

# THE MODERN ERA OF LAOZI INTERPRETATION: THE INTERSECTION BETWEEN JAPANESE AND EUROPEAN SINOLOGY

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## 1 Takeuchi Yoshio and Textual Criticism

During his time at Tōhoku Imperial University, Takeuchi Yoshio (1886–1966) published “Studies of Lao-Zhuang Philosophy in Japan.”<sup>1</sup> That was a year after the publication of *A History of Shina Thought*.<sup>2</sup> The article marked a shift in the studies of Lao-Zhuang philosophy in Japan: the perspectives of modern Sinology started to inform the scholarship on the subject.

In his work *Confucius*, Watsuji Tetsurō described Confucius as a “teacher of the humankind.”<sup>3</sup> Watsuji said that the book was based entirely on a version of *The Analects* which Takeuchi Yoshio edited, translated, and annotated.<sup>4</sup> He also recalled that, “at the Sinological Society conference in Kyoto at the end of 1928, Dr. Takeuchi delivered a truly outstanding talk about textual criticism on *The Analects*.<sup>5</sup> I feel that the deep impression the talk left back then continues to inspire my interest in *The Analects*, as if the impact is still fresh.”<sup>6</sup> Watsuji used the above comments as the opening for a passage celebrating Takeuchi’s *Studies on the Analects*.<sup>7</sup> For Watsuji, Takeuchi was the scholar who introduced “textual criticism [Jp. 原典批判]”—or *textkritik* based on modern philology—into Sinology.

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1 Takeuchi [1937] 1978b.

2 Takeuchi [1936] 1978a, later renamed *A History of Chinese Thought*.

3 Watsuji [1938] 1988, 263.

4 *Rongo no kenkyū*, published from Iwanami shoten in 1939.

5 Translator’s note: the Kanji characters in the Japanese text for “Sinological Society” are 支那学会. The author noted “*sic.*” after the term.

6 Watsuji [1938] 1988, 352.

7 Takeuchi [1939] 1978c.

Watsuji was not the only one to offer such praise to Takeuchi. Rather, it was a sentiment broadly shared. Kanaya Osamu, a student of Takeuchi's at Tōhoku Imperial University and the editor of the ten-volume *Complete Works of Takeuchi Yoshio*, said the following:

Traditionally, we use the methods of collation [Jp. 校勘] and exegesis [Jp. 訓詁] to facilitate the correct reading of texts. If we wish to push this effort further, however, we also need to incorporate the method of textual criticism. The core strength of Takeuchi's scholarship lies herein. [Textual criticism] is about critically analyzing the content of the classics and investigating the conditions of their creation. Further, Takeuchi also developed textual criticism as an approach to intellectual history.<sup>8</sup>

According to Kanaya, Takeuchi combined “the methodology of textual criticism,” developed in classical studies in Europe, and *kaozheng*, i.e., the evidential scholarship of Qing China. Therein lay the essence of Takeuchi's intellectual prowess.

## 2 The Evolution of *Laozhuang* Interpretation in China

So, what did Takeuchi find about “the studies of Lao-Zhuang philosophy in Japan” through textual criticism? Let us examine the following quote.

Essentially, the understanding of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* went through three distinct phases of transformation in China. In the first phase, [people] recognized the differences between *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. In the second phase, which stretched from the Wei-Jin period to the Six Dynasties, [people] found *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* to be fundamentally similar, so much so that they interpreted *Laozi* using the philosophy of *Zhuangzi*. As a result, pure conversations (Jp. 清談) gained popularity and harmed social ethics. However, in the third phase, which covered the period after the Song, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* parted ways again. *Laozi* turned around and joined force with Confucianism. This fusion afforded Confucian ethics, which tended to [focus on] formalities, a foundation in philosophy. If we name the first phase the era of independence

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8 Kanaya 1992, 252.

for *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, then we could call the second phase the era of cooperation between *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, and the third phase the era of separation between *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, or else the era of cooperation between *Laozi* and Confucianism.<sup>9</sup>

The above shows that Takeuchi believed that there were three key transitions in the history of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* interpretation in China. Originally, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* existed as texts in separate systems of thought. However, things changed when, in the Former Han period, *Huainanzi* 淮南子 used the term “Laozhuang 老莊” to refer to both texts as a whole.<sup>10</sup> Since then, the two texts were seen as deeply interrelated. In the Wei-Jin period, “Laozhuang” became one set after Wang Bi annotated *Laozi* using “the philosophy of *Zhuangzi*”. However, in the Song period, Su Shi 蘇軾 and Lin Xiyi 林希逸 offered new interpretations for *Laozi*. This new scholarship separated *Laozi* from *Zhuangzi* and readjusted the relationship between *Laozi*, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Su Shi saw equivalence among Confucianism, Buddhism, *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Lin Xiyi connected *Laozi* to Confucianism and *Zhuangzi* to Buddhism.

The aforementioned Lin Xiyi was a scholar of the southern Song period and the author of *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* 老子齋口義 [Lectures on *Laozi* in the

9 Takeuchi [1937] 1978b, 228.

10 I might add that the first use of “Lao-Zhuang” was in the Yaolue chapter of *Huainanzi* 淮南子. *Shiji* 史記 [Records of the Grand Historian] juxtaposed Lao, Zhuang, Shen, and Han, possibly indicating the constitution of the Daoist school. (Ikeda 1996, 15–29, 88–97) Lao-Zhuang became a common term in the Wei-Jin period between the third and the fourth centuries. According to recent research, it is likely that Zhuangzi was a thinker who created the text *Zhuangzi* between the middle Warring State period and the Emperor Wu period (141–87 BC) of Former Han. It is also likely that Laozi was a thinker who participated in the creation of the text *Laozi* between the end of the Warring State period and the early Han period. (Ibid., 31–32) Incidentally, in the *Boshu Laozi* 帛書老子 [*Laozi* written on bamboo] discovered in the Han-era tomb of Mawangdui, in the early Han period, the [two components of the] text was called *Depian* 德篇 [chapter on De] and *Daopian* 道篇 [chapter on Dao], and not *Laozi*. Scholarly works in the Emperor Wu period started to call the text *Laozi*, using the name of the author as the name of the text. It is therefore possible that it was then that the two chapters on *Dao* and *De* were combined into the text *Laozi*. (Sawada 1997, 10–12)

Studio of Yan]. About Lin, Araki Kengo has offered a detailed study in the essay “The Standpoint of Lin Xiyi 林希逸の立場.”<sup>11</sup> Although he belonged to the intellectual lineage of Chengzi 程子, Lin Xiyi wrote “Lectures” on *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi* and *Liezi*, all of which fell in the Daoist system. In these writings, one can find an emphasis on the views of Buddhism, and especially those of Zen Buddhism. Lin promoted a certain singularism among Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism.

### 3 The Evolution of the Interpretation of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* in Japan

Takeuchi believed that the changes in the interpretation of *Laozi* in China had a significant influence on the evolution of the reception of *Laozi* philosophy in Japan.

As I mentioned before, Lin Xiyi’s Lectures on *Laozi* was a new set of annotations completed during the Jingding 景定 reign of the Song period. This work sought to separate *Laozi* from *Zhuangzi* and draw a connection between *Laozi* and Confucianism. This work earned an entry above that of the Heshanggong-annotated version of *Laozi* 河上公註本, and this signaled the beginning of a transition in the interpretation of *Laozi*. Lin Xiyi’s annotations probably reached our country [Japan] with itinerant Zen monks. This, again, demonstrates that Zen monks helped bring about changes in Lao-Zhuang philosophy in Japan. In the Tokugawa period, various classics from the Qingyuan 慶元 era were published through copper and wood movable type printing. Among these were the *Laozi* text annotated by Heshanggong, and the *Lectures* by Lin Xiyi. Both texts were printed. However, before long, Hayashi Razan added Japanese guiding marks for the Lin Xiyi version and offered vernacular explanations for the text as well. After the publication of this manuscript, the version of *Laozi* annotated by Heshanggong went extinct. Only the version annotated by Lin remained in print. This shows that the study of Lao-Zhuang

11 “Its uniqueness can be seen in the following: the effort to move Lao, Zhuang and Lie closer to Confucianism, which was the central tenet of the text; the recognition afforded to the critique of Zhuzi learning; and its acceptance of Zen Buddhism, and in particular Hua Tou Buddhism.” (Araki 1981, 50)

philosophy went through a complete transformation from the Ashikaga to the Tokugawa period.<sup>12</sup>

In the above, Takeuchi stated the following: the interpretive framework for *Laozi* saw a transformation from the Muromachi era to the Edo era, during which the basis of *Laozi* interpretation shifted from the annotations by Heshanggong to the *Lectures* by Lin Xiyi.<sup>13</sup> After Hayashi Razan popularized Lin's version, Lin's interpretive framework started to dominate the intellectual scene. Incidentally, the *Laozi* text annotated by Heshanggong was falsely attributed to a hermit of the Han period. In fact, the work was authored after the Han. It revolved around the idea of cultivating wellness (Ch. 養生). This is a reading of *Laozi* which came later: it placed *Laozi* in the context of Huang-Lao thought and religious Daoism.

