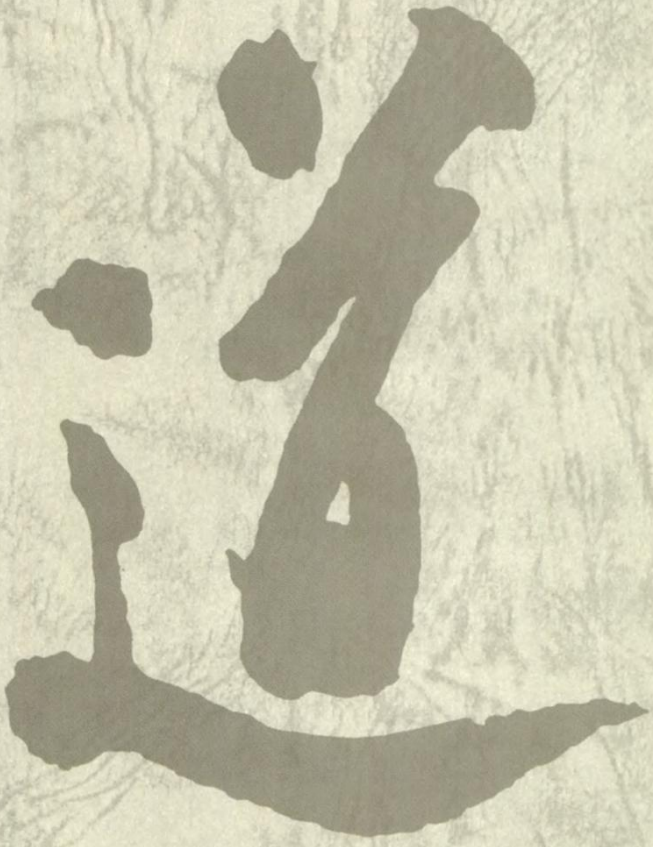
Chinese Classics

Tao Te Ching



Translated by D.C. Lau

CHINESE CLASSICS

TAO TE CHING

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Note to Revised Edition

In 1963 my translation of the *Tao te ching* was published by Penguin Books. In December 1973 two manuscripts of the *Tao te ching* were discovered in a tomb at Ma Wang Tui. As the date of the manuscripts is early Western Han at the latest, the discovery was of great significance. In 1980 The Chinese University Press approached me to see if I was interested in producing a revised edition of the 1963 translation in the light of the newly found manuscripts. As this did not seem to me to be feasible, I suggested that a fresh translation of a conflation of the two manuscripts should be done. This suggestion was accepted by The Chinese University Press and the result was the Bilingual Edition of 1982. This edition incorporated the 1963 translation which formed Part One of the book. This is done because the so-called Wang Pi text has been for centuries the most widely used version, and a translation based on an understanding of the Wang Pi text as it stood should be of interest not only to students of the *Lao tzu* but also to critics of ancient Chinese texts. Conjectures which seemed reasonable on available evidence as often as not turned out to be untenable in the light of the Ma Wang Tui manuscripts. Textual criticism is seen to be the precarious business it undoubtedly is. For this reason it was decided to leave the 1963 translation to stand unchanged.

For this revised edition, while the 1963 translation has been kept unchanged, it was felt that it was time the translation of the Ma Wang Tui text should be given a fairly thorough revision. I have also corrected some misprints in the 1982 edition.

D. C. L.

Hong Kong, September 1989

PART ONE

Translation of the Wang Pi text

Introduction

The *Lao tzu* has had an influence on Chinese thought through the ages out of all proportion to its length. It is often referred to as 'the book of five thousand characters', though, in fact, in most versions it is slightly longer than that. It is a short work even allowing for the fact that ancient Chinese was a very concise language and that the particular style in which it was written is more often than not succinct to the point of obscurity. If the *Lao tzu* is widely read in China as *the* classic in the thought of Taoism,* it is no less well known to the West through a long line of translators. In English alone there are well over thirty translations. The *Lao tzu* is, without a doubt, by far the most frequently translated work in Chinese, but unfortunately it cannot be said that it has been best served by its numerous translators, as the nature of the work attracted many whose enthusiasm for Eastern mysticism far outstripped their acquaintance with Chinese thought or even with the Chinese language.

The text of the *Lao tzu* is divided into two books. This was done probably simply to conform to the statement in the biography of Lao Tzu that he wrote a work *in two books* at the request of the Keeper of the Pass. At any rate, the division into two books goes at least as far back as the first century A.D. We have reason to believe that the present division into eighty-one chapters—thirty-seven in Book I and forty-four in Book II—also goes back to that time. By the end of the second century A.D., the work was also known by the alternative title of the *Tao te ching*. More specifically, Book I was known as the *Tao ching*, and Book II the *Te ching*. This practice seems to have no more foundation than the mere fact that the first word in Book I is *tao* while in Book II the first word (discounting the adjective *shang* which has no special significance) is *te*.

The traditional view is that the *Lao tzu* was written by a man named Lao Tzu who was an older contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). The *locus classicus* of this tradition is the biography of Lao Tzu in the *Shih chi* (*Records of the Historian*), the earliest

*For Chinese terms, proper names, and titles of books, see Glossary.

general history of China, written at the beginning of the first century B.C. by Ssu-ma Ch'ien:

Lao Tzu was a native of the Ch'ü Jen Hamlet in the Li Village of Hu Hsien in the State of Ch'u. His surname was Li, his personal name was Erh and he was styled Tan. He was the Historian in charge of the archives in Chou.

When Confucius went to Chou to ask to be instructed in the rites by him, Lao Tzu said, 'What you are talking about concerns merely the words left by people who have rotted along with their bones. Furthermore, when a gentleman is in sympathy with the times he goes out in a carriage, but drifts with the wind when the times are against him. I have heard it said that a good merchant hides his store in a safe place and appears to be devoid of possessions, while a gentleman, though endowed with great virtue, wears a foolish countenance. Rid yourself of your arrogance and your lustfulness, your ingratiating manners and your excessive ambition. These are all detrimental to your person. This is all I have to say to you.'

On leaving, Confucius told his disciples, 'I know a bird can fly, a fish can swim, and an animal can run. For that which runs a net can be made; for that which swims a line can be made; for that which flies a corded arrow can be made. But the dragon's ascent into heaven on the wind and the clouds is something which is beyond my knowledge. Today I have seen Lao Tzu who is perhaps like a dragon.'

Lao Tzu cultivated the way and virtue, and his teachings aimed at self-effacement. He lived in Chou for a long time, but seeing its decline he departed; when he reached the Pass, the Keeper there was pleased and said to him, 'As you are about to leave the world behind, could you write a book for my sake?' As a result, Lao Tzu wrote a book in two parts, setting out the meaning of the way and virtue in some five thousand characters, and then departed. None knew where he went to in the end.

According to one tradition, there was Lao Lai Tzu who was also a native of the State of Ch'u. He wrote a book in fifteen *p'ien*, setting forth the applications of the teachings of the Taoist school, and was contemporary with Confucius. Lao Tzu probably lived to over a hundred and sixty years of age—some even say over two hundred—as he cultivated the way and was able to live to a great age.

A hundred and twenty nine years after the death of Confucius, it was recorded by a historian that Tan the Historian of Chou had an audience with Duke Hsien of Ch'in during which he said, 'In the first instance, Ch'in and Chou were united, and after being united for five hundred years they separated, but seventy years after the separation a great feudal lord is going to be born.' According to some, Tan was none other than Lao Tzu, but according to others this was not so. The world is unable to know where the truth lay. Lao Tzu was a gentleman who lived in retirement from the world.

The son of Lao Tzu was one by the name of Tsung, who served as general

in the army of the state of Wei and was given the fief of Tuan Kan. Tsung's son was Chu, Chu's son was Kung, and Kung's great-great-grandson was Chia. Chia was an official in the time of Emperor Wen of the Han Dynasty. His son Chieh was Tutor to Ang, Prince of Chiao Hsi, and as a result made his home in Ch'i.

The followers of Lao Tzu try to belittle the Confucianists, and the Confucianists likewise belittle the followers of Lao Tzu. This may be what is meant when it is said that 'people who follow different ways never have anything helpful to say to one another'.

Li Erh 'does nothing and the people are transformed of their own accord'; 'remains limpid and still and the people are rectified of themselves.'

In the biography of Confucius in the same work, there is another version of his meeting with Lao Tzu:

Nan-kung Ching-shu of Lu said to the king of Lu, 'May your servant be granted permission to go to Chou with Confucius.' The king of Lu gave him a carriage and two horses, together with one servant, and he went [with Confucius] to Chou to ask about the rites. It was probably then that they met Lao Tzu.

When they departed, Lao Tzu saw them off and said, 'I have heard that men of wealth and rank make gifts of money while benevolent men make gifts of words. I have not been able to win either wealth or rank, but I have been undeservedly accorded the name of a benevolent man. These words are my parting gift: "There are men with clever and penetrating minds who are never far from death. This is because they are fond of criticizing others. There are men of wide learning and great eloquence who put themselves in peril. This is because they expose the evil deeds of others. Neither a son nor a subject should look upon his person as his own." '

When Ssu-ma Ch'ien came to write the biography of Lao Tzu, he found so few facts that all he could do was to collect together traditions about the man current in his time. He had difficulty even with Lao Tzu's identity. He explicitly suggests that he was probably the same person as Tan the Historian, though the latter lived more than a century after the death of Confucius. He also implied that there was a possibility that Lao Tzu was Lao Lai Tzu because the latter was also a native of Ch'u and the author of a Taoist work. Finally, he identifies Lao Tzu as the father of one Tuan-kan Tsung whose descendants were still living in his own time. He expresses his own doubts and misgivings when he says, 'Lao Tzu probably lived to over a hundred and sixty years of age—some even say over two hundred—as he cultivated the way and was able to live to a great age.' He is half-hearted in his identification of Lao Tzu with Tan the Historian as he

adds, 'The world is unable to know where the truth lay.' When he goes on to say, 'Lao Tzu was a gentleman who lived in retirement from the world,' he is tacitly offering an explanation for the lack of reliable information in this biography.

