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The Siamization of the *Daodejing*: A Hermeneutic Exploration of Pojjana Chantarasanti's Thai Translation

การทำให้ *คัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อจิง* เป็นแบบสยาม: การศึกษาเชิงปรัชญาการตีความในงานแปลของ พจนา จันทรสันติ

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Abstract

This paper explores Pojjana Chantarasanti's Thai translation of the *Daodejing*, which reflects a culturally mediated interpretation shaped by Thailand's intellectual and cultural framework rather than a direct linguistic transfer. This raises fundamental questions about how the meaning of the *Daodejing* shifts when viewed through a Thai lens. By engaging with Hans-Georg Gadamer's hermeneutic theory, particularly his concepts of "text-tradition" and "effective history", this paper argues that translation is not simply a transfer of meaning, but a dynamic process involving a "fusion of horizons", in which the text and interpreter mutually shape one another. The study finds that Chantarasanti's translation of the term "*wúzhī*" (無知), meaning "without knowing", as the Pali term "*avijjā*"—a Buddhist concept often translated as "ignorance", as seen in the Thai phrase "*lathing awitcha*", meaning "to abandon ignorance". This reflects his awareness of the differing traditional roots of the Daoist concept "*wúzhī*" and the Pali-Buddhist concept "*avijjā*." This demonstrates how Daoist philosophy is reinterpreted within the Thai intellectual context. I refer to this process as "the Siamization of the *Daodejing*", which exemplifies how Daoist thought is adapted to Thailand's intellectual and cultural traditions. This paper presents a transcultural approach to Daoism, showing how Chinese philosophy can be creatively reinterpreted across traditions and contribute to broader, cross-cultural philosophical discourse.

Keywords: *Daodejing*, hermeneutics, *Laozi*, philosophy of interpretation

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บทคัดย่อ

บทความนี้วิเคราะห์การแปลคัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อจิงฉบับภาษาไทยของ พจนา จันทรสันติ ซึ่งสะท้อนการตีความที่ผ่านกรอบแนวคิดทางปัญญาและวัฒนธรรมของไทยมากกว่าการถ่ายทอดความหมายโดยตรงจากต้นฉบับ การแปลนี้จึงทำให้เกิดคำถามว่า ความหมายของคัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อจิงเปลี่ยนไปอย่างไรเมื่อมองผ่านกรอบความคิดแบบไทย งานวิจัยนี้ใช้ทฤษฎีการตีความของ ฮันส์ เกอร์ก กาดาเมอร์ โดยเฉพาะแนวคิดเรื่อง “ตัวบทที่อยู่ในขนบ” และ “ประวัติศาสตร์ที่มีผลต่อความเข้าใจ” เพื่อเสนอว่าการแปลมิใช่เพียงการถ่ายทอดความหมายแต่เป็นกระบวนการโต้ตอบระหว่างตัวบทและผู้ตีความ ซึ่งนำไปสู่ “การหลอมรวมความเข้าใจ” การศึกษาพบว่า ผู้แปลแปลมโนทัศน์ *“หวู่จือ”* (無知) หรือ “ความไม่รู้” โดยใช้วลีไทย *“ละทิ้งอวิชชา”* ซึ่งปรากฏคำบาลีทางพุทธศาสนาอย่าง *“อวิชชา”* (*avijjā*) หรือ “ความไม่รู้” ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นว่าปรัชญาเต๋าถูกตีความใหม่อย่างไรในบริบททางปัญญาของไทย กระบวนการนี้เรียกว่า “การทำให้*คัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อจิง*เป็นแบบสยาม” ซึ่งแสดงให้เห็นว่าปรัชญาเต๋าถูกตีความใหม่ให้เข้ากับกับบริบททางปัญญาและวัฒนธรรมไทย บทความนี้นำเสนอมุมมองแบบข้ามวัฒนธรรมต่อปรัชญาเต๋า โดยแสดงให้เห็นว่าปรัชญาจีนสามารถถูกตีความใหม่อย่างสร้างสรรค์ในบริบทของประเพณีต่าง ๆ และช่วยในการสนทนาทางปรัชญาที่กว้างขวางในระดับข้ามวัฒนธรรมได้อย่างไร

คำสำคัญ: คัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อจิง ศาสตร์การตีความ คัมภีร์เหลาจื่อ ปรัชญาการตีความ

Introduction

The *Daodejing* (道德經) is a revered Pre-Qin Classical Chinese text and a cornerstone of Daoist philosophy, with numerous translations across languages. However, translating its Daoist concepts presents challenges. For instance, the term "*dào*" (道), often rendered as "the way" in English, which carries a meaning deeply rooted in pre-Qin Chinese thought.

In Chapter 42 of the *Daodejing*, "*dào*" is presented as the fundamental principle from which all things emerge. D.C. Lau contrasts “*yǒu”* (有,"being”) and “*wú*” (無,"non-being"), suggesting they enable all things to arise from *dào* (Lau, 2001). Arthur Waley interprets “*dào*” as something that physically “gives birth” (生, *shēng*) to all things (Waley, 1958), while Ames and Hall (2003) describe it as something that “gives rise” to them. These interpretations highlight the importance of Classical Chinese and Sinology in accurately translating the *Daodejing*.

