The Daoist Tradition

An Introduction

Louis Komjathy

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Approaching Daoism

Chapter Outline

- Indigenous names, historical origins, and definitional parameters
- Historical periodization
- Models of practice and attainment
- Towards a postmodern and postcolonial approach

The study of Daoism can be perplexing. The sheer diversity and complexity of the Daoist tradition often subverts attempts at definition and characterization. One's perplexity may increase dramatically when one encounters the types of questions and issues that emerge through careful study. However, a theoretically sophisticated approach is part of gaining an accurate and informed understanding of the religious tradition which is Daoism. While we may assume that understanding Daoism is simply a matter of learning the "facts," this is not the case. Those "facts" are themselves conditioned by one's theoretical approach, interpretive framework, and guiding concerns. Every presentation is an interpretation, and every interpretation has specific commitments, whether recognized or not. Specifically, the study of Daoism is conditioned by various interpretive legacies, and by claims regarding the accuracy of designating something "Daoist." In seeking to understand Daoism, we must thus be aware of our own unquestioned assumptions, ingrained opinions, and interpretive legacies.

Daoism (Taoism), the "tradition of the Dao" (Tao), is an indigenous Chinese religion rooted in traditional Chinese culture.[1] Daoism is a religious tradition in which the Dao, translatable as "the Way" and "a way," is the sacred or ultimate concern (see Chapter 6). "Daoism" is shorthand for Daoist adherents, communities, and their religious

expressions (see Chapter 2; *passim*). The emphasis on Daoism as a Chinese religion draws our attention to the importance of Chinese history, culture, and society in the historical development of Daoism. The most influential Daoist communities have been in mainland China and primarily of Han ethnicity. Many of the informing views of Daoism derive from or parallel those of traditional Chinese culture (see Chapters 5 and 6; *passim*). In addition, all of the key scriptures have been written in classical Chinese (see Chapter 12), and the ability to read and write Chinese is required for the performance of Daoist ritual (see Chapter 13). The most important Daoist sacred sites also are located in China (see Chapter 14). Moreover, the Daoist emphasis on ancestors, harmony, lineage, naturalistic cosmology, tradition, and so forth parallel and often derive from pan-Chinese concerns and traditions.

At the same time, Daoism is now a global, transnational religion characterized by cultural, ethnic, and linguistic diversity. The Daoist community now consists of adherents from a wide variety of cultural and ethnic backgrounds (see Chapter 16). Such a development begs the question of the relationship among ethnicity, culture, and religion. Briefly stated and traditionally speaking, Daoism cannot be separated from Chinese culture and Chinese language. While Daoism has tended to be characterized by diversity and inclusivity, it is not universalistic in the ways that many people imagine. This does not exclude the possibility of the conversion and participation of "non-Chinese" people. Rather, it challenges the construction of Daoism so prevalent in Europe and North America, interpretations that are rooted in colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist legacies (see Chapter 16).

Indigenous names, historical origins, and definitional parameters

Much ink—probably too much ink—has been spilt on the question of "What is Daoism?," and particularly on the origin and parameters of the term. My characterization of Daoism as an indigenous Chinese religion is supported by Daoist Studies, that is, the specialized academic field dedicated to studying and understanding Daoism, but we should familiarize ourselves with some critical issues related to gaining a nuanced and accurate understanding of Daoism.

To begin, there is one representation of Daoism that is wholly inaccurate and untenable. This is the claim that there are "two Daoisms," namely, so-called "philosophical Daoism" and so-called "religious Daoism." We may label this interpretation as the "Victorian" or "Leggean view" of Daoism, as the Protestant missionary and Victorian James Legge (1815–97) was one of its most influential advocates (see Girardot 2002). This view of Daoism as a "bifurcated tradition" is the dominant received view of Daoism. Rooted in colonialist legacies, such an interpretive framework is epidemic among non-specialist accounts of Daoism, including among non-specialist educators and world religion textbooks (see Dippmann 2001), not to mention various

