

# Taoism

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# Taoism



- Taoism or Daoism (/ˈtɑʊɪzəm/ ⓘ or /ˈdɑʊɪzəm/ ⓘ) is a diverse tradition indigenous to China, variously characterized as both a philosophy and a religion. Taoism emphasizes living in harmony with the Tao—generally understood as being the impersonal, enigmatic process of transformation ultimately underlying reality.
- The concept originates in the Chinese word 道 (pinyin: dào; Wade–Giles: tao4), which has numerous related meanings: possible English translations include 'way', 'road', and 'technique'. Taoist thought has informed the development of various practices within the Taoist tradition and beyond, including forms of meditation, astrology, qigong, feng shui, and internal alchemy. A common goal of Taoist practice is self-cultivation resulting in a deeper appreciation of the Tao, and thus a more harmonious existence. There are different formulations of Taoist ethics, but there is generally emphasis on virtues such as effortless action, naturalness or spontaneity, simplicity, and the three treasures of compassion, frugality, and humility. Many Taoist terms lack simple definitions and have been translated in several different ways.



# Taoism

- The core of Taoist thought crystallized during the early Warring States period, c. the 4th and 5th centuries BCE, during which the epigrammatic Tao Te Ching and the anecdotal Zhuangzi—widely regarded as the fundamental texts of Taoist philosophy—were largely composed.
- They form the core of a body of Taoist writings accrued over the following centuries, which was assembled by monks into the Daozang canon starting in the 5th century CE. Early Taoism drew upon diverse influences, including the Shang and Zhou state religions, Naturalism, Mohism, Confucianism, various Legalist theories, as well as the Book of Changes and Spring and Autumn Annals.
- Later, when Buddhism was introduced to China, the two systems began influencing one another, with long-running discourses shared between Taoists and Buddhists; the distinct Mahayana tradition of Zen that emerged during the Tang dynasty incorporates many ideas from Taoism.



# Taoism

- Though Taoism often lacks the motivation for strong hierarchies, Taoist philosophy has often served as a foundation for theories of politics and warfare, and Taoist organizations with diverse agendas have existed throughout Chinese history. During the late Han dynasty, Taoist secret societies precipitated the Yellow Turban Rebellion, attempting to create what has been characterized as a Taoist theocracy.
- Many denominations of Taoism recognize deities, often those present in other traditions, where they are venerated as superhuman figures exemplifying Taoist virtues. The syncretic nature of the tradition presents particular difficulties in attempting to characterize its practice. Since Taoist thought has been deeply rooted in Chinese culture for millennia, it is often unclear whether one should be considered a "Taoist".
- The status of daoshi, or 'Taoist master', is traditionally attributed only to clergy in Taoist organizations; these figures usually distinguish between their traditions and others throughout Chinese folk religion.



# Taoism

- Today, Taoism is one of five religious doctrines officially recognized by the Chinese government, also having official status in Hong Kong and Macau.
- It is considered a major religion in Taiwan, and also has significant populations of adherents throughout the Sinosphere and Southeast Asia.
- In the West, Taoism has taken on diverse forms, both those hewing to historical practice, as well as highly synthesized practices variously characterized as new religious movements.

# 道

## Taoism

- The word Taoism is used to translate two related but distinct Chinese terms:
- Firstly, a term encompassing a family of organized religious movements that share concepts and terminology from Taoist philosophy—what can be specifically translated as 'the teachings of the Tao', (道教; dàojiào), often interpreted as the Taoist "religion proper", or the "mystical" or "liturgical" aspects of Taoism is The Celestial Masters school is a well-known early example of this sense.
- The other, referring to the philosophical doctrines largely based on core Taoist texts themselves—a term that can be translated as 'the philosophical school of the Tao' or 'Taology' (道家; dàojiā; 'school of the Tao', or sometimes 道學; dào xué; 'study of the Tao'). This was considered one of the Hundred Schools of Thought during the Warring States period. The earliest recorded use of the word 'Tao' to reference such a philosophical school is found in the works of Han-era historians: such as the Commentary of Zhuo (左传; Zuǒzhuàn) by Zuo Qiuming, and in the Records of the Grand Historian. This particular usage precedes the emergence of the Celestial Masters and associated later religions. It is unlikely that Zhuang Zhou, author of the Zhuangzi, was familiar with the text of the Tao Te Ching, and Zhuangzi himself may have died before the term was in use.



# Taoism

- The distinction between Taoist philosophy and Taoist religion is an ancient, deeply-rooted one. Taoism is a positive philosophy that aims for the holistic unification of an individual's reality with everything that is not only real but also valuable, encompassing both the natural world and society.
- The earliest references to 'the Tao' per se are largely devoid of liturgical or explicitly supernatural character, used in contexts either of abstract metaphysics or of the ordinary conditions required for human flourishing. This distinction is still understood in everyday contexts among Chinese people, and has been echoed by modern scholars of Chinese history and philosophy such as Feng Youlan and Wing-tsit Chan. Use of the term daoia dates to the Western Han c. 100 BCE, referring to the purported authors of the emerging Taoist canon, such as Lao Dan and Zhuang Zhou.
- Neither the Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi themselves, nor the early secondary sources written about them, put forward any particular supernatural ontology. Nonetheless, that religious Taoism emerged from a synthesis of folk religion with philosophical Taoist precepts is clear. The earlier, naturalistic was employed by pre-Han and Han thinkers, and continued to be used well into the Song, including among those who explicitly rejected cults, both private and state-sanctioned, that were often either labeled or self-identified as Taoist.



