

# The conceptual blending of Laozi's Dao and its companions with Heidegger's triad existences

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**Abstract:** Laozi's Ming (name), Qi (tangible part) and Dao (intangible part), coexisting in the same substance, can be compared with Heidegger's triad existences: Seiende (being), Dasein (beings) and Sein (to be). In Laozi, Dao is the essential metonymy for the existence of things from Wu (void, nothing) to You (there is, reality). The effect of Dao is De (virtue) and the combined term of them is Dao-De (morality). By conceptual blend theory, we may draw the following conclusion from the perspective of Heidegger's ontology of triad existences and Laozi's Dao with its companions: any being (Seiende or Ming) exists in the form of combination beings (Dasein or Qi) and to be (Sein or Dao). According to Proper Parts Principle, if  $z$ ,  $x$ ,  $y$  is used to represent being, beings and to be respectively, then, the expression of all things will be the form:  $z \exists (x) \oplus y$ . In terms of independent concept and function, Dao exists as whole. While from Laozi's triangular relationship among Ming, Dao and Qi, Dao can be considered as a proper parthood, too. Both Laozi and Heidegger emphasized that existence is changing, but Heidegger attributed the reason for change to time, while Laozi to Dao. Dao can be considered as way, essence, nothingness, empty, void etc. in structure, but it doesn't mean it's zero or none-existing. On the contrary, it is a form of existence from exotic domain. Both the numeric expression of Heidegger's triad existences and Laozi's triangle existences of Dao with its companions can be written as  $\forall z \exists x (1) \oplus y(\emptyset) \Leftrightarrow z\{1, \emptyset\}$ . In which,  $\emptyset$  is empty set as Laozi's Dao or Heidegger's Sein ( $\emptyset \Leftrightarrow 0$ ).

**Keywords:** Dao; companions; Heidegger's triad existences; conceptual blend theory

## 1. Introduction

Dao is an extremely important concept in traditional Chinese culture, widely existing in the philosophical systems of Taoism, Confucianism, and Buddhism. Based upon primary purpose of searching for Dao, different schools and individual thinkers created "a hundred ideas" about it (Shang, 2002). More importantly, however, it demonstrates an important new trend in philosophical scholarship—namely, the conflation of arguments in the Lunyu and Laozi's Daodejing (D'Ambrosio, 2020, p. 167). A more promising starting point for understanding uses of Ming in early Chinese texts is the idea of a name (Geaney, 2020, p. 150).

Although the term "Dao" is commonly used in Chinese culture, strangely enough, if you asked someone "What is Dao?" Most Chinese people may not be able to answer it because they basically don't know "Dao"! Dao is both a paradox and a trap, which is difficult to articulate. We learn from Laozi's "Dao De Jing" (henceforth abbreviated with DDJ) that Dao is nameless and not easily to speak clearly (ch.1). Contrary to the You (real existence, beings of a named entity), Dao seems Wu (nothingness, non-existent), but it is the reality of the existence of things or the actual situation of existing

(being). In Chinese, another term to represent You is Qi. Laozi rendered Dao as having the metaphysical and cosmological meanings equivalent to the Western concepts of Reality and Origin or Originator (Fu, 1976).

Then, what is the term of Dao after all in Chinese philosophy? DDJ written by Laozi was also translated as “Tao Te Ching” or “Lao Tzu” etc. DDJ includes 81 chapters with different language translations. In this article’s discussion, the latest Chinese versions of Laozi’s DDJ<sup>1</sup> is referenced and the newest edition of “Silk Book Laozi’s Annotations<sup>2</sup>” as a supplementary reference. In the edition of Laozi’s DDJ, the appearing frequency of the terms of Dao (way), Ming (name), Qi (appliance), Wu (none), You (there is) and De (virtue) was 73, 25, 12, 91, 81 and 47 times, respectively. This article intends to start with mereology to partially analyze Dao and its companions in DDJ and to blend the conceptual terms of Dao’s companions and Heidegger’s triad existences from the ontological point of view by conceptual blend theory with an in-depth analysis of the “Dao” and its “companion” in traditional Chinese culture.

## **2. The conceptual cognition of Dao and its companions**

In Laozi’s view, “Dao” is difficult to be expressed and named, but it has infinite power and is despised by many people. However, it is very useful for national governance. For individuals, Dao is an unintentional existence. The person who holds the Dao is not to get more, but to make himself pure and less desire, and more secure. Laozi argued what can be spoken is not eternal Dao (ch.1) and dealing with the evil of others is almost in the Dao (ch.8). In ancient times, those being good at Dao were subtle, mysterious, and unfathomable and those who kept the Dao did not want to gain (ch.15). As being, the Dao is completely absentminded (ch.21), dull and tasteless (ch.35). Although Dao is usually nameless and its essence is tiny, there is nothing in the world that can control it (ch.32). Those who engage in with the Dao are favor of and enjoy it (ch.23). The opposite is the Dao’s movement, and the flexibility is the Dao’s strength (ch.40). After heard of the Dao, excellent people diligently follow it, the common ones still appear to have a vague understanding about it, and the vulgar ones laughed at it loudly. If it not mocked by such kind of people, would it still be called the true Dao? The bright Dao seems dark, the growing Dao seems decadent, and the peace Dao seems like difficulty. The Dao is namelessly hidden. However, only by Dao can goodness and giving be achieved (ch.41). You can see the Heavenly Dao without looking out of the window (ch.47) and the more beneficial it is to learn secular knowledge, the more harmful it is to pursue the true Dao (ch.48).