popular constructions (see Chapter 16). The conventional presentation suggests that so-called "philosophical Daoism," associated with the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*, is "original" or "pure Daoism," while so-called "religious Daoism" is a "degenerate" and "superstitious" adjunct to the former, undeserving of serious attention. In popular accounts, it is the latter so-called "religious Daoism" that has also supposedly lost the original teachings of Daoism. Such a bifurcated interpretation of Daoism is flawed and inaccurate. It involves a systematic misunderstanding and misinterpretation of classical Daoism (see Chapters 2 and 3), usually through selective readings of inaccurate translations of classical Daoist texts (see Chapters 12 and 16). Reference to so-called "philosophical Daoism" and/or "religious Daoism" should be taken *ipso facto* as inaccuracy and misunderstanding with respect to the Daoist tradition. In contrast to this construction, classical Daoism, referred to as so-called "philosophical Daoism" in outdated accounts of Daoism, consisted of inner cultivation lineages that expressed religious commitments (see Roth 1999a; also LaFargue 1992). The lineages had distinctive cosmological and theological views (Dao), emphasized specific practices (apophatic meditation), and aimed at specific experiences (mystical union with the Dao). Here we find at least four of Ninian Smart's (1999) seven dimensions of religion, namely, doctrinal, practical, experiential, and social. All of these are encompassed by the Daoist theological concern with the Dao (see Chapters 5 and 6). The so-called "philosophical/religious Daoism", or so-called "elite/folk Daoism" bifurcation, also essentializes Daoism as corresponding to only *two texts*. This is problematic not only in terms of the relative importance of those texts in the Daoist tradition (see Chapter 12), but also with respect to the larger contours of Daoist history (see Chapter 2; *passim*). It denigrates almost 2,200 years of Daoist history that consists of numerous adherents, communities and movements, scriptures, sacred sites, and so forth.

While the sheer complexity of the Daoist tradition may be a source of perplexity, the so-called "philosophical/religious Daoism" bifurcation is not a viable way to resolve that perplexity. Although it is clear that there are "philosophical dimensions" of Daoism, these are almost always rooted in a religious worldview as well as in religious experience. In addition to philosophy, a nuanced understanding of Daoism must address cosmology, soteriology, theology, and so forth (see Glossary).

More "sophisticated" attempts to justify the bifurcation of Daoism draw upon two, and only two, indigenous terms used to designate Daoism, namely, *daojia* (*tao-chia*) and *daojiao* (*tao-chiao*). This primarily involves a terminological approach to understanding Daoism. In conventional accounts, these terms are said to refer to so-called "philosophical Daoism" and so-called "religious Daoism," respectively. Outside of contemporary contexts, this is simply false. First, on the level of meaning, *daojia* means "Family of the Dao," and could also be rendered as "Lineage of the Way," or "Daoist school"; similarly, *daojiao* means "Teachings of the Dao." Both emphasize the Dao, a Daoist cosmological and theological concept (see Chapter 6), as primary. The former suggests that lineage, whether biological or spiritual, is primary (see Chapter 3), while the latter suggests that teachings (and teachers by implication) are primary (see also Yao and Zhao 2010: 24–44). That is, the terms themselves do not lend

credence to the distinction. Second, each term has a complex history. Briefly stated, it seems that the earliest uses of *daojia* appear in Early Han dynasty historical sources as a way to categorize texts. However, into the early medieval period and later, *daojia* was used to designate ordained Daoist priests and the Daoist religious community as a whole. It meant something like "the Daoist community" or "Daoist tradition," which consisted of various key figures, texts, and movements, including the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. With respect to *daojiao*, the term was early on coined by Lu Xiujing (406–477), a key figure in the early Lingbao movement and architect of the early Daoist tradition (see Chapter 2), in order to distinguish Daoism from Buddhism (*fojiao*) (Kobayashi 1995; Kirkland 1997a: 2004). Throughout much of Chinese history, both terms were used interchangeably by *Daoists* to refer to their religious tradition.

