

中國文化講座



主編 王路江

Lectures on Chinese Culture

(I)

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北京語言大學出版社
BEIJING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

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Chinese Culture
(I)



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北京语言大学出版社
BEIJING LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

中国文化讲座 = Lectures on Chinese Culture. I: 英文 / 王路江主编.
—北京: 北京语言大学出版社, 2011. 9
ISBN 978-7-5619-3134-9

I. ①中… II. ①王… III. ①中华文化—通俗读物—英文
IV. ①K203-49

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字(2011)第190762号

部分图片由微图提供

书 名: Lectures on Chinese Culture (I)

中国文化讲座

责任印制: 陈 辉

出版发行: **北京语言大学出版社**

社 址: 北京市海淀区学院路15号 邮政编码: 100083

网 址: www.blcup.com

电 话: 发行部 010-82303650 / 3591 / 3651

编辑部 010-82303700 / 3592

读者服务部 010-82303653 / 3908

网上订购电话: 010-82303668

客户服务信箱 service@blcup.net

印 刷: 北京联兴盛业印刷股份有限公司

经 销: 全国新华书店

版 次: 2011年9月第1版 2011年9月第1次印刷

开 本: 710毫米×1000毫米 1/16 印张: 10.5

字 数: 185千字

书 号: ISBN 978-7-5619-3134-9 / H·11179

定 价: 98.00元 (含视频光盘2张)

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序

中华文化博大精深，源远流长。文学上，从先秦诸子到西汉大赋，从魏晋志人志怪小说到南北朝民歌，从唐诗宋词元曲到明清小说，产生的鸿文大作灿若星河；艺术上，从琵琶琴瑟到笔墨纸砚，从丝绸刺绣到水墨皴染，从京剧昆曲到越剧评弹，声声点点都蕴含着中华文化的精妙；思想上，从正心诚意到齐家治国，从君子不器到天下大同，从舍生取义到忧国为民，都体现出中华文化中的人伦之道；建筑上，从雄伟壮观的长城到清幽典雅的园林，从代表皇家气魄的紫禁城到散发着民间气息的平遥古城，从西安的大雁塔到拉萨的布达拉宫，无一不彰显着中华文化的魅力。

所有的文化都在潜移默化中影响着中国人的生活方式与行为理念，不管是文学艺术还是建筑精神，都体现着中国人所独有的审美取向与精神诉求。中国人讲求“天人合一”，人的一切活动应以天地四时的自然之法为最高准则，这正体现了中华文化“与自然和谐共生”的传统理念。另外，中国自古以来积极与外国进行经济、文化等各方面的交流。通过交流，不仅影响了周边国家，还通过丝绸之路将中国的丝绸、茶叶运到欧洲，与此同时传播的还有中国的思想和文化，并带回西方的先进观念和文化，使中华文化与世界文化相通。

今天，随着中国经济的飞速发展，中国与海外各国的经济、文化交流日渐紧密。国务委员刘延东在2009年外国汉语教师奖学金项目开学典礼上的致辞中讲到，“鼓励跨文化交流是中国政府的一贯主张。近年来，中国政府把人文交流提升到国家战略的层面，坚持官民并举，倡导不同文化在和而不同中取长补短，在求同存异中共同进步”。原全国人大常委会副委员长许嘉璐曾说，追求和谐与自然的中华文化是世界文化的重要一员，其传播不仅有利于世界人民了解中国，也有利于呈献世界文化的多元性。北京语言大学作为中国唯一一所汉语国际教育和对来华留学生进行汉语、中华文化教育为主要任务的国际型大学，在汉语和中国文化的海外传播中理应负有独特的担当和责任。

为使留学生突破语言水平的限制，在更深层次和更广泛内容上加深对中国文化的认知和理解，促进中外文化的相互交流，学校利用高水平英语师资的优势，于2009年9月推出首期“中国文化英文系列讲座”，至今已举办了四期，每期八至十讲。讲座内容涉及中国历史、文学、哲学、艺术、民俗、教育、经济、建筑等领



