

Article

Qian Xuexi and William Empson's Discussion of Arthur Waley's English Translation of the *Daodejing*

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Abstract: Between June and August 1947, Qian Xuexi and William Empson exchanged 12 letters on the issue of Arthur Waley's misinterpretation of the *Daodejing*. Through a thorough analysis of these new-found letters and Qian's English translation of the *Daodejing*, I intended to show that the central arguments between Qian and Empson are around two major problems concerning Waley's translation: Waley's ideas of the *Daodejing* being part of the "Yoga-Quietism" tradition that Waley himself tried to invent, and Waley's idea of opposing Daoism to Legalism. Qian firmly rejected that the ideas in the *Daodejing* were the same as some Western ideas. Neither did he accept that the ideas of the *Daodejing* were under the influence of either Western culture or Indian religious philosophy. Instead, Qian explained that the so-called "Yoga-Quietism" did not derive from China. Therefore, in his view, Waley's approach was fundamentally problematic. Qian's view eventually convinced Empson, who initially opposed Qian's stance. Qian and Empson's letters and Qian's English translation of the *Daodejing*, though never published, indicate the value of Qian's ideas and the meaning of their intellectual interaction.

Keywords: Qian Xuexi (Chien Hsueh-hsi); William Empson; Arthur Waley; English translation of the *Daodejing*



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1. Introduction

In the summer of 2020, Professor Ji Jin 季進 of Soochow University wrote to inform me that the archives of the late Professor C. T. Hsia 夏志清 of Columbia University contained some manuscripts from his friend, Qian Xuexi (Chien Hsueh-hsi 錢學熙), including 12 letters between Qian and William Empson (dating from June to August 1947) and a printout copy of Qian's English translation of the *Daodejing*. In the mid-1980s, Hsia was eager to help publish Qian's writings, so Qian's daughter, Qian Manli 錢曼立 of Sun Yat-Sen University, sent Qian's manuscript from Guangzhou to Hsia in New York. For some unknown reasons, these manuscripts remained unpublished. With many people's help, I eventually connected with the descendants of Qian's family in Guangzhou. Visiting the family, I obtained other relevant materials, including another copy of these 12 letters and Qian's English translation of the *Daodejing*. Through further effort, I also acquired a third copy of Qian's correspondence with Empson from the William Empson Papers at the Houghton Library of Harvard University. Through all of this preparation work, those 12 letters were finally transcribed, proofread, and translated into Chinese for publication (Guo and Yao 2020; Ji 2020). A discussion between Qian and Empson about Arthur Waley's misinterpretations as reflected in his English translation of the *Daodejing* stands out as one of the most intriguing topics in my study.

Qian, a self-taught scholar and an English teacher, was deeply influenced by the New Criticism theory and most likely by Contemporary New Confucianism. Qian was in intellectual contact with Xiong Shili 熊十力, one of the representatives of Contemporary New Confucianism. In 1938, under the guidance of Xiong, Qian translated one of Xiong's philosophical works, 新唯識論 (*New Treatise on the Uniqueness of Consciousness*), from classical Chinese into modern Chinese, in preparation for its English translation version.

Contemporary New Confucianism had the characteristics of cultural nationalism and subscribed to the firm belief that Chinese cultural tradition had an intrinsic value. Thus, the subjectivity of Chinese thinking needed to be honored in order to carry on its essential role in the modern world. Qian shared the same ideas.

In the late 1940s, both Qian and Empson were professors in the English Department at Peking University. As Empson's colleague, Qian's first letter was written humbly and politely. He asked Empson for advice on issues related to Waley's translation of the *Daodejing*. Hoping to receive Empson's guidance, he came up with two plans. First, to better explain the problems in Waley's translation, he planned to consult Shih Tsun 石峻, a scholar of Buddhist studies at Peking University, for assistance with writing an article of sufficient weight to answer all the critical inquiries. However, I have examined Shih Tsun's anthologies and archives and found no evidence of him commenting on Waley's translation. Second, Qian proposed that he translate a new English version of the *Daodejing*. When it was completed, he would need to ask Empson to polish the final draft. This translation was finalized during Qian's interaction with Waley. However, Qian's English translation of the *Daodejing* did not have the chance to be published.

