

Article

Three Early Russian Documents about the *Daodejing*: An Analysis

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Abstract: It has been nearly 200 years since the *Daodejing* and Daoist thought was first introduced to Russia in the first half of the 19th century. Although the study of Daoist philosophy and Laozi in Russia started relatively late, the *Daodejing* has been the most translated classic of Chinese culture in Russia. The early dissemination of the *Daodejing* in Russia was deeply influenced by the government and religion, and there were some controversial and neglected materials that were difficult to verify due to the lack of documents and manuscripts. For example, the first translation manuscript of the *Daodejing* in Russia has almost become a rare book that is nearly impossible to find and inconvenient to read; the authorship of the first article introducing Laozi's thought in Russia remains a mystery; the first complete translation was completed by a Japanese theologian living in Russia, but it has not received enough research attention. The insufficient research on the early dissemination of Laozi studies in Russia has had a negative impact on the studies of Laozi in Russia. Therefore, this paper, on the basis of various documentary and manuscript references, aims to conduct an in-depth analysis of the early dissemination of Laozi studies in Russia, paying particular attention to the three early Russian documents in the 19th century about the *Daodejing*, namely, the first translation manuscript of the *Daodejing*, the first article introducing Laozi's thought in Russia, and the first complete Russian translation of the *Daodejing*. A detailed review of these three documents can help to correct some misconceptions and misunderstandings of the early dissemination of the *Daodejing* in Russia, and, to some extent, reveal the early dissemination characteristics of Laozi studies in Russia.

Keywords: the *Daodejing*; Russia; sinology; translation manuscripts



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1. Introduction

Russia's study of China began in the 18th century, but research on Daoist philosophy and Laozi started relatively late. This was because early sinology in Russia primarily involved academic activities under official monitoring, and the main task of the Russian Orthodox Missions was to conduct a comprehensive study of the Chinese economy and culture, collect information and intelligence about China, and report major events in the Chinese political life to the Tsarist Russian Foreign Ministry in a timely manner. Therefore, Russian sinologists initially did not pay much attention to the study of Daoist philosophy and Laozi. It was not until the 19th century, with a deeper understanding of Chinese politics and cultural thought, that Russian sinology gradually matured, and the translation and study of the various schools of Chinese philosophy began to take shape.

The *Daodejing* is unique within the global transmission of ideas as the most translated philosophical work (Tadd 2022, p. 87). Although the study of the *Daodejing* started relatively late, it is the Chinese cultural classic that has been most frequently retranslated in Russia, and its circulation in Russia ranks second only to the Bible among world famous classics. The research on the *Daodejing* in Russia can be roughly divided into three stages: the first stage was the Imperial Russian Period (from the early 19th century to the early 20th century), where the research had a mystical and Eurocentric touch; the second stage

was the Soviet Period (from the early 20th century to the late 20th century), where, in the social context of academic research measured by political standards, the study and interpretation of the *Daodejing* became one of the main battlegrounds for the struggle between materialism and idealism; the third stage was the Post-Soviet Period (from the late 20th century to the present), where researchers became more objective and rational in their understanding and attitude, and began to apply scientific methods to conduct multifaceted, in-depth, and specific research on Daoism.

The early dissemination of the *Daodejing* in Russia was heavily influenced by the Russian government and religion. Some valuable translations and research findings were unable to be published and remained as manuscripts. Due to the lack of available materials and references, the academic community struggled to conduct verification and in-depth analysis. Additionally, there were controversial literature and neglected materials, which had a negative impact on the studies of Laozi in Russia.

Through visits to major libraries in Russia and through examination of precious manuscripts, we conducted a detailed analysis of three early Russian manuscripts about the *Daodejing*, namely, the first translation manuscript of the *Daodejing* in Russia, the first article introducing Laozi's thought in Russia, and the first complete Russian translation of the *Daodejing*. All three works were born in the 19th century, during which Russian sinologists obtained sinological materials indirectly from the West on the one hand, and developed their own sinological research directly through the Russian Orthodox Missions on the other hand. In the first half of the 19th century, the Russian Orthodox Missions achieved fruitful results, and the first translation manuscript of the *Daodejing* in Russia emerged at that time. By the middle of the 19th century, Russian sinology began to thrive and continued to learn from western sinology, forming its own unique research perspective. The first article introducing Laozi's thought in Russia was published during this period. By the second half of the 19th century, the Russian government had invaded Chinese territory, and Russian sinology had embarked on a mission to serve its government, becoming a product of the promotion of Far Eastern policies. During this period, the rigidity of the Russian bureaucratic system also led Russian thinkers and writers to rethink the fate and future of Russia, and to seek a way out from the cultural thought of other countries; it was during this period that the first complete translation of the *Daodejing* was produced in Russia.

These three documents became the three "firsts" in the Russian studies of Laozi. A detailed review of these three documents reveals different research characteristics and styles of the three periods of the 19th century. By connecting the three dots, we can also draw a picture of Russian studies of Laozi in the 19th century.

2. The First Translation Manuscript of the *Daodejing* in Russia: A Textual Analysis

Sivillov Dmitriy Petrovich (1798–1871) was a representative figure of Russian sinology in the first half of the 19th century. He was the first person to translate the *Daodejing* in the history of Russian sinology. From 1821 to 1830, he served as the monk priest for the 10th Orthodox Mission in Beijing. In the instructions issued by the Russian government to the Mission in 1818, it was clearly stated that, once the priest had sufficient knowledge of the Chinese language, he should start studying Buddhism and Daoism, translating books that explain the doctrines of these two religions, and preparing materials and arguments to rebut these two religions (Skachkov 1977, p. 128).

In this context, Sivillov completed the first Russian translation of the *Daodejing*. During the translation process, Sivillov did not find the so-called "rebuttal evidence", but was deeply impressed by the philosophical wisdom contained in Laozi's thought. Unfortunately, Sivillov's translation could not be published due to lack of official approval. Regarding the completion time of the manuscript, he once wrote, "I translated the *Daodejing* in 1826, but it has been preserved as a manuscript" (Zhang and Luo 2022, p. 3). Sivillov never gave up the opportunity to publish his translation. In 1844, he wrote a letter to Musin-Pushkin Mikhail Nikolaevich (1795–1862), the inspector of the Kazan educational district, emphasizing the significant importance and value of Chinese classical literature

such as the *Daodejing*, stating that “this classic has long been translated into major European languages, but there is still no Russian translation. Therefore, I have made up my mind to translate it, and I am honored to send the translation to Your Excellency for review, and sincerely request your assistance in applying for official funding for publication. I even have the idea of submitting a report to His Majesty the Tsar; perhaps it will be beneficial” (Khokhlov 2014a, p. 501). Then, 14 years later, Sivillov made another effort and sent his manuscript to Lyubimov Nikolaj Ivanovich (1811–1875), the Director of the Asian Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry, but all his efforts were in vain and there was no response.

