The Essential
Translation of
the Ancient Chinese
Book of the Tao

TAO TE CHING

LAO TZU

Translated with an
Introduction and Commentary
by JOHN MINFORD

TAO TE CHING

(DAODEJING)

THE TAO AND THE POWER

LAO-TZU

(Laozi)

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For Brigette

INTRODUCTION

This little book is the founding text of China's ancient and enduring religious philosophy, known in the West as Taoism. Taoism, with its history of two and a half millennia, is usually depicted in stark contrast with China's other main traditional philosophy, the secular ideology known in the West as Confucianism, whose founding text is another equally short early work, *The Analects of Confucius* (*Lunyu*).[1] Broadly speaking, we may say that Confucianism as it evolved in subsequent centuries emphasized the need for order, respectful harmony within family and society, coded ritual, precise terminology, clearly delineated duty, and structured hierarchy in daily life. Taoism, on the other hand, emphasized inner freedom, meditation, and the Self-Cultivation of the individual, surrender to the spontaneous rhythms of nature, primordial intuition, and exploration of the mysteries of the human condition and the wonders of the cosmos, listening to the silent music of the Tao.

The Tao and the Power (*Daodejing*) is attributed to a shadowy figure known as Lao-tzu (the Old Master),[2] while the book known as *The Analects* contains the enigmatic and often delightfully eccentric sayings, as recorded by his circle of disciples, of a well-documented historical personality, the peripatetic teacher Confucius (Kongzi, 551–479 BC).[3] Confucius lived toward the very end of what is known as the Spring and Autumn period (771–ca. 475 BC), during which the Zhou dynastic royal house, forced to move its capital eastwards in 771 by the incursions of the Quanrong or "Dog" barbarians, began to suffer the erosion of its central authority while several lesser states contended for power. The more stable earlier half of the dynasty (the Western Zhou, ca. 1046–771 BC) had previously seen the gradual emergence of a written culture and the appearance of such formative pre-philosophical compendia as the oracular *Book of Change* (the *I Ching*), with its sixty-four Hexagrams and its wide-ranging and thought-provoking prognostications, and the *Book of Songs*, with its enchanting repertoire of early folksong and dynastic hymns.[4] These collections were eventually to be enshrined as Classics in the official Confucian canon, often undergoing tortuous ideological distortions in the process. Meanwhile in the southern state of Chu, shamanistic poets had

begun to sing with a very different and less restrained voice, one that venerated magic, nature, and the supernatural, in which the individual yearned for erotic and mystical union with the divine.[5] This was the earliest outpouring of Chinese expressive lyricism. Taoism had much in common with this softer and more exotic southern world, and many have claimed that it had its origins there, whereas Confucian thought grew out of the harsher climes of the central plain and the north, especially the rocky eastern area of the states of Qi and Lu (homeland of Confucius), which now form the Province of Shandong.

TWO MASTERS: LAO-TZU AND CONFUCIUS

Legend has it that the two Masters met more than once, Lao-tzu being somewhat senior to Confucius. In a probably apocryphal chapter of the later *The Book of Taoist Master Zhuang*, their encounters are described with a mischievously mocking Taoist sense of humor.

> Confucius had reached the age of fifty-one and still had not "heard the Tao." Finally he went south to Pei and called on Lao-tzu.
>
> "Ah, here you are!" said Lao-tzu. "I've heard of you as a worthy man from the north. Have you attained the Tao?"
>
> "Not yet," replied Confucius.
>
> "How have you sought it?"
>
> "I sought it through rules and regulations. Five years went by and I could not attain it."
>
> "How else did you seek it?" asked Lao-tzu.
>
> "I sought it in the Yin and the Yang. Twelve years went by and still I could not attain it."
>
> "Of course not!" replied Lao-tzu. "The Tao cannot be sought in this manner . . . The *perfecti* of olden times wandered freely in the wilds, they found nourishment in the fields of Simplicity, they took their stand in the garden of No-Giving. They abode in Non-Action, and found easy nourishment. Their wanderings brought them to the True Tao. This was their Wealth . . ."
>
> Confucius called on Lao-tzu again and this time asked him about the Virtues of Benevolence and Righteousness.
>
> Lao-tzu replied:
>
> "When chaff from the winnowing fan blinds the eyes, then Heaven, Earth, and the Four Directions all appear to be out of place.

The sting of a mosquito or of a horsefly can keep a man awake all night. Similarly, these so-called Virtues of yours do nothing but muddle the mind and cause confusion. Let the world cleave instead to Simplicity and the Uncarved Block. Let it move freely with the wind, and abide in Inner Power. Don't go around huffing and puffing, beating a big drum as if to chase an errant child! The snow goose needs no daily bath to stay white. The crow needs no daily ink to stay black . . ."

When Confucius returned from this visit to Lao-tzu, he was silent for three days. His disciples questioned him, saying:

"When you met Lao-tzu, what advice did you give him?"

"Finally," replied Confucius, "I have set eyes on a Dragon! A Dragon that coils to show off the extent of its body, that sprawls to display the patterns on its scales. A Dragon that rides on the Breath of the Clouds, and feeds on the purest Yin and Yang. My mouth simply fell open in amazement. How could I possibly offer such a Dragon advice?"[6]

Sima Qian (ca. 145–86 BC), the Grand Historian, recorded a similar encounter, in his biographical sketch of Lao-tzu.

Lao-tzu was from Quren Village in the southern state of Chu. His name was Li Dan, and he was the Zhou Official Archivist. Confucius went to Zhou to ask him about the Rites. Lao-tzu said to him:

"You speak of men who have long decayed together with their bones. Nothing but their words has survived. When a Gentleman is in tune with the times, he rides a carriage; when he is out of tune, he makes his way disheveled as he is. I have heard that just as the best merchant keeps his stores hidden so that he appears to possess nothing, so the True Gentleman conceals his abundant Inner Power beneath an appearance of foolishness. Rid yourself of Pride and Desire, put aside your fancy manner and your lustful ways. They will bring you nothing but harm. That is all I have to say."

After he had taken his leave of Lao-tzu, Confucius said to his disciples: "Birds fly; fishes swim; animals run. These things I know. Whatsoever runs can be trapped; whatsoever swims can be caught in a net; whatsoever flies can be brought down with an arrow. But a Dragon riding the clouds into the Heavens—that is quite beyond my comprehension! Today I have seen Lao-tzu. He is like a Dragon!"

> Lao-tzu cultivated the Tao and the Inner Power. He advocated the hermit's life, a life lived in obscurity. He lived in Zhou for a long time, but when he saw that the Zhou dynasty was in a state of decline, he departed. When he reached the Pass, the Keeper of the Pass Yin Xi said to him: "You sir are about to retire into seclusion, I beseech you to write a book for me!" So Lao-tzu wrote a book in two parts, treating of the Tao and the Power, in a little over five thousand words. And then he went on his way . . . No one was able to tell who he really was, no one knew where he went to in the end . . . He was a recluse.[7]

The two accounts differ in many ways, but they have in common the vision of Lao-tzu as that transcendent, most auspicious and most powerful creature, a Dragon. He is portrayed as someone with a truly remarkable charisma, someone whose *mana* made a deep and lasting impression, a Great Man, a genuine Immortal riding the clouds. Truly, in the words of the *I Ching*:

The Dragon
Flies in Heaven.
Draco Volans in coelo.
It profits
To see a Great Man.

