TRAD101
Languages & Cultures of East Asia

Daoism/Taoism I:
Laozi & Dao De Jing
Life of Laozi

- Born about 571BC
- About 20 years older than Confucius
- Family Name = Li;
  Given name = Er
  Adult alias = Dan
- Head of the imperial library of the Eastern Zhou Dynasty
Life of Laozi

- The chapter Bibliographies of Laozi, Zhuangzi, Shenzi, & Hanfeizi in The Records of the Historian (Shiji by Sima Qian) records that:

- "Laozi was a native of Qurenli of the town of Lixiang, in Ku County, in the State of Chu (i.e., to the east of Luyi, present-day Henan province)."
Where Laozi was from...
Historical Background

- The spring & Autumn Period (770-476BC)
- Zhou Dynasty about to collapse
- Wars between competing feudal states
- The same historical period as Confucius
China During the Warring States Period & Life of Laozi
Laozi & Confucius

Confucius consulted Laozi

Painting Tablet in Han Dynasty
(206 BC-220 AD)

Painting in Ming Dynasty
(1368 - 1644 AD)
When Confucius went to Zhou & consulted Laozi about rites, Laozi said,

"As for the person you mentioned, when his body & bones have dissipated, only his words continue to exist. A gentleman travels in a carriage when he is successful and walks downheartedly when he is not. I've heard that a good merchant hides everything and seems as if he has nothing, and a virtuous gentleman appears slow-witted. Get rid of your overbearing airs and excessive desires, of your posturing attitude and greed. They will do no good to you, and I tell you that just as it is."
Confucius left & said to his disciples,

"As for birds, I know they are able to fly; as for fish, I know they are able to swim; as for beasts, I know they are able to run. What runs can be stopped with nets, what swims can be stopped with fishing lines, & what flies can be stopped with arrows. As for dragons, I have no idea of their ascending to heaven by wind and clouds. Today I met Laozi, who's just like a dragon!"
Having inhabited Zhou for long & seeing its decline, Laozi set off westward & arrived at the Pass (Hanyuguan). Yin Xi, the official in charge of the pass, said, "Since you are going to live in seclusion, please write a book for me." So Laozi wrote a book of two parts, explaining Dao & its virtue in 5,000 words. Then he left, and it is unknown where he went.
Zhuangzi wrote *The Book of Nanhua* to elaborate on Dao and its virtue.

Zhuangzi’s significance to Daoist philosophy
-- Mencius in Confucianism
One day about sunset, Zhuangzi dozed off and dreamed that he turned into a butterfly. He flapped his wings and sure enough he was a butterfly... What a joyful feeling as he fluttered about, he completely forgot that he was Zhuangzi.

Soon though, he realized that that proud butterfly was really Zhuangzi who dreamed he was a butterfly, or was it a butterfly who dreamed he was Zhuangzi!

Maybe Zhuangzi was the butterfly, and maybe the butterfly was Zhungzi? This is what is meant by the "transformation of things."

http://www.chinapage.com/story/butterfly.html
One day Zhuangzi and Huizi are strolling on Bridge Hao.

**Zhuangzi**: "Look how happy the fish are just swimming around in the river."

**Huizi**: "How do you know they are happy? You are not a fish."

**Zhuangzi**: "And you are not me. How do you know I don't know the fish are happy?"

**Huizi**: "Of course I'm not you, and I don't know what you think; But I do know that you're not a fish, and so you couldn't possibly know the fish are happy."

**Zhuangzi**: "Look, when you asked me how I knew the fish were happy, you already knew that I knew the fish were happy. I knew it from my feelings standing on this bridge.

http://www.chinapage.com/story/fish.html
Basic Concepts

1. Dao/Tao (the way) 道
2. De (the power) 德
3. Yin Yang 阴阳
4. Harmony & Balance 和谐 & 平衡
5. Works without working 无为
6. Refusal to be foremost of all things under heaven / stay backward 不为天下先/ 处后
Basic Concepts

7. Clean & Peaceful Quietness 清静
8. Stay in the low – humbleness 居下
9. Softness 柔弱
Two related clips

- Eckhart Tolle | not reacting to content
  http://youtube.com/watch?v=UPg9DnMP2D4

- Adyashanti | Wisdom of Do Nothing
  http://youtube.com/watch?v=ELTiD7L_nU8
1. Dao/Tao ‘path’ 道

- mentioned 74 times in 37 chapters
- ‘The Tao that can be told of is not an Unvarying Tao; The names that can be named are not unvarying names.’
  
  -- Chapter One
1. Dao/Tao ‘path’ 道

- For the Tao is a thing impalpable, incommensurable. Incommensurable, impalpable yet latent in it are forms; incommensurable yet within it are entities. Shadowy it is & dim; yet within it there is a force, a force that though rarefied is none the less efficacious.

---- Chapter 21
There is a whole formed & born earlier than Heaven & Earth. Silent & empty, it relies on nothing, moving around forever. We may regard it as the mother of all things. I do not know its name, so I name it as Dao, & further name it as the Great. The Great is moving forward without stopping, extending to the remotest distance, & then returning to where it was. That is why I say Dao is Great, Heaven is Great, Earth is Great, & Man is Great. There are four things that are Great, of them Man is one. Man takes Earth as his model, Earth takes heaven as its model, Heaven takes Dao as its model, & Dao takes Spontaneity as its model. -- Chapter 25
1. Dao/Tao ‘path’ 道

- Can be felt & experienced by heart & soul
- Beyond any concrete physical descriptions
- The essence of all things
- An abstract absoluteness
- The origin of all beings
- A metaphysical noumenon causing the physical world
- For though all creatures under heaven are the products of Being, Being itself is the product of Not-being. -- Chapter 40
2. De (the power)

- Mentioned 41 times in 16 chapters
- It is Tao’s power through which people have the possibility to achieve the Tao.
  
