

LAO TZE



“NARRATIVE HISTORY” IS FABULATION, HISTORY IS CHRONOLOGY



LAO TZE

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1,027 BCE

The Shang Dynasty was overcome by the Chou (from what are now Kansu and Shensi provinces). This would bring what later would be known as the “Classical Age” of [China](#), renowned for:

- The Five Classics:

The *SHIH-CHING* or BOOK OF POETRY

The *SHU CHING* or BOOK OF HISTORY

The *LI CHI* or BOOK OF RITES

(a work which contains, incidentally, the first written description of *kuai zi* or “chopsticks”)

The *CH’UN-CH’IU* or SPRING AND AUTUMN ANNALS

The *I CHING* or BOOK OF CHANGES



- the teachings of [Confucius](#)



- the teachings of [Mencius](#)

In this case, not even an **inauthentic** image is available.

- the teachings of [Lao-tze](#)

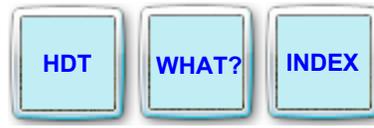
LIGHT FROM CHINA



It would be the Duke of Chou who would have created for him an early “south-pointing carriage” complete with magnetic compass (in Chinese, a compass is referred to as a “south-pointing needle”; this south-pointing carriage used a differential gear to keep a part of the carriage superstructure pointing in the same direction no matter how the carriage beneath it turned).¹

THOREAU AND CHINA

1. Francis Bacon would characterize the origin of the magnetic compass as “obscure and inglorious,” either because it had originated in obscure and inglorious China or because the Neapolitans were claiming that one of their own, Flavio of Malphi, had invented it in the early 14th Century (tour guides on the Amalphi coast southwest of [Naples](#) point out a statue of this Flavio).



LAO TZE

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604 BCE

The person we refer to as [Lao-tze](#), who is attributed as the founder of the way known as Taoism, was presumably born at about this point in [China](#). The name we use is actually a description, as it means “Old Master,” and “Tao” means “the Way” — at least in the sense in which “DI DAO” on a current road sign in the city of Shanghai means “UNDERPASS.” A librarian at the court of Chou, when he began to detect in that kingdom uncorrectable aspects of corruption, he took his leave for parts unknown. The legend is that he rode off on a water buffalo and that, reaching a police checkpoint on the road, the custodian urged him to delay long enough to record the principles of his philosophy, the 81 epigrams of the *TAO TÊ CHING*.

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TAOISM

- 1198 The rape of Helen by Paris, which, in 1193, gave rise to the Trojan war, and siege of Troy by the Greeks, which continued ten years, when that city was taken and burnt.
- 1048 David is sole king of Israel.
- 1004 The Temple is solemnly dedicated by Solomon.
- 896 Elijah the prophet is translated to Heaven.
- 894 Money first made of gold and silver at Argos.
- 869 The city of Carthage, in Africa, founded by queen Dido.
- 824 The kingdom of Macedon begins.
- 753 Æra of the building of Rome in Italy, by Romulus, first king of the Romans.
- 720 Samaria taken, after three years siege, and the kingdom of Israel finished by Salmanasar, king of Assyria, who carries the ten tribes into captivity.
- The first eclipse of the moon on record.
- 658 Byzantium (now Constantinople) built by a colony of Athenians.
- 604 By order of Necho, king of Egypt, some Phœnicians sailed from the Red Sea round Africa, and returned by the Mediterranean.
- 600 Thales, of Miletus, travels into Egypt, consults the priests of Memphis, acquires the knowledge of geometry, astronomy, and philosophy; returns to Greece, calculates eclipses, gives general notions of the universe, and maintains that one Supreme Intelligence regulates all its motions.
- Maps, globes, and the signs of the Zodiac, invented by Anaximander, the scholar of Thales.
- 597 Jehoiakin, king of Judah, is carried away captive, by Nebuchadnezzar, to Babylon.
- 587 The city of Jerusalem taken after a siege of eighteen months.
- 562 The first comedy at Athens acted upon a moveable scaffold.

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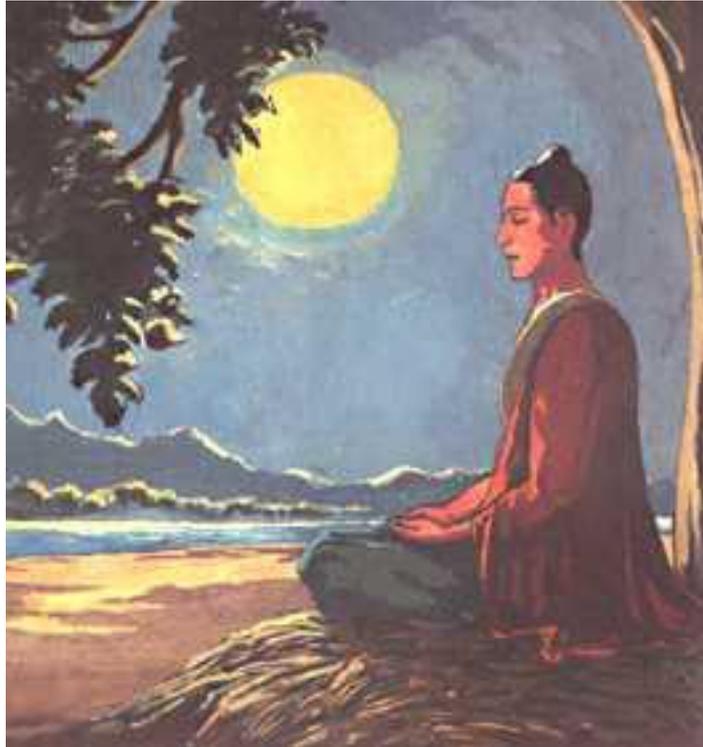
521 BCE

The ascetic Siddhartha, who would be known as [Gautama Buddha](#), began his decade-long journey to the holy city of Benares on the River Ganges in [India](#) (now Varanasi, in southeast Uttar Pradesh) where he would deliver his first sermon underneath a banyan or pipal or bo tree (*Ficus religiosa*) in the deer park of Sarnath.



