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The Dissemination of Laozi's Text and Thought in the Arab World

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Abstract: Based on Chinese and Arabic literature, this paper summarizes the spread of Laozi's text and thought in the Arab world. The specific course of dissemination can be divided into two stages: from 1966 to 2000, the *Dao De Jing* was disseminated on the basis of indirect translations; from 2000 to today, the spread of the *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world reached a climax when the first direct translation was published. Laozi's text and thought have gained acceptance and popularity largely because of their soothing function and similarity to the Sufi spirit found in Arab culture. The spread of Laozi's text and thought in the Arab world presents three features: a long and friendly history of cultural exchange has served as a foundation; languages such as English and French have functioned as intermediaries; and similarities between Sufism and Daoism have provided points of connection.

Keywords: *Dao De Jing*; Laozi's thought; the Arab world; intercultural communication



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1. Introduction

During the Western Han Dynasty, the historian Sima Qian wrote in the "Treatise on the Dayuan" chapter of the *Shiji* that "Tiaozhi lies thousands of miles west of Anxi, near the west sea" (Sima 2019, p. 261). The "Tiaozhi" referred to in the citation is part of the Arab world. Although China and Arab countries geographically are far apart and have cultural differences, exchanges between China and Arabia have a long and profound history. This continuous trade since ancient times has also facilitated the exchange and collision of ideas. Laozi's philosophy, as an excellent achievement of Chinese civilization, provides a meaningful example of this exchange of Chinese between Arab civilizations.

Laozi's *Dao De Jing* and its theories began to be disseminated in the Arab world a few decades ago, with the first Arabic translation of the *Dao De Jing* published in 1966. By the end of 2020, there were already 19 *Dao De Jing* translations in Arabic, 16 relevant research papers, and 19 other research works. After nearly 60 years of dissemination and development, the number of translations and research on this work continue to increase year by year. The list of Arabic translations of *Dao De Jing* can be seen in Table 1.

Non-Islamic people often have a limited understanding of Islamic culture, concluding that Arabs are too conservative to be interested in the cultural achievements of other civilizations. This paper reviews the spread of Laozi's thought in the Arab world, hoping to break this stereotype. We found that Laozi's ideas of care for the spiritual world and return to nature have attracted certain Arab intellectuals, who integrated these ideas with Islamic philosophy. This research aims to modestly contribute to the history of Sino-Arab civilizational exchange, and also highlight the status of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world through its repeated translation into Arabic. This article offers the first ever overview of Arabic *Dao De Jing* translations and the spread of its thought in the Arabic world.

Table 1. List of Arabic translations of *Dao De Jing*.

