

— The Illustrated Chinese Classics Series —

THE ILLUSTRATED BOOK *of* LAOZI

Written and Illustrated by Zhou Chuncai

Translated by Paul White





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新世界出版社
NEW WORLD PRESS

图书在版编目(CIP)数据

老子图典: 英文 / 周春才编著; (英) 怀特译.
北京: 新世界出版社, 2008. 5 (国学漫画典藏系列)
ISBN 978-7-80228-592-7

I. 老… II. ①周…②怀… III. 老子—通俗读物
IV. B223.1-49

中国版本图书馆 CIP 数据核字 (2008) 第 056059 号

The Illustrated Book of Laozi 老子图典

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策 划: 陶 红 杨雨前
责任编辑: 李淑娟 孙 晶
英文审定: 徐明强
封面设计: 王天义
版式设计: 清鑫工作室
责任印制: 李一鸣 黄厚清
出版发行: 新世界出版社
社 址: 北京市西城区百万庄大街 24 号 (100037)
总编室电话: + 86 10 6899 5424 68326679 (传真)
发行部电话: + 86 10 6899 5968 68998705 (传真)
本社中文网址: <http://www.nwp.cn>
本社英文网址: <http://www.newworld-press.com>
本社电子信箱: nwpcn@public.bta.net.cn
版权部电子信箱: frank@nwp.com.cn
版权部电话: + 86 10 6899 6306
印刷: 保定天德印务有限公司
经销: 新华书店
开本: 787×1092 1/16
字数: 180 千字 印张: 14.75
版次: 2008 年 8 月第 1 版 2008 年 8 月北京第 1 次印刷
书号: ISBN 978-7-80228-592-7
定价: 48.00 元

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新世界版图书 印装错误可随时退换

First Edition 2008

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Translated by Paul White

Edited by Li Shujuan

Cover Design by Wang Tianyi

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ISBN 978-7-80228-592-7

Published by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

Distributed by

NEW WORLD PRESS

24 Baiwanzhuang Street, Beijing 100037, China

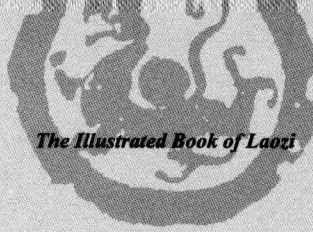
Tel: 86-10-68995968

Fax: 86-10-68998705

Website: www.newworld-press.com

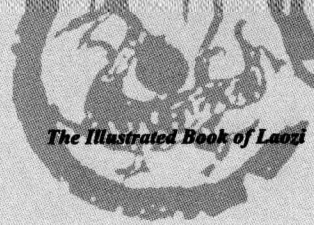
E-mail: frank@nwp.com.cn

Printed in the People's Republic of China

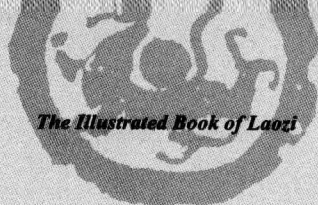


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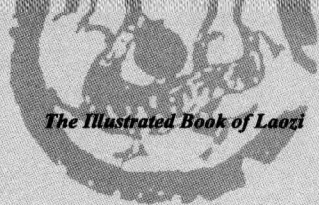
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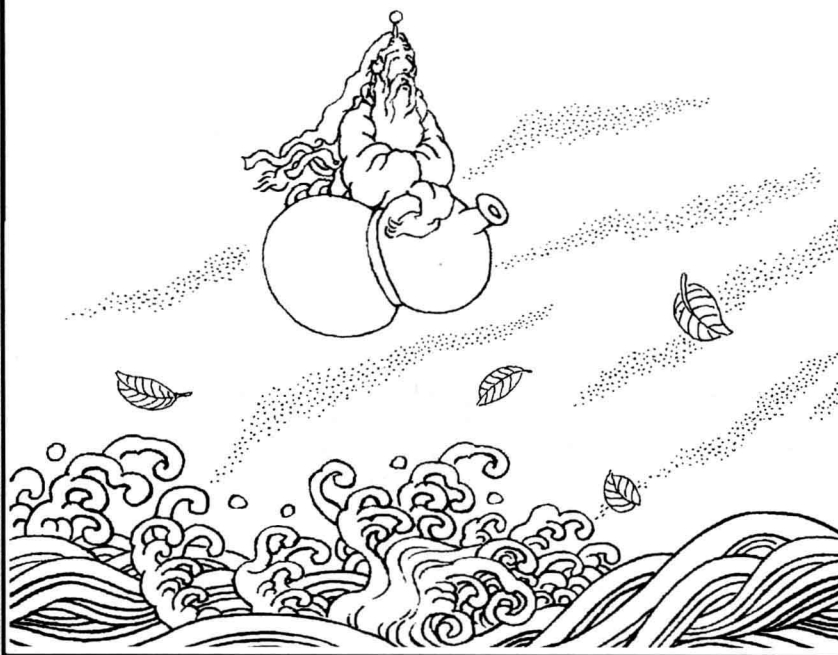