Apart from the statement that Lao Tzu's name was Tan and that his native state was Ch'u, there are only two purported facts in the whole biography. The first is the meeting between Lao Tzu and Confucius at which Confucius asked to be instructed in the rites. The second is Lao Tzu's westward journey through the Pass and the writing of a book at the request of the Keeper of the Pass.

Neither of these two purported facts is recorded in any extant work whose date is indubitably early. In my view both traditions did not become widely known or accepted until the period between 280 and 240 B.C., and there are no strong reasons to believe that they were founded on fact. In all probability Lao Tzu was not a historical figure at all. Once we cease to look at Lao Tzu as a historical personage and the *Lao tzu* as written by him, we begin to see certain features concerning both which point to a more reasonable view.

At a very early stage Confucius came to be known as a sage and naturally stories came to be told about him some of which no doubt originated from hostile circles. Of these there was a particular genre which was popular. This consists of stories about Confucius's encounters with hermits who made fun of him. The Lao Tzu story is only one such story and Lao Tzu was only one among a number of such hermits. Since such stories cannot be taken seriously as historical evidence, we have no reason to believe that Lao Tzu was a real person.

Moreover, in the period covering the second half of the fourth and the first half of the third century B.C. there were at least two works with titles which mean 'elder' and 'old man of mature wisdom'. It cannot be accidental that 'Lao Tzu' also has the meaning of 'old man'. There seems to be a genre of literature in this period to which such titles were given. This is probably because these works consist of sayings which embody a kind of wisdom that is associated with old age. There is no reason to suppose that the titles imply that these works were written by individuals. They are best looked upon as anthologies which were compiled from short passages by an editor or a series of editors. Most of these short passages reflect the doctrines of

the time but some represent sayings of considerable antiquity.

It is probably because 'Lao Tzu' happened to be the name of one of the hermits in the Confucian stories and also figured as the title of one of these anthologies of wise sayings that the *Lao tzu* alone has survived and is attributed to a man who instructed Confucius in the rities.*

The period in which the *Lao tzu* and other works of the same kind were produced was certainly a golden age of Chinese thought. Schools of thought mushroomed, so much so that they are often referred to as 'the hundred schools'. Scholars and philosophers who could lay claim to any originality in ideas won preferment as well as prestige. This can be seen from the gathering of brilliant minds at Chi Hsia under the patronage of King Wei (356-320 B.C.) and King Hsüan (319-301 B.C.) of the state of Ch'i. As we shall see, in the *Lao tzu* are to be found many ideas which were associated with one or other of the thinkers of this period.

At this time the schools of thought founded by Confucius, Mo Tzu (*fl.* fifth century B.C.) and Yang Chu (*fl.* fourth century B.C.) were the 'prominent schools'. Confucius taught a way of life in which morality occupies a supreme position. Morality is shown to have no connexion whatsoever with self-interest. In fact the demands of morality on a man are categorical. If need be, he has to sacrifice even his life in doing what is right. Confucius's view concerning the actual duties a man has was traditional. A man is born into certain relationships and as a result has certain duties. For instance, he has a duty of loyalty to his lord, a filial duty to his parents, a duty to help his friends, and a duty of common humanity towards his fellow beings. These duties are not of equal stringency. A man's duty to his lord and parents comes before his duty to his friends and fellow human beings. It was Confucius's belief that if everyone lived up to his duties according to his station political order would prevail.

Mo Tzu probably started life as a Confucian but gradually became dissatisfied with some of the tenets of Confucianism. He saw that so long as there were duties varying in stringency there was bound to be discrimination, and conflict could not be completely avoided. It may happen that a man has to do something harmful to another because his duty towards his parents demands it. To prevent this kind of

*For a detailed discussion of the *Lao tzu* and its author see Appendices 1 and 2.

situation from arising, Mo Tzu advocated 'love without discrimination'. A man should love others as himself and also their parents as his own. Mo Tzu also placed greater emphasis than later Confucianists on the doctrine that men of worth should be in authority.

Confucius was also traditional in his attitude to *t'ien* (heaven). Heaven was for him vaguely a divine presence, whose decree it was that men should be moral. Mo Tzu was of a much more religious turn of mind. His conception of heaven was the closest to a personal God that is to be met with in ancient Chinese thought. For him it is the will of heaven that men should love one another without discrimination, and those who fail to do so will be punished. The attitude of Confucius and Mo Tzu to heaven is something we shall have to bear in mind when we come to examine the concept of the *tao* (way) in the *Lao tzu*.

In the case of Yang Chu unfortunately we have no extant work representing his school. According to the writings of other thinkers, some of whom were certainly not sympathetic, Yang Chu advocated a thoroughgoing egoism. We shall have ocacasion to return to this topic and discuss the precise nature of this egoism. All we need to say here is that it has been suggested that the *Lao tzu* represents a development of the school of Yang Chu. Whether this is altogether justified or not, there certainly are passages in the *Lao tzu* which are best understood in the spirit of Yang Chu's egoism. Such is the background against which the *Lao tzu* is to be understood.

In my view not only is the *Lao tzu* an anthology but even individual chapters are usually made up of shorter passages whose connexion with one another is at best tenuous; to deal then with the thought contained in the work it is necessary to take these short sections rather than the chapters as units, as the work in its present form must have been compiled by a series of editors out of these short sections. It also follows from our view of the work as an anthology that we cannot expect the thought contained in it to be a closely knit system, though the greater part of the work may show some common tendency of thought which can be described as Taoist in the broad sense of the term. Since we cannot expect a high degree of cohesion in the thought, the most sensible way of giving an account of it is to deal with the various key concepts, and to relate them wherever possible, but also to point out inconsistencies when these are obstinately irreconcilable.

A good way of starting this account is to select those concepts that were, from early times, associated with Lao Tzu or the *Lao tzu* (in Chinese there is no linguistic distinction between the two and so it is impossible to know whether it is the man or the book that is referred to when the name 'Lao Tzu' occurs).

From the fact that the school of thought supposed to have been founded by Lao Tzu is known as Taoism (*tao chia*, the school of the way), it can be seen that the *tao* was considered the central concept in the thought contained in the *Lao tzu*. The opening chapter of the *Lao tzu* begins with an important characterization of the *tao*:

> The way that can be spoken of
> Is not the constant way. (1)

In other words, the *tao* that can be described, cited as authority, and praised is not the immutable way. This point is repeated in chapter XXXII:

> The way is for ever nameless (72).

and again in chapter XLI,

> The way conceals itself in being nameless. (92)

There is no name that is applicable to the *tao* because language is totally inadequate for such a purpose. And yet if the *tao* is to be taught at all, some means, no matter how inadequate, must be found to give an idea of what it is like. This is a difficult task, for even the term '*tao*' is not its proper name but a name we use for want of something better, and if we insist on characterizing it in some manner we can only describe it, not altogether appropriately, as 'great' (XXV, 56a).

The difficulty of finding appropriate language to describe the *tao* lies in the fact that although the *tao* is conceived of as that which is responsible for the creation as well as the support of the universe, yet the description the Taoist aimed at was a description in terms of tangible qualities as though the *tao* were a concrete thing.

In chapter XLII, it is said

> The way begets one; one begets two; two begets three; three begets the myriad creatures. (93)

Although here it is said that 'the way begets one', 'the One' is, in

fact, very often used as another name for the '*tao*'. Understood in this way, we can see that it is 'the One' or the '*tao*' which is responsible for creating as well as supporting the universe.

> Of old, these came to be in possession of the One:
> Heaven in virtue of the One is limpid;
> Earth in virtue of the One is settled;
> Gods in virtue of the One have their potencies;
> The valley in virtue of the One is full;
> The myriad creatures in virtue of the One are alive;
> Lords and princes in virtue of the One become leaders in the empire.
> It is the One that makes these what they are. (XXXIX, 85)

The point is pressed home by what immediately follows,

> Without what makes it limpid heaven might split;
> Without what makes it settled earth might sink;
> Without what gives them their potencies gods might spend themselves;
> Without what makes it full the valley might run dry;
> Without what keeps them alive the myriad creatures might perish;
> Without what makes them leaders lords and princes might fall. (85a)

If this *tao* which is behind the universe is to be described in physical terms, this is the result:

> Its upper part is not dazzling;
> Its lower part is not obscure.
> Dimly visible, it cannot be named
> And returns to that which is without substance.
> This is called the shape that has no shape,
> The image that is without substance.
> This is called indistinct and shadowy.
> Go up to it and you will not see its head;
> Follow behind it and you will not see its rear (XIV, 33),

and

> As a thing the way is
> Shadowy, indistinct.
> Indistinct and shadowy,
> Yet within it is an image;
> Shadowy and indistinct,
> Yet within it is a substance.
> Dim and dark,
> Yet within it is an essence.
> This essence is quite genuine

> And within it is something that can be tested (XXI, 49),

and

> There is a thing confusedly formed,
> Born before heaven and earth.
> Silent and void
> It stands alone and does not change,
> Goes round and does not weary. (XXV, 56)

From these passages we can see that the entity called the *tao* existed before the universe came into being. This, for the author, is an absolutely indisputable fact. It has an essence which is genuine, and this genuineness is vouched for by the existence of the universe which it has produced and continues to sustain. But beyond this there is nothing we can say about the *tao*. The difficulty is indicated by saying that it is 'shadowy and indistinct', that it is 'the shape that has no shape, the image that is without substance'. In fact, even to say that it produced the universe is misleading. It did not produce the universe in the same way that a father produces a son.

> Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures. (IV, 11)
> It images the forefather of God. (IV, 13)

To say that it is 'like' the ancestor of the myriad creatures and that it 'images' the forefather of God is to say that the *tao* produced the universe only in a figurative sense.

