

A Different Beat of the *Dao*: Frederic H. Balfour's Translations of Daoist Texts

魏伶珈 WEI Sophie Ling-chia

The Chinese University of Hong Kong

Foucault posits that all knowledge is contingent upon and shaped by a vast network of power relationships. This system of power, which can be governmental, academic, cultural, or religious, is sustained by a complex web of beliefs universally perceived as "truth" or "knowledge" by individuals across various ranks and roles within any specific context.

During the 18th and 19th centuries in China, missionary-translators established a unique translation enterprise to interpret Confucian classics and Daoist texts. Guided by their Christian beliefs, these translations heavily influenced the evolution of missionary Sinology. They interpreted Chinese canons through the lens of Christianity. However, few scholars have focused on Frederic H. Balfour (1846-1909), a secular Sinologue, who was not constrained by the metaphysical interpretations of his missionary counterparts.

In contrast to the predominantly Christian interpretation, Balfour further delved into the Daoist perspective and attempted to construct a full Daoist landscape of understanding by also translating other Daoist classics, including the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Works of Master Zhuang), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Master(s) from Huainan), *Tai Shang Gan Ying Pian* 太上感應篇 (The Book of Recompenses), the *Huangdi Yinfujing* 黃帝陰符經 (Yellow Emperor's Hidden Talisman Classic), among others.

Leveraging the *China Review* as his publication platform, Balfour's translations of Daoist texts aimed to "transcend" the power structure established by Protestant missionaries. His work endeavored to fill the gap in the Western understanding of Daoist texts. This paper seeks to investigate Balfour's role as a secular Sinologist within the power dynamics between Christianity and Chinese philosophy. The objective is to present a clear picture of how the boundaries between the philosophical and religious interpretations of Dao were delineated during the nascent period of academic Sinology.