> The Great Man is the Dragon. The Yang which has been slowly accumulating is suddenly transformed, it attains perfect freedom. The soaring flight is free, effortless, and unhampered. The Sage simply takes off, following the Tao as naturally and instinctively as if it were an Edict of Heaven.[8]

THE HUNDRED SCHOOLS

In both of these little books, *The Analects* of Confucius and Lao-tzu's *The Tao and the Power*, the Chinese literary language reached a new level of coherence and expressive power; it acquired the potential to articulate more complex and subtle ideas. They were most probably both compiled at the beginning of the period of still further intensified turmoil and civil war known as the Warring States (ca. 475–221 BC), which witnessed the final disintegration of the Zhou dynasty and the ultimate unification of China under the harsh

totalitarian rule of the northwestern state of Qin. These chaotic centuries saw the rise of many contending schools of thought across China, the so-called Hundred Schools, all of whom were "Disputers of the Tao," claiming to possess a recipe, a Way, or Tao, for both the individual and the ruler, for living and statecraft.[9] One such school, known as the Legalists or the School of Law (*fajia*), advocated a drastic totalitarian solution to government, and this was the way of thinking followed by the Ruler of Qin, infamous builder of the Great Wall and (according to some) burner of the books.[10] A short work from this same period, *The Art of War* (*Sunzi bingfa*), is attributed to another shadowy figure, a strategist known as Master Sun (Sunzi, more familiar in its old spelling, Sun-tzu). It is a startlingly Machiavellian treatise in praise of cunning and subterfuge, which cleverly exploits some of the softer and more attractive kungfu-like maxims of early Taoism.

> Military dispositions take form like water: water shuns the high and hastens to the low. War shuns the strong and attacks the weak. Water shapes its current from the lie of the land. The warrior shapes his victory from the dynamic of the enemy.[11]

TAOISM AND CONFUCIANISM IN HISTORY

The thinking of Confucius was further developed by two later Confucian figures, Mencius (Mengzi, or Meng-tzu, ca. 372–289 BC) and Master Xun (Xunzi, or Hsün-tzu, ca. 310–235 BC), whose books contain more sustained philosophical argumentation than is to be found in *The Analects*. In a similar way, the Taoist master-raconteur Master Zhuang (Zhuangzi, or Chuang-tzu, fourth century BC) and his followers brilliantly elaborated the leading ideas of *The Tao and the Power*. Other Taoist compendia followed (such as *The Book of the Huainan Master*, and the later *Book of Master Lie*).[12] Under the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), Confucianism eclipsed Taoism to become established as the dominant state ideology of China, remaining so for over two thousand years, with the occasional hiatus. Chinese public life was thenceforth rooted in the precepts of Confucianism, and every educated individual had to pass a series of grueling examinations on the Confucian canon. But Taoism continued to flourish nonetheless, with monasteries and hermitages on every mountain, and proliferating lineages of Masters and Schools teaching a variety of meditational practices, guiding the seeker toward the Tao. It was in effect the all-pervading undercurrent of Chinese culture, later fusing

with other ways of thinking, helping to give birth to the school of Buddhism known as Chan (*Zen* in Japanese) and deeply influencing the Neo-Confucian revival of the Song dynasty (960–1279).

ART AND LITERATURE

Taoism also permeated the Chinese literary and artistic worlds. The painter Zong Bing (375–443) captured the Taoist ideal of artistic inspiration:

> The Sage embraces the Tao and responds harmoniously to things . . . And so I dwell in leisure and nourish my Breath-Energy. I drain my wine-cup, pluck the *qin*, I unroll painted scrolls and gaze at landscapes in silence. Though seated, I travel beyond the four borders of the land, never leaving the realm of nature, and responding in my solitude to the call of the wilderness. Cliffs and peaks rise before me to soaring heights, and dense groves of trees extend amid clouds into the furthest distance . . . Every delight in the universe comes together in Spirit and Thought. What else do I have need of? I give full and free rein to Spirit. That is all. What could be more important than this?[13]

In his "Twenty-Four Modes of Poetry," Sikong Tu (837–908), like so many writers in all periods of Chinese history, traced the source of all literary creation to the Tao:

The Tao of Nature
Stoop down and there it is;
Seek it neither right nor left.
All roads lead thither—
One touch and spring is present.
It is like coming upon flowers in bloom,
Like gazing at the advent of the year . . .
I am like a hermit on a lonely hill . . .
My words are scant and beyond emotion,
In the distant Harmony of Heaven . . .

Free
Through the Tao I return to Breath-Energy,
Free and unrestrained,
Flowing like the wind of Heaven,

Lofty as mountains and seas,
Sun, moon, and stars before me . . .[14]

Music too was Union with the Tao, especially the delicate music played on the seven-stringed *qin*.

> If you wish to play the *qin*, you must light incense, and sit in silent meditation. Empty the mind of outward thoughts. Poise Breath and Blood in Perfect Harmony. Your soul may now commune with Spirit, and enter into that mysterious Union with the Tao.[15]

Over the centuries, many a Chinese scholar-official would return from his government *yamen* or official workplace to the seclusion of his private studio or *zhai*, where he would quietly practice a sort of "weekend Taoism," writing occasional verse, indulging his love of painting and calligraphy, playing a game of Go, plucking the strings of his *qin*, and enjoying the other pastimes of the leisured man of letters, all of which had as their goal the fusion of the individual with the Tao of the cosmos. He did not feel this to be incompatible with his sterner weekday Confucian public persona. Any complete study of traditional China, and indeed of contemporary China, any understanding of the complex light and shade of Chinese society and culture, requires a knowledge of both these strands: the Confucian and the Taoist.

ORIGINS OF THE CHINESE CLASSIC

What of the original Chinese text of *The Tao and the Power* itself? Its origins and authorship are (appropriately enough) shrouded in the mists of legend and mystery. It has always been associated with the name of Lao-tzu. But as we have already seen, China's great historian Sima Qian concludes that "no one was able to tell who Lao-tzu really was, no one knew where he went to in the end . . . He was a recluse."[16] He was in other words a Chinese hermit, of the kind one sees in innumerable later Chinese landscapes, a tiny figure communing with Nature, dwarfed by mighty mountains and waterfalls. Isabelle Robinet has given this brief modern account of the book (brief because there are indeed so few reliable facts):

> The work is ascribed to Lao-tzu, who allegedly gave it to a border guard named Yin Xi as he left the Middle Kingdom to go to the west. Scholars have long debated its authorship and date. Some think that

> it is not the work of a single author, some maintain that most of it originated as oral tradition during the Warring States period (475–221 BC).[17]

Arthur Waley (1889–1966) comments in a similar vein that parts of the work seem to stem from early Taoist hymns, from what he calls the "general stock of early Taoist rhymed teaching." D. C. Lau, writing in 1963, argued that the work was an "anthology compiled by more than one hand."[18] I tend toward this view. We now know for sure (from irrefutable archaeological evidence) that a text of the Classic existed at least as early as the late fourth century BC. (The slightly different "received text" or vulgate, with its division into eighty-one chapters, dates from the Han dynasty, several centuries later.) In 1973 and 1993, early copies were found in two separate excavated tombs. Two were written on silk and are almost complete. They are datable to before 168 BC, and were excavated in 1973 at Mawangdui in the suburbs of Changsha, capital city of the modern Province of Hunan, from the tomb of a marquis of the southern state of Chu. Another more fragmentary copy, written on bamboo slips, was excavated in 1993 at the village of Guodian in southern Hubei Province, near the site of the ancient capital of Chu. It is datable to just before 300 BC, and was found in the tomb of a lesser dignitary, probably a Royal Tutor.[19] Since my own understanding (and hence translation) of the book is primarily based on the later commentaries of Heshang Gong (the River Master) and Magister Liu Yiming, the text I follow is in the main theirs, the later received text, although very occasionally I have made reference to variations found in the silk or bamboo texts.

A WORDLESS TEACHING

> Beautiful Words are not to be Trusted. Many Words are soon spent. To be sparing with Words is the Tao of Nature. The Taoist practices a Wordless Teaching.[20]

The Tao and the Power proclaims at the very outset the inadequacy of Words to communicate the Mystery of the Tao, to convey the deeper Knowledge that is No-Knowledge.

> The Tao that can be Told is not the True Tao. Who Knows does not speak; Who speaks does not Know. Many Words Harm the Person. If the Mouth keeps opening, if the Tongue keeps wagging, Misfortune will surely follow.[21]

And yet its Five Thousand Words boldly attempt to Tell the Untellable. This dilemma has haunted would-be Tellers (and Translators, or Re-Tellers) of the Tao down the ages, to the present day. A recently published glossary entry for the Word *Tao* reads like a brilliant (and somewhat inebriated, Humpty Dumpty–like) parody of this dilemma.