For the difficulty of describing the *tao* there is a traditional interpretation which is quite ancient but for which there is no explicit support to be found in the *Lao tzu* itself. This is based on the conception of opposite terms which, as we shall see, play an important part in the thought of the *Lao tzu*. If we use a term to describe the attribute of a thing, there is also a term opposite to it which is suitable for describing the attribute of some other thing. We describe one thing as strong, but also describe another thing as weak. Similarly for the long and the short, the high and the low, and all conceivable pairs of opposites. Now if we wish to characterize the *tao*, we have to use such terms and yet none of them is appropriate, for if the *tao* is responsible for the strong being strong it is no less responsible for the weak being weak. It is argued that in order to be responsible for the strong being strong the *tao* must, in some sense, be itself strong also; and yet it would not be true to describe it as strong because as it is equally responsible for the weak being weak it must, in some sense, be

itself weak as well. Thus we can see that no term can be applied to the *tao* because all terms are specific, and the specific, if applied to the *tao*, will impose a limitation on the range of its function. And the *tao* that is limited in its function can no longer serve as the *tao* that sustains the manifold universe.

There is no actual textual support for such an interpretation in the *Lao tzu*, but in all fairness it ought also to be pointed out that there is nothing in the text which is inconsistent with this interpretation either. Whether this is a correct interpretation of the original intention of the *Lao tzu* or not, it is a possible one and has the merit of being interesting philosophically. It forms a striking contrast to the type of metaphysical reasoning in the Western tradition of which Plato is a prominent example. According to Plato, the objects of the sensible world are unreal to the extent that it can be said, at the same time, of anyone of them that it is both A and not-A. There is no object in this world, no matter how round, of which we cannot say, at the same time, that it is not round. Therefore it fails to be fully round and so truly real. The Forms, on the other hand, are truly real because it is nonsense to say of the Form of Roundness that it is not round. What in Plato qualifies the Forms for reality is precisely that which would disqualify the *tao* from being the immutable way.

Plato's view results in a plurality of Forms, each distinct in character from all others, while in the Taoist view there can be, and is, only one *tao*. The advantage seems to rest with the Taoist, as Plato was, in the end, unable to rest satisfied with a plurality of Forms and had to bring in the Form of the Good as a unifying principle, though how this unification was contrived is not at all clear. Again, Plato's insistence that of anything real we must be able to make a statement to the exclusion of its contradictory seems to stem from his assumption that the totally real must be totally knowable. Here once more the Taoist takes the opposite position and looks upon the *tao* as unknowable. As before, the advantage seems to rest with the Taoist. There is no reason for us to assume that the totally real is totally knowable, particularly when the real is thought of as transcendent. The only drawback in saying that the real is unknowable is that it follows from this that the truth must also be ineffable. And this the Taoist is quite prepared to accept.

There may be some doubt whether the interpretation just set out

was the one intended in the *Lao tzu*, but there is no doubt that in the *Lao tzu* opposite terms are not treated as equally inadequate in the description of the *tao*. If we take pairs of opposite terms like Something and Nothing, the high and the low, the long and the short, and so on, we can have two classes each comprising one of the two terms in each pair. We can call Something, the high, and the long the higher terms, and Nothing, the low, and the short, the lower terms. It is clear that in the *Lao tzu* the lower terms are thought of as far more useful or, at least, far less misleading as descriptions of the *tao*. For instance, Nothing is often used to indicate the *tao*,

> The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something, and Something from Nothing. (XL, 89)

We can easily understand why lower terms are preferred, for these terms are very often expressed in a negative form, and negative terms have not the same limiting function that positive terms have, and, as we have seen, it is the limiting function that makes specific terms unfit for describing the *tao*.

Besides Nothing, there are other lower terms which are important in the *Lao tzu*, but we have to return to them later on. For the time being, it is the use of Nothing as an indication of the nature of the *tao* that interests us, for this is part and parcel of the difference between the Taoist view and the philosophical views we find in the West.

In the Western tradition, up to the beginning of the present century at least, it has generally been assumed that only what exists can be real, so much so that when, at one time, universals were denied existence, an *ad hoc* subsistence had to be invented to give them reality. With the Taoist, however, whatever has existence cannot be real, for whatever exists also suffers from the limitations of the specific. Hence it is thought far less misleading to say of the *tao* that it is like Nothing, though, strictly speaking, the *tao* can be no more like Nothing than it is like Something.

The conception of the *tao* as the creator of the universe is interesting, because, as far as we know, this was an innovation of the Warring States period, and the *Lao tzu* is one of the works where it is to be found. Traditionally, the role of creator belonged to heaven (*t'ien*). This was so from the earliest times. Heaven was the term used in the earliest extant works, the *Book of Odes* and the *Book of History*. It is the term used in the *Analects of Confucius* and the *Mo tzu*, and continued to be used in the *Mencius* and even in the *Hsün*

tzu, where, under the influence of Taoist thought, the term had undergone a significant change in meaning. What is interesting is that even in the *Chuang tzu* side by side with the *tao* heaven continued to be a key term. This can be seen from the remark in the *Hsün tzu* (chapter 21) that Chuang Tzu was prevented from realizing the significance of man because of his obsession with the significance of heaven, and this is borne out by the impression one gets in reading the *Chuang tzu*, where heaven is certainly one of the most important concepts, if not the most important.

In these works where the concept of heaven remains central, the term *tao* is always used in the sense of 'the way *of* something', even when it is used without qualifications. In relation to heaven it means the way that heaven follows, and in relation to man it means the way that he ought to follow, whether it be in the leading of his own life or in the government of the state.

In the *Lao tzu*, the *tao* is no longer 'the way of something', but a completely independent entity, and replaces heaven in all its functions. But the *tao* is also the way followed by the inanimate universe as well as by man. As a result, in reading the *Lao tzu* one sometimes gets the feeling that the line is blurred between the *tao* as an entity and the *tao* as an abstract principle which is followed. These two are confused because they share in common the characteristic of transcending the senses. This is a confusion not unlike the one mentioned in chapter XIV:

> What cannot be seen is called evanescent;
> What cannot be heard is called rarefied;
> What cannot be touched is called minute.
> These three cannot be fathomed
> And so they are confused and looked upon as one. (32, 32a)

Since in the *Lao tzu* the term *tao* has, to all intents and purposes, replaced heaven, it is curious to note that the phrase 'the way of heaven' occurs a number of times. In some cases at least, the use of this phrase seems to indicate that the passage belongs to a somewhat different, and most probably earlier, tradition. Apart from two uses in chapters IX and XLVII which are not typical, the phrase occurs only in the last ten chapters, in some of which the ideas contained seem to be contrary to the view taken of the *tao* in the *Lao tzu* generally. In chapter LXXVII we find

> Is not the way of heaven like the stretching of a bow?
> The high it presses down,
> The low it lifts up;
> The excessive it takes from,
> The deficient it gives to. (184)
> It is the way of heaven to take from what has in excess in order to make good what is deficient. (184a)

Then in chapter LXXIX,

> It is the way of heaven to show no favouritism.
> It is for ever on the side of the good man. (192)

In these passages heaven is conceived of as taking an active hand in redressing the iniquities of this world. It is always on the side of the good and the oppressed. This runs contrary to the view of the *tao* generally to be found in the book as something nonpersonal and amoral.

In replacing the concept of heaven by that of the *tao* although the *Lao tzu* sets itself apart from most ancient works, including to some extent even the *Chuang tzu*, it is by no means unique. In this respect it shows a certain affinity with a group of chapters (12, 36 to 38, and 49) in the *Kuan tzu*, another work, probably of the same period, which is also an anthology of early writings. These chapters have, in recent years, been considered by some scholars as representing the teachings of the school of Sung K'eng and Yin Wen. Sung K'eng is certainly mentioned both in the *Mencius* and the *Hsün tzu*, and is probably the same as the Sung Jung Tzu mentioned in the *Chuang tzu*. There is no doubt that in his strong opposition to war and in his attempt to persuade people that they do not, in fact, desire much, he was very close to the Mohist school. Yet in the bibliographical chapter of the *Han shu* (*History of the Western Han Dynasty*) by Pan Ku (A.D. 32-92), the comment on Sung K'eng is that he advocated views of Huang and Lao, in other words, Taoist views. This seems to be an indication that there was some connexion between the early Taoist schools and the later Mohists.

Although in the *Lao tzu* the *tao* which replaces heaven has ceased to be an intelligence and to be moral, nevertheless, the *Lao tzu* continued in the tradition that man should model his behaviour on heaven, only here he is urged to model himself on the *tao*. In order to do this, we must first find out how the *tao* functions. Although the *tao*

is said to leave nothing undone by resorting to no action, there are indications of how it works.

> Turning back is how the way moves;
> Weakness is the means the way employs. (XL, 88)

This sums up the way the *tao* functions. That 'weakness' and other kindred concepts are important in the *Lao tzu* can be seen from the way the thought of the *Lao tzu* is summed up in two works. In the *Lü shih ch'un ch'iu* (chüan 17, pt 7) it is said that Lao Tan valued 'the submissive (*jou*)', while in the *Hsün tzu* (chapter 17) it is said that Lao Tzu saw the value of 'the bent' but not that of 'the straight'. The weak, the submissive, the bent, these are the important concepts in the *Lao tzu* because these are the qualities the *tao* exhibits.

The movement of the *tao* is described as 'turning back'. This is usually interpreted as meaning that the *tao* causes all things to undergo a process of cyclic change. What is weak inevitably develops into something strong, but when this process of development reaches its limit, the opposite process of decline sets in and what is strong once again becomes something weak, and decline reaches its lowest limit only to give way once more to development. Thus there is an endless cycle of development and decline.

There is a further theory concerning the submissive and the weak which is equally prominent in the *Lao tzu*. The submissive and the weak overcome the hard and the strong. Again this is usually given a cyclic interpretation which links up with that of the theory of change. The weak overcomes the strong and in so doing it becomes strong itself and so falls victim in turn to the weak.

