

Literatures of Asia

From Antiquity to the Present

Edited and with introductions by

Tony Barnstone

WHITTIER COLLEGE

Prentice
Hall

Upper Saddle River, New Jersey 07458

Therefore the sage says:

He who takes upon himself the humiliation of the people is fit to rule them.

He who takes upon himself the country's disasters deserves to be king of the universe.

The truth often sounds paradoxical.

■ Zhuangzi (Chuang Tzu) (c. 369–286 B.C.) (philosophy)

TRANSLATED BY BURTON WATSON

Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi is a shadow behind the work that bears his name. Little is known of his life, except that a man named Zhuangzi (Master Zhuang) lived in the fourth century B.C., in what is now Henan province. Early in life he was a petty official in "the lacquer garden" of Meng, but for most of his life he scorned officialdom, preferring to be his own man. The great historian Sima Qian remarks that he had vast knowledge and that he wrote a long work explaining Laozi's teachings and attacking the doctrine of the early philosophers Confucius (551–479 B.C.) and Mo Tzu (470–391 B.C.?). Zhuangzi is the most important interpreter of Daoism, and his unconventional spirit had only sarcasm for stultifying rituals and hierarchies. The Dao is the unity beneath all things, and the person who sees this soon finds, like William Blake, that true marriage lies in contraries. Zhuangzi was able to look at the things of the world with a sense of relativism; therefore, since tall equals short and here equals there, if the true reality is seen to be beneath the surface, "There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount T'ai is little. No one has lived longer than a dead child, and [long lived] P'eng-tsu died young." Though the Dao is absolute, it is not unchanging; in fact, its very nature is flux. A comparison with Buddhism, in which the defining characteristic of the absolute is its freedom from flux, is informative.

Instead of presenting a system of ethical and social reform like other philosophers of his time, Zhuangzi celebrated spontaneity and the cultivation of an inner emptiness that allowed one to merge with the Dao. Human problems are created by human categories; the way out of them is not through changing the world but through changing the way you understand the world. Death and life are mere manifestations of the Dao and thus they are changes in form but not changes in essence. Therefore, we should free ourselves from fear of death and from attachment to life's worries: "How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in hating death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?" This freedom is the primary benefit that Zhuangzi tries to

give his readers, usually through dazzling rhetoric, humor, nonsense phrases, and paradoxes designed to shock us out of our preconceptions. Like Tang dynasty poet Wang Wei in his most Daoist poems, Zhuangzi celebrates inaction, even laziness, as opposed to a life of struggle for gain and a character dominated by desire. By following the Way of Daoism, one may even gain magical powers and immortality. As is the case with so many of the world's mystics, history has elided the life and left us the thought. But behind these fresh and ancient words, one can intuit a peculiar mind, like the Dao inscribed within the things of the world. In the end, it is hard to know whether the Zhuangzi text had only one author, but it is tempting to think of a man named Zhuangzi, a free spirit, unbounded and mystical, wry and just a bit crazed.

FURTHER READING: Kaltenmark, Max. *Lao Tzu and Taoism*. Translated by Roger Greaves, 1965. Watson, Burton, tr. *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings*, 1964; tr. *Records of the Grand Historian of China*, 1961.

from *The Zhuangzi*

Great understanding is broad and unhurried; little understanding is cramped and busy. Great words are clear and limpid; little words are shrill and quarrelsome. In sleep, men's spirits go visiting; in waking hours, their bodies hustle. With everything they meet they become entangled. Day after day they use their minds in strife, sometimes grandiose, sometimes sly, sometimes petty. Their little fears are mean and trembly; their great fears are stunned and overwhelming. They bound off like an arrow or a cross-bow pellet, certain that they are the arbiters of right and wrong. They cling to their position as though they had sworn before the gods, sure that they are holding on to victory. They fade like fall and winter—such is the way they dwindle day by day. They drown in what they do—you cannot make them turn back. They grow dark, as though sealed with seals—such are the excesses of their old age. And when their minds draw near to death, nothing can restore them to the light.

Joy, anger, grief, delight, worry, regret, fickleness, inflexibility, modesty, willfulness, candor, insolence—music from empty holes, mushrooms springing up in dampness, day and night replacing each other before us, and no one knows where they sprout from. Let it be! Let it be! [It is enough that] morning and evening we have them, and they are the means by which we live. Without them we would not exist; without us they would have nothing to take hold of. This comes close to the matter. But I do not know what makes them the way they are. It would seem as though they have some True Master, and yet I find no trace of him. He can act—that is certain. Yet I cannot see his form. He has identity but no form.

