

Comparative Study of Self-Worth in the *Tao Te Ching* and Individualism in *Walden*

Yaru Liu

Abstract—This paper aims to compare Daoism’s “贵身” or Self-Worth and the idea of individualism. It conducts a comparative study based on their specific interpretations in the *Tao Te Ching* and *Walden*, revealing that these two philosophies share similarities in their treatment of the relationship between individuals and the material world, as well as individuals and themselves. The exploration of their similarities is linked to their philosophical foundations, their origins and development and key figures.

Index Terms—Self-worth, individualism, Walden, *Tao Te Ching*

I. INTRODUCTION

The pursuit of wisdom and self-discovery transcends time and cultures, with two distinct philosophical traditions offering profound insights into the self and its place in the world. Daoism, as encapsulated in Laozi’s *Tao Te Ching*, emphasizes harmony with the Dao and introduces the concept of “贵身” (gui shen or self-worth), encouraging individuals to align with the universe’s natural order to find inner value. On the other hand, Henry David Thoreau’s *Walden*, a transcendentalist work, champions individualism, self-reliance, and a strong bond with nature. Although seemingly distinct, these philosophies invite us to explore their intersections and divergences, shedding light on the human condition.

This paper conducts a comparative analysis, focusing on Daoism’s Self-Worth and individualism in Thoreau’s *Walden*. By examining their interpretations in these two books, this paper aims to detect the connections between the two works finished in different times in different countries.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Foreign scholar Cady Lyman V noted that, “Despite numerous references to Chinese Confucian classics in Thoreau’s renowned work *Walden*, his philosophy fundamentally aligns with Daoism” [1]. *Walden*, an enduring literary masterpiece, embodies the essence of Daoism, drawing considerable attention from Chinese scholars who have made significant strides in exploring their similarities. David Scott and Alan Fox also points out the undeniable overlap between Thoreau’s ideas and Daoist culture [2, 3]. Within the domain of comparative literature research, the focus centers on three core dimensions. Firstly, there are some macro-level analysis, which entails a scrutiny of the intricate relationship between Thoreau and China, along with the connection between Thoreau and Laozi. Following this, a

comprehensive and profound examination emerges, emphasizing parallels between Daoist thought and transcendentalism. Lastly, the investigation descends to a micro-level, probing specific angles of comparison, including the dissection of the concept of “无为” (wu wei or non-action) and a meticulous exploration of their respective perspectives on environmental themes.

Incorporating Daoist Self-Worth philosophy is not limited solely to the *Tao Te Ching*, just as the embodiment of “individualism” is not confined solely to *Walden*. To maintain consistency in the comparative framework and focus of this study, we narrow our analysis exclusively to the Self-Worth philosophy in the *Tao Te Ching* and the manifestation of “individualism” in *Walden*. We aim to conduct a comparative analysis, exploring these philosophical concepts in terms of their inherent principles and specific interpretations within the respective works, elucidating their points of convergence, and endeavoring to unearth the underlying reasons for their similarities.

III. MATERIALS AND METHODS

This research employs a comparative methodology to examine Self-Worth in the *Tao Te Ching* and individualism in *Walden*. The methodology entails the careful selection of relevant passages from both texts, rigorous translation procedures to capture nuances, the establishment of a structured comparative framework, close textual analysis to discern core ideas, and interdisciplinary integration of philosophical, literary, and cultural insights. Historical and cultural contexts are considered, and research limitations are transparently addressed. The study concludes by summarizing key findings and exploring the enduring relevance of these concepts in contemporary philosophical discourse.

IV. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

Self-Worth stands as a pivotal concept within Daoist philosophy, expounded upon repeatedly in both the *Tao Te Ching* and “Zhuangzi.” In contrast, “individualism” initially emerged in Europe and subsequently made its way to the United States, continuously evolving and significantly shaping American values. Both these concepts share striking similarities in terms of their inherent meanings and philosophical foundations. However, prior to undertaking a comparative analysis between Daoist Self-Worth and the “individualism” manifested in *Walden*, it is imperative to conduct an in-depth exploration of these two concepts.

