

A Cultural-Translation Study of Paratexts via Victor H. Mair's English Translation of the *Tao Te Ching*

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This paper looks at the authoritative sinologist and philologist Victor H. Mair's English translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. It examines Mair's use of paratexts to support his cross-cultural transfer of such highly Chinese-culture-bound religious and philosophical terms as *Tao*, *Te* and *Ching* from the Chinese source text into English. More specifically, it looks at Mair's interpretative assumptions as well as methodologies. This brings into play several relevant issues with regard to the role of cultural translation within the wider field of translation studies. Firstly, the paper explores Kwame Anthony Appiah's "thick translation" approach, and such cross-cultural linguistic practices as the use of annotations and of other forms of scholarly paratexts, in order that (in Appiah's words) an "academic" translation is produced. Secondly, selected elements of these paratexts are examined in the light of André Lefevere's notion of ideology and Lawrence Venuti's notions of foreignization and visibility, to help us better understand the external factors requiring Mair's careful considerations in the "transaction" of meaning across languages and cultures. This cultural translation study on Mair's translation of the *Tao Te Ching* with extensive preface, annotations and back matter seeks to shed light, then, on the depth and complexity of the art of cultural-translation, itself so vital to cross-cultural understanding.

Keywords: *Tao Te Ching*, thick translation, cultural translation, paratexts, ideology

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梅維恆《道德經》英譯：副文本之文化翻譯探討

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本文透過觀察當代權威漢學家及文字學家梅維恆 (Victor H. Mair) 之《道德經》英譯本，檢視其試圖將具有中文文化特殊性 (culture-bound) 之宗教哲學 (religiophilosophical) 詞彙，例如其核心概念「道」、「德」與「經」在翻譯上達成跨文化語意轉換上所採取之詮釋考量及手法，可見於其副文本 (paratexts) 之大量使用，並探討其翻譯學上之文化翻譯 (cultural translation) 相關課題。本文首先將其置於阿派爾 (Kwame Anthony Appiah) 的「厚實翻譯」 (thick translation) 視角下觀察，以利於透過如附註 (annotations) 及其他學術文本形式的副文本等語言活動應用於跨文化之間的理解，即阿派爾所謂「學術翻譯」。接著，再將特定之副文本元素透過勒菲弗爾 (André Lefevere) 之意識形態 (ideology) 與韋努第 (Lawrence Venuti) 之異化 (foreignization) 及譯者能見度 (visibility) 之視角下觀察，以理解譯者在不同語言及文化間處理語意時之外部影響因素。本文期盼透過文化翻譯之檢視方式，探討梅維恆使用大量前言、注釋及附錄進行翻譯之《道德經》英譯本，能更深入理解賦予於學者型譯者 (scholar-translator) 的責任及其翻譯過程中之各種考量，以提供古文經典翻譯中原意呈現之跨文化轉換知見。

關鍵詞：《道德經》、厚實翻譯、文化翻譯、副文本、意識形態

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Introduction: “Thick Translation” and the *Tao Te Ching*

The *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), one of the most representative canonical texts from ancient China, is characterized by its use of highly culture-bound, religiophilosophical terminologies such as Tao and *Te*.¹ As to the title of the book, there are many translations of the word Tao (道). It has been translated as “nature,” “ultimate reality,” “truth,” “God,” “the Absolute,” and *et cetera*; *Te* (德) has been translated as “virtue,” “attribute of Tao,” “power,” “fitness,” “character,” “attainment,” “integrity,” “honor,” “wisdom,” “goodness,” and so forth. *Ching* (經) has been translated as “classic,” “scripture,” “canon,” and so on. Such an array of translations points to the fact that terms such as Tao, *Te* and *Ching* are not readily translatable into a certain word in the target language or culture. The exegesis and translation of this text is a challenging task, since it was written in the remotely ancient pre-Qin era, replete with peculiarities of an ancient form of the Chinese language and a unique culturally symbolic framework, namely the Taoist philosophy, coupled by its ambiguity, brevity and impenetrability. The interpretation of Taoist political, religious and philosophical thought as well as cultural connotation in the *Tao Te Ching* into English is a great endeavor for translators. Concepts such as Tao, *Te* and *Ching* are unique to the culture of origin and do not readily have direct parallels in the Anglophone readers’ target cultures; translators are faced with a challenge to overcome the cultural distance across time and space. Besides the translator, editors or publishers may choose to naturalize or “domesticate” the source text for an easy and fluent understanding in the process of crossing the

¹ Regarding the italicization of foreign philosophical terminologies discussed in this paper, words such as Tao and Brahman are not italicized as they have entered the lexicon of the English language. Other less frequently used foreign philosophical terminologies (such as *Te* and *Ching*) are italicized accordingly throughout the text.

cultural barriers in the translation of the *Tao Te Ching*. Yet, other translators, especially the scholarly translator, may see that domestication actually impedes the communication between languages and cultures.² In the vein of Friedrich Schleiermacher, the duty of translators is to introduce the source cultures foreign to the target readers to enhance its reception and facilitate a cross-cultural understanding by the target cultures. In this paper, the concept of “thick translation” as a kind of “academic” translation proposed by Appiah (1993) is deemed necessary in defining the methodological foundation for such kinds of cross-cultural transactions (p. 817). To illustrate this, we shall take the “academic” translation by the eminent sinologist Victor H. Mair as an example of “thick translation.” At the same time, other issues in cultural translation such as ideology, foreignization and visibility are also discussed, to see how the responsible scholar-translator negotiates between the publishing industry and his personal responsibility to transfer the cultural elements in the translation into English as fully as possible.

“Thick Translation” : Its Origins

The primary concern of cultural translation is the transfer of meaning across cultural differences. However, the prerequisite for doing so is to understand and interpret the contextual connotation of the source text. As such, in certain cases the translation process is the process of meaning comprehension, or interpretation. In his article “Translation as Interpretation,” Bühler first quoted the view of translational interpretation of hermeneuticist Hans-Georg Gadamer: “Every translation is . . . already interpretation” (as

² It is generally regarded that there are three phases in *Tao Te Ching* translations, of which the first (c. 18th century to early 20th century) is marked by domestication, the second (c. 1934-1963) by faithful “equivalence” to the beauty of the source text, and the third (c. 1973 onwards) by foreignization. For a detailed diachronic periodization of *Tao Te Ching* translations and characterization marked by domestication and foreignization within these different time periods, see Hardy (1998); Liao (2004); Xin and Gao (2008); and Zhang (2008).

cited in Bühler, 2002, p. 56), and that “[b]asically the situation of the translator and the situation of a person making an interpretation are the same” (as cited in Bühler, 2002, p. 56).

