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A COMPARISON OF TAO IN TAO TEH CHING

AND THE WORD IN THE BIBLE

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Sacred Theology

by

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A COMPARISON OF TAO AND THE WORD

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION.	1
Reasons for Making a Comparison	1
The Chief Points of Comparison.	3
The Sources	6
II. <u>TAO TEH CHING</u> AND ITS AUTHOR.	9
Authorship.	9
A Brief Description of <u>Tao Teh Ching</u>	13
The Relationship Between the Book and Its Author to Taoism.	15
III. THE PRINCIPLE OF TAO IN <u>TAO TEH CHING</u>	17
The Meaning of Tao.	17
The Essence of the Tao.	23
The Form and Image of Tao	29
The Functions of Tao.	32
The Movement of Tao	36
The Synonyms and the Allegory of Tao.	41
IV. A COMPARISON OF TAO WITH THE WORD	54
The Book <u>Tao Teh Ching</u> and the Bible.	55
The Authorship of <u>Tao Teh Ching</u> and the Bible	57
The Literal Meaning of Tao and the Word	58
Connotations of the Concept of Tao and the Concept of the Word.	59
The Form of Tao and the Word.	65
The Function of Tao and the Word.	68
The Synonyms and Figurative Descriptions of Tao and the Word.	74
V. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION.	76
BIBLIOGRAPHY	81

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Reasons for Making a Comparison

Chinese Bibles translate the term "Word" with the philosophical and religious term Tao (道). The use of this term Tao has two effects upon the Chinese people. On the one hand, it is an indigenous term and makes the Chinese people feel somewhat favorably inclined to Christianity because it is a term with which they are familiar. The whole traditional, intellectual thought of the Chinese people is 尊師重道 (literally, "honor the teacher and stress the Tao"). Furthermore, there is a religion in China called Taoism, which is generally considered to have originated in that country. What Taoism teaches can be summed up in one word--Tao. On the other hand, there is a proverb in Chinese which says: 道不同不相為謀 (literally "those whose Tao are different cannot lay plans for one another"). Since the Word in Scripture is translated by Tao, and the Christians who work among the Chinese preach Tao, it naturally leads the intellectual Chinese to ask, "Is the Tao which Christians preach the same as Taoism and the Tao which Chinese intellectuals know and believe?" This question is a perennial one for which both missionaries and Chinese pastors would like to know the answer.

One finds many similarities between Tao and the Word in its essence, form (or image) and function. Even the literal meaning of these two terms is similar.

Although there are similarities between Tao and the Word, one also finds many differences, which must be pointed out and clearly distinguished, otherwise people may think, "Well, after all, all religions are the same." Thereby the way of salvation would be completely confused for Peter says, "There is salvation in no one else [save Jesus], for there is no other name under heaven given among men by which we must be saved" (Acts 4:12).

The classic book Tao Teh Ching (道德經) which is one of the main sources of philosophy and religious thought of the Taoists still influences the spirit of the Chinese. Shortly after World War II many Chinese thinkers considered it "good medicine" against the corrupting spirit of the Western world and its eager pursuit of material pleasures and happiness.¹ The Communists, however, advocated the teaching of Tao Teh Ching because of their materialistic use of the Tao. They considered the author of Tao Teh Ching superior to Western writers because he had written of materialism long before Karl Marx, the prime source of Russian Communist thinking. They pointed out that Tao Teh Ching had existed in Chinese thought for more than two thousand years. The Chinese Communists, therefore, encouraged the publication of a new version of Tao Teh Ching, along with a new commentary which supports their point of view.

But the Nationalist Chinese on Taiwan and the overseas Chinese held the opposite point of view. They considered the Tao in Tao Teh Ching as "good medicine" against the spirit of Marxist materialism. Consequently, not only new commentaries of Tao Teh Ching are being published in Taiwan

¹Chang Chi Chün, The Philosophy of Laotse (Taipei: Cheng Chung Books, 1964. But this article in the appendix was published in 1948), pp. 139-146.

and Hong Kong, but also the old commentaries are being reprinted as a whole new series in order to counteract the Communist version.

One naturally wonders why two opposite political parties would want to utilize the same Tao Teh Ching. What is in Tao Teh Ching to make Chinese thinkers consider it "good medicine" against the pursuit of material pleasures and happiness? How valid is the Tao in Tao Teh Ching when compared with the Word in the Holy Scriptures?

The Chief Points of Comparison

Every nation has special features in its culture. The ancient Jews looked for signs, while the Greeks sought wisdom (1 Cor. 1:22). The Greek philosophers zealously discussed the origin of the universe and the essence of the cosmos. But the sages of China dedicated their interests mainly to a way of life.² Although they discussed the origin and the principles of the cosmos, they engaged in the study of the cosmos only to help them to understand life more clearly. To some extent this feature seems to be in agreement with the prime purpose of the Bible. For although the Bible begins with the account of the origin of the universe, it has as "its main purpose to make us wise to salvation."³ St. Paul says in 2 Tim. 3:15-17,

²Cf. Fung Yu-lan, History of Chinese Philosophy (Hong Kong: The Pacific Ocean Books Co., 1959), p. 11. When the sages of China discuss life, they limit themselves to this life only. They rarely search for the life before birth and the life after death.

³Walter R. Roehrs, "The Creation of Genesis Guidelines for an interpretation," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXXVI (May 1965), 302-303.

the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

It is worthwhile to note that although there are many schools of thought among the Chinese, yet for more than two thousand years only two schools of thought actually governed Chinese thinking: Confucianism and Taoism.⁴ The former became the orthodox faith in China in 136 B.C. by decree of Emperor Han Wuti (漢武帝). Although Confucianism remained the official orthodox faith thereafter, actually from time to time individual emperors followed Taoism. Lin Yu-tang (林語堂) in his The Wisdom of Laotse, clearly states:

After 136 B.C., a sharp division was made. Officials liked Confucius and writers and poets liked Chuangtse (莊子) and Laotse (老子), and when the writers and poets became officials, they liked Confucius openly and Laotse and Chuangtse secretly.

It must also be admitted at the outset that if any Chinese sage was distinguished for talking in proverbs, it was Laotse and not Confucius.⁵

⁴The following are generally considered the schools of thought among the Chinese: (1) The Literati (or Confucian School), (2) The Taoists, (3) The Yin and Yang School, (4) The Law School, (5) The School of Names, (6) The School of Mo Tse, (7) The School of Politicians, (8) The Eclectics, (9) The School of Agriculture, (10) The "Storytellers" (or The Novelists). Buddhism began its propaganda in China openly around the year 61 A.D. Cf. Wong Chih-hsin, The History of Chinese Religious Philosophy (Taipei: Chung Wah Books, Co., 1960), pp. 70-74; K. L. Reichelt, Truth and Tradition in Chinese Buddhism (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, Ltd., 1934), pp. 9-11. Practically, many Chinese followed Buddhism. However, Buddhism in China is not the same as it is in India. It adopted many Chinese thoughts and as a result found itself split into four principal divisions and ten schools. Cf. Hsiang-lin Lo, Chinese History (Cheng Chung Books, 1962), pp. 249-252; Reichelt, pp. 331-350. Since it is mingled with so many Chinese traditional thoughts, the Chinese literati class, seldom consider Buddhism as a school of thought which governed Chinese thinking.

⁵Lin Yu-tang, The Wisdom of Laotse (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 4. However, there were exceptions, as Lin points out in his

What Laotse left to the world in regard to his thought of Tao, is found in Tao Teh Ching,⁶ the small book which has been chosen for study.

Tao Teh Ching makes the point mentioned above very clear; namely, that in order to understand life, one must first deserve the cosmos: it moves from metaphysics to physics and then to life. As mentioned before, the Bible also begins in Genesis with the beginning of the world, then directs man to God's concerns about his life.

Tao Teh Ching says that Tao is the originator and preserver of all things and that a successful life is assured by following Tao. While the Bible also says that the Word creates all things, preserves all things, and is the guide of life, Tao and the Word are not identical in their essence, form and functions. Actually their differences are more pronounced than their similarities in their view of the universe and life.

It is the purpose of this study to compare and contrast Tao with the Word in their respective connotations, features and functions. This study, however, is concerned only with the Tao in Tao Teh Ching and the Word in the Bible.

To orient the reader, he will first be introduced to the author and the book, Tao Teh Ching and their relationship to Taoism. The following chapter will deal with the principle of Tao in Tao Teh Ching. The final section will be devoted to a comparison of Tao and the Word. A full

footnote on the same page of his book: "There were periods in Chinese history when Taoism took a dominant position among the literati and almost became a cult, as in the third and fourth centuries A.D., or when it was officially encouraged by the Emperor himself, as in the Tang Dynasty (eighth to tenth centuries)."

⁶Cf. infra, pp. 9-13.

treatment of some aspects such as the concepts of cosmology, anthropology, social responsibility, eschatology, and so forth must be reserved for another occasion.

The Sources

The Chinese text of Tao Teh Ching has more than a hundred different versions. From the Han Dynasty (漢朝, 206 B.C.-220 A.D.) to the end of the Manchu Dynasty (清朝, 1644 A.D.-1911 A.D.) no less than 335 annotated editions have been listed.⁷ The annotators are from various schools of thought, particularly in their political views. Their interpretations also differ from one another.

The text and annotated editions selected for this comparison are the following: (1) Sung Chang-hsing (宋常星), Tao Teh Ching Chiang I (道德經講義). The annotator is a well-known scholar and was a teacher of the Emperor Kang Hsi (康熙皇帝, who ruled from 1662 to 1722). About twenty years after Sung retired from his position as a teacher of the emperor, he published his annotation (1703), which was made required reading for all officials by the Emperor Kang Hsi. (2) Hwong Yuan-chi (黃元吉), Tao Teh Ching Ching I (道德經精義). The annotator is a Taoist scholar. His version was published in 1884. (3) Chu Ching-yuan (朱晴園), Laotse Hsiao Shih (老子校釋). This annotator is a professor of Chinese in Taiwan. His work, published in 1961, refers to 103 different versions and 146 annotations. (4) Laotse. This is a good annotated edition for the common people,

⁷Yang Chia-lo, Truth and Nature (Hong Kong: Wan Kwok Books, 1962), p. 4.

published in 1964 in Taiwan. However, no annotator's name is given. Perhaps he is on the mainland of China, now under Communist rule. (5) Kao Heng (高亨), Laotse Jeng Guu (老子正詁). The annotator is a professor of Chinese on the mainland. The work, first published in 1943, refers to twenty-four popular annotated editions. The work was reissued in 1955 at the instigation of the Chinese Communists.

There are more than forty English translations of Tao Teh Ching.⁸ The reason for their great number is clearly pointed out by Fung Yu-lan (馮友蘭) in his A Short History of Chinese Philosophy:

There have been many translations of the Laotse. . . . Each translator has considered the translations of others unsatisfactory. But no matter how well a translation is done, it is bound to be poorer than the original. It needs a combination of all the translations already made and many others not yet made, to reveal the richness of the Laotse. . . in their original form.⁹

In this study, the four following translations have been chosen (occasionally, however, the writer will use his own translation of excerpts from others): (1) Lin Yu-tang (林語堂), The Wisdom of Laotse. The translator is a famous scholar of both Chinese and English modern literature. The book was published in 1948. It reproduces the literal sense and also catches the original rhythmical spirit. Many of the citations in this paper will be taken from Lin's translation. (2) Yang Chia-lo (楊家駱), Truth and Nature. An interpretive translation of

⁸In Yang Chia-lo's introduction to Truth and Nature (p. 7), he lists thirty-eight translations in addition to Lin Yu-tang's, Wing-tsit Chan's and his own. In the foreword of The Parting of the Way, Holmes Welch mentions thirty-six existing translations in English, but lists only thirty-five works in pp. 4-5.

⁹Fung Yu-lan, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 14.

Tao Teh Ching, (published in 1962), it is very useful and significant as one of the newest versions. (3) James Legge, The Texts of Taoism (1891, reprinted in 1962). The translator was a noted professor of Sinology at Oxford University. He produced an entire series of Chinese sacred books in English but in many places did not seem to fully understand the original text. (4) Edward Harper Parker, China and Religion. It was published in 1905 by Professor Parker, who taught Chinese at Victoria University, Manchester. There are many later translations better than his. The work is chosen, however, in order to give a religious point of view to Tao. For Parker translates "tao" by "Providence."

In this study, the Hebrew Old Testament and Greek New Testament are the basic biblical sources. The Chinese, English and German translations will be used for reference purposes. The Revised Standard Version will be cited except where there is need for a literal translation.

Because of the difficulty of anglicizing Chinese names (for example, Laotse is often found as Lao Tze, Laotse, Lao Tzu, to mention a few variations), the author has arbitrarily selected one transliteration, which will be used throughout the paper. All Chinese names and place references, however, will also be added.

CHAPTER II

TAO TEH CHING AND ITS AUTHOR

Authorship

If someone were to ask who wrote Tao Teh Ching, one would have to answer in all honesty that nobody knows. For centuries its authorship has been the subject of an immense amount of literature, presenting various opposing views. In general, however, three main theories are held.

The first of these holds that the author must have been someone who lived in the Age of the Spring and Autumn Annals (春秋時代, 722 to 481 B.C.) and was a contemporary of Confucius (551-479 B.C.). According to this traditional view, the book's title originally was Laotse and therefore, the original author was Lao Dan (老聃), for in Chinese tradition, Lao Dan is Laotse. Born about 604 B.C.,¹ Lao Dan served as state historian and was also in charge of the secret imperial archives of the country. Confucius once had an interview with him at Lo (洛), capital of the Chou Dynasty (周朝, 1122-256 B.C.).

This theory has its supporters. They point out that in the Age of the Warring States (戰國時代, 403-222 B.C.), well-known scholars such as Shuntse (荀子, fl. 298-238 B.C.) and Chuangtse (莊子, 399-295 B.C.) referred to this book and that Hon Fei Tse (韓非子, d. 233 B.C.) annotated it. They also refer to the fact that in The

¹Lin Yu-tang says that Laotse was born on 571 B.C., cf. The Wisdom of Laotse (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 8.

Book of the Stratagem of the Warring States (戰國策), Tao Teh Ching is cited.²

Some scholars who follow the traditional legendary view think that a person by the name of Lao Lai Tse (老萊子), might be the author of Laotse (another name of Tao Teh Ching). He also lived toward the end of the Age of Spring and Autumn Annals, and was a sage in the state of Ch'ü (楚), noted for his filial piety.³ The prince of Ch'ü offered Lao Lai Tse a high position in the state, but Lao Lai Tse turned down this opportunity and later became a hermit.

