The Way of Lao Tzu

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The Lao Tzu (Tao-te ching)

Preface

No one can understand China or be an intelligent citizen of the world without some knowledge of the Lao Tzu, also called the Tao-te ching (The Classic of the Way and Its Virtue), for it has modified Chinese life and thought throughout history and has become an integral part of world literature. Therefore any new light on it, however little, should prove to be helpful.

There have been many translations of this little classic, some of them excellent. Most translators have treated it as an isolated document. Many have taken it as religious literature. A few have related it to ancient Chinese philosophy. But none has viewed it in the light of the entire history of Chinese thought. Furthermore, no translator has consulted extensively the many commentaries regarding the text, much less the thought. Finally, no translator has written a complete commentary from the perspective of the total history of Chinese philosophy. Besides, a comprehensive and critical account of the recent debates on Lao Tzu the man and Lao Tzu the book is long overdue. The present work is a humble attempt to fill these gaps.

I am grateful to Professor Derk Bodde of the University of Pennsylvania for his constructive criticisms and valuable comments. Professor C. C. Hamilton of Oberlin College has also offered helpful suggestions. My colleague, Professor Arthur Dewing, has always been ready to help when I interrupted him with questions on English usage. Mrs. Alice Weymouth helped me to prepare the manuscript. To all these people I am thankful.

Above all I am grateful to my wife, whose understanding and devotion, more than anything else, have made this book possible.

Wing-tsit Chan

Note on the Translation

The translation is based not on one particular text but on a constant consultation with the Wang Pi and Ho-shang Kung texts. The traditional order of chapters has been preserved, because, as is pointed out in footnotes, there is no objective standard by which to make alterations. Important alterations by commentators and translators are pointed out in footnotes. Obviously it is impossible to reproduce the rhymes, but I have put all chapters in verse form and arranged the sentences to show the rhyming pattern, if possible, in spite of the fact that some passages, including several whole chapters, are not rhymed. It is difficult to determine whether these are prose or blank verse. In the translation, because there are too many titles to cite, studies, commentaries, and translations of the Lao Tzu are referred to only by their authors and translators and not their titles except where one author had more than one title, in which case an abbreviated title is given in parentheses. Except for contemporaries, dates of authors are given in the Bibliography in Chinese and Japanese, where all titles and their translations are listed. Transliteration of Chinese titles follows the modified Wade-Giles system. Except for some contemporaries who, like myself, put their personal names before their family names, Chinese and Japanese names are given in the Chinese order, that is, with the family name first. Three abbreviations are used, namely, SPPY for the Ssu-pu pei-yao (Essentials of the Four Libraries) edition, SPTK for the Ssu-pu ts'ung-k'an (Four Libraries Series) edition, and PNP for the Po-na-pen (Choice Works Series).

W.T.C.

I. The Philosophy of Tao

Chinese civilization and the Chinese character would have been utterly different if the book Lao Tzu had never been written. In fact, even Confucianism, the dominant system in Chinese history and thought, would not have been the same, for like Buddhism, it has not escaped Taoist influence. No one can hope to understand Chinese philosophy, religion, government, art, medicine, and even cooking without a real appreciation of the profound philosophy taught in this little book. It is true that while Confucianism emphasizes social order and an active life, Taoism concentrates on individual life and tranquility, thus suggesting that Taoism plays a secondary role. But in opposing Confucian conformity with nonconformity and opposing Confucian worldliness with a transcendental spirit, Taoism is Confucianism's severe critic. In its doctrines on government, on cultivating and preserving life, and on handling things, it is fully Confucianism's equal.

1. Historical Background and the Taoist Reaction

In some respects Taoism goes even deeper into the way of life, so much so that while every ancient Chinese school taught its own Way (tao), Taoism alone is known by that name. And in spite of the fact that in the last twenty centuries the influence of Taoist philosophy has not been comparable to that of Confucianism or Buddhism, it has remained an important part of the backbone of every aspect of Chinese civilization. How this movement came to be strong and unique is still surrounded by mystery, for many questions about its historical origin, its founder, and the book in which its basic doctrines are set forth remain to be answered. The dispute continues as to whether Lao Tzu lived in the sixth or fourth century B.C., and whether the Lao Tzu, also called the Tao-te ching (The Classic of the Way and Its Virtue), is a product of the Spring and Autumn period (722-481 B.C.) or the Warring States times (403-222

B.C.). One thing is sure, however. Although the name “Taoist school” was not mentioned until the first century B.C., the movement must have been going on for centuries. Tradition says that ancient philosophical schools emerged from governmental offices, and Taoism in particular from that of the historian. What it really means is that they arose in response to actual historical situations. Unlike ancient Greek speculation on Nature or ancient Indian contemplation on the spirit, Chinese philosophies, whether Confucianism or Taoism, grew as a result of deplorable conditions of the time. Thus Taoism arose in opposition to existing practices and systems, on the one hand, and on the other, offered a new way of life that is as challenging as it is profound.

