HANDBOOKS FOR DAOIST PRACTICE

修道手冊

Louis Komjathy

圓玄學院
THE YUEN YUEN INSTITUTE
HONG KONG

The *Handbooks for Daoist Practice* were previously circulated in a private printing under the imprint of © Wandering Cloud Press, 2003.

ISBN: 978-988-98980-1-4

Published by The Yuen Yuen Institute.

The Yuen Yuen Institute,
Sam Dip Tam, Tsuen Wan,N.T., Hong Kong.
Fax: +852 2493 8240
E- mail: admx@yuenyuen.org.hk
Web- site: www.yuenyuen.org.hk

Printed in Hong Kong

BOOK OF VENERABLE MASTERS

老子

TRANSLATED BY LOUIS KOMJATHY

INTRODUCTION

書

序

BOOK OF VENERABLE MASTERS

The *Laozi* 老子(Book of Venerable Masters; abbr. LZ), or *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power; abbr. DDJ), is perhaps the most important and revered text in the entire Daoist tradition. One of the earliest texts of classical Daoism, it may be interpreted in a number of ways, one of the most significant of which is as a manual of self-cultivation and mystical realization.

The *Book of Venerable Masters,* usually translated as the *Book of Master Lao,* is the most well known text from the seminal phase of Daoism, namely, the "classical period" (480 B.C.E.-9 C.E.). In particular, it is one of a number of "classics" that survive from the Warring States (480-222 B.C.E.), a time of immense political strife, violent social upheaval, and philosophical diversity. The received *Book of Venerable Masters* contains material from at least as early as the fourth century B.C.E. and is usually associated with the so-called "Daoist school" (*daojia* 道家),[1] a loosely knit group of individual practitioners and cultivation communities that Harold Roth (Brown

[1] *Daojia* 道家, first appearing in Sima Tan 司馬談(d. 110 B.C.E.) and Sima Qian's 司馬遷 (145-86? B.C.E.) *Shiji* 史記 (Records of the Historian), was originally a bibliographic category, a way to catalogue texts with seemingly similar concerns. However, Harold Roth has shown that there were, in fact, communities of practitioners that could receive the label "Daoist school." Here one should note that this was not a "philosophical school" or a "way of thinking," but rather a religious school and a way of being. See Roth 1999, 173-203. Cf Kirkland 2004.

University) has labeled "inner cultivation lineages."[2] The texts most commonly associated with these inner cultivation lineages or Warring States "Daoism"[3] are the *Laozi* 老子(Book of Venerable Masters)[4] and *Zhuangzi* 莊子(Book of Master Zhuang; abbr. ZZ). However recent revisionist scholarship would add the so-called "Xinshu" 心術 (Techniques of the Heart-mind) chapters of the *Guanzi* 管子(Book of Master Guan), chapters thirty-six through thirty-eight and chapter

---

[2] Developing Roth (1999, 181-85), one might also refer to the earliest "Daoists" as "technicians of the Way" (*daoshu shi* 道術士).

[3] When speaking of the Daoist tradition, some consider it problematic to identify an organized religious movement ("Daoism") before the 2nd century C.E. at the earliest, and perhaps as late as the 5th century. One may thus wish to refer to these texts as "proto-Daoism." In addition, "Daoism" ("Taoism") is a Western interpretative category that encompasses many diverse phenomena; it may thus turn out that we must discard "Daoism" as a viable concept and speak of independent but interrelated movements. Such, however, is not my position. I hold that Daoism is a religious tradition, albeit one composed of diverse adherents, communities, practices, soteriological goals, historical influences and so forth, that begins with the inner cultivation lineages of the Warring States period and that focuses on a life lived in attunement with the Dao as sacred reality. Much work remains to be done on the various connective tissues that bind and separate Daoists and Daoist movements throughout history. One such strand is clearly the cultivation of "clarity and stillness" (*qingjing* 清靜), a concern found in the inner cultivation lineages, early Celestial Masters, Tang-dynasty Shangqing, and Quanzhen. For an initial attempt to identify some commonalities see Russell Kirkland's *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (2004).

[4] This text later received the title *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power). I have translated *Laozi* as "Book of Venerable Masters," rather than "Book of Master Lao," in keeping with my view that the text is a series of "sayings collages." I have also translated *Daode jing* as "Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power," rather than the more conventional "Classic of the Way and Virtue," to emphasize its sacred standing *in the Daoist tradition.* In this sense the text is a "scripture" (*jing* 經). It is clear, however, that the work has also exerted tremendous influence on Chinese culture more generally. In this sense the text is a "classic" (*jing* 經).

forty-nine,[5] as well as parts of the *Huainanzi*), 佳南子 (Book of the Masters of Huainan) and *Lushi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Mister Lü).[6] If one accepts the suggestion that the Daoistic aspects of these texts are related to the early inner cultivation lineages, then they provide insights into the practice modalities and communal contexts of the earliest "Daoist" practitioners and communities.[7] Throughout the pages of the texts of the classical period, one finds practice principles, specific cultivation methods, goals and aspirations, descriptions of mystical absorption, as well as representatives and models of successful training.

The Book of Venerable Masters is traditionally associated with Laozi 老子. Here begins the enigma. "Laozi" may be translated/interpreted in a number of ways: "Master Lao," "Old Child," "Old Master,"or "venerable masters." In terms of traditional attribution and biographical material, the standard source is chapter sixty-three of the *Shiji* 史記（Records of the Historian) at least partially compiled by Sima Tan 司馬談, Grand Astrologer of the Han court during the

[5] The "Neiye"內業 (Inward Training; abbr. NY) is one of the key Techniques of the Heart-mind chapters.

[6] The *Liezi* 列子(Book of Master Lie) is often placed in the classical period. However, although the received text contains some early material, especially from the *Zhungzi,* the *Liezi* was compiled in the fourth century C.E. For a catalogue and historical annotations of translations of Daoist texts see Komjathy 2003.

[7] Some would deny the application of "Daoist," understood as an initiated member of a self-conscious religious tradition, to these practitioners. However, arguably such inclusion involves a specific way of life, specific worldviews, practices, and goals/ideals, more than some institutional affiliation.

early years of Emperor Wu's reign (r. 141-87 B.C.E.), and completed by his son Sima Qian 司馬遷 (ca. 145-86 B.C.E.). The *Records of the Historian* provides the following account:

> Laozi was a person of Quren village in the Lai district of Hu province in Chu 楚. His surname was Li 李. He had the given name Er 耳, personal name Boyang 伯陽, and posthumous name Dan 耼. He was a historiographer in charge of the archives of Zhou.
>
> Kongzi [Confucius] once traveled to Zhou because he desired to ask Laozi about ritual (lǐ 禮). Laozi said, "The sages you speak about have long withered along with their bones. Moreover, when a superior person is in accord with the times, he rides in a carriage; when his time has not yet arrived, he wanders with the wind. I have heard that a good merchant fills his storehouses but appears to have nothing; a superior person is overflowing with inner power (*de* 德) but looks like a fool. Abandon your prideful airs and various desires; get rid of your rigid posturing and lascivious thoughts. Each of these contains no benefit. I have nothing more to say."
>
> Kongzi left and later addressed his disciples, "Birds, I know, can fly; fish, I know, can swim; animals, I know, can run. For the running, one can make a net; for the swimming, one can

make a line; for the flying, one can make an arrow. But when it comes to a dragon, I have no way of knowing how it rides the wind and clouds and ascends into the heavens. Today I have met Laozi who is really like unto a dragon."[8]

Laozi cultivated the Dao (*xiudao* 修道) and inner power. He taught that one should efface oneself and be without fame in the world. After he had lived in Zhou for a long time, he saw that the Zhou was in decline. Then he departed. When he reached the pass [Hangu Pass 涵谷關], the keeper of the pass, Yin Xi 尹喜, said, "We will see no more of you. I request that you write a book for us." Laozi then wrote a book in two parts, discussing the Dao and inner power in 5,000 words.

Thereupon, he departed No one knows where he ended his life.

Thus, Laozi is sometimes known as Li Er 李耳 or Lao Dan 老耽. In this account, Laozi is said to have been an archivist of the Eastern Zhou dynasty (770-256 B.C.E.) and a senior contemporary and teacher of Kongzi 孔子 (Confucius; ca. 551-ca, 479 B.C.E.). In addition, while preparing to depart on his "western journeys," he met

[8] This phrase became the title of the eleventh-century *Youlong zhuan* 猶龍傳 (Like Unto a Dragon; DZ 774).

Yin Xi 尹喜. The latter would come to occupy a central place in the later establishment of Louguan 樓觀(Lookout Tower Monastery) as a major Daoist center.

In contrast to the above account, deeper inquiry suggests that creation of the pseudo-historical person "Laozi" was a conflation of different legends.[9] The earliest stratum, which came from a Ruist 儒 (Confucian) source and was current by the fourth century B.C.E., centered on a meeting between a certain Lao Dan and Kongzi. Subsequently, Laozi was made the foremost representative of Zhuangzi's 莊子 philosophy.[10] During the first half of the third century B.C.E., Lao Dan was recognized as a great teacher in his own right, the founder of the "Daoist," or perhaps more accurately "Laoist," school. It was only during the Early Han dynasty (202 B.C.E.-9 C.E.) that parallels were identified between the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* and the texts became classified under the bibliographic category "Daoist school" (*daojia* 道家). The elevation of Laozi as a verifiable historical figure and "founder" was also an attempt to gain political authority, especially on the part of representatives of Huang-Lao 黃老. This name refers to a Han-dynasty political movement that venerated Huangdi 黃帝 (Yellow Thearch) and

[9] The most detailed and convincing argument may be found in A.C. Graham's article "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan" (1998 [1986]).

[10] Laozi, or Lao Dan, appears in various chapters of the *Zhuangzi,* including chapters three, five, seven, eleven, twelve, thirteen, fourteen, twenty-one, twenty-two, twenty-three, twenty-five, twenty-seven, and thirty-three.

Laozi 老子(Master Lao) and combined aspects of "Daoism" and "Legalism." But what does such revisionist scholarship mean for the Daoist tradition and practicing Daoists? One response might be to continue to revere Laozi as a "place-holder," as representing the classical tradition, including the earliest practitioners and cultivation communities. However, it also suggests that, in the case of Daoism, the search for some obscure founder like Jesus Christ or Śākyamuni Buddha is perhaps a futile endeavor. The Daoist lineage did not begin and does not end with a human being.

With regard to the text itself, recent philological and archaeological research reveals the *Book of Venerable Masters* as an anthology with a variety of textual and historical layers. There is no single author. There is much to recommend the view that the received text (most often the Wang Bi 王弼 [226-249 C.E.] redaction) is an anthology of earlier (perhaps 5th and 4th c. B.C.E.) oral traditions that were later (by at least 168 B.C.E.) codified into a "coherent" text. Thus, one may tentatively identify at least five phases in the historical compilation of the received *Daodejing* 道德經(Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power): (1) oral traditions, including mnemonic aphorisms; (2) collections of sayings;[11] (3) early anthologies; (4) codified, classified, and edited anthologies; and (5) fully integrated and

[11] Here one thinks of the so-called *Book of Q,* which many Bible scholars believe to be a collection of the historical Jesus' sayings that was later used as the source for the received Gospels.

standardized editions.[12] For this reason, I have translated the title *Laozi* as *Book of Venerable Masters* in keeping with my view that the text is an anthology, a collection of teachings from various teachers and communities living between the fifth century B.C.E. and the second century B.C.E.[13]

My proposed sequence of composition is supported by recent archeological finds, specifically the manuscripts unearthed at Mawangdui 馬王堆(near Changsha; Hunan) and Guodian 郭店 (Jingmen; Hubei). The received *Daode jing* consists of eighty-one chapters[14] that are commonly divided into two sections, the so-called *daojing* 道經(chs. 1-37) and *dejing* 德經(chs. 38-81).[15] In the case of the two Mawangdui manuscripts, discovered in 1973 and datable to at least 168 B.C.E., the text of the *Laozi* is similar to the received

[12] The most successful attempt at providing a historically contextualized English translation of the *Daode jing* is Michael LaFargue's *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* (1992).

[13] At some point one can imagine someone undertaking the difficult task of identifying the different "schools" associated with various passages and chapters. Here I am thinking of research on the *Zhuangzi* 莊子(Book of Master Zhuang), which recognizes the following groups: (1) Primitivists (chs. 8-10; parts of 11, 12, and 14); (2) Hedonists (chs. 28-31); (3) Syncretists (chs. 12-16, 33); (4) later followers of Zhuang Zhou (chs. 17-22); and (5) Anthologists (chs, 23-27, 32) (Mair 2000, 37).

[14] The division into eighty-one chapters is associated particularly with the Heshang gong 河上公 version (see below), which also has chapter titles. It was not universally accepted until much later, probably during the Tang period (618-907), when the text was standardized under the patronage of Emperor Xuanzong 玄宗(r. 712-755).