The second theory places the author of Tao Teh Ching in the Age of the Warring States, nearly a century after the death of Confucius.

In the court of the Emperor Chou Hsien (周顯王), there was an official recorder by the name of Jeng (太史儋). He was sent to visit the Western state of Chin (秦) in 350 B.C. Some think that this Jeng wrote Tao Teh Ching. Others point out that in the same age, there was another honorable man by the name of Li Erl (李耳), who was the father of a famous general. About two hundred years after Li Erl's death, a famous historian, Szemah Chien (司馬遷, 145-85 B.C.) confused Li Erl with Lao Dan (Erl and Dan in Chinese characters are similar), an error which is perpetuated to this day. To compound the problem, Szemah Chien suggests, and quotes others, that Jeng is Li Erl or Lao Dan.⁴

²Cf. Fung Yu-lan, History of Chinese Philosophy (Hong Kong: The Pacific Ocean Books Co., 1959), p. 213.

³It is said that even when Lao Lai Tse was seventy years old, he dressed up in brightly colored clothes and played as a child in order to amuse his parents.

⁴Cf. Szemah Chien, Shih Chee (史記), [n. p.] LXIII, 1-4.

Proponents of the third theory hold that Laotse is a fictitious person and regard the book as a collection of sayings current in those two ages (Spring and Autumn Annals and the Warring States). These were compiled later in the Han Dynasty (漢朝, 206 B.C.-220 A.D.) and given the name Tao Teh Ching.

The problem of authorship and the identity of individuals results from the difficulty with Chinese names. Laotse literally means "old boy," or "old son." But in colloquial usage it has the connotation of "father" or "old fellow," and among the educated it is a term of honor meaning "old master," "old one," or "old sir." Among the philosophers the name signifies "old philosopher."

Furthermore, during the Age of Warring States, writers often introduced fictitious characters to illustrate their thoughts. For example, in Chuangtse, there is a story of several "persons" discussing the Tao, which goes as follows:

therefore Ether asked Infinite, "Do you know Tao?"

"I don't know," replied Infinite.

He asked No-action the same question and No-action replied, "I know Tao."

"So you know Tao. Can you specify?"

"Certainly. I know that Tao can be high, can be low, can be centered and can be dispersed. These are some of the specifications that I know."

Ether told No-beginning of No-action's words and asked, "Thus Infinite says he does not know and No-action says he knows. Who is right?"

"The one who thinks he does not know is profound, and the one who thinks he knows is shallow. The former deals with the inner reality, the latter with appearance."

Ether raised his head and sighed: "Then one who does not know really knows, and one who knows really does not know. Who knows this knowledge without knowing?"⁵

Many scholars, therefore, think that "Laotse" is a name to designate a person, who is created for a literary purpose and is similar to the names in the foregoing story.

Nevertheless, because the book originally carried the name Laotse, many people thought the author was Laotse, no matter which Laotse he was.

According to the legend which Taoists tell and which is combined with what Szemah Chien records, Laotse was born to a woman who had been pregnant for eighty years.⁶ When her child was born, he was white haired and fully capable of speech. Thus he became known as Laotse, or "the old boy." Later in life he became an archivist in the Chou Cynasty. When he became disillusioned as he saw the progressive decay in the dynasty, he decided to leave the country. As he approached the border, Yin Hsi (尹喜),⁷ a customs official, invited him to be his guest and begged him to write down the main points of his thought for all posterity. Laotse did so and Tao Teh Ching was the result. The rest of the story is lost in antiquity.⁸ But according to legend, Laotse disap-

⁵Lin, pp. 42-43.

⁶Holmes Welch, The Parting of the Way (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 1; and Loen Fessler and the Editors of Life, China (New York: Time Incorporated, 1958), p. 79.

⁷The name is debatable. The only record of Laotse's seclusion is in Shih Chee. But the five characters referring to Yin Hsi (関令尹喜) may be translated in three different ways: (1) "Yin, the officer of the pass, happily says"; (2) "Yin Hsi, the officer at the pass, said"; or (3) "Kwun Ling Yin happily says."

⁸In a Taoist story, it is said that Laotse withdrew in the ninth year of Chin (213 B.C.), at the age of 1078 years.

peared into the Gobi Desert, went to India and became reincarnate as Sakyamuni,⁹ founder of Buddhism.

In spite of the various legends of the authorship of the book Tao Teh Ching, almost all scholars today agree that the book is a compilation of the sayings of Lao Dan, written down by his disciple or disciples who lived in the Age of Warring States, or even later.¹⁰ However as a rule, when scholars cite this book or any part of it they still use the phrase "Laotse says."

A Brief Description of Tao Teh Ching

The original work consisted of only five thousand words and was written in rhyme. Chinese poetry can suggest many ideas with few words. The intelligentisia read not only the lines of poetry, but what is be-

⁹E. R. Hughes and K. Hughes, Religion in China (London: Hutchinson's University Library, 1950), p. 69. This legend, however, is not popular among the Chinese. The difficult question of whether there was any Hindu or Buddhist influence upon the ideas and formation of Tao Teh Ching is not approached in this investigation. It is interesting, however, to note in this connection the rather extreme opinion of Robert K. Douglas (1839-1913) of the British Museum and professor of Chinese at King's College, London, who says: "Like Pythagoras, Laotse was in China the first great awakener and suggester of thought. Unlike Confucius, whose mission it was to revive in a degenerate age the teachings of the ancient Chinese sages, Laotse appears to have drawn his inspirations from abroad. Every part of his system, from its first conception down to its minutest details, is distinctly Brahminical; and the materials for the interpretation of the Tao Teh Ching must therefore be looked for not in the early books of the Chinese, but in the writings of the Indian philosophers, more especially of the Vedanta school." Confucianism and Taoism (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889), p. 19.

¹⁰Cf. Kao Heng, Laotse Jeng Guu (Peking: China Books, 1959), pp. 153-187; Fung Yu-lan, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), pp. 93-94; and Yang Chia-lo, Truth and Nature (Hong Kong: Wan Kwok Books, 1962), pp. 1-2.

tween the lines. This is true not only of poetry, but also of other Chinese art forms. Philosophers particularly express themselves in this way.¹¹

So many ideas are found in the original five thousand words that scholars today may write books of fifty thousand or even five hundred thousand words, yet never claim that they have exhausted the meaning of the original.¹²

Although there are many versions of Tao Teh Ching, as indicated in Chapter I, the present form of the book is divided into two main sections. The first, chapters one to thirty-seven, is devoted to Tao (道) and the second, chapters thirty-eight to eighty-one, to Teh (德).

The whole book consists of aphorisms which primarily concern humility, gentleness, resignation and the futility of contentiousness. Laotse pointed to the emptiness of rank and luxury and tried to show the advantage and importance of man's being, rather than his having material things. Men are asked to return to the state of pristine simplicity and to lead a natural life. There is little that is new in what Tao Teh Ching has to say since many of the aphorisms can be traced to the old classics.

Laotse was a philosopher, a rugged, radical individualist. After his death, his followers, however, turned their attention almost entirely to the mysterious and magical. As a result, the Taoism of the religion of today is not what Laotse taught.

¹¹Fung, p. 12.

¹²Ibid., p. 13.

The Relationship Between the Book and Its Author to Taoism

Originally Tao Teh Ching had no religious meaning. It was only one of ten schools of thought in the Age of Warring States. Then toward the end of the Han era, in the province of Kiangse (江西), one Chang Tao-ling (張道陵, 34-157 A.D.), claimed to have had a special revelation from Laotse. Later Chang gained the peoples' hearts in the province of Szechwan (四川) and gradually his influence spread farther and farther. What Chang Tao-ling taught was in some respects only a cult of health. However, it went further than that. Apparently acquainted with some accounts of Persian Mazdaism,¹³ he began to encourage worship of Heaven, Earth and Water and created a pantheon of angelic beings.¹⁴

Chang Tao-ling and his followers, now called Taoists because they were advocates of Tao Chiao (道教, literally Tao Religion), annotated the text to suit their purposes. Hence Tao Teh Ching became a mystical book for many people.

By the time of the Emperor Tang Kao Chung (唐高宗, 650-684 A.D.), Taoism had become so popular that Emperor Tang, whose surname was Li (李) canonized Laotse, whose surname, according to tradition, was also Li. The title given Laotse was "The Great Supreme Emperor of the Mystical First Cause" and "The Venerable Prince of the Great Supreme" ("太上玄元皇帝"又稱"太上老君"). Although Taoists believed Laotse was the founder of their faith, they actually traced the

¹³Hu Chang-tu, China: Its People, Its Society, Its Culture (New Haven: Hraf Press, 1960), p. 118.

¹⁴Hughes and Hughes, pp. 93-94.

origins of Taoism to the Emperor Hwang-ti (黃帝, or The Yellow Emperor), who was also a legendary figure, living before the Chinese had recorded history.¹⁵

Tao Teh Ching is a sacred book to the Taoists. It has a real authority for their belief and life. Yet they never claimed that the book was a work of inspiration. They recognized that it is a work of man but they deified the man to whom it supposedly owed its origin.¹⁶

¹⁵Taoists thought so highly of Hwang-ti and his contribution to the early formulation of Taoist thought that they honored him by dating time from the start of his enthronement. Many Chinese, especially in the United States of America, use this reckoning and consider this year (1967) as 4665, i.e., four thousand, six hundred and sixty-four years after Hwang-ti ascended to power. According to legend, Hwang-ti occupied the throne from 2697 to 2597 B.C.

¹⁶The ancient Chinese books were "written" by engraving the characters on the bamboo slats and stringing them together. After the old strings had broken, it commonly happened that some of the slats were misplaced. On the other hand, it was not an uncommon thing for some scholars who were working on the new versions to attempt to replace some difficult characters with easier words. Some might even have purposely changed occasional words or replaced the text with a reading to suit their usage. This is one of the reasons why Tao Teh Ching has so many versions and annotations.

CHAPTER III

THE PRINCIPLE OF TAO IN TAO TEH CHING

The Meaning of Tao

In seeking to ascertain the meaning of Tao, one should be aware that almost all Chinese sages as well as the common people daily speak of Tao. For "to say words" in Chinese is simply "Shu Tao" (說道). Furthermore, the Chinese are not a people of "mono-Tao-ism." There is the Tao of Heaven, Tao of Earth and Tao of Man, Tao of Rectitude and Tao of Deviation, Tao of Gentleness and Tao of Forcefulness, Tao of the Gentleman and Tao of the Peasant, Tao of the Great and Tao of the Small, and so forth. Every Chinese school of thought also has its own concept of Tao. This study will not attempt to discuss all the different interpretations and applications of the concepts of Tao but will restrict itself to the Taoist's thought of Tao, that is Taoism.

Furthermore, there is a distinction between Taoism as a philosophy, which is called Tao Chia (道家, The Taoist School), and the Taoist religion¹ (道教, Tao Chiao).

These two Taos are not only different in many respects but are actually in contradiction with one another. For example, Taoism as a philosophy teaches the doctrine of following nature; but Taoism as a religion inculcates resisting nature. For example, according to Laotse

¹There are many sects in the Taoist religion. Cf. K. L. Reichelt, Religion in Chinese Garment (London: Lutterworth Press, 1951), pp. 165-175; but since this paper is concerned only with Tao Teh Ching, the sects of the Taoist religion will not be discussed here.

and Chuangtse, Taoist philosophers, life followed by death is merely the course of nature and man should submit calmly to this natural course. But the main teaching of the Taoist religion is the principle and technique of avoiding death contrary to the forces of nature.²

This study will deal with the philosophical as well as the religious sense of Tao, avoiding consideration of the superstitious sense as much as possible.

Just as there were many famous philosophers in Greek history during the sixth to third centuries before Christ, so also in China. In fact, this period of Chinese history is called the era of "The Hundred Schools of Thought Sounding Together" (百家齊鳴). While the ancient Greek philosophers devoted much of their discussion to the cosmos, the Chinese sages concentrated more exclusively on the subject life itself. Laotse, however, was an exception. In Tao Teh Ching he gave much consideration to the universe. But unlike the ancient Greek philosophers who regarded water, air and fire as the original elements of the universe, Laotse found the answer both to the origin of cosmos and to what man's life should be in the abstract term Tao.

From the Taoist philosophical point of view, Tao is an "X," like the unknown quantity in mathematics. It is the neuter pronoun of an abstraction "it," for something that is really unknowable. To express it in the ontological terms "it" in reality is a non-being. Laotse says:

The thing that is called Tao
Is elusive, evasive. (Chap. 21)

²Fung Yu-lan, A Short History of Chinese Philosophy (New York: The MacMillan Company, 1958), p. 3.

Looked at, but cannot be seen. . .
 Listened to, but cannot be heard. . .
 Grasped at, but cannot be touched. . .

the Form of the Formless,
 The Image of Nothingness. (Chap. 14)
 (Lin)

In the literal sense, the word "Tao" is a transliteration of the Chinese character 道, or more accurately its phonetic reproduction. It may be used as a noun or as a verb. As a noun its literal meaning is "road," "path" or "way." However the connotation is that of "the right way," or "the true path." In the philosophical sense, Tao signifies "way," "reason" or "truth." For many, Tao stands for a religion, that is Taoism. Edward Harper Parker, former professor of Chinese at Victoria University, Manchester, translated Tao with "Providence." This translation, however, is inadequate. It presupposes that Tao is a religion and, as stated before, Tao as a religion did not emerge until sometime after the original appearance of the book. This study, however, seeks to determine the original meaning of Tao in Tao Teh Ching.³

³In regard to the translation of the term "Tao," W. E. Soothill, former professor of Chinese at Oxford University says in his book The Three Religions of China (London: Oxford University Press, 1923): "One author translates it by 'God'; others by 'The Universal Supreme Reason' ('Raison supreme universelle'); 'Logos'; 'The Way'; and by 'Nature'. Some leave it untranslated. It seems, indeed, impossible to find its exact equivalent in Western languages. Before meeting with Mr. Watters' term 'Nature,' I had endeavoured to apply it to the varying uses of Tao, and, as I have stated, if it be used with a capital letter for Tao in its relative or concrete expressions, 'Nature' and 'nature' approach to the meaning. If you can also conceive of the idea, in the pantheistic sense, of a power, 'a power that makes for righteousness,' immaterial, indefinable, eternal, ubiquitous, which Laotse seems to be striving to exhibit." (p. 47)

It is actually very difficult to translate 道 into English. For it has a variety of meanings. If one translates 道 with "Power," "Providence" or "Way" or any other such term, the full meaning of 道 is limited to a narrow sense. For this reason, most of the translators

As a verb, Tao means "to speak" or "to tell." It also has the connotation of "to govern," and the Chinese classicists give it the meaning "to lead."