> To say that the Tao is the origin, totality, and animating impulse of all that is, ever was, and ever shall be is inadequate, for this would exclude what is not, never was, and never shall be . . . It is ultimately Ineffable . . .[22]

Despite the sheer scale and Ineffability of its subject, *The Tao and the Power* has been read by millions of Chinese readers down the years, has provided them with abundant spiritual nourishment, and is still avidly read today. It is still felt to be relevant. "At a time when officials of particular nations on earth are vying to vaunt the ability of their leadership, or the merit of their incomparable power," wrote the great scholar Anthony C. Yu in 2003, "even in the looming shadow of catastrophic conflict, the wisdom of *The Tao and the Power* seems ever more compelling and urgent."[23] It is one of the most powerful attempts to find Words for a Wordless Truth. It has had a profound and lasting influence on Chinese ways of thinking; it has molded the Chinese Heart-and-Mind. That's why it has survived.

THE TAO

The single word *Tao* (or *Dao* in its modern spelling), from which the term *Taoism* is derived, is shared by many Chinese schools of thought. One of its literal meanings is "way" or "road." In later centuries, in common parlance, Tao came to mean little more than what we would call the Art, or Fundamental Principle: the Tao of Music, the Tao of Tea, the Tao of Painting or Calligraphy or Poetry, etc. Another old and fundamental meaning of the word is to "tell" or "say," to verbalize, to find Words for ideas, somewhat akin to the *logos* of early Western philosophy. Hence the word play of the book's opening line: the Tao that can be verbalized or *Tao*-ed is not the True Tao. Joseph Needham gave his own inimitable explanation of the word:

> Tao is the Order of Nature, which brought all things into existence and governs their every action, not so much by force as by a kind of natural curvature in space and time. It reminds us of the *logos* of Heraclitus.[24]

Richard Wilhelm, the German sinologist, rhapsodized (very much in the style of the Book and its Commentators):

> Tao is earlier than Heaven and Earth. One cannot tell whence it comes . . . It rests upon itself, it is immutable, rapt in eternal, cyclical movement. It is the beginning of Heaven and Earth, in other words, of temporal and spatial existence.[25]

THE TAOIST

The Tao itself cannot easily be Told. But can we at least say a bit about what a Taoist, a Seeker of the Tao, is like, what a Taoist thinks and does, how a Taoist lives? The trouble is, as the Book itself reminds us, such people can only be seen with great difficulty. They don't identify themselves in public, they don't shine, they don't show off their Tao, their Inner Power. They are essentially incognito. One can at best form a vague impression of them.

> Of Old Taoists were Subtle and Marvelous, Darkly Connected, Deep beyond all Knowing. Since they could never be Known, let us tell how they seemed: Hesitant, as though crossing a stream in winter . . . Melting, like Ice at first Thaw; Simple, like a Block of Uncarved Wood; Broad as a Valley; Murky as Mud.[26]

The Taoist often appears drab and undistinguished.

> I alone am forlorn and quiet, I am listless, with no place to go, a poor rustic with no Home, a derelict.

The Taoists keep their Light hidden.

> As the old saying goes: The Light of the Tao seems Dark. The Taoist glows with a Contained Light, the Dark Light of Spirit.[27]

The Taoist's Knowledge is the Inner Knowledge of the Initiate, of the Adept. With it the Taoist Understands everything.

> Without setting foot outside the door, the Taoist Knows All-under-Heaven. The Taoist Understands with the Knowledge of Spirit,

> has no need to set foot outside, has no need to look through the window. The Taoist sees with the Vision of Spirit, Darkly One with the Tao of Heaven-and-Nature. The Taoist Understands everything with the Inner Eye, sees the Tao everywhere, in everything.[28]

THE POWER

So the Taoist is hard to spot and describe, and the Tao itself is Untellable and therefore Untranslatable. (The word itself is indeed best "retold"—i.e., "transliterated"—as *Tao*.) But what can be said of the Power of the Tao, the second word, *Te* (modern *De*), of the Book's title, *The Tao and the Power*, or *Tao Te Ching* (modern *Daodejing*—a title it acquired only after many centuries)? In Waley's words, it is a "latent" power, an inherent "virtue" (in the old sense). It is the Inner Power or *mana* attained by the Taoist Adept through Self-Cultivation, "by virtue" of which, by emanating which, the Taoist can mysteriously influence everyone and everything in the Universe. The Dutch scholar Jan Duyvendak (1889–1954) called it a "magical life-force, the influence radiating from one link to the next in the interminable chain" of Cosmic Resonance and Correspondence which is the Tao. The Taoist tunes into this life-force, which operates or emanates without conscious effort. It is also described variously as the Power of the Infant, the Power of Not-Contending, the Power of Non-Action. Every Taoist reader of this little text, every Seeker of the Tao, accumulates a reservoir of this Energy and Power, this gentle Source of Strength. It is a Power that makes itself felt in everyday life, and although the teaching of the Classic is often mystical and enigmatic, its applications are deeply practical and unpretentious. The Taoist mystic or *perfectus* has a wonderful sense of humor, a twinkle in his eye. He knows, after all, that governing a large state is like cooking a small fish.

COMMENTARIES, THE LINEAGE OF THE LIGHT

Ever since the text of *The Tao and the Power* first began circulating, right up to the present day, many hundreds of Chinese Commentators have tried their hand at making its deliberately misty "meaning" clearer, at "adumbrating" the Tao.[29] One of these was the eighteenth-century practicing Taoist monk Liu Yiming, whom I personally find most compelling. Here is a brief extract from his Commentary:

> The Five Thousand Words of *The Tao and the Power* give us inklings of the Origin, of the Mother, they reveal the Inner Working of the Spiritual Mysteries of the Tao. The Root of the Tao lies in Embracing the One, in Non-Action. The Tao is Soft and Gentle, it does Not Contend. Through Emptiness and lasting Calm, through a Return to the Root, a Return to Simplicity and Purity, to True Life-Destiny, the Taoist reaps the full Benefits of Life. Taoist Self-Cultivation enables All-Under-Heaven to be well Ordered, to be at Peace. For every person, from the Son of Heaven to the humblest commoner, this Truth Prevails: that to bring Order to Others one must first Order Self, that Self-Cultivation is the Root of all.[30] [. . .] Hold Fast, Forget Words, Nurture Breath-Energy, be at Peace with Nature, with the So-of-Itself, be Calm and Still.[31]

This and many other Commentaries have a strange language of their own, they transmit a powerful message, they are a link in what the Classic itself calls the Lineage of the Light. It is my sincere hope that as the reader progresses through my translation of the text and its Commentaries, these at-first-sight-impenetrable Taoist improvisations around a Wordless Teaching will gradually acquire a Resonance and become more meaningful.

TWO CHOSEN COMMENTARIES

> To Know the Spirit of the Valley, seek guidance from a True Teacher. Without such a Teacher, all is vain speculation, and the Spirit will remain elusive.[32]

Two Chinese Commentators, separated by roughly two millennia, have served as my principal Teachers and Guides for this new version. They were both concerned to apply the teachings of Lao-tzu to the Taoist Practice of Self-Cultivation. The first, Heshang Gong, the River Master, is a figure every bit as legendary as Lao-tzu himself. The legend is worth giving.