The whole interpretation seems reasonable enough at first sight, but as soon as we look more carefully into the value of the submissive and the weak we become aware of certain difficulties. The precept in the *Lao tzu* is that we should 'hold fast to the submissive'. But is the precept tenable if the cyclic interpretation is correct? If we are exhorted to hold fast to the submissive because in the conflict between the hard and the submissive it is the latter that emerges triumphant, is not this triumph shortlived if the submissive becomes hard in the hour of its triumph? This, if true, would make it impossible to put the precept into practice. Moreover, if change is cyclic and a thing that reaches the limit in one direction will revert to the opposite direction, then the precept is both useless and impracticable.

It is useless, if both development and decline are inevitable, since the purpose is in the first instance to avoid decline; and impracticable, if it advocates that we should remain stationary in a world of inexorable and incessant change. As this precept of holding fast to the submissive seems central to the teachings in the *Lao tzu*, it is the cyclic interpretation that has to be given up.

It is necessary then to re-interpret both the process of change and the nature of the victory the submissive gains over the hard. First, in the line

> Turning back is how the way moves,

we notice that the term used is 'turning back'. To turn back is 'to return to one's roots', and one's roots are of course the submissive and the weak. All that is said is that a thing, once it has reached the limits of development, will return to its roots, i.e. will decline. This is inevitable. Nothing is said about development being equally inevitable once one has returned to one's roots. In other words, it is never said that the process of change is cyclic. In fact, not only is development not inevitable, it is a slow and gradual process, every step of which has to be sustained by deliberate effort. Development and decline are totally different in nature. Development is slow and gradual; decline is quick and abrupt. Development can only be achieved by deliberate effort; decline comes about naturally and inexorably. Rather than a merry-go-round, the process of change is like a children's slide. One climbs laboriously to the top, but once over the edge the downward movement is quick, abrupt, inevitable, and complete. This makes it not only possible, but also useful, to follow the precept of holding fast to the submissive. One can follow the precept by refusing to make the effort necessary for development and in unusual circumstances by making a positive effort to defeat such development. A poor man can remain poor simply by not making the effort to acquire wealth, but should he be left, against his will, a large legacy by a non-Taoist uncle, he can still stubbornly hold on to his poverty by giving the money away.

The point of holding fast to the submissive is to avoid the fall should one become hard, for in a fall, whether from wealth or from power, one tends—at least in the turbulent times of the Warring States period—to lose one's life into the bargain.

This is the reason for advocating that one should both 'know

contentment' and 'konw when to stop'.

> Know contentment
> And you will suffer no disgrace;
> Know when to stop
> And you will meet with no danger.
> You can then endure. (XLIV, 100)

Again, in chapter XXXIII,

> He who knows contentment is rich. (75)

This point is even more forcefully put in chapter XLVI:

> There is no crime greater than having too many desires;
> There is no disaster greater than not being content;
> There is no misfortune greater than being covetous. (105)

Although development is an uphill climb which needs deliberate effort to sustain it at every step, the impulse to such effort is great and universally present in man. Man is egged on by desire and covetousness to be ever wanting greater gratification, so it is necessary to counter his natural tendencies by the lessons of 'knowing contentment' and 'knowing when to stop'. Only when a man realizes that he has enough can he learn not to aim at winning greater wealth and more exalted rank, the ceaseless pursuit of which will end only in disaster.

There is still the victory of the submissive and the weak over the hard and the strong to be explained in a way consistent with the precept of holding fast to the submissive. The explanation lies in the fact that, in achieving victory over the hard and the strong, the submissive and the weak do not become their opposites. In order to understand this, we must bear in mind the fact that in the *Lao tzu* a term is often used in two senses, the ordinary and the Taoist. 'Victory' is such a term. In the ordinary sense of the word, it is the strong that gains 'victory' over the weak. In this sense, victory cannot be guaranteed indefinitely, as however strong a thing is, it is inevitable that one day it will meet with more than its match. The Taoist sense of the word 'victory', in contrast, is rather paradoxical. The weak does not contend, and so no one in the world can pick a quarrel with it. If one never contends, this at least ensures that one never suffers defeat. One may even wear down the resistance of one's stronger opponent by this passive weapon of non-contention, or at

least wait for him to meet with defeat at the hands of someone stronger. It is in this sense that the submissive and the weak gain 'victory' over the hard and the strong.

> To hold fast to the submissive is called strength. (LII, 119)

'The virtue of non-contention' enables a man to 'defeat his enemy without joining issue' (LXVIII, 166 and 166a). There are many passages in praise of this 'virtue of non-contention'.

> It is because he does not contend that no one in the empire is in a position to contend with him. (XXII, 50c; also LXVI, 162)

> It is because it does not contend that it is never at fault. (VIII, 22)

As we have seen, the value of the Taoist precept of holding fast to the submissive lies in its usefulness as a means to survival. This being the case, we may feel that the *Lao tzu* attaches an undue importance to survival. This feeling shows that we have not succeeded in understanding the environment that produced the hopes and fears which were crystallized into such a precept. The centuries in which the *Lao tzu* was produced were certainly turbulent times. China was divided into a number of states, to all intents and purposes autonomous, constantly engaged in wars of increasing scope and ferocity with one another. For the common man survival was a real and pressing problem. It was to the solution of this problem of survival that much of the wisdom of the *Lao tzu* is directed. To the Taoist,

> He who lives out his days has had a long life. (XXXIII, 75)

Unless one can feel some sympathy for the aspirations of men who could never be sure from one day to another whether they would manage to stay alive, the precept will strike one as singularly negative and pessimistic.

There are a number of pacifist passages in the *Lao tzu* where one can detect a passionate concern for the lot of the common man in times of war.

> Arms are instruments of ill-omen . . . When great numbers of people are killed, one should weep over them with sorrow. When victorious in war, one should observe the rites of mourning. (XXXI, 71)

Again,

> Where troops have encamped
> There will brambles grow;
> In the wake of a mighty army
> Bad harvests follow without fail. (XXX, 69a)

The use of arms is a desperate remedy, and one should resort to it 'only when there is no choice' (XXX, 69b), and 'of two sides raising arms against each other, it is the one that is sorrow-stricken that wins' (LXIX, 169).

There is also a solemn warning to the rulers that if the people are relentlessly oppressed there comes a point when they might not even wish to survive. When that happens the ruler will find himself robbed of the only effective tool of oppression.

> When the people are not afraid of death, wherefore frighten them with death? (LXXIV, 180)

Moreover, if the time ever comes when people no longer fear death, then something terrible will happen, and it will not be the people alone who will suffer. The ruler will perish with them:

> When the people lack a proper sense of awe, then some awful visitation will descend upon them. (LXXII, 174)

In its concern for the common man, the *Lao tzu* shows some similarities to the works of Hobbes, who, in his own way, was equally preoccupied with the problem of survival, as can be seen from the opening remark in his autobiography that his mother gave birth to twins, himself and fear. But if the motive of fear is the same, the solution offered is totally different. In his *Leviathan*, Hobbes sets out to devise a political system that would offer security for the common man, while in the *Lao tzu* there are only precepts to help the common man to survive in the perilous situation in which he finds himself. Perhaps this is because, for the Taoist, the only hope of a world offering security to the common man lies in the conversion of some ruler to Taoism, and he is not over-sanguine about the chances of this being realized. At any rate, it may be a long time before this can happen and it is necessary for the common man to have precepts to live by which will enable him to survive in the meantime. These precepts are based on the value of meekness to survival. That even meekness is not an infallible means was a lesson only to be found in parts of the *Chuang tzu*.

Almost all ancient Chinese thinkers were concerned with the way

one should lead one's life, and this was never confined to conduct in the personal sense, but covered the art of government as well. Politics and ethics, for the Chinese as for the ancient Greeks, were two aspects of the same thing, and this the Chinese thinkers called the *tao*. One who has the *tao* will, in the words of the *T'ien hsia* chapter of the *Chuang tzu*, be 'inwardly a sage and outwardly a true king'. This was the general outlook of the period, and the *Lao tzu* was no exception. This can be seen even from one simple fact. The term 'sage (*sheng jen*)' occurs more than twenty times in the *Lao tzu* and, with only a few exceptions, refers always to a ruler who understands the *tao*.* Besides 'the sage', there are other terms as well that refer to rulers, like 'the lord of men' and 'lords and princes'. This shows that the *Lao tzu* is, through and through, a work on the art of government.

The sage is first and foremost a man who understands the *tao*, and if he happens also to be a ruler he can apply his understanding of the *tao* to government. The knowledge of the *tao* makes the sage a good ruler because the government of the people should be modelled on the way the myriad creatures in the universe are ruled by the *tao*.

We have seen that the term 'Nothing (*wu*)' is sometimes used for the *tao*, because, if we must characterize the *tao* by one of a pair of opposite terms, the negative is preferable because it is less misleading. It follows that as 'Nothing' is preferable to 'Something' so are other negative terms to their positive opposites. Two of these negative terms are central to the Taoist theory of the function of the ruler. The first is '*wu wei*'; the second is '*wu ming*'. *Wu wei* literally means 'without action', and *wu ming* 'without name'. These terms came to be coined probably because they are phrases in which *wu* ('not to have' and so 'nothing') forms the first element. This does not mean that the connexion between *wu wei* and *wu ming*, on the one hand, and *wu*, on the other, is purely a linguistic one. They are, like *wu*, negative terms. What makes *wu* a suitable term for describing the *tao* makes these terms suitable as well. To say of the *tao* that it acts is to limit its effectiveness, because merely by doing some things, it must, by implication, leave other things undone. To say that it does not act at least leaves it untrammelled: no special relation exists between the *tao* and certain affairs to the exclusion of others.

The way never acts yet nothing is left undone. (XXXVII, 81)

*The sage in the Taoist sense is to be distinguished from the sage in the conventional sense whose extermination is said to benefit the people a hundredfold (XIX, 43).

This passage goes on to say that

> Should lords and princes be able to hold fast to it,
> The myriad creatures will be transformed of their own accord.

This is a clear statement that the ruler should model himself on the *tao* and follow the policy of resorting to no action. The reasons for this policy are never very clearly stated, but some indications are given.

