

Daoism

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Daoism, previously spelled “Taoism” in the scholarship (explained shortly), is one of the major indigenous religions of China. Often conflated with Chinese “popular religion,” and sometimes problematically presented with Confucianism and Buddhism as a single religious or cultural system called “Chinese religions,” Daoism is a profound and distinct religious tradition with its own unique set of concerns, values, views, practices, and so forth. Also frequently misrepresented as a divided tradition composed of so-called “philosophical Daoism” and so-called “religious Daoism,” Daoism is, in fact, a single religious tradition, albeit a diverse and complex one. As an identifiable religious community composed of master-disciple lineages, Daoism began in the Warring States period (480-222 BCE). There is no “founder” and no authoritative scripture.

Daoism, or the “tradition of the Dao,” centers on the Dao (“Way”), which is best left untranslated. Impersonal and ineffable in nature, the Dao is the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists, the adherents of Daoism. On a general level, the purpose of Daoist lifeways and religious paths involves “cultivating the Dao” (*xiudao*). This is often framed in terms of “alignment” and “attunement,” with an understanding of existence as energetic in nature.

One challenge to a deep engagement with Daoism involves the tradition’s relative complexity, diversity, and inclusivity. From a Daoist perspective, there are many “ways to the Way.” Daoists have developed and advocated diverse models of practice and attainment. Such diversity and inclusivity often subvert attempts at totalizing statements about religious traditions, including assumptions about “tradition” as singular, unchanging, and/or authoritarian. In terms of modernity and globalization, we may in turn make a distinction between “Chinese Daoism,” an ethnic and cultural Chinese religion still primarily centered in mainland China and in Hong Kong and Taiwan, and “global Daoism,” a transnational tradition rooted in Chinese Daoism as source-tradition. Global Daoism includes Chinese Daoism, but it has global distribution and is characterized by cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. It is as much a “convert religion” as an “ethnic birth-right religion,” which begs the question of the relationship among culture, ethnicity and religion in the conception of adherence, identity and tradition.

On “Daoism” and Indigenous Chinese Categories

“Daoism” is a Western name for an indigenous Chinese religion. The Chinese language is comprised of characters and lacks a premodern alphabet. The Romanization of Chinese, that is, the phonetic approximation of Chinese pronunciations into Roman script, develops within the context of European colonialism and Christian missionary activity in China. In a more modern context, there are two major Romanization systems for the “Mandarin” dialect: the earlier Wade-Giles, which was developed by the British diplomats and Sinologists Thomas Wade (1818-1895) and Herbert Giles (1845-1935), and the later Pinyin, which was created by the Chinese Communist government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC; 1949-present). Since the 1990s, Pinyin increasingly has become the international standard, with Taiwan finally adopting it in 2009. For present purposes, “Tao,” “Taoist,” and “Taoism” derive from Wade-Giles, while “Dao,” “Daoist,” and “Daoism” derive from Pinyin. Both are still pronounced with a “d” sound, as Wade-Giles uses “t” without an apostrophe for a “d” sound and “t’” with an apostrophe for a “t” sound.

Unlike many other major “world religions,” wherein the etymology of the names reveals only vague approximations of their central concerns and which often originate in the conceptions (and assumptions) of others (as in the cases of “Confucianism” and “Hinduism”), “Daoism” actually closely parallels Daoist views of the tradition. The name draws our attention to the central importance of the Dao, which is the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoism.

In an ancient Chinese context, there were a variety of Chinese characters that parallel what we refer to as “religion” or “tradition.” These include *dao* (“way”), *jia* (“family”), and *jiao* (“teachings”), among others. In a modern context, *zongjiao* (lit., “teachings of the ancestors”) is a neologism for “religion” that was borrowed from Japanese. In any case, in ancient China, and before the introduction of Buddhism from Central Asia in the first and second centuries CE, there was much debate about the most effective system for self-cultivation and socio-political harmony. This involved competing approaches often referred to as *dao* (“ways”). (See chapter 1 for a brief discussion of this way of comparing and speaking of “religions” in ancient China.)

The earliest Daoists, members of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism, made a brilliant move. They adopted *dao* not as a name for their approach, but rather as the name for that which was ultimately real. Daoists had *the Way* that encompassed all of the small ways of

other communities. Similarly, in the Early Han dynasty (202 BCE-9 CE), Daoists began to use the term *daojia* (*tao-chia*), which literally means “Family of the Dao,” as the name for their community and tradition. This term specifically emerged in Chinese historiography as a taxonomic and bibliographic category, that is, as a way of categorizing texts. The Family of the Dao stood in contrast to the Family of the Literati (*rujia*; “Confucianism”), the Family of the Law (*fajia*; “Legalism”), and so forth. In subsequent periods, Daoists adopted the term *daojia* to refer to ordained Daoist priests (*daoshi*) and Daoist religious communities. During the Period of Disunion (220-589), Daoists and members of the larger Chinese cultural elite began to employ the name *daojiao* (*tao-chiao*), which literally means “Teachings of the Dao,” in order to distinguish Daoism from Buddhism (*fojiao*). The latter was beginning to make major inroads into Chinese society and to compete with Daoism and Confucianism for imperial patronage and popular support. In this context, *daojiao* included *daojia*, with the latter sometimes corresponding to classical Daoism (see below). Both point toward a larger “tradition of the Dao” (*daotong*).