> The River Master is said to have lived during the reign of fifth Emperor Wen (203–157 BC) of the Western Han dynasty. The Emperor greatly venerated Lao-tzu's *The Tao and the Power.* He heard tell of a Hermit called the River Master, and sent emissaries to summon him for clarification of certain obscurities in the scripture. The

River Master insisted on seeing the sovereign in person at his hermitage, and eventually Emperor Wen sought him out and found him seated in a humble hut by the banks of the Yellow River. There he haughtily demanded instruction. The Master by way of response at first remained seated motionless where he was, then clapped his hands together, and rose a hundred or so feet into the air. He remained there floating in mid-air, and eventually addressed a string of mysterious words to the Emperor. The Emperor fell to his knees, this time begging for enlightenment. The Master, impressed at last by the Emperor's humility and sincerity, presented him with his Commentary on *The Tao and the Power* written on two silken scrolls. "Go home and read this carefully," he said, "and you will be able to put all doubt behind you. It is many hundreds of years since I first wrote this Commentary, and you are only the fourth person ever to read it—do not divulge a word to another living soul." With these words the Master vanished, and a thick mist descended, shrouding everything in darkness. The Emperor knew that he had encountered a True Immortal, a Perfectus of the Tao, and gave orders for a terrace to be constructed in the hills to the west of the River, in the hope of sighting him once more. He never did see him again however, but treasured the Master's Commentary for the rest of his days.[33]

The second Commentator I have followed is Liu Yiming (1734–1821), whom I have already quoted above. He will be familiar to readers of my translation of the *I Ching*, in which I gave lengthy extracts from his *I Ching* Commentary. Magister Liu, as I call him, was a High Master of the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) Taoist sect, and was known by various other Taoist names, including Master of Primordial Enlightenment (*wuyuanzi*) and Vagabond of Simple Silk and the Uncarved Block (*supu sanren*). He also wrote, among many other things, a Commentary on the Ming dynasty novel *Journey to the West*. He was a remarkable individual, who brought to his reading of both the *I Ching* and *The Tao and the Power* insights from his own life in the Tao. During his late teens, he suffered a nearly fatal illness, and was restored to health by a Taoist monk. This changed his life. He set off wandering around remote areas of China, "seeking the Tao," until at the age of twenty-two, in the northwest, he encountered a Taoist Hermit known as the Old Man of the Valley of the Sacred Shrine, who initiated him into the discipline of *neidan*, or Inner Alchemy. This branch of Taoist Practice is no mystical mumbo jumbo, but a carefully thought-out and long-established method of Self-Cultivation or

Self-Development, "a technique of enlightenment, a method of controlling both the world and oneself, a process of existential and intellectual integration."[34] In many ways, it is startlingly modern. After many further years of Self-Cultivation of this sort and more wandering around in China's remoter regions, encountering another Teacher, doing all sorts of odd jobs, Liu finally settled in his own hermitage in the mountains (he called it his Den of Freedom, *zizai wo*), offering Taoist teachings and macrobiotic medical advice to all comers. He wrote large quantities of Taoist-inspired verse, which I find extremely reminiscent of the zany "Won-Done Song" chanted by the Taoist monk in the first chapter of the novel *The Story of the Stone* (after all, Liu was a near contemporary of that novel's main author, Cao Xueqin).

Men all know that salvation should be won,
But with ambition won't have done.
Where are the famous ones of days gone by?
In grassy graves they lie now, every one.[35]

It is so easy to imagine Liu as one of the disheveled monks with whom that novel's hero Jia Bao-yu wanders off into the snow in the very last chapter, chanting:

Who will explore
The supremely Ineffable
Vastly Mysterious
Wilderness
To which I Return?[36]

Magister Liu wrote two Commentaries on *The Tao and the Power*, a long and rather involved one (*Daodejing huiyi*) and a much shorter one for the benefit of readers who found the long one too complex (*Daodejing yaoyi*). I have consulted both, translating them first in their entirety, and then running them freely into one.

I have substantially simplified and shortened both of these Commentaries, trying to avoid unnecessary and unhelpful repetition (of which there is a great deal) and steering clear of arcane alchemical interpretations, which would have made this a very different book.[37] What I present is essentially my personal condensation of their Taoistic ramblings, with a view to casting light on the spiritual message of the original text, making it meaningful and relevant today.

RHYME

Three quarters of the Chinese text of *The Tao and the Power*, as the Swedish philologist Bernhard Karlgren has shown, rhymes, when read according to the reconstructed phonetic values of Ancient Chinese. This gives it an underlying resonance, making it memorable and chantable. Take for example Chapter 6, the Valley Spirit. In modern Mandarin the rhyme is partly detectable, but the older pronunciation (approximate values in square brackets) makes the rhyme even more obvious:

Gu shen bu si [si]
Shi wei xuan pin. [bj'i]
Xuan pin zhi men, [muen]
Shi wei tian di gen. [ken]
Mian mian ruo cun [dz'uen]
Yong zhi bu qin. [gien][38]

I have not attempted a rhyming translation. But I have tried to keep my version as terse as possible, choosing a simple vocabulary, with an inevitable admixture of Taoist "terms for the initiate," which I have usually capitalized. I have also broken the main text into short centered lines, to indicate something of the poetic and aphoristic quality of the Chinese original. This quality is both daunting and inspiring for the translator. It is after all the poetic magic and music that brings us closer to the Ineffable Inner Core of meaning. As Waley memorably wrote, it "flings across intervening space a mere filament such as no sober foot would dare to tread . . . Its Inner Power so intoxicates us that, endowed with the recklessness of drunken men, we dance across the chasm, hardly aware how we reached the other side."[39] It would require a far greater gift than mine to recreate the ancient poetic Power of these Chinese lines, to capture their "dearest freshness deep down things," "the achieve of, the mastery of the thing."[40]

IMAGES AND THEMES

The Tao and the Power employs powerful Symbols and Images to point to the Ineffable, and weaves around its central Wordless Teaching a mesmerizing cycle of Taoist Themes. The Themes are makeshift Names ("the Names that can be Named are not True Names") for aspects of Taoist Teaching.

They form an interlocking code for stages in the spiritual process, for the "existential and intellectual integration" of Self-Cultivation. All of these Images and Themes are connected; they are part of an organic system of ideas. To Understand One is to Understand All. For example, it is hard to Understand the significance of Water as a principal Image and Symbol of the Tao without Understanding the related Themes of Non-Action and Not-Contending, and vice versa. The book proceeds in an intuitive, poetic, non-logical, zigzag, often repetitive, and sometimes incoherent fashion. To help readers new to this whole Taoist way of thinking, and to illustrate certain of the book's key Images and Themes, I have selected and grouped together certain striking terms from both the original text and the Commentaries and appended them at the end of my translation, in the section I have called my "Florilegium of the Tao."

TAOISM TODAY

In 1968, the Beatles recorded George Harrison's classic song "The Inner Light," which they later released as the B-side of "Lady Madonna." Harrison's lyrics are a simple variation on Chapter 47 of *The Tao and the Power*. Similarly, the opening lines of his 1970 song "All Things Must Pass" also derive from the Taoist Classic. They were inspired by a reading of the LSD guru Timothy Leary's 1966 *Psychedelic Prayers after the Tao Te Ching*, and go back ultimately to Chapter 23 of *The Tao and the Power*:

> A whirlwind doesn't last all morning,
> A cloudburst doesn't last all day.

In other words, the Tao is still alive and well. It is constantly being recast in a host of different shapes, and has continued to fascinate the Western mind, working its timeless magic on the likes of psychotherapist Carl Jung, novelist Hermann Hesse, on Alan Watts, Gary Snyder, and the Beat Generation, and on fantasy writer Ursula K. Le Guin. It has turned up in some quite unlikely places—such as Benjamin Hoff's *The Tao of Pooh*.[41]

As the eminent American sinologist Arthur W. Hummel (1884–1975) wrote in 1962, the scripture, which first came into being "in the morning of the human race," still "bears the freshness of the morning upon it."[42] Or as Joseph Needham noted, Taoism is "a program for our time as well as theirs."[43]

PREVIOUS TRANSLATIONS

This new version of mine is the latest in a very long line of translations into Western languages. The very earliest translation, an unpublished Latin manuscript version by a Jesuit, was presented as a gift to the Royal Society in London in 1788. In the early stages of this long lineage, there was an overwhelming tendency to regard all Chinese scriptures as divinely inspired. They were the words of a Christian God speaking Chinese, hence the misguided but strongly held eighteenth-century Jesuit Figurist belief that the *I Ching* was the Lost Book of Enoch . . . In the seventeenth century, two Jesuits, Philippe Couplet (1622–1693) and Louis le Comte (1655–1728), both claimed to recognize in the Taoist Classic references to the Holy Trinity, as in Chapter 42:

The Tao gave Birth to the One.
The One gave Birth to the Two.
The Two gave Birth to the Three.
The Three gave Birth to the Myriad Things . . .

