

Daoism (Taoism)

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Schedule

- The history of Laozi and Zhuangzi
- Some Philosophical Concepts in Daoism
- Daoism as a religion
- Textbook: Chapter 16 and 17

History of Daoism

- The philosophical Daoism was mainly developed in the period of Eastern Zhou Dynasty.
- You may consider that Philosophical Daoism is more or less in the same period with Classical Confucianism
- Religious Daoism exists much later than the philosophical Daoism

Laozi (Tradition)

- Traditionally, people believe that Laozi is the founder of Daoism (Just like Confucian is the founder of Confucianism)
- This establishes the traditional claim that Laozi was a senior contemporary of Confucius. A meeting or meetings between Confucius and Laozi, identified as "Lao Dan," is reported in different sources.

Traditional Story of Laozi

- When he reached the northwest border then separating China from the outside world, the official in charge of the border pass, asked that he put his thoughts to writing.
- The result was a book consisting of some five thousand Chinese characters, divided into two parts. This book is *Daodejing* (*Tao-te ching*)
- Thereafter, Laozi left; no one knew where he had gone.

Laozi

- This traditional story of Laozi has been questioned seriously nowadays.
- Disagreements abound on every front, including the name Laozi itself!
- A confusion: "Laozi" 老子 in Chinese can be more than a name. It can also be a description, meaning "elder" or "old people"

A better explanation

- The traditional story of Laozi reflects a conflation of different legends.
- The earliest strand revolved around the meeting of Confucius with Laozi and was current by the fourth century B.C.E.
- Probably, Confucius only met an *elder* or *old people* who was famous in that period.

A better Explanation

- It was not until the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), when the teachings of Laozi, Zhuangzi, and others were seen to share certain insights centering on the concept of Dao, that they were classified together under the rubric of philosophical Daoism

Laozi or Daodejing (The book)

- Not only Laozi as the person is in questions. The history of the book is also questionable.
- Traditionally, the story is that *Daodejing* was written by Laozi himself (Sima Qian's account).

The Book

- Much remains uncertain. But it may suffice to say that *Daodejing* is not written by one person or in one time period only. It is a collection of different words from the Spring and Autumn period to the Warring States Period.

Zhuangzi (The person and the Book)

- Comparatively, there are fewer questions about Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu). At least we are quite sure that there was such a person in Chinese history!
- Zhuangzi probably authored only parts of the first 7 chapters of the present text, the so-called Inner Chapters.
- The others were written either by followers They often expand on themes in the "inner" chapters. (Outer Chapters and miscellaneous Chapters)

Laozi and Zhuangzi

- The relation between the two founding figures of Daoism is a growing puzzle.
- Tradition treats Zhuangzi as a follower of Laozi. But we know Zhuangzi's life only from the text, which hardly confirms the traditional story.
- On the contrary, along with recent discoveries, the text makes it as plausible that Zhuangzi was the original Daoist.

Dao 道

- Laozi's book is called *Dao-de-jing* 道德經, which actually means the book (jing) of Dao and De.
- Dao is the central concept in Daoism. And it is the hardest concept to understand as well.
- The first sentence of Daodejing is "The Dao that can be spoken of is not the eternal Dao".

Dao

- Dao = Logos?
- Bible John Chapter 1 "1:1 In the beginning was the Logos (Word), and the Logos (Word) was with God, and the Logos (Word) was fully God."
- Sometimes, when we want to translate Logos into Chinese, we use the Chinese word of "Dao" 道. However, it seems that we do not do it the other way round.

Dao

- *Dao* can mean "way", "road", "path", or "route," and can be extended to mean "path ahead", "way forward", "method", "principle", "doctrine", or simply "the Way".
- Metaphysical meaning of Dao: Ontologically, Dao is the "base" or "foundation" of this world. (Supernatural) (see Chapter 42, and Fung pp. 96-97)

Dao

- In ancient China, Dao gained a special currency referring to the Way of Nature or of Heaven, or even God. But a major difference is that, Dao has no personality. Indeed, we cannot "tell" exactly what it is. ("Dao" is not a name)
- Dao is not only something outside our world; it is also something in the world (as our guide, our principle, etc.).
- An example:

The Invariable law of nature

- Dao itself does not change, but things are ever changeable and changing.
- Among the laws that govern the changes of things, the most fundamental is that "when a thing reaches one extreme, it reverts from it"
- 第四十章 反者道之動，弱者道之用，天下萬物生於有，有生於無。

Chapter 40 (D. C. Lau)

- Turning back is how the way moves;
- Weakness is the means the way employs.
- The myriad creatures in the world are born from Something, and something from nothing.

Chapter 40 (Chan Wing-Tsit)

- Reversion is the action of Tao
- Weakness is the foundation of Tao.
- All things in the world come from being.
- And being comes from non-being.

The action of Dao

- The invariable Law of Nature is the action of Dao, i.e. to go further and further means to revert again
- The idea is that if anything develops certain extreme qualities, those qualities invariably revert to become their opposites.

De德

- A Daoist formula for *de* is "*dao* within."
- Translators most commonly use "virtue" as a translation
- "Power" is an alternative translation that reflects the link between *de* and successful action or achievement for its possessor.