Publication Date	Translation	Translator	Publishing House/Location of Publishing House	Original Language
1966	Kitābu at-Tāu wa al-Fadīla كتاب الطاو والفضيلة	‘Abdu Al-Ghafār Makāwī عبد الغفار مكاوي	Egypt Dār Al-maārif دار المعارف	German
1980	Kitābu at-Tāu الطاو كتاب	Hādī Al-‘Alawī هادي العلوي	Lebanon Dār Al-Kūnūz دار كنوز	English
1992	Daodejing: at-Tarīk Ila al-Fadīla الطريق إلى الفضيلة Tao Te Ching	Alā’u Ad-Dību أديب علاء	Kuait Sūād Sabāh دار سعاد الصباح	English
1995	Kitābu at-Tāu التاو كتاب	Hādī Al-‘Alawī هادي العلوي	Lebanon Dār Al-Kūnūz دار كنوز	English
1998	Kitābu at-Tāu: Injilū al-Hikmatī at-Tāwīyya Laozi كتاب التاو -إنجيل الحكمة التاوية	Farās As-Sawāḥ السواح فارس	Syria Dār Alā’u Ad-Dīn دار علاء الدين	English
2001	<i>Tao</i> التاو	Ranyā Mishlib رانبة مشلب	Lebanon/Arab Communication Foundation	English
2002	At-Tarīk wa Tākatuh الطريق وطاقته	Yuhannā Qumayr يوحنا قمير	Lebanon Luizeh	French
2005	<i>Kitābu at-Tāu</i> كتاب الطاو لاوتسي	Muḥsin Farjānī محسن الفرجاني	Egyptian National Translation Center	Chinese
2008	<i>Lao Zi</i> الحكماء يتكلمون - لاو تسي	Alī Mulā علي مولا	Lebanon Arab Scientific Publishers	English
2009	<i>Mūhtārāt min Ash’ārī Laozi</i> مختارات من أشعار لاوتسه	Amal Porter أمل بورتر	Jordan Fadā’āt press فضاءات للنشر والتوزيع	English
2009	Greater China Library - <i>Laozi</i> لاوتسو	Farās As-Sawāḥ فارس السواح Xue Qingguo 薛庆国	Beijing – Foreign language teaching and Research Press	Chinese, English
2015	<i>The Straight “dao” at-Tarīk al-Kawīm</i> تاو تيتشنيج الطريق القويم	Muḥamed Safā صفا محمد	Egypt	English
2015	<i>Kitābu at-Tāu wa al-Fadīla</i> كتاب الطاو والفضيلة	Alā’u Ad-Dību علاء أديب	Egypt Al-karma للنشر	English
2016	<i>Akwalu Al-Faylasūf Lao Tsi</i> أقوال الفيلسوف لاو تسي	SINOLINGUA 华语教学出版社	Lebanon Arab Scientific Publishers الدار العربية للعلوم ناشرون	Chinese
2017	<i>Lih Tsi Fi Ahḍani Al-Rīḥ</i> ليه تسي في أحضان الريح	Wang Youyong 王有勇	Lebanon Arab Thought Foundation	Chinese
2017	<i>Kitābu al-Daodejing Kitābu Assīn al-Mūkaddas, Kitābu at-Tāu aw Sirātu al-Abdāl</i> كتاب التاوتي - تشينغ كتاب الصين المقدس كتاب التاو أو صراط الأبدال	Musallam Sakka Amīnī أميني سقا مسلم	Syria Dār Al-Fikr	Japanese
2018	<i>Ghayyir afkarak, Ghayyir ḥayātak, ‘Aysh fann hikmat at-Tāu</i> غير حياتك أفكارك غير التاو حكمة فن عيش	Haytham Sobeh صبح هيثم	Lebanon Dār al-khayāl دار الخيال	English
2020	<i>Tarīk alḥak wa Fadīlatu al-Hūdā</i> الهدى وفضيلة الحق الطريق	Mohammed As‘ad الأسعد محمد	Kuait Dār Al-Salāsīl دار ذات السلاسل	English
2022	<i>Al-Sufiya Assīniya Fi Kitāb Lao Tsi Al-Kitābu al-Mūkaddas</i> ..الصوفية الصينية في كتاب لاوتسي الكتاب المقدس	Abdu Al-Azīz Hamdī عبدالعزیز حمدي	Egypt Dār Al-Kitāb Al-Hadīth دار الكتاب الحديث	Chinese

2. The Dissemination of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab World in the Past Sixty Years

Compared with Britain, France, Germany, and other regions, the translation of *Dao De Jing* started late in the Arab world. The first Arabic translation, *Kitābu at-Tāu wal-Fadīla* (كتاب الطاو والفضيلة), was published in 1966, finally opening the door to the translation of and research on the *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world. The specific course of dissemination of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world can be divided into two stages: from 1966 to 2000, and from 2000 to today.

2.1. 1966–2000, the Dissemination of *Dao De Jing* Based on Indirect Translations

The spread of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world during this period was largely influenced by Germany, France, and Britain. The Arabic translations were based on indirect translations, whose source language is not Chinese, but German, English, and French. During the 34 years from 1966 to 2000, five Arabic translations of *Dao De Jing* were published. In 1966, *Kitābu at-Tāu wal-Fadīla* (كتاب الطاو والفضيلة) translated by ‘Abdu Al-Ghafār Makāwī (عبد الغفار مكوي) was published by Egypt Arabs Archives Press. This translation originated from a German translation by Günther Debon, a German sinologist and one of the most prominent German translators of Chinese poetry. In 1980, Hādī Al-‘Alawī (العلوي هادي) translated and published *Kitābu at-Tāu* (كتاب الطاو) in Lebanon, which originated from an unknown English version.

In 1992, an Arabic translation of *Kitābu at-Tāu* (كتاب الطاو), based on the 1972 English translation of Feng Gia-fu and Jane English, was published in Kuwait. Alā’u Ad-Dību (علاء أديب), the translator of the book, said, “the English translation I have chosen is a simple, brilliant and vivid one. One professional reviewer commented that it is very ‘vivid and easy to understand by converting previously obscure text into simple text’” (Alā’u Ad-Dību 2016, p. 8). This translation lacks any notes, but does include a short introduction. There, he repeatedly praised Laozi’s thought as an amazing and perfect philosophical system.

