



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***THICK TRANSLATIONS AND THICK CONTEXTUALISATION IN TWO  
ENGLISH VERSIONS OF LAOZI BY LIN YUTANG AND AMES AND HALL***

**HUANG WEIXING**

**FBMK 2021 30**



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ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *LAOZI* BY LIN YUTANG AND AMES AND HALL**

By

**HUANG WEIXING**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra  
Malaysia, in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of  
Doctor of Philosophy**

**October 2020**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

**THICK TRANSLATIONS AND THICK CONTEXTUALISATION IN TWO ENGLISH VERSIONS OF *LAOZI* BY LIN YUTANG AND AMES AND HALL**

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**HUANG WEIXING**

October 2020

**Chairman : Associate Professor Ang Lay Hoon, PhD**  
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*Laozi* is recognized as a fundamental and the earliest scripture of Daoism philosophy. It has profound philosophical thoughts and was written in a pithy style. There is a distinct cultural difference between China and the English speaking countries and a distinct linguistic difference between the Chinese and English languages. These factors present a formidable challenge to translators and make comprehending Laozi's thoughts a difficult task. It is essential to present the cultural, social, and historical contexts of *Laozi* for a better and deeper understanding of its translations. Thick translation, which aims to produce thick contextualized texts, is crucial to comprehending *Laozi* translations.

Although researchers have studied *Laozi* translations extensively, many overlooked the importance of context. This study presents a comparison of two English versions of *Laozi* from the perspective of thick translation theory in an attempt to reveal how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualization. One version was translated by Nobel Prize Nominee in Literature Lin Yutang and the other version was translated by famous philosophers Roger T. Ames and David L. Hall. Lin translated *Laozi* from his native language to a foreign language while Ames and Hall translated *Laozi* from a foreign language to their native language. This comparison identifies similarities and differences of three types of thick translations, namely, text-close, text-remote, and text-self. This study investigates all thick translations appearing in the two selected versions and illustrates their characteristics with typical examples of each type of thick translation.

The findings of this study show that translators can provide abundant contextual information by text-close and text-remote thick translations but limited text-self thick translations in order to optimize the transfer of Laozi's profound philosophical thoughts and at the same time reflect the pithy style of the source text. Moreover, due to the translators' different backgrounds and objectives, attention was paid to different aspects. In conclusion, translators can employ different means of thick translations to construct thick contexts and thereby enhance target readers' understanding. This study contributes to filling the gap in the translation studies of *Laozi* and Chinese philosophical classics as well. Furthermore, this study demonstrates the significance of employing thick translations classification into text-close, text-remote, and text-self that would upgrade future studies on thick translation.

Keywords: *Laozi*, Chinese philosophical classics, thick contextualization, thick translation, text-close, text-remote, text-self

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia  
sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**TERJEMAHAN SECARA MENDALAM DAN ANALISIS MENGIKUT  
KONTEKS SECARA MENYELURUH DALAM DUA VERSI *LAOZI* OLEH LIN  
YUTANG DAN AMES DAN HALL**

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*Laozi* dikenali sebagai suatu asas dan kitab suci terawal falsafah Daoisme. Ianya ditulis dengan gaya ringkas dan mempunyai pemikiran falsafah yang mendalam. Terdapat perbezaan budaya ketara antara negara China dan negara-negara berbahasa Inggeris dan perbezaan ketara linguistik antara Bahasa Cina dan Bahasa Inggeris. Faktor-faktor ini memberi cabaran hebat kepada penterjemah dan menjadikan pemahaman terhadap pemikiran *Laozi* suatu tugas yang sukar. Ianya penting untuk mengetengahkan konteks budaya, sosial dan sejarah *Laozi* supaya terjemahannya dapat difahami dengan lebih baik dan mendalam. Terjemahan secara mendalam, yang bertujuan menghasilkan teks analisis mengikut konteks yang menyeluruh, penting dalam memahami terjemahan *Laozi*.

Meskipun para penyelidik telah mengkaji terjemahan *Laozi* secara meluas, ramai yang terlepas pandang akan kepentingan konteks. Kajian ini menunjukkan satu perbandingan dua versi Bahasa Inggeris *Laozi* dari perspektif teori terjemahan secara mendalam dalam usaha merungkaikan bagaimana terjemahan tersebut menyumbang kepada pencapaian analisis mengikut konteks yang menyeluruh. Satu versi diterjemahkan oleh calon Hadiah Nobel dalam Sastera Lin Yutang dan versi lain diterjemahkan oleh ahli-ahli falsafah terkenal Roger T. Ames dan David L. Hall. Lin menterjemahkan *Laozi* daripada bahasa ibundanya kepada bahasa asing manakala Ames dan Hall menterjemahkan *Laozi* daripada bahasa asing kepada bahasa ibundanya. Perbandingan ini mengenalpasti persamaan dan perbezaan tiga jenis terjemahan secara mendalam, iaitu teks-dekat, teks-jauh dan teks-sendiri. Kajian ini menyelidik semua terjemahan secara mendalam yang muncul dalam dua versi terpilih dan menggambarkan ciri-ciri beserta contoh umum bagi setiap jenis terjemahan secara mendalam.

Dapatan kajian menunjukkan penterjemah boleh mengemukakan banyak maklumat kontekstual daripada terjemahan secara mendalam teks-dekat dan teks-jauh tetapi terhad bagi teks-sendiri dalam mengoptimumkan perpindahan falsafah mendalam pemikiran *Laozi* dan pada masa yang sama mempamerkan gaya ringkas teks sumber. Selain itu, disebabkan oleh perbezaan objektif dan latar belakang penterjemah, perhatian diberikan kepada aspek berbeza. Kesimpulannya, penterjemah boleh mengaplikasikan pelbagai pendekatan terjemahan secara mendalam bagi membina konteks menyeluruh dan seterusnya meningkatkan pemahaman pembaca sasaran. Kajian ini menyumbang kepada pengisian jurang dalam kajian terjemahan *Laozi* dan juga falsafah klasik Cina. Tambahan pula, kajian ini menunjukkan kepentingan mengaplikasi pengkelasan terjemahan secara mendalam kepada teks-dekat, teks-jauh dan teks-sendiri yang akan menaik taraf kajian mengenai terjemahan secara mendalam pada masa hadapan.

Kata kunci: *Laozi*, falsafah klasik Cina, kontekstualisasi mendalam, terjemahan mendalam, teks tertutup, teks kawalan, teks sendiri

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Undertaking this PhD has been a truly life-changing experience for me and it would not have been possible to do without the support and guidance that I received from many people.

First, I would like to thank my committee members who were more than generous with their expertise and precious time. Without their guidance and constant feedback, this PhD would not have been achievable. A special thanks to Associate Professor Dr. Ang Lay Hoon, my committee chairlady, for her countless hours of reflecting, reading, encouraging, and most of all patience throughout the entire process. Many thanks also to Associate Professor Dr. Hardev Kaur and Senior Lecturer Dr. Ser Wue Hiong for their invaluable advice and always being supportive of my work.

I would like to acknowledge and thank Faculty of Modern Languages and Communication for allowing me to conduct my research and providing any assistance requested. I am especially grateful to Associate Professor Dr. Siti Zobidah for her precious support I received throughout the process.

Last but not least, I would also like to say sincere thanks to my family, my schoolmates, my friends, for always believing in me and encouraging me to follow my dreams and for helping me in whatever way they could during this challenging period.

This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Lin	Lin Yuntang
WB	Wang Bi
MWD	Mawangdui
GD	Guodian



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

This chapter details the cornerstones of this study. It provides relevant background information, statement of the research problem, rationale for selecting the two English versions of *Laozi*, research objectives, research questions, and the theoretical framework. Furthermore, it introduces the significance and scope of the study. In addition, it includes operational definitions of key terms in this study and presents the layout of the thesis.