In other words, just like in China, the meaning of *Laozi* changed as the framework for its interpretation evolved in Japan. Although *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* were once seen as texts of the same thought system, they were ultimately separated and connected respectively to Confucianism and Buddhism.

#### 4 Lao-Zhuang Studies under the Ogyū Sorai School

How did things evolve after Hayashi Razan? Takeuchi went on to discuss Usami Shinsui, a disciple of Ogyū Sorai, and Usami's disciple Kaiho Seiryō. To their studies, Takeuchi gave the name "Lao-Zhuang studies under Sorai." Takeuchi said:

The above are the opening remarks of *Kokujikai* 国字解. In it, the author determined that Laozi was a true Confucian because he spoke thoroughly of the Confucian spirit. The author also argued that Laozi was active in an era after that of Confucius. The illogicality of this assertion makes one hit the desk and sigh. This scholarly attitude sets [the author] apart from those who simply parrot Lin Xiyi. His argument about the consistency between Confucius and *Laozi* betrays the hallmarks of that era's views about *Laozi*.<sup>14</sup>

12 Takeuchi [1937] 1978b, 231.

13 As Wang Di has discussed, *Laozi Yanzhai Kouyi* was introduced into Japan in the Muromachi period and became a subject of study then. (Wang 2001, 165)

14 Takeuchi [1937] 1978b, 235.

The above says that Kaiho Seiryō's *Kokujikai* argues that *Laozi* was a true Confucian, and lived after Confucius. Takeuchi went so far as saying that this is something that “makes one hit the desk and sigh.” So, how did Kaiho Seiryō reach such a conclusion?

First, Sorai's disciples used the *Laozi* text annotated by Wang Bi to “search for the true meaning of *Laozi* through comparative analysis with earlier scholarship.”<sup>15</sup> The annotations of Wang Bi 王弼註 refers to a version of the *Laozi* text annotated by Wang Bi of the Wei period. Wang's version uses the concept of non-being 無 to interpret *Laozi* in a metaphysical way. This was before the introduction of Buddhism. Wang Bi sought to construct a kind of metaphysics through the canonization of the three classics of mystic learning (Ch. 三玄): the *Book of Changes*, *Laozi*, and *Zhuangzi*. This endeavor contributed to the formation of the concept “Lao-Zhuang.” Wang Bi's work did not necessarily belong to the genre of Daoist philosophy (Ch. 道家). The *Book of Changes* is a Confucian classic. Yet Wang Bi's scholarship raised its stature. Lin Xiyi had promoted a syncretism through Song learning. In contrast, Kaiho's scholarship linked *Laozi* to Confucius through Wang Bi's annotations.

Another reason for Kaiho's argument is simply that he was a disciple of Sorai school. Ogyū Sorai was influenced by the Ancient Rhetoric School 古文辭派 in Ming China. He believed that one could find originary principles by going back to the origins of things in the “ancient times.” Even if one were in Japan, if one were to read the Chinese classics in ancient Chinese pronunciation and not through Japanese *Kanbun*, then it would be as if one were able to participate in the making of sage rituals, which took place in the “ancient times.” Therefore, *Laozi* also had to be read in the context of the “ancient times.” Sorai was a Confucian scholar. In his eyes, although the substance of *Laozi* did not necessarily deserve much praise, its positioning within the “Confucian intellectual lineage as a mentor” was commendable. So how would one read *Laozi* properly through a Confucian lens? Here Wang Bi's annotations were probably easier for Sorai to accept, for they were based on the assumption that non-being was the ancient, fundamental origin.

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15 Takeuchi [1937] 1978b, 237.

What issue does the reception of Lao-Zhuang studies in Japan address? As a scholar of textual criticism, Takeuchi believed that it addressed the difference between the texts of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*. Indeed, Takeuchi had proposed the following in his dissertation “The Beginnings of *Laozi*” (1926) long ago: if one were to approach *Laozi* through “textual criticism,” then one would conclude that *Laozi* was a text of the Warring State period and was the amalgamation of various component sources.

## 5 Sinology in Europe: Terrien de Lacouperie and Herbert Giles

What made Takeuchi’s “textual criticism” possible? It was contemporaneous advances in European Sinology. Towards the end of “The Beginnings of *Laozi*,” Takeuchi mentioned that his mentor Naitō Konan had met Paul Pelliot in France, and had borrowed *Dunhuangben Xuanyan Xinji* 敦煌本玄言新記 [The Dunhuang Edition of New Notes about Metaphysical Words] and *Wuzhu Laozi* 無註老子 [*Laozi* without Annotation].<sup>16</sup> In his *Studies of Laozi*, published in the following year (1927), Takeuchi referenced additional works by European Sinologists.

Of these works, *Western Origin of the Early Chinese Civilization from 2,300 B. C. to 200 A. D.* (1894), the last piece of published writing by Albert Terrien de Lacouperie (1845–1894), is particularly interesting.<sup>17</sup> Terrien de Lacouperie was a French Orientalist who served at University College London and the British Museum. He was the recipient of the Prix Stanislas Julien by the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. His book argues that ancient Chinese civilization originated in Babylonia. For better or worse, it showcases the modus operandi of the studies of comparative philology and comparative thought in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe. On this book, Takeuchi remarked, “that argument [in the book] is extremely interesting; yet the way the author handled primary sources is not good.” As such, Takeuchi was cognizant of 19<sup>th</sup> century Western perspectives on China such as the “Western origin” thesis.

16 Takeuchi [1926] 1978e, 88.

17 Takeuchi [1927] 1978d, 200 f.

As Maejima Shinji reminded us, there were active discussions in 17<sup>th</sup> century Europe about searching for the origins of the Chinese people in Egypt and Mesopotamia. These conversations were spurred by the information about China that missionaries brought back with them. Although these discussions lost momentum in the eighteenth century, they regained traction in the nineteenth. Our Terrien de Lacouperie was among those who promoted the idea that the Chinese people had originated in the Mesopotamia. Proponents of this theory based their reasoning on things like the speculation that the Chinese word for *baixing* 百姓 [the common people] was a transliteration from the language of the Bak people in Babylonia. “From today’s perspective, these arguments are nothing but a figment of one’s imagination.”<sup>18</sup>

Takeuchi also mentioned “The Remains of Lao Tzu (1886)” by Herbert Giles (1845-1953). Giles was born in the same year as Terrien de Lacouperie. A long-time diplomat in China, Giles took up the position of Professor of Chinese at the University of Cambridge in 1897. In that post, he succeeded Thomas Francis Wade, who invented the Wade-Giles romanization system for the Chinese language. On Giles’s essay, Takeuchi said that it “determined *Tao Te Ching* to be a bogus text.”<sup>19</sup> Yet that was not really Giles’s point. Rather, the essay was about the “discovery” of *Laozi*. That is, how did the “discovery” of *Laozi* in the Han period take place? How did the subsequent canonization of the text happen? Giles argued that it was the “discovery” of *Laozi* in 19<sup>th</sup> century Europe that made these discussions possible.<sup>20</sup> Takeuchi did not wade too deep into these debates. But in his later writings, he would reference a number of European scholars of *Laozi* whom Giles had brought up in this essay.

## 6 European Sinology (2) - Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat

Among European scholars of *Laozi*, Giles and Takeuchi admired Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat the most (1788-1832). It would be proper to call Abel-Rémusat a first-generation Sinologist of France. When Collège Royal (later renamed Collège de France) created a professorial position for the languages and cultures of

18 Maejima 1959, 5.

19 Takeuchi [1927] 1978d, 201.

20 Giles 1886, 232.

China, the Tartary, and Manchuria, Abel-Rémusat was selected as the inaugural holder of the post. Abel-Rémusat published a work called *Memoir on the Life and Opinions of Laozi, a Chinese Philosopher of the 6th Century BC who Held Opinions Commonly Attributed to Pythagoras, Plato, and Their Disciples* (1823). As this long title suggests, Abel-Rémusat attempted a comparison between *Laozi* and the philosophies of the Greco-Roman world. Through this comparison, he reached the following conclusion:

Let me summarize the most prominent features of Laozi. This philosopher was born in central China in the 7<sup>th</sup> century BC. Like the Platonic and Stoic schools, *Laozi* concerned himself with the first principles of the world. That is, with a lofty kind of reason that defied definition: a kind of reason that was nothing but itself.<sup>21</sup>

According to Giles, the kind of comparative study of *Laozi* like that which Abel-Rémusat practiced here marked the “discovery” of *Laozi* in Europe. However, such comparative study was premised upon the assumption that the Greco-Roman world was the origin of modern Europe, and it was not reasonable to conjure up a forced connection between Laozi and Greco-Roman thought.

That said, Takeuchi drew our attention to how Abel-Rémusat translated “Dao” as “logos” in the book.

