

## 摘 要

《道德经》是中国最早的一部道教哲学著作，它对中国传统文化和人们的生活具有重要的意义。自 1868 年第一个英译本诞生以来，它也在世界上受

大量翻译和出版，成为除《圣经》外翻译版本最多的著作。基于上述事实，作者对《道德经》在英美的翻译产生了巨大的研究兴趣。在本文中，她试图从接受理论的视角对这一部中国典籍的英译进行比较研究。

接受理论（又称接受美学）作为文学研究中的一种新型范式和新兴的方法论，将文学批评理论的关注焦点由重作者、重作品转向重文本—读者关系。接受理论认为：读者的反应是评价一部作品好坏的标准，作者在创作过程中应考虑到读者的社会经验、审美倾向、接受能力，即读者的“期待视野”。此外，一部作品并不是把所有的信息都呈现在读者面前，它含有许多意义未定点和意义空白，这些未定点和意义空白是连接作品的创作意识和读者的接受意识的桥梁，它们需要读者根据自己的理解进行解析。这样读者能自觉主动地参与作品，从而使作品的生命力更加鲜活。

在本文中，作者选取了《道德经》在不同时期、不同地域的四个英译本，运用接受理论中“期待视野”和“未定性”这两个概念对它们进行了比较分析。分析表明：四个译者由于文化和时代背景的差异拥有不同的“期待视野”，而四个译本的读者也有各自的“期待视野”和接受能力。鉴于这两方面的考虑，译者对文本的未定点作出了不同的具体化，形成了不同的翻译。

本文进行这一分析的目的不在于评析《道德经》四个英译本孰优孰劣，而在于探讨《道德经》在英美出现众多不同译本的原因。文章认为，《道德经》像一个丰富无比的矿藏，并非通过一次性的阐释就能穷尽对它的发掘。而且，一个译本不可能同时满足不同历史阶段不同读者的需求。只有通过多个译本多次的发掘，我们才不断接近完成对它的认识。

**关键词：**《道德经》， 接受理论， 期待视野， 未定性， 文学翻译

## Abstract

*Tao Te Ching*, the earliest Taoist philosophical text in China, is of profoundly deep significance in Chinese society, both in its philosophical and religious influences and its secular application to everyday life. Since its first English translation in 1868 by the Englishman John Chalmers, it has also received great attention around the world, especially in Britain and America. In the last century, *Tao Te Ching* was translated and published successively, which makes it the most widely translated text except the Bible. On the basis of the above facts, the author produces great interest in the translation of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America. In the thesis, she intends to explore the English translation of this Chinese classic from the perspective of reception theory.

As a new and influential paradigm and methodology in literary theories, reception theory or reception aesthetics marks a shift in concern from the author and the work to the text-reader relationship in literary criticism. It holds the idea that readers' reaction is a criterion for judging the quality and value of a literary work. In the process of the production of a literary text, the author should consider the readers' social experience, aesthetic tendency and receptive ability, which constitute the readers' "horizon of expectations". In addition, in a literary text, there are many spots of indeterminacies and blanks which establish a bridge between the creative consciousness of the work and the readers' receptive consciousness. It is these qualities that need the readers to concretize according to their own understanding. In this way, readers can play an active role in the realization of a text, and make a literary work livelier.

In this thesis, the author chooses four English versions of *Tao Te Ching* which can represent the lapse of time as well as regional diversity. With the help of the two concepts of "horizon of expectations" and "indeterminacy" in

reception theory, she analyzes some samples from the four versions. The result of this analysis shows that owing to differences of the historical and cultural background, the four translators have different “horizons of expectations”; moreover, the target readers of the four versions also have their individual “horizons of expectations” and degrees of receptivity. In view of the above two aspects, the four translators with their particular properties come to different concretizations in the aesthetic pole for those blanks and indeterminacies in the artistic pole, hence different translations of the original text.

Instead of evaluating the relative gains and losses in the four versions, the paper only intends to probe the causes why there are so many translations of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America. It concludes that *Tao Te Ching*, like an abundant mineral resource, can not be fully excavated by a single interpretation. Furthermore, one version of *Tao Te Ching* can not satisfy the need of every reader in every period. Only through reading many versions of it, can we gradually get closer and closer to the original meaning of the work.

**Key words:** *Tao Te Ching*, reception theory, horizon of expectations, indeterminacy, literary translation

## Introduction

Chinese traditional culture is a treasure house among the cultures of the world, and *Tao Te Ching* is one of its brightest pearls in its depository. *Tao Te Ching* is an ancient Chinese example of wisdom literature, including a lot of sayings, aphorisms and pieces of wisdom passed down in oral tradition. The teachings in it exert a far-reaching influence on many fields of China. Confucius (551—479 B. C.), the first teacher and the sagest of the sage, once benefited from it. *Tao Te Ching* is not only one of the most well-known works of Chinese literature but also is considered “possibly the most well-known work of any non-Western civilization” (Kirkland, 1996: 24). It is known throughout the world, for it has been translated into every major language on earth, and into many minor ones. In the last 150 years, this classic work has been translated, interpreted and adapted into the English language over 100 times, which attests to its importance and popularity in the English-speaking society. The well-known sinologist, Joseph Needham, who had worked and traveled for years in China during World War II, wrote in his monumental work, *Science and Civilization in China*, “The *Tao-Te-Ching*, which may be regarded as without exception the most profound and beautiful work in the Chinese language, has as its author Lao Tzu, one of the most shadowy figures in Chinese history...” (Needham, 1956: 348). Such a great work arouses the author’s interest of study. In this thesis, she intends to conduct a tentative research on the translation of this work in Britain and America from the perspective of reception theory.

### 0.1 Research background

Containing the quintessential spirit of Chinese thoughts, *Tao Te Ching* is a 2000-year-old, essay-length poem about the Nature of Things.

Originally containing approximately 5000 characters, the enigmatic text has had an integral role in Chinese philosophy since its appearance and has been assimilated into the religious foundations of Buddhism, Taoism and Neo-Confucianism. Covering a wide scope of subjects from politics, philosophy and art to education and moral cultivation, *Tao Te Ching* is of deep significance in Chinese society, both in its philosophical and religious influences and in its secular application to everyday life.

Although the origin of *Tao Te Ching* is in China, its thought belongs to the world. According to textual research, in 1788, a Latin version of *Tao Te Ching* was brought to London and presented at a meeting. A Russian version followed in 1828. Three years later, G. Pauthie made the first French version, and in 1868, John Chalmers, a protestant missionary in China, made the first English translation. In the two decades between 1943 and 1963, a new version appeared every other year, with half of them in the United States. Now, it has been “ the most frequently translated work next to the Bible” (Goldin, 2002: 183). The Tao and its subtle philosophy are currently being actively assimilated into mainstream western culture as evidenced by the popularity and volume of Taoist works.

Why can the book get such successful reception and propagation? There are two factors: one is external and the other is internal. The external factors include two aspects: the first is the richness and beauty of the collection itself; the second is the social and historical conditions. However, the most critical factor, according to reception theory, is the internal factor: people’s expectation, their desire to escape into some remote and fantastic world, and their search to find the material for dreams of lost wisdom or golden ages. After World War I and World War II, western economy, politics and military were seriously affected, and the rapid development of science and technology also destroyed people’s old faith. Darwin’s theories of evolution shook people’s belief in god. So

people found themselves living in a spiritual wasteland, where life was a meaningless and fruitless affair and man felt homeless, estranged and haunted by a sense of doom. People who lived through the period experienced a sense of loss, a collapse of spiritual authority and a crisis of religious faith. All of these developed into a mood of discontent with western civilization and encouraged a search for more satisfying and meaningful alternatives. In order to reconstruct the moral ideas after the two world wars, western people realized the necessities to more deeply understand other peoples and their spiritual achievements. Many thinkers and writers at that time began to look to the east as a source of cultural renewal. *Tao Te Ching* with its profound philosophy offers them some satisfying and meaningful help, so now it becomes very popular in the western world.

However, we also discover that though various kinds of versions of *Tao Te Ching* continually appear and the literature on it and the Taoist philosophy is abundant, little research has been done on the English translation of this Chinese classic. Due to personal interest and the fact that this book itself exerts profound influence on the Chinese and that its translation is widely received and propagated in the west, especially in Britain and America, the author chooses four English versions of this book as her research object. Every generation has the task of inheriting traditional culture and spreading classic works, and translation plays an important role in fulfilling the task. Thus, for every native Chinese, not only this classic work itself, but also its translation is worth a comprehensive study.

## **0.2 Theoretical framework**

In the context of the linguistic turn in literary studies, the literary criticism of the 20<sup>th</sup> century underwent great changes in depth and in breadth. As one of the most significant literary theories and critical

schools, reception theory emerged in the 1960s and made literary studies enter into a broader space. Moreover, it is noted that translation theorists have also shown their interest in reception theory and have applied many ideas in this theory to their study of literary translation.

### **0.2.1 The reception theory**

Reception theory is regarded as a challenge to the author-centered and text-centered literary theories in which the close connection between the reader and the literary work and the active role of the reader are neglected. It marks a shift in concern from the author and the work to the text-reader relationship.

For a long time, literary theorists have paid most of their attention to the author and the texts, and the reader's reception is usually ignored. In contrast with most literary theories, reception theory, whose theoretical basis is phenomenology and philosophical hermeneutics, attaches great importance to the role of the reader. Its central task is to establish a new approach to literary studies — combining the textual reception history with the reader's present aesthetic experiences. The major representatives of reception theory are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the Constance School. Depending on hermeneutics and particularly influenced by Gadamer, Jauss emphasizes the reader's active role in the historical accounts of literature and the relation between what a work asks of the reader and what a reader expects of the work. The other representative Iser, on the other hand, focuses on the aspect of this dynamic relation — the interaction between the text and the reader.

With the development of reception theory, it has been widely employed in other disciplines, and a case in point is its application to translatology. It takes translation studies out of the confinement of the "text", providing a new angle for our cognition of literary translation. Especially, it helps to consolidate the reader's role in literary translation.

### 0.2.2 Reception theory study of literary translation in China

In China, owing to the relatively late introduction of the theories of hermeneutics and the aesthetics of reception, the application of their relevant principles to translatology is correspondingly rather late in time and small in scale. It was not until the late 1980s that reception theory was introduced into the Chinese translation field. In 1987, the first article related to reception theory, "Interpretation, Reception and the Circulation of Re-Creation" by Yang Wuneng (杨武能), appeared. Following were some papers discussing the subject from different perspectives. However, it didn't come to the notice of China's translation research until the 1990s. From 1987 till now, more than 20 essays in translation studies concerning reception theory have been published in periodicals and magazines. These essays approach the issue from different angles. For example, in "Translation: A Dialogue between a Text and Its Translators", He Wei (贺微), on the basis of modern reception theory, proposes that translation is the communication or dialogue between text and its translators (readers); in "Translation Theory and Practice from the Perspective of Readers Response Theory", Qin Hongwu (秦洪武) reinterprets the reader response theory of Nida through the combination of it with reception aesthetics; Ma Xiao (马萧), on the basis of modern reception aesthetics, proposes in "Reception Aesthetics and Literary Translation" that the active interpretation of the original text and of the translated version by translators and target language readers respectively affects the process and result of translation.

Generally speaking, researches on this subject possess the following features:

1. It stresses the translator's subjective role as both the information receiver and the information releaser in the process of translation.
2. It emphasizes the referential role of the target text reader and



claims that the response of the reader should be taken into consideration in the process of translation.

3. It resolves some practical problems (such as idiom translation) by using relevant theories.
4. It re-examines the nature of translation: on the one hand, translation should regard the response and reception of the reader as reference; on the other hand, translation is a dialogue between text and translator.
5. It challenges traditional translation theory. For example, the concept of “the openness of text” in reception theory raises serious doubt about objectivity and determinativeness as the premise of translation.

### 0.3 Research objective and general structure

Previous Chinese studies of the translation of *Tao Te Ching* are mainly on the choice of strategies such as literal translation and free translation, on the comparison of different versions, or on the comparison between the original and translated texts. They give little consideration to the translator and reader’s active role in translating. In this thesis, the author will apply two major concepts of reception theory — “horizon of expectations” and “indeterminacy”— to a comparative analysis of four English versions of the Chinese classic. Instead of evaluating the relative gains and losses in the four versions, she intends to show that due to translators’ different horizons of expectations as well as their consideration for the target readers’ horizons of expectations, the four versions show differences in the concretizations of those indeterminacies in the original text. This is the cause why there are so many different versions of *Tao Te Ching*.

The thesis is composed of five parts including an introduction and a conclusion:

The introduction includes research background, theoretical framework, research objective and general structure.

Chapter One introduces Lao Tzu and *Tao Te Ching* first, then gives a survey of English translations of *Tao Te Ching*, especially the translations in Britain and America, and corresponding studies.

Chapter Two discusses reception theory and the relationship between it and translation. Then it focuses on the two concepts of reception theory — “horizon of expectations” and “indeterminacy” — and elaborates their application to literary translation.

Chapter Three introduces four English versions of *Tao Te Ching* by James Legge, Arthur Waley, Michael LaFargue and Gu Zhengkun and offers a detailed comparative analysis of the four English versions from the perspective of reception theory

The conclusion summarizes the whole thesis.

