INDEPENDENT VOICES

Tao: The Watercourse Way

"A remarkable book because of Alan Watts's talent for communicating Eastern ways of thought ... This book is a 'must'" – *Shambhala Review*

ALAN WATTS
with the collaboration of Al Chung-liang Huang

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Foreword

Al Chung-liang Huang

THE LAST MORNING I was with Alan Watts was spent in his mountain library overlooking Muir Woods, drinking tea, playing a bamboo flute, and plucking koto strings among the eucalyptus. We had just taught for a week together at Esalen Institute, Big Sur, and on the ferryboat of the Society for Comparative Philosophy in Sausalito. I was helping him with research on his book, and he had just finished reading the manuscript of my book, *Embrace Tiger, Return to Mountain*. We were sitting on the library floor, comparing notes, nodding, smiling. Suddenly Alan jumped to his feet and joyously danced a *t'ai chi* improvisation, shouting, "Ah-ha, *t'ai chi* is the Tao, *wu-wei, tzu-jan*, like water, like wind, sailing, surfing, dancing with your hands, your head, your spine, your hips, your knees ... with your brush, your voice ... Ha Ha ha Ha ... La La Lala ah ah Ah ..." Gracefully he glided into the desk seat, rolled a sheet of paper into the typewriter, and began dancing with his fingers, still singing away. He was writing a foreword for my book, composing a beautiful introduction to the essence of *t'ai chi*. It was probably one of his last actual writings before a strenuous European lecture tour took him away from his desk and from his new ways of spontaneous, joyous writing.

Alan was going to allow his book on Taoism to write itself. He knew, as a scholar, that he was turning out another of his famous themes-and-variations on the meeting of East and West. But as a man of Tao, he also realized that he must give up controlling it intellectually. For as the subject itself clearly maintains, "The Tao that can be Tao-ed is not the Tao."

After so many years of writing beautifully the unwritable, Alan Watts was finally stepping aside, letting his writing happen. He turned to me for reflections. He wished to tune in body and mind totally with the

movement of the Tao, in *t'ai chi.* Alan was enjoying his newfound energy. He wrote the first five chapters with a great sense of discovery, lucidity, and creative insight. All of us who shared in the progress of this book felt confident that it would be his best, surely the most alive and useful. We could not wait for him to finish it.

From the beginning I had felt honored and happy to be of help to him. Alan was especially interested in the ways I read the original Chinese texts. We both found excitement in deciphering the difficult passages, loaded with ambiguity and multiple interpretative possibilities. We would look at all the existing translations, debate, digest, and dismiss them, and then start afresh, attempting a new, on-the-spot translation to satisfy us.

Alan helped me to feel at ease with my lack of fluency in the English language. He said to me often that my broken Chinese-English rendered the Chinese philosophy more explicitly, and that I must not try so hard to improve it. As a teaching team we complemented each other. We were an ideal combination to help people experience what they think they know—taking them out of their heads into their bodies, then back again into their body-mind entity. Finally, Alan asked me to illustrate the book entirely with brush calligraphy. We agreed that the free-flowing brush strokes of the cursive (grass style) would most vividly bring out the watercourse way of the Tao.

After he had finished the chapter "*Te*—Virtuality," Alan said to me with a special glint in his eyes, "I have now satisfied myself and my readers in scholarship and intellect. The rest of this book will be all fun and surprises!" Alan had hoped to bring the Tao to his readers the way he practiced and experienced it in everyday living. Many new vistas had opened in Alan's life. He was like a child again, willing and able to set forth upon new courses and follow the inevitable turning of energies.

During our last seminar at Esalen together, at the finish of an afternoon session when the high-flying spirit had set everyone smiling, dancing, and rolling up and down the grassy slopes, Alan and I started to walk back to the lodge, feeling exuberant, arms around each other, hands

sliding along one another's spine. Alan turned to me and started to speak, ready to impress me with his usual eloquence about our successful week together. I noticed a sudden breakthrough in his expression; a look of lightness and glow appeared all around him. Alan had discovered a different way to tell me of his feelings: "Yah … Ha … Ho … Ha! Ho … La Cha Om Ha … Deg deg te te … Ta De De Ta Te Ta … Ha Te Te Ha Hom … Te Te Te …" We gibbered and danced all the way up the hill. Everyone around understood what we were saying. Alan knew too that he had never—not in all his books—said it any better than that.

At the Alan Watts memorial celebration in the Palace of Fine Arts in San Francisco, someone in the audience shouted to Jano Watts: "What was it like to live with Alan?" Her answer: "Never dull. He was a man full of fun and surprises. And the biggest surprise of all was on November sixteenth last year." During that last evening of his life Alan Watts played with balloons. He described the weightless, floating sensation as being "like my spirit leaving my body." In the night he went on to a new journey of the spirit, riding the wind, laughing joyously.

He left behind, us, the living, missing him terribly for his bravura human aliveness. He left also empty pages, a proposed two more chapters of "fun and surprises" of the book he had begun on the Tao. Many of us with whom he discussed this work, or who met with him during the summer-long seminars on Taoism while *The Watercourse Way* was happening, knew that in the final two chapters of the intended seven Alan hoped to let it be seen how the ancient, timeless Chinese wisdom was medicine for the ills of the West. Yet, paradoxically, it must not be taken as medicine, an intellectually swallowed "pill," but allowed joyously to infuse our total being and so transform our individual lives and through them our society.

Elsa Gidlow, Alan's longtime friend and neighbor, discussed this with me often. She confirmed our talks by writing the following:

> It was his vision that modern technological man, in

attempting absolute control over nature (from which he tended to see himself divided) and over all the uses of human society, was caught in a trap, himself becoming enslaved. Every control requires further control until the "controller" himself is enmeshed. Alan was fond of pointing to Lao-tzu's counsel to the emperors: "Govern a large country as you would cook a small fish: lightly." But it should be understood that Alan never saw "the watercourse way" in human affairs as a flabby, irresponsible, lackadaisical manner of living. The stream does not merely move downhill. The water, all moisture, transpires from the earth, streams, rivers, the ocean, to the upper air, a "breathing out," and then there is the "breathing in" when the moisture is returned downward as dew, as rain—a marvelous cycle, a living interaction: nothing controlling anything, no "boss," yet all happening as it should, *tse jen*.

Just how Alan would have communicated in his final chapters his insights into the need of the West for a realization and a living of the Way of the Tao, we can only guess. What we do know is that it transformed him as he allowed it to permeate his being, so that the reserved, somewhat uptight young Englishman, living overmuch in his head, in his mature years became an outgoing, spontaneously playful, joyous world sage. He believed that a widespread absorption of the profound wisdom of Taoism could similarly transform the West. This book was to be his contribution to the process.

So, when all fingers pointed toward me to undertake completion of this book, I realized that I must not try to imitate Alan or get into his mind, but attempt to show, from my knowing him, where he had arrived. My initial thoughts were sentimental and tributary. I began to relive my memories of Alan Watts. I wanted to share with the readers the total man Alan, not just his brains and words. I wrote about our first meeting dancing on the beach at Santa Barbara, our first Oriental meal together when Alan spoke more Japanese than I. I wrote about exciting events and moments in our many joint seminars which clearly demonstrated Alan's natural Tao as teacher-man.

I remembered one New Year's Eve celebration when we inspired a blind drummer to beat out the rhythm of

our cursive, calligraphic dialogue. How everyone picked up the splash-splatter motions of our ink brushes and began dancing spontaneously their own individual body-brush strokes. Another time when Alan and I guided a blind girl into our mind-body by touching and moving with her so she could gradually see and feel through her inner visions. I recalled rituals and games we played: weddings conducted out of rigid procedures into a true spirit of love and union; impromptu *chanoyu* or tea ceremonies with unauthentic equipment, yet performed and observed in reverent essence.

Alan Watts was a philosophical entertainer. He knew himself to be so. His foremost concern was enjoyment for himself and for his audience. He easily lifted the usual academic seriousness, along with dutiful learning, to new and higher planes of joyous playfulness in natural growth.

And yet, all this remembrance is only thoughts of the past. What is happening to Alan now? What are his current, ongoing "fun and surprises"?

On New Year's Eve 1973–4, during Alan's forty-nine-days' Bardo Journey (the Tibetan and Chinese concept of the intermediate stages between death and rebirth) and only a few days before his fifty-eighth birthday, I had an unusual dream about juxtaposed time-space-people. It was in China, I thought, during a chanting session with the monks for my father's Bardo. Then the place became Alan's circular library where Alan himself was conducting the service, speaking in my father's voice in Chinese. I was playing the flute, but the sound I made was that of a gong, mixed with beats of the woodblock. Then Alan changed into my father, speaking an unrecognizable yet perfectly intelligible language. The booming, resonating voice gradually became the sound of the bamboo flute I was playing, reading his lips. My vision zoomed close to the dark moving void between the lips, entering into a sound chamber swirling with colors and lights, deeper and deeper into the stillness of the continuing sound of the bamboo. I woke up not knowing who, when, or where I was. Next thing, I was flying in the sky (was it by plane?) to arrive at Alan's library by midday New Year's.

For the first time since his passing in November I felt I was truly close to him. Sitting on the deck outside the picture window before which Alan's ashes rested on the altar, I let the sound of my bamboo flute echo over the valley and hills.

It was a clear and beautiful day. Later, I put on Jano's climbing shoes, threw a blanket wrap over my neck, took Alan's Tibetan walking staff, and walked down the small path into the depth of the woods. The sound of the bamboo carried everything inside me to Alan, to everything that is the eternal spirit-body. On my return by the same path, just before I reached the top, an orchidlike flower burst into full bloom before my feet. I asked the orchid, "What is everyday Tao 日常?" The orchid, Lan—the second syllable in Alan's Chinese name—answered, "Nothing special, really."

