Socio-Philosophical Analysis of the Basic Concepts Outlined in His Treatise *Tao Te Ching*, Based on the Author’s Translation-Interpretation

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The article presents the results of a new (authorized) translation of the ancient Chinese text by Lao Tzu *Tao Te Ching*. This ancient text in the world of science is a representative of basic concepts of Chinese culture, Chinese society and the Chinese state. Basic concepts of the *Tao Te Ching* are Tao and Te. The paper presents a fundamentally new interpretation of graphs for some characters, disclosed semantics separate graphemes and holistic characters. It is proved that the basic content of the concept of Tao has great meaning dynamics. This content varies depending on what characters ‘surround’ the character Tao. The direction of movement of the concept of semantic fields Tao is revealed. There are disclosed interconnection and mutual conditionality semantic concepts of Tao and Te. The samples of the new (authorized) translation of chapters and verses *Tao Te Ching* are given.

Keywords: social philosophy, Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching, translation, interpretation, concept, Tao, The, Ming, hieroglyphs, semantics, Chinese society, Chinese culture and the Chinese state.

Practice of studying the text of *Tao Te Ching* shows that the main difficulty is the translation of its first chapter, where the issue is of such a term as *DAO*. The term *DAO* is used in the first two lines of the *Tao Te Ching* thrice. This is followed by the term *MING*, which is also used three times in the next two lines, though its translation is simplified through the use of the term *WU* in the second quatrain. Following this is the transition to the term *WU-MING*, and then to complex categories of Being and Nothingness. Some authors interpret the term *WU YU* as ‘lack of desire’, and *YOU YU* – as their ‘presence’.

Chapter 38 causes not fewer questions among researchers and interpreters, where detailed account about what is *DE* and what kinds of *DE* exist. In the text there are identified three such *DE*: high, middle and lowest. Then there comes the transition to the terms *WEI* and *WU WEI*, traditionally translated as *act* and *inaction*. And finally, builds the semantic line of descending *DAO*, first it passes away in *DE*, and only then through the famous Confucian virtues – Humanity, Duty and Ritual, Loyalty – this line leads eventually to dive ‘into the darkness of stupidity’.

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The first two lines of Chapter 1 of the *Tao Te Ching* are traditionally translated as follows: *The Tao that can be expressed in word, is not eternal and unchanging Tao.* For the Russian readers, who are introduced the ancient Chinese philosophical text for the first time, there is nothing for the term *Tao.* The Big Chinese-Russian dictionary1 (hereinafter – BCRD) shows that the term *Tao* has very many meanings. One of the purposes of this research is to consider at least the most basic meanings of the term.

道 dao – 1. Noun: 1) path, road, track, way, on the road, on the way, and 2) the way the route, path, in astronomy – the path of a celestial body, the orbit, and 3) in anatomy and medicine – tract, and 4) the way line of action, the way, the way method, approach; usually custom 5) technology, art, trick 6) idea, thought, doctrine, dogma, and 7) reason, the base; rightness, truth; 8) philosophy – Tao, Member, the true path, the supreme principle of perfection (e.g., 道 范 堪 仰 – paragon worthy of adoration).

Meaning of the character 道 dao varies depending on its use in a variety of philosophical and religious schools.

A) in Taoism – Tao Path really exists (ubiquitous beginning, the universal law of motion and change the world, the highest absolute source of all phenomena, from which everything emanates and to which everything returns);

B) Confucianism – the highest (true) path verily true and its reflection in man, high integrity, committed behavior (corresponding to the nature of the ideal of the perfect man) high ethical standards, high morals (which one has to follow) – A term used in Confucianism.

C) in Buddhism – a) (Sanskrit Marga) Bodhi Path, the path to salvation, spiritual liberation from rebirth to b) Nirvana c) Buddhist teachings.

2. Verb: 1) to say, utter; tell, interpret.

At first glance it seems that *TAO* can be understood as it is stated in the BCRD. When *TAO* begins to be treated, they begin to speak about it, to interpret, to utter, i.e. – one begins to verbalize it, it loses its permanence, eternal and immutability. The easiest way to translate the word *Tao* as the way. Then the first line of the *Tao Te Ching* should be read as follows: *The way that can be expressed in words, is not a constant and unchanging way*. We can agree that *TAO* – is the way. The question arises, what is the *way*? What meanings can be invested in understanding the *Tao* as the way?