## **Chapter One**

### **Literature Review**

*Tao Te Ching* is an ancient Chinese scripture originally named *Laozi*. This brilliant book began to show its splendor more than 2000 years ago. As Chinese first systematic philosophical work, its content covers many areas of philosophy, from individual spirituality to techniques for governing societies. The poems and saying of this book have powerfully affected Chinese philosophy, culture, and society. What's more, its reputation is not confined to its home country. As one of the most brilliant sources of Chinese traditional culture, *Tao Te Ching* inevitably comes into western researchers' view and becomes one of the earliest objects of their Chinese classic study. From the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century to this day, it has been frequently translated by many scholars and receives a lot of readers' favor.

#### **1.1 Lao Tzu and *Tao Te Ching***

The object of the study in this thesis is the English translation of the Chinese classic work *Tao Te Ching*. Like the studies of other translated texts, it is very necessary to know about the original text, its background and some related information. So in the following parts, a brief introduction to this book will be presented.

##### **1.1.1 Lao Tzu**

Not much is known about Lao Tzu, at least nothing is certain. Though *Tao Te Ching* is traditionally said to have been penned by him, some still have their doubt of the statement. However, Lao Tzu's name became legendary with this writing, which also happens to be his only work.

Some legends say Lao Tzu was born in Ku Prefecture of the state of

Chu, which today is Luyi County of Henan province, in the later years of the Spring and Autumn Period (770—476 B.C.). Some say he was born with white hair, having spent eight or eighty years in his mother's womb, which is given as an explanation for his title, which can be both read as "the old master" and "the old child".

The *Shiji* (*Records of the Historian* 《史记》) by the Han dynasty court historian Sima Qian (145-86 B.C.) offers a "biography" of Lao Tzu. Its reliability has been questioned, but it serves as the most popular point. Lao Tzu was born in a southern state of Chu in the Chou dynasty, but the date of his birth is a mystery. His surname was Li; his given name was Erh, and posthumous name Dan. He was an official of archives in the Chou court. It was while working in this capacity that Confucius came and consulted him on matters of ceremonies and rites and praised him highly. This establishes the traditional claim that Lao Tzu was a senior contemporary of Confucius. And also based upon this encounter it is assumed that he was older than Confucius. "Lao-tzu cultivated the Tao and its Virtue," as Sima Qian goes on to relate, and "he taught that one should efface oneself and be without fame in the world. After he had lived in Chou for a long time, he perceived the Chou was in decline, so departed" (Graham, 1998: 23). When he reached the northwest border separating China from the outside world, the border official asked him to put his thoughts to writing so that they might be passed on. At this point Lao Tzu wrote a book in two parts, discussing the meaning of Tao and virtue in some 5000 words. After he finished the essay, Lao Tzu departed and was not heard from again. This is the main part of Sima Qian's account.

However, some scholars today would not subscribe fully to the *Shiji* report. As William Boltz said, it "contains virtually nothing that is demonstrably factual; we are left no choice but to acknowledge the likely fictional nature of the traditional Lao zi figure" (1993: 270). So there are

some modern controversies concerning Lao zi's life.<sup>1</sup>

1. "Lao zi" was probably a fictitious character. The discussion with Confucius might have been fabricated by Taoists to make their school of philosophy sound superior to Confucianism.

2. The actual author(s) of *Tao Te Ching* created a fictitious character so the origin of the text would look more mysterious, thus making it easier to popularize.

3. Lao zi was probably a pseudonym of Dan, Prefect of the Grand Scribes (Tài Shǐ Dàn, 太史儋); or of an old man from Lai, a prefecture in the state of Qí (齐); or of some other historical person.

In this thesis, the author will adopt the most popular opinion: Lao Tzu is the author of *Tao Te Ching*.

### 1.1.2 *Tao Te Ching*

*Tao Te Ching* is the earliest-known text of the Taoist tradition. Since the sacred Chinese text appeared over 2000 years ago, the origins of *Tao Te Ching* have been shrouded in folklore, mystery, and confusion, especially about its date and authorship.

Generally scholars hold three views on the date of *Tao Te Ching*. First, some scholars maintain that we should accept on the whole Sima Qian's account that the Chinese classic was written by Lao Dan in the 6<sup>th</sup> or early 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. A second and more widely held view traces *Tao Te Ching* to the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C., while a third argues for an even later date, not earlier than the mid-3<sup>rd</sup> century B.C. As to the authorship of *Tao Te Ching*, there also exist several different ideas. According to the traditional views and Sima Qian's account, it was written by Lao Tzu. In contrast, for some scholars, it contains different layers of material spanning the period between 340 and 249 B.C. — "its long timespan precludes a single

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<sup>1</sup> searched from the website: [http://www.thaioxotictreasures.com/lao\\_tzu.html#Lao %20T zua % 20life](http://www.thaioxotictreasures.com/lao_tzu.html#Lao%20T%20zua%20life)

author” (Bruce Brooks and Taeko Brooks, 1998: 151). These are only general indicators; the situation is more complex because *Tao Te Ching* may turn out to be a composite work involving a long process of textual formation.

Awareness of the origins of *Tao Te Ching* is indispensable to the study of this classic because different origins raise different hermeneutic expectations and affect the way in which *Tao Te Ching* is read. If the work was written by a single author, one might expect, for example, a high degree of consistency in style and content. If *Tao Te Ching* was a work of the 6<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C., one might interpret certain sayings in the light of what we know of the period. Because of these uncertainties, there are so many annotations, interpretations and even the subsequent translations.

#### 1.1.2.1 Content

The total 81 chapters of *Tao Te Ching* are written in verse form which is a kind of philosophical poem. It contains just around 5000 Chinese characters, yet covers subjects comprehensively ranging from philosophy, history, politics, ethics, to cultivation of man’s mind. *Tao Te Ching* includes two parts. Chapters 1-37 constitute part one known as *Taojing*, while chapters 38-81 make up part two *Tejing*. This is understood to be a thematic division — chapter 1 begins with the word Tao, while chapter 38 begins with the phrase “superior virtue” — although the concepts of Tao and virtue (Te) feature in both parts. As a heuristic guide, some commentators have suggested that *Taojing* is more “metaphysical,” whereas *Tejing* focuses more on sociopolitical issues.

In *Tao Te Ching*, Tao is the core of Lao Tzu’s philosophical thought. “Centering around the core, Taoism is systematically constructed with four integral parts: 1) the Tao as the ontological being; 2) the Tao as the dialectic law; 3) the Tao as the epistemological tool; 4) the Tao as a

practical guide to worldly affairs”(Gu, 1995: 26). In the book, Lao Tzu explores the origin of the universe, and regards Tao as the general root for all kinds of material and their development. Tao is the mother of all things and it begets all things. While Tao itself is shapeless, soundless and indescribable, if it can be spoken of, then it is not the eternal natural Tao anymore. So, though suggestive, the term Tao itself is no more than a symbol — as Lao Tzu further demonstrates and describes in Chapter 25<sup>2</sup>, “I do not know its name; so I name it as the Tao”. This suggests a sense of radical transcendence, which may explain why *Tao Te Ching* has been approached so often as a mystical text. *Tao Te Ching* is concerned with not only Tao but also Te. Te is not just a matter of moral character and doesn’t just presuppose self-cultivation; Lao Tzu suggests a “higher” Te against any moral achievement attained through repeated effort. Traditional commentaries beginning with *Hanfeizi* often play on the homonymic relation between Te (virtue) and another word also pronounced te, which means to “acquire” or “obtain” something. And some commentators get the conclusion that Te is what one has “obtained” from (the) Tao, a “latent power” by “virtue” of which any being becomes what it is (Waley, 1958: 32). In this sense, *Tao Te Ching* speaks of Te as that which nourishes all beings. In fact, Tao and Te are interdependent and coexist as well. Without Te, Tao can not show its power, and without Tao there is no effect of Te.

In *Tao Te Ching*, there are many profound thoughts. Its rich topics have inspired philosophical and metaphysical reflections. But what on earth is the core value of this great book? It has been a prevalent understanding that “spontaneity or tzu-jan (nature) and nonaction or wu-wei are two essential notions in Taosim, whose meanings are often

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<sup>2</sup> 具体的内容见《道德经》第25章：“有物混成，先天地生。寂兮寥兮，独立而不改，周行而不殆，可以为天地母。吾不知其名，字之曰道，强名之曰大。”Gu Zhengkun’s version: There is a thing integreatedly formed/ And born earlier than heavcn and earth./ Silent and empty, /It relies on nothing, /Moving around for ever. /We may regard it as the mother of all things. /I do not know its name, /So I name it as the Tao, /And further name it as the Great.

thought to be identical". To be exact, "tzu-jan is the cardinal and central value of Taoism while wu-wei is the essential method to realize it in social life" (Liu, 1998: 211). According to *Tao Te Ching*, there are various laws in all things of the universe including heaven, earth, and man; however, the best and the most functional laws are those which are most natural, or, in other words, are those which completely follow the Tao of Nature. On the basis of this, *Tao Te Ching* highlights the concept of wu-wei. Wu-wei does not mean that one should sit around and do nothing, but that one should avoid explicit intentions, strong will, and proactive action; one can reach real efficiency by following the way things spontaneously increase or decrease. Actions taken in accordance with Tao are easier and more productive than actively attempting to counter it.

#### 1.1.2.2 Language features

*Tao Te Ching*, written in verse form, is a philosophical poem. Much of the text is rhymed and the whole text is written in ancient Chinese which has two distinguishing marks: abstraction and logic. The classical Chinese word does not stand for a single concrete idea, but it evokes associations of different ideas and things. Quite a few Chinese words can be used as nouns, adjectives and verbs at the same time. Thus sentences composed of various signs have a sort of suggestive power, evoking emotions, ideas and pictures.

*Tao Te Ching* contains rich connotations, but has them expressed through simple images. Its language is artistic and lively; full of emotion but still concealed; far-reaching in meaning but plain in appearance. Because of its language features, *Tao Te Ching*, in the vast Chinese literary ocean, is the one with the most numerous annotators. It is not surprising that there was once a saying like "with eighty-one chapters in Tao Te, there are as many as three thousand annotators for the work".

In addition, like most other Chinese classics, *Tao Te Ching* is



extremely rich in rhetorical devices: it uses paradox, analogy, appropriation of ancient sayings, repetition, symmetry, rhyme, rhythm and so on to explain its abstract ideas.

### 1.1.2.3 Influence in China

As a rare cultural heritage, *Tao Te Ching* is not only the direct and reliable source for the research of Lao Tzu and Taoism, but also one of the precious classics to study Chinese history, ideology and education. Its influence on Chinese culture is both deep and far-reaching. One indication of its enduring appeal and hermeneutical openness is the large number of commentaries devoted to it throughout Chinese history — some seven hundred, according to one count (Chan, 1963: 77). Of course, this is just one aspect.

The biggest influence of *Tao Te Ching* is in the field of philosophy. For one thing, after the appearance of *Tao Te Ching*, philosophers after Lao Tzu as well as contemporary philosophers are all influenced by it in some way, and among the number are such famous names as Confucius, Mo Tzu, Mencius, Chuang Tzu, Hanfeizi and so on. Mo Tzu, born around the beginning of the Warring States period (475—221 B.C.), was thinking in many ways like what *Tao Te Ching* advocates, and was also an activist for peace. He was sympathetic to the plight of the common people, strongly against wars of aggression. It can hardly be coincidental that Mo Tzu's doctrines of universal love, non-aggression and the supreme authority of Heaven so closely resembled *Tao Te Ching's* pure love, anti-aggression and deep faith in Heaven's way. Chuang Tzu, Lao Tzu's most famous follower, concentrated on study of the ceaseless changes of Nature and wrote a book that had a great deal of influence on Chinese literati, through the ideas of individualism, freedom, carefreeness and art, which may well be the cornerstone of Chinese aesthetic. For another thing, *Tao Te Ching* has inspired two intellectual theories known as

Xuanxue (玄学) and Laoxue (老学). Xuanxue, “Learning of the Mysterious (Tao)” or “Neo-Daoism”, once dominated the Chinese elite or high culture from the 3<sup>rd</sup> to the 6<sup>th</sup> century. Laoxue, “Laozi learning”, now has come to designate an important field of philosophical study; a recent effort that sketches the major landmarks in this development is *Zhongguo Laoxue shi* (*A History of Laozi Learning in China* 《中国老学史》) (Chan, 2001).

Besides its influence on philosophy, *Tao Te Ching* also has an important impact on Chinese people. It is well known that Lao Tzu’s philosophy was assimilated into Buddhism to form Zen Buddhism in the 6<sup>th</sup> century, and also into Neo-Confucianism in the 11<sup>th</sup> century. Its influence on Taoist religion, which began in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century, has been very obvious. Though they are three different religions, they have been influencing Chinese people as a whole. To the Chinese the teachings in *Tao Te Ching* such as working hard, being frugal, avoiding extremes, planning ahead, doing good deeds, believing in fate and chance, valuing central core in adversity, having humility at success, being humble with wisdom or wealth, etc., have formed parts of an integral whole of the Chinese character in various degrees. Depending on one’s intellect and experiences, *Tao Te Ching*’s influence is uniquely interwoven and absorbed in one’s character and outlook. Of course, depending on circumstances, some exceptional behaviors, good or bad, could always occur.