As one can see, the question of the historical origins of Daoism is complex and multifaceted. Although most scholars of Daoism, and tradition-based Daoists, reject an interpretive framework that utilizes the distinction between so-called "philosophical Daoism" and so-called "religious Daoism," or so-called *daojia* and so-called *daojiao*, there are different perspectives on when and how to locate the beginnings of Daoism. The corresponding responses tend to be based in assumptions about the defining characteristics of religion as well as the nature of tradition, including singularity/plurality and degree of self-consciousness. Within Daoist Studies, one of the primary debates centers on the historical origins of Daoism. In this respect, it is important to recognize that there are a variety of viable revisionist views of Daoism. The dominant revisionist view among Sinological scholars holds that Daoism as a religion begins in the Later Han dynasty, principally with Zhang Daoling (fl. 140s CE) and the Tianshi movement (see Chapter 2). This view was the first revisionist account of Daoism, and largely began as a corrective to the earlier emphasis on so-called "philosophical Daoism" and neglect of so-called "religious Daoism." We may label this the "Strickmannian view" of Daoism, as the late Michel Strickmann (1942–94), who primarily taught at the University of California, Berkeley, was one of the principal early advocates (see Strickmann 1979) and as his students and intellectual heirs have become highly influential in the dominant specialist account of Daoism in North America. If one prefers a more impersonal characterization, we may refer to this interpretation as the "truncated tradition" view, as it privileges the Tianshi (Celestial Masters) movement in terms of both the origins and defining characteristics of Daoism. This approach was helpful for correcting certain early problematic constructions of Daoism, but it has outlived its usefulness. It is deficient on multiple grounds (see, e.g. Kirkland 1997a). It implicitly assumes the bifurcation of Daoism, accepting the notion that "Daoism" before the Tianshi movement is best understood as "philosophy" or "thought" with little to no social reality or connection to Daoism as such. In this account, actual Daoism only refers to "religious Daoism" ("*daojiao*"), specifically to one or more organized movements during the Later Han dynasty. It also essentializes and reifies "Daoism" as largely synonymous with the Tianshi movement and its religious affiliates; it is a Tianshi-centered (Taiwanese Zhengyi-centered?) view of Daoist history. It often neglects connections and continuities between classical

Daoism and early Daoism. Finally, it ignores the actual complexity and diversity of early Daoism itself (see Hendrischke 2000, 2007) as well as the relative importance of the earliest Daoist movements in Daoist history considered as a whole (see Chapter 2).

While there are a variety of other revisionist views (see, e.g. Schipper 2000; Kirkland 2002, 2004; Campany 2003), here I will concentrate on the one embraced and advocated in the present book. This perspective, which we might label the "lineal" (in the sense of lineage) or "continuous tradition" view, suggests that there was an actual Daoist religious community during the Warring States period and Early Han dynasty (see LaFargue 1992; Roth 1996, 1999a; Schipper 2000, 2008). Under this interpretative framework, Daoism as a Chinese religious tradition began, at least in seminal form and as a series of master-disciple communities, during the Warring States period and Early Han dynasty. Following Harold Roth of Brown University, we may reasonably label this "movement" as the "inner cultivation lineages" of classical Daoism.

With respect to the existence of an actual Daoist religious community during the fourth to second centuries BCE, there is a great deal of evidence for the social reality of the proposed inner cultivation lineages. The *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang), in particular, documents a variety of teachers and disciples (see Chapter 3). In addition, texts do not exist independently of socio-historical contexts and anthropological realities. The compilation, preservation, and transmission of the texts of classical Daoism hint at a self-conscious religious community (see Chapters 2 and 12; also Schipper 2000; Komjathy 2008a). The Warring States and Early Han periods were a time of bamboo and silk manuscripts, of rare and precious hand-written texts (see Chapter 12); on some level, it is amazing that any texts from this period have been transmitted to the present time. From my perspective, that process suggests an early Daoist community and emerging tradition. Furthermore, the most significant evidence comes from the *Zhuangzi* itself. Revisionist scholarship on the text, like that on other texts of classical Daoism, suggests multiple source-points, and distinct Daoist lineages. Each and every text associated with classical Daoism is a multi-vocal anthology with diverse textual layers. Some passages indicate that members of that community distinguished their religious practice from their contemporaries; they thought of themselves as "practitioners of the Way." Some evidence for these claims is found in Chapter 23 of the *Zhuangzi*, which is named after Gengsang Chu, the chapter's central figure who is identified as a disciple of Lao Dan (Laozi).