But what about readers outside the Chinese culture and context? Can they grasp Daoist concepts in the *Daodejing*, or are their interpretations flawed without knowledge of Classical Chinese or Sinology? Carmichael (2017) points out that many popular English translations of the *Daodejing* in the U.S. are produced by translators without expertise in these areas. As a result, these versions often reflect American cultural and philosophical perspectives, which influence how Daoist ideas are presented (Carmichael, 2017). This raises important hermeneutical questions about how the *Daodejing* is approached as an ancient text and the extent to which a translator’s worldview shapes the interpretation.

Hermeneutics involves interpreting ambiguous meanings that require careful analysis. Scholars like Friedrich Schleiermacher and Wilhelm Dilthey sought to recover a neutral, objective understanding of the texts (Lawn, 2006). This assumes interpreters could set aside preconceptions to access the text's original meaning. However, Hans-Georg Gadamer's (2004) philosophical hermeneutics challenges this notion, arguing that understanding is shaped by historical and cultural contexts. He posits that interpretation arises from the fusion of horizons, where an interpreter's preconceptions interact with the text's unfamiliar meanings, leading to new insights (Gadamer, 2004).

Since 1963, over 30 Thai translations of the *Daodejing* have been produced (See Appendix A and B). Tadd (2022) highlights that the text has been translated into 97 languages, including Thai, as part of "global Laozegetics," the study of its interpretation across cultures. He emphasizes how translations reflect the translators' cultural and philosophical perspectives, shaping the text's global reception. Translating the *Daodejing* into Thai requires not only linguistic accuracy but also sensitivity to its nuanced ideas within Thai intellectual traditions.

Despite this, no study has specifically examined how Thai translations are approached or how a Thai translator's worldview shapes the text's interpretation. This paper addresses that gap by posing the central research question: "*How are Daoist ideas in the Daodejing adapted to fit Thai intellectual and cultural contexts?*"

To explore this, the article focuses on Pojjana Chantarasanti's influential Thai translation, particularly his use of Pali-Buddhist terminology to convey Daoist concepts. Chantarasanti's (1978) translation, reprinted multiple times (Chantarasanti, 1996, 2019), remains widely used in Thai universities for Chinese philosophy, studies, and literature. It was created without formal training in Classical Chinese, drawing on several English versions, including Lin Yutang's *The Wisdom of China and India* (1942), Arthur Waley's *The Way and Its Power* (1960), and Chu Ta-Kao's *Tao Te Ching* (1963), with final revisions based on James Legge's *The Texts of Taoism* (1891). This process reflects a distinctly Thai interpretation influenced by Chantarasanti's cultural background and the English sources he consulted.

This study analyzes Chantarasanti's Thai translation, focusing on his reinterpretation of "*wúzhī*" (無知, "without knowing") in Chapter 10 through Thai cultural and intellectual frameworks—a process termed as "the Siamization of the *Daodejing*." The article compares Thai and English translations for hermeneutic insights, examining four major English versions, each offering distinct interpretations.

Ultimately, this research engages with Gadamer's concepts of "traditionary text" and "effective history," arguing that the Siamization process is facilitated by the translator's awareness of their preconceptions, which are integrated into the interpretive dialogue or "fusion of horizons".

Theoretical Framework

1. The Relevance of Hans-Georg Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

1.1 Tradition

In *Truth and Method*, Gadamer (2004) argues that tradition is an ongoing process that shapes understanding, making it impossible to completely escape its influence. Our self-understanding is shaped by our family, society, and state. Tradition, therefore, represents the collective cultural, historical, and intellectual heritage that guides interpretation across generations.

When interpreting texts, tradition plays a key role, as we approach them through the lens of the traditions to which we belong. This is closely linked to Gadamer's concept of the "traditionary text."

1.2 Traditionary Text/Text-Tradition

A traditionary text is a work integral to a tradition, continually reinterpreted across generations. Gadamer (2004) defines it as a culturally, historically, and philosophically significant text embedded in a living tradition, open to evolving interpretations through the interaction between text and interpreter. This ongoing dialogue reflects Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons".

The concept of a traditionary text helps explain the distinct interpretations of the Daoist concept of "*wúzhī*" in the *Daodejing* and the Pali-Buddhist term "*avijjā*" in Chantarasanti's Thai translation, each shaped by its unique cultural and intellectual context.

1.3 Effective History/the History of Effects

Gadamer's concept of "effective history" highlights the dynamic relationship between the past (tradition, historical context) and the present (interpreter's context). It challenges the idea of objective, value-free interpretation, emphasizing that understanding is shaped by prior interpretations and societal influences. Gadamer (2004) argues that interpretation is influenced by the interpreter's context and pre-understandings, a process he terms "the history of effects". This concept helps explain how Chantarasanti's reinterpretation of the *Daodejing* is influenced by both the text's historical context and his personal, cultural, and intellectual background.