The key to understanding the Dao lies in whether it is singular or plural form! In the Book of Changes, it clarified that one Yin (Female, negative, reverse) and one Yang (Male, positive, righteous) are the Dao. If we consider Dao as the only concept of the whole object, it is single and uncountable. Nevertheless, if we consider Dao as components or kinds of object, it is plural and countable. In Chinese, there are Heavenly Dao, Earthly Dao, Humanity Dao, etc. which are countable in kinds. In the Chinese context of traffic, the difference between road and Dao (way) is that road is a visible physical entity, while Dao is a spatial part separated by lines on the road, so there is double Daos’ Road (both righteous Dao and the reverse Dao, i.e., two ways)

and single Dao's Road (one way). Here (Ch,53 in DDJ), We argue the Dao is plural form, which can be used as manners, ways, actions, intentions etc. even though in most cases, Dao may be considered as a single whole term. To walk among Daos, the big Dao is very safe, but people tend to take dangerous ones; wearing gorgeous clothing as well as with sharp swords, this is the bandit's shining, not related with Dao (ch.53). The stronger things are, the closer to old they grow, which means that they do not follow the Dao a long time (ch.55). Only holding Dao as the mother, can a country last longer (ch.59). Dao, the mystery of all things, is the treasure of good people and the protection of evil ones; why not hold on Dao? Why not seek out the reason why Dao was valued in ancient times? (ch.62). Those who were good at practicing the Dao in ancient times did not make people smarter, but rather made them more simply foolish (ch.65).

In Laozi's view, anything(existence) is composed of two components: You and Wu. In Chinese, "You" means "there is", "have" or "existent", "the real or tangible part of existence", as Laozi also called it as Qi. "Wu" means "there isn't", "none" or "non-existent", i.e., the vacant space or intangible part of existence or an entity, so it also can be translated in English as "emptiness" or "void", but it is the essence of any existence, which Laozi called "Dao". Dao is subtle, mysterious, natural, invisible, but essential and functional to Qi.

## **2.1. The relation of Dao with Qi and Ming**

As to Qi, Laozi mentioned in DDJ, could be any tangible thing, such as appliance, body, organ, vessel, utensil, tool, entity, reality, weapon, person, ruler etc., which is intrinsically involved with Ming and Dao. Laozi stated that a pottery, made of water and soil, serves as a Qi (vessel) while it is empty (ch.11); Qi will become a useful tool, while Dao disappears (ch.28). As the world's divine artifact, Qi should not be utilized as a tool (ch.29). The war is ominous Qi (weapon), so virtuous people never use it (ch.31). The country's Qi (sharp weapon) should not be revealed to others (ch.36). Da Qi (a big vessel) avoids being successfully (ch.41). A person is born from Dao, reared by virtue and formed as a Qi (figure) being made (ch.51). The more Qi (weapon) the people have, the more chaotic the country becomes (ch.57). Who dares not to be the first in the world is able to become a chief Qi (great ruler) (ch.67). Making the small country with less population, and do not use the manpower as Qi (weapon) (ch.80).

As to Ming, Laozi take it as the name of entity, object, thing, or matter etc. Laozi argued what can be named is not a constant Ming (name). At the beginning of the world, it is nameless, but the one with name is the mother of all things (ch.1). Dao can't be named. That is why it must be re-stated as nothingness (ch.14). But from ancient times to the present, its name never disappears (ch.21). It can be the mother of all things in both heaven and earth, but I don't know how to name it; let's just reluctantly call it "Dao" and forcefully named it "Da" (greatness) (ch.25). The Dao is usually nameless; although the essence of Dao is tiny, there is nothing in the world that can control it. But from the beginning of universal order, there should have a name and the heaven should know it (ch.32). Who, caring and nourishing all things but not pretending to be the master, can be named as tininess; While all things attached to whom and who still does not consider himself as a master, whose name is greatness.

Because who didn't think himself big from beginning to end, who achieved his greatness(ch.34). I will use the nameless origin to suppress it and my desire will be cut off by the nameless origin (ch.37).

From the above discussion, we may understand that Ming is the name of an object, Qi is the tangible part of an object as a body, while Dao is the intangible part of an object as nothing, but it is essential. Dao (essence) and Ming (name) are derived from the same Qi (body) but have different denotations. These two originating from the same but have different naming cognation (ch.1). Then, what is the relationship among Dao, Ming, and Qi? If Ming is considered as an "existence", then Qi is the "existent", and Dao is the "existing". Therefore, Ming (named entity) can be considered as the combination of Qi (body of entity) and Dao (essence of entity), i.e., Dao, Ming, and Qi are unified in one object or entity. For human being, how to act is to be oneself? Now that one has known one's Ming(name), to be safely secure one should know one's limits of Qi (body) and don't overstep one's Dao (essence) (ch.32). The Dao is namelessly hidden (ch.41) and which one is closer to yourself, Ming (name) or body (Qi), body or outside goods (ch.44)? As to Laozi, of course body is closest to you than Ming and goods. Therefore, one should know one's Dao, i.e., the way how to act oneself.

## **2.2. The relation of Dao with You and Wu**

In Laozi, there is a dialectical relationship of gains and losses offsetting each other between You (being) and Wu (void). Qi, as "You", is beneficial in shape, but Dao, as "Wu" is functional in essence. Laozi argued that all things in the world are born as substance or existence from "You" (being), while You are born from Wu (void) (ch.40). Wu can enter anything without gaps (ch.43). Both You and Wu are interdependent and mutually reinforcing as difficulty and ease (ch.2). While installing windows for the house, what is it useful for lighting the house is windows' Wu (gap). Therefore, the tangible You is benefit, but the intangible Wu is function (ch.11). Sublime is based on humblest, and lowliness is the foundation of heightens. Why do emperors all claim to be solitary, widowed, and unkind? Isn't this just lowliness as the root evil? Therefore, the highest honor (You) is precisely without it (Wu). Don't pursue crystal like jade and hard like hard rock (ch.39). There are no corners in the largest space, and great form is beyond shape(ch.41). Words You(have) their origin of roots and things You (have) their masters (ch.70), while wisdom You(comes) with great hypocrisy (ch.18). The highest and most virtuous ruler seems to be Wu(imperceptible) to people (ch.17). Dao usually appears to be Wu (doing nothing), but as matter of fact, nothing can be accomplished without it (ch.37). Saints often have Wu(no) intention but take the willing of the people as their own (ch.49). Ruling the country with integrity and govern the world with Wu (nothing to do) (ch.57). If there is Wu (no) action, there is no cure (ch.3). The difficulty of governing people is based on their achievements of rulers; the more able they You(are), the more difficulty of governance there You (gives raise) (ch.75). Therefore, to be a saint, Wu(without) action without defeat, without attachment without loss (ch.29). To do Wu(nothing), the sage can become great and there is Wu(no) difficulty for him in the end (ch.63).