By the time of Confucius (551-479 B.C.), the house of Chou had been in power for more than half a millennium. It now showed many cracks and its foundation was shaking. Feudal lords began to usurp power, setting up virtually independent states, and war was rampant. Autocratic rulers indulged in extravagant ceremonial feasts, displayed fine weapons, and tried to outdo each other in cunning and strategy, all at the expense of the people. Laws and punishment were their last resort to handle the restless masses. A poet, echoing the real sentiment of the people, cried bitterly:

Large rats! Large rats!
Don’t you eat our millet!
We have endured you for three years.
But you have shown no regard for us.
We will leave you,
And go to that happy land!
Happy land! Happy land!
Where we shall be at ease.

At the same time Chinese society was entering upon a new era. Iron was more and more extensively used in place of bronze, thus putting the chief metal into the hands of more people and making it easier to produce utensils, weapons, and means of transportation. Agriculture and handicraft became gradually separated. Trade and business grew, and towns and cities developed. Feudal lords increasingly turned to the common people for talents to win wars and to put their own houses in order. Feudalism was unmistakably on the decline and the common man was definitely on the rise. It was a time for both destroying the old and constructing the new. Lao Tzu did both.

On the destructive side, Lao Tzu launched severe attacks on political institutions and social mores. “The people starve because the ruler eats too much tax-grain,” he declared (ch. 75). Such a ruler will bring his own collapse. “When gold and jade fill your hall,” he said, “you will not be

able to keep them. To be proud with honor and wealth is to cause one's own downfall" (9). It is futile to subjugate people with force, for "the more laws and orders are made prominent, the more thieves and robbers there will be" (57). Since "the people are not afraid of death," he asked, "why, then, threaten them with death?" (74). As to war, it is a symptom of the decline of man. "When Tao prevails in the world, galloping horses are turned back to fertilize (the fields with their dung). When Tao does not prevail in the world, war horses thrive in the suburbs" (46). There were those who offered the doctrines of humanity (jen), righteousness, rules of propriety (It) and wisdom as remedies for the degeneration, but he regarded these as no less symptoms of chaos. To him, "propriety is a superficial expression of loyalty and faithfulness, and the beginning of disorder" (38). "When the great Tao declined," he said, "the doctrine of humanity and righteousness arose. When knowledge and wisdom appeared, there emerged great hypocrisy" (18). Therefore, he said, "Abandon sageliness and discard wisdom; then the people will benefit a hundredfold. Abandon humanity and discard righteousness; then the people will return to filial piety and deep love. Abandon skill and discard profit; then there will be no thieves or robbers" (19).

These outcries have led Hu Shin (1891-1962) to call Lao Tzu a rebel. If this sounds like an exaggeration, let us remind ourselves that throughout Chinese history Taoism has always been the philosophy of the minority and the suppressed, and that secret societies, in their revolt against oppressive rulers, have often raised the banner of Taoism.

2. The Meaning of Tao

The far more important element in Lao Tzu's teachings is, however, the constructive one. This is his formulation of the philosophy of Tao, In this he evolved a concept that had never been known in China before, a concept that served not only as the standard for man but for all things as well.

The word tao consists of one element meaning a head and another meaning to run. It means that on which something or someone goes, a path, or road, later extended to mean "method," "principle," "truth," and finally "reality." All of this is well summed up in the common English translation, "the Way." It is a cardinal concept in practically all ancient Chinese philosophical schools. Hitherto the connotation had been social and moral, but in Lao Tzu it connotes for the first time the metaphysical. It is the "mother" (1, 52) and "ancestor" (4) of all things. It exists before

heaven and earth (25). It is the “storehouse” of things (62). It is at once their principle of being and their substance. “All things depend on it for life” (34). In its substance it is “invisible,” “inaudible,” “vague and elusive” (14, 35), indescribable and above shape and form (14, 41). It is one, a unity behind all multiplicity (14, 42). It is single like an uncarved block that has not been split up into individual pieces or covered up with superficial adornment (28. 32). It is everlasting and unchangeable (7, 16. 25). It is all-pervasive and “flows everywhere” (34). “It operates everywhere and is free from danger” (25). Use it and you “will never wear it out” (6). “While vacuous, it is never exhausted” (5). It depends on nothing (25). It is natural (25), for it comes into existence by itself and is its own principle for being. It is the “great form” (35). It is nameless (wu-ming) (1, 32, 37, 41), and if one is forced to give it a name, he can only call it “great,” that is, unlimited in space and time (1, 25). It is nameless because it is not a concrete, individual thing or describable in particular terms. Above all, it is non-being (wu) (1, 40). “All things in the world come from being. And being comes from non-being” (40).

This concept of non-being is basic in Lao Tzu’s thought. As Chuang Tzu (between 339 and 295 B.C.) said, the system of Lao Tzu is “based on the principles of non-being and being.” In a sense being and non-being are of equal importance. They complement and produce each other (12). “Let there always be non-being,” Lao Tzu says, and “let there always be being” (1). As Fung Yu-lan has said, by non-being is not meant that there was a time when nothing but non-being existed, but logically non-being must be prior because before beings come into existence, there must be something before them. In the final analysis, then, non-being is the ultimate, and in Chuang Tzu’s statement it comes first.

