

## Article

# Translative Trends in Three Modern Greek Renderings of the *Daodejing*

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**Abstract:** Many Chinese and Western scholars have looked into the relation between Daoist and Greek thought, implementing Greek philosophical vocabularies to explain or highlight the distinctness of Daoist terms. This paper offers a view of an alternative and unexplored area of such endeavors: the translation of Daoist philosophy in modern Greek. More specifically, I offer an account of the reception and interpretation of the text by looking at three renderings of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (or *Laozi* 老子) in modern Greek. I first summarize the translators' methodologies, overall understanding of the *Daodejing*'s focus and current relevance, and views on authorship and translation, and identify a set of translative trends: reliance on familiar notions, frameworks, and cultural experiences; mystification; attention to poeticity; and emphasis on a perceived remedial function of the text for a modern Greek readership. I then look at the renderings and explications of the key notions *dao* 道 and *de* 德 in four passages as case studies. The final section sums up the findings and concludes that the dominant interpretive tendency and translative trend in the examined translations is the assumption of similarity between Daoist and more familiar beliefs and frameworks.

**Keywords:** *Daodejing*; modern Greek; translation; *dao*; *de*; comparative studies



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## 1. Introduction

The first translation of the *Daodejing* in a European (classical) language, in Latin, came as late as 1788.<sup>1</sup> An even more belated encounter was that of the *Daodejing* with the modern version of another classical language, namely, with modern Greek. Assumed resonances between Daoism and ancient Greek philosophical traditions have been the focus of much comparative work of East and West, and there is abundant research that compares and/or contrasts Chinese with classical Greek notions, (e.g., *dao* 道 with *logos* λόγος and *de* 德 with *aretē* ἀρετή)<sup>3</sup>. The perception and transformation of the *Daodejing* in modern Greek is an alternative, unexplored field of similar comparatist work. For the purpose of this paper, I have selected and focus on three Greek<sup>4</sup> renderings of the *Daodejing*. I take the key notions of *dao* and *de* in four passages as entry points to the textual transformation and appropriation of the text in the modern Greek linguistic context. More specifically, I look at the first Greek translation of the *Daodejing* (1971) by Mania Seferiadi, Giorgos Alexakis's 1996 translation, and a very recent translation (2021), the first from classical Chinese, by Konstantinos Polymeros. In Section 2, I look closely at the introductions, notes, and appendixes provided in these editions, and present the translators' expressed aims, methodologies, and overall understanding of the *Daodejing*'s focus and relevance, as well as views on authorship and translation. These supplementary materials reveal a set of interpretative attitudes and foreshadow the following translative trends: reliance on familiar notions, frameworks, and cultural experiences; mystification; attention to poeticity; and emphasis on a perceived remedial function of the text for a modern (Greek) readership. In Sections 3 and 4, I look at the renderings and explications provided on the key notions *dao* 道 and *de* 德 in four passages as case studies. The conclusion sums up the findings and identifies the assumption of similarity between Daoist and more familiar beliefs and frameworks as the dominant translative trend in these works.

## 2. Overview of the Translations: Interpretive Attitudes and Translative Trends

Since its first translation in modern Greek,<sup>5</sup> the *Daodejing* 道德經 (or *Laozi* 老子) has become the most translated Chinese classic in the Greek publishing world.<sup>6</sup> With one exception, Greek renderings of the Daoist text are translations of (English and/or French) translations. Overall, lack of access to classical Chinese has not allowed direct engagement either with primary sources or with the Chinese commentarial tradition, and references to Western commentators are limited to non-existent. This paper specifically looks at three translations of the *Daodejing*: Mania Seferiadi's<sup>7</sup> *Lao Tsu: Tao Te King* Λάο Τσου: Τάο Τε Κινγκ (Laozi: *Daodejing*),<sup>8</sup> the first translation of the text in Greek (Seferiadi [1971] 1995); Giorgos Alexakis's *Lao Tse Tao Te King: To Vivlio tou Logou kai tis Fysis* Λάο Τσε Τάο Τε Κινγκ: Το Βιβλίο του Λόγου και της Φύσης (Laozi *Daodejing*: The Book of Logos and Nature; Alexakis 1996); and Konstantinos G. Polymeros's *Tao Te Tzingk: To Poiima tou Gi-raiou* Τάο Τε Τζινγκ: Το Ποίημα του Γηραιού (Dao De Jing: The Poem of the Old Man) (Polymeros 2021), the first Greek translation of the text from classical Chinese that has been published until today.

As a Daoist scholar and translator of the *Daodejing* has succinctly put it, “the text, despite its cryptic nature, makes sense as a whole” (Moeller 2007, p. vii). The co-existence of antithetical elements as a feature of the text itself (abstruseness and appeal to common sense and experience) has led to two opposing tendencies in the translations examined here: (over)reliance on familiar notions, frameworks, and cultural experiences coupled with attempts to preserve the text's enigmatic character through mystification. Moreover, there is attention to the poetic qualities of the text and emphasis on what is perceived as its remedial function for a modern (Greek) readership. More specifically, the introductions and supplementary materials (notes, comments, glosses, and appendixes) examined here reveal an assumed-as-self-evident similarity between Daoist and more familiar themes, categories, and frameworks, mainly from Greek, but also from other non-Chinese philosophical, literary, religious, and folk traditions. Overall, these connections are presented without justification or reference to supporting sources or alternative readings. Secondly, there is at the same time an acknowledgement of the distinct character, difficulty, and even impenetrability of the classical Chinese language and/or of the *Daodejing* itself. Whether a religious (Seferiadi), philosophical (Alexakis), or political (Polymeros) reading of the text is prioritized, there is, in varying degrees, an emphasis on its perceived mystical or esoteric character. Thirdly, all translations reveal some degree of attentiveness to the text's poetic elements (rhythm, terseness, elusiveness, suggestiveness, ambiguity). Lastly, the *Daodejing* is more or less explicitly proposed as beneficial and even remedial for its (Greek) readers, on an individual and/or communal level. In what follows we will look at varying manifestations of the above translative trends in each of the translations, starting with the first published translation of the *Daodejing* by Mania Seferiadi.

Mania Seferiadi's 1971 translation has been considered a “standard” for years. In her prologue to the edition, the translator admits she had no option but to use several earlier translations<sup>9</sup> internationally regarded as authoritative in order to “understand what the Chinese text says, or what it probably says.”<sup>10</sup> Seferiadi notes that any access to the primary text was through secondary sources, and occasionally references specific characters or “ideograms” (according to the traditional terminology, still used in Greek literature), and their alternative meanings. She does not fail to stress the difficulty of the text and cautions about its “fluidity” and its “rough and steep thought” (Ibid., p. 10). As the poet Giorgos Seferis (d. 1971) pointed out to her, the *Daodejing* “breaks bones,” and Seferiadi admits that sometimes her “foot slipped” (Ibid.). She cautions that, faced with the immense difficulty, one is tempted to “hold on to the rope one carries” with them, that is, to resort to familiar notions and frameworks, projecting one's own ideas (Ibid., p. 11). A historical example she mentions is the Jesuits' reading of Chapter 42<sup>11</sup> as proof that the Chinese knew the Holy Undivided Trinity (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 12).