*Tao Te Ching* is a great Chinese classic whose influence is far beyond what is said above. It plays a significant role in informing not only philosophic thought but also the development of literature, art, education, politics, and other cultural traditions. Its thought has penetrated into every corner of Chinese life.

## 1.2 The English translation of *Tao Te Ching*

After a brief introduction to Lao Tzu and *Tao Te Ching*, the author will focus her attention on the translation of this work for in the third chapter of this thesis she will analyze some examples taken from its four English versions. In her opinion, it is necessary to know something about its historical development if one wants to do research on the English translation of *Tao Te Ching*. With the help of some relevant sources and observations, she divides this history into three periods, based on the interpretation perspectives taken by most translators and some general translation phenomena.

### 1.2.1 The period of Christianization

The first period of the English translation of *Tao Te Ching* covers the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries. Influenced by the dominant western ideological, philosophical, and religious values of the time, it is concerned mainly with a comparison of the work with Christian doctrine.

The earliest known western translation of this Chinese classic was a Latin version produced by Jesuit missionaries in China, and presented to the British Royal Society in 1788. The stated intent of the translators was to show that “the Mysteries of the Most Holy Trinity and of the Incarnate God were anciently known to the Chinese nation”<sup>3</sup> (Legge, 1962: xiii). Speculations about Christian doctrine hidden within *Tao Te Ching* were a popular topic among missionaries, and the first scholarly studies of the text, commencing fifty years later, continued these speculations.

In 1842, J. P. Abel-Rémusat’s student Stanislas Julien published a complete French translation of *Tao Te Ching*. His understanding of Tao was a little different from his teacher’s. According to the Chinese, he said, “the Tao is devoid of action, thought, judgment, and intelligence” (qtd. in Hardy, 1998: 166). His interpretation relied on the Chinese commentaries,

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<sup>3</sup> According to Legge, the manuscript version was extant in England when he wrote his preface to *The Texts of Taoism*.

so he was the first western scholar whose concern was to present an authentically Chinese understanding of the text.

The first English version was produced by John Chalmers in 1868; this was, in turn, followed by those of Frederic Balfour and James Legge and so on. James Legge published “the first reliable English translation” (Hardy, 1998:166) in 1891. In his version, Legge tried to avoid the attempts to impose Christian theology onto the Taoist ideas of the text. However, in his introductory remarks, Legge made his sympathies clear and proclaimed Lao tzu wrong in many things about which Christian doctrine was right, not actually interpreting the text but simply measuring it against preconceived standards. Despite all that, “Legge’s extensive Taoist studies... set much of the underlying tone, textual content and hidden logic for subsequent Western discussions of this tradition within Sinology, the general history of religions and popular culture” (Girardot, 2002: 109).

Up to 1905, there were thirteen different translations into English alone<sup>4</sup>. Most translations in this period were not based on substantial scholarly underpinnings, so they didn’t present a Chinese understanding of the text. What these translations mainly concern was the explicit comparisons with Christianity.

### 1.2.2 The period of western adaptation

Comparisons with Christianity continue in the second period which begins around 1915, but a clear shift in the understanding of the text occurs, and *Tao Te Ching* is often employed as an instrument to criticize western thought and values. It is during this period that scholarly participation in the appropriation of *Tao Te Ching* for western needs is most common.

<sup>4</sup> The thirteen versions were produced by J. Chalmer, F.H.Balfour, J.Legges, H.A.Giles, W.R.Old, C.S. Medhurst, P.J.Maclagan, T.W.Kingsmill, E.H.Harper, G.G.Alexander, W.G.Old, P.Carus, I.W. Heysinger, and L.Giles.

During the second stage of western interpretation, *Tao Te Ching* “was received no longer as Christian revelation in an alien form or a misguided oriental attempt at wisdom, but in its own right” (Hardy, 1998: 166-167). Nevertheless, religious and philosophical questions remained important, and comparisons with Christianity were still influential in the interpretation of the text even though they were not explicit. One religious question many interpreters asked was whether or not Tao had qualities that could be associated with western concepts of supreme deity. Some insisted that Tao was something entirely different from the Christian God. Some, holding a different opinion, viewed Tao as a kind of Supreme Being that, even if not directly equated with God, had many qualities associated with Him. And some other interpreters were strongly against the notion of Tao as an absolute being.

In this period, *Tao Te Ching* appealed to many western interpreters simply as a philosophy of life or advice on values and behavior in the ordinary, daily world. They read it as a philosophy that could take the place of religion. Others, like Arthur Waley, interpreted the text in both mystical and practical terms. However, several scholars believed *Tao Te Ching* was an antidote to the disease of the west. The Chinese scholar Lin Yutang said “If I were asked what antidote could be found in Oriental literature and philosophy to cure this contentious modern world of its inveterate belief in force and struggle for power, I would name this book” (qtd. in Hardy, 1998: 172). Among all advocates of this interpretation, Joseph Needham was the most vocal and prolific one. More than any other scholarly interpreter, Needham appropriated *Tao Te Ching* in service of his own agenda — his interpretation was shaped by his perceptions of the situation and needs of the modern west (Hardy, 1990: 30-33), which led to his distorted understanding of the classic, but he struck a chord in western consciousness and his work elicited considerable popular response. Such kind of understanding influenced the English translation

of *Tao Te Ching* and its reception. At that time, the translation of this book mainly served for the emergent situation after the two world wars and functioned as a kind of cure pill for the target western countries. The purpose and the desired function have significant influence on the choices of the translators. To make the thought in this Chinese classic work easy for the westerners to accept and to achieve the desired cure effect for the western society, most of the translators chose the language forms with the implied meaning familiar to the target readers and took the reader-oriented strategy. Consequently western adaptation constituted the norm of most of the translations during the second period.

### 1.2.3 The period of cultural interpretation

Beginning with the discovery of the Ma Wang Dui manuscript of *Tao Te Ching* in 1973, the third period is that of recent scholarship on *Tao Te Ching*; it is marked by a serious attempt to avoid appropriation and create an interpretation based on Chinese sources. In this period, the translations of *Tao Te Ching* become more prosperous, due to the familiarity of westerners with Orientalism, especially Taosim, and the development of domestic and western Taoist research.

Although much effort during the second period was made to interpret this great book appropriately to cure western diseases, there was also much solid and unbiased scholarship before 1980 that laid the groundwork for current *Tao Te Ching* studies. The emphasis was on understanding the text as it had been interpreted by the Chinese and within the context of Chinese history and culture. In the late 1970s and early 1980s, a philosophical interpretation of Taoism proved hugely attractive to western thinkers and created a vision of ancient China. Such attraction and idealization led occasionally to “Orientalist” interpretations of *Tao Te Ching* that were shaped more by the needs and dreams of interpreters than by the text itself (Kohn and LaFargue, 1998: 10). Later

stimulated by the general turn in western scholarship away from the idealized ancient “Orient” and toward an appreciation of current and local cultures, researchers shifted their attention in Taoist studies from the classical texts to later Taoist religious scriptures and ritual (Hardy, 1998: 175). So the general attitude taken by most of the recent translators is to focus on the text of *Tao Te Ching* within its Chinese cultural context. Still, many recent scholars of this Chinese classic have definite agendas based on personal opinions and personal needs and are unlikely to state those agendas.

During this period, the number of *Tao Te Ching* English versions boomed. In translating, though the attitude of these translators was almost the same, every translator carried his/her own purpose and considered the meaning he/she digged was the original one of the source text. The lack of definite meaning led to the possibility of different kinds of interpretation, religious, psychological, architectural, political, military, naturalistic, or aesthetic. The infinite interpretations made the quick rise of *Tao Te Ching* translations possible. According to rough statistics, there came out about 50 English versions in the western world from 1973 to 2000.

### 1.3 Translations and studies of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America

In *The Way of Lao Tzu* Wing-Tsit Chan mentioned that in the 20 years prior to 1963 a new version of *Tao Te Ching* appeared almost every other year and half of these were published in America<sup>5</sup> (qtd. in 崔长清, 1997: 52). And according to LaFargue and Pas’s statistics, “so far about 250 translations into Western languages have been made” (LaFargue and Pas, 1998: 277), and a lot of them were published in Britain and America. Based on these facts, we know the scholars in the Anglo-American world

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<sup>5</sup> Unless otherwise stated, all translations of Chinese quotations are my own.

make outstanding contributions to render and propagate *Tao Te Ching* (The major English *Tao Te Ching* translations in Britain and America are listed in Appendix 1).

### 1.3.1 Translations

*Tao Te Ching* with its rich content attracts the attention of not only Chinese but also westerners. Since it made its western debut in the late 18<sup>th</sup> century, it has been vigorously used and adapted. In every generation the dominant concerns of readers determine their understanding and interpretation of the text. Thus, with the constant change of readers' concerns, various kinds of translations of *Tao Te Ching* have emerged in the western world, especially in Britain and America, which impulses the reception and propagation of the Chinese classic. Among them there are three versions respectively coming from James Legge, Arthur Waley and Michael LaFargue, which have won great preeminence and will be discussed later in this thesis. In addition to them, *Tao Te Ching* has also attracted a list of scholars and they produce their complete translations of the book, which are mainly listed as follows according to the time sequence.

After John Chalmers published the first English translation in 1868 and Paul Carus made the first American translation in 1898, people in the Anglo-American world began to know about *Tao Te Ching* and Taosim. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the versions of *Tao Te Ching* were limited, they yet made effective preparation for the flourishing translations in the future.

At the beginning of 20<sup>th</sup> century, Walter Gorn Old published his English translation *The Book of the Simply Way* in London. In the introduction to this book, Old reviews Lao Tzu's philosophical thought and its significant influence on his descendants and western world. In translation practice, Old considers that "any translation from the Chinese is capable of extreme flexibility and license..." It is safe to say that the



more literal the translation may be the more obscure is its meaning” (qtd. in 费小平, 2001: 64), that is to say, he opposes literal translation and advocates free translation which can rightly render the spirit of the text. In order to make readers easily understand the main idea of a chapter, Old appends a subhead to every chapter in his version. However, most sentences of his translation are descriptive, which is far away from the language style of the original text.

Entitled *The Way of Life According to Lao Tzu*, Witter Bynner’s American version of *Tao Te Ching* was originally published in 1944 by the John Day Company and has received over ten printings since this time. Because Bynner hasn’t any knowledge of classical Chinese and he doesn’t pay much attention to historical scholarship about ancient China, he trusts his own personal sense more instead of historical research and he uses this as a guide to understand the deeper or inner meaning underlying the words of the text (LaFargue and Pas, 1998: 284). In his version, he adds some phrases and lines that correspond to nothing in the Chinese text, following his own intuitive feeling for truths he thinks the text hints at.

Based on Wang Bi text<sup>6</sup>, D. C. Lau gave out his translation *Lao-tzu: Tao Te Ching* in 1963. This version is considered by many scholars to be one of the most expertly translated English versions of *Tao Te Ching* in print. Lau’s experience and qualifications for translating are well established with formal training both in the Chinese language and literature as well as in philosophy. Lau’s 1963 translation is divided into three main parts: introduction, body text, and appendices on the problem of authorship and the nature of the work. There are also a list of passages for comparison, a chronological table, a glossary, and Chinese characters for emendation. Lau’s translation is unadorned, yet replete with the

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<sup>6</sup> In China, *Tao Te Ching* has been the subject of about 700 commentaries in Chinese. Of all the commentaries, those by Ho-shang-gong (probably 2<sup>nd</sup> century B. C.) and Wang Bi (226–249 C.E.) are by far the most important, the most quoted and referred to.

clarifying notes. Due to the use of colloquial style and simple sentences, his version is easy to understand, although sometimes it is not very faithful to the original style. In 1982, he translated *Tao Te Ching* again on the basis of the Ma Wang Dui discovered texts, which is collected in Penguin Classics.

In 1988, Harper & Row published Stephen Mitchell's translation *Tao Te Ching: A New English Version* which represents part of a more recent wave of interest in *Tao Te Ching*. Different from some translators who try to bring readers back into the world of ancient China, Mitchell tries to bring *Tao Te Ching* into the world of the modern reader. So many westerners find Mitchell's translation to be most helpful in their understanding of Tao and it is often recommended to first time readers. James Frey, author of *A Million Little Pieces*, once said: "I have read many translations of this ancient text but Mitchell's is by far the best". In *The New Republic* the editorial review for Mitchell's version is "Beautiful and accessible; the English, as 'fluid as melting ice', is a joy to read throughout".<sup>7</sup>

In 1989 Robert Henricks translated *Tao Te Ching*. His translation is based primarily upon the discovered Ma Wang Dui texts in China. Because the sequence of chapters in this form of the text is totally unrelated to the sequence readers commonly see in the "standard" form of the text, the chapters in his version vary from readings in other versions. Henricks's academic background and thorough research of eastern philosophy and religions lend credence to his well-regarded translation, which is eloquent in its rendering of archaic Chinese, and eminently scholarly in its illuminating comments and notes.