In 1995, Dār Al-Kūnūz (دار كنوز) published *Kitābu at-Tāu* (كتاب التاو) in Beirut, and it was widely and enthusiastically received by Arab scholars and readers. The first translator Hādī Al-‘Alawī (العلوي هادي) wrote a preface of over fifty pages to introduce Laozi’s thought and elaborate on Laozi’s ontology, life conception, and political outlook. Meanwhile, the book compares and analyzes the similarities and differences between Laozi’s thought and the Sufi ideas found in Islamic philosophy. According to Hādī Al-‘Alawī, his translation is derived from the original Chinese language with reference to the English translation. He explains, “In my translation of the *Dao De Jing*, I refer to the English version translated by Chinese-American scholar Feng Gia-fu (1919–1985). For some of the parts of the translation, I give priority to the famous British sinologist Needham’s translation” (Al-‘Alawī 1995, pp. 53–54).

In 1998, Farās As-Sawāh (السواح فارس), a Syrian cultural scholar, revised and polished the translated version and finally completed *Kitābu at-Tāu: Injilū al-Hikmatī at-Tāwīyya Laozi* (كتاب التاو - إنجيل الحكمة التاوية). He notes, “I translated the *Dao De Jing* into Arabic based on three English translations” (Al-Sawwāh 1998, p. 10). This version is based on the English of D. C. Lau and refers to the English and French translations by Feng Gia-fu, Chung-yuan Chang [张钟元], and Nanqi Liu [刘楠祺]. In this third edition he explains, “After I finished my translation, I compared it with Kia-hway Liou’s [刘家槐] French version, and when the third edition was published, Dr. Xue Qingguo proofread my Arabic translation with reference to the original Chinese version” (Al-Sawwāh 1998, p. 10). Sawāh also stressed the reliability of his translation and said, “In my Arabic translation of *Dao De Jing*, there is no such groundless content as in other translations” (Al-Sawwāh 1998, p. 10).

Compared with previous Arabic translations of *Dao De Jing*, this version is of high academic value. At the beginning and the end of the translation, the author attaches a detailed introduction and an explanation to compare the similarities and differences between Laozi’s philosophy, Islamic philosophy, and Western philosophy. He interprets the *Dao De Jing* according to modern scientific theory, offering many unique insights. In addition, this book is presented as having significant practical value. The author resolutely

conveys that the translation of *Dao De Jing* can enable as many people as possible to perceive Laozi's extensive and far-reaching wisdom and so find solutions to many problems of modern civilization.

2.2. From 2000 until Today, the Dissemination of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab World Has Reached a Climax

Although Sino-Egyptian economic cooperation is not new, its scope widened after 2000, following the initiation of China's "Going Out" strategy in combination with Egypt's mounting socioeconomic problems. In 1999, China signed with Egypt the "Joint Communiqué on Establishing Strategic Cooperative Relationship Between the People's Republic of China and Arab Republic of Egypt." These political developments led to Arab sinologists beginning to translate Chinese classical texts directly from Chinese.

Since 2000, more and more scholars in the Chinese Department of Egyptian universities have studied Chinese literature. In addition to 17 teachers specializing in Chinese literature in the Chinese Department of Ain Shams University, 13 students in the preparatory class of the Chinese department have chosen to study Chinese literature. Furthermore, the head of the national translation project of the Supreme Council of the Egyptian Ministry of Culture often encourages Egyptian Chinese experts to make greater efforts to introduce Chinese culture and literature to the Egyptian people. Since 2000, the project has published many Arabic versions of Chinese culture and literature writings, and this coincides with significant improvements in the quantity and quality of the Arab translations of and research on the *Dao De Jing*. During this period, the total number of Arabic *Dao De Jing* translations rose to 14, and the first Arabic *Dao De Jing* translated directly from Chinese was also published.

In 2001, Ranyā Mishlib's (رانية مشلب) translation of *Tao* (التاو), based on an English translation, was published in Lebanon. In 2002, the Lebanese literary writer Yūhannā Qūmayr (يوحنا قمير) translated *At-Tarīk wa Tākatuh* (الطريق وطاقته) "The Path and its Energy" from a French translation. In April 2005, the Egyptian National Translation Center published sinologist Muḥsin Farjānī's (محسن الفرجاني) translation of *Kitābu at-Tāu* (كتاب الطاو), which was the first Arabic translation direct from Chinese and serialized in the *Egyptian Literary News*. Doctor Farjānī (الفرجاني) is a well-known Sinology professor and translator. He is a lecturer of the Chinese Department in Ain Shams University and member of the Chinese Expert Group of the National Translation Center of Egypt. He also has translated a great quantity of Chinese classical works, such as the *Analects of Confucius*, *Strategies of the Warring States*, *Sun Tzu's Art of War*, and *The Four Books*, making important contributions to the spread of Chinese culture in Egypt and the Arab world. In the Cairo International Book Fair in 2011, Doctor Farjānī won the Translation Award granted by the former General Administration of Press and Publication of the People's Republic of China.