Seferiadi's awareness of the danger of cultural reductionism is evident in the absence of any connections with non-Chinese ideas or cultural experiences in her own commentary of the translation (150 notes with glosses and alternative translations of words or phrases). The epigraphs to the edition, however, indicate an assumed commensurability between Daoism and more familiar sources: pre-Socratic philosophy and the New Testament. Explaining *yin* and *yang* and their relation in the introductory "Notes", the translator describes them as opposites but not opponents; "victory does not mean exterminating one of the two, but unification of the two in absolute harmony" (Ibid., p. 16). The epigraphs, combined with other related references, as we will see below, imply that unification of conflicting forces or states often expressed in paradoxical language is taken to be a common idea in sources as diverse as the *Daodejing*, the Gospel of Matthew (10:16: "Be as shrewd as snakes and as innocent as doves"), Empedocles's cosmogony of conflict between love and strife (Fragment 109), and Heraclitus's paradoxical teachings (Fragment 71: "Remember the one who forgets where the logos leads" (Diels 1903, p. 76)). Heraclitus is also quoted<sup>12</sup> in the "Additional Notes" (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, pp. 185–89) section, where the translator describes the theory and practice of *dao* as "unification of opposites," holding that "Heraclitus saw something similar" (Ibid., p. 189).

These associations fit in with Seferiadi's reading of the *Daodejing*, which she seems to appreciate primarily for its religious content. Discussing the issue of authorship in her introductory "Notes" (Ibid., pp. 13–16), the translator mentions the possibility of the text being the product of an oral tradition in passing, but mostly elaborates on the stories around the legendary author of the *Daodejing*, Laozi or Lao Dan 老聃. Moreover, she describes the Daoists as "famous alchemists and magicians," and, as we saw, one of the mottos of the translation is a quote by Empedocles, known for infusing his philosophy with religious and magical beliefs and practices. In her "Additional Notes," Seferiadi refers to Daoist practices (breathing, coitus reservatus) and adds the translations of two classical texts of folk Daoist religion in Appendixes A and B, respectively: the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution) and the *Qing jing jing* 清靜經 (Classic of Clarity and Tranquility). The translator offers some information on these texts' religious and ethical import, making no reference to authorship, textual matters, or the relation between the teachings therein with those in the *Daodejing*. She again seems to appeal to the reader's common sense when she notes that "there is no need to interrupt the reading of the text with notes" in her brief introduction to Appendix B (Ibid., p. 202). She also appeals to the Greek reader's (Christian) religious experiences in the few notes added in Appendix A. There, as in the translation of the *Taishang ganying pian*, words such as "sin" (*amartia* αμαρτία), "Lord" (*kyrios* Κύριος), and "neighbor" (*plision* πλησίον) trigger associations with biblical teachings (Ibid., pp. 193–98).

Poeticity is evidently also one of the translator's main concerns, and Seferiadi's language is undoubtedly most elegant and powerful. One year before the first publication of the *Daodejing* in Greek and one year before the death of the poet Giorgos Seferis (in 1971),<sup>13</sup> her uncle, Seferiadi notes in her prologue that Seferis "brought the text to life" and the language of her translation "bears his mark." Lastly, Seferiadi refers to the remedial function of the *Daodejing* for a modern Greek reader with a brief note describing the relation between *yin* and *yang* as a "holy marriage" (Ibid., p. 16). Perhaps, she argues, this understanding, which is the "true alchemy" of the Daoists, is a remedy for "the divided human" of the modern world (Ibid.).

In Giorgos Alexakis's translation, published twenty-five years after Seferiadi's, the above interpretive attitudes and translative trends are comparatively more salient. The lengthy introduction (Alexakis 1996, pp. 9–21) to the translation evinces reliance on an abundance of familiar notions, traditions, and frameworks. Alexakis parallels the *Daodejing*'s teaching to the Socratic examination of one's life and summarizes it through twelve key ideas. Among them are the "mean/measure" (*to metro* το μέτρο), an interpretation of the text's promotion of female (soft) rather than male (hard) qualities in Chapter 39, and "love" (*agapi* αγάπη), the liberal translation of *xiu* 修 ("cultivation") in Chapter 54. The

translator is more concerned with the philosophical rather than the religious import of the text, which he describes as “a book with poetic aphorisms about life and self-knowledge” (Ibid., p. 9) through the experience of Dao. He also dedicates a separate section in his epilogue to the “Parallel Lives” of Laozi and Heraclitus, whose philosophy, he agrees with Seferiadi, is in many respects reminiscent of that of the “wise old man” (Laozi). Alexakis finds resonances between Heraclitus’s *logos* (λόγος) and the central teaching of the *Daodejing*, stressing “the notable historical phenomenon” of finding two thinkers who lived in places very remote from one another and having “almost identical” teachings (Ibid., p. 118), specifically in terms of “the struggle and harmony of opposites,” constant flux, and “the hubris of arrogance” (Ibid., p. 117). Moreover, as the introduction informs the reader, the translator’s commentary is made up of explanatory notes, later Daoist comments and aphorisms, and passages from holy books of various religions, philosophers, poets, and writers, including a few passages from the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) and the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, two references to Wang Bi 王弼 (d. 249), many Heraclitean fragments and sayings from the Bible, the Quran, the Vedas, T. S. Eliot, Hermann Hesse, Khalil Gibran, Kafka, and others.<sup>14</sup>

The reader is invited to reflect on what seem to be taken as self-evident connections between the text and a variety of religious, philosophical, and literary sources, while the translator argues that the *Daodejing* only has a “seemingly puzzling style and paradoxicality,” meant to help the reader grasp the “duality and continuous succession of phenomena” and their inner unity and harmony (Ibid., p. 111). The text is described as readily accessible without explication or popularization, and the reader is prompted, if they wish, to ignore the translator’s comments (Ibid., p. 21). Quoting Fritjof Capra (b. 1939) and Alan Watts (d. 1973), Alexakis stresses the idiosyncrasy of the Chinese language and gives a brief account of his own personal experience of translating the text (which started in 1983).<sup>15</sup> With a focus on familiarity and accessibility, he supports the legitimacy of translating English translations quoting Dimitris Velissaropoulos,<sup>16</sup> who writes, “the only language that has certain analogies [with Chinese] is English; there are few grammar rules in English, words are not declined, and they are often used as nouns, but also as verbs or adjectives” (Alexakis 1996, p. 15). However, there is also a mystifying tendency in the translator’s epilogue. “Laozi’s Dao” is, Alexakis argues, directly associated with Heraclitus’s *logos*, understood as the Inexpressible, according to Jean Brun (d. 1994), whom the author references (Ibid., p. 117). It is “what is situated in someone’s very heart and remains deeply hidden there;” it is the “original cause,” what Jacob Boeme (d. 1624), the philosopher and Christian mystic, also referenced by Alexakis, describes as *Urgrund*; it is the “Mysterium Magnum.” (Ibid.) These analogies are made without further elaboration. Moreover, in his introduction, Alexakis focuses on the legends around the figure of Laozi, translated as “wise old man (*sofos geros σοφός γέρος*)” or “old friend (*palios filios παλιός φίλος*)” and treated as the thinker behind the teachings found in the *Daodejing*.