1) The true path, the supreme principle of perfection – a philosophical category.

2) Really existing Path (ubiquitous beginning, the universal law of motion and change the world, the highest absolute source of all phenomena, from which everything emanates and to which everything returns) – the term of *Taoism*.

3) High (true) path verily true and its reflection in man, high integrity, committed behavior (corresponding to the nature of the ideal of the perfect man) high ethical standards, high morals (which one has to follow) – A term used in *Confucianism*.

4) Bodhi Path leading to salvation and deliverance from rebirth is the category of *Buddhism*.

Which of these four values is closest in meaning to the word that is used in the *Tao Te Ching*? As this treatise was written by Lao-tse, the founder of Taoism, it is logical to assume that the second interpretation is adequate. We are talking about the Way, which is the beginning of ubiquitous, universal law of motion and change the world, the supreme absolute, the source of all phenomena, from which everything comes from and where it all comes back.

At the first glance, the task of understanding the term *Tao*, which is solved by means of a linguistic dictionary, which confirms the correctness of traditional translation. But if you choose a meaning *Tao as Absolute*, then what words can express the absolute? Absolute defies
any interpretation, nor story, nor rumor. We can assume that in one case the treatise says about 
Tao-absolute, as understood by the Taoists, and in 
the other case – on the interpretation of the Tao, 
reasoning about it.

Earlier there was found the necessity for 
the most adequate translation-interpretation of 
the basic concepts to reveal the structure of the 
semantic meaning of the graphic character 
Tao – 道 dao.

There will be used the material of the books 
by Zadoenko T.P., Huang Shuying Fundamentals 
of the Chinese language2, with which the 
character Tao will disassemble on graphemes and 
semantically analyzed. First of all, are clearly 
distinguished two grapheme: 1) hieroglyph 
辶 key 162 with the meaning go fast and move 
forward, 3) 2)首 hieroglyph meaning crown. 4

For the second meaning of the hieroglyph 
can be specified in the BCRD, which indicates 
the following5: 1. Noun: 1) head, 2) head, leader, 
initiator, and 3) the leader; instigator 4) head 
start, head, front, first, in the first place, first 
of all, the first time, for the first time, 5) chief 
and fundamental; essence 6) title, title (measure 
word for poems, songs, essays), 7) * disk, a circle 
(on the hilt of the sword, at the end of the shaft 
peaks), 8) * outer side, face; 9) * twisted cord 
in 20 threads; II. Verb: 1) to turn one’s head, to 
turn, ask ( smb), bow (to), and 2) to bow one’s 
head, submit, surrender the enemy; repent, to 
come forward, and 3) to let on [ smb] complain 
to] show [ on], 4) begin, initiate, introduce, set 5) 
based [ on].

With the help of these meanings we can 
specify that the second grapheme should 
be understood not as a head, but as Head, 
Beginning of everything. The grapheme given 
to the hieroglyph 2, is not head, but crown, the 
crown with the hair. This fact is not semantically 
significant for Russian readers, but it is extremely 
significant for the Chinese. For carriers Chinese 
culture the second grapheme represents a critical 
point of the energy of the human body – Bai Hui 
(Connection of a hundred points). This point 
is the center of all the nerve endings and used 
by different schools of qigong and wushu for 
‘accumulation of energy’. In particular, Bai Hui 
is used for ‘infusion of energy through the crown’ 
in the school of the well-known qigong master 
Li Hongzhi and known in Russia the school of 
Porfiry Ivanov, in various closed Taoist and 
Buddhist schools to transmit secret knowledge 
by the ‘laying on of hands’.