1.4 Fusion of Horizons

For Gadamer, hermeneutics is a dialectical process in which the interpreter's preconceptions and the text's unfamiliar meanings engage in a dynamic exchange. Interpretation emerges from this fusion of horizons, blending the text's historical context with the interpreter's present perspective to reveal new insights (Gadamer, 2004).

In the Siamization of the *Daodejing*, Chantarasanti's awareness of his preconceptions fosters a dynamic interaction between the traditionary text and his understanding, allowing both to reshape each other.

2. The Interchangeable Terms: "Translator" and "Interpreter"

Translators and interpreters both work with language, but their aims and approaches differ. Translators focus on adapting the original text while preserving meaning, style, tone, and cultural nuances, whereas interpreters prioritize speed and fluency in conveying spoken statements. This study examines Pojjana Chantarasanti's Thai translation of the *Daodejing*, in which he functions as a translator, interpreting concepts like "*wúzhī*". Although Gadamer does not directly address translation, his ideas on interpretation, the fusion of horizons, and dialogue remain relevant, making "translator" and "interpreter" interchangeable in this context (Piecychna, 2012).

Research Methodology

1. Comparison Using the Four Prominent English Translations

This comparison between Chantarasanti's translation and four major English versions highlights the unique aspects of the Thai interpretation, influenced by Thai cultural perspectives. It also demonstrates that Chantarasanti's translation does not seek to uncover a single, objective meaning of the text. The four major English translations examined are as follows:

The first translation is Arthur Waley's *The Way and Its Power: A Study of the Tao Te Ching and Its Place in Chinese Thought* (1958). Waley, an English sinologist, is known for translating Chinese and Japanese literary classics. His *Daodejing* translation offers a comprehensive interpretation from a sinological perspective (Johns, 1983).

The second translation is Wing-tsit Chan's *The Way of Lao Tzu: Tao-te-ching* (1963). A renowned Chinese philosopher, Chan's work has significantly introduced Daoist thought to Western readers (De Bary, 1994). His translation provides a comprehensive interpretation rooted in sinology.

The third translation is Dim-cheuk Lau's *Tao Te Ching* (2001). A Chinese sinologist, Lau is known for his translations of the *Tao Te Ching*, *Mencius*, and the *Analects*, as well as his work on Cantonese pronunciation (Baker, 2010). His translation offers a sinological perspective and introduces a distinctive interpretive approach.

The fourth prominent translation is *Dao De Jing: "Making This Life Significant": A Philosophical Translation* by Ames and Hall (2003). Ames, a philosopher at Peking University and the University of Hawai'i, and Hall, a professor at the University of Texas, approach the *Daodejing* as a philosophical text (Hall & Ames, 1987).

Findings and Discussion

1. A Thai Reinterpretation of the Daoist Concept of "*Wúzhī*" (無知)

In the *Daodejing*'s Classical Chinese text, the term "*wúzhī*" (無知), literally translated as "without knowing," appears in three chapters: Chapters 3, 10, and 71. This study focuses on Chapter 10, where "*wúzhī*" is mentioned twice in two separate verses. Below is the original Chinese text:

The first verse: 愛民治國，能無知乎？
*Ài mín zhì guó, néng **wúzhī** hū?*
The second verse: 明白四達，能無知乎？
*Míng bái sì dá, néng **wúzhī** hū?*

What does "*wúzhī*" mean in the text, and how has it been reinterpreted in the English-speaking world? To address these questions, let us examine how "*wúzhī*" is rendered in the four prominent English translations of the following verses:

Waley's English translation:
The first verse: Can you love the people and rule the land,
Yet remain **unknown** (***wúzhī***)?
The second verse: Can your mind penetrate every corner of the land,
But you **yourself never interfere** (***wúzhī***)?"
(*Tao Te Ching*, 2001)

Waley translates "*wúzhī*" as "unknown," reflecting its passive meaning of "without being known". His translation connects this idea of being "unknown" in the first verse to ruling without interference in the second verse. In my interpretation, a Daoist ruler embodies "*wúzhī*" by governing in a way that goes unnoticed by the people, aligning non-interference with remaining unknown.

Lau's English translation:
The first verse: Can you love the people and govern the state,
Without resorting to action (*wúzhī*)?
The second verse: When your discernment penetrates the four quarters.
Are you capable of **not knowing anything** (***wúzhī***)?"
(*Tao Te Ching*, 2001)

Like Waley, Lau links the concept "*wúzhī"* in the first verse to ruling "without resorting to action" and in the second verse to "not knowing anything". Lau (2001) interprets "*wúzhī*" as "without knowing", aligning it with other *wú-* forms (negative or "non-" forms) in the *Daodejing*, such as *wúwèi* (non-action) and *wúyù* (without desire). This interpretation reflects the ideal ruling style of a Daoist ruler.