### **2.3. The relation of Dao with De and Dao-de**

As to De<sup>3</sup>(virtue), in Laozi's view, the reason why people are human is that they are born from the Dao, nurtured by De(virtue). Only by guarding the Dao, can one have De(virtue) and be in line with one's reputation. Otherwise, one's virtue may not deserve one's position. Laozi argued that the highest De (moral form) is complete obedience to the Dao (ch.21). De is the same as virtue and those who share it also enjoy it (ch.23). Eternal De never leaves but returns to the baby; it is not exceptional but returns to the infinite; De is sufficient when being as the valley of the world (ch.28). Therefore, the upper without De is to show which is just with it, but the lower without losing De is to just illustrate which is without it. If the upper has no action of De, the lower has no thought, which will give rise to the lower's successful behavior. De will be emphasized after losing the Dao, while benevolence will be emphasized by losing the De (ch.38). The upper De is just like a valley and the greater innocence is just like disgrace. If the breadth of De is insufficient, the building of De is just like stealing (ch.41). Being good to those who are not good, which is the kindness of De; believing those who are not believed in, which is the belief of De (ch.49). Born from Dao while nourished by De, all things therefore respect Dao, but cherish De. To bear them but without occupying them is called Xuan De (abstruse virtue) (ch.51). If one personally acts like this, one's De will be true. If one acts like this within a family, one's De will be more than sufficient. If one acts like this within a town, one's De will be profound and long-lasting. If a country's people act like this, their De will be abundant and prosperous. If this is utilized all over the world, the De will be universally practiced (ch.54). The thickness of containing De is comparable with that of an infant (ch.55). The convergence of the mechanism means that we should earlier follow the Dao. To do things early according to Dao is to continuously accumulate De; there is nothing invincible by continuously accumulating De (ch.59). So, Dao and De have also been obtained a union and destination here with the sage (ch.60). Returning De(goodness) for evil, no matter big or small, more or less (ch.63). Being able to always remember this law is called the supreme De. How mysterious and profound this supreme De is! (ch.65) Those who are good at using people are willing to stay below others, which is called the no-competing De (ch.68). Returning good for evil with De can be peacefully good? One with De is only in debt without pursue it, but one without De is ruthless in seeking and scraping the bounded pearls (ch.79).

In modern Chinese, the combination of Dao and De is called Dao-de (Morality). However, whatever Dao (way) one chooses, there is Dao-De (morality), but not all Dao-de are De (virtues). The mixed term "Dao-de" has never appeared in DDJ, indicating that it is not easy to understand and explain what Dao-de is and how to judge whether one's behavior is moral. As matter of fact, Dao and De are a set of contradictions in most cases. Laozi argued that to govern the affairs of the world in accordance with Dao, even ghosts are content with their positions without disturbing others (ch.60). Benevolence and righteousness only emerged when the big Dao was abandoned (ch.18). When it is spoken out of the mouth to become discourse, Dao usually appears to do nothing, but in fact there is nothing accomplished without Dao (ch.37). The vigorous utilization of Dao may not be sufficient, while abyss is as if the ancestor of all things (ch.4). To retreat after success is the heavenly Dao (ch.9).

Knowing the origin is the principle of Dao and by adhering to Dao of ancient times, one can resist the current all things (ch.14). A proud person cannot be a leader because of the Dao; those who have the Dao do not deal with evil things (ch.24).

There are “big four” in the country to govern people: Dao (Nature), Heaven, Earthen and King. These four major domains should obey the following order principles: person (King) follows the rule of Earthen, the Earthen follows the law of Heaven, the Heaven follows the Dao’s principle, and the Dao follows the law of Nature (ch.25). Ordinary people may say that my Dao is too big to imagine what it is. Only because it’s too big it doesn’t exactly look like anything (ch.67). The big Dao exists everywhere and dominates everything (ch.34). A person who exercises sovereignty through the Dao does not strengthen the country with force. The stronger things are, the closer to old they grow, which means that they do not follow the Dao for a long time (ch.30). The war is ominous weapon, so virtuous people with Dao but never use it (ch.31). When there is Dao in the world, the best horses of war are used for farming. While there is no Dao in the world, the mare with a foal will also go to the battlefield (ch.46). The heavenly Dao is to win without arguing, and to respond well without speaking (ch.73). Isn’t the heavenly Dao just like archery with a bow? Pressing down when it is higher, lifting it up while lower, loosening it if pulled over, and pulling if not enough. The heavenly Dao is to reduce surplus and supply insufficient. On the contrary, the human being’s Dao is to reduce the deficiency and to add to the surplus. Who can dedicate their surplus to the world? Only those who practice the Dao (ch.77). The heavenly Dao has no relatives, but often is beneficial to good people (ch.79). The heavenly Dao is beneficial to the world without harming it. A saint’s Dao is for the sake of the world rather than competing with the world (ch.81).

