

## 四十一

Once tigers roamed foothills  
surrounding Mount Tai  
but now tourists ride  
they don't climb to the sky  
gondolas replaced  
six thousand stone stairs  
So, welcome back tigers  
return to your lairs!



## Chapter 41 – Tyranny is More Ferocious than Tigers

During his travels, Confucius was approaching the foot of Mount Tai (泰山 Tàishān) when he encountered a lone woman weeping and obviously distraught. When he asked why she was sad, she told him that her son had recently been devoured by a tiger. The old woman went on to say that her husband and her father-in-law had also been killed by tigers in the same area. Confucius invited her to join his retinue and asked why she remained in this place. The woman politely declined his offer and said that in this place, she felt free and was not subject to the tyranny of the government. Confucius' words, "Tyranny is more ferocious than tigers" (苛政猛于虎 kē zhèng měng yú hǔ) is still used today to describe how some people believe that the benefits of living in isolation or in isolated communities outweigh the benefits of living near a repressive government.



Although Buddhism and Confucianism both have long histories in Shandong Province, it is Daoism which frames China's "5 Sacred Mountains (五嶽 Wǔyuè.) And it is Tai Shan aka Mount Tai in Shandong is the easternmost of those mountains. 華山 Huà Shān, in the province of Shaanxi has that distinction in the west. 衡山 Héng Shān is located in the southern province of Hunan while 恆山 Héng Shān is located in the more northern province of Shanxi. Even those these two mountains have the same names in their Pinyin spellings, they are homonyms and the characters are completely different. Therefore, in English the mountain in Hunan is often referred to as Southern Heng Shan, while the mountain in Shanxi is commonly called Northern Heng Shan. On a similar note, the province of Shaanxi has been given an extra "a" in English to distinguish it from Shanxi, its neighboring province to the east. 嵩山 Sōngshān, in Hebei is the last of the Five Sacred Mountains.



It is said that 72 emperors from China's ancient past journeyed to Tai Shan to pay homage and make sacrifices to Heaven and Earth and pray for peace and prosperity in the Fengshan Ceremony (封禅仪式 fēng shàn yí shì). There are 6,660 steps one needs to climb in order to summit the east peak of Mount Tai, but these days, most people opt for the combination bus and cable car ascent. Expedience does, however, have its costs. Hundreds of stone tablets and engravings, numerous temples and ruins, and a scattering of archways, gates, pavilions, and kiosks line the steps up the mountain. Many of those are missed on the cable car ride up Taishan. Some of the earliest artifacts of Chinese history come from the province of Shandong near Taishan. During the Neolithic period (4100 to 2600 BCE), the Dawenkou culture (大汶口文化 Dàwènkǒu wénhuà) existed alongside the Yangshao culture (仰韶文化 Yǎngsháo wénhuà) and there is strong evidence that there was strong interaction between the two cultures. There is also interesting research going on which suggests links between Dawenkou culture and Austronesian languages and culture. The Dawenkou culture was also believed to have been the first to practice trepanation (boring a hole in the skull to relieve pressure.) But it's the ceramics that I find most fascinating. Some of the pottery was made on pottery wheels and was colorfully decorated with geometric patterns similar to those found in indigenous pottery throughout the world. Black "egg-shell" Longshan pottery from the Neolithic Age has been discovered which was both delicate and strong. Sophisticated tools and ornaments were made from jade and bone.

鄧泰山而小天下 Dēng Tàishān ér xiǎo tiānxià "If you want to see how small the world is, climb Tai Shan."