In the 20th century, the rapid development in cultural anthropology has exerted much influence on the humanities and the social sciences. Among the various branches within the discipline of anthropology, interpretive anthropology, with its integration of hermeneutics and anthropology, offers a new perspective to translation studies. According to the noted cultural anthropologist Clifford Geertz, the founder of interpretive anthropology, the ideal anthropologist engages in “thick description,” an interpretation of the cultural meaning behind the phenomenon and its symbolic meaning in time and space (Geertz, 1973, pp. 5-6).³ From the perspective of hermeneutics, translation is universally regarded as interpretation. What a translator does is the interpretation of the linguistic and cultural meanings of a source text.

In the view of Geertz (1973), human culture is a semiotic system “consist[ing] of socially established structures of meaning” (p. 12), or in other words, “webs of significance” (p. 5). As such, cultural analysis is not an experimental behavior to explore scientific laws, but an interpretive quest for meaning. Culture, as a kind of context for human actions such as language and communication, could be interpreted through what he called “thick description,” in which our social events, behaviors, and processes could be explained in a cultural context. The responsibility of an anthropologist is more than simply to acquire the primitive facts from remote parts of the world and bring back artifacts or unearthed remains, but to tell us clearly what actually occurred there in that corner of the world, so as to expound on the natural significance of a certain foreign behavior in that foreign place (Geertz, 1973,

³ Interestingly, Victor H. Mair also engages in cultural anthropological and archaeological research. For example, see Mair (1997); Mallory and Mair (2000).

p. 17). In Geertz's opinion, shallow descriptions are just like snapshots taken by camera, while the ethnography-based methodology of "thick description" allows us the interpretation of human behavior at the cultural level to construct a hierarchical structure of meaning of what we are observing. Geertz's view of culture as a semiotic system and cultural anthropology as interpretation exerts a significant influence for the other humanities and social sciences related to culture, especially in line with other interdisciplinary cross-cultural communication activities, in this case translation studies.

Kwame Anthony Appiah's "Thick Translation"

Borrowing the view of "thick description" from Geertz's cultural anthropology, Appiah (1993) transplanted the term "thick description" to translation and brings forth the concept of "thick translation," defining it as a translation "that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (p. 817), highlighting the similar interpretative nature of cultural anthropology and cultural translation. It happened to Appiah in translating his native Ghanaian proverbs that what he calls the "thick translation" approach allows the compensation for the loss of source cultural information in translation; therefore, in this case it is deemed useful in literary translation, especially in the enhancement of cultural understanding among readers of English. The first question raised in his article "Thick Translation" is how to translate the 7,000 Akan proverbs in the oral literature of the Twi language from his home country, Ghana (Appiah, 1993, p. 808). As Shuttleworth and Cowie (1997) put it in *Dictionary of Translation Studies*:

[A]lthough Appiah is referring specifically to the problems involved in translating African proverbs it is clear that the term may be applied to any [target text] which contains a large amount of explanatory

material, whether in the form of footnotes, glossaries or an extended introduction. (p. 171)

In the translation of Ghanaian proverbs, Appiah proposed the concept of “thick translation” that refers specifically the act of annotation and additional remarks in order to offer readers the rich cultural and linguistic context of the source text. In his article “Thick Translation,” Appiah (1993) proposed several theoretical points: (a) in understanding an utterer or writer’s intention, the importance of context should be emphasized and brought forward, to which he calls “thick contextualization.” In the case of understanding the connotation of Ghanaian proverbs, the reader ought to first know the textual genre the proverbs belong to, then which leads to discerning the literal meaning and the truth or philosophy expressed in the proverbs; and (b) the differences among the various cultures of the world should be highlighted and brought forward (p. 812). To Appiah, an ideal literary translation to be used in academic settings should retain all the features that are worth of pedagogy and knowledge transfer. It is in this regard that he proposed “thick translation” as a kind of “academic” translation, positioning the source text in its cultural and linguistic contexts in order to retain the characteristics of the source language and culture. In this line of thought, the responsibility of translation is the enhancement of understanding cultural differences and to assist readers in the awareness and acceptance of cultural differences, eventually to respect the equality of cultures especially in today’s Anglo-American cultural hegemony.

Appiah’s concept of “thick translation” was further elaborated by Theo Hermans, who provided another explanation of “thick description” and “thick translation” in his paper “Cross-cultural Translation Studies as Thick Translation.” According to Hermans (2003), “thick translation” seems to be of necessary pursuit if our goal is to study translation across languages and

cultures (pp. 7-8). Viewing from the angle of epistemology, Hermans (2003) sees that “thick translation,” as a form of translation studies, allows for what he calls a “double dislocation,” namely, (a) of “the foreign terms and concepts, which are probed and unhinged by means of an alien methodology and vocabulary” and (b) of “the describer’s own vocabulary, which needs to be wrenched out of its familiar shape to accommodate not only similarity but also alterity,” of which the latter requires an “experimental vigor” (p. 8). With his emphasis on this double dislocation, he sees thick translation as a critical methodology for the adequacy of translations to convey cultural depth and meaning. Moreover, as Hermans (2003) puts it, “thick translation” has the following characteristics: (a) it is an interpretation; (b) it emphasizes the similarities and differences between the source and target cultures; (c) it pays attention to the translation of details of culture-specific elements, namely, what Geertz calls “the delicacy of [their] distinctions”; (d) it disrupts the present vocabularies and assumptions of contemporary Western translation theories by importing other conceptualizations and metaphorizations of translation; and (e) it exhibits the subjectivity of the translators (pp. 8-9). As such, “thick translation” is a pioneering, nonconformist, interpretive translation encompassing translator subjectivity, stresses description of details, and highlights cultural differences. Since the *Tao Te Ching* is laden with highly culture-bound religiophilosophical terms that require scholarly elucidation, the concept of “thick translation” is necessary for translating the ancient Chinese text with plenty of explanation involved. In the act of cultural translation, the purpose of providing background information is to enhance understanding in the target reader towards the source language and culture in crossing the linguistic and cultural barriers. With regard to the profound meaning and religiophilosophical terminologies in the *Tao Te Ching*, the “thick translation” approach is deemed necessary for the translation of ancient

Chinese classics as well as the transmission of cultural connotation from the pre-Qin era, a remote space and time. From this perspective, the concepts Tao (道), *Te* (德) and *Ching* (經) the three essential titular terms from the *Tao Te Ching*, are selected in this paper to illustrate the manifestation of “thick translation” in its English translation by Victor H. Mair among his other scholarly considerations, as expanded below.

