

## THE USE OF THE WORD TAO IN THE CONFUCIAN ANALECTS

BY HUANG K'UEI YUEN AND J. K. SHRYOCK

**T**AO is defined by the Erh Ya, which is attributed to Tzu Hsia in the fifth century B. C., by three words; Ti, meaning progress or principle, Yiu, meaning cause or reason, and Hsun, meaning teaching or training. If Tzu Hsia really wrote the Erh Ya, this would represent the standard Confucian interpretation of the word as recorded by one of the master's own disciples.

The Hsueh Wen, which appeared in 100 A. D., says that in ancient China the character was written differently from the modern usage, and was composed of two characters, one meaning head, and the other a short distance which we translate by the word inch. Later Tao came to be written with the character for head, and a character meaning to act and stop suddenly. These component parts may be still further subdivided, but without shedding much light on the origin and meaning of the term.

Tao as a whole is defined by the Hsueh Wen in two sentences, as that which acts, and as that which is universal, or pervades. We are safe in saying that by the time of the great philosophers of the Chou period, Tao when used as an abstract noun by itself meant a principle which underlies the universe, permeating all things, the cause or reason of phenomena. This definition is not taken from Taoist works, but from recognized Confucian classics.

A recent source book of words and phrases, called the *Tsu Yuen*, published by the Commercial Press in Shanghai in 1917, gives thirteen different meanings to the word, some of which are not ancient. They are as follows:

- 1—A road.
- 2—Law or principle.
- 3—Method or policy.

- 4—To go through; to understand thoroughly.
- 5—Favorable.
- 6—The name of a teaching or doctrine. Taoism.
- 7—A political division. There are several Tao in a province.
- 8—A surname, or clan name.
- 9—To speak, or words.
- 10—Cause.
- 11—To govern.
- 12—To lead, to conduct.
- 13—To follow.

All these meanings belong to the same character, and most of them are supported by quotations from the classics. Besides this, the source book gives seventy-two common phrases in which the word Tao occurs. Only two of these need be considered.

In the *Book of History*, (2,2,15), there is a sentence in which Jen Hsin, or the heart of man, is balanced by Tao Hsin, or the heart of Tao. Legge translates the latter phrase by "that which is right," which is unsatisfactory because the expression Tao Hsin and Jen Hsin are frequently used in later works, man being balanced by Tao as an opposite.

Another expression is Tao Teh, which is the title now given to the work of Lao Tzu. The commentator Wang Pi, 226-249 A.D., explains this phrase by saying, "Tao is the cause; Teh is that which is gained by men." Legge calls Teh the attribute of Tao, in his translation of the Tao Teh Ching. The ordinary translation of Teh is virtue, and in the Book of Rites, Tao and Teh are coupled with Love and Righteousness, but the Taoist writers make a sharp distinction between them.

Tao also occurs in the *Book of History* and the *Book of Changes*, as well as in other classic works, in the expression T'ien Tao, or the Tao or Principle of Heaven. The *Book of History* says, (4,3,2), "The Tao of Heaven is to bless the good." Lao Tzu also uses this expression. It is evident that even before Lao Tzu the word had an abstract meaning, so that if we assume that the original meaning was a road or way, there had already been a considerable philosophic development by the sixth century B. C.

In Lao Tzu, Tao is the fundamental principle of the universe, which cannot be described except by a series of antinomies. These opposites, such as changed and unchanging, known and unknowable,

active and passive, all imply a unity, and that unity is Tao.

Lao Tzu founded a school of thought which took its name from the word which he chose to express his idea of the absolute, and so Tao has come to be inseparably connected with Taoism. This conception has been intensified in the west by the habit of western scholars of translating Tao when it occurs in Confucian works, but simply Romanizing it when it is in a Taoist book. The result has been to make those who do not read Chinese think of Tao as a mysterious entity, a vague something which has significance only to the followers of Lao Tzu. This is unfortunate, because the Confucianists used the word quite as much as the Taoists, and when it occurs by itself as an abstract principle, the meaning is much the same in the early books of both schools.

In the Confucian Analects alone the character Tao is used eighty-eight times.