We do not hear nature boasting about being nature, nor water holding a conference on the technique of flowing. So much rhetoric would be wasted on those who have no use for it. The man of Tao lives in the Tao, like a fish in water. If we try to teach the fish that water is physically compounded of two parts hydrogen and one part oxygen, the fish will laugh its head off.

In the past months, after I had struggled to fill in the empty pages of this book and ended up throwing all my attempts in the wastebasket, I suddenly remembered one morning at a Chicago seminar. Alan was unusually tired and feeling slightly inebriated when one super-intellectual-bigger-than-life question was put to him. Several moments elapsed. During that time, a couple of us who had been with Alan the night before and earlier that day knew for certain that Alan had simply decided to take a short catnap, while everyone else expected, and therefore saw, that he was deep in meditation, thinking that one over. When he finally came to and realized he had totally forgotten the question, he managed with great finesse and eloquence to come up with an even-more-super-intellectual-bigger-than-the-biggest-life answer to dazzle us all.

I can hear Alan laughing now. Every time I find myself

stuck in my thinking, I turn to him. And in all our spiritual dialogues, Alan's answers have been consistently and simply, "Ha Ha Ha Ha Ha Ho Ho Ho Ho Ho Hahahahahahahahahah ha …" Let us laugh together then, wholeheartedly, all human beings of the Tao, for, in the words of Lao-tzu, "If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is."

Preface

CERTAIN CHINESE PHILOSOPHERS writing in, perhaps, the —5th and —4th centuries explained ideas and a way of life that have come to be known as *Taoism* 道家—the way of man's cooperation with the course or trend of the natural world, whose principles we discover in the flow patterns of water, gas, and fire, which are subsequently memorialized or sculptured in those of stone and wood, and, later, in many forms of human art. What they had to say is of immense importance for our own times when, in the +20th century, we are realizing that our efforts to rule nature by technical force and "straighten it out" may have the most disastrous results.[1]

I doubt that we can give a scientifically exact and objective account of what was in the minds of those philosophers because they are too far away in time, and history fades away like the reverberations of sounds and of traces in water. The precise meanings of the Chinese language of those days are hard to establish, and although I appreciate and try to follow the methods of exact scholarship, my real interest is in what these far-off echoes of philosophy mean to me and to our own historical situation. In other words, there is a value in the effort to find out what did, in fact, happen in remote times and to master the details of philology. But what then? Having done as well as we can to record the past we must go on to make use of it in our present context, and this is my main interest in writing this book. I want to interpret and clarify the principles of such writings as the *Lao-tzu* 老子, *Chuang-tzu*, 莊子 and *Lieh-tzu* 列子 books in the terms and ideas of our own day, while giving the original texts as accurately translated as possible—that is, without undue paraphrase or poetic elaboration, following the principles of that master translator Arthur Waley, though with some minor reservations.

It will be obvious that I am heavily indebted to the work and the methods of Joseph Needham and his collaborators at Cambridge University in the production of the many-volumed *Science and Civilization in China*, and though I am not regarding this work as if it were the voice of God, it is, for me, the most marvelous historical enterprise of this century. Needham has the knack of putting out fully documented scholarship as readable as a novel, and, both through reading his work and through personal conversation, my understanding of the Tao has been greatly clarified. He also understands that writing history and philosophy is, like research in science, a social undertaking, so that his work is somewhat more of a conducted chorus than a solo. I think it unfortunate that, especially in America, Sinologists tend to be cantankerous, and hypercritical of each other's work. Needham, on the other hand, is invariably generous without surrender of his own integrity, and I shall try, in what follows, to show how the principle of the Tao reconciles sociability with individuality, order with spontaneity, and unity with diversity.

In sum, I am not attempting to conduct a popular and statistically accurate poll of what Chinese people did, or now do, suppose the Taoist way of life to be. Such meticulous explorations of cultural anthropology have their virtue, but I am much more interested in how these ancient writings reverberate on the harp of my own brain, which has, of course, been tuned to the scales of Western culture. Although I will by no means despise precise and descriptive information—the Letter, I am obviously more interested in the Spirit—the actual experiencing and feeling of that attitude to life which is the following of the Tao.

A.W.

1 Note that I am following Joseph Needham's simplification of dates by substituting the symbols – and + for B.C. and A.D., which are inelegantly inconsistent and not internationally comprehensible, since the first stands for the English "Before Christ" and the second for the Latin *Anno Domini,* "In the year of our Lord." Curiously,

neither B.C nor A.D. is listed in the index of Abbreviations and Signs in the *Oxford University Dictionary* (1955).

Prolegomena

Bibliography

To avoid tiresome footnotation, bibliographical references to Western sources are simply indicated as, e.g., "H. A. Giles (1)" or "Legge (2)," so that by name and number a detailed identification of works consulted may be found in the Bibliography. There is a separate bibliography for original Chinese sources, and the references to these are italicized, as *Chuang-tzu* 12. The Chinese ideograms for brief words and phrases are printed in the margin alongside their romanized forms. On pages 56–73 and 99–104, many of the quotations from Chinese sources are given in Chinese calligraphy. The special importance of including Chinese ideograms is explained in the first chapter in such a way, I trust, that even the nonscholar will find it helpful.

Translation

I must admit right here that I am by no means such a scholar and interpreter of the Chinese language as Giles, Waley, Demiéville, Hurwitz, Bodde, Watson, or Needham —not to mention such Chinese masters of English as Hu Shih and Lin Yutang. But I have the nerve to believe that I understand the basic principles of Taoism more thoroughly than some scholars whose interest is narrowly philological. Thus when a translation is by someone else it is identified as, e.g., "tr. Lin Yutang (1)." When I have compared several translations of a passage and made up my own mind as to how it should go it is identified as, e.g., "tr. Watson (1), mod. auct." When it is simply my own it is identified as "tr. auct." I must confess to a

sentimental liking for such Latinisms, along with such others as *ibid.*, [*sic*], *q.v.*, *et seq.*, and *e.g.*, which conveniently abbreviate their drawn-out equivalents: "from the same work," or "that, believe it or not, is just what it says," or "refer to the source mentioned," or "and what follows," or "for example." Furthermore, they may be identified in any adequate dictionary of English.

Romanization

There is no fully satisfactory way of romanizing either Chinese or Japanese. The word *Tao* 道 will be pronounced approximately as "dow" in Peking, as "toe" in Canton, and as "daw" in Tokyo. But if I were to substitute any one of these three for *Tao* (which, hereafter, will be adopted into the English language and unitalicized), I would simply be behaving freakishly and confusingly in the context of British, American, and much European literature about China. There is also a word romanized as *T'ao* (pronounced in Peking as "tow-" in "towel") which, according to the tone used in uttering the vowel and the context in which it is used, can mean to desire, recklessness, insolence, to doubt, to pull or clean out, to overflow, a sheath or quiver, a sash or cord, gluttony, a peach, profligacy, marriage, to escape, a special type of hand-drum, to weep, to scour, to bind or braid, a kiln for pottery, to be pleased, to beg, to punish or exterminate, a block of wood (as well as a blockhead), great waves, and packaging. Before you condemn this as irrational, consider the number of meanings for the sound "jack" in English—with no tonal alteration to differentiate them. And for almost all the varied meanings of the sound *T'ao* there are distinctly different ideograms.

Throughout the English-speaking world the most usual form of romanizing Chinese is known as the Wade-Giles system, which is explained in a table at the end of this section (p. xxi) because, in spite of its defects, I am going to use it. No uninitiated English-speaking person could guess how to pronounce it, and I have even thought, in a

jocularly malicious state of mind, that Professors Wade and Giles invented it so as to erect a barrier between profane and illiterate people and true scholars. As alternatives there are such awkwardnesses as invented by the Reverend Professor James Legge—e.g., Kwang-ʒze for Chuang-tzu—which require a bizarre font of type, and if one is going to resort to weird letters at all, one may just as well use Chinese itself. I have seriously considered using Needham's revision of the Wade-Giles system, which would, for example, substitute *Thao* for *T'ao* and *Chhang* for *Ch'ang*, but I can't help feeling that the apostrophe is less obnoxious, aesthetically, than the double *h* which, furthermore, does not really suggest the difference: that *Chang* is pronounced "jang" and that *Ch'ang* is pronounced "chang," with an "a" sound close to the "u" in the English "jug." Department of utter confusion! In San Francisco's Chinatown they will spell out the Wade-Giles *Feng* as *Fung* (same "u" as in "jug") and *Wang* as *Wong,* so as not to be read as "whang." On the other hand, a restaurant labeled Wooey Looey Gooey is called (to rhyme with "boy") "Woy Loy Goy."

The problem of romanizing ideograms came to an even higher level of comedy when, shortly before World War II, the Japanese government tried to authorize a new *romaiji* in which *Fuji* became *Huzi*, and Prince Chichibu became Prince Titibu, on the principle that the romanization of Japanese should not have been designed solely for English-speaking people. Therefore Germans would certainly have referred to that noble volcano as "Ootzee," while the British and Americans would have sniggered about Prince Titty-boo. Fortunately, the Japanese have dropped this reform, though many Americans go on calling the cities of Kyoto and Hakone "Kigh-oat-oh" and "Hack-own." You should see the complications which come to pass when attempting to romanize even such alphabetic languages as Tibetan or Sanskrit, which seem, from our point of view, languages specifically designed to be difficult. The scholarly establishment has worked it out so that to tell you about the Lord Krishna I must have a typographer who can make it Kṛṣṇa, and to whom does

this tell anything, other than those already in the know?[1]

As in some economies the rich keep getting richer and the poor poorer, so in the overspecialized disciplines of modern scholarship the learned get more learned and the ignorant more ignorant—until the two classes can hardly talk to each other. I have dedicated my work to an attempt to bridge this gap, and so now will reveal to the uninitiated the Wade-Giles system of romanizing the Mandarin 官 dialect of Chinese 話.