A. Self-Worth or 贵身 (gui shen)

The term “身” (shen) within the context of “贵身” (gui

Manuscript received October 9, 2023; revised October 30, 2023; accepted November 3, 2023

Yaru Liu is with the School of Translation Studies, Shandong University, Weihai, China. E-mail: liuyaru@outlook.com

shen) or Self-Worth is of paramount importance in Laozi's philosophical framework. Self-Worth is the key to reach *Tao* [4] It recurs 23 times in the *Tao Te Ching*, and comprehending its nuanced meanings is pivotal for interpreting the concept of Self-Worth. Thus, we should have an objective study of Laozi's idea on the training of "body" [5]. An analysis of these occurrences reveals three primary interpretations of "身" (shen). Firstly, it predominantly denotes "self" or "oneself," as exemplified in passages such as "The sage puts his own person last and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved" (Chapter 7) and "Accomplish your tasks and retire: this is the way of heaven" (Chapter 9). Secondly, "身" signifies the "body," representing one's external physical form, as evident in the question, "Which is closer to you, your name or your person?" (Chapter 44) and "Once you get what you want, you must know when to stop" (Chapter 52). The third interpretation pertains to notions of "selfishness" or "self-desire," especially when preceded by the negation "无" (wu), as seen in the passage, "When I let go of what I am, I become what I might be" (Chapter 13).

Let's delve deeper into the holistic meaning of "贵身" (gui shen) by examining the character "贵" (gui) within it. It is typically interpreted as a verb, conveying notions like "cherish," "value," or "esteem." When exploring Laozi's philosophy in the *Tao Te Ching*, it becomes evident that he unequivocally dismisses the connotation associated with "selfishness" and "desire." Instead, he emphasizes selflessness and the abandonment of selfish desires. This sentiment is echoed throughout the text, particularly in Chapter 19, where it is recommended to "see the simple and embrace the uncarved block, reduce selfishness and diminish desires to be free from worries."

The second interpretation of "贵" (gui) is linked to the outward form of a person, encompassing not only the physical body but also inner qualities such as the soul, character, and thoughts. When we combine this second meaning with the first, "贵身" (gui shen) conveys the idea of cherishing and valuing oneself as a unified entity comprising both inner essence and physical form. In essence, "贵身" (gui shen) signifies reverence for this holistic self.

Laozi's philosophy concerning the "Tao" applied to human life culminates in the concept of "贵身" (gui shen). Here, the physical self becomes a vessel for the Tao, and cherishing oneself becomes a manifestation of respecting the Tao and valuing virtue. By cherishing oneself, individuals align with the Tao, making it possible to effortlessly realize it, ultimately contributing to societal harmony. In *Tao Te Ching*, its meaning extends to principles of self-cultivation, self-preservation, detachment from material desires, embracing simplicity, and the pursuit of authentic experiences, all of which are integral aspects of this profound concept.

B. Individualism

In accordance with the etymological investigation conducted by the Austrian scholar Hayek in *Individualism and Economic Order*, the term "individualism" in English originally derived from the translation of the French work "individualism" by Tocqueville. It was systematically employed by followers of Saint-Simon in the mid-1820s and

was often associated with pejorative concepts like "disorder," "selfishness," and "anarchy" in 19th-century French thought, suggesting that prioritizing the individual was detrimental to society's greater good and undermined social cohesion [6]. However, the term took on a different meaning when adopted into the English language. In the United States, "individualism" began to be positively connoted. Thomas Jefferson, in drafting the Declaration of Independence, expressed early instances of individualistic thought, emphasizing that "all men are created equal, endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, among these are Life, Liberty, and the pursuit of Happiness." The American frontier experience further promoted personal freedom and self-pursuit. In the 1840s, transcendentalist thinkers like Emerson and Thoreau deepened the concept, shaping it into a cultural and national ethos [7]. Thoreau, a prominent figure of transcendentalism, infused his work *Walden* with individualistic themes, significantly impacting the American national character. His work was even listed as the top book in the "Ten Books That Shaped America" by "American Heritage" magazine in 1985 [8].