THE FAMILY OF THE WAY

"The understanding of people of antiquity went a long way. How far did it go? To the point where some of them believed that things have never existed—so far, to the end, where nothing can be added. Those at the next stage thought that things exist. They looked upon life as a loss, upon death as a return—thus

they had already entered the state of dividedness. Those at the next stage said, 'In the beginning there was nonbeing. Later there was life, and when there was life suddenly there was death. We look upon nonbeing as the head, on life as the body, on death as the rump. Who knows that being and nonbeing, life and death are a single way? I will be his friend!'

"These three groups, while differing in their viewpoint, belong to the same royal clan; though, as in the case of the Zhao and Jing families, whose names indicate their line of succession, and that of the Qu family, whose name derives from its fief, they are not identical." (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 23; adapted from Watson 1968: 257)

This chapter alludes to various other chapters in the *Zhuangzi*. Without providing a specific name for the "movement," it speaks of three groups of adherents being part of the same "royal clan" (*gongzu*), a "line of succession" (*dai*), a "fief" (*feng*), and something like a "family" (*shi*). That is, "Daoists" are located in specific families and lineages, some of which are identified by actual biological ancestry and others of which are identified by geographical and social location. Similarly, along with Chapter 33, Chapter 15 distinguishes "Daoist" practice from five lower-level forms of self-cultivation (see Chapter 10 herein). In contrast to these, "Daoist" practitioners (*shi*) are committed to apophatic meditation with the goal of mystical union with the Dao (see Chapter 11 herein). These various details point towards a self-conscious early Daoist religious community that can reasonably be labeled the "inner cultivation lineages." Such is the beginning of the Daoist tradition, and such is one of the key source-points for the later movements of organized Daoism.

Although members of the inner cultivation lineages did not explicitly use *daojia* as a self-reference, there is evidence to take that name, like "Daoism," as adequately exact. The texts themselves suggest a movement that might be called the "Family of the Dao." Moreover, although *daojia* does not appear in the relevant texts, *daoshu* (techniques of the Way) does (Roth 1999a: 181–5). That is, members of the inner cultivation lineages saw themselves as practitioners of the "techniques of the Way." For example, in Chapter 33 of the *Zhuangzi*, the authors contrast the techniques of the Way with limited "techniques of one-corner" (*fangshu*). The presentation proceeds to demonstrate the strengths and weaknesses of each of the six groups of teachers, concluding that only the models of Lao Dan (Laozi), Zhuang Zhou (Zhuangzi), and their disciples are completely worthy. Such techniques of the Way are aimed at developing "inner sageliness and outer kingliness" and so contain an important element of inner cultivation (Roth 1999a: 182–3; see also idem. 1996).

I would thus suggest that we might reasonably use *daojia*, only in the sense of the "family of the Dao," as a viable indigenous designation for the earliest Daoist religious community and for the Daoist tradition as a whole. This designation is helpful for

drawing our attention to the way in which religious communities are viewed along ancestral lines and lines of transmission from a traditional Chinese perspective (see, e.g. Yao and Zhao 2010: 24–44). Moreover, as discussed in Chapter 3, the term directs us to study both actual Daoist *families* and spiritual lineages. Here we must also recall that later Daoists used the term to refer to a greatly expanded Daoist community and tradition.