In describing his process of translating the *Dao De Jing*, Doctor Farjānī explains his serious scholarly process as follows, "I collected three different versions of the original Chinese manuscript in order to understand and translate the original text more accurately" (Farjānī 2005, p. 16). He also included brief and accurate notes that further enhance the translation's academic value. The response to this pioneering work has been quite positive. For example, author and scholar Jamel Khaldūn speaks highly of Mohsin Farjānī's translation: "Only Dr. Muḥsen's translation has won the popularity of the Egyptian literary and art circles. It has truly introduced to the Arab world the essence of Chinese culture and the wisdom of Laozi. Mohsen's translation opens the door for Chinese culture and literary classics to be introduced to the Arab world" (Hussein 2008, p. 121).

In 2009, the translation of Amāl Porter (أمل بورتير), *Mūhtārāt min Ash'āri Laozi* (مختارات من أشعار لاوتسه), was published in Jordan. After referring to versions of *Dao De Jing* in different languages and regions and incorporating suggestions from many Chinese friends, she finally completed the translation after 15 years of revision and adjustment.

In the same year, China Foreign Language Teaching and Research Press published a new Arabic translation of *Dao De Jing* translated by Xue Qingguo and Farās As-Sawāh.

(السواح فارس). This translation is based on Farās As-Sawāḥ's translation published in 1998, modified by Xue Qingguo, and then further polished by Farās As-Sawāḥ to present readers with an ideal translation faithful to the original meaning, fluent in language and detailed in interpretation. This joint work by Chinese and Arab scholars is the first attempt in the history of Arabic translation of *Dao De Jing*.

In 2017, *Kitābu al-Daodejing Kitābu Assīn al-Mūkaddas Kitābu at-Tāu aw Sirātu al-Abdāl* (التاوتي - تشينغ كتاب الصين المقدس كتاب التاو أو صراط الأبدال) created by Musallam Sakkā Amīnī was published in Syria. He considers *Dao De Jing* to be a very important religious classic in China and presents religious reflections on Laozi's thought. This translation was directly translated from Japanese versions, although the process was more complex than that: "I referred to four authoritative English translations, the original Chinese text, Japanese translations and three different versions of English annotations to complete my translation, and I also consulted dozens of research books on the book," the translator said (Musallam 2017, p. 19).

In 2018, *Ghayyir Afkarak, Ghayyir hayātak: 'Aysh fann hikmat Al-Tāw*, based on the English translation of Wayne Dyer and translated by Haytham Sobeh (هيثم صبح), was published in Lebanon by Dār al-khayāl press (الخيال دار). In December 2020, based on an English translation by American Roland Bernard Blakeney, Palestinian poet and novelist Mohammed As'ad (محمد الأسعد) published *Ṭarīk alḥaq wa Fadīlatu al-Hūdā* (الطريق الحق وفضيلة الهدى). In addition, *Hūsīn Alwān Hūsīn* (حسين علوان حسين) translation *Tarjamāt Kitāb Al-Tāw (Ṭarīk Al-akel)* (متون الطاو لا إسم له) and *Ibrahīm Bin Saīd's Matūn at-Tāu Lā Isma Lahu* (له اسم له) (طريق الطاو لا إسم له) are all translations from this period. *Tarjamāt Kitāb Al-Tāw (Ṭarīk Al-akel)* (طريق الطاو لا إسم له) is based on multiple English translations: *Tao-Teh King* by James Legge, *The Law of Reason and Virtue* by D. T. Suzuki and Paul Carus, and *Laotzu's Tao and Wu Wei* by Dwight Goddard, Henri Borel, and M. E. Reynolds.

With the dissemination of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world, the concept of "Dao," which is purely a category of ancient Chinese philosophy, began to appear frequently in books, newspapers, and academic forums in Arab countries, particularly in Egypt. Laozi's thought has been understood and accepted by more and more Arab people. The dissemination of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world has been mainly concentrated in Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Kuwait.