Interpretation of the hieroglyph 首 (top) 
raises many questions. So, the BCRD based 
on 214 key-signs to look for hieroglyphs, one 
of which is 首 (top) that, for example, Chinese-
Russian Dictionary (Beijing, 1992) (hereinafter – 
the CRD, Beijing) contains 227 ‘keys’. This 
dictionary gives us the opportunity to analyze 
the hieroglyph 首 in maximum details. If we take 
CRD, Beijing as the main source, the grapheme 
首 is divided into certain elements. So the ‘key’ 
to the hieroglyph 首 (top) is a grapheme 八 bā. 
In the book of T.P. Zadoenko7 this grapheme 
traditionally translated into Russian as ‘eight’. 
However, in Chinese grapheme ‘eight’ is also a 
form of 丷, when written at the top8. This upper 
writing allows us to make a serious semantic 
refinement of translation-interpretation.

Analyzing the hieroglyph 首 (top), we can 
take away from it the grapheme \, we obtain 
an upper part of the hieroglyph 頭 (头), which 
is treated as a head. BCRD9 also translates 
this hieroglyph as a noun – 头 – head. Here 
it is possible to make an important transition 
that allows us to go directly from the meaning 
head to the meaning Head and vice versa. If we 
analyze further the hieroglyph 頭 (head), it is 
clearly visible at the bottom too the grapheme 
八 ‘eight’. This ‘eight’ is the inverted reflection 
of 丷. In other words, in one case we are dealing 
with a crown, a wreath, and in another case –
with legs that blockhead is haunted. In this and in another case, ‘eight’ is a symbol of infinity.

But in the first case it is infinity of crown that proudly wear the celestials, Bodhi Buddhist path leading to salvation, and in the other case there is an eternity of wandering in search of the right path.

Thus, in the first two lines of the Tao Te Ching it is said about the two, but different paths. In the first case it is TAO, really existed Path (ubiquitous beginning, the universal law of motion and change the world, the highest absolute source of all phenomena, from which everything emanates and to which all returns). Crown on its head is a symbol of eternity and immutability. In the second case there is normal, roundabout, long way, and most importantly is wrong, it is a movement that takes going farther and farther away from the path of righteousness, speaking Christian language, the road leading to the Temple, and, often, and right ‘to hell’.

However, the semantic analysis of individual graphemes of the hieroglyph Tao can be extended further. Continuing to analyze the elements of the lower part of the hieroglyph 首 (top), you can get unexpected results. ‘Removing’ the crown off the hieroglyph, there are two separate hieroglyphs: 一 (one) and 自 (self). How can their translation sound?

自zm 11 – I. Adverb / official pronominal adverb: 1) oneself, personally, voluntarily, knowingly, and 2) from oneself, independently, on their own, and 3) oneself, -self (service adverb indicating recurrent nature of the action of the verb or verb subsequent design, followed by the addition of not object), and 4) by oneself, of course, surely, no doubt; 5) oneself, particularly, separately.

The hieroglyph 自 is also often used in combination: 自然zmr6n – 1) nature, natural, native; 大自然 [Mother] nature, the natural world, and 2) abbr. natural science, natural sciences, and 3) a natural, unforced, naturalism, natural freedom [of spirit], naturalness, naturally.

The hieroglyph — (one) in addition to those indicated in the Chinese tradition has the meanings Tao, the One, the Only, One Only.

Thus, the decomposition into components (semantically meaningful) hieroglyph 道 (TAO) has made it possible not only to justify the translation of basic concept of TAO, but also to reveal a crucial feature of the Tao Te Ching which is ‘concealed’ by its author Lao-tse – the inextricable link semantics hieroglyph and semantics of a philosophical text, but also to conclude that the semantics of the hieroglyphs can be deciphered through careful analysis of the text as a whole.

Example use of the hieroglyphs 自然 in Chapter 25, Tao Te Ching:

V etom mire znayu ya – Velikikh – chetverykh: [В этом мире знаю я –]
Eto – DAO, Nebo, Zemlya, – [Это – ДАО, Небо, Земля, –]
Chelovek – lish odio iz Nikh! [Человек – лишь один из Них!]
DAO zhe (自然) samo sebe! [ДАО же (自然) само себе!]