Here it is important to note that there is a common misconception concerning Daoism that is epidemic. This is the distinction between so-called “philosophical Daoism” and so-called “religious Daoism.” The former is said to be “pure” or “original Daoism.” Corresponding to the *Daode jing* (*Tao-te ching* or *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*) and *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-tzu* or *Book of Master Zhuang*), it is supposedly “philosophical” in nature. The latter is claimed to be a “degenerate” and “superstitious” adjunct of the former. Corresponding to the various communities and movements from the second century CE to the present, it is supposedly “religious” in nature. From this perspective, Daoism is a bifurcated tradition, and so-called “religious Daoism” has supposedly lost the “original teachings” of so-called “philosophical Daoism.” More “sophisticated” attempts to justify this problematic construction claim parallels with *daojia* and *daojiao*, respectively.

This interpretation is untenable on multiple grounds, including historical, interpretive, and theoretical ones. It is a modern fiction rooted in colonialist, missionary and Orientalist legacies. Use of the terms or parallel distinctions should be taken *ipso facto* as indicative of inaccuracy and misunderstanding concerning the religious tradition *which is Daoism*. We must understand Daoism as a unified religion rooted in traditional Chinese culture and characterized by complexity and diversity. The tradition begins as a religious community during the Warring

States period (480-222 BCE). Although debatable, we may characterize this earliest period as “religious” because it was an identifiable community that had a distinctive theology and model of “salvation” (see below). The earliest Daoists advocated quietistic meditation, a specific type of Daoist meditation that emphasized stillness and emptiness. These Daoists endeavored to experience mystical union with the Dao beyond language and cognition.

Daoists have also referred to their tradition in other interesting ways. As we have seen, Chinese Daoists have tended to speak of their tradition in terms of a “family” and “teachings,” with the assumption of teachers and scriptures as major sources of those teachings. In fact, the Dao, the scriptures (*jing*), and the teachers (*shi*) are often referred to as the external Three Treasures (*sanbao*). The traditions of the Dao, the specific communities, movements, and lineages that comprise Daoism, also receive other designations. “Movements” tend to be referred to as *dao* (“ways”) or as *liu* (“streams”). “Lineages,” usually sub-divisions of larger movements, tend to be referred to as *pai* (“tributaries”). That is, movements are paths or ways to the Dao, to the Way. These are the major expressions of the Daoist tradition.

Some important movements include Tianshi dao (Way of the Celestial Masters), Shangqing dao (Way of Highest Clarity), Quanzhen dao (Way of Complete Perfection), and so forth. These are usually associated with particular “founders,” revelations, scriptures, and often places. Such movements are streams flowing into and out of the larger tradition, with the latter comparable to a river flowing towards the ocean (*hai*) of the Dao. Lineages are the tributaries that flow into and out of the streams of the Daoist movements. These are usually associated with major teachers or systems of practice. Here one notes the central Daoist interest in water and water metaphors.

As a final point, we may replace the outdated and inaccurate interpretive framework of so-called “philosophical Daoism” and so-called “religious Daoism” with a more sophisticated revisionist one. This centers on what I refer to as the “four divisions.” These are as follows:

- (1) classical Daoism (4th-2nd c. BCE)
- (2) early organized Daoism (2nd c. CE-10th c. CE)
- (3) later organized Daoism (10th c.-20th c.)
- (4) modern Daoism (20th c.-present)

The observant reader will note a gap of about three hundred years, between the compilation of the *Huainanzi* (Book of the Huainan Masters; dat. 139 BCE) and the first Daoist movements (ca. 140 CE). Little research has been done on this period, largely because of assumptions at work in Daoist Studies. What we do know is that this period included Fangshi (“formula masters” or magico-religious practitioners) lineages, immortality seekers, and emerging Chinese medical traditions. These contributed to the emergence of Daoism as an organized religion.

One aspect of the above distinction centers on social organization. Classical Daoism was comprised of master-disciple communities, what Harold Roth of Brown University has referred to as “inner cultivation lineages.” Daoism as an organized religion with enduring social institutions began to emerge in the Early Han dynasty (25-220 CE), but became more unified and integrated in the subsequent historical period. Later organized Daoism witnessed a shift towards a monastic model, specifically under Buddhist influences. As discussed briefly below, the most influential movement of early organized Daoism was Tianshi, while that of later organized Daoism was Quanzhen. Finally, modern Daoism brings our attention to the major changes that occurred with the emergence of China as a secular nation-state based on Western political ideologies (1912-present) and the appearance of “global Daoism.”

