

ANCIENT SAGES OF CHINA

LAO TZU

The Eternal Tao Te Ching

By Xu Yuanxiang & Yin Yongjian

[CHINA INTERCONTINENTAL PRESS]

老子

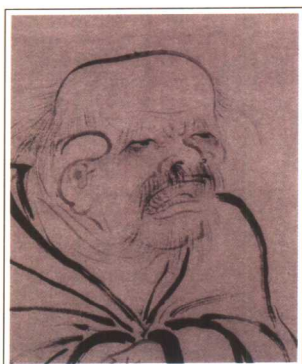
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CONTENTS

[01].....	Introduction
[04].....	Lao Tzu and Taoism
[15].....	Story of Lao Tzu
[22].....	Lao Tzu in History Books
[43].....	Lao Tzu and Chinese Culture
[59].....	Lao Tzu's Theory of Government
[69].....	Influence on the World
[72].....	Tao Te Ching



Introduction

In a rural area in the northern part of China, a wedding is taking place. The ritual is a strange but revealing mixture of Eastern and Western tradition and culture; of the modern and the ancient. The groom and the bride wear Western style dress, not the traditional long gown or cheongsam of old. However, many of the rituals still observed in Chinese weddings date back thousands of years and are a living echo of ancient Chinese teachings. The bride and groom still make traditional obeisances to their parents and each other as well as to the Heavens and the Land. Thus, some 20 percent of the world's population still honor traditions and customs that date back over two millennia. When Christians marry, they commit themselves to each other before God. Chinese typically render these commitments to the Heavens and to the Land. Such relations between the Heavens and the Land that exist in Chinese culture provide a fascinating insight into the development of Chinese civilization.



Lao Tzu—The Eternal Tao Te Ching

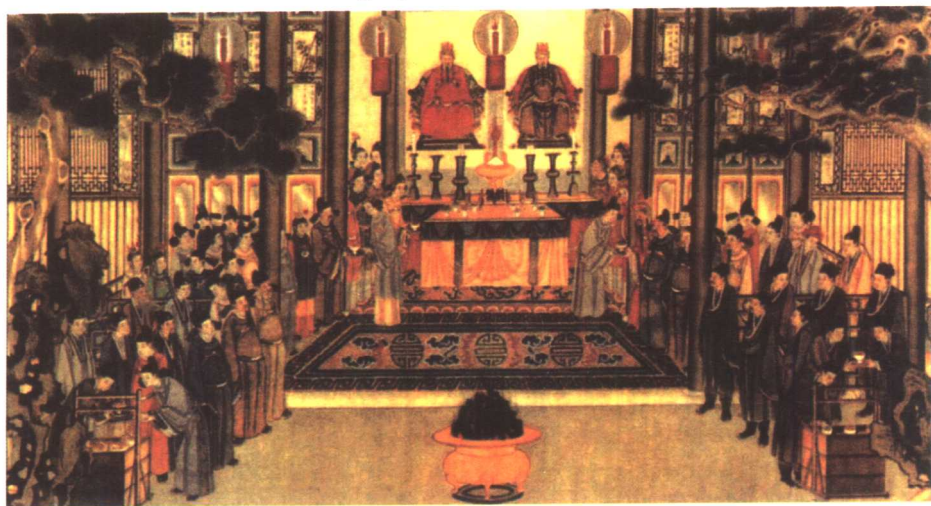


Yangliuqing New Year Painting: Bowing to the Heavens and the Land is a traditional Chinese custom.



Since ancient times, Chinese have all along held the Heavens and the Land that they live on in great reverence. Thousands of years ago, when many peoples on the Earth embraced a strong belief in Spirits who were thought of as the creators of all beings, the Chinese had begun to probe into astronomy as well as geography. There an old man for the first time unveiled the laws of nature and formed a cosmic view of worshipping nature, by symbolically comparing the relations between the Heavens and the Land and men to a chain.

Bowing to parents is a traditional wedding custom in China.





The old man, regarded by the world as the initiator of the Chinese Taoist school—the native religion of China—was called Lao Tzu.