In the illustration above, what he is sitting on is a pile of kusa grass. For the uses of kusa grass, such as for dry sitting, refer to the LAWS OF MENU. Even a sage needs to keep his butt dry and warm.

Here is another, slightly more realistic, presentation of the kusa-grass pad:



The title “Buddha” that is applied to him is never a proper name but literally means “awakened one” or “enlightened one.” The Pali Tipitaka is presently presumed to be the earliest still-extant record of his discourses.





LAO TZE

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At about this point the person we refer to as [Lao-tze](#), to whom we attribute the 81 epigrams of the [TAO TÊ CHING](#) (well, it was in fact written by somebody), has been traditionally reputed to have died in [China](#) (well, in fact he died sometime somewhere).

[TAOISM](#)

At some point during his 30s [Confucius](#) would begin to accept as his pupils various *chün-tzu* (male children of noble family); that is, he would transform himself into what we would today refer to as a schoolmaster.



DO I HAVE YOUR ATTENTION? GOOD.



LAO TZE

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300 BCE

One of the three now-existing variants of the *TAO TÊ CHING*, known now as the Guodian text of [Lao-tze](#), was placed in the Warring States tomb of a royal tutor, at Guodian near the city of Ying, the capital of the southern kingdom of Chu in what is now [China](#). (This text would be recovered in 1993 and published in 1998.)

THE FUTURE CAN BE EASILY PREDICTED IN RETROSPECT





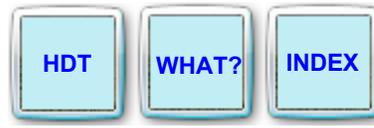
LAO TZE

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200 BCE

In some year between 205 BCE and 190 BCE (positioned at this round-number year for convenience), a copy of one of the three now-existing variants of the *TAO TÊ CHING* was placed in a Han tomb at Mawangdui in [China](#), and in 168 BCE, another of the three variants was placed in another tomb there. (These versions would be published in 1976; we're quite certain that there must be other variants awaiting discovery.)

The contents of a tomb of a monarch of the Western Han Dynasty included a latrine featuring running water, a stone seat, and a comfortable armrest (clearly, at least one person of the period had had a sense of humor).



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

156 BCE

It was probably during the reign of the 4th Han emperor of [China](#), Jing, that the work of Laozi was first referred to as a *jing*, or “canonical text,” rather than being handled as merely another *zi*, or philosophical treatise.



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

50 BCE

In [China](#), the [Taoist](#) materials, which at that time amounted probably to as many as 120 leaves or fragments, some of only four or eight words, were recast as 81 “chapters,” probably because 9X9 makes a “perfect number.” The work falls neatly into two halves, a set of 37 stanzas beginning with the character *Tao* and a set of 44 stanzas beginning with the character *de*. It may be that this *de* part originally preceded this *Tao* part. We do not know when the *Tao* section first came to be placed before the *de* section, but it would seem that *Daode* has always been a common term meaning roughly “morality.”



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

397 CE

Ching Ling-pao's treatise on [Taoist](#) philosophy known as the Book of the Sacred Jewel.

CHINA
LAO-TZE

LIGHT FROM CHINA



LAO TZE

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574 CE

Fu Yi, a [Chinese](#) scholar of the Tang period, would base a version of the [Tao Tê Ching](#) on a text that had in 574AD been found in a Han tomb.

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618 CE

It would be during the Tang Dynasty in [China](#) that the [Taoist](#) text that had been being referred to as the *Daode* or the *Laozi jing* would come to be widely referred to as the “canonical text or *jing* on the Way (*Dao*) and virtue (*de*),” rather than simply being known by the name that had been assigned to its putative author, *Laozi* — “the words of Master *Lao*.”

The silk road trade to Europe would thrive.

Gunpowder would be invented. Block (movable type) printing would be invented.²

Here is the emperor Tai Zu from this period:



2. Francis Bacon would characterize the origin of gunpowder and of paper and printmaking as “obscure and inglorious” because they had originated in obscure and inglorious China.

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LAO TZE

And here is the empress Wu Zetian 武則天 from this period:



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LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1788

The Reverend Professor James Legge, in 1890 in translating the *TAO TÊ CHING* of [Lao-tze](#) into the English language, would discover in the files of the India Office a Latin manuscript translation of this material, that had been sent to the office by a missionary organization in 1788. The document as discovered would be still “in excellent preservation.” Legge would indicate that the object of the translator had evidently been to demonstrate [Chinese](#) knowledge of the Holy Trinity and the Christian God, and would dismiss this manuscript he had found as of little value. In quoting a section of it in a note he would indicate, also, that this represented “the first morsel of it that has appeared in print.”

道德經

[TAOISM](#)[LIGHT FROM CHINA](#)

(Inference: There is zero likelihood that either [Henry Thoreau](#) or [Waldo Emerson](#) ever had access to this early translation.)

[THOREAU AND CHINA](#)



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1823



Abel Remuset's memoir on [Lao-tze](#), in French.

