Posted on the Alternate Homepage of Dr. Louis Komjathy (www.louiskomjathy.com). September 15, 2025.

Western Daoist Literature:
A Remedial Selection

Louis Komjathy, Ph.D.
Center for Daoist Studies 道學中心

This occasional piece is intended as a remedy for the catastrophically deficient and hermeneutically misleading, even academically irresponsible selection on so-called "Western Daoism" in the *Norton Anthology of World Religions: Daoism* (NAWR; 2017; Jack Miles, General Editor), which was edited by James Robson 羅柏松 (Harvard University; formerly University of Michigan). In addition to conventional secular materialist and social constructivist assumptions, part of the reason for said deficiency is the fact that Robson is a scholar of *Chinese Buddhism*, not Daoism.[*] Like most mainstream Sinologists (e.g., Strickmannians/The Sinological Mafia [TSM]), Robson has the mistaken view that so-called "Western Daoism" is equivalent to the fiction of Popular Western Taoism (PWT), a view that is perpetuated rather than rectified in the *Norton Anthology*. In contrast, there are, in fact, tradition-based Daoists, including Daoist ordinands, and Daoist communities in the West. Although some of the publications listed below are problematic, they are more relevant for understanding and more representative of Daoism in the West. From my perspective, the latter, including so-called "Western Daoism," is part of global Daoism, which is rooted in and connected to Chinese Daoism as source-tradition. (P) indicates popular publications, which lack a deep root in the Daoist tradition and often express deficient views. Some, like those published through popular spiritualist presses (e.g., Shambhala, Singing Dragon, Tuttle), also are connected to spiritual colonialism and spiritual capitalism. Observant readers will note that some of the publications post-date the *Norton Anthology*; there is, of course, no reason to be limited by time as a Daoist. As with most of my current work, there is a vision and aspiration for an impossible future-past.

~

Blofeld, John (1913-1987). 1973(P). ***The Secret and the Sublime: Taoist Mysteries and Magic***. London: George Allen & Unwin.

One of the earliest popular and influential accounts of lived/living Daoism. Noteworthy for its engagement with contemporaneous Daoists and Daoist communities in mainland China. Nonetheless, tainted by Orientalist exoticism and Romanticism. Although Blofeld was not a Daoist adherent, perhaps best understood as a Daoist sympathizer, he was highly influential on the "Daoist travelogue genre" (cf. Porter, Silvers) and the formation and development of Popular Western Taoism (PWT).

---

[*] The anthology was originally supposed to be edited by Stephen Bokenkamp 柏夷 (Arizona State University; formerly Indiana University), who was replaced by Robson when he failed to complete the project (Wendy Doniger, pers. comm.). Oddly and tellingly, almost *none* of the translations were composed by Robson, as Robson is not a translator of Daoist literature. Cf. Livia Kohn's 柯恩 *The Taoist Experience* (1993) and Louis Komjathy's 康思奇 *Primer for Translating Daoist Literature* (2022). See also Komjathy's "Daoist Literature in Translation: An Annotated Catalogue" (2022/2024).

Chen Kaiguo and Zheng Shunchao. 1996(P). ***Opening the Dragon Gate: The Making of a Modern Taoist Wizard***. Translated by Thomas Cleary. North Clarendon, VT: Tuttle. (Reissued as *Finding a Life of Harmony and Balance: A Taoist Master's Path to Wisdom* [2024] [!])

Modern hagiography (spiritual fiction?) of Wáng Lìpíng 王力平 (a.k.a. Wáng Yǒngshēng 王永生; b. 1949), a mainland Chinese self-identified lay Lóngmén 龍門 (Dragon Gate) Daoist and potential spiritual fraudster. Helped lead to the recognition and promotion of Wáng, with accompanying spiritual celebritydom and spiritual capitalism. Increasingly influential through various translations of Wáng's writings (e.g., by Mark Bartosh/Livia Kohn, Nathan Brine, Richard Liao) and associated claims of "lineage connections." Spiritual business along the lines of the earlier Healing Tao/Universal Tao. *Opening the Dragon Gate* may be compared to various other "Daoist biographies," including auto-hagiographies, of Oriental Monks (OM)/Taoist Masters (TM).† Now one of the primary genres of Western Daoist literature, with various individuals writing their own promotional accounts. Some other examples include *Become the Master Within* (2012; Yun Xiang Tseng/Wu Dang Chen [?]), *Chronicles of Tao* (1993; Kwan Sai Hung), *Nine Nights with the Taoist Master* (2005; Waysun Liao), *Still Point of the Turning World* (2014; Gia-fu Feng), *Steal My Art* (2002; T.T. Liang), *The Magus of Java* (2000; John Chang) (see also *Ring of Fire* documentary), and *The Valley Spirit* (2013; Lindsey Wei). Raises the question: Is autobiography a Daoist genre? And what is the relationship between egoism/narcissism and internal alchemy?