The Pronunciation of Chinese Words

Consonants	Aspirated: Read *p'*, *t'*, *k'*, *ch'*, and *ts'* as in *p*in, *t*ip, *k*ilt, *ch*in, and bi*ts*.
	Unaspirated: Read *p*, *t*, *k*, *ch*, and *ts* (or *tz*) as in *b*in, *d*ip, *g*ilt, *g*in, and bi*ds*.
	hs or *sh*, as in *sh*oe.
	j is nearly like an "unrolled" *r*, so that *jen* is nearly the English *wren*.
Vowels	Usually Italian values,
	a as in f*a*ther
	e as in *ei*ght
	eh as in broth*er*
	i as in mach*i*ne and p*i*n
	ih as in sh*ir*t
	o as in s*o*ap
	u as in g*oo*se
	ü as in German *ü*ber
Diphthongs	*ai* as in l*i*ght
	ao as in l*ou*d
	ei as in w*ei*ght
	ia as in Will*ia*m
	ieh as in Kor*ea*
	ou as in gr*ou*p
	ua as in sw*a*n
	ueh as in d*oe*r
	ui as in s*way*
	uo as in *whoah!*
Combinations	*an* and *ang* as in b*un* and b*ung*
	en and *eng* as in wood*en* and am*ong*
	in and *ing* as in s*in* and s*ing*
	un and *ung* with the *u* as in l*oo*k.

Historical Notes

Until relatively recent times it was generally believed that Lao-tzu was an individual (otherwise known as Lao Tan or Li Erh) who lived at the time of Confucius (K'ung Fu-tzu) 孔夫子, that is to say in the —6th and —5th centuries, the assumed dates of Confucius himself being —552 to —479. The name Lao-tzu means the Old Boy, deriving from the legend that he was born with white hair. This date is

based on a disputed passage from the historian Ssu-ma Ch'ien (—145 to —79), who relates that Lao-tzu was curator of the royal library at the capital of Lo-yang, where Confucius visited him in —517.

> Li [Lao-tzu] said to K'ung [Confucius]: The men about whom you talk are dead, and their bones are mouldered to dust; only their words are left. Moreover, when the superior man gets his opportunity, he mounts aloft; but when the time is against him, he is carried along by the force of circumstances. I have heard that a good merchant, though he have rich treasures safely stored, appears as if he were poor; and that the superior man, though his virtue be complete, is yet to outward seeming stupid. Put away your proud air and many desires, your insinuating habit and wild will. They are of no advantage to you;—this is all I have to tell you.

After the interview, Confucius is supposed to have said:

> I know how birds can fly, fishes swim, and animals run. But the runner may be snared, the swimmer hooked, and the flyer shot by the arrow. But there is the dragon:—I cannot tell how he mounts on the wind through the clouds, and rises to heaven. Today I have seen Lao-tzu, and can only compare him to the dragon.

To this Ssu-ma Ch'ien adds:

> Lao-tzu cultivated the Tao and its attributes, the chief aim of his studies being how to keep himself concealed and remain unknown. He continued to reside at the capital of Chou, but after a long time, seeing the decay of the dynasty, he left it and went away to the barrier-gate, leading out of the kingdom on the north-west. Yin Hsi, the warden of the gate, said to him, "You are about to withdraw yourself out of sight. Let me insist on your (first) composing for me a book." On this, Lao-tzu wrote a book in two parts, setting forth his views on the Tao and its attributes, in more than 5000 characters. He then went away, and it is not known where he died. He was a superior man, who liked to keep himself unknown.[2]

In the last fifty years, Chinese, Japanese, and European

scholars have, by minute textual criticism, come more or less to the consensus that the *Lao-tzu* 道 book, the *Tao Te Ching* 德經, is a compilation of Taoist sayings by several hands originating in the —4th century, during, and even after, the time of Chuang-tzu, who, according to Fung Yu-lan, must have flourished somewhere between —369 and —286.[3] When I consider the confused opinions arising from textual criticism of the New Testament, I am in some doubt as to how seriously this debunking of the Lao-tzu legend should be taken. Since the latter years of the +19th century, scholars of the Western tradition, including many Chinese and Japanese, seem to have established a trend for casting doubt on the historicity of "legendary" figures of the past—especially if they are of the religious or spiritual type. It will take many years to ascertain whether this is a style or fad of modern scholarship, or honest research. To please their professors, many successful graduate students affect peppery skepticism and an aura of scientific objectivity as a matter of protocol in submitting acceptable dissertations. Because of this way of looking at texts with a big magnifying glass, one sometimes wonders whether pedants miss features which are obvious to the naked eye.

To me, the *Tao Te Ching*, the "Book of the Way and Its Power," could very obviously be the work of one hand, allowing for minor interpolations and for such inconsistencies, real or apparent, as may be found in the work of almost any philosopher. Its laconic, aphoristic, and enigmatic style is consistent throughout the book, as is also the very rhythm of its argument: "The Tao is thus and so, and therefore the sage should conduct himself this way and that." By contrast, the style of the *Chuang-tzu* book is entirely different—discursive, argumentative, narrational, and humorous to the point of provoking belly-laughs, so that to one's aesthetic judgment the two books evoke two very different but consistent personalities. As things now stand I do not believe that we know enough about ancient Chinese history and literature to make a firm judgment, and perhaps it will never be possible to do so.

However, the dating of Chuang-tzu (or Chuang-chou) has never been in much dispute, traditionalists and modern scholars both agreeing, in the main, upon the —4th century. He has been related to Lao-tzu as Saint Paul to Jesus, though there is the difference that whereas Saint Paul never quotes the actual words of Jesus, Chuang-tzu quotes Lao-tzu. Lin Yutang's translation of the *Lao-tzu* intersperses its chapters with substantial portions of the *Chuang-tzu* as commentary, and the device works admirably, so that one tends to see in Chuang-tzu a development and elaboration of the pithy thoughts of Lao-tzu.

H. G. Creel says, "The *Chuang-tzu* is in my estimation the finest philosophical work known to me, in any language."[4] The opinion of such a scholar commands respect. Chinese literati likewise feel that its literary style is of superb quality, and there must be many, like myself, who rejoice in Chuang-tzu as one of the very few philosophers, in all times, who does not take himself painfully seriously, and whose writings are graced with humor of a peculiar character. That is to say, he can laugh about the most profound matters without deriding them, but, on the contrary, making them seem all the more true and profound just because they are comic. Laughter and mysticism, or religion, go together all too rarely. This same attitude may be found, owing, perhaps, to its connections with Taoism, in the literature of Ch'an (Zen) Buddhism, as well as in the personal style of many of its present followers.

There is less assurance as to the dating of the *Lieh-tzu* book. Though assigned by tradition to the —3rd century, it shows the influence of Buddhist ideas, which would suggest a date early in the Christian era, the +1st or +2nd century. Lieh-tzu is also highly critical of what Creel has called "Heien Taoism 仙山," as distinct from "Contemplative Taoism," the former being a quest for immortality and supernormal powers through the gymnosophic and "yogic" practices which seem to have arisen among Taoists in the —2nd and —1st centuries. A *hsien* is an immortal—one who has purified his flesh from

decay by special forms of breathing, diet, drugs, and exercises for preserving the semen comparable to those of Tantric Yoga. When his skin grows old and crinkly, he sloughs it like a snake to reveal a youthful body beneath.[5]

The *Huai Nan Tzu* 淮南子 book, which also takes issue with Hsien Taoism, was written under the sponsorship of the Prince of Huai Nan, a relative and vassal of the Emperor Wu named Liu An, and may fairly safely be placed at c. —120. Of this Creel says:

> A book written under his patronage by various scholars, called the *Huai Nan Tzu,* is eclectic but predominantly Taoist in tone. It contains a good deal of mention of techniques for seeking immortality but never, I believe, recommends them. On the contrary, it insists repeatedly that death and life are just the same, and neither should be sought or feared. It ridicules breath control and gymnastics, which are designed to perpetuate the body but in fact confuse the mind.[6]

The focus of this book is upon Contemplative Taoism rather than Hsien Taoism. I do not know enough of the latter to explain it coherently or judge it fairly. My interest, however, lies in what Buddhists call the Way of Wisdom (*prajna*) rather than the Way of Powers (*siddhi*), because the indefinite enlargement of our powers and techniques seems in the end to be the pursuit of a mirage. One who is immortal and who has control of everything that happens to him strikes me as self-condemned to eternal boredom, since he lives in a world without mystery or surprise.

1 I might also have used the somewhat grotesque alphabet of the International Phonetic Symbols, as employed for representing Chinese words in Forrest (1), but then no ordinary reader could make the least sense of it. The problem is really insoluble. I remember that as a small boy I set out to write down everything I knew in such a way as would be intelligible to people living thousands of years hence. But I realized that I must first devise a key-table to the pronunciation of the letters of the alphabet, for which purpose I had to use that same alphabet!

2 *Shih Chi,* tr. Legge (1), pp. 80–81.

3 Fung Yu-lan (2), p. 104. For much fuller details on research

concerning these dates, see Creel (1), chs. 1 and 4.

