

Article

Four Approaches to *Daodejing* Translations and Their Characteristics in Korean after Liberation from Japan

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Abstract: This article gathered and analyzed the *Daodejing* (DDJ) translations in Korean that appeared after the liberation from Japan and classified them into four perspectives: the perspective continuing Gyeonghak 經學 (Traditional Confucian exegetics), the literary and linguistic perspective, the religious perspective, and the philosophical perspective according to the academic perspective and methodology of translation. Simultaneously, this paper clarified the translation characteristics by comprehensively examining the formation process of each perspective in their historical contexts. Although Daoism had been excluded from the academic curriculum during the pre-liberation era along with Buddhism as heresy, it was later hastily embraced within the category of Oriental Studies to build a cultural consensus when the modern and contemporary educational system was established. In the post-liberation era, the formation of each DDJ translation perspective is directly related to the academic status of Daoism during the modernization of the Korean educational system—a process in which the years 1990 and 2015 stand out as essential turning points. The characteristics of DDJ translations in Korean can be analyzed from five perspectives depending on the Ur-text, ideological perspective, linguistic methodology, national characteristics, and relation to Christianity.

Keywords: Daodejing; translation; Korean; Daoism; Oriental Studies; Gyeonghak



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1. Introduction

Aside from the Bible, the *Daodejing* 道德經 (DDJ) is the book with the largest number of translations worldwide. One of the most important reasons the DDJ, consisting of only about 5000 characters, has been able to exert its influence in various cultures for over 2500 years is its implicit and ambiguous linguistic characteristics that allow for multiple interpretations and imaginations. According to the records of Ban Gu's *Hanshu Yiwenzhi* 漢書·藝文志, by the time of the Later Han dynasty, there were already three different DDJ commentaries. Since then, the DDJ has been annotated by various people of different positions or classes including scholars, Daoists, monks, etc., regardless of their persuasion of Confucianism, Buddhism, or Daoism. There exist more than 700 commentaries alone, of which more than 350 commentaries have been passed down to this day (Chan 1963, p. 77). In the case of South Korea, Wang Bi's 王弼 edition from the Wei-Jin period, Heshanggong's edition from the later-Han dynasty and Fu Yi's 傅奕 edition from the late Sui and early Tang dynasties are referred to as the *Tonghaengbon* 通行本 (received text) in the sense that they are the most prevalent editions to date. In terms of content, Wang Bi's commentary interprets from the viewpoint of *yililun* 義理論 (theory of meaning-pattern) that came from the Xuanxue tradition. In contrast, Heshanggong's commentary argues from the perspective of *Yangshenglun* 養生論 (theory of preserving one's health), which was the essence of Huang-Lao thought. Later, the discoveries of the Mawangdui manuscripts in 1973 and the Guodian manuscripts¹ in 1993 accelerated discussions about the Ur-text of the DDJ.

Korea, along with China and Japan, is one of the significant constituent countries of East Asia². These three countries are bound together by the cultural sphere of Chinese characters, Confucianism ideas, etc. It is estimated that Korea began to accept Chinese

literature in the 5th century. The general view is that the DDJ was brought by envoys whom Fu Jian 符堅 (338–385), the third ruler of the former Qin dynasty, had dispatched from China to Korea during the period of King Sosurim 小獸林 (?–384) of the Goguryeo 高句麗 dynasty (Park 2019a, pp. 74–75). Although Korea accepted Chinese texts relatively early, Daoist ideas have rarely been in mainstream Korean thought or practically used as a political tool. Instead, they have exerted their influence on civilian religion. Meanwhile, a recent study found that sporadic probes into the religious literature related to Korean folk beliefs have discovered a considerable number of records related to Daoist texts existing in Korea³. This means that there is an unexplored area for studying Daoist texts including the DDJ in Korea, and it also shows the potential for future development. Formal Korean DDJ commentaries mainly began to appear only in the 16th century.

Since the first DDJ translation was published in 1957 after the liberation of Korea, about 182⁴ Korean DDJ translations have been published. This accounts for one of the largest numbers of publications after the English versions. The quantity proves that Koreans have a special interest in DDJ from different viewpoints. Nevertheless, so far, only a handful of studies have been published on the current status of DDJ translations in Korea, and even this has been mainly conducted to introduce translation books by era or point out errors in content. Thus, it was difficult to grasp the characteristics of DDJ translations in Korea. Oh Jintak selected 20 Korean translations of the DDJ published over about 20 years and summarized the problems of the Korean translation of Chinese classics from the perspective of Korean literature as follows: (1) The trend of undervaluing translation; (2) Lack of professionalism of the translator; (3) Lack of clear principles for the translation of original Chinese classics; (4) Unnatural translation with the archaic tone, (5) The versatility of Chinese characters was neglected (Oh 1997a, pp. 176–79). However, he did not analyze any unique characteristics or problems that Korean translations of the DDJ have.

On the other hand, Rhee Jae-kwon's research showed a relatively complete form of study on the current state of DDJ translation in Korea. Rhee selected Korean DDJ translations that he deemed necessary and organized the bibliographies by period (Rhee 2013, p. 281). Rhee's work is of great significance insofar as he was the first to classify a large number of Korean translations of the DDJ. However, some deficiencies remain such as the criteria for his classification or the relationship between the classification groups remaining unclear. Kim Si-cheon classified Korean DDJ translations in the 20th century into three groups: a philosophical, religious, and historical category (Kim 2004, p. 337). In this paper, a partial acceptance of Kim's classification was made with a modification of the historical category by dividing it into two new translation categories: Traditional Confucian exegetics and linguistic studies. This is because the academic method of Traditional Confucian exegetics is directly related to the problems of pre-modern DDJ interpretations. For this reason, this paper will first examine the position of pre-modern DDJ interpretations centered mainly on the Joseon dynasty as a preparatory step for analyzing DDJ translations.

2. The Acceptance and Interpretation of DDJ in Pre-Modern Korea

Modern Koreans recognize the DDJ as one of the core scriptures that reveals the three principal types of spirits that compose the Korean people, along with Confucianism and Buddhism. Therefore Oh, the translator of a DDJ Korean translation considered to be the most influential among DDJ translations into modern Korean published by Hyeonamsa, said: "If ethical and realist ideas of Confucius influenced the outer world (*yang* 陽) in our lives, metaphysical and mystical ideas of Laozi moved the inner world in our lives (*yin* 陰)" (Oh 2020, p. 7). The actual discussions about Daoism historically appeared in the 7th century, in the period of King Yeongryu 榮留王 (618–642) of the Goguryeo dynasty. Yeon Gaesomun (淵蓋蘇文, 603–666) and his military experts engaged in Daoism for the political purpose of suppressing Confucianism and Buddhism, which were the political ideologies of King Yeongryu's forces (Park 2019b, p. 73). At that time, *wudoumi jiao* 五斗米教 (Celestial Masters Daoism) was prevalent in Goguryeo (Kim 2019a, p. 68), which shows that the Daoism they accepted had a strong religious character, focused on health preservation

and shamanistic rituals, rather than being a philosophy⁵. However, along with the fall of Goguryeo, the prevalence of Daoism subsided, leaving virtually no literature related to DDJ during the Unified Silla period. In the following Goryeo dynasty, the DDJ began to appear again in the literature records. Goryeo promoted Buddhism as a state religion, but the ritual of *jecho* 齊醮—a ritual of performing ancestral rites to the sky and the stars—was still performed. For that, religiously trained Daoists were required. In particular, King Yejong 睿宗 (reigned in 1122) made an effort to promote Daoists, and according to the records “Wangwu 王僎 (King Yejong) had a strong Daoist faith, and established the first Daoist temple Bogwongwan 福源觀 during the period of Jeonghwa 政和 (1111–1118), and had about 10 Daoists with high achievement there” (Xu 1937). According to the records of the *Yejong Munhyo Daewang yi* 睿宗文孝大王二 (Yejoing, Great King Munhyo, volume 2) chapter in the eighth volume of *Goryeosajeolyo* 高麗史節要 (Essentials of Goryeo History), in the 13th year (1118) of the Musul 戊戌 period, “Yejong ordered Han An-in 韓安仁 to let Daoists lecture about *Laozi* (DDJ) at Cheongyeongak 淸燕閣” (Institute of Korean Studies Culture and Literature 1973, p. 216). Although no DDJ text from the Goryeo dynasty has been preserved until today, we can infer that the DDJ was being distributed and studied as an essential scripture at the time.

All DDJ texts handed down in a relatively complete form until today are from the Joseon dynasty. As of 2022, a total of five editions have been preserved. All of them have been translated into the modern Korean language, and research on them is continuously increasing. Even though the *Seongrihak* 性理學 (i.e., the abstract theory of human reason and nature advocated by Joseon dynasty Neo-Confucians) was at its peak, the gap between the theory and actual problems of society widened. Therefore, some Neo-Confucians started annotating the DDJ to overcome practical issues at that time. Nonetheless, Daoism could never enter mainstream philosophy during the Joseon dynasty. Instead, it was rejected, like with Buddhism, as *idan* 異端 (heterodox), since it deviated from the Korean political ideology of Neo-Confucianism.

