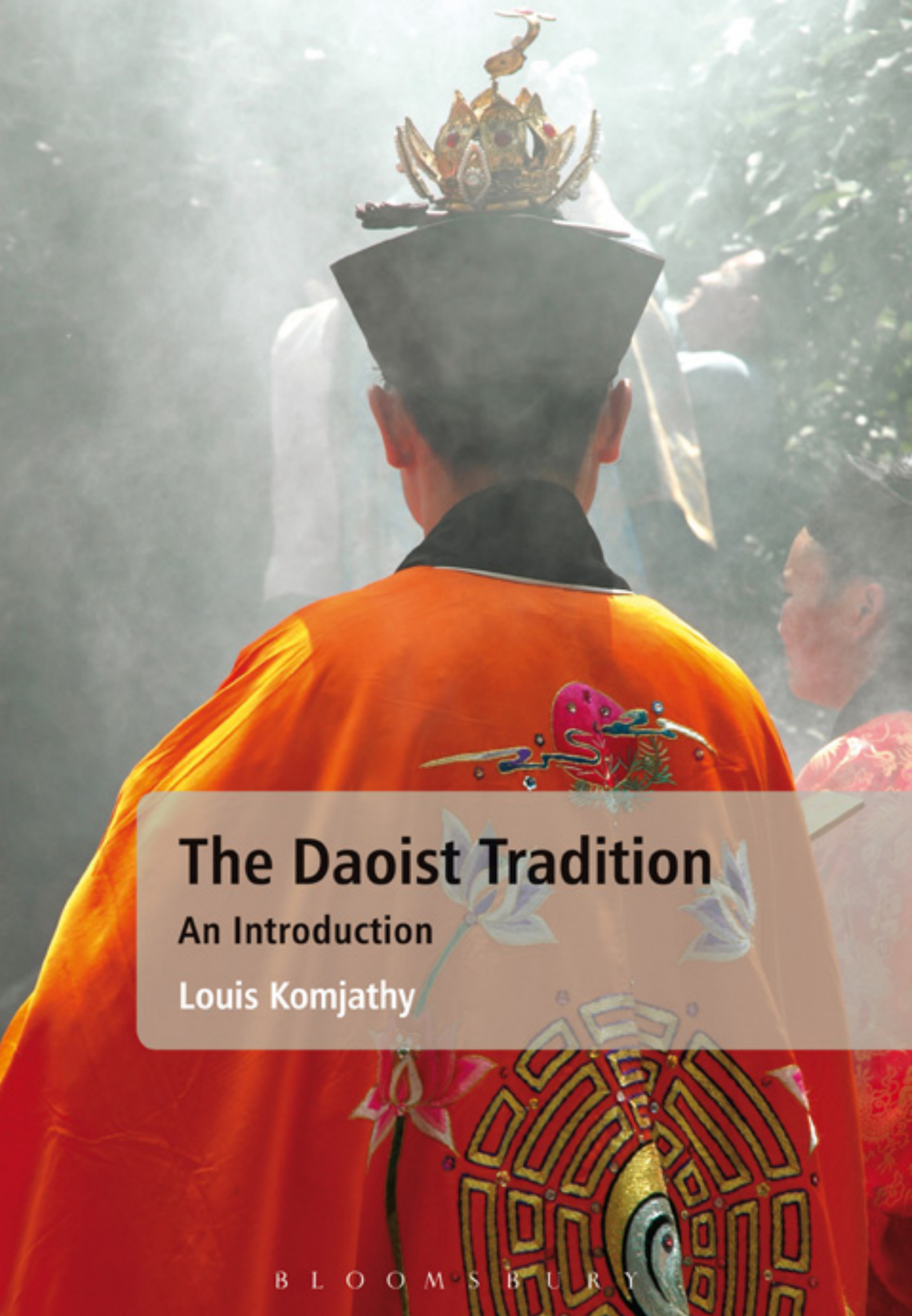

The Daoist Tradition

An Introduction

Louis Komjathy

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LOUIS KOMJATHY

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Cosmogony, cosmology, and theology

Chapter Outline

- Daoist cosmogony
- Daoist cosmology
- Daoist theology
- Daoist deities and pantheons

As comparative categories, cosmogony refers to discourse on and theories about the origins of the universe; cosmology to discourse on the underlying patterns and principles of the cosmos; and theology to discourse on the sacred, with the designation of "sacred" or "ultimately real" depending on specific individuals, communities, and traditions (see Tracy 1987; Jackson and Makransky 1999; Clooney 2010). Thus, cosmogony directs one's attention towards the origin(s) of the universe. Cosmology relates to the ways in which the universe is structured and functions, specifically the underlying patterns and principles of the cosmos. Finally, theology inspires consideration of what is ultimately real, including questions of transcendent meaning and purpose, though such questions may also be existentialist. Daoist cosmogonic, cosmological, and theological views reveal the ways in which Daoists, like other religious adherents, have their own unique symbol systems and accounts of "reality."

In a Daoist framework, there is a close connection among these three categories because the universe and world *are* the Dao on some level, and because one may understand the Dao through observation of the patterns in Nature. While the classical and foundational Daoist cosmogony and cosmology are naturalistic (impersonal, transformative process), Daoist theological views are quite diverse. This is often one of the primary areas of perplexity concerning the Daoist tradition.

Daoist cosmogony

The primary Daoist cosmogony involves an impersonal and spontaneous process of manifestation and emanation. One dimension of the Dao manifests in and as the universe as cosmological process ("Nature"). Generally speaking, Daoists do not believe in intentionality, agency, or inherent and transcendent meaning in the cosmos. That is, in contrast to many monotheists, Daoists believe in neither a creator god nor "creation" as such. The foundational Daoist cosmogony involves a spontaneous transformation that led from primordial nondifferentiation to differentiation.

CLASSICAL AND FOUNDATIONAL DAOIST COSMOGONY

The Dao generated (or generates) the One;
The One generated the two;
The two generated the three;
The three generated the myriad beings.
The myriad beings carry yin and embrace yang,
And it is empty qi [or, "infusing qi"] (*chongqi*) that harmonizes these.
(*Daode jing*, Chapter 42; see also *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 4)

***

There was a beginning. There was not yet beginning to be a beginning. There was not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be a beginning. There was being. There was nonbeing. There was not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There was not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there was nonbeing. But when it comes to nonbeing, I don't know what is being and what is nonbeing. Now I have just said something. But I don't know whether or not what I have said has really said something. (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 2)

***

When the heavens and earth were not yet formed, everything was ascending and flying, diving and delving. We refer to this as the Great Inception. The Dao originally birthed the nebulous void; the nebulous void birthed the cosmos; and the cosmos birthed qi. This qi divided like a shoreline: the clear and light rose and became the heavens; the heavy and turbid sank and became the earth. It is easy for the clear and wondrous to converge, but difficult for the heavy and turbid to congeal. Thus the heavens were completed first, while the earth was established after. The conjoined essences of the heavens and earth became yin and yang, and the disseminated essence of yin and yang became the four seasons. The scattered essences of the four seasons became the myriad beings. (*Huainanzi*, Chapter 3; cf. Major 1993: 62; see also Lau and Ames 1998)

In the *Daode jing* passage, the Dao represents primordial nondifferentiation or pure potentiality. In a pre-manifest "state," the Dao is an incomprehensible and unrepresentable "before," also understood as original qi, the primordial "energy" of the universe. Through a spontaneous, unintentional, and impersonal process of unfolding or differentiation, this nondifferentiation became the One or unity. That is, even unity or the wholeness of Being-before-being is not the Dao in its ultimate sense. The One represents the first moment or stage of differentiation. From this unity, separation occurs. In the next phase of differentiation, the one divides into two, yin and yang (see below). Here yin also relates to terrestrial qi or the qi of the earth (*diqi*), while yang relates to celestial qi or the qi of the heavens (*tianqi*). At this moment yin and yang have not yet formed patterns of interaction. The interaction of yin and yang is referred to as "three;" this moment involves yin and yang in dynamic and continual interaction, resulting in further differentiation. This further differentiation leads to the emergence of materiality as well as to more individuated beings and forces, including human beings. Human beings, as vertically aligned beings, are often seen as the life form with the clearest capacity to connect the heavens and the earth. This is a structural and organizational distinction, not an ontological or theological one. In the later Daoist tradition, the three dimensions of the heavens, earth, and human beings are referred to as the "Three Powers" (*sancai*).