Ways to the Way: Views and Practices

Given the diversity and complexity of the Daoist tradition, it is difficult to make generalizations with respect to views and practices. For every example, one may find a counter-example that problematizes one's claims.

These qualifications notwithstanding, it is appropriate to begin with the Dao, which is first and foremost a Chinese character (道) and the central Daoist category that expresses the nature of both the cosmos and divinity.¹¹ The Dao, pronounced something like *d'ôg in archaic Chinese, is the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists. From a classical and foundational Daoist perspective, the Dao has four primary characteristics: (1) the Source of everything; (2) an unnamable mystery; (3) an all-pervading sacred presence (*qi*); and (4) the universe as transformative process (“Nature”). That is, the primary Daoist theology is monistic (there is one impersonal Reality), panentheistic (the sacred is both in and beyond the physical world), and panenhenic (Nature itself is sacred). The secondary Daoist theology is at once animistic (there

are spirits in nature) and polytheistic (there are multiple gods). This brings our attention to the way in which certain religious traditions do not employ a dualistic conception of the sacred. The world and the “divine” may be interrelated and interpenetrating. In this respect, we might profitably consider theological views along a transcendent-immanent spectrum, that is, the degree to which the sacred is beyond or within the physical world.

Daoists thus tend to view the cosmos, Nature, and all life as manifestations of the Dao. That is, everything is the Dao on some level and in some respect. At the same time, given the ineffability and mysteriousness of the Dao in its own suchness (*ziran*), one's views may be mistaken. Daoists tend to emphasize the inherent limitations of language, conceptualization, intellect, rationality, and so forth. Moreover, given that the Dao manifests as a sacred presence, Daoists tend to view life energetically. This relates to the concept of *qi*, with the character depicting steam above rice.

Part of “traditional Chinese cosmology” and best left untranslated, *qi* (*ch'i*) has been rendered relatively accurately as “subtle breath” or “cosmic vapor,” anachronistically as “energy,” and confusingly as “pneuma.” It has some rough correspondence to the Greek notion of *pneuma* and the Indian notion of *prana* (both meaning “breath”). It is a vital presence that animates all life, that flows through the universe and individual beings. From a Daoist perspective, everything is *qi* on some level: from the most substantial (e.g., rocks) to the most rarified (e.g., gods). Daoist practice may, in turn, increase one's capacity to hear hidden or unrecognized layers of reality. This includes a radically different view of the body-as-energetic-system. Each of these dimensions of a foundational Daoist view often lead to a greater sense of reverence. In this way, one finds that Daoism is one of the more body-affirming and world-affirming of the world's major religions.

While Daoist theological views often prove challenging with respect to assumed metaphysical positions, they are not contradictory if one understands the classical and foundational Daoist cosmogony, that is, the narrative model of how the universe came to be. Under the standard Daoist account, the universe began through a spontaneous, impersonal process of transformation, which is a particular expression of the Dao. While ultimately unknowable and unrepresentable, the Dao as primordial non-differentiation eventually resulted in a spontaneous change that led to increasing degrees of differentiation, specifically through the interaction of *yin* and *yang* and transformations of *qi*.

Part of “traditional Chinese cosmology” and often misidentified as specifically Daoist, *yin-yang* are the foundational cosmological principles or forces of the cosmos employed throughout traditional Chinese culture. Life is based on the recurring and mutually dependent interaction of these principles. They have the following relative associations: *yin*/earth/dark/heavy/cold/etc. and *yang*/heaven/light/light/warm/etc. *Yin-yang* are further distinguished according to the Five Phases (*wuxing*): Wood (minor *yang*/spring), Fire (major *yang*/summer), Earth (balance/—), Metal (minor *yin*/autumn), and Water (major *yin*/winter). From a Daoist cosmogonic perspective, the manifest universe emerged through emanation and in stages. The earliest stages involved the formation of more subtle dimensions, including multiple sacred realms with primordial and cosmic deities. Of these, the Sanqing (Three Purities), said to represent primordial cosmic ethers (*qi*), are the most important in the modern Daoist pantheon. Like any differentiated existence, gods are simply part of the diversity of life, which is as much invisible as visible.

Other foundational Daoist views include various commitments, principles, and values derived from classical Daoist texts. One of the more concise and interesting distillations comes from early organized Daoism, specifically from the Tianshi movement. These are the so-called “Nine Practices” (*jiuxing*). They are as follows: (1) practice non-action (*wuwei*); (2) practice softness and weakness (*rouruo*); (3) practice guarding the feminine (*shouci*); (4) practice being nameless (*wuming*); (5) practice clarity and stillness (*qingjing*); (6) practice being adept (*zhushan*); (7) practice being desireless (*wuyu*); (8) practice knowing how to stop (*zhi zhizu*); and (9) practice yielding and withdrawing (*tuirang*). These phrases derive from various passages in the *Daode jing*, and anyone familiar with the text will recognize the genius of this distillation. We may, in turn, translate these technical terms into more general Daoist principles and values: effortlessness, flexibility, receptivity, anonymity, serenity, aptitude, non-attachment, contentment, and deference. From a Daoist perspective, one endeavors to cultivate and embody such commitments. The Nine Practices also reveal a clear connection between classical Daoism and organized Daoism.

