

## LAOZI (LAO-TZU)

In English, “Venerable Master” or “Old Master.” An honorific title for a mysterious Chinese philosopher and Daoist (Taoist) sage, supposed author of the *Daode Jing* (*Tao Te Ching* in English: “The Classic of The Way and Virtue”), venerated as the deity known as Taishang laojun (Tai-shang Lao-Chün, in English “Highest Venerable Lord”) or Huanglao jun (Huang Lao-Chün, in English “Yellow Venerable Lord”) by the adherents of Daoism (Taoism), lived apparently in the period circa 500–400 B.C. during the Zhou (Chou) Dynasty.

What little is known about his life comes from the account of his supposed life in the *Shiji* (*Shi Chi*, “Records of the Historian”), written by the Chinese historian Sima Qian (Ssu-ma Ch’ien) around 100 B.C. According to him, Laozi’s family name was Li, his supposed given name was Er Dan (Erh Tan, in English “long ears,” probably a reference to the traditional Chinese symbol of wisdom and longevity rather than a reference to the sage’s real name). Apparently, he worked as an archivist at the Zhou imperial court, before leaving in disillusionment and making his way westward in search of wisdom. Scholars are divided as to the historicity of Sima Qian’s account of the alleged encounter between Laozi and CONFUCIUS at the Zhou court, in which Laozi berated Confucius for his arrogance and lack of understanding; many scholars have attributed that account to subsequent anti-Confucian polemics of the Daoists.

Some scholars have questioned Sima Qian’s attribution of the authorship of the *Daode Jing* to Laozi, as there is no mention of an author in all extant versions of the *Daode Jing*. Sima Qian had recounted a legend in which Laozi, weary of living and heading westward in search of wisdom, penned down his philosophy at the request of the “Keeper of the Pass” (i.e., frontier guard). Contemporary textual analysis of the received text points to the existence of several redactional layers. Although the received text is traditionally divided into 81 chapters of 5,000 characters, the earliest extant manuscripts—the Guodian text (circa 300 B.C.) and the Mawang dui (Ma-wang Tui) texts (168 B.C.)—while preserving the contents of the work albeit in an inverted order, suggest that the original was probably a continuous work of some 5,400 characters, in all likelihood written or edited by a single author.

The *Daode Jing* presents the Dao as a nameless, undefinable, spontaneous, eternal, cyclical and ever-changing cosmological essence. It advocates that one engages in “non-action” (*wu-wei*) to be in harmony with the Dao. Here, “non-action” is not mere passivity, but rather, taking only those actions that would be in harmony with the cosmological ordering of things in the Dao.

The utopian society which the *Daode Jing* presents is one of harmony between ruler and ruled, in which the Sage-Ruler embodies *wu-wei* as a way of governing, viz., governing behind the scenes in a manner that the subjects are not even aware that they are being governed. This philosophy has attracted many adherents both in the Far East and in the Western world, making the *Daode Jing* the most translated ancient Asian treatise in the European languages in the 19th and 20th centuries.

*See Also:* CHINESE PHILOSOPHY.

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## LAPIDE, CORNELIUS A.

The Latin form of his Dutch name, Cornelis Cornelissen van den Steen, voluminous exegete; b. Bocholt, Province of Limburg, Belgium, Dec. 18, 1567; d. Rome, March 12 (or 11), 1637. After studying theology at Douai and Louvain, Lapide entered the Society of Jesus in 1592 and was ordained three years later. He taught Sacred Scripture for 40 years, first at Louvain (1596–1616) and then at the Roman College (1616–36). His lively lectures, rich in topical allusions and pleasant irrelevancies, delighted students. His prodigious commentaries, covering the entire Bible with the exception of Job and Psalms, appeared steadily from 1614 to 1645. Supported abundantly by quotations from Church Fathers and later interpreters, his exegesis frequently included not only the literal sense of a passage but the allegorical, tropological, and anagogical meanings as well. His knowledge of Hebrew, Greek, and Latin, of theology, Church history, and the classical philosophers and natural historians (especially Aristotle and Pliny), and his intense industry, fervor, and awareness of problems of the day, all combined to produce commentaries highly esteemed by his contemporaries and posterity. He saw his greatest work, *Commentaria in omnes Divi Pauli Epistolas* (Antwerp 1614), go through 11 of its eventual 80 editions. The entire listing of his works and their editions fills 15 columns in the *Bibliothèque de la Compagnie de Jésus*. Two notable editions of his complete works, with commentaries on Job (by J. de PINEDA) and Psalms (by St. Robert BELLARMINE) added, are the Malta edition (1843–46) in 10 volumes and the Paris edition (1859–63) in 22 volumes. A large part of his