In addition to his correspondence with Empson, Qian also discussed this topic with Shih Tsun, a friend of the Hsia brothers (one of them was C. T. Hsia). Like Qian, the Hsia brothers had exchanges of ideas with Empson and were influenced by him in literary criticism. We can speculate that Qian's view may have been inspired by Shih, although there is a lack of relevant materials to support this view. In 1940, Shih Tsun wrote a critical essay comparing the three English translations of the *Daodejing* rendered by John C. H. Wu, C'hu Ta-Kao, and Hu Tse-ling by pointing out their achievements and deficiencies (Shih 2013). Shih's article had not mentioned Waley's *Daodejing*, published in 1934, indicating that Shih might not have read Waley's version. No other related treatises on the topic of the English translation of *Daodejing*, either by Shih or Qian, survived after 1947.

Both Waley and Empson were significant figures who had a long-term influence on modern Chinese writers and literary scholars, whereas Qian has already been passed into oblivion. Perhaps my investigation could rediscover a forgotten translator, a literary critic, and a talented young scholar, who had an academic dialogue with the well-established scholar Waley, and an intellectual interaction with Empson, during a difficult time (the 1940s). Since it would be somewhat unfair to directly examine Qian's criticism of Waley without clarifying Waley's contributions and deficiencies, it is necessary to explain Waley's interpretation of the *Daodejing* before we can further understand Qian's criticism of him.

2. The Principles of Translation in Waley's *Daodejing*

Before examining Qian's criticism of Waley's *Daodejing*, it is necessary to explore the basic principles underlying Waley's translation, including how Waley reflected on the *Daodejing* and how Waley reflected Chinese thought in terms of his principles. Waley's work *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (Waley 1958) was first published in 1934. Before this, the *Daodejing* had been translated into many European languages, including the highly influential French version rendered by Stanislas Julien (1842) and the German version by Richard Wilhelm (1911), to say nothing of the English translations by John Chalmers (1868), Frederic Henry Balfour (1884), James Legge (1891), Paul Carus (1898), and Lionel Giles (1905). The question then arises: For what purpose was it necessary for Waley to retranslate the *Daodejing*?

For Waley, "Scriptures are collections of symbols. Their peculiar characteristic is a kind of magical elasticity" (Waley 1958, p. 12). In his view, the canonicity of the scriptures carries its original meanings and connotations to reach out to the new reality. If this does not reveal all the intentions behind it, I think Waley's distinction between two types of translation: scriptural and historical, can help further clarification. For Waley, (1) scriptural translation tells the readers what the book means to them nowadays; (2) however, the other one returns to the historical context to trace the text's original purposes (Waley 1958, p. 13). Therefore, unlike scriptural translation, historical translation does not particularly consider

the present-day meaning of the book. With the idea of these two kinds of translation, Waley articulated that translators' interpretations of classical texts always have practical relevance. However, the most important task for the translators of this historical sort is to discover the text's original meaning.

In order to achieve this translation aim, Waley develops his own literary and philological methods and provides an explanation for them. Waley assumed that different strategies should be adopted to render different types of texts. Thus, he differentiated two sorts of translation. First, when a work's essential quality is its beauty, the translator must be prepared to sacrifice a great deal of accuracy to preserve this original quality. This approach is called literary translation. The second is philological translation. The *Daodejing* is both a literary and philosophical text, but Waley believed that the profound intellectual and ideological thoughts it contained were most important. Consequently, his translation aimed to "reproduce what the original says with detailed accuracy" (Waley 1958, p. 14). Waley regarded his translation as a historical, philological one that returned to the original context, by which he unearthed the original meanings.

The translation exemplar that Waley cited to assert his purpose and method among all of the translations of Chinese classics that he had reviewed was Richard Wilhelm's German translation of *The Book of Change*. Despite the imperfections of Wilhelm's translation, which many commentators have condemned, Wilhelm "tells us far more lucidly and accurately than any of its predecessors regarding the unique significance of *The Book of Changes* for the average reader in the Far East today" (Waley 1958, p. 13).

As Waley mentioned, the translations of the *Daodejing* have several good examples of the scriptural translation, the best of which was Wilhelm (1911)'s German translation, and next to it, Carus (1898)'s English version. However, there was no version of the historical translation (Waley 1958, p. 13). Therefore, Waley's English translation of the *Daodejing* aimed to deliver the book's original meaning. For Waley, almost all the previous English translations had problems since they could not meet Waley's standard of historical translation.