In 1825, Abel-Rémusat of France published an essay about *Laozi*, in which he said that he could not think of a better word for “Dao” than *logos*. The word *logos* had three meanings: the supreme being, reason, and word.<sup>22</sup>

What Takeuchi had in mind here was Abel-Rémusat’s translation and annotation for the following line in the first chapter of *Laozi*: “the way that can be spoken of is not the constant Dao 道可道非常道。”<sup>23</sup>

21 Abel-Rémusat 1823, 51.

22 Takeuchi [1927] 1978d, 203 f.

23 Translator’s note: Throughout the article, I translate Laozi’s metaphysical term 道 literally as *Dao*, for the author will go on to discuss the troubled history of the concept’s translation in English. On other occasions where this Chinese character is used in a non-metaphysical sense, I translate it as “the way.” I do the same for the character 德, which I translate as *De* in the Daoist metaphysical sense, and as “virtue” or “nature” on other occasions. Dao and De may also be transliterated as Tao and Te.

For example, the first set of words read “the way that can be spoken of.” That is, “reason which can be rationalized and articulated, or in other words, reason that can be articulated through words.” This is perhaps similar to what Hermes Trismegistus tried to articulate when he said “*νοὺς μὲν νοώμενος*.” It is probably not possible to translate the word “*Dao*” properly using terms other than those derived from the word *logos*. That is, within the three meanings of *logos*: the supreme being, reason, and word.<sup>24</sup>

This passage deserves some explication. Hermes Trismegistus is an imagined figure in what is commonly called Hermeticism. This figure emerged from the syncretic combination of the Egyptian gods Hermes and Thoth and [legendary figures in] alchemy. The quotation referenced here is part of the text “*To Son Thoth*.” The correct Greek spelling should be “*νοὺς μὲν νοούμενος*.” This probably means “*Nous* was also considered.”<sup>25</sup>

Let us consider the significance of the following fact: Abel-Rémusat brought up mystic thought like Hermeticism to interpret *Laozi*. On this point, Abel-Rémusat’s ascension to the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres in 1816 might offer a hint. Today, this academy remains one of the four components of the Institut de France. It was created in 1633 under the name of La Petite Académie and took on its current name in the year of Abel-Rémusat’s ascension. The aim of the academy was to study the ancient era in the Oriental, Greek, Latin, and Medieval worlds. In the 16<sup>th</sup> century, Europe encountered China through the eyes of missionaries, and this gave rise to a thorny issue: there was in China an ancient era that happened even before God supposedly created the cosmos. It was in this context that European scholars problematized “the ancient era.” The mission to resolve this problem was perhaps inherent in Abel-Rémusat’s interpretation of *Laozi*.

## 7 Tsuda Sōkichi and Textual Criticism

Takeuchi performed his *Laozi* interpretation at the intersection of Chinese *kaozheng* scholarship, Japanese Sinology, and 19<sup>th</sup> century European Sinology,

24 Abel-Rémusat 1823, 24.

25 See Chambers 1882, 42

which focused on textual criticism. This much we have already established. Here I would like to examine Tsuda Sōkichi (1873–1961), who, as a contemporary of Takeuchi, also studied *Laozi*.

Tsuda published “Daoist Thought and Its Evolution 道家の思想とその展開” in 1927. Marvelous as it is, this was the same year when Takeuchi Yoshio published his “Studies of *Laozi* 老子の研究.” The primary proposition in Tsuda’s work is that *Laozi* was a text that came after Mencius.<sup>26</sup> In making this point, Tsuda adopted the same spirit of textual criticism as Takeuchi did when Takeuchi argued that *Laozi* was a text of the Warring State period. Yet, as if having taken notice of Takeuchi’s work, in 1933, Tsuda intentionally attached an appendix entitled “on the research methodology of *Laozi*” to his manuscript. In that appendix, Tsuda offered the following elaboration:

Even though the above may seem like my attempt to analyze *Laozi* through textual criticism, they are in fact my musings about the research methodology for *Laozi* thought. This is because, as I have made clear earlier, the textual criticism of *Laozi* cannot be divorced from the very study of *Laozi* thought. And if we can study *Laozi* thought in relation to the totality of ancient Chinese intellectual history, then we will be able to determine, for the first time, the historical period during which *Laozi* was authored.

Let me end with this. I believe we must note two things in relation to Japanese scholars’ mission to study Chinese thought. First, we must break free from the way of thinking prevalent among Chinese *kaozheng* scholars. There is certainly much in their studies of the classics, of grammatology, and of phonology which deserve our respect. In those areas, they have no doubt made an enormous contribution. However, because of their way of thinking, there are limits to the possibilities of their research. Chinese *kaozheng* scholars have no training in [analytical] thinking and cannot understand intellectual thought as intellectual thought. Specifically, they cannot understand the historical evolution of intellectual thought. Therefore, their way of thinking is not conducive to progress in the proper study of intellectual thought. Second, we must break free from the following way of thinking: speculating about Chinese thought based on European thought. Chinese [thinkers] after the Six Dynasties period often sought to interpret *Laozi* through Buddhist thought. The residue

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26 Tsuda 1964, 4.

effects of this approach can still be felt today. In the meantime, a new attitude has taken shape, in which people apply the philosophies and metaphysics of the Europeans to the interpretation of Chinese thought. Ancient Chinese thought emerged from the ancient Chinese way of life, the ancient Chinese political, social, and cultural spheres, and the intellectual milieu of the ancient Chinese world. It is unique to China. Therefore, the study of ancient Chinese thought must take as its basis the unique way of life in China. Although there is much for us to learn in the methodologies of modern European classical studies, we cannot apply them to the interpretation of Chinese thought. If we do not break free from the two errors but conversely seek to build connections between them and the study of Chinese thought, that would be a colossal mistake. In this I believe firmly.<sup>27</sup>

This is a long quotation. It tells us that Tsuda censured those who were inclined to draw connections between Chinese *kaozheng* scholarship, European classical studies, [and the study of Chinese thought]. As a practitioner of textual criticism, Tsuda said “that would be a colossal mistake. In this I believe firmly.” This was a critique leveled at the entirety of modern Japanese Sinology, but Tsuda had Takeuchi specifically in mind.<sup>28</sup>

## 8 Tsuda Sōkichi and the Internalization of the European Perspective

However, it is worth noting that Tsuda was not immune to such an inclination. For, he criticized Chinese *kaozheng* scholars by saying “[they] have no training in [analytical] thinking and cannot understand intellectual thought as intellectual thought. Specifically, they cannot understand the historical evolution of intellectual thought.” Yet in this statement, no critical thinking can be found. Further, in his critique of European Sinology, Tsuda focused on the “Chinese way of life.” Much of this perspective was, in fact, a modern European invention. If we think of *Laozi* studies not so much as the study of the essential character-

27 Tsuda 1964, 580–581.

28 Hashimoto Keiji took up Tsuda’s critique of Takeuchi on the issue of the interpretation of *Zhuangzi*. (Hashimoto 2004, 4 f.)

istics of a region, but rather as the study of an approach to universal problems, then we can see how special Tsuda's position actually is.

The following quotation should allow us to see how much Tsuda had internalized the modern European perspective:

It should also be noted that the structure of the Chinese language often gives rise to chaotic thinking. One sign of this is the freedom [for Chinese speakers] to construct idioms. In the idiom “after the fall of *dao* [the Way; Ch. 道] came *de* [morality; Ch. 德],” *dao* and *de* are set apart and assigned different worth. However, sometimes these two characters are used together as a set phrase for just one concept. This is only one example. The aforementioned relationships among *xing* [character; Ch. 性] and *ming* [life; Ch. 命] and *xingming*, *jing* [essence; Ch. 精] and *qi* [energy; Ch. 气] and *jingqi*, *shen* [god; Ch. 神] and *ming* [bright; Ch. 明] and *shenming* are all the same. It is in these places that linguistic meanings become ambivalent. In addition, nouns and adjectives and verbs are all the same words. For this reason, conceptual confusion arises. For example, we can see these dynamics at work when the word *wu* [none; absence; Ch. 無] is used in the phrase *wu xing wu xiang* [neither shape nor image; Ch. 無形無象]. The rampant imaginative associations, which I mentioned earlier, probably has to do with these dynamics. Generally speaking, many have speculated that the overall lack of accuracy in [Chinese] thinking has to do with the nature of the Chinese language. This is not limited to Daoist thought but is surely present in Daoist thinking. The more thinking there is, the clearer this drawback emerges. That is why we see a lot of this in Daoist thought.<sup>29</sup>

The Chinese language is not a language for philosophy: such an assertion is a mistake typical of the kind of comparative study of thought based on [19<sup>th</sup> century] comparative linguistics. This erroneous line of thinking would immediately lead to the proposition that superior language produced superior thought. Tsuda has followed the same line of reasoning with Heidegger, his thesis seeming like a variation of Heidegger's assertion that Greek and German are the only philosophical languages. “The freedom to construct idioms” is not a characteristic unique to the Chinese language. It can be found in the form of compound phrases in all languages. If we consider how Kūkai used compound phrases to de-