> Whoever takes the empire and wishes to do anything to it I see will have no respite. The empire is a sacred vessel and nothing should be done to it. Whoever does anything to it will ruin it; whoever lays hold of it will lose it. (XXIX, 66)

Again,

> Governing a large state is like boiling a small fish. (LX, 138)

In both passages we see that the state or the empire is a delicate thing that can be ruined by the least handling, or a sacred vessel which must not be tampered with. The empire is as much a part of the natural order as the world of inanimate objects and, being part of the natural order, will run smoothly so long as everyone follows his own nature. To think that one can improve on nature by one's petty cleverness is profanity. The natural order is delicately balanced. The least interference on the part of the ruler will upset this balance and lead to disorder.

The ideal state of the Taoist is one in which the people are innocent of knowledge and free from desire. By 'desire' here is not meant desire for basic necessities like food and clothing. For the Taoist, food is for satisfying hunger and clothes for warding off the cold. Anything going beyond these aims would be luxuries. Food is a basic need; delicacies are objects of desire. Clothes are a basic need; fineries are objects of desire. But we must not think that it is beauty alone that excites desire. Goodness, also, excites desire. Government necessarily involves the setting up of values. Certain modes of conduct are considered good and desirable, and merit, besides being desirable in itself, brings with it rewards which are coveted either for themselves or as emblems of privilege. These are all the results of the interfering acts of the ruler, and he must realize this and avoid such action.

> Not to honour men of worth will keep the people from contention; not to value goods that are hard to come by will keep them from theft; not to display what is desirable will keep them from being unsettled of mind. (III, 8)

The opening phrase in this passage is a direct attack on the doctrine of 'honouring men of worth' which was a basic tenet in the Mohist theory of government but which was also advocated by later Confucianists.

Desire in a sense is secondary to knowledge on which it is dependent. It is through the knowledge of what is desirable that desire is excited. It is also through knowledge that new objects of desire are devised. It is for this reason that knowledge and the clever come in for constant stricture. If the Taoist philosopher could have visited our society, there is no doubt that he would have considered popular education and mass advertising the twin banes of modern life. The one causes the people to fall from their original state of innocent ignorance; the other creates new desires for objects no one would have missed if they had not been invented.

The task of the ruler, then, is to avoid doing anything, so that the people will not gain new knowledge and acquire fresh desires.

> Of old those who excelled in the pursuit of the way did not use it to enlighten the people but to hoodwink them. The reason why the people are difficult to govern is that they are too clever. (LXV, 157)

Again,

> In governing the people, the sage empties their minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones. He always keeps them innocent of knowledge and free from desire, and ensures that the clever never dare to act. (III, 9)

Again,

> The sage in his attempt to distract the mind of the empire seeks urgently to muddle it. The people all have something to occupy their eyes and ears, and the sage treats them all like children. (XLIX, 112)

The aim of the sage is to keep the people in a childlike state where there is no knowledge and so no desire beyond the immediate objects of the senses.

In connexion with the freedom from desire, it is necessary to say something about the 'uncarved block'. There may be other implications of this symbol, but there are two features which stand out prominently.

Firstly, the uncarved block is in a state as yet untouched by the artificial interference of human ingenuity and so is a symbol for the original state of man before desire is produced in him by artificial means. By holding firmly to the principle of non-action exhibited by the *tao*, the ruler will be able to transform the people, but

> After they are transformed, should desire raise its head,
> I shall press it down with the weight of the nameless uncarved block.
> The nameless uncarved block
> Is but freedom from desire,
> And if I cease to desire and remain still,
> The empire will be at peace of its own accord. (XXXVII, 81)

Again, the sage says

> I am free from desire and the people of themselves become simple like the uncarved block. (LVII, 133)

Even after the people are transformed, the sage has to be constantly on the look-out in case 'desire should raise its head', and the way to keep the people in a simple state like the uncarved block is to be himself free from desire.

Secondly, the uncarved block is also said to be 'nameless'. This, as we have said, is one of the important attributes of the ruler. But the meaning of the term 'nameless' deserves careful examination, because it has a further meaning besides the obvious one of 'not being known'.

> When the uncarved block shatters it becomes vessels. The sage makes use of these and becomes the lord over the officials. (XXVIII, 64)

Now 'vessel' is a term used, from early times, to denote a specialist. In the *Analects of Confucius*, for instance, we find the saying, 'A gentleman is no vessel' (2. 12), meaning that the concern of the gentleman is the art of government and not the knowledge of a specialist. The nameless uncarved block is nameless because it has not shattered and become vessels. Hence it is the symbol of the ruler.

> Though the uncarved block is small
> No one in the world dare claim its allegiance. (XXXII, 72)

We may recall that no name is adequate as a description for the *tao*

because a name is always the name of a specific thing and so will limit the function of the *tao*. Similarly, the ruler is nameless because he is no specialist and only specialists can be named. It is in virtue of his knowledge of the *tao* that the ruler is able to rule over his officials who, being specialists, can only be entrusted with departmental duties.

The obvious lesson the ruler can learn from the *tao* is this. Being nameless, it is self-effacing. In relation to the myriad creatures,

> It gives them life yet claims no possession;
> It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
> It is the steward yet exercises no authority. (LI, 116)

The ruler must, likewise, be self-effacing in his relation to the people.

> The sage benefits them yet exacts no gratitude,
> Accomplishes his task yet lays claim to no merit. (LXXVII, 185)

In fact,

> The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects,

and

> When his task is accomplished and his work done
> The people all say 'It happened to us naturally'. (XVII, 39, 41)

In connexion with the subject of the art of government the *Lao tzu* is often charged with advocating the use of 'scheming methods (*yin mou*)'. This is obviously based on the opening passage in chapter XXXVI:

> If you would have a thing shrink,
> You must first stretch it;
> If you would have a thing weakened,
> You must first strengthen it;
> If you would take from a thing,
> You must first give to it. (79)

The interpretation of this passage is certainly not open to question, but it is another matter whether this can justifiably be extended to other passages, such as:

> The sage puts his own person last and it comes first,
> Treats it as extraneous to himself and it is preserved.
> Is it not because he is without thought of self that he is able to accomplis his private ends? (VII, 19 19a)

and

> Desiring to rule over the people,
> One must, in one's words, humble oneself before them;
> And, desiring to lead the people,
> One must, in one's person, follow behind them. (LXVI, 160)

These passages seem to support the charge only so long as we have the preconceived notion that the *Lao tzu* advocates the use of 'scheming methods'. But if we approach them with an open mind, we begin to see that there need not be anything sinister in what is said, which is no more than this. Even if a ruler were to aim at realizing his own ends he can only hope to succeed by pursuing the ends of the people. If he values his own person he can only serve its best interest by treating it as extraneous to himself. What is here said about the realization of the ruler's private ends is reminiscent of what is sometimes said about the pursuit of happiness. A man can achieve his own happiness only by pursuing the happiness of others, because it is only by forgetting about his own happiness that he can become happy. This has never been looked upon as a sinister theory. No more need be the theory in the *Lao tzu*. It is not said in the passages quoted that the ruler should pursue his own ends at the expense of the people. This would indeed be a vicious view, but that is precisely what is said here, by implication, not to be possible, even if one were to grant that it is desirable.

In fact true selfishness is a very rare thing and when it is found in a man it makes him eminently suitable to be a ruler. A truly selfish man is one who would not allow excessive indulgence in the good things in life to harm his body. Such a person is unlikely to take advantage of the people for the sake of gratifying his own desires were he made ruler. Hence it is said,

> He who values his body more than dominion over the empire can be entrusted with the empire. He who loves his body more than dominion over the empire can be given the custody of the empire. (XIII, 31)

This probably represented the view of the school of Yang Chu. In a conversation between Yang Chu and Ch'in Ku-li recorded in the *Yang chu* chapter of the *Lieh tzu*, Yang Chu is said to have remarked, 'A man of old would not have given a hair even if he could have benefited the empire by doing so, but neither would he have accepted the empire were it offered to him for his exclusive enjoyment.' The second half of the statement is a fair representation of Yang Chu's position, but the first half is a distortion similar to the statement by

Mencius that 'Yang Tzu chose egoism and even if he could have benefited the empire by pulling out one hair he would not have done so' (7A. 26). It has been pointed out by Dr. A. C. Graham* that the true position of Yang Chu was that even if he could have *gained* the empire by losing one hair he would have refused to do so. This is surely right, and Yang Chu's ideal was the truly selfish man who would neither harm himself to the least degree in order to gain the empire nor use the empire for his own enjoyment lest such indulgence should be detrimental to his body. Such a man, according to the *Lao tzu*, is eminently suited to rule over the empire.

As passages which seem to support the charge against *Lao tzu* are capable of a different interpretation, we are left with only section 79 as sole grounds for it, and this happens to be a passage which has close parallels which the *Han fei tzu*, the *Chan kuo ts'e*, and the *Lü shih ch'un ch'iu* all attribute to works other than the *Lao tzu*. It seems reasonable to assume that it is a saying of considerable antiquity which belonged to a tradition somewhat different from that to which the greater part of the *Lao tzu* belongs.

From what we have said about the *Lao tzu* it can be seen that the central idea is quite simple and has a direct bearing on life. In life, whether in its ethical or political aspect, we should model ourselves on the *tao*. The supreme goal for the common man as well as for the ruler is survival, and the means to this goal is simply to hold fast to the submissive. No wonder it is said,

> My words are very easy to understand and very easy to put into practice. (LXX, 170)

If few can understand them it is because

> Straightforward words
> Seem paradoxical, (LXXVIII, 189)

and

> When the worst student hears about the way
> He laughs out loud. (LXI, 90)

That no one can put into practice the advice contained in the words is because it is against the grain of human nature in its degenerate form to act in accordance with it.

*'The dialogue between Yang Chu and Chyntzyy', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. XXII (1959), pp. 291-9.