In a separate section of his epilogue entitled “The Current Relevance of Laozi’s Teaching,” but also twice in his notes on the translation, Alexakis stresses the corrective function of the *Daodejing* as “a timeless text of global significance” that proposes “a meaningful, simple, friendly, and conscious life” by promoting measure and simplicity against greed and confusion, faith and friendliness against suspicion and negativity, and focus and awareness against distraction and illusion (Alexakis 1996, p. 122). Finally, even though at the expense of accuracy sometimes, the translation successfully reproduces the original text’s poetic-aphoristic style, preserving its terseness in the modern Greek version.

The third translation examined here, by Konstantinos Polymeros, is the first from classical Chinese. In his prologue, Polymeros offers a “pessimistic,” as he calls it, “Account of Betrayals.” Quoting the Italian saying which says “traduttore traditore,”<sup>17</sup> he recognizes that, despite his work’s uniqueness, translation still remains a “necessary betrayal” since the translator is compelled to choose one meaning of a character among many, one version of the text among various versions, and a certain number of commentaries among many (thus “betraying” all others) (Polymeros 2021, p. 5). It is evident, however, that



Polymeros put every effort in making up for the limitations of his endeavor. He is the only one among the three translators who draws directly on traditional and contemporary Chinese and Western scholarly work, as is also evident in his extensive bibliography. Unlike Seferiadi and Alexakis, Polymeros emphasizes the political import of the *Daodejing* and pays particular attention to the notion of “the people” (*laos λαός*), viewed as “perhaps the most complex notion in the text,” (Ibid., p. 125) which, however, is not discussed further.<sup>18</sup> The focus on the political philosophy of the *Daodejing*, Polymeros explains, is the reason for choosing the commentaries and editions of the “Old Man on the Riverside”<sup>19</sup> (Heshang Gong 河上公 [c. 200 CE]) and, to a much lesser extent, Wang Bi—other thinkers are seen by the translator as more metaphysical and less political. This choice of commentary and the political reading, unlike “methods of breathing and meditation,” are regarded as beneficial for contemporary Greek society, which is characterized by “political cannibalism and moral decay” (Polymeros 2021, pp. 7–8). Polymeros considers the political dimension of the key term *wu wei* 無為 (non-purposeful or effortless action) as “revolutionary” not only for antiquity, but also for the present.

Apart from recognition of the text’s remedial function, the supplementary sections in Polymeros’s translation (prologue, introduction, commentary, and appendix) reveal other translatable trends as well: reliance on familiar notions, frameworks, and cultural experiences, as well as mystification. The main body of the introduction makes use of Chinese classics, such as the *Book of Songs* (*Shijing* 詩經), the *Book of Rites* (*Liji* 禮記), the *Analects* (*Lunyu* 論語), and others. However, the translator draws on a variety of disciplines and sources, too: Greek and world mythologies, ethnography, Eastern religions, ancient Greek philosophy (e.g., Heraclitus and Plato) and literature (e.g., Homer and Euripides), the New Testament, and world folk traditions. Special emphasis is placed particularly on rituals and magic (sacrificial and divinatory practices). Some scholars have argued that the imagery and philosophy of the *Daodejing* can be traced back to an ancient imagery connected to rituals.<sup>20</sup> Polymeros seems to imply a connection between the *Daodejing*’s political philosophy and ritual practices but does not adequately support or elaborate on the connection. Moreover, folk traditions, ritual practices, and beliefs across time and cultures are presented as “coincidentally” similar. The frequent use of expressions such as “is remindful of,” “is related to,” and “is similar to” is telling. The translator resorts to familiar categories and traditions, and also seems to imply that world cultures share a common origin or can be explained in terms of a perceived shared humanity.

Along with assumed similarity, mystification is another feature of the translator’s approach, evident in the supplementary materials and commentary. Polymeros describes the “mythical mist” created around Laozi, who is treated as a historical figure that eventually developed into a religious figure and deity (Polymeros 2021, p. 9). The legends around Laozi are, again, “very remindful of” the “various conjectures about the divine or human nature of Jesus, Bachus, etc.” (Ibid., p. 10). Laozi is also compared to Jesus and the Buddha in terms of the institutionalization and monetarization of their teaching. The epilogue, entitled “The Dark History of the People,” (Ibid., pp. 125–34) adds to the mystical atmosphere surrounding the discussion. It is introduced as a collection of “often dark” “details and personal thoughts,” and comprises three parts: on “The Mythology of Fear,” “Fear, Horror Movies, and Bourgeois Ethics,” and “Symbolization of Ancient Rituals.” Overall, there seems to be no unifying thread connecting the numerous notes and additional materials, which ultimately obscure rather than highlight the political message of the text. Finally, Polymeros seems attentive to the text’s poeticity and his Greek has measure and rhythm, as well as a certain poetic quality thanks to particular lexical choices and preferred structures.

In the following section I will look closely at how the translatable trends discussed above play out in the explications and translations of the key notions *dao* 道 and *de* 德 in four passages. I situate the understanding of these two notions in each translator’s overall take on the text and the Daoist proposal, starting with one of its core notions, *dao*.

### 3. *Dao* 道: “TAO,” “Way,” “Path,” “Logos”

*Dao* 道 (or *Tao*) is a central notion in the Chinese cultural tradition and a fundamental idea in Chinese thought. From the basic meaning of “path,” “course,” “way,” and “road,” as well as “to speak” and “method,” *dao* acquired the broader meaning of the general principle of the world and human life (Yang 2011, p. 319). *Dao* thus involves both an ontological and a moral, both a descriptive and a prescriptive aspect. The *Daodejing* abounds with illustrations, allusions, and images relating to *dao*, which is also often described in paradoxical or negative terms—empty fullness, changeable constancy, the unnamable, the ineffable, the unformed, the solitary, or the silent. Its meaning and connotations differ between chapters and even within sentences. In the *Daodejing* *dao* can refer to a metaphysical entity understood as ultimate true existence, to natural laws or patterns, or to exemplary models of human life (Chen 2020, p. 2). In English editions of the text, *dao*, *Dao*, or the *Dao* is often left untranslated or translated as “Way,” “the Way,” or, with an emphasis on its processual and dynamic character, as “way-making” (Ames and Hall 2003).