In terms of more formal Daoist practice, a holistic and integrated understanding would have to acknowledge at least the following: aesthetics, art, dietetics, ethics, meditation, music, ritual, seasonal awareness, scripture study, and Yangsheng (health and longevity techniques). Of these, meditation and ritual have been and remain the two most widely practiced, with the

qualification that there are diverse forms. Briefly, Daoist meditation consists of five major types: quietistic meditation, ingestion, visualization, inner observation, and internal alchemy. A typical Daoist meditation involves sitting in emptiness and stillness, with the understanding that these are characteristics of both one's own innate nature (*xing*) and the Dao. Some traditional terms for this type of quietistic meditation, which provide insights into the practice itself, include "fasting the heart-mind" (*xinzhai*), "guarding the One" (*shouyi*), "quiet sitting" (*jingzuo*), and "sitting-in-forgetfulness" (*zuowang*). Sometimes referred to more technically as "apophatic (or negation-based) meditation," this type of contemplative practice is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic.

Daoist ritual is extremely complex. On the most basic level, one may distinguish daily personal ritual from public communal performances. A representative example of the former is bowing. Consisting of various historical layers, standardized, large-scale Daoist ritual is modeled on traditional Chinese court protocol. It usually involves making formal offerings in front of a Daoist altar (*tan*), whether temporary or permanent. Formal public Daoist ritual, usually referred to as "*jiao*-offering" and/or "*zhai*-purification," includes a head officiant and assistant priests, dressed in ornate vestments, performing elaborate movements with orchestral and theatrical components. These are usually sponsored by a specific patron or community, although Quanzhen Daoists often chant their own liturgy every morning and evening. For Daoists, ritual may be conducted for various purposes, including commemoration, consecration, personal and communal welfare, cosmic harmonization, and so forth.

Self and Ultimate Purpose

Daoist anthropology and soteriology are also complex topics.ⁱⁱⁱ Although sometimes conflated with "soul" and "salvation," respectively, these aspects of a given worldview are better understood in terms of "self" or "personhood" and "ultimate purpose." Just as the use of "creation" assumes a particular cosmogony, use of "soul" and "salvation" assume a specific anthropology and soteriology. As we have seen in the textbook, there are religious traditions that do not acknowledge the existence of a soul (as an eternal, immortal, immutable substance). There are also religious traditions that do not have a clear model of salvation (other-orientated, transcendent, post-mortem state). That is, in conventional terms, use of "soul" suggests an

immortal given, while “salvation” assumes being “saved” through some form of “other-power.” For example, with respect to death and the afterlife, conventional Christian accounts posit salvation through Christ and eternal life in heaven, while conventional Jingtū (Pure Land) Buddhist accounts imagine salvation through Amitabha (Infinite Light) Buddha and rebirth in his buddha-realm of Sukhavati.

In the case of Daoism, the standard model of self centers on the so-called “two-soul model,” although, again, the use of “soul” is misleading if one assumes enduring substance and immortality. The Daoist view of self emphasizes composite personhood. Human beings are composed of various transitory and distinguishable spiritual faculties. In terms of the Five Phases, they are as follows: ethereal soul (Wood/liver), spirit (Fire/heart), thought (Earth/spleen), corporeal soul (Metal/lungs), and will (Water/kidneys). These associations reveal the Daoist view of being as psychosomatic: Each spiritual faculty is housed in its associated organ.

The “two-soul model” in turn centers on the “ethereal soul” (*hun*) and “corporeal soul” (*po*), which are sometimes translated as “cloud-soul” and “white-soul,” respectively. In understanding these terms, it is helpful to examine them etymologically. *Hun* consists of *yun* (“cloud”) and *gui* (“ghost”), while *po* consists of *bai* (“white”) and *gui* (“ghost”). The use of *gui* indicates that these aspects of self are ethereal, ephemeral, apparitional, and animating; the *hun* and *po* are best understood as animating forces or spiritual elements. “Cloud” is used for *hun* to suggest that it is more ethereal, while “white” is used for *po* to suggest that it is more material and physical. For clarity’s sake, one may think of the *hun* as the *yang*-ghost and the *po* as the *yin*-ghost: the *yang*-ghost is associated with subtle and celestial aspects of self (e.g., dreams), while the *yin*-ghost is associated with substantial and terrestrial aspects of self (e.g., desires, flesh and bones). According to the standard account, after death, the various composite aspects of self separate. The *hun* ascends into the heavens to become an ancestor, while the *po* descends into the earth, eventually dissipating as the body decomposes. In the standard account, one remains an ancestor for seven generations, though it is unclear to what extent this is a conscious and intentional post-mortem existence rather than an “influence” partially maintained through the act of remembrance and ritual offerings by one’s descendants. In any case, it is important to note that the *hun* and *po* are ephemeral and eventually dissipate into the cosmos.