But Tao in Tao Teh Ching is something that cannot be identified, explained, or defined, as the first half of the first strophe of Tao Teh Ching points out:

The Tao that can be told of
Is not the Absolute Tao. (Chap. 1)
(Lin)

What these lines mean is interpreted in a letter from a former missionary (A. H. Gebhardt, Hooper, Nebraska) who states:

Tao K'o tao yeh, fei tao yeh.⁴ The Tao which can be tao-ed is not Tao. . . . What does it mean? The Way which can be explained is not the Way. The Doctrine which can be doctined is not Doctrine. The Philosophy which can be philosophized is not philosophy. The Principle which can be principled is not Principle. The Word which can be worded is not the Word. Well, the Tao Teh Ching, Laotse's book opens with these words, In the Mandarin Bible commonly used in China the word "tao" (道) is used in John 1 for the Greek "Logos," "Word." Any conclusions drawn from this use in John 1 of the Mandarin Bible back to the "tao" in the Tao Teh Ching is unwarranted. The meaning for "tao" in the book by Laotse must be found in the book itself.

Since Tao cannot be put into words or explained, it would seem useless to try to discuss it. In this connection Holmes Welch says:

A discussion of mysticism usually begins with the admission that adequate discussion is impossible. Likewise, if we go to the mystic himself and ask for information about what he has experienced, he will tell us that he cannot tell us, and then he will tell us. . . .

merely transliterate 道 as "Tao" or "tao," although they also seek to express its meaning by translating it with such terms as "Way," "Truth," "Course," where the context seems to indicate such a connotation. In this paper, 道 as used in Tao Teh Ching will be rendered by capitalizing the transliteration "Tao."

⁴Transliterated from one of the old versions of Tao Teh Ching.

Laotse is just as inconsistent. He begins his whole book with the sentence, "The Tao that can be told of is not the Absolute Tao." In Chapter 56 he seems to impale himself on a monstrous dilemma when he announces, "Those who know do not speak; those who speak do not know."

But we must not make fun of mystics for inconsistency. If they said no more about their vision than what they could put into precise, apposite terminology, we would learn nothing at all. We must be content with their symbols and similes.⁵

Actually the possibility of apprehending the meaning of Tao, according to Laotse himself, varies from person to person:

When the highest type of men hear the Tao (truth),
They try hard to live in accordance with it;

When the mediocre type hear the Tao,
They seem to be aware and yet unaware of it;

When the lowest type hear the Tao,
They break into loud laughter--
If it were not laughed at, it would not be Tao. (Chap. 41)
(Lin)

Since the book Tao Teh Ching also uses the word Teh as a synonym for Tao, it is necessary to determine the meaning of the former and the relationship of these terms to one another.

Teh is also a transliteration of the Chinese character 德 and is used both as a noun and as a verb. As a noun, its literal meaning is "virtue," "morality," "goodness," "favor" and "kindness." As a verb it means "to feel grateful." However when Yang Chia-lo translated Laotse from the philosophical point of view he rendered Teh as "nature," and Lin Yu-tang frequently made it equivalent with "character." Edward Harper Parker gave it a religious connotation by translating Teh as "grace," while Arthur Waley gave it the meaning "power."

⁵The Parting of the Way: Laotse and the Taoist Movement (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), p. 51.

In Tao Teh Ching, Tao and Teh actually are not different concepts but merely denote aspects of the same thing. Tao is the essence of the "X," and Teh is the function or manifestation of "X." For example, in Chapter five, Laotse says "Tao gives [them] birth; Teh rears [them]. And the first strophe of Chapter twenty-one 孔德之容，唯道是從， states:

The marks of great character
Follow alone from the Tao. (Lin)

Lin Yu-tang makes this clear in a footnote: "Teh [is used] as manifestation of Tao," or "Tao embodied, the moral principle."⁶ Therefore Tao is used to denote the essence of the "X" while Teh serves to designate its function or manifestation. When both essence and function of manifestation are meant, Tao and Teh are employed.

"Ching," the last word in the title Tao Teh Ching is also a transliteration of a Chinese character 經. When it is used as an adverb, it means "already," or "past." When it is used as a verb, it means "to manage, to regulate, to rule," or "to pass through," "to struggle," to "plan, to contrive," or "to partition." When it is used as a noun, it means "the proper or right course," "the natural order," "bible," or "classic." But in Tao Teh Ching, "Ching" means a classical book and Tao Teh Ching therefore is a classical book of Tao and Teh.

⁶Lin Yu-tang, The Wisdom of Laotse (New York: The Modern Library, 1948), p. 51. Herbert A. Giles, professor of Cambridge University, also says that Teh is "the manifestation of Tao," in Chuang Tzu (Shanghai: Kelly and Walsh, Limited, 1926), p. 326.

The Essence of the Tao

As mentioned before, Tao is an "X" in Laotse's metaphysical system. It is therefore very difficult to determine what constitutes its real essence. From a study of Tao Teh Ching one must conclude that Tao is at the same time an empty, a nothingness, and yet a reality, an "it"; a non-existent and yet an absolute entity; a state of being and yet an unconditioned existence. It is a vacuous super-matter, an abstract being and yet a pure being; it is the abstract principle of all things and yet all things are its concrete appearance. But Tao is not God, for Laotse says (in Chapter 4):⁷

Tao is a hollow vessel,
And its use is inexhaustible!

Fathomless!
Like the fountain head of all things,
Its sharp edges rounded off,
Its tangles untied,
Its light tempered,
Its turmoil submerged,

Yet dark like deep water it seems to remain.
I do not know whose Son it is,
An image of what existed before God. (Lin)

Truth may appear hollow, but its usefulness is inexhaustible. It is so profound that it comprehends all things. It is so vague that its very existence may seem doubtful. I do not know its origin, but I believe that its existence preceded that of the gods. (Yang)

The Tao is (like) the emptiness of a vessel; and in our employment of it we must be on our guard against all fulness. How deep and unfathomable it is, as if it were the Honoured Ancestor of all things!

⁷Four translations are cited here, two by Chinese scholars and two by English scholars. This procedure will be followed whenever it is necessary to get a better understanding of the original sense.

We should blunt our sharp points, and unravel the complications of things; we should attemper our brightness, and bring ourselves into agreement with the obscurity of others. How pure and still the Tao is, as if it would ever so continue!

I do not know whose son it is. It might appear to have been before God. (Legge)

Providence used with restraint need not exhibit its full force. It is profound; and like, as it were, the ancestral progenitor of the innumerable objects. It checks undue impulse, solves entanglements, subdues undue brightness, though preserving life. I do not know whose offspring it is, but indications suggest what is anterior to any monarchs. (Parker)

Since Tao is not God,⁸ it is evident that Laotse cannot be a theist as some Western scholars and the Taoist religion itself consider him.

Laotse himself says of the essence of Tao, in Chapter 1:

The Tao that can be told of
Is not the Absolute Tao;
The Names that can be given
Are not Absolute Names.

The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the Mother of All Things.

Therefore:

Oftentimes, one strips oneself of passion
in order to see the Secret of Life;
Oftentimes, one regards life with passion,
in order to see its manifest forms.
These two (the Secret and its manifestations)
Are (in their nature) the same;
They are given different names
When they become manifest.

They may both be called the Cosmic Mystery:
Reaching from the Mystery into the Deeper Mystery
Is the Gate to the Secret of All Life. (Lin)

⁸ R. K. Douglas in his book Confucianism and Taoism (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1889), p. 211, also says: "Of a personal God Laotse knew nothing, as far as we can judge from the Tao Teh Ching; and indeed a belief in such a being would be in opposition to the whole tenor of his philosophy. There is no room for a supreme God in his system, as is shown by the only mention he makes of a heavenly ruler." Then he uses Chapter 4 to support the above mentioned statement.

The truth that may be told is not the everlasting Truth. The name given to a thing is not the everlasting Name.

Nothingness is used to denote the state that existed before the birth of heaven and earth. Reality is used to denote the state where the multitude of things begins to have a separate existence.

Therefore, when the mind rests in the state of Nothingness, the enigma can be understood; when the mind rests in the state of reality, the bounds can be reached.

These two states, though bearing different names, have a common origin. Both are mysterious and metaphysical. They are the most mysterious, and form the gateway to all mysteries. (Yang)

The Tao that can be trodden is not the enduring and unchanging Tao. 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. (Legge)

The Providence which could be indicated by words would not be an all-embracing Providence, nor would any name by which we could name it be an ever-applicable name.

"Non-existence" is a name for the beginning of heaven and earth. "Existence" is a name for the genetrix of the innumerable objects of creation.

Hence, "absolute non-existence" suggests to us the miraculous working of what in "absolute existence" has become the resulting essence.

These two emanate from the same, though their namings are dissimilar, and jointly they are termed "state of colourless dissolution."

Dissolution, again, within dissolution thus connects us with the various miraculous workings. (Parker)

Although the essence of Tao cannot be defined, it will prove helpful to examine its characteristics more fully, as they are set forth in Tao Teh Ching.

Tao is described, first of all, as having an elusive quality. Chapter 21 says: "The thing that is called Tao, is elusive, evasive," or according to Yang's translation: "Truth is vague and intangible." It is impersonal, and as Chapter 14 says, it is an "image of Nothingness." Chapter 25 gives a somewhat more detailed picture of the characteristics of Tao, when it says:

Before the Heaven and Earth existed
 There was something nebulous:
 Silent, isolated,
 Standing alone, changing not,
 Eternally revolving without fail,
 Worthy to be the Mother of All Things.
 I do not know its name
 And address it as Tao.
 If forced to give it a name, I shall call it "Great."
 Being great implies reaching out in space,
 Reaching out in space implies far-reaching,
 Far-reaching implies reversion to the original point.

Therefore:
 Tao is Great,
 The Heaven is great,
 The Earth is great,
 The King or man is also great.
 These are the Great Four in the universe,
 And the King is one of them.

Man models himself after the Earth;
 The Earth models itself after Heaven;
 The Heaven models itself after Tao;
 Tao models itself after Nature or self-so. (Lin)

There is something evolved from chaos, which was born before heaven and earth. It is inaudible and invisible. It is independent and immutable. It is all-pervasive and ceaseless. It may be regarded as the mother of heaven and earth.

I do not know its name and call it Truth (or Tao). If I must describe it, I will say that it is great.

Thus Truth is great, heaven is great, earth is great, and the king is also great. Within the universe there are four great ones, and the king is one of them. The king must follow the examples of earth, heaven, Truth, and Nature. (Yang)

There was something undefined and complete, coming into existence before Heaven and Earth. How still it was and formless, standing alone, and undergoing no change, reaching everywhere and in no danger (of being exhausted)! It may be regarded as the Mother of all things.

I do not know its name, and I give it the designation of the Tao (the Way or Course). Making an effort (further) to give it a name I call it The Great.

Great, it passes on (in constant flow). Passing on, it becomes remote. Having become remote, it returns. Therefore, the Tao is great; Heaven is great; Earth is great; and the (sage) king is also great. In the universe there are four that are great, and the (sage) king is one of them.

Man takes his law from the Earth; the Earth takes its law from Heaven; Heaven takes its law from the Tao. The law of the Tao is its being what it is. (Legge)

Things existing in a chaotic state had been produced before heaven and earth. In solemn silence stood the solitary subjectivity, without any changes taking place; revolving without any crisis. We may not consider this the "mother of the world." As we cannot know its name, we may apply to it the term "Providence," and make a shift to use the word "greatness" as its name. Now "great" suggests going on, going on suggests distance, and distance suggests return. Hence there are the greatness of Providence, the greatness of Heaven, the greatness of Earth, and the greatness of the Emperor. There are four majesties in the concrete worldly organism, of which four the Emperor is one. Man looks up to Earth for guidance, Earth to Heaven, Heaven to Providence, Providence to Spontaneity. (Parker)

Since Chapter 25 says that Tao was in existence before heaven and earth and Chapter 4 that Tao is "an image of what existed before God," the implication is that Tao has no beginning. On the other hand, since Chapter 25 says that Tao is "eternally revolving without fail," the conclusion is that Tao has no end. Tao is also described as unchangeable, or as Chapter 25 put it: "standing alone, changing not."

Furthermore, Tao is invisible, inaudible and intangible according to Chapter 14.

Looked at, but cannot be seen--
That is called the Invisible.
Listened to, but cannot be heard--
That is called the Inaudible.
Grasped at, but cannot be touched--
That is called the Intangible. (Lin)

Tao is also insipid and inexhaustible. For in Chapter 35, the last strophe says:

The utterance of Tao is insipid.
It cannot be seen with eyes:
it cannot be heard with the ears, and
the use of it is inexhaustible. (Chiu)

In Chapter 10, the description of the mysterious Nature (a synonym for Tao, as explained below) is given as

To give birth, to nourish,
To give birth without taking possession,
To act without appropriation,
To be chief among men without managing them--
This is the Mystic Virtue. (Lin)

This seems to indicate that Tao is completely unselfish.

Whence is Tao? At the end of Chapter 25 it is said that Tao models itself after "Nature." The Chinese characters for Nature (自然), could be translated as "spontaneity," "that which is so by itself," "self-formed" or "self-so." Hence it can be concluded that one of the characteristics of Tao is spontaneity. At the same time, it is ubiquitous. The first strophe of Chapter 34 states,

The great Tao is all-encompassing or all-pervasive
It may be found on the left side or on the right. (Chiu)

Although Chapter 62 states that "Tao is the mysterious secret of the universe, the good man's treasure, and the bad man's refuge. . . to search for the guilty ones and pardon them," yet Tao is not benevolent.

For a line of Chapter 5 states clearly, "Heaven and earth entertain no benevolence." (According to Laotse, heaven and earth, that is, the universe, are but another term for Tao. See the reference above to Chapter 25.)

In summing up the above, it can be said that Tao is characterized as Elusive, Impersonal, Without Beginning and Without End, Invisible, Inaudible, Intangible, Insipid, Inexhaustible, Unchangeable, Unselfish, Spontaneous, Ubiquitous and Not Benevolent.

The Form and Image of Tao

Since one cannot apprehend the real essence of Tao, one can hardly determine the form of Tao. However, in Tao Teh Ching, Laotse does discuss the form or more correctly, the image of Tao.

After describing Tao as Invisible, Inaudible and Intangible (Chapter 14) Laotse goes on to say:

These three elude all our inquiries
And hence blend and become One.

Not by its rising, is there light,
Nor by its sinking, is there darkness.
Unceasing, continuous,
It cannot be defined,
And reverts again to the realm of nothingness.