It follows that the Dao in the Laozi is not only a metaphysical being but guidance for human behavior, as the metaphysical Dao is also a model for human behavior (Oh, 2017). Then, how can rulers have their virtue, or and morality? In Laozi’s moral philosophy, the government governs the country according to the natural Dao (way), and the less it does, the more beneficial it is to the people. Therefore, wining without competing, and retiring from fame will make them more virtue as well morality.

#### **2.4. The metonymy of Dao and its companions**

Two common literary devices that can be used to obscure and/or transmute meaning are metaphor and metonymy. These two devices are essentially linguistic tricks. Traditional semantics holds that metaphor reflects the similarity between things, while metonymy reflects the adjacency between things. The first definition of metonymy broadly involves an individual example standing for the related general category-or more specifically an associated detail standing for an object. As with metaphors, metonyms may be visual as well as verbal. The second definition of metonymy is that this “stylistic figure works according to a process of transfer of denomination by means of which an object is designated by a term other than one that usually belongs to it.” In essence, metonymy is the relation of a part to a whole, a cause for its effect, a content to its container, etc. The third definition of metonymy is to utilize the proximity between things and their attributes, environment, and relationships, rather than words. Metonymy is viewed essentially as a way of

abstracting a relation between concepts, words and objects. This relation is fundamentally a relation of representation (Al-Sharafi, 2004, pp. 80–108).

Dao cannot be characterized as a particular composition, which entails that it does not include parts. However, Dao underpins compositions in You, which entails that it contains compositions or at least parts that make compositions in You (Banka, 2023). In different contexts, the Dao has different meanings, and there are also different relationships between the Dao and its partners. According to Laozi, Dao is the origin of all beings, i.e., Dao produces one, one produces two, two produce three, and three produce all things (ch.42). Everything comes into existence from nothingness and ceases into nothingness. Here Dao was conceived as both metaphysical reality and cosmological origin of the universe, as the origin and reality of things or beings, Dao itself cannot be one of them but is nothing or no-being (Wu) (Shang, 2002). The semantic composition of the Chinese word “Dao” is with meanings such as “road”, “way”, “route”, “norm”, etc. The Dao of Humanity is essentially the “way of human behavior”. Therefore, we argue that the Dao is the essential metonymy for the existence of things from Wu (nothingness, as Ming, De) to You (there is, as Qi). In Laozi’s DDJ, the relationships among terms Dao and Ming, Qi, You, Wu, De can be summarized as **Figure 1**. Anything’s Ming (name) is composed of Qi (or You) and Dao (Wu), which results in its acting outcomes: De (virtue), which is usually called as Dao-de (Morality).



**Figure 1.** The relationship of Dao and terms Ming, Qi, You, Wu, and De in DDJ.

### 3. Dao existing as “Sein” in Heidegger’s triad existences

The study of “being” or “what” in etymology is called “ontology”, which focuses on what is referred to, that is, the affirmation of the “existence” of something” or something “there is”. However, Heidegger warns of the risks of ontology guided in traditional ways (Bartolini, 2019, p. 147). In Heidegger’s “existential analytics”, “Being” is declared as triad Seiende-Dasein-Sein, which is translated in English as “being”, “beings” and “to be” respectively. Being is Existing or Existent, which is the actual living of object; Beings is the Existence or Existents, which is the reality or manners of living; To be is “Time” and the nature of being and existence with denoting “have being”, “be real” or “continue living”. Heidegger’s Dasein’s Being-in-the-world’ is the self-existence of “existing in the world”, which is a tangible, visible, and always pre-understood entity that exists as its own, i.e., beings, which is exactly what Laozi’s refers to as the “tool”, the physical lower part of entity in his DDJ. Any understanding has its Being in an act of understanding. It (Dasein) is in itself the unity of past, present and future, a unity which includes their inauthentic appearance apart from each other (Heidegger, 2005, pp. 55–56). Paradoxically, beings (things) can be found everywhere, but nowhere is being to be found. Why? Because what Heidegger said about being, the beingness of beings, is thought to be as the a priori. Being is prior regarding how it stands with Being insofar as Being “is”, prior in the order in which being essentially

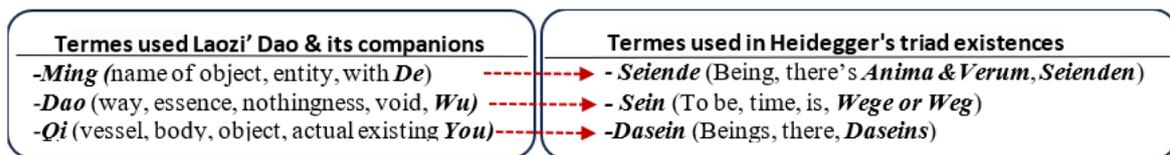
unfolds and beings “are” (Hudac, 1990). Prior knowledge is completely independent of empirical observation and is a necessary assumption of pure rationality. On the contrary, posterior knowledge relies entirely on sensory experience. Laozi clearly declared in DDJ (Ch.1) that at the beginning of the world, there were no Ming (unnamed) for both heaven and earthen, but the Ming (name) is the mother of all things. At the very beginning, there had been un-known thing existed, which Laozi didn't know how to call it and reluctantly named it “Dao”. Obviously, the Dao in Laozi's DDJ is the prior existence of the Qi (object), while the Ming (name) is the posterior existence of the object.