During the process of examining his manuscript materials, it was discovered that Sivillov had two translation manuscripts of the *Daodejing*, the first manuscript was kept in the Manuscript Department of the Lenin State Library (ОП ГБЛ, ф. 273, No. 2894) at that time, consisting of two volumes, titled *Laozi’s Moral Philosophy* (Nравstvennaya filosofiya Lao-tszy). The first volume contains a large number of revision traces, and the second volume is a revised version of the first volume, containing the translation of the *Daodejing*. The second manuscript was preserved in the Library of Kazan University¹ (Б-ка КГУ, рукопись 15322, II/43) at that time, and was titled *Moral Guidelines Derived from Original Natural Reason or Laozi’s Moral Philosophy* (Rukovodstvo k dobrodetelyam, pocherpnutoe iz samykh nachal estestvennogo razuma, ili нравstvennaya filosofiya Dao-tszyya). The manuscript was finished in 1828, and it was finally published in 1915–1916 with the help of Zamotajlo Ivan.²

Although eventually published and distributed, these versions were not reprinted and became almost untraceable, rare, and difficult to access in paper form. Sivillov’s translation was a groundbreaking work in the history of Russian studies on Laozi, but its value was not fully recognized, and its content has not been studied in detail due to its initial manuscript form and small circulation. We found Sivillov’s early translation of the *Daodejing* in the Russian Foreign Policy Archive and Odessa University Library among other institutions, and we conducted a detailed analysis and study of his translation.

Sivillov held a high regard for Daoist philosophy and the *Daodejing*. In his 1831 manuscript “A Brief Overview of Three Existing Religions in China—Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism” (Kratkoe obozrenie tryokh sushhestvuyushhikh v Kitae veroispovedanij, izvestnykh pod imenem konfutsianskogo, daoskogo, i fovevskogo), Sivillov wrote, “A study of Laozi’s moral theory reveals many contradictions and seemingly unreasonable statements. However, if one explores the book from the perspective of the mysterious implications hidden within the author’s conception, rather than just the literal meaning, one will discover many places that reveal his profound wisdom, a kind of wisdom that cannot be found in other Chinese philosophers, not even in Confucius” (Sivillov 1817–1840, p. 37).

During the Qing Dynasty, Daoist organizations fell out of favor among the upper classes and experienced a decline. Nevertheless, Sivillov remained a steadfast defender of the *Daodejing*: “The Chinese erudite gave an extremely negative connotation to Laozi’s most wonderful aphorisms, portraying him as a person with evil intentions, an enemy of good deeds, and that he was hostile to science, which can increase wisdom and facilitate the use of knowledge. While criticizing Laozi, they ignored the quotes in other chapters of the scripture that show Laozi’s endorsement of science and his encouragement for people to accumulate virtues and do good deeds . . . ” (Sivillov 1817–1840, p. 39).

As a clergyman, Sivillov’s translation of the *Daodejing* contained many words and expressions in the style of Russian Orthodox religious texts, and his interpretation was influenced by traditional Christian theology. For example, in his translation of Chapter 4 of the *Daodejing*, the phrase “萬物之宗” (the source of all things) was translated as “Виновник всех тварей” (the originator of all creatures) (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 213), where “Виновник” was a term commonly used in Christian scriptures to refer to the creator or originator, such as in *The Wisdom of Solomon*, where “Lord of all things” and “O Lord” were both translated as “Виновник” in Russian. In other words, Sivillov’s translation included archaic words that were introduced into Russian from Church Slavonic. Church Slavonic

often influenced linguistic style and created an elegant style. For example, the translation of the phrase “富貴而驕” (if a person is proud with wealth and honor) in Chapter 8 of the *Daodejing* was “если богатый или благородный надмевается гордостью” (if a rich or noble person shows pride, arrogance, or haughtiness) (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 215). The use of the verb form “надмеваться” (to be haughty, proud, or arrogant) derived from the adjective “надменный” (haughty, proud, or arrogant) or the noun “надменность” (haughtiness, pride, or arrogance) was a unique feature of Church Slavonic, which still persisted in written language in the 19th century. Through the stylistic overtones of Church Slavonic, Sivillov gave the Russian translation of the *Daodejing* a touch of a religious scripture in the eyes of Russian readers.

From the above, it can be seen that Sivillov’s priesthood affiliation and his identity as a priest deeply influenced his perception and reception of the *Daodejing*. As an Eastern Orthodox Christian, he was influenced by the traditional Christian worldview, which was bound to be reflected in his translation. Here is an example in Chapter 5 of the *Daodejing*:

Source text: “天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗，聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗”.

Sivillov’s translation: “Как небо и земля нечувствительны — для них все вещи значат не больше, чем брошенный пучок травы, так и мудрый ко всем хладнокровен: для него люди, как и пучок травы, не производят никакого приятного впечатления”. (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 213)

(Just as heaven and earth are not sentimental—for them, all things are no more than a discarded bundle of grass, so the wise remain indifferent to all—for them, the common people are like a bundle of straw, which leaves no pleasant impression.)

Sivillov compared all things and the people to a bundle of discarded grass, which did not leave any pleasant impression on the sage, and this interpretation was negative and pejorative. The concept of “Original Sin” in Christianity influenced Sivillov’s interpretation of the source text and word choice in translation. From the perspective of an Eastern Orthodox Christian, life was difficult, and everyone was trapped in sin, so he tended to explain the saints’ “straw dogs” (芻狗) attitude toward people with the sinfulness of their nature. However, from the perspective of traditional Chinese thought, at the beginning of human beings, human nature is inherently good, and people need to retain their original state and natural virtues. Daoist philosophy even advocates a return to the original simplicity of childhood. Such a deviation in understanding was a result of the conflict between the two cultures and worldviews of China and Russia.

Sivillov emphasized the similarities and shared values between the philosophical system of Daoism and Eastern Orthodoxy, particularly highlighting humility and gentleness. In many chapters translated by Sivillov, readers can observe how the Christian worldview and cultural background influenced the translator’s perspective and interpretation of the source text. Here is another example in Chapter 25 of the *Daodejing*:

Source text: “知其白，守其黑，為天下式”.

Sivillov’s translation: “Хотя он имеет ясное понятие о красоте белого цвета, но он больше любит чёрный цвет, чем белый, и этою-то скромностью подаёт образец вселенной”. (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 228)

(Although he has a clear idea of the beauty of white, he loves black more than white, and with this humble attitude, he sets an example for the entire universe.)

Sivillov translated “black and white” literally as colors. This emphasis on humility may have been inspired by the fact that all Orthodox priests and monks, especially those living in seclusion (monasticism), must wear black robes as a symbol of humility and detachment from the world. Priests who regularly wear colored liturgical vestments are referred to as “white clergy”, while those who have taken monastic vows and wear black robes constantly are called “black clergy”. The image of a secluded monk is similar to that of a Daoist practitioner, which may have triggered Sivillov’s association.

When it came to Sivillov's translation strategy, he adopted a highly flexible method of free translation. Firstly, the structure of the translation was significantly altered, with the original 81 chapters being condensed into 70, but without deleting any original text. Instead, he merged neighboring chapters dealing with the same topic into a new chapter and personally wrote a subtitle for each chapter. At the end of the translation, Sivillov evaluated his own work by stating that "my translation, although not fluent and elegant and not entirely literal, is close to the spirit of this ancient Chinese philosopher" (Zamotajlo 1916, p. 21). Thus, it can be seen that Sivillov was more interested in the communication of the overall ideological system of the *Daodejing* than in the accuracy of the literal meaning. His aim was to help readers understand the essence of the work. He provided a detailed explanation and supplemented the vocabulary extensively in the translated text. Sivillov chose to use metaphors or omissions to deal with places that he was not sure about, he found difficult to understand, or were inherently ambiguous. Here is an example in the third chapter of the *Daodejing*:

Source text: "是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其誌，強其骨".