That is why it is called the Form of the Formless,
The Image of Nothingness.
That is why it is called the Elusive:
Meet it and you do not see its face;
Follow it and you do not see its back.

He who holds fast to the Tao of old
In order to manage the affairs of Now
Is able to know the Primeval Beginnings
Which are the continuity of Tao. (Lin)

According to these lines, it is clear that Tao is formless, bodiless, shapeless, vague, indefinity and symbolic of nothingness. Because

the form of Tao is indescribable and because according to the first strophe of Chapter 14 Tao is Invisible [無, pronounced Yi], Inaudible [希, pronounced Hsi], Intangible [微, pronounced Wei], Laotse goes on to say, "These three elude all our inquiries and hence blend and become One."

In this connection it is interesting to note that the Jesuit scholars Amiot and Rémusat recognize the three Persons of the Trinity here and contend that the tetragrammaton 𐤅𐤅𐤅𐤅' is to be found here also.⁹ If the last strophe of Yang's interpretive translation--"I do not know its (Tao's) origin, but I believe that its existence preceded that of the gods,"--is correct, and an actual connection between Tao Teh Ching and the Hebrew term 𐤅𐤅𐤅𐤅' exists, then these claims might be valid. Interesting as this may be, this study must forego speculation on this question at this time and confine itself to a discussion of the form and image of Tao.

The last line of Chapter 14 in Lin's translation reads: "which are the continuity of Tao," but may be rendered more literally: "which is called Tao Chi." This character, Chi (紀), has many meanings. It may mean "annals," "record," "chronicle," "a period of twelve years," "age," "century," "laws," "rules," or as Lin Yu-tang explains, the "main body of tradition," "system" and also "discipline."¹⁰ From this one can conclude that Tao has no form but it embodies laws, rules, a system or discipline. It may be recorded or viewed in the course of time and space, yet the senses are not able to apprehend its form.

⁹Cf. Douglas, pp. 187-189.

¹⁰Lin, p. 102.

A casual reading of Chapter 21 may give the impression that Tao does have a form, or forms, for it says:

The thing that is called Tao
Is elusive, evasive.
Evasive, elusive,
Yet latent in it are forms.
Elusive, evasive,
Yet latent in it are objects.
Dark and dim,
Yet latent in it is the life-force.
The life-force being very true,
Latent in it are evidences. (Lin)

Truth is vague and intangible. Though vague and intangible, within it there is substance. Though vague and intangible, within it there is form. Though distant and vacuous, within it there is essence. Its essence is real, and its validity can be proven.
(Yang)

Who can of Tao the nature tell?
Our sight it flies, our touch as well.
Eluding sight, eluding touch,
The forms of things all in it crouch;
Eluding touch, eluding sight,
There are their semblances, all right.
Profound it is, dark and obscure;
Things' essences all there endure
Those essences the truth enfold
Of what, when seen, shall then be told. (Legge)

but as to the entity of Providence, it is as fleeting as it is illusory. The images suggested by it are illusory in their fleetingness, and the objects yielded by it are just as fleeting in their illusoriness. In that dark vista of space there are vital essences: those essences are unadulterated, and out of them comes truth.
(Parker)

But when one delves into this chapter more deeply, one discovers that the forms mentioned here are not those of the essence of Tao, but principles which are manifested in the concrete cosmos. One of the annotators states correctly:

All things are the concrete manifestation of Tao, and the Tao is the abstract principles of all things.¹¹

¹¹Laotse (Taipei: Wah Lien Books, 1964), p. 37.

In defining Teh and its relationship to Tao in the forepart of this chapter, it was observed that Tao is the essence of the "X" and Teh the function or manifestation of "X". This fact also indicates that there is no form in Tao but that Tao merely manifests itself in principles, rules, a system of laws, in all things, in all affairs and in all times. Thus a vague, abstract image of Tao emerges.

The Functions of Tao

Although one cannot know the essence of Tao and is unable by one's senses to apprehend its form, Tao Teh Ching contains quite a few clues toward determining the functions of Tao.

First, it states that everything comes from Tao, since it gives birth to everything. The first two strophes of Chapters 34 and 42 clearly say:

Chapter 34:

The Great Tao flows everywhere,
 (Like a flood) it may go left or right.
 The myriad things derive their life from it,
 And it does not deny them.
 When its work is accomplished,
 It does not take possession.
 It clothes and feeds the myriad things,
 Yet does not claim them as its own. (Lin)

The great Truth is all-pervasive and may be found everywhere. It gives life to all animate creation, and yet it does not claim lordship over them. It accomplishes all things, and yet it does not claim anything for itself. It embraces all things, and yet it has no fixed abode. (Yang)

All-pervading is the Great Tao! It may be found on the left hand and on the right.
 All things depend on it for their production, which it gives to them, not one refusing obedience to it. When its work is accomplished, it does not claim the name of having done it. It clothes all things as with a garment, and makes no assumption of being their lord. (Legge)

The highest form of Providence is universal, and always at hand. The innumerable objects of creation depend upon its unfailing action for their existence. It achieves results which yet cannot be named as concrete being, and cherishes the innumerable objects without disclosing the directing power. (Parker)

Chapter 42:

Out of Tao, One is born;

Out of One, Two;

Out of Two, Three;

Out of Three, the created universe.

The created universe carries the Yin at its back and the Yang in front;

Through the union of the pervading principles it reaches harmony.
(Lin)

Truth gave birth to one; one gave birth to two; two gave birth to three; three gave birth to the multitude of things which attain the state of harmony when the opposite elements of Ying and Yang are mingled in a well-balanced manner. (Yang)

The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. All things leave behind them the Obscurity (out of which they have come), and go forward to embrace the Brightness (into which they have emerged), while they are harmonized by the Breath of vacancy. (Legge)

Providence produced unity; unity produced duality; duality produced trinity; trinity produced the innumerable objects; the innumerable objects carrying the feminine or shadow principle on the one side, and the masculine or sun-light principle on the other, creating a just harmony by their respective clashes of primitive impulse or ether. (Parker)

From Chapter 34, quoted above, it is evident that Tao also preserves everything. Chapter 51 says this more clearly;

Tao gives them birth,

Teh (character) foster them.

The material world gives them form.

The circumstances of the moment complete them.

Therefore all things of the universe worship Tao and exalt Teh.

Tao is worshipped and Teh is exalted

Without anyone's order but is so of its own accord.

Therefore Tao gives them birth,

Teh fosters them,

Makes them grow, develops them,

Gives them a harbor, a place to dwell in peace,

Feeds them and shelters them.

It gives them birth and does not own them,
 Acts (helps) and does not appropriate them,
 Is superior, and does not control them.
 --This is the Mystic Virtue. (Lin)

It is Truth that gives both life and form to things. The nature of a thing determines its individuality and perfection. Therefore, as regards all things, Truth and Nature are the most important. The importance of Truth and Nature is a matter of course, and requires no comment.

Truth gives birth to life. Nature determines the individuality, growth, development, completion, maturity, protection, and security of a thing.

The mysterious Nature is that which lives without the desire for ownership, gives without the wish for return, rules without claiming lordship. (Yang)

All things are produced by the Tao, and nourished by its outflowing operation. They receive their forms according to the nature of each, and are completed according to the circumstances of their conditions. Therefore all things without exception honour the Tao, and exalt its outflowing operation.

This honouring of the Tao produces (all things), nourishes them, brings them to their full growth, nurses them, completes them, matures them, maintains them and overspreads them.

It produces them and makes no claim to the possession of them; it carries them through their processes and does not vaunt its ability in doing so; it brings them to maturity and exercises no control over them;--this is called its mysterious operation. (Legge)

Being born of Providence, nurtured by Grace, shaped by mortals, and completed by circumstances, the innumerable created objects, for this very reason, without exception revere Providence and honour Grace. Now this revering of Providence and honouring of Grace was never a conferred distinction, but always was so spontaneously. Hence Providence bears all things, nurtures them, develops them, and rears them; completes them, ripens them, and tends them, and protects them. Birth without concrete existence, action without self-conscious assertion of it, and development without direction of it--this is what is called the colourless dissolution of Grace. (Parker)

Tao also enables man to know how to face life and death, how to be a man, and how to deal with or relate to others. These functions of Tao will be examined more fully in a subsequent discussion. At this point it will suffice to cite statements from one of the chapters which give some indications of Tao's function in human lives.

Chapter 62:

Tao is the mysterious secret of the universe,
 The good man's treasure,
 And the bad man's refuge.
 Beautiful sayings can be sold at the market,
 Noble conduct can be presented as a gift.
 Though there be bad people,
 Why reject them?

Therefore on the crowning of an emperor,
 On the appointment of the Three Ministers,
 Rather than send tributes of jade and teams of four horses,
 Send in the tribute of Tao.
 Wherein did the ancients prize this Tao?
 Did they not say "to search for the guilty ones and pardon them?"
 Therefore is (Tao) the treasure of the world. (Lin)

Truth is the abode of the whole of creation.
 It is treasured by good men, and it should also be treasured by
 bad men.

Good words enable one to obtain honour, and good conduct enables
 one to receive respect. When a man is bad, why should we spurn
 him?

Wherefore, it is better to advance toward Truth than to be an
 Emperor, or a Grand Minister, or a royal messenger wearing precious
 jades and riding in fine carriages.

Why did the ancients esteem truth? Was it not for the reason that
 by following Truth men could obtain what was desirable and avoid
 what was undesirable? Because of Truth they could rule the whole
 Empire. (Yang)

Tao has of all things the most honoured place.
 No treasures give good men so rich a grace;
 Bad men it guards, and doth their ill efface.

(Its) admirable words can purchase honour; (its) admirable deeds
 can raise their performer above others. Even men who are not good
 are not abandoned by it.

Therefore when the sovereign occupies his place as the Son of
 Heaven, and he has appointed his three ducal ministers, though (a
 prince) were to send in a round symbol-of-rank large enough to fill
 both the hands, and that as the precursor of the team of horses
 (in the courtyard), such an offering would not be equal to (a lesson
 of) this Tao, which one might present on his knees.

Why was it that the ancients prized this Tao so much? Was it not
 because it could be got by seeking for it, and the guilty could
 escape (from the stain of their guilt) by it? This is the reason

why all under heaven consider it the most valuable thing. (Legge)

"Providence" is the esoteric principle of the innumerable created objects, the jewel of the good man, the stand-by of the bad man. Nice words will amiss to folk. How is it possible to abandon people because of their want of goodness? Hence, in setting up an Emperor or in appointing the three chief Ministers, although it may be glorious for them to sit in a state chariot, preceded by jewelled sceptre bearers, it were better for them to remain at home and advance their store of Providence. Why was it that the ancients honoured this Providence so highly? Was it not that they looked for answers to their prayers and hoped for remission of their sins? For this reason it was esteemed throughout the world. (Parker)

But how does Tao carry out its functions? It does so through the movement of Tao.

The Movement of Tao

In examining the movement of Tao in Tao Teh Ching, it becomes clear first of all that Laotse faces a terrible dilemma, for in the first strophe of Chapter 37 he says:

The Tao never does,
Yet through it everything is done,
If princes and dukes can keep the Tao,
The world will of its own accord be reformed. (Lin)

Truth abides by inaction, and yet nothing is left undone. If the rulers abide by Truth, all animate creation will of their own accord come under their influence. (Yang)

The Tao 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. (Legge)

Providence is perpetually without active purpose, and yet leaves nothing undone. If our rulers could but abide by principle, all creation would improve its own line of conduct. (Parker)

In the opening phrase of Chapter 63, Laotse uses an imperative mood and says:

Accomplish do-nothing (Lin)

Abide by inaction (Yang)

(It is the way of Tao) to act without (thinking of) acting (Legge)

Act with the least possible dwelling on action (Parker)

One may well wonder how the statement that Tao remains in inaction can be harmonized with the assertion that through it everything is done. To understand this paradox it is necessary to know Laotse's system. He asserts that "gentleness" and "flexibility" are features of the function of Tao. In Chapter 40 he says:

Reversion is the action of Tao.
Gentleness is the function of Tao.
The things of this world come from Being,
And being (comes) from Non-being. (Lin)

The motion of Truth is cyclical.
The way of Truth is pliant.

The multitude of things in this world have their origin in Reality.
Before the birth of Reality there was Nothingness. (Yang)

All things under heaven sprang from It as existing (and named);
that existence sprang from It as non-existent (and not named).
(Legge)

"Return" indicates the movements of Providence, and "weakness" indicates the uses of Providence. Heaven, Earth, and the innumerable object of creation derive their being from existence; and existence derives its being from non-existence. (Parker)

Furthermore, in Chapter 43 Laotse writes:

The softest substance of the world
Goes through the hardest.
That-which-is-without-form penetrates that-which-has-no-crevice;
Through this I know the benefit of taking no action.
The teaching without words
And the benefit of taking no action
Are without compare in the universe. (Lin)

The softest thing in the world can overcome the hardest. Such a thing seems to issue forth from nowhere, and yet it penetrates everywhere. From this I have learned the advantage of inaction. Few men in this world have learned the precept of silence, and the advantage of inaction. (Yang)

The softest thing in the world dashes against and overcomes the hardest; that which has no (substantial) existence enters where there is no crevice. I know hereby what advantage belongs to doing nothing (with a purpose).

There are few in the world who attain to the teaching without words, and the advantage arising from non-action. (Legge)

The tenderest things in the world may over-ride the toughest, just as a hard thing may take its rise from nothing, and enter where there is no opening. Whence we may know how it is that inaction has its advantages. Lessons without display of words, advantageous results without doing anything-- he or few men in the world can attain to this point. (Parker)

In this connection one should give some consideration to two important Chinese characters used in Tao Teh Ching, namely, 無 (Wu) and 有 (Yu). In most of the texts of the five thousand characters composing Tao Teh Ching, the former appears at least 99 times and the latter at least 74 times. The meaning of these frequently occurring characters throws further light on the essence, image and functions of Tao. Wu literally means "no," "not," "none," "wanting," "destitute of" or "without." But here in Tao Teh Ching, the real meaning is "non-existence," "non-being," "nothingness," or "vacuum." Yu, literally means "to have," "to possess," "to have in possession," "to exist," "to attain," or "to get." But in Tao Teh Ching, the meaning is "existence," "being" or "reality."