The hundred joints, the nine openings, the six organs, all come together and exist here [as my body]. But which part should I feel closest to? I should delight in all parts, you say? But there must be one I ought to favor more. If not, are they all of them mere servants? But if they are all servants, then how can they keep order among themselves? Or do they take turns being lord and servant? It would seem as though there must be some True Lord among them. But whether I succeed in discovering his identity or not, it neither adds to nor detracts from his Truth.

Once a man receives this fixed bodily form, he holds on to it, waiting for the end. Sometimes clashing with things, sometimes bending before them, he runs his course like a galloping steed, and nothing can stop him. Is he not pathetic? Sweating and laboring to the end of his days and never seeing his accomplishment, utterly exhausting himself and never knowing where to look for rest—can you help pitying him? I'm not dead yet! he says, but what good is that? His body decays, his mind follows it—can you deny that this is a great sorrow? Man's life has always been a muddle like this. How could I be the only muddled one, and other men not muddled?

* * *

Words are not just wind. Words have something to say. But if what they have to say is not fixed, then do they really say something? Or do they say nothing? People suppose that words are different from the peeps of baby birds, but is there any difference, or isn't there? What does the Way rely upon,¹ that we have true and false? What do words rely upon, that we have right and wrong? How can the Way go away and not exist? How can words exist and not be acceptable? When the Way relies on little accomplishments and words rely on vain show, then we have the rights and wrongs of the Confucians and the Mo-ists. What one calls right the other calls wrong; what one calls wrong the other calls right. But if we want to right their wrongs and wrong their rights, then the best thing to use is clarity.

Everything has its "that," everything has its "this." From the point of view of "that" you cannot see it, but through understanding you can know it. So I say, "that" comes out of "this" and "this" depends on "that"—which is to say that "this" and "that" give birth to each other. But where there is birth there must be death; where there is death there must be birth. Where there is acceptability there must be unacceptability; where there is unacceptability there must be acceptability. Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of right. Therefore the sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven.² He too recognizes a "this," but a "this" which is also "that," a "that" which is also "this." His "that" has both a right and a wrong in it; his "this" too has both a right and

1. Following the interpretation of Chang Ping-lin. The older interpretation of yin here and in the following sentences is, "What is the Way hidden by," etc.
2. [The Chinese word translated here as "Heaven" is] *T'ien*, which for Chuang Tzu means Nature or the Way.

a wrong in it. So, in fact, does he still have a "this" and "that"? Or does he in fact no longer have a "this" and "that"? A state in which "this" and "that" no longer find their opposites is called the hinge of the Way. When the hinge is fitted into the socket, it can respond endlessly. Its right then is a single endlessness and its wrong too is a single endlessness. So I say, the best thing to use is clarity.

To use an attribute to show that attributes are not attributes is not as good as using a nonattribute to show that attributes are not attributes. To use a horse to show that a horse is not a horse is not as good as using a non-horse to show that a horse is not a horse,³ Heaven and earth are one attribute; the ten thousand things are one horse.

What is acceptable we call acceptable; what is unacceptable we call unacceptable. A road is made by people walking on it; things are so because they are called so. What makes them so? Making them so makes them so. What makes them not so? Making them not so makes them not so. Things all must have that which is so; things all must have that which is acceptable. There is nothing that is not so, nothing that is not acceptable.

For this reason, whether you point to a little stalk or a great pillar, a leper or the beautiful Hsi-shih, things ribald and shady or things grotesque and strange, the Way makes them all into one. Their dividedness is their completeness; their completeness is their impairment. No thing is either complete or impaired, but all are made into one again. Only the man of far-reaching vision knows how to make them into one. So he has no use [for categories], but relegates all to the constant. The constant is the useful; the useful is the passable; the passable is the successful; and with success, all is accomplished. He relies upon this alone, relies upon it and does not know he is doing so. This is called the Way.

But to wear out your brain trying to make things into one without realizing that they are all the same—this is called "three in the morning." What do I mean by "three in the morning"? When the monkey trainer was handing out acorns, he said, "You get three in the morning and four at night." This made all the monkeys furious. "Well, then," he said, "you get four in the morning and three at night." The monkeys were all delighted. There was no change in the reality behind the words, and yet the monkeys responded with joy and anger. Let them, if they want to. So the sage harmonizes with both right and wrong and rests in Heaven the Equalizer. This is called walking two roads.

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Now I am going to make a statement here. I don't know whether it fits into the category of other people's statements or not. But whether it fits

into their category or whether it doesn't, it obviously fits into some category. So in that respect it is no different from their statements. However, let me try making my statement.

There is a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be a beginning. There is being. There is nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There is a not yet beginning to be a not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there is being and nonbeing. But between this being and nonbeing, I don't really know which is being and which is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether what I have said has really said something or whether it hasn't said something.

There is nothing in the world bigger than the tip of an autumn hair, and Mount T'ai is little. No one has lived longer than a dead child, and P'eng-tsu died young.⁴ Heaven and earth were born at the same time I was, and the ten thousand things are one with me.