They interpreted the opening words of Chapter 14 in the same way:

These three merge into the One,
They form the Ineffable Whole of the Tao . . .

These hallucinations continued well into the nineteenth century.[44] Jean-Pierre Abel-Rémusat (1788–1832), first professor of sinology at the Collège de France, in his Commentary on Chapter 14, identified three Chinese words as "originally Hebrew."

Look, and you can never see it—
It is too *Subtle*.
Listen, and you can never hear it—
It is too *Faint*.
Feel for it, and you can never take hold of it—
It is too *Elusive*.

The three words, *yi* (which I translate as subtle), *shi* (faint), and *wei* (elusive), were, he declared, "signs for foreign sounds in the Chinese language

and appear identical to the Hebrew Tetragrammaton of Jahweh: it is remarkable that the most exact transcription of His celebrated name is to be found in a Chinese book."[45] Now I am only too aware that these three Chinese words are tantalizingly hard to translate, and that my own versions are mere approximations. But they are at least approximations based on the Chinese words themselves. And of one thing I am quite sure: those words have nothing whatsoever to do with Jehovah, just as the *I Ching* had nothing to do with the Lost Book of Enoch! But the habit of Christianizing the Tao died hard. Many years later the German scholar of Old Testament studies Julius Grill (1840–1930) claimed to have discovered no fewer than eighty parallels between the New Testament and *The Tao and the Power*.[46] This may have encouraged him to proclaim the importance of the Classic: "The time of Lao-tzu is now just beginning; he is not a man and a name of the past, but a strength for now and the future. He is more modern than the most modern and more alive than many who are living."[47]

Ex Oriente Lux! By the last decades of the nineteenth century, Western thinkers (such as the Theosophists) had already begun to grow more and more convinced that True Wisdom, a brighter light, a deeper spirituality, would come from the East. Paul Carus (1852–1919), the German scholar who migrated to the United States in 1884, was one of the first to translate the Taoist Classic directly out of the Chinese (in a bilingual format) from the perspective of a universal monism, the philosophical belief that all existence shares a fundamental unity. This trend continued throughout the twentieth century, as well-meaning Seekers of Wisdom and authors of self-help books used the Classic (nearly always in someone else's translation) as a springboard for their own ideas.[48]

WESTERN VOICES OF THE TAO

How have less wayward Western interpreters sought to expound the true (truly Chinese) "business of the Tao," the basic message of *The Tao and the Power*? Arthur Waley, one of the finest translators and interpreters of Chinese poetry and of Chinese mystical thought, ended the Introduction to his 1935 translation with a brief quip from the later Taoist Master Zhuang:

> [According to the Taoists] the soul was looked upon as having become as it were silted up by successive deposits of daily toil and perturbation, and the business of the [Taoist] self-perfecter was to work his way back through these layers till "man as he was meant to

> be" was reached . . . traveling back through layers of consciousness to the point of Pure Consciousness, to the point where language, created to meet the demands of ordinary, upper consciousness, no longer applies. The Adept who has reached this point has learnt "to get into the bird-cage without setting the birds off singing."[49]

In more recent times, Angus Graham (1919–1991), brilliant philosopher and translator, has captured some of the essential ingredients of the Taoist way of life.

> The Taoist relaxes the body, calms the mind, loosens the grip of categories made habitual by naming, frees the current of thought for more fluid differentiations and assimilations, and instead of pondering choices lets problems solve themselves as inclination spontaneously finds its own direction, which is the Tao. At the deep end is the mystical, at the shallow end Self-Cultivation may serve as a means to relaxation, poise, loosening of habit, creativity, quickening of responsiveness, for the Chinese wrestler or for the Californian businessman using meditative techniques to enhance efficiency.[50]

Graham at the same time acknowledges the difficulties inherent in understanding or translating the Classic and its philosophy:

> *The Tao and the Power*, with its strange and elusive philosophy of life, can only guide us in the Direction of the Tao by way of aphorisms and parable. It is a text with infinite possibilities of divergent interpretation and sheer misunderstanding.[51]

In Waley's words, it is a text full of the "paradoxical twisting-round of other people's maxims," it has "an epigrammatic and pungent quality." And it is literally without time, it is timeless, as is all Chinese classical poetry. Literary Chinese knows no tense. "Every sentence in *The Tao and the Power* refers as much to the past as to the present."

A VERSION FOR *LECTIO SINICA*

The German sinologist Eduard Erkes wrote in 1945 that he wished to help the reader make practical use of the book as a "guide to meditation and to the Taoist life."[52] This has also been my aim. In that sense, I belong to the lineage

of Paul Carus, Richard Wilhelm, and Arthur Waley. But it is very much a Chinese lineage too. *The Tao and the Power* has always been used in China "as a sacred text that, like all sacred writings, must be recited in conjunction with meditation and ritual practices for exorcist and healing purposes."[53]

My version, therefore, is not for scholars or intellectuals, but for the purposes of slow meditative reading, a form of *Lectio Sinica*, in the Benedictine monastic tradition of *Lectio Divina*, or Sacred Reading.

> In Sacred Reading the monk or nun would sit with the text of Scripture and begin to read attentively and reflectively until a word or phrase or scene struck the imagination or the heart. At that moment the reader paused, put the text aside, and gave himself or herself to prayer. The prayerful pause might last less than a minute or might be extended for a number of minutes. When attention faltered, the reader would return to the text until another moment of insight or another incentive to love should come along. The rhythm of reading and pausing would continue peacefully, unhurriedly, until the bell announced the next exercise of the monastic day.[54]

Charles Cummings, author of the above, himself a Trappist-Cistercian monk, laments that reading has lost its savor for many in today's culture, having been replaced by a complicated host of devices, by ever more sophisticated (and upgraded) audiovisual media of communication. I wholeheartedly agree. So did Lao-tzu.

> With Cunning Skills, Strange Contraptions and Devices proliferate. So the Taoist says: "I Return to Non-Action."[55]
>
> The folk Return to the Ancient Tying of Knots.[56]

Magister Liu Yiming expands on this.

> They find Peace in Nature, in the So-of-Itself, in True Resonance and Calm, just as in Ancient Times men kept records with Knotted Ropes.

I first encountered the living tradition of slow meditative reading in December 2016 when I had the great privilege of staying in the Benedictine College of St. Anselm, on the Aventine Hill in Rome.[57] I was then working on

the fourth revision of this translation, and the timeless atmosphere of the College's cloisters, the simple calm and orderly rhythm of monastic ritual (including silence at breakfast in the refectory), the resonant Gregorian plainchant sung every evening at Vespers by the monks assembled in the Basilica, merged imperceptibly in my mind with the Chinese words as I worked on the Taoist Classic.

A GUIDE TO EVERYDAY LIVING

So those seeking an intellectual or textual reading of this classic will be disappointed by my translation. More than fifty years ago I first studied this book as an undergraduate at Oxford, with the help of my genial tutor Ian McMorran. I am grateful to him for having encouraged me even then to read it as something more than an academic exercise in textual criticism. I remember vividly traveling with him in his car down Cumnor Hill and noticing the Chinese words *wuwei* (Non-Action) stuck firmly to the dashboard of his car. He also introduced me early on to the work of Waley and Duyvendak, whose insights will be found scattered throughout my Commentary.[58] When I began work on my own version more than five years ago, at the kind suggestion of John Siciliano of Viking in New York, I knew that my priority would still be to convey the book's value as a guide to everyday living. Liu Ts'un-yan (1917–2009), my longtime friend and teacher, was himself a practicing Taoist with an unparalleled knowledge of the history of Taoism. In his later years he always emphasized two things in conversation: (1) that at the heart of Taoist teaching lay the simple perception of what was True (*zhen*) and what was False (*jia*); and (2) that the main value of Taoism was not at all esoteric, it was quite simple, it was to help people lead better, kinder, gentler lives. I have tried to remain faithful to his teaching.[59]

I cannot pretend to know exactly what each phrase of this often baffling Chinese text means. But I have chosen to try and follow my own understanding, guided by the River Master and by Magister Liu, rather than provide the reader with a perplexing array of uncertain readings. That array might have made for an interesting book in its own right (a bit like the fascinating anthology of differing versions of Wang Wei by Eliot Weinberger and Octavio Paz). But it is not what I chose to do.