Eight times it occurs as a verb, as in the following sentences:

"The master said, 'To govern (Tao) a country of 1000 chariots, there must be a reverent conduct of affairs. . . .'". (1,5).

"If the people are led (Tao) by government. . . ." (2,3).

"Happy in speaking (Tao) of the goodness of others. . . ." (16,5).

It will be noticed that in these three sentences where the verb is Tao, it must be translated by three very different English words.

Once only in the Analects is the word used in the sense of an actual road.

"Although I may not get a great burial, shall I die on the road (Tao)?" (9,11.3).

In the remaining seventy-nine places where the term occurs it is used as an abstract noun, either by itself, or as the property of certain men or classes of men.

When it is used in the latter way, it is usually translated by way, or characteristic. There is the Tao of the Superior Man, (5,15-14,30,1), the Tao of men of high rank, (8,4,3), the Tao of the good man, (11,19), the Tao of the father, (1,11-4,20), the Tao of the former emperors, (1,12,1), the Tao of ancient times, (3,16), the Tao of Wen and Wu, (19,22,2), and finally the Tao of the Master, Confucius himself. (4,15.) Lao Tzu also uses the word in this way in the phrase, the Tao of Heaven. (*Tao Teh Ching*, 73-77-79.)

Tao as a quality of something or someone, is sometimes con-

nected with lists of virtues. Once, it is with humility, reverence, kindness and justice. (5,15). Again, it is self-control, sincerity and propriety. (8,4,3). In a third place, it is benevolence, wisdom or being without doubts, and courage. (14,30,1). Lao Tzu also does something like this when he says that "the Tao of Heaven has no favorites; it is always with the good man." (*Tao Teh Ching*, 79.)

There is one passage in the Analects which is a connecting link between the use of Tao as a quality of something else, and as an abstract principle.

"When superior men learn Tao they love men; when the common men learn Tao, they are easily commanded." (17,4,3.) Here Tao is something which can be learned by all men, no matter what their ability.

On the other hand, Lao Tzu contrasts Tao with the virtues in several passages.

The Use of the Word Tao in The Confucian Analects 2

"When great Tao fell into disuse, (or ceased to be practiced) benevolence and justice appeared." (*Tao Teh Ching*, 18.) This distinction between Tao and ethics is sharpened by Chuang Tzu, and is one of the differences between the Taoists and the followers of Confucius, but only the beginnings of this gap are present in Lao Tzu and Confucius themselves, and neither of the sages is altogether consistent with the doctrines which go by their names. Lao Tzu in the passage already quoted does connect Tao with virtue, and when Confucius uses Tao by itself as an abstract principle, it is in much the same sense as his older contemporary. In fact, the best definition of Taoism is to be found in Confucius' description of his own teaching.

"My Tao," said the sage, "is an all-pervading unity." (4,15).

Having delivered this remark, Confucius left the room, and the disciples asked Tseng Tzu what he meant.

"The Tao of the Master," Tseng Tzu interpreted, "is reverence and love."

The words Chung Hsu, reverence and love, themselves need a good deal of study, for they give the essence of Confucianism. The translators have followed Chu Hsi, the Sung commentator, in defining Chung as conscientiousness, making it apply to oneself, while love applies to one's neighbors. The Erh Ya, however, defines the word as reverence. The important point is that these are the words of Tseng Tzu, and not of the master. In this passage, Confucius

himself described Tao in a way that is as Taoist as any phrase of Lao Tzi, but his chief disciple, who established what is regarded as the orthodox line of Confucian thought, at once turned the remark into a different channel. Was Tseng Tzu right in his interpretation of the mind of his teacher?

Western scholars have followed him, and no one ignorant of Chinese reading their translations would imagine that Confucius had ever used the word Tao, which in Taoist works is left untranslated. Legge and Couvreur render Tao by doctrine, Soothill and Ku Hung Ming, by teaching, and Zottoli, whose translation is in Latin, by *agendi*.

There are other passages in which Tao in the abstract is discussed.

"If Tao is established, it is the Decree; if Tao is destroyed, it is the Decree." (14,38,2.)