Victor H. Mair’s “Thick Translation” of the *Tao Te Ching*

The eminent Penn sinologist Victor H. Mair is one of America’s foremost translators of ancient Chinese. Mair approaches his scholarly tasks at hand as an open-minded sinologist always engaging on issues of “multiculturalism, hybridity, alterity, and the subaltern” (Boucher, Schmid, & Sen, 2006, p. 1). He is also a successful demonstrator of the application of philology—a lost art from the nineteenth-century—for twenty-first century sinological concerns, as we shall see below. As a translator, his sinological contribution to Chinese literature includes his initial study and translation on *bianwen* (變文) (lit. “transformation texts”), semi-vernacular prosimetric narratives from the Tang dynasty, in which his skills as a translator shines light on the heteroglossia and literary sophistication of these precious texts unearthed in Dunhuang (敦煌). His work on *bianwen* led way to his later studies on the earliest Chinese translations of Indian Buddhist texts in the Han dynasty, as well as his studies and translations of Chinese Taoist religious and philosophical texts, beginning with his influential complete translation of the *Chuang Tzu* (莊子), which is widely regarded a masterpiece in Asian translation literature, followed by his scrupulously careful translation of the *Tao Te Ching* (道德經), which “goes a long way toward reclaiming its rightful place in classical Chinese philological

studies” (Boucher et al., 2006, p. 8). Well-equipped with encyclopedic knowledge in comparative philology, his understanding of the historical evolution of the various languages on the Eurasian continent across time has helped him through the many years of endeavor in philologically translating the archaic *Tao Te Ching* as precisely as possible, partly through his extensive use of annotations and other forms of paratexts.

Annotations and Other Paratexts

In *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, Genette (1987/1997) mentions that “a literary work is accompanied by a certain number of productions, such as an author’s name, a title, a preface and illustrations” (p. 1). Further, Genette (1987/1997) points to the fact that “these productions surrounding and extending the text ensure the text’s presence in the world, its reception and consumption in the form of a book” (p. 1). By *paratext*, we refer to these productions auxiliary to the work itself. Genette states that paratexts may exist in diverse forms and is generally considered to belong to two categories: *peritext* and *epitext*. The peritext comprises the paratextual elements placed in the book along with the body text, such as prefaces and notes. The epitext, whether public or private, consists of the elements apart from the book itself, such as an interviews and correspondences with the author, conversations, speeches, textual communication such as letters, and diaries. We shall see both the peritext and epitext from Mair in this paper.

In order to reconstruct the linguistic meaning of an ancient text, most often the context is to be put into consideration, as evidently in the case of Mair’s consideration of historiolinguistic context. The principal guidance for Mair in seeking the right English word for certain Chinese characters such as *Te* or handling unusual or obsolete Chinese characters is philology. To Mair, the purpose in embarking on a comparative philological endeavor is

to address the importance in referring to the reconstruction of Old Chinese from about 2,600 years ago, in the comprehension of the meaning of ancient texts such as the *Tao Te Ching*, which emerged during the widespread use of Old Chinese. The Chinese language has evolved over a very long time span, and translators of ancient texts are very easy to be deceived by solely relying on the modern standard Mandarin pronunciations of Chinese characters, distorting the meaning of important passages (Mair, 1990a, p. 150). In general, this particular hermeneutic methodology is often referred to as the historical linguistic method, and requires the use of annotations or extended prefaces or afterwords in a translated text.

In translation, annotations and similar devices are critical or explanatory notes added to a translated text for enhancing understanding on the part of the reader. As a translation methodology, annotation is widely used in literary and philological translation to provide supplementary information and to compensate for linguistic and cultural discrepancy. Furthermore, we ought to understand that translation is a communicative activity between two cultures, and never occurs in a vacuum. Lefevere (1992a) points out that “universe of discourse” is one of the main factors restricting the successful transmission of cultural meaning in translation (p. 87). A “universe of discourse,” i.e., the various social and cultural elements in the source text, may not be readily intelligible to the readers of the translation, thus necessitating the translators to find a way to cross the cultural barriers between the source and target languages, to which annotation is a good choice. In recent years, annotation has gained much attention in translation studies, especially after the “cultural turn” advocated by Bassnett and Lefevere (1990). For example, in the case of feminist translation, prefacing and footnoting is considered as one of the three practices of feminist translation, along with supplementing and “hijacking”. Luise von Flotow considered that prefacing and footnoting has practically

become routine in feminist translation in providing the explanatory description for the intended readers (as cited in Simon, 1996, pp. 14-15). Methodologically, philologists and historical linguists attempt to reconstruct the original readings of sacred texts from their variants of manuscripts to produce a so-called critical edition, providing a reconstructed text with elaborate annotations, footnotes or endnotes regarding information on the manuscript variants, which are called critical apparatuses. These footnotes or endnotes may assist scholars from other academic disciplines in comprehending the entire manuscript tradition, thus enabling further research and completion through reasoning (Greenham, 1992, p. 9).

Mair's Manifestations of "Thick Translation"

In 1990, Mair published his own translated version of the *Tao Te Ching*, albeit in two separate forms: one a consumer version published by Bantam Books, a commercial publisher, with extensive introductory notes, annotations and other kinds of paratexts, and another a purely scholarly paper published as the addendum to the aforesaid introductory notes and endnotes in the Bantam consumer version. On the book title page of the Bantam version, it says: "An entirely new translation based on the recently discovered Ma-wang-tui Manuscripts. . . . Translated, annotated, and with an Afterword by Victor H. Mair" (Mair, 1990a, p. i). Further, on the contents page of the same book, it is indicated that the book is divided into the following sections:

1. Preface

- Acknowledgment

- Note on the Numbering of Chapters

- Note on the Use of Pronouns

2. Translation of the Ma-wang-tui Silk Manuscripts of the *Tao Te Ching*

Integrity

The Way

3. Notes and Commentary

4. Afterword

Part I: Did Lao Tzu Exist? The *Tao Te Ching* and Its Oral Background

Part II: The Meaning of the Title and Other Key Words

Part III: Parallels Between Taoism and Yoga

Part IV: Sinological Usages and Principles of Translation

5. Appendix

6. Selected Bibliography (Mair, 1990a, p. iv)

A page count indicates that the paratexts 1, 3 to 6 occupy 79 out of 168 pages of the monograph, which is almost half of the entire book. It would be lengthy to illustrate the extensiveness of Mair's "thick translation" elements in his numerous paratexts from both publications in full; let us first take a look at his philological notes on the words Tao (道), *Te* (德) and *Ching* (經), the central, titular terms of the ancient text, from his annotative comments in the form of two consecutive entries in the "Afterword" section. Below are the slightly truncated contents of Mair's extensive etymological elucidation on the concept of Tao, *Te* and *Ching* in his translation of the *Tao Te Ching*:

THE WAY / Tao (pronounced *dow*)

The translation of Tao as "Way" is an easy matter. But our understanding of the term will be heightened by a closer look at its early history. . . . The archaic pronunciation of Tao sounded approximately like *drog* or *dorg*. This links it to the Proto-Indo-European root *drogh* (to run along) and Indo-European *dborg* (way, movement). Related words in a few modern Indo-European languages are Russian *doroga* (way, road),

Polish *droga* (way, road), Czech *draba* (way, track), Serbo-Croatian *draga* ([path through a] valley), and Norwegian dialect *drog* (trail of animals; valley) . . . The nearest Sanskrit (Old Indian) cognates to Tao (*drog*) are *dbrajās* (course, motion) and *dbraj* (course). The most closely related English words are “track” and “trek,” while “trail” and “tract” are derived from other cognate Indo-European roots. Following the Way, then, is like going on a cosmic trek. Even more unexpected than the panoply of Indo-European cognates for Tao (*drog*) is the Hebrew root *d-r-g* for the same word and Arabic *t-r-q*, which yields words meaning “track, path, way, way of doing things” and is important in Islamic philosophical discourse.

As a religious and philosophical concept, Tao is the all-pervading, self-existent, eternal cosmic unity. . . . This description could serve equally well for Brahman, the central principle of Indian philosophy and religion. Just as the Tao exists in the myriad creatures, so is Brahman present in all living things. Brahman, like the Tao, is unborn or birthless (Sanskrit *aja*; modern standard Mandarin *wu-sheng*) and without beginning (*anādi*; *wu-shih*), both important ideas in *Master Chuang* and in later Taoism . . . A frequent image in Indian religions is that of a way leading to unification with Brahman, that is, *Brahma-patḥa* (*patḥa* being cognate with “path”). The Buddhists translated this into Chinese as *Fan-tao*, literally “Brahman-Way,” a striking expression which brings together these two manifestations of cosmic unity . . . An even more common word for the Way in Indian religions is *mārga*. In Buddhism, for example, it was thought of as the means for escape from the misery of worldly existence. Among the many translations of *mārga* into Chinese were the following: Tao, *sheng-tao* (“sagely way”), *cheng-tao* (“correct way”), *sheng-tao* (“way of victory”), *chin-tao* (“way of progress”), and so

forth. These and other usages make clear the correspondence of Tao to Indian religious concepts, including Brahman.

INTEGRITY / *te* (pronounced *dub*)

The second word in the title of the *Tao Te Ching*, namely *te*, is far more difficult to handle than the first, as is evident from the astonishing sweep of the following thoughtful renderings of its meaning: power, action, life, inner potency, indarrectitude (inner uprightness), charisma, mana (impersonal supernatural force inherent in gods and sacred objects), sinderesis (conscience as the directive force of one's actions), and virtue. . . . Of these, the last is by far the most frequently encountered. Unfortunately, it is also probably the least appropriate of all to serve as an accurate translation of *te* in the *Tao Te Ching*. . . . Regrettably, the English word "virtue" has taken the same moralistic path of evolution as that followed by modern standard Mandarin *te*.

To illustrate how far we have departed from the Old Master, *tao-te* has come to mean "morality," which is surely not what he had in mind by *tao* and *te*. To return to our exploration of the latter term alone, in the very first chapter of the Ma-wang-tui manuscripts, we encounter the expression *hsia-te*, which means "inferior *te*." Another common expression is *hsiung-te*, which signifies "malevolent *te*." If we were to render *te* as "virtue" in such instances, we would be faced with unwanted and unacceptable oxymorons. Clearly we must seek a more value-neutral term in modern English . . .

Te was pronounced approximately *dub* during the early Chou period (about 1100 to 600 BC). The meanings it conveys in texts from that era are "character," "[good or bad] intentions," "quality," "disposition," "personality," "personhood," "personal strength," and "worth." There

is a very close correlation between these meanings and words deriving from Proto-Indo-European *dbugh* (to be fit, of use, proper; acceptable; achieve). And there is a whole series of words derived from the related Teutonic verbal root *dugan*. These are Old High German *tugan*, Middle High German *tugen*, and Modern German *taugen*, all of which mean “to be good, fit of use.” There is another cognate group of words relating to modern English “doughty” (meaning worthy, valiant, stouthearted) that also contribute to our understanding of *te*. They are Middle English *doubti*, *dobti*, or *dübti* (valiant), which goes back to the late Old English *dohtig* and earlier Old English *dyhtig* (also “valiant”).

As it is used in the *Tao Te Ching*, *te* signifies the personal qualities or strengths of the individual, one’s personhood. *Te* is determined by the sum total of one’s actions, good and bad. Therefore it is possible to speak of “cultivating one’s *te*.” Like karma, *te* is the moral weight of a person, which may be either positive or negative. In short, *te* is what you are. *Te* represents self-nature or self-realization, only in relation to the cosmos. It is in fact the actualization of the cosmic principle in the self. *Te* is the embodiment of the Way and is the character of all entities in the universe. Each creature, each object has its own *te* which is its own manifestation of the Tao . . . The closest English approximation of *te* as used in the *Tao Te Ching* is “integrity.” In simplest terms, integrity means no more than the wholeness or completeness of a given entity. Like *te*, it represents the selfhood of every being in the universe. Integrity may have a moral dimension in the sense of adherence to a set of values. But it lacks the uniformly positive quality of the usual translation, “virtue,” which subverts the moral ambiguity so important to our understanding of *te*.

CLASSIC / *ching* (pronounced *jeang*)

Ching is the standard term in Chinese for “classic” or “scripture.” Its basic meaning, however, is “warp of a fabric” and from this is derived the idea of “pass through,” “experience,” “transacting.” *Ching* comes to mean “classic” because it also signifies the threads which were used to hold manuscripts together . . . The Old Chinese sound of *ching* is roughly *gwing*. Without the final nasalization, this is very close to Proto-Indo-European *gwhi* (thread). Another form of the latter is **gwhi-slo-*, which appears in Latin as *filum* (thread). English words ultimately derived from the Latin are “filament,” “fillet” and “file” (in the sense of “line”). The latter may be traced back through Middle English *filen* and Middle French *filer*, which means “to string documents on a thread or wire” and is reminiscent of Chinese *ching*. Other Indo-European cognates are Lithuanian *gysla* and Old Prussian *gisto*, both of which mean “vein,” as well as Lithuanian *gija* (thread) and Welsh *genyn* (sinew, nerve). Note that the latter, like Chinese *ching* (*gwing*) has a nasalized ending. The character used for Chinese *ching* (*gwing*) almost certainly depicts the warp of a fabric on a loom.