域，听众累计约2000余人次。其中的师生互动环节更体现了中外文化的交流与碰撞，深受广大留学生的欢迎。

学校从前三期讲座中精选了10讲内容，正式出版《中国文化讲座》（第一辑）。同时，我们还将不断创新、完善、充实讲座的形式和内容，努力使更多的留学生从中受益，使《中国文化讲座》成为学校留学生教育的品牌项目。

愿这本书的出版能对中华文化的海外传播起到些许裨益，为中外文化交流贡献绵薄之力。

王路仁



Foreword

Chinese culture boasts a long history, endowed with broad and profound significance. In literature, the works of great reputation and everlasting influence have been shining brightly as the stars in the galaxy: the great philosophers in the pre-Qin Dynasty (the period before the Qin Dynasty, the 21st century BC-221 BC), the vigorous *Fu*¹ in the Western Han Dynasty (202 BC-25 AD), the fantasies (the tales of mystery and the supernatural) in the Wei Kingdom (one kingdom of the Three Kingdoms Period, 220-280) and the Western and Eastern Jin Dynasties (265-420), the folk songs in the Northern and Southern Dynasties (420-589), the poems in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the lyrics in the Song Dynasty (960-1279), *Qu*² in the Yuan Dynasty (1206-1368), and novels in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and Qing Dynasty (1616-1911). In arts, the delicacy and exquisiteness of Chinese culture has been reflected in various aspects, such as *pipa* (a plucked string instrument with a fretted fingerboard), *qin* (a seven-stringed plucked instrument), and *se* (a twenty-five-stringed plucked instrument)³, writing brushes, ink sticks, paper and ink stones⁴, silk embroidery, Chinese ink and wash painting, *Cun* dyeing (a unique mode in Chinese painting), Beijing opera, *Kunqu* opera⁵, Shaoxing opera (a popular opera in Shanghai and Zhejiang Province), and *pingtan* (a popular local opera in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province). In thoughts, the human values in Chinese culture have been demonstrated in such qualities as integrity, honesty, family harmony, ambition in state-

1. A literary form, once translated as "rhyme prose", "poetic prose", or "prose poem".

2. Also known as Yuan songs, a type of verse popular in the Yuan Dynasty, including *zaju* and *sanqu*, sometimes referred to as *zaju* only.

3. All these are typical traditional Chinese stringed musical instruments.

4. These are the four essential components in Chinese calligraphy.

5. Also known as Kunju, one of the oldest forms of Chinese opera.



running, versatility in one's ability, harmonious world, dying for righteousness, and devotion to one's nation and people. In architecture, the enchantment of Chinese culture has been manifested in the majestic Great Wall, the quiet and elegant gardens and parks, the Forbidden City representative of royal imposing manner, the Ancient City of Pingyao (Shanxi Province) symbolic of ordinary style, the Greater Wild Goose Pagoda in Xi'an (Shaanxi Province), and the Potala Palace (Lhasa, Tibet).

All these cultural constructs have always been exerting their subtle and persistent impact on Chinese people's life and behavior. And Chinese literature, art, and architectural pattern, in turn, have expressed Chinese people's unique aesthetic orientation and moral quest. Chinese people advocate the philosophy of the "unity of heaven and man" so that everything in one's life shall be subject to the natural law of the heaven and the earth, an exact representation of a traditional Chinese cultural concept of "harmony and coexistence with nature". Besides, since ancient times, China has been actively conducting economic and cultural exchanges with other countries, which have not only made an immense impact on China's neighbors, but also brought China's silk and tea to Europe by way of the Silk Road⁶. Meanwhile, these exchanges have helped to both spread Chinese thoughts and culture and introduce advanced ideas and cultures from the West so that a cultural communication has been fulfilled between China and the world.

