Foreword

Confucianism and Daoism are the two pillars of Chinese intellectual tradition. Both were deeply concerned about the well-being of common people, but they followed different approaches. The terms, Dào and Dé (the Way and Virtue) are commonly used by both schools of thought, yet their meanings differ.

For Confucians, Dào is the Way to bring about a benevolent government and a harmonious society, both of which in turn are based on the virtue (Đế) of every individual. The Daoists on the other hand take Dào to be the Absolute, Eternal Truth that preceded the creation of the universe, and Đế to be those intrinsic qualities and the nature of all things that comprise the Dào. As Confucians emphasize the pursuit of a moral education, Daoists advocate compliance with nature (to follow natural instinct). When they engaged in public service, Chinese scholars usually tried to embody the masculine, political, and assertive characteristics of Confucianism; yet, when they retired from public service to lead a life in seclusion, they tried to adopt the feminine, artistic, and flexible Daoist qualities. The wisdoms of both schools have benefited Chinese minds for more than two millennia, and their influence endures to this day and remains strong.

This volume consists of four sections: Confucian Analects, Mencius, Lǎozi, and Zhuāngzǐ. Criteria for text selection included:

1. representative key ideas expressed in the various modes and on different occasions;
2. passages showing stylistic characteristics and grammatical points;
3. items of interest and continued relevance to modern readers; and
4. passages about daily life that became common sayings and set-phrases.

Recognized as “a paragon for all generations” throughout Chinese dynastic history and even until this day, Confucius is considered the first and greatest private teacher in Chinese history. Mainly concerned with building a harmonious society composed of moral individuals, Confucius espoused a benevolent government, taught conscientiousness and altruism as basic human virtues, advocated virtue and rites as governing principles, and emphasized the importance of education and self-improvement. He left no written works to posterity, but his disciples collected his sayings into the “Confucian Analects.” The
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selections presented here show the ket facets of his teachings, his interaction with his disciples, his sense of humor, and his strong will in doing the right thing against all adversity.

The second great master in the Confucian school, Mencius further developed the Confucian doctrine by clearly delineating between that which was right and that which was profitable. He expounded a workable step-by-step program to achieve a benevolent government, calling it “The Kingly Way.” He opined that human nature is innately good; it needed only constant vigilance and nourishment. Mencius’ belief that ‘the people are more important than the ruler’ has often been cited as a rudimentary form of Chinese democracy. He also elevated the status of scholars as equals to those holding political power. His style, both eloquent and powerful, persuades almost all in any debate. The selections included here contain some of his famous speeches that demonstrate his unique speaking and writing style.

Lǎozǐ, founder of the Daoist school, pondered on metaphysics. He believed that everything originates from the Way (the Absolute Ontological Entity), which is governed by the function/virtue of the Way (Dē), a universal principle in Lǎozǐ. From this precept, he then developed a political philosophy in which one governs by inaction, that is, non-interference. Lǎozǐ emphasized such ideas as vacuity, tranquility, and non-contention in his philosophy of life; accentuating softness, weakness, and self-content. His linguistic style is laconic yet profound, affording much food for thought.

Zhuāngzǐ, the second grand master in the Daoist school, was a man of great wit, wisdom, and ingenuity; moreover, he was by far the most fascinating philosopher among the four introduced in this volume. He expanded Lǎozǐ’s naturalistic philosophy, further perfecting it by proclaiming, “Heaven and Earth and I coexist; the myriad things and I are one.” His wandering mind transcended the relativity and dichotomy of things, musing that life and death are but the continuation of a single process, and that right and wrong are indistinguishable. He exclaimed that only a vacuous mind can remain pure, and that one should not permit the tranquility of one’s mind to be disturbed by external matters and circumstances. He shook off worldly bonds and pursued complete spiritual freedom. His style is lively and sprightly, inscrutably novel and imaginative; it is at once serious, sarcastic, and humorous. His philosophical essays are imbued with extraordinary literary beauty. The selections here highlight the originality of his ideas and illustrate his marvelous means of expression.
We base our glossaries on traditional and modern scholarship on these texts; in some instances, we have made necessary changes to elucidate the meaning. The authors we have consulted include Hán Fēi (269-233 BCE), Zhèng Xuán (127-200 CE), Hé Yàn (d. 249 CE), Wáng Bì (226-249 CE), Guō Xiàng (d. 312 CE), Kǒng Yīngdá (574-648 CD), Zhū Xī (1130-1200 CE), Hān Shān (1546-1623 CE), Jiāo Xún (1762-1820 CE), Líu Bǎonán (1791-1855 CE), Guō Qīngfán (1844-1896 CE) and contemporary scholars Jiāng Bóqián, Yáng Bójùn, Láo Sīguāng, and Chén Gūying. We have paid special attention to the use of grammatical particles and the variations of syntactic structures; we assume all responsibilities for any errors.

Students interested in Chinese philosophy or intellectual history may find this book useful, riveting, and inspiring. As they work through this book, students will gradually realize how well they have mastered the grammar of classical Chinese, and how far they have advanced in the general study of Chinese culture.

The Authors