



道 德 經

Lao Zi

Dao De Jing



FOREIGN LANGUAGES PRESS



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Translated with a thematic reading guide by Wang Keping



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Acknowledgements

This is a newly revised edition of the *Dao De Jing* (*Tao-Te Ching*). It bears particular reference to the Mawangdui silk-copies and other old versions including those of Wang Bi and Heshang Gong, etc. What is most noteworthy herein are a number of textual rearrangements and modifications. All this is largely based on recent philological studies of the Daoist (Taoist) classic made by such leading Lao Zi (Lao-tzu) scholars as Gu Di, Zhou Ying, Chen Guying, Ren Jiyu, Gao Heng, Ma Xulun, Yan Lingfeng, Sha Shaohai and many others.

The contemplation of this task is considerably inspired by two most important works in Chinese: one is the *Lao Zi Tong* (A Systematic Revision of the *Dao*

De Jing) by Gu Di and ZhouYing, and the other is the *Lao Zi Zhu yi Ji Pingjie* (An Annotated and Paraphrased *Dao De Jing* with Commentary) by Chen Guying. They are virtually working encyclopedias of Lao Zi studies at the present stage. The English rendering of this edition owes a great deal to the existing translations by Chan Wing-tsit, Robert G. Henricks, He Guanghu et al.

I would like to take this occasion to acknowledge my gratitude to all these scholars aforementioned.



Preface

Lao Zi is considered the founder of early Daoism (Taoism) and studied worldwide. As has been observed by both oriental and occidental readers (e.g. Hegel), the ideas of Lao Zi tend to be more philosophical in the pure sense of this term when compared with those of his contemporaries in China. It is commonly acknowledged that Lao Zi's philosophizing is one of the main sources underlying the structure or formation of the overall psychology of the Chinese people.

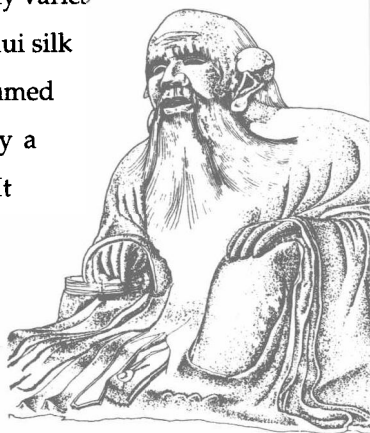
Lao Zi's philosophizing is basically presented in the *Dao De Jing*, with such English renderings as *The Way and Its Power* or *Tao-Te Ching* (as a translitera-

tion of its non-standard Chinese pronunciation). This book, the major Daoist (Taoist) classic, is composed of 81 chapters as arranged by Heshang Gong. The classification itself remains all along controversial, even though it was once officially approved by an emperor of Tang Dynasty in 8th century. The compilation of the *Dao De Jing* by Heshang Gong features an additional subtitle for each chapter to help the reader approach the book in a more convenient and rewarding manner. This has conducted to my methodology of rearranging all the texts thematically in order to facilitate, I hope, a more practical or fruitful reading today (cf. Appendix). It has in turn given birth to this newly revised edition with relevant modifications.

Lao Zi, as a Daoist philosopher, is attracting more and more attention and interest both in the East and the West. Accordingly his book enjoys a rapidly increasing number of readers today. There are, consequently, more than a dozen of English versions of the *Dao De Jing* available published in

various countries. The reason why we felt it important to add one more lies in the following considerations:

- (1) 1973 witnessed the discovery of the Mawangdui silk copies of the *Dao De Jing*. According to relevant archaeological studies, one of the Mawangdui versions may date back at least to the third century BC, and is regarded as the oldest edition found so far (Note: The Guodian version on bamboo slips discovered in 1993 appears even older, but its content partly varies from the Mawangdui silk copies and it is assumed to be produced by a different author). It is therefore necessary to revise the previous texts with particular





reference to the Mawangdui findings.

- (2) It is largely due to the favorable cultural policy introduced since China embarked on the reform policy in 1980s that the studies of Lao Zi and his like have made far more progress than ever before. But most of the latest achievements in this field are missing from the versions of the *Dao De Jing* available in English and other Western languages. This edition is intended to fill in this gap.
- (3) Most of its English versions tend to employ the ready-made terms to translate the ideas of Lao Zi, which I find most likely to lead the reader onto the beaten track of the occidental cultural background when it comes to

cognizing what the author is supposed to say. In this case I have ventured to translate the key concepts with newly coined terminology. I sincerely hope that this approach will help the reader rethink from a new perspective, and better identify what is really meant, in line with textual and contextual analysis.