Moreover, Waley evaluated the long-term commentary tradition of the *Daodejing* before he started his own work. Undoubtedly, *Daodejing* has a long commentary tradition before Waley. In Waley's time, the earliest version of the *Daodejing* that existed was the commentary version by Wang Bi 王弼 (Wang Pi). Waley argued, "All the commentaries, from Wang Pi's onwards down to the 18th century, are 'scriptural'; that is to say that each commentator reinterprets the text according to his own particular tenets, without any intention or desire to discover what it meant originally" (Waley 1958, p. 129). The study of the *Daodejing* in China opened up a new era in the 18th century as two new research approaches emerged, as Waley noted: the study of textual variants and the historical study of grammar. The latter was critically important because, through this method of analyzing the grammar of the text, Waley conjectured that the author of this text was "typical of 3rd century B.C. philosophers" (Waley 1958, pp. 127, 129).

To better understand the text's original meaning, it is necessary to clarify who the author was and when the text was completed. However, the author of the *Daodejing* and the time of its creation have always been controversial issues. Waley invented an ingenious solution to this puzzle and made bold speculations. He supposed that many early documents could not help determine the author or the time of the composition of the *Daodejing*. Waley compared the records of Laozi (Laotzu) in Sima Qian's *Record of the Grand Historian* (史記) with other accounts of Laozi, by which he reasoned that Sima Qian's account or other biographical texts regarding Laozi all came from unorthodox records. He acknowledged that "the facts in it were transformed in the process of oral transmission, systematized and romanticized" (Waley 1958, p. 123). Therefore, Waley was more inclined to think that the author and textual content of the *Daodejing*, and many contemporary texts, sentences, or words with similar expressions to the *Daodejing*, might have a common source. This source, which Waley called "a common oral fund of stories about Quietist

sages" (Waley 1958, p. 122), used to exist, but there were now no traces of it. Waley's theory seems to rest on bold speculations.

Waley argued that his theory could be applied in order to explain many texts and literary phenomena in the same period. He utilized a simple example to demonstrate the validity of the hypothesis. Provided that three memoirs from the 1890s tell the same story about Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), we should not arbitrarily assume that any one of them cites the other unless one explicitly references another. For the same reason, the *Zhongyong* (*The Doctrine of the Mean*) and the *Daxue* (*The Great Learning*) include four phrases similar to those in the *Lunyu* (*The Analects*), which does not imply that either the former two cited the *Lunyu* or that the *Lunyu* came before the other two. Just as in the case of the three memoirs of Wilde that may have come from the same source, similar sentences, phrases, and words in *The Analects*, *The Great Learning*, and *The Doctrine of the Mean*—in Waley's view—may have come from other texts of the same period (such as the earlier oral tradition). Therefore, he concludes that his theory could be used to explain the earlier writings of the so-called Quietism. Waley described his theory as a novel but persuasive approach to studying the *Daodejing* and an imaginative way of answering the question of how to reconstruct the conditions under which early Chinese books arose.

On the other hand, it is worth pointing out that Quietism, as a religious practice, also has a long European tradition. In the Catholic traditions of Spain, France, and Italy in the 17th century, Quietism was a spiritual theology with a mystical tendency. It was condemned as heresy by the Holy See at that period. "Quietism, a doctrine of Christian spirituality that, in general, holds that perfection consists in passivity (quiet) of the soul, in the suppression of human effort so that divine action may have a full play" (*The Editors of Encyclopaedia Britannica* 2021). Waley borrowed the term from European religious tradition, reflecting his interesting thinking on comparative religions. In this way, Waley boldly speculated about the *Daodejing* as a text of Quietism.

Waley placed the *Daodejing* in the context of other early Chinese philosophical texts and invented a "Quietism" tradition that never occurred in the Chinese tradition. Waley's *The Way and Its Power* contains an English translation of the *Daodejing* with commentaries and his research introduction, which is 140 pages long, more than half of the 259 pages of the entire book. In this long introduction, Waley provided a comprehensive analysis of the *Daodejing*. In Waley's theory, the *Daodejing* and the accounts of Laozi and Sima Qian's narration came from the earlier Quietist sage. Waley believed that in the fourth and fifth centuries B.C., there were many different factions of Quietism in China, but only a tiny part of their writings survived. Waley explained his understanding of the self-cleansing practice of Daoist (Taoist) Quietism:

Such cleansing consisted above all in a "stilling" of outward activities, of appetites and emotions; but also in a "returning" for the soul was looked upon as having become as it were silted up by successive deposits of daily toil and perturbation, and the business of the "self-perfecter" was to work his way back through these layers till 'man as he was meant to be' was reached. (Waley 1958, p. 44)

In Daoist terms, this static sitting for purification of one's soul is called "zuowang" (坐忘, sitting with the blank mind). Waley described, "Slackening limbs and frame, blotting out the sense of hearing and sight, getting clear of outward forms, dismissing knowledge and being absorbed into that which Pervades Everything" (Waley 1958, p. 117). Waley called this form of practice "the Taoist Yoga". In India, it is called Yoga, Dhyana, or other names; in Japan, it is called Zen. In the following discussion, Waley classified these Oriental schools of quiet sitting and the similar European schools of Quietism into the same category, as all have the characteristics of mysticism. He mentioned, "The Quietist, whether Chinese, Indian, German or Spanish, has always made the same reply: by such practices three things are attained, truth, happiness and power" (Waley 1958, p. 45). From this answer, we know that Waley considered all practitioners of Chinese and foreign schools to achieve the purpose of cultivation (to obtain truth, happiness, power, and become a perfect person) through "sitting in meditation," all of which were called Quietism.