The hypothesis that the Tao can be interpreted as ‘wrong way’ is confirmed by the text in Chapter 53:

Zhizn postigaya yestestvom, ya mnogo raz mog ubeditsya, - [Жизнь постигая естеством, я много раз мог убедиться, -]
Velikim sleduy Putem, ya ne boyus s nim oshibitsya. [Великим следуя Путём, я не боюсь с ним ошибиться.]
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To, chto vysoko –
prinizhayet, –
cht o nizk o –
podnimayet tozhe.

[То, что высоко –
принижает, –]
[что низко –
podnimayet тоже.]

In the same chapter it is said of human, non-eternal Tao:
Lyudskoye zhe DAO –
naprivot,
estestvennost ne soblyudayet, -
Boatykh – bogatstvom privetit, 
u bednych zhе – vse zabirayet.

The true Tao and human, wrong Tao are repeatedly found in the text of "Tao Te Ching."

On the bases of the semantic analysis of hieroglyphs and graphemes, their components, from the context of the whole treatise, it is considered that TAO is Starting and the Head of the movement that never stops, that TAO is Consistently and immemorial, It is the One, unique and follows only Itself. To this reached understanding there can be added the analysis of several more hieroglyphs.

In Chapter 46:
Yesli Nebesnoye DAO v pochte, -
koney otrpravlyayut polya udobryat, 
Net DAO – i loshadi vechno v rabote, –
i budut pod vsadnikom v bitve rozhat!

In Chapter 77:
Nebesnoye DAO po sutи –
iz luka na strelbu pokhozhe, -

The mentioning of the true Heavenly Tao Way and its difference from the wrong human tao-way, is also expressed in many other chapters of the Tao Te Ching. For example, in chapter 9.

Kol v zhizni uspekha dobilsya, -
Pro imya i slavu zabud!
Telom nazad podaysya, –
Vot DAO Nebesnogo Put!

In Chapter 46:
Yesli Nebesnoye DAO v pochte, -
koney otrpravlyayut polya udobryat, 
Net DAO – i loshadi vechno v rabote, –
i budut pod vsadnikom v bitve rozhat!

In Chapter 77:
Nebesnoye DAO po sutи –
iz luka na strelbu pokhozhe, -
Ethical standards, ethics, morals, Confucianism has five ethical principles [of human relations].

Taking these meanings into account, we can do the following translation-interpretation of the first sentence of the *Tao Te Ching*:

**DAO – Glavoy i Nachalom dvizhenya Vselennoy zovetsya,**
**DAO – yeshche nazyvayut Velikim Putem,**
**No, yesli Yego prevrashcheniye v put obychnyy nachnetsya,** –
**DAO-Puti – Neizmennost i Vechnost uteryany budet pritom.**

Thus, it is obvious that the first two lines of the *Tao Te Ching* refer to completely different ways: 1) the Path of Nothingness, Heavenly, Divine Path, and 2) an ordinary and often the wrong path of life.

This analysis of the first two lines can be applied to the following two lines of the *Tao Te Ching*, which refers to another base concept – of Name.

**名** m̀nhg¹⁶ I. Noun/measured word: 1) the name, title, name, word, noun 2) headline, title, and 3) abbr., Gram. noun, substantive, with a feature of noun, 4) glory, reputation, reputation, illustrious, distinguished, honored, known, famous, 5) people (measured word lists of people or rank); II. Verb: 1) to give * name (name), call, qualify, 2) * grave, engrave (on metal, stone); perpetuate.

By analogy with the analysis of the hieroglyph 道 (*TAO*), we can assume that the third and fourth lines of the first verse are built on the same principle as the first and second lines. We can also assume that in one case the name refers to the Tao, which is known from the above analysis, and in the second case it refers to the *simple* name. Expanding on the simple elements of hieroglyph 名 (name), we can obtain the following results.