The first attempt to interpret the DDJ was made by Neo-Confucian scholar Lee Yi (Lee Yulgok 李栗谷, 1536–1584), a proponent of the tradition of Neo-Confucianism during the Joseon dynasty. His interpretation was subsequently dismissed as heresy by Joseon Confucian scholars. Lee Yi selected only what he viewed as the necessary chapters from the DDJ and compiled them into *Sun-eon* 醇言 (Unmixed Words). Lee Yi’s position follows the philosophical thought of Lee Hwang (Lee Toegye 李退溪, 1502–1571), who regarded *Laozi* and Zhuangzi as heretics (Yi 1989, p. 335). However, unlike Lee Hwang, Lee Yi stated that the fundamental contradictions between Daoists and Confucians were as follows: “Those who study the *Laozi* reject Confucianism, and those who study Confucianism also reject the *Laozi*, thus if their *dao* is not the same, they cannot talk about their common interests” (Lee 1814a). In other words, the contradictions between Confucianism and Daoism can be overcome only by finding the parts of their *dao* (way or teachings) that harmonize. Under this point of view, Lee Yi selected only those chapters from the DDJ that could support Neo-Confucianism and compiled them into *Sun-eon* 醇言.

The fundamental reason why the Neo-Confucianism scholars in the Joseon dynasty—who were studying the philosophy of human reason and nature based on Zhuxi’s 朱熹 theory—rejected the DDJ as heresy is that they understood the DDJ as a pure theory of *qi* according to their theory of *li* and *qi*. However, by interpreting *dao* from a Confucian idealist (*lixue* 理学) point of view rather than leading the DDJ discussion to the pure theory of *qi*, Lee Yi not only tried to establish a contact point between Confucians and Daoists but also to increase inclusiveness among different schools and prevent political division. From a practical point of view, the purpose of Neo-Confucianism asserted by Lee Yi is to correct the *dao* of the world and the present situation. The methodology for this is the theory of correcting the innate temperament (Gyogijilron 矯氣質論): “It is contained in the teachings of the sages, and among them, there are three most important things: deliberation (*goongli* 窮理), magnificence (*geogyeeong* 居敬), and exertion (*yeok-haeng* 力行)” (Lee 1814b). This thought is contrary to Zhu Xi’s “return to one’s good nature true character” theory of

cultivation, and it shows that Lee's position is not based on Zhu Xi's theory of the innate good of human nature that was the basis of the political system during the Joseon dynasty, but rather on the theory that human nature is fundamentally evil. In addition, Lee Yi's practical way to correct a wrong disposition was to "empty the mind", even forget "the *li* of heaven" (law of nature). For this purpose, he felt attention should be paid to the practical theory of Daoism. Lee Yi interpreted the DDJ in the same way as the Confucian scriptures (Kim 2020a, pp. 105–29).

After Lee Yi, who was the first Neo-Confucianist, attempted to accept and interpret DDJ among Joseon scholars, the DDJ interpretation was later extensively developed by Neo-Confucian scholars with an Anti-Neo-Confucian stance including Park Sedang⁶. In the 17th century, when Park Sedang was active, Joseon suffered a series of political divisions during the 16th century, followed by the Imjin War and the Manchu invasion of Korea. While the national power weakened, reflections on the existing political order increased, and doubts about the Neo-Confucian ideology grew. With an empirical and practical attitude, Park Sedang tried to break away from Neo-Confucianism (especially focusing on Cheng-Zhu 程朱 thought) and regain the original Confucianism (*wenzhi binbin* 文質彬彬). To this end, he regarded Lee Yi's theory of *li* as *yili* 易理 (the theory of change). For the first time, a scholar of the Joseon dynasty wrote a commentary on both DDJ and the Zhuangzi, the *Sinju Dodeokgyeong* 新註道德經 (A New Annotation to the Daodejing), and *Namhwagyeong Juhae Sanbo* 南華經主解刪補 (An Annotation to the Nanhuajing, revised and expanded), respectively.

Park paid attention to the practical parts of Confucian, Laozi's, and Zhuangzi's philosophies and considered that all of them had a common purpose "to cultivate oneself and govern others" (*xiujizhiren* 修己治人) to become sages. Here, the theory of *taiji* 太極, Yin-Yang, and the theory of being (*you* 有) and non-being (*wu* 無) in the Book of Changes provides the metaphysical basis for how *dao* turned out to be substance. For this reason, Park criticized Wang Bi's commentaries, the most commonly distributed edition of the time, and instead selected about 40 commentaries he deemed necessary and added annotations to them. This is because the standpoint of "to take nothingness as root" (*yiwuwei ben* 以無爲本) and to consider nothingness precious (*guiwu* 貴無), etc., which are at the core of Wang Bi's *Xuanxue* thought, deviated from the *yili* discussion. Instead of being rejected as heresy, the DDJ could now become the literature of reasons for exploring truth (Jo 2010, p. 280). In short, skepticism toward and reflection on Neo-Confucianism originated in the 16th century, whereas direct criticism began in the 17th century, and both opened a new possibility for engaging the heretical Laozi.

In the 18th century, the idea of Anti-Neo-Confucian thought was largely visible in three schools. First, the Nam-in 南人 school reorganized its ruling principle after the Confucianism of the Han dynasty. Second, the Wang Yangming 王陽明 school introduced the Yangming study as a political ideology. Third, the school shared the scholarly lineage of Park Sedang and introduced the Daoist thought of Laozi and Zhuangzi to shape a new political ideology. The two books *Dodeokjigwi* 道德指歸 (The Intention of Dao and De) annotated by Seo Myeong-eung (1716–1787), and *Chowondamno* 椒園談老 (Chowon's Discussion about Laozi) annotated by Lee Chung-ik (1744–1816) were both published in the 18th–19th century and shared the academic lineage of Park Sedang insofar as they considered Laozi's *dao* to intersect that of Confucianism, abandoning the dichotomy of *li* and *qi*. However, unlike the 16th–17th century attempts of Lee Yi and Park Sedang to break away from the limitations of Neo-Confucianism through annotating the DDJ, Seo Myeong-eung tried in the 18th century to transform the Neo-Confucian worldview through traditional mathematical science (*surihak* 數理學) and mathematical interpretation of the book of change (*sangsuhak* 象數學). The reason why he was looking for a method to modify Neo-Confucianism with *sangsuhak* is likely to be due to the shock caused by the contact with Western civilization starting in the 17th century and a sense of shame when realizing the advanced stage of astronomy and science in the West (Kim 2013, p. 206). After that, Lee Chung-ik also interpreted *dao* in Laozi as *taiji* (Jo 2005, pp. 139–68), which

is clearly distinguished from other DDJ annotators in the Joseon dynasty including Seo, who interpreted *dao* with Laozi's ideas of *wuwei*, and the being (*you*) and non-being (*wu*) concepts, but did not link *dao* to the theory of *taiji* and *yin-yang*. Thus, it is noticeable that Lee Chung-ik is taking an extreme standpoint that denies Neo-Confucianism and even the original Confucianism.

The trends of Korean philosophy in the 19th century can be mainly divided into three categories: first, development through the improvement of Neo-Confucianism; second, criticism and attack on Neo-Confucianism; third, overcoming Neo-Confucianism through a religious mind (Cho 2016, pp. 119–21). The government tried to keep Neo-Confucianism as the political ideology from the first standpoint. Still, the public was already aware of Western and European dominance, for which they blamed Neo-Confucianism. Subsequently, this critique turned into a movement that attacked Neo-Confucianism with skepticism and criticism. Hong Seokju is an example who belongs to the first trend and tried to modify and develop Neo-Confucianism in a more practical way. For this reason, in Seok-ju's DDJ annotation, *Jeongno* 訂老 (To Rectify Laozi), he rejected the abstract and metaphysical parts of Neo-Confucianism, but actively adhered to the *gyeongseron* 經世論 (the theory of managing the world), which he judged to be useful for minimizing the evils in reality and protecting the authority of Neo-Confucianism as a political ideology. To this end, he chose a strategy that attributed both Neo-Confucianism and DDJ to original Confucianism (Kim 2013, p. 203).

As shown above, it can be confirmed that the perspectives of the DDJ commentaries that appeared during the 16th–19th century in the Joseon dynasty were determined by how the commentators understood the relationship between Daoism and Neo-Confucianism. These DDJ annotations all tried to resolve political divisions and the practical problems resulting from them through DDJ interpretation. However, there was a big difference in the attitude toward Neo-Confucianism and to what extent they should adhere to, transform it, develop it, criticize it, or outright deny it. Neo-Confucianism significantly influenced the state's political ideology, and accordingly, the perspective of each DDJ interpretation was also clearly different⁷. The interpretations of DDJ by Joseon Neo-Confucianists continued until modern times and provided the basis for scholars after liberation to interpret DDJ in a contemporary sense. After entering the stage of modernization, the political influence of Joseon Neo-Confucianism reached its limits, but that did not lead to an elevation of the status of Daoism. During the Japanese Colonial period, the political influence of Neo-Confucianism receded considerably. In 1914, the Korean linguist Gang Mae 姜邁 (1878–1941) argued that the principles of Western philosophy were deeply rooted in Ancient Greek and Roman thought. In contrast, the principles of philosophy in East Asia originated from the rationalism of Cheng and Zhu, from the philosophy of the mind (*xinxue* 心學) of Lu Xiangshan 陸象山 and Wang Yangming 王陽明, from Itō Jinsai 伊藤仁齋 in Japan, and from Neo-Confucian of Lee Toegye in Joseon (Shin 2014, p. 36). Here, he compared the concept of “East Asian philosophy” on an equal footing with “Western studies” (*seohak* 西學). However, the former was still centered on Neo-Confucianism, while Buddhism and Daoism remained excluded.