Nowadays, China's rapid economic growth

6. An ancient trade route that linked China with West Asia and Europe.



has brought about increasingly closer economic and cultural exchanges between China and other countries. In her speech at the opening ceremony of the Scholarship Program for Overseas Teachers of Chinese Language (2009), State Councilor Liu Yandong said: “The Chinese government has been consistently promoting cross-cultural exchanges. In recent years, the Chinese government has identified cultural exchanges as its national strategy and has made great efforts in this regard through both governmental and non-governmental channels. And we maintain that different cultures can achieve ‘diversity in unity’ by learning from others to address their own deficiency and that they can strive for a mutual progress by ‘seeking common grounds and shelving differences’.” Xu Jialu, former vice chairman of China’s National People’s Congress Standing Committee, once said that Chinese culture, one that treasures harmony and naturalness, is an important component among the cultures in the world. Chinese culture’s transmission, therefore, will both help other peoples to understand China and promote the cultural diversity globally. Beijing Language and Culture University, as the only higher educational institute in China specialized in Chinese language and culture education for the students studying Chinese as a foreign language, should shoulder its distinctive duty in the transmission of Chinese language and culture.

In order to help the international students overcome the linguistic barriers so as to sharpen



and broaden their recognition and understanding of Chinese culture for the ultimate better exchange between China and the world, we launched the English lectures featuring Chinese culture in September 2009. So far, the lectures have been running for four rounds, each comprising 8-10 lectures, covering such wide topics as Chinese history, literature, philosophy, art, folk customs, education, economy, architecture, etc. More than 2,000 students have attended the lectures. The lectures, the question-and-answer sections in particular, have enjoyed great popularity among the international students, who have managed to experience the exchanges between Chinese culture and other cultures.

Ten lectures from the first three rounds have been selected to be compiled and published as *Lectures on Chinese Culture (1)*. Furthermore, we will make more innovation and improvements in the lectures in both format and topics for the benefit of the wider and more diverse international students so that the *Lectures on Chinese Culture* can serve as a model program in international students' education.

It is our wish that the book can be of assistance for the transmission of Chinese culture and make its own contribution to the cultural exchange between China and the world.

Wang Lujiang

Table of Contents

- 
- 1 An Introduction to Laozi's Philosophical Ideas
老子哲学思想管窥
- 8 Chinese Culture in Architecture: From the Forbidden City
to the Courtyard
建筑中的中国文化——从紫禁城到四合院
- 27 To Enter Society or Return to Nature: Confucian and
Taoist Perspectives on Traditional Chinese Values
儒家入世思想与道家出世思想对中国传统价值观的影响
- 38 The Cultural Value of Chinese Calligraphy and Painting
中国书画的文化价值
- 57 Bamboo and Chinese Culture
中国竹文化
- 75 Introduction to *Book of Changes*
《易经》思想概述
- 91 The Idea of *Hanxu* In Traditional Chinese
Aesthetic Thought
中国传统美学思想中的含蓄观
- 105 Four Must-Follow Life Values in Traditional Chinese Culture
中国传统文化中的人生“四要”
- 125 The Twelve Symbolic Animals in Chinese Culture
中国文化中的十二生肖
- 138 On Decoding Classic Images in Chinese Literature
中国文学中的经典意象解释



An Introduction to Laozi's Philosophical Ideas

老子哲学思想管窥

Ning Yizhong 宁一中

1. General Introduction

It is said that Laozi (also spelt Lao-tze, Laotse or Lao-tzu) is named Li Er; his other names are Chong'er and Lao Dan. Laozi was born in the Spring and Autumn Period more than 2500 years ago, in Ku County of the State of Chu, which was located in the now Henan Province. He once served as a librarian of the official library of the Zhou Dynasty. Later he resigned from his office and lived a hermit life. In the 23rd year of King Zhaowang Period, he rode backwards on a black buffalo, crossing the Hangu Pass, and never coming back.



Sculpture of Laozi



It is said Laozi wrote *Dao De Jing*, which consists of 5000 words. Laozi is a great pioneering philosopher of China. *Dao De Jing*, the first complete philosophical work in Chinese history, which is composed of 81 chapters, contains rich ideas about the truth about the universe, human life and ontology. The first 37 chapters are called *Dao Jing*, and the latter 44 chapters *De Jing*.

Short as it is, this book is regarded as the classic of all classics. With profundity and richness of thoughts, it investigates into the birth of the universe, the operation of heavenly bodies, the balance of ecology and protection of the environment, the wisdom of government, the military strategy and tactics, the dialectics of fortune and misfortune, the relation between loss and gain, internal and external affairs, the way of dealing with people, the natural laws, the way of cultivating and preserving oneself for longevity, etc. It is indeed an ore where philosophers, politicians, military people, entrepreneurs, scientists, artists, every kind of people can find what they need.