Waley's dissatisfaction with all previous Western language translations of the *Daodejing* was the main reason for his retranslation. Therefore, finding out what caused this dissatisfaction is necessary. After completing *The Way and Its Power*, Waley read the *Gushibian* (古史辨, Evaluations of Ancient Historiography) Vol. IV, and found that he and Gu Jiegang (顧頡剛, the editor and primary author of *Gushibian*) held precisely the same views about the date and authorship of the *Daodejing* (Waley 1958, p. 15). Influenced by Western historiography, the younger generation of historians from the 1920s to the 1940s began challenging the traditional views of ancient Chinese historiography, questioning the authenticity of Chinese classics and early Chinese history. This group of historians later became known as the school of Gushibian (古史辨派). Under this ideological trend and new historical research methods, many essential Chinese classics have been re-examined, and the cultural background of ancient history has been systematically deconstructed and reconstructed. Waley assumed that his new approach and the conclusion for interpreting the *Daodejing* were very similar to the historians of Gushibian. There is a possibility that both Waley and the historians of Gushibian were influenced by a similar class of contemporary Western historians.

3. Discussion between Qian and Empson

Qian discovered the problem with Waley's translation far earlier than his contemporary and later scholars. In the era of Waley and Qian, Qian's insight was of particular historical significance. Waley understands the text and context of the *Daodejing*, and where Qian thinks Waley's theory was wrong or which points were invalid are questions worthy of further exploration.

In these 12 letters between the two scholars, Empson played the roles of a supervisor, an audience member who posed many questions, and an arbitrator who made the final decision. Empson did not stubbornly insist on one point or another but kept asking Qian whether he was being unfair to Waley, why he thought this way and required him to explain issues in more detail. Therefore, the discussion between Qian and Empson was conducted as follows: Empson coached his colleague, Qian, to elaborate upon his views further and helped him to complete his English translation of the *Daodejing*. Thus, Qian's criticism of Waley is the main object of the following discussion.

In a letter from Qian to Empson dated 25 June 1947, Qian explained, "If I am to define my grievance against Waley, I shall say: it is just his grafting on Lao Tzu the Yoga-Quietism and the definite antagonism against 'realists'" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 25 July 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 143). These two points were repeatedly explained in Qian's letters and gradually elaborated in detail during his discussions with Empson.

As Qian pointed out, in the context of Chinese tradition, the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* (*Chuangtzu*) could not be incorporated into the "Yoga-Quietism" system. Furthermore, in the texts of the *Daodejing*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Hanfeizi* (*Han Fei Tzu*), there were no sections related to the physical skills of Quietism. Even if some passages might have evocative hints, these texts would often refer to a state of mind rather than the technique of practice, which was quite different from the traditional Indian Yoga practice that Waley mentioned frequently.

Qian objected to Waley's categorization of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* into Quietism. Qian responded to Waley in this regard:

Let alone the physical techniques in Lao Tzu, even the physical techniques in Chuangtzu are not so "Quietist" as Waley manages to make them out. And what will perhaps sound almost staggering is that even in Han Fei Tzu (Pien 51), from which Waley (p. 43) seems to have derived the term Quietist and Quietists, there is absolutely no warrant to be found for the term Quietist and for Quietism the original is but content or self-sufficiency. (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 9 July 1947)