The final interpretive issue related to the view that there was a Daoist religious community from the fourth to second century BCE must address the connection between so-called classical Daoism and the emergence of organized Daoism during the Later Han dynasty. If there were actual inner cultivation lineages, what became of such lineages in subsequent periods? Did they exert any influence on the later Daoist tradition? What are the connections between classical Daoism and early organized Daoism? At present, we do not know of any specific lineage connections, although I provide some conjecture in Chapter 3. More research is required on what I would label "Daoism-between-Daoism," namely, historical developments between the compilation of the *Huainanzi* (139 BCE) and the emergence of the Taiping and Tianshi movements in the mid-second century CE. We await research on potential continuities and departures, divergences and convergences within the Daoist tradition and among distinct Daoist movements. At present, we do know that the history of Daoism is a history of continual reconfiguration. It is a history of the emergence, mingling, dissolution, and revitalization of distinct movements. Some movements emerged, and seemingly disappeared, only to reemerge in a new form decades or centuries later. The Daoist tradition is also characterized by diversity, inclusivity, and adaptation, including the incorporation of new cultural influences such as Buddhism from at least the fourth century CE forward. Research on continuities and departures is only just beginning.

In summary, Daoism is a diverse and complex religious tradition composed of Daoist adherents, communities, and their religious expressions. Our understanding of Daoism is complicated by a number of factors, including a scarcity of historically informed and nuanced studies, including accurate translations, as well as a "conspiracy of ignorance." The latter consists of inaccurate representations, such as the distinction between so-called "philosophical Daoism" (equated with *daojia*) and so-called "religious Daoism" (equated with *daojiao*), popular translations, primarily of the *Daode jing* and *Zhuangzi*, as well as various New Age appropriations (see Chapter 16; Komjathy 2011b). Thus, what most have come to know as "Daoism" in the modern West is either a popular construction rooted in various Orientalist legacies, or a reified entity reconstructed through texts associated with early and early medieval Daoism. The former view is found among various "Daoist sympathizers," hybrid spiritualities, and forms of spiritual capitalism. It is found in most non-specialist studies and world religion textbooks. The latter view is the dominant position in specialist discourse, especially among those who overemphasize the importance of the Tianshi movement and problematically interpret Daoism through the indigenous Chinese category of *daojiao*.

A more comprehensive understanding would recognize that Daoism is an indigenous Chinese religious tradition rooted in traditional Chinese culture. This religious tradition has multiple source-points, but begins with the inner cultivation lineages of the Warring States period and the Early Han dynasty. From this perspective, Daoism is the "tradition of the Dao," which is made up of various "families" and "communities of practice." Generally speaking, the Daoist tradition is characterized by diversity and plurality, especially with respect to setting parameters of inclusion and participation. The study of Daoism will always thwart neat categorization because the tradition itself embodies a resistance to hegemony, homogeneity, and monolithic structure. Daoism has multiple source-points, including various "founders," foundational movements and lineages, key scriptures, and so forth. We must understand Daoism as both a *tradition* and a set of *traditions*, as both Daoism and Daoisms. It is simultaneously singular and plural, varied and unified. The complexity of Daoism, and the consistent willingness of Daoists to include new revelations and religious paths into their tradition, subverts attempts to establish unambiguous demarcation. For the study of Daoism, intellectual humility, interpretive openness, and sustained inquiry, with the commitment to discovery and surprise, are helpful attributes.

Historical periodization

Until the establishment of the Republic of China (1912), Chinese history was organized according to dynasties and the reign periods of specific emperors. What we refer to today as "China," a unified geo-political "country" and nation-state, first came into being following the Warring States period, with the final victory of the state of Qin and the establishment of their Qin dynasty (221 BCE). Until the end of dynastic rule following the Manchu Qing, the subsequent dynasties were ruled by emperors or imperial families, and their bureaucratic hierarchies. On the culturally elite level, there was both an aristocratic land-holding class and a merit-based bureaucracy, with the latter characterized by relative social mobility based on education and success in examination systems.