3. The Analysis of DDJ Translation Trends in the Korean Language after the Liberation from Japan

Pre-modern Joseon underwent many political changes and transformations to achieve modernization during the opening period in the late nineteenth century. Self-conversion to a modern academic system also occurred, but when it came under the Japanese colonial period in 1910, the independent development of academics was inevitably sanctioned. With the establishment of Gyeongseong Imperial University—the first modern university in Korean history—in 1924, the pre-modern academic structure collapsed, and a new intellectual category of “Oriental studies” was formed. However, the so-called “Orient” only referred to China, while Joseon was excluded (Seo-Reich 2020, pp. 136–40). Kim YOUNG-gyeong argues that studies on Daoist literature in Korea became common in the 1920s. Still,

these works had a distinctly different character because they aimed to overcome the colonial period's national crisis (Kim 2022, pp. 249–71). In the wake of the liberation, Oriental studies were juxtaposed with Western studies for comparison, and Daoism and Buddhism, which had thus far been only considered heterodox in Korea, were now discussed on an equal footing with Confucianism for the integrity of complete oriental culture and building a cultural consensus. The academic discussion of the DDJ in Korea was formally established in 1956 with the opening of the *Dokyo* 道教 (religious Daoism) curriculum at Yeonhee Junior College (Shin 2014, pp. 309–19), which means it was established in the category of religious studies, not philosophy (Kim 2019b, p. 337). Later, with the development of Daoism studies in Korea, *Doga* 道家 was established as the philosophy of Laozi and Zhuangzi within the category of Eastern philosophy that corresponded to Western philosophy. At the same time, *Dokyo* was set within the category of religion.

For this reason, most studies about former DDJ translations in Korea focused on translations after the liberation. For instance, Kim Gapsu limited the scope of his research on DDJ translations in Korea to the 20th century. However, his research shows that DDJ translations, of which there were only two in the 1950s and 1960s, respectively, have since steadily increased to 14 in the 1970s, 21 in the 1980s, and 31 in the 1990s, and after 2000, has rapidly grown in both quantity as well as in the diversity of perspective (Kim 2003, pp. 213–38). Accordingly, this paper set the scope of research by focusing on the time after the liberation of 1945—when translation and study of the DDJ in the modern sense began—when it analyzed the categories according to the academic perspective of the DDJ translator.

This paper was based on the results of prior research on Korean translations of the DDJ after the Korean liberation, but partially reconstructed it for the purpose of revealing the characteristics of DDJ translation in Korean that can be distinguished from DDJ translations in other languages. Since the Korean liberation in 1945, DDJ translations in Korean have rapidly increased to the point where it is difficult to find similar numbers in other countries. Nevertheless, there were only a few types or trend analysis studies targeting this subject that moreover merely analyzed the characteristics of the translation according to the publishing years. This analysis method of former research is meaningful insofar as it presents the developing process of the DDJ Korean translations but has its limits when it comes to explaining the characteristics typical of the Korean translations, their historical causes, and the connections between various perspectives. Therefore, this paper accepts the Christian religious point of view from the relatively recent analysis of Rhee Jae-kwon. At the same time, it takes the categorization by Kim Si-cheon, who modified Rhee's three translation types—the philosophical, religious, and historical—but splits them into four perspectives from the viewpoints of Traditional Confucian exegetics, philology, religious studies, and philosophy. The main reasons for separating “the perspective of Traditional Confucian exegetics”, which is often discussed in the category of Oriental or Chinese philosophy, into an independent perspective of DDJ Korean translation are as follows: First, Gyeonghak (Traditional Confucian exegetics) has already played an important role as a pre-modern knowledge system in Korean and academic methodology beyond the category of the study of Confucianism. Second, Sino-Korean literature (*Hanmunhak* 漢文學), which has Confucian literature as its main research object, inherited this pre-modern academic method. However, from the perspective of the modern and contemporary academic structure, it is difficult to completely attribute it to any one field because the study of Gyeonghak is located at the intersection of philology, linguistics, and philosophy. Furthermore, in the case of philology, the tendency to focus on characteristics in purely linguistic terms including grammatical differences between the two languages (Ancient Chinese and Korean) is noticeable. This needs to be established as a separate translation perspective because it has been overlooked despite its importance in terms of performing the basic function of translation.

In short, the first translation perspective reflects changes in the knowledge system, methodology, and national self-awareness in the transition from the pre-modern to the modern era. The second translation perspective reflects the linguistic function and char-

acteristics of translation from Ancient Chinese into modern Korean. The third translation perspective reflects a religious perspective, and the fourth translation perspective reflects a philosophical perspective. The above contents show that each of these four perspectives forms an independent translation tendency.

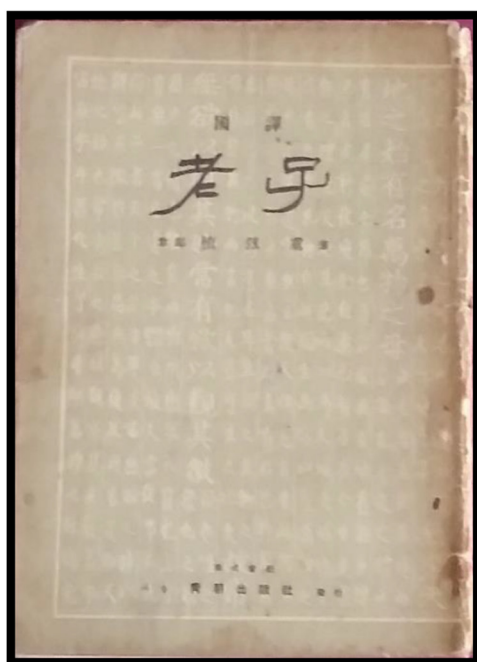
3.1. Translation from the Perspective of Traditional Confucian Exegetics (Gyeonghak 經學)

After the liberation, the Gyeongseong Imperial University under Japanese imperialism was rebuilt as Seoul National University, a modern academic institution, and departments of Sino-Korean literature⁸ were established quickly at Seoul National University, Yeonhui University, and Korea University. The areas of pre-modern academics including Traditional Confucian exegetics of Joseon Neo-Confucianism were thus rearranged into departments that matched their characteristics. The term “Traditional Confucian exegetics” here refers to *jingxue* 經學, which can be considered as the main form of study in East Asia during the pre-modern era. In Korea, it has been called Gyeonghak and formed the center of the educational system. The study methodology was based on the form of annotation letters, phrases, and sentences of Chinese Confucian classics with *Hyunto* (grammatical particles) and the Korean pronunciation of Chinese characters.

For Traditional Confucian exegetics, due to the grammatical differences between Chinese and Korean, it has always been challenging to interpret the original Chinese text directly. For this reason, the *Hyunto* 懸吐 (i.e., to add Korean endings to classical Chinese phrases) was invented to help interpret the Chinese classics. The word *to* 吐 here means a Korean component such as a letter or syllable inserted in between or added after the Chinese text. Most of them belong to the postpositional particles (*josa* 助詞) used to mark grammatical structures in modern Korean. Joseon Confucian scholars succeeded in producing vernacularized editions of the Confucian classics (*eonhaebon* 諺解本) by utilizing *to*. Especially between the 16th and 17th centuries, the vernacularized edition began to be printed to strengthen the Confucian regime and became widespread. Park Si Nea tried to find the reason for the success of this perspective in both the vernacularization and dissemination of the Confucian classics—aside from political factors—also in the linguistic characteristics of the vernacularized edition:

I argue that at the core of the creation of *The Vernacularized Classics* were concerns about how to mobilize orality (utterance) and aurality (hearing) to provide Chosŏn readers with vernacular aural proxies of the Confucian Classics. The Chosŏn state created *The Vernacularized Classics* as books that inscribe the voice of an imaginary tutor’s vocalization of the Confucian Classics in the vernacular language for Chosŏn readers to imitate. (Park 2019b, p. 132)

This interpretation of scriptures based on the *Hyunto* was centered on Confucianism until the Joseon dynasty, but after the liberation, it was also applied to both Daoist and Buddhist texts. The DDJ translations made shortly after the independence of 1945 follow this *Hyunto* method of former Joseon Confucians. The first officially published Korean translation of the DDJ is 1957 *Gugyeok Noja* 國譯老子 (Korean Translation of Laozi), translated by Shin Hyunjung. Shin added *Hyunto* to the original text commonly available edition of the DDJ in the same way that *The Vernacularized Classics* had done it and wrote a corresponding Korean translation, which provided a model for DDJ translations for the next 30 years⁹. Figure 1 below is Shin’s translation with *Hyunto* and its explanation of the first lines of DDJ Section 1 (Shin 1957, p. 3):



道可道는, 非常道요,
(Dogado 道可道 is bisangdo 非常道, so)
도를 도라고 할 수 있을 때 그것은 벌써 길이 변함 없는
도가 아니요,
(When do 道 can be told as do 道, it is already not the do 道
of constant way,)

名可名은, 非常名이니,
(myeong-ga-myeong 名可名 is bisangmyeong 非常名, so)
이름을 이름이라 할 수 있을 때 그것은 벌써 길이 변함
없는 이름이 아니어니,
(when a name can be called a name, it is already not a name
of constant way, thus)

無名은 天地之始오, 有名은 萬物之母니라.
(mumyeong 無名 is cheonjijisi 天地之始, and youmyeong
有名 is manmurjimo 萬物之母.)
이름할 수 없는 것이 천지의 비롯이요, 이름 있는 것은
만물의 어미라.
(what cannot be named is the origin of heaven and earth, and
what is named is the mother of all things.)