In 1991, Thomas Cleary published his translation *The Essential Tao* which incorporates two books: *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tzu*. In *Tao Te*

<sup>7</sup> searched from the website: [http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060812451/qid=1143277075/sr=1-1/re f=sr\\_1\\_1/102-0414864-5685713?s=books&v=glance&n=283155](http://www.amazon.com/gp/product/0060812451/qid=1143277075/sr=1-1/re f=sr_1_1/102-0414864-5685713?s=books&v=glance&n=283155)

*Ching* Lao-tzu's classic anthology of sayings, poems, and proverbs, appears in its entirety; Cleary's excellent, detailed notes to each of the 81 chapters illuminate the difficult verses and unfamiliar ideas. Readers already acquainted with *Tao Te Ching* will find renewed enjoyment in the directness and simplicity of Cleary's translation, which is particularly pleasing to modern ears while losing none of the nuances of the original.

Even at the beginning of the 21<sup>th</sup> century, a number of translated works keep coming out for readers such as Johnathan Star's *Tao Te Ching: The Definitive Edition* (2001), David Hall and Roger T. Ames's *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant* (2003), Moss Robert's *Dao De Jing: The Book of the Way* (2004). Their translations and philosophical presentation of the text will be seen to complement each other. It is obvious that the translation history of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America shows not only its own great vitality but also Anglo-American scholars' interest in Chinese literature and culture throughout centuries.

### 1.3.2 Studies

With the publication of translated Chinese literary and philosophical works, western scholars have come to realize the great value of Chinese traditional culture. It can be seen that once the scholars want to cast off the traditional fetters of European culture, they will seek strength and reference from the others including Chinese culture. *Tao Te Ching* with its profound philosophy provides great help for them. And at the same time the work also arouses many scholars' enormous interest of study. In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it has become one of the focuses of Chinese studies in the western world. Sinologists study it from various angles. Some scholars attempt to find solutions to modern problems, inevitably adapting the text to their own cultural environment. Some, based on cultural comparison, try to make out whether it represents a religious mysticism or not. Some, concerned with the text itself, endeavor to find wise instructions or

ideological systems in it. And some scholars aim to discover the original meaning of this ancient writing. Here I'd like to list several representatives in Britain and America.

At the initial stage of western studies, *Tao Te Ching* was considered an appendant to Christian doctrines and was only used to show the superiority of Christianity. However, some modern scholars, such as Diana Dreher, think it can also be used to create a kind of new religion. Based on her consideration of western social culture, Dreher's study is to indicate the trend of taking *Tao Te Ching* as a religion of life. Different from other religious faith or ritual, the religion of life refers to a kind of belief that people can live wisely through a particular way and this way can be obtained from *Tao Te Ching*. According to Dreher's opinion, people can find inner peace by following Tao. Only when they find peace within themselves can they see more clearly, act more effectively, cooperating with the energies within and around them to build a more peaceful world. What's more, The Tao can offer people new sources of power and inspiration, a vision of peace to transform themselves and their world. (Dreher, 1990: xiii-xv)

Different from Dreher, Alan Chan concerns more about "Lao Xue", which is shown on his discussing the two earliest and most influential commentaries of the text by He-shang-gong and Wang Bi. He tries to show how the former commentary connects ideas about self-cultivation and nourishing life with cosmological speculation about *ch'i*-energy, and also with a political philosophy centered on the sage king. Then he shows how the commentary by Wang Bi represents a reaction against this cosmological thought from the viewpoint of sophisticated intellectual with philosophical or metaphysical leanings (Kohn and LaFargue, 1998: 9). In his idea, Wang Bi's commentary establishes both the standard edition of the text and the mainstream interpretation of its ideas.

William Baxter, another researcher, focuses his study on the text of

*Tao Te Ching* itself. In a linguistic analysis, he shows how the rhyme structure and the rhetorical characteristics of the text, such as rhythm, repetition of words, and the use of paradoxes, go back to a period of about 350 B.C., “being similar to certain patterns found in the *Shih-ching* (*The Book of Songs* 《诗经》) and the *Chu-tzu* (*Songs of Chu* 《楚辞》), but neither consonant with nor contemporaneous with them” (Kohn and LaFargue, 1998: 11). He proves the importance of recovering the actual words of the text and not losing sight of the root from which the philosophy ultimately stems.

In addition, as mentioned above, the origin of *Tao Te Ching* is always shrouded in folklore, mystery, and confusion. The vague introduction of its author in *Shiji* makes the relationship between Lao Tzu and the classic a puzzle. Some scholars, interested in the identity of Lao Tzu, carry a research in this aspect. The representatives are Homer H. Dubs and Derk Bodde. In 1941 and 1942 Dubs published two papers entitled “The Date and Circumstances of the Philosopher Lao-dz” and “The Identification of Lao-dz” in *Journal of the American Oriental Society*. Bodde holds different ideas from those of Dubs. In 1942 and 1944 he wrote two articles in response entitled “The New Identification of Lao Tzu” and “Further Remarks on the Identification of Lao Tzu”.

It can't be denied that some scholars have analyzed *Tao Te Ching* from different perspectives, which not only provides information for later scholars to systematically study the mysterious work but also is beneficial for readers to fully understand the work and accept it. However, up to now little research has been done on the English translations of this classic work especially from the perspective of reception theory. So in this paper, the author would like to make a tentative study on this subject.

## 1.4 Summary

The thesis devotes the first chapter to the introduction of *Tao Te Ching*

and its translations. *Tao Te Ching* is the earliest-known text of the Taoist tradition, full of mysteries. Since it appeared over 2000 years ago, it has served as the foundation for both philosophical and religious Taoism. It, with its broad and deep thought, attracts scholars not only from China but also from the whole world, especially from Britain and America. Since the first English translation of *Tao Te Ching* in 1868 by the Englishman John Chalmers, the simple spiritual messages found in the Chinese classic have begun to be assimilated into western culture. In the thesis, the historical development of the English translation of *Tao Te Ching* is divided into three periods. In the author's opinion, only after getting a general idea of the historical development of the English translation of this great work can we better analyze the English versions produced in the three periods. Based on the above information, she narrows down her study scope and gives a brief review of the English versions of *Tao Te Ching* ever produced in Britain and America. In the end, through listing the researches scholars did in the past, she seeks to prove that it is a comparatively new and worthy topic to study the translations of *Tao Te Ching* from the perspective of reception theory.

## **Chapter Two**

### **Reception Theory and Literary Translation**

In the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many schools and theories of literature arose in the west, which influenced the development of translation theory to a certain degree. Since the appearance of Russia's Formalism in the 1910s, the focus of literary studies had been transferred from the study of positivism in the 19<sup>th</sup> century to the study of literary text itself. In the 1960s, because the linguistic development had stimulated the literary studies, the Structuralism appeared in France. The Structuralism considered that the value of literary work lay in the application of language. When this theory is applied to translation, it shifted the focus of translation study from the artistic study to the study of the language structure in the source text and the target text. Meanwhile, semiotics also had a rapid development, exerting significant influence on many aspects such as literature, art, language and translation studies. One result was that it made translation studies break the shackles of the "text" itself and free from the control of the Structuralism. However, reception theory, which developed from hermeneutics and the post-structuralism, influenced translation theories most and took translation studies out of the confinement of the "text". As a literary aesthetics and criticism theory, reception theory or reception aesthetics originated in mid 1960s. It was established on the basis of hermeneutics and phenomenology and its major representatives were Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser of the Constance School.

#### **2.1 Reception theory**

Reception theory is a branch of modern literary studies. It eliminates the previously overwhelming author-centered and text-centered concepts in literary theories, emphasizing the active role of the reader. It marks a

shift in concern from the author and the work to the text-reader relationship in literary criticism. In 1967, Jauss expounded the main viewpoints of reception theory for the first time in the lecture entitled “Literary History as a Challenge to Literary Theory”. This lecture has been generally recognized as the theoretical programme of this movement and marks the birth of the reader-centered aesthetics of reception. In the following years, many theorists take part in its studies.

### 2.1.1 Development

In the late 1960s, the reception theory was established by some scholars at the University of Constance in Germany, and soon swept across the whole European and American literature circle. Now there are mainly two schools of aesthetics of reception study: one is “reception research”, the other “effect research”, whose respective representative are Hans Robert Jauss and Wolfgang Iser. Although both are concerned with a reconstitution of literary theory by drawing attention away from the author and the text and refocusing it on the text-reader relationship, their respective methods of approaching this shift diverge sharply (Holub, 1984: 82).

Depending on hermeneutics and particularly influence by Hans-Georg Gadamer, Jauss advocates a new approach to literary history. He says that such a new approach can only be successful in depicting a process when it takes into account the interaction between text and reader and thereby to exclude the reception of literary work. The approach is reception theory, which can be understood as a part of the shift in the study of literature from a preoccupation with authors and texts to a concern for reception and reading. For him, the central task of reception theory is to establish a new approach to literary studies, which should unite the textual reception history with the reader’s present aesthetic experiences. He maintains that the understanding of the first readers is not lost or neglected by later



readers, but rather sustained and enriched in a chain that stretches from initial reception to subsequent generations. Therefore, past meanings are an integral part of present practices, and the reception of the individual work across time is part of a larger process and coherence of literature.

However, Iser is mainly concerned with the phenomenological analysis of the response mechanism for reading existing in the individual text and how readers relate to the text. He incorporates in his reading theory the investigation of the intentional object (the text), the intentional subject (the reader) and the intentional act (the process of literary reading). Iser's phenomenological inquiry of literary reading centers around three fundamental questions: the process in which texts are absorbed, the structures that guide the reader in his processing of the text, and the function of the literary text in its contexts (qtd. in Zhu, 1998: 10).

The reception theory stresses the text's openness and the importance of the role of the reader's participation in reading, so much so that it regards the reader's reception as an underlying factor of the text's literary evolution in its meaning and as the text's innate driving force. By examining the process in which the social effect of the literary work is achieved, Jauss and Iser have revealed the dialectical relationship between the author, the work and the reader, particularly the reader's dynamic role in reception. They have both succeeded in expounding how, with the change of reader's reception consciousness, the historical changes of the position, the evaluation and influences of the author or the work take place.

### **2.1.2 Main concepts**

There are many important concepts in reception theory such as "horizon of expectations", "indeterminacy", "implied reader", "fuse of horizon", "concretization" and so on. In this part, the author will go over two concepts: "horizon of expectations" and "indeterminacy" respectively

proposed by Jauss and Iser.

### **2.1.2.1 Horizon of expectations**

The horizon of expectations —a very important concept in Jauss's theory, which developed from Martin Heidegger's "pre-understanding" or Hans-Georg Gadamer's "prejudice" and "horizon", refers to "an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a 'system of references' or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text" (Holub, 1984: 59). In reception theory, there are actually two horizons of expectation. One is the relatively narrowed horizon of literary expectation formed on the basis of the previous aesthetic experience, such as the previous knowledge of the literary genre and the previous appreciation of the themes, styles and language of the works. The other is the much wider horizon of expectation of life established from previous life experience. The two horizons interact with each other and make up the concrete reading horizon.

If a work conforms to the reader's horizon of expectation, it can be quickly understood and accepted by the reader. However, when a work is not in agreement with, or even in conflict with the reader's horizon of expectation, reception of the work will encounter some resistance. At this moment, the reader has to break through his/her original horizon, raising the new reading experience up to a certain level of consciousness to construct a new horizon.

From the diachronic perspective, Jauss stresses the fact that the horizon of expectation is not fixed, it changes from period to period. Any literary work, even if it appears with a new look, can't present itself as something absolutely new in an informational vacuum. It awakens memories of that which was already read, brings the reader to a specific emotional attitude, and with its beginning arouses the expectation for the "middle and end", which can then be maintained intact or altered,

reoriented, or even fulfilled ironically in the course of the reading according to specific rules of the genre or type of text (Jauss, 1982: 23). That is to say, the new text evokes the reader's horizon of expectations and rules formed from earlier texts, which are then varied, corrected, altered, or even just reproduced. So the original horizon of expectation only tells us how the work was valued and interpreted when it first appeared, but does not establish its final meaning. According to Jauss's opinion, each historical period establishes its own horizon of expectation, the overall value and meaning of any text can never become fixed or universal, for readers from any historical period establish for themselves what they value in a text. Therefore, readers in a certain period can't excavate all potential meanings of a work. The meanings can only be achieved by generations of readers. This is a long and unbroken historical process.

In addition, in the reception process, readers understand the literary work with their particular "horizon of expectations" which is decided by their ideology, ethics, intuition, aesthetic taste and reception ability, so each reader with his/ her own properties will have diverse understandings, then different interpretations of the original text, that is to say, readers with different cultural backgrounds will also have different horizons of expectation.

#### **2.1.2.2 Indeterminacy**

In 1970, in his monumental "Indeterminacy and the Reader's Response in Prose Fiction", Iser points out the difference between non-literary work and literary text and claims that meaning indeterminacy is the distinctive feature of literary text. According to Iser, indeterminacy refers to "the absence of an exact correlation between phenomena described in literary texts and the objects in the world of real life" (Jauss, 1982: 145). "There arises a certain amount of indeterminacy which is

peculiar to all literary texts, for they permit no referral to any identical real-life situation” (Iser, 1971: 11). It is this peculiar openness that gives readers imagination, making the readers capable of shaping the various situations in their individual reading. Only in the act of reading can indeterminacy be replaced by meaning. Only when the blanks are filled and the indeterminacy is defined through readers’ perception and experience can the realization of a literary work be attained.

