

***Dao*: Sacrifices to the “Road God”**

(An abstract)

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Scholars tend to understand the meaning of *Dao*, one of the most important concepts in ancient Chinese culture, from a philosophical or ethical perspective. The renowned Chinese dictionary *Ci Hai*, in its volume on Philosophy (1980), presents *Dao* as a word that means: 1) law and order; 2) the origin and subject of the universe; and 3) a certain kind of life concept, world view, political standpoint or thought pattern. This stands, admittedly, as authoritative and is accepted by most scholars to date. The author of this paper, however, points out that this interpretation is incomprehensive, for it fails to bring out the religious implication of *Dao* in the ancient practice of making sacrifices to the “God of Roads.” Making sacrifices to the God of Roads in ancient times was variously termed “dao” (ways/roads), “zu” (ancestors), “zu dao” (the ways/roads of ancestors), “ba” (sacrificing to the Road God), or “xing shen” (the God of Walking). The term features frequently in historical documents coming from the pre-*Qin* and *Hans* dynasties. The cult of the Road God is preserved today in regional Chinese customs, in Taoist rituals, and even in Japanese cultic practices where it has been syncretized.

Having gone through a development of use for nearly

three thousand years, now the word *Dao* is experiencing a worldwide reorientation: back to its primordial meaning as “ways/roads.” Jacques Derrida, when he brings out the concept of “walking” to protest against Western-centrism, comes quite close to *Zhuang Zi* and Taoist thinking. Martin Heidegger contends that it is misleading to comprehend *Dao* in a spatial sense as the “road,” or comprehend it in any extended rational or spiritual senses. He proposes that *Dao* should be understood in its primordial meaning, namely, “opening up a way” or “becoming the way.” Hideki Yukawa, the well-known Japanese physicist who won the 1949 Noble Prize with his meson theory of nuclear forces, holds another interpretation: *Dao* is a way/road, but not for a destination, only, to be gone through. It is not a fix construction, and there is no end for anyone to arrive at to forever rest. *Dao*, according to Yukawa, is a process, to be passed through, over and again.

Dao is also an important concept in the study of religions. In fact it is from the word “*Dao*” that the name of the traditional Chinese religion Taoism is derived. In Taoism, *Dao* is God, and *Dao* is “*Tai Shang Lao Jun*,” the most senior of all superior beings. In Christianity, *Dao* (*logos*) is God, and *Dao* is Christ.

So, in tracing the origin of the word *Dao*, the author of this paper uncovers a long neglected implication of its meaning, namely, it has to do with the making of sacrifices to the God of Roads.

English abstract translated by
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