Phenomenology (SZ) showed us that the structure in man which enables him to metaphysic is the process of finite transcendence, whose ultimate meaning is time (Richardson, 1963, p. 106). However, time and space are inherent intuitions in our cognition, not inherent truths in our experience. Heidegger's assertion in *Being and Time* that ‘only so long as Dasein is, is there Being’ ... means that only so long as the clearing of Being appropriates does Being convey itself to man. Finitude in *Being and Time* is not ‘bodily’ but rather that of Dasein itself (Levin, 2019). Laozi stated in DDJ that the Dao (way) that can be spoken is not a constant Dao and the Ming (name) that can be named is not a constant Ming (ch.1). Obviously, In Laozi's view of point, Dao, Ming, Qi are all temporarily co-existing in certain time and space. Therefore, Laozi's Dao (way), Ming (name), Qi (body) can be compared with Heidegger's Sein (to be), Seiende (being) and Dasein (beings), respectively. Heidegger once attempted to explore the Chinese term Dao (way), Ziran (nature), Wuwei (inaction), Xuwu (nothingness), and Xuxin (modesty) of Taoism, the Xukong (void) and Kongyou (emptiness) in Buddhism, and the relationship between the Dao and Ethos as well as their existence. Heidegger was aware of Daoism since at least 1919. He repeatedly directly cited and indirectly evoked multiple translations of its two classics from 1930 (Nelson, 2023, p. 3). While still drafting *Being and Time* in the 1920s, Heidegger had already familiarized himself with the classical texts of Chinese Daoism and Japanese Zen Buddhism and established personal contacts with thinkers from the Far East (Wei, 2005). The Chinese (indeed, non-Western) text that is mentioned most often in Heidegger's corpus is the “*Dao de Jing*” associated with the mysterious figure of Laozi. Heidegger's different reflections on the “*Dao de Jing*” have their own features, while each of them addresses “*Dao de Jing*” (ch.11) and takes up Daoist nothingness (Wu) and images of the emptiness that makes the wheel (the empty spokes) and the vessel (the empty space between) possible (David, 2014). Daoist generative nothingness, Buddhist emptiness of form, and Heidegger's open clearing of being convey exemplary orientational models of being relationally free and responsive in the world with things and environments. Heidegger discusses Nichts (nothing) as a possibility and existence (Sein) itself in a virtual Taoist way (Nelson, 2023, pp. 2–9). However, Heidegger notes in a number of passages how Dao, as a primordial word, is untranslatable (Nelson, 2019).

What is this “*Dao*”? The Chinese Dao (道) character is composed of the radicals related to walking (辵) and head (首). An initial clue is found in the *Zhuangzi* that states a way is made by walking it. Some explanations accentuate the head as directing

the feet. On ontology, the universality of the concept of “existence” is that it cannot be defined in the form of genus plus species difference, and the highest nature of the concept of “existence” is that there is no higher concept to define it (no genus, unable to define scope). Therefore, it can be seen as one or as many. Heidegger used three forms of existence: Seiende, Dasein and Sein, which is considered as being(existence), beings (existent) and to be (is), respectively. Laozi also used “three forms of existence”: Ming (name, thing), Qi (vessel, body, tangible part), and Dao (way, void, intangible part). Qi is as You (there is) and Dao as Wu (nothingness). Human being-in-the-world is the most ontological whole. In Heidegger’s view, humans have no essence, only existence, the essence of human beings lies in their existence, and it is simply the existence of “there” and the meaning of existence is only “that is” or “will be”. The reason why humans are human is that they are able to do what they are. The unified imagination is “being-in-the-world” or “being -the entity- the- world”, such as (being) what they are. Therefore, human existence in the world is a potential for existence, or whether it already exists in the world depends on time. While in Laozi’s view, Ming(name), Qi (body), and Dao(way) are also a unified entity. Dao is the essence of things, which is invisible and difficult to describe, while Qi is a visible and nameable substance of things. The difference between human being with Ming (name) lies one’s Dao (way), which connected with one’s De (virtue). In Laozi’s view, the co-existing Ming (name), Qi (body), and Dao (way) as well as De (virtue) are also a unified entity.

Based on the above discussions, we tried to outline the relationship of Laozi’s Dao and Heidegger’s Sein in his triad existences (**Figure 2**). The heterodox interpretive strategy deployed here is a mixture of philosophical inquiry, China and European discourses and traverse shifting perspectives with and beyond Heidegger, which is referred from Nelson (2023, p. 2).



**Figure 2.** Expression of Laozi’ Dao & its companions with Heidegger’s triad existences.

Comparing the ternary structure of Laozi’s Dao and its companions: Ming (name of anything), Qi (body as “You”), and Dao (Void as “Wu”) and Heidegger’s Triad existences: Seiende (Being), Dasein (Beings) and Sein (To be). We argue that both consider anything has the three forms of existences and what is different is the terms of the existences and the angles to view them. Laozi values the change of structural name, shape, and essence of things, i.e., the origin of all things in the universe, while Heidegger values the status of being’s existence with time, i.e., the existence of the ontology of things.

#### 4. Dao existing as both of a whole or a proper parthood

The awareness of the one out of many and differences often accompanied the first emerging of philosophy, say, Being in early Greek philosophy and Dao in the pre-Qin Chinese philosophy. “One whence Dao is through”, Zhuangzi held his distinctive