4 Creel (l), p. 55.

5 See Needham (1), vol. 2, p. 422 and illus. Though the idea is here connected with the Buddhist principle of transformation (nirmana 化 or *hua*), I do not find the image of skin-shedding in Indian or Tibetan iconography, and it therefore seems derivative from Hsien Taoism.

6 Creel (1), p. 19.

TAO: The Watercourse Way

1. The Chinese Written Language

AN OFTEN QUOTED Chinese proverb is that one picture is worth a thousand words, because it is so often much

easier to show than to say. As is well known, Chinese writing is unique in that it does not employ an alphabet, but rather characters or ideograms that were originally pictures or conventional signs. In the course of centuries, pictograms scratched on bone or bamboo became figures made with a brush on silk or paper, few of which bear recognizable resemblance to their primitive forms or to what they are used to indicate, and they have grown immensely in number and in degree of abstraction.

Most Westerners—indeed most alphabetic people—and even some Chinese have the impression that this form of writing is impossibly complex and inefficient. In recent years there has been much talk of "rationalizing" Chinese by introducing an alphabet similar, perhaps, to the Japanese *hiragana* and *katakana*.[1] But this, I believe, would be a disaster.

We may not be aware of the extent to which alphabetic people are now using ideograms. International airports and highways abound with them because their meaning is at once obvious whatever one's native tongue may be. Table 1 is a partial list of such symbols, and Table 2 suggests how they might be employed in constructing sentences. Give rein to the imagination, and it becomes obvious that a rich visual language could be developed from these images which, with little difficulty, would be understandable to almost everyone without the necessity of learning a new spoken tongue. One would pronounce it in one's own. But it would take a long time for this language to develop a literature, and grow to the point where it could express subtle nuances of thought and feeling. However, computers would master it easily, and, as demonstrated in Table 2, such ideograms could convey complex relationships or configurations (*Gestalten*) much more rapidly than long, strung-out alphabetic sentences. For the ideogram gives one more information at a single glance, and in less space, than is given by the linear, alphabetic form of writing, which must also be pronounced to be understandable. Might there not be some connection between the length of time which it now takes to "complete" an education and the sheer mileage

of print which one's eyes must scan?

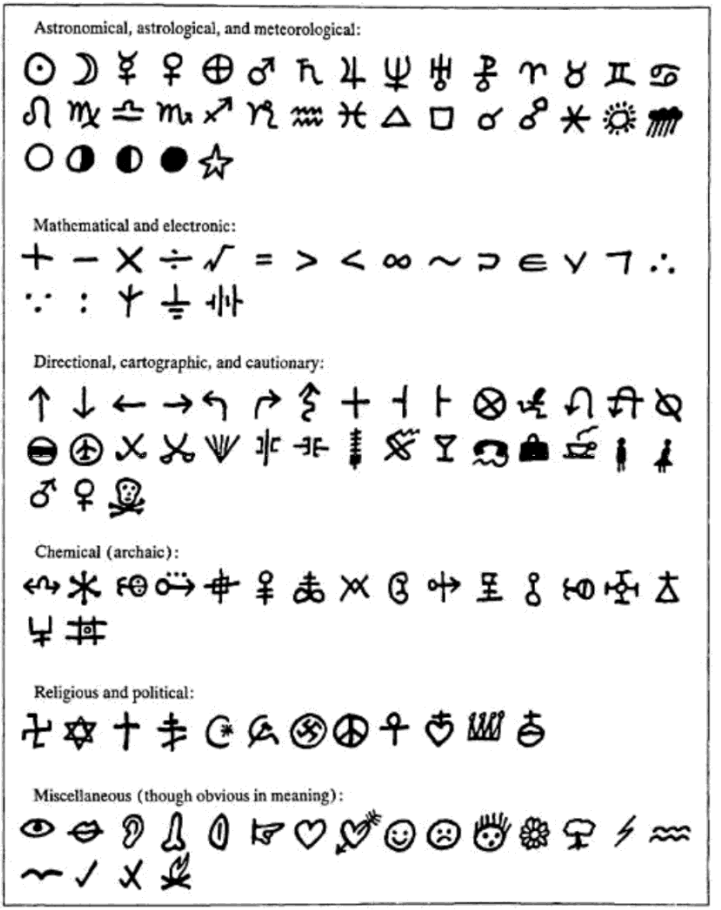


Table 1. A Selection of Western Ideograms

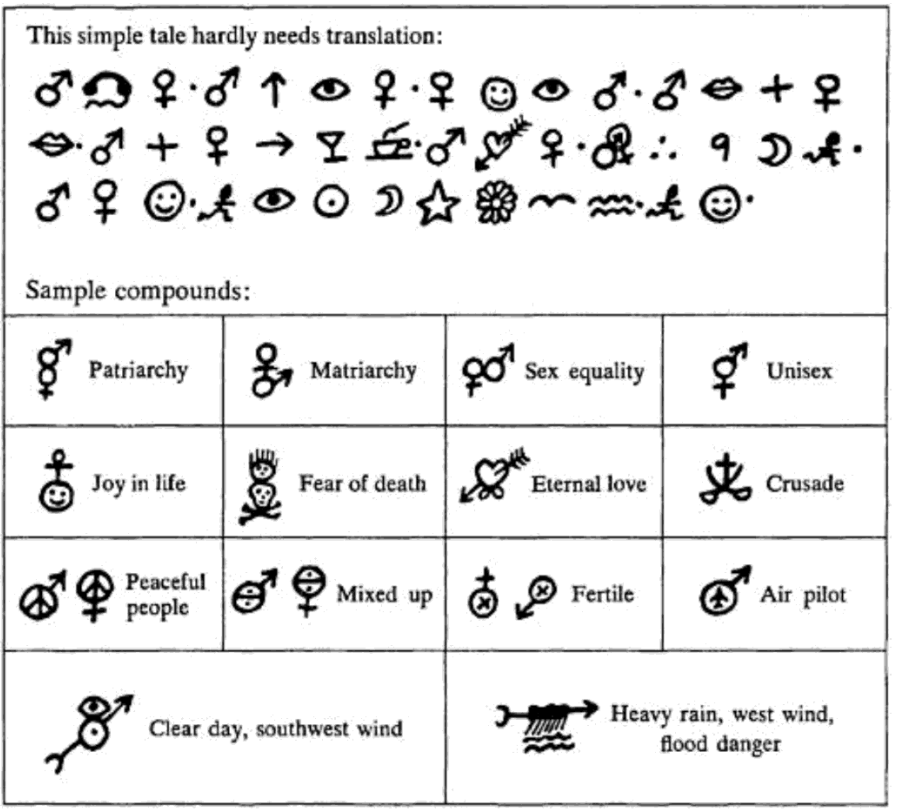


Table 2. WESTERN IDEOGRAMS USED AS LANGUAGE

For the natural universe is not a linear system. It involves an infinitude of variables interacting simultaneously, so that it would take incalculable aeons to translate even one moment of its operation into linear, alphabetic language. Let alone the universe! Take the planet Earth alone, or even what goes on in a small pond or, for that matter, in the structure of the atom. This is where problems of language relate to Taoist philosophy, for the *Lao-tzu* book begins by saying that the Tao which can be spoken is not the eternal (or regular) Tao. Yet it goes on to show that there is some other way of understanding and getting along with the process of nature than by translating it into words. After all, the brain, the very organ of intelligence, defies linguistic description by even the greatest neurologists. It is thus

that an ideographic language is a little closer to nature than one which is strictly linear and alphabetic. At any moment, nature is a simultaneity of patterns. An ideographic language is a *series* of patterns and, to that extent, still linear—but not so laboriously linear as an alphabetic language.

This critical point—that our organisms have ways of intelligent understanding beyond words and conscious attention, ways that can handle an unknown number of variables at the same time—will be discussed later. Suffice it to say now that the organization and regulation of thousands of bodily processes through the nervous system would be utterly beyond the capacity of deliberate thinking and planning—not to mention the relationships of those processes to the "external" world.

Now, as I have said, it would take years and years for a new and artificial ideographic language to develop a literature. But why go to the trouble when we already have Chinese? It is read by 800,000,000 people who pronounce it in at least seven different ways, or dialects, not including Japanese, which differ from each other far more radically than the King's English from Cockney or from the jazz argot of New Orleans. Furthermore, it has retained substantially the same form for at least 2,500 years, so that anyone speaking English today has far more difficulty in understanding Chaucer than a modern Chinese in making sense of Confucius. To some extent English—an incredibly complex and idiomatic language—has become the main international tongue, although Spanish would have been simpler. Isn't it possible that a second world language, in the written form, might be Chinese?

This is by no means so preposterous as most people would imagine, for our customary bafflement by Chinese ideograms is really a matter of uninformed prejudice. They are supposed to be outlandish, weird, devious, and as tricky as "the mysterious East." Although the K'ang-hsi dictionary of +1716 lists about 40,000 ideograms, a reasonably literate person needs about 5,000, and a comparably literate Westerner would know quite that

many words of his own language. The difficulty of recognizing and identifying ideograms is surely no greater than with such other complex patterns as the various kinds of flowers, plants, butterflies, trees, and wild animals.

In other words, Chinese is simpler than it looks, and may, in general, be both written and read more rapidly than English. The English MAN requires ten strokes of the pen, whereas the Chinese *jen*  requires but two. TREE needs thirteen, but *mu*  is only four. WATER is sixteen, but *shui*  is five. MOUNTAIN is eighteen, but *shan*  is three. Even when we get really complicated, CONTEMPLATION is twenty-eight, whereas *kuan*  is twenty-five. Roman capitals are the proper equivalents of these ideograms as shown, and though our longhand speeds things up it is nothing to its Chinese equivalent. Compare  with *wu*  . To contrast our writing with Chinese as to relative complexity, simply turn this page through a ninety-degree angle—and *then* look at English!

