

# Four Classics of Huang Di (The Yellow Emperor)

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## Book I: The Eternal Law Chapter One: On the Birth of Law

Out of Dao (Tao, 道) is born law, what is used to define “right and wrong,” and verified by gain and loss. (Therefore) those who have mastered Dao give birth to law and dare not to break, follow what is born and dare not to destruct. (Now that) they use the law to regulate themselves, certainly they will be accepted by all. Dao is formless, out of which everything comes. Life harms, the harm it does is called desire or insatiability. Life will act. Action harms. The harm action does is called ignorance of timing, since action should be well-timed. Action constitutes events. Events harm. The harm events do is called counter act, or imbalance, or ignorance of what can be used as resources. Events will be talked about. Discourse harms. The harm discourse does is called misname, or not knowing to fear others (for that they will know the truth sooner or later), or wrong expression of oneself, or talking big, or taking insufficiency as abundance.

So all come from that same formless origin, while some live some die, some lose some win. Wellness and woe follow the same law, but nobody knows its origin. The way to wisdom is to know what is and is not from that formless. No matter how small a form is, there will be a name for it. With form and name, there will be contrast like black and white. So those who know the Dao encounter the world indifferently, rootlessly, effortlessly, selflessly.

So whatever happens in this world, it will have a form and be discoursed. With form and within discourse, the rightness can never be escaped, and the trace never covered. The impartial see the clear picture, and at their best they change the public. The most upright are calm, and the calmest are sages. The selfless are wise, and the wisest embody the model for the world. They can judge according to the law of

Heaven<sup>2</sup> (Tien, 天), their wisdom can be tested by the events. This is like straightening the timbers, no matter the quantity. Once you have the tools and measures ready, no one can escape. So people say, with measures ready, it is easy to rule the country. Breakdown and continue, lose and regain—who knows the reason? Death and rebirth, take woe as well, who knows the extremity? Reflect on the formless, and you know where wellness and woe come from. The method to cope with change stops at balance.<sup>3</sup> The imbalance between the heavy and the light is called loss of Dao. There is eternal law of Heaven and of Earth, of public affairs, of class<sup>4</sup>, of holding ministers, and of the extremity of using the citizen. The eternal law of Heaven and Earth includes: season change, day and night, birth and death, softness and hardness. The eternal law of public affairs includes: man working on farms, and women working at home. The eternal law of class is: the upper class and the lower class do not mix. The eternal law of holding ministers: use them according to their capability and do not make them do what they can’t accomplish. The eternal law to use the citizen is to order them work for the public rather than certain individuals. When the eternal law is broken and the limit is overdone, Qi,<sup>5</sup> the method of counter balancing, should be used. After Qi and Zheng (justo)<sup>6</sup> are established, their names will be eternal. Despite of the size of an entity, it resides in itself. Whether it follows the Dao or against it, live or die, it has its own name. With its name, there is justo.

Only those who have mastered Dao, can be clear about Heaven up above, and know the difference between the methods to be a king and to be a minister in the middle, and be aware of the process of birth and death of everything down on Earth. Only they can be simplest and finest, thus being formless and the embodiment of justo for the world.

<sup>1</sup> The “Yellow Emperor,” Father of the Chinese people. In 1973, many silk books were discovered in Mawangdui Han Tomb (No.3). There are four of them before the Second version of Lao-tzu. They were originally titled *The Eternal Law*; *The Ten Masterpieces*; *Chen(g)*; and *The Origin of Dao*. Here is the first chapter of the first book.

<sup>2</sup> Please keep in mind the difference between Western concept of Heaven and Chinese concept of Tien. The later does not refer to the spiritual entities like angels, but to nature or cosmos.

<sup>3</sup> It means the best method to cope with change is to keep balance.

<sup>4</sup> It means the difference in social status of people.

<sup>5</sup> Qi as used in the Four Classics of Yellow Emperor (or Four Canons of Yellow Emperor) does not refer to spirit/pneuma, but the states of abnormality and the method to restore the natural balance.

<sup>6</sup> Zheng (justo) as used in this context refers to natural balance, not justice in the jurisprudential sense, though in the Huang Di classics natural balance and justice would not be unrelated.