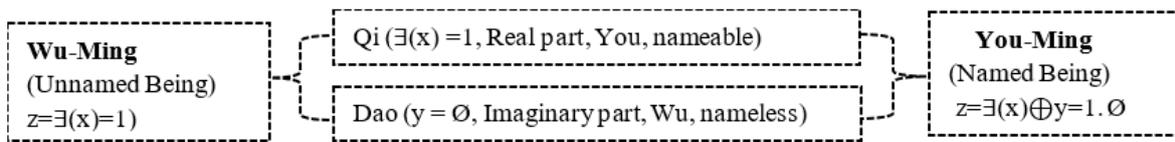
understanding of Dao not as “ontological Being” (Plato), “cosmological Origin” (Laozi) or “ultimate goodness and universal order” (Confucius), but as the One of differences and many. In his utterance of “Dao is/as One”, One is what Dao is, while through-ness is the state of Dao (Shang, 2002). In an aporia as to how to articulate the difference between the One (ἓν) and the many (πολλά), since if the one is, it becomes many. How do many beings share in the one mode of Being? Plato’s answer invoking the enigmatic concept ‘exaiphnēs’ (ἐξαίφνης), the temporal becoming of the unity and plurality of the One, seems to contradict the privileging of presence that Heidegger charges him with, he nonetheless fails to offer an understanding of difference that has neither Being nor unity (Thatcher, 2024). Because the relation to Being has, as it were, dissolved in indifference, the differentiation of Being and beings also cannot become questionable for metaphysics (Heidegger, 1982, pp. 194–195). We argue that being (existence) can be considered as both one and many, and the reason is given raised by what Laozi called Dao, Plato’s exaiphnēs, and Heidegger’s Sein. For unnamed thing, the Dao is a priori; For named things, the Dao can be regarded as a posterior, and due to the uncertainty and mystery of Dao, Heidegger used “to be” as the “Weg”, occasionally Wege(paths) as Laozi’s Dao.

The Proper Parts Principle (PPP) says that for any concrete  $x$  and anything  $y$  that is part of  $x$ , if  $y =$  the One, then there is some  $z$  that is a proper part of  $y$  and such that  $z =$  the One (Segal, 2014). By the major recent theories about proper names, there are four important principles that can be derived from different intuitive beliefs about names: The constituent principle, the essence principle, the propositional attitude principle and the causal principle (Ackerman, 1979). The concept of being is closely allied with the concept of number; to say that there are  $X$ s is to say that the number of  $X$ s is 1 or more—and to say nothing more profound, nothing more interesting, nothing more, “Something exists” means that something is self-identical or identical with something. one resorts to the dummy predicate:  $Ex = d f \exists y (y = x)$ . It ought to correspond to  $\exists x \exists y (y = x)$ , and thus to  $\exists x (x = x)$ , which brings us back to our previous problem: to claim that “o exists” is to be rendered as  $\exists x (x = o)$  may be a petition against those who have not already subscribed to the received view on quantification and existence.  $x$  exists =  $d f \exists y (y = x)$  (Berto, 2013, pp. 29–31, 49–50). In Chinese history, scholar Wang Bi once also used key concepts of metaphysics (such as existence, non-existence, one, and many) to discuss the 64 hexagrams in the classic Chinese work “The Book of Changes”, and “regarded them as symbols of time and space” (Hon, 2020, p. 267).

Banka (2023) differentiated Dao from the angle of mereology and propose to conceptualize, Dao and You as two metaphysical regions of unrestricted and restricted composition respectively. On assuming nihilism, Dao is composed of simples—ultimate entities that are not parts themselves, and that cannot be subdivided into parts. He tackled one such possible explanatory variant—mereological nihilism, according to which no composition is possible. In nihilism, parthood collapses into identity and does not leave space for compositions of more than one part. Nihilism is formulated in the following way:  $P x y \leftrightarrow x = y$ . Here,  $x$  is part of  $y$  if and only if  $x$  is  $y$ . The proper parthood (PP) is defined in the following way:  $PP x y := \forall x \forall y (P x y \wedge x \neq y) = y$ , which means, for any  $x$  and any  $y$ ,  $x$  is part of  $y$  and  $x$  is not  $y$ .  $P x y \rightarrow PP x \vee x = y$ ,

$x$  is proper part of  $y$  or  $x$  is  $y$ . According to appropriate extension, any object has a true part, and either of the two can be added as an axiom to any of the above systems, but the two are incompatible. As a part of  $y$ ,  $x$  is not  $y$  because it is not composed solely of itself. In weak complementarity principle and minimum part theory, (weak) PP  $x y \rightarrow \exists (z) (P z y \wedge O z x), \forall x (PP x y \wedge PP x z) y = z$ . For any  $x$ , if and only if  $y$  is  $z$ ,  $x$  is the inherent part of  $y$ , and  $x$  is the inherent part of  $z$ .

If  $z$  is used to represent Ming (name of existence),  $x$  is used to represent Qi (You, the existence of reality), and “ $y$ ” is used to represent Dao (Wu, the void or emptiness of the existence), then the three elements are related as follows:  $z$  (Ming)  $\exists$  ( $x$ ) (Qi)  $\oplus$   $y$  (Dao). Laozi said in DDJ (ch.11) that a wheel made of thirty spokes can be used as a hollow space to fit an axle, thus giving it the function of a cart. Laozi’s philosophy profoundly describes the dialectical relationship between “part” and “whole”, which is both “opposition and unity”, and “coexistence and destruction”. The essence of Xuanxue is metaphysics, which is the imagination of the existence of the imaginary part(void), analogous to theology or mysticism. Jones analyzed Buddhist mereology from the Chinese tradition of Huayan Buddhism and summarized that the term “whole” refers to something that admits disassembly into many components and does not refer to any one of those many components. The activity of reification projects onto many components the characteristic of existing as whole. Projected characteristics do not exist apart from the reifying activity from which they arise. Therefore, the term “whole” refers to something that is a reality of convention but not real. Just as, with an assemblage of parts, the word “chariot” is used, So, when the aggregates exist, there is the convention “a being.” When a space is enclosed by bones and sinews, flesh and skin, it comes to be termed “material form (Jones, 2023). Therefore, in terms of independent concept and function, Dao exists as the whole. But from Laozi’s triangular relationship between Ming, Dao (Wu), and Qi (You), Dao is also considered as an appropriate part, i.e., proper parthood (**Figure 3**).