On the surface non-being seems to be empty and devoid of everything. Actually, this is not the case. It is devoid of limitations but not devoid of definite characteristics. Han Fei Tzu (d. 233 B.C.), the first commentator on Lao Tzu, did not understand Tao in the negative sense of emptiness but in the positive sense of involving definite principles. He says:

Tao is that by which all things become what they are. It is that with which all principles (li) are commensurable. Principles are patterns according to which all things come into being, and Tao is the cause of their being. Therefore it is said that Tao puts things in order (li). Everything has its own principle different from that of others, and Tao is commensurate with all of them. . . . According to definite principles, there are existence and destruction, life and death, and flourish and decline. . . . What is eternal has neither change nor any definite, particular principle itself. Since it has no definite principle itself, it is not bound in any particular locality. This is why it is said that it cannot be

told.

Tao as non-being, then, is not negative but positive in character. This concept of non-being was absolutely new in Chinese thought and most radical. Other Chinese schools of thought conceived of non-being simply as the absence of something, but in Taoism it is not only positive; it is basic. This was epoch-making in the history of Chinese philosophy. According to Dubs, it is also new to Occidental thought. He says, “Here is a solution to the problem of creation which is new to Western philosophy: the universe can arise out of nothing because nonexistence itself is not characterless or negative,” In his opinion, “here is a metaphysical system which starts, not with matter or with ideas, but with law (Tad), nonexistence, and existence as the three fundamental categories of reality.” He found nothing similar in Occidental philosophy. “After Parmenides declared that nonexistence cannot exist,” he says, “Western philosophers never attempted to challenge his dogma. The non-being of Plato and Plotinus, like the empty space of Greek atomists, was given no positive character. Only Einsteinian space-time—which is nothing, yet directs the motion of particles—comes at all close to the Lao Tzu’s concept of nonexistence.”

This positive character can be seen not only in the substance of Tao. It can also be seen in its function. Just as its nature is characterized by having no name, so its activity is characterized by taking no action (wu-wei). Taking no action does not mean to be “dry wood and dead ashes,” to use the metaphors of Chuang Tzu. Rather, it means taking no artificial action, noninterference, or letting things take their own course. Tao invariably “takes no action” (37) but “supports all things in their natural state” (64) and thus “all things will transform spontaneously” (37). As things arise, Tao “does not turn away from them” (2). “It produces them, but does not take possession of them,” and “accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit for it” (2, 10, 34, 51). It “benefits all things and does not compete with them” (8). At the same time, things are governed by it and cannot deviate from it. Following it, a thing will flourish and “return to its root and destiny” (16). With it, heaven becomes clear, the earth becomes tranquil, spiritual beings become divine, the valley becomes full, and all things live and grow, but without it they will be exhausted, crumble, and wither away (39). In the production of things, it proceeds from the one to the many. “Tao produced the One. The One produced the two. The two produced the three. And the three produced the ten thousand things” (42). In its own activities, it always returns to the root (16, 40) or the non-ultimate (28). It operates in cycles.

From the above, it is not an exaggeration to say that Tao operates according to certain laws which are constant and regular. One may even

say there is an element of necessity in these laws, for Tao by its very nature behaves in this way and all things, in order to achieve their full realization, have to obey them. Tao, after all, is the Way. In the words of Han Fei Tzu, it is the way in which things are ordered. Needham is fundamentally correct in equating Tao with the Order of Nature and in saying that Tao "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." When things obey its laws, all parts of the universe will form a harmonious whole and the universe will become an integrated organism. One is tempted to compare Taoism with the organicism of White-head, but that would be putting too much modern philosophy into ancient Chinese thought. One thing is sure, however. Because Tao operates in a regular pattern, it is nothing mysterious. It is deep and profound (hsüan), to be sure, and it is described as subtle and elusive (1, 14). But it is neither chaotic nor unpredictable, for it is the "essence" which is "very real," and "in it are evidences" (21). It is popular, especially in the West, to describe Tao as mysterious, and there seems to be a special attraction to translate hsüan as mystery. It is mysterious only in the sense of subtlety and depth, not in the sense of irrationality.

The above description of Tao is inadequate but sufficient to indicate its novel and radical character. Its inception definitely marked a great advance in Chinese thought. Hu Shin thinks that Lao Tzu's conception of Tao as transcending heaven, earth, and all things is his greatest contribution. Other schools of thought confined their thought and interest to the mundane world, whereas Lao Tzu extended his concern beyond the realm of human affairs to include the natural and the metaphysical. The human is no longer the criterion of what is good or true. The traditional idea that a supreme supernatural being. Heaven, is the ruler of the universe is replaced by the doctrine that the universe exists and operates by itself. When he says that "Heaven and Earth are not humane" (5), he means in a narrow sense that they are impartial, but in a broader sense that Nature is no longer governed according to human standards. And if there is a Lord, he says, Tao existed before him (4). In one stroke he removes Heaven and man as the standards of things and replaces them with Nature. Instead of the will of Heaven or human desires, there is now the law of Nature. As Needham has noted, to declare independence from the ethical judgment of men, in spite of the ethical character of the culture in which Taoism emerged and thrived, is the great credit of the Taoist movement.

