

## **Document 8.1**

Excerpts from *Daodejing* (《道德经》) on Dao, written around the 4<sup>th</sup> century B.C.E.

*Legend has it that when Laozi (老子) left Luoyang, he traveled west. As he went through a mountain pass, a border guard recognized and stopped him. Fearing that Laozi's wisdom would be lost, he asked the sage to write down his thoughts. The result was Daodejing, a little book of just eighty-one very brief chapters. Although tradition has it that Laozi wrote the book, most scholars believe it is a collection of writings by several people. The poems have been discussed and debated for centuries. No other Chinese book has been translated as many times as Daodejing.*

*The Chinese language differs in many ways from European languages (see Lesson 5). A character may be used as a noun or verb, sometimes in the same sentence. The characters may have multiple shades of meaning. Daodejing is very poetic and quite abstract. It has been interpreted and translated in many ways.*

### Chapter 34

The way is broad, reaching left as well as right.  
The myriad creatures depend on it for life yet it claims no authority.  
It accomplishes its task yet lays claim to no merit.  
It clothes and feeds the myriad creatures yet lays no claim to being their master.  
For ever free of desire, it can be called small; yet, as it lays no claim to being  
    master when the myriad creatures turn to it, it can be called great.  
It is because it never attempts itself to be great that it succeeds in becoming  
great.

### Chapter 43

The most submissive thing in the world can ride roughshod over the hardest in  
the world—that which is without substance entering that which has no  
crevices.  
That is why I know the benefit of resorting to no action. The teaching that uses  
no words, the benefit of resorting to no action, these are beyond the  
understanding of all but a very few in the world.

*Source: From Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu, translated and introduction by D. C. Lau (Penguin Classics, 1963). Copyright © D. C. Lau, 1963. Reproduced by permission of Penguin Books Ltd.*