

= Laozi =

Laozi (also Lao @-@ Tzu / ?la??dz? / or Lao @-@ Tze , Chinese : ?? ; pinyin : L?oz? , lit . " Old Master ") was an ancient Chinese philosopher and writer . He is known as the reputed author of the Tao Te Ching and the founder of philosophical Taoism , and as a deity in religious Taoism and traditional Chinese religions . Although a legendary figure , he is usually dated to around the 6th century BC and reckoned a contemporary of Confucius , but some historians contend that he actually lived during the Warring States period of the 5th or 4th century BC . A central figure in Chinese culture , Laozi is claimed by both the emperors of the Tang dynasty and modern people of the Li surname as a founder of their lineage . Laozi 's work has been embraced by various anti @-@ authoritarian movements as well as Chinese Legalism .

= = Names = =

In traditional accounts , Laozi 's personal name is usually given as Li Er (?? , Old * R?? N?? , Mod . L? ?r) and his courtesy name as Boyang (trad . ?? , simp . ?? , Old * P?rak @-@ lang , Mod . Bóyáng) . A prominent posthumous name was Li Dan (?? , L? D?n) .

Laozi itself is an honorific title : ? (Old * r?u? , " old , venerable ") and ? (Old * ts? ? , " master ") . It is usually pronounced / ?la??dz? / in English . It has been romanized numerous ways , sometimes leading to confusion . The most common present form is Laozi or L?oz? , based on the Hanyu Pinyin system adopted by Mainland China in 1958 and Taiwan in 2009 . During the 20th century , Lao @-@ tzu was more common , based on the formerly prevalent Wade ? Giles system . In the 19th century , the title was usually romanized as Lao @-@ tse . Other forms include the variants Lao @-@ tze and Lao @-@ tsu .

As a religious figure , he is worshipped under the name " Supreme Old Lord " (????? , Tàishàng L?oj?n) and as one of the " Three Pure Ones " . During the Tang , he was granted the title " Supremely Mysterious and Primordial Emperor " (??????? , Táish?ng Xu?nyuán Huángdì) .

= = Historical views = =

In the mid @-@ twentieth century , a consensus emerged among scholars that the historicity of the person known as Laozi is doubtful and that the Tao Te Ching was " a compilation of Taoist sayings by many hands . " Alan Watts urged more caution , holding that this view was part of an academic fashion for skepticism about historical spiritual and religious figures and stating that not enough would be known for years ? or possibly ever ? to make a firm judgment .

The earliest certain reference to the present figure of Laozi is found in the 1st @-@ century BCE Records of the Grand Historian collected by the historian Sima Qian from earlier accounts . In one account , Laozi was said to be a contemporary of Confucius during the 6th or 5th century BCE . His surname was Li and his personal name was Er or Dan . He was an official in the imperial archives and wrote a book in two parts before departing to the west . In another , Laozi was a different contemporary of Confucius titled Lao Laizi (???) and wrote a book in 15 parts . In a third , he was the court astrologer Lao Dan who lived during the 4th @-@ century BCE reign of Duke Xian of Qin . The oldest text of the Tao Te Ching so far recovered was written on bamboo slips and dates to the late 4th century BCE .

According to traditional accounts , Laozi was a scholar who worked as the Keeper of the Archives for the royal court of Zhou . This reportedly allowed him broad access to the works of the Yellow Emperor and other classics of the time . The stories assert that Laozi never opened a formal school but nonetheless attracted a large number of students and loyal disciples . There are many variations of a story retelling his encounter with Confucius , most famously in the Zhuangzi .

He was sometimes held to have come from the village of Chu Jen in Chu . In accounts where Laozi married , he was said to have had a son named Zong who became a celebrated soldier . Many clans of the Li family trace their descent to Laozi , including the emperors of the Tang dynasty . This family was known as the Longxi Li lineage (?????) . According to the Simpkinses , while many (if

not all) of these lineages are questionable , they provide a testament to Laozi 's impact on Chinese culture .

The third story in Sima Qian states that Laozi grew weary of the moral decay of life in Chengzhou and noted the kingdom 's decline . He ventured west to live as a hermit in the unsettled frontier at the age of 80 . At the western gate of the city (or kingdom) , he was recognized by the guard Yinxi . The sentry asked the old master to record his wisdom for the good of the country before he would be permitted to pass . The text Laozi wrote was said to be the Tao Te Ching , although the present version of the text includes additions from later periods . In some versions of the tale , the sentry was so touched by the work that he became a disciple and left with Laozi , never to be seen again . In others , the " Old Master " journeyed all the way to India and was the teacher of Siddhartha Gautama , the Buddha . Others claim he was the Buddha himself .