Chan's English translation:
The first verse: Can you love the people and govern the state **without knowledge (cunning)** (***wúzhī***)?
The second verse: Can you understand all and penetrate all **without taking any action**? (***wúzhī***)"
(*The Way of Lao Tzu: Tao-Te Ching*, 1963)

Chan (1963) translates "*wúzhī*" in the first verse as the abandonment of desires and cleverness. In this sense, "*wúzhī*" implies a style of ruling without cunning. In the second verse, Chan connects "*wúzhī*" to non-action, aligning it with Lau's (2001) interpretation of "*wúwèi*" and other *wú-* forms in the *Daodejing*.

Ames' and Hall's English translation:

The first verse: In loving the common people and breathing life into the state, are you able to do it **without recourse to wisdom** (***wúzhī***)?

The second verse: With your insight penetrating the four quarters, are you able to do it **without recourse to wisdom** (***wúzhī***)?

(*Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant,* 2003)

In contrast to other scholars, Ames and Hall translate "*wúzhī*" literally as "without knowing" in both the first and second verses, aiming to preserve the original meaning of the Chinese characters. In their commentary, "*wúzhī*" is not based on established, instrumental wisdom. Rather, it represents an immediate and fundamentally creative process from which new and potent intelligence emerges to guide the way forward (Ames & Hall, 2003).

According to scholars of Chinese philosophy and sinologists, the concept of "*wúzhī*" in the *Daodejing* does not imply complete ignorance but rather varying degrees of "knowing." It describes a ruler who governs subtly, without interference, aligning with "*wúwèi*" (non-action) and "*wúyù*" (without desire). These qualities emphasize natural wisdom over cleverness and suggest a spontaneous, creative intelligence that guides the way forward.

In contrast, Chantarasanti provides distinct renderings of the concept in his Thai translation, treating each verse differently. For example, he translates the first verse as follows:

The first verse: มีความรักและปกครองอาณาจักร โดย***ไม่เข้าไปบังคับบัญชา***ได้หรือไม่

Mi kwam rak lae pokkhrong anachakra doi mai khao pai bangkhap bancha dai rue mai

(*Prachaya Laozi: Withi Haeng Dao,* 2019)

Chantarasanti's Thai translation of the first verse does not retain the literal meaning of "*wúzhī*" as "without knowing." Instead, he uses the phrase "*mị̂ khâo pai bạngkháp banchā*," meaning "to not control." This choice resembles Lau's English translation, in which "*wúzhī*" is rendered as "without resorting to action" rather than the literal "without knowing". This raises an important question: does Chantarasanti's translation draw on Lau's interpretation?

As previously mentioned, Chantarasanti's Thai translation is influenced by four key English versions, including Legge's translation. Legge translates "*wúzhī*" in the first verse as follows:

The first verse: In loving the people and ruling the state, cannot he proceed **without any (purpose of) action (*wúzhī*)?**
(*The Texts of Taoism* (Vol. 1), 1891)

"*Wúzhī*" is not rendered literally as “without knowing” but rather as “without any action”, similar to Lau’s interpretation. Chantarasanti’s Thai translation appears to be more influenced by Legge’s version, as it served as a key reference in refining his own rendition. For the second Chinese verse, Legge translates it as follows:

The second verse: While his intelligence reaches in every direction, cannot he (appear to) be **without knowledge (*wúzhī*)**?”
(*The Texts of Taoism* (Vol. 1), 1891)

There appears to be a connection between Legge’s translation of "*wúzhī*" as "without any action" in the first verse and "without knowledge" in the second. Similarly, Chantarasanti, akin to Lau and Legge, interprets “*wúzhī”* as "to not control", presenting it as an appropriate approach for a ruler to govern, a perspective that also influences his translation of "*wúzhī*" in the second verse.

Unlike other scholars, Chantarasanti uses the Pali-Buddhist term "*avijjā*" to translate the second verse. In Theravāda Buddhism[2], "*avijjā*" means "ignorance" and is considered the root cause of evil and rebirth (Davids & Stede, 2015). However, scholars of Chinese philosophy note that "*wúzhī*" does not imply complete ignorance but rather a nuanced, context-specific understanding of knowledge. Thus, "*avijjā*" cannot be directly equated with "*wúzhī*" in the second verse.

Nevertheless, Chantarasanti acknowledges that "*avijjā*" and "*wúzhī*" differ in meaning, as seen in his use of the Thai phrase *“ละทิ้งอวิชชา”* (*lathing awitcha*), which incorporates "*avijjā*" (ignorance) in his interpretation of "*wúzhī*."

The second verse: แสวงหาความรู้แจ้ง เพื่อ***ละทิ้งอวิชชา(avijjā)*** ได้หรือไม่
Sawaeng ha khwam ru chaeng phuea lathing awitcha dai rue mai
(*Prachaya Laozi: Within Haeng Dao,* 2019)

In his translation of the second verse, Chantarasanti differs from Legge and other scholars by using the Thai phrase “*lathing awitcha*,” meaning “to abandon *avijjā*” or “to abandon ignorance”, rather than directly substituting “*avijjā*” for “*wúzhī*”. This phrase preserves the meaning of “*wúzhī*” as "without knowing" in Chapter 10 while also incorporating the Pali-Buddhist connotation of “ignorance”.