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29 Tsuda 1964, 537–538.

velop philosophical thinking in Japan, then we can see that Tsuda's understanding of philosophy is very limited indeed.<sup>30</sup>

## 9 How to Understand the Chinese Language? - Abel-Rémusat and Wilhelm von Humboldt

Incidentally, the first-generation Sinologist of France Abel-Rémusat, whom I discussed earlier, engaged in a debate about how to understand the Chinese language with Wilhelm von Humboldt (1767–1835). This exchange took place through written correspondence between 1824 and 1831. Wilhelm von Humboldt had proposed that the clarity of thought could only arise from fusional languages like the Indo-European languages. Conversely, Abel-Rémusat argued that, although the Chinese language was an isolating language, it was not necessarily grammar-less. We only need to consider what a civilization [the Chinese people] managed to build to see how thoroughly erroneous Wilhelm von Humboldt's views are. On the debate between the two, Ono Aya wrote the following:

What Abel-Rémusat issued to Wilhelm von Humboldt here was not just a challenge for him to reconsider minor issues about the nature of the Chinese language. Rather, Abel-Rémusat issued an implicit invitation [for scholars] to reconsider a way of thinking that was often articulated in 19<sup>th</sup> century historical linguistics: the procedures that were used to connect signs in a language and a sentence were somehow similar to the methods that were used to connect concepts in intellectual thinking. If the spirit and the language are synchronous, and if, like Wilhelm von Humboldt proposed, in true relational grammar, expression and content are one and the same, would this not lead to a refusal to recognize other forms of relational grammar, or in other words, other ways of thinking and speaking? Although Abel-Rémusat did not pose the question in an inquisitory manner, he closed the argument by strongly encouraging Wilhelm von Humboldt to continue studying the Chinese language.<sup>31</sup>

30 On the analysis of compound phrases by Kūkai, see Kobayashi Yasuo and Nakajima Takahiro, *Nihon wo tokihanatsu* 日本を解き放つ [Unleashing Japan].

31 Ono 2006, 35.

In a word, Abel-Rémusat's question cast doubts on a key assumption of 19<sup>th</sup> century historical linguistics: the strong connection between language and thought. Later, Wilhelm von Humboldt would accept Abel-Rémusat's argument to a certain extent and refrain from speaking of the Chinese language as an inferior exception.

This debate raged one hundred years before Tsuda. Yet Tsuda made the same argument again.

## 10 Inoue Tetsujirō and Takase Takejirō

Takeuchi Yoshio and Tsuda Sōkichi, whom we have examined above, both sought to interpret *Laozi* through textual criticism and [methods from] modern European Sinology. These two characters did not take the stage out of the blue. Rather, they had predecessors in the world of Japanese Sinology. In order to show this, I will examine the interpretations of *Laozi* by 20<sup>th</sup> century Japanese Sinologists that came before them.

In the year 1903, Inoue Tetsujirō and Kanie Yoshimaru co-edited and published the tenth volume of *Nihon Rinli Ihen* 日本倫理彙編 [Anthologies of Japanese Ethics]. To that volume was attached a "Part on the Lao-Zhuang School." Inoue had created a classificatory framework which included the Japanese Yōmei school, the Japanese Shushigaku school, and the Japanese Kogaku school. To these main schools of thought, he also added the eclecticist school 折衷学派 and the independent school 独立学派. Scholars in these schools could not fit neatly in the three main brands of Japanese thought. Lao-Zhuang school was classified as part of the independent school.

Scholars enumerated in the independent school included Miura Baien, Hoashi Gutei, and Ninomiya Sontoku. Those listed under the Lao-Zhuang school included Ro Sōsetsu, Arika Unzan, and Hirose Tansō. Arika authored the work *Dōgaku Seiyō* 道学正要 [Essence of Daoism] (1767). Therefore, his inclusion in this category is understandable. Ro Sōsetsu was an astronomer; Hirose was a Confucian scholar. Along with Miura Baien and Hoashi, he was known as one of the three wise Confucian scholars of Bungo. Thus, we have to conclude that this was a rather forced classification of scholars.

Here I will focus on Takase Takejirō's discussion in his *Rōsō Tetsugaku* 老莊哲学 [Lao-Zhuang philosophy] (Sakakibara bunseidō, 1909). Takase Takejirō (1869-1950) was a disciple of Nemoto Michiaki (1822–1906) and Inoue Teutsujirō. Together with Inoue, he promoted “modern Japanese Yōmeigaku,” a term that Ogyū Shigehiro formulated.

On Lao-Zhuang, Takase had a more expansive perspective than Inoue, whose views we just examined.

At the beginning of his work *Rōsō Tetsugaku*, Takase argued that there were five intellectual lineages in the studies of *Laozi*. Based on this, Takase examined *Laozi* studies in Europe with great care. The second of the five lineages, Takase said, evolved around the thesis that “*Laozi* philosophy had its origins in Brahmanism and Buddhism in India.”<sup>32</sup> In his discussion of this thesis, Takase mentioned Abel-Rémusat, as well as Robert Douglas, Pierre Laffitte, and Paul Carus.

In Takase's narrative, Douglas and Laffitte believed that *Laozi* [thought] came from India. Conversely, Abel-Rémusat and Carus promoted a thesis that belonged to the fifth lineage [in Takase's scheme]. That is, “*Laozi* was a master who synthesized the [various schools of] thought about non-being in ancient China.”<sup>33</sup> Takase rejected the thesis of Douglas and Laffitte. However, as I explained earlier, Abel-Rémusat in fact tried to fit *Laozi*, quite forcefully, into [the framework] of Oriental, Greek and Latin studies. In this sense, Takase's interpretation missed the mark.

### 11 European Sinology (3) – Robert Douglas

In the year 1907, Takase moved from a lecturer position at the Tokyo Imperial University to an assistant professor position at the Kyoto Imperial University. He traveled to China in 1912 and then went on to Europe, before making it back to Japan in 1915. He wrote *Rōsō Tetsugaku* before his research trip to Europe.

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32 Takase 1909, 4.

33 Ibid., 16.

Takase made the following comments about Robert Douglas (1838–1913):

Thirty-Six. *Confucianism and Taouism* was written by Robert Douglas, a professor at the University of Cambridge in England. The book discusses Confucianism, Daoism, and the various other thinkers related to the above. There are many things in the book that are of interest to us: its different perspectives and the novelty of its [analytical] structure. It is a useful reference book for the study of Confucius and *Laozi*.<sup>34</sup>

Here Takase was referencing *Confucianism and Taouism* by Robert Kennaway Douglas (1877). Douglas entered King's College London in 1857, where he studied Chinese with James Summers (1828–1891). Summers was a scholar of China and Japan. He had welcomed the Iwakura mission to Europe in London in 1872 and moved to Japan in 1873 as a foreign government advisor through this prior connection. He taught at the Kaisei School in Tokyo, the National Niigata English School, the Osaka English School, Sapporo Agricultural College, and the *Ōbun Seikoku Gakkan* (Jp. 欧文正鵠学館), which he established on his own. (Nakagawa 2008, 95)<sup>35</sup> Douglas served in diplomatic posts in China between 1858 and 1864 and worked at the British Museum in 1865. Together with Summers, he greeted the Iwakura mission at the Museum in 1872. When Summers left for Japan, Douglas took over his position at King's College London while still serving concurrently at the British Museum.<sup>36</sup> Sometime thereafter, Douglas published the *Catalogue of Chinese Printed Books, Manuscripts and Drawings in the Library of the British Museum* as well as *Confucianism and Taouism*, which Takase read. In 1892, the British Museum created the Department of Oriental Printed Books and Manuscripts, and Douglas served as its inaugural director. In 1898, he published the *Catalogue of Japanese Printed Books and Manuscripts in the Library of the British Museum*. It is widely known that Minakata Kumagusu (1867–1941) contributed to this work. Although Minakata

34 Ibid., 119.

35 Nakagawa 2008, 95. Inoue Tetsujirō (Funakoshi at the time) mentioned Summers as someone he remembered from the Kaisei School (ibid., 118). Okakura Tenshin and Kanō Jigorō also studied at the Kaisei School. Naitō Konan studied with Summers at the the *Ōbun Seikoku Gakkan*.

36 Brown 1998, 122–129.

was banned from the British Museum, Douglas allowed Minakata to read in his office.

From the above, we can see that Douglas was not, in fact, a professor at the University of Cambridge as Takase had believed. But this is not the issue here. The issue is what thesis about *Laozi* did Douglas propose in *Confucianism and Taoism*. In his work, Douglas touched upon the scholarship of Abel-Rémusat, Aignan-Stanislas Julien (1797–1873), Jerome Potier (1801–1873), James Legge (1815–1897), and Thomas Watters (1840–1901).<sup>37,38</sup> Douglas devoted much space to a meticulous introduction of Abel-Rémusat's views. And then he said the following:

Like Pythagoras, Laou-tsze was in China the first great awakener and suggester of thought. Unlike Confucius, whose mission it was to revive in a degenerate age the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages, Laou-tsze appears to have drawn his inspiration from abroad. Every part of his system, from its first conception down to its minutest details, is distinctly Brahminical; and the materials for the interpretation of the Taou-tih king must therefore be looked for not in the early books of the Chinese, but in the writings of the Indian philosophers, more especially of the Vedanta school.<sup>39</sup>

Takase also took note of this quote above and cited this passage in his work.<sup>40</sup> It is clear that this line of thinking followed that of Abel-Rémusat about *Laozi*'s origins in the Pythagoras school. However, Douglas believed that those origins more likely lay in India. This kind of European Oriental studies framework was what Takase had to confront.