FIRST COLUMN: Archaic Script, SECOND: Small Seal style.
THIRD: Classical and Modern, based on use of the brush.

Table 3. THE EVOLUTION OF CHINESE WRITING

To simplify matters further, Chinese makes no rigid distinctions between parts of speech. Nouns and verbs are often interchangeable, and may also do duty as adjectives and adverbs. When serving as nouns they do not require the ritual nuisance of gender, wherewith adjectives must agree, nor are they declined, and when

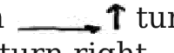
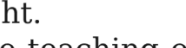
used as verbs they are not conjugated. When necessary, certain single ideograms are used to show whether the situation is past, present, or future. There is no pother over *is, was, were,* and *will be,* much less over *suis, es, est, sommes, êtes, sont, fus, fûmes, serais,* and *sois* as forms of the verb *être,* "to be." When translated very literally into English, Chinese reads much like a telegram:

上德不德是以有德

Superior virtue not virtue is its being virtue.

This we must elaborate as, "Superior virtue is not intentionally virtuous, and this is just why it is virtue," but the Chinese is more shocking and "gives one to think."

From this it might seem that it is hard to be precise in Chinese, or to make those clear distinctions which are necessary for scientific analysis. On the one hand, however, Chinese has the peculiar advantage of being able to say many things at once and to mean all of them, which is why there have been at least seventy English translations of Lao-tzu. On the other, Chinese uses compound words for precision. Thus *sheng* 生 which means, among other things, "to be born," can be specified as 生產 parturition, 生(出)世 to be born from the world, 生下 or 生養 begotten, the latter having also the sense of bringing up; and then one distinguishes 胎生 birth from a womb, 卵生 birth from an egg, and 化生 birth by transformation, as with the butterfly.

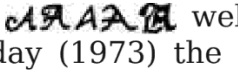
An important part of Chinese grammar is the order of words. Although this is in many ways close to English, and does not, for example, remove verbs to the end of the sentence as in Latin and German, one must take care to distinguish 手背 the back of the hand (s) from 背手 hand (s) behind the back, and whereas 皇上 is the Emperor, 上皇 is his father, or the late Emperor. This is not so different in principle from  turn right and then go up, and  go up and turn right.

I have long been advocating the teaching of Chinese in secondary schools, not only because we must inevitably

learn how to communicate with the Chinese themselves, but because, of all the high cultures, theirs is most different from ours in its ways of thinking. Every culture is based on assumptions so taken for granted that they are barely conscious, and it is only when we study highly different cultures and languages that we become aware of them. Standard average European (SAE) languages, for example, have sentences so structured that the verb (event) must be set in motion by the noun (thing)—thereby posing a metaphysical problem as tricky, and probably as meaningless, as that of the relation of mind to body. We cannot talk of "knowing" without assuming that there is some "who" or "what" that knows, not realizing that this is nothing more than a grammatical convention. The supposition that knowing requires a knower is based on a linguistic and not an existential rule, as becomes obvious when we consider that raining needs no rainer and clouding no clouder. Thus when a Chinese receives a formal invitation, he may reply simply with the word "Know  ," indicating that he is aware of the event and may or may not come.[2]

Consider, further, the astonishing experiment of Rozin, Poritsky, and Sotsky of the University of Pennsylvania, who discovered that second-grade children who were backward in reading could easily be taught to read Chinese, and could construct simple sentences within four weeks.[3] I do not know if anyone has yet studied this method with deaf children, but it seems obvious that an ideographic language would be their ideal means of written communication. One notices often that both Chinese and Japanese people in conversation will draw ideograms in the air or on the table with their fingers to clarify ambiguity or vagueness in the spoken word. (It is quite a trick to draw them backwards or upside down for the benefit of the person facing you!)

It is sometimes said that Chinese writing (as well as painting) comprises an "alphabet" in the sense that it has a finite number of standard components.[4] It is said, not quite correctly, that the ideogram *yung*  , "eternal," contains all the basic strokes used in Chinese writing,

though I cannot see that it includes the fundamental "bone stroke"  or such formations as  . As soon as one is familiar with the elemental strokes and component forms of the ideograms, they are more easily recognized and remembered, even before one knows their English meaning. Reading Chinese is fundamentally what communications technicians call "pattern recognition"—a function of the mind which is, as yet, only rudimentarily mastered by the computer, because it is a nonlinear function. The mind recognizes instantly that A a *A a* A a as  well as are all the same letter, but as of today (1973) the computer has trouble with this. But it does not seem at all inconceivable that a computer could absorb the *k'ai-shu* 楷書, which is the formal and rigid style of Chinese printing, and so begin to approach a nonlinear method of thinking.

The idea of nonlinearity is unfamiliar to many people, so I should perhaps explain it in more detail. A good organist, using ten fingers and two feet, could—by playing chords—keep twelve melodies going at once, though, unless he was very dexterous with his feet, they would have to be of the same rhythm. But he could certainly render a six-part fugue—four with the hands and two with the feet—and in mathematical and scientific language each of these parts would be called a variable. The performance of each organ of the body is also a variable—as is also, in this context, the temperature, the constitution of the atmosphere, the bacterial environment, the wavelength of various forms of radiation, and the gravitational field. But we have no idea of how many variables could be distinguished in any given natural situation. A variable is a process (e.g., melody, pulse, vibration) which can be isolated, identified, and measured by conscious attention.

The problem of coping with variables is twofold. First: how do we recognize and identify *a* variable, or *a* process? For example, can we think of the heart as separate from the veins, or the branches from the tree? Just what exact delineations distinguish the bee process from the flower process? These distinctions are always

somewhat arbitrary and conventional, even when described with very exact language, for the distinctions reside more in the language than in what it describes. Second: there is no known limit to the number of variables that may be involved in any natural, or physical, event—such as the hatching of an egg. The boundary of the shell is hard and clear, but when we begin to think about it, it washes into considerations of molecular biology, climate, nuclear physics, techniques of poultry farming, ornithological sexology, and so on and so on until we realize that this "single event" should—if we could manage it—be considered in relation to the whole universe. But conscious attention, relying on the instruments of spelled-out words in lines, or numbers in lines, cannot keep simultaneous track of more than a few of the variables which are isolated and described by these instruments. From the standpoint of linear description, there is just much too much going on at each moment. We persuade ourselves, then, that we are attending to some really important or significant things, much as a newspaper editor will select "the news" out of an infinitude of happenings.

The ear cannot detect as many variables at the same time as the eye, for sound is a slower vibration than light. Alphabetic writing is a representation of sound, whereas the ideogram represents vision and, furthermore, represents the world directly—not being a sign for a sound which is the name of a thing. As for names, the sound "bird" has nothing in it that reminds one of a bird, and for some reason it would strike us as childish to substitute more direct names, such as tweetie, powee, or quark.

Aside from all these utilitarian advantages of the ideogram, there is also its formal beauty. This is not simply because, to our eyes, it is exotic and unintelligible. No one appreciates the beauty of this writing more than the Chinese and Japanese themselves, though one might suppose that their familiarity with it would have made them indifferent to anything but its meaning. On the contrary: the practice of calligraphy is considered in the

Far East as a fine art, along with painting and sculpture. A written scroll, hanging in one's alcove, is by no means to be compared to some biblical admonition, printed in Gothic letters, framed, and hung on the wall. The importance of the latter is its message, whereas the importance of the former is its visual beauty and its expression of the character of the writer.

I have practiced Chinese calligraphy for many years, and am not yet a master of the art, which could be described as dancing with brush and ink on absorbent paper. Because ink is mostly water, Chinese calligraphy—controlling the flow of water with the soft brush as distinct from the hard pen—requires that you go with the flow. If you hesitate, hold the brush too long in one place, or hurry, or try to correct what you have written, the blemishes are all too obvious. But if you write well there is at the same time the sensation that the work is happening on its own, that the brush is writing all by itself—as a river, by following the line of least resistance, makes elegant curves. The beauty of Chinese calligraphy is thus the same beauty which we recognize in moving water, in foam, spray, eddies, and waves, as well as in clouds, flames, and weavings of smoke in sunlight. The Chinese call this kind of beauty the following of *li* 理, an ideogram which referred originally to the grain in jade and wood, and which Needham translates as "organic pattern," although it is more generally understood as the "reason" or "principle" of things. *Li* is the pattern of behavior which comes about when one is in accord with the Tao, the watercourse of nature. The patterns of moving air are of the same character, and so the Chinese idea of elegance is expressed as *feng-liu* 風流, the flowing of wind.

Now this going with the wind or the current, plus the intelligence pattern of the human organism, is the whole art of sailing—of keeping wind in your sails while tacking in a contrary direction. Buckminster Fuller has suggested that sailors were the first great technologists, studying the stars for navigation, realizing that Earth is a globe, inventing block-and-tackle devices for hoisting sails (and

thus cranes), and understanding the rudiments of meteorology. Likewise Thor Heyerdahl (1) in his Kon-Tiki expedition reconstructed the most primitive sailing raft to see where the winds and currents of the Pacific would take him from Peru, and was amazed to discover how his act of faith was honored by nature's cooperation. Along the same line of thought: just as it is more intelligent to sail than to row, our technology is surely better advised to use the tides, the rivers, and the sun for energy rather than fossil fuels and the capricious power of nuclear fission.