A similar cosmogonic account appears in Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang; DZ 640) and Chapter 3 of the *Huainanzi* (Book of the Huainan Masters; DZ 1184) (see above). The former may be read in a number of ways. On one level, it is representative of the *Zhuangzi*'s playfulness and apparent skepticism concerning human language and our capacity for actual understanding, especially in terms of a more encompassing perspective. In this view, ordinary human beings are narrow-minded and egoistic, limited by their own views and assumptions. While they attempt to create convincing and comprehensive accounts of reality, such realization is beyond rationality, linguistic expression, and conceptualization. The passage thus provides a sarcastic account aimed to mock individuals who engage in cosmogonic and theological reflection, to subvert and remedy such rumination. On another level, however, Daoists have read this passage as an intuitive and experientially sound cosmogony. The universe is finite; it will come to an end. So, at some point, there was a beginning. However, that beginning came from a source that "existed" before the beginning. Daoists generally interpret this to mean that the Dao as Source "pre-dates" the manifest universe and will not cease to exist when this cosmic expression disappears. In addition, the Dao in its own suchness will not be diminished by that fact.

Paralleling Chapter 42 of the *Daode jing* and Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, Chapter 3 of the received *Huainanzi*, which is titled "Tianwen" (Celestial Patterns), provides another classical and foundational Daoist cosmogonic account. In the beginning, before the imagined beginning in fact, there was an unrepresentable "before;" there was primordial nondifferentiation. The *Huainanzi* speaks of this "moment" in terms of the Dao as nebulous void. From the nebulous void, the Great Inception (*taichu*; *taishi*) commenced, which initially led to the division of the heavens and earth, yang and yin.

Each of these moments of emanation, and the eventual formation of further differentiated beings, involved spontaneous shifts of qi. In this passage and the parallel one from the *Zhuangzi*, one also notices a lack of emphasis on human beings. They are not important players in the account; they are part of the "ten thousand things" (*wanwu*). Like everything that exists, humans are spontaneous and random expressions of the Dao, however unique and interesting one may find them. That is, Daoism tends to be more theocentric (Dao-centered) and cosmocentric, less anthropocentric. There are larger concentric circles decreasing in diameter from the Dao, to the cosmos, including visible and invisible realms, world, and then to individuated beings such as terrestrial animals and plants.

Within the larger contours of the Daoist tradition, the foundational and primary cosmogonic account, the movement from nondifferentiated Source and primordial unity to differentiation, is spoken of in terms of Wu wuji ("without non-differentiation"), Wuji ("non-differentiation") and Taiji ("differentiation"), which may be represented in a chart (cf. Pregadio 2008a: 555).

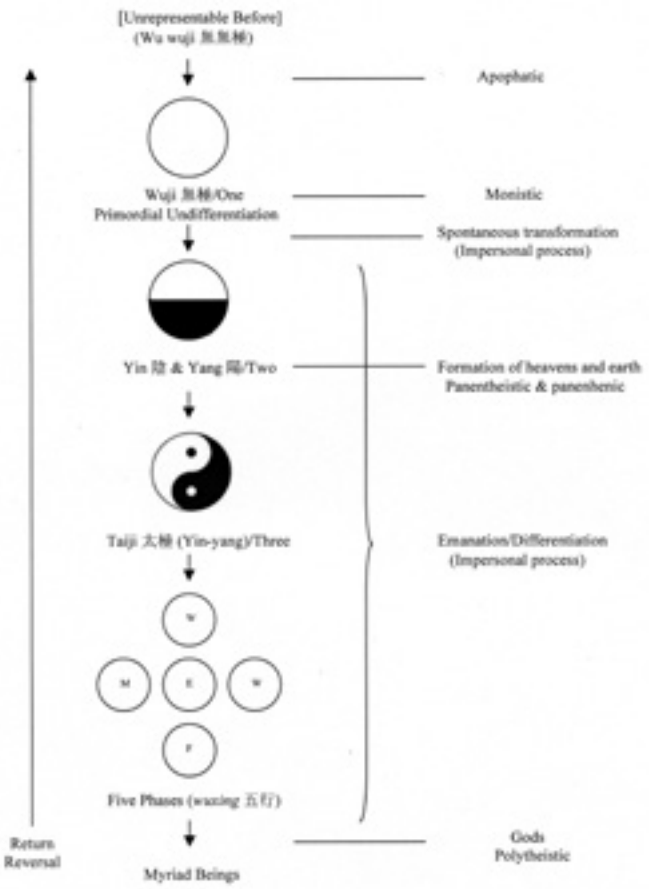
[Unrepresentable Before]
(Wu wuji 無無極)
Apophatic
Wuji 無極/One
Primordial Undifferentiation
Monistic
Spontaneous transformation
(Impersonal process)
Yin 陰 & Yang 陽/Two
Formation of heavens and earth
Panentheistic & panenhenic
Taiji 太極 (Yin-yang)/Three
Emanation/Differentiation
(Impersonal process)
W
M
E
W
F
Five Phases (wuxing 五行)
Gods
Polytheistic
Return
Reversal
Myriad Beings

FIGURE 5 Classical and Foundational Daoist Cosmogony

Taiji, which literally means the "Great Ridgepole," or the "Great Ultimate" by extension, refers to the dynamic interaction of yin and yang. It is a cosmological category. Etymologically speaking, *ji* is the "ridgepole" or the center beam in an architectural structure. Applied to yin and yang, it suggests both distinction (a center dividing point) and connection (a center meeting point). This cosmogonic and cosmological process, involving yin and yang in continual, dynamic interaction, is not just in the past; it also represents the context of being and becoming, the unending process that is the world and being-in-the-world. Yin-yang interaction may be further mapped according to the Five Phases (*wuxing*), which are represented cosmogonically in the above chart. That is, they are located in their associated directions (Water/north; Wood/east; Fire/south; Metal/west; and Earth/center).

As the above illustration indicates, one of the primary Daoist soteriologies involves "returning the Source" (*guigen*), to the Dao as primordial origin (see Chapter 5). This is a movement from differentiation to nondifferentiation. Daoists in turn use various technical terms when referring to the Dao as primordial nondifferentiation. These include "source" (*yuan*), "root" (*gen*), "mother" (*mu*), "beginning" (*shi*), and "ancestor" (*zong*). Here we must recognize that these are metaphors (see Chapter 1), and these metaphors have a context-specific Chinese cultural and Daoist religious meaning. In particular, the Daoist view of the Dao is primarily impersonal, especially when considering the Dao as primordial Source and in its own suchness. Thus, Dao as "mother" does not refer to a compassionate and loving being, a personal divine consciousness (see below). Rather, it refers to that which gave birth to the world, to life, and to all beings. It is the source of life and that which nourishes all beings without conscious concern. It is neither an actual mother (or father) nor gendered in any essential respect. At the same time, one might recognize that the Dao as impersonal Source also manifests through beings who do express personal concern and consideration. This includes humans who embody humaneness.