In this thesis, a system for writing translated Chinese terms is used; the Han Yu Pin Yin form and Chinese characters between parentheses follow the English translation of a Chinese term. This system is applicable to the translation of names of historical periods and persons, places, philosophical concepts, and ancient book titles. An example of the translation of a historical period is Spring and Autumn Period (chūn qiū shí qī 春秋时期) and an example of the transliteration of a historical person is Ssu-ma Ch'ien (sī mǎ qiān 司马迁). An example of the translation of a place is Hangu Pass (hán gǔ guān 函谷关) and an example of the translation of a philosophical concept is ziran (zì rán 自然). An example of a translated ancient book title is *The Analects of Confucius* (lún yǔ 论语). For ancient historical persons and book titles that appear many times in this thesis, this system is applied only once when the term appears for the first time. In addition, when a Chinese source text is presented, the Han Yu Pin Yin form and Chinese characters are provided, e.g. jí shì shàng zuǒ, xiōng shì shàng yòu 吉事尚左, 凶事尚右.

### 1.1 Background to the Study

This section presents background information to the study. First, it provides a brief discussion on the translation of philosophical texts and related studies. Second, it includes a brief introduction to *Laozi* and an overview of its English translations. In addition, this section introduces the research focus of this study, i.e. thick translation of *Laozi* into English.

#### 1.1.1 Translation of philosophical texts

Philosophy refers to "the rational, abstract, and methodical consideration of reality as a whole or of fundamental dimensions of human existence and experience" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020). Philosophy can also be considered as the study of the wisdom or knowledge about the general facts and situations related to human values and existence and general reality.

Philosophy can be divided into two basic categories according to geographical location: Eastern Philosophy and Western Philosophy. Apart from geographical locations, Eastern and Western societies have differences in their way of living and the approach to life in general. These differences have not only resulted from geographical location and physical circumstances, but also the schools of thought that govern the major societies in the Eastern and Western parts of the globe. Western philosophy is referred to as the school of thought from Greek philosophy, while the Eastern philosophy is based mainly in Asia. In addition, Western philosophy takes its roots from ancient Greece, Rome, and Christianity while Eastern philosophy, on the other hand, is from Confucianism, Mahayana Buddhism, and Daoism. A major difference between the schools of thought or the philosophies of the East and West is the West's Individualism and the East's Collectivism. Eastern Philosophy advocates "unity" and "harmony". Among the most famous Eastern philosophers were Laozi, Confucius, Mulla Sadra, and Siddhartha Gautama. Among the prominent Western ancient Greek philosophers were Socrates, Plato, Aristotle, and Thales. Philosophical texts contain philosophers' thoughts about fundamental issues on human society and universe.

However, many of these philosophical texts were written in the language spoken by the philosophers. Thus, there was a need to translate these philosophical texts into a language, which can be understood by people from a different culture. In this regard, translation was a means to spread philosophers' ideas to other cultures. As Appiah asserted, "translation is an attempt to find ways of saying in one language something that means the same as what has been said in another" (1993, p. 808). Heisig claimed, "the translation of a philosophical text is faithful to philosophy itself" (2003, p. 56). Thus, the priority in translating a philosophical text is correctly transferring the meaning of the original text into a target language in order to introduce the philosopher's thoughts in the target culture. In this translation process, the translators' deep understanding of the original text is essential. Philosophical texts involve abstract and intellectual concepts that challenge the translators. Therefore, the translator should have a thorough understanding of the philosophy that he is going to translate in addition to a good knowledge of its history. Moreover, "Philosophical texts are often ambiguous" (Ingarden, 1991, p. 169). The ambiguity can be rooted in a word, in a sentence, or in the flow of the argument. The translator should not only have insight into the philosophical thoughts and perceive the ambiguities, but also be able to express them explicitly in the translation. Consequently, the correct transfer of philosophical thoughts is one of the main difficulties in translating philosophical texts.

In translation studies, "Translation theorists have so far devoted scant attention to the translation of philosophical texts" (Parks, 2004). The western world has experienced few developments of philosophical translation in the Renaissance, but the translation theorists started gradually to pay attention to this field in recent years. In the east, the translation of philosophical texts into western languages started in the middle of the 19th century by missionaries and has

developed rapidly with the increase of international communications and cultural exchanges. However, studies on the translation of philosophical works did not attract much attention of scholars compared with other types of texts, such as literary, religious, and technical texts.

Early exploration of the translation of philosophical texts started at the end of 1990s. Gill (1998) examined English translation of *Plato: Complete Works*, a single volume, published by Hackett Publishing Company in 1997. Then, Gill compared this version with *Plato: The Collected Dialogues, Including the Letters* of Bolling Series 71 published by Princeton University Press in 1961 and gave positive comments on Hackett version. He pointed out, "this collection seems to me to meet the very high standards that we would expect from the editors and translators (many of whom are experts in ancient philosophy), and indeed from the publisher" (1998, p. 206). In this article, Gill argued that Hackett version meets the two requirements for this type of translation: accuracy and fluency. In addition, he brought up the problems encountered in translating Plato such as literal translation, idiomatic translation, and paraphrasing. Parks (2004) translated two books on philosophy and experienced two similar problems: "the use of technical terms, often of the philosopher's own invention, which may be almost untranslatable, and the difficulties inherent in the use of a literary, metaphorical language, with all the consequent ambiguity and stylistic questions involved". Both Gill and Parks recognized difficulties in the translation of philosophical texts, which lies mainly in translating phrases that carry rich philosophical meanings and the use of metaphorical language ambiguously in addition to translating technical philosophical terms. The translation of such a term requires a thorough understanding of the philosophical meaning then uses a proper term with proper style in the target language to express the original meaning. In general, translation theorists during this period became more concerned with the translation of philosophical texts, and scholars took broader view in their research of this topic.

Ames (2006) in *The Road of My Philosophical Studies* expressed his view on philosophical translation and exposed the stubborn prejudice of racially centered traditions in the western philosophy arena. In addition, he introduced a set of "strategic frames" he developed for readers' reexamination of the real meaning of key Chinese philosophical terms and their proper application. Ames (2007) further explored the prejudice in western philosophy circle towards the Chinese philosophy. He pointed out, to have a constructive understanding of Chinese philosophical thoughts: western scholars should remove the prejudice and translate the true meanings of Chinese philosophy. Yang (2011) also gave a similar view on the translation of Chinese philosophical classics. He maintained, the cross-cultural translation of Chinese philosophical classics should shed light on the legitimacy and uniqueness of Chinese philosophy, give full play to the dominant role of the translators, display the distinctive Chinese characteristics by the use of foreignization strategy, and construct a model for philosophical translation. Yang (2012)

continued his research on the translation of Chinese philosophy. He argued, translators should interpret Chinese philosophy in its own context and avoid Christian proselytizing, western philosophical adaptation, and cultural appropriation in favor of cultural restoration approaches such as transliteration, innovative rendition, and comprehensive translation. Both Ames and Yang realized that the goal of philosophical translation is to transfer concepts to target culture. Without full regard of the source culture and removing the prejudice, the goal of philosophical translation will never be met.

Swanson and Heisig (2005) shared their thoughts on the promise and perils of translating philosophical texts from Far East languages into English. They discussed the relations between the original text and its translation, limitations on the possibility of an accurate translation, the influence of intended audience, and readability of translations of technical terms and expressions. Their professional views on translating philosophical texts make valuable contribution to philosophical translation studies.

Foran (2012) published her collection of essays on philosophical translation, in which she responded to intriguing and provocative questions such as how philosophical texts should be translated and how does translation impact philosophy? The essays focused on the translation of Jacques Derrida's works. Foran explored a wide range of issues from the complexities of translating ambiguous philosophical terms to the role of language in the concepts of identity and society. This collection of essays is a good contribution to a better understanding of the relationship between translation and philosophy.