3. Reasons for Spread of Laozi's Text and Thought and Their Influence in Arab World

3.1. Reasons Why Laozi's Text and Thought Have Been Accepted and Welcomed in the Arab World

Despite the conservative tendency in Arab Islamic countries, Laozi's text and thought are becoming increasingly popular in the Arab world. Although Muslims in the Arab world are united in their belief in God and the Prophet Muhammad, they have widely differing views about many other aspects of their faith, including how important religion is to their lives and what practices are acceptable in Islam.

There are three main reasons Laozi's thought has become popular and welcomed in the Arab world:

Firstly, it has a positive psychological impact on readers. The *Dao De Jing* has touched the hearts of Arab translators and readers, for whom Laozi's thoughts are soothing and bear "healing" wisdom. They specially focus on the value of Laozi's idea of "following nature's course" in the construction of modern people's spiritual world.

Alā'u Ad-Dību (أديب علاء), one of the Arabic translators of the *Dao De Jing*, said, "This book (*Dao De Jing*) is closer to my spirit than my brain, and perhaps it reveals one of the fundamental contradictions of mankind. 'Dao' calls for integration, not contradiction. The philosophy prevailing in the Middle East and Europe is a cultural contradiction that involves good and evil, peace and anti-war, night and day" (Alā'u Ad-Dību 1992, p. 4). Essentially, the meaning of the above passage is that, according to Laozi, the distinction between good and evil is a wrong-headed human contrivance, whereas Western culture emphasizes a duality between good and evil, and a call to embrace the good and spurn

the evil. This idea is expressed by Laozi through the terms Yin and Yang. The two words mean the fundamental and opposite forces or principles in nature. Yin meant “sunless” or “northern”. It was associated with darkness, emptiness, and passivity. The opposite state was Yang, which meant “sunny” or “southern.” Yang was associated with light, fullness, and action. These traits appear oppositional on first inspection. However, that opposition is only a surface illusion in Laozi belief. In fact, the two states of nature require each other.

Farās As-Sawāḥ (السواح فارس), a prominent Syrian cultural scholar, explained his motivation for, and the effect of, translating *Dao De Jing* as follows: “I want as many people as possible to enjoy that kind of peace, so I translated the *Dao De Jing* for Arab readers. As soon as the translation was published, it received a wide response. Readers told me that ‘I changed a lot after reading *Dao De Jing*,’ and that ‘*Dao De Jing* has changed my life.’ I firmly believe that modern civilization, with its many problems, can benefit from the thoughts of this Chinese sage” (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29). As many readers of the book explain, Laozi teachings are intended to be utilized as a guide to daily living. Their greatest value lies in their ability to direct people toward our own process of self-exploration, growth, and transformation, which connects us deeply to ourselves and to the world around us. In fact, teachings of Daoism as Simplicity, patience, compassion are considered a great way to navigate life with harmony. The Dao is a principle that embraces nature, a force which flows through everything in the universe. Daoism encourages working with natural forces. This is also represented graphically by the Yin-Yang concept.

Secondly, there are concepts in Arab culture similar to or even connected with “Dao”. It is no accident that Daoism has been accepted and welcomed in the Arab world. Gamāl Khaldūn (خلدون جمال), one of the most important contemporary Egyptian writers, also loves the book *Dao De Jing*. He once said, “After reading *Dao De Jing*, a Classic of Chinese culture, I found that it is similar to many masterpieces of Arab Sufi philosophy, whose core is the search for truth. Whether it’s the *Dao De Jing* or the Sufi classics, they are the home of my soul” (Zong 2009, pp. 137–42). As Gamāl Khaldūn pointed out, there are many similarities between Daoist thoughts and Sufi thoughts, the spiritual gem of Arab Islamic culture. Both emphasize grasping the world through the non-rational way of direct comprehension, and advocate for getting rid of unnecessary and overelaborate formalities, returning to nature and pursuing freedom. They both advocate an implicit and mysterious aesthetic taste.

Hādī Al-‘Alawī (العلوي هادي), an influential Iraqi thinker in the Arab world, went to China in the 1980s and 1990s and studied Chinese during his stay in China. He wrote in the preface to his 1994 book *Collecting Treasures in China* that “Chinese philosophy is good at dialectics, especially in Daoist thoughts.” His idea is representative among Arab scholars. He also mentioned that Chinese philosophy pays more attention to man than to nature, which is similar to the Sufi thought in the Islamic world. Al-‘Alawī (العلوي) explained Laozi’s philosophy as an authentic “Eastern” tradition similar to Sufism philosophy in terms of its “communal” spirit and concern for the people, as well as what he perceived to be its inexorable opposition to the state and the monopolization of wealth (Al-Sudayrī 2014, pp. 19–20).