"Individualism" has evolved through various developmental phases, with its connotations shifting alongside changing societal contexts. As Lucius observed in his book "Individualism," it is imperative to recognize that the same term or concept can often signify entirely different notions when used by individuals from diverse circumstances. Moreover, there is no universally standardized interpretation of individualism, as different cultural backgrounds and historical periods yield varying perspectives. In the contemporary era, Chen Zhongping posits that individualism has developed into a comprehensive value system spanning ethical, political, and economic domains within Western societies. On a rationalized level, individualism encompasses several aspects, as elucidated by Caixia: (1) individual dignity and respect; (2) individual autonomy and freedom; (3) individual rights and interests; (4) individual development and self-realization [9]. Through comparative analysis, it becomes evident that individualism places humans at the center of their relationship with the external world, emphasizes respect and equality in their interaction with society, and underscores autonomy and self-fulfillment in their relationship with themselves, thereby accentuating the realization of individual worth.

C. Comparative Study

In the preceding sections, we have elucidated and expounded upon the concepts of "self-worth" and "individualism" separately, revealing numerous points of convergence. This forms the foundation for a comparative analysis of these highly analogous concepts in two classic works. As previously mentioned, the same term, when used in different contexts by different people, can manifest differently. Examining how "self-worth" presented in the *Tao Te Ching* and how Individualism is embodied in *Walden* enables a deeper understanding of these two concepts and provides new insights into the two literary works.

1) *The relationship between individuals and material possessions: "Not to Be Encumbered by Things" vs. "Economic Life"*

Both the notion of not being burdened by external

possessions and the attitude toward economic life aim at self-discovery and maintaining one's true self. Self-Worth advocates avoiding the encumbrance of external possessions, while Individualism revolves around recognizing the "self." The search for the self and the preservation of one's true essence form the basis for practicing both Self-Worth and Individualism ideologies.

Laozi advocates for a simple and uncluttered lifestyle, emphasizing the need to "see simplicity, embrace simplicity, reduce selfishness, and lessen desires" [10]. He urges an inner simplicity, reduced selfishness, and diminished desires. Laozi further warns, "The five colors blind the eye; the five tones deafen the ear; the five tastes dull the palate. Racing and hunting madden the mind" [10]. According to Laozi, the abandonment of materialistic desires and attachments, including fame and fortune, is essential to return to one's original state, akin to that of an infant—a state that leads to the attainment of the *Tao*.

Henry David Thoreau's life at Walden Pond also exemplifies a highly "economic" lifestyle. "Economy" comprises nearly a quarter of Walden, underscoring its profound significance to Thoreau. In Thoreau's view, fulfilling life's necessities requires minimal conditions: "I find by my own experience, a few implements, a knife, an axe, a spade...rank next to necessities, and can all be obtained at a trifling cost." [11]. He conducted an experiment at Walden Pond, demonstrating that people can live well with minimal material possessions. This form of "well-being" is not measured in material wealth but in spiritual contentment. A life with fewer material possessions allows one's true self to emerge, enabling individuals to recognize what lifestyle is most appropriate for themselves.

2) *The relationship between individuals and themselves: "Cultivating the Self and Nurturing Virtue" vs. "Self-Realization"*

Only by avoiding external encumbrances can individuals maintain their true selves, cultivate the self, and engage in self-realization. Self-worth seeks to cultivate the self, while the core idea of individualism is self-realization.