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Introduction

The ancient work known as the *Laozi* consists of two parts: The first part deals with *Dao*, or the Way, and the second part deals with *De*, or Virtue. So the book is also called the “*Daodejing*” (*Classic of the Way and Virtue*). It is a work of philosophy written in verse. It offers a penetrating description of the origins of all things in the Universe and the laws of their motion. These laws are a synthesis of the “Heavenly Way” and the “Way of Man”. Using an overall dialectical approach, the author expounds on the contradictions existing in all things in the cosmos, and the laws of their antagonism and transformation. In the course of his disquisition, the author touches on a wide range of topics, including politics, military affairs and self-cultivation. As one of mankind’s important ideological resources, the *Laozi* has had a profound impact on China for thousands of years, and even on the world....



【The Life of Laozi】

The man known later as Laozi was born in Ku County (today's Luyi County, Henan Province) in the State of Chu in the sixth century BC. Surnamed Li, his given name was Er and his honorary name was Dan. He once served as the imperial archivist at the Zhou Dynasty court — an ideal position for him to cultivate his philosophical thought.



According to the *Records of the Historian – Biographies of Laozi and Han-feizi* written by Sima Qian, Laozi was an older contemporary of Confucius. The story goes that the latter once journeyed to the Zhou capital — Luoyang to learn about the rituals of Zhou from Laozi. The *Book of Rites*, the *Zhuangzi* and other ancient documents carry records of Laozi's replies to Confucius' questions about the rites.



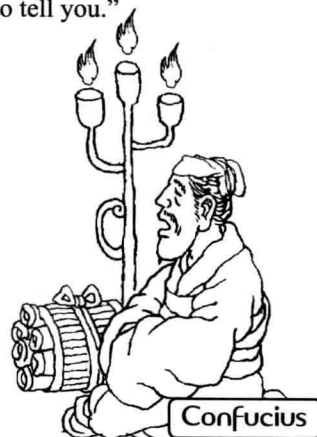
The fact that Laozi transmitted information about the rites to his fellow philosopher indicates that the former did not entirely despise this type of knowledge. He was doubtless following the principles of “settling disorder” and “setting up peace” when he admonished Confucius: “Those who formulated the rites that you advocate are long since dead; only their words remain. Men of wisdom practice the rites only when the conditions for doing so are completely in place; if the situation is not yet ripe, then it is necessary to retire from public life.”



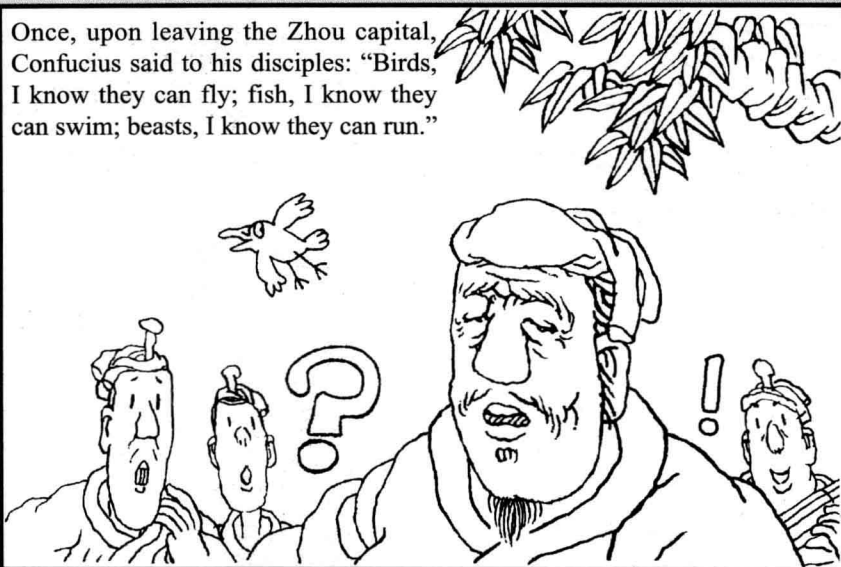
“I have heard that people who are good at doing business hide their goods away, so at first glance it seems that they have nothing. Similarly, the gentleman who has cultivated the Way and Virtue to a high degree puts on an appearance of dull-wittedness.”



