

CIS BULLETIN: TAOISM (DAOISM)

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Lao-Tzu

Taoism began in the 6th century B. C. in China when Lao-Tzu, whose life overlapped that of the better known Chinese philosopher, Confucius, began teaching a philosophy that people should lead a natural and simple life.

There is much uncertainty about Lao-Tzu so Western students have some difficulty understanding the reported founder of Taoism. For example, his name has alternate spellings (Lao Tze, Lao Tsu, Lao Tzu, Laozi, Laotze, etc.).

Little is known about Lao-Tzu. Even his historical existence is strongly debated. His name is probably a title – it means “old master” or perhaps “old child.” Some legends state he was born with white hair after his mother carried him in her womb for eight years – some say it was eighty years! (In either case, I am certain she had white hair.)

Confucius claims to have met Lao-Tzu. Confucius told his disciples,

Of birds I know that they have wings to fly with, of fish that they have fins to swim with, of wild beasts that they have feet to run with. For feet there are traps, for fins nets, for wings arrows. But who knows how dragons surmount wind and cloud into heaven. This day I have seen Lao Tzu. Today, I have seen a dragon. (Huston Smith, *The Religions of Man* (New York: Harper & Row, 1958), p. 198.

Yet some scholars say he did not live until two hundred years after Confucius.

Taoism is sometimes spelled Daoism. A google search found 718,000 sites spelling the word as Taoism; 408,000 sites spelling it as Daoism.

Tao Te Ching (*The Way and its Power*) is the main Taoist text. It is also called *Dao De Jing*. Many believe Lao Tzu wrote it; others believe it was written by several philosophers two hundred years after Lao-Tzu died.

Tao Te Ching focuses on the nature of life, the path to peace, and the ways a person should lead his life. Some scholars believe Lao Tzu wrote the book in an attempt to overcome the almost constant warfare and conflict taking place during his lifetime. This short 5,000-word book is popular with Americans and can be found in most major book stores.

There are approximately 20 million Taoists

worldwide, with most living on Taiwan. Many Chinese, wherever they live, hold to the three main Chinese philosophies/religions (Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism) at the same time. They may also add Chinese folk religions (animism) to their religious life. About 30,000 Taoists live in the United States. Their numbers are slowly increasing as can be seen by the article on page 2 on this bulletin about the new Hui-Tz Taoist Temple being completed in Duluth, Georgia. Taoism has had a major impact on American culture through acupuncture, herbalism, holistic medicine, meditation, chiropractic, and martial arts (Tai Chi, etc.)



A legend states that Lao-Tzu worked as an archivist. At some point he quit his work, some the legend goes, climbed on his water buffalo and headed west, never to be seen again. As he approached the western-most gate of the Great Wall, a guard convinced him to write down his philosophy.

Lao-Tzu's response to the soldier's request was the *Tao Te Ching*. It is more likely that Lao-Tzu's students wrote down many of his saying which began the *Tao Te Ching*.

Taoist Beliefs

The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you've gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you've gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you've gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him? (*The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*, p. 302. Chuang-tzu, a Taoist Master or Sage, allegedly lived in the 4th century B.C.)

- The main belief of Taoism is the belief in Tao. Tao is generally translated into English as “Path” or “Way.”

The Way (Tao) is like an empty vessel
That yet may be drawn from
Without ever needing to be filled.

It is bottomless;
the very progenitor of all things in the world.
(*Tao Te Ching*, translation by Arthur Wesley)

- Tao is the cause of existence and flows through everything.
 - The Tao is the path a person must follow in life. It is a code of behavior.
 - The Tao is the universal force that underlies the nature of all things.
 - The problem in life is that we do not follow the Tao; therefore we have disharmony and disorder in our lives. Self-assertiveness and competition are examples of not following the Tao.

Who is puffed up cannot stand,
Who is self-absorbed has no distinction,
Who is self-revealing does not shine,
Who is self-assertive has not merit,
Who is self-praising does not last long.
As for the Way (Tao), we may say these are
“excess provisions and extra baggage.”
Creation abhors such extravagances.
Therefore,
One who aspires to the Way,
does not abide in them.

(Victor H. Mair, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 86)

- Taoists seek the solutions to life's problems through personal meditation and observation.
 - All Taoists must learn to live in harmony with nature, according to the Yin and Yang.
 - The development of virtue is the Taoist's chief task.
 - All Taoists should live by the Three Jewels of Taoism:

- Compassion — leads to courage
- Moderation — leads to generosity
- Humility — leads to leadership

- The ultimate goal of Taoism is to become one with the Tao.
 - For Taoists, this means leading a natural and simple life.
 - Nature is to be befriended. When Mt. Everest was climbed, people around the world spoke of the “conquest of Everest.” A Taoist would put it differently; he would have spoken of the “befriending of Everest.”

The Taoist love of nature has had a profound influence on Chinese art. It can be contrasted with Asian Indian art which emphasized the Hindu gods. Chinese artists made nature their subjects; trees and water, a man riding a buffalo suggested the Taoists' love for nature,

the here and now, rather than the afterlife as found in Hindu architecture.