[15] The *Daode jing* is also referred to as the "Five Thousand Character Text" (*wuqian wen* 五千文), a reference to its approximate length.

version except for one interesting fact: the divisions are reversed.[16] The Mawangdui manuscripts begin with the *dejing* section (chs. 38-81) and end with the *daojing* section (chs. 1-37).[17] This means that the basic organization and content of the received text was established by at least the second century B.C.E. However, if one accepts the importance of the Guodian manuscripts, also referred to as the "Bamboo Laozi," then there is evidence for considering the earliest versions as being "anthologies" and "sayings collages." The Guodian bamboo strips, discovered in 1993 and datable to at least 300 B.C.E., represent the oldest extant version of the *Laozi,* In its transcribed form, it divides into three groups: (A) Thrity-nine bamboo slips, which correspond in whole or in part to various chapters (chs. 19, 66, 46, 30, 15, 64, 37, 63, 2, 32, 25, 5, 16, 64, 56, 57, 55, 44, 40, and 9); (B) Eighteen slips (chs. 59, 48, 20, 12, 41, 52, 45, and 54); and (C) Fourteen slips (chs. 17, 18, 35, 31, and 64). The arrangement of the passages differs significantly from the received version, and there are numerous variant and/or archaic characters. In terms of content, it is noteworthy that many of the polemical and anti-Ruist (Confucian) passages are absent. One explanation is that the "Bamboo Laozi" represents an earlier phase of composition. The Guodian slips point towards the fact that the organization and content

[16] There are also character variants and some grammatical particles that have provided textual clarification.

[17] Translations of the Mawangdui manuscripts may be found in Henricks 1989 and Lau 1989.

of the received text was in flux at least as late as the end of the fourth century B.C.E.[18]

In sum, the *Book of Venerable Masters,* or *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power,* is an anthology containing a variety of historical and textual layers. It is an anonymous text, with many of its passages coming from the fifth and fourth centuries B.C.E.

Returning to the received *Book of Venerable Masters,* the text consists of eighty-one chapters and approximately 5,000 characters. The chapters have varying line length, chapter length, and concerns. In addition, much of the text is rhymed. Comparison between the *Book of Venerable Masters* and other early poetry collections, such as the *Shijing* 詩經(Classic of Poetry) and Chuci 楚辭 (Lyrics of Chu), reveal a poetic structure closer to that used in the fourth century B.C.E. Perhaps more importantly, the concise and rhythmic characteristics of the text suggest a mnemonic function; that is, the lines, representing earlier sayings and practice guidelines, were easily committed to memory and recited.[19] The text is often cryptic and enigmatic, enabling it to be adopted, adapted, and interpreted in a

---

[18] A translation of the Guodian *Laozi* may be found in Henricks 2000. For academic articles see Allan and Williams 2000.

[19] This is obvious in contemporary Daoist contexts as well, wherein the *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power* is sometimes chanted. In addition, during a fieldtrip to China in 1997 I visited Daoist temples at Qingcheng shan 青城山 (Azure Wall Mountain). While staying at Shangqing gong 上清宫(Palace of Highest Clarity), a Dragon Gate monk and I exchanged our favorite memorized lines from the scripture.

variety of ways and contexts. As this is true of the original Chinese text(s), how much more so for contemporary English translations with their assorted agendas?

It is unnecessary to review all of these Euro-American cultural productions, but some of the most prevalent and influential distortions must be mentioned. There are various outdated misconceptions and misinterpretations that continue to hold sway in non-specialist contexts, particularly in popular New Age discourse communities and Western academic discourse. The most epidemic among these is the bifurcation of the Daoist tradition into "philosophical Daoism" and "religious Daoism."[20] I would label this interpretative tendency as the "received view" concerning Daoism. Under this interpretation, the former is "original," "pure" and "true" Daoism, while the latter is a "corrupt" and "degenerate" adjunct to the former. Some also mistakenly equate "philosophical Daoism" with the Chinese *daojia* 道家 (lit., "Family of the Way") and "religious Daoism" with the Chinese *daojiao* 道教 (lit., "Teachings of the Way"). With regard to the former, the Western construction of "philosophical Daoism" has no correlation to the Chinese term *daojia,* a taxonomic category used

[20] This outdated interpretative framework is, unfortunately, perpetuated in Julian Pas' *Historical Dictionary of Taoism* (1997). For a critical review see the Review Section at the Daoist Studies website (www.daoiststudies.org). For discussions of such interpretative issues in Daoist Studies, especially key questions such as "Who is a Daoist?" and "What is Daoism?", see Creel 1956; Sivin 1978; Saso 1978; Strickmann 1980; Thompson 1993; Kobayashi 1995; Kirkland 1997; 2000; Clarke 2000; Kohn and Roth 2002; Komjathy 2002a; 2004; Miller 2003.

by Han historiographers as a way of classifying texts and as a veiled reference to the Huang-Lao 黃老 tradition. With regard to the latter, the use of *daojiao* as a designation for a self-conscious Daoist religious tradition did not emerge until the fifth century C.E. This occurred in the struggle for imperial patronage and court influence, in attempts to distinguish "Daoism" from Buddhism. It was also employed as a legitimizing factor in Kou Qianzhi's 寇謙之（365-448) reform movement called the New Way of the Celestial Master, also known as the "Northern Celestial Masters." That is, there are no theoretically grounded, historically accurate, or anthropologically relevant referents for the Western distinction between "philosophical Daoism" and "religious Daoism." This bifurcated interpretative framework fails to consider the complexity and diversity of the Daoist tradition itself. Any bimodal (bipolar) understanding of Daoism should be discarded.

Moreover, *there is no such thing as philosophical Daoism.* Philosophical Daoism is wholly a modern Western construct that has no correspondence to actual historical events or personages.[21] From its "beginnings," here dated to the Warring States period (480-222

[21] When I say that "philosophical Daoism is a complete fiction" I am speaking historically in terms of the Chinese religious tradition *which is* Daoism. However, if one were to expand the discussion to include contemporary developments, it is clear that there are individuals, both Chinese and Western, who consider themselves "philosophical Daoists." One such individual is Liu Xiaogan 劉笑敢 (b. 1947). Internet groups, or "webrings," such as the Circle of Wandering Daoists fall into this category as well. While such individuals are clearly applying classical Daoist "ideas" to modern intellectual and social needs, much of their authority rests on the highly questionable belief and claim of representing "original Daoism."

B.C.E.), "Daoism" was a "religious tradition."[22] "Religion" here is not used in a restrictive sense as a veiled reference to Catholicism, that is, as a highly structured institution with priestly hierarchies, although such characteristics are clearly part of many religious traditions (including certain movements in organized Daoism). As I use the term, "religion" involves an *interaction* between the human dimension and the sacred dimension(s), often through trans-rational responses.[23] This "definition" suggests that the core of religious traditions centers on "mystical experiences" or "encounters" with that which a given community defines as "sacred" or as "ultimate reality."[24] It centers on a "more." This does not entail that other, non-mystical experiences, such as a feeling of communal belonging, are not equally valid and important. What it does suggest is that, especially emicly speaking, many forms of communal organization fail to *re-member* such connections with the sacred. My claim that

---

[22] For many historians, it is problematic to speak of "Daoism," which in this reading is understood as an organized tradition with a self-conscious collective identity, before the 2nd century C.E. This view centers on Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (fl. 142 C.E.?) and the early Tianshi 天師 (Celestial Masters) movement. This view is misguided for two important reasons. First, it neglects historical precedents (see below); second, one could argue that "Daoism" was not an organized tradition with a self-conscious identity until the early medieval period (see Kobayashi 1995; Kirkland 1997).

[23] This definition is indebted to the work of Rudolf Otto, William James, Mircea Eliade, and Paul Tillich.

[24] What exactly the "sacred dimension" is depends of the Daoist sub-tradition involved. There are also different types of "mystical experiences" in Daoism. For instance, Warring States adepts were directed towards "unification," while early Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) practitioners aimed at joining a celestial bure^icracy. On types of Daoist mysticism see Kohn 1991.

"Daoism" is a "religious tradition" from the very beginning is based on both a close reading of classical Daoist texts, such as the *Daode jing* 道德經 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and a more comprehensive understanding of the tradition as a whole.[25] With regard to the *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power,* this text, which is held up as *the* representative work of "philosophical Daoism," contains references to specific techniques, stage-based training regimens, specific types of experiences, and accounts of successful and venerated models for "realizing the Dao"(*dedao* 得道).

So how did such a historical construction come to dominate and be perpetuated in Western cultural contexts? The "received view" of Daoism originates in Western colonialism and missionary activity, concerning which contemporary New Age appropriative agendas are heirs. It was during the late imperial period (1368-1911) that the first Western missionaries arrived in China, bringing with them a whole set of new cultural influences, sensibilities, and prejudices. One of the

[25] Two additional points should be made. First, the modern Chinese approximation of the Western category "religion" is *zongjiao* 宗教, literally meaning the "teachings of the ancestors." That is, in a Chinese context, "religion" is understood as involving a community that is both corporeal and spiritual. Second, my suggestion that religion involves an interaction between the human dimension and the sacred dimension would, arguably, be recognized and accepted by practicing Daoists. As will become clear, most Daoist movements originated in divine revelations, most notably from gods and immortals. For the moment, it is enough to note the importance of talismans (*fu* 符) in the Daoist tradition. Like a talisman, the Daoist practitioner's practice culminates in a joining of two things that were originally unified but which have become separated over time.

most well-known early missionaries was Matteo Ricci (1551-1610), a representative of the Roman Catholic Jesuit order[26] who was based in Macao in the 1580s. Ricci and his Jesuit brethren were soon followed by various other Catholic orders, specifically the Dominicans in the early years of contact. This eventually led to a conflict concerning the Jesuit practice of adaptation and accommodation. In 1704, the Pope condemned Chinese rituals, and in 1742 a decree was issued that settled all points against the Jesuits. This remained the position of the Catholic Church until 1939. However, emperors such as Shengzu 聖祖（Kangxi 康熙; r. 1662-1722) and Gaozong 高宗（Qianlong 乾隆; r. 1736-1795) promoted the Jesuit position. This led to the proscription of Christianity in 1724. It was not until 1846 at French insistence that the proscription was lifted.[27] The period between 1860 and 1900 saw the gradual spread of missionary stations into every province. One of the central figures in this missionary activity and in the Western "invention" of Daoism was James Legge (1815-1897), a Scottish Congregationalist and representative of the London Missionary Society in Malacca and Hong Kong (1840-1873). Legge was one of the first Westerners to translate Daoist texts beyond the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi.* His translations became highly popular, to the point of becoming canonical (they are still in print through Dover).

---

[26] The Jesuits were and are known especially for their erudition and openness to learning. In addition, their basis in Roman Catholicism makes them more sympathetic to ritualistic expression and institutional hierarchies.

[27] The development of Daoist Studies itself is indebted to colonialism: the earliest researeh occurred in France and Japan.

They were published in Max Müller's *Sacred Books of the East,* published in fifty volumes between 1879 and 1891. Legge's *Texts of Taoism* made up volumes thirty-nine and forty. Legge, like his Victorian and Christian missionary counterparts, viewed and disseminated the *Daode jing* as the "Daoist bible" and Laozi as the "founder" of Daoism. This also involved the distinction between a so-called "philosophical Daoism" and "religious Daoism," with the former being "pure" and "original" Daoism and the latter being a degenerate and superstitious adjunct to the former. There can be little doubt that the "Victorian invention of Daoism," the "Leggian view" of the Daoist tradition, established many of the dominant interpretative lenses for the West's interaction with the tradition. That is, Legge's portrayal of Daoism, influenced by Confucian literati officials, is the "received view" of Daoism, the most widespread construction of Daoism in the West. One might even go so far as to call it the "Sinological prejudice" concerning Daoism, because of the widespread influence of Confucian literati, Victorian translators, and their intellectual progeny.[28]

---

[28] As Girardot explains, "Legge was the single most important figure in contributing to the late Victorian invention of 'Taoism' as a reified entity located 'classically', 'purely, and 'philosophically' within certain ancient texts or 'sacred books'—or, more accurately, within a single enigmatic 'classical' text or Taoist 'bible' known as the *Tao Te Ching* (Book of the Tao and Its Power) attributed to the sage Lao Tzu" (1999, 108). In addition, "Legge's extensive Taoist studies...set much of the underlying tone, textual content and hidden logic for subsequent Western discussions of this tradition within Sinology, the general history of religions and popular culture" (ibid., 109; see also Girardot 2002).