Bai (2014) made a study into the ontological nature of context in English translations of Chinese philosophical classics. She emphasized the importance of context in translating classical Chinese philosophical works. She pointed out, understanding the original text is the most important step in the English translation of Chinese philosophical classics; however, she overlooked the acceptance of target readers. Only by understanding Chinese philosophical classics objectively, presenting the surrounding contexts of the original text, and considering the acceptability of English readers, proper English versions of Chinese philosophical texts can be produced. A good translation requires the translator to make a balance between adequacy and acceptability.

After tracing a history of key philosophical translations from ancient times to the 21st century, Large summarized five different purposes for philosophy translation: "cultural exchange (including ideological manipulations), textual interpretation (including creative misreadings and misinterpretations), linguistic enrichment, founding or furthering an indigenous philosophical tradition, and the philosophical development of the individual translator" (2018, p. 307). He addressed the difficulties posed to the translator of philosophical texts. Large's

work not only helps to sort out philosophical translation activities, but also presents the challenging realities to future philosophy translators.

Yin (2021) investigated Fung Yu-Lan's English rendition of the Chinese philosophical classic *Zhuangzi*. The translator was a distinguished philosopher with good academic background in both western and Chinese philosophies. Yin subjected both the text and the paratexts of Fung's version to a mutually illuminating analysis. The study found that Fung Yu-Lan's translation of *Zhuangzi* is not only in line with his unique philosophical vision, but also promotes the Chinese hermeneutic method of analogical interpretation. She concluded that this rendition is an application-oriented product and influenced by the translator's philosophical academic background.

Tian and Zhu (2021) studied English Translations of Zhu Xi's Concept of *Taiji* in the 19th Century. Zhu Xi, a representative of Neo-Confucianism, was an influential Chinese philosopher in the Song Dynasty (sòng cháo 宋朝) (960 AD—1279A). The notion of *taiji* is the highest category of Zhu Xi's metaphysics. Tian and Zhu critically examined the renditions of *Taiji* in their historical contexts by leading missionary-translators such as Medhurst, Bridgman, McClatchie, and Chalmers; they disclosed the historical and cultural values underlying the missionary-translators' interpretations of this Neo-Confucian category.

In brief, although the study of philosophical translation started relatively late in the 1990s, it has been increasingly catching the attention of scholars ever since. Realizing the significance of translation in introducing diverse philosophical works from other cultures, more scholars put emphasis on the studies of philosophical translations.

### **1.1.2 A brief introduction to *Laozi* and its translation**

*Laozi* (lǎo zǐ 老子) is a fundamental and the earliest scripture of Daoism philosophy which stands alongside Confucianism and Buddhism as one of the three most important philosophies that constitute the Chinese thought. The main concepts of Daoism include the interaction between humans and nature, the doctrine of reversion of everything back to the Dao (dào 道)—also called Tao from within it emerged, the rhythm of constant flux and change from which rise and decay alternate, the concept of oneness and spirituality, and the transformation in the universe. Daoism is a way of living and its concepts intend to restore harmony and tranquility within nature and the cosmos. It offers a wealth of valuable philosophical insight concerning the cultivation of mind. In Chinese history, the impact of Daoism is pervasive, not only in philosophy but also in art, literature, science, folklore, politics, religion, and medicine.

*Laozi* was written by Laozi of the sixth century BC, by whose name this book had been entitled. In later Han Dynasty (hàn cháo 汉朝) (206 BC-220 AD), scholars gave the book another title: *Dao De Jing* (dào dé jīng 道德经). Therefore, this book has been called through history by both names *Laozi* and *Dao De Jing*.

It should be stated that there are several English translations of the title of this book. At the early stage, the translation was influenced by Romanization. Based on the prevalent Wade–Giles system in the 18th and 19th centuries, the title was romanized as *Lao-tse*. During the 20th century, *Lao-tzu* was more common. Other forms include the variants *Lao-tze* and *Lao-tsu*. Currently the most common form is *Laozi* based on the Han Yu Pin Yin system, which was adopted by the People's Republic of China in 1958 and by the International Organization for Standardization (ISO) in 1982. The other names for the translations of this book are *Dao De Jing* (Han Yu Pin Yin), or *Tao Te Ching* (Wade–Giles). This thesis uses the Han Yu Pin Yin system, which helps readers pronounce Chinese characters.

Laozi, the founder of Daoism, was a senior contemporary of Confucius (kǒng zǐ 孔子) (551 BC–479 BC). He was first mentioned in Chapter 3 of *Inner Chapters* (nèi piān 内篇) of *Zhuangzi* (zhuāng zǐ 庄子) (Yang, 2007, p. 37). Laozi's first known biography was written by Ssu-ma Ch'ien (sī mǎ qiān 司马迁) (145 BC-89 BC) in *The Grand Scribe's Records* (shǐ jì 史记). Ssu-ma Ch'ien (sī mǎ qiān 司马迁) wrote,

Lao Tzu 老子 was a native of the hamlet of Ch'ii-jen 曲仁 in the village of Li 厉乡 in Hu County 苦县 of [the state of] Ch'u. His praenomen was Erh 耳, his agnomen Tan 聃, and his cognomen Li 李. He was a scribe in the Chou office of archives (Ssu-ma et al., 1994, p. 21).

According to this biography, Laozi cultivated the Dao (dào 道) and its Virtue (dé 德). He never sought fame and was modest to the point of self-effacement. Laozi decided to leave the capital Luoyi (luò yì 洛邑) because of the decline of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty (dōng zhōu 东周) (770 BC-256 BC). When he reached the northwest border, Hangu Pass (hán gǔ guān 函谷关), he met Kuan Yin (guān yǐn 关尹) the official in charge of the border who asked him to put his teachings into writing. That is how Laozi wrote a book, consisting of over 5000 Chinese characters, which discusses the meaning of Dao (dào 道) and its Virtue (dé 德). Thereafter, Laozi left for the west and no one knows how he ended (Ssu-ma et al., 1994, p. 22).

*Laozi* was written in Classical Chinese, which is the formal writing language during the classical period of Chinese literature from the end of the Spring and Autumn Period (chūn qiū shí qī 春秋时期) (the early 5th century BC) to the end of Han Dynasty (hàn cháo 汉朝) (206 BC-220 AD). Classical Chinese and today's Chinese languages are different; therefore, *Laozi* is almost incomprehensible even to native speakers of today's Chinese. Moreover, *Laozi* includes profound philosophical thoughts and was written in a pithy, poetic, and esoteric style, which makes its philosophical ideas difficult for readers to grasp. The original *Laozi* is lines of wisdom. It did not have a title and was not divided into chapters or parts. Therefore, from the time *Laozi* came into being, commentaries have continuously been emerging throughout Chinese history. Furthermore, many scholars attempted to elaborate Laozi's thoughts with the objective of better comprehension of the book. Chapter 21 (Han, 2007, pp. 89-92) and Chapter 22 (Han, 2007, pp. 118-119) of *Hanfeizi* (hán fēi zǐ 韩非子), titled *Explaining the Laozi* (jiě lǎo 解老) and *Illustrating the Laozi* (yù lǎo 喻老) respectively, are regarded the earliest commentaries to *Laozi*. Thereafter, many scholars at different times like He Shang Gong (hé shàng gōng 河上公) (203 BC-157 BC), Yan Zun (yán zūn 严遵) (80 BC- 0 AD), Ge Xuan (gě xuán 葛玄) (164 AD-244 AD), and Wang Bi (wáng bì 王弼) (226 AD-249 AD) attempted to achieve better comprehension of Laozi's thoughts and provided their own commentaries. In the past 2,500 years, over 700 commentaries of *Laozi* have been documented in China (Robinet, 1998).