In this section I look closely at the opening lines of Chapter 1 (Table 1) and Chapter 42 (Table 2). I present the three Greek translations, offer a brief discussion on the translation choices in each case, and summarize the commentaries identifying instances where the translative trends identified above (reliance on familiar categories and frameworks, mystification, attention to poeticity, and emphasis on current relevance) are most evident. The Chinese text<sup>21</sup> and the three Greek renderings with transcriptions and rough English translations are as follows:

**Table 1.** Chapter 1.

Original Text	Seferiadi (1971) T1	Alexakis (1996) T2	Polymeros (2021) T3
道可道 非常道 <i>dao ke dao</i> <i>fei chang dao</i>	To TAO που μπορούμε να πούμε TAO δεν είναι το αιώνια αμετάβλητο TAO.	Ονόμασέ το Λόγο, όμως δεν λέγεται.	Αν η Οδός περιγράφεται με λόγια, δεν είναι η αιώνια Οδός.
	To TAO <i>pou boroume na poume</i> TAO <i>den einai</i> <i>To aionia ametavlito</i> TAO.	<i>Onomase to Logo,</i> <i>omos den legetai.</i>	<i>An i Odos</i> <i>perigrafetai me logia,</i> <i>den einai i aionia Odos.</i>
	The TAO we can call TAO is not the eternally unchanging TAO.	Name it Logos, but it cannot be said.	If the Way is described with words, it is not the eternal Way.

Reliance on the familiar is apparent in all three translations of both verses (Tables 1 and 2), in varying degrees and ways. First, capitalization, non-existent in Chinese, is one method the translators employ to point to the centrality of *dao* in the teachings of the *Daodejing*. In one case *dao* is left untranslated (T1: TAO<sup>22</sup>), and also rendered as *o Dromos* in Chapter 9 (*tian dao* 天道, ο δρόμος του Ουρανού *o dromos tou Ouranou*, the Way of Heaven). In her introductory note, Seferiadi defines *dao* as a noun meaning “road,” “path,” “method,” or “way something happens,” and as a verb meaning “to say” or “to lead, to guide.” She further compares *dao*, in the broader sense it gradually acquired, with Western equivalents of “the One” and “Being,” such as the Gnostics’ *Nous* (Mind) and Heraclitean *logos*. In the other two translations (T2 and T3), *dao* is also identified with what are seen as similar central concepts in the Western philosophical and religious tradition: with the Greek terms *Logos* (λόγος; here mainly: “word,” “speech”) (T2) and *Odos* (οδός) (T3); the Koini Greek<sup>23</sup> variant for “road,” “path,” “way,” “passage,” and “method”; and Jesus’s self-description in the New Testament.<sup>24</sup>

Table 2. Chapter 42.

Original Verse	Seferiadi (1971) T1	Alexakis (1996) T2	Polymeros (2021) T3
道生一, 一生二, 二生三, 三生萬物。 <i>dao sheng yi</i> <i>yi sheng er</i> <i>er sheng san</i> <i>san sheng wanwu</i>	Το ΤΑΟ γέννησε το Ένα, το Ένα γέννησε το Δύο, το Δύο γέννησε το Τρία και το Τρία γέννησε όλα τα όντα και τα πράγματα του κόσμου.	Ο Λόγος είναι ένας αλλά έγινε ζευγάρι, έπειτα τριάδα, ώσπου γέννησε τα μύρια πράγματα.	Η Οδός γέννησε το Ένα. Το Ένα, γέννησε τα Δύο. Τα Δύο, γέννησαν τα Τρία. Και τα Τρία, γέννησαν όλα τα πράγματα.
	To Tao gennise to Ena, to Ena gennise to Dyo, to Dyo gennise to Tria kai to Tria gennise ola ta onta kai ta pragmata tou kosmou.	O Logos einai enas alla egine zevgari, epeita triada, ospou gennise ta myria pragmata.	I Odos gennise to Ena. To Ena, gennise ta Dyo. Ta Dyo, gennisan ta Tria. Kai ta Tria, gennisan ola ta pragmata.
	The Dao gave birth to the One, the One gave birth to the Two, The Two gave birth to the Three and the Three gave birth to all beings and things of the world.	Logos is one but it became a couple, then a triple, until it gave birth to the myriad things.	The Way gave birth to the One. The One, gave birth to the Two. The Two gave birth to the Three. And the Three, gave birth to all things.

While noting the absence of articles and plural markers in the Chinese language, as well as the verbal use of *dao*, all three translators opt for translating *dao* as a proper noun in the singular and with the definite neuter (T1), masculine (T2), and feminine (T3) article, respectively: *to* ΤΑΟ το ΤΑΟ, *o* Logos ο Λόγος, *i* Odos η Οδός. *Dao* is presented within a Western two-world theoretical framework solely in terms of oneness: as a single, unified principle generating, governing, and retaining an independent status in relation to all things and affairs. Moreover, in many Indo-European languages, articles accompany substantives and are thus related to substances. In Chinese, words that could be categorized as common nouns or substantives do not behave solely as substantives if at all. The addition of the definite article in all translations examined here reveals a reliance on the more familiar Western metaphysics of substance.<sup>25</sup> Particularly with regard to Chapter 40 (Table 2), the exclusive use of the singular number (“the Dao,” “the Way,” *Logos*) and the definite article brings *dao* into the familiar hermeneutic framework of Western metaphysics, rendering it unilaterally an absolute principle of unity that produces and explains multiplicity. *Dao* is thus perceived as independent and outside multiplicity. As we saw above, in some instances *dao* is in fact alternatively translated or understood as the Absolute, the One, the Cause, the divine, or even God.

The pun in the original verse of Chapter 1, with the multiple meanings of the character *dao* 道 (“way,” “to speak/to be spoken,” and its cognate *dao* 導 “to guide/to be guided”), is untranslated and unexplained. Only in one case (Table 1, T2) does the translator attempt to preserve the alliteration (*logos-legetai* λόγος-λέγεται, “speech—it is said/spoken”), and he gives a paradoxical twist to the opening line (Name it Speech [*Logos*], but it cannot be spoken), while seeming to focus on the ineffable aspect of *dao* and taking the third *dao* of the line (*chang dao* 常道) as also referring to speech. In the other three translations, *chang* 常 is translated with the adjective *aionios* αιώνιος (“eternal”) and the adverb *aionia* (αμετάβλητο) αιώνια (αμετάβλητο), meaning “eternally” (“unchanging”), a word often used in the Bible and in Christian theology to describe the eternally existent God. *Dao* is thus assigned to a realm beyond time. Seferiadi, in particular, makes a related note in the Appendix. Dao as “being” or “presence” (*you* 有) is the source of all things, “outside place and time” (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 189).