# Taoism

- A common tradition holds that Laozi founded Taoism. Laozi's historicity is disputed, with many scholars seeing him as a legendary founding figure.
- While Taoism is often regarded in the West as arising from Laozi, many Chinese Taoists claim that the Yellow Emperor formulated many of their precepts, including the quest for "long life". Traditionally, the Yellow Emperor's founding of Taoism was said to have been because he "dreamed of an ideal kingdom whose tranquil inhabitants lived in harmonious accord with the natural law and possessed virtues remarkably like those espoused by early Taoism. On waking from his dream, Huangdi sought to" bring about "these virtues in his own kingdom, to ensure order and prosperity among the inhabitants".
- Early Taoism drew on the ideas found in the religion of the Shang dynasty and the Zhou dynasty, such as their use of divination, ancestor worship, and the idea of Heaven (Tian) and its relationship to humanity. According to modern scholars of Taoism, such as Kirkland and Livia Kohn, Taoist philosophy also developed by drawing on numerous schools of thought from the Warring States period (4th to 3rd centuries BCE), including Mohism, Confucianism, Legalist theorists (like Shen Buhai and Han Fei, which speak of wu wei), the School of Naturalists (from which Taoism draws its main cosmological ideas, yin and yang and the five phases), and the Chinese classics, especially the I Ching and the Lüshi Chunqiu





# Taoism

- The first organized form of Taoism was the Way of the Celestial Masters, which developed from the Five Pecks of Rice movement at the end of the 2nd century CE. The latter had been founded by Zhang Daoling, who was said to have had a vision of Laozi in 142 CE and claimed that the world was coming to an end. Zhang sought to teach people to repent and prepare for the coming cataclysm, after which they would become the seeds of a new era of great peace. It was a mass movement in which men and women could act as libationers and tend to the commoners. A related movement arose in Shandong called the "Way of Great Peace", seeking to create a new world by replacing the Han dynasty. This movement led to the Yellow Turban Rebellion, and after years of bloody war, they were crushed.
- The Celestial Masters movement survived this period and did not take part in attempting to replace the Han. As such, they grew and became an influential religion during the Three Kingdoms period, focusing on ritual confession and petition, as well as developing a well-organized religious structure. The Celestial Masters school was officially recognized by the warlord Cao Cao in 215 CE, legitimizing Cao Cao's rise to power in return. Laozi received imperial recognition as a divinity in the mid-2nd century BCE.



# Taoism

- During the sixth century, Taoists attempted to unify the various traditions into one integrated Taoism that could compete with Buddhism and Confucianism. To do this they adopted the schema known as the "three caverns", first developed by the scholar Lu Xiuqing (406–477) based on the "three vehicles" of Buddhism. The three caverns were: Perfection (Dongzhen), associated with the Three Sovereigns; Mystery (Dongxuan), associated with Lingbao; and Spirit (Dongshen), associated with the Supreme Clarity tradition. Lu Xiuqing also used this schema to arrange the Taoist scriptures and Taoist deities. Lu Xiuqing worked to compile the first edition of the Daozang (the Taoist Canon), which was published at the behest of the Chinese emperor.
- Thus, according to Russell Kirkland, "in several important senses, it was really Lu Hsiu-ching who founded Taoism, for it was he who first gained community acceptance for a common canon of texts, which established the boundaries, and contents, of 'the teachings of the Tao' (Tao-chiao). Lu also reconfigured the ritual activities of the tradition, and formulated a new set of liturgies, which continue to influence Taoist practice to the present day."
- This period also saw the development of the Three Pure Ones, which merged the high deities from different Taoist traditions into a common trinity that has remained influential until today.



# Taoism

- Tao (or Dao) can mean way, road, channel, path, doctrine, or line. Livia Kohn describes the Tao as "the underlying cosmic power which creates the universe, supports culture and the state, saves the good and punishes the wicked. Literally 'the way', Tao refers to the way things develop naturally, the way nature moves along and living beings grow and decline in accordance with cosmic laws."
- The Tao is ultimately indescribable and transcends all analysis and definition. Thus, the Tao Te Ching begins with: "The Tao that can be told is not eternal Tao." Likewise, Louis Komjathy writes that the Tao has been described by Taoists as "dark" (xuan), "indistinct" (hu), "obscure" (huang), and "silent" (mo).