Among *Laozi* commented versions, WB version is the most popular in Chinese academia throughout history. It is called WB received version or the received version. WB received version of *Laozi* consists of over 5000 Chinese characters in 81 Chapters that are divided into two parts. Part one comprises chapters 1–37 and was entitled *Daojing* (dào jīng 道经), which can be literally translated as Classic of Dao since chapter 1 begins with the word Dao (dào 道). This part deals with metaphysical issues. Part two consists of chapters 38–81 and was named *Dejing* (dé jīng 德经), which can be literally translated as Classic of Virtue since chapter 38 begins with the word De (dé 德). It addresses sociopolitical issues. In these 81 chapters Laozi teaches, "The Tao of the Taoist is the divine intelligence of the universe, the source of things, the life-giving principle...The one important message of Taoism is the oneness and spirituality of the material universe" (Lin, 2009, p. XXIII). *Laozi* covers diverse range of subjects: philosophy, history, politics, ethics, and cultivation of mind.

Furthermore, recent archeological discoveries of *Laozi* texts made significant contribution to enriching *Laozi*'s textual information. In 1973, archeologists excavated a tomb in Mawangdui (MWD) village (mǎ wáng duī xiāng 马王堆乡) near Changsha city (cháng shā shì 长沙市), Hunan Province (hú nán shěng 湖南省) dating from 168 BC. They discovered copies of early Chinese books, known as the *MWD Silk Texts* (mǎ wáng duī bó shū 马王堆帛书). Yates claimed, "Their retrieval was of immense, worldwide significance, comparable

to the discovery of the *Dead Sea Scrolls in the West*" (1997, p. 3). The discovered material included two near-complete copies of *Laozi* texts, referred to as Text A and Text B. These two texts reverse the traditional sequence of the book: putting the *De Jing* (dé jīng 德经) section before the *Dao Jing* (dào jīng 道经) section. This is the reason why Robert Henricks entitled his English translation of The MWD version *Lao Tzu: Te-Tao Ching—A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts* (1989). Based on the historical calligraphic styles and imperial naming taboo avoidances, scholars estimated Text A to be dated to the first decade of the 2nd century BC and Text B to the third decade of the 2nd century BC.

In addition, the oldest known version of *Laozi* was discovered in 1993 in a tomb near Guodian (GD) village (guō diàn cūn 郭店村) in Jingmen city (jīng mén shì 荆门市), Hubei Province (hú běi shěng 湖北省). It was written on bamboo slips and dated prior to 300 BC. The bamboo slips, discovered from the tomb, were named *GD Chu Bamboo Slips* (guō diàn chǔ mù zhú jiǎn 郭店楚墓竹简).

*GD Chu Bamboo Slips* (guō diàn chǔ mù zhú jiǎn 郭店楚墓竹简) includes over 13,000 characters in about 800 bamboo slips. It comprises a version of *Laozi* and 14 other previously unknown verses. "Preliminary examination indicates that the contents of the three versions (about two-fifths of the extant DDJ [*Dao De Jing*]) are again largely similar to the received text, though the documents reveal different chapter arrangements" (Yu, 2003). Unlike the extant versions of *Laozi*, the text found at GD contains 31 chapters, only 38% of 81 chapters in the received version and approximately 2,000 characters, 40% of 5,000 characters in the received version. Allan argued,

the GD tomb has a special significance because it contained manuscripts of philosophical works recorded in the local Chu script before imperial unification and the literary conflagrations 焚书坑儒 [fén shū kēng rú] of the Qin Dynasty [qín cháo] 秦朝 (221 BC-206 BC) (2003).

The MWD and GD versions of *Laozi* are consistent with the received text, except differences in the sequence of Chapters and graphic variants. Several translators of recent *Laozi* versions adopted these two versions as their originals. For example, Henricks (1989) and Henricks (2000) employed the MWD and GD versions respectively. These two archaeological discoveries added invaluable sources to the studies of *Laozi*.

With increased international exchanges and communications, the philosophical ideas of *Laozi* have spread widely in the world and become part of the shared spiritual wealth of humanity. Bebell and Fera (2000) pointed out, "The Tao and its subtle philosophy is currently being actively assimilated into mainstream western culture as evidenced by the popularity and volume of Taoist works". *Laozi* has inspired and stimulated the interest of many philosophers, scientists, political leaders, and entrepreneurs. Great philosophers around the world such as Bertrand Russell (1922) and Martin Heidegger (1971) widely extolled *Laozi* for its abundant ideas for nourishing the minds and spirits, which have increasingly drawn scholars' attention globally.

Fen Youlan, a distinguished Chinese philosopher of the 20th century claimed, "the ideas expressed in the greater part of the *Lao-tzu* represent an attempt to reveal the laws underlying the changes of things in the universe" (1948, p. 65). Liu summarized Laozi's philosophy into three central concepts, "ziran [zì rán 自然] (natural order in civilized societies), wuwei [wú wéi 无为] (imperceptible yet effectual action), and Dao [dào 道] (the source and ground of the universe)" (2015, p.73). Liu argued,

These three aspects of Laozi's thought should not be understood as separate or isolated. They are associated in a roughly coherent system in which they support and interpenetrate each other. Dao provides metaphysical support for the highest value ziran, and wuwei provides a principled method by which to realize that value. Ziran and wuwei also embody the features and character of Dao (2015, p.98).

Liu's summary of Laozi's philosophy seizes the gist of Laozi's thought; it gives a clear picture for this elusive philosophy. This study employs Liu's summary of *Laozi's* central philosophical concepts to guide the analysis of text-self thick translations in the two selected versions of *Laozi*.

"Laozi (Lao Tzu, c. sixth century B.C.E.) seems to be the Chinese philosopher best-known to the western world, through his short treatise the *Laozi* or *Daodejing*" (Shen, 2013, P. 355). For centuries, Laozi's thoughts have been attractive to Chinese and western readers who are searching for the meaning of life and thinking about the proper role of human beings in this world. LaFargue and Pas stated, "both sinologists and amateurs, fascinated by the intoxicating qualities of this little book, have tried to capture its flavor and have devised ever new bottles for it, ever new translations" (1998, p. 277). This statement reveals why *Laozi* appeals to many translators, which is demonstrated by the great number of *Laozi* translations into different languages.

*Laozi* was first translated into Japanese, in the Sui Dynasty (suí cháo 隋朝) (581 AD-618 AD), which contributed to shaping and developing the Japanese culture (Feng, 2007, p. X). *Laozi* was translated next into Sanskrit, in the Tang Dynasty (táng cháo 唐朝) (618 AD-907 AD), by the well-known Monk, Xuan Zang (xuán zàng 玄奘) (602 AD-664 AD), and the Daoist Cheng Xuanying (chéng xuán yīng 成玄英) (608 AD-669 AD) who introduced Laozi's philosophical thoughts to India (Cui, 2012, p. xi). In the early 17th century, the Belgian priest Francois Noël (1651-1729) translated *Laozi* into Latin and that was the first western version of *Laozi* (Kohn, 2019, p. 206). In 1842, Stanislas Julien, French sinologist, made the first printed translation of *Laozi* in the western world (Pohl, 2003). Influenced by the chinoiserie style from the 18th century, European scholars paid more attention to the Chinese philosophical works ever since and the translations of *Laozi* developed faster.

According to the *Index Translationum of UNESCO Statistics*, *Laozi* has been translated 467 times from Chinese to other languages and is the most translated Chinese text (2020). Laozi's philosophy has been introduced widely outside of China with the development of its translations. There is no doubt that more *Laozi* translations will be produced, because *Laozi* can provide beneficial solutions and prudent advice to today's challenges. In English, translators have continuously provided *Laozi* translations since 1868; there have been 380 English versions of *Laozi* published by the end of 2016 (Carmichael, 2017).