## 12 European Sinology (4) – Auguste Comte and Pierre Laffitte

Takase also mentioned Pierre Laffitte (1823–1903), who shared Douglas's views. Laffitte was a student and successor of the positivist philosopher Auguste Comte (1798–1857). He published the English version of *A General View of Chinese*

37 Douglas 1877a, 176.

38 Here Douglas said that all authorities in Sinology believed that Confucius, who was Aristotle, visited *Laozi*, who was Socrates.

39 Douglas 1877a, 191.

40 Takase 1909, 7.

*Civilization and of the Relations of the West with China* in 1887. This book was not just published in London. It was also printed in Shanghai and Hong Kong, as well as Tokyo and Yokohama.<sup>41</sup> Its Japanese version was published in 1894 under the title *Shina Bunmeiron*. This translation was prepared by Gamō Sen (who was a member of the Diet at the time). Takase referenced both the Japanese translation and the original book.

According to the introduction of the book, when Laffitte delivered the lectures that formed the basis of the publication, he was heavily influenced not just by Comte's positivist philosophy, but also by Comte's view on the Chinese civilization. Laffitte quoted Comte's words on the Chinese civilization as follows:

Although this is primarily a social issue, thanks to a particular combination of influences, the Chinese civilization developed fetishism to a far greater extent than could be possible elsewhere. This was much more systemic than in other areas; [the Chinese civilization] overcame theologism and, despite the fact that occupations [there] were hereditary, shielded one third of the human population from the caste system.<sup>42</sup>

For these reasons, Laffitte held the Chinese civilization in high regard. He proposed to “replace Christendom with Westerndom” multiple times.<sup>43</sup> This [geographic concept] covered an area that stretched from France and Italy to Spain, England, and Germany. It was none other than the Holy Roman Empire of Charles the Great.<sup>44</sup> Laffitte aimed at removing Russia and Christianity from Europe and creating a more “reasonable” West. He based his proposition on the French principle of *Laïcité*.<sup>45</sup>

Laffitte offered three reasons for the failure of Europe to understand China at the time. That is, Europe tried to understand China through theology, metaphysics, and pure science.<sup>46</sup> The theological understanding here refers to the

41 John Carey Hall, who was the English translator of this book, was introduced as Assistant Japanese Secretary to H.B.M [Her/His Britannic Majesty]'s Legation, Tokyo. Therefore, he was a British diplomat.

42 Comte 1856, 7.

43 Laffitte 1887, V.

44 Ibid., IV–V.

45 Ibid., V.

46 Ibid., 2.

European understanding of China since the Jesuits. The metaphysical understanding was, for Laffitte, nothing more than a variation of the theological understanding and was even more inappropriate. A typical example of this trend was Abel-Rémusat, who applied the predominant metaphysics of the time, quite erroneously, to the interpretation of *Laozi*. He “made the mistake of seeing *Laozi* as representing originary Chinese thought, or in other words starting point for the [Chinese] civilization.”<sup>47</sup>

Going beyond these conventional frameworks, Laffitte saw China through the lens of “fetishism.” Fetishism is a concept that Comte defined in the later part of his intellectual life. As the quotation above from Comte shows, the concept represents a way of thinking which casts theologism aside and, without invoking deities, turns directly to nature.<sup>48</sup> Fetishism in China, which had been seen as existing in a most primitive stage, was now thought of as almost overlapping with positivist philosophy. Thus, Chinese fetishism received high praise. Within the Chinese civilization, Confucius was seen as the representative [of this fetishism].

### 13 Laffitte and *Laozi*

So, what became of *Laozi* in Laffitte’s thinking? On this, he said the following:

Let us first see what the philosophy of Lao-tsze consists of.

It consists in a metaphysical system having for its object to deduce everything from one supreme principle, Reason, and to explain everything by abstract properties; so that, like all metaphysics, it ends by presenting mere verbal combinations as if they were real scientific explanations. Such notions have no more genuine value than those of the Neo-Platonists, for example; and I merely mention them for the sake of historical completeness and to show of what sort they were.<sup>49</sup>

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47 Laffitte 1887, 3.

48 On the concept of fetishism in Comte’s later writings, see Sugimoto 2003, 121–125.

49 Laffitte 1887, 29.

The second characteristic of this philosophy is that it is metaphysical and abstract, contrary to the concrete spirit of Chinese civilization.<sup>50</sup>

This is a very strong critique. Since *Laozi* was metaphysical, it stood contrary to the kind of fetishism in the Chinese civilization that Laffitte advocated for. Here, Laffitte criticized Abel-Rémusat:

Whence comes Lao-tsze? Evidently his origin is foreign. Probably his philosophy is a Hindoo importation; though we have no direct documentary proofs of such a filiation. M. Abel-Rémusat at first upheld the opinion that Lao-tsze's philosophy was of foreign origin. He abandoned that view, however, and laterly maintained that such a philosophy was the primitive base, the starting point, of Chinese civilization. This notion, profoundly irrational, betrays a misunderstanding of the elementary laws of the working of the intellect. It is a sheer impossibility for the intelligence to start with such metaphysical abstractions. But the irrationality of the notion is shown still more clearly by a direct analysis of Lao-tsze's philosophy itself. So little Chinese is it, in fact, that it fails to recognize what are precisely the two main characteristics of that civilization, namely, its respect for the past, - for antecedents, and the preponderance of the concrete spirit.<sup>51</sup>

In any case, Laffitte was also applying positivism, which was at the time a modern school of thought, to *Laozi*. Thus, he was not completely critical of Abel-Rémusat. Further, although Laffitte proposed that *Laozi* originated in India, and this conclusion matches that of Douglas, the aim of the proposition was quite the opposite. Laffitte was using the Indian origin of *Laozi* to marginalize it.

Takase said the following about Laffitte and his *A General View of Chinese Civilization and of the Relations of the West with China*:

Thirty-nine. *General View of Chinese Civilization* is a book by Pierre Laffitte of France, and was translated into English by J. C. Hall. Although this book is not primarily about *Laozi*, when the author discusses the late Zhou and early Qin periods, he strongly criticizes Daoism. After reading the book, [I] found

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50 Ibid., 30.

51 Ibid., 30–31.

that it offered many new perspectives. This book was translated and published as part of the *Nisshin Sōsho* 日新叢書 series and can be seen here and there on the book market. It is worth a read.<sup>52</sup>

Having said this, though, Takase went on to critique Laffitte nonetheless.

And Laffitte contended that *Laozi* was of foreign origin because he could not find in *Laozi* the reverence for the past and the spirit for the concrete that were characteristic of Chinese thought. Essentially, Laffitte speculated that *Laozi* came from a foreign source because *Laozi* thought contained much that was metaphysical in nature. It also did not respect the ways of ancient sages as Confucius and Mozi did. However, there is much in this speculation that one should find wanting. [We should consider, for a moment, the possibility that] *Laozi* resented the chaos in society and the problems in the intelligentsia at the time, and that he constructed his theories from a special angle [to address these problems]. [If this were true, then] *Laozi* thought should of course be different from those of Confucius and Mozi. In addition, ideas like those of *Laozi* did exist in ancient China. Yet people like Abel-Rémusat refused to accept the thesis that *Laozi* originated in China.<sup>53</sup>

Although [Takase] did not examine the context that gave rise to Laffitte's arguments, this is indeed a proper critique. As such, Takase paid close attention to the debates in French Sinology.

#### 14 European Sinology (5) – Paul Carus

Takase mentioned one more character: Paul Carus (1851–1919).

Thirty-Seven. *The Teachings of Lao-Tzu: The Tao-Te Ching* is a book by the American scholar Paul Carus. Carus translated every one of the more than five thousand characters in *Laozi* into English and then wrote the book about Dao-De. This is a meticulously written reference book. Its title and the like are written in Chinese characters and printed in the vermilion color. It is a useful reference book. Carus put the four characters *bao yuan yi de* [requite

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52 Takase 1909, 120.

53 Ibid., 11.

hatred with goodness; Ch. 报怨以德] on the cover page. A follower of Jesus, he praised the phrase for its affinity with Jesus's teachings. He also made numerous attempts to bring Taoism and Christianity into comparison.<sup>54</sup>

Although an American, Carus was born and educated in Germany before moving to the United States in 1882. The book that Takase referred to here was published in 1898. We now know that the book was co-authored by Carus and Suzuki Daisetz.<sup>55</sup> Yet Takase made no mention of Suzuki.