Chia, Mantak, and William U. Wei. 2009(P). ***Living in the Tao: The Effortless Path of Self-Discovery***. Rochester, VT: Destiny Books.

A general-audience discussion of "Daoist practice" by one of the earliest first-generation immigrant Thai-Chinese and self-identified Taoist Masters (TM; via the Oriental Monk [OM]). Chia was the founder of the new religious movement (NRM) Healing Tao (HT)/Universal Tao (UT) (United States/Thailand). Although largely a work of Popular Western Taoism (PWT) rooted in hybrid spirituality, provides a window into one of the more influential popular self-identified Daoist teachers. Includes Chia's nonsensical, though influential emphasis on so-called "Daoist sexual yoga" [*sic*], with Chia possibly being the originator of the so-called "Tao of Sex/Taoist sex" literary genre. Compare (avoid) the work of Jolan Chang, Stephan Chang, B.K. Frantzis, Hsi Lai (Stuart Alve Olson), Daniel Reid, Eric Yudelove, and many, many others. Also influenced other HT/PWT adherents, including Michael Winn et al., and various Western engagements with internal alchemy (*nèidān* 內丹), at least nominally speaking.

Cleary, Thomas (1949-1991). 1991(P). ***Vitality, Energy, Spirit: A Taoist Sourcebook***. Boston: Shambhala.

Earliest modern anthology of translations of Daoist literature. Although Cleary was not a Daoist and his translations have various deficiencies, often more closely resembling paraphrase than translation as such, his work as been highly influential on Western Daoists. This includes scholars of Daoism, although the latter rarely acknowledge such influence. For example, much of the

† On the "Taoist Master" (TM), which is an Orientalist construct and now-ethnic Chinese and trans-Chinese commercialist/consumerist performance, see the corresponding occasional piece on my Alternate Homepage.

Western interest in the Lóngmén 龍門 (Dragon Gate) lineage of Quánzhēn 全眞 (Complete Perfection) Daoism in general and Liú Yīmíng 劉一明 (Wùyuán 悟元 [Awakening-to-the-Origin]; 1734-1821) in particular is indebted to Cleary. The current work also early on (1990s) influenced Louis Komjathy 康思奇, the founding Co-director and senior teacher of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (United States; est. 2007), and his "replacement volume" *The Way of Complete Perfection* (2013).

Hammond, Holly. 1995. "**Being Human Is Nothing Extraordinary: An Interview with Liu Ming**." *Yoga Journal* May/June 1995: 72-75, 143-45.

An early interview with the self-identified and now-discredited Euro-American Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priest Liu Ming 劉明 (Charles Belyea; 1947-2015), the founder of the now-defunct Orthodox Daoism in America (ODA; 1986-2004). While problematic, includes Liu Ming's germinal views concerning "Daoist naturalness." Influenced a variety of eventual Liu Ming students and ODA community members.

Hsien Yuen 玄元 (Xuányuán; ca. 1935-2013). 1988. ***The Taoism of Sage Religion: Tan Ting Sitting Meditation***. New York: North Pole Gold Temple & Temple of Transcendental Wisdom.