*Laozi* has profound philosophical thoughts and was written in a pithy style. It is essential to present its cultural, social, and historical context to target readers for a deep understanding of *Laozi* translations. This study presents a comparison of two English versions of *Laozi* from the perspective of thick translation theory in an attempt to reveal how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualisation, which is the research focus of this study.

## 1.2 Statement of the research problem

*Laozi* is iconic Chinese philosophical work. The influence of Laozi's thoughts on Chinese culture is pervasive. Laozi's thoughts have reached far beyond China's border, which is demonstrated by the great number of *Laozi* translations into different languages.

However, translating *Laozi* into English is a mounting challenge for three main reasons: philosophical, linguistic, and cultural. *Laozi* has profound philosophical thoughts and was written in a pithy style. These thoughts were often expressed by ambiguous words. Thus, the first difficulty translators encounter is understanding the philosophical thoughts of *Laozi*. The second difficulty is *Laozi* was written in Classical Chinese, which is substantially different from modern Chinese. In addition, Chinese and English belong to

different language families; they have distinct linguistic differences. Therefore, translators have to overcome the intra-lingual linguistic difficulty within Chinese and inter-lingual difficulty between Chinese and English. Moreover, China and the English speaking countries are geographically far from each other and they don't share a common language, which resulted in limited cultural communications throughout history. This explains the significant cultural differences between China and the English speaking countries, which is the third difficulty encountered in translating *Laozi*. Hence, translators have to bridge the gap between the two distinctive cultures for their target readers. These three factors present a formidable challenge to translators.

Naturally, a thin translation of *Laozi* is problematic for target readers to comprehend the concepts in *Laozi*. In this study, a thin translation refers to rendering of text from one language to another by closely following the form of the source language regardless of fully expressing the original meaning or not. A thin translation cannot transfer *Laozi*'s thoughts in its rich cultural, historical, linguistic, and philosophical contexts. It is ideal for a translator to follow the style of the original text and then add annotations, commentaries, background information, or other explanatory material in order to present the surrounding cultural, historical, linguistic, and social contexts of the original. This thick translation approach, which aims to produce thick contextualized texts, will enable target readers to acquire a deep understanding of *Laozi*'s thoughts and capture the flavor of the original. A thick translation of *Laozi* can help readers to improve significantly their understanding of this Chinese classical work.

In fact, translators adopted thick translation strategy in *Laozi* more than a hundred years ago, for example, "thick translation adopted by James Legge [1891]" (Chang, 2018). Translators added cultural, historical, and linguistic contexts to facilitate readers' understanding. However, the studies on thick translation of *Laozi* have not received sufficient attention. One of the few studies that examined the thick translations in *Laozi* is that by Liu (2014) which focuses on connotation transmission of cultural words. In this study, Liu discussed the merits and demerits of thick translations applied in *Laozi* and concluded that thick translation is a functionally efficient translation technique, provided the translator has good language ability and enough cultural knowledge. Other studies include one which revealed the reasons behind thick translations in *Laozi* (Zhang, 2015) and another which demonstrated the significance of thick translations in *Laozi* made by the translator and the press company (Lu, 2017). Although researchers have studied *Laozi* translations extensively, many tended to overlook the importance of context. With this gap in consideration, this study addresses thick contextualisation in *Laozi* English translations in order to reveal how thick translation constructs thick context. Thick translation theory is employed as the theoretical framework of this study.

### 1.3 Rationale for selecting the two English versions of *Laozi*

In this study, two eminent thick translations of *Laozi* were selected for comparison. The criterion for selecting versions mainly considers the academic value of the version, translator's personal identity, and translator's reputation in translating Chinese classical literature. One selected version is *The Wisdom of Laozi* (Lin, 2009) and the other selected version is *A Philosophical Translation of the Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant* (Ames & Hall, 2003).

Lin Yutang (1895-1976) was a famous scholar, translator, and writer. He was born in China and received Chinese and western education. He was the first Chinese author to reach the top of *New York Times* bestseller list. Lin was nominated for the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1940, 1950, and 1975.

Lin was not only a well-known writer, but also a great contributor to the development of translation theory and practice. He was a translation theorist, critic, and practitioner. Lin published his article *On Translation* which is the most systematic and known one among his articles on translation studies. In this article, Lin argued that translation should be regarded as an art and proposed three translation criteria: "faithfulness (zhōng shí 忠实)", "fluency (tōng shùn 通顺)" and "beautifulness (měi 美)" (1984, p. 418). In translation practice, Lin translated from Chinese into English and from English to Chinese but has been "well-known for his translations of classic Oriental literature" (Anderson, 1975, p. 4). He is remembered as one of the few individuals who bridged the intellectual environments between the east and west.

Lin's translation of *Laozi*, titled *The Wisdom of Laozi*, was first published by Random House in 1948. Lin's background knowledge and deep understanding of classical Chinese language, traditional Chinese culture, Daoism, and western audience assured the quality of his *Laozi* English version. Among hundreds of English versions of *Laozi*, *The Wisdom of Laozi* is popularized by its elegancy and expressiveness. The version is direct and poetic. Chan commented, "Dr. Lin makes the *Tao-te Ching* a living classic. His version not only makes provocative philosophy, but also fascinating literature" (1945, p. 210).

In 2009, the Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press in Beijing published a collection of books named *English Works of Lin Yutang*, which contained 16 outstanding works of Lin including his translations and writings; *The Wisdom of Laozi* is one of them. Lin's *Laozi* version has exceptional features compared with other English versions. Lin added translated selections from *Zhuangzi* to the translations of 71 chapters of *Laozi* to emphasize and expand upon the themes of *Laozi*. Furthermore, Lin attached the document

*Imaginary Conversations between Laotse and Confucius* written by Zhuangzi, also known as Chuangtse, a Laozi's disciple. These conversations show the basis of thinking and the character of Laozi's ideas through the eyes of Zhuangzi, which helps readers view Laozi's thoughts from another perspective. *The Wisdom of Laotse* is a thick translation.

The other selected version, titled *A Philosophical Translation of the Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, was translated by Ames and Hall (2003), two prominent philosophers particularly in classical Chinese philosophy. Roger Ames (1947-present) was a professor of philosophy and director of the Center for Chinese Studies in the University of Hawaii where he established his reputation as a distinguished philosopher and outstanding translator of Chinese philosophical works. Apart from studies on philosophy, Ames has made fruitful achievements on translating classical Chinese literature. His works in translation are highly appraised. His interpretations and translations "have made the profound ideas found in Chinese classics more and more accessible to Westerner readers" (Cheng, 2015). In addition, Ames was also the winner of *Huilin Prize for Chinese Culture* in 2016 for his outstanding contributions, which advanced the communication of Chinese culture internationally. His works have helped to remove the misunderstanding and misinterpreting of Chinese philosophical ideas existing for centuries in the west and opened a new space for communication in philosophy and culture between China and the outside world. Regarding the translation of philosophical works from Chinese to English, Ames expressed his strong concern in an interview (Tan & Huang, 2015), "There has been a tendency for Westerner scholars to transplant Chinese texts into a Western interpretive context, and to fail to read them on their own terms". Ames argued,

I try to interpret Chinese philosophy with reference to its own cosmology-to let the tradition speak for itself and I would thus claim to be more conservative. If we uproot Chinese philosophy and transplant it in the soil of another culture, that would be radical (Tan & Huang, 2015).

David Hall (1937-2001) was a professor of philosophy at the University of Texas at El Paso, USA. His main interest was Chinese philosophy, specifically Confucianism and Daoism. His early research led him to think about Daoism and classical Greek philosophy, which benefited his later cooperation in translating *Laozi* with Ames.