3. The Emphasis on Man and Virtue

This is by no means to suggest that Taoism is a dehumanizing philosophy, as is so often understood in the West. Like Confucius and other ancient philosophers, Lao Tzu's main concern is still man. Eighty per cent of the Lao Tzu is devoted not to the substance of Tao but to its function, particularly to its operation in society. The chief subject of the book is how to live, including ethics, government, and diplomacy. Lao Tzu may or may not have been a recluse. The fact remains that whereas other ancient recluses ridiculed reformers and retired to farms, Lao Tzu came forward with a comprehensive program for social and political reconstruction for the happiness of all.

Waley thinks that the Lao Tzu is "not in intention a way of life for ordinary people," but a description of how the sage "through the practice of Tao acquires the power of ruling without being known to rule." Ch'ien Mu also contends that Lao Tzu, in his political theories at least, speaks only in the interest of the ruling sage but not that of the masses. This is most unfair. Although about half of the chapters deal with the sage and how he should rule, the other half do not, and it is here that the most important ideas are expressed. Furthermore, the sage is no more than an ideal person, which everyone could become through the practice of Tao. In the Chinese tradition in general and in Taoism in particular, everyone has the potentiality to become a sage. There is not the slightest hint in the Lao Tzu that the sage is of a different species. Besides, as indicated above, the Lao Tzu puts forth some of the most vigorous protests against government. These protests and attacks can hardly convince people that Lao Tzu speaks for the ruler. If the sage is singled out as the one fit to rule, it is because he has cultivated virtue according to Tao. In short, the main objective of the book is the cultivation of virtue or te.

What is te? The traditional interpretation is a pun, namely, te ("virtue") is "to obtain" (te), that is, what one has obtained, in this case what one has obtained from Tao. Therefore, in explaining Lao Tzu, Han Fei Tzu says, "Te means the perfection of personality. In other words, to obtain te is to make one's person virtuous (te)." Elsewhere he says, "Te is that in which principles are evident and which is found in all things." Put differently, te is Tao endowed in the individual things. While Tao is common to all, it is what each thing has obtained from Tao, or its te, that makes it different from others. Te is then the individualizing factor, the embodiment of definite principles which give things their determinate features or characters. When Legge translated te as "characteristic," he was essentially correct. But there is nothing wrong with the common translation "virtue." Waley objects to this translation because, he says, te can be good or bad, but there is no bad virtue. Evidently he has forgotten that while there is no bad virtue, the absence of virtue is quite possible, and that is the term used in ancient texts. He prefers to translate it as

“power,” because, according to him, it is bound with potentiality or latent power. So far as potentiality is concerned, there is really no difference between “power” and “virtue.” As the Webster’s International Dictionary defines it, virtue is “active quality or power; capacity or power adequate to a production of a given effect.” If it is objected that “virtue,” to ordinary people, does not mean this, but means moral excellence, the answer is that ordinary people do not understand “power” in this sense but in the sense of force, which is diametrically opposed to the teachings of the Lao Tzu. The Lao Tzu itself says that “the all-embracing quality of the great virtue follows alone from the Tao” (21). If in one’s life one follows Tao, that is virtue indeed.

What is the life of virtue? It requires the usual moral qualities taught in almost all ethical systems. To Lao Tzu, deep love, frugality, and not daring to be ahead of the world are “three treasures,” and because of them one becomes courageous, generous, and leader of the world (67). He urges us to love the earth in our dwelling, love what is profound in our hearts, love humanity in our associations, love faithfulness in our words, love order in government, love competence in handling affairs, and love timeliness in our activities (8). He wants us to maintain steadfast quietude and to be tranquil, enlightened, all-embracing, impartial, one with Nature, and in accord with Tao (16). He teaches us to “benefit all things” (8), to “treat those who are good with goodness” and “also to treat those who are not good with goodness” (49), and to “repay hatred with virtue” (63). He admonishes us not to have ulterior motives (38), to show or justify ourselves or to boast (24), to be proud, to hoard things, or to be extravagant (44). He advises us to know the subtle and the eternal (16) but when we do not know anything, know that we do not know (71).

Virtually all the ingredients of a virtuous life, including the golden ride, are included.

4. Weakness and Simplicity

But there is in the Lao Tzu a peculiar emphasis on what is generally regarded as negative morality, such as ignorance, humility, compliance, contentment, and above all, weakness. Lao Tzu is very insistent that we avoid the extreme, the extravagant, and the excessive (29), do away with desires (3, 19, 37), knowledge (10), competition (8), and things of the senses (12). He wants us to be “contented with contentment” (46) and “know when to stop” (44). He encourages us to “keep to humility” and

accept disgrace (28), to be willing to live in places which others detest (8), to be low and submissive, to be behind others but never ahead of them (7, 61, 67), and to "become one with the dusty world" (4)—in short, to be weak (30, 76).