Sivillov's translation: "Поэтому-то мудрый опрастывает своё сердце от всех подобных страстей и старается наполнить внутренность свою чистейшими правилами любомудрия. Ослабляя свои высокопарные помыслы, он тем более укрепляет внутренние силы своего духа". (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 228)

(Therefore, the sage guards his heart against all such passions, and strives to fill his inner being with the purest wisdom. By weakening his lofty aspirations, he strengthens the inner forces of his spirit.)

For the translation of the words "腹" (stomach) and "骨" (bones) in this passage, Sivillov avoided a literal translation and instead interpreted them as metaphors. He translated "腹" (stomach) as "inner being" (внутренность), and "骨" (bones) as "inner forces of the spirit" (внутренние силы своего духа). As for the interpretation of the word "其" (his/her/its/their) in "強其骨" (strengthen his/her/its/their bones), although most translators believe that "其" refers to the common people, Sivillov, like He Shangong, interpreted "其" as referring to the sage himself.

In another chapter, Sivillov chose a different translation approach when it came to translating body parts. For example, in the interpretation of the line "為腹不為目" in Chapter 12 of the *Daodejing*, Chinese commentators suggested that it should be understood as a metaphor. Lin Yutang believed that "腹" (stomach) referred to the inner self, whereas "目" (eyes) meant the external self or the sensory world (Lin 2009, p. 130). However, Sivillov translated "腹" (stomach) and "目" (eyes) as human organs directly in Chapter 11 of the *Daodejing*:

Source text: "是以聖人為腹不為目，故去彼取此".

Sivillov's translation: "Итак, мудрый желает лучше быть желудком, который повидимому спокойно пребывает во внутренней середине человеческого тела, однако же безпрестанно работает, но никому не показывает своей работы, кажется, будто-бы ничего не делает, однако по всему телу распространяет жизнь и питательность, -нежели оком, которое на все смотрит с порочным вожделием, сообщая через впечатление наружных предметов заражение и самому сердцу, но мудрый-же, чтобы избрать первое, -всегда отвергает это последнее". (Zamotajlo 1915, p. 217)

(The sage would rather be the "stomach". The stomach stays quietly within the body, constantly working without showing its efforts to anyone. It may seem like it is doing nothing, but it spreads vitality throughout the entire body and delivers nutrients to it. The eyes, on the other hand, look at everything with immoral greed, and pass on to the "heart" what it has been contaminated with through external things. However, the sage always rejects the latter in order to choose the former.)

Sivillov endeavored to convey the charm and essence of the *Daodejing* to 19th century Russian readers through his translations. As analyzed earlier, he avoided using unfamiliar concepts and instead opted for a “domestication” translation strategy, attempting to compensate for cultural gaps by finding corresponding Russian words. He hoped to give Russian readers an experience similar to reading a sacred text such as the Bible. Sivillov’s interpretation of the *Daodejing* came from the viewpoint of a Christian clergyman. However, his position was fundamentally different from that of some Catholic and Protestant missionaries in other countries, who tended to replace others’ cultural heritage and awareness with their own worldview and cultural symbols, thus promoting their viewpoints under the influence of Eurocentrism.

Relying on his strong language knowledge, Sivillov endeavored to understand and communicate another culture and the worldview it carried. Despite the near absence of references, his translation was mostly free of errors resulting from misunderstandings of the vocabulary and grammar of the source texts. In short, his translation and interpretation reached a high standard of depth and accuracy. It is unfortunate that Sivillov’s work was not published until the beginning of the 20th century and had limited circulation. If his translation could have been published earlier, it might have accelerated the process of Russian familiarity with Daoist thought and culture during the Imperial Russian period and, to some extent, prevented misunderstandings and defamation of Daoist philosophy by some Russian thinkers and critics during that period.

3. The First Article in Russia Introducing Laozi’s Thought: A Documentary Examination

The year 1842 was a significant year for the international study of Laozi’s philosophy. In that year, the French sinologist Stanislas Julien (1797–1873) published his French translation of the *Daodejing*. Around the same time, two works were published in Russia that introduced Laozi’s *Daodejing*. The first was a two-volume work titled *Statistical Summary of the Chinese Empire* (Statisticheskoe opisaniye Kitajskoj imperii) authored by Bichurin Nikita Yakovlevich (1777–1853), one of the founders of Russian sinology, and published in St. Petersburg. In the fifth chapter of the book, “Introduction to Religion”, Bichurin pointed out that “Confucius and Laozi share the same view on interpersonal morality, both regarding the ‘Dao’ as a natural law engraved in the soul, and as a virtue or characteristic guiding one’s actions. The difference between the views of these two sages lies in the different methods they propose for retaining one’s original ‘simplicity’ and cultivating one’s character” (Bichurin 2002, p. 64). Bichurin’s concise summary of Daoism had a profound influence on the approach of Russian sinologists toward Daoism and Daoist philosophy, and many later scholars continued to conduct research on Daoist works within this paradigm. In his book *Statistical Summary of the Chinese Empire*, Bichurin did not directly quote from the *Daodejing* and omitted most of the details, using simple language to convey the essence of Daoism and Laozi’s teachings to readers.

The groundbreaking work in the history of Russian sinology that provided an in-depth introduction to the thought of Laozi was an article titled “Laozi and His Teachings” (Lao-dzy i ego uchenie), which was published anonymously in the 11th issue of *The Son of Fatherland* (Syn Otechestva) in 1842. The author of the article was exposed to the ideas of the *Daodejing* through the first French translation published by the renowned French sinologist Julien. In the form of a dozen or so pages, the author introduced Laozi in detail to Russian readers. This article is widely considered by the Russian academic community as the groundbreaking work discussing Laozi’s thought in the history of Russian sinology. Additionally, this article translated a significant amount of the *Daodejing* from Julien’s French version to Russian, making it the first publicly published excerpt of the Russian translation of the *Daodejing*.

There are two speculations in the Russian sinology community about the anonymous author of the article. The first view is that the article was written by Bichurin. Yang Xingshun (1904–1989) wrote in his work, “The article is anonymously published, but based on its content, it was probably written by Bichurin, a famous Russian sinologist in the

19th century” (Yang 1950, p. 97). The second view is that the author of the article was the Senkovskij Osip Ivanovich (1800–1858), an Orientalist scholar who studied Arabic. At the 19th All-Russian Conference of Philosophy and Modern Civilization of the East Asian Region, Khokhlov Aleksandr Nikolaevich (1929–2015) presented a report exploring the issue of the authorship of the article in *The Son of Fatherland* (Khokhlov 2014b, pp. 87–93). After a literature check and close reading of the text, we agree with the second opinion that the author of “Laozi and His Teachings” was Senkovskij for the following reasons:

(1) *The Son of Fatherland* was founded by Grech Nikolaj Ivanovich (1787–1867) in 1812, who was also the nominal editor-in-chief of another magazine, *Reader’s Library* (Biblioteka dlya chteniya). However, the actual editor-in-chief of *Reader’s Library* was Senkovskij, who had been the actual editor of *The Son of Fatherland* since 1840. He once hosted the column “Baron Brambeus’ Miscellaneous Notes” in *The Son of Fatherland* under the pen name of Baron Brambeus. Starchevskij Al’bert Vikent’evich (1818–1901) mentioned that Senkovskij wrote as many as 100 articles a year in the 1840s, mostly anonymously or published under various pen names, in *Reader’s Library*, *Northern Bee*, and *The Son of Fatherland*. There were records showing that almost all the works in *The Son of Fatherland* edited by Senkovskij in 1841 were written by himself. His works were rarely discussed because they were all anonymously published (Starchevskij 1855, pp. 370–77). This showed that Senkovskij had a close relationship with *The Son of Fatherland*, which provided strong evidence for our speculation.