Yin and Yang

Yin and Yang are two opposing types of energy or contrasting forces. Yin is described as yielding, passive, negative, dark, cold and female. Yang is dynamic, assertive, positive, light, hot and male. The two energies are opposite each other yet depend upon each other. One energy without the other leads to disharmony.

Ancient proverb: “All sunshine makes a desert.”

Yin may become yang and vice versa, just as day become night, cold becomes hot, and there reverse. There is always a little yin in yang, and yang in yin, as the symbol to the right shows.



For Taoists, the objective is to reach and maintain harmony with the Yin and Yang, which is the Tao or way. When this harmony is reached, enlightenment will be achieved. Enlightenment comes when Taoists accept the plainness of their lives. Enlightenment cannot be found in doctrine, rather it is found when one's energy is balanced and one's mind is clear.

A Taoist who reaches enlightenment by following the Tao is referred to as a *sage* or *master*. A sage or master is said to have the following characteristics:

- an openness to life
- tranquility
- simplicity
- genius
- reserve
- they lack arrogance
- they do not discriminate against opposites
- they are indifferent to worldly affairs.

Religious Taoism

During the Han dynasty (206 B.C. - A. D. 220), Lao-Tzu was deified; he remains one of the most important deities in religious Taoism (Not all Taoists are religious.).

Religious Taoism does not have a God like the God of the Judeo-Christian faiths. There is no omnipotent being beyond the cosmos, who created and controls the universe. In Taoism everything springs from the impersonal Tao. One may hear Taoists refer to Lao-Tzu as “Lord Lao.”

The Taoist god is subject to the Tao. They may have once been virtuous humans.

There are a hierarchy of gods in religious Taoism.

Yu-huang, the Jade Emperor, is the great High God of the Taoists. He rules heaven and all other Taoist gods

must report to him. According to a Taoist myth, he was once an emperor's son.

The Three Pure Ones, Jade Pure, Upper Pure, and Great Pure, are not rules as such. They are believed to be manifestations of Lao Tzu who seek to save humans through teaching and benevolence.

The Three Officials keep an account of good and evil deeds and can grant happiness, forgiveness of sins and can remove evil.

Chang Tao-ling (A. D. 157-178) is believed to have been the founder of the Yellow Turban Taoists and the Five Bushels of Rice sect of religious Taoism. He is said to have discovered the elixir of immortality, swallowed it, and ascended to heaven, leaving his secrets, including his seals and demon-dispelling sword, with his son. The current leader of the Five Bushels of Rice sect is the 63rd and lives on Taiwan.



This Taoist priest was sent by his monastery in China to teach Taoism to Americans and to start a Taoist temple in New York State. He speaks excellent English and has a most pleasant personality. I enjoyed my visit with him when he spoke at a Unity School of Christianity meeting in Atlanta several years ago.

Finally, the Eight Immortals live in heaven. Some of these became immortal by eating peaches of immortality.

They are modeled on historical figures. One was a medical doctor, another a noble. Others were a handicapped person, a woman, a youth, and one was a hermit. He is believed to have had a magic mule which could travel thousands of miles a day. When he reached his destination the mule would turn to paper and he would fold it up and put it in his pocket. To revive it he unfolded it and spurted water on it with his mouth.

Some of the gods cultivated powers that could transform base metals to gold. Some gods now dwell in the North Star.

As can be seen, among the important features of religious Taoism are the belief in physical immortality, alchemy, astrology, breath control and hygiene (purifying baths).

Vitalizing Taoism

In addition to philosophical and religious Taoism, a third current of Taoism is sometimes called

“vitalizing Taoism” which seeks to increase the flow of Tao within a person or some object, such as a building, through movement, placing of objects and use of the mind. This kind of Taoism emphasizes the Tao’s life-force, or chi, which is said to flow through everything. Sometimes spelled ki or qi, chi is literally translated as “air” or “breath.” This idea has long been a part of Chinese philosophy and practice.

According to theories of traditional Chinese medicine, the human body has natural channels, called meridians in English, through which chi circulates. When this flow is disrupted or blocked, chi cannot flow properly and the individual becomes ill. This problem can also occur in organs if the chi becomes unbalanced. Traditional Chinese medicine seeks to restore the imbalance or flow of chi through a variety of techniques.

These techniques include herbal medicines (plants and plant extracts), special diets (Chinese medical calls for a balance of yang and yin foods. A person eating too much yang food might suffer from acne and bad breath while a person eating too much yin food might be lethargic or anemic.), physical training (qigong, tai chi, etc.), massage (to clear blockages) and acupuncture (inserting very fine needles into the body along meridians to open chi passage) or acupressure.

Feng shui is an ancient Chinese practice; feng means “wind” and shui means “water.”

Feng shui is the theory that the arrangement of objects in a home or business can be optimized to create health, wealth and happiness by allowing chi to flow naturally throughout the setting. This requires the use of a feng shui compass and a Ba-Gua, an energy map of the home or business.