In the Lao Tzu, water, the infant, the female, the valley, and the uncarved block are used as models for a life according to Tao. No other school has deliberately selected these as symbols for a good life. Practically all of these symbolize the life of simplicity. Some people have therefore regarded the teaching of Lao Tzu as negative and defeatist. But this is not the case. Take the doctrine of having no desires, for instance. The virtue of having no desires is a current theme in the Lao Tzu, but as will be pointed out later, having no desires simply means having no impure or selfish desires, but not having no desires at all. While desires should be few (19), good ones are to be fulfilled (61). This is also true of knowledge. Knowledge in the sense of cleverness and cunning is to be discarded, but knowledge of harmony and the eternal (16, 55), contentment (44), where to stop (32), and the self (33) is highly valued. Or take simplicity. The symbol for it is the uncarved block which is not spoiled by artifice. Metaphysically it stands for the original purity and unity of Tao (28, 32, 37) and ethically it stands for a simple life that is free from cunning and cleverness, is not devoted to the pursuit of profit or marked by hypocritical humanity and righteousness, but is characterized by plainness, tranquility, and purity (15, 19, 57). Lao Tzu wants us to return to the life of a single and simple community where people do not use their utensils, weapons, or carriages, and where they "grow old and die without visiting one another" (80).

This sounds like primitivism and renunciation of civilization. Taken literally, this kind of simple life is entirely contrary to modern civilization. Not even the most devout follower of Lao Tzu would withdraw from civilization to this extent. Some modern writers in mainland China have seized upon this description of a primitive society, and other sayings of Lao Tzu, to say that he was advocating a communal life. To Hou Wai-lu, for example, uni does not mean non-being but the absence of private property; the simplicity that is not split up means a communal society; becoming one with the dusty world means the abolition of classes; non-competition means the elimination of class struggle. Following Hou, Needham has interpreted simplicity or the uncarved block as "the solidarity, homogeneity, and simplicity of primitive collectivism," and becoming one with the dusty world as uniting "the rank and file for the community." The primitive community described above not only becomes to him a "primitive agrarian collectivism" but also provides the clues for the opposition to feudal nobility and to the merchant alike. The fact is that there is no evidence

whatsoever in the Lao Tzu of collectivism, anti-feudalism, or opposition to merchants, nor is there any condemnation of kings and barons (see 37, 39, 42). What Lao Tzu advocated is a life of plainness in which profit, cleverness, selfishness, and evil desires are all forsaken (12, 19).

Is this primitivism a desertion of civilization? It is not. In the primitive society described above, Lao Tzu wants people to "relish their food, beautify their clothing, be content with their homes, and delight in their customs." Taken literally, primitivism is decidedly a deterrent to progress and amounts to renunciation. But if the spirit is correctly understood, it is simplicity and not renunciation that is desired. Unless we understand this, we shall not be able to appreciate why Taoism has become the central principle in Chinese aesthetic enjoyment. Tea drinking, landscape painting, poetry, the landscape garden, and the like, are not to be deserted but to be enjoyed in their simplicity.

As in the case of simplicity, weakness is not to be taken one-sidedly or literally. Weakness is advocated for at least three reasons. One is that it is a virtue in itself, that is, as necessary in life as strength. "He who knows the male (strength) and keeps to the female (weakness) becomes the ravine of the world" (28). Secondly, weakness is often an outward expression of real strength. "What is most full seems to be empty" and "the greatest eloquence seems to stutter" (45). Thirdly, weakness overcomes strength in the long run. "There is nothing softer and weaker than water, and yet there is nothing better for attacking hard and strong things" (78). The life Lao Tzu advocates, totally speaking, is one of producing and rearing things without taking possession of them (10, 51), a life that is "as pointed as a square but does not pierce," "as acute as a knife but does not cut," "as straight as an unbent line but does not extend," and "as bright as light but does not dazzle" (58). In short, it is the life of "taking no action."

5. Unorthodox Techniques

Applied to government, this doctrine becomes that of laissez faire. The sage takes no action and does not interfere with the people, and they will transform spontaneously and the world will be at peace of its own accord (37). "I take no action and the people of themselves are transformed. I love tranquility and the people of themselves become correct" (57). The sage will rule "like cooking a small fish," firm in his conviction that much handling will spoil it (60). He "has no fixed (personal) ideas" but "regards the people's ideas as his own" (49). He embraces the One and

becomes the model of the world (22). He leads the people but does not master them (10). He does not exalt the worthy (3). He does not seek to enlighten the people but makes them ignorant (65). He governs the state with correctness and operates the army with surprise tactics (57), but does not dominate the world with force (30).

This philosophy of laissez faire is a logical application of the doctrine of not taking action, but as the application of Tao several elements are difficult to explain. Why should the sage refuse to exalt the worthy? To say that the sage does not want others to share his power is to speak the language of the Legalists who advocated dictatorship, a system clearly out of tune with the tenor of Taoist philosophy. Lao Tzu's own explanation is that if the worthy is not exalted, the people will not compete (3). This sounds like giving up food because of a cough, as the Chinese common saying has it. More likely, the idea is part of a general opposition to political theories of the time, for one of the common tenets of political thought, in nearly all schools, is the exaltation of the worthy. Possibly Lao Tzu's opposition is due to the fact that the worthies of his time were advocates of ceremonies and music of which he disapproved. In any case, Lao Tzu contradicts himself, for inasmuch as the sage is but a higher stage of the worthy, in not exalting the worthy he is really not exalting the sage.

