

Because Daoists see good and bad as connected they try to accept both, neither bragging about good fortune nor complaining about bad fortune. All things that occur are accepted as part of the balance of yin and yang.



- What are yin and yang?
- Why do Daoists accept all things that occur?

Laozi was opposed to organized government, but he knew that lords and emperors would not disappear and leave people to govern themselves. Rather, he believed that the Dao contained rules by which rulers should govern. The most important principle of Daoism for the ruler to follow was what Laozi called *wuwei* (pronounced *woo-way*), which translates as “action through non-action.” Rather than attempting to take control and guide the people, a ruler should take very little action and only support the people in achieving what they naturally desire. Just as a farmer cannot force a plant to grow, Laozi thought that a ruler cannot force the people to prosper. A plant grows best on its own, and excessive prodding from the farmer only hurts it. Likewise, people already know how to live, and a ruler who makes too many laws will only interfere and cause problems. Daoists believe the principle of *wuwei* can be applied to all areas of life.

Since Laozi’s time, Daoist philosophy has been an important influence on Chinese culture, and it continues to be. Chinese people have survived difficult periods in recent Chinese history by practicing *wuwei*, not trying to take control of the situation, but rather waiting for the situation to pass. One can also see Daoist influence in how nature is portrayed in Chinese landscape paintings, which show serene mountains (yin) contrasted with violent storms (yang). The paintings often include humans, but always as small beings living in harmony with a natural world, which is depicted as larger and more powerful.



- How did Laozi believe a ruler should rule?
- What is *wuwei*? How does it relate to Daoism?
- How does Daoism influence Chinese society today?

Quotes from the Teachings of Laozi

Quote 1: *“Highest good is like water. Because water excels in benefiting the myriad creatures without contending with them and settles where none would like to be, it comes close to the Way.”*

Quote 2: *“The more laws and edicts are imposed, the more thieves and bandits there will be.”*

Quote 3: *“Of the best rulers the people only know that they exist; the next best they love and praise; the next they fear; and the next they revile. When the best rulers have done their task, the people all remark, ‘We have done it ourselves!’ ”*