In 2003, Ballantine Books published *A Philosophical Translation of the Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*, a cooperative translation of *Laozi* by the two philosophers: Ames and Hall. *Laozi* is a philosophical text with profound thoughts; therefore, these two translators' professional training in philosophy gave them advantage in presenting Laozi's philosophical concepts. In order to

facilitate target readers' comprehension of the abstruse philosophy in *Laozi*, the two translators provided a thick translation. The extensive introduction at the beginning of the book offers a model of accessible scholarship in which these two translators addressed the origin of the text, placed Daoist philosophy in its historical and political context, and outlined Daoism central tenets. In this version, Ames and Hall featured the original text of *Laozi* and translated it into English with similar style: crisp and chiseled that reads like poetry. Each of the 81 chapters, in this version, is followed by its translation with a clear and thought-provoking commentary exploring the layers of meaning in the text. In addition, an Appendix section *The Great One Gives Birth to the Waters* was attached to this version. This ancient document is the latest archeological discovery related to *Laozi*. In this version, the two translators' insight into classical Chinese cosmology, ontology, and epistemology is exemplary. Chang (2017) commented that Ames and Hall's version rejects Platonism and lets the Chinese classic speak its own language. No previous translation has achieved Ames and Hall's philosophical depth in translating *Laozi*. Truly, Ames and Hall's *Laozi* version is a thick translation.

In brief, there are hundreds of English translations of *Laozi* by now among which Lin's version *The Wisdom of Laozi* and Ames and Hall's version *A Philosophical Translation of the Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant*. These two translations are well received by their target readers because of their unique features in locating the readers into thick context of the source text. The two versions were translated by distinguished scholars, each in his own circle. The three translators have rich experiences in translating Chinese classics with recognized achievements. In addition, both versions employed thick translation strategies providing detail background information of *Laozi*'s author, history, society, and culture of its time. Moreover, the translators employed extensive notes, commentaries, and supplementary materials in the two versions, which are helpful for readers to capture the philosophical ideas and enjoy the flavor of the original. These two versions, produced at different times, played important roles in enhancing cross-culture communication and stimulated the interest of western scholars in the research of classical Chinese philosophy and literature. For Lin, *Laozi* is translated from his native language to a foreign language and for Ames and Hall *Laozi* is translated from a foreign language to their native language. The two versions are of high academic value in the translation of Chinese philosophical literature. In addition, the translators of the two versions have different translation objectives in translating *Laozi* into English and they have different identities. Lin, a well-known writer and translator, his objective of *Laozi* translation was to introduce the Chinese culture and thoughts to average middle-class westerners (Qian, 2017), while Ames and Hall who are distinguished philosophers with rich experience in translating classical Chinese philosophical works into English aimed to produce a philosophical and academic English translation of *Laozi* (Chang & Ames, 2016). The comparison of the thick translations in these two versions can reveal how different translation objectives and translators' different identities influence thick contextualisation. Therefore, this study selected these two versions to make a systematic and comprehensive comparison with thick translation theory as its theoretical support.

## 1.4 Research objectives

This thesis presents a comparison of two English versions of *Laozi* from the perspective of thick translation theory. There are three primary research objectives for this study:

- i. to explore the two English versions of *Laozi* translated by Lin Yutang and by Roger Ames and David Hall from the perspective of thick translation theory;
- ii. to examine the similarities and differences of thick translations in the two selected versions of *Laozi*;
- iii. to examine how thick translation contributes to achieving thick contextualisation which facilitates readers' understanding of the two English versions of *Laozi*.

This study attempts to reveal how thick translation contributes to achieving thick contextualisation by analysing and comparing the similarities and differences of thick translations adopted in the two selected versions of *Laozi*. It is expected that this study will shed light on the importance of relying on thick translation as a strategy in future translations of *Laozi* and Chinese philosophical classics as well.

## 1.5 Research questions

Based on the research objectives set forth in section 1.4, this research will answer the following three questions:

- i. How did Lin Yutang and Roger Ames and David Hall apply thick translations in their *Laozi* versions?
- ii. What are the similarities and differences of the two selected versions from the perspective of thick translation theory?
- iii. How does thick translation contribute to achieving thick contextualisation which facilitates readers' understanding of the two English versions of *Laozi*?

## 1.6 Theoretical framework of the study

*Laozi* has profound philosophical concepts and was written in a pithy style. It is crucial to present its contextual information to target readers for a deep understanding of *Laozi*'s thoughts. Two thick translated English versions of *Laozi* were selected in this study as research subjects. Thick translation theory

stresses thick contextualisation; therefore, this theory is employed as the theoretical framework of this study.

### 1.6.1 The concept of thick translation theory

Thick translation as a phenomenon existed long time ago in translation practice (Hermans, 2003). For example in 1897, the distinguished scholar Yan Fu partially translated *Evolution and Ethics* by Thomas Henry Huxley into Chinese (2010). Although this printed translation contains about 84,000 Chinese characters, only 43,800 characters approximately were used for the translation of the original. The remaining part, nearly 40200 Chinese characters, is preface, annotations, footnotes, and other explanatory materials accounting for 48% of the whole translation. It is a typical thick translation in practice. However, as a theory Appiah put forward thick translation theory in 1993 about 100 years later than Yan Fu's thick translation practice.

Thick translation theory can be traced back to Clifford Geertz's thick description theory of Cultural Anthropology (1973). Geertz, a representative figure turning cultural anthropology from evolution to hermeneutics of anthropology, was considered "the single most influential American anthropologist in the past four decades" (Shweder & Good, 2005, p.1). Geertz suggested in his book *The Interpretation of Cultures* that cultural studies are a theory of behavioral interpretation. In fact, Geertz did not coin the term thick description; he borrowed it from the British philosopher Gilbert Ryle's story to describe the characterization of ethnographic work (1971).

Ryle's story is about two boys rapidly contracting the eyelids of their right eyes. In one, it is an involuntary twitch while the other contracting his eyelid on purpose. The two movements are, as movements, identical but the differences are vast: one is just a biological uncontrollable movement while the other is communicating a signal to a friend. A public cultural code existed in the society where doing so was counted as a conspiratorial signal. To record the eyelid movement of the second boy in thin description: he rapidly contracted his right eyelid, while in thick description: rapidly contracted his right eyelid to practice a burlesque to a friend faking a wink to deceive an innocent into thinking a conspiracy is in motion. Thick description not only provides details to the readers regarding an action with more words, but also reveals the motivation of the action. Geertz (1973) assumed that each detail of a person's thoughts and actions is embedded in hugely complex realms of cultural meaning: each detail is worth studying and each detail is important in order to understand the other details and the contextual whole. Geertz applied this concept to Anthropology Studies and claimed,

Man is an animal suspended in webs of significance he himself has spun. I take culture to be those webs, and the analysis of it to be therefore not an experimental science in search of law but an interpretive one in search of meaning (1973, p. 5).

With the enlightenment of thick description of cultural anthropology, Appiah (1993) introduced the concept of thick translation. Appiah, full name Kwame Anthony Akroma-Ampim Kusi Appiah, is a British-born Ghanaian-American philosopher and cultural theorist, novelist, and scholar of African and African-American studies. He is best known for his contributions to political philosophy, moral psychology, and the philosophy of culture. His scholarly interests range over African and African-American intellectual history and literary studies, ethics, and philosophy of mind and language. He also worked on theories of translation since he was associated with translation studies in Princeton University.

In his essay *Thick Translation*, Appiah discussed how to translate 7,000-odd proverbs of his hometown of Kumasi Ghana into English with rich glosses and annotations. From analytical philosophy point of view, he analysed the limitation of meaning transformation in a translation process. At the beginning of his essay, Appiah provided three examples of proverb in Akan, a dialect spoken in Ghana, which he called as Twi-Language. He also presented the literal translations of the proverbs into English as follows:

Asém a éhia Akanfoö no na Ntafoö de goro brékété.

