

二

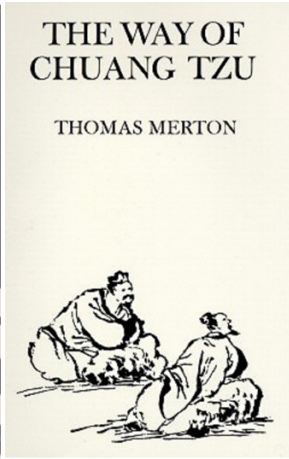
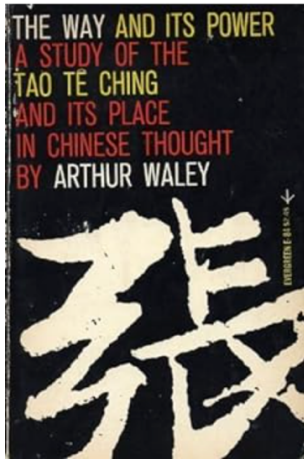
I dug pretty fast
but didn't get far
when my shovel went clink
I'd found me a jar
inside was a map
there were mountains and rivers
but the words had no letters
that gave me the shivers



Chapter 2 - Journey of a Thousand Miles

千里之行，始于足下 qiān lǐ zhī xíng , shǐ yú zú xià - “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a first step.”

About 2,500 years ago, a man by the name of 老子 *Lǎozǐ*, spoke these words. Laozi lived around the same time as Confucius. The words of Laozi are considered to be the foundation of Daoism (Taoism) and are looked upon in China both as a philosophy and as a religion. The canon of Daoism is the 道德經 *Dàodéjīng* aka the Tao Te Ching. Arthur Waley translated this title into English as The Way and Its Power in 1934.



道可道，非常道。
名可名，非常名。

In Chapter 1 of the 81 chapters that make up the text of the Daodejing, we learn that the word “道 dào” (“path” or “way”) and the word “名 míng” (“name”) cannot accurately be defined by words. “The Dao that we can name is not the eternal Dao; the “name” of the object that we name is not the object itself.” In Chapter 2, we discover how opposites define one another. “Short” does not exist without “long”; there would be no “ugliness” without “beauty”; nor would there be “easy” without “difficult.” “Water”, we discover in Chapter 8, is what may be most like the “dao.” In Chapter 78, “Nothing under heaven is softer or more yielding than water; but when it attacks things hard and resistant there is not one of them that can prevail.”

莊子 (Zhuāngzǐ) a.k.a. Chuang Tzu, a 4th century BCE follower of Laozi wrote some beautiful parables based upon passages from the Daodejing. “The Worthless Tree” is one such story that makes us reconsider what we might, at first glance, consider to have value. My favorite interpretation is the one by Thomas Merton, who said about his rendition: "Since I know only a few Chinese characters, I

obviously am not a translator. These 'readings' are then not attempts at faithful reproduction but ventures in personal and spiritual interpretation ." I based my interpretation of this story on "***The Worthless Tree***" (Thomas Merton's interpretation in *The Way of Chuang Tzu, Abbey of Gethsemani, 1965*)

One day, a man by the name of Hui Zu struck up a conversation with Zhuangzi. "See that big ugly old tree. It's called a Stinky Tree. Butt ugly. Trunk completely twisted. The entire tree is riddled with gnarls and knotholes. There's no way anyone could make even one good board from it. Check out the branches. Different sizes, awkward shapes, going this way and that. Not one thing about that tree makes any sense at all. Big, clumsy, and confusing. Worthless."

Zhuangzi thought for a minute and then responded. "Have you ever seen a wild cat crouching and waiting for its prey? The cat sits motionless while the mouse scurries around. In the end, the mouse always ends up in the cat's trap. Water buffalos are massive, almost as big as clouds. They're really huge and strong, but they can't catch mice."

"You're telling me that tree is worthless. Uproot it then, and plant it where there is nothing else – in empty space. After it's taken root, walk around it. Sit under it and enjoy its shade. No one's ever going to cut it down."

"Worthless?" We should all be so worthless.

