz, in his paper “What Is Daoism and Who Is Its Founder?”, stated that Sima Qian’s account of Laozi is unreliable and that Laozi is most likely a legendary figure (Raz, 2015).

In summary, by the second half of the 20th century, the commonalities in Laozi studies between Chinese and Western academia had almost disappeared. Chinese and Western scholars exhibited two contradictory trends. In China, influenced by the “Trust Antiquity” trend, scholars regained confidence in traditional descriptions, while in the West, the view that Laozi did not exist and that the *Tao Te Ching* is merely a fragmented anthology became the uncontested mainstream view. Moreover, this mainstream view continues to be widely accepted and acknowledged to this day.

Roots of Divergence: Differences in Definitions and Materials

Although it is not uncommon for scholars from different countries to have differing attitudes towards the same issue, the academic discussion on the Laozi issue remains a unique case worthy of attention. First, we need to emphasize that although some scholars had proposed views differing from the traditional ones before the rise

of the “Doubting Antiquity” trend in the 1920s, these new views never became mainstream. Therefore, we can say that the academic discussion analyzed in this article was initiated by Chinese scholars and subsequently gained wide attention in the international sinology community. Why did Chinese scholars, who initiated this academic discussion from the “Doubting Antiquity” perspective, eventually return to the traditional view in the 1990s, while Western scholars, influenced by the Chinese, gradually established completely different conclusions during the same period? The reasons behind this are worth pondering.

When discussing the differences in opinions between Chinese and Western sinologists, it is easy to assume that scholars from different countries produce biased conclusions due to their beliefs, emotions, and other subjective factors. This assumption has its rationality and cannot (or should not) be completely denied. We must admit that complete objectivity in the humanities or social sciences is almost impossible to achieve, as we cannot completely remove the conscious or unconscious influence of subjective factors on our thinking. The maximum objectivity we can achieve is essentially composed of numerous biased narratives influenced by personal subjective factors complementing each other to form an overall objectivity. Professor Edward Shaughnessy, in reviewing the differences between Chinese and Western scholars at the end of the 20th century, stated that Western scholars’ neglect of the “Trust Antiquity” trend in China was due to an undesirable chauvinism. Indeed, we should not deny the role of subjective emotions in academic research, but attributing all the differences to scholars’ subjective tendencies is clearly also undesirable. In fact, if we closely examine the research conducted by Chinese and Western scholars on this issue, we will find that the arguments made by both sides are generally rigorous, detailed, and well-founded.

Therefore, we need to delve deeper into the reasons behind this phenomenon. We know that research materials on Laozi’s life are actually very scarce, and neither Chinese nor Western scholars studying this issue have overlooked any specific important materials. Thus, on the surface, it is difficult to understand why Chinese and Western scholars, using the same research materials to investigate the same issue, would arrive at completely different conclusions. However, when we observe the research process more closely, we find that our description of the phenomenon itself is inaccurate.

In fact, as the author sees it, the reason Chinese and Western scholars ultimately reached opposite conclusions on the dating of Laozi, aside from subjective influences, is that they were using “seemingly identical but different research materials” and attempting to answer “seemingly identical but different questions”. The reason for saying “seemingly identical” is that if we ignore the differences in research languages and the definition of certain important terms, we might consider the materials used by Chinese and Western scholars and the questions they posed as entirely consistent. However, once we consider language differences and definition issues, we find that these subtle differences are sufficient to significantly influence the conclusions drawn by Chinese and Western scholars.

In-depth Analysis: Specific Causes of Sino-Western Academic Divergence

So, what are the subtle differences between the research materials used by Chinese and Western scholars and the questions they pose? To clarify this issue, we need to discuss the materials and questions separately.

First, we need to clarify the core point, which is the difference in the questions explored by Chinese and Western scholars. On the surface, the questions seem to be “Did Laozi exist?” and “If Laozi existed, when did he live?”. However, based on their research processes and conclusions, we find that they actually assigned different definitions to “Laozi” in these questions. Since this difference in definition was not explicitly stated but

rather implied in their discussions, we need to review some details of their research processes before discussing the definitional differences.

As mentioned earlier, both Chinese and Western scholars have conducted extensive research on the dating of Laozi, making it difficult to discuss all the studies in detail here. Therefore, in this paper, we will only examine some representative examples.