Such are our interpretative legacies. The interpretations are, of course, intimately related to the translations. Concerning the history of the translation of the *Daode jing,* Chinese historiography tells us that a Sanskrit translation was produced in the seventh century and that the Buddhist monk Xuanzang 玄装 (596-664) transported it to India during his pilgrimage (see Pelliot 1912). The earliest known Western translation of the *Daode jing* was a Latin version produced by Jesuit missionaries in China, which a certain Matthew Raper presented to the Royal Asiatic Society in 1788. The stated intention of the translators was to show that "the Mysteries of the Most High Trinity and Incarnate God were anciently known to the Chinese nation" (Legge 1962a [1891], xiii; Hardy 1998, 165).[29] The next earliest translation (French; 1842) was that of Stanislas Julien (d. 1873), a student of Jean-Pierre (J.P.) Abel Rémusat (1788-1832?). The first English version (1868) was produced by John Chalmers (fl. 1860); this was, in turn, followed by those of Frederic Balfour (fl. 1880) (English; 1884) and James Legge (1815-1897) (English; 1891) (see Legge 1962a [1891], xi-xiv; Welch 1957, 4-5; Hardy 1998, especially 165-66; LaFargue and Pas 1998, 299-301).

And so began the Western fascination with the *Daode jing,* one of the most hermeneutically open and interpretatively malleable texts in "world literature." In 1998, Michael LaFargue and Julian Pas

[29] According to Legge (ibid.), the manuscript version was still extant in England when he wrote his preface to *The Texts of Taoism.*

estimated the number of Western translations at 250, pointing towards the oft-stated truism that "the *Daode jing* is the most translated book in the world next to the Bible" (see, e.g., Welch 1957, 4; Mair 1990, xi; Chan 2000, 1). Moreover, the text has become a sort of bible for contemporary New Age discourse communities, in both "translations" and "adaptations" such as the *Tao of Pooh* (1982). With regard to "translations," the situation has deteriorated to the point where one does not need to

know Chinese to produce and publish a "translation." Perhaps the most well-known (and influential) of these cultural productions, which tell us more about Western fantasies than the Daoist tradition, is Stephen Mitchell's translation. Here Mitchell informs the reader, "[T]he most essential preparation for my work was a fourteen-year long course of Zen training, which brought me face to face with Lao-tzu and his true disciples and heirs, the early Chinese Zen Masters....If I haven't always translated Lao-tzu's words, my intention has always been to translate his mind" (Mitchell 1988, x).

When someone reads such "translations" and claims to have an affinity, one must realize that the text at hand is not the *Daode jing*. It is a manipulated and reinterpreted approximation, a source text forced into parameters that meet the most prevalent desires and expectations of a contemporary audience.[30]

[30] For discussions of some of these translations see Julia Hardy's contribution to *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching* (Kohn and LaFargue 1998). Here Hardy suggests that "bad scholarship often makes good religion."

These misconceptions and misinterpretations aside, in the context of Daoist tradition, the figure of Laozi and the *Book of Venerable Masters,* or *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power,* are intimately connected. During the Later Han dynasty (25-221 C.E.), numerous communal and populace-supported forms of religious activity began to become more viable and widespread. It was also during this time that Laozi 老子 became imperially recognized as the deity Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao). Thus, there is the *Laozi ming* 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi), which dates from 165 C.E. and is the earliest textual evidence about the official cult of a deified Laozi. It was also during this time that Laozi as Lord Lao and the text of the *Laozi* became centrally important in the most well-known earliest form of organized Daoism, namely, the Tianshi 天師 (Celestial Masters) movement. According to traditional accounts, in 142 C.E. Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (fl. 140 C.E.?) received a revelation from Lord Lao, the "deified" form of Laozi and personification of the Dao, on Mount Heming 鶴鳴 (Crane Cry).[31] During Lord Lao's revelation, Zhang was appointed as terrestrial representative, the "Celestial Master," and given healing powers as a sign of his empowerment. The movement in turn became patrilineal, passing from Zhang Daoling to his son Zhang Heng 張衡 and then to his son Zhang Lu 張魯（fl. 190 C.E.). In the communal and ritual context of the early Celestial Masters, the text of *Laozi* was so important that Zhang Lu wrote a commentary on it entitled the

[31] In contemporary Longmen 龍門 (Dragon Gate) Daoism, this location is sometimes associated with Qingcheng shan 青城山(Azure Wall Mountain; Sichuan).

Laozi Xiang'er zhu 老子想爾注(Xiang'er Commentary on the *Laozi*; DH 56).[32] Moreover, this commentary and the text itself formed the earliest extant Daoist precepts, also associated with the early Celestial Masters. These are the so-called "Nine Practices" and "Xiang'er Precepts," both of which appear in the sixth-century *Taishang laojun jinglü* 太上老君經律 (Scriptural Statutes of the Great High Lord Lao; DZ 786).

Laozi as "historical personage" occupied a place of prominence during many other moments and in various contexts of Daoist history. Perhaps most importantly was his role in the establishment of Louguan 樓觀 (Lookout Tower Monastery), the first Daoist monastic community, and in the founding mythology of the Tang imperial house. At the end of the Northern Wei dynasty (386-534), members of the Northern Celestial Masters congregated in a newly established center in the Zhongnan mountains (near present-day Xi'an). This was Louguan 樓觀 (Lookout Tower Monastery; called Louguan tai 樓觀臺 today), which was founded by Yin Tong 尹通（398-499?) and became the first Daoist monastery.[33] Yin Tong claimed descent from Yin Xi 尹喜, the "guardian of the pass" who legend tells us received the *Daode jing* from Laozi as he left China for his western travels. Louguan eventually grew significantly and rose to prominence under the leadership of Wang Daoyi 王道一

[32] The *Xiang'er* commentary has been translated by Stephen Bokenkamp in his *Early Daoist Scriptures* (1997).

[33] See Livia Kohn's *Monastic Life in Medieval Daoism* (2003).

(447-510). A number of visions of Lord Lao appeared there, which also helped to solidify the temple's place of importance in the geo-political landscape. Some representative works from Louguan include the *Laojun jiejing* 老君戒經 (Precept Scripture of Lord Lao; DZ 784), *Xishengjing* 西昇經 (Scripture on Western Ascension; DZ 666; DZ 726), and *Chuanshou jingjie* 傳授經戒 (Transmission of Scriptures and Precepts; DZ 1241). Louguan Daoists also compiled encyclopedias, including the important *Wushang biyao* 無上秘要 (Esoteric Essentials of the Most High; DZ 1138).

During the Tang dynasty (618-907), many Tang emperors and their courts showed imperial favor for the Daoist tradition. As noted above, Lord Lao as the deified Laozi became central to the Chinese state as early as the Han dynasty. Similarly, the patterns of millenarian prophecy were also well established. During the beginning of the Tang, the rulers embraced a prophecy centering on a figure with the surname Li 李 (Li Hong 李洪) as the future Lord of Great Peace. Interestingly, Li was the surname of both Laozi (Li Er 李耳) and the founders of the Tang dynasty. Thus, the Tang rulers became linked with both Laozi, the preeminent figure in the Daoist tradition and now the Tang's own original ancestor, and the vision of a Daoist utopia. Numerous miracles centering on divine appearances of Lord Lao occurred. One such vision took place at Bozhou 亳州, Laozi's supposed birthplace, where Lord Lao caused a withered cypress tree to bloom again. Miraculous material signs were also discovered

throughout China and at various Daoist sacred sites; these included inscribed stones, divine statues, and images on walls and cliffs. Such discoveries, of course, helped to ensure continued imperial patronage for places such as Louguan. Tang emperors gave extensive privileges to the Daoists, offered lavish gifts to temples and monasteries, established a Daoist track in the imperial bureaucracy, sponsored Daoist collection efforts, honored Lord Lao with the title Xuanyuan huangdi 玄元皇帝 (Sovereign Thearch of Mysterious Origin), and aided the success of the tradition in general. Especially under Xuanzong 玄宗 (r. 713-755), Daoism flourished and membership grew extensively. A number of imperial princesses were given Daoist initiation in elaborate ceremonies (see, especially, Benn 1991). Monasteries *(guan* 觀), first established in the seventh century, were staffed by Daoist priests and priestesses (*daoshi* 道士), who performed *jiao* 醮 ("offering") and *zhai* 齋 ("purification") rituals for integrating society and cosmos. The Tang dynasty also established a system of official control, including a state-controlled ordination system and legal codes governing religious behavior. It was in this context that the *Laozi* (Book of Venerable Masters) was formally elevated to the status of a *jing* 經("classic" or "scripture"), that is, the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power). In addition, the *Daode jing* became required reading for the imperial examinations.

Laozi, as both historical figure and as Lord Lao, continues to hold a place of veneration in the contemporary Daoist tradition. Among other things, he is part of the Sanqing 三清 (Three Purities; Three Pure Ones), being represented as Daode tianzun 道德天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Dao and Inner Power). The Three Purities most often occupy the central altar in contemporary Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) temples and monasteries.

With regard to the *Book of Venerable Masters,* numerous commentaries have been written. According to one count, over 700 commentaries have been composed, of which 350 are extant (W.T. Chan 1963, 77). A more modest estimate, based on Isabelle Robinet's research (1977; 1998; 1999), is approximately one hundred as contained in whole or in part in the Ming-dynasty (1368-1644) Daoist Canon. This, of course, does not include commentaries composed from the sixteenth century forward.[34] Nonetheless, there can be little debate that the text has inspired much interest and diverse interpretation. This points not only to its central importance in the Daoist tradition in particular and Chinese culture more generally, but also to its hermeneutical openness and interpretative malleability. The *Book of Venerable Masters* has received a diversity of readings depending on changing socio-historical contexts and religious concerns. The earliest extant commentary is found in the *Hanfeizi* 韓

34 It is impossible to estimate the total number of extant commentaries, but they continue to be composed throughout the world. With regard to American Daoism, Liu Ming, head priest of Orthodox Daoism in America, is currently working on one.

非子(Book of Master Hanfei; DZ 1177), a Legalist (*fajia* 法家) text dating from the third century B.C.E. The commentary is found in chapter 20, entitled *Jie Lao* 解老 (Explaining the *Laozi),* and chapter 21, entitled Yu Lao 喻老 (Illustrating the ***Laozi***).[35]

In addition to the *Hanfeizi,* four early Daoist commentaries on the text are still extant. The earliest surviving Daoist commentary in the Daoist Canon is that of Yan Zun 嚴遵 (Junping 君平; fl. 83 B.C.E.-10 C.E.), originally named Zhuang Zun 莊遵. Yan Zun was a formula master (*fangshi* 方士) who spent his days in the markets of present-day Chengdu engaging in divinization and prognostication and his nights teaching cultured elite the intricacies of the Chinese literati tradition. For instance, he taught Yang Xiong 揚雄 (53 B.C.E.-18 C.E.), a famous Han poet and philosopher. He in turn wrote the *Laozi zhigui* 老子指歸 (Essential Meaning of the *Laozi*; a.k.a. *Daode zhenjing zhigui* 道德真經指歸; DZ 693), which reads the *Daode jing* from the perspective of a magico-religious practitioner. Only chapters 38-81 are extant. Unfortunately, very little work has been done on this text. We also have the above-mentioned Celestial Masters' commentary, namely, the *Laozi Xiang'er zhu* 老子想爾注 (Xiang'er Commentary on the *Laozi*; DH 56). Accepting an earlier date of composition, the text is associated with the early Tianshi 天師 (Celestial Masters) movement and is sometimes attributed to Zhang Lu 張魯, the third Celestial Master. It thus interprets the *Laozi*

[35] A translation of these chapters may be found in Sarkissian 2001.

in terms of Celestial Masters, concerns. It is also associated with the so-called "Xiang'er Precepts," a set of twenty-seven conduct guidelines. Only chapters 3-37 are extant. Next, there is the commentary by Heshang gong 河上公 (Master Dwelling-by-the-River; fl. 160 B.C.E.?); this is the *Laozi zhangju* 老子章句 (Commentary by Chapter and Verse on the *Laozi;* a.k.a. *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經註 [Commentary on the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power]; DZ 682). This commentary is one of the most influential Daoist commentaries; here Heshang gong reads the *Daode jing* as a manual on longevity (*yangsheng* 養生) techniques, including its references to the "country" as relating to internal corporeal realities.[36] The commentary also contains titles to the various chapters of the *Book of Venerable Masters.* Finally, we have the *Daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經註 (Commentary on the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power; DZ 690) by Wang Bi 王弼（226-249），a member of the Xuanxue 玄學 (Profound Learning) hermeneutical tradition, which is sometimes incorrectly identified as "Neo-Daoism" in earlier Western scholarship. Here Wang Bi emphasizes cosmological aspects of the *Daode jing,* especially a distinction between "being" *(you* 有）and "non-being" (*wu* 無）and the concept of emptiness (*kong* 空/*xu* 虛）. This commentary has exerted a profound influence on Western

---

36 For a translation of the *Heshang gong* commentary see Erkes 1958. Alan K.L. Chan (1991) has published a comparative study of the Heshang gong and Wang Bi commentaries.

understandings of the text, so much so that it is the only commentary to have been translated into English more than once.[37]

In terms of later commentaries, Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850-933), ritual master and famous court Daoist, stands out. Du Guangting had a profound interest in the *Daode jing* and its commentarial tradition. He reviewed and collated more than sixty previous commentaries, dividing them into five groups. In the process, Du became the leading codifier of the Chongxuan 重玄 (Twofold Mystery) hermeneutical school. Drawing inspiration from the Buddhist Mādhyamika or Sanlun 三論 (Three Treatises) school, Twofold Mystery emphasized the realization of an ontological condition where neither being nor non-being exists. This is the state of "oneness," and Twofold Mystery adherents such as Du Guangting equated this with realization of the Dao. This is evident in the name "Twofold Mystery," which is a reference to chapter one of the *Daode jing:* "Mysterious and again more mysterious/The gateway to all that is wondrous" *(xuan zhi you xuan zhongmiao zhi men* 玄之又玄眾妙之門). Du's commentary is found in his *Daode zhenjing guangshengyi* 道德真經廣聖義 (Expansive and Sagely Meaning of the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power; DZ 725).