# Taoism

- According to Komjathy, the Tao has four primary characteristics: “
  - (1) Source of all existence;
  - (2) Unnamable mystery;
  - (3) All-pervading sacred presence; and
  - (4) Universe as cosmological process.“
- As such, Taoist thought can be seen as monistic (the Tao is one reality), panenhenic (seeing nature as sacred), and panentheistic (the Tao is both the sacred world and what is beyond it, immanent and transcendent). Similarly, Wing-Tsit Chan describes the Tao as an "ontological ground" and as "the One, which is natural, spontaneous, eternal, nameless, and indescribable. It is at once the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their course." The Tao is thus an "organic order", which is not a willful or self-conscious creator, but an infinite and boundless natural pattern



# Taoism

- Furthermore, the Tao is something that individuals can find immanent in themselves, as well as in natural and social patterns. Thus, the Tao is also the "innate nature" (xing) of all people, a nature which is seen by Taoists as being ultimately good. In a naturalistic sense, the Tao as visible pattern, "the Tao that can be told", that is, the rhythmic processes and patterns of the natural world that can be observed and described. Thus, Kohn writes that Tao can be explained as twofold: the transcendent, ineffable, mysterious Tao and the natural, visible, and tangible Tao.
- Throughout Taoist history, Taoists have developed different metaphysical views regarding the Tao. For example, while the Xuanxue thinker Wang Bi described Tao as wú (nothingness, negativity, not-being), Guo Xiang rejected wú as the source and held that instead the true source was spontaneous "self-production" (zìshēng 自生) and "self-transformation" (zìhuà 自化). Another school, the Chóngxuán (Twofold Mystery), developed a metaphysics influenced by Buddhist Madhyamaka philosophy.



## Taoism: De

- The active expression of Tao is called *De* (德; *dé*; also spelled, *Te* or *Teh*; often translated with virtue or power), in a sense that De results from an individual living and cultivating the Tao.
- The term *De* can be used to refer to ethical virtue in the conventional Confucian sense, as well as to a higher spontaneous kind of sagely virtue or power that comes from following the Tao and practicing wu-wei. Thus, it is a natural expression of the Tao's power and not anything like conventional morality.
- Louis Komjathy describes De as the manifestation of one's connection to the Tao, which is a beneficial influence of one's cosmological attunement



## Taoism: Ziran

- Ziran (自然; zìrán; tzu-jan; lit. "self-so", "self-organization") is regarded as a central concept and value in Taoism and as a way of flowing with the Tao.
- It describes the "primordial state" of all things as well as a basic character of the Tao, and is usually associated with spontaneity and creativity.
- According to Kohn, in the Zhuangzi, ziran refers to the fact that "there is thus no ultimate cause to make things what they are. The universe exists by itself and of itself; it is existence just as it is. Nothing can be added or subtracted from it; it is entirely sufficient upon itself."



# Taoism: Ziran

- To attain naturalness, one has to identify with the Tao and flow with its natural rhythms as expressed in oneself.
- This involves freeing oneself from selfishness and desire, and appreciating simplicity.
- It also involves understanding one's nature and living in accordance with it, without trying to be something one is not or overthinking one's experience.
- One way of cultivating ziran found in the Zhuangzi is to practice the "fasting of the mind", a kind of Taoist meditation in which one empties the mind. It is held that this can also activate qi (vital energy).
- In some passages found in the Zhuangzi and in the Tao Te Ching, naturalness is also associated with rejection of the state (anarchism) and a desire to return to simpler pre-technological times (primitivism).
- An often cited metaphor for naturalness is pu (樸; pǔ, pú; p'u; lit. "uncut wood"), the "uncarved log", which represents the "original nature... prior to the imprint of culture" of an individual. It is usually referred to as a state one may return to





## Taoism: Wu Wei

- The term wu wei constitutes the leading ethical concept in Taoism. Wei refers to any intentional or deliberated action, while wu carries the meaning of "there is no ..." or "lacking, without". Common translations are nonaction, effortless action, action without intent, noninterference and nonintervention.
- The meaning is sometimes emphasized by using the paradoxical expression "wei wu wei": action without action. Kohn writes that wuwei refers to "letting go of egoistic concerns" and "to abstain from forceful and interfering measures that cause tensions and disruption in favor of gentleness, adaptation, and ease."



## Taoism: Wu Wei

- In ancient Taoist texts, wu-wei is associated with water through its yielding nature and the effortless way it flows around obstacles. Taoist philosophy, in accordance with the I Ching, proposes that the universe works harmoniously according to its own ways. When someone exerts their will against the world in a manner that is out of rhythm with the cycles of change, they may disrupt that harmony and unintended consequences may more likely result rather than the willed outcome. Thus the Tao Te Ching says: "act of things and you will ruin them. Grasp for things and you will lose them. Therefore the sage acts with inaction and has no ruin, lets go of grasping and has no loss."
- Taoism does not identify one's will as the root problem. Rather, it asserts that one must place their will in harmony with the natural way of the universe. Thus, a potentially harmful interference may be avoided, and in this way, goals can be achieved effortlessly. "By wu-wei, the sage seeks to come into harmony with the great Tao, which itself accomplishes by nonaction."