It is impossible for us to delve into the vast sea of things in this book. For the time being, we shall just pick up some of the major ideas for discussion.

2. Warming-up Questions

- (1) Do you know anything about the Chinese philosophical idea “*Dao*”?
- (2) What do you think is a good government?

3. Lecture: Major Ideas in *Dao De Jing*

3.1 *Dao* and Its Implications

The original Chinese text of the first chapter is as follows:

道可道，非常道。名可名，非常名。无名，万物之始也；有名，万物之母也。故恒无欲也，以观其眇；恒有欲也，以观其所徼。两者同出，异名同谓。玄之又玄，众眇之门。

The following is an English translation:

The *Dao* that can be talked about is not the enduring and unchanging *Dao*. The name that can be named is not the enduring and unchanging name. (Conceived of as) having no name, it is the Originator of heaven and earth;

(Conceived of as) having a name, it is the Mother of all things. Always without desire we must be found, if its deep mystery we would sound; but if desire always within us be, its outer fringe is all that we shall see. Under these two aspects, it is really the same; but as development takes place, it receives the different names. Together we call them the Mystery. Where the Mystery is the deepest is the gate of all that is subtle and wonderful.

3.1.1 Major Ideas in This Chapter

This chapter tells of the writer's understanding of the origin of the universe, with the purpose of finding the very beginning and the "mother" of all things in the universe. For this purpose, Laozi coined a number of terms: *Dao*, *changDao*; *ming* (name), *changming* (the all-referential name), *wuming* (no being), *youming* (existence); *wuyu* (no desire), *youyu* (with desire); *xuan* (metaphysical, mystery), *youxuan* (deepest mystery); *miao* (the wonderful); *jiao* (the boundary), etc. By elaborating the complex relationships between these terms, he tries to expound the subtlest elements that constitute the origin of the universe.

3.1.2 Further Comments

Laozi puts forward, for the first time in human history, the concept of *Dao* as the origin of all things, and the core of his philosophical system. This concept covers so much that it provides an inexhaustible source for exploration, no matter whether it is from the angle of philosophy, or history, or politics, or literature, or aesthetics.

In the philosophical world, there exist various understandings of this concept *Dao*. Some people maintain that it means a kind of material thing, which is the generator of everything in the universe; others hold that it is a kind of spiritual thing, invisible and intangible, but it produces everything in the universe. All philosophers, however, do agree that this *Dao* is dynamic and changing, not static or rigid, and that all in the universe, including the natural world, human society, and human thoughts, operate according to the law of the *Dao*. In the first chapter of *Lao Zi*, Laozi says that *Dao* is the source of all in the universe, and that it is so rich, so profound, so subtle that it cannot be explained in language.

Let's try to summarize, very briefly, some prominent features of the *Dao*:

- (1) It is the source of the universe; it provides the original dynamic power for all. It also shows to us a picture of the chaotic state of the universe where



everything has the potential to be flourishing and prosperous.

- (2) For Laozi, this *Dao* cannot have verbal explanation, and there is a kind of awe in him for this unnamable power.
- (3) This *Dao* has both the quality that cannot be named and the quality of being or presence.
- (4) This *Dao* is the mother or the root of all, and it is very subtle.
- (5) The way of operation of the *Dao* is boundless.
- (6) It is the ontological subject, but it does not exist without specific other objects; it exists in all things in the universe.

Though it exists in all, it is not confined to the things in which it has its being, and it is not equal to the thing it exists in. *Dao* is only embodied in the thing, but it is not the thing itself. Therefore the *Dao* varies boundlessly in form. For this and its changeability, *Dao* has limitless life.