Waley's usage of "Yoga-Quietism" defined the theory of religious practice in the *Daodejing* as related to his view on the juxtaposition of Taoism and Legalism as two sets of opposing ideas. In Waley's text, the term "Quietist" he employed corresponds to those

philosophers who emphasize “tian dan 恬淡” (tranquil, indifferent). The word “tian dan” comes from Chapter 31 of the *Daodejing*, “恬淡為上，勝而不美，而美之者，是以樂殺人”。 James Legge’s translation of the sentence reads, “Calm and repose are what he prizes; victory (by force of arms) is to him undesirable. To consider this desirable would be to delight in the slaughter of men” (Legge 1891, p. 74). As Wu Cheng 吳澄 (d. 1333) clarified, “tian 恬 means not to delight in, dan 淡 means diluted or bland. [It] refers to what a person does not enjoy” (Chen 2020, pp. 209–10). Waley translated this line into English as: “The Quietist, even when he conquers, does not regard weapons as lovely things. For to think them lovely means to delight in them, and to delight in them means to delight in the slaughter of men” (Waley 1958, p. 181). In this part, Waley’s footnote referred to two documents with similar expressions: Chapter 51 of the *Hanfeizi* and Chapter 10 of the *Zhuangzi*. In Waley’s theory, the relevant phrases of the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Hanfeizi* were woven into an intertextual network of interpretation.

In terms of “no-action” (無為), the *Zhuangzi* uses the teaching of no-action to oppose the teaching of action and points out that the latter, not the former, is the source of social disorder. The last sentence of the 10th chapter of the *Zhuangzi* reads, “釋夫恬淡無為而悅夫啍啍之意，啍啍已亂天下矣！” Legge’s English translation reads, “...the quiet and unexciting method of non-action is put away, and pleasure taken in ideas garrulously expressed. It is this garrulity of speech which puts the world in disorder” (Legge 1891, pp. 289–290). However, there were opposite viewpoints in the *Hanfeizi*: the teaching of inaction was the root of chaotic society. In the introduction to his book, Waley reserved a section for exploring so-called Quietism in the Chinese intellectual tradition, and the literature he quoted as proof was drawn from the *Hanfeizi*.

The 51st chapter of the *Hanfeizi*, “Loyalty and Filial Piety” (忠孝), has the following paragraph (as Waley mentioned and translated):

Han Fei Tzu speaks of people who “walk apart from the crowd, priding themselves on being different from other men. They preach the doctrine of Quietism, but their exposition of it is couched in baffling and mysterious terms. I submit to your Majesty that this Quietness is of no practical value to any one and that the language in which it is couched is not founded on any real principle... I submit that man’s duty in life is to serve his prince and nourish his parents, neither of which things can be done by Quietness. I further submit that it is man’s duty, in all that he teaches, to promote loyalty and good faith and the Legal Constitution. This cannot be done in terms that are vague and mysterious. The doctrine of the Quietists is a false one, likely to lead the people astray”. (Waley 1958, p. 3; Liao 1959, pp. 315–16; Wang 1998, pp. 467–68)

In this part, the term “恬淡之學” was translated by Waley as “the doctrine of Quietism” and by W. K. Liao as “the philosophy of peace and quietude,” and the term “恍惚之言” was translated by Waley as “baffling and mysterious terms” and by Liao as “the doctrine of vagueness and illusion” (Liao 1959, p. 315). Both terms, in the context of the *Hanfeizi*, referred to the philosophies of Laozi and Zhuangzi. The passage above came from the chapter “Loyalty and Filial Piety,” which refuted the philosophies that were not conducive to governing the state, and required people to abide by the law, be dedicated to serving the ruler, and be loyal to the king. The doctrine of Quietism was likely to lead the people astray, was unable to make individuals filial to their relatives and loyal to the king, and was not conducive to maintaining social order. Waley categorized the *Hanfeizi* in the school of “the Realists” (he dropped the term “the Legalists”), and thus the “Legalist-Realists” was the complete opposite of “Taoist-Quietism” (or “Yoga-Quietism”). This was the logic of Waley’s thought.

Qian was unsatisfied with Waley’s theory and resisted Waley’s idea of the definite antagonism of the Daoists against the Legalists (Realists). Qian raised three reasons: (1) because Laotzu in the original does not warrant such an interpretation and emphasis, (2) because the Laotzu tradition with the cultured Chinese has always emphasized the metaphysical and spiritual aspects, (3) and because the metaphysical and spiritual aspects

are more basic and hence more important than the political in philosophy (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 9 July 1947). He had more to say about this view. Qian pointed out, "The English term Quietism may not differ much from content and self-sufficiency in its original sense. But in Waley's hands, it does. As to 'the baffling and mysterious terms' in the *Hanfeizi*, it is clear in a fuller context that it is but a feint of his". Qian mentioned that he translated the full text of the *Hanfeizi* into English in the 1930s, which had previously been submitted to a publisher (now lost). In this place, he alluded to how he was particularly familiar with the *Hanfeizi*. He thus had the expertise to comment on Waley's mistakes in his comparison of the *Hanfeizi* and the *Daodejing*.