In Laotse's thought, however, these two opposite concepts are not viewed antithetically, but absorb one another. For example, the second strophe of Chapter 1 has the following annotations:

Nothingness is used to denote the state that existed before the birth of heaven and earth. Reality is used to denote the state where the multitude of things begins to have a separate existence.
(Yang)

"Non-existence" is a name for the beginning of heaven and earth.
 "Existence" is a name for the genatrix of the innumerable objects
 of creation. (Parker)

Again the second strophe of Chapter 40 reads: "All things of the cosmos derive from Being (Yu), and Being from Non-Being (Wu)." Furthermore the first line of the second strophe of Chapter 2 says:

Therefore: Being and non-being interdepend in growth. (Lin)

Thus we have the alternation of existence and non-existence.
 (Yang)

So it is that existence and non-existence give birth the one to
 (the idea of) the other. (Legge)

Hence "existence" and "non-existence" have a common birth. (Parker)

The understanding of this alternating cycle of existence and non-existence (literally: "Yu and Wu give birth to each other") has a useful purpose. For the last strophe of Chapter 11 says:

Therefore by the existence of things we profit.
 And by the non-existence of things we are served. (Lin)

Therefore, what has a (Positive) existence serves for profitable adaptation, and what has not that for (actual) usefulness. (Legge)

Similarly Laotse says "Tao never does," or "Tao in its regular course does nothing." In Chinese, "never does" or "does nothing" is expressed by two characters 無為 (Wu Wei). Wu Wei can mean "no-action," "to remain passive" or "to do nothing." On the other hand, Wu Wei also has the meaning of "no self-centered doing," "no self-beneficial intention" or "no selfish purpose." As a result, Laotse boldly states in Chapter 48:

till he arrives at doing nothing (on purpose). Having arrived at this point of non-action, there is nothing which he does not do.
 (Legge)

Therefore the connotation of "The Tao never does" (the first line of

Chapter 37) could be "The Tao never intended to do things for its own benefit." Although literally it says that Tao never does anything, it does not mean that Tao has no movement. For Tao can not cease from moving as Chapter 25 states clearly. In the last line of the second strophe of Chapter 25, 周行而不殆, literally means "cyclical moving and ceaseless." Lin Yu-tang's translation, "Eternally revolving without fail," catches the original meaning quite closely. For in Laotse's mind, Tao is moving "eternally."

How does the Tao move? In Tao Teh Ching it seems there are two answers. The first is that Tao is moving "cyclically," "in a revolving motion," "in an endless circle." In the latter part of Chapter 25, Tao is also said to move like an endless echo or the radio beam of radar.

Tao

If forced to give it a name, I shall call it "Great."
 Being great implies reaching out in space,
 Reaching out in space implies far-reaching,
 Far-reaching implies reversion to the original point. (Lin)

Chapter 16 has a similar statement:

The innumerable objects display their activities in common, and all we have to do is to watch into what they resolve themselves: for each of these swarming objects reverts to its original root, and this reversion to the root signifies calm; which is renewed life; which, again, means perpetuity. (Parker)

At the end of Chapter 65 it is put thus:

When the Mystic Virtue¹² becomes clear, far-reaching,
 And things revert back (to their source),
 Then and then only emerges the Grand Harmony. (Lin)

It appears then that in Laotse's system, Tao is moving eternally.

No matter whether it moves revolvingly or reversingly, it moves!

¹²A synonym of Tao. See infra, "The Synonyms and the Allegory of Tao."

Through this quiet, gentle movement of Tao, something is smoothly changing. This ongoing gradual changing of the movement of Tao, enables the Wu (non-being) to become Yu (being). This process goes on without ceasing and reverses to non-being. That is why Laotse says in Chapter 2, "Being and non-being interdepend in growth" and Chapter 40 states:

Reversion is the action of Tao.
Gentleness is the function of Tao.

The things of this world come from Being,
And Being (comes) from Non-being. (Lin)

The Synonyms and the Allegory of Tao

What this study has revealed about Tao up to now seems to limit Tao to the realm of metaphysics. But Laotse as well as all the sages of China is concerned mainly with the practical aspects of life: How should man live in this life? As pointed out before,¹³ he emphasized the emptiness of rank and luxury and tried to show the advantage and importance of being rather than having. The whole book of Tao Teh Ching consists of aphorisms which primarily concern humility, gentleness, resignation and the futility of contentiousness. These features of Laotse become still clearer by his use of synonyms and allegorical descriptions of the Tao.

Teh

The first synonym for Tao which Laotse utilizes to illustrate his point is Teh, although the literal meaning of these terms is not

¹³See supra, Chapter II, p. 13-14.

identical. Teh, as was said above, denotes primarily virtue, morality, goodness, favor or kindness and is used by Laotse to set forth the manifestation of Tao. Although the latter part of Tao Teh Ching (Chapters 38-81) is devoted more exclusively to Teh, it also plays a part in the first part. In Chapter 10, Teh is called a Mystic Virtue¹⁴ and its features are described as:

To give birth, to nourish,
 To give birth without taking possession,
 To act without appropriation,
 To be chief among men without managing them--
 This is the Mystic Virtue. (Lin)

In Chapter 21, Teh is called the Great Teh and:

The marks of Great Teh
 Follow alone from the Tao. (Chiu)

Chapter 28 contains the expression 常德 (Chang Teh), which Lin translates as "Original Character"; Legge, as "Constant Excellent"; Lau, as "Constant Virtue"; Chan, as "Eternal Virtue" and Parker as "Permanent Grace." By Combining these various translations, one may come quite close to the real meaning of what Laotse wanted to convey in regard to Teh and its relationship to what man's life should be. That is why in Chapter 23 Laotse says:

He who follows the Tao is identified with the Tao.
 He who follows Character (Teh) is identified with the Character.
 He who abandons (Tao) is identified with abandonment (of Tao).
 He who is identified with Tao--Tao is also glad to welcome him.
 He who is identified with Character--Character is also glad to welcome him.
 He who is identified with abandonment--Abandonment is also glad to welcome him. (Lin)

¹⁴In some versions, 元德; literally it means: the Original, Primary, First or Principal Virtue.

The Teh in the second part of Tao Teh Ching (Chapters 38-81) shows quite clearly what men should be when they "follow alone from the Tao." In Chapter 38 one gets closer to the original sense of Teh by translating it with "character," "virtue" or by leaving it untranslated.

The man of superior character is not (conscious of his) character,
Hence he has character.
The man of inferior character (is intent on) not losing character,
Hence he is devoid of character.
The man of superior character never acts,
Nor ever (does so) with an ulterior motive.
The man of inferior character acts,
And (does so) with an ulterior motive. (Lin)

Chapter 41:

Superior character appears like a hollow (valley). . . .

Extensive character appears like insufficient;
Solid character appears like infirm. (Chiu)

Chapter 49:

The good ones I declare good;
The bad ones I also declare good.
That is the goodness of Virtue.
The honest ones I believe;
The liars I also believe;
That is the faith of Virtue. (Lin)

Chapter 51:

Tao gives them birth,
Teh (character) fosters them.
The material world gives them form.
The circumstances of the moment complete them.
Therefore all things of the universe worship Tao and exalt Teh.
Tao is worshipped and Teh is exalted
Without anyone's order but is so of its own accord.
Therefore Tao gives them birth,
Teh fosters them,
Makes them grow, develops them,
Gives them a harbor, a place to dwell in peace,
Feeds them and shelters them,
It gives them birth and does not own them,
Acts (helps) and does not appropriate them,
Is superior, and does not control them.
--This is the Mystic Virtue. (Lin)

Chapter 54:

Cultivated in the individual, character will become genuine;
 Cultivated in the family, character will become abundant;
 Cultivated in the village, character will multiply;
 Cultivated in the state, character will prosper;
 Cultivated in the world, character will become universal. (Lin)

Chapter 55:

Who is rich in character
 is like a child. (Lin)

Chapter 59:

In managing human affairs, there is no better rule than to be
 sparing. [means: never do too much]
 To be sparing is to forestall;
 To forestall is called a heavy accumulation of Teh;
 To have a heavy accumulation of Teh is to be ever-victorious. (Lin)

Chapter 63:

Requite hatred with virtue. (Lin)

One

The second synonym of Tao is "One," a very important word in Taoism, especially for the later Taoist religion. In Tao Teh Ching, One has several meanings. For example, the first strophe of Chapter 10 reads:

In embracing the One with your soul,
 Can you never forsake the Tao? (Lin)

Sung Chang-hsing, a Confucianist scholar, has interpreted One in this passage as "will," or "thought." Hwong Yüang-chi, a Taoist scholar gives it the meaning "mind," or "Teh." Chu Ching-yuan, a professor in Taiwan, says that One is "breath," or "spirit." But Kao Heng, a professor on the mainland of China, now under Communist rule, explains One as "body."

In Chapter 14 we are told that the Invisible (Yi), Inaudible (Hsi), Intangible (Wei), "these three elude all our inquiries and hence blend and become One." Almost all annotators agree that this "One" is the essence of Tao. But in the first two strophes of Chapter 22 some translators interpret it differently:

To yield is to be preserved whole.
 To be bent is to become straight.
 To be hollow is to be filled.
 To be tattered is to be renewed.
 To be want is to possess.
 To have plenty is to be confused.

Therefore the Sage embraces the One,
 And becomes the model of the world. (Lin)

The imperfect becomes perfect. The old becomes new. The crooked becomes straight. The empty becomes full. Loss means gain. Plentitude means confusion.

Wherefore, the Sage holds fast to Truth and thereby sets an example for the world. (Yang)

The partial becomes complete; the crooked, straight; the empty, full; the worn out, new. He whose (desires) are few gets them; he whose (desires) are many goes astray.

Therefore the sage holds in his embrace the one thing (of humility), and manifests it to all the world. (Legge)

It is by bending that we survive, by giving way that we assert. It is by lowliness that we exercise full force, by wear and tear that we go on renewing. It is by owning little that we possess much; by owning much that bewilderment comes. For which reasons the highest form of man is single in purpose as an example to the rest of the world. (Parker)

In the above translations Yang interprets One as "Truth." Parker translates it: "embraces the One" by being "single in purpose." In his annotations, Sung equates One with "reason," while Hwang says that it is "the primordial." Kao Heng asserts that "embraces One" means "holding the body."¹⁵ Still others simply identify One with Tao. But in a

¹⁵The actual meaning Kao Heng gives is "to keep the animal spirits

footnote on One Lin Yu-tang defines it as "The Absolute, to which transient attributes revert."¹⁶

From these references to One it is obvious that in Tao Teh Ching it generally denotes instruction on how to live a successful life by following Tao. That is why in Chapter 39 Laotse says:

There were those in ancient times possessed of the One:

Through possession of the One, the Heaven was clarified,
 Through possession of the One, the Earth was stabilized
 Through possession of the One, the gods were spiritualized,
 Through possession of the One, the valleys were made full
 Through possession of the One, all things lived and grew,
 Through possession of the One, the princes and dukes became the
 ennobled of the people.

--That was how each became so. (Lin)

The things which from of old have got the One (the Tao) are--

Heaven which by it is bright and pure;
 Earth rendered thereby firm and sure;
 Spirits with powers by it supplied;
 Valleys kept full throughout their void;
 All creatures which through it do live;
 The model which to all they give.

All these are the results of the One (Tao). (Legge)

However, in Chapter 42 the One does not have the meaning of instruction but denotes the creative constitution of the universe. For it says:

Out of Tao, One is born;
 Out of One, Two;
 Out of Two, Three;
 Out of Three, the created universe.
 The created universe carries the Yin at its back and the Yang in
 front;
 Through the union of the pervading principles it reaches harmony.
 (Lin)

and body in health."

¹⁶Lin, p. 134.

Another way to translate it would be:

The Tao produced One; One produced Two; Two produced Three; Three produced All things. All things leave behind them the obscurity (out of which they have come), and go forward to embrace the Brightness (into which they have emerged), while they are harmonised by the Breath of Vacancy. (Legge)

Wing-tsit Chan favors the literal sense and translates this section in this way:

Tao produced the One.
 The One produced the Two.
 The Two produced the Three.
 And the Three produced the ten thousand things.
 The ten thousand things carry the yin and embrace the yang, and through the blending of the material force they achieve harmony.

However, the more accurate literal translation probably should be,

Tao begot One,
 One begot Two,
 Two begot Three,
 And Three begets all things.
 All things carry the Yin and embrace the Yang, and through the blending of the material force they achieve harmony.

Two reasons can be advanced to justify this translation. (1)

Taoists are almost unanimously agreed on the meaning of the "Two" and the "Three." The Two means Yin (female) and Yang (male). The Three means Ch'i (氣, breath or air) harmony with Yin and Yang. But concerning the One there are differences of opinion. Some say that it is another name for Teh, the manifestation of Tao; some say that it is the will, the mind, the thought of Tao or the original motive power of all things; some say that it is the breath or the spirit; and some say that it is primordial or primordial cell. But as was pointed out before regardless of the name they use to designate it, almost all agree that it is the essence of Tao. (2) Since the Three was begotten by the Two and the Two was begotten by the One, the One is the creative constitution

of all things. However, as Tao is moving eternally,¹⁷ the One--the essence of Tao--is also working unceasingly. Hence the One continually gives the Three the motive or procreating power, and therefore the "Three begets all things" in an ongoing process!

Great

The third synonym of Tao is Great. It is found in several chapters in Tao Teh Ching and also refers to what a man should be and how he is to deal with daily affairs.

The first use of Great as a synonym for Tao occurs in Chapter 25: "I do not know its name, and address it as Tao. If forced to give it a name, I shall call it 'Great.'" Man is then reminded that he is one of the Greats in the universe. For it says: "Therefore, Tao is Great, The Heaven is Great, The Earth is Great, The King is also Great. These are Great Four in the universe, and the King is one of them." Here one should observe that some of the ancient versions probably correctly read "Man" in place of "King." For in Chinese, "Heaven, Earth and Man" is a very common phrase; some gambling-sets even use it in their instructions. When Laotse here speaks about "Man being Great" he wants to convey the thought that man is as great as Tao, as Heaven and Earth. Therefore no things under heaven or on earth can be greater than man and there is no need of his seeking to be great. On the other hand, as the Tao moves endlessly, there comes a day when man has to return. If he really knows this course of life, he will model himself after the

¹⁷Cf. supra, The Movement of Tao.

Earth, Heaven, Tao, and imitate them by their "self-so" as the end of Chapter 25 teaches. That is why, in Chapter 34, Laotse says:

The Great Tao flows everywhere.
 All things return to it, yet claiming not,
 It may be considered great.
 Because to the end it does not claim greatness,
 Its greatness is achieved. (Lin. The alternate trans.)

In Chapter 67 Laotse makes another suggestion for man's daily life.