The complete title of the book reads "The Teachings of Lao-Tzu: The Tao-Te Ching; with Introduction, Transliteration, and Notes." As the Table of Contents shows, the book consists of 48 pages of introduction, 44 pages of Chinese texts (the biography of *Laozi* in *Records by the Grand Historian* by Sima Qian, and *Tao-Te Ching*), 46 pages of English translation, 134 pages of transliteration, and 49 pages of annotations. In this composition, we can see that the author paid much attention to the transliteration of the Chinese text (which also included an English translation of concepts). Carus also discussed at length the translation of important concepts, such as his choice to translate Dao and De as reason and virtue.

In the Introduction, Carus touched upon *Memoir on the Life and Opinions of Laozi, a Chinese Philosopher of the 6th Century BC who Held Opinions Commonly Attributed to Pythagoras, Plato, and Their Disciples* by Abel-Rémusat. He then devoted much space to Robert Douglas and Carus's criticism of Douglas's research.<sup>56</sup> What Takase focused on in Carus's writings is precisely this criticism of Douglas.<sup>57</sup> The following is what Takase quoted from Carus:

While the Tao-Teh-King as a genuine production of the age, and Lao-Tze's authorship of the book is beyond dispute, its very existence is a historical problem which has not as yet found its solution. Were Lao-Tze not six hundred

54 Ibid., 119.

55 This book was reprinted multiple times. For example, the abbreviated version of 1913 was printed after Daisetz had returned to Japan (he was in the United States between 1897 and 1908). Thus, the introduction was thought to be from Carus. However, the writing style and content were quite different.

56 Carus said that Douglas was "a professor of Sinology at Oxford." (4)

57 Takase 1909, 8–10.

years older than Christ, and a hundred years older than Buddha, we should be inclined to believe that he had borrowed his main ideas from either Buddhism or Christianity; but that is a theory which is impossible. Nevertheless, Professor Douglas believes he finds traces of Brahmanical influence in the Tao-Teh-King, and argues that Lao-Tze was a descendant of one of the Western nations of the Chinese Empire, which may have been in connection with India since older times. Taking for granted that the name Er, i.e. Ear, was a sobriquet given to Lao-Tze on account of the unusual size of his ears, Professor Douglas says:

It is remarkable that the description of his large ears and general appearance tallies accurately with those of the non-Chinese tribes on the western frontiers of the empire. His surname, Li, also reminds one of the large and important tribe of that name which was dispossessed by the invading Chinese, and was driven to seek refuge in what is now South-Western China. But however that may be, it is impossible to overlook the fact that he imported into his teachings a decided flavor of Indian philosophy.' (Society in China, p. 403)

Douglas goes so far as to find a strong resemblance between Lao-Tze's Tao and the pre-Buddhistic Brahm of the Indian sages, which, however, I am unable to discover. No doubt there are similarities between Indian and Chinese doctrines, but they are too vague and do not prove a common origin; and we must bear in mind that certain similarities of doctrines, nay, also of superstitions, arise naturally in the course of evolution. We must grant, however, that when Lao-Tze resigned his position as a custodian of the archive of Cho he went West, which seems to indicate that his sympathies were bound up with those Western people whom his parents may have praised to him as models of simplicity and virtue.

We cannot say that the Brahmanical origin of Lao-Tze's philosophy has been proved. The whole proposition remains a vague hypothesis whose main right to existence consists in the fact that we know too little either to substantiate or to refute it.<sup>58</sup>

This is a long quote. Here Carus stated that he could not draw such a strong positive connection between *Laozi* and India as Douglas did. That said, however,

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58 Carus 1898, 7–8.

Carus did not advocate too strongly for the China origin theory, as Takase's narrative implied. Rather, it might be better to say that [Carus] did not necessarily think the origins of *Laozi* was a problem. Rather, Carus focused on a different issue: that *Laozi* found its way into "the mystic [Jp. 神秘]" through its treatment of the "Dao."

## 15 How to Translate *Dao* 道?

Carus devoted much attention to the translation of the character *dao* [Ch. 道], and finally settled on Reason. This reminds us of Abel-Rémusat. And then, just as Abel-Rémusat used mystic thought like that of Hermes to interpret *Laozi*, Carus, too, brought in "the mystic."

It [Dao] is identical with 玄 (*hsüen*), the mysterious abyss of existence. As the mystery of existence it is called 無名 (*wu-ming*), the Ineffable or Nameless. It is 根 (*ken*), the Root from which everything proceeds and to which everything returns. Although the source of all things, it is itself 無源 (*wu-yuen*), the Sourceless, i.e., Spinoza's *causa sui*.<sup>59</sup>

Like Abel-Rémusat, Carus did not hesitate to interpret *Laozi* from a "mystic" perspective in a comparative context. He compared *Laozi* not just with Buddhism, but also with Greek thought and Christianity. *Hsüen* is the key concept here. Suzuki Daisetz would take up this idea many times. Izutsu Toshihiko also showed great interest in the concept.<sup>60</sup>

Let us turn to the next quote.

The philosophy of Lao-Tze, which places the Tao at the beginning of the world, is the echo of a thinker who was engaged with the same problem as the author of the Fourth Gospel. We read in the Tao-The-King that the Tao, far from being made by God, must be prior even to God, for God could never have existed without it, and that, therefore, the Tao may claim the right of priority.<sup>61</sup>

59 Ibid., 12.

60 See Nakajima Takahiro 中島隆博 2015. "Nihon no shūkyōteki shikō niokeru shimpi – Suzuki Daisetz to Izutsu Toshihiko wo megutte" 日本の宗教的思考における神秘 – 鈴木大拙と井筒俊彦をめぐって [The mystic in Japanese religious thought – around Suzuki Daisetz and Izutsu Toshihiko].

61 Carus 1898, 13.

Dao as a mystic being prior to God. Here Carus was referencing a passage in chapter four of *Laozi*: “I know not whose son Reason (i.e., the eternal Reason) can be. It seems to be prior to God.”<sup>62</sup> [the translation is Carus’s; the original Chinese text is 吾不知誰之子，象帝之先] Then, referencing the opening lines of the Gospel of John “in the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God,” Carus said, “the Word, the Tao, the Logos, is uncreated, and it is part and parcel of God’s being.”<sup>63</sup> In essence, this implies that “the mystic” cannot be reduced to the established deities of a given religion.

Carus also said that “Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages, especially the Mystics, present even more striking analogies to Lao-Tze’s terminology than St. Paul.”<sup>64</sup> On this, he invoked Scotus Erigena of the 9<sup>th</sup> century and Master Eckhart (1260–1328). He then went on to say that “there is no doubt, the Taoists could claim Eckhart as one of their own.”<sup>65</sup>

As such, after Douglas and Laffitte, Carus returned to an interpretation of *Laozi* akin to that of Abel-Rémusat. It is therefore no wonder that Takase treated Carus and Abel-Rémusat in the same category.

As the above has shown, Takase paid due attention to how European Sinologists of his time interpreted *Laozi*.

## 16 Oyanagi Shigeta

Here, let us supplement our discussion through an examination of *Rōsō Tetsugaku* 老莊哲学 [Lao-Zhuang philosophy] by Oyanagi Shigeta (Koshisha Shobo, 1928). Oyanagi (1870–1940) was a disciple of Shimada Chōrei (1838–1893). Yet in his early work *Sōgaku Gairon* 宋学概論 [An overview of Song learning] (1894), there were two prefaces, one by Shimada, and the other by Inoue Tetsujirō. Inoue also reviewed Oyanagi’s *Futsū Dōtoku Shinron* 普通道德新論 [A new treatise on general morality] (1902). Just like on Takase, Inoue also cast a long shadow on Oyanagi.

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62 Carus 1898, 13.

63 Ibid., 13.

64 Ibid., 24.

65 Ibid., 25.

In *Rōsō Tetsugaku*, Oyanagi devoted a chapter entitled “the transmission of *Laozi* to the West 老子の西漸” to a detailed discussion of *Laozi* studies in Europe. In addition to Abel-Rémusat, Aignan-Stanislas Julien, and Paul Carus, whom we have already discussed, Oyanagi’s work also features a treatment of the translation and research of *Laozi* in Germany. For example, Oyanagi discussed Reinhold von Plaenckner, Victor von Strauss, Richard von Wilhelm, and Alexander Ular.<sup>66</sup> However, there are many errors and typos. Oyanagi also quoted from the commentary of James Legge in the first two volumes. From these observations, we might conclude that, although Oyanagi had interest [in the above authors], how much he was able to read their writings on his own remains a question.<sup>67</sup>

So, what is Oyanagi’s primary argument? It is that *dao* is not just “logos,” but also “practice [Jp. 実践躬行]” and “experience [Jp. 体験].”<sup>68</sup> Inoue mentioned the concept *logos* in his “On *Dao* and Law and Logos [道と法とロゴスに就いて]” (1923). In this article, Inoue argued that the *dao* in Confucianism, “law” in India, “logos” in Greek thought, Christianity, and Judaism, and “reason” in modern Europe are all the same. Oyanagi probably followed this line of thinking as well.<sup>69</sup> Since this came after the publication of the work co-authored by Carus and Daisetz, it will probably be productive for us to examine the translation of *Dao* a bit further.