*Dao* is not translated as *logos* in T1 and T3, but the connections with Heraclitean philosophy and Christian theology are still present, as discussed in the previous section. In Greek, *logos* λόγος, a concept as vast in scope and versatile in meaning as *dao*, is related to spoken language, rationality, and ratio: “what is said,” “word,” “story,” “account,” “mathematical ratio,” “proportion,” “calculation,” “right reckoning,” “reasonable proportion,” “reason,” “cause.” The explicit or assumed relation between *dao* and *logos* in these translations is an example of a long-standing trend. Discussions on the relation between *dao* and *logos* abound in both Chinese- and non-Chinese-speaking academia.<sup>26</sup> One of the first Chinese thinkers to discuss the commensurability between *dao* and *logos* was the writer Qian Zhongshu 錢鐘書 (d. 1998), who argued for the universality of the logical structure of thinking, even though he also acknowledged that thinking can be formulated in time- and culture-specific ways.<sup>27</sup> Many scholars have read the two terms as meant to serve similar purposes and as having cosmological, epistemological, and ethical functions. Among the three translators, Alexakis (T2) is the only one who renders *dao* as (capitalized) *Logos*, adding three quotes in the footnotes: from the Gospel of John<sup>28</sup>, the *Rig Veda*<sup>29</sup>, and Timothy Leary:

Tao is best translated as ‘energy’, as energy in process. Energy in its pure, unstructured state (the E in Einstein’s equation), and energy in its countless temporary states of structure (the M of Einstein’s equation).<sup>30</sup>

Here, apart from the connection to Heraclitean *logos* and Jesus Christ, the embodied *Logos* in Christian theology<sup>31</sup>, parallels are also drawn between *dao* and Om (ultimate reality) in Hindu philosophy, and, as we saw, with Socratic self-knowledge. Alexakis also offers a lengthy list of alternative nouns and adjectives as possible renderings: *Onoma* Ὄνομα (“Name”), *Noima* Νόημα (“Meaning”), *Odos* Ὀδός (“Path,” “Way”), *Pneuma* Πνεύμα (“Spirit”), *Aitia* Αἰτία (“Cause”), *Theos* Θεός (“God”), *Nomos* Νόμος (“Law”), *Afto* Αυτό (“It,” “This”), *Ena* ἓν (“One”), *On* ὄν (“the Being”), *Mi-On* Μη-ὄν (“the Non-Being”), *Apolyto* Απόλυτο (“Absolute”), *Ateleftito* Ατελεύτητο (“Inexhaustible”), *Ametavlitto* Αμετάβλητο (“Unchanging”), *Einai* Εἶναι (“Being”), *Nous* Νους (“Mind”), *Energieia* Ενέργεια (“Energy”), *Armonia* Ἀρμονία (“Harmony”), and *Logos* Λόγος (“Speech,” “Word,” “Reason”).<sup>32</sup> The numerous references to what are viewed as parallel texts and similar ideas (T2, T3), and the abundance of what are perceived as related or equivalent terms (T2), in the absence of any accompanying explication, mystify rather than clarify aspects of the notion of *dao*. Scarce and brief comments such as, “in religion, it [*dao*] meant the magical communication with the divine and the spirits” (T2), and “in religion and magic it [*dao*] meant communication with the divine and spirits” (T1) (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 13), intensify the mystification of the specific term and the text as a whole. Lastly, in all three translations there is concern for preserving the text’s aphoristic and poetic style in modern Greek. Examples are Alexakis’s choice of the more poetic *myria* μύρια instead of “thousands” for *wan* 萬, and *zevgari* ζευγάρι (“mating couple”) (Table 2). The metaphor of human reproduction is used in all three translations (*sheng* 生 is rendered with the more vivid *genise/genisan* γέννησε/γέννησαν, “it/they gave birth/generated”), whereas there is also attention to metric rhythm, especially in Seferiadi’s translation.

#### 4. De 德: “TE,” “Virtue,” “Power,” “Grace”

*De* 德 gives its name to the second or, for some scholars, the first part of the *Daodejing*<sup>33</sup>, *Dejing* 德經 (The Classic of Power). *De* is a central notion, not only in the *Daodejing*, but in the entire Chinese tradition. One of the most common translations of *de* is “character,” often understood as “good character.” As Lin Yutang 林語堂 (d. 1976) notes, “[a]part from the English, few nations have laid such stress on character in their ideal of education and manhood as the Chinese. The Chinese seem to be so preoccupied with it that in their whole philosophy they have not been able to think of anything else” (Lin [1935] 1938, p. 42). *De* is, however, also understood as having a broader cosmic and political meaning, and it is related to its cognate *de* 得 (“to get,” “to receive,” “to attain”), as will be explained below.



On the ontological level, *de* and *dao* are viewed as two aspects of the same reality. As the root of all things, *dao* has a metaphysical quality, but its physical manifestation in the myriad things (*wan wu* 萬物) is *de* (Yang 2015, pp. 79–80). Moreover, in the *Daodejing*, one of the aspects or expressions of *dao* is to serve as a standard of human life, and that aspect is *de*. In the political realm, *de* describes the virtue a ruler gives forth but also what the ruler receives (*de* 得) from the people in return. *De* thus denotes the optimal relationship between the ruler and the ruled; it is “both the ‘beneficence’ extended to the people in response to their worth, and the ‘gratitude’ expressed by the people in response to the largesse of a worthy ruler” (Ames and Hall 2003, p. 76). In English, *de* is translated as “virtue,” “virtuosity,” “nature,” “potency,” “power,” “efficacy,” or “excellence,” which generally refer to the potential, power, or individual nature (*shuxing* 属性) of each thing (Chen 2020, p. 14), but also as “moral charisma,” “kindness,” “generosity,” “integrity,” “rewards,” “gratitude,” or “vibes,” which take *de* as a kind of virtue, bringing out the ways *de* manifests in one’s interaction with the world and others. Scholars have found resemblances between *de* and ancient Greek *areti* ἀρετή (“virtue”), *ithos* ἥθος (“moral character”), *charis* χάρις (“grace”), *kalokagathia* καλοκαγαθία (“benignity,” “benevolence”), *dynamis* δύναμις (“power,” “potential”), *eunoia* εὐνοία (“favor,” “grace”), and *christotis* χρηστότης (“probity,” “decency”).

In this section I look at two key verses on *de* from Chapter 21 (Table 3), which has been characterized as one of the most important if not the most important chapter of the book (Chan 1963, p. 151), and Chapter 38 (Table 4). I present the three Greek renderings, offer a brief discussion on some translation choices, and summarize the commentaries identifying instances where the translative trends identified above (reliance on familiar categories and frameworks, mystification, attention to poeticity, and emphasis on current relevance) are most evident. The original text and the three Greek renderings with transcriptions and rough English translations are as follows:

Table 3. Chapter 21.