Daoist cosmology

The foundational Daoist cosmology parallels that of pre-modern Chinese society and culture, and it centers on yin-yang and the Five Phases. This cosmology is not Daoist per se. It is best understood as "traditional Chinese cosmology" or part of the dominant "traditional Chinese worldview," as it was the primary cosmological viewpoint in traditional China. It was, in turn, employed in various indigenous systems, such as those of Confucianism, Daoism, and Chinese medicine. Historically speaking, this correlative cosmology, also referred to as the system of correspondences, was systematized by Zou Yan (ca. 305–240 BCE) and within the so-called Yinyang jia (Family of Yin-yang) (see, e.g. Schwartz 1985; Graham 1989). The latter "school" is often referred to as the "Cosmologists" or "Naturalists" in Western language publications, and it was part of the intellectual and cultural diversity of the Warring States period (480–222 BCE) and Early Han dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE). While such a cosmology is not Daoist per se, it is often misidentified as such because Daoism is one of the few places were the view remains prominent in the contemporary world.

This cosmology is based on the principles and forces of yin-yang, which we encountered above in the classical Daoist cosmogonic accounts. Etymologically speaking, yin 陰 depicts a hill (*fu* 阜) covered by shadows (*yin* [illegible]), while yang 陽 depicts a hill (*fu* 阜) covered by sunlight (*yang* 昜). At the root level, yin and yang are ways of speaking about the same place at different times or moments of the day. Yin and yang are not "polar opposites" or antagonistic substances; they are, in fact, complementary principles, aspects, or forces. As the characters suggest, yin and yang are used to represent different dimensions of the same phenomenon or situation. By extension, there are various associations:

> yin/female/earth/moon/dark/death/cold/moist/heavy/turbidity/descent/rest/inward
> yang/male/heavens/sun/light/life/hot/dry/light/clarity/ascent/activity/outward

At times, "yin" is also used to designate "negative" or harmful aspects of life more generally (immorality, ugliness, disease, etc.), while "yang" becomes related to "positive" or beneficial aspects of life (morality, beauty, health, etc.). What must be emphasized is that these are *relative associations*, not absolute characteristics. They do not parallel conventional views of so-called "good" and "evil" as distinct ontological categories. Just because women are considered "yin" in one respect or in one context, it does not follow that they are also "immoral" or "turbid." There are also varying degrees of yin and yang in every phenomenon, in each moment or experience, and in every being. So, certain men may be more yin than certain women, and vice versa. People in one context may be more yang (e.g. talkative or hot), while in another that same person may be quite yin (e.g. quiet or cold). Because the universe is understood as a transformative process (*zaohua*), this also means that any negative or harmful pattern or manifestation may be transformed into a positive or beneficial pattern or manifestation. In the context of a classical Chinese worldview in general and Daoism in particular, life is seen as depending on the mutually beneficial interaction of yin and yang. Even when Daoists speak of entities like "demons" (*mo*) or "ghosts" (*gui*) (see below), they generally understand them to be a momentary, unresolved energetic pattern capable of transformation into a more beneficial pattern. Generally speaking, such beings are not irrevocably lost or distorted. A skilled Daoist priest may assist their transformation.

Here we should also note that yin and yang take on specific and alternative meanings in certain contexts. For example, in many internal alchemy lineages (see Chapters 7 and 11), yin appears to be defined negatively, while yang appears to be defined positively. A distinction must be made between yin-yang as cosmological principles, and yin-yang as alchemical map, specifically as a map of alchemical transformation. That is, there are cosmological and alchemical interpretations and applications of yin-yang, with the associations varying depending on system and context. The cosmological dimension cannot be changed—it is the underlying structure of cosmos. However, on an existential and alchemical level, yin may designate mortality, defilements, delusion, and so forth; yang may designate immortality, purity, realization, and so forth. Internal alchemists thus frequently speak of transforming yin into yang, of becoming a yang-spirit, a pure yang being. This does not mean that one transcends the foundational cosmological harmony of yin and yang. In fact, classical Daoism and the foundational Daoist worldview urge one to "embrace the feminine" (see Chapter 5), understood as correlative with "yin qualities" (flexibility, passivity, receptivity, silence, etc.). Rather, it means that the internal alchemist works to become a perfected being in which all negative characteristics have been transformed into their positive counterparts.

The foundational Daoist cosmology also centers on the so-called Five Phases (*wuxing*), also rendered as Five Elements or Five Agents. Integrated into a single system, yin-yang and the Five Phases are referred to as "correlative cosmology" and the "system of correspondences." This again is best thought of as "traditional Chinese cosmology." The Five Phases include Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water, and the sequence is important. In terms of yin-yang, Wood is minor or lesser yang, while Fire is major or greater yang. Metal is minor yin, while Water is major yin. Earth is generally thought to be a balance of the two forces or a transition between them.

Conventionally rendered as "Five Elements," *wuxing* literally means something like "five activities" or "five movements." This dynamic and process-orientated aspect becomes more satisfactorily rendered in the designation of "Five Phases." While these five do, in fact, relate to actual substances as well as related phenomena and energetic qualities of the "phases," the system is much more complex and dynamic than "elements" would lead one to believe. Also referred to as "naturalistic medicine,"[1] this system of correspondences consists of the following associations:

ASSOCIATIONS	WOOD	FIRE	EARTH	METAL	WATER
Season	Spring	Summer	(Indian Summer)	Autumn	Winter
Direction	East	South	Center	West	North
Color	Azure	Red	Yellow	White	Black
Emblem	Azure Dragon	Vermilion Bird	——	White Tiger	Mysterious Warrior
Taste	Sour	Bitter	Sweet	Pungent (Acrid)	Salty
Climate	Wind	Heat	Dampness	Dryness	Cold
Life Stage	Birth	Adolescence	Adulthood	Maturation	Old-age
Orientation	Outward	Upward	Centered	Inward	Downward
Cultivation Cycle	Planting	Tending	Pausing	Harvesting	Storing
Practice Stage	Enthusiasm	Inspiration	Commitment	Discipline	Unification
Number	8	7	5	9	6
Planet	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
Yin-Yang	Lesser Yang	Greater Yang	Center	Lesser Yin	Greater Yin
Animal	Fish	Birds	Human	Mammals	Crustaceans
Domestic Animal	Sheep	Fowl	Ox	Dog	Pig
Grain	Wheat/Barley	Beans	Rice	Hemp	Millet
Yin Orb (Zang)	Liver	Heart	Spleen	Lungs	Kidneys
Yang Orb (Fu)	Gall Bladder	Small Intestine	Stomach	Large Intestine	Bladder
Spiritual Dimension	Ethereal Soul (*hun* 魂)	Spirit (*shen* 神)	Thought (*yi* 意)	Corporeal Soul (*po* 魄)	Will (*zhi* 志)
Sense Organ	Eyes	Tongue	Mouth	Nose	Ears
Tissue	Sinews	Vessels	Muscles	Skin	Bones
Positive Emotion	Humaneness (*ren* 仁)	Respect (*li* 禮)	Honesty (*xin* 信)	Righteousness (*yi* 義)	Wisdom (*zhi* 智)
Negative Emotion	Anger (*nu* 怒)	Excessive joy (*xi* 喜)	Worry (*si* 思)	Grief (*bei* 悲)	Fear (*kong* 恐)
Sound	Shouting	Laughing	Singing	Crying	Groaning
Injurious Activity	Excessive Walking	Excessive Talking	Excessive Sitting	Excessive Reclining	Excessive Standing

CHART 8 Five Phase Associations

Here it is important to recognize that these are, from a traditional Chinese and Daoist perspective, actual *correspondences and associations*. Each element of the column directly relates to, and often may be substituted for, the others. For example, eye problems frequently appear or become exacerbated during spring; heart issues may manifest in problems with arteries; feelings of grief and depression may be more pronounced during autumn; kidney problems may manifest as a groaning voice; and so forth.