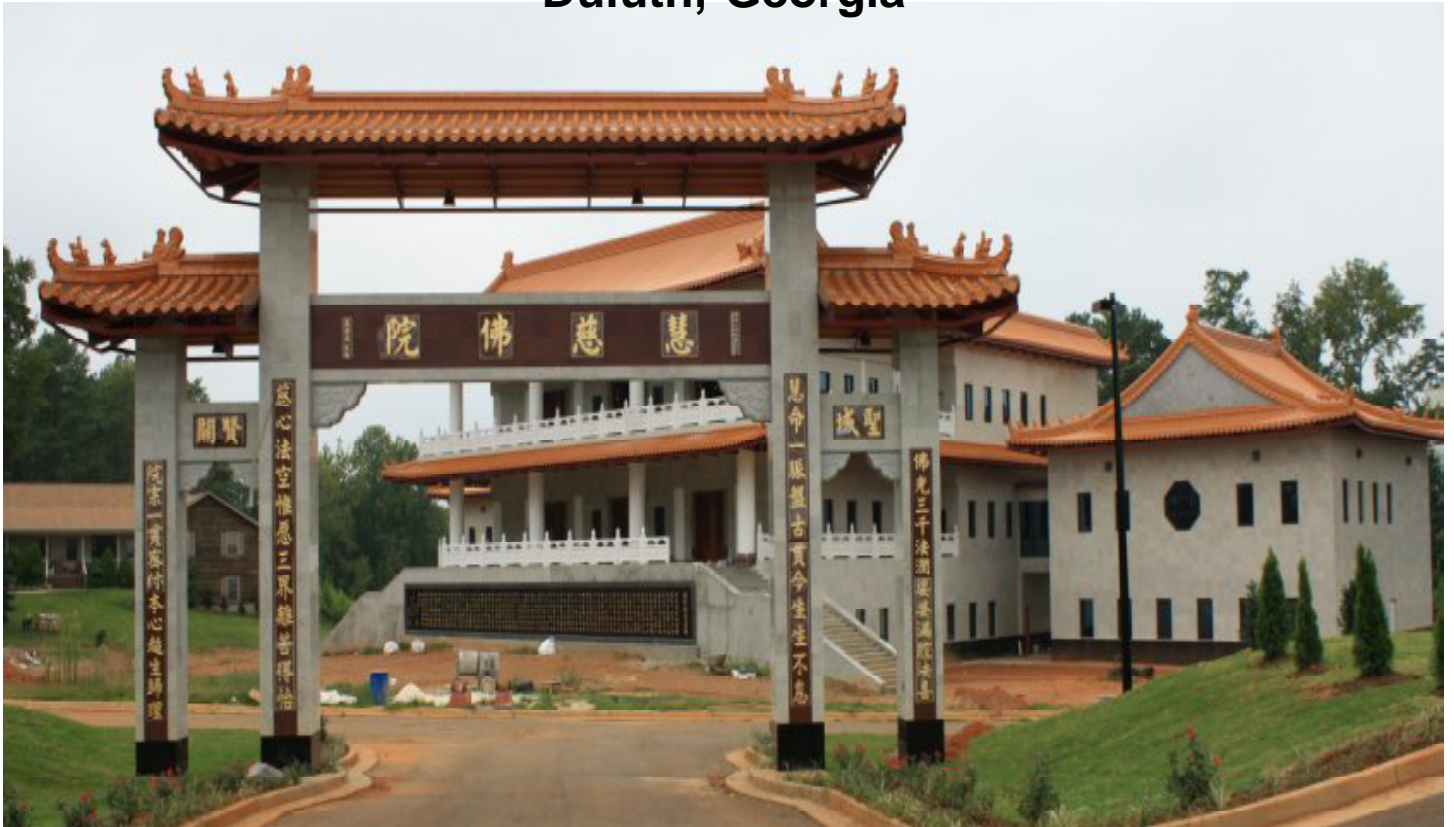
Feng shui crystals are often used to bring happiness to the area. A full bowl of rose quartz crystals may be placed in the bedroom or bathroom as a feng shui love cure. Hematite crystals (seen at right) may be placed by the front door to benefit from its protective qualities.

The mind is also important in vitalizing Taoism. A practice called *mu wei*, best translated as “creative quietness,” allows the mind to relax and remove tension so that chi can flow through a person. For a Taoist, new or wiser action follows *mu wei*. The mind becomes clear



and able to focus, just as “Muddy water let stand will clear (Victor H. Mair, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 76)

The Hui-Tz (meaning “wisdom” and “love”) Tao Temple, Duluth, Georgia



This Tao temple, begun in 2007, is being built on Satellite Blvd, about two miles from the headquarters of the Georgia Baptist Convention in Gwinnett County, Georgia, 25 miles northeast of Atlanta. The temple was completed and dedicated in May 2011

The Tao sect that is building this temple comes from Taiwan and teaches a Tao-Buddhist philosophy.