Original Verse	Seferiadi (1971) T1	Alexakis (1996) T2	Polymeros (2021) T3
孔德之容， 唯道是從。 <i>kong de zhi rong</i> <i>wei dao shi cong</i>	Η μεγάλη δύναμη πηγάξει μόνο από το ΤΑΟ. <i>I megali dynami</i> <i>pigazei mono apo to TAO.</i>	Η πιο μεγάλη χάρη είναι ν’ ακολουθείς το Λόγο. <i>I pio megali chari</i> <i>einai n’ akoloutheis</i> <i>to Logo.</i>	Το περιεχόμενο της Μεγάλης Αρετής, ακολουθεί την Οδό. <i>To periechomeno</i> <i>tis Megalis Aretis,</i> <i>akolouthei tin Odo.</i>
	The great power springs only from <i>dao</i> .	The greatest grace is to follow Logos.	The content of the Great Virtue follows the Way.

Table 4. Chapter 38.

Original Verse	Seferiadi (1971) T1	Alexakis (1996) T2	Polymeros (2021) T3
上德不德， 是以有德。 <i>shang de bu de</i> <i>shi yi you de</i>	Το ανώτατο ΤΕ δεν είναι δύναμη ούτε αρετή γύ’ αυτό και είναι ΤΕ.	Η φυσική αρετή δεν προβάλλεται και είναι αληθινή.	Αυτός που εκτιμά την Αρετή, δεν δείχνεται για ενάρετος. Γύ’ αυτό και έχει την Αρετή.
	To anotato TE den einai dynami oute areti gi’ afto kai einai TE.	I fysiki areti den provalletai kai einai alithini.	Aftos pou ektima tin Areti, den deichnetai gia enaretos. Gi’ afto kai echei tin Areti.
	The highest <i>de</i> is neither power nor virtue that’s why it is <i>de</i> .	Natural virtue does not display itself and it is true.	He who appreciates Virtue, does not appear as/show himself to be virtuous. That’s why he has Virtue.

In the three translations we focus on here, *de* is rendered as “power” (*dynami* δύναμη) (T1), “virtue” (*areti* ἀρετή) (T2), and “grace” (*chari* χάρη) (T3). Two translations (T1 and T2) follow the division of the text into *Daojing* 道經 and *Dejing* 德經, respectively, the latter extending from Chapter 38 to 81. *Dejing* is translated as *Te King* Τε Κινγκ (Dejing) (T1), and *To Vivlio tis Fysis* Το Βιβλίο της Φύσης (The Book of Nature) (T4).

As with renderings and explications of the key notion of *dao* discussed in the previous section, reliance on familiar notions and frameworks aimed at illuminating the key notion *de* and explaining its role in the philosophy of the *Daodejing* has instead the effect of mystifying it. Little to no justification for what are seen as common-sensical parallels also adds to this effect, which becomes easily apparent in the supplementary notes and translations of *de*. This is perhaps less so in Seferiadi’s translation (T1), which informs the reader about the diverse meanings of *de*. She provides the nominal and verbal meaning of *de*, and thus assigns both a substantive and a dynamic aspect to the term, rendering it as both “virtue” (*areti* ἀρετή) and “power” (*dynami* δύναμη). She explains that *de* is “the hidden power, the potentiality inside the seed, the egg, or the field”; “to gain” (*apokto* αποκτώ) and “profit/gain” (*kerdos* κέρδος); the quality of a thing, its nature; and, finally, “the magical power it radiates” (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 12). Translating *de* as “nature” (*fysi* φύση), Seferiadi adds, is also precise and consistent since “TE” (*de*), “initially TEK (*tek*)” etymologically originates from the ancient word “NTXIEK” (*dchiek*), which means “to plant.”<sup>34</sup> Still, the translator is relying on the more familiar understanding of etymology in Indo-European languages when she assigns a single etymological root to the character *de*. In line with a common interpretation that relates *de* to the Greek *areti* ἀρετή (“virtue”), she connects the etymological roots of *de* and *areti*, *ar-*, also found in *Aris* Ἀρης (“Mars”), *aristos* ἀριστος (“excellent”), etc., that corresponds to the Latin root *vir-* in words such as *virtus* (“virtue”). Both of these roots she understands to have the double meaning of “power” and “virtue”.

Seferiadi also notes the different usages of *de* in the text. Unlike virtue, the translator explains, *de* is not only perceived as positive, since “bad *de* can come from a bad thing,” even though TE [*de*] is usually good and life-giving” (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 12), and second, by preserving the paradoxical formulation *shang de bu de* 上德不德 in Chapter 38 in the Greek rendering (Table 4, T1). To this purpose, the words *dynami* (“power”) and *areti* (“virtue”) are here used negatively: “The highest *de* is neither power nor virtue, that’s why it is *de*.” In a footnote, Seferiadi offers an alternative translation: “The highest *de* is not *de*.” In the absence of elaboration on the paradox, however, the term and the verse ultimately remain obscure. Lastly, *cong* 從 is given a poetic rendering with ontological implications: *pigazei* πηγάζει (“it springs from”), a verb derived from the word *pigi* πηγή (“water source”), renders the relation between *de* and *dao* as one of derivation, as noted above, and thus assigns temporal precedence and supremacy to *dao* in relation to *de*.

Attempts to explain the paradoxical formulation in Chapter 38 are evident in the other two translations (Table 4, T2 and T3). The verbs “is displayed” (*provalletai* προβάλλεται) (Table 4, T2) and “appears as” or “shows himself to be” (*deichmetai* δείχνεται) (Table 4, T3) imply that *shang de* 上德 is understood as “true” (*alithini* αληθινή) and “natural” (*fysiki* φυσική) *de* (T2), to be displayed, superficial, or pretended 不德 *bu de*. A connection to the more familiar concept of *areti* (“virtue”) is found in T3 (Table 4). Here, the anthropocentric reading of *de*, which is rendered as “he who appreciates virtue,” and the essentialistic understanding of *de* as an attribute or quality one possesses (“he has Virtue”), are reminiscent of ancient Greek (Platonic) conceptions of *areti* in the broad sense, the essence of specific virtues such as courage, wisdom, etc.