Another puzzling point is the doctrine of keeping the people ignorant—a doctrine, emphasized by the Legalists and employed by more than one despot, which has been severely denounced. Lao Tzu frankly says that if people have too much knowledge they will be difficult to rule (65). But it is inconsistent with laissez faire deliberately to make people ignorant. As will be pointed out later, it may be part of his general condemnation of cunning and cleverness, or it may be a desire for the people's spontaneous compliance with Tao without deliberation or thought. This explanation, however, is not satisfactory enough to remove the suspicion of Legalistic tendencies in Lao Tzu. One interesting question should be asked at this point. Lao Tzu says, "The best (rulers) are those whose existence is (merely) known by the people" (17). According to another reading, the best government is that whose existence is not known by the people. Could it be that making the people ignorant means making them ignorant of the existence of the ruler?

The most troublesome element is Lao Tzu's advocacy of devious tactics. They concern not only military operation (69). If they did, they would be easier to explain, for the opposition of Taoism to the use of force is well known, and the most bitter attack on militarism is found in the Lao Tzu. It can then be argued that Lao Tzu uses warfare to illustrate his principles of taking no action and weakness because warfare is among the most

dynamic and critical of human experiences, just as the Indian classic, the Bhagavadgita, chooses fighting as the theme on which to discuss the terrible dilemma whether one should fulfill his duty, as in the case of a soldier, and kill, or should fail in his duty and refrain from killing. But Lao Tzu's tactics seem to apply to life in general. "In order to destroy," he says, "it is necessary first to promote. In order to grasp, it is necessary first to give" (36). Undeniably there is an element of deceit involved. What is worse, if these tactics are the true Way in general or the way of taking no action in particular or an honorable activity of the sage, then they are morally questionable. The Confucianists are to be excused for having severely condemned them. Confucius would never have tolerated such doctrine.

6. Lao Tzu and Confucius Compared

This is only one point at which Confucius and Lao Tzu are diametrically opposed. They differ in many other respects. While Lao Tzu stresses taking no action, Confucius stresses doing something. Lao Tzu focuses his attention largely on the individual, whereas Confucius focuses his on society, although the contrast must not be pushed too far. For the individual, Lao Tzu emphasizes peace of mind and tranquility of the spirit, but Confucius emphasizes moral perfection and social adjustment. Lao Tzu would nourish one's nature, but Confucius would fully develop it. With regard to one's destiny, Lao Tzu aims at returning to it, while Confucius aims at establishing it. Metaphysically, the basic concept of Lao Tzu is non-being while that of Confucius is being. Politically, Lao Tzu leaves people to their own transformation, whereas Confucius insists on transforming them through education, moral guidance, and personal influence. Lao Tzu wants us to become one with Nature, while Confucius wants us to become one with Heaven. Both seem to advocate forming one body with all things, but while in Lao Tzu the subject and all objects are to be interfused and unified, in Confucius there is a gradation from being affectionate to relatives, being humane to all people, and finally being kind to all things. All in all, it is not incorrect to say, as popular writers do say, that the philosophy of Lao Tzu is for the individual while that of Confucius is for society, and that the former is for the aged while the latter is for the young. Surely the Taoism of Lao Tzu is more feminine and Confucianism more masculine. One is unmistakably more passive and the other, more active. Lao Tzu did not even mention any ancient king, while Confucius loved and eulogized them. Lao Tzu rejected ceremonial and musical institutions, but Confucius promoted them. This is interesting because Lao Tzu,

according to tradition, was an expert on these matters, on which Confucius went to consult him. Some scholars have tried to explain these differences by saying that while Lao Tzu came from Ch'u. south of the Yellow River, where culture was characterized by the ideal of weakness, Confucius grew up and taught in Lit, north of the river, where the ideal was strength. This geographical factor is one of those on which Hu Shin has based his theory that Lao Tzu was a ju (literati) of the old type, that of the weak, whereas Confucius was a ju of a new type, that of the strong. Perhaps the differences are due to the fact that Lu was historically, politically, and culturally a strong center, whereas although Lao Tzu served as a curator of archives in the capital of Chou, he originally came from the small and oppressed state of Ch'en. Consequently, Lao Tzu took the attitude of protest against government and criticism of institutions, whereas Confucius directed his efforts to participation in government and promoting culture. It may have been that, having been keeper of records at the capital, Lao Tzu saw at close range the vices of social and political institutions more clearly than did Confucius.

All these suggestions are no more than idle speculation, however. It is more profitable to note the similarities between them in order to offset the possible impression that the teachings of Lao Tzu and Confucius are irreconcilable. A number of similarities are pointed out in the comments on the various chapters. Suffice it to mention here that both are primarily interested in moral, social, and political reform, that both cherish the same basic values such as humanity, righteousness, deep love, and faithfulness. Both oppose the use of force and punishment. Both avoid extremes and teach the golden rule. Both highly esteem the integrity of the individual and social harmony, although their approaches are different. By implication, at least, both emphasize the goodness of human nature and the potentiality of all to become sages. It is because of these and other similarities that Taoism and Confucianism run harmoniously parallel throughout Chinese history so that every Chinese is at once a Taoist and a Confucianist.