Just as Chinese writing is at least one step closer to nature than ours, so the ancient philosophy of the Tao is of a skillful and intelligent following of the course, current, and grain of natural phenomena—seeing human life as an integral feature of the world process, and not as something alien and opposed to it. Looking at this philosophy with the needs and problems of modern civilization in mind, it suggests an attitude to the world which must underlie all our efforts towards an ecological technology. For the development of such a technology is not just a matter of the techniques themselves, but of the psychological attitude of the technician.

Hitherto, Western science has stressed the attitude of objectivity—a cold, calculating, and detached attitude through which it appears that natural phenomena, including the human organism, are nothing but mechanisms. But, as the word itself implies, a universe of mere objects is objectionable. We feel justified in exploiting it ruthlessly, but now we are belatedly realizing that the ill-treatment of the environment is damage to ourselves—for the simple reason that subject and object cannot be separated, and that we and our surroundings are the process of a unified field, which is what the Chinese call Tao. In the long run, we simply have no other alternative than to work along with this process by attitudes and methods which could be as effective technically as *judo*  , the "gentle Tao," is effective athletically. As human beings have to make the gamble of trusting one another in order to have any kind of

workable community, we must also take the risk of trimming our sails to the winds of nature. For our "selves" are inseparable from this kind of universe, and there is nowhere else to be.

1 These are highly simplified characters, the first cursive and the second scriptlike, used to designate the syllables of spoken Japanese. Written Japanese combines these alphabets with Chinese ideograms (*kanji*) so that, among other things, verbs may be conjugated and nouns declined. But I think it would be agreed that most Westerners find it far more difficult to read Japanese than Chinese. You must speak Japanese before you can read it.

2 Lin Yutang (l), p. 164.

3 Rozin, Poritsky, and Sotsky (1), pp. 1264–67.

4 Aside from the basic strokes (of the brush), there are slightly more complex components, roughly equivalent to the simpler forms of the 214 "radicals" whereby the ideograms are classified in dictionaries. It seems to me that by far the most convenient and sensibly arranged beginner's dictionary is Arthur Rose-Innes (1), even though the pronunciations given are Japanese. As to the use of a similar principle in painting, see Mai-mai Sze (1), vol. 2, the section entitled "The Mustard-Seed Garden." Also Chiang Yee (1), *Chinese Calligraphy*.

2. The Yin-Yang Polarity

AT THE VERY ROOTS of Chinese thinking and feeling there lies the principle of polarity, which is not to be confused with the ideas of opposition or conflict. In the metaphors of other cultures, light is at war with darkness, life with death, good with evil, and the positive with the negative, and thus an idealism to cultivate the former and be rid of the latter flourishes throughout much of the world. To the traditional way of Chinese thinking, this is as incomprehensible as an electric current without both positive and negative poles, for polarity is the principle that + and —, north and south, are different aspects of one and the same system, and that the disappearance of either one of them would be the disappearance of the system.

People who have been brought up in the aura of Christian and Hebrew aspirations find this frustrating, because it seems to deny any possibility of progress, an ideal which flows from their linear (as distinct from cyclic) view of time and history. Indeed, the whole enterprise of Western technology is "to make the world a better place"—to have pleasure without pain, wealth without poverty, and health without sickness. But, as is now becoming obvious, our violent efforts to achieve this ideal

with such weapons as DDT, penicillin, nuclear energy, automotive transportation, computers, industrial farming, damming, and compelling everyone, by law, to be superficially "good and healthy" are creating more problems than they solve. We have been interfering with a complex system of relationships which we do not understand, and the more we study its details, the more it eludes us by revealing still more details to study. As we try to comprehend and control the world it runs away from us. Instead of chafing at this situation, a Taoist would ask what it means. What is that which always retreats when pursued? Answer: yourself. Idealists (in the moral sense of the word) regard the universe as different and separate from themselves—that is, as a system of external objects which needs to be subjugated. Taoists view the universe as the same as, or inseparable from, themselves—so that Lao-tzu could say, "Without leaving my house, I know the whole universe." [104*a*][1] This implies that the art of life is more like navigation than warfare, for what is important is to understand the winds, the tides, the currents, the seasons, and the principles of growth and decay, so that one's actions may use them and not fight them. In this sense, the Taoist attitude is not opposed to technology per se. Indeed, the Chuang-tzu writings are full of references to crafts and skills perfected by this very principle of "going with the grain." The point is therefore that technology is destructive only in the hands of people who do not realize that they are one and the same process as the universe. Our overspecialization in conscious attention and linear thinking has led to neglect, or ignore-ance, of the basic principles and rhythms of this process, of which the foremost is polarity.

In Chinese the two poles of cosmic energy are *yang* 陽 (positive) and *yin* 陰 (negative), and their conventional signs are respectively ⚊ and ⚋. The ideograms indicate the sunny and shady sides of a hill, *fou* 阜 or 阝, and they are associated with the masculine and the feminine, the firm and the yielding, the strong and the weak, the light and the dark, the rising and the falling, heaven and

earth, and they are even recognized in such everyday matters as cooking as the spicy and the bland. Thus the art of life is not seen as holding to *yang* and banishing *yin,* but as keeping the two in balance, because there cannot be one without the other. When regarding them as the masculine and the feminine, the reference is not so much to male and female individuals as to characteristics which are dominant in, but not confined to, each of the two sexes. Obviously, the male has the convex penis and the female the concave vagina; and though people have regarded the former as a possession and the latter as a deprivation (Freud's "penis envy"), any fool should be able to recognize that one cannot have the outstanding without the instanding, and that a rampant *membrum virile* is no good without somewhere to put it, and vice versa.* But the male individual must not neglect his female component, nor the female her male. Thus Lao-tzu says:

> Knowing the male but keeping the female, one becomes a universal stream. Becoming a universal stream, one is not separated from eternal virtue.[2] [104*b*]

The *yang* and the *yin* are principles, not men and women, so that there can be no true relationship between the affectedly tough male and the affectedly flimsy female.

The key to the relationship between *yang* and *yin* is called *hsiang sheng* 相生, mutual arising or inseparability. As Lao-tzu puts it:

> When everyone knows beauty as beautiful, there is already ugliness;
> When everyone knows good as goodness, there is already evil.
> "To be" and "not to be" arise mutually;
> Difficult and easy are mutually realized;
> Long and short are mutually contrasted;
> High and low are mutually posited; …
> Before and after are in mutual sequence.[3] [104*c*]

They are thus like the different, but inseparable, sides of a coin, the poles of a magnet, or pulse and interval in any

vibration. There is never the ultimate possibility that either one will win over the other, for they are more like lovers wrestling than enemies fighting.[4] But it is difficult in our logic to see that being and nonbeing are mutually generative and mutually supportive, for it is the great and imaginary terror of Western man that nothingness will be the permanent end of the universe. We do not easily grasp the point that the void is creative, and that being comes from nonbeing as sound from silence and light from space.

> Thirty spokes unite at the wheel's hub;
> It is the center hole [literally, "from their not being"] that makes it useful.
> Shape clay into a vessel;
> It is the space within that makes it useful.
> Cut out doors and windows for a room;
> It is the holes which make it useful.
> Therefore profit comes from what is there;
> Usefulness from what is not there.[5] [104*d*]

I do not know if this point can really be argued in our logic, but I find it impossible to conceive any form whatsoever without the component of relatively empty space. We ignore space just because it is uniform, as water to fish and air to birds. It is almost impossible to give intelligible descriptions of elements or dimensions which are constant in all experiences—such as consciousness, time, motion, or electricity. Yet electricity is very much here, having measurable and controllable properties. But Professor Harold A. Wilson, writing on "Electricity" in the 1947 *Encyclopaedia Britannica,* says:

> The study of electricity to-day comprehends a vast range of phenomena, in all of which we are brought back ultimately to the fundamental conceptions of electric charge and of electric and magnetic fields. *These conceptions are at present ultimates,* not explained in terms of others. In the past there have been various attempts to explain them in terms of electric fluids and aethers having the properties of material bodies known to us by the study of mechanics. To-day, however, we find

> that the phenomena of electricity cannot be so explained, and the tendency is *to explain all other phenomena in terms of electricity, taken as a fundamental thing.* The question, "What is electricity?" is therefore essentially unanswerable, if by it is sought an explanation of the nature of electricity in terms of material bodies.[6]

That, from a scientist, is pure metaphysics. Change a few words, and it would be Saint Thomas Aquinas writing about God.

Yet, as I feel it intuitively, "space" and "void" (*k'ung* 空) are very much here, and every child teases itself out of thought by trying to imagine space expanding out and out with no limit. This space is not "just nothing" as we commonly use that expression, for I cannot get away from the sense that space and my awareness of the universe are the same, and call to mind the words of the Ch'an (Zen) Patriarch Hui-neng, writing eleven centuries after Lao-tzu:

> The capacity of mind is broad and huge, like the vast sky. Do not sit with a mind fixed on emptiness. If you do you will fall into a neutral kind of emptiness. Emptiness includes the sun, moon, stars, and planets, the great earth, mountains and rivers, all trees and grasses, bad men and good men, bad things and good things, heaven and hell; they are all in the midst of emptiness. The emptiness of human nature is also like this.[7]

Thus the *yin-yang* principle is that the somethings and the nothings, the ons and the offs, the solids and the spaces, as well as the wakings and the sleepings and the alternations of existing and not existing, are mutually necessary. How, one might ask, would you know that you are alive unless you had once been dead? How can one speak of reality or is-ness except in the context of the polar apprehension of void?