Figure 1. The first translation of Laozi in Korean with Hyunto after liberation from Japan.

As we can see in the excerpt above, the biggest problem with the *Hyunto* translation is that its purpose is to “recite”, like with *The Vernacularized Classics*, and not to interpret or decipher their contents. In other words, since the grammatical parts have been adjusted to fit the Korean grammar, it is helpful for reading and grasping the linguistic structure. Still, it is not enough to be considered as a complete Korean translation because many Chinese characters are left as they are. Thus, from the linguistic point of view, the *Hyunto* translation has limitations in the following two aspects. First, it is used to add corresponding grammatical components to Chinese sentences so that Chinese lines can fit the Korean word order and grammar structure. However, since the expressions used in the *Hyunto* system belong to an antiquated style, it is not only unnatural to people’s ears nowadays, but it is also difficult to understand when people are listening. Second, it is difficult to see it as a complete form of translation because the *Hyunto* system sees a Chinese character as a fixed concept and only adds the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese characters but does not attempt to specify the various meanings. For this reason, Oh Jintak criticizes *The Vernacularized Classics* in the pre-modern era: “Philosophical thought merely developed around Chinese characters, but it failed to take root in people’s daily lives at that time because they could not utilize everyday language properly” (Oh 1997b, pp. 169–79).

Another problem with the vernacularizing translations before the 1990s was the lack of awareness about which DDJ version was used as the original text by the author. For example, most translations before the 1990s stated that the *Tonghaengbon* was taken as the original text, but did not clarify which version was used. Regarding this, Kim Si-cheon—who carried out a contrastive analysis between the actual contents of translations and commonly available editions published before the 1900s—found out “whether the translations mentioned Wang Bi’s commentaries or not, they all correspond to Wang Bi’s commentary *Laozizhu* 老子注, which in turn has created a tendency in Koreans to completely ignore versions other than Wang Bi’s” (Kim 2004, p. 262).

The criticism and reflection on the problems of the *Hyunto* method translations before the 1990s led to three changes in the 1990s. First, DDJ translations in the 1990s tended to stray from the realm of Sino-Korean literature and expanded in various directions under new categories of modern studies such as linguistics, Chinese literature, religious studies, and philosophy. Furthermore, there was a tendency to interpret conceptual words that previously had been replaced by phonograms in the *Hyunto* translation. Moon Seongjae’s

Cheoeumbuteo Saero Ikneun Noja Dodeokgyeong (Laozi's Daodejing, read anew from the beginning) (2014) is a prime example of this tendency. As the title suggests, instead of adopting the *Hyunto* method, the author not only attempted to conduct etymological research through literature such as *Erya* 爾雅 (the first exegetical work in the history of linguistics in China), *Fangyan* 方言 of Yang Xiong 揚雄, and *Shuowen* 說文 of Xu Shen 許慎, but he also ascertained the meaning of specific characters through paleographic research referring texts including silk manuscripts, oracle bones, inscriptions on bronze, seal script, and clerical script. Second, there was also the translation of the DDJ commentaries by Joseon Neo-Confucian scholars, which provided a way to carry on the national characteristics and traditions in the context of the diversification of the DDJ original texts. The DDJ commentaries of the 16th–19th century Korean Confucians that we have examined in Section 2 of this paper all belong to this last case and were most actively developed around 1995. Third, in the post-liberation period, Daoism was forced to be incorporated into the realm of the “East.” These attempts can be found in DDJ translations early after liberation. A relatively early example of this is the *Gugyeok Hwadamjip · Sinju Dodeokgyeong* (Korean Translation of Hwadamjip 花潭集 · Sinju Dodeokgyeong), one of a series of Korean classical translations directed by the Research Institute of Korean Studies at Korea University, with the clear intent of promoting Korean self-identity and ethnicity. The author grouped and translated Park Sedang's annotations to the DDJ and the collections of Seo Gyeongdeok's articles, representing the debate in Joseon in the 16th and 17th centuries.

The three translation trends from the perspective of Traditional Confucian exegetics discussed above differ in their specific methodologies. Nevertheless, they still all seek to express the original text's meaning as much as possible in pure Korean language. As a result, this led to a shift from the *Hyunto* interpretation method, which uses a language that is difficult to communicate, to a language that corresponds to that spoken in daily life. The role of the linguistic interpretation played by Traditional Confucian exegetics has expanded to Chinese and Korean literature. Regarding the number of publications, DDJ translations utilizing the methods of Traditional Confucian exegetics have declined sharply since the 1990s. Still, efforts to translate it into pure Korean from the ideological perspective of Confucianism are continuing.

The prime example of this trend is the interpretation of Lin Xiyi's 林希逸 (1193–?) *Laozi Laoziyanzhaikouyi* 老子鬳齋口義, translated by Kim Mankyum (Kim 2014). The commentator Lin Xiyi, a scholar of the Song dynasty, sought to prove the unity of the three religions—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism—by annotating *Laozi*, *Zhuangzi*, and *Liezi* through the “theory of the non-dual-mind” (*wuxinlun* 無心論). He appreciated Confucius' concise words while he uttered criticism of Laozi's excessiveness. Lin's commentary is important in the history of Confucianism because he employed the Confucian philosophy of mind to comment on the DDJ, thus creating room for the DDJ literature to be accepted by Korean Confucian scholars. The *Sinju Dodeokgyeong*, Park Sedang's annotation of the DDJ, and his commentary on *Zhuangzi*, the *Namhwagyong Juhae Sanbo*, discussed earlier in Section 2, both took Lin Xiyi's commentaries on these two Daoist classics as base texts. These two books were engraved on printing blocks (*gyongjaja* 庚子字)¹⁰ and printed as copies for distribution in the seventh year of King Sejong 世宗 (1425). It can be inferred that Lin's commentary on the DDJ was also widely read by Joseon scholars in the 15th century¹¹. Currently, the translations of Lin's DDJ commentary broaden our knowledge of how Confucians during the Joseon dynasty understood the philosophies of *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*.

3.2. Translation from a Literary and Linguistic Point of View

From the viewpoint of translation, even *The Vernacularized Classics* succeeded in unraveling Chinese classics following the word order and basic grammar of Korean; it reduced the need for the translation of Chinese characters, but it failed to interpret the philosophical implications within them in a way that fit the contemporary language environment. Nonetheless, DDJ translations into pure Korean, which dispensed with Chinese characters,

did finally appear later. The first pure Korean DDJ translation attempts were made in the 1950s, not by Confucian or literature scholars but by several Christians. At that time, the literature translation experience of religious individuals who had encountered “Western studies” including Catholic or Christian thought was an indirect cause of these perspectives on translations. The Confucian regime had been suppressing these Christians because they rejected specific ritual customs and ancestor worship, which were highly valued in Confucianism. Thus, Western religious individuals at the time targeted commoners for missionary activities to avoid the oppression of the elite Confucian regime, and naturally, taking into account the language habits of the audience, delivered their doctrine in pure Korean rather than in Chinese.

The first DDJ translation in pure Korean was included in Park Yeongho’s *Bicheuro Sseun Eol-ui Norae* (The Song of Eol Written by Light) (Yu 1992). The translation was started relatively early in the 1950s by Park’s teacher, Yu Yeongmo. Even so, it was distributed in the form of printed material issued inside the church, not as a formal publication¹². Consequently, the translation was not significantly influential at that time, yet it became widely known when it was officially published in 1992 through his student Park. Yu Yeongmo’s intention to translate the DDJ only into pure Korean can be seen in the title of *Neulgeuni* (an old man)—the literal Korean translation of DDJ. The most challenging aspect of this method utilizing pure Korean is translating the components of combined Chinese characters. In Korean, one Chinese character generally has only one syllable, while in contrast, one pure Korean word has two or more syllables. Consequently, when Chinese characters are translated into pure Korean, the number of letters increases several times. Be that as it may, Yu compressed the translation as much as possible to match the number of characters of the original text of the DDJ to protect the phonological features of the original text. For example, Yu Yeongmo takes issue with the fact that *dao* in the DDJ has previously been translated as *do*, the Korean pronunciation of the Chinese character *dao* 道, and therefore proposes the single syllable pure Korean word *eol* 열 as the translation for *dao* shown below, without considering the different meanings of *dao* in the DDJ.

