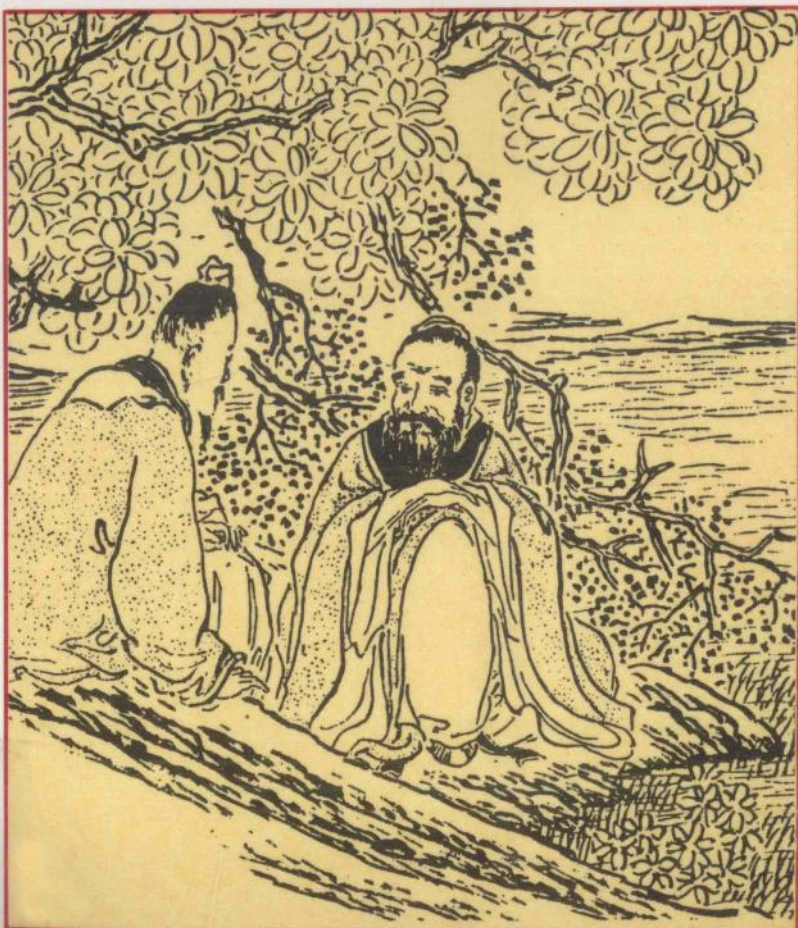


# TAO TE CHING

TRANSLATED BY WANG RONGPEI  
AND WILLIAM PUFFENBERGER

# 英译老子



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**英 译 老 子**

**Translated**

**by**

**Wang Rongpei**

**and**

**William Puffenberger**

Editor: Bian Yun-ge(卞云阁)

Cover Designer: Liu Gui-xiang(刘桂湘)

Proof-Reading: Li Bo(李波)

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## 英译老子

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and Puffenberger

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## PREFACE

Almost anyone can translate words from one language to another but the best translations must be works of art rather than manipulations of words. When working with *Tao Te Ching* ( *Book of Tao* and *Book of Virtue* ), one of the most frequently translated Chinese classics, only a few versions will be considered satisfactory because no translation can be as ambiguous as the Chinese original. Much of this is by design: Laotse believed that many of his most profound ideas: like the Tao itself, could not be put into words. This is why so much of what he says sounds paradoxical and ambiguous. His teaching methods were intuitive; he placed a low price on formal logic and empty words. Intuitive insight is the necessary key for understanding *Tao Te Ching* and the Tao. It is presumptuous to think one can express these ideas clearly and unequivocally; nevertheless, such an exercise stands as a constant challenge to all who would be students of Tao.

To attempt such a translation is a labour of love. The philosophical essence of Taoism is contained in the roughly 5,000 Chinese characters which comprise the eighty-one chapters of *Tao Te Ching*. One is drawn to its mysterious insights perplexed by attempts to decipher and express it, yet unable to lay it aside. The obscurity of the book is made even more troublesome by the nature of the ancient Chinese language..... it has no active or passive, no sin-

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## II

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gular or plural, no case, no person, no tense, no mood. It has no punctuation whatsoever: one must decide for one's self where one sentence ends and another begins; and there are many cases where such decisions dramatically reverse meaning.

This English translation of the bi-lingual text is based on the earliest extant copy of *Tao Te Ching*, the Mawangdui Version A which was unearthed at Changsha in 1973, but the Chinese text we are using is not tied to one single version. For reasons of clarity and accuracy, certain Chinese characters from other versions have been substituted and we have decided to follow the older chapter divisions (which are not always the same as those of the more popular versions). As much as possible, this translation attempts to remain faithful to the meaning and intention of the ancient text while trying to render it into intelligible and contemporary English. For the convenience of foreign readers, we have put *pinyin* (Chinese phonetic transcriptions) under the Chinese characters.