There are certain ideas which we have, so far, not touched on in our account and to these we must turn our attention. As the work is known as the *Tao te ching*, it must seem strange that we have not said anything about the term '*te*'. *Te* means 'virtue', and seems to be related to its homophone meaning 'to get'. In its Taoist usage, *te* refers to the virtue of a thing (which is what it 'gets' from the *tao*). In other words, *te* is the nature of a thing, because it is in virtue of its *te* that a thing is what it is. But in the *Lao tzu* the term is not a particularly important one and is often used in its more conventional senses.

There are two passages which seem to go against the general tenor of the work. The first is the passage in chapter XIII in which it is said,

> The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble have I? (30a)

This is enlightenment indeed, but does not fit well into the *Lao tzu* where survival is assumed, without question, to be the supreme goal in life.

The second is the passage in chapter II,

> Thus Something and Nothing produce each other;
> The difficult and the easy complement each other;
> The long and the short off-set each other;
> The high and the low incline towards each other;
> Note and sound harmonize with each other;
> Before and after follow each other. (5)

The point here made is that opposite terms are relative. Take away the high, and there will no longer be the low. This line of thought, pushed to its logical conclusion, is capable of destroying the distinction between opposites. When the distinction between life and death is abolished, death is no longer something to be feared. This again goes against the general tendency in the *Lao tzu* where not only is survival a supreme value but the distinction between opposites is basic. Take away this basis, and you render superfluous almost everything that is said in the book. Both these passages fit in much better with the kind of Taoist thought to be found in the most important parts of the *Chuang tzu* where the problem that is the main concern of the *Lao tzu* is solved by cutting the Gordian knot.

There are certain ways of interpreting the thought of the *Lao tzu*

which are very common but which do not seem to me to be well founded. Both in China and in the West, there have been attempts to put undue emphasis on the mysterious elements in the *Lao tzu*. So far we have seen only a rather down-to-earth philosophy aimed at the mundane purpose of personal survival and political order. There are a few passages which form the basis of this emphasis on the mysterious. These are of two kinds: the first concerns the origin of the universe; the second concerns certain practices of the individual. In the first, we often find the term 'the mother of the myriad creatures', but the term which lends itself most easily to such a purpose is 'the mysterious female', which occurs in chapter VI,

> The spirit of the valley never dies.
> This is called the mysterious female.
> The gateway of the mysterious female
> Is called the root of heaven and earth.
> Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there,
> Yet use will never drain it. (17)

It is possible, however, to take this as a piece of cosmogony. Just as living creatures are born from the womb of the mother, so is the universe born from the womb of 'the mysterious female'. It is a remote possibility that the language used here is an echo of some primitive creation myth. But even if that were the case, the language in the *Lao tzu* has no longer any mythical significance, as can be seen from the description of 'the mysterious female' as 'dimly visible' and seemingly there. It is no more than a picturesque way of describing how the universe came to be, and an expression of wonder at the inexhaustible nature of this creative process. The comparison of the creative processes of nature with the union of male and female is not limited to this passage. Further examples are,

> Heaven and earth will unite and sweet dew will fall, (XXXII, 72)

and

> The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang*, and are the blending of the generative forces of the two. (XLII, 94)

It seems hardly justifiable to take such passages and interpret the whole work in the light of them.

The second type of passage deals with practices of the individual

and has 'the new born babe' as a symbol.

> One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to a new born babe. (LV, 125)

Again,

> If you are a ravine to the empire,
> Then the constant virtue will not desert you
> And you will again return to being a babe. (XXVIII, 63)

What is it, we may ask, in a baby that makes it a suitable symbol for a state so desirable in the eyes of the Taoist? It is its suppleness.

> Its bones are weak and its sinews supple yet its hold is firm. (LV, 125)

We have seen that *jou* (supple, pliant, submissive) is looked upon as the quality resembling most closely that of the *tao*, and because of this,

> A man is supple and weak when living, but hard and stiff when dead. Grass and trees are pliant and fragile when living, but dried and shrivelled when dead. Thus the hard and the strong are the comrades of death; the supple and the weak are the comrades of life. (LXXVI, 182)

It may be noted, in passing, that the insight thus gained into the nature of things is an intuitive one. The Taoist sees that water is submissive and weak yet it can wear down the hardest of things, that the baby is supple and weak yet no one wishes to harm it, that the female is meek and submissive yet she is able to get the better of the male, that the body is supple when alive and rigid when dead, and from these isolated observations he gains the intuitive insight that in the nature of the universe it is the submissive that survives and triumphs in the end. Once this intuition is gained, further observation is unnecessary and serves only to confuse.

> Without stirring abroad
> One can know the whole world;
> Without looking out of the window
> One can see the way of heaven.
> The further one goes
> The less one knows. (XLVII, 106)

About the new born babe there is one passage which seems to show a different point of view.

> In concentrating your breath can you become as supple
> As a babe? (X, 24)

It is possible that the concentrating of the breath implies some sort of breathing exercise or perhaps even yogic practice. But again this is an isolated passage in the *Lao tzu*, and what may be even more significant is that this passage has parallels in chapter 37 of the *Kuan tzu* and chapter 23 of the *Chuang tzu*, and in the latter work the passage occurs in a story concerning Lao Tzu and is attributed by him to a book on the safeguarding of life (*Wei sheng chih ching*). It is therefore possible that the passage belongs properly to a school which was given to practices thought to be conducive to the prolonging of life. In the *Lao tzu* the aim is rather to avoid an untimely death through the adoption of submissiveness as a principle of conduct than the prolonging of life beyond its natural limit by artificial practices popular with the seekers after immortality.

There is another common assumption that needs examination. Ever since Wang Pi (A.D. 226-49) who wrote a commentary on the *Book of Changes* as well as on the *Lao tzu*, there has been no lack of interpreters who found affinity between the two works. But it seems to me that this assumption is mistaken. Elsewhere* I have argued that the interpretation of the theory of change as cyclic is more appropriate to the *Book of Changes* than to the *Lao tzu*. Here I wish only to call attention to the *yin* and the *yang*, the central concepts in the *Book of Changes* and the basis for the process of cyclic change. In the *Lao tzu*, the *yin* and the *yang* appear only once, in section 94 which has been quoted above. This is perhaps related to another passage,

> When carrying on your head your perplexed bodily soul can you embrace in your arms the One
> And not let go? (X 24)

If this is so, then section 94 probably belongs to the same group as section 24, which, as we have just seen, represents the school given to practices conducive to the prolonging of life, a tradition quite different from that of the main part of the *Lao tzu*. This may be speculation, but the fact remains that the *yin* and the *yang* appear once and once only in the whole of the *Lao tzu* and there is no reason to suppose that they occupy an important place in the thought of the whole work.

*See my article, 'The Treatment of Opposites in *Lao Tzu*', *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies*, vol. XXI (1958), pp. 344-60.

As in our view the *Lao tzu* is an anthology, it is a matter of some interest and importance that we should try to identify in it the views of some of the thinkers of the Warring States period whose works are unfortunately no longer extant.

We have seen for instance that views similar to those of Yang Chu can be found in passages where the ideal ruler is represented as the truly selfish man. We have also seen that in replacing the concept of heaven by that of the *tao*, the *Lao tzu* bears some resemblance to parts of the *Kuan tzu* which, in the opinion of some modern scholars, are the work of the School of Sung K'eng and Yin Wen who figured among the scholars gathered in Chi Hsia in the state of Ch'i.

Again, according to the *Lü shih ch'un ch'iu* (chüan 17, pt 7), the key concept in the teachings of the legendary Kuan Yin (Keeper of the Pass) is 'limpidity'. In the *T'ien hsia* chapter of the *Chuang tzu*, in an account of the thought of Kuan Yin and Lao Tzu, the former is quoted as saying, presumably in connexion with the sage, 'There is nothing inflexible in him, and so things show themselves up clearly. In his movement he is like water; in his stillness he is like a mirror; in his response he is like an echo. Indistinct, he seems shadowy; silent, he seems limpid. . . . He never leads but always follows behind others.' Here, besides 'limpidity', there are other concepts, many of which, like 'water', 'stillness', 'indistinct', 'shadowy', 'to follow and not to lead', are to be found in the *Lao tzu*. As Kuan Yin is so closely associated with the story of the westward journey of Lao Tzu, it is not surprising that so many of the ideas attributed to Kuan Yin are to be found in the *Lao tzu*.

Lieh Tzu, who is as nebulous a figure as Lao Tzu, was said to have advocated 'emptiness (*hsü*)' (*Lü shih ch'un ch'iu*, loc. cit.), and 'emptiness' figures very prominently in the *Lao tzu*, although the term used, except in sections 15 and 37, is *ch'ung* and not *hsü*.

The most fascinating case is Shen Tao (and T'ien P'ien who is invariably mentioned with him) who not only figured at Chi Hsia but, one suspects, was at least as prominent in the Warring States period as Chuang Tzu or Lao Tzu as representative of what was later called Taoist thought. He is said in the *T'ien hsia* chapter of the *Chuang tzu* to 'discard wisdom', 'to laugh at the empire for honouring men of worth', 'to consider wrong the great sages of the empire'. He is quoted as saying, 'The highest thing we can hope to emulate is the insensate. Men of worth and sages serve no useful purpose, as the

clod never strays from the way.' According to the *Hsün tzu* (chapter 17), he was able to see the value of following behind but not the value of taking the lead. It is somewhat surprising that all his views that we have mentioned are to be found somewhere in the *Lao tzu*. His attack on wisdom, men of worth, and sages is identical with the opening lines of chapter XIX,

> Exterminate the sage, discard the wise,
> And the people will benefit a hundredfold, (43)

and the opening words of chapter III,

> Not to honour men of worth will keep the people from contention. (8)

The value of not taking the lead is also to be found in a number of passages some of which we have already quoted in connextion with the refutation of the charge of the use of scheming methods. It is also found in chapter LXVII,

> I have three treasures
> Which I hold and cherish.
>
> The third is known as not daring to take the lead in the empire.
>
> Not daring to take the lead in the empire one could afford to be lord over the vessels.
>
> Now . . . to forsake the rear for the lead is sure to end in death. (164, 164a)

Finally, Shen Tao's insensate clod is singularly like the uncarved block in the *Lao tzu*, the symbol for freedom from desire.