3.2 The Dialectical Thoughts in *Dao*

The original Chinese text of the second chapter is as follows:

天下皆知美之为美，斯恶已；皆知善之为善，斯不善已。故有无相生，难易相成，长短相形，高下相倾，音声相和，前后相随。是以圣人处无为之事，行不言之教，万物作焉而不辞，生而弗有，为而弗恃，功成而弗居。夫惟弗居，是以弗去。

The following is an English translation of the text:

When all the world recognizes beauty as beauty, this in itself is ugliness. When all the world recognizes good as good, this in itself is evil. Indeed, the hidden and the manifest give birth to each other. Difficult and easy complement each other. Long and short exhibit each other. High and low set measure to each other. Voice and sound harmonize each other. Back and front follow each other. Therefore, the sage manages his affairs without ado, and spreads his teaching without talking. He denies nothing to the teeming things. He rears them, but lays no claim to them. He does his work, but sets no store by it. He accomplishes his task, but does not dwell upon it. And yet it is just because he does not dwell on it that nobody can ever take it away from him.

3.2.1 Major Ideas in This Chapter

What is beauty? What is ugliness? What is the difference between a truly eloquent man and a man with a glib tongue? What is *wu* (absence) and *you* (presence)? What is being difficult or not difficult? Long and short? High and low? Forward and backward? They are not absolute terms and they are to be known only by comparison. The sages know the difference and the truth in them, so they take the right attitude in dealing with everything.

3.2.2 Further Comments

In this chapter, Laozi uses the comparative approach to elaborate his dialectical thinking, that is, things are co-existing: without A, there won't be the existence of B; and things are changing and developing. They depend on each other and complement each other. This is the law governing all the existence of things in the world, a law which reveals the dialectical thinking in modern terms. The right way of dealing with things and people should be abiding by the law of nature, which the sages do.

3.3 *Wuwei* and the Strategy of Government

In *Dao De Jing*, there are three chapters on *wuwei* and the English translation of each is as follows:

Chapter 37:

道常无为，而无不为。侯王若能守之，万物将自化。化而欲作，吾将镇之以无名之朴。无名之朴，夫亦将无欲。不欲以静，天下将自定。

The *Dao* in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it), and so there is nothing which it does not do. If princes and kings were able to maintain it, all things would of themselves be transformed by them. If this transformation became to me an object of desire, I would express the desire by the nameless simplicity. Simplicity without a name is free from all external aim. With no desire, at rest and still, all things go right as of their will.

Chapter 60:

治大国，若烹小鲜。以道莅天下，其鬼不神；非其鬼不神，其神不伤人；非其神不伤人，圣人亦不伤人。夫两不相伤，故德交归焉。

Governing a great state is like cooking small fish. Let the kingdom be



governed according to the *Dao*, and the manes of the departed will not manifest their spiritual energy. It is not that those manes have not that spiritual energy, but it will not be employed to hurt men. It is not that it could not hurt men, but neither does the ruling sage hurt them. When these two do not injuriously affect each other, their good influences converge in the virtue (of the *Dao*).

Chapter 72:

民不畏威，则大威至。无狎其所居，无厌其所生。夫唯不厌，是以不厌。是以圣人自知不自见。自爱不自贵。故去彼取此。

When the people do not fear what they ought to fear, that which is their great dread will come on them. Let them not thoughtlessly indulge themselves in their ordinary life; let them not act as if weary of what that life depends on. It is by avoiding such indulgence that such weariness does not arise. Therefore the sage knows (these things) of himself, but does not parade (his knowledge); loves, but does not (appear to set a) value on, himself. And thus he puts the latter alternative away and makes choice of the former.

3.4 Comments

Laozi maintains that the universe is composed of *wu* (absence, void), therefore the government should be in accordance with that law, for that is the way to achieve ultimate government. *Wuwei* is not doing nothing. Politically, *wuwei* means not to disturb the peace of the people, but let them put their own initials into full play. It is not to enact hard restrictions on them, but to let them develop themselves and improve themselves in a natural way, so that people can enjoy peace, prosperity, and the society can be peaceful and harmonious.

So *wuwei* means not to do things against the natural laws, not to violate social rules and moral codes, not to abuse power against people's will or to harm people. Let everything go naturally. This is the political wisdom implied in *wuwei*.

Follow-up Questions

1. Do you see any difference between the *Dao* and Logos or God in the West?
2. Do you have any comments on the *Dao*?
3. How does Laozi demonstrate the dialectical ideas in his concrete examples?
4. Is it possible to excise *wuwei* in the modern society? What is your opinion of a right way of government?

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