Therefore, in strictly etymological terms, *Tao Te Ching* means “track-doughtiness-file.” It would originally have been pronounced roughly as *drog-dugh-gwing*, had the title in its current form already existed during the Chou period. It is clear that all three words of the title *Tao Te Ching* are conceptually linked to Indian notions such as Brahman or *mārga*, karma or *ātman*, and *sūtra*. But etymogically they appear to be more closely related to European terms. It is thus conceivable that both China and India may have received the ideas they represent from some such Europoids as the Tocharians or their predecessors who lived in

Central Asia before the formation of the *Tao Te Ching*. And China may have received them more directly than did India. However, these are speculations that await the findings of archeology for confirmation. (Mair, 1990a, pp. 132-136)

The point in bringing forth the “thickly” manifestations in Mair’s translation in a translation studies context here is to illustrate that, in the words of Appiah (1993):

[This is the kind of translation] that aims to be of use in literary teaching; and here it seems to me that such “academic” translation, translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing. I have called this “thick translation.” (p. 817)

In terms of Appiah’s “thick contextualization,” certainly the linguistic context in translating the highly culture-bound concepts *Tao*, *Te* and *Ching* is brought to the fore by Mair, namely the kind of linguistic context made possible to be elucidated through his extensive historical linguistic methodology as seen above. However, one of Appiah’s flaws (or wits, depending on how one receives his theory) is that Appiah does not provide his viewpoints on how “thick translation” should be practiced, nor giving the meaning of his exact use of the word “thick,” leaving the reader with the only clue that it is “context-dependent” (Appiah, 1993, p. 818). Cheung (2007) has pointed out that what differentiates “thick translation” from straightforward “sinological translation” is being conscious that any interpretation is mediated and therefore never total or complete (p. 35). This points to the warning that the practitioner of “thick translation” may have taken the risk of being merely “thick,” without

the necessities that such “thickness” requires—namely, being conscious of the scope, complexity, and careful distinctions of interpretive meaning, to which we shall evaluate Mair’s interpretive efforts. As we can see, the scope of Mair’s extensive etymological elucidation clearly indicates the thickness of Mair’s academic rigor in translating the two words with the utmost care as a sinologist and philologist holding a teaching post at a research-oriented university, employing his encyclopedic knowledge on the historical evolution of the various languages on the Eurasian continent across time. However, like the two sides of a sword, one should also note that the authoritative tone that Mair possesses could also puzzle the laymen and students of the *Tao Te Ching*, owing to the complexity of its formation. First of all, Mair (1990a) has stated that he has not consulted previous *Tao Te Ching*-related works, dismisses Chinese commentaries as “misleading or erroneous” (p. 127), and “intentionally avoided consulting other translations” (p. 153) as not to be “trapped by facile solutions” (p. 153), which altogether may risk overlooking the earlier efforts of sinologists and translators around the world who worked on this puzzling ancient text. Furthermore, Mair’s translation is also driven by the will to establish the link between the *Bhagavad Gītā* and the *Tao Te Ching* based on Sino-Indo-European etymologies. However, the layman may overlook the fact that early, historical languages are often hypothetical, reconstructed or unattested, however approximated to the best the researcher can, hence resulting in varying views. For example, Mair (1990a) saw a linkage between *wan-wu* (萬物) and reconstructed Old Chinese **myanb-var* (the asterisk mark indicates a reconstruction), hence related to modern English “many varieties” (p. 150), when another reconstruction of *wan-wu* by the late eminent Chinese linguist Li Fang-kuei (李方桂) was also proposed as **myanb-mjet* (Li, 1971, p. 35), which is different from Mair’s. Overall, it is indeed a bold, courageous endeavor in being driven by his view that there is significant contact between India and

China at a very early age (Boyce, 2012, p. 20), but perhaps it would be better if more evidence is provided. However, there are other relevant research findings suggesting the influence of the *Bhagavad Gītā* on the *Tao Te Ching* (e.g., Grafflin, 1998), and the parallels between Tao and Brahman (e.g., Vasil'ev, 2014). Nevertheless, Mair's interpretive methodology has followed the dedicated yet ambitious works of linguists who advocate the idea of "global cognates" before him.⁴ Furthermore, in terms of highlighting the differences among cultures, Mair's "academic" translation through extensive explanation on comparative etymology not only positions the culture-specific elements in the ancient Chinese text on the crossroads of the various branches of Indo-European and cognate languages across time, it also opens up a door for future academic input in Asian Studies, if his assumptions are proven to be true, by doing the opposite: showing that perhaps there exists a missing link between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European, indicating the possibility of overturning the age-old assumption of the great divide between Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European languages, in other words, that the various cultures on the Eurasian continent across space and time are, after all, not as different as we have regarded them for millennia.⁵

Moreover, let us examine Mair's (1990a) extensive elucidation of etymological facts of the two words, especially the case of translating Tao as "the Way" as "an easy matter. But our understanding of the term will be heightened by a closer look at its early history, which shows that the Tao is deeply imbedded in elemental human experience" (p. 132) under the criteria of Theo Hermans. Mair's translation and annotation on the word Tao by employing historical linguistic methods certainly puts translation, interpretation

⁴ See Edkins (1871) and Conrady (1906) for example.

⁵ There exist other pioneering papers on the possible link between Old Chinese and Proto-Indo-European; for example, see Zhou (2002, 2003, 2005).

and description in the same discursive space, or as Lydia H. Liu puts it, “as a translingual act itself, it enters, rather than sits above, the dynamic history of the relationship between words, concepts, categories and discourses” (as cited in Hermans, 2003, p. 8). In terms of highlighting the similarities and differences of cultural elements, Mair’s annotative translation certainly provides robust evidence of similarities and differences of cognate words and languages, hence of cultures, again with the underpinning fact that Tao is deeply imbedded in human experience across time and space, hence showing its universality and Geertz’s “delicacy of distinctions” at the same time.