**Figure 3.** The existence of Dao as proper parthood.

As the whole, the existence of Ming, Qi, Dao can be expressed as:  $z \exists (x) \oplus y$ . For unnamed being, its Dao is the whole, but the Dao can’t be said. We argue Laozi’s logic (Dao generates one, one generates two, two generates three, and three generates all things in ch.44) is as followings: (big) Dao ( $\emptyset$ )  $\rightarrow$  One (1, unnamed being, You)  $\rightarrow$  Two (Qi and Dao or You and Wu, 1,  $\emptyset$ )  $\rightarrow$  three (Qi, Dao and Ming of being, 1,  $\emptyset$ ,  $\exists$ )  $\rightarrow$  all things,  $\exists 1 \oplus \emptyset$ . Therefore, the being can be expressed as  $z = 1$ . Whereas for the named being, we can utilize 1 and  $\emptyset$  to identify it,  $\emptyset$  is the imaginary exotic part, which exists as a “nothingness”, but is kind of being’s part. Then, the co-existing of Ming, Qi and Dao can be expressed as:  $z \exists (x) \oplus y \leftrightarrow \{1, \emptyset\}$ . In which, The Ming is the result of the semi-adding operation between the Qi (body) and the Dao (essence). In classical logic, a domain is always related to contradiction, adding a new dimension can expand the domain and turn contradiction into complementarity. If Ming of

existence is considered as a domain (a set of Qi elements), then the Dao is an exotic domain, i.e., an empty set of Qi elements. As Laozi declared in ch.1 of DDJ, Ming is mother of all things, which are Wu-Ming (nameless) at the origin. Dao and Ming, Wu and You originate from the same source, but they are different titles. According to the semi additive operation rule: the same is 0 and the different is 1. Therefore, when the Dao matches with the Qi, the Ming is  $x \oplus y = 0$ , which is the so-called ‘Great vessel is needless to be made’ advocated by nihilism; When the Dao and the Qi are not well mating (virtue is not in harmony with Ming’s morality), the Ming is  $x \oplus y = 1$ , which is proposed by existentialist. Our further research show  $\emptyset$  is equal to  $e^i$ , in which  $i$  is an imaginary number and  $i^2 = -1$ .

## **5. Conceptual blending of Laozi’s Dao and Heidegger’s unconfined existence**

Laozi’s Dao and its companions are closely related to Heidegger’s triadic existence, the difference only lies in the expressing the forms of existence of things through different discourse systems as shown in **Figure 2**. While being in harmony with heaven, one will be in Dao and safely long live (ch.16). Whether one uses name in a definite or temporary way in describing the metaphysical Dao is related to one’s understanding of the characteristics of guidance for human behavior. The term “paradox” is never used in the Laozi, but this does not imply that the author of the Laozi was not aware of the paradox. He apparently claims that he “grudgingly” gives the Dao names even though it is unnamable (Laozi 25) (Oh, 2017). Laozi’s Dao corresponds to Heidegger’s existence of Sein (to be), but the difference is that “to be” can be zero, while the Dao will be co-existing with body (Qi) forever. We argue that the understanding of the essence of the Dao is related to time, but time does not equal the essence, which is precisely where the cognitive difference between Laozi and Heidegger lies.

The dependent-independent relations and laws prescribe unity of objects at the center of Husserl’s theory of whole and parts (Miron, 2023, p. 141). Banka (2023) differentiated Dao from the angle of mereology and propose to conceptualize, Dao and You as two metaphysical regions of unrestricted and restricted composition respectively. On assuming nihilism, Dao is composed of simples—ultimate entities that are not parts themselves, and that cannot be subdivided into parts. The problem was that “There are many who have studied the art of Dao and each believes he has possessed the truth that cannot be improved” and “The world was in great disorder, the valuable and sacred became equivocal, Dao and its virtuality were no longer One, most in the world were obsessed by their one partial point” (Watson, 1968, p. 363).

The paradigm for “parthood” is the relation between the conjunction of two properties and each of those two properties. By the conceptual blend theory, from both perspective of Heidegger’s ontology of triad existences and Laozi’s triangular companionship, we may draw the following conclusion: Ming ( $z$ ) (conceptual language name) = Qi ( $x$ ) (there is, real body, the tangible part of entity; Heidegger’s space)  $\oplus$  Dao ( $y$ ) (void, emptiness, imaginary part, but the essence of entity; Heidegger’s time). If there is no Dao, there is no name, no time, then the existence = body = Qi = 1; On the contrary, if there is Dao, there should have name and time, then

existence =  $\{1, \emptyset\}$ , but in Heidegger, the existence should be  $\{1, 0\}$  (Figure 4).

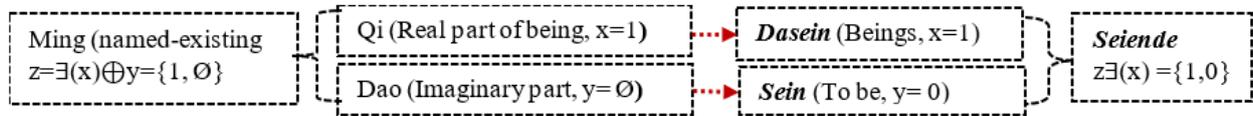


Figure 4. The Dao and its companions blending with Heidegger’s triad existences.

Laozi’s Dao can serve as an explanation of essence, and its relationship with Qi (body) is more like a proper component of Ming (name of object). Therefore, the “existence” relationship among the three can be expressed as:  $z = \exists (x) \oplus y \Leftrightarrow 1 \cap \{\emptyset\}$ , simply  $1.\emptyset$ . Heidegger’s Sein can be explained as is (to be), therefore, the relationship between Seiende and Dasein is like a “whole” i.e., the same relationship, so the relationship between the three can be expressed as:  $z \exists (x) \oplus y \Leftrightarrow \{1, 0\}$ , which can be utilized to express any existing in the world,  $z \exists = 1 (x \wedge y)$  in Existentialism, or  $z \exists = 0 (x \vee y)$  in assuming nihilism.