There are other, perhaps alternative models, including self as an accumulation of *qi* and, later under Buddhist influence, self as a quasi-soul. That is, Daoists, like pre-modern Chinese

people more generally, eventually adopted a reincarnation model via Buddhism. In any case, it is important to recognize the complex relationship between models of self and religious practice, that is, the close connection between views of personhood and specific training regimens. For example, medieval Daoists engaged in various practices aimed at complete psychosomatic transformation, that is, at the unification of the composite self. Often referred to using the Western category of “alchemy,” such systems involved either “external alchemy” (*waidan*; lit., “outer cinnabar/pill”) or “internal alchemy” (*neidan*; lit., “inner cinnabar/pill”). The former involved the concoction and ingestion of “elixirs” (*dan*), which consisted of rare and often toxic ingredients, while the latter involved the formation of an inner elixir. The “ingredients” for such inner elixir formation included fluids (*jinye*), vital essence (*jing*), subtle breath (*qi*), spirit (*shen*), and so forth. The latter three are often referred to as the internal Three Treasures. Here one notes the central importance of conservation and transformation in the Daoist tradition.

There are two standard Daoist models of religious attainment, although it is again important to recognize alternative views such as salvation through deities and the radical reconceptualizations that occurred under Buddhist influence. Put simply, the classical and foundational Daoist soteriology is union with the Dao. From a Daoist perspective, through the practice of emptiness- and stillness-based meditation, one enters a state of deep stillness. Related to a “quietistic model” of Daoist practice and attainment, this state is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. The boundaries of individuated existence dissolve and one realizes a transpersonal condition. One unites with the Dao. In terms of death and the afterlife, one dissipates into the universe. However, as one has already died on some level (i.e., to separate identity), death is simply another transformation. The ideal here is the “sage” (*shengren*), and clear descriptions of this view may be found in the *Zhuangzi*.

The second major model of religious attainment is immortality, which is sometimes discussed as “transcendence.” This involves the *attainment* of post-mortem existence, usually in a Daoist sacred realm. Related to an “alchemical model” of Daoist practice and attainment, this view becomes dominant in the early and late medieval period, especially in communities utilizing external alchemy or internal alchemy. Employing the above-mentioned alchemical methods, this model involves fusion of the various disparate and ephemeral aspects of self into a unified being, one that is capable of transcending physical death and surviving in some form of post-mortem existence. In the case of internal alchemy, through complex, often stage-based

training regimens aimed at complete psychosomatic transformation, one unites the various physical, energetic and spiritual aspects of self in order to form a transcendent spirit. This is often referred to as the “body-beyond-the-body” (*shenwai shen*), “immortal embryo” (*xiantai*), and “yang-spirit” (*yangshen*). This Daoist soteriology assumes the above-mentioned composite view of personhood. In this respect, it is imperative to recognize that immortality is *actualized*, not given. From a traditional Daoist perspective, one does not have a transcendent spirit; rather, it is *created* through alchemical practice. While ordinary human beings are destined to decompose into the cosmos, successful alchemists may endure, but if and only if the difficult and dangerous process of transmutation is successful. The ideal here is the “immortal” (*xianren*), and one finds various descriptions in medieval alchemical tracts.

Community, Social Organization, and Authority

Historically speaking, Daoism has been a relatively diffused and decentralized tradition. There has been a certain Daoist distrust in and resistance to centralized authority, including in the form of imperial control and the contingency of state boundaries. This is not to say that Daoists have avoided political involvement or social engagement; in fact, some Daoists have worked to establish a Daoist utopia or theocracy, that is, a Dao-centered government. Rather, it is simply to observe that the issue of authority, both within and beyond the parameters of the Daoist tradition, is a complex topic.

As mentioned, the earliest Daoist community was the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. These were loosely connected master-disciple communities of the Warring States period (480-222 BCE). These practitioners were responsible for preserving, transmitting, and eventually compiling the teachings that became the earliest Daoist classics. They also helped to establish the central importance of teachers and lineage in the Daoist tradition. Here lineage refers to a particular line of spiritual ancestry, a line passed from teachers to students. In Daoism, this line may be biological, spiritual, and/or institutional.

The next phase of Daoist social organization occurred during the Later Han dynasty (25-220 CE), specifically with the emergence of the early Tianshi (Celestial Masters) community. This community established a semi-independent state in Shu (present-day Sichuan). It consisted of a hierarchically ordered social organization, with the Celestial Master, a patrilineal position

within the Zhang family, as the highest religious and socio-political leader. This was followed by the “libationers” (*jijiu*), community elders who were the equivalent of parish priests. This earliest form of organized Daoism involved ordination and ritual training commensurate with one’s rank.