The Ming-dynasty Daoist Canon also contains internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) commentaries. A representative example of

[37] For translations see Lin 1977; Rump and Chan 1979; Lynn 1999; Wagner 2003.

this interpretative approach is by Bai Yuchan's 白玉蟾(1194-ca. 1227), one of the principal members of the so-called Nanzong 南宗 (Southern Lineage) of internal alchemy and practitioner of thunder magic (*leifa* 雷法). Bai's commentary appears in the *Daode zhenjing jiyi* 道德真經集義 (Collected Interpretations of the Perfect Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power; DZ 724).[38] The *Book of Venerable Masters* was also centrally important in early Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism. In particular, the practitioners of early Complete Perfection emphasized its importance as a guide for Daoist training. Wang Zhe 王嚞 (Chongyang 重陽 [Redoubled Yang]; 1113-1170), the founder of Complete Perfection, frequently cites the *Book of Venerable Masters*. For example, in the *Chongyang quanzhen ji* 重陽全真集 (Chongyang's Anthology of Complete Perfection; DZ 1153), Wang explains, "[To practice spiritual refinement] you must fully understand the three hundred characters of the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman) and read up on the five thousand words of the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power)" (13.7b-8a). Moreover, traditional accounts mention that Liu Chuxuan劉處玄 (Changsheng 長生 [Perpetual Life]; 1147-1203), one of the so-called Seven Perfected

[38] Bai Yuchan's commentary, as it appears in *Taishang daode baozhang yi* 太上道德寶章翼 (Aide to the Great High Precious Chapters on the Dao and Inner Power; JY 64/JH-84), has been translated into Italian by Alfredo Cadonna (2001).

(*qizhen* 七真), also wrote a commentary on the text. This commentary has not survived.[39]

During my fieldwork on contemporary Daoist monasticism (2005-2006), I found that Quanzhen monks often knew the *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power* by heart and would cite it at will. It formed part of the daily fabric of life for many monastics. In this respect, it is noteworthy that Ren Farong 任法融(b. 1936), current President of the Chinese Daoist Association (Zhongguo daojiao xiehui 中國道教協會; Beijing), has written a commentary on the text entitled the *Daode jing shiyi* 道德經釋義 (Explaining the Meaning of the *Daode jing).* In addition, the text has been inscribed at a variety of Daoist sacred sites, including the Kunyu 崑蝓 mountains in eastern Shandong, Shangqing gong 上清宮 (Palace of Highest Clarity) on Qingcheng shan 青城山 (Azure Wall Mountain; Sichuan), and Yuquan yuan 玉泉院 (Temple of the Jade Spring) at Huashan 華山 (Mount Hua; Shaanxi),

In the Daoist tradition, the *Book of Venerable Masters,* or *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power,* is read *as a scripture* and often as a manual of self-cultivation. In terms of the text as "scripture" (*jing* 經), it is understood to be "sacred" or an emanation of the Dao. The character for "scripture" contains two elements: the *si* 絲 ("silk")

[39] For guidance concerning Daoist commentaries see Robinet 1977; 1998; 1999. A selection of various commentaries may be found in Red Pine's (Bill Porter) idiosyncratic translation entitled *Lao-tzu 's Tao-te-ching* (2001 [1997]).

radical on the left, and the *jing* 巠 ("well") phonetic on the right. A further etymological reading of this character might suggest that the *jing* phonetic is also a meaning-carrier. Under this reading, "scriptures" are threads and watercourses that form and re-form networks of connection. They connect the Daoist practitioner to both the unnamable mystery which is the Dao and the Daoist tradition, the community of adepts that preceded one, as a historical continuum. This understanding of the *Book of Venerable Masters* has been maintained throughout Daoist history, specifically in a ritual context where it is chanted.[40]

The *Book of Venerable Masters* is also read as a guide to self-cultivation. While some would identify this as a later "religious manipulation," a close reading of the text reveals that such concerns and orientations are clearly present in the text itself. Throughout the chapters of the *Book of Venerable Masters*' one finds practice principles, specific cultivation methods, proposed benefits, goals and aspirations, descriptions of mystical absorption, as well as representatives and models of successful training. Regarding specific cultivation methods, the most explicit example is probably chapter ten. Here we find the following:

---

40 In contemporary Complete Perfection communities, the text is recited ritually. Recitation of the *Book of Venerable Masters* began as early as the Latter Han dynasty (25-221 C.E.) and was well established by the Tang dynasty (618-907) (see Kohn 1998).

Carrying the ethereal and corporeal souls,[41]
Embracing the One,
Can you be without separation?
Concentrating the qi and attaining softness,
Can you be like a newborn child?
Cleansing and purifying mysterious perception,
Can you be without flaws?
Loving the people and governing the country,
Can you abide in non-knowing?
Opening and closing the Celestial Gates,
Can you become like a female?
Illuminating and purifying the four directions,
Can you abide in non-action?

---

[41] I have taken the character ying 營 (lit., "to manage") here as a variant for *hun* 魂 ("ethereal soul"). In this decision, I am following Eduard Erkes. Erkes follows the *Heshang gong* 河上公 (Master Dwelling-by-the-River) commentary by taking the term *ying* as the functional equivalent of *hun;* he suggests it is a variant of *ling* 靈 ("numen") in Chu dialect (1950, 141-42; Roth 1999b, 95, n. 69). In the context of a classical Chinese worldview, the human being was understood to consist of two "souls," the ethereal or cloud soul (*hun* 魂) and the corporeal or white soul (*po* 魄). The former was yang in nature and associated with the heavens and spirit, while the latter was yin in nature and associated with the earth and the body/bones. That is, an eternal soul was not an ontological given. At death, the *hun* ascended and eventually dissipated into the heavens, while the *po* descended and eventually decomposed into the earth. Thus, early Daoist views of death involved a "disintegration" model, wherein the human being was understood to disappear into (merge with) the cosmos at death.

This passage is clearly alluding to a specific set of techniques (*shu* 術), meditation methods (*fa* 法) intended to purify and regulate, and ultimately to lead to (reunification (*yi* 一) and mystical perception (*xuanlan* 玄覽). This chapter is by no means unique or atypical. Numerous examples could be offered, but one more will suffice.

> Attaining emptiness completely and guarding stillness sincerely,
> The ten thousand beings arise together; I simply observe their return.
> Each being comes to flourish, then returns to the Source.
> Returning to the Source is called stillness;
> Stillness is called returning to life-destiny.
> Returning to life-destiny is called constancy;
> Knowing constancy is called illumination.
> (ch. 16)

The texts of classical Daoism in general and the *Book of Venerable Masters* in particular emphasize such mystical praxis and realization. However, there is more to these works than some vague concept of "mystical identification" or "sacred absorption." In addition to advocating and prescribing a religious way of life, such as lessening desires and purifying consciousness, the *Book of Venerable Masters* contains references to specific rituals that are most often glossed over and/or purged from the text in translation. For example, in chapter

twenty there is a reference to the Tailao 太牢 (Great Sacrifice) ritual.

> Most people are busy as though attending the Tailao feast,
> As though ascending a tower in spring.
> I alone am unmoving, showing no sign,
> (see also ZZ chs. 18 & 19)

The Tailao ritual was one of the most elaborate ancient sacrifices, wherein three kinds of animals were killed as ritual offerings. The animals included an ox, sheep, and pig. We also find the following in chapter five:

> The heavens and earth are not humane;
> They regard the ten thousand beings as straw dogs.
> The sage is not humane;
> He regards the people as straw dogs.
> Between the heavens and earth, it is like a bellows.

This passage may be interpreted in a variety of ways, but one viable reading would suggest that it conceives of the cosmos as an unending ritual sequence. In ancient China, "straw dogs" (*chugou* 舞狗) were used as effigies, as ritual offerings. During the sacrificial ceremony, they were burned and through this process absorbed by the divine. Arguably, the above passage is envisioning a world and universe

where each being has a particular place in the perpetual sacrifice which is life. No one can know the "fate" (*ming* 命) of each being in that ritual process.[42] This is not to say that the *Book of Venerable Masters* is a ritual text, or that it is even advocating a ritualistic approach to cultivation. Rather, it suggests that many of its concerns emerged *within a religious context,* and that its proposed way of life incorporated and modified such influences.

The *Book of Venerable Masters* also contains some technical terminology that deserves mention. As the more common title of the text, *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power), indicates, two of the most important "concepts" are *dao* 道 and *de* 德. In the present translation, *dao* 道 has been left untranslated and placed in upper-case letters as "Dao." When rendered into English, *dao* is most commonly translated as "way" and/or "Way." In a Daoist context, *dao* refers to both the unnamable mystery underlying and pervading all existence and one's overall way of life. By extension, it relates to the practices and religious path that one follows. It is easy for the reader of the *Book of Venerable Masters* to become attached to "Dao" as the name of some "ultimate reality." However, various passages emphasize that that to which "Dao" refers is "nameless"

---

42 Similarly, chapter twenty-nine gives the following description: "The world is a sacred vessel (*shengqi* 聖器); the world cannot be acted upon." And in chapter seventy-eight we encounter the following: "To accept the soil of the country is to become the master of the earth-shrine (*sheji* 社稷). To accept the inauspicious omens (*xiang* 祥) of the country is to become the ruler of the world."

(*wuming* 無名)and "mysterious" (*xuan* 玄). When speaking about the Dao, and the Daoist adept by extension, the text employs a whole vocabulary of negation and obscurity: "wondrous" (*miao* 妙), "subtle" (*wei* 微), "chaotic" (*hun* 混), "obscure" (*mei* 昧), "vague" (*huang* 恍), and "indistinct" (*hu* 惚). The Dao also receives other cognate designations: "source"(*yuan* 原), "root" (*gen* 根), "mother" (*mu* 母), "beginning" (*shi* 始), and "ancestor" (*zong* 宗). The inability to adequately express "what" or "how" the Dao is (if it is at all) becomes clear in such passages as the following from chapter twenty-five: "I do not know its name, and so I call it 'Dao.'[43] Forced to name it, I call it "great.'" Echoing this passage, the eighth-century *Qingjing jing* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) has the following: "The great Dao is without name. It raises and nourishes the ten thousand beings. I do not know its name; forced to name it, I call it 'Dao'" (1a). Because humans communicate primarily through language, and because one wishes to verbally express one's experience, one uses names (*ming* 名). However, in the context of classical Daoism, the name that expresses the subtle presence/absence at the center of Daoist practice is only a vague approximation. As chapter one of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuang) explains, "Names are the guest of reality" (*ming zhe shi zhi bin ye* 名者實之賓也). *Dao* itself is a contingent, perhaps

[43] Interestingly, the text contains the character *ming* 名 in the first instance and *zi* 字 in the second. In terms of Chinese naming practice and in the present context, this suggests that the speaker does not know the name of the Dao when it came into being (*ming*), and so can only provide a relational name (*zi*).

semi-arbitrary, signifier; it is fundamentally inadequate. Here one may also note the emphasis on negation (wu 無) in the text, which has close parallels with "apophatic mysticism" or "negative theology" more generally.[44] The Dao is "not this," "not that." Any attribution or description is contingent at best, and misleading at worst. Thus, the text emphasizes abiding in a place of "non-knowing" (*wuzhi* 無知), "non-action" (*wuwei* 無爲), and "suchness" (*ziran* 自然). Interestingly, the *Book of Venerable Masters* may also be understood in terms of sensory perception: the text is "aural centric," not "ocular centric." Emphasis is placed on "hearing" (*wen* 聞) and "listening" (*ting* 聽), versus "seeing" (*jian* 見) and "visual perceiving" (*shi* 視). The sage (*shengren* 聖人), or the advanced Daoist adept, is the "receptive one," a human being who listens attentively. Such attentiveness is more sensitive to the subtle and hidden aspects of existence.[45]

---

[44] For a detailed discussion of "apophatic mysticism" in the *Book of Venerable Masters* see Harold Roth's contribution to *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (Csikszentmihalyi and Ivanhoe 1999). For an opposing view see Csikszentmihalyi's article in that same publication.