[A matter which troubles the Akan people, the people of Gonja take to play the brékété drum.]

Kaka ne éka ne ayafunka fanyinam éka.

[Toothache and indebtedness and stomach ache, debt is preferable.]

Kamesékwakye se: sé önim sé abé rebébere a, anka wanköware adöbé nkonto.

[The drongo says: if he had known that the palm nuts were going to ripen, then he would not have married the raffia palm with a twisted leg.]"

(1993, p. 809)

### Notes

1. Brékété is the (Akan) name of one of the main Dagomba drums, which accompanies dancing.
2. The most obvious thought suggested by this proverb is that if one has to choose among evils one should choose the least of them. (The proverb is typical of a whole class of proverbs that depend on playing with the similar-sounding names of dissimilar objects.)

(1993, p. 819)

Based on these proverbs and their translations, Appiah emphasized,

what we translate are utterances, things made with words by men and women, with voice or pen or keyboard; and these utterances are the products of actions, which like all actions are undertaken for reasons. Since reasons can be complex and extensive, grasping an agent's reasons can be a difficult business; and we can easily feel that we have not dug deeply enough, when we have told the best story we can. (1993, p. 809)

The first example of these Akan proverbs is a complex one to understand. However, as Appiah annotated, whenever Akan people fall into trouble they play the brékété drum, which is a symbol of joy in African societies. Thereby, readers can understand brékété drum is a kind of safe port for Akan people to dock and relax. The meaning of the second example is clear, but only with Appiah's annotation readers can capture the beauty in the sound of this proverb. To the third example, Appiah did not give any annotation, which leaves the proverb as a puzzle to most readers due to the lack of knowledge of the palms. Later, Edward Craig gave an explicit annotation in his book *Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Craig's annotation is as follows:

Any contextual application of this proverb requires knowledge of the two plants in question: They are both palms, but one produces a valuable oil, while the other produces less valuable fibres...With this knowledge, it might be grasped that, in a particular context, the proverb was being used to express regret at having made the wrong choice in a situation of insufficient knowledge. In this context, the proverb could be said to be analogous to 'more haste less speed' (1998, p. 432).

This example demonstrates the significance of contextual knowledge in understanding a translation. Appiah argued that literal translations are not sufficient in providing the reader with enough contexts to be able to understand the source text and culture, so we need to make use of sufficient amount of annotations and glosses (1993). To solve the problems in translating into English African proverbs in Akan, Appiah brought up the concept of "thick translation". According to Appiah, thick translation refers to

a translation that aims to be of use in literary teaching; and here it seems to me that such "academic" translation, translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context, is eminently worth doing (1993, p. 817).

Sturge (2007) expressed that Appiah aimed at bringing in a less reductive text of the non-western literature by emphasizing the different sets of conventions and intentions bound to that specific culture which produced the source language words. Appiah claimed that information should not only be interpreted from its literal meanings but also from its convention—associated meanings by way of mutual expectation embedded in thicker—contextualisation(1993). Although Appiah first came up with the concept of thick translation from translating African proverbs, thick translation may be used to refer to any target text containing a great deal of added materials in the form of annotations, commentaries, notes, extended introduction, afterword, glossary. Appiah maintained, translation should be context-dependent in order to understand the culture, conventions, customs and features of the source culture that will ultimately help the reader to understand the true meaning of the words (1993).

### **1.6.2 Context in thick translation**

In Appiah's view (1993), thick translation is an academic literary translation that involves richer or thicker contextualisation. Thick translation is pivotal to thick contextualisation. Lacertosa (2017) pointed out that the meaning of an expression is rooted in a broader context made of a constellation of concepts in the source culture. Thick contextualisation helps target readers acquire deep understanding of the original text by presenting its surrounding cultural, linguistic, social, and historical contexts. Thick contextualisation attracts target readers to the source text and brings in them respect for the source culture and admiration of the way other people have articulated themselves. Nida asserted, "context not only determines how a word is to be understood, but also how it is to be translated" (2001, p. 35).

In general, context is "the background or circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea" (Laycock, 2016, p. 234). The concept of context was first put forward by anthropologist Malinowski (1923). Later, Halliday established his framework of context based on studies of previous scholars. According to Halliday's framework (2007), there are three types of context, namely, context of co-text, context of situation, and context of culture. The context of co-text refers to wording that comes before and after whatever is under attention. Halliday pointed out that "The context of situation is a theoretical construct for explaining how a text relates to the social processes within which it is located" (1978, p. 10). Context of situation relates to the register of language in use that consists of three aspects: field, tenor, and mode. The field aspect refers to the theme of activity such as what is going on in a situation and domain of experience that this activity relates to (subject matter, theme, or topic). The tenor refers to who is taking part in a situation and what kind of role she/he has among the participants. The mode aspect refers to what task the language and symbols play in a situation such as symbolic organization of the text, status it has, and its function in the context (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014). The context of culture, described by genre, refers to the

meaning of any semiotic system that members of a society share (Halliday & Matthiessen, 2014), such as customs, traditions, beliefs, background. Thick translation emphasizes the importance of thick contextualisation in translation practice. Shuttleworth and Cowie claimed,

the purpose of such an approach [thick translation] is to draw target readers to the source text and to engender in them a deeper respect for the source culture and greater appreciation for the way that people of other backgrounds have thought and expressed themselves (2004, p. 171).

### **1.6.3 Development of thick translation theory**

After Appiah, Hermans further developed thick translation theory (2003). Hermans claimed that thick translation, as a practice, attempts to assimilate other culture while at the same time resist cultural invasion through the translation. He admitted, it is impossible to translate a source text completely because of epistemological and contextual complexities (Hermans, 2003). Furthermore, Hermans argued,

as a form of translation studies, it [thick translation] has the potential to bringing about a double dislocation: of the foreign terms and concepts, which are probed by means of an alien methodology and vocabulary, and of the describer's own vocabulary, which must be wrenched out of its familiar shape to accommodate both alterity and similarity (2003, p. 386).

In addition, Hermans (2003) supported the subjectivity of the translator and indicated that thick translation can be used to critique cross-cultural translation studies. He believed, thick translation not only can avoid the dullness of terms in translation studies, but also can construct more diversified vocabulary.

Encouraged by Ryle, Geertz, Appiah, and Hermans's contributions to the development of thick translation theory, Cheung (2007) advanced this theory further. She pointed out that the translation of a text is related intimately to transferring the culture of the original. Xu (2012) explored the role of translator in thick translation. Xu claimed, "the nature of 'thick translation' is a typical characteristic of the scholar translators" (p. 155) and asserted, "the position of the translator has greater decisive power; that a scholar translator is more visible in the target text (TT); and that the stronger the academic background of the translator, the more ST-oriented the translation" (p.151).

#### 1.6.4 Types of thick translation in this study

In translation practice, thick translation is geared to improve the quality of translation by means of adding different types of related material. According to Wen and Wang (2016), "In terms of its relation to translation's main body, thick translation can be divided into three types: text-self, text-close, and text-remote, and those three types have mutual effects".

Text-self thick translation refers to any direct addition to a specific part of target text. It can be in the form of appositive, parentheses, or attributive clause. Text-close thick translation refers to any added material related to a part of target text in the form of translator's note (footnote or endnote), annotation, commentary, or supplementary material. Text-remote thick translation refers to any addition of contextual material as a separate section before and/or after a translation. Therefore, it is not directly related to a specific part of the translation. It is added contextual information by the translator, publisher, or third party. It can be translator's preface, prolegomena, introduction, gloss, postscript, appendix, or supplementary material. Editors of translations may provide text-close or text-remote thick translations based on the translated text and personal preference of the editor. These three types of thick translation influence target readers' understanding and appreciation of the source text. In translation practice, text-close and text-remote thick translations contribute more to providing contextual information to target readers. Figure 1.1 shows the theoretical framework of thick translation theory in this study.