A highly esoteric and even quasi-mediumistic self-published manual of Daoist practice and lifeways. Hsien Yuen was an ordained immigrant Taiwanese Daoist priest, who maintained a formal Daoist temple in New York City's Chinatown. He had some connections with the second-generation American Daoism scholars Norman Girardot 吉瑞德 (formerly Lehigh University) and Michael Saso 蘇海涵 (formerly University of Hawai'i, Manoa). Although the book includes a variety of theistic and ritualistic dimensions that may be perplexing, even disturbing to the uninitiated, it contains interesting technical instructions on "Dāndǐng 丹鼎 [Cinnabar Cauldron] Meditation," that is, internal alchemy (*nèidān* 內丹).

Kohn, Livia 柯恩. 2002. ***Living with the Dao: Conceptual Issues in Daoist Practice***. E-dao (electronic) publication. Cambridge, MA: Three Pines Press. (Print version released in 2011)

While primarily rooted in an academic approach and theoretical materials, this book represents an early attempt to discuss Daoist identity. Note that Kohn is *not* a Daoist adherent and often is misidentified (and misidentifies) as a surrogate for tradition. The later Kohn (post-2012) also increasingly expresses PWT views and even adherence.

Komjathy, Louis 康思奇. 2023 (2003). ***Handbooks for Daoist Practice*** 修道手冊. Twentieth Anniversary Edition. 3 vols. Ravinia, IL: Square Inch Press 方寸書社.

The first and only tradition-based Daoist translation series, especially intended for Daoist adherents and Daoist community. One of the earliest third-generation Western Daoists, Komjathy is a Euro-American Daoist scholar-practitioner, ordained Quánzhēn 全眞 (Complete Perfection) Daoist priest, and Co-founder (with Kate Townsend) of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (United States; est. 2007) and associated Clarity-and-Stillness Order 清靜道 (CSO; a.k.a. Order

of Daoist Contemplatives [ODC]). Rooted in an inner cultivation approach and "Daoist translation" (*dàojiào fānyì* 道教翻譯), the series consists of nine individual handbooks. Also the primary sourcebook of the Daoist Foundation community and the focus of their scripture study meetings. (Note that the earlier edition has been used as the basis of various plagiarized popular translations.)

Komjathy, Louis 康思奇, and Kate Townsend 唐鄉恩. 2022. ***Entering Stillness: A Guide to Daoist Practice*** 入靜指南. Ravinia, IL: Square Inch Press 方寸書社.

One of the few Daoist guides to tradition-based Daoist practice-realization (cf. *The Arts of Daoism* and *The Taoist Manual*). In terms of selections, the introduction and "Stillness" chapter might be engaged as primary. Also includes a more sophisticated discussion of Daoist adherence and being than other (non)parallel publications (e.g., Olson, Silvers, Wong). Also the primary practice manual of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (United States; est. 2007) community and utilized as the "textbook" for the Second-Year Training (SYT) of the American Daoist Seminary 美國道教學院 (ADS; est. 2024).

Liu Ming 劉明 (Charles Belyea; 1947-2015). 2001. "**Daoist Meditation: Zuowang**." *Frost Bell: The Newsletter of Orthodox Daoism in America* Winter 2001: 1, 4-11.

Although Liu Ming is a now-discredited Euro-American Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priest, he was the founding-teacher of the now-defunct Orthodox Daoism in America (ODA; 1986-2004). Nonetheless, this article includes some interesting information on Liu Ming's presentation and practice of *reconstructed* Daoist *zuòwàng* 坐忘 ("sitting-in-forgetfulness) meditation. Also influenced various later self-proclaimed "lineage successors" [*sic*] and connected to the current corpse-cult and ghost-shrine of Da Yuan Circle (DYC).

Ni Hua-ching 倪化清 (a.k.a. OmNi). 1997(P). ***Entering the Tao: Master Ni's Guide for Self-Cultivation***. Boston: Shambhala.

A general-audience discussion of "Daoist practice" by one of the earliest first-generation immigrant Taiwanese and self-identified Taoist Masters (TM; via the Oriental Monk [OM]). Ni was the founder of the so-called College of Tao and Universal Society of the Integral Way (USIW; United States). Although largely a work of Popular Western Taoism (PWT) rooted in hybrid spirituality, provides a window into one of the more influential popular "Daoist" teachers. Also influenced other PWT adherents, including Solala Towler et al.

