

FOREWORD

by Louis Komjathy

On (Not) Being a Fish and Other Daoist Ramblings

Gazing into the surrounding ravines and towering oak trees of this forest retreat, I reflect on my three decades of involvement with Daoism, both in mainland China and the modern West. I think about a life committed to following a Daoist path, albeit an unconventional one as a scholar-practitioner. And I think of the alternations and oscillations of the Daoist tradition, its ongoing shift from an indigenous, culturally and ethnically Han Chinese religion to a now global community characterized by ethnic, cultural and linguistic diversity. This shift involves a multitude of expressions, with varying degrees of connection to Chinese Daoism as our source-tradition. For those of us living outside of Daoism's ancestral home and modern center in mainland China, we need opportunities and resources for deepening our understanding and practice of tradition-based Daoism. Johan Hausen's *The Arts of Daoism* represents an important offering. It provides an access-point to the headwaters of a particular stream (Wūdāng 武當) of contemporary Daoist practice-realization.

Fish thrive in water; humans thrive in the Dao.

Daoism is the Tradition of the Dao (*dàotǒng* 道統), with Dao (道/Tao/Way) being the sacred and ultimate concern of Daoists. Recall-

ing and reminding us about the numinous thread (糸) and mysterious movement (炁) underlying and pervading our lives. Source • Mystery • Presence • World. The Dao is the ocean towards which the river of Daoism flows and eventually returns. Daoist movements, like Quánzhēn 全真 (Complete Perfection) and Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity), are the streams flowing into the larger river of Daoism, while Daoist lineages, like Huàshān 華山 (Mount Hua) and Lóngmén 龍門 (Dragon Gate), are the branches flowing out of and into the movements. Waterways: Each of these represents a path home, especially if we have the right guides and learn to follow the currents. This is Daoism as Xuánfēng 玄風 (Mysterious Movement) and Xuánmén 玄門 (Mysterious Gate). Here Johan and his Chinese teachers (*shīfu* 師父) and Companions of the Dao (*dàoyou* 道友), both living and vanished, offer a taste from the wellsprings of Daoism. They provide guidance to being and living centered on inner cultivation and sacred connection.

In the Northern Darkness, there's a fish called Kūn.

We live in the Northern Darkness. This refers the Dao-as-Mystery, meditative absorption and mystical union, as well as the resultant “non-knowing” (*wúzhī* 無知) of advanced and realized Daoist practitioners. Knowledge Wandering North. “To know that you do not know is best; not to know that you are knowing is sickness.” Each of us is a Kūn 鯤 fish, a minnow in the immensity of the universe. Or are we, rather, an unknown and unimaged sea-creature (魚) comparable (比) to the sun (日)? Something that emerged from and lives in a mythical, immortal realm (崑). Recognizing our finitude leads to realizing that we are connected to the infinite. We are both absolutely significant *and* completely irrelevant. Here the Kūn fish becomes the great Péng 鵬 bird, a mythical bird whose wings extend across the known universe. This is expanded consciousness realized and transformed in/as/through dedicated and prolonged Daoist practice.

The Arts of Daoism provides insights from individuals committed to a Daoist way of life. It records some important glimpses of and from fish who have swam in the Northern Darkness. They emerge here to illuminate key dimensions of the mystery of both authentic Daoist practice and transformed Daoist being.

*Fish forget each other in rivers and lakes;
humans forget each other in the Arts of the Way.*

Daoists practice techniques of the Dao (*dàoshù* 道術), which are also referred to as “Arts of the Way,” or “Way-Arts” for short. These are methods that assist us in becoming attuned with and realizing the Dao. For such an excursion, we need an aspiration for the Dao (*dào* 道), the heart-mind (*xīn* 心) of an adept (*shì* 士). This is a spiritual approach and disposition characterized by commitment, honesty, humility, reliability, sincerity, stability, and the like. As Daoists, we aspire to realize the Dao (*dédào* 得道), to cultivate, embody, and transmit the Way in the world. We remain attentive to foundational Daoist views, views that inform and are informed by Daoist practice. One of the most important of these centers on innate nature (*xìng* 性), also referred to as “Dao-nature” (*dàoxìng* 道性). This is the heart-mind (*shí* 心) with which we were born (*shēng* 生). It is our original and inherent connection with the Dao. It becomes realized in/as/through stillness practice (*jìnggōng* 靜功), quiet sitting (*jìngzuò* 靜坐) in particular. Innate nature *is* stillness, and this inner silence *is* the Dao-as-Stillness. A single, unified hydrosphere. As the anonymous fourth-century BCE *Nèiyè* 內業 (Inward Training) tells us, “Inwardly still; outwardly reverent” (*nèijìng wàijìng* 內靜外敬). This is Daoist practice-realization rooted in stillness and expressed as reverence. Such is our innate nature. Daily internal and external application (*rìyòng* 日用). Along this canal, Johan and his collaborators provide reliable guidance on various Way-Arts, including grain-avoidance, quietistic meditation, sleeping practice, and dream practice. The