All the world says: My teaching (Tao) greatly resembles folly.
 Because it is great; therefore it resembles folly.
 If it did not resemble folly,
 It would have long ago become small indeed! (Lin-Chiu)

Why does Great resemble folly? In Chapter 63 Laotse alludes to the reason and says:

Deal with the difficult while yet it is easy;
 Deal with the big while yet it is small.
 The difficult (problems) of the world
 Must be dealt with while they are yet easy;
 The great (problems) of the world
 Must be dealt with while they are yet small. (Lin)

Thus Laotse is saying that the man who does not strive for great things commits folly, yet in the following lines he says:

Therefore the Sage by never dealing with great (problems)
 Accomplished greatness. (Lin)

For these reasons Laotse cries out in the first strophe of Chapter 35,

Hold the Great Symbol [i. e. Tao]
 And all the world follows,
 Follows without meeting harm,
 (And lives in) health, peace, commonwealth. (Lin)

Because Great and One are synonymous with Tao, the later Taoists combined them and commonly call Tao the Great One--太乙.

Water

One of the common allegorical terms for Tao, as used in Tao Teh

Ching, is water. Laotse pictures Tao as water and thus, by this comparison, presents many teachings to man. Four of these are singled out here.

1. Water is soft, weak, supple, pliant and gentle, similar to the Tao. But Laotse says, in the first half of Chapter 78,

There is nothing weaker than water
 But none is superior to it in overcoming the hard,
 For which there is no substitute.
 That weakness overcomes strength
 And gentleness overcomes rigidity,
 No one does not know;
 No one can put into practice. (Lin)

After careful observation of the principles of the universe, Laotse, like all the sages of China, made use of them in teaching. More than two thousand years ago Laotse noticed both the power and gentleness of water. He applied these characteristics to Tao and wrote:

The softest substance of the world
 Goes through the hardest.
 That-which-is-without-form penetrates that-which-has-no-crevice;
 Through this I know the benefit of taking no action.
 The teaching without words
 And the benefit of taking no action
 Are without compare in the universe. (Chap. 43) (Lin)

Laotse observed further that

When man is born, he is tender and weak;
 At death, he is hard and stiff.
 When the things and plants are alive, they are soft and supple;
 When they are dead, they are brittle and dry.
 Therefore hardness and stiffness are the companions of death,
 And softness and gentleness are the companions of life. (Chap. 76)
 (Lin)

In Chapter 78 Laotse goes on to say: "There is nothing weaker than water, but none is superior to it in overcoming the hard, for which there is no substitute. Weakness overcomes strength; and gentleness overcomes rigidity." He is disappointed, however, that men do not understand this and laments:

No one does not know;
 No one can put into practice! (Chap. 78) (Lin)

2. By using water as an illustration Laotse also teaches the principle of "no strife." In Chapter 8, for example, he says:

The best (of men) is like water;
 Water benefits all things
 And does not compete with them.
 It dwells in (the lowly) places that all disdain--
 wherein it comes near to the Tao. . . .

It is because he does not contend
 That he is without reproach. (Lin)

Because water preserves all animate things without, however, competing with them or aggrandizing itself, it seems as an allegory of Tao.

Therefore, whoever follows Tao is not only "without reproach," but also prevails. For in Chapter 22 Laotse says: "It is because he does not contend that no one in the world can contend against him." This is also the reason why in Chapter 73 Laotse says: "Heaven's Way (Tao) is good at conquest without strife."

3. The most significant thing about water, Laotse observed, is that it always "willingly" seeks the lowest place. Nevertheless he also maintained that there is no mountain on earth higher than water. For this reason he urges in Chapter 61:

A big country (should be like) the delta low-regions. . . .
 . . . if a big country places itself below a small country,
 It wins over the small country;
 (And) if a small country places itself below a big country,
 It overcomes the big country.

A big country ought to place itself low. (Lin)

To lower one's self is a virtue of the humble. But Laotse does not want to say it in this way. Instead he says "never be the first in the world" (Chapter 67) or "Tao in the world, may be compared to the rivers seeking repose in the sea" (Chapter 32). Furthermore, in Chapter 66:

How did the great rivers and seas become the Lords of the Ravines?
 By being good at keeping low.
 That was how they became the Lords of the Ravines. (Lin)

Now one understands also why in Tao Teh Ching Laotse again and again uses a valley or ravine to picture Tao (cf. Chapters 6, 28, 41), for they are in the lowly and empty places and thus exemplify the attributes of Tao.

4. Finally, there appear to be some other teachings of Tao allegorized by water, but no clear textual proof for them can be adduced. There is one passage, however, which seems to indicate that Laotse had water in mind when he declares that Tao cleanses all dirtiness, yet at the end is still clean itself and rules over everything. In Chapter 78, after stating that weak water overcomes what is hard, he says:

"Who receives unto himself the calumny of the world
 Is the preserver of the state.
 Who bears himself the sins of the world
 Is the king of the world."
 Straight words seem crooked. (Lin)

A Bending Bow

Another allegory used to describe Tao is that of "a bending bow." How it resembles Tao and what this is to teach is clearly stated in Chapter 77:

The Tao (way) of Heaven,
 Is it not like the bending of a bow?
 The top comes down and the bottom-end goes up,
 The extra (length) is shortened, the insufficient (width) is expanded.
 It is the Way of Heaven to take away from those that have too much
 And give to those that have not enough.
 Not so with man's way:
 He takes away from those that have not
 And gives it as tribute to those that have too much.
 Who can have enough and to spare to give to the entire world?
 Only the man of Tao.

Therefore the Sage acts, but does not possess,
Accomplishes but lays claim to no credit,
Because he has no wish to seem superior. (Lin)

There are other allegorical references to Tao, such as Mystic Female, Mother of Universe, Primary Cause, and so forth. Because these are mainly connected with cosmology, they are not of immediate concern.

CHAPTER IV

A COMPARISON OF TAO WITH THE WORD

In the foregoing chapters, the reader was introduced to the book of Tao Teh Ching, its author, and the main concepts of Tao. The purpose of this chapter is to compare the Word in the canonical books of the Bible with the Tao as used in Tao Teh Ching. As was indicated in Chapter I of this paper, this comparison is necessary because in the Chinese Bible "Tao" is commonly used to translate the biblical term for Word.¹ While it is true that this rendering is adequate, a misunderstanding of its meaning may arise if the "Tao" in its biblical sense is not differentiated from its connotations in Tao Teh Ching.

The discussion of Tao in Chapters I to III of this paper first gave an introduction to the book of Tao Teh Ching, then proceeded to analyze the Tao by examining its literal meaning, its essence, its form and image, its function, its movement and its synonyms and allegory. These aspects will be taken up in the same sequence in comparing the Tao in Tao Teh Ching with the Word in the Bible. But since in its essence Tao proved to be an elusive concept and can only be deduced to some extent

¹See *supra*, p. 1. Not in all instances, however, is the biblical "Word" translated by 道 (Tao) in the Chinese Bible. In many cases, it is rendered by 說 (Shu--as a verb it means "to speak," "to talk," "to say," "to tell," "to narrate," "to speak for" or "to excuse"; as a noun, it means "words," "speech," "discourse," "talk," or "conversation.") or by 言語 (Hua--which basically has the same meaning as Shu, but more often it is used as a noun rather than as a verb). In some places, "Word" is translated by 言 (Yen--has the same meaning as Shu and Hua; it can be used, both as a noun or as a verb). As a noun in the plural, "Words" is mostly rendered by 言語 (Yen Yü) or by 話語 (Hua Yü).

from its characteristics,² as these appear in the "movement" of Tao, the "essence" and the "movement" are treated together in this comparison under the section entitled "Connotations of the Concept of Tao and the Concept of the Word."

As will become evident, Tao and Tao Teh Ching are two different entities. Consequently, it is difficult to find a common basis for comparison since the Word also has a double usage: it may denote the inspired Word (Scriptures) as well as the personal or the incarnate Word (Christ).³ In order therefore to maintain a corresponding sequence with the foregoing chapters, points of comparison with both the inspired Word and the incarnate Word will be made under each of the topics of discussion.

The Book Tao Teh Ching and the Bible

Before taking up the terms Tao and the Word, it will prove helpful to compare the book Tao Teh Ching as such with the Bible. Both are widely disseminated and read by many people. Although some of the

²See supra, p. 26.

³In a footnote to his article "Hermeneutical principles of the Lutheran Symbols," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXIX (Jan. 1958), 2, A. C. Piepkorn points out that "'Word of God' has various meanings in the Symbols, and it is not always easy to fix the meaning precisely. In addition to being a synonym for the Sacred Scriptures, the following meanings for 'Word [of God]' can be documented: (1) As a description of the Second Person of the Most Holy Trinity (AC I 6); (2) as a synonym for 'Gospel' (Ap IV 67; LC Preface 11; FC Ep 4); (3) as the formal object of the sacred ministry (Ap XIII 11); (4) as the subject matter of the Christian proclamation (AC VIII 2 [Latin], SA-III IV; LC V 31; FC Ep II 13; SD XI 76); (5) as a generic designation for the preached Word and the Holy Sacraments (FC SD II 50); (6) as a component of a Sacrament (Ap XIII 5; SA-III V 1; SC IV 1; LC IV 18, 45; V 4)."

sayings in Tao Teh Ching are used by the Chinese in their daily lives, the book itself is still foreign to most of them because it is written in an antiquated Chinese language. The Bible, of course, is also a foreign book to the Chinese. Even at the present time, most of them still do not know the content of the Bible although it is available in translations the people can understand.

Tao Teh Ching is a small book containing only about five thousand words in the form of aphorisms. It does not deal with history or geography and has little variety in style and mood to attract readers. The Bible by comparison is a huge book. It contains history, genealogies, laws, prophecies, psalms, and epistles. It has a worldwide appeal in its concerns for all people and holds out promises to all who read and accept it.

Tao Teh Ching is concerned about the life of this world only. Its readers are not asked to believe in God or gods. It does not even require people to believe in it. It simply presents the ways of nature and hopes that people will be wise enough to follow them and thereby lead healthy, peaceful lives on earth. In other words, the primary theme of Tao Teh Ching revolves about virtues such as humility, gentleness, resignation and the futility of contentiousness. It has nothing to say about life after death. But the Bible is concerned not only with this life, but also the life to come. It urges its readers to believe in God, to forsake idols, and to accept the Gospel message so that they may have an abundant life on earth and also life everlasting. Its central message is that God loved the world and gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world and promises that he who believes this proclamation

of grace will have life eternal. It also provides man with a guide for leading a decent and satisfying life on earth. For in 2 Tim. 3:15-17 we read:

the sacred writings which are able to instruct you for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.

In concluding his Gospel, St. John also says,

These are written that you may believe that Jesus is Christ, the Son of God, and that believing you may have life in his name.
(John 20:31)

When the controversy arose in questioning Christ's divine authority,

He told the Jews:

You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me.
(John 5:39)

The Authorship of Tao Teh Ching and the Bible

Tao Teh Ching and the Bible also differ from one another regarding authorship. Tao Teh Ching is said to be the work of one person, Laotse, whose sayings were then compiled, edited and annotated by others in the course of time. The Bible was written by thirty or more people and yet in the last analysis has one author, namely, the Holy Spirit. Furthermore, even if "Laotse is a fictitious person and the book is a collection of sayings current in Spring-Autumn Annals and Warring States,"⁴ the process of compilation of Tao Teh Ching extended over a period of only

⁴See supra, pp. 11-12.

about three hundred years. But the Bible was composed by authors who were active at various times during sixteen centuries or more.

It is also interesting to note that the author, compilers and the book of Tao Teh Ching never claim that the book is a work or result of inspiration. But the Bible bases its authority on the fact that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit as is clearly stated in the passage quoted above, 2 Tim. 3:16, "All scripture is inspired by God" and, in 2 Peter 1:21, "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." (AV) Consequently, a sharp distinction should be noted: The Tao and Tao Teh Ching are two different entities. Tao Teh Ching tells about the Tao; it is not the Tao itself. The Bible, however, because it is the inspired Word of God is the Word--the Written Word.

The Literal Meaning of Tao and the Word

A comparison of the concept of Tao and the concept of the Word demonstrates that in their literal or basic meaning, Tao and the Word are quite similar. In its verbal form, Tao means "to speak," "to say" or "to tell." The Word, too, whether it is the Hebrew דָבָר or the Greek $\text{\textit{\lambda\omicron\gamma\omicron\varsigma}}$ has as its base a verb meaning "to say," "to speak," "to tell," "to mention," "to declare," "to narrate" or "to express."

Tao and the Word are also used with connotations that have similarities. As a noun, Tao denotes "word" or "doctrine." But more often, it connotes "road," "path" or "way" and more specifically "the right way," or "the true path." In its philosophical sense, Tao signifies "way," "reason" or "truth." After Chang Tao-ling established the Tao religion, Tao, came to mean "Providence." The noun "Word" also can have many

meanings. Basically, it is a "saying," a "statement," an "account," a "written narrative" and even a "doctrine" or "reason" (see Acts 18:14). By way of contrast with Tao, it is used to mean "message," especially, a prophetic "announcement." (See John 12:38; 2 Cor. 5:19; 1 Tim. 1:15 et al.) The most significant thing to note is that δ $\lambda\acute{o}\gamma\omicron\varsigma$, even without a modifier, is used as "the Word" of God (cf. Matt. 13:21,22; Mark 16:20; Luke 1:2; Acts 6:4) and in John 1:1,14 it explicitly refers to the divine "Word,"--God, the Son. The incarnate Word, Jesus, declares that He is "the way," "the truth" and "the life" (John 14:6). In His high-priestly prayer, Jesus says, "Thy Word is Truth" (John 17:17).

Connotations of the Concept of Tao and the Concept of the Word

While therefore "tao" may be used as an equivalent of the Word in the Chinese Bibles, it has already become apparent that Tao of Tao Teh Ching has connotations and characteristics that are intrinsically different from those of the biblical "tao," the Word. In the following these differences will be demonstrated and elaborated.

Tao is "impersonal," "invisible," "inaudible," "intangible," and "insipid" (Chapters 14, 21, 25).⁵ But the Word that the Scripture presents is so personal that John can say that

the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth; we have beheld his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father. (John 1:14)

This Word of a personal God is addressed to men, for St. John also states that

⁵Since a thorough study on the characteristics of Tao has already been given in the previous chapter of this paper, here merely the references to Tao Teh Ching are given.

