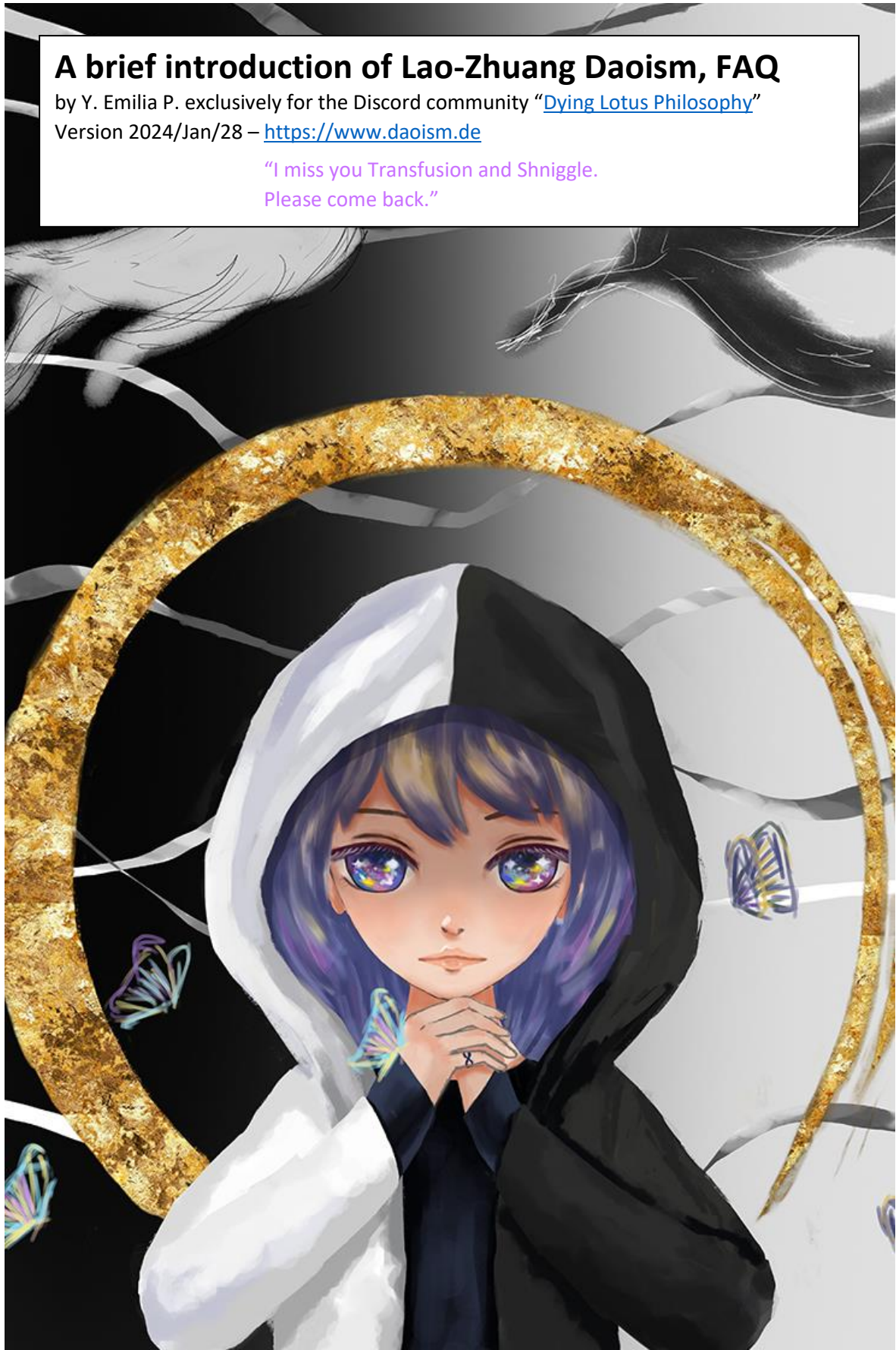


A brief introduction of Lao-Zhuang Daoism, FAQ

by Y. Emilia P. exclusively for the Discord community "[Dying Lotus Philosophy](#)"

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"I miss you Transfusion and Shniggle.
Please come back."



Preface: Scope of this text

This text was written as a comment on a philosophical interpretation of the Daoism as described by Laozi and Zhuangzi (in short: Lao-Zhuang Daoism) to give a first introduction on the basic concept.

It will not withstand the requirement of a scientific text and as such, will not necessarily cite proofs for all statements. The content is, however, accurate to the best knowledge of the author.

Preface: Pinyin vs. Wade-Giles

We are going to cover a few thousand years of history and during that time the Chinese language and its access to the Western world developed.

In Chinese, you would only use Chinese characters, never any Latin letters.

To give the Western world easier access to the Chinese language, phonetic systems for those characters were introduced about just 100 years ago.

Thus, very often there will be multiple competing ways of writing Chinese characters in Latin letters. Most commonly used to be Wade-Giles (until ~1970) and now is Pinyin.

Unfortunately, many terms were completely mixed in the Western books / media, sometimes using either of them.

To keep the follow text readable, I will not always mention both ways, but will list the different terms once in both transcriptions.

During the text, I will stick to the now modern way of Pinyin and, for better readability, without tone indicator.