In the next periods of Daoist history, specifically during the Period of Disunion (220-589) and Tang dynasty (618-907), Daoists began to more fully systematize their tradition. This involved the integration of various movements into something that might be called “Daoism” as a generic and umbrella name, along with the creation of a textual collection, referred to as the *Daozang* (Daoist Canon) (discussed below). The Tang dynasty also witnessed the emergence of a fully developed monastic system, although the earliest known Daoist monastery was the late fifth-century Louguan (Lookout Tower Monastery; Zhouzhi, Shaanxi). While there were earlier ascetic and eremitic tendencies, Daoist monasticism developed under the influence of Buddhism. This included models of social organization and religious discipline, especially rules and precepts. Daoist monasticism also began to incorporate core requirements such as celibacy and sobriety (understood generally as the abstention from all intoxicants), and eventually vegetarianism.

The most developed and enduring Daoist monastic institution emerged in the subsequent period. This was Quanzhen (Ch’üan-chen or Complete Perfection), which began as a local ascetic, alchemical, and mystical community. It was then transformed into a regional and national movement, and then a monastic order with nationwide distribution. Late medieval Daoism consisted of a vast network of temples and monasteries that were eventually overseen by state agencies and supported by imperial and popular patronage. Considered as a whole, the Daoist tradition thus includes ascetics, hermits, householders, ordained priests, monastics, and so forth.

There is no founder of Daoism and no universally accepted religious authority. It is more appropriate to discuss “founders” of specific movements and lineages. That is, our account must be plural rather than singular. In terms of classical Daoism, the two most well known figures are Laozi (Lao-tzu or “Master Lao”; 6th c. BCE?) and Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu or “Master Zhuang”; ca. 370–ca. 290 BCE). Each is associated with the text of the corresponding name, although this is problematic because the texts are in reality multi-vocal anthologies with various historical and textual layers. Revisionist scholarship has also conclusively demonstrated that Laozi was pseudo-historical, that is, he was an amalgam of various distinct individuals.

In terms of early organized Daoism, Zhang Daoling (Chang Tao-ling; fl. 140s CE) is the founder of the Tianshi movement and the first Celestial Master. According to tradition, Zhang received a revelation from Laojun (Lord Lao), the deified Laozi and high god of early Daoism, in 142 CE. Zhang was appointed as the Celestial Master, Lord Lao's terrestrial representative, and the position was, in turn, passed down to the eldest male heir in the Zhang family throughout most of Chinese history. With respect to later organized Daoism, the most important figure, especially viewed retrospectively, was Wang Zhe (Chongyang or "Redoubled Yang"; 1113-1170), although his youngest disciple Qiu Chuji (Changchun or "Perpetual Spring"; 1148-1227) was also pivotal. According to tradition, Wang had a number of mystical encounters with immortals and eventually established the early Quanzhen community in Shaanxi and Shandong. He gathered a group of senior disciples, who later became referred to as the Seven Perfected (*qizhen*). We may, in turn, recognize figures such as the Celestial Master and specific Patriarchs within different Daoist movements and lineages. Of course, many more Daoists could and should be added, but here it is sufficient to acknowledge the significance of various mythological figures, immortals and gods in the Daoist tradition.

There also is no authoritative Daoist scripture. It is more appropriate to discuss movement-specific textual "canons," most of which are associated with particular revelations. Examples include Taiqing (Great Clarity), Shangqing (Highest Clarity), Lingbao (Numinous Treasure), and so forth. In this respect, it is important to understand that there are different types of Daoist literature, with "scriptures" (*jing*) being most important. We may also recall that scriptures are one of the external Three Treasures. These texts are generally anonymous and associated with the revelations of specific deities, with Lord Lao probably being most important. In addition, beginning in the early medieval period, Daoists began to collect and disseminate Daoist texts in a collection that became known as the *Daozang* (*Tao-tsang* or Daoist Canon), which literally means "storehouse of the Dao." This was modeled to some extent on the Buddhist Canon. The received Daoist Canon dates to 1445, with a supplement added in 1607. It consists of roughly 1,500 texts, with varying degrees of importance, relevance, and comprehensibility. There are also many later, supplemental or "extra-canonical" collections.

While there is no central Daoist scripture, the *Daode jing* (*Tao-te ching* or *Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power*) has probably been the most influential, both inside and outside the Daoist tradition. The text was originally called the *Laozi*, which is conventionally

translated as the *Book of Master Lao*. However, as Laozi is a pseudo-historical figure, and as the text is a multi-vocal anthology with various historical and textual layers, it is better understood as the *Book of Venerable Masters*. It collects a variety of teachings and practices from the elders of the classical Daoist inner cultivation lineages. From a contextual perspective, the primary layer of text advocates self-cultivation, especially apophatic meditation, aimed at mystical union with the Dao. Some of these Daoists also advocated a political application: A Daoist sage-king could bring harmony to the country and cosmos. In the later tradition, there are various interpretations and applications of the *Daode jing*. This is so much the case that over a hundred commentaries are contained in the Daoist Canon, most of which have never been translated or studied.