Another Arab scholar, Muhammed al-Sudayrī, explained in his article “Hadi al-‘Alawi, Scion of the Two Civilizations” that al-‘Alawi’s interest in Chinese culture stemmed from what he saw as a natural affinity between Islamic and Chinese civilizations, unified as they are by a common “humanistic” essence that contrasted with the spiritual emptiness and corruption of the West. This notion explains al-‘Alawi’s affinity for the dual traditions of Sufism and Daoism, wherein he identified a *masha’i* or communal tendency driven by a sense of dignity and defense of the downtrodden against authority. More importantly, he valued the attempts of these traditions to rein in man’s unbridled whims and ease his return to an essential nature (*fitra*), which is *masha’i* in its most basic form. Of course, those people who attain this lofty rank are exceptions, comprising what he called “universal intellectuals” or “prophets” (of different categories) such as Muhammad, Ibn al-Hallaj, Laozi, Goethe, and Marx.

In addition to Arab scholars, some European and American scholars are also concerned with the similarities between Sufism and Taoism. Toshihiko Izutsu's *Sufism and Taoism* is a comparative study of Islamic Sufism philosophy of Ibn Arabi and its connection with Daoism (Izutsu 1983). In this work, Izutsu compares the metaphysical and mystical thought-systems of Sufism and Daoism and discovers that, although historically unrelated, the two share features and patterns which prove fruitful for a transhistorical dialogue. In addition, according to M.A. Rostamian, an Assistant Professor at the University of Religions and Denominations, despite doctrinal differences among Muslim Sufis and Daoists, followers of these traditions have a great deal in common when it comes to spiritual practice, and this is not surprising since each of these traditions was founded upon spiritual insight rather than speculation or belief. Daoism and Sufism both grew by establishing fundamental teachings about human insight and spiritual practices (Rostamian 2010, pp. 141–52).

In addition to China being a great civilization competing for dominance in the Islamic Arab world, Arab intellectuals are trying to undertake further studies on China's culture, religions, and history in many areas, including the issue of prophethood and divine books in this region. The *Dao De Jing* has inspired many Arab intellectuals to reflect on the relation between Western religion and Islam. Ibrahim Burkan's critical study investigates the Daoist religion, its doctrine of divinity based in the *Dao De Jing*, and Islam's attitude towards it. The study reached a number of conclusions. Despite the multiple similarities between Daoism and Islam, however, Daoism still differs from Islamic doctrine in terms of the unity of creator and creation, which is basically why Daoism is not considered as a divine religion. According to Ibrahim burkân, Daoist Scriptures contain few hints about how Daoism is compatible with the Islamic view of God and the conception of divinity, He is viewed as the origin and destination of all sentient beings, great, one and only, unlimited by time and place, eternal, and unperceived by the senses (Ibrahim burkân 2017, p. 88).

Thirdly, as the Chinese departments in Egypt universities became focused more on the research and translation of Chinese literary writings, more Egyptian teachers have engaged Chinese texts. Their work is encouraged by the Chinese government, and the Chinese Embassy in Egypt often invites Egyptian and Chinese experts to discuss cultural exchanges between China and Egypt. China has been striving to introduce Chinese culture to the Egyptian people, often showing representative Chinese films, and inviting cultural and literary celebrities to talk about Chinese culture and literature to Egyptians. The establishment of the Chinese Cultural Center in Cairo has become a convenient bridge for cultural exchanges between Egyptian and Chinese peoples. These efforts undoubtedly provide a broad space for the long-term sustainable development of Chinese literature and research in Arab countries.

Chinese culture and Arab culture are both similar and complementary. It can be said that this unique charm is the fundamental reason for the mutual attraction and interaction of the two ancient civilizations.

3.2. The Influence of Laozi's Text and Thought on Arab Culture

At the beginning of the 20th century, when there were no published translations of *Dao De Jing* in Arabic, Arabic scholars got to know and disseminated Laozi's thought through translations in other languages.

