

A Note on The Orientalist Mind

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Although I have previously commented that any reference to so-called “philosophical Daoism” [*sic*] and so-called “religious Daoism” [*sic*] should be taken *ipso facto* as ignorance, confusion, and misunderstanding concerning the religious tradition *which is Daoism* (Komjathy 2013b, 2014a), see, e.g., Paul Fischer’s (Western Kentucky University) recent deficient (academic careerist) attempt to justify the fiction of so-called “philosophical Daoism” [*sic*] and the accompanying absurd comment about my critique and dismissal of the bifurcated/Leggean view: “Inasmuch as I have never met a philosopher or sinologist, Chinese or Western, who would agree with this claim, this matter may well be a case, within Western academia, of ‘if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail’” (“The Creation of Daoism” [2015], 17). Addressing Fischer’s metaphor, my work is perhaps better understood as a surgical scalpel or an alchemical furnace, although I would probably choose mountain wind. In any case, allow me to wield said imaginary hammer and add yet another death-blow to and nail in the coffin of “philosophical Daoism” [*sic*], and the “scholarship” that clings to this colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist construction. The invocation of “authority” and “trends” as support for absurd views is perhaps akin to saying that because members of QAnon believe in pedophilia-cult pizzerias, anyone who doesn’t must not understand “real pizzerias.” It is thus no coincidence that Fischer aligns himself with Roger Ames, Hans-Georg Moeller, and Steve Coutinho (*ibid.*, n. 33), quasi-philosophers who have little, if any actual understanding of (or direct experience with) Daoism as such. This is not to mention actual Daoists and an accompanying decolonial approach. We are, in turn, in need of an ethnography of this insular academic discourse community, with its accompanying “psyops” and “propo.” Unfortunately, just as the majority of Sinologists have no formal training in Religious Studies, while simultaneously working in such academic departments, the majority of scholars of so-called “Chinese philosophy” have no actual training in Daoist Studies. Simply stated, they begin with a series of false constructions and cognitive attachments and then proceed to conduct, read, and cite “scholarship” that reproduces said fabrication. This may be understood as a “conspiracy of ignorance” and “invincible ignorance,” perhaps somewhat surprising (though not at all) on the part of “educators” who present themselves as advocating and utilizing “critical thinking.” For actual scholarship on Daoism that both refutes Fischer’s misrepresentation of the field and advances the “classical Daoist alternative,” see the work of Russell Kirkland, Louis Komjathy, Michael LaFargue, Isabelle Robinet, Harold Roth, Michael Saso, and Kristofer Schipper. Here one also thinks of Zhuangist well-frogs and Tom Watts’ “Frank’s Wild Years.” See my *The Daoist Tradition* (2013); *Primer for Translating Daoist Literature* (2022); *Handbooks for Daoist Practice* (2023 [2003]); and *Dàodé jīng: A Contextual, Contemplative, and Annotated Bilingual Translation* (2023).