That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon and touched with our hands, concerning the word of life--the life was made manifest, and we saw it, and testify to it, and proclaim to you the eternal life which was with the Father and was made manifest to us--that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you may have fellowship with us; and our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ. (1 John 1:1-3)

Tao in Tao Teh Ching is furthermore said to be "inexhaustible," "without beginning and without end." (Chapters 4, 25, 35) In this respect it appears to be similar to the Word, for Peter speaks of it as "living and abiding Word" (1 Peter 1:23), John says: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God." (John 1:1). Jesus says, "Heaven and earth will pass away, but my words will not pass away." (Matt. 24:35) This similarity, however, breaks down when another characteristic of Tao is drawn into the picture. Tao Teh Ching teaches that Tao is a "spontaneity" (Chapter 25) in contrast with the Word which "proceeds from the mouth of God" (Deut. 8:3; Matt. 4:4) and "is God," as pointed out above. This difference between Tao and the Word is stated clearly by Richard Klann:

For the Christian the Word of God is several things. At its highest it is the Logos, the structure of intelligibility, that which is prior to all things, the creative and ultimate power. That Word is Jesus Christ, "who was made flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Here we find Logos, Word, Jesus Christ, and God totally identified.⁶

Richard Caemmerer says:

"Word of God" means not merely saying of God, but God Himself as He acts and as He unfolds Himself and His actions to human beings.

Noteworthy is Martin Luther's insight into this dual freighting of

⁶What, Then, Is Man? (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1958), p. 11.

the concept "Word of God." Thus in 1 Peter 1:23 (EA 51, p. 377, from 1523): "It is a divine power, yes, it is God Himself."⁷

When Tao is described as "Unchangeable" in Tao Teh Ching (Chapter 25), it seems to have this quality in common with the Word. Since the latter is the Word of God and in fact is God, the characteristics of God also are those of the Word. It is as unchangeable as God is unchangeable. The psalmist confesses of God, "Thou art the same, and thy years have no end." (Ps. 102:27) and God Himself declares "I the Lord do not change." (Mal. 3:6) In Matt. 24:35, a passage quoted above, it is said that the Word likewise will not pass away. Heb. 13:8 says that the incarnate Word, "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today and for ever." But Tao is not unchangeable in this sense since it is also said to be "elusive" (see Chapter 21). Furthermore, it can not be like the Word, since it is merely a tentative hypothesis of Laotse's system and is itself a "non-existent being." In this connection, it should also be remembered that Tao is not the book of Tao Teh Ching while the Word in the Bible, however, means a concrete reality, pointing either to God Himself (Son of God), or to God's concrete revelation to men (Scriptures).

In Tao Teh Ching the claim is made that the Tao is also "ubiquitous" (see Chapter 34). And through the study of "the movement of Tao" it becomes evident that Tao is "the original motive" of all things. (See Chapters 2, 25, 40, 65) The Word, too, is "omnipresent," "omnipotent" and even "omniscient." In Jer. 23:24 God asks: "Can a man hide himself in secret places so that I can not see him? . . . Do I not fill

⁷"A Concordance Study of the Concept 'Word of God,'" Concordia Theological Monthly, XXII (March 1951), 172.

heaven and earth?" Since God fills heaven and earth, and the Word was with God and is God, therefore, the Word is "omnipresent." The resurrected Jesus declared to His disciples, "Lo, I am with you always, to the close of the age." (Matt. 28:20) God is "omnipotent." In Is. 55:10-11 God declares:

For as the rain and the snow come down from heaven, and return not thither but water the earth, making it bring forth and sprout, giving seed to the sower and bread to the eater, so shall my word be that goes forth from my mouth; it shall not return to me empty, but it shall accomplish that which I purpose, and prosper in the thing for which I sent it.

The Word also is "omnipotent." For Jeremiah (23:29) says that the Word is like fire and like a hammer which breaks the rock in pieces. Luke in recording the angel's announcement to Mary says that the Word is "powerful."⁸ In Ps. 139:1-4, the Psalmist acknowledges that God is "omniscient."

O Lord, thou hast searched me and known me! Thou knowest when I sit down and when I rise up; thou discernest my thought from afar. Thou searchest out my path and my lying down, and art acquainted with all my ways. Even before a word is on my tongue, lo, O Lord, thou knowest it altogether.

The Word is "omniscient," too. Heb 4:12 indicates that "the Word of God is living and active . . . discerning the thoughts and intentions of the heart." To the incarnate Word, Peter, the Apostle, confesses: "Lord, you know everything." (John 21:17)

In spite of similarity in terminology, these characteristics of the Word are not applicable to Tao. When "ubiquity" is ascribed to Tao in Laotse's system, this term is used to express the conviction that after observing the principles of the universe, the Taoist can assert

⁸ Notice the Greek text of Luke 1:37. In the Chinese Kuoyü Bible it is translated as 因為出於上帝的話，沒有一句不帶能力的。(Literally: For out of the Word of God, no one sentence has no power.)

that Tao exists in all things and all things are the manifestation of Tao. It is "Impersonal" and "elusive." But the Word is a definite, unchangeable, objective verity; in the Scripture and in the incarnate Word a personal God speaks to men of realities and truths that endure.

This difference must also be kept in mind when Tao is characterized as "unselfishness." (Chapter 10) Since Tao is impersonal, it must be a neutral abstract "being" or "thing." It has no feeling or emotion. Therefore, it is "not benevolent" as Chapter 5 of Tao Teh Ching claims. Consequently, the last part of Chapter 62 in Tao Teh Ching which states

Why did the ancients highly value this Tao? Did they not say,
 "Those who seek shall have it and those who sin shall be freed"?
 (Chan)

must not be taken to indicate that one of the characteristics of Tao is "forgiving." The Word, however, who is God Himself, is "benevolent," "merciful," "gracious" and "love"; and through His inspired Word, the Bible, conveys His "benevolence," "mercy," "grace" and "love" to men. Though the Word is "just" and "faithful" it is also "forgiving." That is why John says,

the blood of Jesus his (God's) Son cleanses us from sin. . . .

If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just, and will forgive our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness. (1 John 1:7,9)

Paul, too, is able to proclaim in 2 Cor. 5:18-19,

And all things are of God, who hath reconciled us to Himself by Jesus Christ, and hath given to us the ministry of reconciliation; to wit, that God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself, not imputing their trespasses unto them; and hath committed unto us the word of reconciliation. (AV)

Furthermore, since Tao is a neutral abstract "being" or "thing," Tao is not life itself. But the Word is spirit and life as Jesus says, "the words that I have spoken to you are spirit and life" (John 6:63)

and "I am the life" (John 14:16). Since Tao is "an image of what existed before God" (Chapter 4), it is evident that Tao is not God or of divine origin. The whole Tao Teh Ching gives an impression that Tao is independent of God and has a spontaneous origin (see Chapters 1, 4, 14, 21, 25, 34, 40, 42, 51, 67, and others). Therefore while one reads Tao Teh Ching, he is not actually reading Tao. One may understand Tao partly by reading Tao Teh Ching, yet fully and actually to know the Tao, one must observe the ways and the external phenomena of nature and then ponder within himself whether he is really observing the ways of nature. For this reason the Chinese may meditate on and immerse themselves in Tao without directing their thoughts to God or engaging in religious worship. It remains on the level of humanism. This is especially true of the literati class. Theoretically they are adherents of Confucius yet practically they are following Laotse. It is the metaphysical concept of Tao which is the real attraction for them. But the Word is not a metaphysical concept. It is not a principle of physics. When one reads the Bible, he is reading the Word. The Word is of divine origin for it is inspired by God and therefore is spirit and truth. The incarnate Word is God, God the Son.

So Tao in Tao Teh Ching is essentially a philosophical system. It is an object and a way of thinking but does not, originally, direct the reader to a divine being who is to be worshipped. The Word is not just a thought, it also inspires and directs religious living. The incarnate Word is the object of adoration. For Jesus says, "You believe in God, believe also in me" (John 14:1); "I and the Father are one" (John 10:30). Therefore, "all men (should) honor the Son, even as they honor the Father who sent him." (John 5:23)

The Form of Tao and the Word

Since Tao in Tao Teh Ching is essentially a philosophical system and an object and a way of thinking rather than divine instruction for worship, it follows that Tao has no concrete form but consists merely of principles. In fact, since Tao is not the book of Tao Teh Ching and is something other than Tao Teh Ching, it has no written form at all. A casual reading of Chapter 21 of Tao Teh Ching may give the impression that Tao does have a form, or forms, for it says:

The thing that is called Tao
Is elusive, evasive,
Evasive, elusive,
Yet latent in it are forms. (Lin)

But when one delves into this chapter more deeply, one discovers that the forms mentioned here are not different ways of expressing what Tao actually is and says, but modes of its various manifestation in principles, rules, systems, or laws, in the concrete cosmos. For as Chapter 14 says, Tao "is called the Form of the Formless, the Image of Nothingness."

The Word, however, does have actual forms. It may be oral (Preaching), written (Scriptures) or signed (Sacraments). But in all its forms it has one purpose: to direct man to Jesus Christ, the personal, incarnated form of the eternal, divine Word, that is to God Himself. For in Heb. 1:1-2 the writer says:

God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by His Son, whom He hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also He made the worlds. (AV)

There are two elements in this passage that are relevant at this point: (1) at sundry times and (2) in divers manners. Before the time

of Moses, God spoke to man only in the oral form of the Word. Later, God spoke to man both in oral and written form. But when the time had fully come, God sent forth His Son, born of a woman, born under the law (Gal. 4:4), and thereby spoke to man by the incarnated form of the Word. Today God speaks to man through the written, spoken and signed forms of the Word.

When the Word was given by God in oral form, it does not necessarily mean that it had a sound audible to human ears. We do not know how God spoke to the "nothing" and made it become existence. God is not a man and restricted to human speaking. But in order to make Himself known and in order to enable man to understand His will, the Bible frequently says that the Word of the Lord came to an individual. Often it simply states that God said so and so. In other instances, God revealed His holy will through dreams. For example, in Jer. 23:28 God says: "Let the prophet who has a dream tell the dream, and let him who has my word speak my word faithfully." God also made His Word known through visions. Sometimes certain visions appeared to an individual to whom He was speaking. At other times He spoke to people in a vision. Sometimes He let the prophets see unusual visions, at other times He let the seers see ordinary things or affairs in which the message of God was given to them.

The Word in written form is also the Word of God. For the Bible was "inspired by God" (2 Tim. 3:16); and "men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God." (2 Peter 1:21)

The Word in incarnated form is also called the personal Word (John 1:14), as was pointed out above in the comparison of the characteristics

of Tao and the Word. In his book, The Word That Can Never Die, Valen-Sendstad says,

This is the incarnation of God, of the eternal Son--i. e., His becoming flesh and appearing in the world of time and history. This does not happen whenever or wherever a human being is born. This happened on one single occasion at a specific time: in the days of Caesar Augustus (Luke 2:1 ff.); and at a specific place: conceived in Nazareth (Luke 1:26), born in Bethlehem (Luke 2:4) in Palestine, 'the Promised Land' on the eastern shore of the Mediterranean. He who came in the flesh received the name Jesus (Matt. 1:21), and is God's Messiah, the Lord in the city of David (Luke 2:11)--Jesus Christ. The incarnation will never be repeated in all eternity, neither in heaven nor on earth. (Cf. Heb. 9:26 f.)⁹

In His state of humiliation, Jesus, God's only Son "emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, being born in the likeness of men" (Phil. 2:7). But after Jesus' ascension, the incarnated form of the Word is no longer physically present in the world. Before His ascension, Jesus not only charged the disciples to proclaim the Gospel (to preach and teach the oral form, written form and incarnated form of the Word), but also instituted two sacraments--the Word in signed form.

The signed form of the Word is also called the visible Word of God. In a broader sense, the signed form of the Word includes all symbols, such as crucifixes, icons, pictures or whatever may be used to remind us of the Word. In Old Testament times, circumcision, the passover feast, sacrifices and the symbolic actions of the prophets belong to this category.¹⁰ But "strictly speaking," as H. A. Preus says, the

⁹Olav Valen-Sendstad, The Word That Can Never Die (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1966), pp. 36-37.

¹⁰For instance, "Ahijah the Shilonite tore his garment into twelve pieces and gave them to Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:29 ff.), Isaiah drew up a tablet with a name written on it (Is. 8:1-4) and went about 'naked,' that is, in modern language, in the dress of a deportee (Is. 20:1 ff.), and

signed form of the Word "should be used only with reference to the [two] sacraments."¹¹ They are Holy Baptism and Holy Communion.

Baptism is the Word in a signed form--the visible Word of God--for as Luther says in his Small Catechism: "Baptism is not simple water only, but it is the water comprehended in God's command and connected with God's word." Luther says further, the power of Baptism "is not the water . . . but the word of God which is in and with the water, and faith, which trusts such word of God in the water."

Holy Communion is the visible Word of God, because in, with and under the bread and wine, the personal Word of God, Jesus Christ gives his true body and true blood to those who take this Sacrament for the forgiveness of sins. This eating and drinking effects forgiveness because of the words that Jesus says--"given and shed for you for the remission of sins."

The Function of Tao and the Word

Though Tao Teh Ching claims that Tao creates and preserves everything (see Chapters 34, 42, 51) and even gives some indication that it forgives man (see Chapter 62), yet it is basically a philosophical system or hypothesis. For the book of Tao Teh Ching speaks of "flexibility," and "gentleness" as the function of Tao (see Chapters 10, 36, 40, 43, 52

Jeremish broke a flask and bought a field (Jer. 27:6 ff.), and Ezekiel in particular is credited with a whole series of extremely curious 'symbolic actions' (Ezek. 4-5)," as Gerhard von Rad (OTT, II, 95) observes.

¹¹"The Written, Spoken, and Signed Word," Concordia Theological Monthly, XXVI (Sept. 1955), 641.

and 78); Tao is inaction and everything is complete (see Chapters 37 and 48; also Chapters 2, 3, 38, 43, 57, 63 and 64). This emphasis on resignation to nature arose from a troublesome eon. Throughout Chinese history, from the Age of the Spring and Autumn Annals, through the Age of Warring States down to the Chin Dynasty, all rulers wanted to have something done for their own glory and advantage. Hence the states were restless. War, plague, famine were endless. This resulted in the pessimism of Laotse who urged inaction and resignation. Through the book of Tao Teh Ching, Laotse and its compilers urged people, especially those who were in high positions, to return to a state of pristine simplicity and to lead a quiet and peaceful life. For instance, in Chapter 80, Laotse says,

(Let there be) a small country with a small population,
 Where the supply of goods are tenfold or hundredfold, more than
 they can use.
 Let the people value their lives (literally, "death") and not mi-
 grate far.
 Though there be boats and carriages,
 None be there to ride them.
 Though there be armor and weapons,
 No occasion to display them.
 Let the people again tie ropes for reckoning,
 Let them enjoy their food,
 Beautify their clothing,
 Be satisfied with their homes,
 Delight in their customs.
 The neighboring settlements overlook one another
 So that they can hear the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks of
 their neighbors,
 And the people till the end of their days shall never have been
 outside their country. (Lin)

The State should be small, and its inhabitants should be few. Its ruler should teach the people to shun arms and weapons even though they are available. He should teach the people to avoid the risks of death, and to be reluctant to travel in distant countries. Thus though there might be ships and carriages, they would have no need to mount them. Though there might be arms and weapons, they would have no need to use them. He should make the people return to the state of pristine simplicity where the system of knotting threads

was used. Then they would relish the food they eat; consider beautiful the clothes they wear; regard as comfortable the houses they dwell in; enjoy the customs they have. The States may be so closely situated that the barking of dogs and crowing of cocks in one may be heard in the other. Thus the people would be content to live in their own country from the time of their birth until their death without thinking of foreign intercourse. (Yang)

In a little state with a small population, I would so order it, that, though there were individuals with the abilities of ten or a hundred men, there should be no employment of them; I would make the people, while looking on death as a grievous thing, yet not remove elsewhere (to avoid it).

