

The Tao (v. Đạo) of the Universe

Lao Tzu (v. Lão Tử)

The Introduction

Of all the scriptures of ancient East Asian philosophies, the *Tao Te Ching* (v. Đạo Đức Kinh), the *Nan Hua Ching* (v. Nam Hoa Kinh), and the “Ten Wings” of the *Chou Yi Ching* (v. Chu Dịch Kinh) contain some original and philosophically significant doctrines of reality.

These texts take the “Tao” (v. Đạo [Way]) as their theoretically hegemonic concept and offer two doctrines of reality, the Lao-Chuangian (v. Lão-Trangian) vision and the Yiian (v. Dịchian) vision, which are philosophically similar in many respects. Their philosophical similarities suggest a historical possibility that they must have been theoretically and culturally related. More researches are needed to determine their philosophical and cultural relationships. What are the similarities and differences between the two visions? Did the Lao-Chuangian vision of the Tao originate from the Yiian (v. Dịchian) vision or the other way around? Did they both originate from one common philosophical tradition?

Concerning modern studies on the origins of the *Chou Yi Ching* (v. Chu Dịch Kinh), see Iulian K. Shchutskii, *Researches on the I Ching* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1979).

[01] The Tao ([v. Đạo-ccp] Way) that can be told
of is not the eternal Tao [v. Đạo-ccp];
The name that can be named is not the eternal
name.

The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the mother of all things [10,000
Species-ccp].

Therefore let there always be non-being so we may
see their subtlety,

And let there always be being so we may see their
outcome.

The two are the same,
But after they are produced, they have different
names.

They both may be called deep and profound
(*hsüan* [v. huyền-ccp]).

Deeper and more profound,

[Source: “The Laoian Ontology of the Tao (v. Đạo).” Taken from Lao Tzu, *The Tao Te Ching*, printed in Wing-Tsit Chan, trans., *The Way of Lao Tzu: A Translation of the Tao-te ching* (New York: Bobbs-Merrill, 1963), chapters cited, pp. 97, 124, 137, 144, 160, 162, 166, 170, 173–74, 190, 210.]

The door of all subtleties!

[TTC:1 (which refers to *The Tao Te Ching* [v. *Đạo Đức Kinh*], chapter 1)]

[02] We look at it and do not see it;

Its name is The Invisible.

We listen to it and do not hear it;

Its name is The Inaudible.

We touch it and do not find it;

Its name is The Subtle (formless).

These three cannot be further inquired into,
and hence merge into one.

Going up high, it is not bright, and coming down
low, it is not dark.

Infinite and boundless, it cannot be given any
name;

It reverts to nothingness.

This is called shape without shape,

Form (*hsiang* [v. *tượng-ccp*]) without object.

It is the Vague and Elusive.

Meet it and you will not see its head.

Follow it and you will not see its back.

Hold on to the Tao of old in order to master the
things of the present.

From this one may know the primeval beginning
[of the universe].

This is called the bond of [the-ccp] Tao.

[TTC:14]

[03] The all-embracing quality of the great virtue
(*te* [v. *đức-ccp*]) follows alone from the Tao
[v. *Đạo-ccp*].

The thing that is called Tao is eluding and vague.
Vague and eluding, there is in it the form [v.
tượng-ccp].

Eluding and vague, in it are things [v. *vật-ccp*].

Deep and obscure, in it is the essence [v. *tính-ccp*].

The essence is very real; in it are evidences [v.
tín-ccp].

From the time of old until now, its name
(manifestations) ever remains,

By which we may see the beginning of all things.

How do I know that the beginnings of all things
are so?

Through this (Tao).

[TTC:21]

[04] There was something [wu (v. *vật-ccp*)]
undifferentiated and yet complete,

Which existed before heaven and earth.

Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing and
does not change.

It operates everywhere and is free from danger.

It may be considered the mother of the universe.

I do not know its name; it is called [the] Tao.

If forced to give it a name, I shall call it Great.

Now being great means functioning everywhere.

Functioning everywhere means far-reaching.

Being far-reaching means returning to the original
point.

Therefore [the] Tao is great.

Heaven is great.

Earth is great.

And the king is also great.

There are four great things in the universe, and
the king is one of them.

Man models himself after Earth.

Earth models itself after Heaven.

Heaven models itself after [the] Tao.

And [the] Tao models itself after Nature [v. *tự
nhiên* (that which is natural)-ccp].

[TTC:25]

[05] The Great Tao flows everywhere.

It may go left or right.

All things depend on it for life, and it does not
turn away from them.

It accomplishes its task, but does not claim credit
for it.

It clothes and feeds all things but does not claim
to be master over them.

Always without desires, it may be called The
Small.

All things come to it and it does not master them;
it may be called The Great.

Therefore (the sage) never strive himself for the great, and thereby the great is achieved.

[TTC:34]

[06] We look at [the] Tao; it is imperceptible.

We listen to it; it is inaudible.

We use it; it is inexhaustible.

[TTC:35]

[07] [The] Tao invariably takes no action, and yet there is nothing left undone.

If kings and barons can keep it, all things will transform spontaneously.

If, after transformation, they should desire to be active,

I would restrain them with simplicity, which has no name.

Simplicity, which has no name, is free of desires.

Being free of desires, it is tranquil.

And the world will be at peace of its own accord.

[TTC:37]

[08] Of old those that obtained the One:

Heaven obtained the One and became clear.

Earth obtained the One and became tranquil.

The spiritual beings obtained the One and became divine.

The valley obtained the One and became full.

The myriad things obtained the One and lived and grew.

Kings and barons obtained the One and became rulers of the empire.

What made them so is the One.

[TTC:39]

[09] Reversion is the action of [the] Tao.

Weakness is the function of [the] Tao.

All things in the world come from being.

And being comes from non-being.

[TTC:40]

[10] When the highest type of men hear [the] Tao

They diligently practice it.

When the average type of men hear [the] Tao,

They half believe in it.

When the lowest type of men hear [the] Tao,

They laugh heartily at it.

If they did not laugh at it, it would not be [the] Tao.

Therefore there is the established saying:

The Tao which is bright appears to be dark.

The Tao which goes forward appears to fall backward.

The Tao which is level appears uneven. . . .

[The] Tao is hidden and nameless.

Yet it is [the] Tao alone that skillfully provides for all and bring them to perfection.

[TTC:41]

[11] [The] Tao produces them (the ten thousand things).

Virtue [Te (v. Đức)-ccp] fosters them.

Matter gives them physical form.

The circumstances and tendencies complete them.

Therefore the ten thousand things esteem [the] Tao and honor virtue.

[The] Tao is esteemed and virtue [te (v. đức)-ccp] is honored without anyone's order.

They always come spontaneously.

Therefore [the] Tao produces them and virtue fosters them.

They rear them and develop them.

They give them security and give them peace.

They nurture them and protect them.

([The] Tao) produces them but does not take possession of them.

It acts, but does not rely on its own ability.

It leads them but does not master them.

This is called profound and secret virtue [hsüan te (v. huyền đức)-ccp].

[TTC:51]

[12] [The] Tao is the storehouse of all things.

It is the good man's treasure and the bad man's refuge.

[TTC:62]