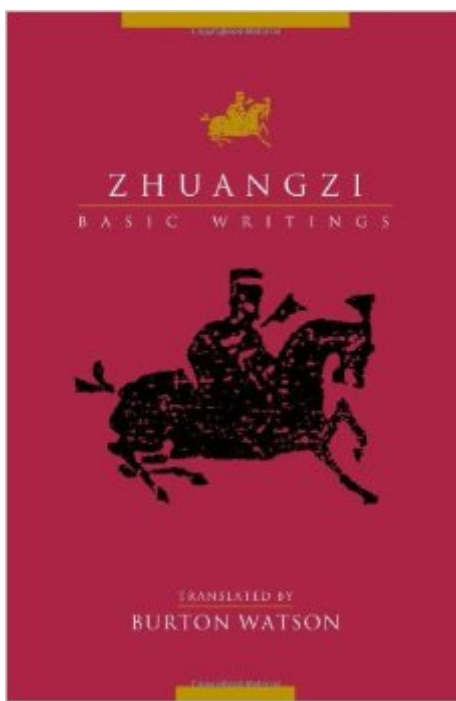


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Zhuangzi: Basic Writings



Synopsis

Only by inhabiting Dao (the Way of Nature) and dwelling in its unity can humankind achieve true happiness and freedom, in both life and death. This is Daoist philosophy's central tenet, espoused by the person or group of people known as Zhuangzi (369?â€”286? BCE) in a text by the same name. To be free, individuals must discard rigid distinctions between right and wrong, and follow a course of action not motivated by gain or striving. When one ceases to judge events as good or bad, man-made suffering disappears, and natural suffering is embraced as part of life. Zhuangzi elucidates this mystical philosophy through humor, parable, and anecdote, using non sequitur and even nonsense to illuminate truths beyond the boundaries of ordinary logic. Boldly imaginative and inventively written, the Zhuangzi floats free of its historical period and society, addressing the spiritual nourishment of all people across time. One of the most justly celebrated texts of the Chinese tradition, the Zhuangzi is read by thousands of English-language scholars each year, yet, until now, only in the Wade-Giles romanization. Burton Watson's conversion to pinyin in this book brings the text in line with how Chinese scholars, and an increasing number of other scholars, read it.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

This is a very different book than the Lao Tzu. It's written in a much less poetic style, but I find Zhuangzi more readable for that reason. The style is more conversational, and well rendered into

contemporary English by Burton Watson. These inner chapters contain only the core of a much longer work. Over the 2200 years since its writing, many accretions had crept into the work, including commentaries and addenda by other authors. Watson strips those away and leaves only the central and most vivid writings. Some of those may already be familiar to today's reader. For example, this book originates the man dreaming to be a butterfly dreaming to be a man. Zhuangzi offers many more of these anecdotes, too long to be analogies but too short for fables. He also calls on the history and mythology of his time - not always distinct from each other - and creates mythology of his own, whether he meant to or not. That mythology lived on in Chinese alchemy, when Zhuangzi's magical sages were taken as literal beings. Zhuangzi lived on, too, in Taoism's eventual alignment with Buddhism. His cryptic, non sequitur style of answer seems to foreshadow the koans of the distinctly Chinese and Japanese schools of Buddhism. This is a wonderful complement to the Lao Tzu. If that book is the art of enlightenment, then this is more like the practical craft. I recommend it highly to any student of eastern classics. I must add that Zhuangzi is a more recent romanization of "Chuang Tzu" - different renderings of one name. It is easy to become confused and think that the two were different writers. It is especially confusing since Watson published this same material many years ago under the "Chuang Tzu" spelling, and now as "Zhuangzi." While I have the highest respect for Burton's scholarship, I think that this difference-without-a-difference should be made more explicit.

The Zhuangzi is one of the two most important Daoist texts in the Chinese tradition, but it gets short shrift next to its cousin, the Tao Te Ching (Dao De Jing). One of the reasons is the length of the Zhuangzi. It has none of the brevity and conciseness of the Tao Te Ching. It is a collection of many materials, of varying quality and authenticity, often in the same passage. That is why Burton Watson's translation of the Zhuangzi is so useful. He has culled through the text, and presented us with only the very best material. This, coupled with his fine introduction and notes on the translation, give us a Zhuangzi that is both easy to read, interesting and smooth flowing.

Considered the two primary texts of Daoism, Zhuangzi and the Dao de Jing are both getting at the same thing. However, I personally found Zhuangzi to be more humorous, story-like, and enjoyable (not that the Dao de Jing is not wholly incredible and unique~ it's really unfair to compare the two, but nonetheless). Watson includes the inner chapters and outer chapters, getting the 'basic writings' covered and leaving the reader with a sound essence of the Dao. The stories may be puzzling to someone unfamiliar with Daoism, Zen, or the 'enlightened mind'. However, if one's mind is ripe for

this kind of wisdom, the stories contain wonderful messages and good humor. I recommend this to anyone interested in Eastern religion, mysticism, natural living, 'enlightenment', or Chinese philosophy. I read this book for a course on Eastern Religion and Philosophy and enjoyed it so much that my professor suggested reading the entirety of Zhuangzi. So if you enjoy this, good news.. there's more!

Very interesting book for people practicing Zen today. This writing clearly has a bearing on our practice today and its origins. I would have liked a little more commentary on where it fits in with ancient Taoism and historical events of the time.

Great book that really had an effect on my thinking some years ago when I first read it

I'm enjoying Zhuangzi, but can't say I'm crazy about the interpreter. He just doesn't seem to get it.

Nice book

Great book!!!!!! just what I ordered..This book was needed for class & has a wonderful and interesting perspective!! thank you!

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