Here Legge translates Tao by "my principles," Zottoli by "*rectam doctrinam*," Ku Hung Ming by "my teaching among men," Couvreur by "*ma doctrine*," and Soothill by "my principles." When the word is left untranslated, the sentence might have been written by a Taoist. The instance is particularly interesting because there is no word "my" or "true" in the text, and the translators had to insert it from nowhere in order to square the passage with what they felt Confucius ought to have said. The term Ming, or the Decree, means either Fate, or the Command of Heaven.

Confucius also said, "When a man has heard Tao in the morning, he can die in the evening without regret." (4,8.)

In this case, Tao is translated by "the right way," by sapientiam, by wisdom, and by "the Truth." Yet when Tao is simply Romanized, the sentence might have been taken from the Tao Teh Ching.

Tzu Kung said, "When the Master speaks about the Nature and the Tao of Heaven, he cannot be understood." (5,12). The translations are "the way of Heaven," "*de natura coelique lege*," "metaphysics or theology," and "*l'action du Ciel*." The mysticism of Confucius, which was misunderstood by the matter-of-fact disciples who interpreted his doctrine, is entirely lost.

Tzu Yiu said, "The Superior Man concentrates upon fundamentals, and Tao is born." (1,2,2). Tao is translated by "right courses," "practical courses," and wisdom. It seems as if the translators have been willing to go to any lengths to remove the least

taint of Taoism from Confucius' fair name. Last of all comes a passage that is nearly too much for them.

"The Master said, 'Man can enlarge Tao, but Tao cannot enlarge man'." (15,28.) Tao is rendered by "his principles," and even by "his religion, or the principles he professes."

Chu Hsi, the great Sung commentator, treats the passage as follows:

"Apart from man, there is no Tao, and apart from Tao, there is no such thing as man; but the mind of man is sentient, while the body of Tao is inactive." (Chu Hsi's Commentary on the Analects.) It is significant that here the standard Chinese interpreter of Confucius, in describing what Confucius meant by Tao, uses the very words of Lao Tzu, Wu Wei, or non-action, a characteristic Taoist phrase. The translations of Legge and Soothill do not even make sense, and the latter apologizes for the "apparently fallacious aphorism." He is forced to it because he translates Tao by "principles." In Chu Hsi the meaning is perfectly clear, whether or not it is the real meaning of Confucius.

These passages, in which Tao is considered as an abstract principle and not as the Tao of someone in particular, show that Confucius used the word in a sense that was not very different from that of Lao Tzu, and that the two were not as far apart as has usually been assumed.

This is confirmed indirectly from other sources. Lieh Tzu, the Taoist thinker who lived about a century later, is quite respectful toward Confucius and even attributes miraculous power to him, although admitting that he did not use it. Lieh Tzu also quotes the favorite disciple of Confucius, Yen Hui, and Chuang Tzu makes Yen Hui much more Taoist than Confucius himself, although he interprets a passage in the Analects, (2,4), as showing that the sage became a follower of Lao Tzu. Had Yen Hui lived and become the chief interpreter of his master, instead of Tseng Tzu, Confucianism might have been a very different thing.

There are certain conclusions to be drawn from this brief analysis. As soon as the word Tao is left untranslated and simply Romanized, it becomes apparent that while Confucius did not develop the word and give it paradoxical attributes as Lao Tzu did, nor make it the key-word to his teaching, he did use it in much the same sense as the older man.

This similarity has been almost entirely lost sight of, first, in the

interpretation which Tseng Tzu and the long line of orthodox Confucians have given to the teaching of the sage, and second, in the translations based on this interpretation by western scholars. Tao used as a verb, or as a road, or even as an attribute, may be translated, but Tao as an abstract principle ought to be left untranslated in Confucian, as in Taoist works.

The word itself is difficult, not because of any mystic significance, but because it has so many meanings. When the various words which are used to translate it are brought together, it becomes clear that the complex of ideas which is associated with the character does not correspond with any similar word in English. Yet when the word is used in one sense by a Chinese writer, it carries with it as a penumbra into the consciousness of the reader the other meanings associated with the character. Similar associations will not be found with any English word, and therefore, in translating passages where Tao occurs, one should first try to get into one's mind the varied associations which the word has for a Chinese, and then leave the word untranslated. Perhaps, to paraphrase the famous sentence of Lao Tzu, the Tao that can be translated, is not Tao.