TAO TÊ CHING

LIGHT FROM CHINA

TAOISM



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1838

[M.J. Pauthier](#) translated the *TAO TÊ CHING* into French.³

LIGHT FROM CHINA

TAOISM

NOBODY COULD GUESS WHAT WOULD HAPPEN NEXT



Lao Tze

“Stack of the Artist of Kouroo” Project

3. Lyman V. Cady’s inference that [Henry Thoreau](#) could not have encountered Taoism, based as it was on incomplete evidence about the sorts of Taoist reading material available in Indo-European languages during Thoreau’s lifetime, must now be subjected to reexamination. A Latin version of the *TAO TÊ CHING* would be created by Jesuits, and two German translations would appear, during the 1840s. These were all, of course, languages that Thoreau could read. [David T.Y. Ch’en](#) has become convinced on the basis of new evidence of the 19th-Century availability of such translations, and on the basis of detective work among several strands of converging internal evidence, and on the basis of a series of seven paradoxes written into Thoreau’s journal on June 26, 1840, that Thoreau had as of that date just been perusing one or another of the translations of [Lao-tze](#), most likely this one by Pauthier. – For more information, refer to that entry for June 26, 1840.

CHINA

THOREAU AND CHINA



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1840

June 26, Friday: [David T.Y. Ch'en](#) has become convinced on the basis of research into the 19th-Century availability of translations from the [Chinese](#), and on the basis of detective work among several strands of converging internal evidence, and on the basis of a series of seven paradoxes written into Thoreau's journal on this day, that our guy had just been perusing one or another of the translations of [Lao-tze](#), most likely the one by [M.J. Pauthier](#). Do any changes or developments in [Henry Thoreau](#)'s patterns of thought hinge on this period?⁴

THOREAU AND CHINA

4. "Thoreau and Taoism," pages 410-11: We must also ask ourselves questions about possible readings of translations of Chuang-tze for, according to [Ch'en](#)'s reading, [Thoreau](#)'s personality was more like Chuang-tze's than like [Lao-tze](#)'s. Ch'en notes



that there are more affinities between Thoreau and Chuangtse than there are between Thoreau and Laotse.... [T]he fundamental teaching of Laotse was humility. He often praised the virtue of gentleness, resignation, non-contention and the wisdom of lying low. Chuangtse, on the other hand, was inclined to speak of the virtue of quiescence, of keeping and preserving men's spiritual power through tranquility and rest. Therefore, while Laotse regarded water, the softest of all substances, as a symbol of the wisdom of seeking lowly places, Chuangtse often compared it to the tranquility of the mind and clarity of spirit: "Calm represents the nature of water at its best. In that it may serve as our model, for its power is preserved and is not dispersed through agitation." In another instance, Chuangtse likened the mind of the perfect man to a mirror: "The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It does not move with things, nor does it anticipate them. It responds to things, but does not retain them. Therefore, he is able to deal successfully with things, but is not affected." In like manner, Thoreau wrote of Walden symbolically: "Walden is a perfect mirror.... Nations come and go without defiling it. It is a mirror which no stone can crack, whose quicksilver will never wear off, whose gilding Nature continually repairs; no storms, no dust, can dim its surface ever fresh; -a mirror in which all impurity presented to it sinks, swept and dusted by the sun's hazy brush, -this the light dust-cloth, -which retains no breath that is breathed on it, but sends its own to float as clouds high above its surface, and be reflected in its bosom still." On the surface, this passage is a beautiful description of the pond. But when we look beneath, we shall find that the limpidity of its water is intended to signify the transparency of Thoreau's character.

(After becoming aware that Thoreau retained this perspective, unchanged, for the remainder of his short life, we may wonder when this perspective developed, and from whom he "absorbed" it.)



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

There is a [Taoist](#) concept, [tzu-jan](#), that we ought to be investigating in connection with research into such “Thoreauvian” attitudes. It is that ideal state of human existence which would proceed from a life which, because wholly spontaneous, would be in complete harmony with all the realities of nature. This world is constantly being made and unmade and made and unmade, therefore we should offer no resistance whatever to the process of making and unmaking. Question: what would be the primary [Chinese](#) sources in which we should study such an attitude, and when did these sources become available in the Western world which Thoreau inhabited? Question: To what extent was [Lin Yu-t'ang](#)'s endorsement of [Thoreau](#) as Chinese in his writing and in his thought processes merely an identification of Thoreauvianism with this sort of [tzu-janism](#)?



June 26: The best poetry has never been written, for when it might have been, the poet forgot it, and when it was too late remembered it — or when it might have been, the poet remembered it, and when it was too late forgot it.

The highest condition of art is artlessness.

Truth is always paradoxical.

He will get to the goal first who stands stillest.

There is one let better than any help —and that is —Let-alone.

By sufference you may escape suffering.

He who resists not at all will never surrender.

When a dog runs at you whistle for him.

Say —not so —and you will outcircle the philosophers.

Stand outside the wall and no harm can reach you — the danger is that you will be walled in with it.



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1844

In this year, according to the Reverend [James Legge](#), appeared two German versions of the [TAO TÊ CHING](#) of [Lao-tze](#), very different from each other.

道德經

CHINA

THOREAU AND CHINA

We don't have any information that [Henry Thoreau](#) ever came across either of these translations into German.