Empson's questions often led Qian to think further and make reasonable explanations. In one of the letters, Empson asked, "Your argument that the term Quietism is not in Han Fei Tzu, from which Waley appears to derive it, does not seem to me strong. The English term does not in itself mean what it has come to mean, but only some theory or system based on quietness, and this looks to me the same as your 'content or self-sufficiency'. If Waley is right in making Han Fei Tzu say that the doctrine is expounded in baffling and mysterious terms, that seems enough to make it probable that there was some kind of mystical doctrine". To answer Empson's inquiry, Qian argued that Waley grafted the *Daodejing* into Quietism. The source was the above-quoted paragraph from the *Hanfeizi*, in which the *Hanfeizi* heavily lambasted "the philosophy of peace and quietude" and "the doctrine of vagueness and illusion". Waley regarded all these philosophies and doctrines as Quietism and tended toward mysticism, while Qian disagreed with this idea.

Waley classified Taoist "zuowang" (坐忘), Yoga or Dhyana from India, and Zen from Japan as falling into the same category of "Quietism". However, Qian did not believe this classification had any degree of justification. The word "zuowang" comes from the chapter "The Great and Most Honored Master" (大宗師) in the *Zhuangzi*, but it is not mentioned in the *Daodejing*.

In the chapter "The Great and Most Honored Master", *Zhuangzi* uses Yan Hui's words to criticize Confucianism. The passage reads:

Yan Hui said, "I am making progress". Zhongni replied, "What do you mean?" "I have ceased to think of benevolence and righteousness," was the reply. "Very well; but that is not enough". Another day, Hui again saw Zhongni, and said, "I am making progress". "What do you mean?" "I have lost all thought of ceremonies and music". "Very well, but that is not enough". A third day, Hui again saw (the Master), and said, "I am making progress". "What do you mean?" "I sit and forget everything". Zhongni changed countenance, and said, "What do you mean by saying that you sit and forget (everything)?" Yan Hui replied, "My connexion with the body and its parts is dissolved; my perceptive organs are discarded. Thus leaving my material form, and bidding farewell to my knowledge, I am become one with the Great Pervader. This I call sitting and forgetting all things". Zhongni said, "One (with that Pervader), you are free from all likings; so transformed, you are become impermanent. You have, indeed, become superior to me! I must ask leave to follow in your steps". (Legge 1891, pp. 256–57; Wang and Liu 2012, pp. 68–69)

As discussed in their correspondences between Qian and Empson, although some ideas in the *Zhuangzi* and the *Daodejing* look similar at some points, these two works are still quite different in many aspects. Benevolence, righteousness, and the culture of ritual and music: all these virtues and values emphasized by Confucianism were too practical for the Daoist philosopher. In *Zhuangzi*'s view, the spiritual cultivation of an individual was far more valuable than the Confucian practical pursuit of serving the king and the state by "cultivating one's body, aligning the family, governing the country and the world" (*The Great Learning*). Unlike *Zhuangzi*'s philosophy of spiritual cultivation, much of the *Daodejing*, like that of Confucian classics, was deeply involved in the art of governing the state. However, *Zhuangzi* assumed that the ideal life of a human being should surpass all these realistic Confucian pursuits by practicing the way of quiet-sitting and forgetting all

mundane affairs (zuowang). The highest purpose of this pursuit was to get rid of excessive desires and achieve the spiritual discipline of forgetting oneself.

Qian's criticism of Waley's theory of "Yoga-Quietism" shifted to the subject of re-examining one's desire and discrimination related to the interpretation of the Dao (道). By this method, Qian could disassemble the theory of Quietism and the mysticism Waley had constructed. Qian acknowledged, "Lao Tzu only advises against the perversion of vital needs into desires and vital perception into desire-prompted discrimination. The more one follows the said advice, the less fuss one makes over one's life and the more at peace with oneself and at ease with the world one comes to be. It is all very simple and un-mystical (by the way)" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 25 June 1947). Again he noted, "To my mind, the Taoistic peace or union with all (even the peace of true mystics) is far from 'mystical'; it can be reached by simple reasoning upon commonly-accessible experience" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 25 June 1947). This was also echoed in the way in which Taoists treated the object of desire. In Qian's view, it was necessary to distinguish between general needs and desires, for true Taoists become Taoists because they have long known the consequences of having desires on the individual. Desire (and the passion for knowledge and power in Confucian philosophy) created an illusion that clouded "nature" (ziran 自然) and ultimately resulted in the individual's inability to obtain the truth and happiness he sought. Hence, Qian argued that Taoists exalt Taoist nature over Confucian benevolence (ren 仁), "because following nature one will be bountiful without the fuss of benevolence" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 25 June 1947).