## 6. Conclusions

Transcendence is a fundamental question in western philosophy. However, the absence of such an important concept in Chinese philosophy leaves puzzles and difficulties for western thinkers to understand (Schuler et al., 2021). Does this mean that the Chinese people have no transcending thinking? A big misunderstanding! Largely, the early stages of modern and contemporary sinology research have been marked by an exceptionally negative attitude toward Chinese thought (Gandolfo, 2019). If, in constructing a definition for “philosophy,” we consider the only teachings of Kant, Hegel, or Wittgenstein, and accept only such teachings as genuine philosophy, then we may say there is no philosophy in China at all. However, if we include Socrates and many other Hellenistic thinkers, then we must realize that Confucius, Mencius, Laozi, and Zhuangzi also deserve this classification (Liu and Wong, 2015, pp. 471–473). However, if we delve deeper into the comparison between Laozi’s Dao with its companion and Heidegger’s triadic existences, we will be surprised to find out that the philosophical ideas of both China and the West countries are essentially the same, with only different discourse systems to express their philosophic ideas. On such ground, there is no difference between language and reality “or”, to use the Heideggerian formulation, between language and Being (Drake, 2002).

The existing literature’s interpretation of Laozi’s Dao is not based on the Dao itself, and the research methods are seldomly based on ontology, nor on mereology. This article intends to start from an ontological perspective and with the theory of separation to partially analyze the concepts of “Dao” and its related “companions” in Laozi’s DDJ and integrate them with the existences in Heidegger’s triadic ontology. We argue that Laozi’s Ming (name), Qi (tangible part) and Dao (intangible part), coexisting in the same substance, can be compared with Heidegger’s triad existences: Seiende (being), Dasein (beings) and Sein (to be). In Laozi, Dao is the essential metonymy for the existence of things from Wu (void, nothing) to You (there is, reality). The effect of Dao is De (virtue) and the combined term is Dao-De (morality). According to Proper Parts Principle, if  $z, x, y$  is used to represent Ming, Qi, Dao

respectively, then, the three as a form of “existence” is:  $z \exists (x) \oplus y$ . In terms of independent concept and function, Dao exists as a whole; while from Laozi’s triangular relationship among Ming (De), Dao (Wu) and Qi (You), Dao is also considered as a proper parthood.

By the conceptual blend theory, we may draw the following conclusion from the perspective of Heidegger’s ontology of triad existences and Laozi’s Dao with its companions:  $z$  (Ming/Being) is existing as the combination of  $x$  (Qi/Beings) and  $y$  (Dao/To be). The conspicuous difference is that Heidegger’s Dasein and Sein emphasizes space and time, while Laozi’s Qi and Dao focus on structure and essence. Time can be zero (0), but essence not, which will co-exist with body forever. For human beings, if one died in bed of old age, it means that one’s time living in the world is zero, and one’s Qi (body) and Dao (way) have also stopped or changed simultaneously. Therefore, while one’s name re-appears in a certain field, the name is often enclosed in a black box.

This may be why Heidegger emphasized the relationship between time and existence, while Laozi emphasized the relationship between Dao and Ming. Therefore, we argue that Laozi’s expression of the form of existence of all things is consistent with Heidegger’s expression of the ternary existence. In structure, essence can be expressed as emptiness or gap, but it doesn’t mean it’s not existing or zero. It’s not a non-existent, but another form of existence, i.e.,  $\emptyset$ , an empty set of elements from an exotic domain. Therefore, both the numeric expression of Heidegger’s triad existences and Laozi’s triangle existences of Dao and its companions can be written as  $\forall z \Leftrightarrow \exists x (1) \oplus y(\emptyset) \Leftrightarrow \{1, \emptyset\}$ , simply form  $1. \emptyset$ . Due to the intangible  $\emptyset$ , which is usually treated as 0, existence is easily considered as ONE in a whole, then  $z \exists (x) \oplus y = 1$ . On the contrary, if  $\emptyset$  is not treat as zero, but a virtual existence, then different types of existence are treated as proper parthood.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Laozi (2023). *Dao De Jing (DDJ)*, translated by Gao Wenfang, Beijing: Beijing United Publishing Company. Author’s noting: the remarks of Laozi without specific sources are all from this version, expressed in chapter abbreviations ch.1,2...81.
- <sup>2</sup> The Chinese version of “Silk Book Laozi Collated Annotations” written by Gao Ming is a model work for modern research on “DDJ”. The first edition was published in 1996 and had been printed 24 times by Sep.,2022. The new edition is Gao Ming (2022) *Silk Book Laozi Collated Annotations (Volume 1–2)*, published by Zhonghua Book Company in Beijing.
- <sup>3</sup> Laozi’s DDJ (*Dao De Jing*) consists of two parts. The *Dao Jing* (The Book of Dao, ch.1–37) and *De Jing* (The Book of Virtue, ch.38–81). The Book of Dao is the ideological guidance for the king to educate and govern the people, focusing on providing advice and suggestions to the king from a social perspective; The Book of Virtue focuses on personal cultivation of mind and

body, and has universal significance for the whole people. DDJ's purpose is to use the Dao (way) and De (virtue) to correct social immoral practices and lead society onto the right path with Dao-de (morality). Therefore, many scholars believe that the DDJ should (or is more suitable) be called the "De Dao Jing" rather than Dao De Jing. The silk book Laozi, unearthed from the Mawangdui Han Tomb in Changsha in 1973, is currently the earliest and most complete Laozi text, strengthening the understanding of the DDJ. "得" (De) appeared in DDJ 30 times, which means personal internal "obtain" compared to "德" (De), the virtue, which is actually the external "obtaining" esp. in reputation. Therefore, the author believes that here in the context additionally clarifying and distinguishing the Dao (道), De (德), De (得), and Dao-De (道德) in Chinese is helpful for systematic understanding of DDJ.

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