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1849

September 13, Thursday: [Henry Thoreau](#) was reading portions of the *MAHABHARATA*, as well as Professor [Joseph-Héliodore-Sagesse-Vertu Garcin de Tassy](#)'s *HISTOIRE DE LA LITTÉRATURE HINDOUI et Hindoustani*, from which he would extract snippets pertaining to [Kabîr](#) and to [Mîr Camar uddîn Mast](#):

On prétend que les vers de Kabîr ont quatre sens différents: l'illusion (mâyâ), l'esprit (âtmâ), l'intellect (man), et la doctrine exotérique des Védas.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

WALDEN: Why level downward to our dullest perception always, and praise that as common sense? The commonest sense is the sense of men asleep, which they express by snoring. Sometimes we are inclined to class those who are once-and-a-half witted with the half-witted, because we appreciate only a third part of their wit. Some would find fault with the morning-red, if they ever got up early enough. "They pretend," as I hear, "that the verses of Kabir have four different senses; illusion, spirit, intellect, and the exoteric doctrine of the Vedas;" but in this part of the world it is considered a ground for complaint if a man's writings admit of more than one interpretation. While England endeavors to cure the potato-rot, will not any endeavor to cure the brain-rot, which prevails so much more widely and fatally?

KABÎR



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

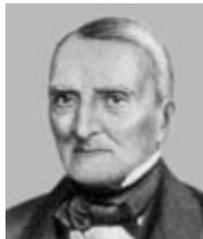
Etant assis, parcourir la région du monde spirituel: j'ai eu cet avantage dans les livres. Être enviré par une seule coupe de vin: j'ai éprouvé ce plaisir lorsque j'ai bu la liqueur des doctrines ésotériques.

WALDEN: My residence was more favorable, not only to thought, but to serious reading, than a university; and though I was beyond the range of the ordinary circulating library, I had more than ever come within the influence of those books which circulate round the world, whose sentences were first written on bark, and are now merely copied from time to time on to linen paper. Says the poet Mîr Camar Uddîn Mast, "Being seated to run through the region of the spiritual world; I have had this advantage in books. To be intoxicated by a single glass of wine; I have experienced this pleasure when I have drunk the liquor of the esoteric doctrines." I kept Homer's Iliad on my table through the summer, though I looked at his page only now and then. Incessant labor with my hands, at first, for I had my house to finish and my beans to hoe at the same time, made more study impossible. Yet I sustained myself by the prospect of such reading in future. I read one or two shallow books of travel in the intervals of my work, till that employment made me ashamed of myself, and I asked where it was then that **I** lived.

PEOPLE OF
WALDEN

MÎR CAMAR UDDÎN MAST

HOMER



M. Garcin de Tassy

Note that Jeff Cramer, in his notes to WALDEN, identifies this [Mîr Camar uddîn Mast](#) with Mîr "Qamar-uddin Minnat, Persian and Urdu poet, a native of Delphi, who died in Calcutta in 1793," repositioning a city in India as in the vicinity of Mount Parnassus! On a following page appear two snippets from this work by Garcin de Tassy that Thoreau checked out, demonstrating that this Mîr simply was not that Mîr. In fact we have no information whatever as to when or where the poet Mîr mentioned by Thoreau was born or died, except that his *florut* was in Delhi and during the 18th Century (his name might be rendered into the English as "Mîr, the low-caste leather-worker of the Islamic faith whose life is so overwhelmed with love for Allah that sheer existence has become for him an ecstasy").

MINNAT.

Mir Camar uddin Minnat³, de Dehli, selon Lutf⁴, descendait par sa mère du saïyid Jalâl Bokhârî, célèbre saint musulman. Il fut d'abord disciple de Muhammad Câim, puis, surtout pour le persan, de Mir Schams uddin Faquir; il eut aussi des rapports littéraires avec Futuwat Huçain Khân. Selon Lutf, il fut élevé dans la maison de Schâh Wali ullah Muhdis, et ce fut l'illustre contemplatif, le maulawî Fakhr uddin, qui l'instruisit dans la science du spiritualisme. Il fut initié à l'art des vers par Faquir, et au bon goût poétique par Nûr uddin Nawed; il acquit ainsi dans la littérature une réputation méritée. Son calâm, dit Lutf, fit honte au pinceau du célèbre Bihzâd. Il avait des connaissances variées, et

¹ مهربان affectionné, ami.

² Dans le catalogue des livres de Farzâda Cûli, il y a l'indication de deux manuscrits des œuvres de cet écrivain. Le premier est intitulé دیوان و مرثیہ از مہربان خان *Diwân et marciya de Mîhrbân Khân*; le second, قدری از ریختہ مہربان خان *Portion des poésies de Mîhrbân Khân*.

³ ممت obligation et supplication.

⁴ Selon Mushafî, il était natif de سنوی پت, et selon Bêni Narâyan, de سنیت.

possédait entre autres l'arabe et le persan. Il a écrit en prose et en vers, dans ce dernier idiome, différents ouvrages, et s'est fait par là un nom distingué parmi les écrivains qui, dans l'Inde, se sont servis du persan pour écrire leurs compositions. On cite surtout de lui un ouvrage dans le genre du *Gulistan*, ouvrage intitulé *Schakaristân*, ou Sucrerie. Il a aussi écrit en hindoustani, et c'est seulement comme écrivain hindoustani que Lutf, Mushafî et Bêni Narâyan le citent dans leurs ouvrages. En 1191 de l'hégire (1777-1778 de J. C.), à cause de la dévastation de Dehli, il alla à Lakhnau, où il resta quelque temps, puis il se rendit à Calcutta, en 1206 (1791-1792), et trois à quatre mois après, la fièvre le saisit et le conduisit au tombeau. Il mourut dans cette dernière ville, en 1207 (1792-1793), et y fut enterré. Mushafî donne un tarikh de cinq vers sur sa mort, et un échantillon de ses poésies hindoustani. De son côté, Lutf en cite deux pages.