Tao Te Ching consists of 81 chapters, with 31 chapters dedicated to self-cultivation, highlighting its importance in Laozi's philosophy. Chapter 54 states, "The cultivation of the self leads to true virtue." Here, self-cultivation refers to adhering to the *Tao* and establishing virtues, regulating one's speech and behavior, thus allowing virtues to be genuine. Laozi's explanation of "virtue" is profound: "The highest virtue is like water." In the context of *Tao Te Ching*, water is a vital symbol, and being like water represents the highest virtue. Water, situated in lowly places like valleys, can hold the waters of rivers and streams. Thus, it represents the highest virtue. To cultivate the self and nurture virtue, one must "know others" (understand external circumstances) and "know oneself" (understand one's true nature). Self-awareness and understanding are essential aspects of self-cultivation.

Walden, by Henry David Thoreau, dedicates a significant portion of the book to the concept of "Economy." Thoreau emphasizes the importance of living deliberately and "fronting the essential facts of life." He also urges individuals to simplify their lives and pursue their own paths, asserting that they should "walk to the beat of a different drum,

however measured or far away" [11]. Thoreau suggests that people should follow their own rhythm, emphasizing one's own beat rather than conforming to others'. Even if the path seems distant, individuals should walk it to create value in their lives. The concepts of self and self-realization are interrelated and complementary.

3) *Relationships with others: "Supreme Goodness Like Water" and "Equality and Respect"*

In the practice of "noble self" and "individualism," it is essential to not focus solely on oneself and one's own interests. How one navigates relationships with others is also a crucial component of these two philosophical concepts.

Water is a significant metaphorical symbol in the *Tao Te Ching*, and Laozi frequently employs this metaphor to elucidate the nature of the *Tao* and how one should conduct themselves in society. Chapter 8 states, "The highest goodness resembles water. Water greatly benefits myriad beings without contention. It stays in places that people loathe; therefore, it is similar to the *Tao*." In the context of human relationships, Laozi conveys the idea of "non-contention" in this verse and concludes the chapter by stating, "Hence, it is only by not contending that there is no reproach." Similarly, in Chapter 7, Laozi discusses how "sages" put themselves last and yet remain foremost, emphasizing that rulers who seek their own interests will not be able to maintain their positions. While this passage primarily discusses the way of a ruler, the concept of not contending with others is consistent. Moreover, in dealing with others, Laozi advocates goodness and benevolence, as mentioned in Chapter 42 of the *Tao Te Ching*, where he states, "The *Tao* produces them and the virtue raises them. Thus, every being honors the *Tao* and cherishes virtue. None command it, but it ever benefits them."

In contrast, individualism, as it has evolved over time, places emphasis on the autonomy, dignity, and equality of individuals in their relationships with others. This concept highlights that individuals are not means to an end but ends in themselves. Individualism fosters a sense of respect for the uniqueness of each person and promotes the idea that individuals should be free to pursue their own goals and interests within a framework of mutual respect and equality. This philosophy has been instrumental in shaping modern democratic societies, where principles of individual rights and freedoms are paramount.

In summary, both "supreme goodness like water" in Daoism and the principles of "equality and respect" in individualism underscore the importance of harmonious and respectful relationships with others. Daoism advocates non-contention and benevolence, while individualism emphasizes the value of each person and their right to pursue their own interests within a framework of equality and mutual respect. These philosophies offer valuable insights into how individuals can navigate their interactions with others in a diverse and interconnected world.

In *Walden*, Thoreau conveys themes of equality and respect, which are also prevalent throughout the work. For instance, in the essay *Former Inhabitants; and Winter Visitors*, Thoreau describes individuals who embrace a wide range of identities, from children to beggars, madmen to scholars, and he accommodates all forms of thought, often expanding upon them with his enthusiastic wisdom.

Although not a direct depiction of Thoreau himself, this passage illustrates his respect for people of diverse backgrounds and identities. This respect is also evident in the narrative style of *Walden*, where Thoreau objectively describes woodcutters, neighbors, slaves, black and white individuals, and even animals without judgment. Despite the sparse population around Walden Pond, Thoreau encounters individuals from various professions, backgrounds, and races. In his writing, he refrains from making overt value judgments and instead provides an objective portrayal, placing each life on an equal footing.