We have already become one, so how can I say anything? But I have just said that we are one, so how can I not be saying something? The one and what I said about it make two, and two and the original one make three. If we go on this way, then even the cleverest mathematician can't tell where we'll end, much less an ordinary man. If by moving from nonbeing to being we get to three, how far will we get if we move from being to being? Better not to move, but to let things be!

* * *

How do I know that loving life is not a delusion? How do I know that in having death I am not like a man who, having left home in his youth, has forgotten the way back?

Lady Li was the daughter of the border guard of Ai.⁵ When she was first taken captive and brought to the state of Chin, she wept until her tears drenched the collar of her robe. But later, when she went to live in the palace of the ruler, shared his couch with him, and ate the delicious meats off his table, she wondered why she had ever wept. How do I know that the dead do not wonder why they ever longed for life?

He who dreams of drinking wine may weep when morning comes; he who dreams of weeping may in the morning go off to hunt. While he is dreaming he does not know it is a dream, and in his dream he may even try to interpret a dream. Only after he wakes does he know it was a dream. And someday there will be a great awakening when we know that this is all a great dream. Yet the stupid believe they are awake, busily and brightly assuming they understand things, calling this man ruler, that one herdsman—how dense! Confucius and you are both dreaming! And when

³The strands of animal fur were believed to grow particularly fine in autumn: hence "the tip of an autumn hair" is a cliché for something extremely tiny. P'eng-tsu was the Chinese Methuselah.

⁵Duke Hsien of Chin in 671 B.C., and later became his consort.

I say you are dreaming, I am dreaming, too. Words like these will be labeled the Supreme Swindle. Yet, after ten thousand generations, a great sage may appear who will know their meaning, and it will still be as though he appeared with astonishing speed.

Suppose you and I have had an argument. If you have beaten me instead of my beating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I have beaten you instead of your beating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can know the answer. Shall we wait for still another person?

But waiting for one shifting voice [to pass judgment on] another is the same as waiting for none of them.⁶ Harmonize them all with the Heavenly Equality, leave them to their endless changes, and so live out your years. What do I mean by harmonizing them with the Heavenly Equality? Right is not right; so is not so. If right were really right, it would differ so clearly from not right that there would be no need for argument. If so were really so, it would differ so clearly from not so that there would be no need for argument. Forget the years; forget distinctions. Leap into the boundless and make it your home!

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Once Chuang Chou⁷ dreamt he was a butterfly, a butterfly flitting and fluttering around, happy with himself and doing as he pleased. He didn't know he was Chuang Chou. Suddenly he woke up and there he was, solid and unmistakable Chuang Chou. But he didn't know if he was Chuang Chou who had dreamt he was a butterfly, or a butterfly dreaming he was Chuang Chou. Between Chuang Chou and a butterfly there must be some distinction! This is called the Transformation of Things.

* * *

You hide your boat in the ravine and your fish net⁸ in the swamp and tell yourself that they will be safe. But in the middle of the night a strong man shoulders them and carries them off, and in your stupidity you don't know why it happened. You think you do right to hide little things in big

6. I follow the rearrangement of the text suggested by Lü Hui-ch'ing. But the text of this whole paragraph leaves much to be desired and the translation is tentative.

7. Another name for Chuang Tzu (Zhuanzi) [Editor].

ones, and yet they get away from you. But if you were to hide the world, so that nothing could get away, this would be the final proof of the constancy of things.

* * *

Master Ssu, Master Yü, Master Li, and Master Lai were all four talking together. "Who can look upon inaction as his head, on life as his back, and on death as his rump?" they said. "Who knows that life and death, existence and annihilation, are all a single body? I will be his friend!"

The four men looked at each other and smiled. There was no disagreement in their hearts and so the four of them became friends.

All at once Master Yü fell ill. Master Ssu went to ask how he was. "Amazing!" said Master Yü. "The Creator is making me all crookedly like this! My back sticks up like a hunchback and my vital organs are on top of me. My chin is hidden in my navel, my shoulders are up above my head, and my pigtail points at the sky. It must be some dislocation of the yin and yang!"

Yet he seemed calm at heart and unconcerned. Dragging himself haltingly to the well, he looked at his reflection and said, "My, my! So the Creator is making me all crookedly like this!"

"Do you resent it?" asked Master Ssu.

"Why no, what would I resent? If the process continues, perhaps in time he'll transform my left arm into a rooster. In that case I'll keep watch on the night. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my right arm into a cross-bow pellet and I'll shoot down an owl for roasting. Or perhaps in time he'll transform my buttocks into cartwheels. Then, with my spirit for a horse, I'll climb up and go for a ride. What need will I ever have for a carriage again?"