Another similarity between Lao Tzu and Confucius is that just as Confucius' teachings were developed by Mencius (371-289 B.C.), so those of Lao Tzu were developed by Chuang Tzu. Mencius and Chuang Tzu were contemporaries but were probably not aware of each other. Instead of comparing these two, however, it is more necessary here to compare Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. They are often referred to as Lao-Chuang, as if their doctrines were the same or those of Chuang Tzu but an elaboration of Lao Tzu's philosophy. In fact, there are vast differences between them.

7. Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu Compared

In every aspect Chuang Tzu carried Taoism to a higher stage of development. Lao Tzu's "One" becomes in Chuang Tzu the "great One." Lao Tzu urges us to be infants, but Chuang Tzu wants us to be "a newborn calf." Lao Tzu urges us to return to destiny or fate, whereas Chuang Tzu urges us to be contented with it. To Lao Tzu, it is most important for the mind to be pure and tranquil, but to Chuang Tzu, it is most important for it to be vacuous and empty.

These are but minor differences. Of far greater significance is the development of epistemology, metaphysics, and cosmology. Lao Tzu says nothing about the nature of knowledge but only about what one should know (44, 55). Chuang Tzu, however, distinguishes "great knowledge," which is "leisurely and at ease," and "small knowledge," which is "inquisitive." The former is all-embracing, extensive, and synthetic, while the latter is partial, discriminative, and analytic. Lao Tz."'s Tao is still vague, but that of Chuang Tzu "has reality and evidence." Lao Tzu's cosmology (1, 25) is quite simple and elementary, whereas that of Chuang Tzu is much more refined, involving not only being and non-being but the state of neither being nor non-being. In Lao Tzu, self-transformation concerns only man and operates in the social and moral spheres. In Chuang Tzu, it concerns all things and operates in the sphere of their nature. Thus both the scope and character of self-transformation are greatly expanded, and naturalism is carried to a higher degree. Likewise the concept of change takes a great step forward. In Lao Tzu, the major notes are constancy and eternity while that of change is but a minor one. In Chuang Tzu, however, change is a main theme. He conceives of the universe as a great current in which one state succeeds another in an endless procession, and in which things are in a perpetual flux. Life goes on "like a galloping horse." Things not only develop from the simple to the complex as in Lao Tzu (42), but acquire an evolutionary character, for all things grew from germs through various stages of life to that of horse and then to that of man. In these constant changes and rapid transfigurations, "all things are one," for Tao embraces all of them and combines them into a unity. "Heaven and earth and I coexist," he says, "and all things and are one." Lao Tzu has stressed the unity of Tao, but it is a newer note to stress the oneness of all things. Within this unity, all differences and contraries disappear. Lao Tzu still sharply distinguishes black and white, glory and disgrace, and the front and the back (2, 28),52 but to Chuang Tzu life and death, construction and destruction, beauty and ugliness, possibility and impossibility, and right and wrong are but differences in points of view, or merely relative, or causes of each other. In any case, Tao identifies them all as one.

It can readily be seen that the arena of Chuang Tzu's philosophy is much greater than that of Lao Tzu and the action much faster. In fact, Chuang Tzu thinks of life as a play, with the universe as the stage. He therefore wants life to be like leisurely roaming and wandering in the universe. If Lao Tzu treasures the tranquility of the spirit (10, 16), Chuang Tzu treasures its freedom. Chuang Tzu is therefore comparatively more romantic and otherworldly, while Lao Tzu is more realistic and mundane. Lao Tzu aims at handling human affairs and mastering worldly situations, but Chuang Tzu prefers to transcend them and go along with the transformation of heaven and earth. To Lao Tzu, the ideal man is the sage who is a practical man not above resorting to various tactics to handle human affairs. To Chuang Tzu, the ideal man is the pure man who "did not know what it was to love life or to hate death." Creel is essentially correct in maintaining that Chuang Tzu is primarily "contemplative," interested in an intoxication with the wonder and power of Nature, whereas Lao Tzu is primarily "purposive," chiefly interested in how to govern. Lao Tzu speaks only of everlasting life (59), but Chuang Tzu tells stories about a man of the spirit who lives in a certain mountain, eats no grains, thrives on wind and dew, rides the clouds, and roams the universe, and a perfect man who does not feel the heat of fire or the cold of frozen rivers, but rides on the sun and moon and rambles at ease beyond the seas. There is very little mysticism in Lao Tzu, unless one considers union with Tao (56) as necessarily a mystical experience. Chuang Tzu, however, speaks of "the fasting of the mind" in which "the mind is empty to receive all things" and "sitting down and forgetting everything" in which "the body is abandoned, the intelligence is discarded, one is separated from the body and free from knowledge, and one becomes identical with a great penetration." Such an experience is definitely mystical. There is nothing like this in the Lao Tzu. Every passage of it can be understood in terms of ordinary human experience, whereas many in the Chuang Tzu deal with pure experience that transcends the mundane. Many writers, especially translators, have presented Lao Tzu as almost the greatest mystic in Chinese history. They have either confused him with Chuang Tzu or have taken any intuitive philosophy as mysticism.