Furthermore, these methodologies are perhaps yet to be discussed in the realm of contemporary translation studies, with the hope that it imports new ideas to current translation theory when dealing with East-West differences, hopefully providing a slight clue, a single step, in addressing the translatability/untranslatability issue in current translation studies, which does have, in Hermans’ words, have an “experimental vigor” to it. In my personal view, if Mair’s interpretive methodology is proven to be valid, it could provide valuable implications in the discipline of translation studies, since this methodology may provide a clue to the century-old problem of the myth of Babel, encountered since Walter Benjamin until present. The numerous etymological cognates of Tao, *Te* and *Ching* across the Eurasian continent, if Mair’s assumptions are proven to be true, are pretty much like Walter Benjamin’s pieces of broken vase to be mended together, fitting into each other, in order to bring forth a more complete picture of the original outlook of Tao, *Te* and *Ching*, the essential titular terms in the *Tao Te Ching*. Finally, in terms of the translator’s subject position, we shall clearly see that Mair attempts to counteract the illusion of transparency or neutral description, and introduces his personal voice into his account with explicit viewpoints and statements, as expanded below.

Other Issues in Cultural Translation: Ideology

Lefevere (1992b) has pointed out that “[t]ranslations are not made in a vacuum. Translators function in a given culture at a given time. The way they understand themselves and their culture is one of the factors that may influence the way in which they translate” (p. 14). In his book *Translation, Rewriting and the Manipulation of Literary Fame*, Lefevere regards translation as a kind of rewriting of an original text, under certain circumstances. He further states that:

It is my contention that the process resulting in the acceptance or rejection, canonization or non-canonization of literary works is dominated not by vague, but by *very concrete factors* [emphasis added] that are relatively easy to discern as soon as one decides to look for them, that is as soon as one eschews interpretation as the core literary studies and begins to address issues such as power, ideology, institution and manipulation. (Lefevere, 1992a, p. 2)

He points to several concrete factors determining the reception and image of a literary work as projected by its translation, of which one is the translator’s ideology and the other the poetics dominant in the receiving literature at the time of translation, both influencing the basic strategy as adopted by the translator (Lefevere, 1992a, p. 41). As a translation is produced in a given society within a given time period, the corresponding external ideology (namely, that of the patronage) may exert an influence on the translator’s ideology, and in turn influence his selection of translation strategies. Mair’s translation provides a good illustration of the external and internal ideologies in negotiation under concrete factors that systematically govern the reception and consumption of the *Tao Te Ching* within the Western readership, as we shall see below.

Translator and Patronage: Power at Play

In the spirit of Bassnett and Lefevere's (1990) "cultural turn" as first raised in their collection of essays *Translation, History and Culture*, let us examine the power relations between the publishing industry, Bantam, and the translator, Mair, in pursuit of specific ideologies. The people in such power relations, whether professionals involved within the literary system (in this case, the translator) or patronage outside the literary system (in this case, the publisher), govern the consumption of the translated work by the general public, where these forces can be both conforming to or rebelling against the dominant ideology and poetics.

In Mair's scholarly version of the introduction and notes for the *Tao Te Ching* translation published as an addendum to the annotations in the Bantam version, he explicitly writes in the introductory description on the cover page of the journal paper, of which he himself is the editor:

SINO-PLATONIC PAPERS is an occasional series edited by Victor H. Mair. The purpose of the series is to make available to specialists and the interested public the results of research that, because of its unconventional or controversial nature, might otherwise go unpublished. (Mair, 1990b, cover page)

For Lefevere, ideological considerations are the most important, be it the translator's ideology, or the ideology imposed upon the translator by patronage. Here we see an outright mentioning of Mair's ideology in going against the dominant ideology and poetics of the present day, on the cover page of the journal paper, not in the body text. Although, as Lefevere (1992a) has put it, in the case where linguistic considerations enter into conflict with considerations

of an ideological and/or poetological nature, the latter tend to “win out” (p. 39), it seems that on the surface Mair is not in an advantageous position in the conflict between the pioneering translator and the domesticating publisher, but nevertheless he tries to overturn this situation by means of making explicit mentions on his personal ideology to be made known to both the layman and scholarly reader. Through Mair’s (1990a) annotative comments accompanied by justificatory footnotes, we clearly see that they are indeed “indicative of the ideology dominant at a certain time in a certain society” (p. 41), and they “quite literally become the play” (p. 42) for the target text audience that cannot read the source text.

“Academic Translation” and Translator’s Ideology

As previously mentioned, Mair published his own translated version of the *Tao Te Ching* in 1990, albeit in two separate publications: one a consumer version published by Bantam Books with extensive introductory notes, endnotes and other forms of paratexts, and another a purely scholarly paper as the addendum to the aforesaid introductory notes and endnotes in the Bantam consumer version. Let us take a look at the contents of this latter scholarly publication to compare it with that of the Bantam consumer version:

1. Abbreviations and Symbols
2. Preface
3. Author’s Note
4. Sinological Usages and Principles of Translation
5. Introduction

[a] The Oral Background of the Text

[b] The Title and Some Other Key Terms

[c] Taoism : *Tao Te Ching* : Yoga : *Bhagavad Gītā*

[d] Conclusion

[e] Endnotes

6. Textual Notes and Commentary

7. Select Bibliography (Mair, 1990a, Table of Contents)

Since this is a scholarly paper on sinology by nature, the “Abbreviations and Symbols” section is absent in the Bantam consumer version. The “Author’s Note” section is an explicit statement mentioning that this publication is an addendum to the paratexts of the consumer version:

These materials were originally intended to accompany my *Tao Te Ching: The Classic of Integrity and the Way* which was published by Bantam Books in September, 1990. When I was informed by my editors that the remarks herein, although expressly intended for the layman, were too scholarly in nature, it became necessary for me to rewrite completely the introduction and notes to the published translation. The contents of the two versions are now quite dissimilar. The Bantam introduction (now actually an afterword) is but a pale reflection of what I had originally written. Because there are ideas and information in these pages that may still be of interest to some, I have decided to issue them in the present form. (Mair, 1990b, p. 8)

Further, in this scholarly paper addendum, Mair offers three explanations to the popularity of the *Tao Te Ching* as the most translated book in the world next to the Bible and the *Bhagavad Gītā*, one of which is that:

It is supposedly “very easy to understand” when actually it is exceedingly impenetrable . . . this deceptive ease which masks tortuous difficulty is both a challenge and an invitation, a challenge to the honest

scholar and an invitation to the charlatan. Since no one can fully plumb the profundity of the *Tao Te Ching*, even the amateur cannot be held responsible for misrepresenting it. Hence the plethora of translations, many by individuals who command not one iota of any Chinese language. (Mair, 1990b, p. 6)