(2) In the preface of the article published in *The Son of Fatherland*, the anonymous author described the Qing Dynasty’s condescending attitude toward foreign countries with a slight sense of sarcasm, showing bias in his perception of China. The article unveils an unfamiliar nation little by little, which is different from the articles written by sinologists who have sufficient knowledge of China. On the other hand, from Bichurin’s works, it can be seen that he was always a staunch supporter of Chinese culture and philosophy, and he never tolerated any ridicule of the East and China. In 1977, Academician Tikhvinskij Sergej Leonidovich (1918–2018) wrote, “Bichurin’s obsession is reflected in his idealization of certain aspects of Chinese society, politics, international system, and Qing Dynasty law” (Tikhvinskij 1977, p. 149). Senkovskij also pointed out that Bichurin’s views were too idealistic, and he commented on Bichurin’s impression of China, saying that “it completely does not conform to the actual situation at that time, especially in the context of the Qing Empire’s disastrous defeat in the Sino-British War” (Khokhlov 2013, p. 303). “Everything is so perfect in this country, everything is strictly in accordance with legal procedures, the law is so perfectly implemented, the monarch is so benevolent, the officials are so diligent, morality is so pure, and even philosophy is so lofty that when reading Bichurin’s book, one cannot help but be amazed and jealous of China . . . What surprises us even more is that he did not say a word about the decline of China” (Senkovskij 1841, p. 4). It follows that Bichurin was unlikely to be the author of the article in *The Son of Fatherland*.

(3) At the beginning of the article, there is a description that reads, “Not long ago, the East was an unknown land to us. Going to Constantinople was considered an important task” (Anonymous 1842, p. 16). This paragraph also mentions Kabul, Afghanistan, India, and other places. According to Senkovskij’s biography, he first visited Constantinople in 1819, while Bichurin never showed an interest in Turkey and Afghanistan as subjects of research.

(4) Senkovskij had always aspired to establish a journal focused on literary commentary. To this end, he introduced a column called “Literary Review” in the magazine he edited. Upon reviewing his published articles, it is evident that, in addition to literary works, he frequently selected and analyzed exemplary works by other authors, often drawing from foreign magazines to pique readers’ curiosity. He would then excerpt the original texts for analysis and provide commentary on their merits and flaws, thus forming a distinctive style of literary criticism that bore similarities to the writing style found in “Laozi and His Teachings”.

(5) Some scholars, such as Bernshtam Aleksandr Natanovich (1910–1956), believed that the anonymous author was Bichurin. Bernshtam argued that 1840s coincided with the peak period of Bichurin’s publications, and that Bichurin had corresponded with the French sinologist Julien in 1841, with Julien’s name appearing in the preface of the article (Bernshtam 1950, p. 16). However, such a claim is untenable, as the introduction and writing style of the article *Statistical Summary of the Chinese Empire*, published in the same year, is very different from that of *The Son of Fatherland*. In the latter, the author repeatedly mentioned the similarities between the philosophies of Laozi and that of Hinduism, indicating a deep understanding of various religions and cultures in Asia. Bichurin, on the other hand, had no involvement in Hindu studies and made his academic contributions primarily in the field of Buddhist studies.

(6) In 1839, in the third part of the “Science and Art” section of the seventh issue of *The Son of Fatherland*, an article titled “The Basic Principles of Chinese Historical Compilation Established by Confucius” (Osnovnye pravila kitajskoj istorii) was published, clearly signed by Bichurin. Therefore, if the article published in 1842 was indeed written by Bichurin, there would have been no need for Bichurin to publish it anonymously.

On the basis of the above reasons, we speculate that the author of the article is likely Senkovskij. After discussing the authorship of the article, we can then focus on its core content. The article begins by praising Julien’s French translation of the *Daodejing*, stating that “the distinguished sinologist Julien has provided readers with a translation of Laozi’s work, titled *The Book of the Way and Virtue* (Lao Tseu, Tao-Te King, le livre de la Voie et de la Vertu). This book elaborates on Laozi’s incisive and unique thoughts . . . Translating the *Daodejing* is a very difficult task, and only Julien is competent to do so. His translation is so accurate that anyone with a little knowledge of Chinese can find every word in the source text” (Anonymous 1842, p. 18). In this article, the author explored Daoist thought and the *Daodejing*, providing many excerpts translated from Julien’s French version into Russian to illustrate his understanding of the *Daodejing* and interpret Laozi’s philosophical system from his own perspective. From the translation, it can be seen that the author did not refer to the original Chinese text but instead completely translated the content from the French version. For example:

Source text: “我獨泊兮，其未兆，如嬰兒之未孩”。

Julien’s translation: “Moi seul je suis calme: (mes affections) n’ont pas encore germé. Je ressemble à un nouveau-né qui n’a pas encore souri à sa mère”. (Julien 1842, p. 69)

(I feel very calm, my emotions have not yet sprouted. I look like a newborn who hasn’t smiled at his mother yet.)

Translation by the anonymous author: “Я спокоен, мои страсти не пустили ещё ростков; я похож на новорождённого, который не умеет ещё улыбнуться своей матери”. (Anonymous 1842, p. 27)

(I am very calm, my passion has not yet sprouted; I look like a newborn baby, he doesn’t know how to smile at his mother.)

In the source text, “孩” is often understood as “the smile of a baby”, while the anonymous author, like Julien, translated it in a relatively flexible manner as “baby smile to the mother”. Julien’s translation did not apply Western philosophical concepts to explain the source text, and it also removed the religious connotations of Christianity or Hinduism, taking a relatively neutral stance on Laozi’s thoughts. The anonymous author retained Julien’s ideas and translation style when translating the *Daodejing*.

However, when analyzing Laozi’s thoughts, the author employed the method of comparative philosophy to draw parallels between Laozi’s philosophy and Hindu philosophy. The author was the first to introduce in Russia the similarities between the concept of Dao and Indian religious thought. Russian translations of Indian scriptures were published earlier in Russia than Daoist scriptures, such as the Russian version of the *Bhagavad Gita* (1788) published by Russian educator Novikov Nikolaj Ivanovich (1744–1818)

(Shaumyan 2018, p. 21). By contrasting it with Indian religious thought, the author bridged the aesthetic gap between the concept of “Dao” in the *Daodejing* and Russian readers. The author pointed out that the entire *Daodejing* is imbued with the inherent spirit of “monism” and “pantheism” found in Indian philosophy. The *Daodejing* emphasizes the oneness of all things, which is deeply rooted in the concept of “Dao”. This parallels the philosophy of the *Upanishads*, particularly the “Advaita Vedanta”, where one of the main arguments is that the world is not as it seems, but rather an illusion, and that “Brahman” is the sole reality and true existence. The anonymous author mentioned, “From Laozi’s perspective, oneness is the essence of all things; therefore, there is no essential difference or separation; there is neither truth nor falsehood, beauty nor ugliness, existence nor non-existence” (Anonymous 1842, p. 27). Although it was not indicated here that it was derived from the *Daodejing*, it can be seen that it is related to Chapter 2 of the *Daodejing*, “天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已，皆知善之為善，斯不善已” (When all the world knows beauty as beauty, there is ugliness. When they know good as good, then there is evil).