“Get rid of your arrogance and avarice. Cast aside your haughty demeanor and rich trappings, and your overbearing aspirations! They will do you no good. This is all I want to tell you.”



Once, upon leaving the Zhou capital, Confucius said to his disciples: "Birds, I know they can fly; fish, I know they can swim; beasts, I know they can run."

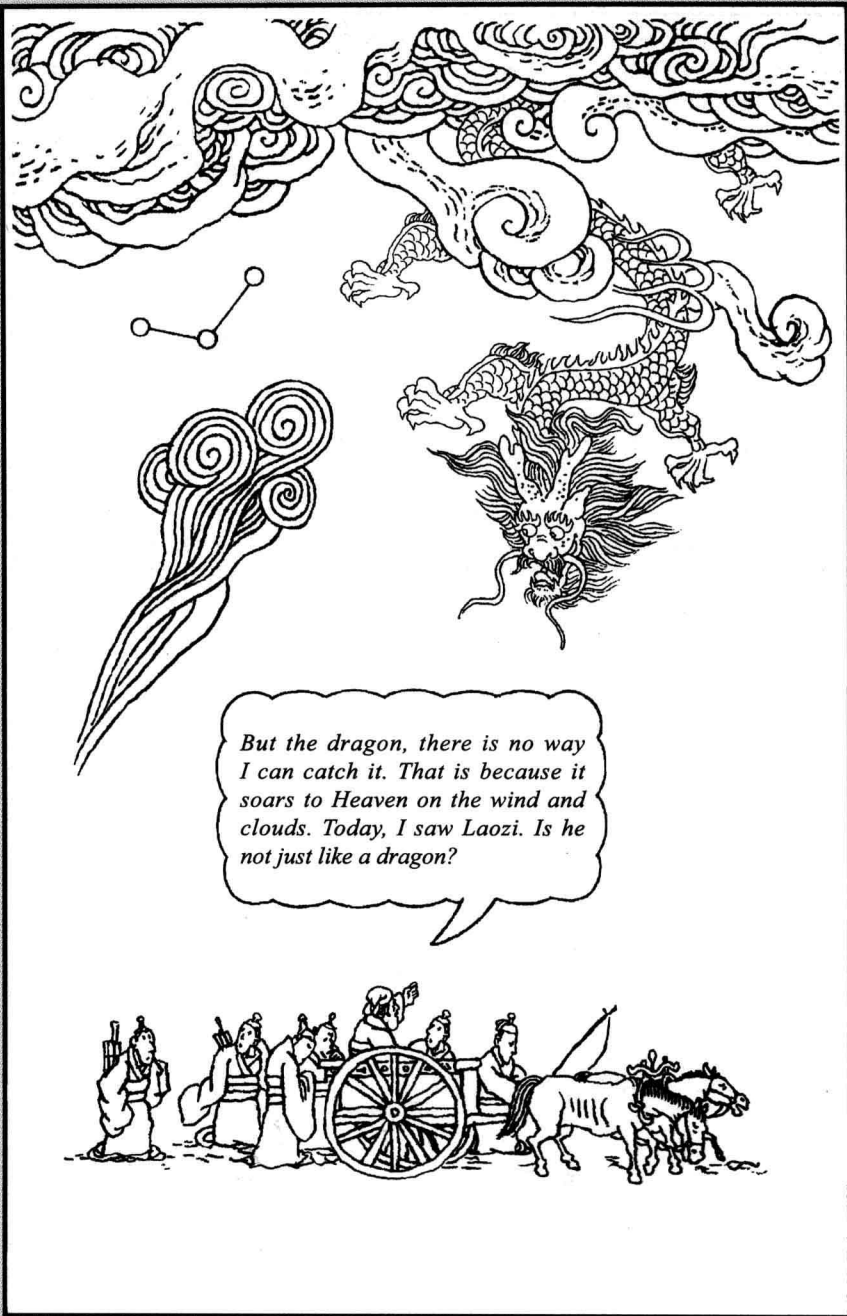


"The creatures that can run can be caught in nets; those that can swim can be caught with rod and line."