Qian disagreed with Waley's mystifying interpretation of the *Daodejing*. He assumed that the word "no desire" (無欲) and "zuowang" in the *Daodejing* could not be equated with that of Indian Yogic philosophy. "No desire," unlike in Yoga, was not achieved through physical effort but a spiritual state accomplished through mental effort. Moreover, he was deeply skeptical about the physical skill of Yoga. He stated, "Spiritual results, the divine release of the soul or spirit, can be reached only by spiritual effort; and it is almost impossible for those who know the true way to reach the result to simultaneously advocate other false ways" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 9 June 1947). Why was that? In Qian's view, those who did not have spiritual enthusiasm and depth would especially appreciate the physical skill of Yoga and pursue esoteric art more than true wisdom.

Furthermore, Qian supposed that the *Daodejing* expressed the view that excessive desire and discrimination were the roots of all troubles. This idea was derived from the principle that "the Dao follows the example of what is self-so (道法自然)" (Chen 2020, p. 171). Nevertheless, this view is completely different from Waley's understanding. Qian articulated that "The reason I prefer 'the state before discrimination' to 'the pure consciousness' is that the latter is a sophisticated affair and so is remote from nature and cannot chime in with the trend of Lao Tzu" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson, 25 June 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 156). "The state before discrimination" is natural, whereas the state of "pure consciousness" achieved through hard work (such as through the practice of Yoga) is far too complex. Unlike Waley's view that Yoga guides people to achieve Quietism through physical exercise, Qian argued that "Yoga only occults desire and renders it harder to be disillusioned" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 9 July 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 146). Therefore, he assumed that Waley's translation and theory indicate that he did not understand the plain yet profound thoughts in the *Daodejing*. Thus, he concluded: "So far, my feeling has been that he jars on spiritual earnestness, is occult but silly, where Lao Tzu is plain and yet wise and often turns sayings, general and timeless, into specific girds and flings" (Chien Hsueh-hsi's letter to William Empson 25 July 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 156).

Qian neither accepted the viewpoint that the ideas in the *Daodejing* were the same as some Western ideas, nor did he approve the claim that the composition of the *Daodejing* was under the influence of Western culture or Indian religious philosophy. Waley presumed that Quietism in ancient China had come from an external source. What he indicated was the Indian tradition of Yoga. But Qian rejected this notion. In the following correspondence,

Qian provided some chapters of the *Daodejing*, which he translated into English. Followed by his English version of Chapter 16, Qian concluded that in Chinese tradition, whether ancient or modern, there was no such term as “Quietism” or “Quietists”. Therefore, it was Waley who borrowed these two terms from the Western tradition, referring to all Yoga-like practices and their practitioners. Qian further elaborated on the relationship between desire and discrimination in different traditions, by which he distinguishes the distinct ideas of Daoism and Buddhism on the same subject. He pointed out:

In Buddhism, desire includes all becoming and all nature (vital needs); in Taoism, desire means only sophisticated appetite or crav[ing] for pleasure which differs from nature or unsophisticated appetite in wanting its protracted alertness, whereas the latter wants only its own allayment. As to discrimination, it means in Buddhism all perception, but I mean by it only be discrimination that is promoted by desire and in turn promotes desire. So with Buddhism, all life or the universe is a delusion and to be deprecated. With Taoism, only the life or the universe built up by desire and the discrimination as above defined, the life of sophisticated appetites and sophisticated discrimination is a delusion and to be deprecated. (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson, undated; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 142)

At the end of their discussion, Qian briefly summarized, “In XIX ‘to have no desire’ (wuyu 無欲) and ‘to have few desires’ (guayu 寡欲), when desire is interpreted in the sense I defined, seem equal to have little bearing on ‘Quietism’” (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson 9 July 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 147). The content discussed in Chapter 19 of the *Daodejing* demonstrated the difference between Daoism and Confucianism. Its key notion was very close to Qian’s concept of “exalt Taoist nature over Confucian benevolence” discussed above.

As for Waley’s date for the writing of the *Daodejing* (about 240 B.C.), Qian responded vaguely: “I do have doubts not only about Waley’s date for the writing of Tao Te Ching but about the existence at the date of precisely such a controversy as he has pieced out and about the evidence, as well, of the grammar and the rest for such a date” (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson 9 July 1947). Qian said he would invite his friend Shi Jun, who confirmed that his opinion was different from that of Waley and was happy to answer these questions. For unknown reasons, these questions have not received any further responses. None of their subsequent responses, by means of letters or academic writings, have survived.