The Five Phases, including their various associations, are, in turn, understood to relate to each other in patterns of dynamic interaction. The so-called "production cycle" is as follows: Wood→Fire→Earth→Metal→Water→Wood→. Then there is the "destruction cycle": Wood→Water→Metal→Earth→Fire→Wood→. Finally, there is the "control cycle": Wood→Earth→Water→Fire→Metal→Wood→. In contemporary Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM),[2] these sequences are often represented as a circle (the production cycle) with a pentagram inside (the control cycle).

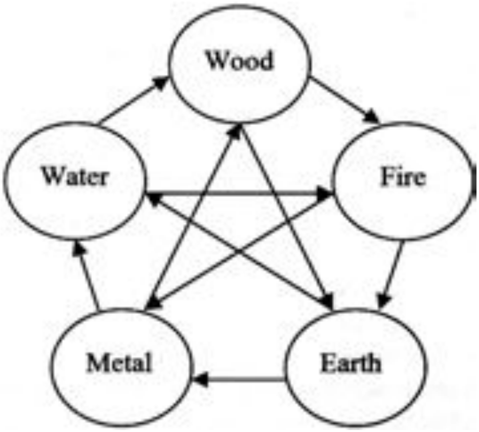

FIGURE 6 Production and Control Cycles of the Five Phases

As the patterns of interaction are interrelated, dynamic, and mutually influential, each association or correspondence may be placed in the above diagram. Viewed in the production cycle, the liver (Wood) influences the heart (Fire), which influences the spleen (Earth). Viewed in the same cycle, intense grief (Metal) may lead to fear (Water). Viewed in the control cycle, honesty (Earth) may help to alleviate fear (Water). These are just some examples of the patterns of dynamic interaction drawn from the above chart of correspondences.

The final element of traditional Chinese cosmology, and of foundational Daoist cosmology by extension, is qi (*ch'i*). Etymologically speaking, the standard character for qi 氣 consists of *qi* 气 ("vapor") above *mi* 米 ("rice"). Qi is like steam derived from the cooking of rice, with the latter often seen as paralleling vital essence (*jing*) in the human body (see Chapter 7). Interestingly, there is also a Daoist esoteric character for *qi* 炁, which consists of *wu* 无 ("non-being") above *huo* 灬/火 ("fire"). From this perspective, qi is a subtle (lit., "non-existing") heat in the body. In Western language sources, qi has been rendered relatively accurately as "subtle" or "vital breath," anachronistically as "energy," and obfuscatingly as "pneuma." While it does have some similarity with the Indian notion of *prāṇa* and the Greek concept of *pneuma*, qi, like "Dao" and "yin-yang," is best left untranslated. Qi refers to both material breath as well as subtle breath. With respect to the former, it is associated with the lungs and with physical respiration. In terms of the latter, it circulates through the universe and the human body as a subtle force or energetic presence. As discussed in Chapter 7, the notion of qi moving through the body relates to the organ-meridian system, subtle networks and channels throughout the body, and to the various vital functions of the organs. In combination with the Daoist notion of "elixir fields" (*dantian*), this system became an essential component of internal alchemy practice.

As an animating force or sacred wind, qi bridges the apparent divide between the "material" and "spiritual," "body" and "mind," and so forth. From a traditional Chinese and Daoist perspective, everything consists of qi; everything is qi. Everything may be mapped along a spectrum of qi, from the most substantial (rocks and bones, for example) to the most rarified (cosmic ethers and gods, for example). However, qi is not simply an undivided or unified quasi-substance. There are types of qi. As we saw above, on the most basic level, qi may be distinguished in terms of "celestial qi" (*tianqi*), the subtle breath associated with the sky and heavens, and "terrestrial qi" (*diqi*), the subtle breath of the earth. These are related to yang and yin, respectively. In the human body, they are thought to enter through the crown-point (Baihui) and soles of the feet (Yongquan), respectively. Although conventionally associated with "celestial qi," there are also other cosmological influences, such as from the sun, moon, stars, and so forth. Such attentiveness was especially prominent in early Shangqing and related visualization practices (see Chapters 9 and 11). Daoism and Chinese medicine also distinguish so-called "prenatal qi" (*xiantian qi*), which literally means "before heaven qi," from so-called "postnatal qi" (*houtian qi*), which literally means "after heaven qi." Prenatal qi refers to the qi that one receives from the universe and one's ancestors, especially one's parents, before birth. Postnatal qi refers to the qi that one acquires and gathers after birth, specifically from breath and food. Other types of qi include ancestral qi (*zongqi*), nutritive qi (*yingqi*), protective qi (*weiqi*), and original qi (*yuanqi*). From this perspective, qi is part of the vital substances of the body (see Chapter 7). On a more specifically Daoist level, there is *daoqi*, the qi of the Dao, which is mentioned, for instance, throughout the standard Quanzhen liturgy. While one might be inclined to think of all qi as the "qi of the Dao," we must remember the above-mentioned cosmogonic account. There are some forms of qi that are less differentiated and closer to the Dao in its primordial suchness (*ziran*). Often discussed as "original," "primal," or "primordial qi" (*yuanqi*), *daoqi* is a "purer" form of qi, a sacred presence. It is not simply manifest in the universe and world; it is also activated and actualized through Daoist religious practice. From a Daoist perspective, its presence may be embodied, recognized, and transmitted within and among Daoists. From an emic ("insider") or adherent perspective, this is one of the ways in which Daoist being would be understood and identified. Daoists frequently refer to its presence as "connection" (*tong*) and/or as "numinosity" (*ling*).

Daoist theology

As a comparative category, "theology" (lit., "god-talk") refers to discourse on the sacred. Due to its close association with Christianity and theistic views, some interpreters may resist the use of "theology" to discuss the Daoist tradition. However, the use of language and semantic meaning changes over time, and I take a more pragmatic and heuristic perspective. Here theology does not specifically mean "god-talk," and as such makes space for "non-theistic" theologies. As discourse on the sacred, theology may thus relate to metaphysics, or hidden realities, beings and presences beyond the physical world.

Before examining Daoist theology, it is also helpful to understand the various types of theology, with some modifications in order to make space for non-theistic views in a comparative framework. We may identify at least the following theologies: animistic, atheistic, monistic, monotheistic, panenhenic, pantheistic, panentheistic, and polytheistic. Animisitic theologies hold that nature is populated by personal gods and/or spiritual entities. Such deities and spirits tend to be place-specific. Although resistant to such designations, atheistic theology, which is technically anti-theological, denies the existence of gods, especially the Abrahamic god ("God"). Monistic theologies hold that there is one impersonal Reality. Monotheistic theologies hold that there is one supreme, personal god, usually with conventional attributes of personhood and agency (e.g. God the Creator, God the Father). Panenhenic theology holds that Nature as a whole is sacred. Pantheistic theology claims that the sacred is in the world, that the world is a manifestation of the sacred. Because this creates certain theological problems, such as the diminishment of the sacred through extinction, some theological discourse tends towards panentheism, that is, that the sacred is in and beyond the world. Under this view, there is both an immanent (world-affirming) and transcendent (world-negating) aspect. Finally, polytheistic theology is belief in many gods. These various theologies may not be mutually exclusive or necessarily irreconcilable.

The primary Daoist theology is monistic, panenhenic, and panentheistic. Daoist theology is secondarily animistic and polytheistic. Daoist theology centers, first and foremost, on the Dao (Tao). The Dao is the sacred and ultimate concern of Daoists. It is, first and foremost, a Chinese character as well as a Daoist cosmological and theological concept. Etymologically speaking, the character *dao* 道, probably pronounced something like **d'ôg* in archaic and ancient Chinese (Karlgren 1964, 272), consists of *chuo* 辵 ("to walk") and *shou* 首 ("head"). It is a road that one travels, and a religious or existential path by extension. *Dao* may thus mean "path," "way," "to walk," and "to speak." Like "qi" and "yin-yang," Dao is best left untranslated, though it has been rendered as "Way." Here it is important to recognize that *dao* was part of the shared intellectual and conceptual repertoire of ancient China (see Schwartz 1985; Graham 1989). In that context, various individuals and movements discoursed on *dao*. However, more often than not, such individuals meant their specific "way" or "path." In contrast, the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism (see Chapters 2, 3 and

4) elevated the concept of *dao* to designate that which is ultimately real ("the Way"), that which transcends and encompasses all of the small *dao*s ("ways").