Hieroglyph name consists of two graphs: a) 夕, which is translated as follows: ə xo¹⁷ 1) evening, eve, 2) night; and b) 口 kòu¹⁸, which is translated as follows: I. Noun: 1) mouth, lips, face, lip, and 2) the hole, hole, crack, hack, muzzle (of guns) ; neck (of vessel); socket (e.g., of a speaker) , and 3) the mouth (river); harbor port; mountain pass, pass, and 4) the input, output, pass, passage (of the building), the beginning, the end (e.g. street) intersection; notches (hive ) mouth (e.g. wells) 5) pass at the Great Wall; outpost, border post, cordon; 7) * food , meal, 8) taste (dishes), 9) the words; speech, saying, apt word; oral, orally, in words; 10 ) speech technology (e.g. pronunciation ); oratory eloquence; 11) speaking person; exposi, witness; 12) in Chinese medicine the place of the pulse [on hand], wrist, 13 ) measured word for mouth actions (e.g. bite, sip, puff), 14 ) measured word for people (especially family members); eater mouth; 15) measured word for livestock; head; 16) measure word for tableware, with a hole or cover; 17) measure word for stabbing or cutting tools; II. Verb: 1) to taste, savor, and 2) * report; show.

Thus, the semantic analysis of graphemes constituting hieroglyph name, allowed us to create the next pattern: the evening or night, one can not see anything, and someone shouts someone by name, because they do not see in the dark. Is it possible to call the Great Way TAO by name? Of course, it is not. Calling it by name, we belittle the Great, eternal and unchangeable name. In this case we are dealing with the name that Jews
use in their sacred texts. Yahweh God has many names, but there is a special name, which means God’s Name – HaShem. This Name differs Name of God from the ordinary names. Moreover, the word Shem means simple name. Thus, we can make the following translation-interpretation of the third and fourth lines of Chapter 1, Tao Te Ching:

Imya obychnoye – oklik vo mrake vechernem,
S Imenem Vechnym i Neizmennym – neshkhozhe,
Esli Izvechnoye Imya – obychnym okliknut,
Imya Izvechnoye budet uteryano tozhe.

[Имя обычное – оклик во мраке вечернем,]
[С Именем Вечным и Неизменным – несходже,]
[Если Извечное Имя – обычным окликнуть, -]
[Имя Извечное будет утеряно тоже.]

Subsequent lines confirm the correctness of this interpretation:

Imya Izvechnoye – imenem ne nazyvayas,
Neba, a takzhe Zemli i istok i nachalo,
Imya obychnoye, v sumrake oklikayas,
Materyu dlya vsekh veshchey v Mire stalo.

[Имя Извечное – именем не называясь,]
[Неба, а также Земли и исток и начало,]
[Имя обычное, в сумраке откликаясь,]
[Матерью для всех вещей в Мире стало.]

The term that in Tao Te Ching has been translated as The eternal Name or Name of TAO, referred to herein as Wu-Ming – Name from Nothingness (无名).
Secondly, the hieroglyph 欠 qian, which has meanings: I verb – 1) miss, miss (translated as negatives and restrictive adverbs)  26. It is also necessary to analyze the following hieroglyphs:

妙 (妙) 27 miao – I adjective/adverb: 1) beautiful, lovely, adorable, charming, excellent, exciting, interesting, and 2) clever, cunning, subtle, skillful, clever, and 3) hidden, secret, mysterious, wonderful; magical, supernatural  28;

玄 29 xuān I adjective – 1) black [color] black and brown (Note: The black color is a symbol: the sky, the water, the north, winter, cold), 2) distant, remote, and 3) hidden, invisible, secret, mysterious, incomprehensible, and 4) amazing, wonderful, deep  30;

少 31 shǎo; shào – I shǎo quantitative adverb/adjective: 1) a little bit, rarely, a small number (in the predicate function); few, small (in the function definition in Baihua necessarily design degree adverb 很)  32;

徼 33 jiāo; jiào – I jiāo noun: 1) strengthening the border (in the south of the country); abroad, border, limit 2) road, path (especially: abroad) pathway 3) blocking the way; detain 3) jiao curl, crook; entangled  34.

All these hieroglyphs are necessary to translate one important phrase of Being and Non-Being. As a result of the semantic analysis of hieroglyphs and their constituent graphemes it is possible to make the following translation-interpretation.

Comparing the first two lines and the second two ones, you can see that they are built on the same principle of structure-semantic. On the basis of the created translation-interpretation we can make a definite conclusion concerning the content of basic concepts – TAO and MING, namely in the first two lines of Tao Te Ching refers to two very different ways: 1) Ways of Nothingness, Heaven, divine Path, and 2) an ordinary, often the wrong way out of existence. Second two lines as there are two senses of the concept MING – 1) about
the *Name of Nothingness* (Name of TAO), and 2) normal, transient name.

