

CHAPTER 8 | LESSON 2 China's Ancient Philosophies

Literature***Dao De Jing* by Laozi**

Very little is known about the author of the *Dao De Jing*. Some historians believe the philosopher Laozi wrote it. According to historian Sima Qian, Laozi lived during the sixth century B.C. He held the office of keeper of the archives [records] and sacred books.

According to legend, as Laozi was leaving the state of Chu, a guard of the passage into the state of Ch'in stopped him. He was asked to write down his wisdom. After three days, he produced a book of about 5,250 characters known as the *Dao De Jing*. The following selection is from the book.

THE SUPREME

There is something mysterious and whole
which existed before heaven and earth,
silent, formless, complete, and never
changing.

Living eternally everywhere in
perfection,
it is the mother of all things.

I do not know its name; I call it the
Way.

If forced to define it, I shall call it
supreme.

Supreme means absolute.
Absolute means extending everywhere.
Extending everywhere means returning
to itself.

Thus the Way is supreme.
Heaven is supreme.
Earth is supreme.
And the person is supreme.

There are four supremes in the
universe,
and the person is one of them.
The person reflects the earth.
The earth reflects heaven.
Heaven reflects the Way.
And the Way reflects its own nature.

—*Dao De Jing Way Power Book*, by Lao-zi

MAIN IDEAS

1. How does Laozi define the Way?

2. According to Laozi, what are the four supremes in the universe?

CRITICAL THINKING

3. **Summarizing** Where and how did “the Way” live?

4. **Forming and Supporting Opinions** What do you think Laozi is speaking of when he refers to “the Way”?