MAST.

Mir Camar uddin Mast¹, de Dehli, descendait par sa mère du saïyid Jalâl Bukhârî Mir. Il retira des avantages littéraires de la société de Mir Nûr uddin Nawed et de Mir Schams uddin Faquir, et fut initié par eux aux difficultés de la versification. Il fut un des disciples du spiritualiste le maulawî Fakhr uddin, et se dévoua à la vie spirituelle, en sorte que Bêni Narâyan le nomme faquir. Il a écrit beaucoup de vers hindoustani et persans; il avait une grande célérité de conception; il s'énonçait avec esprit et pureté de langage. En 1196 de l'hégire (1781-1782), il était attaché à l'honorable M. Jones². Il était très-enclin à l'amour, et faisait beaucoup attention à la beauté.

Ali Ibrâhim cite deux pages et demie de ses vers hindoustani, et Bêni Narâyan, un gazal mystique qui me paraît très-beau dans l'original. Je joins ici la traduction de quelques hémistiches de ce poème :

Aujourd'hui j'ai vu en songe ma bien-aimée; j'ai vu la lumière de Dieu sous le voile. Moi qui suis néant, m'unir à son essence: j'ai vu ce spectacle pareil à celui de la bulle d'eau qui se perd dans l'Océan.....





LAO TZE

LAO TZE

In “Going Inside” on page 98 of WHEREVER YOU GO, THERE YOU ARE: MINDFULNESS MEDITATION IN EVERYDAY LIFE (NY: Hyperion, 1994), John Kabat-Zinn has allowed [Thoreau](#) to travel in the company of [Kabîr](#) and of Lao-tzu:

Don't go outside your house to see the flowers.
My friend, don't bother with that excursion.
Inside your body there are flowers.
One flower has a thousand petals.
That will do for a place to sit.
Sitting there you will have a glimpse of beauty
inside the body and out of it,
before gardens and after gardens.
— [Kabîr](#)

The heavy is the root of the light.
The unmoved is the source of all movement.

Thus the Master travels all day
without leaving home.
However splendid the views,
she stays serene in herself.
Why should the lord of the country
flit about like a fool?
If you let yourself be blown to and fro,
you lose touch with your root.
If you let restlessness move you,
you lose touch with who you are.
— [Lao-tze](#), *TAO TÊ CHING*

Direct your eye right inward, and you'll find
A thousand regions in your mind
Yet undiscovered. Travel them and be
Expert in home-cosmography.
— [Thoreau](#), *WALDEN*



TRY: The next time you feel a sense of dissatisfaction, of something being missing or not quite right, turn inward just as an experiment. See if you can capture the energy of that very moment. Instead of picking up a magazine or going to the movies, calling a friend or looking for something to eat or acting up in one way or another, make a place for yourself. Sit down and enter into your own breathing, if only for a few minutes. Don't look for anything – neither flowers nor light nor a beautiful view. Don't extol the virtues of anything or condemn the inadequacy of anything. Don't even think to yourself, “I am going inward now.” Just sit. Reside at the center of the world. Let things be as they are.



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

1868

Asked to discourse at a banquet in honor of an embassy from [China](#) that was passing through Boston, [Waldo Emerson](#) delivered an after-dinner speech in which he naturally focused upon his more positive impressions. The Chinese were to be praised as they possessed a great “power of continuous labor” (were there already Chinese restaurants in downtown Boston?) — the Chinese were to be praised as practitioners of a “stoical economy” (were there already Chinese shirt laundries in downtown Boston?) One item in this polite speech, having to do with the Mandarin education, is of special interest because it appears nowhere else in Emerson’s published records:

I am sure that gentlemen around me bear in mind the bill ... requiring that candidates for public offices shall first pass examinations on their literary qualifications for the same. Well, China has preceded us, as well as England and France, in this essential correction of a reckless usage; and the like high esteem of education appears in China in social life, to which distinctions it is made an indispensable passport.

EMERSON AND CHINA

Emerson had apparently forgotten that he had once contrasted the “fatalism” and “withdrawal” that was typical of [China](#) with the “freedom” and “dynamism” to be found characteristic of the West. China, the “playground of the world’s childhood,” he had mused, was to be urged by the West to grow up and stand tall. Our project was to be her “regeneration.” Or perhaps he hadn’t forgotten, and his polite after-dinner speech was intended to urge these Chinamen along the path of “regeneration”?

Emerson also during this polite speech credited China with its many early inventions and innovations, and recognized there the “respectable remains of astronomic science, and the historic records of forgotten time.” He concluded this by dropping the name of a Chinese philosopher who could not be spared by the world:

Confucius has not yet gathered all his fame.

Emerson had apparently forgotten that he had once characterized Confucius, derogatorily, as “no originator,” and suggested that he knew no more to do with philosophy than had General Washington (which would have been, in case you are wondering, precisely nothing). The reasons why [Confucius](#) was needed by the world were that he had originated the Golden Rule of [Jesus](#) (the Doctrine of Reciprocity, the Golden Mean), that like [Socrates](#) he had known that he knew nothing, that “His ideal of greatness predicts Marcus Antoninus,” and that he grasped the fact that we must always place the blame for our own misfortunes upon ourselves rather than upon others — as when the governor who complained to Confucius of thieves was told “If you, sir, were not covetous, though you should reward them for it, they would not steal.”