Understanding this will help us to develop (create) the two kinds of ‘new hieroglyphs’: 1) Training (auxiliary) and 2) those that may be able to claim to be the *real* Chinese hieroglyphs.

The first two lines are recorded with *training hieroglyphs* and can be read as follows: *Tao of Nothingness, becoming a Tao of existence loses its immutability and eternity.*

道 无 *Tao of Nothingness,* is transferred into
道 有 *Tao of being,* loses its *unchanging and Eternity*

Continuing the process of creating *new hieroglyphs,* you can get similar results with respect to the concept of *Name:* Not having a name that has a name Nothingness, Name of Tao, turning into having a name, the name being, loses its immutability and eternity.

名 无 *Not having a name that has the name of Nothingness,* Tao name, is changed into
名 有 *existing name, the name of being*

loses its immutability and eternity.

For *Tao from Nothingness* and Tao normal as possible to create two more *educational hieroglyph* Tao of Heaven and Human Tao.

道 天 *heaven TAO,* is becoming
道 人 *Human Tao*

loses its immutability and eternity.

Now it is possible to go for *real hieroglyphs.* Thus, the hieroglyph for *eternal and unchangeable Tao* can be left unchanged, so as not to disturb the existing tradition. It is enough that it is recorded the difference from *ordinary Tao* with the help of educational hieroglyphs. However, we can try to *turn on* a new hieroglyph for *Way fickle and changeable* – the way of being. The result will be as follows.

道 道 无 *Tao of Nothingness,* is turning in the usual way 道 有 *existing name, the name of being*

loses its immutability and eternity.

We can go the third way, building value chain of extinction, degradation and Tao Name. The construction of this value chain will help in further analysis of terms such as virtue, conduct, Knowledge, Word, Sage, Emptiness. This chain will look like this:

道 道 道 天 *heaven TAO* 道 人 *Human Tao*
and to which everything returns), a crown on his head is a symbol of eternity and immutability. Head Start and the movement of the universe, gradually transforms into some substance 道, which can also carry out the movement by receiving energy and knowledge through the crown. But this is not Absolute. It does not follow only itself as unchanging and eternal Tao. It is not a one and only. It depends on what will be poured in it through the crown. If it is able to take the Tao inside – it’s good, but there can be poured and other – negative – energy and knowledge.

Transition from Tao of Nothingness to Tao of being shows visible signs of transformation towards degradation. But its crowning glory is the transition to the third stage: 辶, when the crown is capable for making knowledge and energies from TAO, turns the head, on which there are no channels for the reception of such energy and knowledge. This head, as it is called, operates on the principle as to act as to take in someone’s head. This head makes much work for the feet and goes wrong and narrow road.

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Социально-философский анализ базовых концептов, изложенных в трактате «Дао дэ цзин», на основе авторского перевода-интерпретации

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В статье представлены результаты нового (авторского) перевода древнекитайского текста Лао цзы «Дао дэ цзин». Данный древний текст в мировой науке является репрезентантом базовых концептов китайской культуры, китайского общества, китайского государства. Базовые концепты «Дао дэ цзин» – это Дао и Дэ. В статье дана принципиально новая интерпретация графем некоторых иероглифов, раскрыта семантика отдельных графем и целостных иероглифов. Доказывается, что содержание базового концепта «Дао» имеет большую смысловую динамику. Это содержание изменяется в зависимости от того, какие иероглифы «окружают» иероглиф Дао. Раскрывается направление движения смысловых полей концепта Дао. Раскрыта взаимная связь и взаимная смысловая обусловленность концептов Дао и Дэ. Даны образцы авторского перевода глав и стихов «Дао дэ цзин».

Ключевые слова: социальная философия, Лао цзы «Дао дэ цзин», перевод, интерпретация, концепт, Дао, Дэ, Мин, иероглифы, семантика, китайское общество, китайская культура, китайское государство.