

New Daoist Studies

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New Daoist Studies (NDS) is an alternative, innovative, radical, and even subversive approach to Daoist Studies. “Daoist Studies” conventionally refers to the academic field dedicated to research and education on Daoism (Taoism), especially the Sinological study of Chinese Daoism as a historical artifact and opportunity for careerist advancement. In contrast, New Daoist Studies places the emphasis on *Daoist*. Specifically, New Daoist Studies utilizes a study-practice model (SPM), or at least an approach *informed by the Daoist tradition* as such. As decolonialist and non-Orientalist, it may be Daoist-inspired and/or Daoist-infused, or at least Daoist-informed. Ideally, such an approach to Daoist Studies also is informed by and informs the comparative and cross-cultural study of religion, especially as rooted in the larger scholarly discipline and field of Religious Studies. This includes the development and application of more sophisticated interpretive frameworks (e.g., Daoist Being and Identity, Seven Periods and Four Divisions, Models of Practice and Attainment). Simply stated, New Daoist Studies is collaborative, comparative, critical, Daoist-informed, decolonialist, engaged, egalitarian, historically-accurate, inclusive, integrated, merit-based, non-Orientalist, and theoretically-informed.

New Daoist Studies was first articulated in germinal form in Louis Komjathy’s 康思奇 *Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism* (Brill, 2007), which explicitly critiques mainstream Sinological (contemporary 19th-century Orientalist) approaches to Daoist Studies and is the first publication explicitly to utilize a Religious Studies approach. It was subsequently advanced through the Daoist Studies Unit (est. 2004) of the American Academy of Religion, which was primarily established through the organization and leadership of Louis Komjathy, who served two full three-year terms as Co-chair (2004-2010). New Daoist Studies was explicitly articulated in the panel “New Directions in Daoist Studies: Interdisciplinary Approaches to Lived Religion,” which was organized by Komjathy and held at the 2017 annual national meeting of the American Academy of Religion. The panel, which focused on three major and innovative new publications in Daoist Studies, consisted of the following individuals:

Presider: Michael Puett

Panelists: Louis Komjathy, James Miller, David Palmer, and Elijah Siegler

Respondent: Norman Girardot

Komjathy discussed his *Taming the Wild Horse: An Annotated Translation and Study of the Daoist Horse Taming Pictures* (Columbia University Press, 2017); Miller focused on his *China’s Green Religion: Daoism and the Quest for a Sustainable Future* (Columbia University Press, 2017); and Palmer and Siegler discussed their *Dream Trippers: Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality* (University of Chicago Press, 2017). These scholarly publications express and provide potential models for actual New Daoist Studies. The panel also was attended by various Strickmannians and members of The Sinological Mafia (TSM), including Stephen Bokenkamp, Terry Kleeman, David Mozina, and Gil Raz, among others.

New Daoist Studies has been further and explicitly established through the Center for Daoist Studies 道學中心 (CDS; est. 2003), which is under the direction of Louis Komjathy, and his more recent *Primer for Translating Daoist Literature* 道文翻譯入門 (Purple Cloud Press, 2022). The latter

includes an advocacy statement on New Daoist Studies, as utilizing a scholar-practitioner approach (SPA) and critical adherent discourse (CAD), as well as a discussion of what Komjathy refers to as “Daoist translation” (*dàojiào fānyì* 道教翻譯).

New Daoist Studies was, in turn, coopted by the academic politicians and technocrats Stephen Bokenkamp and Lai Chi-tim in the namesake series (est. 2019) through the University of Hawaii Press. This was done without acknowledgement of the inspiration and influence of Komjathy, and in fact involved intentional exclusion and erasure of his work. The so-called New Daoist Studies Series [*sic*] actually is Old Daoist Studies (ODS) conducted by younger scholars, usually Bokenkamp acolytes and vassals, utilizing conventional Sinological approaches and reproducing the status quo (or worse).

New Daoist Studies	Old Daoist Studies
Sacred Site	Museum
Old Growth Forest	Strip Mall
Wild Animal	Taxidermy Trophy
Intact Culture	Artifact

Framing Metaphors for Understanding Daoism

In contrast, actual New Daoist Studies is being advanced through the Center for Daoist Studies, the education and research branch of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (est. 2007), a non-profit Daoist educational and religious organization and public charity dedicated to fostering authentic Daoist study and practice and to preserving and transmitting traditional Daoist culture (*dàojiào wénhuà* 道教文化). Some defining characteristics including the following:

- ~ Recognition of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism as the beginning and foundation of the Daoist tradition
- ~ Documentation of the entire breadth and depth of the Daoist tradition(s) and the full spectrum of Daoist adherence, affiliation, and participation
- ~ Exploration of lineal connections and connective strands throughout the Daoist tradition, including “Daoism-between-Daoism” (ca. 140 BCE-140 CE)
- ~ Utilization of sophisticated interpretive frameworks, especially those established and expounded in Louis Komjathy’s *The Daoist Tradition* (Bloomsbury Academic, 2013)
- ~ Engagement with comparative Religious Studies, especially theory and method derived from and applicable to the comparative and cross-cultural study of “religion”
- ~ Commitment to creating reliable scholarly and literary translations of Daoist literature informed by a Daoist scholar-practitioner approach (SPA) with the aspiration to create “Daoist translations” (*dàojiào fānyì* 道教翻譯)
- ~ Dynamic and inclusive bibliographies and citation based on merit