According to reception theory, “The literary work is neither completely text nor completely the subjectivity of the reader, but a combination or merger of the two” (Holub, 1984: 84), so the literary work includes two poles: the artistic and the aesthetic. “The artistic pole is the author’s text, and the aesthetic is realization accomplished by the reader”(Iser, 1978: 21). The artistic pole, or the author’s text, contains indeterminacies to be settled by the reader; the aesthetic pole, the reader’s realization, means each individual reader’s understanding of the literary work on the basis of his own knowledge and experience. The literary work is more than the text. The text takes on life when it’s completed, while the literary work must include the interpretation by the reader, it’s the convergence of a text and the reader that brings the literary work into existence. The reader actualizes what would otherwise remain only potentially meaningful. So the meaning of a literary work is not inborn and is not something that people can fully realize by reading through the lines carefully, but a result of interaction between the text and reader. The activity stimulated in the reader would link him to the text and induce him to create the conditions necessary for the effectiveness of that text. In the process of reading, reader would experience things that no longer exist or things are totally unfamiliar to him. For readers, these are the indeterminacies, but they can be concretized through the interaction between reader and text. However:

Since concretizations are considered the activity of individual readers, they can be subject to vast variation. Personal experiences, moods, and a whole array of other contingencies can affect each concretization. Thus no two concretizations are ever precisely identical, even when they are the product of the same reader. (Holub, 1984: 26)

To sum up, in the entire process of reader-text interaction indeterminacy plays a decisive role for it not only stimulates the reader to start the process but also sustains it with continuous stimulation and guidance.

### 2.1.3 Significance

The birth of reception theory brings unprecedented significance to literary criticism. It challenges the traditional author-centered and text-centered literary theories in which the close connection between the reader and the literary work and the active role of the reader are neglected. It shapes a new critical and conceptual “paradigm” marked by an emphasis on the reader and reading. Reception theory widens our field of vision and enriches the contents and categories of the literary studies, seeking a new understanding of the history of literature as a communication process. In terms of concrete application to literary subjects, almost no area has been ignored. In the following decades after its emergence, it spread across borders and was introduced to western Europe, America even Japan. Former Soviet Union and Eastern European countries also responded rapidly and developed their own Marxism reception aesthetic studies. As Holub observes “From Marxists to traditional critics, from classical scholars and medievalists to modern specialists, virtually every methodological perspective and area of literary endeavor has responded to the challenge raised by reception theory” (1984:7). Indeed, traces of this method have also affected adjacent

disciplines like translatology, sociology and art history as well.

In China, owing to the later introduction of the theories of hermeneutics and the aesthetics of reception, reception theory did not come to the notice of Chinese critics and scholars until about ten years after it had been a topic of heated debate for their counterparts. But soon, it found an enthusiastic response. Beginning in early 1980s the theory quickly spread among Chinese literary critics and theorists through publications and exchanges at academic conferences. "An incomplete survey shows that within a short span of eight years there have been about two hundred major publications, including books, translations and essays, relating directly to the theory<sup>8</sup>, not to mention a lot more studies that are indirectly related to it" (Zhu, 1998: 9).

## 2.2 Reception theory and literary translation

In many former translation theories, the author-centered theory and the text-centered theory occupied a definitely dominant position and did not consider the reader's reception, nor even did they consider that the translator should choose various translation strategies according to the reader's reception during the translating process. With the birth of reception theory based on people's reception, people find a new research method, which is an important revolution on methodology. In this part, the author will discuss the application of reception theory in literary translation.

### 2.2.1 Different perspectives on literary translation

Reception theory is mainly a literary theory, in a strict sense, a literary criticism theory. Before we apply it into the translation, it is necessary for us to know something about the literary translation.

<sup>8</sup> The survey, made by Zhu Gang, is based chiefly on the bibliography attached to the monthly *Duplicated Materials on Literary Theory*, published by the Information Center of the People's University of China.

The essence of any translation, whether it is the non-literary translation or literary translation, is the transplantation of information from one language into another. While during the process of transplantation in literary translation, in order that recipients or target text readers can have the same enlightenment and enjoyment as the source text readers the translator has to find some ways to stimulate them to produce the same or similar associations in the target language. In fact, through literary translation the target text is expected or required to be an artistic work as the original. So in a way, literary translation is not a simple exchange between language words, but a creative job. Translators of the east and west throughout history have different interpretations to literary translation since it first appeared as an independent concept in translation theories,

In the west, most westerners tend to treat literary translation as creation of literary work of art. Cicero, the ancient Roman rhetorician, the forerunner of western literary translation theories, views literary translation as a kind of literary creation and lays emphasis on its creativity. Pushkin, the founder of Russian literary translation, views that translation and writing have the same property, that is, creativity, because they are all derived from creative work. He advocates flexible translation rather than mechanically literal translation, however, it is a pity that he pursues poetic aesthetics and art value in translated language, which has gone far beyond the boundaries of translation. In the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Goethe argues that literary translation must pass through three phases. The first epoch acquaints readers with foreign countries on their own terms. The second mode is that of appropriation through substitution and reproduction, where the translator absorbs the sense of a foreign work but reproduces it in his own terms. The third mode is one which aims for perfect identity between the SL text and the TL text, and the achieving of this mode must be through the creation of a new manner which fuses the uniqueness of

the original with a new form and structure. (Bassnett, 2004:66) Goethe is arguing for a new concept of originality in translation, together with a vision of universal deep structures that the translator should strive to meet. The problem with such an approach is that it is moving dangerously close to a theory of untranslatability. Later, a famous representative of Russian literature points out that literary translation is one form of literary writing and one form of art facts with form and content perfectly combined with each other, in which translator reflects what he has chosen with his specific views of the world. The definition reflects the artistic characteristic of literary translation and reveals the subjectivity of translator in the translation process. However, the conception of art facts is a little abstract, so translator is difficult to master essence of translation activity.

In the Chinese translation field, translators also have their own perspectives on literary translation. Modern Chinese translator, Yan Fu, doesn't clearly state that literary translation is a kind of creative writing, but the evidence of his creation is apparent all through his translated work "Evolution" (郑海凌, 2000: 30-31). In theory, his criteria of "fidelity, expressiveness, and elegance" has set limitation on the creative impulse of many translators, but in practice he carries the criteria of "fidelity and expressiveness" to far less the extent than that of "elegance", which gives flexible and elastic measurement to those translators who have the urge to extend and explore their creation. Great writer and translator Mao Dun also gives out his definition of literary translation which is viewed by many Chinese scholars as a classic one. He points out that "literary translation is one in which the artistic creative concept of the source text should be completely conveyed into the target text so that TL reader can be enlightened, moved, and aesthetically entertained in the same way as one can obtain from the original" (1984: 511). This definition stresses specific characteristic of literary translation and regards readers' response



as the standard for measurement of translation effect. The flaw of this definition is that the “artistic conception” is difficult to master, manipulate and convey.

To look back on the former translation studies, a commonly-accepted definition can not be reached, but we can summarize that literary translation has two characteristics: first, the language in literary translation is a kind of artistic language performing an aesthetic function; second, the essence of literary translation can't escape its relevance to creativity. When we observe the versions of *Tao Te Ching*, we'll find out that its translation bears these two characteristics, so we regard it as a kind of literary translation.

### **2.2.2 The application of reception theory in literary translation**

With the development of reception theory, more and more translation theorists apply it to their study of translation, especially the study of literary translation. So, what is literary translation from the perspective of reception theory?

According to reception theory, literary translation involves two processes of reception. Before beginning to translate, the translator has to go through the original text and understand it thoroughly. The original text is not fixed and there are still some vacancies needed to be filled by the translator. So the understanding of the original text is a process of concretization. This process of understanding is not passive instead is affected by the translator's previous reading experience and pre-understanding. Consequently, the object of translation or reception is not the original text, but a similar one produced in the translator's mind in the process of the translator's communicating with the original one. It changes with the change of the translator, time and space. Meanwhile, the translator's understanding is also constrained by the original text, which makes sure that the translator can't deviate from the intention of the text

and the author. The translator correspondingly tries his best to make the text approximate to the original one to the large extent. As far as the second reception is concerned, it exists in the process of readers' reading of the translated version. In the view of reception theory, a literary work is primarily destined for the addressee; likewise a translation is destined for a certain kind of readers. In the triangle of the original text, the translation, the reader, the last is not a passive, unimportant part. On the contrary, it actively helps to construct literary history. So in this process, translator has to pay more attention to the readers' demand and their receptivity and try to make the version communicate with the presupposed readers. (马萧, 2000: 48-49)

From the two processes of reception, it is not difficult to find out that reception theory takes translation studies out of the confinement of the "text", providing a new angle for our cognition of literary translation. Especially, it helps us have a better understanding of an active role a translator plays and the complex process in which the translator reads the original text, forms his own understanding, takes into consideration the reception of his readers and translates into the target language. Here, the author chooses two major concepts of reception theory — "horizon of expectations" and "indeterminacy" which are quite useful to solve the problems in translation —and talks about the correlations between them and translation.

### **2.2.2.1 Horizon of expectations and literary translation**

The concept of "horizon of expectation" is relevant to translation study because the original text, translator and readers of the translated version all have their horizons of expectations. The horizon in the original text can be understood as all that is expressed by the original author in the literary text; while the horizons of expectations of the translator and of the readers of the translated version, refer to everything in their mind that

they, both as readers in nature, may bring into reading, including the norms and assumptions from their previous literary encounters as well as experiences from the whole socio-cultural world (马萧, 2000: 49). Only the horizon of expectations of the readers and that of a literary text combine can the translation be accepted and understood. A study of the relationships between these horizons may shed light on the feature of translation and give translators enlightenment on how to treat the other horizons in the practice of translation.

Jauss's "horizon of expectations" helps further our understanding of the communication and mediation among the translator, the original text and readers of the translated version. On the one hand, although the two horizons can't be fully identical, the translator should not relax his effort to enter into the horizon in the text through a penetrating study of the original text and its author. On the other hand, the translator inevitably brings his horizon into his understanding of the original text. Since these elements do not always bring an accurate interpretation and reproduction of a literary text, the translator should keep a sober mind and be ready to adjust his horizon whenever necessary. A work without participation of readers' response is lifeless according to reception theory, so is the translation. Only when readers universally accept a translation, can the translation be effective and does the original gain life in a foreign culture. If not, the translation is senseless and could not play the role of bridging the author and the reader. In order to reach these aims, the translator should have sufficient knowledge of the horizon of his readers, the appropriate language varieties, the reader's cultural knowledge, thinking modes, aesthetic preferences, taking the readers' reception ability into consideration and adopting corresponding translation method. Anyway, the translator does not always cater for the horizon of his readers but needs to expand their horizon occasionally in order to enhance an overall communication between different cultures, for example, the translator can

introduce something characterized by foreign flavor which is strange to readers or which is never expected before. Only by this way, can the present horizon of expectations be expanded.

#### **2.2.2.2 Indeterminacy of text meaning and literary translation**

According to reception theory, it is the convergence of text and reader that brings the literary work into existence and the convergence can never be pinpointed because it is not identical with either the text or the disposition of the readers (Iser, 1980: 50). As we know, the language of literary work is connotative and complex. The original text stands as an open framework full of “blanks”, vacancies and indeterminacies instead of a fixed, static entity which allows for no alteration. In translation, the reader’s role is not passive, but active. All the blanks and indeterminacies in a text must be filled in through a reader’s actual reading activity. So the process of understanding the text is a process of concretization. The translator, as a particular reader, “reads in order to produce” and he “decodes in order to re-encode” (Hatim & Mason, 2001: 224). If we label the original text as the artistic pole, we can take the translator’s interpretation of the original work as the aesthetic pole. Each translator with his/her particular properties comes to the different concretization in the aesthetic pole for those blanks and indeterminacies in the artistic pole, hence the different interpretations of the original text. However, a translator should be scrupulous not to eliminate openness in writing style so that the readers could be given enough room to be involved in the textual structure of literary works, since the image-making activity of the readers is always present in the reading process.

### **2.3 Summary**

The introduction of reception theory into literature changes its study focus from writer and text to readers and the reception of reading which

were neglected in the past. This chapter first gives a brief account of the reception theory, then devotes the main content to its two concepts: “horizon of expectations” and “indeterminacy”. Horizon of expectations refers to “an intersubjective system or structure of expectations, a ‘system of references’ or a mind-set that a hypothetical individual might bring to any text”. According to Jauss, every reader possesses certain pre-experience when he/she reads any specific literary work. Horizon of expectations is the reader’s expectations to the text according to his/her pre-understanding. What’s more, his/her expectation is not static but constantly changing. Another representative Iser makes a distinction between the literary text and the non-literary text and points out that each literary work contains an infinite number of indeterminate places. According to Iser, the literary work has two poles: the artistic and the aesthetic: the former refers to the author’s text which includes many indeterminacies to be settled by the readers, the latter refers to the realization accomplished by the reader on his/her own experience and understanding. The realization of a literary work can only be attained when the blanks are filled and the indeterminacy is defined through the reader’s perception and experience. When the two concepts are applied to translation, it involves two processes of reception. Before beginning to translate, the translator has to go through the original text and understand it with his horizon of expectations. Due to the indeterminacies in the text, sometimes the translator can not fully recognize the information that the original author intends to convey, and consequently he has to play his imagination to the full to search for the meaning of the text in the process of concretization. In the second process of reception, the translator should consider the reader’s expectations and leave some spaces for the reader to interpret.