## 17 Suzuki Daisetz and Raymond B. Blakney

Suzuki Daisetz (1870–1966), who translated *Laozi* together with Paul Carus, was a contemporary of Oyanagi. As I have discussed earlier in the section on Paul Carus, Carus and Daisetz made an effort to analyze the mystic *dao* [道], which was prior to God. They translated the line 玄之又玄，眾妙之門 in the first chapter of *Laozi* as “Indeed, it is the mystery of the mysteries. Of all spirituality

66 Oyanagi 1928, 287–291.

67 Incidentally, von Strauss translated *dao* as Tao, *miao* 妙 as tief. (Strauss 1870, 57) Wilhelm translated *dao* as *der sinn* and *miao* as *das Geheimnis*. (Wilhelm 1919, 3) Ular translated *dao* as *die Bahn*, and *miao* as *das Unergründliche* (Ular 1903, 5).

68 Oyanagi 1928, 195 f.

69 Ibid., 196 f.

it is the door.”<sup>70</sup> Later, the idea of spirituality, which Daisetz rendered as 靈性, would emerge as a central concept in Daisetz’s thinking.

Daisetz probably learned about Eckhart when working with Carus. Yet it was through his encounter with a translation of *Laozi* by Raymond B. Blakney (1895–1970) that Daisetz took up Eckhart as an analytical problem. The Blakney translation was published under the title *The Way of Life, Lao Tzu, Wisdom of Ancient China, Tao Te Ching: A New Translation* through the New American Library in New York in 1955. Prior to this, Blakney had published a treatise on Eckhart entitled *Meister Eckhart* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941). Through Blakney, Daisetz re-encountered *Laozi* on the basis of Eckhart.

Blakney translated *dao* as Way, as his title has already shown. It will be interesting to compare this choice of words with that of James Legge in his 1959 work *The Texts of Taoism: The Tao Te Ching, The Writings of Chuang-tzu, The Thâi-shang, Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions (The Tao teh king, The Writings of Kwang-tsze, The Thâi-shang, Tractate of Actions and Their Retributions)*. Daisetz wrote an introduction for this 1891 translation by James Legge and had it published in 1959. Therefore, this title used Legge’s choice of words, which are different from that of Blakney.

In his Introduction, Daisetz translated *dao* not as Reason but rather as *Tao*, a transliteration, or else as Way.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, the Introduction mentioned Blakney’s translation of Eckhart. Daisetz explained the concept of *xuantong* 玄同 in chapter 56 of *Laozi* as follows: “To those who have achieved the ‘mysterious identity,’<sup>72</sup> not even tigers, or weapons whatsoever, can do any harm. These people are aristocrats.”<sup>73</sup> Here Daisetz was referencing Eckhart through the Blakney translation. It is clear that Daisetz was conscious of Blakney and his contribution. So, what did Blakney say about these issues?

In the preface to his 1941 *Meister Eckhart*, Blakney specifically mentioned “EDEL: Aristocratic, of high rank, noble.”<sup>74</sup> In pages 74–81 of the translation,

70 Carus 1898, 97.

71 Suzuki 1959, 13.

72 In Blakney’s translation, this is “mysterious unity.” (Blakney 1955, 109). In Carus’s translation, it is “profound identification.” (Carus 1898, 125)

73 Suzuki 1959, 24.

74 Blakney 1941, 10.

the author elaborated on this theme of the “aristocrats.” It was these pages that Daisetz referenced. Daisetz mentioned Eckhart and those “aristocrats” again in his book *Mysticism, Christian and Buddhist* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1957). I quote him here:

So I say that the aristocrat is one who derives his being, his life, and his happiness from God alone, with God and in God and not at all from his knowledge, perception, or love of God, or any such thing. Thus our Lord says very well that life eternal is to know God as the only true God and not that it is knowledge that God may be known. A person can hardly know that he knows God when he does not know himself! This much is certain: when a man is happy, happy to the core and root of beatitude, he is no longer conscious of himself or anything else. He is conscious only of God.<sup>75</sup>

Here Daisetz discussed the way of being for those “aristocrats” who merged themselves completely with God. So what was Eckhart to Blakney? About this, Blakney said the following in his 1941 *Meister Eckhart*:

Certainly he [Eckhart] lifted Christianity above any parochial conception and revealed its inner relation to the great, universal spiritual movements which have found expression in many forms. He lived on that high level, on the same highlands of the spirit that were disclosed in the Upanishads and Sufi classics. To go where Eckhart went is to come close to Lao Tzu and Buddha, and certainly to Jesus Christ.<sup>76</sup>

Daisetz concerned himself with precisely this “spiritual movement” and *Laozi*. Blakney’s book was published in 1941. Daisetz wrote his *Nihon teiki Reisei* 日本の靈性 [Japanese spirituality] in 1944. I believe there is a simultaneity between the two.

## 18 Izutsu Toshihiko and Henri Maspero

Next let us examine Izutsu Toshihiko (1914–1993). Izutsu wrote two important texts about *Laozi*. The first is *Sufism and Taoism*. This was published

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75 Ibid., 80.

76 Ibid., 14.

through the Keio Institute of Cultural and Linguistic Studies between 1966 and 1967. It was originally thought that the work could have been published through the Institute of Islamic Studies at McGill University.<sup>77</sup> The second piece of important writing was an English translation of *Laozi*, which Izutsu completed together with Seyyed Hossein Nasr of Iran in the late 1970s. In the meantime, Izutsu also did a Persian translation of the same text.<sup>78</sup>

In both pieces of writing, Izutsu used James Legge's system of transliteration. For example, he translated 老子 as Lao-tzû, and 道德經 as Tao Tê Ching. This was consistent with Daisetz's choices. But the first scholar Izutsu mentioned in *Sufism and Taoism* was Tsuda Sôkichi: "although there are some problematic points in Tsuda's argument, he is, I think, on the whole, right."<sup>79</sup> What Izutsu spoke approvingly of here was Tsuda's proposition that *Laozi* was created in a rather late time period. However, what were the "various problems"? Izutsu did not say.

On this, Kokachi Ryûichi's commentary is helpful. "Izutsu's perspectives on *Laozi* the thinker and *Laozi* the text is not a mere replication of findings in modern Chinese philology and modern Chinese intellectual history."<sup>80</sup> "There is a way of interpreting *Laozi*, in which the reader focuses exclusively on the inconsistencies – that is, breaks and contradictions – in the text. The reader would then divide *Laozi* into chaotic pieces. [Izutsu]'s approach is completely different from this."<sup>81</sup> In other words, Izutsu rejected the interpretive methods of Tsuda and Takeuchi, which were based on "modern Chinese philology and intellectual history." Rather, Izutsu offered a different way of reading the text.

What is this alternative way of reading? It is a "personal" reading.

In this respect Henri Maspero is, I think, basically right when he takes exception to the traditional view that Taoism abruptly started in the beginning of the fourth century B.C. as a mystical metaphysics with Lao-tzu, was very much

77 Toshihiko Izutsu (1983). *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts*. Tokyo: Iwanami shoten, preface.

78 Kokachi 2017, 231 f.

79 Izutsu [2001] 2017, 8.

80 Kokachi 2017, 234.

81 Ibid., 235.

developed by Chuang-tzu toward the end of that century and vulgarized to a considerable degree by Lieh-tzu and thenceforward went on the way of corruption and degeneration until in the Later Han Dynasty it was completely transformed into a jumble of superstition, animism, magic and sorcery. Against such a view, Maspero takes the position that Taoism was a “personal” religion – as contrasted with the agricultural communal type of State religion which has nothing to do with personal salvation – going back to immemorial antiquity. The School of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, he maintains, was a particular branch or section within this wide religious movement, a particular branch characterized by a marked mystical-philosophical tendency.<sup>82</sup>

Here Izutsu was referencing *Le Taoïsme* by Henri Maspero. Henri Maspero’s father Gaston Maspero (1846–1916) was an Egyptologist and, like Abel-Rémusat, a member of the Académie des Inscriptions et Belles-Lettres. Henri Maspero (1883–1945) had also aspired to be an Egyptologist like his father, but eventually chose to study Sinology. He studied under Émmanuel-Édouard Chavannes (1865–1918). From this fact, we know that he inherited the legacies of French Sinologists like Abel-Rémusat and Julien. However, his scholarship also had a critical dimension. Maspero said:

The kind of Daoism which sought for permanent life is categorically different from the kind of Daoism which is philosophical and mystic. It has often been said that Daoism corrupted the teachings of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.<sup>83</sup>

Maspero criticized scholars – his own mentor Chavannes included – for their “very simplistic views.”<sup>84</sup> And it was this view that Izutsu treated as a “traditional interpretation.” Maspero argued that Lao-Zhuang was “a branch within Daoism that displayed philosophical and mystic inclinations. It was just a small circle. Educated literati [of the branch] transformed Daoist teachings, which contained much vulgarity, into something more philosophical.”<sup>85</sup> In other words, Daoism was not a degenerative, superstitious deviation from Lao-Zhuang teachings. Rather, Lao-Zhuang teachings belonged to a special circle of literati, who

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82 Izutsu [1984] 2019, 9 f [291].