There are also various modern fantasies about the text, including constant and unnecessary retranslation, even by individuals who have no knowledge of classical Chinese or Daoism. Three points deserve mention here. First, the *Daode jing* is text written in classical Chinese and so any translation is only an approximation of the text. Second, the *Daode jing* is a *Daoist* text and so there are specific Daoist views expressed in and interpretations of the text. There are also ethical and political dimensions involved in appropriation. For example, actual Daoists and Daoist communities receive little if any cultural or economic benefit.

Finally, popular “translations” are modern cultural productions with little connection to Daoism as such. This begs the question of the relationship of any translation to the corresponding source-text, including issues of interpretive authority and knowledge of the associated tradition. Recalling the above-mentioned Daoist view of Daoist scriptures (that is, revealed texts written in classical Chinese) as actual manifestations of the Dao, and the importance of teachers in the Daoist tradition, we might reasonably utilize the Daoist principle of “returning to the Source” (*guigen*) in our engagement with Daoist literature. To what extent is a given translation connected to the source-text and the source-tradition?

As a final set of points about authority in Daoism, it is important to recognize the central importance of self-cultivation, lineage, ordination, mystical experience, and revelation in the tradition. The complicated interplay among these aspects of adherence and identity may confirm or subvert tradition. In addition, for every attempt to establish authority and maintain power, there have been counter-movements towards something else. In this respect, it is noteworthy that foundational Daoist values include desirelessness (*wuyu*), namelessness (*wuming*), non-action (*wuwei*), non-knowing (*wuzhi*), and so forth. The recurrence of *wu* (“without”) is important, as it

also refers to the Dao as Nondifferentiation (*wuji*) and Primordial Chaos (*hundun*). From a Daoist perspective, it also points towards the human ability to overcome conditioning and to inhibit habituation, to return to one's innate nature and the Dao. Although apparently about negation, it is rather about the affirmation beyond every negation.

Modernity and Globalization

Modern Daoism begins in 1912 with the emergence of China as a secular nation-state based on Western political ideologies. In the case of mainland China, this involved major disruption to the Daoist tradition, especially in terms of the loss of cultural capital and actual patronage. The disruption and impoverishment of Daoism increased with the Chinese Communist takeover of China and the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949. It culminated in the so-called Cultural Revolution (1966-1976), which resulted in Daoism and traditional Chinese culture being targeted as "feudal superstition" (*mixin*). It also involved the forced laicization of Daoist clergy (that is, removing their religious authority and titles and returning their social status to that of an ordinary citizen) and the occupation and redesignation of Daoist temples. Although major socio-economic reforms, including increased religious freedom, began in 1978, it was really only from the 1990s to today that the revitalization of Chinese Daoism has occurred. These various socio-political events also prepared the way for Hong Kong and Taiwanese Daoism becoming more prominent and influential.

In terms of China and the larger Chinese cultural sphere, and with respect to institutional expressions, the two major forms of Daoism in the modern world are Tianshi (Celestial Masters) and Quanzhen (Complete Perfection), with the latter sometimes referred to as "Complete Reality." The former name refers to the highest clerical position in the movement, while the latter name refers to the transformed condition of being claimed to result from intensive practice. More commonly referred to as Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity) in the modern world, Tianshi Daoism is primarily found in southeast China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. The two most important sacred sites are Longhu shan (Dragon-Tiger Mountain; near Yingtian, Jiangxi) and Maoshan (Mount Mao; Jurong, Jiangsu). Tianshi Daoism consists of ordained householder priests and their associated family lineages and religious communities. Except for preparatory purification for Daoist ritual, Tianshi priests tend to eat meat and consume alcohol in ways that parallel the

larger Chinese population. The primary activity of Tianshi priests is communal ritual. In contrast, Quanzhen is a monastic order, although there are “non-celibate” Quanzhen Daoists outside of mainland China. Quanzhen Daoism is distributed throughout mainland China. It is dominated by its Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage, members of which oversee most of the major Daoist temples and sacred sites. The headquarters is Baiyun guan (White Cloud Temple) in Beijing. Technically speaking, Quanzhen Daoists adhere to a monastic way of life rooted in the aforementioned principles of celibacy, sobriety, and vegetarianism. The primary activities of Quanzhen monastics are meditation, especially internal alchemy, and liturgical performance. The latter usually involves the monastic community chanting in the morning and evening before a central altar.