However, Laozi's approach to relationships with others in the *Tao Te Ching* differs somewhat. Laozi lived during the late Spring and Autumn period in ancient China, a time when society was transitioning from a slave system to a feudal one. Equality and respect were not readily achievable during that era. Consequently, Laozi's approach to relationships with others, as reflected in the *Tao Te Ching*, is more subtle and restrained. His emphasis on respecting others and non-contention is often a byproduct of the broader focus on self-cultivation. In contrast, "individualism" in the United States went through significant historical developments during the Puritan period, the American Revolutionary era, and the westward expansion. By the time of Thoreau, individualism had deeply penetrated American society, becoming a mainstream ideology that championed equality and respect among individuals. These values had evolved and solidified as societal norms over time.

In summary, both Thoreau's *Walden* and Laozi's *Tao Te Ching* underscore the importance of equality and respect in human relationships. Thoreau's work demonstrates these principles through his respectful portrayal of a diverse array of individuals in his community. In contrast, Laozi's philosophy, written during a different time and cultural context, subtly emphasizes non-contention and respect as byproducts of self-cultivation. These differences in approach are reflective of the historical and societal contexts in which these philosophies emerged.

D. Exploration of the Causes of Similarity

1) Philosophical foundations

"Self-worth" and "individualism" are fundamentally philosophical concepts, each belonging to distinct philosophical systems. Therefore, the exploration of their similarities inevitably begins with an analysis of their philosophical foundations. "Self-worth" is a significant component of Daoist thought, while "individualism" is a vital element of transcendentalism. Regarding the intrinsic meanings of Daoist thought and transcendentalism, Daoism's founder, Laozi, once stated: "Man follows Earth, Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is natural" (Chapter 25). He also proclaimed: "The Dao gives birth to One, One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three, and Three gives birth to all things" (Chapter 42). Here, the "Dao" essentially represents a natural, eternal, spontaneous, nameless, indescribable, and formless force that governs all things in the universe.

In contrast, the core tenet of transcendentalism is that humans can transcend sensory perception and reason to directly apprehend truth, emphasizing the importance of intuition. First and foremost, transcendentalists emphasize

the spiritual or the transcendent, considering it the most significant presence in the universe. The transcendent is an omnipresent, benevolent force that underpins all existence, both in humans and the natural world. Secondly, transcendentalists prioritize the expression of individual personality. They assert that all things share a fundamental unity, with all beings subject to the influence of the transcendent. In this view, humanity and the transcendent are in harmony.

It becomes evident that while these two philosophies possess distinct intrinsic meanings, they also share commonalities. Daoism posits that the "Dao" is the source of all life and governs all things, while transcendentalism maintains that the transcendent is the foundation of all things. In conceptual terms, this suggests a certain similarity between the "Dao" and the transcendent. Consequently, both philosophical systems exhibit a high degree of similarity in their cosmological and naturalistic views. These perspectives are crucial in shaping one's worldview, values, and political outlook.

2) Origins and development of two philosophical systems

Due to the considerable antiquity of figures like Laozi and other representatives of Daoism, and the scarcity of verifiable historical records, the origins of Daoism remain a subject of ongoing scholarly debate. As Zhao Kuifu notes, "In summary, everyone is exploring the origins or genetic makeup of Daoist thought, forming various opinions [12]. However, most discussions are relatively simplistic, lacking comprehensive reasoning and failing to pinpoint the crux of the matter" (36). Nevertheless, it can be reasonably surmised that, although Laozi himself did not explicitly identify with any particular philosophical school, the origins of Daoism can be traced back to the pre-Qin period, particularly to Laozi and Zhuangzi. During the early Han Dynasty, Huang-Lao Daoism emerged as another manifestation of Daoist thought. In the late Han Dynasty, Daoism was religiousized, intertwining with ideas of longevity and esoteric practices. During the Wei and Jin Dynasties, Lao-Zhuang Daoism integrated with Confucianism, giving rise to the school of Daoist metaphysics known as Xuanxue. Among the three great philosophical classics of Daoism are the *Tao Te Ching*, the "Zhuangzi," and the "I Ching." These two latter works are considered Daoist classics. Daoist thought has evolved over the centuries, adapting to changing times and acquiring new contemporary meanings.