De

- Given the importance of aesthetics in Chinese accounts of *dao*, we may think of *de* as constant virtue
- De exhibits itself in a performer by making his "interpretation" of the thing performed (a ceremony, chant or ritual) work in the context.
- Thus *de* links *dao* with correct performance.

De as babe?

- Chapter 28: Then the constant virtue will not desert you; And you will again return to being a babe.
- Chapter 55: One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to a new born babe
- Chapter 49: the sage treats them all like children.

Dao, De and Ren, Yi, Li

- Notice that in Dadejing, Daoists consider that Dao and De are more important than those moral virtues from Confucianism
- Chapter 38: "Hence when the Dao was lost there was De; when De was lost there was Ren; when Ren was lost there was Yi; when Yi was lost there was Li. Li is the wearing thin of loyalty and good faith, and the beginning of disorder."

Chapter 18

- When the great Dao is cast aside you will have 'humanity' and 'morality.'
- When intuitive wisdom emerges you will have great artifice.
- When great kinship is not in harmony, you will have 'filiality' and 'affection.'
- When states and great families sink and become deranged, you will have 'loyal ministers.'

Chapter 19

- Terminate the Sage, junk 'wisdom', the people will benefit a hundred-fold.
- Terminate Ren, junk Yi, the people will respond with filial and affection.
- Terminate 'artistry', junk 'benefit', thieves and robbers will lack 'existence'.

Wu-Wei 無為

- Literally, Wu-Wei in Chinese means "do nothing"
- But the meaning of Wu-Wei in Daoism does not mean that we should do nothing.
- It seems that it means that we should not do anything that is not related to Dao and De.

Wu-Wei

- Both *Dadejing* and *Zhuangzi* explicitly denies knowledge and morality. We should do nothing about them.
- Chapter 48: In the pursuit of learning one knows more every day; in the pursuit of the way one does less every day. One does less and less until one does nothing at all (Wu-Wei)

Zhuangzi on Wu-Wei

- Zhuangzi also has a strong intention to decline knowledge.
- "My life is finite, but learning knowledge is infinite. Using the finite life to chase infinite knowledge must be a failure. If I think this failure is successful, it is even a greater failure."
吾生也有涯，而知也無涯。以有涯隨無涯，殆已；已而為知者，殆而已矣。(Zhuangzi, Chapter "Key to nurturing Life") (My translation!)

Bible (Comparison)

- Ecclesiastes 12:12 And further, my son, take note of this: of the making of books there is no end, and much learning is a weariness to the flesh

Wu-Wei in Politics

- According to Laozi, the duty of a ruler is not to do things, but rather to undo or not to do at all. The troubles of the world come, not because there are many things not yet done, but because too many things are done.

Chapter 3

- Not praising the worthy prevents contention,
Not esteeming the valuable prevents theft,
Not displaying the beautiful prevents desire.

In this manner the sage governs people:
Emptying their minds,
Filling their bellies,
Weakening their ambitions,
And strengthening their bones.

If people lack knowledge and desire
Then they can not act;
If no action is taken
Harmony remains.

Chapter 57

- Do not control the people with laws,
nor violence nor espionage,
But conquer them with inaction.

For:

The more morals and taboos there are,
The more cruelty afflicts people;
The more guns and knives there are,
The more factions divide people;
The more arts and skills there are,
The more change obsoletes people;
The more laws and taxes there are,
The more theft corrupts people.

Yet take no action, and the people nurture each other;
Make no laws, and the people deal fairly with each other;
Own no interest, and the people cooperate with each other;
Express no desire, and the people harmonize with each other.

Confucianism and Daoism

- Now it is obvious that why Daoism is a main alternative to Confucianism in China.
- When Confucian asks people to develop and construct the world, Daoist asks people not to care about that.
- Many Chinese became Daoists when they had failed in their career (say, in politics)

Daoism as a religion

- All of the above is about philosophical Daoism (Daojia 道家) . However, it does not have any strong relationship with Daoism as a religion (Daojiao 道教).
- Daoism-religion: start from late Han Dynasty 漢朝, become a mainstream of religion in China in the Three Kingdom Period 三國 and later.

Daoism-religion

- Daoism-religion is just like a combination of many different religious traditions in China.
- Since there is no a single source of this religion, there is neither a founder of it, nor there is a united set of religious doctrines.

Gods in Daoism

- Laozi, a fictional figure in Philosophical Daoism, has mentioned Dao, which is quite 'supernatural'. And so later Laozi has become a God in Daoism.
- Indeed, Daoism-religion has many Gods. Zhuangzi has become another God. The Yellow Emperor 黃帝, a fictional figure as the first king of China in legend, is also an important God in Daoism.

Huang-Lao

- Indeed, Daoism-religion treats the Yellow Emperor and Laozi as the founders of this religion. So Sometimes the term "Lao-Zhuang Philosophy" is used to distinguish the philosophical Daoism from the more religious "Huang-Lao" (Yellow Emperor-Laozi) strain of Daoist thought.

Daoism

- Daoism-religion is a very rich source to understand Chinese culture because it has combined and adopt many Chinese traditions.
- Your textbook has a very detailed description of the history of Daoism-religion.