# Taoism: Aspects of Self

- The Taoist view of the self is a holistic one that rejects the idea of a separate individualized self. As Russell Kirkland writes, Taoists "generally assume that one's 'self' cannot be understood or fulfilled without reference to other persons, and to the broader set of realities in which all persons are naturally and properly embedded."
- In Taoism, one's innate or fundamental nature (xing) is ultimately the Tao expressing or manifesting itself as an embodied person. Innate nature is connected with one's heartmind (xin), which refers to consciousness, the heart, and one's spirit. The focus of Taoist psychology is the heartmind (xin), the intellectual and emotional center (zhong) of a person. It is associated with the chest cavity, the physical heart as well as with emotions, thoughts, consciousness, and the storehouse of spirit (shen). When the heartmind is unstable and separated from the Tao, it is called the ordinary heartmind (suxin). On the other hand, the original heartmind (benxin) pervades Tao and is constant and peaceful.
- The Neiye (ch.14) calls this pure original heartmind the "inner heartmind", "an awareness that precedes language", and "a lodging place of the numinous". Later Taoist sources also refer to it by other terms like "awakened nature" (wuxing), "original nature" (benxing), "original spirit" (yuanshen), and "scarlet palace". This pure heartmind is seen as being characterized by clarity and stillness (qingjing), purity, pure yang, spiritual insight, and emptiness.



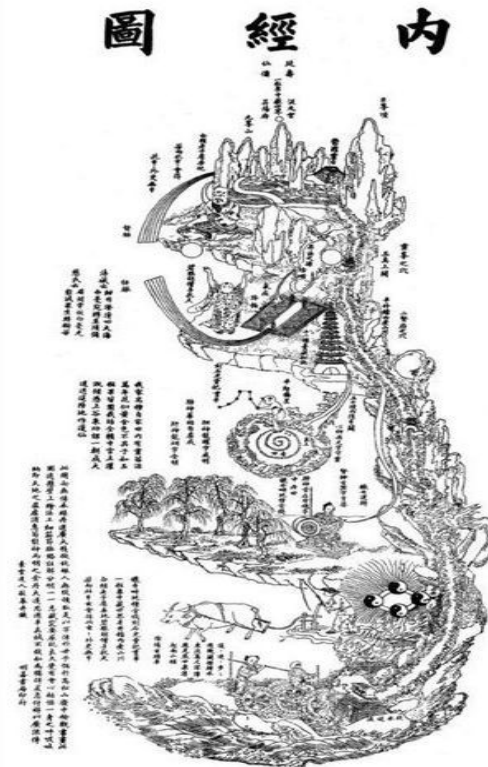
# Taoism: Aspects of Self

- Taoists see life (sheng) as an expression of the Tao. The Tao is seen as granting each person a ming (life destiny), which is one's corporeal existence, one's body and vitality. Generally speaking, Taoist cultivation seeks a holistic psychosomatic form of training that is described as "dual cultivation of innate nature and life-destiny" (xingming shuanxiu). Taoism believes in a "pervasive spirit world that is both interlocked with and separate from the world of humans."
- The cultivation of innate nature is often associated with the practice of stillness (jinggong) or quiet meditation, while the cultivation of life-destiny generally revolves around movement based practices (donggong) like daoyin and health and longevity practices (yangsheng).

# 道

## Taoism: Aspects of Self

- Many Taoist practices work with ancient Chinese understandings of the body, its organs and parts, "elixir fields" (dantien), inner substances (such as "essence" or jing), animating forces (like the hun and po), and meridians (qi channels). The complex Taoist schema of the body and its subtle body components contains many parallels with Traditional Chinese medicine and is used for health practices as well as for somatic and spiritual transformation (through neidan – "psychosomatic transmutation" or "internal alchemy"). Taoist physical cultivation rely on purifying and transforming the body's qi (vital breath, energy) in various ways such as dieting and meditation.





# Taoism: Three Treasures

- According to Livia Kohn, qi is "the cosmic energy that pervades all. The concrete aspect of Tao, qi is the material force of the universe, the basic stuff of nature." According to the Zhuangzi, "human life is the accumulation of qi; death is its dispersal." Everyone has some amount of qi and can gain and lose qi in various ways. Therefore, Taoists hold that through various qi cultivation methods they can harmonize their qi, and thus improve health and longevity, and even attain magic powers, social harmony, and immortality. The Neiye (Inward Training) is one of the earliest texts that teach qi cultivation methods.
- Qi is one of the Three Treasures, which is a specifically Taoist schema of the main elements in Taoist physical practices like qigong and neidan. The three are:
  - jing (精, essence, the foundation for one's vitality),
  - qi and
  - shén (神, spirit, subtle consciousness, a capacity to connect with the subtle spiritual reality).
- These three are further associated with the three "elixir fields" (dantien) and the organs in different ways.