accompanying accounts commingle and coalesce insights from classical Daoist sources and contemporary practitioners.

*He didn't fish as though he were fishing for anything,
but as though his constant occupation was to fish.*

In our practice of tradition-based approaches and methods, we avoid excess focus on goals. We inhibit concern for fruition. We focus on fishing (practice/process) over the fish (experience/outcome). Then, in relaxed and carefree ease, our practice unfolds naturally and effortlessly. We find a subtle energetic support beyond egoic control or personal willfulness. *The Arts of Daoism* encourages us to remember practice, community, and tradition. As a record of training and dialogic exchange, it reminds us that we are dependent on one other for finding our way. This is Daoism as the way to the Way.

Once you get the fish, forget the fish-trap.

The purpose of the fish-trap is to get the fish. And, when making an axe, the pattern is not far off. Daoism is a fish-trap; the Dao is the fish. "Forced to name it, we call it 'Dao'." And "names are the guest of reality." Daoism, as the Tradition of the Dao, is a system of spiritual realization and transformation, leading to a transpersonal state of being and experiencing. It inspires and directs us to overcome the Three Obscurations (*sānhui* 三晦) of society, family, and self and the Three Poisons (*sāndú* 三毒) of money, fame, and power. For Daoist (non)attainment, we need fish-traps and models, ideally exemplars who are embodiments of tradition. Such fish-traps may include Daoist scriptures, teachings, methods, and so forth. When thinking about Daoism, or more appropriately *when practicing and living Daoism*, we must recognize that there are various outpourings and infusings. If we are fortunate, we discover a book like the present one. Here we may remind ourselves that Daoism, as a living and

lived practice modality and existential approach, consists of a series of aquifers and aqueducts. I view *The Arts of Daoism* as important partially because it represents a channel or viaduct between Chinese Daoism and so-called “Western Daoism,” whether in the northern or southern hemisphere. It represents a symphony of voices: classical texts, contemporary teachers, and committed students. Study-practice combined with oral instruction (*kōujué* 口訣). It charts a navigational path, opening a less familiar, perhaps even unexpected and new nautical route. The potency and efficacy will be increased exponentially when paired with other reliable guidebooks like Michael Saso’s *Teachings of Taoist Master Chuang* (1978), Bill Porter’s *Road to Heaven* (1993), Brock Silvers’ *The Taoist Manual* (2005), Adeline Herrou’s *A World of Their Own* (2013), and my own *Handbooks for Daoist Practice* (2008 [2003]). As Daoists, we are one community, a community of the Way, beyond ethnocultural identity, geographical distance, or temporal limitations. We participate in a historical and energetic continuum, simultaneously in and beyond ordinary time. Contemplative, immortal and sacred time(less)ness. Perhaps we may now imagine multiple voices from multiple places converging in a shared space of equal standing. Rooted in mutual respect and mutual support.

That’s what fish enjoy.

We walk along different riverbanks, near rivers inhabited by different fish. And yet each of us may observe how the fish come and go, playing in sunlight and shadows, dancing in the moonlight. We may (re)discover our shared animality and shared sacrality. This is the Joy of Fish (*yú zhī lè* 魚之樂), the true joy (*zhēnlè* 真樂) that is our original endowment and ownmost possibility. We are such fish. Swimming in the river of Daoism, finding our way towards the ocean of the Dao.

May this book serve as a beacon, leading you to the headwaters

and confluence of awakening. Returning to the Source (*guīgēn* 歸根). Home.

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