Transcendentalism, on the other hand, originated in the cultural hub of 19th-century America, the early industrial region of New England, often referred to as "New England Transcendentalism" or the "American Renaissance." It gradually took shape from around 1830 and thrived until the end of the American Civil War in 1865 [13]. The cradle of transcendentalism was the Transcendental Club founded by Unitarian minister George Ripley, and later joined by Ralph Waldo Emerson, who also established the magazine *The Dial*. With the later inclusion of thinkers like Henry David Thoreau, transcendentalism grew and flourished. Initially, Calvinism and Unitarianism played a significant role in fostering transcendentalist thought. However, as societal and environmental factors changed over time, the theological doctrines of predestination and the concept of a chosen people advocated by these religions were seen as hindrances

to societal progress. Consequently, transcendentalism critiqued these ideas. Despite these critiques, these two religions laid the religious groundwork for transcendentalism.

Through this comparison, it is evident that both Daoism and transcendentalism, at their origins and during their developmental phases, exhibited elements of religiosity. Religion poses a fundamental question regarding humanity's place in the world and how individuals should live in it. The philosophies of "self-worth" and "individualism" are essential components in addressing this overarching question.

3) The historical context and life experiences of key figures

Zhao Kuifu, in his work, asserts that "the formation of a thinker's theories and beliefs is related to the natural environment in which they grew up, the cultural traditions they absorbed, and the influences they received from their families and society" [12]. Daoism boasts numerous key figures, including Laozi, Zhuangzi, and Liezi, among others. However, for the purposes of this study, the focus is on Laozi and Thoreau due to the central roles they play in exploring the similarities between Daoism and transcendentalism.

Given the scarcity of historical records, there is no definitive account of Laozi's life. However, the widely accepted narrative suggests that Laozi served as a keeper of the imperial archives in the Zhou Dynasty. Disillusioned by the tumultuous times and the prevalence of warfare in the late Spring and Autumn period, he abandoned his official position and retreated into seclusion. As he left the pass of Hangu, he composed the *Tao Te Ching*. Zhao Kuifu speculates that Laozi's family resided in the region of Xiangyi in the state of Song, an area situated at the junction of the north and south. Laozi's upbringing exposed him to the traditional culture of the Song state. Consequently, he developed perspectives on the intrigue and deception among northern feudal lords. Moreover, he possessed insights into the socio-political conditions of the time, as many southern regions still existed as agrarian communities or tribal alliances during his era [12].

In the Spring and Autumn period, characterized by economic advancement with the widespread use of iron tools and an increase in productivity, political turmoil as feudal lords vied for supremacy, and significant cultural transformations due to societal upheaval, ideas flourished.

Henry David Thoreau, a graduate of Harvard University, lived during the period following the American War of Independence and before the outbreak of the American Civil War. He was actively involved in the abolitionist movement and, later, undertook a two-year sojourn at Walden Pond, during which he wrote *Walden*. The essential societal conditions in the United States during this period were marked by economic development with the rapid growth of industrial production, political independence achieved after much struggle but also brewing conflicts between the North and South, and cultural changes that gave rise to new intellectual movements like transcendentalism.

Through this comparison, several key findings emerge: Both Laozi and Thoreau were individuals of higher education in their respective societies, which endowed them with heightened intellectual acumen, enabling them to engage in