Developing the work of Russell Kirkland (1997a, 2002; see also Kohn 1998: 164–7; 2000; Miller 2003), I would propose the historical periodization of Daoism based on seven major periods and four basic divisions.

The seven periods would roughly correspond to major watersheds for Daoism in Chinese dynastic and post-dynastic history: (1) Warring States (480–222 BCE), Qin (221–206 BCE), and Early Han (202 BCE–9 CE); (2) Later Han (25–220 CE); (3) Period of Disunion (220–589) and Sui (581–618); (4) Tang (618–907), Song (Northern: 960–1127; Southern: 1127–1279), and Yuan (1260–1368); (5) Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911); and (6) Republican (1912–49; 1949–) and early Communist (1949–78). I would, in turn, divide the modern period into "early modern Daoism" (1912–78) and "late modern Daoism" (1978-present), with the latter including contemporary expressions

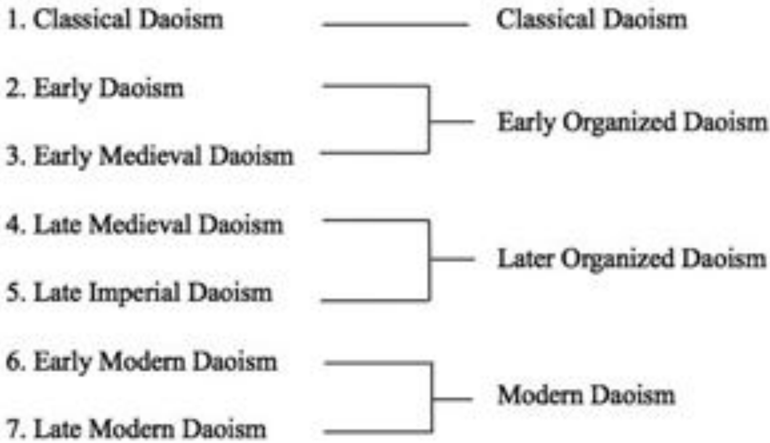

CHART 1 *Seven Periods and Four Divisions of Daoist History*

and developments. In terms of Chinese history, 1978 is used as the key date because that was when Deng Xiaoping (1904–97) initiated the so-called Four Modernizations, socio-economic reforms that also led to an increase in religious freedom and eventually to the "revitalization" of Daoism. In concert with the Chinese Communist revolution (1949) and the subsequent flight of the Nationalists/Republicans to Taiwan, this was also a decisive factor in the globalization of Daoism (see Chapter 16). Period seven, in turn, encompasses more contemporary developments in mainland China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan. It also includes the transmission and transformation of Daoism in other Asian, European, and North American contexts, as well as the establishment of the field of Daoist Studies throughout the world. While helpful, such periods should not lull one into believing that they encompass the dramatic changes that occurred between, for instance, the Tang and Song dynasties.

As discussed in Chapter 2, each of these periods saw the emergence of specific communities and movements. Briefly stated, classical Daoism encompasses the diverse communities and "school" of the inner cultivation lineages as well as Huang-Lao dao (Way of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi). Major movements associated with early Daoism include Taiping (Great Peace) and Tianshi (Celestial Masters). Early medieval Daoism consisted of such important movements as Taiqing (Great Clarity), Shangqing (Highest Clarity), and Lingbao (Numinous Treasure). Late medieval Daoism included a variety of internal alchemy lineages, including Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) and so-called Nanzong (Southern School), as well as new deity cults and ritual movements. Late imperial and modern Daoism was dominated by Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity; a.k.a. Tianshi) and Quanzhen, though it also saw the emergence of major lineages of the latter as well as new lineages of internal alchemy. The constituents of global Daoism are a highly complex topic, which will be partially addressed in Chapter 16. Briefly stated, from a tradition-based and institutional perspective,

global Daoism remains primarily a Zhengyi-Quanzhen tradition. However, there are also dynamic (and problematic) recent developments, including mediumistic cult influences, obscure family lineages, and diverse organizations. The student of Daoism is, in turn, faced with many perplexities and challenges when studying the contemporary landscape of things identified as "Daoist."