Yang and *yin* are in some ways parallel to the (later) Buddhist view of form, *se* 色空, and emptiness, *k'ung*—of which the *Hridaya Sutra* 色空 says, "That which is form is just that which is emptiness, and that which is emptiness is just that which is form." This seeming paradox is at

once intelligible in terms of the idea of clarity, *ch'ing* 清, for we think of clarity at once as translucent and unobstructed space, and as form articulate in every detail —as what photographers, using finely polished lenses, call "high resolution"—and this takes us back to what Lao-tzu said of the usefulness of doors and windows. Through perfect nothing we see perfect something. In much the same way, philosophers of the Yin-Yang School (—3rd century) saw the positive ⚊ and negative ⚋ as aspects of *t'ai chi* 太極, the Great Ultimate, initially represented as an empty circle, as *wu chi* 無極, although *chi* seems to have had the original meaning of a ridgepole upon which, of course, the two sides of a roof, *yang* and *yin,* would lean.

The *yin-yang* principle is not, therefore, what we would ordinarily call a dualism, but rather an explicit duality expressing an implicit unity. The two principles are, as I have suggested, not opposed like the Zoroastrian Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, but in love, and it is curious that their traditional emblem is that double helix which is at once the pattern of sexual communication and of the spiral galaxies.

> One *yin* and one *yang* is called the Tao. The passionate union of *yin* and *yang* and the copulation of husband and wife is the eternal pattern of the universe. If heaven and earth did not mingle, whence would everything receive life?[8]

The practical problem of life was not to let their wrestling match get out of hand. Only recently have the Chinese set their hearts upon some kind of utopia, but this must be understood as the necessary reaction to years and years of foreign exploitation, anarchy, and extreme poverty.* But in the —4th century Chuang-tzu wrote:

> Thus, those who say that they would have right without its correlate, wrong, or good government without its correlate, misrule, do not apprehend the great principles of the universe, nor the nature of all creation. One might as well talk of the existence of Heaven without that of

> Earth, or of the negative principle without the positive, which is clearly impossible. Yet people keep on discussing it without stop; such people must be either fools or knaves.[9] [58*a*]

Both Lao-tzu (once, in ch. 42) and Chuang-tzu (many times) mention the *yin-yang* polarity, but there is no reference to the *I Ching* 易經, or *Book of Changes,* in which the permutations and combinations of the two forces (*liang yi* 兩儀) are worked out in detail, in terms of the sixty-four hexagrams of *yin* and *yang* lines. Yet the *I Ching* is supposed to have been the most ancient of all the Chinese classics, dating from as far back as the —2nd or even —3rd millennium, and thus to exhibit the basic patterns of Chinese thought and culture. But in that neither Lao-tzu nor Chuang-tzu mentions it, quotes it, nor uses its characteristic terminology, the hoary antiquity and authority of this text must be called in question.[10] On the other hand, since at least the —3rd century Chinese savants have commented on this work in such a way as to perfume it with their thoughts and thus to give it a philosophical profundity. Readers of the great Wilhelm translation, and especially those who use it for divination, should be aware that he has interspersed the earliest forms of the text with passages from the "Wings," or Appendices, most of which are certainly later than—250. In other words, the Wilhelm translation gives us a true picture of the *I Ching* as used and understood in China in relatively modern times. But my guess is that in the —5th and —4th centuries it was circulating as an orally transmitted folk wisdom, of indeterminable antiquity, comparable to the art of reading tea-leaves or the lines on the palm of the hand. There might have been written versions of it, but they would have been of the status of the *Farmer's Almanac* or popular guides to the meaning of dreams.

Thus the *I Ching,* as a specific text, does not appear to have influenced Taoism until after the days of Lao-tzu and Chuangtzu. Nevertheless, there is a common element in the rationale of the *I Ching* and early Taoist philosophy.

Briefly, this element is the recognition that opposites are polar, or interdependent, and that there is something in us—which Groddeck, Freud, and Jung called "the Unconscious"—which may be called upon for a higher wisdom than can be figured out by logic. In more up-to-date terms one might say that the labyrinth of the nervous system can integrate more variables than the scanning process of conscious attention, though this way of putting it is still a concession to the mechanistic assumptions of +19th-century science. But one uses such language mainly to stay in communication with colleagues who have not outgrown it.

The *I Ching* involves a method for the random sorting of milfoil twigs or coins. The twigs or the coins are thus sorted or thrown six times, with a question seriously held in mind. Each casting results in a *yin* — — or *yang* —— line, so that one builds up, from the bottom, a hexagram such as:

The hexagram is composed of two trigrams—in this case, the upper signifies fire and the lower water—and is the last of the sixty-four hexagrams. Turning to the text, one reads:

THE JUDGMENT

Before completion. Success.

But if the little fox, after nearly completing the crossing,
Gets his tail in the water,
There is nothing that would further.

THE IMAGE

Fire over water:
The image of the condition before transition.
Thus the superior man is careful
In the differentiation of things,
So that each finds its place.[11]

The comment is invariably oracular, vague, and ambivalent, but a person taking it seriously will use it. like a Rorschach blot and project into it, from his "unconscious," whatever there is in him to find in it. This is surely a way of allowing oneself to think without keeping a tight guard on one's thoughts, whether logical or moral. The same sort of process is at work in the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams and in eidetic vision, whereby we descry faces, forms, and pictures in the grain of wood or marble, or in the shapes of clouds. In this connection I must quote some anecdotes about Ch'an (Zen) painters of the +13th century.

About the year 1215, a Zen priest called Mü Ch'i 牧溪 came to Hangchow, where he rebuilt a ruined monastery. By rapid swirls of ink he attempted, with undeniable success, to capture the moments of exaltation and set down the fleeting visions which he obtained from the frenzy of wine, the stupor of tea, or the vacancy of inanition. Ch'en Jung, about the same time, was noted for the simplicity of his life and the competence with which he fulfilled his duties as a magistrate.... Finally, he was admired for his habits of a confirmed drunkard. "He made clouds by splashing ink on his pictures. For mists he spat out water. When wrought up by wine he uttered a great shout and, seizing his hat, used it as a brush, roughly smearing his drawing; after which he finished his work with a proper brush." One of the first painters of the sect, Wang Hsia, who lived in the early ninth century, would perform when he was drunk real *tours de force,* going so far as to plunge his head into a bucket of ink and flop it over a piece of silk on which there appeared, as if by magic, lakes, trees, enchanted mountains. But none

> seems to have carried emancipation further, among these priests, than Ying Yü-chien, secretary of the famous temple Ching-tzü ssii, who would take a cat-like pleasure in spattering and lacerating the sheet.[12]

The remarks about Ch'en Jung, in particular, suggest that these gentlemen, having spattered the silk with ink, would contemplate the mess until they could project the shapes and outlines of landscape. Thereafter they would take "the proper brush" and with a few touches bring it out for all to see.

Cases of this use of the creative un-, sub-, or superconscious are so numerous among painters (including Leonardo), physicists, mathematicians, writers, and musicians that we need not go into further examples. I am sure that the *I Ching* oracles are used in the same way as these painters used splashes of ink—as forms to be contemplated empty-mindedly until the hidden meaning reveals itself, in accordance with one's own unconscious tendencies.[13] As with astrology, the rituals and calculations of consulting the *I Ching* are a kind of doodling which quiets the repressive anxieties of consciousness and, with luck, allows useful insights to emerge from one's deeper centers.*

The book, therefore, is not entirely superstitious. Consider that when we are about to make decisions we usually collect as much information as we can; but often it is so ambivalent that we are reduced to tossing a coin which can say either "Yes" or "No," "Do" or "Don't." Would there be some advantage to having, as it were, a coin with sixty-four sides? The hexagram drawn above might be saying, "No, yes, no; yes, no, yes." Also it should be noted as a curious characteristic of the *I Ching* that there are no absolutely good or bad hexagrams in its cyclic series.*

This may be illustrated by the Taoist story of a farmer whose horse ran away. That evening the neighbors gathered to commiserate with him since this was such bad luck. He said, "May be." The next day the horse returned, but brought with it six wild horses, and the

neighbors came exclaiming at his good fortune. He said, "May be." And then, the following day, his son tried to saddle and ride one of the wild horses, was thrown, and broke his leg. Again the neighbors came to offer their sympathy for the misfortune. He said, "May be." The day after that, conscription officers came to the village to seize young men for the army, but because of the broken leg the farmer's son was rejected. When the neighbors came in to say how fortunately everything had turned out, he said, "May be."[14]

The *yin-yang* view of the world is serenely cyclic. Fortune and misfortune, life and death, whether on small scale or vast, come and go everlastingly without beginning or end, and the whole system is protected from monotony by the fact that, in just the same way, remembering alternates with forgetting. This is the Good of good-and-bad. Hasegawa Saburo, the Japanese artist, told me that when he was in Peking with the Japanese invaders in 1936 he would watch the eyes of the Chinese crowds—the resigned, cynical, and faintly amused expression which seemed to say, "We've seen the likes of you many times before, and you too will go away." And he imitated the expression with his own face.

If there is anything basic to Chinese culture, it is an attitude of respectful trust towards nature and human nature—despite wars, revolutions, mass executions, starvation, floods, droughts, and all manner of horrors. There is nothing in their philosophy like the notion of original sin or the Theravada Buddhist feeling that existence itself is a disaster.[15] Chinese philosophy, whether Taoist or Confucian or, one hopes, even Maoist, takes it as a basic premise that if you cannot trust nature and other people, you cannot trust yourself. If you cannot trust yourself, you cannot even trust your mistrust of yourself—so that without this underlying trust in the whole system of nature you are simply paralyzed. So Lao-tzu makes the sage, as ruler, say:

> I take no action and people are reformed.
> I enjoy peace and people become honest.