- (4) Previously mentioned, this version of the *Dao De Jing* is thematically rearranged with attempts to facilitate a more practical and fruitful reading today. The thematic arrangement as such is based not merely on the scrutiny of Lao Zi's philosophizing as a systematic whole, but also on considerations of the reading habit of the English reader. The overall aim is to obtain a more relevant understanding and effective communication with regard to the text.
- (5) The present approach to the *Dao De Jing* is largely grounded on the conviction that it will be of more advantages to have the reader di-

rectly involved in textual reading and analysis rather than to take a detour by tackling merely second-hand interpretation or reinterpretation. For it is often the case that an idiosyncratic interpreter, conceived of his own authority, gallops ahead while neglecting the reader's initiative and observation.

I must confess that whatever efforts I have to tackle this formidable project, it seems to me that I cannot hope to have succeeded completely. All too often the revision alone puts me under the impression that it is extremely difficult to transfer the thought of so lucid and poetic a writer as Lao Zi from one language to another without some damage occurring in the process. I found that the rhyming system, for instance, was almost untransferable no matter how hard I have tried. On the other hand, the *Dao De Jing* was written in a style based on metaphors and an expressive form of aphorisms such that many of the ideas presented appear to be engagingly

suggestive, polysemous and somewhat ambiguous rather than articulate. Thus elaborate annotation and extended commentary are of need for the reader to attain a justified comprehension and interpretation, and fortunately there are some references of this kind available in English. *The Classic of the Dao* (1998), for instance, is one of them.

Incidentally, as regards the straightforward translation of the book, as many English renderings are, it seems to me as though a glass of fine wine has been mixed with water, reducing it to a less tasteful cocktail. But still it is of practical value for it serves to make inter-cultural communication or dialogue possible to certain extent.

In carrying out the actual work, I have been very fortunate to receive generous support from late Professor Herbert Mainusch of Münster University in Germany. I always cherish the memory of our obsessed conversations over the *Dao De Jing* during his stay in Beijing and my visit to Münster years ago.

Now Professor Albert A. Anderson is working

on a Mind Series in CD form. He has selected some classics by the most outstanding of all world thinkers. Among many others, the *Dao De Jing* is included and this very version in English is to be used. Such an academic venture by means of high-tech is sure to offer one more walking stick for those who are interested in exploring Lao Zi's thoughts.

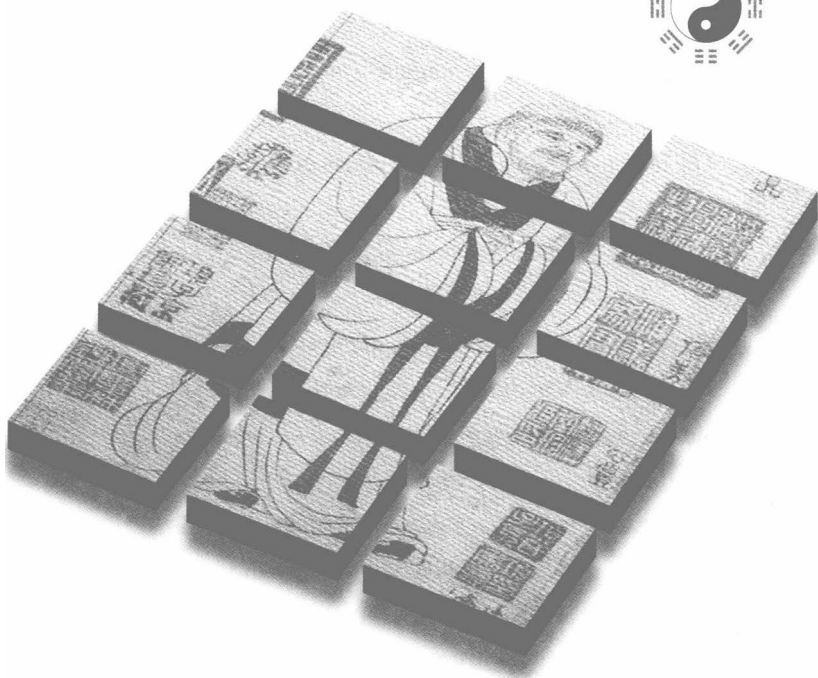
Finally, I wish to extend my sincere thanks to my publisher and editor for their unflagging assistance when making this handy version.

Wang Keping
Beijing, China
Spring, 2008



道德經

Dao De Jing



【Chapter 1】

The *Dao* that can be told is not the constant *Dao*.

The Name that can be named is not the constant Name.

The Being-without-form is the origin of Heaven and Earth;

The Being-within-form is the mother of the myriad things.

Therefore it is always from the Being-without-form

That the subtlety of the *Dao* can be contemplated;

Similarly it is always from the Being-within-form

That the manifestation of the *Dao* can be perceived.

These two have the same source but different names,

They both may be called deep and profound.

The Deepest and most profound

Is the doorway to all subtleties.