For simplicity's sake, we might further speak of four basic divisions of Daoism: (1) classical Daoism; (2) early organized Daoism; (3) later organized Daoism; (4) modern Daoism. The rationale for this grouping is to distinguish historical developments (see Chapter 2), types of community (see Chapter 4), and distinctive models of practice (see below). It draws our attention to the ways in which the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism differ from the householder, ascetic, and eremitic communities of early organized Daoism, as the Later Han dynasty witnessed the emergence of Daoism as an organized religious tradition with enduring institutions. Early organized Daoism may be distinguished from later organized Daoism based on the ascendance of a monastic model in the latter (see Chapter 4) and the emergence of new models of practice, especially internal alchemy. Modern Daoism corresponds to the end of dynastic rule in China and the increasing influence of Western values and political ideologies. In its more contemporary form, it directs our attention towards Daoism as a global religious tradition.

The seven periods and four divisions in turn provide a relatively simple and nuanced interpretive framework for discussing Daoism from a historical perspective, including attentiveness to larger cultural and social developments. In the following chapter I provide a concise overview of Daoist history based on this periodization model. It will also be utilized as one of the primary interpretive frameworks throughout the subsequent thematic and topical chapters.

Models of practice and attainment

While it may seem self-evident that "realization of the Dao" or "attunement with the Way" is both the origin and culmination of a Daoist training regimen, one cannot deny that Daoists have developed and advocated different and perhaps competing models for such realization or attunement. Some traditional models of Daoist praxis include the following:

1. Alchemical: Transformation of self through ingestion of various substances (external) and/or through complex physiological practices (internal).
2. Ascetic: Renunciation, perhaps even body-negation. May involve psychological purification (internal) or practices such as fasting, sleep deprivation, voluntary poverty, etc. (external).
3. Cosmological: Emphasis on cosmological integration and seasonal attunement.

4 Dietetic: Attentiveness to consumption patterns and influences.
5 Ethical: Emphasis on morality and ethics, including precept study and application.
6 Hermeneutical: Emphasis on scripture study and interpretation, often resulting in the production of commentaries.
7 Meditative: Meditation as central, with the recognition of diverse types of meditation.
8 Quietistic: "Non-action" (*wuwei*), involving non-interference, non-intervention, and effortless activity, as central.
9 Ritualistic: Ritual as central, with the recognition of diverse types of ritual expression and activity.

As discussed in more detail in the following chapter, these models emerge in specific contexts and may be associated with particular Daoist movements (see Komjathy 2008b), but most Daoists employed and recommended a combination.

An interpretative framework based on models of Daoist practice helps one understand the diverse expressions of Daoist religiosity and "paths to the Dao." This interpretative framework will, in turn, be used throughout the present book. In concert with insights derived from Religious Studies (see, e.g. Smart 1999), it supplies at least one of the organizational structures of our inquiry: cosmology and theology (Chapter 6), ethics (Chapter 8), dietetics (Chapter 9), health and longevity practice (Chapter 10), meditation (Chapter 11), hermeneutics (Chapter 12), ritual (Chapter 13), and material culture (Chapter 15).

Towards a postmodern and postcolonial approach

The aim of a postmodern and postcolonial approach to the study of Daoism would be to move beyond solely Western frameworks and concerns, especially Western academic accounts of Daoism. It would consider indigenous Chinese and Daoist views, especially through conversations and direct experience with Chinese Daoist adherents and communities, but it would not privilege those. It would attempt to avoid any ethnocentric bias. It would be neither Sinocentric nor Eurocentric, neither Orientalist nor Occidentalist. At the same time, the academic study of Daoism must be Sinocentric on some level. Pre-modern China is the source-culture of Daoism, and Daoism has deep connections with traditional Chinese culture. This includes language and informing worldviews. Any informed perspective must acknowledge "Chinese Daoism" as the source-tradition of contemporary "global Daoism."