[45] The character *sheng* 聖 ("sacred") contains the radicals for "ear" (*er* 耳) and "mouth" (*kou* 口). With reference to this character, Izutsu has commented, "[The] term designates a man, endowed with an unusually keen ear, who is capable of hearing the voice of a super-natural being, god or spirit, and understands directly the will or intention of the latter" (1984, 301), The sage is the "receptive one," the one who listens to the sonorous patterns of the cosmos and its varied subtle layers. This capacity for listening also leads to an additional ability: one's speaking expresses such a divine connection and such expression then resonates with others.

Closely related to the Dao as unnamable mystery and all-pervading ontological ground is *de* 德. In the present translation, *de* has been rendered as "inner power." Other translations have been proposed and employed, including "virtue" and "potentiality."[46] *De* is the inherent connection (*tong* 通) that one has with the Dao; it is the "nature" (*xing* 性) or "life-destiny" (*ming* 命) that has been endowed by the Dao. By extension, *de* is the overall manifestation of the Dao in and as one's life. The more that one maintains such a connection and actualizes such potential, the more one comes to *embody* the Dao as being-in-the-world. Thus, the *Book of Venerable Masters* emphasizes "alignment" (*zheng* 正), "accordance" (*cong* 從), "simplicity" *(pu* 樸), and "suchness" or "being-so-of-itself, (*ziran* 自然). Inner power is both what one is from the beginning and what one becomes through this being.

These various terms, and the ontological conditions to which they refer, are interrelated. The *Book of Venerable Masters* advocates a way of life based on "decreasing" (*shao* 少) and "lessening" (*gua* 寡)." Appear plain (*jiansu* 見素) and embrace simplicity (*baopu* 抱

[46] "Virtue" is the most frequent translation of *de.* The *Oxford English Dictionary* identifies three primary meanings: (1) The power or operative influence inherent in a supernatural or divine being, and/or an embodiment of such power; (2) Conformity of life and conduct with principles of morality; and (3) Moral excellence; a special manifestation of the influence of moral principles in life or conduct. Taken in these various layers of meaning, "virtue" closely approximates the Chinese *de.* However, in its more common usage, "virtue" connotes "ethical" or "moral" behavior. This has the potential to cause serious misunderstandings, as the *Book of Venerable Masters* is clearly critiquing conventional (Ruist) morality.

樸); decrease personal interest (*shaosi* 少私) and lessen desires (*guayu* 寡欲)" (ch. 19; also ch. 37). The heart-mind (*xin* 心) and one's innate nature (*xing* 性) become obscured by desire (*yu* 欲), knowing (*zhi* 知), contending (*zheng* 爭), selfishness (*si* 私), and excess (*tai* 泰). "Thus we may consider the sage's approach to governing (*zhi* 治)--Empty the heart-mind (*xu qi xin* 虛其心) and fill the belly (*shi qifu* 實其腹). Weaken the will (*mo qi zhi* 弱其志) and strengthen the bones (*qiang qi gu* 強其骨)" (ch. 3; also ch. 12). On the most basic level, this passage emphasizes living closer to necessity and sustenance. However, from a Daoist perspective, "governing the country" (*zhiguo* 治國) also relates to "governing (or healing) the body-self" (*zhishen* 治身). To empty the heart-mind is to decrease excessive intellectual and emotional activity; to fill the belly, *fu* 腹 also refers to the lower abdominal region, is to increase the qi stored in the body's center.

Perhaps the most central term relating to the "quietistic approach" advocated in the text is *wuwei* 無爲, which literally means "without acting." Here technically rendered as "non-action" *wuwei* involves a way of being that avoids contrived, artificial, or fabricated behavior. The more technical translation of *wuwei* as "non-action" encompasses this notion of effortless activity. In some sense, "acting through non-action" (*wei wuwei* 爲無爲; ch. 3) presupposes a process of purification (*jing* 淨), return (*gui* 歸), and reversal (*fan* 反). By purifying the heart-mind of intellectual and emotional turmoil, one

returns to being through one's innate nature *(xing* 性), the heart-mind with which one was born. How is this condition realized?

Block the passages (*se qi dui* 塞其兑);
Close the doorways (*bi qi men* 閉其門);
Blunt the sharpness (*cuo qi rui* 挫其銳);
Loosen the tangles (*jie qifen* 解其紛);
Harmonize the brightness (*he qi guang* 和其光);
Unite with the dust (*tong qi chen* 同其塵).
(ch. 56; also ch. 4)

One "decreases and again decreases" (*sun zhi you sun* 損之又損; ch. 48)[47] and comes to attain "constant contentment" (*changzu* 常足; ch. 46). One must become less to become more. This involves practicing "emptiness" (*chong* 冲/*xu* 虛) and connecting with "nonbeing" (*wu* 無). "Who can be turbid (*zhuo* 濁) so that it may become suspended? Practice stillness (*jing* 靜) until it gradually becomes clear (*qing* 清)" (ch. 15; also 37 & 45). And, "Returning to the Source (*guigen* 歸根) is called stillness (*jing* 靜); this means returning to life-destiny (*guiming* 歸命). Returning to life-destiny is called constancy (*chang* 常); knowing constancy is called illumination (*ming* 明)" (ch. 16;

[47] It is no accident that this phrase directly parallels one found in chapter one: "mysterious and again more mysterious" (*xuan zhi you xuan* 玄之又玄). The implication is that the practice of twofold decreasing leads to an experience of the twofold mystery which is the Dao. The latter phrase also became the name of a major Daoist hermeneutical school known as Chongxuan 重玄 (Twofold Mystery).

also ch. 52).[48] The *Book of Venerable Masters* refers to the realization of such an ontological condition, one's original connection with the Dao, as "simplicity" (*pu* 樸) and "suchness" or "being-so-of-itself" (*ziran* 自然). *Pu,* poetically rendered as "uncarved block," indicates a condition where one's original nature has not been disrupted or altered. It suggests the condition of a tree as tree, in contrast to a tree as "lumber" or "vessel."[49] *Ziran,* sometimes translated as "nature/natural" or "spontaneity," literally means "self-so." Through decreasing and doing less, one returns to one's innate nature, to being-so-as-oneself.

A person who follows such practice principles is an "adept" (*shi* 士). Conventionally rendered as "knight," "scholar," or "scholar-idealist," in certain chapters of the *Book of Venerable Masters* this phrase appears to refer to members of Daoist inner cultivation lineages, to someone involved in Daoist mystical praxis. This usage seems to anticipate the later term referring to a "Daoist priest" (*daoshi* 道士), literally, "adept of the Dao." "Considering those in primeval times skilled at being adepts (*shi* 士), they were subtle (*wei* 微), wondrous (*miao* 妙), mysterious (*xuan* 玄), and connected (*tong* 通)" (ch.

[48] These chapters on "clarity" (*qing* 清) and "stillness" (*jing* 靜) exerted a major influence on the development of "Clarity-and-Stillness literature" during the Tang dynasty (618-907). The most well-known and influential text is the *Qingjingjing* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620).

[49] This term was adopted by Ge Hong 葛洪(287-347) as part of his Daoist name, Baopuzi 抱樸子 (Master Embracing Simplicity), which is a direct reference to chapter ten of the *Book of Venerable Masters.*

15). And, "When the highest adepts (*shangshi* 上士) hear about the Dao, they are diligent in their practice (*xing* 行) of it. When the middle adepts (*zhongshi* 中士) hear about the Dao, they wonder whether or not it exists. When the lowest adepts (*xiashi* 下士) hear about the Dao, they laugh loudly and mock it. If they did not laugh, it would not be the Dao" (ch. 41). The more advanced practitioner, the *shangshi* 上士 ("highest adept"), is, in turn, described in a variety of ways in the *Book of Venerable Masters*. Such a Daoist practitioner is adept *(v.)(shan* 善), conventionally rendered as "good" or "good at."

> In dwelling, be adept at groundedness.
> In cultivating the heart-mind, be adept at deepness.
> In giving, be adept at humaneness.
> In speaking, be adept at sincerity.
> In rectifying, be adept at regulation.
> In doing, be adept in abilities.
> In moving, be adept at timeliness.
> (ch. 8; also 15)

Throughout the *Book of Venerable Masters,* we also find references to the "heavens" (*tian* 天), "earth" (*di* 地), and "human beings" (*ren* 人). In the later tradition, these interrelated "concepts" are called the

"Three Powers" (*sancai* 三才).[50] I have translated *tian* as "heavens" rather than "heaven" for two primary reasons. First, the plural form enables one to avoid possible confusion of this term with the Christian "Heaven." Second, *tian* literally refers to the sky. In this sense, it relates to natural and cosmological cycles, occurrences, and realms. Later, these heavens become seen as subtle realms with divine inhabitants. That is, the cosmos is multi-tiered and multi-layered. In this respect, we also find reference to Di 帝, the "Thearch" (ch. 4).[51] The earth is literally the ground or soil upon which one stands; it is the terrestrial context of one's being. When speaking about the earth as "world," that is, as including human culture and the "ten thousand beings'' (*wanwu* 萬物), classical Daoism uses the phrase *tianxia* 天下, which literally means "under the heavens." With regard to the "ten thousand beings," this phrase, usually translated as "myriad things," refers to every being and thing in existence, with *wan* 萬

[50] In the Daoist tradition, the *locus classicus* for the Three Powers is the *Yinjujing* 陰符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman; DZ 31): "Heaven and earth steal from the ten thousand beings;/The ten thousand beings steal from humanity;/Humanity steals from the ten thousand beings./When the Three Bandits are correctly ordered,/The Three Powers are then at peace" (1b).

[51] In its earliest usage Di 帝, conventionally rendered as "emperor," refers to Shangdi 上帝(Supreme Thearch), the high god and supreme ancestor of the Shang dynasty (ca. 1550-ca. 1030 B.C.E.). During the Zhou dynasty (ca. 1030-222 B.C.E.), when the *Book of Venerable Masters* was composed, the conception of Di as a personal being was becoming replaced by *tian* 天 ("the heavens") as an impersonal cosmological and naturalistic process. A thearch (thē/ark) is a divine ruler. Like theopany (divine manifestation) and theology (study of divinity), thearch is derived from the Greek *théos,* meaning "god" and relating to divinity more generally. I have translated Di as "Thearch" to indicate the divine connotation of the term; "cosmocrat" might be a more liberal equivalent.

(lit., "ten thousand") being the classical Chinese way of saying "all" or "every."[52] I have rendered *wanwu* as "ten thousand beings" in order to suggest that there are lives involved. The translation of *wanwu* as "ten thousand beings," and not as "myriad things," attempts to counteract the all too pervasive tendency to objectify lives. *Wu* often refers to "things" (i.e., inanimate objects) but often also to other (non-human) beings. The notion of "inanimate objects" also becomes problematic in a worldview based on a spectrum of qi 氣. "The qi is empty and waits on all beings" (*qi ye zhe xu er dai wu zhe ye* 氣也者虛而待物者也; ZZ ch. 4). And, "The ten thousand beings carry yin and embrace yang. It is the empty qi (*chongqi* 沖氣) that harmonizes these" (DDJ ch. 42).

Finally, the *Book of Venerable Masters* also employs a wide variety of technical terms relating to meditational practice and mystical realization (*dedao* 得道). These include the following: "guarding the Center" (*shouzhong* 守中; ch. 5); "embracing the One" (*baoyi* 抱一; ch. 10); "guarding stillness" (*shoujing* 守靜; ch. 16); "embracing simplicity" (*baopu* 抱樸; ch. 19); "guarding the black" (*shouhei* 守黑; ch. 28); and "mysterious sameness" (*xuantong* 玄同; ch. 56).

The present handbook is an anthology of select chapters. I have selected those chapters which, from my perspective, are most relevant

[52] This gives one pause at the extent to which the "scale of being" has been altered by industrialization and modernization. In contemporary usage, "billion" or "trillion" expresses the unlimited number that was once expressed by "ten thousand."

to self-cultivation. This does not mean that there is no need to familiarize oneself with the other chapters. With the proliferation of translations, the interested reader can easily find numerous complete versions.

As mentioned, the *Laozi,* or *Daode jing,* has been translated too many times to document. These various cultural productions are discussed in the contributions of Julia Hardy and of Michael LaFargue and Julian Pas to *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching* (Kohn and LaFargue 1998). A philologically sound and bilingual translation is that by D.C. Lau. The most recent edition of this seminal and influential translation, published by the Chinese University Press of Hong Kong (1989), also contains Lau's rendering of the Mawangdui manuscripts. The Mawangdui manuscripts have also been translated by Henricks (1989), who, in addition, has published a translation of the "Guodian Laozi" (2000). The most systematic and convincing attempt at historically contextualizing the text and applying such insights to its translation is Michael LaFargue's *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching* (1992). A concise and helpful overview of scholarship on the text is Alan K. L. Chan's contribution to the *Daoism Handbook* (2000). Also recommended are the more recent articles on Laozi and the *Daode jing* collected in *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching* (Kohn and LaFargue 1998) and *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi* (Csikszentmihalyi and Ivanhoe 1999). Especially important for understanding the classical period of Daoism in general and the

Daode jing in particular are Harold Roth's various publications. For Laozi as Lord Lao and his place in the Daoist tradition, one may consult Livia Kohn's *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth* (1998).