Similarly, Alexakis offers a basic understanding of *de* as “going straight to the heart or coming straight from the heart, from the essence.” In his translation and explanatory notes, he seems to further embed *de* in a Western paradigm by listing a number of possible meanings for *de*: *Dynami* Δύναμη (“Power”), *Ousia* Ουσία (“Substance”), *Areti* Ἀρετή (“Virtue”), *Gignesthai* Γίγνεσθαι (“Becoming”), *Dynatotita* Δυνατότητα (“Capability”), *Taxi* Τάξη (“Order”), *Drasi* Δράση (“Action”), *Axia* Αξία (“Value”), *Chari* Χάρη (“Grace,” “Favor”),

*Agapi* Αγάπη (“Love”), *Zoi* Ζωή (“Life”), *Fysi* Φύση (“Nature”), *doro* δώρο (“gift”), *eug-nomosyni* ευγνωμοσύνη (“gratitude”), *ofelos* όφελος (“benefit”), and the medicinal power of plants (Alexakis 1996, pp. 16–17). Moreover, like Seferiadi, Alexakis also mentions the etymological relation of *de* to “to plant” (*tiēk* τιεκ), which “implies the deeper nature of things where authentic virtue and spontaneous power spring from” (Ibid., p. 16). *De* is thus to be understood in terms of a perceived “depth” or as an intrinsic essence, contrasted, as we will see below, with false or inauthentic appearance.

In his translation (Table 3, T3), Polymeros seems to draw on a similar, and familiar, paradigm of distinction and opposition between “depth” and “surface,” true essence and false appearance, or genuineness and pretense. He offers some explanation on the meaning of the word *kong* 孔 (“opening,” “hole,” “great”) as a characterization of *de*, juxtaposing Heshang Gong’s and Wang Bi’s readings. The translator opts for Heshang Gong’s reading of *kong* 孔 as “great” and translates *kong de* 孔德 as “Great Virtue” (*Megali Areti* Μεγάλη Αρετή), instead of Wang Bi’s reading of the character *kong* 孔 as its homophone *kong* 空 (“void,” “empty”). Among the four translators, Polymeros is the only one who translates the character *rong* 容 (“capacity,” “volume,” “to contain,” “appearance,” “manner”). He chooses the word “content,” or, more literally, “what is contained” (*periechomeno* περιεχόμενο), rather than “what contains.” The word *periechomeno* in modern Greek implies a juxtaposition and superiority to a perceived appearance that can be less real, less true, and less valuable. This lexical choice creates associations with the familiar distinction and hierarchy between appearance and reality (e.g., in Parmenides and Plato). *De* is thus understood as possessing a content that is hierarchically higher than an implied appearance or semblance of *de*, since it is the content of the Great Virtue that follows or models *dao*.

The three instances of *de* in the first verse of Chapter 38 are translated in similar manners. In two cases (Table 4, T1 and T2), the translators understand the first instance of *de* to be referring to a “highest” (*anotati* ανώτατη), “higher” (*anoteri* ανώτερη), or “natural” (*fysiki* φυσική) virtue, implicitly juxtaposed to a lower, unnatural, or ingenuine kind. Understanding the relation between the first instance of *de* (*shang de*) and the second as one of opposition and subordination evades the paradox and brings the reading of *de* closer to more familiar categories, such as truthfulness, genuineness, integrity of character, and the acquisition of positive character traits or moral excellence. Moreover, in all the translations examined here, the relation between *dao* and *de* is viewed in terms of a Western metaphysics of universals and particulars, according to which concrete manifestations of specific *de* derive from or model a superordinate principle, essence, or universal—*dao*.

## 5. Conclusions

Comparative studies that explore resonances between Daoist and Greek philosophies abound in the literature. This paper offered a view of an alternative and unexplored field of similar comparatist work: modern Greek translations of the most fundamental among Daoist texts, the *Daodejing*. I have focused on three modern Greek renderings of the *Daodejing* and have discussed the translators’ methodologies, expressed aims, general understanding of the text’s focus, and current relevance, as well as views on authorship and translation. The analysis has revealed a set of translatable trends: reliance on familiar notions, frameworks, and cultural experiences; mystification; attention to poeticity; and emphasis on a perceived remedial function of the text for a modern (Greek) readership. I have looked at how these translatable trends are evinced in the explications and translations of the two key Daoist notions *dao* 道 and *de* 德 in four passages. The analysis has shown that in the translations examined here, there is expressed awareness of the idiosyncrasies of the Chinese language and, in most cases, a recognition of the ambiguity and open-endedness of the particular text. The translations evince attempts to preserve these qualities through attentiveness to poeticity and emphasis on what is perceived as the mystical and esoteric nature of the text. At the same time, the translators rely more or less heavily on an assumed commensurability between key Daoist notions and Greek lexical equivalents for which they provide little to no justification. Specific translation choices, accompanying

comments and glosses, and other supplementary materials create associations and evoke connections with ideas and cultural experiences familiar to Greek readers. Overall, the dominant translative trend in these renderings is assumed similarity between the teachings in the *Daodejing* with Greek philosophical proposals in general, primarily with Heraclitean philosophy and with teachings in the Bible (particularly the New Testament), as well as with other non-Chinese religious and literary sources and traditions. Considering the perceived remedial function of the text, it is plausible to assume that, even at the expense of clarity, the translations examined here are primarily meant to be inspiring rather than informative.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> This first translation of the *Daodejing* in a European language was completed by the Jesuits and came to London in 1788 as a present to the Royal Society. For more on the historical background of the Western reception of Daoism, see Karl-Heinz Pohl (2003).
- <sup>2</sup> For Chinese and Greek text, the phonetic transcription is followed by the original script. The transliteration of Greek characters into Latin characters follows ELOT [Ellinikos Organismos Typopoiisis Ελληνικός Οργανισμός Τυποποίησης, The Hellenic Organization for Standardization] 743 (2001), the transliteration system that complies with the International Standard ISO 843 and has been adopted by the Greek government. Monotonic orthography (the standard system of modern Greek) is used throughout.
- <sup>3</sup> A very recent example, indicative of the persistent appeal of such comparisons in Chinese academia, is Zheng Kai's 郑开 "Dao yu logos: zhexue de shijie lishi shiye zhong de discourse yu reality" 道与 logos: 哲学的世界历史视野中的 discourse 与 reality (Dao and Logos: Discourse and Reality from the Perspective of World History of Philosophy), a paper presented at the "Chinese Philosophy from the Perspective of World Philosophy" 22nd International Conference of the ISCP (International Society for Chinese Philosophy) hosted online and on site from 27 June to 1 July 2022 by East China Normal University (Shanghai). Another is Yu's (2015).
- <sup>4</sup> I use "Greek" and "modern Greek" interchangeably in this paper. I use "classical Greek" when referring to ancient Greek.
- <sup>5</sup> By Mania Seferiadi, in 1971. See below.
- <sup>6</sup> Comparatively, there are very few translations of the *Analects* (or *Lunyu* 論語) in modern Greek, the standard (and only one from classical Chinese) among them being that by Sotiris Chalikias (b. 1947), by far the most prominent and prolific translator of philosophical and literary Chinese works from classical Chinese into modern Greek. Chalikias was the first to translate the *Four Books* (*Si Shu* 四書) of classical Confucian learning, as well as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and the *Liezi* 列子, into modern Greek. He is also currently working on a Greek translation of the *Daodejing* (personal communication, 28 May 2022).
- <sup>7</sup> Mania A. Seferiadi (d. 2018) is the niece of Giorgos Seferis (the pen name of Giorgos Seferiadis, d. 1971), one of the greatest modern Greek poets and the first Greek to receive the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1963. Seferis guided Seferiadi through the process of the translation on matters of poetic expression in Greek. The *Daodejing* was a text that Seferis himself had been preoccupied with at an earlier period of his life; Seferiadi (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 12).
- <sup>8</sup> Seferiadi, Mania, A. (first ed. 1971; second ed. 1983; third ed., 1995) (Seferiadi [1971] 1995). For this article, I have used the revised and most recent 1995 edition.
- <sup>9</sup> Seferiadi lists the sinological works, translations of Chinese classics (the *Yijing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Analects*), and the three English and two French translations she compared and combined to come up with her own: J. Legge's (1891), A. Waley's (1937), D. C. Lau's (1963), J. J. L. Duyvendak's (1953), and Liou Kia-Hway's [Liu Jiahui 刘家槐 b. 1908] (1967).
- <sup>10</sup> Seferiadi (Seferiadi [1971] 1995, p. 9). Translations from modern and classical Greek belong to the author.
- <sup>11</sup> From Chapter 42: "The Dao generates Oneness. Oneness generates Twoness. Twoness generates Threeness. Threeness generates the ten thousand things"; trans. by Moeller (2007).
- <sup>12</sup> Seferiadi quotes part of Fragment 67 from the Diels edition: "God is day night, winter summer, war peace, satiety hunger (all the opposite things); my translation. Diels (1903), p. 76.
- <sup>13</sup> Seferiadi's first translation of the *Daodejing* in modern Greek was published during the period of the Greek junta (1967–1974). It is plausible to assume that censorship would not have allowed a political reading or a discussion on the political relevance of the *Daodejing* for a Greek readership. It may also be possible to conjecture that, read as a spiritual and religious scripture of self-cultivation, the *Daodejing* may have offered Seferiadi, and Seferis, a vocal opponent of the dictatorial regime, some route of escape from what many intellectuals of the time saw as political and cultural decadence, but also perhaps a cryptic language for indirect criticism of the political and social pathologies of that period.