The author argued that according to Laozi’s teachings, which advocate for rejecting all activities, war is naturally prohibited. In this aspect, Laozi’s and Confucius’s opinions align. Another fundamental idea borrowed from the works of Laozi and Confucius is that human nature is inherently good, and, in order to achieve moral perfection, people should return to the simplicity of nature. This is clearly contradictory to the Christian concept of sin, but similar to Rousseau’s philosophical thoughts. The author’s insight into the role of tradition in China is also remarkable, as evident from the following statement: “China is a country where tradition serves as the foundation for everything. New ideas here are merely an expansion of ancient thoughts. All Chinese philosophers, whether they are negative mystics or simple materialists, express themselves using the same expressions and wording from the same traditional stories. The only difference among them lies in their interpretations of the same legend” (Anonymous 1842, p. 32).

The author drew a comparison between the concept of wuwei (nonaction) in the *Daodejing* and the mystical Quietism movement in Christianity from the 16th to 18th centuries.³ Quietism advocates a “passive” attitude of silence and self-cultivation, emphasizing the importance of inner prayer techniques. It promotes entrusting oneself to God and denies the necessity of formal church praying. The author referred to Laozi’s philosophy as “Eastern Quietism”. Therefore, the author selected sentences that are more aligned with the principles of Quietism for excerpted translation:

Source text: “塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤；開其兌，濟其事，終身不救”.

Julien’s translation: “S’il clôt sa bouche, s’il ferme ses oreilles et ses yeux, jusqu’au terme de ses jours, il n’éprouvera aucune fatigue. Mais s’il ouvre sa bouche et augmente ses désirs, jusqu’à la fin de sa vie, il ne pourra être sauvé”. (Julien 1842, p. 189)

(If he closes his mouth and shuts his ears and eyes, he will not be tired until the end of his days. But if he opens his mouth and increases his desires, until the end of his life, he cannot be saved.)

Translation by the anonymous author: “человек должен закрыть уста, зажать уши и глаза, если он раскроет уста и увеличит свои желания, он не сыщёт спасения”. (Anonymous 1842, p. 29)

(A person must close their mouth, ears, and eyes. If they open their mouth and increase their desire, they will not seek redemption.)

Compared with Julien’s translation, the author made some deletions in the content, but, in general, he expressed his Quietism views. The author emphasized the incompatibility of selfish desires with the Way, and that man should restrain his desires and observe the virtues of the Way. At the same time, the author believed that Laozi is the only philosopher who praises weakness; therefore, he excerpted Julien’s relevant translation to prove this point, such as “人之生也柔弱，其死也堅強” (Man is soft and weak at birth; at death,

he is hard and rigid.) and “弱之勝強，柔之勝剛” (The weak overcomes the strong; the soft conquers the hard).

The author was highly interested in Laozi’s concept of wuwei (nonaction), which he saw as the supreme principle of the Laozi’s doctrine—abandoning all desires and achieving perfect calmness and peace. The author contrasted Westerners and Easterners, viewing Europeans as insatiable in their desires, adventures, and ideas, constantly disturbed by the need for new activities. In order to feel alive and present, they indulge in life and seek enjoyment. On the other hand, Easterners avoid action and are even willing to escape from themselves. They suppress desires, give up actions, and repress thoughts. Europeans have difficulty understanding Asians, who seek to escape the whirlwind of life and find satisfaction in perfect tranquility (Anonymous 1842, p. 29). As a result, the author inappropriately translated the principle of wuwei as “бездействие” in Russian, which connotes “no action or inaction” and carries a negative connotation of passivity, easily interpreted by readers as shirking responsibility or laziness.

During this period, three magazines—Reader’s Library, The Northern Bee, and The Son of Fatherland—were the main channels of information dissemination in Russia, which met the basic needs of the public for various genres and information. These magazines dominated the dissemination of information, guided public opinion, and shaped reading preferences. The article published in The Son of Fatherland was the first in Russia to introduce Laozi and the *Daodejing*, leaving the initial impression of the *Daodejing* on Russian readers, and influencing the development of social thought and the literary opinions about the *Daodejing* at that time. The anonymous author’s interpretation of wuwei became one of the factors that contributed to a certain degree of aversion to Daoist thought among Russian readers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries.⁴ For example, in his book *China and Europe* (Kitaj i Evropa) published in 1890, the Russian philosopher and poet Solov’ov Vladimir Sergeevich (1853–1900) regarded the *Daodejing* as a “preaching of obscurantism” and “the opposition to life, knowledge, and progress” (Solov’ov 1966, p. 122). In the context of revolutionary sentiment, the Russian literary writer Maxim Gorky (1868–1936) mentioned Laozi in his 1915 article “Two Souls” (Dve dushi), where he criticized the social and political life of the East and Laozi’s philosophy from the perspective of Eurocentric bias and stereotypes. Gorky’s viewed Laozi as advocating retrogression and considered his ideas as one of the reasons for the stagnation of China in the late 19th and early 20th centuries (Gorky 1918, pp. 174–75).

4. The First Complete Translation of the *Daodejing* in Russia: Characteristic Analysis

As mentioned earlier, Sivillov completed the translation of the *Daodejing* as early as 1826, but it remained unpublished for a long time. There were several abridged translations of the *Daodejing* that were published since that. For example, Tolstoy Lev Nikolaeovich (1828–1910) started his own research and translation of the *Daodejing* in 1884. He selected the chapters to be translated, but his translation work was not smooth until 1893 when he began translating and proofreading with his follower Popov Evgenij Ivanovich (1864–1938). The translation work lasted until May 1894, and it was published in 1910 by the “Medium” publishing house under the title *Quotes of the Chinese Sage Laozi* (Izrecheniya Kitajskogo mudretsa Lao-Tze), which included a preface titled “On the Essence of Laozi’s Teaching” (O sushhnosti ucheniya Lao-Tze) and 64 selected chapters of the *Daodejing*. In addition, the famous poet of the Silver Age, Bal’mont Konstantin Dmitrievich (1867–1942), began translating the *Daodejing* at the end of the 19th century. In 1909, he published a collection of writings titled *The Calls of Antiquity* (Zovy drevnosti), in which he selected and translated 14 chapters of the *Daodejing* in poetic form, paving the way for the first Russian translation of the *Daodejing* in poetic form.

It was not until the end of the 19th century that the first complete Russian translation of the *Daodejing* was published. It was translated by a Japanese named Konishi Masutaro (小西増太郎 1862–1940), who, in May 1893, published the first three chapters of a review article titled “The Philosophy of Laozi” (Filosofiya Laosi) in the Issues of Philosophy and

Psychology (Voprosy filosofii i psikhologii). In May 1894, the fourth chapter of the article “The Philosophy of Laozi” was published in the same journal, together with the full translation of the *Daodejing*. In 1913, the offprint *Laozi, Daodejing or the Book of Morality* (Lao Si. Tao-te-king ili pisanie o npravstvennosti) was published, which was proofread by Tolstoy and annotated by the Russian literary critic Durylin Sergej Nikolaevich (1886–1954). Konishi’s translation of the *Daodejing* remained the most influential full Russian translation until 1950, and, under the influence of Tolstoy, this translation was reprinted at least 13 times and was considered a valuable asset in the Russian studies on Laozi. However, it did not receive much attention in the academic circle. There was relatively little or no critical discussion on this translation, and it was often ignored when reviewing the Russian studies on Laozi. For example, Yang Xingshun (1904–1989), a representative figure in the study of Daoism during the Soviet period, dedicated a chapter to the study of the *Daodejing* in his monograph *Ancient Chinese Philosopher Laozi and his Doctrine* (Drevnekitajskij filosof Lao-tszy i ego uchenie), where he reviewed in a comprehensive and objective manner various research on the *Daodejing* in Russia before the revolution, yet he did not mention Konishi’s translation.