July 1995  
Dalian, China

Wang Rongpei  
and  
William Puffenberger

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Preface .....	I
Book of Tao .....	1
Book of Virtue .....	99

道 经

**BOOK OF TAO**

# 1 章

道，可道也，

dào kě dào yě

非恒道也；

fēi héng dào yě

名，可名也，

míng kě míng yě

非恒名也。

fēi héng míng yě

无名，万物之始也；

wú míng wàn wù zhī shǐ yě

有名，万物之母也。

yǒu míng wàn wù zhī mǔ yě

故恒无欲也，以观其妙；

gù héng wú yù yě yǐ guān qí miào

恒有欲也，以观其所徼。

héng yǒu yù yě yǐ guān qí suǒ jiào

两者同出，异名同谓；

liǎng zhě tóng chū yì míng tóng wèi

玄之又玄，众妙之门。

xuán zhī yòu xuán zhòng miào zhī mén



## (1)

Tao can be defined as "Tao",  
But it is not the eternal Tao;  
Names can be used for its name,  
But they do not give the eternal name.  
The nameless Tao is the origin of all things;  
The named Tao is the mother of all things.

Therefore, be always dispassionate to detect  
its wonders;  
Be always passionate to detect its manifestations.  
The "named" and "nameless" designate the same  
Tao;  
Form mystery to mystery leads this gateway to  
all wonders.

---

## 2 章

天下皆知美为美，恶已；

tiān xià jiē zhī měi wéi měi è yǐ

皆知善，斯不善矣。

jiē zhī shàn sī bù shàn yǐ

有、无之相生也，

yǒu wú zhī xiāng shēng yě

难、易之相成也，

nán yì zhī xiāng chéng yě

长、短之相形也，

cháng duǎn zhī xiāng xíng yě

高、下之相盈也，

gāo xià zhī xiāng yíng yě

音、声之相和也，

yīn shēng zhī xiāng hè yě

先、后之相随：

xiān hòu zhī xiāng suí

恒也。

héng yě

## (2)

When everyone knows beauty as beauty,  
ugliness is revealed;  
When everyone knows goodness as goodness,  
evil is revealed.

Being and nonbeing are two phases of existence;  
Difficult and easy are two stages of persistence;  
Long and short are two degrees of distance;  
High and low are two ranks of eminence;  
Echo and sound are two expressions of resonance;  
Before and after are two orders of sequence;  
Things always contrast in this way.

是以圣人居无为之事，

shì yǐ shèng rén jū wú wéi zhī shì

行不言之教。

xíng bù yán zhī jiào

万物作而弗始也，

wàn wù zuò ér fú shǐ yě

为而弗恃也，

wéi ér fú shì yě

成功而弗居也；

chéng gōng ér fú jū yě

夫惟弗居，是以弗去。

fú wéi fú jū shì yǐ fú qù

Therefore, the sage acts without visible action;

He teaches without verbal instruction.

He observes growth without activating it;

He works without claiming credit;

He succeeds without dwelling upon it;

He claims no credit--he deserves it.

---

### 3 章

不上贤，使民不争；

bù shàng xián shǐ mǐn bù zhēng

不贵难得之货，使民不为盗；

bù guì nán dé zhī huò shǐ mǐn bù wéi dào

不见可欲，使民不乱。

bù jiàn kě yù shǐ mǐn bù luàn

是以圣人之治也：

shì yǐ shèng rén zhī zhì yě

虚其心，实其腹，

xū qí xīn shí qí fù

弱其志，强其骨。

ruò qí zhì qiáng qí gǔ

恒使民无知无欲也，

héng shǐ mǐn wú zhī wú yù yě

使夫知不敢弗为而已，

shǐ fū zhī bù gǎn fú wéi ér yǐ

则无不治矣。

zé wú bù zhì yǐ

## (3)

Not honouring wise men keeps people from  
dissension;

Not valuing rare goods keeps people from  
thievery;

Not stimulating desires keeps people from  
confusion.

Therefore, the sage governs his people by  
Emptying their minds and filling their  
stomachs,

Weakening their wills and strengthening  
their bones.

If the people abstain from intellectualism  
and desire

And are convinced not to aspire,  
Order will always prevail.

---

## 4 章

道冲，而用之有弗盈也；

dàochōng ér yòng zhī yǒu fú yíng yě

渊呵似万物之宗。

yuān ā sì wàn wù zhī zōng

挫其锐，解其纷，

cuò qí ruì jiě qí fēn

和其光，同其尘，

hé qí guāng tóng qí chén

湛呵似或存。

zhàn ā sì huòchún

吾不知谁子也，

wú bù zhī shuí zǐ yě

象帝之先。

xiàng dì zhī xiān

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## (4)

Tao is a void which never drains with use;

It is an abyss from which all things spring.

It blunts its sharpness and untangles its knots;

It conceals its brilliance and is as humble as dust;

It appears to exist like a visible void.

I know not how it was conceived;

It appears to have preceded the heavenly gods.