- Ibid., p. 20; see also footnotes throughout the translation.
- At that time, Alexakis relied on the English translations by D. C. Lau (d. 2010), Feng Jiafu 馮家福 (d. 1985), and Jane English (b. 1942), as well as on previous Greek translations (by Andreas Tsakalis, Mania Seferiadi, and Petros Kouropoulos). Revising his older translation, he also turned to the English translations by Ch'u Ta-Kao (Chu Ta-Kao 初大告; d. 1987), who published five editions of his English translation of the Laozi between 1937 and 1972, and Raymond B. Blakney (d. 1970).
- Dimitrios K. Velissaropoulos served as ambassador of Greece to China from 1976 to 1979 and has authored a two-volume history of Chinese philosophy in Greek, among other works.
- "Translator, traitor".
- The reader is referred to Polymeros's previous work (Polymeros 2020).
- The translator explains that the interpreter is "an anonymous commentator of the late pre-Christian era, known as 'the old man on the river bank,' or, in short, *Parochthios Geron Παρόχθιος Γέρων* [Old Man on the River Bank] (河上公 *hé shàng gōng*)"; Ibid., p. 7.
- See Pu (1995), quoted in Moeller (2007). Moeller has in fact proposed that the *Daodejing* "secularized" the ritualistic and cosmological imagery of the culture and state of Chu 楚, transforming it into a philosophical imagery.
- For *Daodejing* passages, I have used the version on the Ctext.org database.
- In Seferiadi's translation many key notions are capitalized, including the title of the text (TAO TE KINFK Dao De King), Daoism (TAOÏΣΜΟΣ Taoismos), yin-yang (ΓΙΑΝΓΚ-ΓΙΝ Yang-Yin) and others. Seferiadi notes that the word TAO is stressed on the last syllable, which makes evident that she relied on French translations. (In French, the stress falls on the final syllable of a word.)
- Koini (κοινή, lit. "common"), Hellenistic or Biblical Greek is the language that developed and flourished during the Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine periods. It was based on the Attic and Ionian dialects of classical Greek and its descendant is modern Greek.
- John 14:6. Jesus's followers called themselves or were called Hodositae (Roadies; Those Of The Way (See Acts 9:2, 19:9, 19:23, 22:4, 24:14, 24:22 and Isaiah 35:8). Source: Abarim Publications online Dictionary, accessed at <https://www.abarim-publications.com/DictionaryG/o/o-d-o-sfin.html> (accessed on 20 November 2022).
- In some English translations of the *Daodejing* attempts have been made to avoid the trap of monistic or essentialist readings of *dao*. For instance, Chad Hansen opts for the plural ("ways"), Ames and Hall for a gerund ("way-making"), and Hans-Georg Moeller uses the indefinite article ("a Dao"), interchanging it with the definite article ("the Dao"), thus capturing the dual structure of *dao* as one and many.
- See for instance Burik (2018), where the author examines the resonances between Heidegger's reading of Heraclitean *logos* with *dao*; Jia Y. and Jia X. look at the different linguistic worldviews of *dao* and *logos* in Jia and Jia (2008); Ming Donggu argues for "the perfect compatibility between the Dao and Logos" in Ming (2002); Zhang Longxi explores the common ground between Eastern and Western thought through a comparative study of the central concepts of *dao* and *logos* in Zhang (1992); and Elena Butti offers a balanced account of similarities and differences between *logos* and *dao* in Butti (2016).
- In his *Guan Zhui Bian* 管錐編 (Pipe-Awl Chapters). Quoted in Zhang (1985, pp. 393, 397).
- "In the beginning was the Word [ . . . ] through Him all things were made and without Him nothing was made that has been made" (John 1: 1–3).
- No reference to the specific verse is included.
- Alexakis (1996), p. 25; no page number is included in the citation. The Greek edition of Leary's book is listed in the bibliography: Leary (n.d.).
- A fascinating discussion taking the opposite perspective is Ziporyn (2021).
- Alexakis (1996), p. 16. Capitalization in the original.
- Based on the Mawangdui manuscripts (discovered in 1973), some scholars have argued for placing the *Dejing* before the *Daojing*. See Henricks (1989).
- Seferiadi does not cite sources. "Tek" is a phonetic reconstruction of the pronunciation of *de* in the pre-Han era, accepted by many scholars. "Dchiek" (NTXIEK) is probably "dræk," the phonetic reconstruction of *zhi* 直 ("upright"), part of the character *de* 德 and the phonetic component of *zhi* 植 ("to plant," "to grow").

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