## Taoism: Ethics

- Daoist ethics tends to emphasize various themes from the Taoist classics, such as naturalness (pu), spontaneity (ziran), simplicity, detachment from desires, and most important of all, wu wei.
- The classic Daoist view is that humans are originally and naturally aligned with Tao, thus their original nature is inherently good.
- However, one can fall away from this due to personal habits, desires, and social conditions. Returning to one's nature requires active attunement through Daoist practice and ethical cultivation.



# Taoism: Ethics

- Some of the most important virtues in Taoism are the Three Treasures or Three Jewels (三寶; sānbǎo). These are:
  - ci (慈; cí, usually translated as compassion),
  - jian (儉; jiǎn, usually translated as moderation), and
  - bugan wei tianxia xian (不敢爲天下先; bùgǎn wéi tiānxià xiān, literally "not daring to act as first under the heavens", but usually translated as humility).
- Arthur Waley, applying them to the socio-political sphere, translated them as: "abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment", "absolute simplicity of living", and "refusal to assert active authority".
- Taoism also adopted the Buddhist doctrines of karma and reincarnation into its religious ethical system. Medieval Taoist thought developed the idea that ethics was overseen by a celestial administration that kept records of people's actions and their fate, as well as handed out rewards and punishments through particular celestial administrator





# Taoism: Goals

- Taoists have diverse religious goals that include Taoist conceptions of sagehood (zhenren), spiritual self-cultivation, a happy afterlife, and/or longevity and some form of immortality (xian, variously understood as a kind of transcendent post-mortem state of the spirit).
- Taoists' views about what happens in the afterlife tend to include the soul becoming a part of the cosmos (which was often thought of as an illusionary place where qi and physical matter were thought of as being the same in a way held together by the microcosm of the spirits of the human body and the macrocosm of the universe itself, represented and embodied by the Three Pure Ones), somehow aiding the spiritual functions of nature or Tian after death, and/or being saved by either achieving spiritual immortality in an afterlife or becoming a xian who can appear in the human world at will, but normally lives in another plane.
- "[S]acred forests and[/or] mountains" or a yin-yang, yin, yang, or Tao realm inconceivable and incomprehensible by normal humans and even the virtuous Confucius and Confucianists, such as the mental realm sometimes called "the Heavens" where higher, spiritual versions of Daoists such as Laozi were thought to exist when they were alive and absorb "the purest Yin and Yang" were all possibilities for a potential xian to be reborn in. These spiritual versions were thought to be abstract beings that can manifest in that world as mythical beings such as xian dragons who eat yin and yang energy and ride clouds and their qi.



# Taoism: Goals

- More specifically, possibilities for "the spirit of the body" include "join[ing] the universe after death", exploring or serving various functions in parts of tiān or other spiritual worlds, or becoming a xian who can do one or more of those things.
- Taoist xian are often seen as being eternally young because "of their life being totally at one with the Tao of nature. They are also often seen as being made up of "pure breath and light" and as being able to shapeshift, and some Taoists believed their afterlife natural "paradises" were palaces of heaven.
- Taoists who sought to become one of the many different types of immortals, such as xian or zhenren, wanted to "ensure complete physical and spiritual immortality".
- In the Quanzhen school of Wang Chongyang, the goal is to become a sage, which he equates with being a "spiritual immortal" (shen xian) and with the attainment of "clarity and stillness" (qingjing) through the integration of "inner nature" (xing) and "worldly reality" (ming).
- Those who know the Tao, who flow with the natural way of the Tao and thus embody the patterns of the Tao are called sages or "perfected persons" (zhenren). This is what is often considered salvation in Taoist soteriology. They often are depicted as living simple lives, as craftsmen or hermits. In other cases, they are depicted as the ideal rulers which practice ruling through non-intervention and under which nations prosper peacefully. Sages are the highest humans, mediators between heaven and earth and the best guides on the Taoist path. They act naturally and simply, with a pure mind and with wuwei. They may have supernatural powers and bring good fortune and peace



# Taoism: Goals

- Some sages are also considered to have become one of the immortals (xian) through their mastery of the Tao. After shedding their mortal form, spiritual immortals may have many superhuman abilities like flight and are often said to live in heavenly realms.
- The sages are thus because they have attained the primary goal of Taoism: a union with the Tao and harmonization or alignment with its patterns and flows. This experience is one of being attuned to the Tao and to our own original nature, which already has a natural capacity for resonance (ganying) with Tao. This is the main goal that all Daoist practices are aiming towards and can be felt in various ways, such as a sense of psychosomatic vitality and aliveness as well as stillness and a "true joy" (zhenle) or "celestial joy" that remains unaffected by mundane concerns like gain and loss.
- The Taoist quest for immortality was inspired by Confucian emphasis on filial piety and how worshipped ancestors were thought to exist after death.
- Becoming an immortal through the power of yin-yang and heaven, but also specifically Taoist interpretations of the Tao, was sometimes thought of as possible in Chinese folk religion, and Taoist thoughts on immortality were sometimes drawn from Confucian views on heaven and its status as an afterlife that permeates the mortal world as well.