All share the surprise and pleasure when the venerable Oriental dynasty -hitherto a romantic legend to most of us- suddenly steps into the fellowship of nations. This auspicious event, considered in connection with the late innovations in Japan, marks a new era, and is an irresistible result of the science which has given us the power of steam and the electric telegraph. It is the more welcome for the surprise. We had said of China, as the old prophet said of Egypt, “Her strength is to sit still.”



LAO TZE

LAO TZE

At the end of the journal entries for this year, Emerson listed his recent readings in Oriental materials: “Menu; Bhagavat Geeta; Vishnu Purana; Hafiz; [Confucius](#).”

The first published partial translation of the [TAO TÊ CHING](#) of [Lao-tze](#) into English was in this year, and had been accomplished by a Reverend Doctor John Chalmers.

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The volume was entitled THE SPECULATIONS ON METAPHYSICS, POLITY, AND MORALITY OF “THE OLD PHILOSOPHER”, LAU-TSZE and had been published in London by Trubner. (This is one of the editions that Bronson Alcott would have in his library at the point of his death that [Henry Thoreau](#) could not possibly have seen. The volume in question is inscribed “A.B. Alcott with the affectionate regards of William Henry Channing – 1870.” Even though 1870 is very much later in his life, it was amply prior to his stroke and death in 1888 — and thus Alcott is the only Transcendentalist of whom we can say, with assuredness, that a good contact had been made with Taoism.)

NATURE creates in the East the uncontrollable yearning to escape from limitation into the vast and boundless, to use a freedom of fancy which plays with all works of Nature, great or minute, galaxy or grain of dust, as toys and words of the mind; inculcates a beatitude to be found in escape from all organization and all personality, and makes ecstasy an institution.

MR. MAYOR: I suppose we are all of one opinion on this remarkable occasion of meeting the embassy sent from the oldest Empire in the world to the youngest Republic. All share the surprise and pleasure when the venerable Oriental dynasty- hitherto a romantic legend to most of us - suddenly steps into the fellowship of nations. This auspicious event, considered in connection with the late innovations in Japan, marks a new era, and is an irresistible result of the science which has given us the power of steam and the electric telegraph. It is the more welcome for the surprise. We had said of China, as the old prophet said of Egypt, “Her strength is to sit still.” Her people had such elemental conservatism that by some wonderful force of race and national manners, the wars and revolutions that occur in her annals have proved but momentary swells or surges on the pacific ocean of her history, leaving no trace. But in its immovability this race has claims. China is old, not in time only, but in wisdom, which is gray hair to a nation, or, rather, truly seen, is eternal youth. As we know, China had the magnet centuries before Europe; and block-printing or stereotype, and lithography, and gunpowder, and vaccination, and canals; had anticipated Linnaeus’s nomenclature of plants; had codes,



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journals, clubs, hackney coaches, and, thirty centuries before New York, had the custom of New Year's calls of comity and reconciliation. I need not mention its useful arts, - its pottery indispensable to the world, the luxury of silks, and its tea, the cordial of nations. But I must remember that she has respectable remains of astronomic science, and historic records of forgotten time, that have supplied important gaps in the ancient history of the western nations. Then she has philosophers who cannot be spared. Confucius has not yet gathered all his fame. When Socrates heard that the oracle declared that he was the wisest of men, he said, it must mean that other men held that they were wise, but that he knew that he knew nothing. Confucius had already affirmed this of himself: and what we call the GOLDEN RULE of Jesus, Confucius had uttered in the same terms five hundred years before. His morals, though addressed to a state of society unlike ours, we read with profit to-day. His rare perception appears in his GOLDEN MEAN, his doctrine of Reciprocity, his unerring insight, - putting always the blame of our misfortunes on ourselves; as when to the governor who complained of thieves, he said, "If you, sir, were not covetous, though you should re-ward them for it, they would not steal." His ideal of greatness predicts Marcus Antoninus. At the same time, he abstained from paradox, and met the ingrained prudence of his nation by saving always, "Bend one cubit to straighten eight."

China interests us at this moment in a point of politics. I am sure that gentlemen around me bear in mind the bill which the Hon. Mr. Jenckes of Rhode Island has twice attempted to carry through Congress, requiring that candidates for public offices shall first pass examinations on their literary qualifications for the same. Well, China has preceded us, as well as England and France, in this essential correction of a reckless usage; and the like high esteem of education appears in China in social life, to whose distinctions it is made an indispensable passport.

It is gratifying to know that the advantages of the new intercourse between the two countries are daily manifest on the Pacific coast. The immigrants from Asia come in crowds. Their power of continuous labor, their versatility in adapting themselves to new conditions, their stoical economy, are unlooked-for virtues. They send back to their friends, in China, money, new products of art, new tools, machinery, new foods, etc., and are thus establishing a commerce without limit. I cannot help adding, after what I have heard to-night, that I have read in the journals a statement from an English source, that Sir Frederic Bruce attributed to Mr. Burlingame the merit of the happy reform in the relations of foreign governments to China. I am quite sure that I heard from Mr. Burlingame in New York, in his last visit to America, that the whole merit of it belonged to Sir Frederic Bruce. It appears that the ambassadors were emulous in their magnanimity. It is certainly the best guaranty for the interests of China and of humanity.



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WHAT?

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1890

The [Reverend James Legge](#)'s translation of the *TAO TÊ CHING* of [Lao-tze](#).