Earlier, we mentioned that Professor Chad Hansen, in his works, agreed with the mainstream view that “Laozi did not exist” and that the *Tao Te Ching* is merely a collection of fragmented pieces. However, when discussing the *Tao Te Ching*, he used rigorous logic and semantic reasoning to prove that the text of the *Tao Te Ching* can be interpreted in a non-metaphysical way. In his interpretive framework, the *Tao Te Ching*, described as a fragmented anthology, actually shows a surprising consistency of thought. This consistency indirectly reflects the possibility that the *Tao Te Ching* has a single author or compiler. If we understand “Laozi” as the compiler of the *Tao Te Ching*, the assertion of a single author for the *Tao Te Ching* itself can serve as positive evidence for the existence of Laozi. From this perspective, his conclusion seems to contradict the view he agrees with (Hansen, 1992). Similarly, in one of the most influential discussions in Western academia during the 1980s and 1990s, British sinologist A. C. Graham’s paper “The Origins Of The Legend Of Lao Tan”, we can see that although Professor Graham clearly argued that the accounts of Laozi included many different sources of legends, he did not deny that some of these legends might have been true. For example, regarding the event of “Confucius Consulted Laozi”, Graham determined based on his arguments that this legend likely originated from the Confucian school and might have actually happened.

From these discussions alone, we still cannot see the role of the definition issue in the discussions. Therefore, we need to compare these Western scholars’ discussions with the research of Chinese scholars. Taking the research of scholars from the Doubting Antiquity School as an example, we can see that there are indeed Chinese scholars who agree with the view that “the accounts of Laozi (or more precisely, the Laozi story based on Sima Qian’s biography of Laozi) are a mixture of legends from different sources.” For instance, Zhang Dainian, in his paper “A Hypothesis on the Dating of Laozi”, divided the evolution of Laozi legends into five different stages chronologically. Although the stage divisions are not entirely the same, we can see that Zhang’s view is very similar to that of Professor Graham. However, Zhang (2003) did not deny the existence of Laozi and, after reading Luo Genze’s discussion on Laozi, believed that Laozi’s real identity might indeed be Taishi Dan. Subsequently, in Tan Jiefu’s *Study of Two Lao Zi*, he more explicitly argued that the current accounts of Laozi are actually a mixture of the stories of Lao Laizi and Taishi Dan, where Lao Laizi is Lao Peng, and Taishi Dan is Lao Dan.

With these clarifications, we need to ask a question—under the premise that “the accounts of Laozi are a mixture of legends from different sources and do not deny the truth of some legends,” why do Western scholars further infer from Professor Graham that Laozi is merely a legendary figure, while Chinese scholars do not deny the existence of Laozi and even believe there are multiple Laozis in different eras? The answer becomes apparent: the definition of “Laozi” as a figure is inherently ambiguous. This ambiguity exists perhaps because “Laozi” itself is not a precise name. “Zi” is an honorific, and “Lao” has various interpretations. Generally, Chinese scholars interpret “Lao” as a surname or clan name, while Western scholars often interpret it as “old”, the original meaning of “Lao”. Therefore, from a semantic perspective, the “Laozi” in question, if we delve into its semantics more rigidly, should be expressed as “a gentleman surnamed Lao” or more broadly as “an old gentleman”. Thus, our question becomes “whether a gentleman surnamed Lao (or an old gentleman) existed”. When we see this question, we immediately realize that to get a widely accepted answer, we must first clarify which specific

individual the “gentleman surnamed Lao (or old gentleman)” refers to. However, based on past research, the definition of “Laozi” is not clear. If we believe that the “Laozi” in question needs to meet all the related accounts, we will inevitably conclude that “Laozi” did not exist because we can be fairly certain that the current Laozi story is a mixture of many different sources of legends. However, if we believe that the “Laozi” we are discussing only needs to conform to specific core narratives, it is not difficult to conclude that Laozi existed and even infer the existence of multiple different Laozis.

In summary, the ambiguity in defining “Laozi” leads to ambiguity in the question, and differences in scholars’ definitions lead to differences in the questions they pose. Recognizing this, it is easy to understand why Chinese and Western scholars’ conclusions are so different.

Apart from the differences in questions, there are also subtle differences in the research materials used by Chinese and Western scholars. Although they use the same set of textual materials, these materials are translated due to language differences. Because of the inherent differences between languages, we cannot equate the Chinese original text with its translation. Indeed, Western sinologists generally read the Chinese original texts of the materials they use in their research. However, due to differences in language habits, we can imagine that even if the text translation does not actually occur, it still widely exists in the researchers’ thought processes. In areas such as the dating of Laozi and the *Tao Te Ching*, which require extensive use of ancient Chinese materials, issues of translation and language are more complex than in areas that do not involve ancient Chinese. American sinologist Victor H. Mair once stated that “the difference between Classical Chinese and vernacular Chinese is at least as great as the difference between Latin and Italian or Sanskrit and Hindi.” (Mair, 1994, p.707). In other words, when we compare Chinese and Western sinology, we are dealing with at least three different research-related languages: Classical Chinese, Modern Chinese, and English. The subtle differences in understanding that may arise in each translation process can guide researchers’ inferences in different directions. Although we still lack sufficient data to understand the extent of this influence, we can at least agree that the difference in materials exists. And since this difference exists, it is likely to influence the final conclusions.