Konishi was a unique figure in the history of Russian sinology. He was born in Japan in 1862 during the Meiji Restoration Era. Influenced by this trend, he began to explore new spiritual realms. In 1877, Konishi entered the saltworks of the famous Japanese salt merchant Takeyoshiro Nozaki in Okayama, where he met the priest of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Japan and was baptized in Japan in 1879 as Daniel Petrovich (also known to some Russian scholars as Daniel Pavlovich). He was schooled for 6 years at the Orthodox Seminary and the Orthodox School of Russian language in Tokyo between 1880 and 1886.⁵ He received extensive training in Orthodox Christian theology and the Russian language, and he was a student of everything that made Nikolay’s mission unique (Konishi 2013, p. 104). In 1887, Nikolay (Ivan Dmitrievich Kasatki) (1836–1912), then the bishop of the Japanese Orthodox Church, sent Konishi to study the history of theology at the Kiev Theological Academy. In 1892, Konishi graduated from the Kiev Theological Academy and entered the Department of History and Philosophy at Moscow University. From 1887 to 1893, Konishi studied in Russia for 6 years, where he received dual education in theology and secular philosophy.

Translating and studying Chinese classics was an important academic activity during his time in Russia, and it was during this period that he completed the translation of the *Daodejing* with the help of two key figures. The first was philosopher and psychologist Grot Nikolaj Yakovlevich (1852–1899), who was Konishi’s academic mentor in Russia. He was a professor at Moscow University, the Chairman of the Moscow Psychological Society, and one of the founders of the largest philosophical journal in Russia—*Issues of Philosophy and Psychology*. It was in this journal that Konishi published his translation of the *Daodejing, the Great Learning, the Doctrine of the Mean*, and other works. It was also through Grot’s introduction that he met Tolstoy.

The second key figure was Tolstoy, who admired the philosophy of Laozi and believed that it was a great loss that there was no excellent translation of the *Daodejing* in Russia. Therefore, Tolstoy actively promoted the study and translation of Laozi’s philosophy in Russia. In addition to helping Konishi proofread his translation of the *Daodejing*, Tolstoy also assisted his follower and fellow translator Popov in proofreading his translation. Regarding Tolstoy’s proofreading of the Russian translation of the *Daodejing*, Konishi wrote in the preface of his offprint translation in 1913, “In November 1895, Tolstoy heard that I was translating the famous classic the *Daodejing* from Chinese to Russian, so he asked Grot to invite me to his house. He said, ‘In order to have the best translation in Russia, I am willing to help you proofread the text’. I gladly accepted the kindness of Lev Nikolayevich (Tolstoy). I brought my translation of the *Daodejing* to him for his guidance several times, and we worked together for 4 months. Lev Nikolayevich (Tolstoy) compared my translation with English, German, and French translations, and decided on the text of

each chapter. My translation was, thus, completed and initially published in the journal *Issues of Philosophy and Psychology*” (Konishi 1913, p. 3).

However, according to historical records, Konishi’s translation was published in *Issues of Philosophy and Psychology* in 1893–1894. Tolstoy’s daughter Tolstaya Aleksandra L’vovna (1884–1979) wrote in her memoirs the details of her father’s discussions with Konishi about the translation of the *Daodejing*, and the time was recorded as 1893. Tolstaya pointed out in her annotations that the time “1895” mentioned by Konishi in the preface of his 1913 Russian translation of the *Daodejing* was incorrect (Tolstaya 1981, p. 126). In the book *Konishi Masutaro–Tolstoy–Nozaki Takejiro—The Trajectory of Friendship* by Ota Kenichi, the author clearly stated that Professor Grot introduced Konishi to Tolstoy on 23 November 1892, and began to collaborate on the translation of the *Daodejing* (Ota 2007, p. 262). All these sources prove that Tolstoy actively participated in the translation and publication of Konishi’s work on Laozi’s philosophy in 1892–1893. They were drawn to each other because of their common interest in the nonchurch, nonhierarchical, universal, “rational” religious perspective expressed by the common people in the *Daodejing*. Their collaboration to translate the *Daodejing* reflected their shared beliefs and ideas (Konishi 2013, p. 112).

The influence of Tolstoy on Konishi was undoubtedly significant. Konishi later became a supporter of Tolstoyism. Under Tolstoy’s influence, Konishi abandoned his Orthodox faith shortly after returning to Japan in 1893 and immersed himself in the study of Tolstoy’s philosophy. He actively engaged in translating and studying Tolstoy’s works, becoming the first person in Japan to directly translate Tolstoy’s works from Russian. As an illustration, he initially rendered *The Kreutzer Sonata*, a story by Tolstoy, with the intention of indirectly criticizing the Confucian ethical system. His primary aim in introducing Tolstoy to Japan was not to present him as a literary writer, but rather to showcase his consistent set of religious thought, which were eventually labeled as the “anarchist religion” in Japan. With Tolstoy’s help, he completed the translation of the *Daodejing*, which not only reflected Konishi’s understanding of Laozi’s philosophy, but also embodied Tolstoy’s interpretation of Chinese culture. Konishi found Tolstoy’s ideas particularly meaningful because they were similar to those in the *Daodejing*. He believed that Tolstoy’s emphasis on universal virtue was at the heart of his philosophy, echoing fundamental concepts from the ancient Daoist thought.

However, Tolstoy expressed dissatisfaction with Konishi’s translation in a letter he wrote in 1907, stating that “it is strange that he (Laozi) is not known to this day. He is so deep in thought and wears Chinese clothes (language and writing). Konishi’s translation is very poor. The translation should have philosophical wisdom and not be subject to arbitrary interpretations” (Makovitskij 1979, p. 348). It is, thus, clear that Konishi’s translation, although influenced by Tolstoy, and was expressive of Russian–Japanese transnational intellectual practices beyond the East–West divide; however, his translation also maintained its independence and originality, as can be seen from the comparison of the two translations:

Source text: “有物混成，先天地生”.

Tolstoy’s translation: “оно и есть существо непостижимое, Оно было прежде неба и земли”. (Tolstoy 1992, p. 534)

(It is an incomprehensible existence, before heaven and earth.)

Konishi’s translation: “Вещество произошло из хаоса. Есть бытие, которое существует раньше, нежели небо и земля”. (Konishi 1913, p. 17)

(Matter came from chaos. There is a being that exists before heaven and earth.)

The Chinese word “混” in the original text refers to concepts such as “chaos” and “fusion”, with a vague meaning. Konishi’s translation selected the religiously suggestive “chaos” to retain this ambiguous meaning. Tolstoy translated it as “incomprehensible existence”, retaining the sense of “profound and unfathomable”, but not reflecting the meaning of chaos and fusion. In other words, Tolstoy claimed Dao as an incomprehensible, but not a chaotic deity.