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CHINA





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1891

[Reverend James Legge](#). THE TEXTS OF [TAOISM](#). Oxford UP, 1891

TAO TÊ CHING
CHINA



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1937

[Lin Yu-t'ang](#) at this point became acquainted for the first time with the writings of [Henry Thoreau](#), and created THE IMPORTANCE OF LIVING (NY: Reynal & Hitchcock):⁵

5. [Lin](#) added a footnote of explanation to this: “[Thoreau](#) is the most [Chinese](#) of all American authors in his entire view of life, and being a Chinese, I feel much akin to him in spirit. I discovered him only a few months ago, and the delight of the discovery is still fresh in my mind. I could translate passages of Thoreau into my own language and pass them off as original writing by a Chinese poet, without raising any suspicion.” But see comments on the [Taoist](#) concept of [tzu-jan](#).

THOREAU AND CHINA



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"A richly, enjoyably wise and suggestive book."
— *The New York Times*

The Importance of Living



The Classic Bestseller
That Introduced Millions
to the Noble Art of Leaving
Things Undone

Lin Yutang



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1972

[David T.Y. Ch'en](#). "[Thoreau and Taoism](#)" in Narasimhaiah, C.D., ed., 1972, ASIAN RESPONSE TO AMERICAN LITERATURE, Vikas Publications, Delhi, India, pages 406-16

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1973

At Mawangdui in [China](#), in the tomb of an official's son, were discovered, inscribed upon silk, two variant texts of the [Tao Tê Ching](#). (These are now referred to as "A" and "B.")



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1976

The two variant texts of the [Tao Tê Ching](#) that had been discovered, inscribed on silk, in 1973, when the tomb of an official's son had been opened at Mawangdui in [China](#), the texts that are now referred to as "A" and "B," were in this year published.

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**“NARRATIVE HISTORY” AMOUNTS TO FABULATION,
THE REAL STUFF BEING MERE CHRONOLOGY**



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1993

In [China](#), the 300BCE *GUODIAN LAOZI* inscribed on bamboo strips was dug up. (This would not be published until 1998.)

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1998

In THOREAU, EMERSON AND EUROPE: FOUR TITLES (Hartford: Transcendental Books), [Kenneth Walter Cameron](#) provided an examination of Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche, William Jesse Jupp, John Page Hopps, and Francois de Salignac de La Mothe-Fenelon.

Also in this year, his TRANSCENDENTALISM OF EMERSON'S HOMILETICAL YEARS (1826-1836) (Hartford CT: Transcendental Books, 1998).

EMERSON, NIETZSCHE AND MAN'S STRIVING UPWARD THE "VIA EMINENTIAE" OF SUPERIOR PEOPLE: BACKGROUNDS AND A SPECIAL BIBLIOGRAPHY / [edited by] Kenneth Walter Cameron. (Hartford, Connecticut; Box A, Station A, Hartford 06126: Transcendental Books).

EMERSON, GLASGOW AND JOHN PAGE HOPPS: THE UNITARIAN STRUGGLE WITH SCOTTISH CALVINISM / [edited by] Kenneth Walter Cameron. (Hartford, Connecticut; Box A, Station A, Hartford 06126: Transcendental Books).

THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY OF EMERSON AND THOREAU IN ENGLAND—WILLIAM JESSE JUPP: SELECTIONS FROM HIS WORKS / edited with backgrounds by Kenneth Walter Cameron. (Hartford, Connecticut; Box A, Station A, Hartford 06126: Transcendental Books).

GEORGE P. BRADFORD, EMERSON AND THE PERENNIAL PHILOSOPHY OF FÉNELON / [edited by] by Kenneth



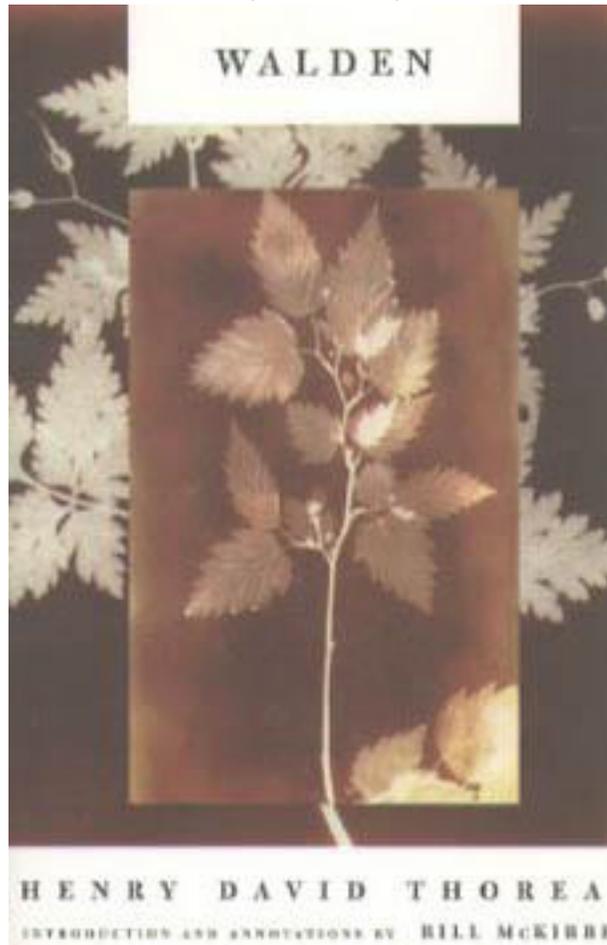
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Walter Cameron. (Hartford, Connecticut; Box A, Station A, Hartford 06126: Transcendental Books).