The *dao* of *Laozi* means the genuine oneself, just like the *eol* of Jesus (πνεμα), the law (法) of the Buddha (Dharma), and the *xing* 性 of *The Doctrine of the Mean*. Since Westerners do not know this well, thus they either transliterate it phonetically as *dao* or paraphrase it as “way.” There is a reason why *Laozi* referred to *eol-na* (the authentic genuine self) as *dao*, which means the way. The only way out of this annihilating world is to grasp life *eol*. Therefore, *eol* is the way, and the way is *eol*. (Yu 1992, pp. 21–22)

In addition to *eol*, the translation of *dao* seen above, Yu also translated key concepts such as *mul* 物 (thing) into *mon*, the numbers *man* 萬 (ten thousand) and *bak* 百 (one hundred) into *jeumeun*, and *on*, all of which are the old Korean expressions utilized during the pre-modern era. However, these Korean expressions decreased in use after liberation; moreover, they were utilized in compressed forms in Yu’s translation, creating a situation where it was even more challenging for the general public to understand¹³. Because of this difficulty, Yu’s pupil, Park Yeongho, had no choice but to re-translate the sections where the meaning was not clearly conveyed while organizing Yu’s manuscript of the DDJ translation (Yu 1992). For example, Yu translated the beginning part of DDJ chapter 1 as “The *gil* (way) that is right is not *neul* (always) the *gil*, and the name that can be called is not *neul* the name”. Park knew that *gil* here means the same as *eol* in Yu’s words, so Park added modern Korean words to Yu’s translation. “The unspeakable *cham* (truth)—*eol* in Yu’s words—is not *neul* (everlasting) *cham* (truth). The God who can be named is not the *neul* (everlasting) God”. It is worth noting that Park highlights god’s existence in the pure Korean interpretation of the DDJ. Yu’s disciple Ham Seokheon’s book, *Ssi-al-ui Yetgeul Puri* (Ssi-al’s Interpretation of Old Writings) (Ham 1988), included a partial translation of the DDJ. That effort continued Yu’s translation tradition of using pure Korean and also further increased its religious overtones. Starting from that early beginning, Christian translations of the DDJ all revealed the characteristics of Christian doctrinal interpretations¹⁴.

Since the 1990s, translators of the pure Korean DDJ have increasingly been linguists, not religious or Traditional Confucian exegetics scholars. By 2015, this shift became even more noticeable¹⁵. These linguists tried to linguistically analyze DDJ's literary characteristics and translate them to suit the habits of the linguistic peculiarities of the Korean language. They paid particular attention to the poetic expressions in the DDJ as linguistic features. In this regard, Yang Hweseok criticizes that previous DDJ translations did not grasp the linguistic characteristics revealed in their poetic terms, only attempting to explain the meaning through bibliographic knowledge such as adding lengthy annotations. As a result, not only did the translation not sound like Korean, but it also did not reveal all the aspects inherent in the poetic language of the DDJ (Song 2008, pp. 208–10). From Yang's view, the DDJ is a beautifully decorated poem, not just a literary work of prose. Thus, his translation has a solid phonetic character and feels poetic. For example, all sentences in his translation end with an expression characteristic of poems such as *~yiji* (expressing enlightenment), *~ine* (expressing admiration), and *~rira* (expressing will or strong guesses). Moreover, he focused on analyzing the phonological components and interpreting passages of the DDJ text. For example, the following passage is Yang's explanation of the first chapter of the DDJ:

It consists of four paragraphs. The first paragraph is *rhymed in the sentence*, *do* and *myeong* 名 are repeated three times each to rhyme. The second paragraph is also made up of a reply, and here the rhymes are *si* 始 and *mo* 母. The third paragraph is also done in reverse, and its rhymes are *myo* 妙 and *yo* 徼. Most of the characters are repeated in the form of “常○, 欲以觀其△”. Therefore, it can be considered as alliteration and *rhyme in the sentence*. The fourth paragraph is prose as a whole, but the *hyeon* 玄 rhymes with *moom* 門. (Yang 2018, pp. 19–20)

According to Yang's analysis above, DDJ rhetoric has strong poetic characteristics, such as reciprocation, word chains, metaphors, etc. Aside from phonology, it is highly likely that the DDJ originated from oral literature, not written prose. A number of literature scholars¹⁶ insisted that an additional reason for the phonological characteristics of the DDJ is that it was initially an oral religious tradition before the text was fixed in the written form. Rhymes and rhythms are characteristic of these kinds of texts, as they would assist in memorization. The spiritual attributes of the DDJ have been a driving force that motivated its translation from different religious perspectives, including those of Buddhists, Christians, and Daoists. Numerous Christians have accepted the opinions of these linguists and attempted to translate and unravel the religious sentiments of the DDJ in the form of poetry.

3.3. Translation from a Religious Point of View

There always have been two different perspectives in interpreting the DDJ, both in the East and the West: One perspective reads the DDJ as a philosophical, political, or ideological text, while the other focuses on the mystical, religious, or spiritual aspects. This difference in perception stems from the different features and interpretations in the commentaries of Wang Bi and Heshanggong and to which of them the author referred in his understanding. As mentioned in the introduction, among *Tonghaengbon*, these two DDJ editions are universally read in Korea. Primarily, the majority of translations in Korea utilize *Laozizhu* by Wang Bi as the source text. Wang Bi's edition has been associated with the study of *Xuanxue* in the Wei-Jin period and with *Daoxue* 道學 during the Song and Ming dynasties. Nevertheless, in Korea, during the Joseon dynasty, it was grouped with Buddhism as *nobul* 老佛 or *seokbul* 釋老 and regarded as a form of heretical thought.

The other edition is *Laozi Heshanggong Zhangju* 老子河上公章句. Heshanggong's commentary combines the ideas of *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 and *Laozi*, and reflects the Huang-Lao school's views on *yangsheng* 養生 (preservation of one's health) and administering the state, which is also discussed in *Dongi Bogam* 東醫寶鑑 (Precious Mirror of Eastern Medicine) in the Joseon dynasty (Heo 2002, pp. 19–21). According to *Huangdi Neijing*, human life consists of *jing* 精, *qi*, and *shen* 神, yet the system of how these three

elements interact is not fully explained. In the Yangsheng school, these three elements were esteemed as *sanbao* 三寶 (three treasures): *jing* was defined as the origin of human life, *qi* as the driving force in life, and *shen* as the expression of life. Based on these two ideas, Heo Jun clarified the system and structure between *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* in *Dongi Bogam* (Kim 2020b, p. 110). Especially in the *Jibye* 集例 chapter, Heo stated that “*doga* is based on the cultivation of a clean mind, and medicine is based on medical herbs, diet, acupuncture, and moxibustion as a method of curing disease”, which shows that Heo’s understanding of Daoism focused on the practical aspects. As a result, the “Daoist hygienic system was highly estimated and adopted in the former chapters of the *Precious Mirror of Eastern Medicine* published by a royal order” in the Joseon dynasty (Kim 2007, p. 1). Heo’s concept of *yeongseong* 靈性 discussed in *Dongi Bogam* is based on the concepts of *gushen busi* 谷神不死 (the god of the valley never dies) and *xuanpin* 玄牝 (mysterious female) in DDJ. At this point, Heo explained *yeongseong* both as the mechanism of the cosmic circulation of *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* and as the mechanism of the human body (Jung 2014, pp. 219–21). In the *Naegyeong* 內景 chapter of *Dongi Bogam*, he also described the process of creation of things in the order of “*taeyeok* 太易-*taecho* 太初-*taesi* 太始-*taeso* 太素,” which corresponds to “The Dao has produced one; one has produced two; two has produced three; three has produced all beings.” (Yao 2016, p. 154) in DDJ chapter 42. Here, Heo directly quoted a commentary on the *Cantongqi* 參同契 written by the religious Daoist Chen Xianwei 顯微微 of the Song dynasty, and this shows that Heo accepted the religious perspective of Daoism in understanding DDJ (Seong 2000, p. 259).

Until the 1960s, research on Daoism from a religious perspective—one of the dominating DDJ research trends in Western academia—greatly influenced the Korean academic community. As discussed in Section 3.2, from a linguistic point of view, the translation of the DDJ by Christians has tremendous significance for advancing texts in pure Korean without utilizing any Chinese characters. Since Christians had been working on translations since the early 1950s, they had a foundation that enabled their DDJ research to be rapidly established. As a representative example, Ham Seokheon published excerpted translations of the DDJ in his 1988 book, where he explained the reason for his DDJ translation: “One of the important things that we must do nowadays for the idea of *Ssi-al* 씨알 is to reread the old classical texts in the correct way. Among them, in particular, the old classics of the Orient” (Ham 1988, p. 13). At this point, he mentions the concept of *Ssi-al*, the core idea of Ham’s Christian thought. Ham discovered *Ssi-al* from reading the DDJ and later attempted to reveal the dynamic tension in the relationship between oneself and god by interpreting the DDJ (Park 2012, p. 99). According to Ham’s explanation, the letter “ㅇ” in the syllable *al* 알 represents the maximum or “transcendent sky,” “.” in *al* 알 means the minimum or “intrinsic sky” (i.e., oneself), and “ㅅ” signifies “active life.”¹⁷ Ham attempted to prove that Daoism and Buddhism are both consistent with god’s teachings based on the idea of *Ssi-al*.¹⁸ Ham’s translation shows thoughts similar to those of Holmes Welch, whose book *The Parting of the Way: Lao Tzu and the Taoist Movement* (Welch 1957) was also translated and published in Korea (Welch 1990). At this juncture, Welch also revealed the linguistic and philosophical similarities between the DDJ and the Bible and was influential in the Korean Christian interpretation of the DDJ during the 1990s.