Konishi's translation was based on the *Daodejing*, which was collected as the 40th issue of "Chinese Collection" in the Rumyantsev Museum. He also consulted Japanese publications on Laozi's works available in Russia at that time, as well as the French translation of the *Daodejing* published by the French sinologist Stanislas Julien in 1842. We speculate that Konishi also referred to Japanese publications on Laozi's works that were available in Russia at the time, because, when he publicly debated Vasil'ev's views on Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Han Feizi in his book *Religions of the East: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Daoism*, Konishi pointed out that Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Han Feizi were not contemporaries, and that the time of appearance of Laozi's works pointed out by Professor Vasil'ev was unfounded. The appearance of the *Daodejing* was at least three or four centuries earlier than what Professor Vasil'ev believed. Konishi presented a large amount of evidence and proof, in which he used Japanese characters to spell out Chinese place names and personal names related to Laozi's life in Japanese, rather than in Chinese pronunciation; for example, Han Feizi was translated into Japanese as "Kanpishi", Zhuangzi was translated into Japanese as "Soshi", and so on (Konishi 1893, pp. 25–28).

The translation of the *Daodejing* published in 1913 was basically the same as the one published in *Issues of Philosophy and Psychology* in 1894, but with slight differences. In the 1894 version, Konishi presented the translation notes as footnotes, while the 1913 version removed Konishi's footnotes and replaced them with Durelin's annotations at the end of the translation. Durelin, in some cases, added the translations of French sinologist Julien, Russian sinologist Vasil'ev, or Russian poet Bal'mont, and conducted a simple evaluation and analysis in his annotations on the basis of Konishi's original footnotes. For example, in the annotation for the term "straw dogs" (芻狗), Durelin added Vasil'ev's translation for comparison while retaining Konishi's footnotes. He also made a brief comment, "The use of straw dogs instead of any living sacrificial objects shows that, in Laozi's time, natural sacrificial objects had been replaced by symbolic ones" (Konishi 1913, pp. 64–65).

Unlike Sivillov's translation, Konishi preserved the form and structure of the original chapters and attempted to translate them as accurately as possible, and he succeeded to a large extent, but there were also translations that did not match to the original meaning of the source text, showing his difficulty in understanding the text. For example:

Source text: "持而盈之，不如其己；揣而銳之，不可長保".

Konishi's translation: "Чтобы посуда была наполнена чем-нибудь, нужно держать ее твердо (без малейшего движения) и ровно. Чтобы лезвие наострилось, нужно долго продолжать натачивание". (Konishi 1913, p. 8)

(To fill a vessel, one must hold it firmly and evenly, without the slightest movement. To sharpen a blade, one must continue sharpening it for a long time.)

The original meaning of the passage is "You hold to fullness, and it is better to stop in time. You keep on beating and sharpening a sword, and the edge cannot be preserved for long." From the translation, it can be seen that Konishi's understanding and translation of this sentence almost contradicted the original meaning. Although there were some errors related to literal translation in Konishi's translation, it did not deviate from the meaning of the original text and the integrity of its internal logic on the whole. Moreover, Konishi's study of Laozi was not limited to translation, but he also provided a profound analysis and historical examination of Laozi's ideas.

The article "The Philosophy of Laozi" published in 1893–1894 was an epitome of Konishi's research on Laozi's philosophy. The article was divided into four parts. In the first part, Konishi engaged in an open debate against Vasil'ev's views in his book *Religions of the East: Confucianism, Buddhism and Daoism*. Vasil'ev, with a strong spirit of skepticism, denied the authenticity of the author of the *Daodejing* and argued that it was written at a time when Confucianism held an important position. Konishi refuted this viewpoint in the article and vigorously defended the authenticity of Laozi, as recorded in Sima Qian's *The Records of the Grand Historian*. In the second part, Konishi examined the time period and life of Laozi, challenging Julien's assertion that Laozi was born in 604 BC. In the third part,

the author argued that individual wisdom and turbulent times played a role in the emergence of Laozi's philosophy. Konishi held a higher opinion of Laozi compared to Confucius, seeing Confucius as proud and self-conceited, while Laozi as humble and benevolent (Konishi 1893, pp. 25–45). In the fourth part, Konishi introduced his position and views on the ethics and metaphysics of the *Daodejing*. He believed that Laozi's "metaphysics" included the doctrines of the Dao and cosmology, and that the two were closely related, with the former serving as the foundation of the latter. Laozi's ethics encompassed individual ethics and social ethics. The root of ethical corruption, according to Konishi, was personal desires, and moral perfection could only be achieved by overcoming selfish desires. When discussing Laozi's social ethics, Konishi believed that the core idea was to recognize the legitimacy of monarchy, advocate governance by nonaction, promote policies of keeping the people ignorant, advocate legal nihilism, reject wealth, and oppose war. This interpretation shared similarities with Tolstoy's ideas (Konishi 1894, pp. 363–79).

Konishi's study of Laozi was even more persuasive when viewed from the perspective of the world civilization. He received a Western-style education, initially following the Eastern Orthodox Church, before later embracing Tolstoyism. Therefore, his study of Daoist philosophy was conducted within the framework of Western philosophy, rather than Chinese classical philosophy. He drew parallels between Laozi's thought and that of Western philosophers such as Heraclitus (about 544–483 BC), Plato (427–347 BC), and the Eleatic School, arguing that the concept in Western philosophy that is closest to the "Dao" is "nous" proposed by Anaxagoras (500–428 BC). Konishi pointed out that, "similar to Greek philosophy, Laozi's metaphysical system is also a systematic and comprehensive exposition on the highest existence. The difference lies in the fact that Laozi's thought is the product of individual wisdom, whereas Greek philosophy is the product of the collective efforts of many scholars" (Konishi 1894, pp. 386–88). Thus, it is evident that he was skilled at drawing on and analogizing classical Western philosophy. In most cases, these were valuable insights, but sometimes the supposed similarities he pointed out did not actually exist, such as the so-called correspondence between some of Laozi's propositions and the philosophy of Heraclitus, or the similarity between the cosmology of the *Daodejing* and the thought of the Greek philosopher Anaxagoras. Although his views were still open to debate, and his translation had some shortcomings, it is undeniable that he had a strong spirit of scientific inquiry and dared to challenge the works of Russian sinologist Vasiliev and French sinologist Julien. In the process of interpreting Laozi's thought, he compared it with the doctrines of ancient Greek philosophers, building on the foundation of Western philosophical perspectives, and he made unique contributions to the translation and cross-cultural exploration of Chinese philosophical classics.

5. Summary and Conclusions

The Imperial Russian Period was an important stage for Russia's expansion abroad, with a strong emphasis on studying the culture and economy of neighboring countries. The study of Chinese culture in Russia at that time was carried out under official instructions and monitoring, with the aim of seeking some kind of "homogeneous discourse support" to achieve spiritual colonization of China. Although the development of Russian sinology began with the establishment of the Russian Orthodox Mission in Beijing in the early 18th century, it was not until a century later that research on the *Daodejing* started to appear in the works of the Russian Orthodox missionaries stationed to Beijing. The research on Daoism and Laozi in Russia started relatively late, but the *Daodejing* is now the most frequently translated Chinese classic in Russia and an important component of international studies on Laozi. The characteristics of the early dissemination of Laozi's teachings in Russia can be summarized as follows:

Strong Historical and Religious Limitations: Translators during this period in Russia inevitably approached the translation and interpretation of the *Daodejing* with a comparison to religious theology, resulting in strong historical and religious limitations. In the early stages of dissemination, Russian studies of the Eastern countries were always inter-

twined with Russian interests, and sinological studies, including the study of Laozi, were characterized by practicality and utilitarianism. The research on Laozi conducted by members of the Orthodox Mission, who had strong religious zeal and academic spirit under official instruction, played a significant role in the early dissemination of the *Daodejing*.