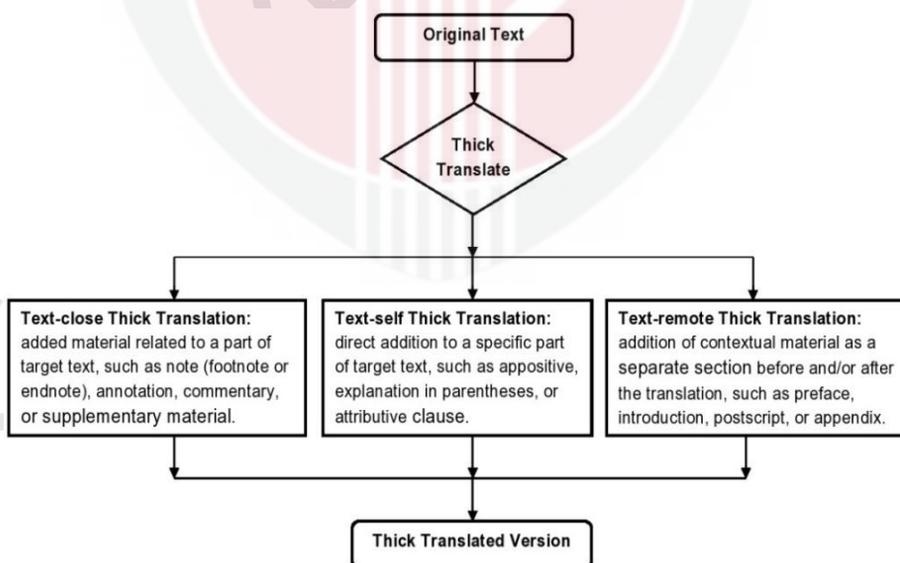


Figure 1.1 : Theoretical Framework of Thick Translation Theory

### 1.6.5 The significance of thick translation

Thick translation, among theories, is the most suitable for translating works with rich philosophical, historical, and cultural information such as *Laozi*. It expounds concepts, allusions, historical background, geographical terms, words with connotations, and images. The objective of thick translation is to arouse equivalent response in target readers as that of the source readers. With the help of thick translation, target readers acquire knowledge about the source culture that the original work represents, thus they capture the meaning of the original work.

The significance of thick translation lies in narrowing the gap between the source and target texts related to philosophical, cultural, and historical aspects by producing thick contextualized texts, which facilitates target readers' comprehension and appreciation of the original. Thick translation theory offers theoretical support for thick translation practices and enhances the source text's translatability by explanatory means. Thick translation is crucial in translating Chinese classical works into English; it situates target readers into Chinese context.

### 1.7 Significance of the study

*Laozi* has profound philosophical thoughts and was written in a pithy style. Thick translation of *Laozi* is essential for target readers to have a good understanding of Laozi's thoughts. Although *Laozi* has been investigated extensively, no systematic and comprehensive study has been made to address the issue on thick contextualization in English translations from the perspective of thick translation theory.

According to Frank, "insight into the specifics of translation can best be gained by looking at several translations of the same text" (as cited in Jung, 2002, p. 43). This study compares thick translations in two selected versions of *Laozi* from the perspective of thick translation theory in an attempt to reveal how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualisation in the two versions. It is expected that this study contributes to filling the gap in the translation studies of *Laozi* and its theoretical validity and practical significance advance the translation studies of *Laozi* and Chinese philosophical classics as well.

## 1.8 Scope of the study

This study examines how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualisation in *Laozi* English translations. Two translated versions of *Laozi* are selected in this study as research subjects. One version is translated by Lin Yutang (Lin's version), Nobel Prize Nominee in Literature, and the other version is translated by distinguished philosophers Roger Ames and David Hall (Ames and Hall's version).

This study describes, compares, and analyses the thick translations in the two versions using thick translation classification into text-close, text-remote, and text-self. It compares numerically each of the adopted thick translation means. Furthermore, this study examines the motives and strategies behind the adopted thick translation characteristics. It emphasizes how the translator's identity and objectives influenced his thick translations and style. This study reveals the significance of thick translation in translating philosophical woks with profound meaning and rich cultural, social, and historical background.

## 1.9 Operational definitions of key terms

This section defines the key terms used throughout this study. The following are operational definitions of the key terms:

Context refers to "the background or circumstances that form the setting for an event, statement, or idea" (Laycock, 2016, p. 234).

Philosophy refers to "the rational, abstract, and methodical consideration of reality as a whole or of fundamental dimensions of human existence and experience" (Encyclopaedia Britannica, 2020).

Text-close thick translation refers to any added material related to a part of target text, such as note (footnote or endnote), annotation, commentary, or supplementary material (Wen & Wang, 2016).

Text-remote thick translation refers to the addition of contextual material as a separate section before and/or after a translated text. It can be translator's preface, introduction, gloss, postscript, appendix, or supplementary material, to name a few (Wen & Wang, 2016).

Text-self thick translation refers to any direct addition to a specific part of target text. It can be in the form of appositive, parentheses, or attributive clause (Wen & Wang, 2016).

Thick contextualisation in translation refers to the process of providing rich contextual information of an original text to its target text.

Thick translation refers to "a translation that aims to be of use in literary teaching and it is an 'academic' translation that seeks with its annotations and its accompanying glosses to locate the text in a rich cultural and linguistic context" (Appiah, 1993, p. 817).

Thin translation in this study refers to rendering of text from one language to another by closely following the form of the source language regardless of fully expressing the original meaning or not.

## **1.10 Layout of the thesis**

This thesis presents a study of two well-known *Laozi* English translations and compares them from the perspective of thick translation theory in an attempt to reveal how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualization. It includes analyses and comparisons of the thick translation features. In addition, it explains why the translators selected *Laozi* to translate and sheds light on the translators' decisions of which original versions they adopted. Furthermore, this thesis examines the motives and strategies behind the adopted thick translation characteristics. The layout of this thesis follows the guidelines for preparation of thesis of Universiti Putra Malaysia. The main body of this thesis consists of five chapters as follows.

### **Chapter 1: Introduction**

This chapter includes ten sections, namely, background to the Study, statement of the research problem, rationale for selecting the two English versions of *Laozi*, research objectives, research questions, theoretical framework of this study, significance of the study, scope of this study, operational definitions of key terms, and layout of the thesis.

### **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

This chapter provides the literature review of this study. It introduces English translations of *Laozi* and discusses the difficulties in translating *Laozi* into English. It reviews the development of translation studies of *Laozi*, the relevant

researches on previous studies on English translations of *Laozi*, and the application of thick translation theory to Chinese classical literature. In addition, this chapter identifies the research gap of this study.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

This chapter discusses the methodology adopted in this study. It presents the research design of this study and its conceptual framework. Moreover, it addresses sampling of the research subjects and data collection process. In addition, it details the applied research methods and explains the procedure of how this study is carried out. Furthermore, this chapter describes how the trustworthiness of this study is established.

### **Chapter 4: Discussion and Findings**

This chapter is devoted to discussing and analyzing thick translation features and presenting the findings of this study. This chapter investigates three types of thick translations applied in the two selected versions, namely, text-close, text-remote, and text-self thick translations using descriptive and comparative methods. Moreover, this chapter addresses thick contextualisation; it reveals how thick translations contribute to achieving thick contextualisation in the two selected versions.

### **Chapter 5: Conclusion**

This chapter brings the whole thesis to a natural conclusion. This chapter presents the major findings of the study, highlights the implications, contribution, and limitations of the study, and finally provides recommendations for future research

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