83 Maspero 1978, 219.

84 Ibid., 219.

85 Ibid., 220.

introduced philosophical and mystic sophistication to Daoism. However, one would still want to know what mysticism was in Maspero's thought.

The word "mystic" has gained popularity, and this is unfortunate. I do not understand the reason for this, but the word is used randomly everywhere. For many people, it is just a cleaner, more elegant alternative to the word "unreasonable," which is too direct and irritating. And some people do remember that the word has religious connotations, yet they only know its meaning as being selfless, which is in fact secondary. As such, the term is either misused or used in a narrow sense, and this has caused much chaos. Therefore, I suspect it would be useful to define the term by its originary meaning. A mysticist, according to William James, is someone who has had what he called the religious experience. When one experiences those religious moments, one feels that one is in a direct, unmediated relationship the supreme being [Jp. 絶対者], however one understands the term.<sup>86</sup>

Maspero states that the mystic is the same as the "religious experience" in James's formulation. That is, an experience in which "one feels that one is in a direct, unmediated relationship the supreme being." This is a personal experience. However, "personal" here should not be translated as 個人的 or 人格的, which would invite unnecessary confusion. This "personal experience" is not a private experience that is unique to an individual. Rather, it is something that allows a person to emerge as "the person": it is not inherent, but rather opens onto peculiarities. This is a more expansive experience. It is not just about oneself: others also inevitably enter the horizon. However, this cannot be reduced to institutionalized religions. In his *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1901), William James stressed this kind of personal experience. It is tied to self-transcendence and self-transformation. Maspero stressed this understanding of the personal experience in the interpretation of mysticism.

Whether one is a Christian, a Neoplatonist, a Muslim, a Judaist, a Hinduist, a scholar, or an uneducated person: one's identity as such is irrelevant to whether one is a mysticist. All mysticists demonstrate that mysticism entails long-term spiritual transformation. The essence of the "mystic way" is a fundamental psychological fact, and cannot be truly understood through any systemic religion.

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86 Maspero 1978, 231.

Those mysticists who managed to document and analyze their varied personal experiences divide the “mystic way” into several stages.<sup>87</sup>

It should be clear from this passage that Maspero treated this issue within James’s psychological framework, in which the “mystic way” could only be found through spiritual transformation and was unrelated to any specific religious system. Further, the mystic could only exist in “personal experience.” Interestingly, Maspero did not just quote James. He also mentioned Étienne Henri Gilson (1884–1978) and Swami Vivekananda (1863–1902).<sup>88</sup> Gilson was a scholar of medieval philosophy and specifically Christian philosophy. Vivekananda spoke about “spirituality” at the 1893 Parliament of World Religions in Chicago and had a significant influence on Suzuki Daisetz. Maspero’s thinking took place in the context of his times. After the above quotation, Maspero spoke of Dionysius the Areopagite, Al-Hallaj, Al-Ghazali, Attar, and Sufists. This is strikingly similar with the concerns of Izutsu Toshihiko.

Let us return to Izutsu. Izutsu attempted a different reading of *Laozi* from that of Tsuda and Takeuchi. That is, he read *Laozi* as a “personal experience.”

When we read the Tao Te Ching with the preceding observation in mind, we cannot but feel the breath, so to speak, of an extraordinary man pervading the whole volume, the spirit of an unusual philosopher pulsating throughout the book. With all the possible later additions and interpolations, which I readily admit, I cannot agree with the view that the Tao Te Ching is a work of compilation consisting of fragments of thought taken from various heterogeneous sources. For there is a certain fundamental unity which strikes us everywhere in the book. And the unity is a personal one. In fact, the Tao Te Ching as a whole is a unique piece of work distinctly colored by the personality of one unusual man, a shaman-philosopher.<sup>89</sup>

From this passage, we can see that Izutsu does not approve of the modern concept of individual authorship. The issue in *Laozi* is about a “personal being,” an ancient being that goes beyond the modern self. In other words, it is a shamanic being. *Sufism and Taoism* brings this shaman up frequently. This “shaman” is not

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87 Ibid., 232.

88 Ibid., 298–299.

89 Izutsu [1984] 2019, 10 [291 f.]

of the type which cultural anthropology takes as its subject of study. Rather, it is a shaman that is a “personal being.”

Quite the contrary: the Tao Te Ching is in a certain sense an extremely personal book. This “personal” nature of the book comes primarily from the fact that Lao-tzu speaks in the first person. Throughout the book, the subject of speech is always and everywhere “I.” And the “I” here is, instead of being the ego as the center of empirical experiences of an individual man, the existential awareness of a man who has lost his ego, who, having lost his own ego as the “named” self, is not completely identified with the Nameless. It refers, in other words, to a nameless Self existing and acting in accordance with the creative activity of Nature itself. This nameless Self, which stands on the basis of a total negation of the individual ego and which, therefore, reveals itself only in a metaphysical dimension of Being beyond that of names, expresses itself in the Tao Te Ching in the form of the first person pronoun. Hence the remarkably peculiar personal concreteness which runs through the book.<sup>90</sup>

I inserted a few words into Izutsu’s original text. Personal being is not “individual ego:” Izutsu thoroughly rejected this conception. So, what is the personal? It is a “first-person pronoun:” it is “I.” This argument almost reaches back to the discussion about proper names and their physical characteristics in medieval European theology. Izutsu understood “personal being” not so much as a noun but rather as a pronoun.

Izutsu’s interpretation of *Laozi* is probably the opposite of textual criticism. Along with that of Suzuki Daisetz, this interpretation echoes the theses about mysticism from scholars based on the American East Coast and the arguments in French Sinology. Incidentally, Izutsu also used the text of *Laozi* annotated by Wang Bi. This is truly an attempt to read *Laozi* as metaphysics.

So, what are Izutsu’s interpretations, specifically? Let us take a look at chapter four of *Laozi*, which Daisetz had interpreted through an invocation of Eckhart. Daisetz had read “dao” as something that existed even before God. Izutsu inherited Daisetz’s reading, to which he also added a new interpretive element: the “image.” His translation of the line *xiang di zhi xian* 象帝之先 is as follows:

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90 Izutsu [2001] 2017, 11 f. [21 f.]

But its Image was there even before the Emperor.<sup>91)</sup>

Izutsu's annotation for this line reads:

i.e., nobody knows what it is in reality but as a primordial Image it was there even before the existence of the world. That is to say, it can be represented only as a primordial, mysterious Image. By "Emperor" is meant either the first mythical Emperor or the heavenly Emperor, God. D. I.: "It would seem to be antecedent even to the Emperor," or "It is, one might say, the ancestor of the heavenly Emperor, himself."<sup>92</sup>

The D. I. [different interpretation] above reads *xiang* 象 as "seem to be," and indicates that *dao* was antecedent to the Emperor. This is what Izutsu inherited from Daisetz. However, Izutsu then chose to accept another interpretation, which equates *xiang* 象 with *xiang* 像, or Image. The thing that came before the Emperor was, in Izutsu's proactive reading, an Image. Why would this be so?

Briefly stated, I consider the Taoist world-view of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu as a philosophical elaboration or culmination of this shamanic mode of thinking; as, in other words, a particular form of philosophy which grew out of the personal existential experience peculiar to persons endowed with the capacity of seeing things on a supra-sensible plane of consciousness through an ecstatic encounter with the Absolute and through the archetypal images emerging out of it.<sup>93</sup>

"Archetypal image" is the image that a Shaman could see. Izutsu understood it as something that one could try to see through personal experience.

## 19 Conclusion

In the above, I have discussed the interplay between modern Sinological studies in Japan and Europe through a focus on the interpretation of *Laozi*. While inheriting the legacy of *Laozi* studies from the premodern era, Japanese Sinology also resonated deeply with the contemporaneous intellectual developments

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91 Ibid., 29 [34].

92 Ibid., 30 [35].

93 Izutsu [1984] 2019, 20 [300].

in Europe and America. The exploration on issues like the origins of *Laozi* and the translation of *dao* overlapped with those about the “ancient era” in Europe, modern mysticism, and contemporaneous modern thought. In the meantime, Takeuchi Yoshio and Tsuda Sōkichi utilized the framework of 19<sup>th</sup> century textual criticism to interpret *Laozi*. However, they did not manage to go beyond that framework.

Scholars did not depart from the philological framework in modern Sinology until the postwar. The interpretations of *Laozi* by Suzuki Daisetz and Izutsu Toshihiko represent this departure. What kind of *Laozi* interpretation can exist beyond that? The question remains open.

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