I use no force and people become rich.
I have no ambitions and people return to the good and simple life.[16][103*a*]

Ultimately, of course, it is not really a matter of oneself, on the one hand, trusting nature, on the other. It is a matter of realizing that oneself and nature are one and the same process, which is the Tao. True, this is an oversimplification, for one knows very well that some people cannot be trusted and that the unpredictable ways of nature are not always one's own preconceived way, so that basic faith in the system involves taking risks. But when no risk is taken there is no freedom. It is thus that, in an industrial society, the plethora of laws made for our personal safety convert the land into a nursery, and policemen hired to protect us become self-serving busybodies.

Early Taoism presupposes the *yin-yang* principle but seems, in the main, to have rejected another view which went along with it, the theory of the five elements or energies (*wu hsing* 五行), whose first celebrated exponent was Tsou Yen (c. —350 to —270), master of the Yin-Yang Chia, who came from the state of Ch'i in the northeast of China. He was, by all accounts, a man of immense erudition and imagination, consulted and honored by rulers, and one of the first serious geographers of China who pointed out, among other things, that China, so far from being the Middle Kingdom, occupied but one part in eighty-one of the earth's surface. The five energies were identified, or better, symbolized, as (1) *wood,* which as fuel gives rise to (2) *fire,* which creates ash and gives rise to (3) *earth,* which in its mines contains (4) *metal,* which (as on the surface of a metal mirror) attracts dew and so gives rise to (5) *water,* and this in turn nourishes (1) *wood*. This is called the *hsiang sheng* 相生, or "mutually arising" order of the forces, and utterly fanciful as it may seem to us, it has the special interest of describing a cycle in which cause and effect are not sequential but simultaneous. The forces are so interdependent that no one can exist without all the

others, just as there can be no *yang* without *yin*.

The forces were also arranged in the order of "mutual conquest" (*hsiang sheng*, but *sheng* is a different ideogram 相勝) in which (1) *wood,* in the form of a plow, overcomes (2) *earth* which, by damming and constraint, conquers (3) *water* which, by quenching, overcomes (4) *fire* which, by melting, liquifies (5) *metal* which, in turn, cuts (1) *wood.* This reminds one of the children's game of paper, scissors, and stone, in which two players hold up their right hands at precisely the same moment. Held as fist, the hand represents stone; fingers in a V represent scissors; and the open palm represents paper. Stone blunts scissors, scissors cut paper, and paper wraps stone; so that if fist and palm are held up at the same time, palm is the winner, and so on.

In later times other such cycles were elaborated as, for example, the sequence (1) receiving breath, (2) being in the womb, (3) being nourished, (4) birth, (5) being bathed, (6) assuming cap and girdle, or puberty, (7) becoming an official, (8) flourishing, (9) weakening, (10) sickness, (11) death, and (12) burial.[17] This is curiously similar to the Buddhist Chain of Dependent Origination (*pratitya samutpada*) and may have been influenced by it, though in the latter the stages are (1) ignore-ance, (2) activity generating karma, (3) consciousness, (4) name-and-form, (5) sense organs, (6) contact, (7) feeling, (8) craving, (9) clinging, (10) becoming, (11) birth, (12) old age and death—which is again (1). *Samutpada* (much as some philologists may disapprove) can roughly be broken down as *sam-* (all together) *ut-* (out) *pada* (stepping), which is the same principle as the Chinese "mutually arising." Conscious attention scans the cycle sequentially, but existentially the whole clock is present while the hand moves. This is the sense of Lao-tzu's (ch. 2) "Before and after are in mutual sequence." There cannot be any "before" unless there is an "after," and vice versa, and six o'clock has no meaning without the whole series of hours from one through twelve.

(From) Tao arises One; from One arises Two; from Two

arises Three; and from Three arise the ten thousand things.[18] [103*b*]

In other words, no number has any significance except in relation to those which precede and those which follow. Thus if we were to omit 13 from the series of integers (as they do in some apartment buildings), 1,000 would have to be understood ridiculously and inconveniently as 999, since that would be the actual value of the figure. The point is simply that you cannot omit one integer without upsetting the entire system. What we are beginning to get at here is a view of the universe which is organic and relational—not a mechanism, artifact, or creation, and by no means analogous to a political or military hierarchy in which there is a Supreme Commander.

In the *yin-yang* and *wu hsing* theories this organic view of the world is implicit, but it becomes explicit in Lao-tzu, and far more so in Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu, though one does not find it stressed in Confucian thought (absorbed as that was with political and social matters) until the Neo-Confucianism of Chu Hsi (+1131 to +1200), in which all the compatible threads of Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism are woven together. Perhaps the greatest exponent of this organic view was the Buddhist Fa-tsang (+643 to +712) of the Mahayanist Hua-yen School, whose image of the universe was a multidimensional network of jewels, each one containing the reflections of all the others *ad infinitum.* Each jewel was a *shih,* or "thing-event," and his principle of *shih shih wu ai* 事事無礙 ("between one thing-event and another is no obstruction") expounded the mutual interpenetration and interdependence of everything happening in the universe. Pick up a blade of grass and all the worlds come with it. In other words, the whole cosmos is implicit in every member of it, and every point in it may be regarded as its center. This is the bare and basic principle of the organic view, to which we shall return in our discussion of the meaning of Tao.

In the meantime—and before we go any further—it

should be said that to a true Taoist even such a mildly academic discussion of the Tao as this would seem pretentious and unnecessary. I am, of course, puttering about in Chinese literature and philosophy as one who takes care of a kitchen garden as distinct from a big farm, and have the same sort of affection for the literary atmosphere of the Tao—the texts, the calligraphy, the paintings, and even the Chinese dictionaries—that one might have for a small row of tomatoes or runner beans, a plum tree, and a modest stand of corn.

However, a one-sidedly literary and academic approach to the Tao gives nothing of its essence, so that to understand what follows the reader must now, and at each subsequent reading, allow himself to be in a proper state of mind. You are asked—temporarily, of course—to lay aside all your philosophical, religious, and political opinions, and to become almost like an infant, knowing nothing. Nothing, that is, except what you actually hear, see, feel, and smell. Take it that you are not going anywhere but here, and that there never was, is, or will be any other time than now. Simply be aware of what actually *is* without giving it names and without judging it, for you are now feeling out reality itself instead of ideas and opinions *about* it. There is no point in trying to suppress the babble of words and ideas that goes on in most adult brains, so if it won't stop, let it go on as it will, and listen to it as if it were the sound of traffic or the clucking of hens.

Let your ears hear whatever they want to hear; let your eyes see whatever they want to see; let your mind think whatever it wants to think; let your lungs breathe in their own rhythm. Do not expect any special result, for in this wordless and idealess state, where can there be past or future, and where any notion of purpose? Stop, look, and listen … and stay there awhile before you go on reading.

1 *Lao-tzu* 47, tr. auct. The number in brackets refers to the page on which this quotation is reproduced in Chinese calligraphy. The letter *a* identifies this quotation on that page. A note on p. 105 below explains the arrangement of the calligraphy, which appears on pp. 56–73 and 99–104.

* Besides, the female also has a convex sexual part—the clitoris—smaller but possibly more potent in pleasure than that of the male (more, and more sustained, orgasms). She also has a convex breast, compared with the male's flat chest. She is endowed, above all, with the equipment to bear children—envied by many men nowadays—and her beauty is more subtle than the peacocklike opulence outstanding in the male of the species. Chinese men have always known this "balance in imbalance." Perhaps this is one of the reasons for the universal suppression of the woman by her man.

The asterisk indicates additional notes made by Al Chung-liang Huang, who believes these changes and extensions would have been made by Alan Watts himself had he lived and continued to improve upon the existing manuscript. All comments are based on discussions between Al Huang and Alan Watts during the course of their collaboration in writing this book. Some are adapted or taken directly from the words of friends who read Alan's first draft and were kind enough to return comments.

2 *Lao-tzu* 28, tr. auct.

3 *Lao-tzu* 2, tr. auct.

4 It is thus of interest that a common Chinese expression for sexual intercourse is *hua ehen* 花陣, the flowery combat, in which, of course, there is no wish in either partner to annihilate the other.

5 *Lao-tzu* 11, tr. Gia-fu Feng (1), n.p., mod. auct.

6 *EB* (1947), vol. 8, p. 182. Italics mine. This is reminiscent of Lao-tzu beginning, "The Tao which can be explained is not the eternal Tao," and then going on to write a whole book about it; for the article which follows this paragraph is a vastly learned discussion of the properties and behavior of this unknown "ultimate."

7 *Tan-ching* 24, tr. Yampolsky (1), p. 146.

8 *Ch'eng-tzu,* tr. Forke (1), p. 68, mod. auct. See also the works of Ch'eng Ming-tao and Ch'eng Yi-ch'uan in Graham (1).

* And looking back into Chinese history, there has been one revolution after another, each swinging with equal urgency to the opposite extreme from the previous government. Cyclically, after an equilibrium has been attained, a new imbalance begins to rise to its height, then a new revolution becomes necessary. Most Chinese view the present Chinese government as one phase of the moon. The name of the king or ruler may change from time to time, but the Chinese people, the human being and his nature, will remain constant.

9 *Chuang-tzu* 17, tr. Lin Yutang (3), p. 51.

10 The reference to Confucius' reverence for the book in the *Lun Yü* is of very doubtful veracity, for there is no reference to it in the Lu version of the *Analects.* See Waley (1), p. 124 *n.*

11 Wilhelm (l), p. 249.

12 Duthuit (l),pp. 33–34.

13 Some accounts say that the *I Ching* hexagrams were derived from contemplating the cracks which appeared when the shell of a tortoise was heated, and this would certainly support the idea that its method was based on something like eidetic vision.

* Hokusai (1760–1829), one of the great Ukiyoye masters of