It should be emphasized that, broadly speaking, the differences between Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu are a matter of degree rather than kind. The differences are far outweighed by the similarities, which are too many to mention. It is enough to point out that the doctrines of both are exclusively devoted to Tao and its virtue. It is interesting to note, too, that Chuang Tzu also came from south of the Yellow River and shared Lao Tzu's spirit of the frontier, the unorthodox, the minority, and the oppressed.

8. Influences on Neo-Taoism, Buddhism, and Neo-Confucianism

Both of their philosophies were raised to a higher level in the Neo-Taoism of the third and fourth centuries. We shall bypass the Huai-nan Tzu and the Lieh Tzu. The former is by Liu An (d. 122 B.C.) whose originality is negligible. Aside from a reiteration and elaboration of earlier Taoism, his only contribution is a rational approach to metaphysics and cosmogony that helped to usher in the rationalism of Neo-Taoism. The Lieh Tzu is probably a product of the third century. Its ideas of the equality of things, indifference to life and death, following one's nature, and accepting one's fate are all original ingredients of Taoism, especially that of Chuang Tzu. But the Taoist doctrine of taking no action is degenerated into a complete abandonment of effort, spontaneity is confused with resignation, and having no desire is replaced by hedonism. It represents no development of Taoism at all.

The most important development of Taoism in the history of Chinese thought is that of Neo-Taoism. It finds its expressions in the commentaries on the Lao Tzu and the Book of Changes (I ching) by Wang Pi (226-19) and the commentary on the Chuang Tzu by Kuo Hsiang (d. 312). In them, non-being is no longer essentially in contrast to being, but is the ultimate of all, or pure being (pen-wu), the One and undifferentiated. According to Wang Pi, original non-being transcends all distinctions and descriptions. It is the pure being, original substance (pen-t'i), and the One in which substance and function are identified. It is always correct because it is in accord with principle. Where Lao Tzu had destiny, Wang would substitute principle, thus anticipating the development in Neo-Confucianism.

Just as Wang Pi went beyond Lao Tzu. so Kuo Hsiang went beyond Chuang Tzu. The major concept is no longer Tao, as in Chuang Tzu, but Nature (tzu-jan). Things exist and transform themselves spontaneously and there is no other reality or agent to cause them. Things exist and transform according to principle, but each and every thing has its own principle. Compared with Wang Pi, he emphasizes being rather than non-being and the many rather than the one. To Wang Pi, principle transcends things, but to Kuo Hsiang it is immanent in them.

These major Taoist concepts of being and non-being were carried over to Buddhism from Neo-Taoism. In the third and fourth centuries, Buddhist thinkers practiced "matching the concepts" of Buddhism and Taoism, in which a Buddhist concept is equated with one in Taoist thought. Following Taoism, the early Buddhist philosophical schools centered

9. The Taoist Religion

The origin of the Taoist religion is still not clear. The practices of divination, astrology, faith healing, witchcraft, and the like had existed from very early days. By the fourth century B.C., there was, in addition, the belief in immortals who were supposed to live in islands off the China coast. The belief was so widespread and so firm that feudal lords sent missions there to seek elixir from them. On top of this effort, the ancient Chinese resorted to sitting in meditation, concentration of thought, dietary techniques, medicine, breathing exercises, bathing of all sorts, including sun bathing, various kinds of gymnastics, such as extending and contracting the body, sexual techniques, and alchemy, all directed to the search for the preservation of life, that is, longevity, and for immortality. Priest-magicians, called fang-shill or practitioners with special formula, went around to offer their services. By the early first century of our era these fang-shin came to be known as tao-shin, that is, practitioners of the Way.

In the meantime, a cult emerged bearing the names of the legendary Yellow Emperor of antiquity and Lao Tzu, most probably because their teachings of everlasting life, or similar teachings attributed to them, were a great help to preserving life and to achieving immortality. In spite of the supremacy of Confucianism as the state doctrine since 140 B.C., when non-Confucian scholars were dismissed from office, this cult continued to grow. In 103 B.C., Taoist scholars were again allowed to serve in the government, thus raising the prestige of the Yellow Emperor and Lao Tzu. In A.D. 167, the emperor even sacrificed to them in the capital. Needless to say, by this time the word Tao had assumed a special significance and possessed, especially for the masses, almost a magical meaning.

In the middle of the second century, a rebel by the name of Chang Ling (fl. A.D. 156), who had established a semi-independent state on the borders of Szechuan and Shensi, attracted many followers through faith healing and other magical practices. Lie charged five bushels of rice for membership in his group. Consequently his movement has been known as the Tao or Way of Five Bushels of Rice and eventually became the Taoist religion with practitioners of the Way as its priests. His name came to be known as Chang Tao-ling. He may have been the first to use the name Tao-chiao. If so, did he purposely coin the term to stress the fact that his movement was a religion to be sharply distinguished from the Taoist school?

Chang Ling’s movement was carried on and spread by his grandson,