[2] Theravāda Buddhism, which prioritizes the Pali canon, is mainly practiced in Southeast Asian countries such as Myanmar, Thailand, Laos, and Cambodia (Johnson, 2004).

Chantarasanti's use of "*lathing awitcha*" (to abandon *avijjā*) in Chapter 10 aligns with his translation in Chapter 71, where he substitutes the Chinese term "*bìng*" (病, sickness) with "*avijjā*." Although he does not explicitly explain this choice,[3] "*avijjā*" in Buddhism signifies ignorance as the root cause of suffering, including sickness (Jackson, 2003). By linking "*avijjā*" to sickness, Chantarasanti reflects the Buddhist view that abandoning ignorance leads to the cessation of suffering (the Enlightenment), akin to curing an illness.

Chantarasanti demonstrates an awareness of the distinction between the Pali-Buddhist "*avijjā*" and the Daoist "*wúzhī*." While both refer to forms of "ignorance", they stem from different intellectual and cultural contexts. By incorporating the Pali-Buddhist term into his Thai phrase to render "*wúzhī*" in Chapter 10, Chantarasanti emphasizes the Buddhist concept of ignorance and suffering while acknowledging its difference from the Daoist notion of "*wúzhī*".

2. The Siamization of the *Daodejing*, Understood Through Gadamer's Philosophical Hermeneutics

In Thai studies, the term "Siamization" typically refers to the adaptation of foreign ideas and practices to align with Thai traditions and values. Historically, "Siam" was the name used for Thailand before the country officially changed its name in 1939. However, the concept of "Siamization" remains a subject of debate. Winichakul (1997) views "Siamization" as a process that not only adopts foreign ideas but also transforms them to suit Thai political and cultural needs, shaping modern identity and consolidating political power. In contrast, Eoseewong (2003) sees it as the integration of local cultures into a centralized Thai state identity, influenced by the monarchy and state institutions.

In this article, however, "Siamization" specifically refers to the adaptation of the *Daodejing* within Thai intellectual and cultural frameworks. This process involves incorporating local beliefs, linguistic nuances, and philosophical concepts, such as Pali-Buddhist terminology, to ensure the text resonates with a Thai audience.

The "Siamization of the *Daodejing*" is facilitated by Chantarasanti's awareness of his own preconceptions and their integration into the interpretive process. This dynamic interaction between the traditional text and his perspectives reshape both, a phenomenon explained through Gadamer's concepts of "traditionary text," "effective history," and "fusion of horizons". The discussion is organized under the following subheadings:

2.1 The Traditionary Texts: "Avijjā" and "Wúzhī"

The study shows that in the Thai translation of the *Daodejing*, the Pali-Buddhist "*avijjā*" cannot replace the Daoist "*wúzhī*," as each term is deeply embedded within its distinct cultural and intellectual traditions.

In Theravāda Buddhism, "*avijjā*" denotes ignorance, the root cause of suffering and the cycle of birth, aging, sickness, and death, whose elimination leads to enlightenment. In contrast, Daoist "*wúzhī*" in the *Daodejing* signifies a subtle form of knowing, where a ruler governs with minimal interference, in harmony with "*wúwèi*" (non-action) and "*wúyù*" (without desire).

[3] This will be explored in more detail in the next section.

"*Wúzhī*" reflects intuitive, creative intelligence that flows with the natural course of life. Given their fundamentally different meanings, *avijjā* and *wúzhī* cannot be directly equated without losing important nuances.

Both "*wúzhī*" and "*avijjā*" have evolved over time, with each generation adding cultural and philosophical layers. While "*wúzhī*" and the *Daodejing* have been reinterpreted in the Anglo tradition, "*avijjā*" varies across Buddhist schools, such as Theravāda and Mahāyāna (Jackson, 2003). For instance, some interpretations consider "*avijjā*" the primary cause of all phenomena, though this contradicts the doctrine of Dependent Origination (*paṭiccasamuppāda*), which asserts that all things arise from dependent causes, meaning there cannot be any singular primary cause (Chandrkaew, 1982). In addition, "*Avijjā*" is sometimes personified as Mara (Boowa Nyanasampanno, 1982).

Buddhadasa[4] challenges conventional interpretations of "*avijjā*", rejecting its treatment as an inherent entity along with defilements (*kilesa*), as such views falsely imply permanence in impermanent phenomena. Instead, he advocates mindfulness (*sati*) to prevent the arising of "*avijjā*" and encourages remaining in the natural state of *chit wang* (Jackson, 2003). This approach to Theravāda Buddhism profoundly influences Chantarasanti's reinterpretation of the *Daodejing* (See section 2.2).