# Taoism: Cosmology

- Taoist cosmology is cyclic—the universe is seen as being in constant change, with various forces and energies (qi) affecting each other in different complex patterns. Taoist cosmology shares similar views with the School of Naturalists. Taoist cosmology focuses on the impersonal transformations (zaohua) of the universe, which are spontaneous and unguided.
- the root of creation Tao rested in deep chaos (ch. 42). Next, it evolved into the One, a concentrated state cosmic unity that is full of creative potential and often described in I Ching terms as the taiji. The One then brought forth "the Two", the two energies yin and yang, which in turn merged in harmony to create the next level of existence, "the Three" (yin-yang combined), from which the myriad beings came forth. From original oneness, the world thus continued to move into ever greater states of distinction and differentiation. Source: Livia Kohn



# Taoism: Cosmology

- The main distinction in Taoist cosmology is that between yin and yang, which applies to various sets of complementary ideas: bright – dark, light – heavy, soft – hard, strong – weak, above – below, ruler – minister, male – female, and so on. Cosmically, these two forces exist in mutual harmony and interdependence. Yin and yang are further divided into five phases (Wu Xing, or five materials): minor yang, major yang, yin/yang, minor yin, major yin. Each of these correlates with a specific substance: wood, fire, earth, metal, and water respectively. This schema is used in many different ways in Taoist thought and practice, from nourishing life (yangsheng) and medicine to astrology and divination.
- Taoists also generally see all things as being animated and constituted by qi (vital air, subtle breath), which is seen as a force that circulates throughout the universe and throughout human bodies (as both air in the lungs and as a subtle breath throughout the body's meridians and organs). Qi is in constant transformation between its condensed state (life) and diluted state (potential). These two different states of qi are embodiments of yin and yang, two complementary forces that constantly play against and with each other and where one cannot exist without the other



# Taoism: Cosmology

- Taoist texts present various creation stories and cosmogonies. Classic cosmogonies are nontheistic, presenting a natural undirected process in which an apophatic undifferentiated potentiality (called wuwuji, "without non-differentiation") naturally unfolds into wuji (primordial oneness, "non-differentiation"), which then evolves into yin-yang (taiji) and then into the myriad beings, as in the Tao Te Ching. Later medieval models included the idea of a creator God (mainly seen as Lord Lao), representing order and creativity. Taoist cosmology influences Taoist soteriology, which holds that one can "return to the root" (guigen) of the universe (and of ourselves), which is also the Tao—the impersonal source (yuan) of all things.
- In Taoism, human beings are seen as a microcosm of the universe, and thus the cosmological forces, like the five phases, are also present in the form of the zang-fu organs. Another common belief is that there are various gods that reside in human bodies. As a consequence, it is believed that a deeper understanding of the universe can be achieved by understanding oneself.
- Another important element of Taoist cosmology is the use of Chinese astrology



# Taoism: Theology

- Taoist theology can be defined as apophatic, given its philosophical emphasis on the formlessness and unknowable nature of the Tao, and the primacy of the "Way" rather than anthropomorphic concepts of God. Nearly all the sects share this core belief.
- Arguments do exist the monotheistic concepts in Taoism. However, Taoism does include many deities and spirits and thus can also be considered animistic and polytheistic in a secondary sense (since they are considered to be emanations from the impersonal and nameless ultimate principle). Some Taoist theology presents the Three Pure Ones at the top of the pantheon of deities, which was a hierarchy emanating from the Tao. Laozi is considered the incarnation of one of the three and worshiped as the ancestral founder of Taoism.
- Different branches of Taoism often have differing pantheons of lesser deities, where these deities reflect different notions of cosmology. Lesser deities also may be promoted or demoted for their activity. Some varieties of popular Chinese religion incorporate the Jade Emperor (Yü-Huang or Yü-Di), one of the Three Pure Ones, as the highest God. Historical Taoist figures, and people who are considered to have become immortals (xian), are also venerated as well by both clergy and laypeople.

# 道

## Taoism: The Nine Practices

- Nonaction (wúwéi 無為)
- Softness and weakness (róuruò 柔弱)
- Guarding the feminine (shǒucí 行守)
- Being nameless (wúmíng 無名)
- Clarity and stillness (qīngjìng 清靜)
- Being adept (zhūshàn 諸善)
- Being desireless (wúyù 無欲)
- Knowing how to stop and be content (zhī zhǐzú 知止足)
- Yielding and withdrawing (tuīràng 推讓)





# Taoism: Ten Precepts

- The Five precepts (Taoism) are identical to the Buddhist five precepts (which are to avoid:
  - killing [both human and non-human animals],
  - theft,
  - sexual misconduct,
  - lying, and
  - intoxicants like alcohol.)
- The other five were a set of five injunctions:
  - I will maintain harmony with my ancestors and family and never disregard my kin;
  - When I see someone do good, I will support him with joy and delight;
  - When I see someone unfortunate, I will support him with dignity to recover good fortune;
  - When someone comes to do me harm, I will not harbor thoughts of revenge;
  - As long as all beings have not attained the Dao, I will not expect to do so myself.
- Apart from these common ethical precepts, Taoist traditions also have larger sets of precepts that are often reserved for ordained priests or monastics.