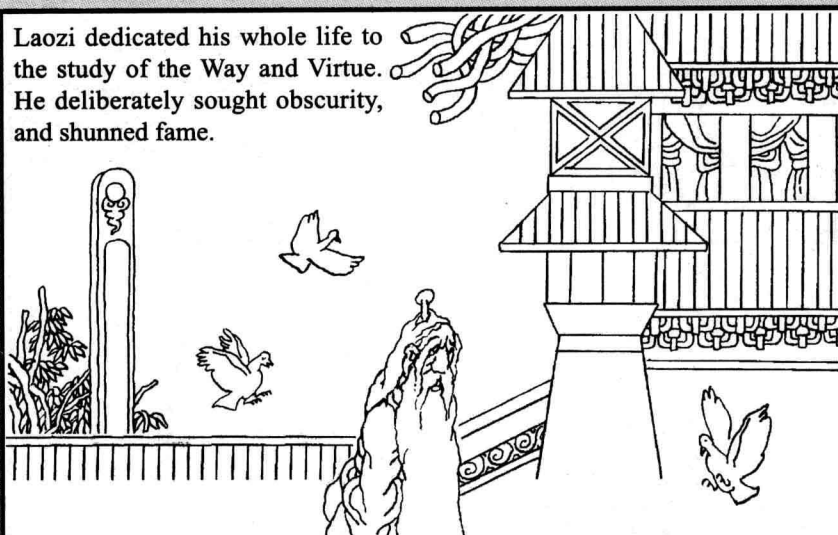


Those that can fly
can be shot down
with arrows.

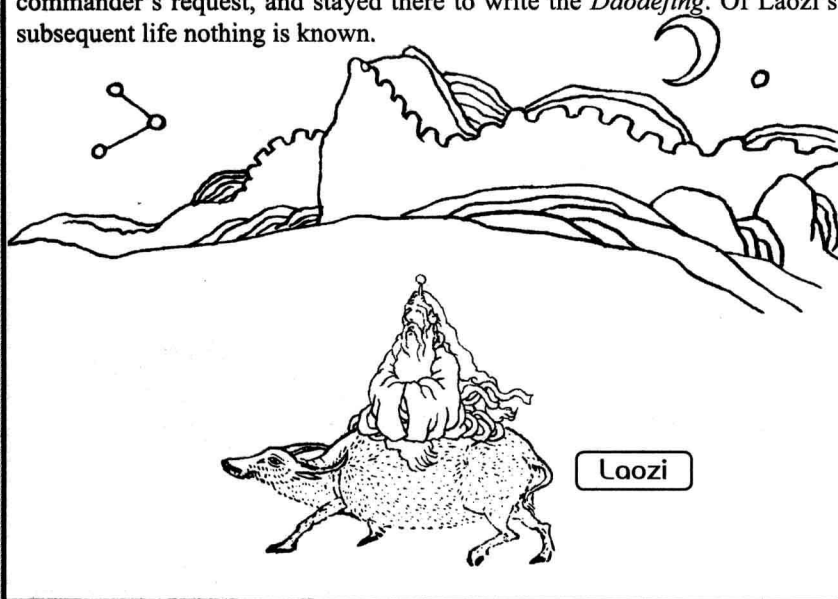




Laozi dedicated his whole life to the study of the Way and Virtue. He deliberately sought obscurity, and shunned fame.



Laozi lived for many years in the Zhou capital. When the Zhou Dynasty (1046-221 BC) finally collapsed, he went on a journey to the west. Coming to San Pass (to the southwest of present-day Baoji City in Shaanxi Province — although some say that the place was actually Han'gu Pass, northeast of today's Lingbao County seat in Henan Province), he acceded to the garrison commander's request, and stayed there to write the *Daodejing*. Of Laozi's subsequent life nothing is known.



【The Cultural Platform of Laozi's Doctrine】

Around 700 BC, almost all around the world men stepped into the Iron Age. In essence, the use of iron implements had a decisive influence on the history of mankind's development. They gave mankind the possibility and strength to wrest what it needed from Nature. This strength caused man to have a very distorted and alluring view of his own identity.



Along with the increase of the productive forces, and the appearance of a rising accumulation of benefits, China entered the Spring and Autumn (770-476 BC) and the Warring States (475-221 BC) Periods, a time when traditional values were being eroded and there was a crisis of faith in the old beliefs. The Zhou Dynasty ruler held sway over the country in name only. Driven by their own interests, the feudal states were engaged in plotting against each other, and the whole world, it seemed, was embroiled in chaos.



Finding a way to put an end to this chaos became the unavoidable and primary concern of all the intellectuals of this period who had courage and vision, insight and a sense of responsibility. But beyond the solution to this problem lay the cultural background which held out for the sages of ancient China the great and indispensable yardstick of thought:

What is the primary motive force of all man's striving, and what is its ultimate objective?