We have said enough to show that passages are to be found in the *Lao tzu* which contain key concepts of the various schools of the Warring States period, but unfortunately we cannot take our investigations any further in this direction, for two reasons. Firstly, we know far too little about most of these early schools whose representative works are no longer extant. Secondly, from the key concepts associated with these schools one gets the impression that very often there is more difference between them in terminology than in substance. Does not 'valuing the submissive', or 'valuing the empty', or 'avoiding the lead' amount to the same thing? May it not be the case that some of these schools were very much alike but each had to put up a different 'slogan' in order to justify the claim to be an independent school, since in the Warring States period so much

was to be gained by such a claim? If this is so, there is perhaps much to say for looking upon all the schools represented in the *Lao tzu* as coming under the general description of Taoism, as the historians of the Han certainly did. Whatever the truth of the matter, with the scanty material at our disposal we cannot hope to sort out what pertains to the different schools; though the little we can do reinforces our conviction that the *Lao tzu* is an anthology in which are to be found passages representing the views of various schools, including some which flourished at Chi Hsia in the second half of the fourth and the first half of the third century B.C. and which shared the general tendency in thought that came to be known as Taoism.

In the translation, the division into chapters in the traditional text has been adhered to, but section numbers have been introduced. These serve to separate existing chapters into parts which, in my view, need not originally have belonged together. This does not mean that in every case these could not, in fact, have formed a continuous whole. If the reader can see a connexion between parts that I have separated, he can simply ignore my section markings. I have used this method in preference to rearrangement of the text which has been attempted by Eastern as well as Western scholars, because I am unable to share their assumptions that the present text is not in the proper order and that there is a proper order which can be restored by rearrangement. Where two passages are possibly independent, I have given them different section numbers, but when a passage is followed by another which serves as further exposition and was probably added by some editor, I have used the same section number but with an added letter after it.

As considerably more than half of the text consists in rhyming passages which are most probably of an earlier date, it seems desirable to separate them from the prose parts. This is done by printing the translation of the rhyming passages in separate lines and with indention. Needless to say, no attempt has been made to translate these passages in verse form.

D.C.L.

Translation of the Wang Pi Text

NOTE ON THE CHINESE TEXT

The text

The text on which the translation is based is the so-called Wang Pi 王弼 text. The text given in the *Erh shih erh tzu* 二十二子, which is a reprint of the Che Chiang Shu Chü 浙江書局 reprint of the Hua T'ing Chang Shih 華亭張氏 edition, has been followed except that the character *hsüan* 玄 which, for taboo reasons, was systematically changed to *yüan* 元, has been restored. Emendations are marked and where the variant reading given is that found in other editions, the reader is referred to such standard works as (1) Ma Hsü-lun 馬敍倫 *Lao tzu ho ku* 老子覈詁 (1924; reprinted as *Lao tzu chiao ku* 老子校詁, Peking, 1956), (2) Chiang Hsi-ch'ang 蔣錫昌, *Lao tzu chiao ku* 老子校詁 (Shanghai, 1937) and (3) Chu Ch'ien-chih 朱謙之, *Lao tzu chiao shih* 老子校釋 (Shanghai, 1958). Of these works, (2) is still the most convenient for reference.

Editorial signs

[a]	insert a
⟨a⟩	omit a
⟨a⟩ [b]	substitute b for a
a (b)	read a as b

一　章

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〉[曒]。此兩者同，出而異名。同謂之玄，玄之又玄，衆妙之門。

BOOK ONE

I

1 The way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.

2 The nameless was the beginning of heaven and earth;
The named was the mother of the myriad creatures.

3 Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its* secrets;
But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.

3a These two are the same
But diverge in name as they issue forth.
Being the same they are called mysteries,
Mystery upon mystery—
The gateway of the manifold secrets.

*In translating from the Chinese it is often impossible to avoid using the pronouns 'it' and 'they' and their derivatives without any clear reference, whether these are expressed in the Chinese or only implied. In the present work 'it' used in this way sometimes refers to 'the way' and 'they' to 'the myriad creatures'.

二　章

天下皆知美之為美，斯惡已；[天下]皆知善之為善，斯不善已。故有無相生；難易相成；長短相〈較〉[形]；高下相傾；音聲相和；前後相隨。是以聖人處無為之事，行不言之教。萬物作焉而不辭〔司〕；生而不有；為而不恃；功成而弗居。夫唯弗居，是以不去。

II

4 The whole world recognizes the beautiful as the beautiful, yet this is only the ugly; the whole world recognizes the good as the good, yet this is only the bad.

5 Thus Somthing and Nothing produce each other;
The difficult and the easy complement each other;
The long and the short off-set each other;
The high and the low incline towards each other;
Note and sound* harmonize with each other;
Before and after follow each other.†

6 Therefore the sage keeps to the deed that consists in taking no action and practises the teaching that uses no words.

7 The myriad creatures rise from it yet it claims no authority;
It gives them life yet claims no possession;
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.

7a It is because it lays claim to no merit
That its merit never deserts it.

*The Chinese terms used here are not precise and it is not clear what the intended contrast is. The translation is, therefore, tentative.
†It may seem strange to say that before and after follow each other, but this refers probably to a ring. Any point on a ring is both before and after any other point, depending on the arbitary choice of the starting-point.

三　章

不尚賢，使民不爭；不貴難得之貨，使民不為盜；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，使夫智者不敢為也。為無為，則無不治。

四　章

道沖而用之或不〈盈〉[窮]。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。

！昭八年《穀梁傳》：車軌塵。王念孫云：「予謂軌者循也，謂後車循前車之塵，不得旁出也。」（王引之《經義述聞》萬有文庫本頁一〇〇八）《老子》

III

8 Not to honour men of worth will keep the people from contention; not to value goods that are hard to come by will keep them from theft; not to display what is desirable will keep them from being unsettled of mind.

9 Therefore in governing the people, the sage empties their minds but fills their bellies, weakens their wills but strengthens their bones. He always keeps them innocent of knowledge and free from desire, and ensures that the clever never dare to act.

10 Do that which consists in taking no action, and order will prevail.

IV

11 The way is empty, yet use will not drain* it.
Deep, it is like the ancestor of the myriad creatures.

12 Blunt the sharpness;
Untangle the knots;
Soften the glare;
Let your wheels move only along old ruts.

13 Darkly visible, it only seems as if it were there.
I know not whose son it is.
It images the forefather of God.

*The word in the text meaning 'full' has been emended to one meaning 'empty'. Cf. 'Yet use will never drain it' (17); 'Yet it cannot be exhausted by use' (78); 'Yet use will not drain it' (101).

此文，其義正與此相同。

五　章

天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗；聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。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（沖）。

六　章

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。

V

14 Heaven and earth are ruthless, and treat the myriad creatures as straw dogs*; the sage is ruthless, and treats the people as straw dogs.

15 Is not the space between heaven and earth like a bellows?
It is empty without being exhausted:
The more it works the more comes out.

16 Much speech leads inevitably to silence.
Better to hold fast to the void.

*In the *T'ien yün* chapter in the *Chuang tzu* it is said that straw dogs were treated with the greatest deference before they were used as an offering, only to be discarded and trampled upon as soon as they had served their purpose.

VI

17 The spirit of the valley never dies.
This is called the mysterious female.
The gateway of the mysterious female
Is called the root of heaven and earth.
Dimly visible, it seems as if it were there,
Yet use will never drain it.

七　章

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。非以其無私邪故能成其私？

八　章

上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處衆人之所惡，故幾於道。居善地；心善淵；與善仁；言善信；正(政)善治；事善能；動善時。夫唯不爭故無尤。

VII

18 Heaven and earth are enduring. The reason why heaven and earth can be enduring is that they do not give themselves life. Hence they are able to be long-lived.

19 Therefore the sage puts his person last and it comes first,
Treats it as extraneous to himself and it is preserved.

19a Is it not because he is without thought of self that he is able to accomplish his private ends?

VIII

20 Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the way.

21 In a home it is the site that matters;
In quality of mind it is depth that matters;
In an ally it is benevolence that matters;
In speech it is good faith that matters;
In government it is order that matters;
In affairs it is ability that matters;
In action it is timeliness that matters.

22 It is because it does not contend that it is never at fault.*

*In sense and, possibly, in rhyme, this line is continuous with 20.

九　章

持而盈之，不如其已；揣而梲(銳)之，不可長保；金玉滿堂，莫之能守；富貴而驕，自遺其咎。功遂身退天之道。

十　章

載(戴)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〉[為]乎？天門開闔，能〈無〉[為]雌乎？明白四達，能無〈為〉[知]乎？生之畜

IX

23 Rather than fill it to the brim by keeping it upright
Better to have stopped in time;*
Hammer it to a point
And the sharpness cannot be preserved for ever;
There may be gold and jade to fill a hall
But there is none who can keep them.
To be overbearing when one has wealth and position
Is to bring calamity upon oneself.
To retire when the task is accomplished
Is the way of heaven.

*This refers to a vessel which is said to have been in the temple of Chou (or Lu). It stands in position when empty but overturns when full. The moral is that humility is a necessary virtue, especially for those in high position. For a detailed discussion of the significance of the vessel, see D. C. Lau, 'On the term *"ch'ih ying"* and the story concerning the so-called "tilting vessel" ', *Symposium on Chinese Studies commemorating the Golden Jubilee of the University of Hong Kong 1911-1961*, Vol. III, 1968, Hong Kong.

X

24 When carrying on your head your perplexed bodily soul* can
you embrace in your arms the One
And not let go?

*Man has two souls, the *p'o* which is the soul of the body and the *hun* which is the soul of the spirit. After death, the *p'o* descends into earth while the *hun* ascends into heaven. Cf. "The myriad creatures carry on their backs the *yin* and embrace in their arms the *yang*' (94).