Bibliography

Allan, Sarah, and Crispin Williams, eds. 2000. *The Guodian Laozi:* Proceedings *of the International Conference' Dartmouth College, May 1998.* Berkeley: The Society for the Study of Early China.

Baxter, William H. 1998. "Situating the Language of the *Lao-tzu:* The Probably Date of the *Tao-te-ching."* In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue ، 231-53. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Benn, Charles D. 1991. *The Cavern-Mystery Transmission: A Taoist Ordination Rite of A.D. 711.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Bokenkamp, Stephen. 1993. "Traces of Early Celestial Master Physiological Practice in the *Xiang'er* Commentary." *Taoist Resources* 4.2: 37-52.

. 1997. *Early Daoist Scriptures,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Boltz, William G. : 1982. "The Religious and Philosophical Significance of the 'Hsiang erh' *Lao Tzu* in the Light of the Ma-wang-tui Manuscripts." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 45.1: 95-117.

. 1993. *"Lao tzu Tao te ching"* In *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide,* edited by Michael Loewe, 269-92, Berkeley: University of California Press.

Cadonna, Alfredo. 2001. *"Quali parole VI aspettate che aggiunga?" II commentario al Daodejing di Bai Yuchan, maestro taoista del XIII secolo.* Orientalia Venetiana no. 9. Venice: Fondazione Giorgio Cini.

Chan, Alan K.L. 1991a. “The Formation of the Heshang gong Legend.” In *Sages and Filial Sons: Mythology and Archaeology in Ancient China,* edited by Julia Ching and R. Guisso, 101-34. Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

. 1991b. *Two Visions of the Way: A Study of the Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung Commentaries on the Lao-tzu.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 1998. “The Essential Meaning of the Way and Virtue: Yan Zun and *‘Laozi* Learning' in Early Han China.” *Monumenta Serica* 46: 105-27.

. 2000. “The *Daode jing* and Its Tradition.” In *Daoism Handbook,* edited by Livia Kohn, 1-29. Leiden: Brill.

Chan, Wing-tsit. 1963. *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy.* Princeton: Princeton University Press.

Chen, Ellen M. 1973. “Is There a Doctrine of Physical Immortality in the *Tao Te Ching? History of Religions* 12: 231-49.

Clarke, J.J. 2000. *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought.* London and New York: Routledge.

Creel, Herlee, 1956. “What Is Taoism?” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 76: 139-52. Reprinted in *What Is Taoism? and Other Essays in Chinese Cultural Studies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970).

Csikszentmihalyi, Mark, and Philip J. Ivanhoe, eds. 1999. *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Erkes, Eduard. 1958. *Ho-shang-kung 's Commentary on Lao-tse,* Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae.

Fung Yu-lan. 1937/1952. *A History of Chinese Philosophy.* Translated by Derk Bodde. 2 vols. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press.

Girardot, Norman. 1999. '"Fiding the Way': James Legge and the Victorian Invention of Taoism." *Religion* 29.2: 107-21.

. 2002. *The Victorian Translation of China: James Legge's Oriental Pilgrimage,* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Girardot, Norman, James Miller, and Liu Xiaogan, eds. 2001. *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape,* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Center for the Study of World Religions.

Graham, A.C. 1998 (1986). "The Origins of the Legend of Lao Tan." In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue, 23-40. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Guojia wenwu ju gu wenxian yanjiu shi 國家文物局文獻研究, ed. 1974-1980. *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu* 王堆漢墓帛書 (Silk Manuscripts from the Han Tombs at Mawangdui). 8 vols. Beijing: Wenwu.

. 1976. *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu:*Laozi 馬王堆漢墓帛書老子(Silk Manuscripts from the Han Tombs at Mawangdui: *Laozi).* Beijing: Wenwu.

Hardy, Julia M. 1998. “Influential Western Interpretations of the *Tao-te-ching.”* In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue, 165-88. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Henricks, Robert G. 1989. *Lao-tzu Te-Tao Ching: A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts.* New York: Ballantine.

. 2000. *Lao Tzu ,s Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Hendrischke, Barbara, and Benjamin Penny. 1996. *“The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao: A* Translation and Textual Study.” *Taoist Resources* 6.2: 17-29.

Hubei sheng Jingmen shi bowu guan 湖北省荊門市博物館, ed. 1998. *Guodian Chumu zhujian* 郭店楚墓竹簡(Bamboo Slips from the Chu Tomb at Guodian). Beijing: Wenwu.

Izutsu, Toshihiko. 1984. *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts.* Berkeley: University of California Press.

Kirkland, Russell. 1997. “The Historical Contours of Taoism in China: Thoughts on Issues of Classification and Terminology.” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 25: 57-82.

. 2000. “Examining Daoism: Realities, Cultural Constructs and Emerging Perspectives.” In *Daoism Handbook,* edited by Livia Kohn, xi-xviii. Leiden: Brill.

. 2004. *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition.* London and New York: Routledge.

Kobayashi Masayoshi. 1995. "The Establishment of the Taoist Religion *(Tao-chiao)* and Its Structure." *Acta Asiatica: Bulletin of the* **Institute of** *Eastern Culture* 68: 19-36.

Kohn, Livia. 1991. *Early Chinese Mysticism: Philosophy and Soteriology in the Taoist Tradition.* Princeton: Princeton University Press,

. 1997. "Yin Xi: The Master at the Beginning of the Scripture." *Journal of Chinese Religions* 25: 83-139.

. 1998a. "The *Tao-te-ching* in Ritual" In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue , 143-61. Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 1998b. *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth.* Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan.

, ed. 2000. *Daoism Handbook.* Leiden: Brill.

. 2001. *Daoism and Chinese Culture.* Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press.

. 2003. *Monastic Life in Medieval Daoism.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

. 2003. *Cosmos and Community: The Ethical Dimension of Daoism,* Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press.

Kohn, Livia, and Russell Kirkland. 2000. “Daoism in the Tang (618-907).” In *Daoism Handbook,* edited by Livia Kohn, 339-83. Leiden: Brill.

Kohn, Livia, and Michael LaFargue, ed. 1998. *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Kohn, Livia, and Harold Roth. 2002. *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Komjathy, Louis. 2002a. “Changing Perspectives on the Daoist Tradition.” *Religious Studies Review* 28.4 (2002): 327-34

. 2002b. *Title Index to Daoist Collections.* Cambridge, Mass.: Three Pines Press.

. 2003. “Daoist Texts in Translation.” <www.daoistcenter.org/articles>.

. 2004a. “Reading Daoist Texts as Practice Manuals.” *The Empty Vessel: Journal of Contemporary Taoism* 11.3 (Spring 2004): 30-37.

. 2004b. “Tracing the Contours of Daoism in North America.” *Nova Religio* 8.2: 5-27.

LaFargue, Michael. 1992. *The Tao of the Tao Te Ching.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

LaFargue, Michael, and Julian Pas. 1998. "On Translating the *Tao-te-ching:'* In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue, 277-301. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Lau, D.C. 1989 (1982). *Chinese Classics: Tao Te Ching.* Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Lau,D.C. (Dim Cheuk)劉殿爵 and F.C. (Fong Ching) Chen 陳方正, eds. 1996. *Laozi zhuzi suoyin* 老子逐字索引/A4 *Concordance to the Laozi.* Concordance Series, Philosophical Works, no. 24. Hong Kong: Commercial Press.

, eds. 2000. *Zhuangzi zhuzi suoyin* 莊子逐字索引/A4 *Concordance to the Zhuangzi.* Concordance Series, Philosophical Works，no. 43. Hong Kong: Commercial Press.

，eds. 2001. *Guanzi zhuzi suoyin* 管子逐字索引 /A *Concordance to the Guanzi.* Concordance Series, Philosophical Works, no. 37. Hong Kong: Commercial Press.

Legge, James. 1962 (1891). *The Texts of Taoism. 2* vols. New York: Dover.

Lin, Paul J. 1977. *A Translation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and Wang Pi's Commentary.* Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies.

Liu Xiaogan 笑敢.1994. *Classifying the Zhuangzi Chapters*: Translated by William E. Savage. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan, Center for Chinese Studies.

Liu Ming (Charles Belyea)劉明. 1998. *The Blue Book: A Text Concerning Orthodox Daoist Conduct.* 3rd edition. Santa Cruz, Calf.: Orthodox Daoism in America.

Lynn, Richard John. 1999. *The Classic of the Way and Virtue: A New Translation of the Tao-te-ching of Laozi as Interpreted by Wang Bi.* New York: Columbia University Press.

Mair, Victor. 1990. *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

. 2000. "The *Zhuangzi* and Its Impact." In *Daoism Handbook,* edited by Livia Kohn, 30-52. Leiden: Brill.

Miller, James. 2003. *Daoism: A Short Introduction.* Oxford and New York: Oneworld.

Mitchell, Stephen. 1988. *Tao Te Ching.* New York: Harper & Row.

Pas, Julian F, with Man Kam Leung. 1998. *Historical Dictionary of Taoism.* Lanham, MD: The Scarecrow Press, Inc.

Pelliot, Paul. 1912. "Autour d'une traduction sanskrite du Tao-to king." T'*oung-Pao* 13: 351-430.

Rao Zongyi 饒宗頤. 1956. *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian* 老子想爾注校箋. Hong Kong: Tong Nam.

. *1991. Laozi Xiang er zhu' jiaozheng* 老子想爾注校證. Shanghai: Guji.

Red Pine (Bill Porter). 2001 (1997). *Lao-tzu's Taoteching.* San Francisco: Mercury House.

Ren Farong 任法融. 1993. *Daode jing shiyi* 道德經釋義(Explaining the Meaning of the *Daode jing).* Xi'an: Sanqin chubanshe.

Robinet, Isabelle. 1977. *Les commentaires du Tao to king jusqu 'au VII siècle.* Paris: Mémoires de l'Institute des Hautes Études Chinoises 5.

. 1998. "Later Commentaries: Textual Polysemy and Syncretistic Interpretations." In *Lao-tzu and the Tao-te-ching,* edited by Livia Kohn and Michael LaFargue, 119-42. Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 1999. "The Diverse Interpretations of the *Laozi."* In *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi,* edited by Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Philip Ivanhoe, 127-59. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Roth, Harold. 1991. "Psychology and Self-Cultivation in Early Taoistic Thought." *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 51.2: 599-650.

. 1996. "The Inner Cultivation Tradition of Early Taoism." In *Religions of China in Practice,* edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr" 123-48. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

. 1997. "Evidence for Stages of Meditation in Early Taoism." *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 60.2: 295-314.

1999a. *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism."* New York: Columbia University Press.

. 1999b. *"Laozi* in the Context of Early Daoist Mystical Praxis." In *Religious and Philosophical Aspects of the Laozi,* edited by Mark Csikszentmihalyi and Mark and Philip J. Ivanhoe, 59-96. Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 2003. "Bimodal Mystical Experience in the "Qiwulun" Chapter of the *Zhuangzi.*"In *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the Zhuangzi,* edited by Scott Cook, 15-32. Albany: State University of New York Press.

Rump, Ariane, with Wing-tsit Chan. 1979. *Commentary on the Lao-tzu by Wang Pi.* Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.

Sarkissian, Hagop. 2001. *"Laozi:* Revisiting Two Early Commentaries in the *Hanfeizi:,* Master's thesis, University of Toronto.

Saso, Michael. 1978. *The Teachings of Taoist Master Chuang.* Hartford, Conn.: Yale University Press.

Schwartz, Benjamin. 1985. *The World of Thought in Ancient China.* Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press of Harvard University Press.

Seidel, Anna. 1969. *La divinisation de Lao-tseu dans le Taoisme des Han,* Paris: École Franfaise Extrême-Orient.

Seminar für Ostasiatische Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft der University Miinchen, ed. 1968. *Konkordanz zum Lao-tzu.* Miinchen: Universität Miinchen Seminar für Ostasiatische Sprach- und Kulturwissenschaft.

Sivin, Nathan. 1978. “On the Word ‘Taoist’as a Source of Perplexity (With Special Reference to the Relation of Science and Religion in Traditional China).” *History of Religions* 17: 303-330.

Strickmann, Michel. 1980. "History, Anthropology, and Chinese Religion.” *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies:* 201-48.

Thompson, Laurence G. 1993. “What **is** Taoism? (With Apologies ***to*** H.G. Creel).” *Taoist Resources* 4.2: 9-22.

Vervoorn, Aat. 1990. *Men of the Cliffs and Caves.* Hong Kong: Chinese University Press.