In their last correspondence, Empson was persuaded, for he honestly admitted that Waley’s references to Zhuangzi’s mystical bodily skills could not prove his point. In the reply, Qian noted that after rereading Lionel Giles’s English translation, he was convinced that Giles’s version was more reliable. As Qian mentioned, “It is an orthodox thing” (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson 5 August 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 158). In addition, he mentioned, “It is perhaps the scriptural version according to Waley, and his version of historical translation was meant to be an improvement upon it. But his acuteness of intellect, scholarship, and language brilliance succeeded only in building up a splendid hoax” (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson 9 July 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 153). Qian mocked Waley’s theory as a kind of “a splendid hoax”, indicating that he did not accept Waley’s translation, especially Waley’s over-interpretation and misinterpretation in the introduction of his translation.

Nevertheless, at the end of their discussion, Qian learned to appreciate the merits of Waley’s translation. He described, “I shall add now that I am well aware of the glamor of Waley. His emphasis on Quietism and political controversy add to Lao Tzu the charms of mystic depth and intellectual brilliance” (Chien Hsueh-hsi’s letter to William Empson 10 August 1947; Guo and Yao 2020, p. 157).

4. Conclusions

In my evaluation, Qian’s criticism was somewhat unfair to Waley since Qian made the harsh critiques without reading Waley’s other writings published earlier. In his 1939

monograph *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China*, Waley noted, “Taoism to some extent influenced almost all writers of the period. Hsun Tzu’s twenty-first chapter, the genuineness of which I see no reason to doubt, contains a long mystical section about ‘the heart,’ which is typically Quietist” (Waley 2005, p. 207). Hanfeizi, a student of Xunzi, was also in the circle of this influence. Waley further explained, “This is borne out by the fact that Hanfeizi contains several chapters in which a small amount of Realism is diluted with a strong dose of Taoism”. Thus, Waley concluded, “Taoism was in the air, and every writer was liable to be affected by it (Waley 2005, p. 208). In light of these discussions, Qian’s criticism of Waley, especially the opposition between Daoism and Legalism, was invalid, which indicated that Waley had the opportunity to make an adequate justification for himself in his subsequent writings. However, Qian did not see this. Furthermore, Qian did not discuss Waley’s translation in the broader context of the English translation of the *Daodejing*, and there seem to be too many unfair comments regarding Waley’s translation in general.

In many cases, Waley mixed up philosophical Daoism (Daojia 道家), religious Daoism (Daojiao 道教), and Laozi’s ideas in the *Daodejing*. This indiscriminate method makes it impossible for readers to understand what it means. Waley’s English translation has been included in UNESCO’s Collection of Representative Works—Chinese Series. So far, this translation has had a significant influence and is widespread in Europe and the United States. Waley’s *Daodejing* is undoubtedly excellent, but the interpretive system presented by the various paratexts supporting his translation has weaknesses. Waley invented a theory of “Yoga-Quietism”, of which the *Daodejing* was a product, and he also emphasized the complete opposition between Daoism and Legalism.

The newly discovered documents of Qian Xuexi, including 12 letters between Qian and Empson, and Qian’s English translation of the *Daodejing*, have not been published yet. From the discussion above, we can see the value of Qian’s thinking on the *Daodejing*. Qian might have been inspired by his friend Shih Tsun, and was supervised by Empson in their correspondence. The various questions that Qian put forward about Waley’s theory and approach were valid. Empson ultimately accepted Qian’s view that the *Daodejing* could not be classified into the theory of Quietism Waley invented. In this case, Chinese and Western scholars’ interaction and exchange of ideas played a significant role in solving problems and jointly advancing academic research.

After discussing Waley’s translation with Empson, Qian translated the full text of the *Daodejing* into English. This article left some topics untouched, since it did not further explore the similarities and differences between Qian’s and Waley’s translations in specific passages and their respective views on interpreting the *Daodejing*. In addition, Qian translated the *Hanfeizi* and carried out some research on the text of *Hanfeizi* as well. However, unfortunately, his translation has been lost. How he and Waley translated the *Hanfeizi* individually might also have something to do with how they understood early Chinese texts and the *Daodejing*. In his prime in 1947, when Qian was 41 years old, his criticism of Waley’s *Daodejing* showed his highly critical talent, academic training, and profound thinking. After 1949, Qian accepted Chinese Marxist literary theory and turned to write articles with a novel spirit. Since then, he has not published any articles or books on the translations and interpretations of the Chinese classics.

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