

## Laozi

(6<sup>th</sup> century B.C.?). Traditionally, it was thought that a sage named Laozi (or Lao-Tzu) wrote the most translated work in all the literature of China, the *Daodejing*, which was also previously known as the *Laozi*. The book is the earliest document in the history of Daoism (“the Way”), one of the major philosophical-religious traditions that, along with Confucianism, has shaped Chinese life and thought for more than 2,000 years. It is a viewpoint that emphasizes individuality, freedom, simplicity, mysticism, and naturalness.



Figure 1: Laozi.

Little is known about Laozi, and historians today consider most of the stories about his life to be legends. His earliest biographer, who wrote in about 100 B.C., relates that Laozi lived in the district of Hu, in what is now Henan Province, during the Zhou Dynasty (1046–256 B.C.). He worked at the court of the emperor as a scholar, presumably in astrology and divination. The biographer tells of a questionable meeting of Laozi with the younger Confucius. Another story says that Laozi left China during the decline of the Zhou Dynasty and on his way west wrote the *Daodejing*, after which he disappeared. He was worshiped as an imperial ancestor during the Tang Dynasty (618–907) and has long been revered as a god or saint. Confucians revere him as a philosopher. Scholars today believe that the *Daodejing* cannot have been written by one person. Some of the sayings in it may date from the time of Confucius, while others are from much later periods. It is possible that the name Laozi represented a type of scholar and wise man, rather than one individual.

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