## **Chapter Three**

### **Reception Theory and the Translation of *Tao Te Ching*: Four English Versions Compared**

As a root of Chinese philosophy and literature, *Tao Te Ching* has been introduced to westerners first through Latin and then the other European languages, as has been briefed in the Introduction. Translation of the work became an increasingly purposeful activity in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, when western scholars began to realize the great value of Chinese traditional culture. The translation of this classic introduced Chinese philosophy and culture to English readers and stimulated further efforts to understand and represent them accurately. Its influence and reception in British and American society have even continued until now.

Why do Chinese philosophy and culture arouse such great interest among Anglo-American people? Why do so many translators render this classic and why do so many versions of it appear? In this chapter, the author will explore the answers of these questions through applying the two concepts of reception theory mentioned in the previous chapter to make an analysis of some samples from four English versions.

#### **3.1 The four English versions of *Tao Te Ching***

As an ancient classical work, *Tao Te Ching* has attracted generations of scholars devoted to its English translations. Among them the author singles out four whose translations have proven to be conspicuous: James Legge, Arthur Waley, Michael LaFargue and Gu Zhengkun. Versed in two languages and with careful research on the text, all of them have made great achievements in reproducing the original features of the text.

##### **3.1.1 The reasons for choosing the four versions**

*Tao Te Ching* is a combination of being mystical and obscure, so sometimes different translations have nothing in common, which suggests that getting a deep understanding of the text requires reading more translations than one. Thus, in the thesis, the author selects four English versions of *Tao Te Ching* for analysis. They are done respectively by:

- 1) James Legge, 1891: James Legge, a Scottish Protestant, was the forerunner who systematically translated the Chinese classical works into English so as to introduce them to the Western countries. He was also considered one of the foremost authorities in Chinese philosophy and *Tao Te Ching* he translated has remained popular since its first printing. His *Tao Te Ching of Lao Tzu*, which formed the first part of the *Texts of Taoism*, was contained in the thirty-nine volumes of *The Sacred Books of the East* and published by Dover Publications in 1891. In translating, Legge is primarily concerned with conveying an ahistorical, spiritual meaning of the text. Though he originally wants to interpret an authentically Chinese understanding of the text, in practice he is biased towards comparing *Tao Te Ching* with Christian doctrine. In spite of that, for many westerners, Legge's version is one of the earliest introduction to Chinese philosophy and it is an excellent translation from the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, with copious notes. Moreover, it is also a hugely rewarding fortune for anyone interested in learning about Taoism.
- 2) Arthur Waley, 1934: Arthur Waley was the most outstanding sinologist and translator of England in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Allen and Unwin Press published his translation *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* in 1934. Since that time, Waley's translation as well as his other works in Chinese philosophy and culture has been influencing scholars and the public alike. Waley's *Tao Te Ching* has had at

least 14 printings, earning the Englishman popularity and respect. His translation is simple and lucid and the translation of each chapter is followed either by a paraphrase, a brief commentary, or, in most cases, simply a few footnotes at the bottom of each page. The notes are brief, practical, and invariably helpful in explaining choice of language and meaning of metaphors, and are designed to assist both the general reader and those with access to the Chinese texts to arrive at a better understanding of the texts. In the preface to this book, Waley makes a distinction between translations which set out to discover what such a book meant to start with, and those which aim only at telling the reader what such a text means to those who use it today. For want of better terms he calls the first sort of translation “historical”, the second “scriptural”. At that time, “There are several good ‘scriptural’ translations of the *Tao Te Ching*. But there exists no ‘historical’ translation” (Waley, 1958: xvi), so Waley tries to supply a translation that can discover what the book meant when it was first written. Though fully conscious of the fact that to know what a scripture meant to begin with is perhaps less important than to know what it means today, he still believes that the study of the past will throw light upon the present. On the other side, he thinks that the translation of *Tao Te Ching* is not “literary”; for the simple reason that the importance of the original lies not in its literary quality but in the things it says, so in translating he aims to reproduce what the original says with detailed accuracy (Waley, 1958: xvii).

- 3) Michael LaFargue, 1992: Michael LaFargue is a lecturer in religion and philosophy, and director of East Asian Studies at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. He was trained in biblical hermeneutics at Harvard Divinity School, and specializes in the application of methods developed in biblical studies to the study of pre-Han



Taoist and Confucian texts. So different from those predecessors who often interpreted the work from spiritual, historical, philosophical and linguistic insights, his approach to interpreting *Tao Te Ching* is to apply hermeneutics — “the theory and practice of trying to recover the original meaning of written texts” (LaFargue, 1992: xvi). His translation of the Lao Tzu classic is based on the standard traditional Chinese text of *Tao Te Ching* given in the commentary of Wang Bi. If he accepts a reading not from Wang Bi, he always mentions this in the textual notes. During the translation process, he goes carefully through the Chinese text a number of times, comparing it to the principal available scholarly translations in western languages. The method he mainly adopts is literal translation. He, where possible, approximates one English word for one Chinese word and approximates also the Chinese word order (LaFargue, 1992:215). However, sometimes literal translation would be too succinct to make sense to an ordinary English-speaking reader, so the reader of this version should try first to get a concrete sense of what the Chinese probably means.

- 4) Gu Zhengkun, 1995: Gu Zhengkun is a professor, doctoral supervisor of Department of English at Beijing University, president of Peking University Literature and Translation Society. He has published more than 100 articles at home and abroad either in English or in Chinese. His translation *Lao Zi: The Book of Tao and Teh* was published in 1995. In translating *Tao Te Ching*, he considers “most translators are apt to indulge themselves in interpreting rather than translating the original, so they occasionally impose their own ideas upon the author they translate”(Gu, 1995: 54). In order to fend such misreading and misinterpretation, he read as many of the annotated *The Book of Lao Tzu* in Chinese as possible. When understanding of the original tends to be in too

many directions, he carefully chooses the one that is supposed to be preferred by modern scholars. In his translated book, “the texts of *The Book of Tao and Teh* are all matched with Chinese phonetic symbols so that foreign readers can learn how to read the Chinese text” (Gu, 1995: 55).

There are some ideas to explain the reasons why the author selects these four versions.

- 1) Among all English translations, the four versions are in the list of the most excellent ones, exerting significant influences on their following translations. Legge, Waley and LaFargue are all famous sinologists with a good command of Chinese culture. In addition to *Tao Te Ching*, they have extensive experiences in translating other ancient Chinese masterpieces. As a Chinese translator, Gu Zhengkun has studied the translations of *Tao Te Ching* for many years and has a good understanding of the classic work. Compared with other translators, they are considered as authoritative and representative, and their versions are widely accepted by readers.
- 2) According to reception theory, readers of different historical and social backgrounds show great diversity in their interpretation of the same literary work because of their different horizons of expectations (qtd. in 金浦元, 1998: 408). Translators, as readers of the original text, also produce different translations if they are from different periods and different cultural backgrounds. Three western translators and one Chinese translator are included in this thesis and they are picked out respectively from the three periods mentioned in Chapter One in order that the analysis can reflect the historical dimension as well as cultural dimension.

Owing to these considerations, the author chooses the four versions and she believes that they will be helpful for her to analyze the English translations of *Tao Te Ching* in the light of reception theory.

### 3.1.2 The difficulties of translating *Tao Te Ching*

There exist many difficulties in translating *Tao Te Ching*.

First, the mystery of Lao Tzu and *Tao Te Ching* lead to the difficulty of translation. Lao Tzu's *Tao Te Ching* involves many uncertain questions concerning date, authorship, chapter divisions, possible additional ideas of the commentators into the original text and so on. Some questions seem irrelevant to the translation, but in fact, it is hard for translators to ascertain the social and cultural atmosphere of the time when the book was produced without the certainty of these. In turn, it would be hard for them to reproduce the original. Such problems mentioned above are commonly reflected in which edition to choose as the source text. "Most translators simply accepted the Chinese text of *Tao-te-ching* as printed together with Wang Bi's commentary, occasionally borrowing readings from the Ho-Shang-kung commentary or a few other manuscripts" (LaFargue and Pas, 1998: 278). But in 1973 with the discovery of the Ma Wang Dui manuscripts which contain more variations when compared to previous manuscripts, several translations are based completely on these manuscripts.

Secondly, *Tao Te Ching* is written in classical Chinese, which is far different from modern Chinese and it is in itself difficult even for normally educated modern native speakers of Chinese to understand completely, to say nothing of the English-speaking people. Furthermore, many words used in the *Tao Te Ching* are deliberately vague and ambiguous. At the time *Tao Te Ching* was written, educated Chinese who could read it would have memorized a large body of fairly standard Chinese literature, and when writing it was common to convey meaning by making allusions to other well-known works which now may have been lost. Few people today have the full command of the vast body of ancient Chinese literature that would have been common in Lao Tzu's day and the meaning of certain terms has changed with the course of

history, thus many levels of subtext are potentially lost on modern translators.

Lastly, there is no punctuation in classical Chinese, and thus often no way to determine where one sentence ends and the next begins. Moving a period a few words forward or back or inserting a comma can profoundly alter the meaning of many passages, and such divisions and meanings must be determined by the translator<sup>9</sup>. So the obscurity that abounds in classical syntax may easily result in different readings. A lot of editors and commentators of *Tao Te Ching* have never completely agreed with one another as to the interpretation of this mysterious work, so do translators.

### 3.2 The four English versions compared

*Tao Te Ching* contains many universal truths, but each language's interpretation of them and each translator's translation of them (even including interpretation and translation of the three-character title) differ at least slightly and occasionally profoundly from the next. Depending on how one reads them, some chapters could have three or more interpretations and various translations. Here the author chooses some samples from the four English versions and analyze them from the perspective of reception theory.

#### 1. 道可道，非常道；（Chapter 1）

Legge: The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao.

Waley: The Way that can be told of is not an unvarying way;

LaFargue: The Tao that can be told is not the invariant Tao

Gu Zhengkun: The Tao that is utterable / Is not the eternal Tao;

道(Tao) is the most common character and the core topic in the work,

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<sup>9</sup> searched from the website: [http://fixedreference.org/en/20040424/wikipedia/Tao\\_Te\\_Ching](http://fixedreference.org/en/20040424/wikipedia/Tao_Te_Ching)

supplemented by related themes such as *Te* (virtue or power), nothingness, return, detachment, and *wu wei* (non-action). In the 81 chapters, the character appears 74 times in 37 chapters and it is very mysterious and harmonious in meaning. As we learn from *Tao Te Ching*, 道 has several basic features. It can be seen as a what is before and beyond all distinctions between different forms or essences of things<sup>10</sup>. Everything comes from it and returns to it. It is not only the immanent, natural law of all things, being inclusive of all the gods or Heaven's will, but also a guide or a norm of human society. 道 is not a concept and can't be explained in precise words. So it is hard for such a word with abundant meanings to find a completely equivalent word in English. To foreigners, this is a blank which produces the meaning indeterminacy. The readers need to concretize it according to their own experience and understanding and the translation of it should take into consideration all its possible meanings in the context.

In the above sentence, the character 道 appears three times. The first and the third are nouns, and the second one is a verb which means to speak or to explain in words. In the four versions, the first 道 is translated as "Tao" except Waley's version which translates it into "the Way".

According to the author's analysis, to begin with, in dealing with some parts of the source text, western translators tended to bring Christian doctrines into the translation because Christian doctrines had been deeply rooted in the western world and exerted significant influence on western thought and culture. In the Gospel of St. John, Jesus said to him "I am the way, and the truth, and the life", so some western translators compared 道 to Jesus or God and rendered it into English as "the Way", and Waley was one of them. Waley's translation can not show all meanings of this character because 道 is omnipotent and inclusive and

<sup>10</sup> searched from the website: [http://fixedreference.org/en/20040424/wikipedia/Tao\\_Te\\_Ching](http://fixedreference.org/en/20040424/wikipedia/Tao_Te_Ching)

any single explanation will not be enough for conveying its connotation. However his version can't be fully denied if we consider the time of his translation. Although the English translation of *Tao Te Ching* had already appeared at that time, Waley was not sure about English-speaking readers' awareness of it. Considering his readers' horizon of expectations and based on his own understanding, he used the word "the Way", which was the best word to interpret 道 in his mind, instead of directly putting it as "Tao" so as to avoid possible confusions and ambiguities among target readers. Another translator Legge was a Protestant missionary and he was also influenced by Christian doctrines. It is inevitable that he would compare Tao with God or Jesus though he once attempted to avoid the comparison. In Legge's version the first 道 is transliterated, but his rendering of the second "道" into "be trodden" suggests that the first "Tao" means "path, road", or "way". As time went by, more and more translations of *Tao Te Ching* were produced, the studies of Taoism gained momentum in western countries, and lots of people came to know *Tao Te Ching* and Taoism. According to the American *Webster's Ninth New Collegiate Dictionary* and the British *Chambers 20<sup>th</sup> Century Dictionary*, Tao has been used as a fixed phrase specially referring to Lao Tzu's 道. It can be affirmed that the word "Tao" has been accepted in Britain and America. As Jauss suggests, a reader constructs his horizon of expectations through familiar norms and implicit relationships to familiar works of the literary-historical surroundings (Jauss, 1982: 24). In this historical background, LaFargue and Gu translated "道" into "Tao" in their versions, which meets modern readers' horizon of expectations.