Both "*wúzhī*" and "*avijjā*" function as "traditionary texts" in Gadamer's sense—works continuously reinterpreted within their respective cultural and intellectual traditions. Gadamer (2004) defines such texts as deeply embedded in tradition, evolving through interaction with new contexts. This ongoing reinterpretation, guided by historical consciousness, ensures that the meaning of these texts remain dynamic, reflecting an ongoing dialogue between text and interpreter.

Despite their cultural and historical differences, "*avijjā*" and "*wúzhī*" can be integrated through interpretation, fostering new insights while preserving their distinct meanings. This process exemplifies the dynamic potential of cross-cultural interpretation—the "fusion of horizons", as Gadamer puts it.

2.2 The Effective History of the Interpreter: Pojjana Chantarasanti's Historical Contexts

While Chantarasanti does not explicitly explain his translation choices, two key factors influence his decision: the historical reinterpretations of "*wúzhī*" and "*avijjā*" across traditions and the intellectual and historical context of his Thai background.

Chantarasanti's reinterpretation of the *Daodejing* is significantly influenced by prior translations of "*wúzhī*," such as Legge's. Instead of translating *wúzhī* literally as "without knowing,", Chantarasanti translates the first verse of Chapter 10 using the Thai phrase "*mai khao pai bang khap bancha*," meaning "to not control". This choice reflects Legge's influence, serving as a key reference in shaping Chantarasanti's translation. His understanding

[4] Buddhadasa Bhikkhu (1906-1993) was a key Thai Buddhist monk and philosopher who sought to modernize Thai Buddhism by emphasizing personal insight over tradition. His universal, non-dogmatic approach made him one of the 20th century's most influential Buddhist thinkers (Panitch, n.d.).

of "*wúzhī*" is influenced by prior translations, making him aware of its nuanced meaning within the *Daodejing* Chinese philosophical tradition, which has evolved over generations. Despite this, he opts to integrate the Pali-Buddhist term into the Thai phrase "*lathing awitcha*," considering it an appropriate interpretation of "*wúzhī*".

Chantarasanti's interpretation is also influenced by prior readings of "*avijjā*," particularly Buddhadasa's reinterpretation. Buddhadasa's reformed approach to Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand appears to be a key element of Chantarasanti's historical and intellectual context, significantly shaping his understanding of the *Daodejing*.

During Chantarasanti's youth, he was raised as a Catholic. However, after the 1973 Uprising[5], like many other young people, he sought alternatives to communism and socialism as a means of opposing dictatorship. As an undergraduate at Thammasat University, he explored various teachings, including Gandhi's non-violence (*ahimsā*), Buddhism, and Daoism, which eventually led to his translation of the *Daodejing* in 1978. In an interview, Chantarasanti noted that he translated the *Daodejing* at Buddhadasa's monastery, Suan Mokkh, and shared the translation with Buddhadasa, who praised his work (Chaemduang, 2007). Buddhadasa's reinterpretation of "*avijjā*" reflects the modernist reform of Theravāda Buddhism in Thailand, a key intellectual movement of the time (Jackson, 2003). Though a Theravāda monk, Buddhadasa integrated Mahayana elements into his teachings while preserving core Pali-Buddhist terms (Jackson, 2003). This synthesis influenced his reinterpretation of concepts like "*avijjā*," grounding them in the broader Thai intellectual and cultural context.

Influenced by Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's non-dogmatic approach to Buddhism, Chantarasanti acknowledges the impact of Buddhadasa's ideas on his interpretation of the *Daodejing* (Chaemduang, 2007). In the appendix of his translation, Chantarasanti includes six articles on Daoism, one of which, "Daoism and Zen," reflects Mahāyāna Buddhist elements integrated by Buddhadasa into his modernist Theravāda reform, such as the Pali term "*tathatā*" (Chantarasanti, 2019).[6] Despite criticisms from traditional Theravāda thought, Buddhadasa's ideas remain integral to Thailand's intellectual and cultural history, forming a key aspect of Thai identity and "Siamization."

This aligns with Gadamer's concept of "historical effects", which suggests that "history does not belong to us; we belong to it" (Gadamer, 1960/2004). Gadamer challenges value-free hermeneutics, asserting that understanding is influenced by the interpreter's context-dependent pre-understandings. Lebech (2006) further clarifies that Gadamer's "history of effects" involves two conditions: the interpreter's preconceptions and how these shapes their understanding.

[5] The 1973 uprising was driven by dissatisfaction with Thanom Kittikachorn's military dictatorship, marked by authoritarianism, political repression, and strong U.S. ties during the Cold War. Economic inequality, political oppression, and unmet democratic demands fuelled resentment among students, workers, and intellectuals (Musikawong, 2006).

[6] Buddhadasa Bhikkhu defined "*tathatā"* (suchness) as the true, untainted nature of things, beyond ordinary perception and conceptualization. It represents the impermanent, interdependent reality of phenomena (Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, 1994).