之。生而不有；為而不恃；長而不宰。是謂玄德。

十一章

三十輻共一轂。當其無，有車之用。埏埴以為器。當其無，有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室。當其無，有室之用。故有之以

In concentrating your breath can you become as supple
As a babe?
Can you polish your mysterious mirror†
And leave no blemish?
Can you love the people and govern the state
Without resorting to action?
When the gates of heaven+ open and shut
Are you capable of keeping to the role of the female?
When your discernment penetrates the four quarters
Are you capable of not knowing anything?
25 It gives them life and rears them.
26 It gives them life yet claims no possession;
It benefits them yet exacts no gratitude;
It is the steward yet exercises no authority.
Such is called the mysterious virtue.

†i.e. the mind.
+The gates of heaven are, according to the *Keng sang ch'u* chapter of the *Chuang tzu*, the invisible gateway through which the myraid creatures come into being and return to nothing.

XI

27 Thirty spokes
Share one hub.
Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the cart. Knead clay in order to make a vessel.

為利，無之以為用。

十二章

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。是以聖人為腹不為目。故去彼取此。

Adapt the nothing therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the vessel. Cut out doors and windows in order to make a room. Adapt the nothing* therein to the purpose in hand, and you will have the use of the room.

27a Thus what we gain is Something, yet it is by virtue of Nothing that this can be put to use.

*In all cases, by 'nothing' is meant the empty spaces.

XII

28 The five colours make man's eyes blind;
The five notes make his ears deaf;
The five tastes injure his palate;
Riding and hunting
Make his mind go wild with excitement;
Goods hard to come by
Serve to hinder his progress.

29 Hence the sage is
For the belly
Not for the eye.

29a Therefore he discards the one and takes the other.

十三章

寵辱若驚;貴大患若身。何謂寵辱若驚?寵為下得之若驚,失之若驚。是謂寵辱若驚。何謂貴大患若身?吾所以有大患者,為吾有身。及吾無身,吾有何患?故貴以身為天下,若可寄天下。愛以身為天下,若可託天下。

十四章

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,故混而為一。其上不皦;其下不昧。繩

XIII

30 Favour and disgrace are things that startle;
High rank* is, like one's body, a source of great trouble.

30a What is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle? Favour when it is bestowed on a subject serves to startle as much as when it is withdrawn. This is what is meant by saying that favour and disgrace are things that startle. What is meant by saying that high rank is, like one's body, a source of great trouble? The reason I have great trouble is that I have a body. When I no longer have a body, what trouble have I?

31 Hence he who values his body more than dominion over the empire can be entrusted with the empire. He who loves his body more than dominion over the empire can be given the custody of the empire.

*It is probable that the word *kui* ("high rank") here has crept in by mistake, since, as it stands, this line has one word more than the first. If this is the case, then the line should be translated: 'Great trouble is like one's body.' This brings it into line with the explanation that follows where 'high rank' is not, in fact, mentioned.

XIV

32 What cannot be seen is called evanescent;
What cannot be heard is called rarefied;
What cannot be touched is called minute.

32a These three cannot be fathomed

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。

十五章

古之善為〈士〉[道]者，微妙玄通，深不可識。夫唯不可識，故强為之容。豫焉若冬涉川，猶兮若畏四鄰；儼兮其若〈容〉[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〈靜〉

And so they are confused and looked upon as one.

33 Its upper part is not dazzling;
Its lower part is not obscure.
Dimly visible, it cannot be named
And returns to that which is without substance.
This is called the shape that has no shape,
The image that is without substance.
This is called indistinct and shadowy.
Go up to it and you will not see its head;
Follow behind it and you will not see its rear.

34 Hold fast to the way of antiquity
In order to keep in control the realm of today.
The ability to know the beginning of antiquity
Is called the thread running through the way.

XV

35 Of old he who was well versed in the way
Was minutely subtle, mysteriously comprehending,
And too profound to be known.
It is because he could not be known
That he can only be given a makeshift description:
Tentative, as if fording a river in winter,
Hesitant, as if in fear of his neighbours;

[止]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(敝)〈不〉[而]新成。

十六章

致虛極;守靜篤。萬物並作,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。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。

Formal like a guest;
Falling apart like thawing ice;
Thick like the uncarved block;
Vacant like a valley;
Murky like muddy water.

36 Who can be muddy and yet, settling, slowly become limpid?
Who can be at rest and yet, stirring, slowly come to life?
He who holds fast to this way
Desires not to be full.
It is because he is not full
That he can be worn and yet newly made.*

*The present text reads "That he can be worn and not newly made'. The negative must have crept in by mistake. Cf. 'Worn then new (50).

XVI

37 I do my utmost to attain emptiness;
I hold firmly to stillness.
The myriad creatures all rise together
And I watch their return.
The teeming creatures
All return to their separate roots.
Returning to one's roots is known as stillness.
This is what is meant by returning to one's destiny.

十七章

太上下知有之。其次親而譽之;其次畏之;其次侮之。信不足焉,有不信焉。悠(猶)兮其貴言。功成事遂,百姓皆謂我自然。

Returning to one's destiny is known as the constant.
Knowledge of the constant is known as discernment.
38 Woe to him who wilfully innovates
While ignorant of the constant,
But should one act from knowledge of the constant
One's action will lead to impartiality,
Impartiality to kingliness,
Kingliness to heaven,
Heaven to the way,
The way to perpetuity,
And to the end of one's days one will meet with no danger.

XVII

39 The best of all rulers is but a shadowy presence to his subjects.
Next comes the ruler they love and praise;
Next comes one they fear;
Next comes one with whom they take liberties.
40 When there is not enough faith, there is lack of good faith.
41 Hesitant, he does not utter words lightly.
When his task is accomplished and his work done
The people all say, 'It happened to us naturally.'

十八章

大道廢,有仁義;慧知出,有大偽;六親不和,有孝慈;國家昏亂,有忠臣。

十九章

絶聖棄智,民利百倍;絶仁棄義,民復孝慈;絶巧棄利,盜賊無有。此三者以為(偽)文不足,故令有所屬:見素抱樸,少私寡欲。

XVIII

42 When the great way falls into disuse
There are benevolence and rectitude;
When cleverness emerges
There is great hypocrisy;
When the six relations* are at variance
There are filial children;
When the state is benighted
There are loyal ministers.

*The six relations, according to Wang Pi, are father and son, elder and younger brother, husband and wife.

XIX

43 Exterminate the sage, discard the wise,
And the people will benefit a hundredfold;
Exterminate benevolence, discard rectitude,
And the people will again be filial;
Exterminate ingenuity, discard profit,
And there will be no more thieves and bandits.

43a These three, being false adornments, are not enough
And the people must have something to which they can attach themselves:
Exhibit the unadorned and embrace the uncarved block,

二十章

絕學無憂。唯之與阿、相去幾何？善之與惡、相去〈若何〉[何若]？人之所畏、不可不畏。荒兮其未央哉。衆人熙熙，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。衆人皆有餘而我獨若遺(匱)。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。衆人皆有以而我獨頑似鄙。我獨異於人而貴食母。

Have little thought of self and as few desires as possible.

XX

44 Exterminate learning and there will no longer be worries.*

45 Between yea and nay
How much difference is there?
Between good and evil
How great is the distance?

46 What others fear
One must also fear.

47 And wax without having reached the limit.†
The multitude are joyous
As if partaking of the *t'ai lao*+ offering
Or going up to a terrace‡ in spring.
I alone am inactive and reveal no signs,
Like a baby that has not yet learned to smile,

*This line is clearly out of place in this chapter, and should, almost certainly, form part of the previous chapter, but there is disagreement among scholars as to the exact place in the previous chapter to which it should be restored. Some believe that it is in fact the last line in that chapter. I am inclined to the view that it should be the first line. In that case, it should also be the first line of 43.

†This line seems unconnected here. Kao Heng suggests that it probably follows on the line 'I alone am inactive and reveal no signs', as both lines are similar not only in their grammatical structure but also in having internal rhymes (*Lao tzu cheng ku*, Peking, 1956, p. 46.)

+*T'ai lao* is the most elaborate kind of feast, and consists of the three kinds of animals, the ox, the sheep, and the pig.

‡i.e. going on an outing.

二十一章

孔德之容、惟道是從。道之為物、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。其精甚眞，其中有信。自〈古〉[今]及〈今〉[古]，其名

Listless as though with no home to go back to.
The multitude all have more than enough.
I alone seem to be in want.
My mind is that of a fool—how blank!
Vulgar people are clear.
I alone am drowsy.
Vulgar people are alert.
I alone am muddled.
Calm like the sea;
Like a high wind that never ceases.‖
The multitude all have a purpose.
I alone am foolish and uncouth.
I alone am different from others
And value being fed by the mother.

‖These two lines though seemingly unconnected to the rest of the section are meant to be a description of the sage, who is referred to throughout this section in the first person.

XXI

48 In his every movement a man of great virtue
Follows the way and the way only.
49 As a thing the way is
Shadowy, indistinct.
Indistinct and shadowy,
Yet within it is an image;

Part Two of this book is a fresh translation of a text which is a conflation of two manuscripts of the *Lao tzu*, dating at the latest from the early Western Han, discovered at Ma Wang Tui in December 1973. This is far superior to texts previously available to us, as we have here, for the first time, a text we can be sure to be free from scribal errors and editorial tamperings of a subsequent age. Moreover, we have a text with fuller use of particles which often rules out a good many of the conjectural interpretations by scholars down the ages.

Part One is a reprint of the earlier translation of the so-called Wang Pi text first published by Penguin Books in 1963. The text of the translation has been deliberately left unchanged, because there is room for a translation of what has been for centuries the most widely used version of the *Lao tzu*. Besides, it may be interesting to the student of textual criticism that many of the conjectures which appeared reasonable on available evidence then have turned out to be untenable in the light of the newly found manuscripts of Ma Wang Tui.

In this revised edition the translation of the Ma Wang Tui text has been given a fairly thorough revision.

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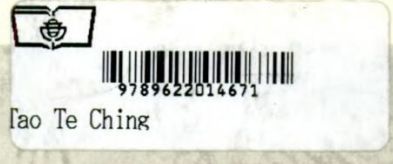

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