In mainland China, Daoism is under the supervision of various bureaucratic units of the PRC government. The main organization is the Chinese Daoist Association (Zhongguo daojiao xiehui; CDA), the national headquarters of which is also housed in Baiyun guan. Consisting of national, regional and local branches, the CDA is under the supervision of the Bureau of Religious Affairs, which oversees clergy and religious life. This administrative unit works in concert, and often in competition with the Bureau of Culture and the Bureau of Tourism. The former controls important cultural materials, while the latter controls visitor fees. Thus, Daoism in mainland China is highly political and bureaucratic. In a broad sense, Daoist places are not under the control of actual Daoists. They are as much cultural and tourist sites as sacred ones.

While there were earlier patterns of conversion and dissemination, the globalization of Daoism is primarily a modern phenomenon. Specifically, it largely begins following the Chinese Communist takeover in 1949 and an upsurge of Chinese immigration. There are many other factors, including country-specific immigration laws (for example, 1965 legislation in the United States) as well as conversion patterns. As mentioned, global Daoism is a transnational religion rooted in Chinese Daoism as source-tradition. It is characterized by cultural, ethnic and linguistic diversity. There are now ordained and lineage-based Daoists throughout the modern world. At the same time, there are various modern appropriative agendas, especially in the form of hybrid spirituality. Daoism is one of the only major religions not represented by formal members of the tradition. This would be the equivalent of an account of Roman Catholicism that did not recognize ordained clergy and monastic orders or a discussion of Buddhism absent of monasticism. We may thus consider the phenomenon of “global Daoism” in terms of cultural

studies, intellectual history, as well as religious studies. It is as much about intellectual genealogies, contexts of reception, and cultural legacies as about Daoism as such.

We might, in turn, analyze global Daoism along a spectrum: tradition/transmission, innovation/adaptation, appropriation/fabrication. While most of what goes by the name of “Daoism” in the West is fabrication, fiction, and fantasy, there are now tradition-based Daoist adherents and communities throughout the modern world. They are working to preserve and transmit tradition and to contribute to the modern revitalization of Daoism. They are working to cultivate and embody the Dao in ways that remain rooted in and transcend Chinese Daoism.

Glossary

Chinese Daoist Association primary bureaucratic (religio-political) organization that oversees Daoism in mainland China

dantian elixir field. Subtle body locations wherein precious substances are conserved and transformed. Usually three in number and associated with the head, heart and navel regions

Dao (Tao) Daoist sacred and ultimate concern

daoshi ordained Daoist priests and monastics

de (te) inner power. The Dao manifesting through particular beings, especially humans

Laojun Lord Lao. Deified Laozi and early high god of Daoism

Longmen Dragon Gate lineage of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism

qi (ch`i) subtle breath. “Energy” that pervades the universe and being

Quanzhen	Complete Perfection. Daoist monastic order characterized by celibacy, sobriety, and vegetarianism
Sanqing	Three Purities. Highest “gods” of the modern Daoist pantheon. Often understood as three primordial cosmic ethers, which are also contained in the body
Tianshi	Celestial Masters. Daoist movement comprised of householder priests and family lineages
<i>wuwei</i>	non-action. Key Daoist principle and practice emphasizing effortlessness, non-interference, and non-intervention
<i>yin-yang</i>	<i>yin-yang</i> . Two interdependent cosmological principles and forces with various relative associations (for example, dark/light, cold/hot)
<i>zaohua</i>	transformative process. Dao as cosmological process based on <i>yin-yang</i> and <i>qi</i>
<i>ziran</i> (<i>tzu-jan</i>)	suchness. Also translated as “naturalness,” “self-so,” and “spontaneity.” Key Daoist principle and ontological condition. Being-so-of-itself

ⁱ “Chinese popular religion” is an inexact and problematic category, albeit one that retains some heuristic value. It is generally used to refer to either pan-Chinese beliefs and practices related to the dominant culture regardless of socio-economic distinctions or the religion of the masses, with the assumption that the latter is often about “superstition.” Generally speaking, Chinese popular religion is an amalgam of Confucianism (*rujia*; *rujiao*), Daoism (*daoja*; *daojiao*), Buddhism (*fojiao*), and various more diffused folk beliefs and practices. It is often used as a placeholder for everything *other than* the so-called Three Teachings (*sanjiao*). Nonetheless, some interpretive space must be maintained in order to distinguish the *traditions* of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese Buddhism from Chinese imperial/state and folk religion.

ⁱⁱ As a comparative category, “theology” refers to study of, discourse on or theories about the sacred, with the latter being another comparative term for that which a given individual or community identifies as ultimately real. As an interpretive practice, one must identify the tradition-specific technical term and associated defining characteristics. There are also diverse types of theology, including “non-theistic” ones. In this respect, it is noteworthy that “comparative theology” has recently emerged as a distinct sub-field of the discipline of Theology, which historically is associated with Christianity.

ⁱⁱⁱ As comparative categories, “anthropology” refers to discourse on, study of or theories about human existence and personhood. “Soteriology” refers to discourse on actualization, divinization, liberation, perfection, realization, salvation, or however an individual or community identifies the ultimate purpose of human existence. The latter relates to the goal of religious practice.