Also in this year, his THE VARIORUM [WALDEN](#): COMMENTARY AND INDEXES FOR THE THOREAU SCHOLAR (Box A, Station A, Hartford, Connecticut 06126: Transcendental Books, 1998).

[WALDEN](#), ANNOTATED BY BILL MCKIBBEN (Beacon Press).



Professor of English Wang Guanglin of the Shanghai Institute of Foreign Trade prepared a translation of [Thoreau](#)'s [WALDEN](#) into the [Chinese](#) language, and it was published by Writer's Press in Beijing (subsequently, there would be a revised edition published by the Changjiang Literature and Arts Press, in 2005 and 2006).

[TIMELINE OF WALDEN](#)

Publication of the 300BCE Guodian Laozi inscribed on bamboo strips, that had been dug up in [China](#) in 1993.



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1980

April: John Emerson pointed out in “Thoreau’s Construction of Taoism,” in the Thoreau Quarterly Journal (Volume 12, Number 2, pages 5-14) that [David T.Y. Ch’en](#) in his 1972 study “Thoreau and Taoism” had failed to establish not only that Thoreau had seen the 1838 rendition of the *TAO TÊ CHING* of [Lao-tze](#) into French, but even so much as that **any copy** of this book ever had made its way to America, or that **any American** had ever

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perused it. He chooses to emphasize the other possibility, that Thoreau came up with his [Taoist](#) ideas by personal inspiration and by life situation rather than by the reading of prior writings: “Taoism did not come to Thoreau, and what we must in the end try to understand is why Thoreau was looking so hard for Taoism.... To explain Thoreau’s convergence to Taoism ... the key is the closing off of public life.” The essence of this 1980 argument by Emerson is the same as the essence of Chen’s 1972 argument, that is to say, each author has presumed that because it may have happened one way, it is likelier that it happened that way. Chen presumed that Thoreau **could** have seen a translation of Taoist writings from the [Chinese](#) script into a Western script and that therefore he **presumably did** see that translation. Emerson presumed that Thoreau **could** have come up with these Taoist-like thoughts on his own and therefore he **presumably did** come up with these thoughts on his own. In neither case, it would seem, has the research as yet been attempted which would resolve this scripture-vs-inspiration dispute.

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1987

May: Okker, Patricia A. "Thoreau: An American [Taoist](#) Sage." *The Comparatist: Journal of the Southern Comparative Literature Association* 11 (May 1987): 86-95

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CHINA



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2007

Winter: Linda Brown Holt's "[Chinese](#) Philosophy in America: How It Influenced H.D. Thoreau" appeared in the [Qi Journal](#).⁶

[READ THE FULL TEXT](#)

[TAOISM](#)

CHANGE IS ETERNITY, STASIS A FIGMENT

6. "Linda Brown Holt is an independent scholar in the field of comparative religious literature, and graduate faculty mentor and capstone coordinator with Thomas Edison State College. Author of the book VIEWING MEISTER ECKHART THROUGH THE BHAGAVAD GITA, Holt has written articles that appeared in [The New York Times](#), [Qi Journal](#), [Yoga Journal](#), [Liberal Education](#), [The Empty Vessel](#) and other publications. She is the author of chapters in the books LETTING GO: LIVING WITHOUT A NET and SEEING THROUGH SYMBOLS: INSIGHTS INTO SPIRIT, both published by Swedenborg Foundation Publishers. She has lectured on distance learning and communicating with adult students at the University of Vienna, Charles University in Prague and the University of Innsbruck. Author of THE LILAC THIEF, a collection of poetry, she has published two novels under a penname, one of which has been translated into Spanish (search "Tigre Blanco") and published by Ediciones La Llave (<http://www.edicioneslallave.com/>). She holds an earned Doctor of Letters degree focusing on comparative religious literature from Drew University, an M.A. from California State University-Dominguez Hills and a B.A. with honors from Rider University. She is a liberal Christian by religion, a Western Daoist by inclination and a student of classical Yoga and Vedanta for more than 40 years, and is a huge fan of H.D. Thoreau."



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"It's all now you see. Yesterday won't be over until tomorrow and tomorrow began ten thousand years ago."

- Remark by character "Garin Stevens"
in William Faulkner's INTRUDER IN THE DUST



Prepared: January 10, 2014



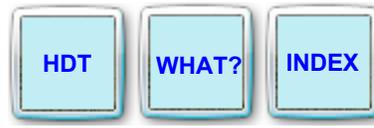
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*ARRGH AUTOMATED RESEARCH REPORT
GENERATION HOTLINE*



This stuff presumably looks to you as if it were generated by a human. Such is not the case. Instead, someone has requested that we pull it out of the hat of a pirate who has grown out of the shoulder of our pet parrot "Laura" (as above). What these chronological lists are: they are research reports compiled by ARRGH algorithms out of a database of modules which we term the Kouroo Contexture (this is data mining). To respond to such a request for information we merely push a button.



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Commonly, the first output of the algorithm has obvious deficiencies and we need to go back into the modules stored in the contexture and do a minor amount of tweaking, and then we need to punch that button again and recompile the chronology – but there is nothing here that remotely resembles the ordinary “writerly” process you know and love. As the contents of this originating contexture improve, and as the programming improves, and as funding becomes available (to date no funding whatever has been needed in the creation of this facility, the entire operation being run out of pocket change) we expect a diminished need to do such tweaking and recompiling, and we fully expect to achieve a simulation of a generous and untiring robotic research librarian. Onward and upward in this brave new world.

First come first serve. There is no charge.
Place requests with <Kouroo@kouroo.info>. Arrgh.