In the case of Chantarasanti's understanding of the *Daodejing*, Gadamer's concept of "historical effect" helps explain how his interpretation is shaped by both his intellectual journey and the historical context of the text. As a Thai translator influenced by Theravāda Buddhism, Chantarasanti approaches the *Daodejing* through his cultural and intellectual background, including his exposure to Buddhadasa Bhikkhu's reinterpretations of key Buddhist concepts. These preconceptions, rooted in Thai Buddhism and modernist interpretations, shape how he reads and translates the *Daodejing*, particularly in his integration of Buddhist terms like "*avijjā*" and his understanding of "*wúzhī*."

This results in Chantarasanti's fusion of horizons, driven by his historical consciousness, which will be further explored in the next section, leading to the Siamization of the *Daodejing*. This process illustrates how Daoist ideas are adapted to fit Thai intellectual and cultural contexts.

2.3 The Fusion of the Daodejing's and Pojjana Chantarasanti's Horizons

Chantarasanti's fusion of horizons occurs when his personal and cultural contexts merge with the *Daodejing*'s philosophical traditions. Gadamer (2004) describes this process as reshaping meaning, where the present horizon is influenced by past engagement and reflection on tradition, resulting in a new understanding through the fusion of past and present. Additionally, an interpreter's awareness of "historical effect" plays a key role in this fusion. Gadamer (2004) refers to this as "historical consciousness" (*Wirkungsgeschichtliches Bewússtsein*), arguing that interpretation is inherently influenced by one's historical context, challenging the notion of neutral or objective interpretation. This consciousness recognizes that understanding is shaped by history and culture, and that the interpreter's context—including past interpretations, cultural shifts, and personal experiences—inevitably affects their engagement with the text.

This fusion process illustrates the "Siamization of the *Daodejing*," shaped by Chantarasanti's awareness of his preconceptions, which are integrated into the interpretive process. Consequently, "Siamization" demonstrates how Daoist ideas are adapted to fit Thai intellectual and cultural contexts.

Through the fusion of horizons, the interaction between the text and Chantarasanti reshapes both, adapting Daoist concepts to Thailand's intellectual environment. This process acknowledges the evolving interpretations of the text while ensuring respect for its traditions through Chantarasanti's historical consciousness. His approach maintains objectivity by recognizing the text's historical effects while remaining open to new insights. This interaction continually tests and reaffirms the text's meaning. The *Daodejing* remains rooted in its tradition while embracing contemporary perspectives, reflecting Gadamer's concept of the "traditionary text", where the fusion of horizons allows meaning to evolve while maintaining continuity.

Vessey (2009) supports this idea, explaining that horizons fuse when multiple interpretations are recognized, leading to new understanding. This shift, driven by new information or re-evaluation, reveals the contingency of initial interpretations and integrates them into a broader perspective, offering fresh insights. The interplay between historical consciousness and the fusion of horizons enables the interpreter to refine and transform their understanding over time (Vessey, 2009).

The Siamization process views the text as a living tradition, continually evolving through new interpretations. As Gadamer emphasizes, understanding is grounded in the present, with the fusion of horizons as an ongoing process. This dialogue between the text's historical roots and contemporary reinterpretations ensures its relevance and continuity, as Chantarasanti's approach demonstrates the dynamic interplay between past and present interpretations.

Conclusion

This study explores the Siamization of the *Daodejing* in Pojjana Chantarasanti's translation through the lens of Gadamer's hermeneutic philosophy. Chantarasanti's awareness of his preconceptions leads to a nuanced reinterpretation of the Daoist concept of "*wúzhī*" within a Thai context. Using Gadamer's concepts of "traditionary texts", "effective history", and "fusion of horizons", this study demonstrates how Chantarasanti's translation reflects both historical engagement and cultural positioning, emphasizing dynamic reinterpretation over static translation.

Gadamer's concept of the "fusion of horizons" explains the Siamization of the *Daodejing*, showing how the text's original Daoist philosophy merges with Chantarasanti's Thai Buddhist background. The "horizon" of the *Daodejing* is rooted in its Daoist traditions, while Chantarasanti's "horizon" is shaped by his intellectual training, cultural context, and Buddhist influences. The Siamization process occurs when these two horizons—Daoist and Thai Buddhist—interact and influence one another.

Chantarasanti's understanding of the *Daodejing* is informed by both the historical context of the text and his personal cultural background. His exposure to Theravāda Buddhism, particularly modernist reinterpretations from Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, influences his reading and translation of the *Daodejing*. Thus, Siamization becomes a form of "fusion of horizons", where Daoist ideas are reinterpreted through the lens of Thai Buddhist thought. This process explains how Daoist concepts in the *Daodejing* are adapted to Thai intellectual and cultural contexts.

This study contributes to the understanding of cross-cultural interpretation through philosophical hermeneutics, highlighting the evolving nature of texts and their meanings. It demonstrates how tradition is both preserved and transformed through the interpreter's work. However, by focusing on a single Thai translation, the study's scope is limited. Future research could explore how different translators interpret key concepts like "*wúzhī*" within their respective intellectual climates.