The Dao cannot be separated from the religious tradition which is Daoism. It is a Daoist cosmogonic, cosmological, and theological concept. From a Daoist perspective, veneration of the Dao and commitment to realizing the Dao involves both recognition of the character as a place-holder for [ ] and reflection on Daoist theological views. To mistake "Dao" for [ ] is either idolatry or a mistaken view.

DAO BEYOND DAO

The *dao* that can be spoken is not the constant Dao.
The name that can be named is not the constant Name.
Nameless—the beginning of the heavens and earth.
Named—the mother of the ten thousand beings.
Thus, constantly desireless, one may observe its subtlety.
Constantly desiring, one may observe its boundaries.
These two emerge from sameness, but differ in name.
This sameness is called "mysterious."
Mysterious and again more mysterious—
The gateway to all that is wondrous.
(*Daode jing*, Chapter 1; see also *Baopuzi*, DZ 1185, Chapter 1)

The first line of Chapter 1 of the *Daode jing* reads *dao kedao feichang dao*, which literally means, "The *dao* that can be *dao*ed (i.e. made into 'dao') is not the continuous Dao." That is, the labeling of [ ] as "Dao" limits its suchness. In addition, the second to the last line reads *xuan zhi you xuan, zhongmiao zhi men*, which literally means, "The even more mysterious within the mysterious is the gate to all wonders." That is, the Dao as such is a twofold mystery, a mysteriousness that even "mystery" cannot express. Similarly, in Chapter 25 of the *Daode jing*, we are informed: "Forced to name it, I call it 'great'." Here *da* 大, the character rendered "great," depicts a human being (*ren* 人) with outstretched arms (—). The Dao as *da* is beyond the human capacity for comprehension (encompassment), especially through linguistic, conceptual, and intellectual frameworks. As a further expression of such views, the anonymous, eighth-century *Qingjing jing* (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) comments, "Forced to name it, we call it 'Dao'." That is, even "Dao" is simply an approximation of that which is ultimately real. Moreover, as one can see from these various Daoist theological insights, there is a strong skepticism in the Daoist tradition concerning language, conceptualization, and the human tendency toward "knowing." As Chapter 1 of the *Zhuangzi* explains, "Names are the guest of reality." Moreover, in Chapter 2 of the same text, which is titled "On

Making Things Equal," we find a major Daoist theological and existential perspective: The commitment to abiding in a state of "non-knowing" (*wuzhi*).

NON-KNOWING

"Suppose you and I have an argument. If you defeat me instead of me defeating you, then are you necessarily right and am I necessarily wrong? If I defeat you instead of you defeating me, then am I necessarily right and are you necessarily wrong? Is one of us right and the other wrong? Are both of us right or are both of us wrong? If you and I don't know the answer, then other people are bound to be even more in the dark. Whom shall we get to decide what is right? Shall we get someone who agrees with you to decide? But if he already agrees with you, how can he decide fairly? Shall we get someone who agrees with me? But if he already agrees with me, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who disagrees with both of us? But if he already disagrees with both of us, how can he decide? Shall we get someone who agrees with both of us? But if he already agrees with both of us, how can he decide? Obviously, then, neither you nor I nor anyone else can decide for each other. Shall we wait for still another person?

"But waiting for one shifting voice [to pass judgment on] another is the same as waiting for none of them. Harmonize them all with Celestial Equality, leave them to their endless changes, and so live out your years. What do I mean by harmonizing them with Celestial Equality? Right is not right; so is not so. If right were really right, it would differ so clearly from not right that there would be no need for argument. If so were really so, it would differ so clearly from not so that there would be no need for argument. Forget the years; forget distinctions. Leap into the boundless and make it your home!" (*Zhuangzi*, Chapter 2; adapted from Watson 1968: 48)

This relates to apophatic discourse (based on negation, or more accurately "beyond") as primary, and kataphatic discourse (based on affirmation) as secondary. This dimension of classical Daoism has been labeled "relativism" and "skepticism," but such characterizations fail to recognize the ways in which such views are rooted in meditative praxis and the resulting mystical experiences and spiritual insights. That is, Daoist apophatic discourse is primarily soteriological and theological, rather than merely intellectual and philosophical. It is primarily existential (about existence) and ontological (about being), and only conventionally epistemological (about knowing).

From a Daoist perspective, that which is referred to as "Dao," has four primary characteristics: (1) Source of all of existence; (2) Unnamable mystery; (3) All-pervading sacred presence; and (4) Universe as cosmological process. This is the foundational Daoist theology. As discussed above, everything emerged from and through the Dao's spontaneous and impersonal process of cosmogonic unfolding and emanation. In this respect, the Dao represents an unrepresentable and incomprehensible before. From its cosmogonic emanation, all differentiated existences came into being: from invisible realms and cosmic ethers to solar systems, stars, and sentient life. As mentioned above, this is the Dao as "mother," as impersonal origination process. Daoists generally believe that this emanationist process moved from more undifferentiated and subtle cosmological dimensions to more differentiated and material dimensions. That is, Daoists do not have a developmental model that privileges later forms of "evolution" (e.g. the emergence of humans on earth); such life forms are, cosmogonically speaking, more distant from the Dao as Source, as primordial unity. Various Daoist texts in turn urge practitioners to "return to the Source" (*guigen*). At the same time, Daoists understand the universe, world, and ultimately all things as manifestations of the Dao. The Dao is immanent in the universe, and this is so much the case that it is difficult to draw a distinction between the Dao and Nature as such. The Daoist reverence for the cosmos, and the human body by extension, is expressed in various admonitions to practice seasonal attunement, specifically through attentiveness to solar and lunar cycles (see Chapters 5, 9, 10 and 13). As a famous Daoist oral saying has it, "Out of step with the times, but not with the seasons." The second characteristic of the Dao, as unnamable mystery, suggests that the Dao as such is beyond human linguistic and conceptual expression and intellectual comprehension. It is a mystery so mysterious that it is beyond mysteriousness. Thus, classical Daoist texts speak of the Dao as "dark" (*xuan*), "subtle" (*miao*), "dim" (*hu*), "indistinct" (*huang*), and so forth. At the same time, the Dao is an all-pervading sacred presence in the world. It can be directly experienced and participated in, and humans can cultivate a greater sensitivity to its presence, in whatever form it takes. This can occur as and through mountain summits, oak trees, extraordinary dogs, immortals, spiritual teachers, and so forth. However—and this cannot be stressed enough—there are degrees of presence. Although everything is the Dao in some sense, and everything expresses the Dao in certain respects, the sacred presence of the Dao (*daoqi*) has different degrees of intensity and clarity (see also Chapter 7). Finally, the Dao is understood as the universe as cosmological process, specifically as expressed in the constant patterns of oscillation between yin and yang. In this respect, the Dao *is* the universe, but it is a universe of constant change and transformation. The Dao's manifest patterns are most clearly observed in the shifts of the constellations and seasons. The alterations of yin and yang, rest and activity, darkness and light, cold and heat, are literally the Dao.