  Tao gave them birth; the ‘power’ of Tao reared them, shaped them according to their kinds, perfected them, giving to each its strength. ---Chapter 51
2. De (the power)

- The highest power vs. the inferior power
- The man of highest “power” does not reveal himself as a possessor of “power”; therefore he keeps his “power”. The man of inferior “power” cannot rid it of the appearance of “power”; therefore he is in truth without “power”. The man of highest “power” neither acts[1] nor will anybody who so regards him;[2] the man of inferior “power” both acts & is so regarded.[3] The man of highest humanity, though he acts, is not so regarded; whereas a man of even the highest morality both acts & is so regarded.

--- Chapter 38

[1] Does not act separately & particularly but only applies the power in a general way.[2] Regards him as a possessor of power.[3] i.e. is regarded as a possessor of De.
2. De (the power)

- Highest De: the mysterious power, spontaneous, simple & pure as children
- Inferior De: deliberate artifice as benevolence, justice, courtesy, etc. → hypocrisy
- Highest De → close to Tao
Therefore as Tao bore them & the “power” of Tao reared them, made them grow, fostered them, harbored them, brewed for them, so you (the sage) must rear them, but not lay claim to them; control them, but never lean upon them; be chief among them, but not manage them. This is called the mysterious power.

---Chapter 51
2. De (the power)

- Apply it to yourself & by its power you will be freed from dross. Apply it to your household & your household shall thereby have abundance. Apply it to the village, & the village will be made secure. Apply it to the kingdom, & the kingdom shall thereby be made to flourish. Apply it to an empire, & the empire shall thereby be extended.

--- Chapter 54
3. Yin Yang

- **Yin**: the feminine, negative principle; **Yang**: masculine & positive.

- In this Taoist symbol, they occupy an equal half of a circle & complement each other rather than oppose. Each part contains the essence of the other in its deepest recess. The dividing line of them is curved, representing the whole circle staying in an endless cycling process. The opposites are melting into an eternal wholeness, for each turns continually into its opposite by exchanging places.

- [http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOaw3iqfTJM](http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=YOaw3iqfTJM)
3. Yin Yang

- Because the Yin & Yang are equally present, the circle is calm & quiet, although an endless exchanging is running inside. The Yin & Yang are a model that the faithful follow, an aid that allows each person to contemplate the state of his or her life.

- In such a state, “Life does not move onward & upward toward a fixed pinnacle or pole. It bends back upon itself to come, full circle, to the realization that all is one & all is well.”
4. Harmony & Balance

- Perfection = absolute harmony following *Dao De Jing*
- **Contradictions:** opposite but interdependent:
  - being & not-being, life & death, long & short, high & low, more & less, big & small, front & back, far & near, light & heavy, quiet & restless, hard & easy, black & white, female & male, positive & negative, same & different, true & false, beautiful & ugly, good & bad, strong & weak, fortune & misfortune, glory & ignominy, wise & foolish, good luck & ill luck, right & wrong, expensive & cheap, order & disorder, hard & soft, success & failure, clean & dirty
4. Harmony & Balance

- Contradictions complement each other:
  
- *Being and Not-being grow out of one another; difficult and easy complete one another. Long and short test one another; pitch and mode give harmony to one another. Front and back give sequence to one another.* ---

  Chapter 2
4. Harmony & Balance

The true perfection looks imperfect: The way (Tao) out into the light often looks dark, the way that goes ahead often looks as if it went back. The way that is least hilly often looks as if it went up and down, the power (De) that is really loftiest looks like an abyss, what is sheerest white looks blurred. The power that is most sufficing looks inadequate, the power that stands firmest looks flimsy. What is in its natural, pure state looks faded; the largest square has no corners, the greatest vessel takes the longest to finish, great music has the faintest notes, the Great Form is without shape. --- Chapter 41

4. Harmony & Balance

- What is most straight seems crooked; the greatest skill seems like clumsiness, the greatest eloquence like stuttering. --- Chapter 45
- The absolute good & bad, hard & soft do not exist.
- The human perfection is just based on those elements that people consider as imperfect—the soft, low, simple, weak, quiet and so on. In Tao the only motion is returning; the only useful quality, weakness. --Chapter 40
- Lao Zi believes that standing on the negative might be a shortcut to the positive, since the negative effects work much more efficiently than the positive ones.
4. Harmony & Balance

- Why the weakness?
  - the positive elements only exist in contrast to their opposites
  - It is because every one under heaven recognizes beauty as beauty, that the idea of ugliness exists. And equally if every one recognized virtue as virtue, this would merely create fresh conceptions of wickedness.
    --- Chapter 2

- the perfection attained should begin from imperfection.
  - To remain whole, be twisted! To become straight, let yourself be bent. To become full, be hollow. Be tattered, that you may be renewed. Those that have little, may get more, those that have much, are but perplexed.
    ---Chapter 22
4. Harmony & Balance

- Perfection is filled with contradictions. It is harmonious at the same when it is contradictory.
- Tao unifies all tensional opposites into an eternal whole:
- *As for the things that from of old have understood the Whole—the sky through such understanding remains limpid, earth remains steady, the spirits keep their holiness, the abyss is replenished, the ten thousand creatures bear their kind, barons and princes direct their people. It is the Whole that causes it.* — Chapter 39
Dao

- http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=idRjBm46Mik