Other Christian DDJ translations after Ham show prominent religious characteristics in their content. For example, *Nalgaereul dan Noja* (Laozi with Wings) (2000), translated by pastor Jang Ilsun and his disciple Pastor Lee Hyeonju, is based on the *Laoziyi* 老子翼 by *Jiaohong* 焦竑 (1540–1620), a commentary from the Ming dynasty that was frequently referenced during the Joseon dynasty. Consequently, this work can be viewed as an attempt to select a new source text for DDJ translation. Its interpretation reveals a clear religious perspective, often quoting Bible verses similar to the DDJ scriptures or comparing Daoist sages and Jesus.

Christian DDJ translations remained stagnant in the 2000s. Still, in 2010, Pastor Lee Hyeonju’s revised edition of *Nalgaereul dan Noja* came out, and more diverse forms of similar translations began to be published. Kim Sang-u attempted to interpret the meaning

of lines in the DDJ by referring to verses from the Bible that he considered similar to the DDJ in his translation, *Noja Saeroun Tamsaek* (New Exploration of Laozi) (2010). Jeon Jaedong, a Christian literature expert, translated the DDJ in 2016 as a Christian-style poem in *Si-ro Purosseun Dodeokgyeong* (Poetic Interpretation of Daodejing). Recently, in 2018, theologian Lee Myungkwon attempted to interpret the DDJ by comparing concepts from the DDJ and the Bible. For example, he paired the ideas of *ziran* 自然 (self-so) in the DDJ and the “self-transformation of God”, as well as “*dao*” with Christian God, Jesus, and Logos (Lee 2018, pp. 17–18).

Aside from a Christian perspective, Korean DDJ translations have also taken the religious points of view of Buddhism and Daoism. As translations of the received DDJ text in Korea used Wang Bi’s edition until the 1990s, no translation truly followed the religious Daoist tradition. The ambiguous relationship between these two “Daoisms” has long been the most challenging aspect of DDJ translation. Accordingly, H. G. Creel classified different kinds of Daoism as “Philosophic Taoism” and “*Hsien* 仙 Taoism”. If the so-called philosophic Daoism, “a philosophy saying much that is still pertinent even in this day of great sophistication and scientific complexity” (Creel 1970, pp. 23–24), is based on Wang Bi’s commentary, then the Hsien Daoism, “aiming at the achievement of immortality by a variety of means, [has its] roots in ancient Chinese magical practices and a cult of immortality” (ibid., p. 24), is based on Heshanggong’s commentary, and these two concepts are entirely in contradiction. The DDJ, which had been dealt with without distinction between religious and philosophical characteristics until the 1990s, came to be embraced by Korean scholars of religion and philosophy within the modern educational system. There it has obtained its academic status as one of the main Eastern traditions, as well as one of the world religions.

According to published information provided by the National Library of Korea, the first translation representing a religious Daoist DDJ was officially published in 2004 by Jo Yunrae and Kim Hakmok. Nonetheless, this work had previously been released in an unpublished form. *Hyunto Yeokju Dodeokgyeong* (Hyunto Commentary Translation of Daodejing) (Tanheo 1983) by Buddhist monk Tanheo¹⁹ follows the *hyunto* translation method of Traditional Confucian exegetics, as shown in the title, and adds annotations and interpretations.

Through the contents of Table 1 seen above, it can be confirmed that there is no significant difference between the original text with *hyunto* and the *hyunto* translation. For this reason, there has been a barrier that keeps individuals lacking knowledge of Chinese characters from comprehending it, which was the same problem with the translations by Traditional exegetic scholars. According to Lee Jaehyeok’s literature analysis, in terms of content, Tanheo’s annotation is based on *Laoziyi* annotated by Jiao Hong, and the interpretation refers to the *Daodejing jiangyi* 道德經講義²⁰ the annotation of Song Longyan 宋龍淵, the eighth generation of descendants of the Longmen 龍門 sect of Quanzhen 全真 Daoism. The DDJ translation by a Buddhist monk like Tanheo offers a highly unusual case in Korea; moreover, it is difficult to say whether his translation even represents the viewpoint of Buddhists, as it refers to the interpretation of religious Daoists. The translations that more explicitly reveal the perspective of Buddhism are *Gamsanui Noja Puri* (Gamsan’s Interpretation of Laozi) by Oh Jintak and the *Noja Geu Bulgyojeok Ihae* (A Buddhist Understanding of Laozi) by Song Chan-u, both published in 1990. Both of these translations took *Daodejingjie* 道德經解 of Hanshan-Deqing 憨山德清 (1546–1623), an eminent monk in the late Ming dynasty, as their source text, and their translations make Hanshan’s interpretation of the three-way convergence of Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism obvious. These examples make it apparent that the understanding of the DDJ from a Buddhist viewpoint in Korea is practically presented as integration of Buddhism and Daoism.

Table 1. Tanheo’s translation of the beginning of the first chapter of DDJ.

| Original Text with <i>Hyunto</i> | <i>Hyunto</i> Translation |
|---|---|
| 道可道 非常道 <i>Do ga do myon bi sang do yo</i> 名可名 이면 非常名 이니 <i>Myong ga myong i myon bi sang myong i ni</i> 無名은 天地의 始요 <i>Mu myong eun chon ji ui si yo</i> 有名은 萬物의 母니라 <i>Yu myong eun man mul ui mo ni ra</i> | 도를 可히 道라 한다면 常道가 아니요 If (one) <i>ga</i> 可 (can) call <i>do</i> 道 as <i>do</i> 道, that is not <i>sangdo</i> 常道 名을 可히 名이라 한다면 常名이 아니요 If (one) <i>ga</i> 可 (can) call <i>myong</i> 名 as <i>myong</i> 名, that is not <i>sangmyong</i> 常名 無名은 天地의 始요 <i>Mumyong</i> 無名 is <i>si</i> 始 of <i>chon ji</i> 天地 有名은 萬物의 母니라 <i>Yumyong</i> 有名 is <i>mo</i> 母 of <i>man mul</i> 萬物 |

Meanwhile, regarding the translation of the DDJ from the religious perspective of *Dokyo*, the foundation for its research was laid when the *Heshanggong Zhangju* edition was translated and published as *Gi Suryeoneuro bon Dodeokgyeong* (Reading Daodejing as Seen Through Qi-Training) by Jo Yunrae and Kim Hakmok published in 2004, and *Noja Dodeokgyeong* (Laozi Daodejing) by Lee Seokmyeong published in 2005. Significantly, they were the first in Korea to focus on the practical sections according to the religious characteristics of the *Heshanggong* commentary. Furthermore, they provided a foundation for the study from the viewpoint of religious Daoism. Subsequently, Choi Jinseok and Jung Jiwook translated *Daodezhenjingyishu* 道德真經義疏 of Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (608–669), an outstanding Daoist scholar from the Tang dynasty. Moreover, their translation of *Laozi Shuyi* 義疏 had a considerable influence on scholars of Daoism and the Korean academic realm of philosophy. The *Heshanggong* edition, which was previously ignored in favor of the commonly available edition, received attention as one of the four significant editions, along with the bamboo slips, the silk manuscript, and Wang Bi’s edition for the decade between 2005 and 2015. Although the DDJ translation from a religious Daoist perspective did not show a significant amount of prominence during this period, for the reason mentioned above, it can be said that a profound understanding of the DDJ was gained.

Finally, other religious Daoist scriptures derived from the DDJ began to be translated around 2015, and DDJ translation from a religious perspective marked its second revival. In 2014, Korean medicine scholar Jeong U-jin translated *Laozi Xiangerzhu* 老子想爾註, the scripture central for the *Wudoumi jiao* (Celestial Masters Daoism), and added the theory of self-cultivation through mind and body, the concept of good and evil from the perspective of preserving one’s health, breathing techniques, and Chinese medicine, to the interpretation (Jeong 2014). At this point, the pragmatic Daoist commentaries centered on the original text of the DDJ were translated from a religious perspective. In 2017, Kim Beomseok and Jeong Ilhwa translated the religious Daoist text *Heshanggong Zhangju bashiyihua* 河上公章句八十一化 with an interpretation by the Daoist Tao Suxuan 陶素耜 from the Qing dynasty, also known as Qingjingxin Jushi 清淨心居士 (Daoist of the pure heart) or Tongwei Daoren (Tongweidaoren 2017), which focuses on *mifa* 密法 (the secret method) and *danfa* 丹法 (the inner alchemy method) in religious Daoism. The preface was intended to prove its Daoist legitimacy by attaching a foreword from the *Xiuxiang Daodejing* 繡像道德經 written by Yue Chongdai 嶽崇岱, the first chairman of the Chinese Daoist Association and abbot of the Shenyang Taiqing palace. In 2018, Choi Sang-yong, an expert in *qigong* study and *qi* study (2018), translated the *Heshanggong* edition based on modern human physiology and an understanding of the *Huangdi Neijing* and Huang-Lao studies (Choi 2018). In the most recent case, in 2020, Lee Seunghun, a trainee of Wang Liping 王力平—the 18th generation lineage holder of the Longmen sect of Quanzhen religious Daoism—translated *Chunyang Zhenren Shiyi Daodejing* 純陽真人釋義道德經 ascribed to the Tang dynasty Daoist immortal Lu Dongbin 呂洞賓. As noted above, it can be seen that since 2014, DDJ translation from a religious point of view has developed with a focus on revealing the spiritual tradition of

Dokyo, and it has attempted to clarify the issues of body and health preservation through the interpretation of the DDJ.