To the main text I have added my Running Commentary, giving first the thoughts of the River Master and Magister Liu, then a selection of thoughts from others. I decided to end each Chapter with a Chinese poem or a brief

extract from a literary essay. Taoist themes permeate Chinese literature, and sometimes a well-written poem seemed to me to shed light on these themes more effectively than any amount of expository or aphoristic prose. The poems I have chosen provide a layman's counterpoint to the sometimes obscure drift of the main text and Commentary. Although sometimes they may seem to be quite unconnected with the preceding Chapter, they take the reader aside into another corner of the Taoist Realm (in which all corners are connected). My own favorites as Exemplars of the Taoist lifestyle have always been those medieval Chinese hippies, the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove. Xi Kang, Liu Ling, and Ruan Ji feature prominently here.[60]

THE VALLEY SPIRIT NEVER DIES

It is a basic Taoist conviction that there is a Simple Way to a better and healthier Life, to Long Life in the deeper sense, to a Softer, Gentler, Kinder, more Generous Harmony with Others and with Nature, with the Suchness-of-Self, and of other Beings and Things, with their Essence, their So-of-Itself, with Life-Destiny. The first step on this path or Tao is, in Arthur Waley's words, to be "in Harmony with, not in rebellion against, the fundamental laws of the universe." Attainment of this comes from a changed way of thinking, a bigger, more open Heart-and-Mind. It comes, as Magister Liu would say, from the Transformation of the Human Heart-and-Mind into the Heart-and-Mind of the Tao. Hummel wrote of the book's "mind-stretching quality," of the way it "challenges at every turn, expanding our view of life's possibilities."[61] I hope that this translation of mine, despite its many stumblings and shortcomings, if read in the calm spirit of *Lectio Sinica*, will in some small way convey the powerfully thought-altering quality of this ancient text, and of its Commentators.[62]

My own favorite lines are from the Sixth Chapter:

The Valley Spirit never Dies.
The Mystic Feminine,
The Gate of the Mystic Feminine,
The Root of Heaven and Earth . . .

Magister Liu comments:

The Valley Spirit
Exists for ever,

It is the Mother
Of All Marvels,
Gate of the Mystic Feminine,
Opening and closing
According to season,
It is the Root
Of the Primordial Wonder
Of Heaven and Earth,
Of spontaneous Motion and Stillness,
Of Calm.
Wherever this Spirit is,
There is the Tao.

Done over the years 2010–2017 at Fontmarty, Corbières; Three Dog Hall, Broulee; Karori, Wellington; Siu Lek Yuen, Hong Kong; Benedictine College of St. Anselm, Rome; Palazzo Maurogonato, Venice; the French Quarter, Featherston, New Zealand.

NOTES

1. See Arthur Waley, tr., *The Analects of Confucius* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1938). See also D. C. Lau's *The Analects* (London: Penguin Classics, 1979); the stimulating translation by Simon Leys (New York: Norton, 1997); and the new Penguin Classics translation by Annping Chin (London: Penguin Classics, 2014).
2. I use the old and familiar spelling, Lao-tzu, as opposed to the modern Laozi.
3. "Confucius" (from the Chinese *kong-fu-zi*) was the latinized name given him by the early Jesuits.
4. For the first see Richard Wilhelm's classic version, translated into English by Cary F. Baynes in two volumes (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1951), and my more recent *I Ching* (New York: Viking, 2016). The best translation of the *Book of Songs* for the general reader remains Arthur Waley's *The Book of Songs* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1937).
5. See *The Songs of the South*, a revised edition translated by David Hawkes (London: Penguin Classics, 1995), especially the sections "Heavenly Questions" and "Nine Songs."
6. Compare Burton Watson, tr., *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), Chapter 14, "The Turning of Heaven," pp. 161ff, on which this translation is based.
7. Extracted from the biography of Lao-tzu in the *Shiji*.
8. The *I Ching, Book of Change*, Hexagram I, Yang in Fifth Place, with commentary based on Wang Fuzhi. John Minford, tr. (New York: Viking, 2014), pp. 21–2.
9. Angus Graham uses the expression "Disputers of the Tao" as the title for his excellent study of early Chinese thought (Chicago: Open Court, 1989).
10. Waley's *Three Ways of Thought in Ancient China* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1939) is a brilliant introduction to the thinking of the Confucian, Taoist, and Legalist schools.

11. See my translation in Penguin Classics, 2002, in which I examine at some length the way Sun-tzu exploits Taoist thinking. The extract comes in Chapter 6, pp. 37–8.
12. See D. C. Lau, tr., *Mencius* (London: Penguin Classics, 1970); Burton Watson, tr., *Hsun-Tzu Basic Writings* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1963); John S. Major et al., trs., *The Huainanzi* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010); and A. C. Graham, tr., *The Book of Lieh-Tzu* (London: John Murray, 1960).
13. See the translation of this passage by Wing-tsit Chan in John Minford and Joseph Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature: An Anthology of Translations* (New York and Hong Kong: Columbia University and Chinese University of Hong Kong, 2000), pp. 606–7; also another version in Yutang Lin, *The Chinese Theory of Art* (London: Putnam, 1967), pp. 31–3.
14. See the translation by Herbert Giles in Minford and Lau, eds., *Classical Chinese Literature*, pp. 944ff, on which this is based.
15. This is Lin Dai-yu holding forth about music to her cousin Jia Bao-yu, in Chapter 86 of the eighteenth-century novel *The Story of the Stone* (London: Penguin Classics, 1982), p. 154.
16. See the extract from his biography above.
17. Isabelle Robinet, "*Daode jing*," in Fabrizio Pregadio, ed., *The Routledge Encyclopedia of Taoism* (London and New York, 2008), p. 311.
18. See the excellent discussion by D. C. Lau in the Introduction to his translation, *Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching* (London: Penguin Classics, 1963).
19. These archaeological discoveries have been extensively studied and have led to some fascinating discussions of textual variations and intricacies of early Taoist thought. See for example the two translated versions (1998 and 2000) by Henricks, and the detailed 1998 conference proceedings edited by Sarah Allan and Crispin Williams. See also Dan Murphy's 2006 master's thesis at the University of Massachusetts, Amherst, which is available online. Details of these are all given in Further Reading.
20. Chapters 81, 5, 23, and 2.
21. Chapters 1 and 56, and the River Master's commentary on Chapter 5.
22. Meyer in *The Huainanzi* (2010), p. 872.
23. This is the final sentence of his wise and thought-provoking essay "Reading the 'Daodejing': Ethics and Politics of the Rhetoric," *CLEAR*, vol. 25 (Dec. 2003).
24. Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), p. 37.
25. Wilhelm, tr., *Tao Te Ching*. English version by H. G. Ostwald (London: Routledge, 1985), p. 69.
26. Chapter 15.
27. Commentaries on Chapter 20, Chapter 41, Magister Liu's Commentary on Chapter 58.
28. Chapter 47, and Magister Liu's Commentary on Chapter 47.
29. An interesting example of this long tradition of Commentary is the recent book by the former (and, after the Tiananmen killings, disgraced) minister of culture, Wang Meng, entitled *Help from Lao-tzu* (Taipei: Maitian, 2012). A passage typical of his straightforward and heartwarming approach is to be found on p. 432: "In all of *The Tao and the Power* the most beautiful lines are 'Ruling a Great Nation is like cooking a Small Fish.' What a wonderfully concise, what a brilliantly pithy, effortlessly beautiful, and clear statement! If only the world's statesmen could hang this on their study walls, if only they could learn not to meddle, but to pay things exactly as much attention as they need, and no more. I'm no scholar, but I concur with this sentiment from the bottom of my heart." The latest compendium of traditional Commentaries, published in China in 2015, runs to fifteen bulky tomes, and contains the work of almost seven hundred Commentators over the ages.
30. From Magister Liu's General Preface. Liu Yiming, *Daodejing Yaoyi*, p. 195 in the *Laozi jicheng* edition.

SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER READING

In Chinese

Laozi jicheng.

A comprehensive and well-produced and punctuated fifteen-volume collection of Editions and Commentaries, from the very earliest (Guodian) to recent times. Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua, 2011. Since just about everything is included in this vast compendium, I shall only add below one or two other odds and ends that I have consulted.

Chen Guying.
Laozi zhuyi ji pingjie.

Many editions and revisions. Translated by Rhett Y. W. Young and Roger Ames as *Lao-tzu: Text, Notes, and Comments*. San Francisco: Chinese Materials Center, 1977. Chen is one of the liveliest and most thoughtful of contemporary Commentators on this book, as he is on the *I Ching*.

He-shang-gong laozi daodejing (The River Master's Commentary).

I have consulted both the Kwang-wen shu-chü facsimile of a Song dynasty edition (Taipei, 1964) and the carefully edited and punctuated edition in *Laozi jicheng.*

Laozi daodejing zhu, with Commentary by Wang Bi.

Commonly referred to as the vulgate, or Received Text. I have mostly followed this, using the Shi-chieh shu-chü facsimile Taipei, twelfth reprinting, 2005.

Li Ling.
Ren wang dichu zou: Laozi tianxia diyi. Hong Kong: Sanlian, 2008.

An interesting edition and Commentary from a prolific scholar teaching at Peking University.

Liu Yiming.
Daodejing huiyi, Daodejing yaoyi.

For these two Commentaries by Magister Liu, I have followed the punctuated texts in *Laozi jicheng*.

Daoshu shi'er zhong (*Twelve Books on the Tao*).

Often reprinted collection of works on Internal Alchemy by Magister Liu.

In European Languages

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

Ames, Roger, and David Hall, trs.
Dao De Jing: Making This Life Significant. New York: Ballantine, 2003.
A modern philosophical reading, in the inimitable Ames and Hall style.

Carus, Paul, tr.
Lao Tze's Tao-Teh-King. Chicago: Open Court, 1898.
Thought-provoking translation and Commentary, informed by the interesting theosophical currents of thought of the late nineteenth century.

Chan, Wing-tsit, tr.
The Way of Lao Tzu. New York: Macmillan, 1963.
Chan is an authority on Neo-Confucianism, and this bias comes through in his Commentary.

Chung-yuan, Chang, tr.
Tao: A New Way of Thinking. New York: Harper & Row, 1975.
A fascinating, if somewhat abstract, interpretation, much influenced by Heidegger.

Coutinho, Steve.
An Introduction to Daoist Philosophies. New York: Columbia University Press, 2013.

Creel, Herrlee G.
What Is Taoism? Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970.

Duyvendak, J. J. L., tr.

Tau-te-tsjing: Het Boek van Weg en Deugd. Arnhem, Netherlands: Van Loghum Slaterus, 1942.

Tao Tö King: Le Livre de la Voie et de la Vertu. Paris: Maisonneuve, 1953.

Tao Te Ching: The Book of the Way and Its Virtue. London: John Murray, 1954.

Duyvendak relies heavily on the earlier work of the Chinese scholars Ma Xulun and Gao Heng, who had often allowed themselves to rearrange the text quite arbitrarily, and were unable to consult the early versions unearthed decades later at Mawangdui and Guodian. But I have nonetheless benefited enormously from his careful textual reading, and from his always sensitive and thoughtful interpretations, which combine Dutch good sense with imaginative insight and a broad knowledge of Chinese culture.

Dyer, Wayne W.

Change Your Thoughts, Change Your Life: Living the Wisdom of the Tao. Carlsbad, CA: Hay House, 2011.

One of the more interesting of the many self-help books based on the *Tao Te Ching*.

Erkes, Eduard, tr.

"Ho-shang Kung's Commentary on Lao-Tse." *Artibus Asiae*, vol. 8, no. 2/4, Ascona, Switzerland: Artibus Asiae, 1958.

Feng, Gia-Fu, and Jane English, trs.

Tao Te Ching. New York: Knopf, 1972.

Giles, Herbert A., tr.

Chuang Tzu, Taoist Philosopher and Chinese Mystic. Revised edition. London: Allen & Unwin, 1926.

This Victorian translation, first published in the late 1880s, greatly impressed Oscar Wilde, and is still an eloquent introduction to the world of Master Zhuang.

Graham, A. C., tr.

The Book of Lieh-tzu. London: John Murray, 1960.

Fluent translation of *The Book of Taoist Master Lie*.

Graham, A. C.

Disputers of the Tao: Philosophical Argument in Ancient China. Chicago: Open Court, 1989.

One of the most scintillating studies of early Chinese thought ever written.

Henricks, Robert G., tr.
Lao-tzu: Te-Tao Ching: A New Translation Based on the Recently Discovered Ma-wang-tui Texts. New York: Ballantine, 1989.
Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian. New York: Columbia University Press, 2000.

Ivanhoe, Philip J., tr.
The Daodejing of Laozi. New York: Seven Bridges, 2002.

Julien, Stanislaus, tr.
Lao Tseu, Tao Te King. Paris, 1842.
This was the version made by the early French sinologue, as used by Tolstoy.

Karlgren, Bernhard.
"The Poetical Parts in Lao-Tsi." Göteborg, Sweden: Elanders, 1932.
Meticulous reconstruction of the rhymes.

Komjathy, Louis.
Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism. Leiden, Netherlands, and Boston: Brill, 2007.
Daoism: A Guide for the Perplexed. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 2014.

Lau, D. C., tr.
Lao Tzu: Tao Te Ching. London: Penguin Classics, 1963. Also various later bilingual editions from the Chinese University Press.

Legge, James, tr.
The Texts of Taoism. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1891.

Le Guin, Ursula K., with Jerome P. Seaton, trs.
Tao Te Ching: A Book About the Way and the Power of the Way. Boston: Shambhala, 2009.

Liu Yiming
Cultivating the Tao: Taoism and Internal Alchemy, tr. Fabrizio Pregadio. Mountain View, CA: 2013.

An excellent translation of Magister Liu's difficult treatise. Invaluable for readers wishing to delve deeper into the arcane world of *neidan*, or Internal Alchemy, which lies behind Liu's Commentary on *The Tao and the Power*, but which has been largely excluded from the present translation.

Lin Yutang, tr.
The Wisdom of Laotse, 2 vols Chinese-English Bilingual Edition. Taipei: Cheng-chung, 2009.
Lin cleverly accompanies his translation with lengthy extracts from *The Book of Taoist Master Zhuang* (Zhuangzi).

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

Mair, Victor H., tr.
Tao Te Ching: The Classic Book of Integrity and the Way. New York: Bantam, 1990.

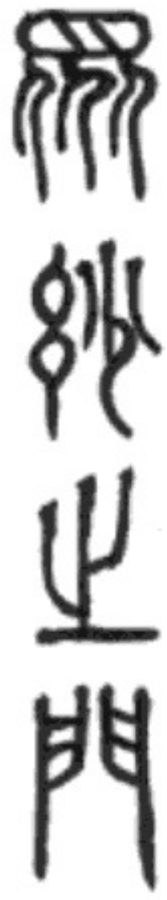
Major, John S., Sarah A. Queen, et al., trs.
Liu An, King of Huainan, *The Huainanzi,* New York: Columbia University Press, 2010.
An impeccable rendering of this vast compendium, containing much Taoist material, and abundant quotations from *The Tao and the Power.*

Maspero, Henri.
Taoism and Chinese Religion. Tr. Frank A. Kierman, Jr. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1981.
Maspero, son of the renowned Egyptologist Gaston Maspero, died in Buchenwald in 1945. He was one of the last giants of French sinology. This book is still essential reading, placing Taoism in a broad historical and cultural context.