A seventh @-@ century work , the Sandong Zhunang (" Pearly Bag of the Three Caverns ") , embellished the relationship between Laozi and Yinxi . Laozi pretended to be a farmer when reaching the western gate , but was recognized by Yinxi , who asked to be taught by the great master . Laozi was not satisfied by simply being noticed by the guard and demanded an explanation . Yinxi expressed his deep desire to find the Tao and explained that his long study of astrology allowed him to recognize Laozi 's approach . Yinxi was accepted by Laozi as a disciple . This is considered an exemplary interaction between Daoist master and disciple , reflecting the testing a seeker must undergo before being accepted . A would @-@ be adherent is expected to prove his determination and talent , clearly expressing his wishes and showing that he had made progress on his own towards realizing the Tao .

The Pearly Bag of the Three Caverns continues the parallel of an adherent 's quest . Yinxi received his ordination when Laozi transmitted the Daodejing , along with other texts and precepts , just as Taoist adherents receive a number of methods , teachings and scriptures at ordination . This is only an initial ordination and Yinxi still needed an additional period to perfect his virtue , thus Laozi gave him three years to perfect his Dao . Yinxi gave himself over to a full @-@ time devotional life . After the appointed time , Yinxi again demonstrates determination and perfect trust , sending out a black sheep to market as the agreed sign . He eventually meets again with Laozi , who announces that Yinxi 's immortal name is listed in the heavens and calls down a heavenly procession to clothe Yinxi in the garb of immortals . The story continues that Laozi bestowed a number of titles upon Yinxi and took him on a journey throughout the universe , even into the nine heavens . After this fantastic journey , the two sages set out to western lands of the barbarians . The training period , reuniting and travels represent the attainment of the highest religious rank in medieval Taoism called " Preceptor of the Three Caverns " . In this legend , Laozi is the perfect Daoist master and Yinxi is the ideal Taoist student . Laozi is presented as the Tao personified , giving his teaching to humanity for their salvation . Yinxi follows the formal sequence of preparation , testing , training and attainment .

The story of Laozi has taken on strong religious overtones since the Han dynasty . As Taoism took root , Laozi was worshipped as a god . Belief in the revelation of the Tao from the divine Laozi resulted in the formation of the Way of the Celestial Master , the first organized religious Taoist sect . In later mature Taoist tradition , Laozi came to be seen as a personification of the Tao . He is said to have undergone numerous " transformations " and taken on various guises in various incarnations throughout history to initiate the faithful in the Way . Religious Taoism often holds that the " Old Master " did not disappear after writing the Tao Te Ching but rather spent his life traveling and revealing the Tao .

Taoist myths state that Laozi was conceived when his mother gazed upon a falling star . He supposedly remained in her womb for 62 years before being born while his mother was leaning against a plum tree . (The Chinese surname Li shares its character with " plum " .) Laozi was said to have emerged as a grown man with a full grey beard and long earlobes , both symbols of wisdom and long life . Other myths claim that he was reborn 13 times after his first life during the days of Fuxi . In his last incarnation as Laozi , he lived nine hundred and ninety years and spent his life traveling to reveal the Tao .

= = Tao Te Ching = =

Laozi is traditionally regarded as the author of the Daodejing (Tao Te Ching) , though the identity of its author (s) and / or compiler (s) has been debated throughout history . It is one of the most significant treatises in Chinese cosmogony . As with most other ancient Chinese philosophers , Laozi often explains his ideas by way of paradox , analogy , appropriation of ancient sayings , repetition , symmetry , rhyme , and rhythm . In fact , the whole book can be read as an analogy ? the ruler is the awareness , or self , in meditation and the myriad creatures or empire is the experience of the body , senses and desires .

The Tao Te Ching , often called simply Laozi after its reputed author , describes the Dao (or Tao) as the source and ideal of all existence : it is unseen , but not transcendent , immensely powerful yet supremely humble , being the root of all things . People have desires and free will (and thus are able to alter their own nature) . Many act " unnaturally " , upsetting the natural balance of the Dao . The Daodejing intends to lead students to a " return " to their natural state , in harmony with Dao . Language and conventional wisdom are critically assessed . Taoism views them as inherently biased and artificial , widely using paradoxes to sharpen the point .