Lao Tzu and Taoism

A Journey to the West is the fantastic mythological tale, which rightly occupies a preeminent place amongst the



Monkey King Plays Havoc with the Heavenly Imperial Palace.

pantheon of classical Chinese literature. Sun Wukong, the Monkey King hero of the tale, was a magical being possessed of considerable powers. He was also an incorrigible trickster. When he violated the laws of the Heavens, he was thrown into the



Lao Tzu—The Eternal Tao Te Ching

so-called Crucible of the Eight Trigrams, where Taishang Laojun, a supernatural God, burned him in alchemical oil for 49 days. The supernatural God is none other but Lao Tzu. Ironically, despite such a characterization Lao Tzu himself and his teachings are very much anti-theistic in nature.



Taishang Laojun, a supernatural God, who is in fact Lao Tzu.

He laid great emphasis not on supernatural beings in the Heavens but rather on the laws of nature and dedicated his whole life to seeking after the links in the cosmic chain that bound the Heavens and the Land.

Taoism is the only spiritual belief system which is native



Lao Tzu—The Eternal Tao Tz Ching

to China. Its ultimate origins are shrouded in the remote mists of history, but Taoism has always been associated with one man who is Lao Tzu.

Taishang Laojun is a respectful name of Lao Tzu in Taoism, the only Chinese native religion. Of the sites cited

Baiyunguan is the chief temple of the Quanzhen Taoist Sect and center for the Longmen Subsect. It is now the site of the China Taoist Association. According to historical records, Tang Emperor Xuanzong (685-762) built a stone statue of the seated figure of Lao Tzu and a temple known as the Tianchang Temple to enshrine it. After the Jin Dynasty (1115-1234), it was renamed Taiji Palace and Changchun Palace. In the early days of the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), it was named Baiyunguan Temple. The existing Baiyunguan Hall was built during the Ming Dynasty.





Lao Tzu—The Eternal Tao Te Ching



Statue of Taishang Laojun worshipped in Sanqingge (Three Pure Gods) of Baiyunguan Temple. Lao Tzu is worshipped as the founder of Taoism and held as the incarnation of Taishang Laojun, or incarnation of "Tao."



by the UNESCO as the World Heritages in China, five are associated with Taoism.

In any Taoist area of China, it is common to see a statue of an old man, with white hair and beard, long ears drooping down towards his shoulders. This is the traditional representation of Lao Tzu the man most closely associated with Taoist belief.

Mirages are caused by the reflection of light. Like wind, rain and lighting they are a natural phenomenon that seem unremarkable to us, living as we do in a world where everything can be explained scientifically. But in ancient times, such phenomena could be understood only in terms

Taoist paper cut: *Eight Immortals Crossing the Surging Sea*.





of supernatural spirits. They saw the Heavens as a faraway: an incomparably wonderful world, the domain of wandering and various supernatural beings. While fearing and worshipping such supernatural beings people also dreamed themselves of becoming a member of this pantheon one day. But how could this be achieved?

Some said if you prayed reverentially every day facing the Heavens, a supernatural being would come down to the Earth and bring you up to the Heavens; others maintained that by making and eating so-called immortal pills you could become a supernatural being and fly yourself to the Heavens.

For many thousands of years, the Chinese people subscribed to such beliefs and worshipped a whole galaxy



Making Elixir by Ren Bonian (Qing Dynasty, 1616-1911).

Located southwest of Danjiangkou City of Hubei Province, Wudang Mountain, also called Taihe Mountain and Xuanyue Mountain, is a noted Taoist land and boasts the largest Taoist group architecture in China. Its Taoist group architecture was chosen to be listed into the World Heritages on December 15, 1994.







Chinese character reading "Tao."

of supernatural beings, ghosts and ancestors. Around the middle of the 2nd century BC, a man named Zhang Daoling, came across a book. It was only 5,000 characters long but still Zhang Daoling recognized its all-embracing importance. Zhang, who had been a seventh-rank county magistrate, cherished it as a book of the Heavens, and in his later years, taking this book as the highest holy scripture, founded a sect, to live by the ideas set down in this short