According to Syrian scholar Farās As-Sawāh (السواح فارس), it was renowned Lebanese writer Mīhāil Nūaymān (نعيمه ميخائيل) who first introduced the *Dao De Jing* to Arab readers. In the 1930s, Mīhāil Nūaymān read the *Dao De Jing* in the United States. In 1932, he published a collection of essays titled *Stages*, in which an article entitled *The Face of Laozi* (لاوتسو وجهه) quoted many passages in *Dao De Jing* to explain Laozi's philosophical ideas and express his admiration and love for Laozi. He regarded Laozi as "the angel of peace, the messenger of serenity, the saint of virtue, the model of contentment, and the disseminator of 'Dao,' the spirit of all souls" (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29). He called Laozi's "Dao" mother and praised it as "owning everything but not claiming to be a king, being a benefactor but

not claiming to be virtuous, nurturing everything but not dominating them” (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29). He strongly affirmed the practical significance of Laozi’s idea of letting things take their own course: “Oh, Laozi! I wish that the law-makers and religious jurists on earth would recognize, like you, the great difference between the eternal order of “Dao” and the artificial temporary order of the moment” (Xue 2013).

Mihāil Nūaymān (نعيمه ميخائيل) benefited from the different sources of the literary philosophical thoughts of the Eastern and Western culture, and his works reflected them. His novel *Mirdād* (مرداد), which he wrote in English, has significant place in his literary legacy. It is a novel based on divine ethics akin to Sufi mysticism. Different subjects presented in the novel can also be seen in Sufism as well as in Daoism. Some scholars pointed out that “both stories of *Mirdād* (مرداد) and the Chinese master and philosopher Laozi are extremely similar” (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29). Mihāil Nūaymān’s views about life, being, death, God, and many other subjects have been conveyed in this novel. The author takes the story of the great flood in the Bible as the background, and records the words and deeds of *Mirdād* (مرداد), the main character, who volunteered to be a servant in Noah’s Ark. These words and deeds have strong enlightenment characteristics, and they are quite consistent with Chinese Daoist thought. In fact, the narrator, who ascends the Altar Peak through Flint Slope, facing many difficulties during this journey, symbolizes a man who wants to set himself free from the clutches of this temporary world and attain a divine position, although the journey of the seeker, who is heading towards the divine goal by purifying his desires, is looked at from the Sufism perspective. Besire EZIZELIYEVA explained in “The Book of Mirdad” the ideas that are rooted in Islam and Christianity, and that Sufism and the mysticism are connected around different subjects. When talking about the temporary and divinity, the notion of “I”, the spiritual evolution of the human being, and prophetism, the writer presents many original ideas of his own in addition to his references to the above-mentioned sources (different schools of thoughts) EZIZELIYEVA (Besire 2014, pp. 75–88). The spiritual books Daodejing and *Mirdād* (مرداد) both expand the reader’s understanding of life and tell about how to heal and purify the soul. Although the book of *Mirdād* (مرداد) has a particular poetic language and vision, it has also multiple versions; however, it has not been translated into more than 30 languages like Daodejing.

The Arab poet Gibrān Ḥalīl Gibrān (جبران خليل جبران) was deeply influenced by Laozi. He believed that Confucius and Laozi should be ranked among the top philosophers in the world. In his essay *Lakum Fikratukum wali Fikratī* (لكم فكرتكم ولي فكرتي) he said, “You think the glory of nations comes from heroes such as Nero, Nebuchadnezzar, Rameses, Alexander, Caesar, Hannibal, Napoleon, etc., while I believe in Confucius, Laozi, Socrates and Plato” (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29).

Al-‘Alawī was particularly attracted to Daoism. Following in the footsteps of the medieval freethinker Abu al-‘Alā al-Ma‘arri, and inspired by Daoism’s emphasis on radical simplicity and non-action (无为 *wuwei*), Al-‘Alawī abjured the consumption of meat and stuck to a strictly vegetarian diet for the rest of his life. He also refused to have children. He considered himself a son of Chinese civilization; this is demonstrated by the placard he hung atop the door to his house: “Here lives Hādī Al-‘Alawī, scion of the two civilizations” (Al-Sudayrī 2014, pp. 19–20)—meaning the Islamic and the Chinese civilization.

Jamel Khaldūn (خلدون جمال), a contemporary Egyptian novelist, calls himself “one of the many people who greatly admire China.” He highly respects Laozi’s philosophy. During his tenure as the chief editor of *Literary News* (جريدة أخبار الأدب), the newspaper published the complete and partial translations of many Chinese cultural classics, such as *Dao De Jing*, *Sun Tsu’s Art of War*, and *The Book of Songs*. In addition, Tunisian novelist Mahmūd el-Mes‘adī (المسعودي محمود) also included an Oriental philosopher character in his short story *Al-Musāfir* (المسافر), who is very similar to the image of Daoists in Chinese culture (Xue 2017, pp. 25–29).