Annoyed at the presumptuousness of those who pretend to convey the ideas of Lao Tzu (老子) to others when they had no idea of its highly impenetrable meanings, Mair vowed in the 1970s:

I would never be so bold as to add my own voice to the cacophonous chorus of *Tao Te Ching* paraphrasts. Two unexpected and celebrated events, however, conspired to make me recant. One was the egregiously large advance and effusive national publicity awarded to an absolute tyro a couple of years ago who dared to dabble with the daunting *Tao Te Ching*. Although the individual concerned will remain mercifully unnamed, I felt duty bound to reclaim translation of the *Tao Te Ching* as the proper province of the conscientious Sinologist. The other prod was the recent discovery of two ancient [Ma-wang-tui] manuscripts in China which made it possible to produce a totally new translation of the *Tao Te Ching* far more accurate and reliable than any that has hitherto been published. (Mair, 1990b, p. 6)⁶

⁶ To the delight of researchers in Taoist literature, in 1973 the archaeological discovery of two previously unknown text versions in ancient tombs in China has shed considerable light on the nature of the composition and compilation of the *Tao Te Ching*, since these texts are found to be a few centuries older than the Wang Pi (王弼) version after close examination, hence more accurate to the original. The version used by Mair consists of two silk manuscripts A and B, buried in a Western Han Dynasty (202 BCE – 9 CE) tomb under a hill named Mawangdui (馬王堆) (lit. “Horse King Mound”) near modern-day Changsha (長沙) in Hunan.

Here we see a clear statement of Mair's personal attitude ideology towards the conditions, necessity and seriousness in his motive behind translating the *Tao Te Ching*.

Once Mair assumed the task of freshly translating the *Tao Te Ching*, he was completely preoccupied with overwhelming details, putting his encyclopedic etymological knowledge as a philologist to full force, for instance, how to convey the meaning of *Te* (德), the second word in the title, spending an entire two months on it. As we have seen above, his final choice of "integrity" is grounded on a thorough etymological study of the word, along with a close examination of each of its 44 occurrences in the text. Nevertheless, his translation is different from other translations in the sense that during his monumental task in translating the *Tao Te Ching*, his first and foremost guide throughout has been philology, to which he states that "only by the most rigorous application of this noble science can we hope to come close to a full understanding of ancient texts" (Mair, 1990a, p. 7). After an intensive period of translation, Mair turned his attention to the paratexts, namely the introduction and the notes sections. Again, here Mair pioneers in showing that the *Tao Te Ching* is a collated accumulation of oral wisdom resultant to the cultural interaction between India and China across centuries, and thus, unsurprisingly, not the enterprise of a single author, most widely alleged to be Lao Tzu (Mair, 1990a, p. 7). Then, Mair expounds on an exhaustive etymological examination of the three words that constitute the customary title of the book, along with explanations of several other key terms. As a renowned philologist whose concentration is on sinology and indology, a radical approach is engaged by Mair in recognizing that the *Tao Te Ching* bears a very close relationship to the aforementioned best known oriental classic originating in India, the *Bhagavad Gītā*. Having read both of them in their original languages repeatedly and attentively for over two decades, Mair strongly believes that they are related

in an essential way in the sense that the resemblances and parallels are so numerous, to which he also provides much annotation on the similarities between the *Tao Te Ching* (Chinese Taoism) and the *Bhagavad Gītā* (Indian Yoga) in the paratext, namely the introduction and the textual notes. This is a robust evidence of Mair's motive for pursuing the "thick translation" approach towards the *Tao Te Ching*, in addition to his personal stance on translator's ideology.

Other Issues in Cultural Translation: Foreignization and Visibility

In the discussion of Mair's translation, it is also crucial to mention the issue of foreignization and invisibility in Venuti's (1995) treatise *The Translator's Invisibility*, in which he refers to the invisibility of the translator in the contemporary context of the Anglo-American cultural hegemony, and relates the invisibility to the imperialistic and xenophobic attitude of the domineering Anglo-American culture (p. 17). Often influenced by publishing institutions, editors and the global market, translations are manipulated to the extent that the translator's work leaves almost no trace of any translational activity. In this sense, the translator has become "invisible." Driven by economic motives, publishers often prefer fluent, highly readable translations that will perform economically better on the market than foreignizing translations that resist a fluent English discourse and promote the foreignness of the text by retaining the distinct foreign character.⁷

To counter such an "invisibility," Chesterman provides a checklist in regard to the issue of translator visibility, in a paper on translation typology:

⁷ Matter of fact, there are even *Tao Te Ching* translations produced by people who do not know Chinese, resulting in (a) reliance on earlier translations, (b) failure of accuracy, and (c) distortion and simplification of the original; yet publishers continue to market such works for reader consumption. See Goldin (2002).

Is the translator visible, e.g. in footnotes, a commentary or preface, via inserted terms from the source text in brackets, via evidence of the translator's own particular ideology (learned translation, philological translation, commentary translation, *thick translation* [emphasis added]; feminist translation, polemical translation)? (Chesterman, 2017, p. 102)

Under this criterion, clearly we see translator visibility in Mair's work, which features a "Preface" that contains an "Acknowledgment": "I would like to thank my editor, Linda Loewenthal, for managing to be both gentle and firm in helping me to make this book more accessible to the people for whom it was written" (Mair, 1990a, p. xvi).⁸ Here we see the various forces behind the production of a consumer version of the book at play, namely the negotiation between the editor, belonging to a publication institution, and the individual translator. Furthermore, the "Preface" also includes a "Note on the Numbering of Chapters", and a "Note on the Use of Pronouns" (Mair, 1990a, p. xvi). After the main translated text, there is a section titled "Notes and Commentary", followed by a four-part "Afterword", as mentioned previously. This "Afterword" includes a section titled "The Meaning of the Title and Other Key Words", from which his philological translation of *Tao* and *Te* is expounded in this paper. Moreover, it is followed by an "Appendix", which is "designed for those who want additional information on the relationship between Yoga and Taoism" (Mair, 1990a, p. 155), and contains a note at the very end, announcing the existence of the scholarly paper addendum:

⁸ Furthermore, as a public epitext, Mair states that when he wrote the translation of the *Tao Te Ching* for Bantam, a commercial press, it is very different from writing for an academic press, that the former involves the consideration for a large audience and is "supposed to sell books," and the latter for scholars. When Bantam asked him for a self-description of his occupation to appear on print, Mair first stated that he is a "sinologist" and later a "philologist," both to which Bantam rejected, considering that the general public may lack the knowledge of these terms. Bantam suggested that Mair identify himself as a "linguist," to which Mair rejected. See Swofford (2012).