Finally, this study underscores the translator's role as a cultural pioneer, rather than merely an interpreter, in introducing Daoist ideas to Thai readers. This aspect, which Gadamer's theory does not explicitly address, offers a promising avenue for future research on the translator's creative role in shaping how a text enters and evolves within a new cultural context.

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Appendix A
A List of Known Thai Translations of the *Daodejing*

Numbers	Publishing Years	Translators	Thai Translations
1	1963	Sathian Phothinanta	*Methitawanok* (*เมธีตะวันออก*)
2	1967	Chamlong Thongprasert	*Bo Kerd Laththi Prapheni Jeen* (*บ่อเกิดลัทธิประเพณีจีน*)
3	1973	Jang Sae Tang	*Tao* (เต้า)
4	1974	Liang Sathiansut	*Khamphi Laozi* (*คัมภีร์เหลาจื้อ*)
5	1978	Pojjana Chantarasanti	*Withi Tao* (*วิถีเต๋า*)
6	1984	Somkiat Sukho & Nawarat Phongphaiboon	*Khamphi Khunthamm* (*คัมภีร์คุณธรรม*)
7	n.d.	Boonsak Phromnoi	*Tao thi lao jaeng* (*เต๋าที่เล่าแจ้ง*)
8	n.d.	Chatsumarn Kabilsingh	*Khamphi Tao* (*คัมภีร์เต๋า ฉบับสมบูรณ์ พร้อมอรรถกถา*)
9	1986	Thongsod Mekmuangthong	*Tao khue Tao* (*เต๋าคือเต๋า*)
10	1987	Thongthaem Natchamnong	*Laozi son wa...* (*เหลาจื่อสอนว่า...*)
11	1987	Jang Sae Tang	*Paramat Tao* (*ปรมัตถ์เต๋า*)
12	1991	Boonmak Phromphuai	*Tao yom rai nam* (*เต๋าย่อมไร้นาม*)
13	1993	Mongkhon Siisopon	*Tao* (*เต๋า*)
14	1994	Chotchiuang Nadon (Thongthaem Natchamnong)	*Tao Te Ching* (*เต๋าเต็กเก็ง*)
15	n.d.	Suksan Wivekmetakorn	*Prachaya Laozi* (*ปรัชญาเหลาจื๊อ*)
16	1995	Buncha Sirikai	*Khamphi Prachaya Laozi* (*คัมภีร์ปรัชญาเหลาจื่อ*)

Numbers	Publishing Years	Translators	Thai Translations
17	1995	Boonsiri Suwanpetch	*Saeng Sawang Haeng Satchatham Lae Khunthamm Tao* (*แสงสว่างแห่งสัจธรรมและคุณธรรมเต๋า*)
18	1995	Thonglor Wongthamma	*Prachaya Jeen* (*ปรัชญาจีน*)
19	1996	Prayong Suwanbuppa	*Khamphi Tao Te Ching* (*คัมภีร์ เต๋า เต้ จิง*)
20	1998	Ajahn Sampanno	*Sam Lathi Satsana Thi Na Sonjai* (*สามลัทธิศาสนาที่น่าสนใจ*)
21	2000	Chatree Saebang	*Sueksa Khamphi Tao Te* (*ศึกษาคัมภีร์เต้าเต๋อ*)
22	2003	Klinsukon Ariyachatkul	*Tao Te Ching* (*เต้าเต๋อจิง*)
23	2004	Phawit Thongrot	*Withi Tao khong Than Laozi* (*วิถีเต๋าของท่านเล่าจื๊อ*)
24	2004	Pakorn Limpanusorn	*Khamphi Tao khong Laozi* (*คัมภีร์เต๋าของเหลาจื๊อ*)
25	2005	Pracha Hutanuwat	*Phu Nam Thi Thae: Makkawithi Khong Laozi* (*ผู้นำที่แท้: มรรควิธีของเล่าจื๊อ*)
26	2005	Chatree Saebang	*Prachaya Tao: Withi Haeng Thammachat, Withi Khon, Withi Jai* (*ปรัชญาเต๋า: วิถีแห่งธรรมชาติ วิถีคน วิถีใจ*)
27	2006	Thonglor Wongthamma	*Tao Thang Haeng Thammachat* (*เต๋าทางแห่งธรรมชาติ*)
28	2015	Sruangapsorn Kasikaranan	*Tao Te Ching: Khamphi Tao* (*เต้าเต๋อจิง: คัมภีร์เต๋า*)
29	2021	Norabhan Phak Thai	*Khamphi Thamma Dao Dek Keng* (*คัมภีร์ธรรมเต๋าเต็กเก็ง*)
30	2022	Suwanna Chokprachakchat	*Tao Te Ching* (*เต๋า เต้อ จิง*)

Numbers	Publishing Years	Translators	Thai Translations
31	2022	Suwanna Chokprachakchat-Uchukatanon	*Tao Te Ching: Translated from Chinese to Thai* (*เต้า เต๋อ จิง ฉบับแปล จากจีนเป็นไทย*)

Appendix B
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