Drawing on Outstanding Achievements from European Sinology: Russian sinology research has been greatly influenced by the West, particularly French sinology. The translation and interpretation of Western versions have indirectly contributed to the development of Russian studies on Laozi. In particular, Julien's French translation of the *Daodejing* in 1842 had a tremendous impact on Russian sinologists and facilitated the dissemination of the *Daodejing* in Russia.

Comparisons and Contrasts Between East and West: The translation and study of the *Daodejing* during the Imperial Russian Period were predominantly based on the methodology of comparative philosophy. In Tsarist Russia, the main reference points for interpreting the *Daodejing* were Christian Quietism, Hinduism, and Neoplatonism. In the later period of Tsarist Russia, there were also translations and summaries of the *Daodejing* from the perspective of religious syncretism, such as Tolstoyism and theosophical thought. Direct comparison of Laozi's philosophy with similar ideas in other religious and philosophical systems was a consistent research method and tradition in Russian studies on Laozi in the early stages, and it continues to be so today.

The Fusion of Tolstoyism and Laozi's Teachings: Tolstoy played an indispensable role in the spread of the *Daodejing* in Russia. He used the authority of the *Daodejing* and some of its ideas to reinforce his own concept of nonresistance to evil and nonviolence within the framework of Tolstoyism, which was gradually emerging at that time. In Tolstoy's translations and reviews of the *Daodejing*, the integration of Laozi's philosophy with the Tolstoy's own thinking was clearly visible, profoundly influencing the development of Russian studies on Laozi. Even Russian scholars such as Lisevich Igor' Samojlovich (1932–2000) and Maslov Aleksej Aleksandrovich (1964–) hypothesized that Konishi's translation and Yang Xingshun's translation during the Soviet Period tended to replace Chinese Daoist philosophy with Tolstoyism⁶ (Myshinskij 2016, p. 123).

Widespread Misinterpretations and Misunderstandings: The early dissemination of the *Daodejing* in Russia, compared to the West, was closer to the source text and showed greater respect for the original work. However, due to issues such as language comprehension and Eurocentrism, translations often retained a touch of mystical or utopian color, resulting in various mistranslations and misinterpretations. In particular, there was a negative understanding of wuwei (nonaction) that directly influenced the evaluations of Russian thinkers in the late 19th and early 20th centuries regarding Laozi's teachings, labeling the *Daodejing* with characteristics of nihilism, laziness, pessimism, individualism, etc.

High Academic Value, but Limited Dissemination: During the early stage of dissemination, translations and research articles on Laozi's teachings were produced by Russian sinologists such as Sivillov, the anonymous author, and Bichurin. These works were profound and objective in their research. However, due to various reasons, they were unable to be published or had very limited circulation, resulting in the lack of a significant impact on society. As a result, subsequent scholars' studies on the scholars and works of this period were relatively scarce, leading to some erroneous historical accounts and literature. It is imperative for the academic community to engage in discussions and corrections on these issues.

In summary, early Russian studies on Laozi exhibit distinct historical and regional characteristics. Russian sinologists generally approach the studies on Laozi with a positive and respectful attitude. However, there are inherent limitations in research due to the perspective of the "other", resulting in difficulties in transcending religious and Eurocentric biases in translation and research. Conducting a comprehensive analysis of historical documents and the unique characteristics of early Russian studies on Laozi, as well as investigating the understanding and cultural impact of these studies in Russia, can enrich

our research and correct inaccuracies in existing literature, and provide a detailed and supplementary portrayal to the global landscape of Laozi studies.

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Notes

- ¹ The manuscript materials of the Kazan University library are now preserved in the Russian Foreign Policy Archive and the National Central Archive of History.
- ² In 1915, Zamotaylo published the first half of Sivillov's translation on pages 209–245 of the fifth and sixth issues of the fourth volume of the Odessa Library Association Magazine affiliated with Novorossisk University. The second half of Sivillov's translation was published by Zamotaylo on pages 3–21 of the first and second issues of the fifth volume of the same magazine in 1916, as well as in 1916 in an offprint with the following information: И. Замотайло. 1916. «Перевод Дао-дэ-цзина Архимандрита Даниила Сивиллова 1828г. Со вступительной статьей о даосизме и конфуцианства.» Одесса: Н.Л. Ламберга. ([Zamotajlo 1916](#) «Perevod Dao-deh-tszina Arkhimandrita Daniila Sivillova 1828 g. So vstupil'noj stat'ej o daosizme i konfutsianstva.» Odessa: N.L. Lamberg.)
- ³ The most important work about Quietism *Spiritual Guide* (Guía spiritual) was written by Spanish theologian and Catholic mystic Miguel de Molinos, and then translated into Russian by Lopukhin Ivan Vladimirovich (1756–1816), one of the leading representatives of Russian Freemasonry, published in Moscow in 1784.
- ⁴ Another important factor that contributed to the negative interpretation of Daoist philosophy in Russian society was *Religions of the East: Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism* (*Religii Vostoka: konfutsianstvo, buddizm i daosizm*) published in 1873, written by Vasil'ev Vasilij Pavlovich (1818–1900), in which Vasil'ev mistakenly depicted the concept of wuwei as laziness and opposed it to active living. He commented on Laozi's philosophy from the perspective of Eurocentrism, which played a negative role in Russia's understanding of Daoist philosophy ([Vasil'ev 1873](#), pp. 72–104). He even speculated that Laozi had been to the West, and that the *Daodejing* was completed on the way to the West. He compared the *Daodejing* to the Bible, believing that the ideas reflected by the three Chinese characters of Dao 道, de, and jing 经 were very close to the concept of God ([Zhang and Luo 2022](#), p. 3).
- ⁵ The Russian Orthodox Mission in Japan was founded in 1870 by Nikolay, who came to Japan in 1861 as a priest accompanying the Russian Consulate in Hakodate. The Russian Orthodox Mission opened this Orthodox Christian school in order to expand the influence of Orthodox Church in Japan, train Japanese priests, and absorb Japanese believers. In addition to theology and Japanese, the curriculum of the school included courses in Russian, Chinese, algebra, geometry, geography, history, psychology, and the history of philosophy.
- ⁶ In the text, we mentioned that Yang Xingshun did not mention at all in his monograph the complete translation published by Konishi at the end of the 19th century, which was reprinted many times, and that he could not have been unaware of this Japanese scholar's translation of the *Daodejing*. It is speculated that this is because Yang Xingshun hoped to completely eliminate the religious elements in Daoist philosophy; thus, he did not recognize Konishi's translation. However, it is interesting to note that the Russian scholar Myshinskij Aleksej Leonidovich (1966–) carefully compared Yang Xingshun's translation with Konishi's translation and found a high degree of similarity between the two translations ([Myshinskij 2015](#), pp. 666–69). One possibility is that Yang Xingshun referred to this translation and, therefore, did not want to acknowledge its historical status, claiming that his translation of the *Daodejing* was the first complete translation in Russia. Another possibility is that his thinking is actually consistent with Konishi, who included the ideas of Tolstoy; hence, his translation coincidentally or miraculously matches Konishi's translation. This view has been discussed by Russian scholars such as Lisevich, Maslov, and Myshinskij.

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