Wagner, Rudolf G. 2000. *The Craft of a Chinese Commentator: Wang Bi on the Laozi.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 2003a. *Language, Ontology, and Political Philosophy in China: Wang Bi's Scholarly Exploration of the Dark (Xuanxue).* Albany: State University of New York Press.

. 2003b. *A Chinese Reading of the Daodejing: Wang Bi's Commentary on the Laozi with Critical Text and Translation.* Albany: State University of New York Press.

Welch, Holmes. 1957. *Taoism: The Parting of the Way.* Boston: Beacon Press.

TRANSLATION

翻

譯

BOOK OF VENERABLE MASTERS

—1—

The dao that can be spoken is not the constant Dao.
The name that can be named is not the constant name.
Nameless—the beginning of the heavens and earth.
Named—the mother of the ten thousand beings.
Thus, constantly desireless, one may observe its subtlety.
Constantly desiring, one may observe its boundaries.
These two emerge from sameness, but differ in name.
This sameness is called "mysterious."
Mysterious and again more mysterious—
The gateway to all that is wondrous.

—2—

When all under the heavens knows beauty as beauty,
    Ugliness is already present.
When all under the heavens knows benefit as benefit,
    Non-benefit is already present.
Therefore, being and non-being generate each other;
Difficulty and ease complement each other;
Long and short contrast with each other;
High and low depend on each other;
Sound and voice harmonize with each other;
Front and back follow each other.
Therefore, the sage abides in a condition of non-action,
Practicing a teaching that does not require words.
The ten thousand beings appear, but one does not reject them.
There is generation, but one is free from having.
There is action, but one is free from depending.
Accomplishment is complete, but one is free from dwelling.
It is only because one does not dwell that it does not leave.

— 3 —

Do not exalt the worthy, and people will not contend.
Do not value rare goods, and people will not steal.
Do not display desirable things, and people's heart-minds
will not be disturbed.
Thus we may consider the sage's approach to governing—
Empty the heart-mind and fill the belly.
Weaken the will and strengthen the bones.
Constantly enabling people to abide in non-knowing
and non-desiring
Inhibits those with schemes from daring to act.
By acting through non-action, nothing is not governed.

— 4 —

The Dao is empty; when applied, it does not overflow.
Fathomless, as if the ancestor of the ten thousand beings.
Blunt the sharpness;
Untie the knots;
Harmonize the brightness;
Unite with the dust.
Deep and clear, it seems as though it exists.
I do not know whose descendent it is;
It symbolizes that which preceded the Thearch.

—5—

The heavens and earth are not humane;
They regard the myriad beings as straw dogs.
The sage is not humane;
He regards the people as straw dogs.
Between the heavens and earth, it is like a bellows.
Being empty, one is not exhausted;
Moving, even more becomes manifest.
Excessive speaking always impoverishes;
It is better to guard the Center

—6—

The Valley Spirit does not die;
It is called the Mysterious Female,
The gateway to the Mysterious Female
Is called the root of the heavens and earth.
Continuous and uninterrupted, it seems to exist.
Applying this does not require effort

—7—

The heavens are long-lasting and the earth is abiding.
The reason why they are long-lasting and abiding
Is because they do not live for themselves.
Therefore, they are able to live long.
Thus, the sage puts himself last, but actually comes first.
He steps outside himself, but through this is preserved.
Is this not because the sage lacks personal concerns?
Through this, he is able to complete himself.

—8—

The highest adeptness resembles water.
Water is adept at benefiting the ten thousand beings,
But it has no need to compete with them.
It resides in the places that people avoid.
Therefore, it is close to the Dao.
In dwelling, be adept at groundedness.
In cultivating the heart-mind, be adept at deepness.
In giving, be adept at humaneness.
In speaking, be adept at sincerity.
In rectifying, be adept at regulation.
In doing, be adept in abilities.
In moving, be adept at timeliness.
Only one who does not compete is free from blame.

—10—

Carrying the ethereal and corporeal souls,
Embracing the One,
    Can you be without separation?
Concentrating the qi and attaining softness,
    Can you be like a newborn child?
Cleansing and purifying mysterious perception,
    Can you be without flaws?
Loving the people and governing the country,
    Can you abide in non-knowing?
Opening and closing the Celestial Gates,
    Can you become like a female?
Illuminating and purifying the four directions,
    Can you abide in non-action?
Accomplishing this and nourishing this,
Accomplishing this but not possessing this,
Acting through this but not relying on this,
Developing this but not controlling this,
This is called mysterious inner power.

—12—

The five colors cause one's eyes to become blind.
The five sounds cause one's ears to become deaf.
The five flavors cause one's mouth to become frail.
Racing around and hunting cause one's heart-mind
    To become mad.
Difficult-to-get goods cause one's activity to become disrupted.
Therefore, the sage is for the belly, not for the eyes.
Thus, he abandons that and receives this.

—13—

Favor and disgrace are like being startled.
Caring about calamities is like having a self.
What do we mean by saying "Favor and disgrace are like being startled"?
Receiving favor is for the inferior.
Attaining it startles one; losing it startles one.
Thus favor and disgrace are like being startled.
What do we mean by saying "Caring about calamities is like having a self"?
The reason why I have calamities is because I have a self.
If I did not have a self, what calamities would I have?
Therefore, the one who takes his self as the world
Can be entrusted with the world.
The one who cares for his self as the world
Can be relied on by the world.

—14—

Looking for it, one cannot perceive it.
We call it remote.
Listening for it, one cannot hear it.
We call it rare.
Grasping for it one cannot attain it.
We call it subtle.
These three cannot be investigated.
Thus, they are commingled and become one.
Above it there is no brightness;
Below it there is no darkness.
Continual and continuous, it cannot be named.
Once again one returns to non-being.

This is called the form of formlessness,
The appearance of non-being.
It is called vague and elusive.
Meeting it, one cannot perceive its face;
Following it, one cannot perceive its back.
Adhere to the Dao of primeval time
In order to attend to being in the present.
The ability to know this primeval beginning
Is called tracing the threads of the Dao.

—15—

Considering those in primeval times skilled at being adepts,
They were subtle, wondrous, mysterious, and connected.
Their depth was such that they could not be recognized.
It is only because they could not be recognized
That here we force ourselves to describe them.
    Cautious, as if crossing a river in winter.
    Hesitant, as if fearing neighbors everywhere.
    Impeccable, as if a guest.
    Expansive, as if ice on the verge of melting.
    Sincere, as if an uncarved block.
    Vast, as if a valley.
    Commingled, as if turbidity.
Who can be turbid so that it may become suspended?
Practice stillness until it gradually becomes clear.
Who can be calm so that it may become long-lasting?
Practice activity until it gradually becomes generated.
Those who protect this way do not desire fullness.
Only the one who is free from fullness
Can remain hidden and without new achievements.

—16—

Apply emptiness completely;
Guard stillness steadfastly.
The ten thousand beings arise together;
I simply observe their return.
All beings flourish and multiply;
Each again returns to the Source.
Returning to the Source is called stillness;
This means returning to life-destiny.
Returning to life-destiny is called constancy;
Knowing constancy is called illumination.
One who does not know constancy
Will be disordered and act recklessly.
Knowing constancy leads to endurance.
Endurance leads to openness.
Oneness leads to correct governing.
Governing leads to accordance with the heavens.
Accordance with the heavens leads to the Dao.
Through the Dao, one becomes everlasting.
Then there is no self; then there is no danger.

—18—

When the great Dao is abandoned,
Humanity and righteousness appear.
When the intelligent and clever rise up,
Great falsity and hypocrisy appear.
When the six relationships are disharmonious,
Filial piety and familial kindness appear.
When the country is chaotic and disordered,
Loyal ministers and officials appear.

—19—

Renounce sagehood and abandon intelligence;
The people will benefit a hundredfold.
Renounce humanity and abandon righteousness;
The people will return to filial piety and familial kindness.
Renounce skillfulness and abandon profit-making;
Robbers and thieves will no longer exist.
These three must be regarded as ornamental;
They are not sufficient.
Therefore, they must become subordinate.
Appear plain and embrace simplicity;
Decrease personal interest and lessen desire.

—20—

Renounce learning and be free from sorrow.
Affirmation and negation, what is the difference?
Beneficent and malevolent, what is the distinction?
What humans fear cannot but be feared.
Because they are uncultivated, it has not yet ended.
Most people are busy as though attending the Tailao feast,
As though ascending a tower in spring;
I alone am unmoving, showing no sign.
I resemble an infant who has not yet become a child;
Lazy and idle, as though there is no place to return.
Everyone has more than enough;
I alone appear as though abandoned.
I have the heart-mind of a fool—
Chaotic and unpredictable.
Ordinary people are bright and clear;
I alone appear dim and indistinct.

Ordinary people are inquiring and discerning;
I alone appear hidden and obscure.
Like an ocean in its tranquility;
Like a high wind in its endless movement.
Each person has his reasons;
I alone am insolent as though unconcerned.
I alone am different from other people;
I revere being fed by the mother.

—21—

Considering the orientation of great inner power,
Only the Dao becomes followed.
The Dao considered as a thing—
It is elusive and indistinct.
Indistinct, elusive, its center contains forms.
Elusive, indistinct, its center contains beings.
Obscure, unseen, its center contains essences.
These essences are fundamentally real;
The Center contains something deserving trust.
From antiquity to the present,
Its name has not been abandoned.
Through it we may observe all beginnings.
How can I know the form of every beginning?
Through this.

—28—

Know the male, but guard the female—
Become the streambed of the world.
Becoming the streambed of the world,
Constant inner power does not separate.
Return to a condition of childhood.
Know the white, but guard the black—
Become the pattern of the world.
Becoming the pattern of the world,
Constant inner power does not deviate.
Return to a condition of non-differentiation.
Know honor, but guard disgrace—
Become the valley of the world.
Becoming the valley of the world,
Constant inner power is then sufficient.
Return to a condition of simplicity.
When simplicity dissipates, there are vessels.
The sage employs them to become an elder.
Thus the great governing is not disrupted.

—29—

You wish to take the world and act upon it;
I know that this cannot be accomplished.
The world is a sacred vessel;
The world cannot be acted upon.
To act upon it is to fail it;
To grasp it is to lose it.
Therefore, considering beings,
Some take action, while others follow;
Some breathe through the mouth□

Others through the nose.
Some are strong, while others are weak.
Some destroy, while others are destroyed.
Thus the sage avoids extremes,
Avoids extravagance, avoids excess.

—33—

To know others is intelligence;
To know one's self is illumination.
To overcome others is power;
To overcome one's self is strength.
To know sufficiency is affluence.
To act through force is obstinance.
To not lose one's place is endurance.
To die but not to perish is longevity.

—37—

The Dao constantly abides in non-action,
And yet nothing is left undone.
If ministers and rulers are able to guard it,
The myriad beings will transform naturally.
In transformation, desires may arise;
I will subdue them through nameless simplicity.
Through this nameless simplicity,
I will come to be without desires.
Becoming desireless through stillness,
All the world will become settled naturally.

—40—

Reversal is the movement of the Dao.
Weakness is the application of the Dao.
All beings of the world are born through being,
Being is born through non-being.

—41—

When the highest adepts hear about the Dao,
They are diligent in their practice of it.
When the middle adepts hear about the Dao,
They wonder whether or not it exists.
When the lowest adepts hear about the Dao,
They laugh loudly and mock it.
If they did not laugh, it would not be the Dao.
Thus, we have well-established sayings—

Illuminating the Dao seems like obscurity.
Advancing in the Dao seems like retreat.
Being unwavering in the Dao seems like imbalance.
The highest inner power seems like a valley.
The greatest purity seems like disgrace.
Abundant inner power seems like deficiency.
Established inner power seems like aversion.
Essential perfection appears changeable.
A great square has no corners.
A great vessel is completed late.
Great music is seldom heard.
A great image has no form.

The Dao is hidden in namelessness.
Only the Dao is adept in lending; and still remaining complete.

—42—

The Dao generated the One;
The One generated the two;
The two generated the three;
The three generated the myriad beings.
The myriad beings carry yin and embrace yang.
It is the empty qi that harmonizes these.
People dislike aloneness, scarcity and poverty,
But rulers and ministers take these as their names.
Thus, all beings may gain by losing.
And may lose through gaining.
What people teach, I also teach—
"The strong and violent will not die well."
I take this as the father of my teaching.

—43—

The softest thing in the world
Overcomes the hardest thing in the world.
Non-being can enter places without openings.
Through this, I know the benefit of non-action.
The teaching without words,
The benefit of non-action—
Few in the world can reach this.

—45—

Great achievement seems imperfect;
Its application is never exhausted.
Great fullness seems empty;
Its application is never suspended.
Great direction seems twisted.
Great skillfulness seems inept.
Great eloquence seems confused.
Restlessness overcomes cold;
Stillness overcomes heat.
Clarity and stillness are the rectification of the world.