Mathieu, Rémi, tr.
Lao Tseu: Le Daode jing, Classique de la voie et de son efficience. Paris: Entrelacs, 2008.
A very careful rendering that takes into account all the latest archaeological findings. Mathieu is scrupulous about giving varying readings and

1

GATEWAY TO ALL MARVELS



The Tao that can be Told
Is not the True Tao;
Names that can be Named
Are not True Names.
The Origin of Heaven and Earth
Has no Name.
The Mother of the Myriad Things
Has a Name.
Free from Desire,
Contemplate the Inner Marvel;
With Desire,
Observe the Outer Radiance.
These issue from One Source,
But have different Names.
They are both a Mystery.
Mystery of Mysteries,
Gateway to All Marvels.

THE RIVER MASTER

The Tao that can be Told is the mundane Tao of the Art of Government, as opposed to the True Tao of Nature, of the So-of-Itself, of Long Life, of Self-Cultivation through Non-Action. This is the Deep Tao, which cannot be Told in Words, which cannot be Named. The Names that can be Named are such worldly things as Wealth, Pomp, Glory, Fame, and Rank.

The Ineffable Tao
Emulates the Wordless Infant,
It resembles
The Unhatched Egg,
The Bright Pearl within the Oyster,
The Beauteous Jade amongst Pebbles.
It cannot be Named.

The Taoist glows with Inner Light, but seems outwardly dull and foolish. The Tao itself has no Form, it can never be Named.

The Root of the Tao
Proceeds from Void,
From Non-Being,
It is the Origin,
The Source of Heaven and Earth,
Mother of the Myriad Things,
Nurturing All-under-Heaven,
As a Mother Nurtures her Children.

MAGISTER LIU

The single word *Tao* is the very Core of this entire Classic, its lifeblood. Its Five Thousand Words speak of this Tao and of nothing else.

The Tao itself
Can never be
Seen.
We can but witness it

Inwardly,
Its Origin,
Mother of the Myriad Things.
The Tao itself can never be
Named,
It cannot be Told.

And yet we resort to Words, such as *Origin*, *Mother*, and *Source*.

Every Marvel
Contemplated,
Every Radiance
Observed,
Issues from this One Source.
They go by different Names,
But are part of the same
Greater Mystery,
The One Tao, the Origin, the Mother.
In freedom from Desire,
We look within
And Contemplate
The Inner Marvel,
Not with eyes
But inwardly
By the Light of Spirit.
We look outward
With the eyes of Desire,
And Observe
The Outer Radiance.

Desire itself, in its first Inklings, in the embryonic Springs of Thought, is born within the Heart-and-Mind. Outer Radiance is perceived through Desire, in the World, in the opening and closing of the Doors of Yin and Yang. This is the Named, the Visible, these are the Myriad Things. Thus, both with and without Desire, we draw near to the Mystery of Mysteries, to the Gateway that leads to all Marvels, to the Tao.

John Minford: *The Tao and the Power* says to its reader at the very outset, "Only through experience, only through living Life to the full, in both the Inner and Outer Worlds, can the True Nature of the Tao be Understood and communicated. Not through Words." Desire and the Life of the Senses are part of that experience. Through Desire we witness and enjoy the Beauty of the World, we Observe the Outer Radiance of the Tao. We live Life, we bask in its Radiance. Taoists do not deny the Senses. But Contemplation, the Light of Deep Calm, of meditative experience, goes further. It reveals the Inner Marvel, the Mystery of Mysteries. Outer Radiance and Inner Marvel issue from one and the same Source, which is the Tao. This twofold path is one of the central themes in Magister Liu's commentary, one to which he returns again and again, exhorting the Taoist Aspirant to begin from Observation of the Outer Radiance, and to proceed through Contemplation of the Inner Marvel to a deeper level of Self-Cultivation, to a deeper Attainment of the Tao. "It is Contemplation that gives spiritual significance to objects of sense."

The Book of Taoist Master Zhuang: The Great Tao cannot be Told. The Great Discussion lies beyond Words . . . Where can I find someone who Understands this Discussion beyond Words, who Understands the Tao that can never be Told? This True Understanding of the Tao is a Reservoir of Heaven-and-Nature. Pour into it and it is never full. Pour from it and it is never exhausted. It is impossible to know whence it comes. It is Inner Light.

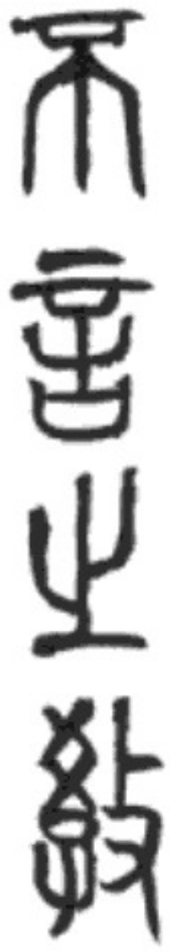
Arthur Waley: Not only are Books the mere discarded husk or shell of wisdom, but Words themselves, expressing as they do only such things as belong to the normal state of consciousness, are irrelevant to the deeper experience of the Tao, the "wordless doctrine."

Jan Duyvendak: The ordinary, mundane Tao (the one that can be easily Told, or talked about) is unchanging, static, and permanent. The True Tao is Elusive and Ineffable, is in its very Essence Perpetual Change. In the Tao, nothing whatsoever is fixed and unchanging. This is the first great paradox of this Classic, the ever-shifting Cycle of Change, of Being and Non-Being, in which Life and Death constantly yield to and alternate with each other.

Richard Wilhelm: In the Taoist Heart-and-Mind, Psyche and Cosmos are related to each other like the Inner and Outer Worlds.

2

A WORDLESS TEACHING



That which All-under-Heaven
Considers
Beautiful
May also be considered
Ugly;
That which All-under-Heaven
Considers
Good
May also be considered
Not-Good.
Being and Non-Being
Engender one another.
Hard and Easy
Complete each other.
Long and Short
Generate each other.
High and Low
Complement each other.
Melody and Harmony

Resonate with each other.
Fore and Aft
Follow one another.
These are Constant Truths.
The Taoist dwells in
Non-Action,
Practices
A Wordless Teaching.
The Myriad Things arise,
And none are rejected.
The Tao gives Birth
But never Possesses.
The Taoist Acts
Without Attachment,
Achieves
Without dwelling
On Achievement,
And so never loses.

THE RIVER MASTER

The Taoist rules through Non-Action, through the Tao. The Taoist guides through Wordless Teaching, by example. The Primal Breath-Energy of the Tao gives Life to the Myriad Things, but never Possesses them.

The Tao seeks
No recompense.
The Taoist,
Having Achieved,
Retires to Seclusion
And never dwells on
Achievement.

MAGISTER LIU

Non-Action and Wordlessness are the Core of this Chapter, Freedom from so-called Knowledge. Whosoever goes beyond False Knowledge is freed from "opposites" such as Beautiful and Ugly, High and Low. From this Higher Knowledge flows a Life without Possession or Attachment. The Heart-and-Mind of Opposition (such as that between Beautiful and Ugly) brings a Diminution of Life-Essence, a loss of Spirit, a confusion of Emotion. All of these damage Life. The Taoist abides in Non-Action. Freed from all such distinctions, which melt away in the Taoist Heart-and-Mind, the Taoist Returns to Non-Action, to the Wordlessness that leaves no trace.

White is contained
Within Black,
Light shines
In an Empty Room.
This is the Taoist Vision.
The Taoist finds Joy
In unalloyed
Serenity and Calm.

***The Book of Taoist Master Zhuang*:** Every That is also a This, every This is also a That. A thing may not be visible as That, it may be perceived as This. This and That produce each other. Where there is Birth there is Death. Where there is Death there is Birth. Affirmation creates Denial, Denial creates Affirmation. Right creates Wrong, Wrong creates Right. The Taoist's This is also a That, the Taoist's That is also a This.

Waley: The first great principle of Taoism is the relativity of all attributes. Nothing in itself is either long or short. If we call a thing long, we merely mean longer than something else that we take as a standard. What we take as our standard depends on what we are used to . . . All antinomies, not merely high and low, long and short, but Life and Death themselves, merge in the Taoist identity of opposites. The type of the Sage who in true Taoist manner "disappeared" after Achieving Victory is Fan Li (fifth century BC) who, although offered half the