"I received life because the time had come; I will lose it because the order of things passes on. Be content with this time and dwell in this order and then neither sorrow nor joy can touch you. In ancient times this was called the 'freeing of the bound.' There are those who cannot free themselves, because they are bound by things. But nothing can ever win against Heaven—that's the way it's always been. What would I have to resent?"

* * *

Yen Hui said, "I'm improving!"

Confucius said, "What do you mean by that?"

"I've forgotten benevolence and righteousness!"

"That's good. But you still haven't got it."

Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, "I'm improving!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I've forgotten rites and music!"

"That's good. But you still haven't got it."

Another day, the two met again and Yen Hui said, "I'm improving!"

"What do you mean by that?"

"I can sit down and forget everything!"

Confucius looked very startled and said, "What do you mean, sit down and forget everything?"

Yen Hui said, "I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with the Great Thoroughfare. This is what I mean by sitting down and forgetting everything."

Confucius said, "If you're identical with it, you must have no more likes! If you've been transformed, you must have no more constancy! So you really are a worthy man after all!⁹ With your permission, I'd like to become your follower."

* * *

Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom. Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail. Hold on to all that you have received from Heaven but do not think you have gotten anything. Be empty, that is all. The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror—going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding but not storing. Therefore he can win out over things and not hurt himself.

* * *

Once, when Chuang Tzu was fishing in the P'u River, the king of Ch'u sent two officials to go and announce to him: "I would like to trouble you with the administration of my realm."

Chuang Tzu held on to the fishing pole and, without turning his head, said, "I have heard that there is a sacred tortoise in Ch'u that has been dead for three thousand years. The king keeps it wrapped in cloth and boxed, and stores it in the ancestral temple. Now would this tortoise rather be dead and have its bones left behind and honored? Or would it rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud?"

"It would rather be alive and dragging its tail in the mud," said the two officials.

Chuang Tzu said, "Go away! I'll drag my tail in the mud!"

* * *

Hui Tzu said to Chuang Tzu, "Your words are useless!"

Chuang Tzu said, "A man has to understand the useless before you can talk to him about the useful. The earth is certainly vast and broad, though a man uses no more of it than the area he puts his feet on. If, however, you were to dig away all the earth from around his feet until you reached the Yellow Springs,¹⁰ then would the man still be able to make use of it?"

"No, it would be useless," said Hui Tzu.

"It is obvious, then," said Chuang Tzu, "that the useless has its use."

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9. Chuang Tzu probably intends a humorous reference to the words of Confucius in Analects VI, 9: "The Master said, 'What a worthy man was Hui!'"

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?

■ The Songs of Chu [attributed to Qu Yuan (Ch'ü Yüan), 322–295 B.C.?] (poem)

TRANSLATED BY DAVID HAWKES

The Songs of Chu is the second great anthology of Chinese poetry. These works come from the kingdom of Chu, a southern state located in the central valley of the Yangtze River; *The Songs of Chu* are thus often considered representative of a southern style of poetry, versus the northern style of *The Book of Songs*. The two collections have formal elements in common, however, and modern scholars question the adequateness of the northern/southern dichotomy. Most of the anthology's poems are attributed to Qu Yuan (c. 322–295 B.C.?), the first Chinese poet whom we know by name, but the anthology itself reached its final form only in the second century A.D. It seems unlikely that Qu Yuan composed all the works attributed to him. We know little about the historical Qu Yuan, except that he belonged to the royal house of Chu and served in the court of King Huai (reigned 328–229 B.C.). As a result of slander from a jealous colleague, Qu fell from the king's graces and was said to have written the important poem "Encountering Sorrow" to show his faithfulness and remonstrate with the king. Qu Yuan was supposed to have repeatedly warned the king against the aggressions of the state of Qin, but he was ignored, and the king was captured by Qin. After the king's death in captivity abroad, his son was inaugurated, but he proved as gullible and flawed a king as his father. He banished Qu Yuan to the far south where Qu Yuan drowned himself in the Miluo River in protest. Eventually, the state of Chu was swallowed up by Qin. Qu Yuan is widely admired as an early figure of the honest retainer who dares to criticize his superiors, along the Confucian model, and his death is the subject of the yearly Dragon Boat Festival in China.

If *The Book of Songs* consists primarily of poems in a lyric mode, *The Songs of Chu* are longer narratives, more dramatic in nature. In addition to the extended narrative poem "Encountering Sorrow," the collection includes a set of shamanistic ritual songs in which the shaman sexually joins with the deity (the "Nine Songs"); the "Heavenly Questions," a riddling, gnomic series of questions about the origin of the cosmos, mythology, and Chinese history; "Far Journey," a celestial voyage that bears resemblance to the "Nine Arguments" attributed to Song Yu.