Note: Scholars who wish to obtain complete documentation for all points raised in the Afterword and who desire fuller annotations for the text may write to the author for a separate, sinologically oriented publication concerning the *Tao Te Ching*. (Mair, 1990a, p. 161)

Here we see Mair's individual motive and scholarly effort at work, behind the power play between the publisher, the editor, and the translator. With these two examples, clearly we see the visibility of the translator in Mair's approach in assuming the task in producing a thoroughly new translation of the *Tao Te Ching* that possesses its inherent importance among other translations, a highly individual contribution.

Furthermore, a translation in which the cultural distance is maintained to inform target text readers about the culture or cultures related to the source text, aiming to broaden their cultural perspectives. In defense of the important yet unmistakable cultural linkage between Old Chinese and Indo-European languages backed by evidence from archaeological research, Mair (1990a) feels "fully justified in pointing out the Indo-European cognates" (p. 131) in his philological analysis of the words *Tao*, *Te* and *Ching*, which is discussed in his "Afterword":

I also believe that this analysis will serve to illuminate powerfully the meanings of these terms for readers as well as to demonstrate the nonexotic, nonperipheral quality of Chinese civilization. No longer may China be excluded from discussions of world history, for it has always been very much a part of the ebb and flow of human events and ideas. It is only our limited historiography that has underestimated China's place in the evolution of mankind. (Mair, 1990a, pp. 131-132)

This is in line with the spirit of Appiah's notion of respect for the equality and variation of cultures, and of Venuti's emphasis of Antoine Berman's concept of translation ethics in the discussion of foreignization, based on the relationship between the domestic and foreign cultures embodied in the translated text:

Good translation aims to limit this ethnocentric negation: it stages "an opening, a dialogue, a cross-breeding, a decentering" and thereby forces the domestic language and culture to register the foreignness of the foreign text. (as cited in Venuti, 1998, p. 81)

Here, in the same spirit of Appiah's "respect," Venuti (1998) purports that a good translation is to "show 'respect' for [the foreign text] by 'offering' a 'correspondence' that 'enlarges, amplifies and enriches the translating language'" (p. 81) through Berman's words. A translator certainly has the prerogative to choose the direction along the ethnocentric-ethnodeviant axis of translation, so as to "decenter the domestic terms that a translation project must inescapably utilize" (Venuti, 1998, p. 82). The favor in "a translation ethics of difference" as opposed to "a translation ethics of sameness" has the power to enhance the domestic culture, in the sense that the "difference" has the power to reform cultural identities occupying dominant positions in the domestic culture, in the advocacy of a foreignizing translation (Venuti, 1998, pp. 82-83). As such, it is crucial to yield a theory and practice of translation countering dominant target-language cultural values, in bringing the linguistic and cultural difference of the source text to light, thereby signifying the importance in appreciating an annotation-based approach in translation.

Conclusion

In this paper, we have seen that, as a feasible translation strategy, Kwame Anthony Appiah's "thick translation" is necessary in defining the methodological foundation for academic and cross-cultural translations, which plays an irreplaceable role in etymologically elucidating cultural elements and successful knowledge transfer in cultural translation, illustrated through Mair's attempted "thick translations" of highly culture-bound terminologies in classical Chinese canonical texts such as *Tao*, *Te* and *Ching* in the *Tao Te Ching*. The characteristic Chinese culture-boundedness of the ancient text calls for a sophisticated interpretative methodology to be presented to modern-day Western readers. Furthermore, in cross-cultural translation as illustrated in this paper, we have seen that Mair attempts to negotiate with the dominant poetics as expected by the patronage (namely, the publishing industry and the academy) through explicit statements, both in printed peritext and verbal epitext, of his personal ideology in the form of annotations and other forms of paratexts, with the final goal of elucidating the original linguistic and cultural meaning to the Western reader as precisely and delicately detailed as possible.

Cross-cultural translation, an activity whose goal is successful communication across cultures, has played an important role in the progress of human civilization. The translation of ancient Chinese canonical works such as the *Tao Te Ching* is no exception. The authenticity and the cultural images of the original works, however, may be distorted or lost during the translation process, owing to the complexity of cross-cultural translation, as in the case of many previous versions of *Tao Te Ching* translations. Therefore, it is necessary to seek a translation methodology which compensates for the loss of authenticity and the linguistic and cultural context of the ancient

Chinese source text so as to ensure genuine cross-cultural communication. Ian Robertson, a noted sociologist, writes: “Culture consists of all the shared products of human society” (Robertson, 1987, p. 55). Culture includes not only material things such as dwellings, organizations, and artifacts, but also intangible things such as languages, ideas, beliefs, customs, myths, and traditions. Translation is not only a two-way communication in crossing the language barrier, but also the location of cross-cultural exchange to achieve and enhance cultural understanding. With the examples shown in this paper, the main contribution of Mair’s translation is for the purpose of intercultural exchange and the reconstruction of the source culture in the target text. As such, the substance of translation is cultural transplantation and hybridization, in addition to linguistic transformation and elucidation. To sum up, the aim of a successful translation as strenuous as that of the dauntingly difficult *Tao Te Ching* is to allow the target readers to understand the meaning of the original text as closely as possible and have a grasp of the source language culture as precisely as possible, and a translator need to be aware of the choices of effective translation methodologies in conveying the cultural information of the source language to the target language, thereby filling the cultural gap between the source culture and the target culture. Culture-bound words in classical Chinese canonical works such as the *Tao Te Ching* prove to be of value, both in terms of cultural understanding. As such, it is proposed that Appiah’s “thick translation” approach provides valuable guidance for the translation of highly culture-bound, religiophilosophical words such as *Tao*, *Te* and *Ching* as appears in the *Tao Te Ching*. The extensive footnotes, annotations notes and other forms of paratexts employed in Mair’s translated work not only aids the target reader understand the cultural connotations and cultural information of these highly culture-bound words, in addition to their complex cultural contexts, it also shines light on many other

issues such as providing a new understanding on the universality of human existence, as well as importing new insight into the realm of translation studies on the issue of translatability/untranslatability between the Sino-Tibetan and Indo-European languages, at the same time opening a door for academic research in Asian Studies. It is hoped that further interdisciplinary research in this area shall shine light on the long-debated issue of the great divide between the languages and cultures of the East and the West.

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