3.4. Translation from a Philosophical Point of View

During the 1990s, the Kim Youngsam government promoted diversification and specialization within Korean universities. In particular, philosophy departments and the various language departments became increasingly specialized. Following the reform of national universities by the Kim Daejung government in 1998, expanded the philosophy departments and stabilized the academic research environment. Under these circumstances, DDJ translation, which had been primarily carried out by scholars of Traditional Confucian exegetics, linguists, and Christians until the 1990s, was extensively developed by both Eastern and Western philosophy experts, as they considered it a significant text underlying Lao-Zhuang thought. Their shared perspective was that they attempted to philosophically²¹ interpret Lao-Zhuang thought in their DDJ translations, setting their gaze beyond its linguistic aspect.

The translators producing philosophically minded translations mainly from 2000 to 2015 shifted away from the commonly available DDJ edition, most often used as the source text for other translations. The first of these changes involves the translation of excavated documents. The Mawangdui manuscripts were already first translated into Korean by Park Heejoon in 1991 but did not draw much academic attention at this time. It was only more than a decade later when a widely recognized improved rendering was produced by Kim Hongkyung in 2003, which added detailed interpretations to each phrase and a long preface to better understand the original text. It was similar to the case of the Guodian manuscripts that were first partially translated and released by Choi Jinseok and Lee Kidong, both experts in Daoist philosophy, together with parts of the *Tonghaengbon*, in 2001. Later, Yang Bangwoong fully translated them in 2003, and then Choi Jaemok subsequently penned an even more detailed version, complemented with commentaries and explanations by the translator.²²

The translation of the excavated manuscripts of DDJ, which was a trend in the 2000s, eventually led to another perspective on DDJ translation, namely translation through comparison, contrast, and analysis between various editions that had been translated or discovered at the beginning of the 21st century in Korea. Representative examples include *Baekseo Noja* (The Silk Text Laozi) (2003) by Lee Seokmyeong and *Nojaui Dareujiman Gateun Gil* (The Different but the Same Way of Laozi) (2015) by Ahn Seongjae. With the appearance of translations in this trend, the bamboo strip edition, the silk text edition, the Heshanggong edition, and the Wang Bi edition solidified their positions as the “four major editions of the DDJ”²³ in Korea.

The third translation style that has emerged since the 2000s uses modern Chinese language editions of the DDJ, instead of the original classical Chinese, as the source texts. This significant change occurred following the establishment of diplomatic ties between Korea and China. For example, *Jingoeung-i Purihan Noja* (Laozi interpreted by Chen Guying) (2004) by Choi Jaemok and Park Jongyeon is the translation of Chen Guying’s 陳鼓應 *Laozi Jinzhu Jinshi* 老子今注今譯, one of the most influential modern translations of the DDJ not only in China but also internationally, and this opened the possibility for a new DDJ translation style, the translation of contemporary interpretation of the DDJ in modern Mandarin. Furthermore, modern interpretations of the DDJ in modern Chinese such as *Laozi Yidu* 老子釋讀 by Ren Jiyu 任繼愈, *Xinyi Laozi Duben* 新譯老子讀本 by Yu Peilun 余培林, or *Ren Wang Dichu Zou* 人往低處走 by Li Ling 李零 were all translated into Korean respectively in 2009, 2011, and 2019.

The fourth translation style is a method in which numerous DDJ editions, commentaries, translations of DDJ modern Chinese interpretations, and other materials are selectively adopted and utilized for translation if they suit the translator’s particular viewpoint. This translation perspective has been steadily increasing since 2015, when the rate of new DDJ translations reached a new high. For example, in 2017, Kim Si-cheon comprehensively

used the four DDJ editions, as well as DDJ research from both the East and the West. He also appended translated materials directly related to the DDJ such as *Laozi Weizhi Lielie* 老子微旨例略 of Wang Bi or the “Laozi Liechuan” 老子列傳 (The Biography of Laozi) chapter of *Shiji* 史記. In the same year, Jeong Segeun, who focused on the theme of “femininity”, selected and translated only the parts from the four common editions of DDJ, Fu Yi’s received edition, the commentaries from the Tang, Song, Ming, Qing, and Joseon dynasties, and the *Laozi Jinzhu Jinshi* of Chen Guying that fit the parameters of his theme.

Meanwhile, DDJ translations from the perspective of Western philosophy began to appear around the last decade of the 20th century. This paper summarizes these developments from three chief perspectives. The first is from a comparative philosophical point of view. The second is the perspective of religious study that has a particular relationship with the Christian perspective, which has been discussed in Section 3.3 of this paper. Even so, religious studies perceived the DDJ text as an object of study rather than from a religious point of view. The third is the perspective of Western philosophy led by Western philosophy scholars. Specifically, in the case of the second perspective, it cannot be ignored that it was influenced by the Western tendency during the 1970s to switch from a religious perspective to a philosophical one when studying Daoism.

The comparative philosophical perspective can be observed in Kim Yongok’s *Noja Gilgwa Eodeum* (Laozi: The Way and its Achievement). Kim majored in Oriental philosophy in East Asia and North America and was directly influenced by his contemporaries Yu Yeongmo and Ham Seokheon. For this reason, he also tried to interpret the problematic Chinese character concepts of the DDJ into pure Korean, simultaneously interpreting the philosophical ideas contained in the lines based on modern philosophical thought through his unique perspective. For instance, he translated an excerpt in chapter 11 of the DDJ as follows: “Thirty spokes of a wheel gather on one hub. The use for the cart lies in the emptiness of hub ... Therefore, existence becoming a benefit is because of the use of non-existence” (Wang 2014, p. 54). In this case, Kim interprets “wheel (*gu* 轂)” as “civilization” from the perspective of criticism of material civilization in modern philosophy and explains that humankind can overcome the gap between civilization and nature through the “emptiness” of *gu*. However, according to the research of Chinese philosophers (Kim 2004, pp. 265–66), wheels have been used as a symbol of means to govern people in much of the literature of the time, e.g., in the “Tianjingzhongwan Shijia” 田敬仲完世家 (The Family of Jingzhong 敬仲 Chenwan 陳完) chapter of *Shiji* 史記. In this case, the wheel (*gu*) here was likely utilized as a metaphor for the means of governing people.

Nevertheless, this is far from the meaning of “civilization” symbolized by a wheel in Kim’s translation. Aside from this, *Daodejing* (2003) by Kim Hapung—a re-translation of his English DDJ translation *Reading Lao Tzu: A Companion to the Tao Te Ching with a New Translation*—also belongs to the translations from a comparative philosophical point of view. Kim re-translates it into Korean by comparing Western philosophy with oriental Zen thought.

Secondly, Oh Gangnam’s *Dodeokgyeong* (Daodejing) (1995) can be cited as an early DDJ translation from the perspective of religious studies. Oh majored in Western religious studies (not theology) in Korea and religious studies centered on Korean Buddhist thought in North America. His attitude from the angle of religious studies is expressed well in his translation of chapter 1 of the DDJ.

Therefore, if there is no greed, the mystery (*xuan* 玄) can be seen, and if there is always greed, you can see its manifestation. Both have the same origin. The name is different, but all are mysterious. (It is the) Mystery (*xuan* 玄) of mysteries (*xuan* 玄), the door to all mysteries (*miao* 妙). (Oh 2020, p. 19)

As noted above, while Oh interprets both *xuan* 玄 as *miao* 妙 as “mystery” and at this point goes beyond the logic of language, simultaneously, he explains in the paragraph that “historically, many thinkers continued to ask the question, why are there things at all, other than nothing?” and expressed the mystery by saying ‘mystery of being’ or ‘shock of being.’ ... The mystery of existence and the shock of existence, but what about the mystery of

non-existence that makes existence possible? What about the shock of non-existence? The DDJ leads us to the mystery of the existing world, the mystery of the non-existing world that includes and controls the realm of the current world and is the basis of this ‘gate of mystery’” (ibid., pp. 22–23). Through this, it can be confirmed that he perceived the DDJ from a typical perspective of mystical religious studies, contrary to philosophical analysis.

The final one is a translation of Western philosophy scholars. There is Kim Hyeonghyo’s *Sayuhaneun Dodeokgyeong* (Thinking Daodejing) (2004) from the perspective of structuralism, deconstruction, and ontology, and Lee Sujeong’s *Nojaneun Ireoke Malhaetta* (Laozi Said Like This) (2020), which was translated from a recent ontological perspective of German philosophy. Nonetheless, these would not become mainstream DDJ translations in Korea. DDJ translations and interpretations from this point of view have been carried out in the West since the 1970s but had insignificant amounts of influence in Korea itself.