According to reception theory, a reader's background and experience influence his/her understanding. In the author's personal view, "Tao" has been the most suitable word for interpreting "道" up to now. Meanwhile, some annotation or explanation is necessary for ensuring the reader's sufficient understanding.

2. 曲则全，枉则直，洼则盈，敝则新，少则多，多则惑。(Chapter 22)

Legge: The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight; the empty, full; the worn out, new. /He whose (desires) are few gets them; he whose (desires) are many goes astray.

Waley: "To remain whole, be twisted!" /To become straight, let yourself be bent. /To become full, be hollow. /Be tattered, that you may be renewed. / Those that have little, may get more, / Those that have much, are but perplexed.

LaFargue: "Bent - then mature." /Compromised - then upright /Empty - then solid, old and spent - then young and sprightly. /A little - then a gain, a lot - then confusing.

Gu Zhengkun: Bow down and you are preserved; /Bend and you can be straight; /Hollow, then full /Worn, then new; /Seek a little and you get a lot; /Seek a lot and you get perplexed

*Tao Te Ching* tells us that contradictions are universal. The two opposite sides are by no means isolated but are mutually interdependent. In this book a lot of contradictory concepts in pairs frequently appear: big and small, high and low, advance and retreat, beautiful and ugly, new and old, strong and weak, rigid and supple, having and having-not, honor and disgrace, gain and loss, Yin and Yang, etc. The above sentence is a good instance. It consists of six coordinate elements. The first four elements, composing the first part of this sentence, are used to describe the objective phenomena, and the latter two elements, composing the second part, are used to describe human's subjective ideology.

The four translators paid different attention to the style and the form of the original text due to their different horizons of expectation and their consideration for target readers' different horizons of expectations. The style feature is reflected in many aspects, and syntactic structure is one of them. At the initial period of introducing *Tao Te Ching* to the western world, readers at that time had little touch with Chinese classics and the

horizon of expectations they had formed was narrow, so the acceptance of this work was not an easy thing. In order to convey the meaning they favored, the early translators, such as Legge and Waley, tried to represent the text with the help of such methods as paraphrase, commentary, notes and so on. In Legge's version, there are many brackets just in the main body to further explain the unfathomed parts, which is shown in the above sentence. When Legge translated the sentence “少则多，多则惑”，he added “desires” in the bracket. Waley was also an earlier translator, his translation is indeed rather prosaic and he was considered the one who added “most to the text in the way of clarifying expansions” (LaFargue and Pas, 1998: 287). We can discover this characteristic from his version. In addition, why Waley has such kind of translation is related to his own horizon of expectation. In his opinion, the importance of *Tao Te Ching* doesn't lie in its literary quality but in the things it says, and his main aim is to reproduce what the original says with detailed accuracy (Waley, 1958: xvii). In translating he thus failed to realize the value of *Tao Te Ching* from literary perspective. Whereas we know *Tao Te Ching* is a philosophic poem, being composed of a collection of brief aphorisms. The diction is concise but the meaning is always deep. The style is terse, mere 5000 characters bring the exact meaning to the full. Obviously Waley obscured the original's concise style. Unlike Waley, LaFargue noticed the terseness of the original and the well-considered organization. Compared to the other three translators, he brought forth the original meaning to the full with fewer words. As to Gu's version, in the author's opinion, the style he used is a flaw. He attempted to make the readers better understand the meaning of this sentence, but failed to show the syntactic form of the original.

In all, the translations of Legge, Waley and Gu all try the best to clear up the potential ambiguities and uncertainties in the original text, stating out the meaning clearly. But the disadvantage here is that the readers



become dependent on the translator's opinions and play limited role in the process of making sense of the text. According to reception theory, the historical life of a literary work is unthinkable without the active participation of its readers. The target readers should never receive target text passively but exert their subjective initiative and recreate the target text. Thus, as far as the translation of this sentence is concerned, the author appreciates LaFargue's version more.

### 3. 其政闷闷，其民醇醇；其政察察，其民缺缺。(Chapter 58)

Legge: The government that seems the most unwise, /Oft goodness to the people best supplies; /That which is meddling, touching everything, /Will work but ill, and disappointment bring.

Waley: When the ruler looks depressed the people will be happy and satisfied; /When the rule looks lively and self-assured, the people will be carping and discontented.

LaFargue: When the ruler is dull and incompetent, the people are pure and simple. /When the ruler is sharp and alert, the people are a bad lot.

Gu Zhengkun: When the governor is magnanimous, /The people will become simple; /When the governor is harsh, /The people will become cunning.

Non-action (wu wei), a key creed in the work, designates the way by which people and things can and should realize their own naturalness in the world. "Politically the idea of non-action does not mean doing nothing at all but means doing things as naturally as possible, issuing orders as few as possible and interfering with people's life as little as possible" (Gu, 1995: 46). Non-action (wu wei) is just the idea that the above sentence expects to convey. According to Lao Tzu, the best policy is that of noninterference, or to use a western term, laissez-faire. It is fitting for a government to exist only in name without taking trouble to

enact any policies for the people. The more policies it takes, the more trouble it creates.

After observing the sentence, we notice that among the four versions there are great differences in translating this sentence, especially in face of the spot of indeterminacy “闷闷” to be filled out, the four translators here, historically and culturally situated, give us different concretizations. Legge’s translation is “the most unwise”, Waley’s “depressed”, LaFargue’s “dull and incompetent”, and Gu’s “magnanimous”.

“闷闷”, an abstract image in Chinese, has an original meaning of “depressed and dull”, but if we take a close look, we will find that in this sentence “闷闷” has another meaning different from “depression” and “dullness”.

In his version, Legge translated “闷闷” into “unwise”, which is a little far way from the original meaning. Because if the explanation is put into the context, the content of this sentence will be contradictory to that of the following sentence, we know Legge misunderstood it. At the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century, Legge had little relevant materials to resort to in the process of producing the English version of *Tao Te Ching*, so the translation of this work was a difficult job. The note in Legge’s translation is telling. “We are not helped to an understanding of it by Han Fei, with his additions and comments (XI, 3 b, 4 b), nor by Hwâi-nan with his illustrations (XII, 21 a, b).” To Legge, the difficulty of understanding this part is increased because it is separated from the preceding chapter of which it is really the sequel<sup>11</sup>. As to Waley, we can notice that in trying to produce his English version from the Chinese original he highly relied on the annotations made by ancient Chinese commentators. On the basis of Wang Bi and He Shang-gong’s annotations, Waley only grasped the literal meaning of “闷闷” and produced the corresponding translations. LaFargue’s version seems to have the same problem as Waley’s. However,

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<sup>11</sup> searched from the website: <http://www.sacred-texts.com/tao/sbe39/sbe39065.htm>

he expounded meaning of his diction in the annotation. In his opinion, “The image of ‘dull and incompetent’ ruler is an exaggerated self-caricature emphasizing the opposite Laoist ideal — a ruler who actually stands for high standards, but who is not dramatic and confrontational about this and so sometimes appears not to know what is going on” (LaFargue, 1992: 129). Comparatively speaking, Gu’s version fully considers the concept of non-action (wu wei) in political sense. With lots of previous translations and analysis materials at hand and based on his Chinese cultural environment, Gu has a deeper understanding of the word, producing a wonderful translation.

#### 4. 圣人无常心，以百姓心为心。善者吾善之，不善者吾亦善之，德善。(Chapter 49)

Legge: The sage has no invariable mind of his own; he makes the mind of the people his mind. /To those who are good (to me), I am good; and to those who are not good (to me), I am also good;--and thus (all) get to be good.

Waley: The Sage has no heart of his own; /He uses the heart of the people as his heart. /Of the good man I approve, /But of the bad I also approve, /And thus he gets goodness.

LaFargue: The Wise Person is always a man without a mind - he takes the mind of the hundred clans as his mind. /Those who are good, I am good to them those who are not good, I am also good to them - Te is good.

Gu Zhengkun: The sage often has no will, /He takes the people’s will as his own. /What is good I treat with goodness /What is not good I also treat with goodness. /Thus I obtain goodness.

In this chapter, Lao Tzu describes the ideal dynast in his mind, who regards the mind of people as his own one and discards personal desire. In the four versions, the translators have different interpretations to “德

善”, especially to the character “德”. What causes those differences?

Ancient Chinese writing was not entirely standardized, so that sometimes the same word could be used to represent different characters and such word is called loan word. That is to say, there is one word in Chinese to represent two characters that are pronounced the same but usually written differently and have different meanings. “德”, now transliterated as *te*, is such kind of word. One word *te* means “virtue” (or “power, goodness”) (德), the other *te* is usually a verb, “to obtain” (得). Sometimes the character normally meaning “virtue” might be used to represent the word “to obtain”. In the instance listed above, some translators interpret “德” as “virtue, goodness,” and accordingly the normal reading of “德善” would be “virtue is good”. However, every reader has his/her own pre-structure which is decided by his/her culture, personal experience, ideology, aesthetic taste and so on, he/she will, according to his/her understanding, produce different concretization for such spot of indeterminacy as loan word “德”. Thus some other translators suppose that this character is being used as a loan character for the homophone “to obtain,” resulting in the meaning “[he] obtains goodness.” There is no way of making sure what the original author of this line meant to say. There is also no way to leave this matter uncertain in an English translation. Each translator must decide which understanding of the line is probably the one originally intended, and translate accordingly. So in the four versions, every translator had his own choice.

In addition, among the four translators, only LaFargue translated “德” into “*Te*” not “virtue”, which is acceptable by readers. The reason is that with the passage of time, “*Te*” has also been accepted like “*Tao*” in Britain and America. LaFargue rendered “德” into “*Te*”, which not only did the original its justice in its profound meaning and concise wording, but also fused with the reader’s horizon of expectations.

5. 大国者下流，天下之交，天下之牝。牝常以静胜牡，以静为下。

(Chapter 61)

Legge: What makes a great state is its being (like) a low-lying, down-flowing (stream); -it becomes the center to which tend (all the small states) under heaven./ (To illustrate from) the case of all females:

Waley: A large kingdom must be like the low ground towards which all streams flow down. /It must be a point towards which all things under heaven converge. /Its part must be that of the female in its dealings with all things under heaven.

LaFargue: The great state is a low and easy/ woman for the world /the one the whole world unites with.

Gu Zhengkun: A large state should play the role of female, /Just like the lowest reaches of a river/ Where all the other streams meet.

One idea frequently repeated in *Tao Te Ching* is that the weak conquers the strong. According to Lao Tzu's outlook upon life, it is good to be gentle and to stay low. Furthermore, he advocates "feminine" (Yin) values, emphasizing the qualities of water — fluidity and softness. So in his mind, a realistic man should always take the side of the weak just as realistic states should resign themselves a lower position.

In this part, the characters “交” and “牝” both derive from and extend the meaning of “下流”. The use of similes and metaphors with the image of water(下流), the female(牝), and the valley(交) is one of the main characteristics of this philosophical book. All these images symbolize a life of simplicity. Foreigners unfamiliar with Chinese culture, especially Taoism, may not be able to totally understand these ideas or to relate such images with the profound philosophical meaning. So in translating they are some spots of indeterminacy for readers to fill out. At this moment, translators encounter the problem of choosing appropriate expressions to convey the delicate and rich meaning. We can see, in rendering the

images of the original text, the four translators took different strategies and produced different versions. Some of them explained those concepts in detail to make the versions easier for readers to understand, such as Legge and Waley. To translate “下流”, Legge directly used adjective “low-lying” and “down-flowing” to modify the extra word he added in the bracket and Waley employed a clause to modify such vehicle of simile as “low ground”. They made the implied meaning of “下流”(low ground) explicit. However, the later translators, such as LaFargue and Gu, rendered the marked culture-specific character with fewer and fewer words in order to involve the readers in the act of making sense of the concept without providing much explanation. Gu and LaFargue just rendered it liberally into “the lowest reaches of a river”, or just “low”, which is simpler and terser. As a result, the later translators kept the concept implicit, offering readers the chance of understanding the concept on their own. It is similar in the translation of “交”. Legge and Waley rendered it into sentences with an attributive clause. Their renditions are much longer and more complex than those done by the LaFargue and Gu. LaFargue and Gu deviated from the normal character sequence and rearranged the two sentences. They compared a large/great state to a female/woman, and then the two sentences are rearranged into a simple one with female/woman as the key word.

#### 6. 六亲不合，有孝慈。(Chapter 18)

Legge: When harmony no longer prevailed throughout the six kinships,  
filial sons found their manifestation;

Waley: It was when the six near ones were no longer at peace /That there  
was talk of “dutiful sons”;

LaFargue: When the six family relationships fell into disharmony we got  
“Respect and Caring.”