Indeed, the smooth acceptance of Laozi’s text and thoughts in the Arab world influenced Arabic scholars and helped readers better understand China amid the Asian country’s growing global influence. There is a desire to learn more about China’s culture, so as

to better cooperate with China. Chinese to Arabic Translations of *Dao De Jing* are proving a real success. That is because people from Arabian countries have become increasingly interested in China after the Belt and Road Initiative, dating back to 2013, encouraging the translation of Chinese books into Arabic for Arab audiences.

4. Conclusions

Although the translation of *Dao De Jing* started late in the Arab world, it has already made an impact. By examining the historical path of the dissemination of Laozi's text and thought in the Arab world and exploring the reasons for its acceptance and popularity, we identified the following three major features.

First, the two-thousand-year history of friendly exchanges between China and Arab countries is the foundation. In the history of China–Arab civilization exchanges, peace, friendship, inclusiveness, mutual learning, and mutual benefit have always occupied a central position. Since the second half of the 20th century, the two ancient civilizations have carried out more exchanges and equal dialogues, achieved harmonious coexistence, and promoted the spread of Laozi's thoughts in the Arab world.

Second, languages such as English, French, German, and Japanese have played an important role in the translation and research of Laozi's writings and thoughts, and their dissemination in the Arab world. From the perspective of the translation history of *Dao De Jing* in the Arab world, most of its Arabic translations are retranslated from translations in English, French, or other languages. This is due to the impact of imperialism on the Arab world. Like China, Arab countries had experienced and suffered from the tragedy of imperialist colonial oppression and struggled for independence. Later, the national liberation movements of Arab peoples against imperialism and colonialism emerged, while China established diplomatic relations with Egypt, Syria, and other Arab countries. Now, more and more Chinese works are directly translated into Arabic, bringing Arab readers into a world of Chinese classics brimming with wisdom and culture. This is in contrast to the past, when Chinese works were translated into Arabic through French and English as intermediaries, which made the works lose their original brilliance.

Third, although historically unrelated, Sufism and Daoism share features and patterns that prove fruitful for a transhistorical dialogue, opening doors in the study of comparative philosophy and mysticism. More and more scholars turn their attention to an analysis of parallel concepts of Taoist thinkers and Islamic thinkers, as returning to nature and pursuing freedom are basic concepts shared between Sufism and Daoism.

It is worth mentioning that the spread of *Dao De Jing* is mainly concentrated in countries such as Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, and Kuwait. Moreover, the collation and thematic study of Laozi's thought started late in Arab academic circles, and there is room for further improvement in terms of both quantity and quality.

The world today is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century. As a force beyond national boundaries and nations, economic globalization has become an irreversible trend. With the expansion and deepening of global economic integration, the exchanges between the civilizations of the world are gradually increasing. Based on the principles of "respecting the diversity of civilizations" and "civilizations are enriched by exchanges and mutual learning," China and Arab countries have carried out more frequent and in-depth cultural exchanges and integration. In recent years, there has been a "Chinese learning craze" in Arab countries. Major universities such as Ain Shams University, Cairo University, Al-Azhar University, and Suez Canal University are competing to establish or are planning to establish their own Department of Chinese Language and Literature, and to incorporate Chinese language study into their curricula.

To cope with the trend of cultural development under the trend of globalization, the two peoples have taken concrete actions, including successfully holding and launching the China–Arab Civilization Dialogue Seminar, China–Arab Art Festival, China–Arab Press Cooperation Forum, China–Arab Radio and Television Cooperation Forum, and Translation and Publication of Chinese and Arabic Classics Project. In *Culture and Imperialism*,

Said argues that “In our time . . . We shall see imperialism continues to exist, as it has in the past, in specific political, ideological, economic and social activities and in the cultural sphere in general” (Said [1993] 2003, p. 56). In global cultural communication, the Western culture shows consistency with the cultural expression of globalization to some extent, and gradually occupies a dominant position in the cultural communication and integration of the age of globalization (Sun 2017, p. 12). In the face of the dominant posture of Western culture, maintaining cultural independence and integrity, and effectively avoiding cultural colonization and hegemony of Western countries, have become an arduous task and a requirement for cultural development in China and Arab countries. China and Arab countries should continue to adhere to the traditional spirit of exchange and mutual learning between civilizations to promote the mutual learning between the great civilizations of the two nations and foster cultural achievements that will benefit the modern world.

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