The classification of the Korean DDJ translations according to the translator’s perspective after liberation discussed above has limitations in the ability to derive distinguished classification results due to the feature of the research subject—“translation”. This is because, unlike research works, translation does not clearly state its standpoint from the beginning but is determined solely by the academic tendencies and perspectives of individual translators. For this reason, it is often found that one translator is also included in multiple categories from different viewpoints. A representative example is Ryu Youngmo, a Christian, who maintains a religious interpretation of the translation content. Still, it linguistically adopts the translation method utilizing pure Korean words according to the tradition of a Christian missionary in contrast to the methodology that Gyeonghak took. These two perspectives seem to be in entirely different categories, but they are linked to each other in the process of historical flow. Therefore, this paper classified them into four perspectives to convey the characteristics of the Korean DDJ translations more clearly, which was the primary purpose of this paper, and added an explanation of the organic connection formed between different perspectives.

4. Conclusions

In this article, the DDJ translations in Korean that appeared after the liberation from Japan were gathered and analyzed and subsequently classified into four perspectives according to the academic field and the methodology of translation: the perspective continuing Traditional Confucian exegetics from where the diversification started, the literary and linguistic perspective, the religious perspective, and the philosophical perspective. Simultaneously, the translation characteristics were clarified by comprehensively examining the formation process of each view in context.

The characteristics of DDJ translation in Korean can be essentially summarized into five points. First, in terms of the original DDJ text selection, most translations until the 1990s depended on Wang Bi’s edition. However, this means that Wang Bi’s edition was popular, not that the interpretations closely followed Wang Bi’s commentary. Second, the interpretations of the DDJ varied depending on whether the *Dogyo* or the *Doga* approach was followed. The standpoint of religious Daoism prevailed until the Goryeo and Joseon periods. However, in the Joseon dynasty, the interpretation of philosophical Daoism was also becoming compatible with religious Daoism. Finally, the liberation led to the DDJ becoming an object of Traditional Confucian exegetics, to a religious perspective, and a philosophical perspective, respectively. Third, the shock of contact with Western civilization during the enlightenment and the Japanese colonial period created the awareness of the necessity of establishing national independence and, for that purpose, building a cultural consensus. Eventually, DDJ and other Daoist texts that had been excluded from the academic field as heresy before the liberation were officially integrated into the modern academic field. Fourth, the Christian ideas, which were accepted during the opening port era, provided the methodological basis for the DDJ translation into pure Korean and opened a new and unique way to interpret the DDJ. Fifth, the characteristics of the translations varied according to whether the translator accepted *hyunto*—the unique Korean

method to interpret Chinese classics—and followed the interpretation method of Traditional Confucian exegetics or whether they rejected it and followed a linguistic interpretation method. Furthermore, the new translation method, which deviated from the *hyunto* method, using pure Korean language, was first attempted by Christians.

The period between the years 1990 and 2015 was essential in the formation process of DDJ translations. The main reasons for this are that the academic identities of philosophy, Chinese literature, Chinese classics, and religious studies were completed when the modern structure of universities took shape in the 1990s, and direct academic exchanges between China and Korea increased after the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and Korea in 1992. Subsequently, since 2015, the translation of the DDJ in Korea has expanded its horizon and added depth based on the profound achievements made in the 25 years before.

The above research results show that DDJ translation in Korea after the liberation goes beyond mere translation and is closely linked to significant issues such as the Korean cultural identity, the academic structure of knowledge, the acceptance and dissemination of religion, and the methodology of Traditional Confucian exegetics. As a result, the DDJ translation in Korean was able to develop rapidly in various fields and from different perspectives, resulting in the nowadays second-largest corpus of DDJ translations after the English language.

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Notes

- ¹ Mawangdui silk edition of the *Laozi* was used as a grave good presumably around the 2nd century B.C. and the Guodian bamboo strip edition of the *Laozi* dates to around 300 BC.
- ² For concepts of East Asia and views on East Asian studies, see Seo-Reich (2020, pp. 129–64).
- ³ For more on the distribution and research status of Korean Daoist literature, see Kim (2022, pp. 249–71).
- ⁴ According to Kim Gapsu’s research, there are about 70 Korean translations of DDJ published up until the 1900s (Kim 2003, pp. 213–38). According to my own survey, which relied on the publication registration data released by the National Library of Korea (www.nl.go.kr) (accessed on 4 August 2022) and the data released by Kyobo Bookstore (www.kyobobook.co.kr) (accessed on 4 August 2022), which has the largest publication data in Korea, about 112 DDJ Korean translations have been published from 2000 to 2022 (excluding novels and educational books). To be more specific, from 2015 to 2022, 65 translations have been published, considerably more than the 47 translations published between 2000 and 2014, which shows the increased interest in the DDJ.
- ⁵ For information on the acceptance of Daoism in Goguryeo, see: Lee (2008, pp. 51–102) and Kim (2010, pp. 163–202).
- ⁶ This is based on Lee Byungdo’s view, which was the cornerstone research regarding Sedang Park’s literature. He defined Park as an anti-Neo-Confucianist (Lee 1966, pp. 8–18).
- ⁷ Lee Bongho largely classified the three trends of commentaries to *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* during the Joseon dynasty: first, “Daoism as heresy” (閉異端論); second, “using Confucian thought to explain Daoism” (以儒釋老); third, “breaking away from Neo-Confucianism” (脫朱子學). However, in this paper, the author argues that the first trend also aims to integrate Laozi’s ideas into Confucianism, and that the second and third also share the intention to solve problems in reality by applying practical Daoist thoughts to Neo-Confucianism or original Confucianism (Lee 2004, pp. 11–47).
- ⁸ Regarding the modern Sino-Korean literature (漢文學), Kim Jin-kyun pointed out that “modern civilization’s perspective, Chinese characters and traditional Sino-Korean literature were from the exterior or China, so ultranationalists called those Chinese studies. Afterwards, nationalistic scholars found the national characteristics in the Chinese studies, so they called that traditional Sino-Korean literature” (Kim 2011, p. 165).
- ⁹ Shin Hyunjung first attempted to translate the DDJ via the *Hyunto* method according to their exegetics tradition, and this became the most common translation form of the DDJ until the 1990s (Shin 1957). This article includes exempla such as Nam (1970); Shin, Dongho (1970); Lee (1975); Jang (1977). DDJ translations, which follow this traditional translation method, appear steadily even

after the 1990s, but it is difficult to say that it is mainstream, because there has been a sharp drop in publications. No (1999); Park (2011) can serve as examples.

Gyongjaja 庚子字 are bronze metal types made at Jujaso 鑄字所 from 1420—the second year of King Sejong (Academy of Korean Studies 1995).

For more information about the acceptance and understanding of Lin Xiyi's commentary by Confucian scholars during the Joseon dynasty, see Choi (2003, pp. 315–40).

It seems impossible to find the original manuscript of Yu Yeongmo's first pure Korean DDJ translation that he completed in the 1950s because it was not registered as an official publication. However, Park Yeongho released the original text of Yu Yeongmo's DDJ translation without any revisions in the appendix "Daseok Ryuyongmo-ga Omgin Noja" (Laozi Translated by Daseok Ryu Youngmo) of his second DDJ translation in 1998 (Park 1988, pp. 412–17).

The difficulty of Yu's translation has been pointed out by a number of scholars in the linguistics and Chinese philosophy research field including Oh Jintak and Rhee Jae-kwon (see Rhee 2013, pp. 286–87).

This will be dealt with in further detail in Section 3.3.

Since 2015, the pure Korean translation of DDJ through linguistic experts has been possible from increasingly diverse angles. This article mentions examples such as Kim (2018), who translated from the perspective of Sino-Korean literature, Yang (2018) who worked from the perspective of Chinese literature and phonology, or Yoon (2020) from the perspective of Korean language studies.

Jeon (2016) can be the representative example for this.

This content is a quote from Park Jae-soon's summary of the original data from the back cover of *Ssi-al-ui Sori* [The Sound of the Ssi-al], vol. 146 (Ham 1999). For additional details, see Park (2012, p. 99); Lee (2016, pp. 283–307).

In this regard, Ham Seokheon said that he read Buddhist scriptures and Daoist literature while in prison to obtain information on the Joseon spirit in his collection of works *Bible Korea* during the Japanese Colonial period. During this time, he realized that the ideas of Buddhism and Daoism were in agreement with Christian thought (Ham 1964, pp. 250–51).

The real name of Tanheo 吞虛 is Kim Geumtaek 金鉉. However, he used his Buddhist name Tanheo for a significant majority of his publications, this text included.

Although Tanheo did not directly mention the source text for the translation of his *Hyunto yokjju Dodeokgyeong* 縣吐譯註道德經, from the contents of the commentary, it is presumed that he took *Daodejing jiangyi* 道德經講義 (A Lecture on the Daodejing), printed in Taipei in the 1970s before the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and China as the original text. It became the first DDJ translation of Daodejing in Korea interpreted from the Daoist perspective. See for comparison: Tanheo (1983), Song (1970).

In this paper, I considered the category of religious studies as another category of philosophy because they share many methods, since the establishment of philosophy as an independent modern discipline began with the separation of philosophy from the theological seminary (Seo-Reich 2017, pp. 90–99).

Furthermore, in 2020, Daecheol Jeong showed the rather extreme opinion that only the Daodejing on bamboo scripts could be acknowledged as the genuine literature of Laozi, and that other editions should be doubted.

"Four major editions of the DDJ" is an expression that began to be used since Ahn Seongjae presented them in his book Ahn (2015).

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