Conclusions and Insights: The Value of Sino-Western Academic Exchange

As mentioned above, we can summarize the differences and their causes between Chinese and Western academia regarding the dating of Laozi from the early 20th century to the present: the divergence in attitudes between Chinese and Western scholars is influenced not only by subjective factors related to personal cultural backgrounds but also significantly by differences in research languages and the definitions of “Laozi” in their discussions. Therefore, we cannot simply dismiss the research findings of Western or Chinese academia.

In fact, the differences presented in the research processes of Chinese and Western academia themselves can offer profound insights into the study of Laozi and even into overseas sinology research.

Firstly, the differences in the conclusions reached by Chinese and Western scholars draw our attention to the significance of the definition of “Laozi”. The specific reference of “Laozi” is a question well worth discussing in the study of Laozi. Current discussions on Laozi largely base their analyses on Sima Qian’s accounts in *Records of the Grand Historian*. However, we know that *Records of the Grand Historian* has a tendency to retain conflicting important materials to preserve the richness of historical data, and Sima Qian’s research is not without errors. Therefore, it is logical not to insist that our inquiry into the existence or dating of Laozi conforms to all the descriptions in *Records of the Grand Historian*. However, this creates new issues. If we do not require the “Laozi” we are investigating to meet all descriptions, then how many descriptions must an individual conform to

in order to be called “Laozi”? Just like the sorites paradox proposed by ancient Greek Megarian philosophers Eubulides and Alexinus, the continuous addition or subtraction of small quantities can change the essence of things. When we continually add grains of “stories” to an empty space, at what point can we determine that we have obtained a heap called “Laozi”? Or can we simply define “Laozi” as the author of the *Tao Te Ching* or as an ancient figure perceived by pre-Qin people as Laozi? These questions still urgently need answers.

Additionally, the translation of ancient Chinese literature by Western scholars also deserves our attention. As Professor Victor H. Mair said, from a linguistic perspective, the difference between Classical Chinese and Modern Chinese is significant enough to consider them as two different languages. Therefore, even Chinese scholars, when studying ancient literature, experience a thought process similar to translation. In our research of ancient literature, Classical Chinese actually functions as the object-oriented language (Object-Oriented Language) in contrast to Modern Chinese as the metalanguage (Metalanguage). Because our metalanguage and object-oriented language use the same writing system, this results in high accuracy but also introduces issues of semantic ambiguity. For example, the term “Dao” frequently discussed in the *Tao Te Ching* is often retained as “Dao” in Modern Chinese translations, which, from a semantic perspective, can be seen as a form of ambiguity. When Western scholars conduct similar research, since their metalanguage differs more significantly from their object-oriented language, researchers often have to attempt to translate and explore all object-oriented languages. In this sense, their translations can sometimes be clearer than Modern Chinese translations in certain specific situations. Of course, we do not deny the existence of translation biases, as Chinese words and foreign words often do not have exact counterparts. However, the clarity in expression prompted by the inherent differences between the metalanguage and the object-oriented language is also worth noting. Furthermore, the independent characteristics of different languages can bring attention to many issues that might otherwise go unnoticed. For instance, the system of articles and singular/plural forms in English, when used to translate Classical Chinese, which lacks these elements, forces the translator to consider whether the translated names are generic, specific, or unique, and this thought process itself can be seen as a special form of research. Paying attention to these different perspectives can yield many new insights, providing new potential solutions to many currently unsolved problems.

In any case, distinguishing Chinese classical literature from its foreign translations and giving more attention to foreign translations as part of the translator’s research achievements is significant for scholars’ research. Taking the *Tao Te Ching* as an example, as early as 1963, the sectioning of the *Tao Te Ching* in the English translation by renowned Hong Kong translator D. C. Lau differed from the prevalent version of the original text. The Guodian Chu Tomb Bamboo Slips version of the *Tao Te Ching* unearthed in 1993 confirmed that D. C. Lau’s adjustments in his translation were quite reasonable, matching the Guodian Chu Tomb version of the *Tao Te Ching*. Examples like these remind us that translations are not merely simple reproductions of the original text but should be considered another form of interpretation of the original text. However, the significance of this interpretation should not be overlooked.

In summary, as Derk Bodde said, paying attention to the research of scholars from other countries is very important. Our research on overseas sinology is not only to understand their culture and research trends but also to enrich our research materials, discover new research perspectives, and ultimately provide support for solving the research questions we are concerned with. Although the differences and causes of the debate on the Laozi issue between Chinese and Western academia discussed in this article are only an example, through research and discussion, we can understand the significance and value of paying attention to overseas sinology from another

perspective. We also hope that in the future, Chinese and Western academia will engage in more exchanges and discussions on these differences to obtain more research results.

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