Gu Zhengkun: Filiality and benevolence come/ Along with the family

feud.

Chapter 18 and Chapter 19 mainly show how the silent, passionless influence of Tao is gradually and injuriously replaced by the wisdom of the world in the conduct of government. In Chapter 18, Lao Tzu puts emphasis on demonstrating how the general decay of manners affords opportunity for the display of certain virtues by individuals. In Lao Tzu's mind, so long as the deliberate, deceptive consciousness does not arise, the harmonious pattern of family and social life may in fact exist "naturally" as it does among the programmed "social" life (Benjamin Schwartz, 1998: 202).

In this part, we focus our attention on the interpretation of the culture expression "六亲". As we know, there is no such expression in English, but in Chinese it has become a set phrase. Because of the cultural difference, in the process of translation, "六亲" becomes a meaning blank which produces the spot of indeterminacy. The four translators gave different interpretations of it according to their own understanding. However, some of the versions deserve careful considerations.

In *The Contemporary Chinese Dictionary*, "六亲" refers to father, mother, elder and younger brothers, wife and children. Legge, as one of the earliest English translator of *Tao Te Ching*, carried a literal word-for-word translation, that is, he translated "六亲" into "six kinships". Legge's version is not misunderstanding but does simplify the meaning. At the sight of his translation "six kinships", some of the target readers with their horizon of expectations naturally assume that it only refers to six persons in the family relation, which is in fact not the full meaning of "六亲". And some other target readers will puzzle about what "six kinships" exactly refers to, why the expression is "six kinships" not "five" or "four". Waley's rendition gives a better representation for "六亲". His version was created in 1930s, when only a few Chinese literary works were translated into foreign languages and most westerners

knew little about Chinese culture. The target readers were almost those who fully didn't know Chinese. Thus, in his version, Waley added annotations, explaining that "six relations" means "father, mother, elder brother, younger brother, husband and wife" in archaic Chinese. Though adding annotations is the last resort to take—because the reading of annotations interrupts the readers' reading process—it is sufficient to serve as an expedient solution. When LaFargue translated the same work in 1990s, there had been lots of English versions of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America and many Chinese literary works had been translated into English. Compared with that of readers in the past, the contemporary readers' horizon of expectations was wider, so the target readers could understand LaFargue's rendition without the annotations. Waley and LaFargue's versions not only keep the source cultural element but also generate high degree of culture communication. By reading their versions, readers, foreigners in particular, can approach more closely to the source culture. As for Gu's translation, we can notice that the target cultural element replaces the source cultural element, so his rendition plays a limited role in cultural communication. However from his introduction to *Lao Tzu: the Book of Tao and Teh*, we know Gu had his own reason to deliver such translation. The readers of his version include not only foreigners but also the Chinese people, who own their respective horizon of expectations. In order to satisfy two sides' expectations, the translator chose the word "family" to convey the meaning of "六亲".

7. 视之不见名曰夷，听之不闻名曰希，搏之不得名曰微。此三者不可致诘，故混而为一。其上不缴，其下不昧，绳绳不可名，复归于无物。是谓无状之状，无物之象，是谓惚恍。(Chapter 14)

Legge: We look at it, and we do not see it, and we name it "the Equable." / We listen to it, and we do not hear it, and we name it "the Inaudible." / We try to grasp it, and do not get hold of it, and we



name it “the Subtle.” /With these three qualities, it cannot be made the subject of description; and hence we blend them together and obtain The One. /Its upper part is not bright, and its lower part is not obscure. /Ceaseless in its action, it yet cannot be named, and then it again returns and becomes nothing. /This is called the Form of the Formless, and the Semblance of the Invisible; this is called the Fleeting and Indeterminable.

Waley: Because the eye gazes but can catch no glimpse of it, /It is called elusive. /Because the ear listens but cannot hear it, /It is called the rarefied. /Because the hand feels for it but cannot find it, /It is called the infinitesimal. /These three, because they cannot be further scrutinized, /Blend into one, /Its rising brings no light; /Its sinking, no darkness. /Endless the series of things without name /On the way back to where there is nothing. /They are called shapeless shapes; /Forms without form; /Are called vague semblance.

LaFargue: “Look for It, you won’t see It: It is called ‘fleeting’ Listen for It, you won’t hear It: It is called ‘thin’. Grasp at It, you can’t get It: It is called ‘subtle’.” /These three lines are about something that evades scrutiny. Yes, in it everything blends and becomes one. /Its top is not bright. Its underside is not dim. Always unnameable, It turns back to nothingness. /This is the shape of something shapeless the form of a nothing this is elusive and evasive.

Gu Zhengkun: What cannot be seen is called “Yi” (without color) /What cannot be heard is called “Xi” (without sound); /What cannot be touched is called “Wei” (without shape) /There three things can be in no way defined, /So they are combined into one. /Above it there is no light; /Below it there is no darkness; /So vague as to defy any description. /It is categorized as the Nothingness, /And is called the shape without shape as well as the image without substance /It is hence named as “huhuang” (vague and dimly visible).

In this chapter, Lao Tzu tells us the nature of Tao is abstract, spiritual and mystical. Awareness of it cannot be reached via the senses, except by the intuitive mind, by the rule acquired from the history and by its observed effects on the environment, on people's ideas, and on society. In Chapter 14 the words like “不见”, “不闻”, “无状”, and “无物” are all used to indicate the nature of Tao.

In the above part, four characters “夷” “希” “微” “惚恍” are all culture-specific expressions which bear the essence of Lao Tzu's philosophy. In the first three versions, the translators tried their best to search for the best words to convey corresponding information. However, as we know, it is difficult to describe them in Chinese, let alone in English. Consequently, the meanings of the words used by them are still a little far away from Lao Tzu's intended meaning. According to Peter Newmark, in the reproduction of the abundant cultural and historical allusions, especially those proper nouns, a method adopted by many translators is to use transliteration with annotation. Transliteration avoids many misunderstandings and confines the freedom and diversity, functioning as register marker. Gu used this method in his version.

According to reception theory, readers' reading experience constitutes their horizon of expectations, and their horizon of expectation will affect their reception of the translated work. Through a chain of receptions from generation to generation a literary work will enter a series of continuous transformation of horizon of expectations. In translating, when a translated work steps into this continuously changing horizon of expectation, the cultural background in which it is imbedded is also gradually perceived and accepted by the readers. Through this way, the receptive capacity of the readers constantly increases and accordingly their horizon of expectation is expanded. As a matter of fact, after years of propagation of Taoism, *Tao Te Ching* and other Chinese classics, western readers' understanding of Chinese culture increases and their

horizon of expectations has been expanded. They not only have a better understanding of the original text but also have a similar association as the Chinese readers, so Gu's version can be accepted by them. Of course, the translation will be better if a necessary annotation can be added just as what Newmark says. In addition, if we look at the four characters from another perspective, we will find they are also the indeterminacies of the text. Gu's version enables the readers to fill in indeterminacies according to their horizon of expectations.

### 3.3 Summary

In this chapter the author chooses four English versions of *Tao Te Ching* by James Legge, Arthur Waley, Michael LaFargue and Gu Zhengkun respectively for a comparative study. She deliberately chooses the four versions because they represent diachronic differences as well as cultural and social differences. In the analysis, two major concepts of reception theory are used: horizon of expectations and indeterminacies. Through the comparison, she intends to explore how the two concepts of reception theory influence the translating process. The result of the analysis shows in two aspects. On the one side, because the four translators with different identities at different historical periods have diverse pre-experiences and horizons of expectations, they have various understanding of the indeterminacies in the original text, then their translations are naturally different. On the other side, in the process of translation the four translators' consideration for the target readers' different horizons of expectations and for their different degrees of receptivity lead to their different translations.

Through the analysis, the author intends to show that such a text as *Tao Te Ching* does not only have one correct interpretation, for its supposed meaning changes in different cultural and historical backgrounds. A final assessment about *Tao Te Ching* thus becomes

impossible. In the author's opinion, the four English versions all play their important roles in presenting different readers the Chinese classic at different periods, which is of great benefit for the cultural communication between the East and the West.

## Conclusion

*Tao Te Ching*, one of the oldest Chinese classics, has exerted great influence not only in China but also the world over. “As an old wine of exquisite and mysterious vintage attracts sophisticated enjoyers of life, so likewise has the *Tao-te-ching* over the centuries and till the present put a magic spell on sophisticated readers, searching for the meaning of life.” “Both sinologists and amateurs, fascinated by the intoxicating qualities of this little book, have tried to capture its flavor and have devised ever new bottles for it, ever new translations” (LaFargue and Pas, 1998: 277). A number of new translations keep coming, most of them in English. Now *Tao Te Ching* has become one of the most frequently translated works in Chinese literature. Its influence in Britain and America is almost comparable to that of Bible. Why are there so many translations of it? Why can it be widely accepted by the Anglo-American society? In the thesis, the author has explored this reason from the perspective of reception theory.

Reception theory is an influential theory of literary criticism in the twentieth century. It marks a shift in concern from the author and the work to the text-reader relationship in literary criticism. In the thesis, the author has applied two concepts of reception theory — Jauss’s “horizon of expectations” and Iser’s “indeterminacy” — to analyze examples chosen from four English versions of *Tao Te Ching*. The analysis shows that the translators’ different horizons of expectations as well as their consideration for the target readers’ different horizons of expectations lead to differences in the concretizations of “spots of indeterminacy”, hence the different versions of the same source text. This explains why there are so many translations of *Tao Te Ching* in Britain and America.

*Tao Te Ching* is a precious heritage of human thought, bearing

profound cultural information. Its value transcends the limitation of time and space. Researches on this great Chinese classic will not cease but will continue. Just as Ma Xiao said, “The potential meaning of a literary work can not be fully recognized by a particular reader or readers of a particular period; it can only be gradually unfolded in the constant reception process” (qtd. in 马萧, 2000: 50). With reception theory, interpreters and translators will gain new insight into the work: in the translation process, translators, as readers of the original text, must consider not only their horizon of expectations but also the target readers’ horizon of expectations. Based on this insight, they will keep bringing forth new translations. And this process will have no end.

In Britain and America there are many English translations of *Tao Te Ching*, but in this thesis the author only analyzes four versions. The study is very limited. According to reception theory, different readers of the same cultural background in the same period or the same reader in different periods will show great diversity in their interpretation of the same original due to their different or changing horizons of expectations. These issues may be topics for further study in this area.

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## Appendix 1: Chronological List of Major English *Tao Te Ching* Translations in Britain and America (1868-2005)

- 1868 John Chalmers, *The Speculations on Metaphysics, Polity and Morality of "The Old Philosopher," Lao-tze*. London: Trubner.
- 1884 Frederick Henry Balfour, *Taoist Texts, Ethical, Political and Speculative*. London: Trubner.
- 1886 Herbert A. Giles, *The Remains of Lao Tzu*. London: John Murry.
- 1891 James Legge, *The Texts of Taoism*. New York: Dover.
- 1895 G. G. Alexander, *Lao-tsze: The Great Thinker with A Translation of His Thoughts on the Nature and Manifestation of God*. London: Trubner & Co.
- 1898 Paul Carus, *Lao-tze's Tao-the-king: Chinese and English with Introduction*. Chicago: Open Court Publications.
- 1903 I.W. Heysinger, *The Light of China, The Tao Teh King of Lao Tsze*. Philadelphia: Peter Reilly.
- 1904, 1905 Walter Gorn Old, *The Simple Way, Laotze*. London: Philip Wellby.
- 1905 Lionel Giles, *The Sayings of Lao Tzu*. London: John Murray.
- 1905 G. Spurgeon Medhurst, *Tao Teh King. A Short Study in Comparative Religion*. Chicago: Theosophical Book Concern.
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- 1946 Herman Ould, *The Way of Acceptance*. London: A. Dakers.
- 1948 Lin Yutang, *The Wisdom of Laotse*. New York: Random House.
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- 1970 Yu Tinn-hugh, *The Philosophy of Taoism*. S.F.: Falcon Pub.
- 1972 Gia-Fu Feng and Jane English, *Lao Tzu, Tao Te Ching*. New York: Vintage.  
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- 1975 Chang Chung-yuan, *Tao: A New Way of Thinking*. NY: Harper & Row.  
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- 1982 Tolbert McCarroll, *The Tao: The Sacred Way*. New York: Crossroad.  
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- 1995 Aleister Crowley, *Tao Te Ching, Liber CLVII*. York Beach: Samuel Weiser
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- 2001 Johnathan Star, *Tao Te Ching: The Definitive Edition*. NY: Tarcher/Putnam.
- 2003 David Hall and Roger T. Ames, *Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*. New York: Ballantine Books.
- 2004 Moss Robert, *Dao De Jing: The Book of the Way*. University of California.

## Appendix 2

论文目录	发表刊物	发表时间
翻译原则在《傲慢与偏见》汉译本中的应用 ——浅析小说中的对话艺术	吉林科学技术出版社·湖南师范大学 2006 年研究生优秀论文集	2006 年 3 月
由直译和意译之争引起的思考	湘南学院学报	2005 年第 3 期

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