The postcolonial approach would specifically include voices from the Chinese Daoist tradition itself. It would attempt to understand Daoism from Daoist perspectives.

Historically speaking, one would understand the ways in which Daoists have defined and understood their tradition. This would include contemporary Daoist perspectives as well. Here we must recognize that Daoists are adherents of Daoism, with ordained and lineage-based priests and monastics being the primary representatives (see Chapter 3). To allow one's understanding of Daoism to be informed by Daoist perspectives presupposes religious literacy concerning Daoism and Daoist religious affiliation, identity, and adherence. It requires that one actually has access to Daoists. Such an approach faces a number of challenges in the modern world, not the least of which is widespread misunderstanding and misrepresentation (see Chapter 16; Komjathy 2011b). Most self-identified "Daoists" in the West, most visible through various "virtual communities," unreliable electronic sources, and popular publications, have fabricated their identities from the various colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist legacies already mentioned. Metaphorically speaking, they are primarily tourists or miners in the sacred site of Daoism.

In a postcolonial approach, ordained Daoists and adherents with formal standing in the religious community, actual committed Daoists and representatives of Daoism, would be empowered to speak for their tradition. This would especially include indigenous Chinese Daoist perspectives. It would recognize and respect individuals with formal commitments to and participation in the Daoist religious community. One interpretive benefit from the postcolonial approach is that it guides us to study the tradition *through the tradition*. It allows us to understand the ways in which *Daoists* have established and developed their tradition. We may then avoid some of the abovementioned interpretive issues, although the question of historical viability remains. For example, most modern Daoists view the contours of Daoist history in a way parallel to the present book. They see so-called *daojia* as part of so-called *daojiao*. In such a context, *daojia* functions something like "classical Daoism," while *daojiao* functions something like "organized Daoism." That is, Daoism is a diverse, but unified religious tradition. This tradition begins with classical Daoism, and includes the *Daode jing* and *Nanhua zhenjing* (*Zhuangzi*) as Daoist scriptures, as sacred texts and manifestations of the Dao (see Chapter 12). Moreover, many modern Daoists read those texts as practice manuals, as guidebooks for Daoist cultivation.

Allowing Daoist views and perspectives to inform one's understanding of Daoism is thus both challenging and enlightening. With respect to the former, it requires that one find *actual Daoist adherents* as conversation partners and *actual Daoist communities and places* as educational locales. This is especially challenging outside of China. Few "connoisseurs of Daoism" have actually met tradition-based Daoists, specifically ordained priests and monastics. To understand Daoism thus requires vigilance in terms of establishing parameters of inclusion and identifying legitimate sources of interpretive authority. It requires one to avoid, or at least to critically investigate, popular appropriations and distortions. It might involve avoiding the internet altogether as a viable source of information (see Chapter 16). In contrast, actual conversations with Daoists, whether through historical sources or modern clergy, reveal unexpected insights. These might include the importance of community, connection, cultivation,

embodiment, energetic awareness, place, ritual, sacred presence, tradition, virtue, and so forth. For educators, a postcolonial approach that includes actual Daoist views might lead to alternative questions and new interpretations. One might in turn wonder whether or not a Daoist-inspired or actual Daoist type of scholarship is possible.

As this book attempts to demonstrate, there is an academic model of scholarship that may be simultaneously historical, theoretical, ethnographic, and postcolonial. Metaphorically speaking, such an approach would attempt to overcome approaching Daoism as historical artifact, museum piece, and/or mining site. Such an approach might understand Daoism as an old growth forest, intact culture, and/or sacred site. The present book in turn aims to be a field-guide and a map to the landscape of Daoism as a Chinese and now global religious tradition.

FIGURE 1 *Map of Chongyang gong (Palace of Chongyang; Huxian, Shaanxi) during the Yuan Dynasty*
Source: *Photo by author (Louis Komjathy)*

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