

Lao Zi was a great philosopher, thinker, educator, and the founder of the Daoist school of thought in ancient China.

Lao Zi was not his real name, but an honorific given the sage, meaning "Old Master." The specific date of Lao Zi's birth is unknown. Legends vary, but scholars place his birth between 600 and 300 B.C.E. Lao Zi is attributed with the writing of the *Dao De Jing*, the scripture for the Daoist school.

*Dao*, frequently written as *Tao*, literally means *The Way*, *The Great Ultimate*, or *The Secret of the Universe*.

Lao Zi's wise counsel attracted followers, but he refused to set his ideas down in writing. He believed that written words might solidify into formal dogma. Lao Zi wanted his philosophy to remain a natural way to live life with goodness, serenity, and respect. Lao Zi laid down no rigid code of behavior. He believed a person's conduct should be governed by instinct and conscience.

Daoism holds that the universe, far from being a complex web of tangled events, is actually very, very simple. All forms of matter and being are merely manifestations of Yin (female cosmic element) and Yang (male cosmic element), surrounded by Qi (energy).

Lao Zi believed that human life, like everything else in the universe, is constantly influenced by outside forces. He believed "simplicity" to be the key to truth and freedom. Lao Zi encouraged his followers to observe and seek to understand the laws of nature, to develop intuition and build up personal power, and to use that power to lead life with compassion and without force.

Legend says that in the end, Lao Zi was saddened by the evil side of mankind and set off into the desert on a water buffalo, leaving civilization behind. When he arrived at the final gate at the great wall protecting the kingdom, he stopped for a cup of tea with the gatekeeper. The gatekeeper was so stunned at Lao Zi's wisdom that he begged him to jot down a few revelations for posterity. Lao Zi grabbed a brush and dashed off a few ultimate truths before heading on his way.

The result was the 5,000-word philosophical poem in the verses of the *Dao De Jing*, in which *Dao* (*The Way*) is expounded. Next to the Bible, this ancient Chinese text is the world's most translated classic.

As for the reclusive Lao Zi, he ended up in Heaven. Now deified as one of the San Qing (the supreme trinity of Chinese Daoism, known as The Three Pure Ones) under the name Lao Jun, he advises the Jade Emperor on do-nothing policy and spends eons refining doctrine.