From this brief account, one may recognize the ways in which the primary Daoist theology is monistic, panenhenic, and panentheistic. With respect to a monistic view, everything is the Dao. The Dao is Oneness, the primordial unity before the manifest cosmos and the totality of that universe. This includes all beings in all places at all times. Here one encounters the Dao-centered perspective that many Daoists endeavor to realize. Such is primarily an impersonal or transpersonal existential approach, although it does manifest through some sentient beings as love and compassion. With respect to the panenhenic view, the universe and Nature are the Dao. To be alive as an embodied being in the world is to participate in the Dao. Here one encounters the cosmocentric dimension of Daoism. On the one hand, the universe and its constant transformative shifts are primary; on the other hand, that universe is manifest in and expressed through each individual being. For Daoists, one problem with being human is an overemphasis on that category of being and an obsessive concern for one's individual life. Finally, in terms of the panentheistic view, the Dao is simultaneously immanent and transcendent, neither immanent nor transcendent. Although the universe is the Dao, the Dao will not cease to exist when the universe goes out of being. Daoists hold that the Dao is both Being and Nonbeing. While there is some question as to whether the universe is deemed eternal in the Daoist tradition, careful study seems to indicate that the dominant view is a finite universe that will one day end. In this way, the classical and foundational Daoist cosmogonic account seems to parallel the contemporary Big Bang theory to some extent; after the expansion (yang) reaches its extreme, contraction (yin) will increase until all returns to primordial unity. Daoists often compare this to human respiration. From a Daoist panentheistic perspective, we cannot know either what the Dao was before this manifestation or what it might be afterwards. Such a Daoist view would, in turn, emphasize the nature of embodiment, and one's location in a universe functioning according to yin-yang interaction.

The secondary Daoist theology is animistic and polytheistic. That is, the vast majority of Daoists throughout Chinese history believed in gods and spirits, and this remains true in contemporary Daoism. On some level, Daoists are polytheists, although one must consider Daoist conceptions of such deities (see below). Daoist polytheism recognizes both place-specific deities, usually referred to as "locality-gods" (*dishen; tudi gong*), as well as cosmic, divine beings. The former include mountain-gods, such as the gods of the Five Marchmounts (see Chapter 14), and the gods of the five directions. Many of these deities were adopted from the Chinese popular pantheon; they are not "Daoist gods" as such. Cosmic deities are discussed in more detail below, but they may be primordial gods, early emanations of the Dao, or apotheoses, human beings who went through a process of divinization.

Daoists also generally accept the standard Chinese distinction among gods (*shen*), ghosts (*gui*), and ancestors (*zong*) (see Jordan 1972; Wolf 1974). Gods are divine beings. Ghosts are disenfranchised and anomalous dead, usually those who fall outside the family structure, such as orphans or widows, or those who died unexpectedly or strangely, such as suicides. Ancestors are person-specific; they are the people from whom one descends. Ghosts are usually associated with unsettled corporeal souls (*po*), while ancestors are usually associated with settled ethereal souls (*hun*) (see ch. 7 herein). To this tripartite structure, we should also add demons (*mo*), important in certain Daoist movements, and immortals (*xianren*) and Perfected (*zhenren*). Demons are usually viewed as malevolent entities, disoriented spirits and/or unresolved qi patterns. Depending on the Daoist sub-tradition, they are more or less permanent and fixed. As discussed below, immortals and Perfected tend to be understood as individuals who completed a process of self-divinization, who made themselves into "gods." However, they differ from gods as such because they are outside the bureaucratic structure and are free from obligations.

As a final Daoist theological point, many individuals find it difficult to reconcile the primary Daoist theology (monistic, panenhenic, panentheistic) with the secondary one (animistic and polytheistic). However, if one understands Daoist emanationist cosmogony, such diverse theological views are easily reconciled. The Daoist cosmogonic account does not simply address the appearance of the visible universe; it also claims an earlier cosmogonic moment during which invisible or subtle realms formed. Within the dominant Daoist theological tradition, the universe contains multiple sacred realms inhabited by multiple gods. The unseen universe is as diverse as the seen universe. As the *Laozi xiang'er zhu* (Commentary Thinking Through the *Laozi*; DH 56; S. 6825) explains, "The One exists beyond the heavens and earth. When it enters the space between the heavens and earth, it simply comes and goes in the human body. It resides within the entire skin; it does not dwell in just one place. The One scatters its form as qi; it assembles its form as Taishang Laojun (Great High Lord Lao), who constantly governs Mount Kunlun" (see also Chapter 12). Deities are thus simply differently differentiated aspects of the Dao, and worshipping deities is not, in and of itself, different than having reverence for the unnamable mystery which is the Dao. At the same time—and this is centrally important for understanding the Daoist tradition—gods may be "higher" on some level, but Daoist panenhenic and panentheistic commitments recognize the ways in which the Dao may manifest through everything. So, some Daoists focus on divine immortals, while others venerate embodied teachers. Both may be manifestations of the Dao. Similarly, encountering a cherry tree blooming in spring may be as much of an encounter with the Dao's sacred presence as the appearance of Lord Lao or Lü Dongbin.

Daoist deities and pantheons

A comprehensive history of Daoist deities has yet to be undertaken. Here I will simply provide a few brief historical points on the "history of Daoist gods." Such a statement highlights the fact that all gods have histories, whether one understands them in terms of revelation or human construction. This account will be followed by a discussion of Daoist theological claims regarding specifically Daoist deities. I will conclude with information on major Daoist deities, with particular emphasis on the contemporary pantheon, and Daoist interpretations of those gods.

With respect to historical development, the earliest gods to receive a place of veneration in Daoism were Xiwangmu (Queen Mother of the West) and Laojun (Lord Lao). Although the former goddess predates Daoism, she was incorporated into the Daoist pantheon quite early, partially as a source of cultural capital related to the Han dynasty cult of immortality. There are various accounts of Xiwangmu (see Cahill 1993), but a standard one locates her palace in the mythological Mount Kunlun, the western paradise, where she oversees an orchard where the peaches of immortality grow.

Every thousand years or so she holds an invitation-only banquet during which she bestows the peaches, and the lucky guests become immortals. Her standard iconography is a headdress featuring the peaches of immortality. Peaches in turn become a symbol for immortality in Daoism. Xiwangmu is also known as Yaochi jinmu (Golden Mother of the Turquoise Pond). Although contemporary Daoists recognize Xiwangmu, she tends to be less central than the goddesses Bixia yuanjun (Primordial Goddess of Cerulean Mists), Doumu (Dipper Mother), and Guanyin ([Buddhist] Bodhisattva of Compassion) (see, e.g. Despeux and Kohn 2003). Within certain Daoist views, each of these particular goddesses is simply one manifestation of the Goddess, occasionally identified as Xiwangmu herself.

The second major early Daoist deity is Laojun. Laojun is the deified Laozi (Master Lao), the pseudo-historical figure often elevated to "founder of Daoism" and attributed author of the *Daode jing* (see Chapter 2 herein; also Komjathy 2011b). Unlike Xiwangmu, Laojun is technically a Daoist deity, though the matter is complicated by the pan-Han dynasty veneration of this god. Laojun has been variously characterized as the "god of the Dao," "deified Laozi," "personification of the Dao," and so forth (see Kohn 1998a). These claims suggest that attention must be given to the context-specific conception of Laojun. For example, some Daoist movements identified Laojun as the apotheosis of Laozi (Laozi became Laojun), while others saw Laozi as a manifestation of the deity (Laojun became Laozi). Historically speaking, Laozi as a "historical" personage (Warring States) predates Laojun (Early Han). In any case, as discussed in previous chapters, Laojun became the source of the founding revelation of the early Tianshi movement, and he generally maintained a place of veneration throughout Daoist history. For example, there is a Daoist theological view that emphasizes the "transformations" (*bianhua*) or "manifestations" of Laojun (see Little 2000: 174–6), including as Guangchengzi (see Chapter 3). Laojun also became the revelatory source of various later Daoist scriptures, such as the fifth-century *Xisheng jing* (Scripture on the Western Ascension; DZ 666) and eighth-century *Qingjing jing* (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) (see Chapter 12 herein). In some cases, he is even elevated to the status of "creator" and "cosmocrat" (ruler of the universe) (see Kohn 1998a). As such, however, he is still a manifestation of the Dao. While he may be a more primordial and cosmic deity, he will go out of being when the universe ends.