Olson, Stuart Alve (1950-2025). 2014(P). ***Being Daoist: The Way of Drifting with the Current***. Rev. ed. Phoenix, AZ: Valley Spirit Arts.

One of the earliest, explicit book-length Western Daoist attempts to discuss Daoist identity. Although Olson had no formal standing in the Daoist tradition, the book offers a popular construction by one of the more influential self-identified, second-generation Western Daoist teachers. As an exercise in identity politics, may be partially read as a response to the identity

constructions of Michael Saso, Liu Ming, and Brock Silvers, with the latter two influenced by Saso. May be compared to Eva Wong's *Being Taoist* (2015).

Orthodox Daoism in America (ODA). 1998. ***The Blue Book: A Text Concerning Orthodox Daoist Conduct***. 3rd ed. Santa Cruz, CA: Orthodox Daoism in America.

The earliest and one of the only Western Daoist precept manuals. Primarily a collection of (unattributed) academic translations by Stephen Bokenkamp 柏夷 (Arizona State University; formerly Indiana University), Barbara Hendrischke 芭芭拉 (Universität Wien/University of Vienna), and Benjamin Penny 裴凝 (Australian National University), reworked and modified by the self-identified and now-discredited Euro-American Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priest Liu Ming 劉明 (Charles Belyea; 1947-2015). (Liu Ming only had rudimentary Chinese language facility.) Influenced Livia Kohn's 柯恩 *Cosmos and Community* (2004).

Paynter, Joshua, and Jack Schaefer. 2024 (2019). ***Daoist Morning and Evening Altar Recitations***. 3rd ed. New York: Parting Clouds Press.

A complete annotated translation of the *Quánzhēn gōngkè* 全眞功課 (Liturgy of Complete Perfection; ZW 936/ZW 937), also known as the *Xuánmén gōngkè* 玄門功課 (Liturgy of the Mysterious Gate). This is the primary "hymnal" or "missal" of modern Quánzhēn ritual, specifically as centering on morning and evening daily recitation (*rìsòng* 日誦) before the central Daoist altar (*dàotán* 道壇) in observant Quánzhēn monasteries and temples (*dàoguàn* 道觀). Although the translation is often inaccurate and the annotations sometimes insufficient, provides English access to the text. Also used for catechetical purposes in the Parting Clouds Daoist Education 美國清雲道院 (United States) system.

Porter, Bill. 1993. ***The Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits***. San Francisco: Mercury House.

A travelogue focusing on modern Buddhist and Daoist hermits. Note that Porter is not a Daoist and more closely resembles a literatus-recluse with some Daoist sympathies. While the book largely consists of Buddhist content, it does include an interview with Xuē Tàiláí 薛泰來 (1924-2001), the master-father (*shīfu* 師父) of Chén Yǔmíng 陳宇明 (b. 1969) and master-grandfather (*shīye* 師爺) of Louis Komjathy 康思奇 (Xiūjìng 修靜 [Cultivating Stillness]; Wànruì 萬瑞 [Myriad Blessings]; b. 1971) and Kate Townsend 唐鄉恩 (Bàojìng 抱靜 [Embracing Stillness]; Wànqīng 萬清 [Myriad Clarities]; b. 1962), the Co-founders of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 (est. 2007) and associated Clarity-and-Stillness Order 清靜道 (CSO; a.k.a. Order of Daoist Contemplatives [ODC]). May be compared to John Blofeld's *The Secret and the Sublime* (1973) and Brock Silvers' *Seeking Immortals* (2024).

Saso, Michael 蘇海涵. 1978. ***The Teachings of Taoist Master Chuang***. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press. (2nd ed.: *Taoist Master Chuang* [Sacred Mountain Press, 2000]; 3rd ed.: *The Teachings of Daoist Master Zhuang* [Oracle Bones Press, 2012])

The earliest Western account of a tradition-based Daoist priest and associated Daoist community. Focuses on the Taiwanese Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priest Zhuāng-Chén Dēngyún 莊陳登雲 (1911-1976), who also ordained Saso as a Zhèngyī priest. Also has accompanying online Saso-narrated ethnographic video footage of the associated Jiào 醮-offering ritual. The object of an academic careerist hit-piece by the disgraced American Francophile Sinologist and miscreant Michel Strickmann 司馬虛 (Michael Strickman; 1942-1994). Thus the book often is disparaged in mainstream Daoist Studies and by individuals who have not engaged it directly. Technically not part of "Western Daoist literature," but highly influential on tradition-based Western Daoists. For example, influenced Liu Ming 劉明 (Charles Belyea; 1947-2015; Orthodox Daoism in America [ODA; defunct]), with the latter apparently lifting at least part of his fictional Daoist autobiography from Saso, and Brock Silvers (Taoist Restoration Society [TRS; defunct]).