# Taoism: Divination

- A key part of many Taoist traditions is the practice of divination. There are many methods used by Chinese Taoists including
  - I Ching divination,
  - Chinese astrological divination,
  - feng shui (geomantic divination), and
  - the interpretation of various omens.
- Mediumship and exorcism is a key element of some Taoist traditions. These can include tongji mediumship and the practice of planchette writing or spirit writing.



# Taoism: Tao Te Ching

- Throughout the history of Taoism, the Tao Te Ching has been a central text, used for ritual, self-cultivation, and philosophical purposes.
- According to legend, the Tao Te Ching (also known as the Laozi) was written by Laozi. Authorship, precise date of origin, and even unity of the text are still subject of debate and will probably never be known with certainty. The earliest manuscripts of this work (written on bamboo tablets) date back to the late 4th century BCE, and these contain significant differences from the later received edition (of Wang Bi c. 226–249). Apart from the Guodian text and the Wang Bi edition, another alternative version exists, the Mawangdui Tao Te Chings

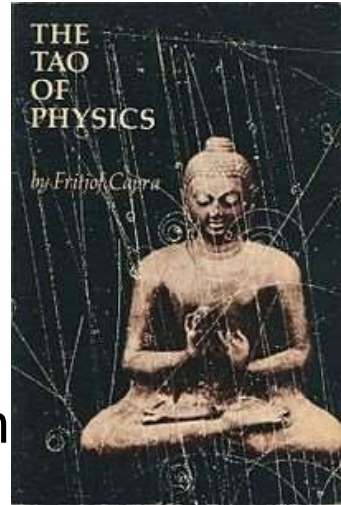


# Taoism: The Zhuangzi

- The Zhuangzi (Book of Master Zhuang, 莊子), named after its supposed author Zhuang Zhou, is a highly influential composite text of multi-vocal writings from various sources and historical periods. The commentator and editor Guo Xiang (c. CE 300) helped establish the text as an important source for Taoist thought.
- One traditional view is that a sage called Zhuang Zhou wrote the first seven chapters (the "inner chapters"), and his students and related thinkers were responsible for the other parts (the outer and miscellaneous chapters). However, some modern scholars, like Russell Kirkland, argue that Guo Xiang is actually the creator of the 33-chapter Zhuangzi text and that there is no solid historical data for the existence of Zhuang Zhou himself (other than the sparse and unreliable mentions in Sima Qian).
- The Zhuangzi uses anecdotes, parables, and dialogues to express one of its main themes—avoiding cultural constructs and instead living in a spontaneous way aligned with the natural world. This way of living might be perceived as "useless" by most people who follow their own "common sense" and social and political rules, but this uselessness is actually a wiser alternative, since it is more in accord with reality.

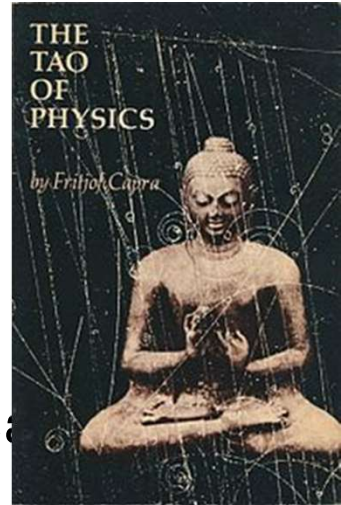
# The Tao of Physics by Fritjof Capra

- The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels Between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism is a 1975 book by physicist Fritjof Capra.
- A bestseller in the United States, it has been translated into 23 languages.
- Capra summarized his motivation for writing the book: “Science does not need mysticism and mysticism does not need science. But man needs both.”



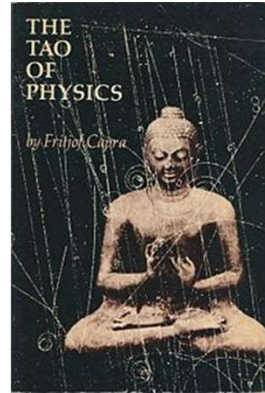
# The Tao of Physics

- According to the preface of the first edition, reprinted in subsequent editions, Capra struggled to reconcile theoretical physics and Eastern mysticism
- He was at first "helped on my way by 'power plants'" or psychedelics, with the first experience "so overwhelming that I burst into tears, at the same time, not unlike Castaneda, pouring out my impressions to a piece of paper". (p. 12, 4th ed.)