Another pivotal development in the emergence of a standardized Daoist pantheon occurred within the early Lingbao tradition, which proposed a more primordial god named Yuanshi tianzun (Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning). Although more research needs to be done, it appears that Lingbao eventually systematized the competing early Daoist pantheons into one that became fairly standard from the Period of Disunion forward (see Kohn 2008b). This involved recognition of a triad of highest cosmic and primordial deities, namely, Yuanshi tianzun (abbr. YSTZ), Lingbao tianzun (Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure; abbr. LBTZ), and Daode tianzun (Celestial Worthy of the Dao and Inner Power; a.k.a. Laojun; abbr. DDTZ). These deities were, in turn, located within the Three Heavens of Yuqing (Jade Clarity), Shangqing (Highest Clarity), and Taiqing (Great Clarity), respectively. Here one notes a potentially polemical and sectarian element. Just as early Shangqing located its heaven above that of the earlier Taiqing movement (see Chapter 2), so early Lingbao placed its associated deities in the Shangqing heavens. Especially noteworthy is the fact that the god associated with the Lingbao tradition itself is located in the highest heaven of Jade Clarity. At the same time, the highest god of the Tianshi movement, Lord Lao, is located in the third and lowest position.

The history and development of Daoist deities and pantheons are, of course, quite complex, with different gods recognized as more or less important in different historical contexts and religious movements. Generally speaking, Daoists have been quite inclusive with respect to the selection of and devotion to various deities and immortals. This tends to be dependent on individual persuasion and communal influence. Moreover, in the case of temples and sacred sites, there is also local and regional variation, often based upon specific associations (see Chapter 14). For present purposes, it is also important to locate Daoist theological claims within the larger context of Chinese culture and society. Daoists early on made claims that the Daoist pantheon was superior to both the popular gods worshipped by both common people and the society as a whole and the official pantheon established by emperors and the ruling elite. As Daoism gained cultural capital and political power, and as one of the means through which it accomplished this, Daoists made claims about the superiority (greater power and efficacy) of Daoist deities. Daoists claimed that there was another pantheon above the received one: it was inhabited by specifically Daoist deities. As discussed in Chapters 9 and 13, the Daoist gods, in contrast to the deities of Chinese society more generally, did not depend on blood offerings. In addition, they only responded to petitions offered by ordained Daoist priests. The Daoist clergy thus came to be conceptualized as more powerful, at least in spiritual matters, than the emperor himself. It was through them and their performance of efficacious rituals that cosmic and societal harmony would be established and preserved.

The number of deities in the Daoist pantheon is extremely large, and a complete inventory would require an entire book (see, e.g. CDA 1995; Little 2000; Silvers 2005: 17–51; Wang 2006: 65–92). Here I will emphasize some of the most important and representative ones, especially those that tend to be venerated in Daoist temples and monasteries. As mentioned, such deities may be either cosmic, primordial gods, or apotheoses, human beings who became gods. At the pinnacle of the standard, modern Daoist pantheon is the Sanqing (Three Purities). They are also known as the Sanzun (Three Worthies). One finds them represented as three old Chinese men, usually sitting on elevated platforms. Yuanshi tianzun sits in the center, with Lingbao tianzun on his left and Daode tianzun on his right. From a traditional Chinese perspective, this positions Yuanshi tianzun as host, and Lingbao tianzun as first guest and Daode tianzun as second guest. Here we may note a theological issue: Laojun, formerly the "high god of Daoism," has become located in a triad in which he is technically in the lowest position. Whereas in earlier Daoist history he was a single high god, here he stands in relation to the other Three Purities. One explanation is that Daode tianzun is a more primordial, less differentiated presence, which becomes manifest in the personal deity of Laojun. This conception parallels modern Daoist views of Yuhuang dadi (Jade Emperor), the high god of the Chinese popular pantheon.

In terms of iconography, Yuanshi tianzun usually holds a sphere or circular object in his hand, which represents unity. Lingbao tianzun holds a Ruyi scepter, which represents cosmic power and a wish-fulfilling capacity. Daode tianzun holds a fan, which usually depicts his celestial paradise and represents immortality. In a correct altar configuration, the scepter and fan extend out and away from the center as a sign of respect to Yuanshi tianzun. Different Daoists have different interpretations of the Sanqing. Some hold that they are personal, and will respond to petitions, including personal prayers. However, many modern Daoists believe that the Sanqing are impersonal, and represent the three primordial ethers or energies of the cosmos. They are usually placed on the central Daoist altar because they are the earliest emanation of the Dao, and closest to the Dao as Source. Beyond them, the Dao as primordial undifferentiation cannot be represented iconographically. The Three Purities also receive additional correspondences, including the external Three Treasures of the Dao, scriptures, and teachers, and the internal Three Treasures of spirit, qi, and vital essence (see Chapters 5 and 7).

Immediately beneath the Three Purities in importance is Yuhuang dadi (Jade Emperor). In standard Daoist accounts, he is the cosmocrat, the supreme ruler of the cosmos. The Jade Emperor is assisted by various other nature deities in governing the cosmos. Associated especially with early Tianshi (Celestial Masters) ritual, the Three Officials (*sanguan*) oversee heaven, earth, and water (see Chapter 13). The Five Emperors (*wudi*) are the rulers of the five directions (north, south, west, east, center). These Daoist deities are usually synonymous with the Five Marchmounts (see Chapter 14).

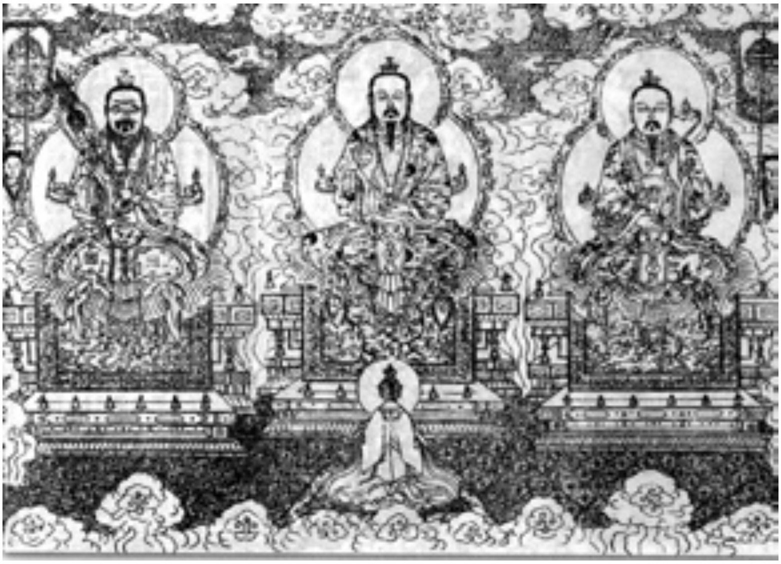

FIGURE 7 The Three Purities
Source: Frontpiece of Daozang; Duren jing, DZ 1

Other key deities are Bixia yuanjun (Primordial Goddess of Cerulean Mists), who is the daughter of the Eastern Emperor (Taishan) and protects women and children; Doumu (Dipper Mother), associated with the Northern Dipper and a salvific figure along the lines of Guanyin; Jiuku tianzun (Celestial Worthy Who Relieves Suffering), who is also a salvific figure along the lines of Guanyin; Leigong (God of Thunder), who controls thunder and lightning and who is associated with exorcism and purification; Wenchang (God of Literature and Culture), who is the patron saint of scholars and students; Yaowang (God of Medicine), who was originally the Daoist physician Sun Simiao (581–682) and who is the patron saint of physicians and aids in healing; and Zhenwu (Perfected Warrior), also known as Xuanwu (Mysterious Warrior), who is sometimes associated with Northern Emperor and martial arts. Like the immortal Zhang Sanfeng, Zhenwu is the patron saint of Wudang shan (Mount Wudang; near Shiyan, Hubei) (see Chapter 14). In addition to Doumu, we also find Daoist astronomical interests expressed in gods associated with the moon, twenty-eight (lunar) lodges (*xiu*; constellations), sixty stem-branch combinations, as well as the stars of the Northern and Southern Dipper. These are just some of the most important and venerated Daoist deities. As mentioned, while some Daoists understand these theistically, as actual gods (divine beings with subjectivity), many others understand them as energetic influences and spiritual resonances. We should also be aware of a "lesser god," Wang Lingguan (Spirit Guardian Wang), who is the guardian of Daoist temples.