independent and profound philosophical contemplation. Both figures are often perceived as "world-renouncers" due to their periods of seclusion. However, this characterization does not capture the full essence of their philosophies. Although Laozi disappeared from public life after leaving the Hangu Pass, his *Tao Te Ching* is replete with discussions on governance and political philosophy, suggesting that he did not entirely withdraw from worldly concerns. Similarly, Thoreau's *Walden* contains political viewpoints, but his seclusion served as an experiment and an opportunity for contemplation and firsthand experience rather than a complete withdrawal from society. The social environments in which Laozi and Thoreau lived exhibit striking parallels. Both periods, the Spring and Autumn period in ancient China and the post-American War of Independence era in the United States, were characterized by significant societal upheaval. These periods of great societal transformation gave rise to numerous new cultural and philosophical movements. Daoism and transcendentalism emerged as representative new schools of thought during these times. Thus, the similarities in the backgrounds of the key figures of these two philosophical systems can partially explain the resemblance in their philosophical ideas. In essence, the convergence of educated backgrounds, nuanced approaches to seclusion, and the societal contexts in which Laozi and Thoreau lived contribute to the shared philosophical underpinnings of Daoism and transcendentalism. These findings underscore the importance of considering the thinkers' educational and social backgrounds when examining the similarities between these philosophical traditions.

V. CONCLUSION

This paper aims to compare the Daoist philosophy of self-worth as depicted in *Tao Te Ching* with the theme of individualism found in *Walden*. To do so, it first explores the philosophical essence of self-worth and individualism and then analyzes how these concepts are portrayed in the respective works. While both self-worth and individualism emphasize the "self" or "individual," humans exist within the context of the world and society. Therefore, this study delves into their philosophical interpretations concerning the relationships between individuals and the material world as well as individuals and themselves. The investigation reveals that self-worth and individualism exhibit similarities not only in their philosophical foundations but also in their specific presentations within the texts. Lastly, this paper seeks to unravel the reasons behind these similarities by analyzing three aspects: their philosophical origins, developmental trajectories, and representative figures. Despite existing in different eras and cultures, Daoist thought and transcendentalism, when compared through these three dimensions, reveal both differences and certain similarities. This sheds light on the connections between Daoist thought and transcendentalism, ultimately explaining the resemblance between self-worth and individualism.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The author declares no conflict of interest.

REFERENCES

- [1] C. Lyman, "Thoreau's quotations from the Confucian books in Wald," *American Literature*, vol. 3, pp. 20–32, 1961.
- [2] D. Scott, "Rewalking Thoreau and Asia: 'Light from the East' for 'A very Yankee Sort of Oriental,'" *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 57, no. 01, pp. 14–39, 2007.
- [3] A. Fox, "Guarding what is essential: Critiques of material culture in Thoreau and Yang Zhu," *Philosophy East and West*, vol. 58, no. 3, pp. 358–371, 2008.
- [4] Y. Zhou, "An interpretation of Laozi's doctrine on valuing the self and its historical influence," *Social Science Frontline*, pp. 235–237, 2012.
- [5] L. Han, "A preliminary study of Laozi's idea on the training of body," *Journal of Yunnan University (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 3, pp. 14–19+94, 2004.
- [6] H. Cai, "An analysis of the rational connotation of 'Individualism'," *Journal of Yanshan University (Philosophy and Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 13, no. 2, pp. 47–49, 2012.
- [7] M. Qian, *Emerson and China*, Beijing: Three Links Press (Sanlian Bookstore), 1996.
- [8] H. Cheng, *In Search of the Wilderness*, Beijing: Three Links Press (Sanlian Bookstore), 2001, p. 103.
- [9] Z. Chen, "Individualism in American culture," *Study and Exploration*, vol. 8, pp. 137–140, 2013.
- [10] Laozi, *Laozi: Annotated and Explained*, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2008.
- [11] H. D. Thoreau, *Walden*, Shengshi Education Western Classics Translation Committee Trans. Shanghai: World Book Publishing Company, 2011.
- [12] K. Zhao, "The regional origins of Pre-Qin philosophers and the formation of Daoist thought," *Journal of Northwest Normal University (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 59, no. 6, pp. 33–46, 2022.
- [13] L. Yu, "An analysis of American transcendentalism," *Journal of Hubei Radio and Television University*, vol. 29, no. 8, pp. 86–87, 2009.

Copyright © 2023 by the authors. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited ([CC BY 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)).