Schipper, Kristofer 施舟人 (1934-2021). 1993 (1982). ***The Taoist Body***. Translated by Karen Duval. Berkeley: University of California Press.

One of the most important introductions to Daoism as a lived/living religious tradition. Although technically an academic publication, Schipper, a prominent second-generation/third-generation Dutch scholar of Daoism, also was an ordained Zhèngyī 正一 (Orthodox Unity) Daoist priest. Along with Michael Saso 蘇海涵 (b. 1930), Schipper was the earliest known Western Daoist priest and first-generation Daoist scholar-practitioner. While neither Saso nor Schipper explicitly utilized a scholar-practitioner approach (SPA), they provided a model for and some influence on Louis Komjathy 康思奇. The book also has influenced various tradition-based Western Daoists, including members of the Clarity-and-Stillness Order 清靜道 (CSO) via its discussion of the importance and meaning of mountains in Daoism.

Shijing 世靜. 1999. ***Eight Brocades Tao Yin and Meditation***. Epping, Essex: British Taoist Association.

A simple discussion of Daoist Quiet Sitting (*jìngzuò* 靜坐; a.k.a. "Tranquil Sitting") and basic Dǎoyǐn 導引 (Guide Stretching). Primarily important for providing a window into Daoist training under Shijing 世靜 (Global Stillness; Alan Redman), the Co-founder and President of the British Daoist Association 英國道教協會 (BDA; est. 1996). May be compared to Ni Hua-ching's *Attune Your Body with Dao-In* (1989), Stuart Alve Olson's *Eight Brocades Seated Ch'i-Kung* (1997), Mantak Chia's *Tao Yin* (1999), and Yang Jwing-Ming's *Simple Qigong Exercises for Health* (2013), among others.

Silvers, Brock. 2005. ***The Taoist Manual: Applying Taoism to Daily Life***. Nederland, CO: Sacred Mountain Press.

The first Western Daoist attempt to provide an introduction to tradition-based Daoist lifeways. Although deficient in terms of Daoist view and Daoist practice, includes Silvers' problematic discussion of "being a Daoist" (1-13). The latter, along with the earlier writings of Michael Saso and parallel writings of Liu Ming, was influential on various tradition-based Western constructions of Daoist identity, including the third generation of Daoist ordinands. The author is a Lóngmén 龍門 (Dragon Gate) Daoist initiate and the founder and principal moderator of the now-defunct Taoist Restoration Society (TRS; 1993-2006). Strongly influenced by the related (problematic) views of Michael Saso 蘇海涵 (b. 1930; formerly University of Hawai'i, Manoa). May be compared to Xìng Dé and Johan Hausen's *The Arts of Daoism* (2021) and to Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend's *Entering Stillness* (2022). The latter is more informed and sophisticated on Daoist adherence and being.

Towler, Solala. 1996(P). ***A Gathering of Cranes: Bringing the Tao to the West***. Eugene, OR: Abode of the Eternal Tao.

Highly problematic popular account (construction) of so-called "Western Daoism." Primarily relevant for understanding how a prominent PWT adherent (mis)constructs "Daoism." Towler also was the founding editor of *The Empty Vessel* magazine, which is one of the primary mouthpieces of and platforms for Popular Western Taoism, although the so-called *Journal of Daoist Studies* (Livia Kohn, ed.) also has become instrumental in its enablement and perpetuation. (Note that Towler also has, instructively, published various versions of classical Daoist materials, even though his Chinese language facility is non-existent.)

Wong, Eva. 2015(P). ***Being Taoist: Wisdom for Living a Balanced Life***. Boston: Shambhala.