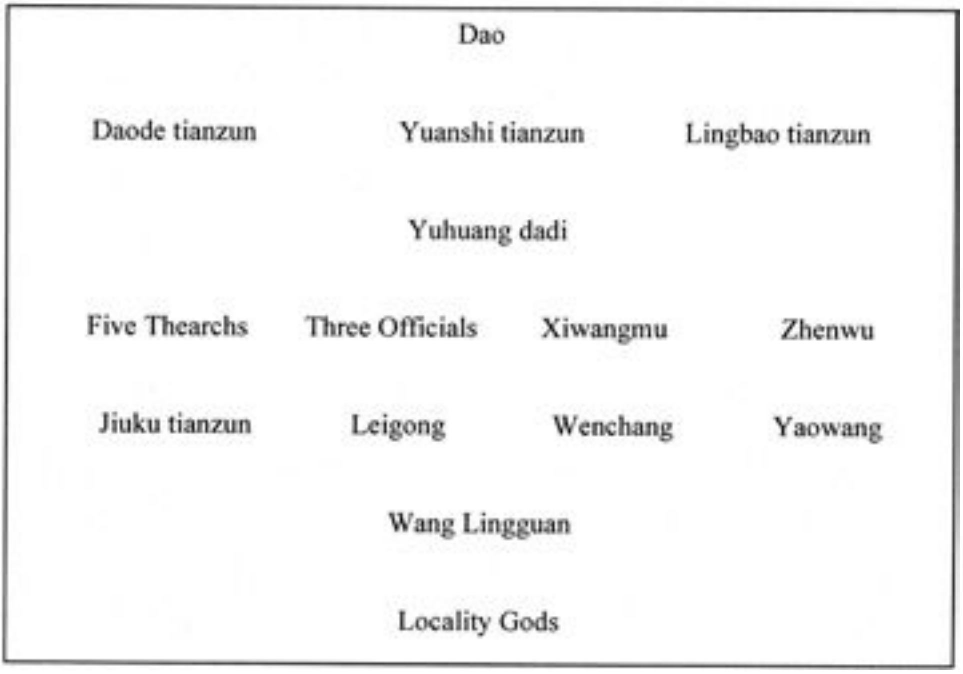

CHART 9 Approximation of Simplified Modern Daoist Pantheon

He is easily identifiable because of his iconography (ferocious appearance, sword, and sword hand-seal) and his location at the entrance to temples.

From a Daoist perspective, every god, like every being in the manifest universe, is finite and ephemeral. While deities may seem eternal from a limited human perspective, they will eventually go out of existence and become reabsorbed into the Dao's totality. Daoist theological views also make space for the emergence and disappearance of gods, as well as for the possibility of self-divinization. Thus, the boundaries between "divinity," "nature," and "humanity" are permeable, and the historical Daoist pantheon is an ever-expanding and ever-contracting one.

Daoists often revere immortals (*xianren*) and Perfected (*zhenren*), beings who have completed the process of self-transformation and who serve as inspiring models. They tend to be understood as individuals who completed a process of self-divinization, who made themselves into "gods." The standard character *xian* 仙, variously translated as "ascendent," "immortal," and "transcendent," consists of *ren* 人 ("human") and *shan* 山 ("mountain"), thus apparently emphasizing seclusion and loftiness (see Chapter 4). The alternative character *xian* 僊 consists of *ren* 人 and *qian* 䙴 ("to fly"). Immortals transcend the limitations of mundane concerns and terrestrial life, especially associated with mortality. In this respect, we should note that there has been much debate about the best translation of *xianren*, here rendered as "immortal." "Immortal" suggests eternal life, while "transcendent" suggests going beyond ordinary existential and ontological modes. Both translations are viable, but limited (see Komjathy 2007a: 216). Throughout Chinese history, Daoists have also distinguished various types of immortals. For example, Ge Hong (Baopu [Embracing Simplicity]; 283–347) presented one of the earliest typologies of Daoist immortals.

TYPES OF DAOIST IMMORTALS

Superior adepts who rise up in their bodies and ascend to the Void are called celestial immortals (*tianxian*). Mid-level adepts who wander among renowned mountains are called terrestrial immortals (*dixian*). Lesser adepts who first die and then cast off [their shell] are called corpse-liberated immortals (*shijie xian*). (*Baopuzi neipian*, DZ 1185, 2.11a; see also Lai 1998; Campany 2002, especially 75-80)

In an influential and nearly standard late medieval expression, associated with the Zhong-Lü textual tradition (see Chapter 2), there are five types: "The immortals have five ranks, including ghost immortal, human immortal, terrestrial immortal, and spirit immortal. The celestial immortal is beyond rank. All of these are immortals" (*Chuandao ji*, DZ 263, 14.2b; also *Jinguan yusuo jue*, DZ 1156, 13a; Komjathy 2007a: 337–8; see also Wong 2000: 23–30). Many texts in turn describe the corresponding levels of attainment, degrees of rarification, as well as numinous abilities and divine qualities (see Chapter 11 herein; Komjathy 2007a: 216–38). In standard accounts, the "spirit immortals" and "celestial immortals" are highest.

Different periods of history and different movements have emphasized different immortals and Perfected. Some major early important figures include Zhang Daoling, Wei Huacun, Ge Hong, Lu Xiujing, Tao Hongjing, and Sima Chengzhen (see Chapter 2). This is not to mention important figures from classical Daoism (see Chapter 3) as well as the many names that appear in various Daoist hagiographies (biographies of saints) (see Chapters 3 and 4). In the case of contemporary Quanzhen Daoism and popular Daoist devotionalism, Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin are probably the most venerated. As documented in the Quanzhen liturgy (see Chapter 13) and as manifested in Quanzhen temple configuration and altars, there are three Quanzhen sets of immortals: (1) Five Northern Patriarchs, five key figures in early Quanzhen; (2) Five Southern Patriarchs, five key figures in the so-called Nanzong (Southern School) of internal alchemy; and (3) Seven Perfected, the seven senior Shandong disciples of Wang Zhe (see Chapter 2). The Five Northern Patriarchs include Wang Xuanpu (Donghua dijun), Zhongli Quan, Lü Dongbin, Liu Haichan, and Wang Zhe. Occasionally Laozi is added before Donghua dijun, and Liu Haichan is subtracted. Here the Five Southern Patriarchs include Zhang Boduan, Shi Tai, Xue Shi, Chen Nan, and Bai Yuchan. The Eight Immortals are a more popular and "trans-Daoist" (pan-Chinese) group. The most famous and popular list includes Cao Guojiu, Han Xiangzi, Han Zhongli (Zhongli Quan), He Xiangu, Lan Caihe, Li Tieguai, Lü Dongbin, and Zhang Guolao. There are many popular stories about these characters, both within Daoism and in late medieval and late imperial Chinese fiction and theatre. While there are many different meanings, devotionalism is a strong dimension of popular Daoist religiosity, including various forms of offering and petition. In this respect, immortals also become one dimension of pilgrimage and tourism: Chen Tuan is venerated at Huashan; Laozi at Louguan tai; Zhang Sanfeng at Wudang shan; and so forth (see Chapter 14).

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