Though they had boats and carriages, they should have no occasion to ride in them; though they had buff coats and sharp weapons, they should have no occasion to don or use them.

I would make the people return to the use of knotted cords (instead of the written characters).

They should think their (coarse) food sweet; their (plain) clothes beautiful; their (poor) dwellings places of rest; and their common (simple) ways sources of enjoyment.

There should be a neighbouring state within sight, and the voices of the fowls and dogs should be heard all the way from it to us, but I would make the people to old age, even to death, not have any intercourse with it. (Legge)

My ideal is a series of small states with small populations. Let them possess an army machine of moderate size, but not be too ready to use it. Let them place a proper value on their lives, and refrain from distant migrations. Then, though they will be possessed of boats and carts, there will be no one to ride in them; though they will be possessed of arms and cuirasses, there will be no need for arraying them. Let the people revert to the old quipu system of records, enjoy their food, take a pride in their clothes, dwell in peace, and rejoice in their local customs. Each state would be within easy sight of the other; the sound of each other's hens crackling and dogs barking would be heard across. The people of each state would live to a good old age, and would have no movement of intercourse with neighbouring states. (Parker)

Hence, it becomes clear that Tao seeks to solve life's problems by a negative principle of life.

The Word, however, is not just a theory. This is evident from Col. 2:8-15, where St. Paul says:

See to it that no one makes a prey of you by philosophy and empty deceit, according to human tradition, according to the elemental spirits of the universe, and not according to Christ. For in him the whole fulness of deity dwells bodily, and you have come to fullness of life in him, who is the head of all rule and authority. In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of flesh in the circumcision of Christ; and you were buried with him in baptism, in which you were also raised with him through faith in the working of God, who raised him from the dead. And you, who were dead in trespasses and the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made alive together with him, having forgiven us all our trespasses, having canceled the bond which stood against us with its legal demands; this he set aside, nailing it to the cross. He disarmed the principalities and powers and made a public example of them, triumphing over them in him.

The Word has a real function. When the Word is spoken, it produces action; when the Word proceeds from God, something happens. For example, in the beginning when God began to create the heavens and the earth, God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light (Gen. 1:3); when God said, "Let the earth put forth vegetation, plants yielding seed, and fruit trees bearing fruit in which is their seed, each according to its kind, upon the earth." And it was so (Gen. 1:11). These facts enable the psalmist to say,

By the word of the Lord the heavens were made, and all their host
by the breath of his mouth. . . .
For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood forth.
(Ps. 33:6,9)

The Word not only creates the whole world, it also preserves it.

For instance, in Heb. 1:3 the assurance is given that

He (God's Son, the incarnate Word) reflects the glory of God and bears the very stamp of his nature, upholding the universe by his word of power.

And the psalmist attributes to God what is accomplished by the Word, "O Lord, Thou preservest man and beast." (AV, Ps. 36:6)

Furthermore, the Word not only is life, it is also the source of life. When the Word calls for life, life is there. Genesis states:

And God said, "Let the waters bring forth swarms of living creatures, and let birds fly above the earth across the firmament of the heavens." So God created the great sea monsters and every living creature that moves, with which the waters swarm, according to their kinds, and every winged bird according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. (1:20-21)

And God said, "Let the earth bring forth living creatures according to their kinds: cattle and creeping things and beasts of the earth according to their kinds." And it was so. And God made the beasts of the earth according to their kinds and the cattle according to their kinds, and everything that creeps upon the ground according to its kind. And God saw that it was good. Then God said, "Let us make man in our image, after our likeness; and let them have dominion over the fish of the sea, and over the birds of the air, and over the cattle, and over all the earth, and over every creeping thing that creeps upon the earth." So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them. (1:24-27)

In the Gospel Jesus said to a widow's son who had died, "Young man, I say to you, arise," and the dead man sat up, and began to speak (see Luke 7:11-17). Lazarus, a man dead for four days, responded when Jesus came to the tomb and cried with a loud voice, "Lazarus, come out!" (See John 11:1-44) Moreover, the Word not only is the source of life, it gives life eternal to those who believe. In John 5:24, Jesus says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life.

The Word also functions as a means of resisting temptation. For example, when Jesus was tempted He used the Word to defeat the devil (Matt. 4:1-11). Any believer can use the Word to resist temptation and says with Joseph "How can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?" (Gen. 39:9), or pray as David,

Create in me a clean heart, O God, and put a new and right spirit within me.
Cast me not away from thy presence, and take not thy holy Spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of thy salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit. (Ps. 51:10-12)

Whoever reads the Bible, or hears the Word proclaimed, and thus meets the Word who became flesh--Jesus Christ--and ponders upon it, not resisting the Holy Spirit, will receive the power to believe (Rom. 10:17), and by believing receives forgiveness of sins, becomes a new creature who rejoices in doing God's will, has the hope of everlasting life, and tastes the love of God. All of these are brought about as a result of the functions of the Word. People actually experience the Word's power; it is not just an abstract theory. This is why Peter says,

You have been born anew, not of perishable seed
 But of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God; for
 "All flesh is like grass and all its glory like the flower of grass.
 The grass withers, and the flower falls, but the word of the Lord
 abides for ever."
 That word is the good news which was preached to you. (1 Peter 1:
 23-25)

In addition, the Word is also able to discern the thoughts and intentions of the heart. The writer of Hebrews states:

For the word of God is living and active sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing to the division of soul and spirit, of joints and marrow, and discerning thoughts and intentions of the heart.
 (Heb. 4:12)

The Word also is an agent of punishing and judging. When the Israelites rebelled against God, (Hos. 6:5) He says,

Therefore I have hewn them by the prophets,
 I have slain them by the words of my mouth,
 and my judgment goes forth as the light.

And in John 12:47-48, Jesus declares:

If any one hears my sayings and does not keep them, I do not judge him; for I did not come to judge the world but to save the world. He who rejects me and does not receive my sayings has a judge; the word that I have spoken will be his judge on the last day.

The Synonyms and Figurative Descriptions of Tao and the Word

Finally, it is true that through the study of the synonyms and the allegory of Tao, the reader is to learn some practical hints on how man's life should be. For example, it urges man to be virtuous and noble, not to be ashamed to appear foolish, to go to the lower place as does water, gently and willingly, and to live free of strife.¹² Man, the sages suggested "acts, but does not possess; accomplishes, but lays claim to no credit." (Chapter 77)

The Word, too, uses many synonyms and figurative descriptions to direct man to live a quiet and peaceable life on earth and to preserve the real life unto everlasting. When contending against the principalities, against the powers, against the world rulers of this present darkness, against the spiritual hosts of wickedness in the heavenly places, Eph. 6:13 advises Christians to take on the whole armor of God in order to be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand. The whole armor of God is described in verses 14-17:

Stand therefore, having girded your loins with truth, and having put on the breastplate of righteousness, and having shod your feet with the equipment of the gospel of peace; above all taking the shield of faith, with which you can quench all the flaming darts of the evil one. And take the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God.

Man has a material life to sustain, yet the Word warns that "man is not to live by bread alone." The real need of man's real life is the Word--the Son of God, Jesus Christ. Because natural man does not see his need of the Word and is concerned only with the material aspect

¹²Cf. supra, pp. 41-53.

of life, Jesus describes Himself as fulfilling the real need for man in this way: "I am the bread of life; he who comes to me shall not hunger, and he who believes in me shall never thirst" (John 6:35). Again Jesus says, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven; if any one eats of this bread, he will live for ever" (John 6:51). To make the same point, the Bible also pictures the Word as "milk." So Peter urges Christians, "Like newborn babes, long for for the pure spiritual milk, that by it you may grow up to salvation " (1 Peter 2:2).

When the troublesome world makes man hopeless, the Word is Gospel-- Good News. It is "the word of truth" (Eph. 1:13) and comes to man "in power and in the Holy Spirit and with full conviction" (1 Thess. 1:5). Actually, the Gospel "is the power of God for salvation to every one who has faith." (Rom 1:16)

When one's life is filled with gloom and chaos, the Word is "light" for him as the psalmist confesses to God, "Thy word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path." (Ps. 119:105) In fact, Jesus, the incarnate Word is the light of the world. (See John 1:5; 8:12; 9:5)

There are other synonyms and figurative descriptions of the Word such as "law," "wisdom," "manna," "door of the sheep," "true vine" and so forth. But there is nothing in Tao Teh Ching which offers any comparison to the power and effect of the Word, as it is described in the above in symbols of human experience.

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Tao Teh Ching is one of the most important sacred books to the "Tao Religion" which is known to the Westerners as Taoism. This study, however, does not deal with all the aspects of the Taoist religious view of Tao in comparing it with the Word. Rather, it restricts itself to combine the philosophical and religious sense of Tao and does not enter into a consideration of the superstitious sense of Tao.

Although not all Chinese believe in the Taoist Religion, in a way, consciously or unconsciously, they all are Taoists for they do follow the concept of Tao in Tao Teh Ching in their daily lives. The Confucians, for example, while they profess to have a high esteem for Confucius, nevertheless will cite Tao Teh Ching to point out how the greatness, gentleness and unselfishness of Tao functions in directing human lives. The Chinese Buddhists, too, base their practices to a considerable degree on the concept of Tao in Tao Teh Ching. Since different political beliefs, different schools of thought, and even different translations of Tao Teh Ching have different views of Tao Teh Ching and of Tao, this study has tried as objectively as possible to consider most of their views, yet has almost always traced back its meaning to the original writer's and the compilers' concept of Tao in comparing it with the Word in the Bible.

Although not every place where the "Word" appears is translated by "Tao" in the Chinese Bible, the most common way to say "Preaching" is "Chiang Tao" (講道, literally: to preach the Tao). While the rendering of "Word" by "Tao" apparently is adequate in the literal sense,

the ontological sense of Tao and the Word have immense differences. The pronounced differences can be summed up as follows:

1. Tao Teh Ching is concerned about the life of this world only. The Bible is concerned not only with this life, but also the life to come.
2. The primary theme of Tao Teh Ching revolves about virtues such as humility, gentleness, resignation and the futility of contentiousness. The Bible's central message is that God loved the world and gave His Son, Jesus Christ, to the world and promises that he who believes this proclamation of grace will have life eternal.
3. The author, compilers and the book of Tao Teh Ching never claim that the book is a work or result of inspiration. The Bible, on the other hand, bases its authority on the fact that it is inspired by the Holy Spirit.
4. Tao Teh Ching and Tao are two different entities. The Bible is the Word.
5. Tao is an "X" of Laotse's metaphysical system. It is impersonal, invisible, inaudible, intangible and insipid. But the Word that the Bible presents is personal. This Word of a personal God is addressed to men and becomes incarnate in Jesus Christ, God's only begotten Son.
6. Tao in Tao Teh Ching is said to be inexhaustible, without beginning and without end and yet it is a spontaneity or self-so in origin. The living and abiding Word, however, proceeds from the mouth of God and is God.

7. Tao and the Word both are described as unchangeable. This similarity with the Word, however, is only specious because Tao is also said to be elusive and a non-existent being. The Word, on the other hand, is a well-defined and permanent message of the changeless God and in the incarnate Word is an actual reality.
8. In spite of the fact that Tao is claimed to be ubiquitous and powerful, similar to the omnipresent, omnipotent and even omniscient Word, Tao and the Word are different in kind and degree. Proceeding from the observation of the principles of the universe, Taoism asserts that Tao exists in all things and all things are the manifestation of Tao, but Tao is not God or gods. The Word on the contrary, emanates from God and therefore has all the characteristics of God. Jesus Christ is God incarnate.
9. Tao is characterized as unselfishness. Since it is impersonal, it can only be a neutral abstract entity or thing without feeling or emotion. Therefore, it is not actually benevolent or forgiving. The Word, however, whether it in its inscripturated form or as the incarnate Word, is benevolent, merciful, gracious. Though it is just and faithful, it also affords forgiveness.
10. As a neutral abstract being or thing Tao apparently is not life itself. But the Word is life and Spirit.
11. Tao is essentially a philosophical system. Originally, it is an object and a way of thinking but not an object for worship. The Word is not just a thought, it also inspires and directs religious living. The eternal God as Word and that Word incarnate as Jesus Christ is the object of adoration.

12. Tao has no concrete form but consists merely of principles, which are designed to lead man to turn back to nature (or, to the natural, pristine way of life). The Word, however, does have actual forms. It may be oral, written or signed. In all its forms, it has one purpose: to direct man to the incarnated form of the personal Word, God manifest in the flesh, Jesus Christ.
13. Though Tao Teh Ching claims that Tao creates and preserves everything, it is basically a philosophical system or hypothesis. The Word on the other hand, is not just a theory. It functions in creating and preserving heaven and earth. Its power derives from the almighty God. Jesus Christ is the incarnate Word through whom all things were made.
14. Tao seeks to solve life's problems through a negative principle of life. The living Word, however, is a positive source of life. It gives man the power to resist temptation, to believe in Jesus, the Savior, and thereby to obtain the forgiveness of sins and life everlasting. Because it also discerns the thoughts and intentions of the heart, it acts as a punishing and judging agent.

Since Tao is an unknown "X" and a non-existent being or thing, it should be clear that the teaching of Tao Teh Ching cannot solve man's problems. The world's only hope is the Word of God. Jesus, the incarnate Word says:

Truly, truly, I say to you, he who hears my word and believes him who sent me, has eternal life; he does not come into judgment, but has passed from death to life. (John 5:24)

This study has dealt mainly with a comparison of the concepts of Tao and the Word. A sequel to this study could profitably deal with a comparison of Tao Teh Ching and the Bible as offering a solution to life's problems.

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