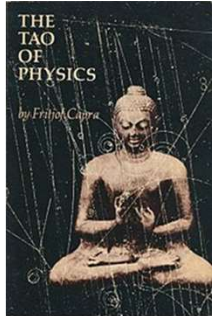


# The Tao of Physics

- Capra later discussed his ideas with Werner Heisenberg in 1972, as he mentioned in the following interview excerpt:
- I had several discussions with Heisenberg. I lived in England then [circa 1972], and I visited him several times in Munich and showed him the whole manuscript chapter by chapter. He was very interested and very open, and he told me something that I think is not known publicly because he never published it. He said that he was well aware of these parallels. While he was working on quantum theory he went to India to lecture and was a guest of Tagore. He talked a lot with Tagore about Indian philosophy. Heisenberg told me that these talks had helped him a lot with his work in physics, because they showed him that all these new ideas in quantum physics were in fact not all that crazy. He realized there was, in fact, a whole culture that subscribed to very similar ideas. Heisenberg said that this was a great help for him. Niels Bohr had a similar experience when he went to China



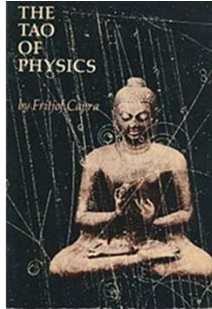
# The Tao of Physics



- Bohr adopted the yin yang symbol as part of his coat of arms when he was knighted in 1947, it is claimed in the book that it was a result of orientalist influences.
- The Tao of Physics was followed by other books of the same genre like The Hidden Connection, The Turning Point and The Web of Life in which Capra extended the argument of how Eastern mysticism and scientific findings of today relate, and how Eastern mysticism might also have the linguistic and philosophical tools required to undertake to some of the biggest scientific challenges remaining.

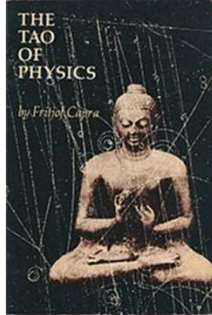


# Afterword to Third Edition



- In the afterword to the third edition (published in 1982, pp 360-368 of the 1991 edition) Capra offers six suggestions for a new paradigm in science.
- Consider the part and the whole as more symmetrically conditioning one another.
- Replace thinking in terms of structure with thinking in terms of process.
- Replace 'objective science' with 'epistemic science', where the approach to decide what counts as knowledge adapts to the subject studied.
- Replace the idea of knowledge as buildings based on foundations with an idea of knowledge as networks.
- Abandon the quest for truth with a quest for better approximations.
- Abandon the ideas of domination of nature with one of cooperation and nonviolence.
- Capra reconnects this new paradigm to the theories of living and self-organizing systems that has emerged from cybernetics. Here he quotes Ilya Prigogine, Gregory Bateson, Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela (p.372 of the 1991 edition).

# The Tao of Physics



- According to Capra, Werner Heisenberg was in agreement with the main idea of the book:
- I showed the manuscript to him chapter by chapter, briefly summarizing the content of each chapter and emphasizing especially the topics related to his own work. Heisenberg was most interested in the entire manuscript and very open to hearing my ideas. I told him that I saw two basic themes running through all the theories of modern physics, which were also the two basic themes of all mystical traditions-the fundamental interrelatedness and interdependence of all phenomena and the intrinsically dynamic nature of reality. Heisenberg agreed with me as far as physics was concerned and he also told me that he was well aware of the emphasis on interconnectedness in Eastern thought. However, he had been unaware of the dynamic aspect of the Eastern world view and was intrigued when I showed him with numerous examples from my manuscript that the principal Sanskrit terms used in Hindu and Buddhist philosophy-brahman, rta, lila, karma, samsara, etc.-had dynamic connotations. At the end of my rather long presentation of the manuscript Heisenberg said simply: "Basically, I am in complete agreement with you."

# Geoffrey Chew: Bootstrap Theory

- His bootstrap theory, technically known as S-Matrix theory, is based on the idea that nature cannot be reduced to fundamental entities, like fundamental constituents of matter, but has to be understood entirely through self-consistency. According to Chew, all of physics has to follow uniquely from the requirement that its components be consistent with one another and with themselves.
- This idea constitutes a radical departure from the traditional spirit of basic research in physics, which has always concentrated on finding the fundamental constituents of matter. At the same time, it can be seen as the culmination of the conception of particles as interconnections in an inseparable web of relationships, which arose in quantum theory and acquired an intrinsically dynamic nature in relativity theory.
- The bootstrap philosophy abandons not only the idea of fundamental constituents of matter but accepts no fundamental entities whatsoever — no fundamental laws or equations, and not even a fundamental structure of space and time. The universe is seen as a dynamic web of interrelated events. None of the properties of any part of this web are fundamental; they all follow from the properties of the other parts, and the overall consistency of their mutual interrelations determines the structure of the entire web.
- During the 1980s and 1990s, the bootstrap theory was eclipsed by the success of the so-called “standard model,” which is very different, as it postulates the existence of fundamental fields and their corresponding particles. Today, bootstrap physics has virtually disappeared from the scene.