—46—

When the world is with the Dao,
Galloping horses are used for their manure.
When the world is without the Dao,
War horses are bred in the borderlands.
No calamity is greater than not knowing contentment.
No trouble is greater than desiring attainment.
Thus, the contentment of knowing contentment
Is constant contentment.

—48—

In the pursuit of learning, one increases each day.
In the practice of the Dao, one decreases each day.
Decreasing and again decreasing,
One eventually arrives at non-action.
Through non-action, nothing is left undone.
In taking hold of the world, remain uninvolved.
Becoming involved with affairs,
One cannot take hold of the world.

—52—

The world had a beginning;
We regard it as the world's mother.
By coming to attain the mother,
One can know the child.
By coming to know the child,
One can again guard the mother.
To the end of life, there will be no danger.
    Block the passages;
    Close the doorways.
To the end of life, there will be no fatigue.
    Open the passages;
    Attend to affairs.
To the end of life, there will be no relief
Perceiving the subtle is called illumination.
Guarding softness is called strength.
Apply the brightness, and return to illumination.
Do not bring calamities on yourself.
This is called practicing constancy.

—13—

Holding an abundance of inner power is like being a child.
Poisonous insects and venomous snakes will not sting.
Fierce and menacing animals will not gorge;
Birds of prey will not attack or seize.
The bones are soft and sinews flexible,
But the grasp still remains firm.
Not knowing the union of female and male,
There is completion in activities.
This is the culmination of vital essence.
A child can cry for a whole day without becoming hoarse.
This is the culmination of harmony.
Knowing harmony is called constancy.
Knowing constancy is called illumination.
Attempting to increase life is called inauspicious.
A heart-mind ordering the qi is called strength.
To become strong is to become aged.
We cannot call this the Dao.
Not being in the Dao, one will die early.

—56—

One who knows does not speak;
One who speaks does not know.
Block the passages;
Close the doorways;
Blunt the sharpness;
Loosen the tangles;
Harmonize the brightness;
Unite with the dust.
We refer to this as mysterious sameness.

Thus, there is no way to get close to it;
There is no way to separate from it;
There is no way to benefit it;
There is no way to harm it;
There is no way to honor it;
There is no way to disgrace it.
Thus, it is revered in the world.

—70—

My words are very easy to understand,
And very easy to practice.
But the world does not understand them,
And does not practice them.
My language has an ancestor;
My affairs have their lord.
Only I abide in non-knowing;
Therefore I remain unknown.
Those who know me are few,
So what I am is revered.
Therefore, the sage wears coarse clothes,
But embraces the jade within.

—71—

To know that you do not know is best;
To not know that you are knowing is sickness.
Only by being sick of sickness are you not sick.
The sage is not sick because he is sick of sickness.
Through this, he is not sick.

—76—

When living, human beings are soft and flexible;
When dead, human beings are hard and rigid.
When living, grass and trees are soft and pliable;
When dead, they become withered and dry.
Thus, hardness and rigidity are companions of death;
Softness and flexibility are companions of life.
Thus, powerful weapons will not overcome.
Strong trees will be singled out and cut down.
The powerful and great will become lowered.
The soft and flexible will become elevated.

—78—

Nothing in the world is softer and weaker than water;
But attacking with hardness and strength cannot overcome it.
This is because nothing can change it.
Weakness overcomes strength;
Softness overcomes toughness.
Everyone in the world knows this,
But no one is able to practice it.
Thus the sages have said,

> 'To accept the soil of the country
> Is to become the master of the earth-shrine.
> To accept the inauspicious omens of the country
> Is to become the ruler of the world."

Direct communication seems like its opposite.

—81—

Honest words are not beautiful;
Beautiful words are not honest.
One who is adept does not contend;
One who contends is not adept.
One who knows is not expansive;
One who is expansive does not know.
The sage avoids accumulation—
The more he works for others, the more he has;
The more he gives to others, the more he gains.
The way of the heavens is to benefit, not to injure.
The way of the sages is to act, not to compete.

CHINESE TEXT

中

文

老子

一

道可道非常道。名可名非常名。
無名天地之始。有名萬物之母。
故常無欲以觀其妙。常有欲以觀其徼。
此兩者同出而異名。
同謂之玄。玄之又玄，眾妙之門。

二

天下皆知美之爲美斯惡已。
皆知善之爲善斯不善已。
故有無相生。難易相成。長短相較。
高下相傾。音聲相和。前後相隨。
是以聖人處無爲之事。行不言之教。
萬物作焉而不辭。生而不有。爲而不恃。
功成而弗居。夫唯弗居是以不去。

三

不尙賢使民不爭。不貴難得之貨使民不爲盜。
不見可欲使民心不亂。是以聖人之治。
虛其心，實其腹。弱其志，強其骨。
常使民無知無欲。使夫智者不敢爲也。
爲無爲則無不治。

四

道沖而用之或不盈。淵兮似萬物之宗。
挫其銳。解其紛。和其光。同其塵。
湛兮似或存。吾不知誰之子。象帝之先。

五

天地不仁。以萬物爲芻狗。
聖人不仁。以百姓爲芻狗。
天地之間，其猶橐籥乎。
虛而不屈。動而愈出。
多言數窮。不如守中。

六

谷神不死。是謂玄牝。
玄牝之門是謂天地根。
綿綿若存。用之不勤。

七

天長地久。天地所以能長且久者，以其不自生。
故能長生。是以聖人後其身而身先。
外其身而身存。非以其無私耶。故能成其私。

八

上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭。
處眾人之所惡。
故幾於道。居善地。
心善淵。與善仁。言善信。
正善治。事善能。動善時。
夫唯不爭故無尤。

十

載營魄抱一能無離乎。專氣致柔能嬰兒乎。
滌除玄覽能無疵乎。愛民治國能無知乎。
天門開闔能爲雌乎。明白四達能無爲乎。
生之畜之，生而不有，爲而不恃，
長而不宰，是謂玄德。

十二

五色令人目盲。五音令人耳聾。五味令人口爽。
馳騁畋獵令人心發狂。
難得之貨令人行妨。
是以聖人爲腹不爲目。
故去彼取此。

十三

寵辱若驚。貴大患若身。
何謂寵辱若驚。寵爲下。
得之若驚。失之若驚。是謂寵辱若驚。
何謂貴大患若身。吾所以有大患者，爲吾有身。
及吾無身吾有何患。故貴以身爲天下若可寄天下、
愛以身爲天下，若可託天下。

十四

視之不見。名曰夷。
聽之不聞。名曰希。
搏之不得。名曰微。
此三者不可致詰。故混而爲一。
其上不皦。其下不昧。繩繩不可名。
復歸於無物。是謂無狀之狀、無物之象。
是謂惚恍。迎之不見其首。
隨之不見其後。執古之道以御今之有。
能知古始是謂道紀。

十五

古之善爲士者、微妙玄通。深不可識。
夫唯不可識、故強爲之容。
豫焉若冬涉川。猶兮若畏四鄰。
儼兮其若客。渙兮若冰之將釋。
敦兮其若樸。曠兮其若谷。
混兮其若濁。孰能濁以止。
靜之徐清。孰能安以久。動之徐生。
保此道者、不欲盈。夫唯不盈故能蔽不新成。

十六
致虛極，守靜篤。
萬物并作，吾以觀復。
夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。
歸根曰靜，是謂復命。
復命曰常，知常曰明二
不知常，妄作凶。
知常容，容乃公、公乃王。
王乃天，天乃道、道乃久。
沒身不殆。

十八

大道廢，有仁義。
智慧出，有大僞。
六親不和，有孝慈。
國家昏亂，有忠臣。

十九

絕聖棄智，民利百倍。
絕仁棄義，民復孝慈。
絕巧棄利，盜賊無有。
此三者以爲文不足。故令有所屬。
見素抱樸。少私寡欲。

二十

絕學無憂。唯之與阿，相去幾何。
善之與惡，相去若何。
人之所畏，不可不畏。荒兮其未央哉。
眾人熙熙如享太牢，如春登臺。
我獨泊兮其未兆，如嬰兒之未孩，儽儽兮若無所歸。
眾人皆有餘，而我獨若遺。
我愚人之心也哉，沌沌兮。
俗人昭昭，我獨昏昏。
俗人察察，我獨悶悶。
澹兮其若海，飂兮若無止。
眾人皆有以，而我獨頑似鄙。
我獨異於人，而貴食母。

二十一

孔德之容，唯道是從。
道之爲物，惟恍惟惚<
惚兮恍兮，其中有象。
恍兮惚兮，其中有物。
窈兮冥兮，其中有精。
其精甚真。其中有信。
自古及今、其名不去。
以閱眾甫。吾何以知眾甫之收哉。以此。

二十八

知其雄，守其雌。爲天下谿。
爲天下谿，常德不離。復歸於嬰兒。
知其白，守其黑。爲天下式。
爲天下式，常德不忒。復歸於無極。
知其榮，守其辱。爲天下谷。
爲天下谷，常德乃足。復歸於樸。
樸散則爲器。聖人用之則爲官長。
故大制不割。

二十九

將欲取天下而爲之。吾見其不得已。
天下神器。不可爲也。爲者敗之。執者失之。
故物或行或隨。或歐或吹。或強或羸。或挫或隳。
是以聖人去甚。去奢去泰。

三十三

知人者智。自知者明。
勝人者有力。自勝者強。
知足者富。強行者有志。
不失其所者久。死而不亡者壽。

三十七

道常無爲，而無不爲。
侯王若能守之，萬物將自化。
化而欲作。吾將鎭之。
以無名之樸，無名之樸，夫亦將無欲。
不欲以靜，天下將自定。

四十

反者道之動。
弱者道之用。
天下萬物生於有。
有生於無。

四十一

上士聞道，勤而行之。
中士聞道，若存若亡。
下士聞道，大笑之。
不笑不足以爲道。
故建言有之，明道若昧。進道若退。夷道若類。
上德若谷。大白若辱。廣德若不足。
建德若偷。質真若渝。大方無隅。
大器晚成。大音希聲。大象無形。
道隱無名。夫唯道善貸且成。

四十二

道生一。一生二。一生三。
三生萬物。萬物負陰而抱陽。
沖氣以爲和。人之所惡，
唯孤寡不穀。而王公以爲稱。
故物或損之而益，或益之而損。
人之所教，我亦教之。
強梁者不得其死。吾將以爲教父。

四十三

天下之至柔，馳騁天下之至堅。
無有入無間。吾是以知無爲之有益。
不言之教，無爲之益，天下希及之。

四十五

大成若缺，其用不弊。
大盈若沖，其用不窮。
大直若屈。大巧若拙。
大辯若訥。
躁勝寒，靜勝熱。清靜爲天下正。

四十六

天下有道，卻走馬以糞。
天下無道，戎馬生於郊。
禍莫大於不知足。咎莫大於欲得。
故知足之足常足矣。

四十八

爲學日益。爲道曰損。
損之又損，以至於無爲。
無爲而無不爲。取天下常以無事。
及其有事，不足以取天下。

五十二

天下有始，以爲天下母。
既得其母，以知其子。
既知其子，復守其母。
沒身不殆。塞其兌，閉其門。
終身不勤。開其兌，濟其事。
終身不救。見小曰明。
守柔曰強。用其光，復歸其明。
無遺身狹。是謂習常。

五十五

含德之厚比於赤子。蜂蠆虺蛇不螫。
猛獸不據。攫鳥不搏。骨弱筋柔，而握固。
未知牝牡之合而全作。精之至也。
終曰號而不嗄。和之至也。
知和曰常。知常曰明。益生曰祥。心使氣曰強。
物壯則老。謂之不道。不道早已。

五十六

知者不言。言者不知。
塞其兌。閉其門。挫其銳。解其紛。
和其光。同其塵。是謂玄同。
故不可得而親。不可得而疏。
不可得而利。不可得而害。
不可得而貴。不可得而賤。
故爲天下貴。

七十

吾言甚易知，甚易行。
天下莫能知，莫能行。
言有宗，事有君。
夫唯無知，是以不我知。
知我者希，則我者貴。
是以聖人被褐懷玉。

七十一

知不知上。不知知病。
夫唯病病，是以不病。
聖人不病，以其病病。
是以不病。

七十六

人之生也柔弱。其死也堅強。
萬物草木之生也柔脆。其死也枯槁。
故堅強者死之徙。柔弱者生之徙。
是以兵強則不勝。木強則兵。
強大處下。柔弱處上。

七十八

天下莫柔弱於水。而攻堅強者莫之能勝。
以其無以易之。
弱之勝強。柔之勝剛。天下莫不知，莫不行。
是以聖人云，受國之垢是謂社稷主。
受國不祥是謂天下王。正言若反。

八十一

信言不美，美言不信。
善者不辯，辯者不善。
知者不博，博者不知。
聖人不積。既以爲人己愈有。
既以與人己愈多。
天之道利而不害。聖人之道爲而不爭。