Livia Kohn provides an example of how Laozi encouraged a change in approach , or return to " nature " , rather than action . Technology may bring about a false sense of progress . The answer provided by Laozi is not the rejection of technology , but instead seeking the calm state of wu wei , free from desires . This relates to many statements by Laozi encouraging rulers to keep their people in " ignorance " , or " simple @-@ minded " . Some scholars insist this explanation ignores the religious context , and others question it as an apologetic of the philosophical coherence of the text . It would not be unusual political advice if Laozi literally intended to tell rulers to keep their people ignorant . However , some terms in the text , such as " valley spirit " (gushen) and " soul " (po) , bear a metaphysical context and cannot be easily reconciled with a purely ethical reading of the work .

Wu wei (??) , literally " non @-@ action " or " not acting " , is a central concept of the Daodejing . The concept of wu wei is multifaceted , and reflected in the words ' multiple meanings , even in English translation ; it can mean " not doing anything " , " not forcing " , " not acting " in the theatrical sense , " creating nothingness " , " acting spontaneously " , and " flowing with the moment " .

It is a concept used to explain ziran (??) , or harmony with the Dao . It includes the concepts that value distinctions are ideological and seeing ambition of all sorts as originating from the same source . Laozi used the term broadly with simplicity and humility as key virtues , often in contrast to selfish action . On a political level , it means avoiding such circumstances as war , harsh laws and heavy taxes . Some Taoists see a connection between wu wei and esoteric practices , such as zuowang " sitting in oblivion " (emptying the mind of bodily awareness and thought) found in the Zhuangzi .

Some of Laozi 's famous sayings include :

- " When goodness is lost , it is replaced by morality . "
- " Without Darkness , there can be no Light . "
- " The usefulness of a pot comes from its emptiness . "
- " The best people are like water , which benefits all things and does not compete with them . It stays in lowly places that others reject . This is why it is so similar to the Way . "
- " When people see some things as beautiful , other things become ugly . When people see some things as good , other things become bad . "
- " Try to change it and you will ruin it . Try to hold it and you will lose it . "
- " Those who know do not say . Those who say do not know . "
- " When you realize there is nothing lacking , the whole world belongs to you . "
- " Nature does not hurry , yet everything is accomplished . "
- " A good traveler has no fixed plans , and is not intent on arriving . "
- " Music in the soul can be heard by the universe . "
- " A journey of a thousand miles starts under one 's feet . "
- " The more that laws and regulations are given prominence , the more thieves and robbers there will be . "

== Taoism ==

Laozi is traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism , intimately connected with the Daodejing and " primordial " (or " original ") Taoism . Popular (" religious ") Taoism typically presents the Jade Emperor as the official head deity . Intellectual (" elite ") Taoists , such as the Celestial Masters sect , usually present Laozi (Laojun , " Lord Lao ") and the Three Pure Ones at the top of the pantheon of deities .

== Influence ==

Potential officials throughout Chinese history drew on the authority of non @-@ Confucian sages , especially Laozi and Zhuangzi , to deny serving any ruler at any time . Zhuangzi , Laozi 's most famous follower in traditional accounts , had a great deal of influence on Chinese literati and culture .

Political theorists influenced by Laozi have advocated humility in leadership and a restrained approach to statecraft , either for ethical and pacifist reasons , or for tactical ends . In a different context , various anti @-@ authoritarian movements have embraced the Laozi teachings on the power of the weak .

Left @-@ libertarians have been highly influenced by Laozi . In his 1937 book Nationalism and Culture , the anarcho @-@ syndicalist writer and activist Rudolf Rocker praised Laozi 's " gentle wisdom " and understanding of the opposition between political power and the cultural activities of the people and community . In his 1910 article for the Encyclopedia Britannica , Peter Kropotkin also noted that Laozi was among the earliest exponents of essentially anarchist concepts . More recently , anarchists such as John P. Clark and Ursula K. Le Guin have written about the conjunction between anarchism and Taoism in various ways , highlighting the teachings of Laozi in particular . In her rendition of the Tao Te Ching , Le Guin writes that Laozi " does not see political power as magic . He sees rightful power as earned and wrongful power as usurped ... He sees sacrifice of self or others as a corruption of power , and power as available to anyone who follows the Way . No wonder anarchists and Taoists make good friends . "

The right @-@ libertarian economist Murray Rothbard suggested that Laozi was the first libertarian , likening Laozi 's ideas on government to F.A. Hayek 's theory of spontaneous order . James A. Dorn agreed , writing that Laozi , like many 18th century liberals , " argued that minimizing the role of government and letting individuals develop spontaneously would best achieve social and economic harmony . " Similarly , the Cato Institute 's David Boaz includes passages from the Daodejing in his 1997 book The Libertarian Reader . Philosopher Roderick Long , however , argues that libertarian themes in Taoist thought are actually borrowed from earlier Confucian writers .

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