

Act and you ruin it.
Grasp and you lose it.
Therefore the Sage

Does not act

Wu mei

And so does not ruin

Ku wu pai

Does not grasp

And so does not lose.

無爲

故無敗

上善若水

Shang shan jo shui
Best to be like water,
Which benefits the ten thousand things
And does not contend.
It pools where humans disdain to dwell,
Close to the TAO.

Live in a good place.
Keep your mind deep.
Treat others well.
Stand by your word.
Make fair rules.
Do the right thing.
Work when it's time.

Only do not contend,
And you will not go wrong.

微妙玄通

The ancients who followed TAO:
Dark, wondrous, profound, penetrating,
Wei, miao, hsüan, t'ung,

Deep beyond knowing.

Because they cannot be known,
They can only be described.

Cautious,
Like crossing a winter stream.

Hesitant,
Like respecting one's neighbors.

Polite,
Like a guest.

Yielding,
Like ice about to melt.

Blank,
Like uncarved wood.

Open,
Like a valley.

Mixing freely,
Like muddy water.

Calm the muddy water,
It becomes clear.

Move the inert,
It comes to life.

Those who sustain TAO
Do not wish to be full.

Because they do not wish to be full
They can fade away
Without further effort.

曲
則
全

Ch'ü tse ch'üan

Crippled becomes whole,
Crooked becomes straight,
Hollow becomes full,
Worn becomes new,
Little becomes more,
Much becomes delision.

Therefore Sages cling to the One
 And take care of this world;
 Do not display themselves
 And therefore shine;
 Do not assert themselves
 And therefore stand out;
 Do not praise themselves
 And therefore succeed;
 Are not complacent
 And therefore endure;
 Do not contend
 And therefore no one under heaven
 Can contend with them.

The old saying
 Crippled becomes whole
 Is not empty words.

It becomes whole and returns.

Trying to control the world?
I see you won't succeed.

T'ien hchia shen ch'i
The world is a spiritual vessel
And cannot be controlled.

Those who control, fail.
Those who grasp, lose.

Some go forth, some are led,
Some weep, some blow flutes,
Some become strong, some superfluous,
Some oppress, some are destroyed.

Therefore the Sage
Casts off extremes,
Casts off excess,
Casts off extravagance.

天下神器

執大象

Chih ta hsiang
Hold the great elephant
—The great image—
And the world moves.
Moves without danger
In safety and peace.

Music and sweets
Make passing guests pause,
But the TAO emerges
Flavorless and bland.

Look— You won't see it.
Listen— You won't hear it.
Use it— You will never use it up.

The great scholar hearing the TAO
 Tries to practice it.
 The middling scholar hearing the TAO,
 Sometimes has it, sometimes not.
 The lesser scholar hearing the TAO
 Has a good laugh.
 Without that laughter
 It wouldn't be TAO.

Therefore, these sayings:

The bright road seems dark,
 The road forward seems to retreat,
 The level road seems rough.

Great TE seems hollow.
 Great purity seems sullied.
 Pervasive TE seems deficient.
 Established TE seems furtive.
 Simple truths seem to change.

The great square has no corners.
 The great vessel is finished late.
 The great sound is scarcely voiced.
 The great image has no form.

TAO hides, no name.
Tao yin wu ming

Yet TAO alone gets things done.

道隱無名

Humans are born soft and weak.
They die stiff and strong.
The ten thousand plants and trees
Are born soft and tender,
And die withered and sere.

The stiff and strong
 Are Death's companions
The soft and weak
 Are Life's companions.

Therefore,
 The strongest armies do not conquer,
 The greatest trees are cut down.

The strong and great sink down.
The soft and weak rise up.
Jou jo ch'u shang

柔弱處上

Nothing in the world is soft and weak as water.
But when attacking the hard and strong
Nothing can conquer so easily.

Weak overcomes strong,
Soft overcomes hard.

Everyone knows this,
No one attains it.

正言若反