One of the earliest, explicit book-length Western Daoist attempts to discuss Daoist identity. Eva Wong, the (post-Cleary) Taoist darling of Shambhala, is an immigrant Hong Kong Daoist practitioner with earlier connections to Fung Loy Kok (FLK)/Taoist Tai Chi Society (TTCS), although this connection was subsequently whitewashed from her autobiography. Wong's actual Daoist training and standing are unclear. Offers a popular construction by one of the more influential second-generation Western Daoist teachers. As an exercise in identity politics, may be partially read as a response to the identity constructions of Michael Saso, Liu Ming, and Brock Silvers, with the latter two influenced by Saso. May be compared to Stuart Alve Olson's *Being Daoist* (2014).

Xìng Dé 興德. 2021. ***The Arts of Daoism***. Translated by Johan Hausen and Allen Tsaur. Auckland, New Zealand: Purple Cloud Press 紫雲出版社.

Contains teachings and practices associated with Lǐ Xìngdé 李興德 (b. 1964), the abbot of Wǔxiān miào 五仙廟 (Five Immortals Temple) of Mount Wǔdāng 武當 (Shíyàn 十堰, Húběi) and Hausen's own master-father (*shīfu* 師父). Along with Zhāng Míngxīn 張明心 (b. 1952; Jiànfú gōng 建福宮 [Qīngchéng shān 青城山]), Lǐ Xìngdé is one of the principal contemporary mainland

Chinese ordainers of Western Daoists, often without the requisite training or discernment, especially with respect to character. Although technically not part of "Western Daoist literature," provides a glimpse into materials associated with one of the more influential contemporary mainland Chinese Daoist teachers, especially with respect to Western Daoist Wǔdāng ordinands. May be compared to Brock Silvers' *The Taoist Manual* (2005) and to Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend's *Entering Stillness* (2022).

Yīn Shìh Tzu 因是子 (1873-1958). 1995(P). ***Tranquil Sitting: A Taoist Journal on the Theory, Practice, and Benefits of Meditation***. Translated by Shi Fu Hwang and Cheney Crow. Saint Paul, MN: Dragon Door Publications.

Select translation of the *Yīnshìzǐ jìngzuò fǎ* 因是子靜坐法 (Master Yinshi's Methods of Quiet Sitting; JH 22), a key work on Daoist Quiet Sitting (*jìngzuò* 靜坐) by Jiǎng Wéiqiáo 蔣維橋 (Yīnshì 因是 [Adaptive Presence]; 1872-1954). Jiǎng was a lay Daoist practitioner and central figure in the development of Qìgōng 氣功 (Ch'ì-kūng; Energy Work/Qi Exercise). Influential on the associated Western Daoist meditation practice. Other translations include those by Lu K'uan Yü 陸寬昱 (Charles Luk; 1898-1978) (1964), Livia Kohn (1993), and Yang Shuhui and Yang Yunqin (2012). May be compared to the account in Louis Komjathy and Kate Townsend's *Entering Stillness* (2022).

Zhang Jiyu 張繼禹. 2001. "**A Declaration of the Chinese Daoist Association on Global Ecology**." In *Daoism and Ecology*, edited by Norman Girardot et al, 361-72. Cambridge, MA: Center for the Study of World Religions, Harvard University Press.

Although not "Western Daoist literature" per se, this is a widely circulated and influential early statement on "Daoism and ecology" by the Zhōngguó dàojiào xiéhuì 中國道教協會 (Chinese Daoist Association [CDA]/Chinese Taoist Association [CTA]), the primary PRC bureaucratic organization overseeing Daoism in mainland China. At the time, Zhāng Jìyǔ 張繼禹 (b. 1962), one of the alleged claimants of the title of 65th Celestial Master, was the Vice-President of the national CDA/CTA. The statement has, in turn, been instrumental in influencing the modern construction of Daoism as "China's green religion," including among various Western Daoist adherents and sympathizers. This is not to mention Orientalist connoisseurs of "Daoism." May be compared to Louis Komjathy's occasional piece "Daoism and Ecology: A Modest Proposal (Which Will Not be Adopted)" (2022).