Pinyin	Wade-Giles / Wilhelm	Chinese (simplified)	English (partly literal)
Dào	Tao	道	Way, path, course
Sān jiào	San Chiao	三教	Three teachings
Lǎozi	Lao Tzu Lao Tse	老子	Old Master
Dào dé jīng	Tao Te King Tao Te Ching	道德经	Book of the way of virtue
Yìjīng	I Ging I King Yi King	易经	Book of changes
Zhuāngzǐ	Chuang Tzu Chuang Tse	庄子	Farmstead (Chinese name)
Wǔ dòu mǐ dào	Wu tou mi tao	五斗米道	Five pecks of rice
Wú wéi	Wu Wei	无为	Inaction
Dào jiā	Tao Chia	道家	Home of Dao Philosophical Daoism
Dào jiào	Tao Chiao	道教	Teaching of Dao Religious Daoism
Lièzǐ	Lieh Tzu Lieh Tse	列子	(Chinese name)
Tàijí tú	T'ai Chi t'u	太极图	Symbol of the supreme beginning
Wújí	Wu Chi	无极	Without ridgepole
Yīn	Yin	阴	Dark
Yáng	Yang	阳	Bright
Qì	Ch'i	气	Gas

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Q1: What is Daoism?

Originally Daoism is a philosophy and one of the so-called "three teachings" (San Jiao) of China, beside Confucianism and Buddhism.

Later an additional, religious branch was added.

Each of the "three teachings" describes their individual way to walk on the path of life.



Fig. 1: 释(Shi, syllable of Siddharta), 道(Dao), 儒(Ru, Confucianism)

Confucianism

Confucianism (Rujiao) is likely the oldest of the "three teachings" and named after its founder Confucius (Kongzi) in English.

Typical elements were the emphasis on fixed virtues and morals, such as the "five constant virtues": Wisdom, propriety, benevolence, trustworthiness and righteousness.

The inner thoughts should be aligned with your actions and vice-versa.

Another core idea is the focus on improving yourself and your surroundings and if everyone did the same, the entire world would be in peace.

Daoism

That's what we are here for and will be explained throughout this FAQ, no spoilers yet!

Buddhism

Unlike Confucianism and Daoism, that both started as philosophies and originate from China, Buddhism is an Indian religion. It focuses on freedom from suffering, which is done through practices, that differ from tradition to tradition. While Buddhism also offers a philosophical aspect, it can be best described as a way of life of right action, right concentration, right meditation etc., according to the eightfold path ("eight Buddhist practices").

The core tenant throughout almost all schools is that humans feel miserable because they are unaware of /attached to things in an unhealthy way.

Q2: What does the character of “Dao” (道) mean?

Looking at the character “Dao” (道) in Chinese independently from Daoism, the character would be translated as “Course”, “Path” or “Way”.

It consists of the character „Shou“ (首, head, chief) and the radical „Chuo“ (辵, to walk, to stomp a path).

However, the character is not exclusive to Daoism. There are other “ways” (to act / walk in life) such as in Confucianism or Zen Buddhism for example. The “Dao” as used in Daoism is defined differently than the original character’s definition in Chinese.

Since “Dao”ism is the “teaching” or “way”, that deals with “ways”, I like to interpret it as the “Way of the (many different) ways”.



Fig. 2 Character 道

Q3: So how is “Dao” defined in Daoism?

The Dao in Daoism will be talked about for example in the very first passage of Laozi’s “Dao De Jing”. It will be described as ever-changing and not being able to be defined by words. Even the name “Dao” is randomly chosen, it might as well be named by any other term.

Just like everyone, I will try to define “Dao”, after stating that “Dao” cannot be defined.

A possible description by words could be that the “Dao” is the entirety of a cosmic driving force that causes everything. That cosmic driving force sends things “on their way”, it makes them happen and those things make other things happen. Thus, it is the birth mother of everything in creation and everything that has the potential to be created, be it perceivable or not.

It is the underlying principle or fundamental nature of the universe.

The Dao is both the source and the pattern of all existence.

For a practical approach to get the idea of Dao, a little exercise:

Grab the first item you have nearby right now.

Look at it and take some time thinking about the path it has taken between being in your hands and all the way backwards step by step up to the point of the creation of the atoms that make up just one fiber of it, the creation of the quarks, that make up the atoms, the creation of a universe, that allowed the quarks to exist and whatever came before that. What was the driving force for all of that to happen? Can you possibly comprehend why it happened?

Combine that myriad of steps of just one item in your hands with the entirety of not only everything that has existed until now but also everything that has the potential to exist in the future.

The driving force for all of that, the way all of those things take, is considered to be the Dao.

And while you thought about that, think of all the steps all those things have taken in just that short amount of time.



Fig. 3 Illustration: One thing causes the next, like in Domino, but what is the reason?

Q4: Where does Daoism come from?

HISTORY TIME!

Its first scriptures originate from around 600-400 BCE, depending on which texts we allocate to Daoism. Classically the creator of the first scriptures called "Dao De Jing" is considered "Laozi", going back to about 400 BCE.

There is some discussion going on in the academic community whether or not Laozi was an actual sole existing person or a group of people under a fictional name of Laozi.

After the relatively vaguely expressed texts of Laozi, came the texts of Zhuangzi about 350-290 BCE.

Unlike Laozi it's evident he actually existed as a single person; however, it seems likely the later scriptures were not written by his hand, but his disciples. There is a pretty clear cut and strong differences in choice of words, style and even basic meaning, that support that allegation.

The scriptures of Zhuangzi are divided in three main parts, called:

Inner Chapters, Outer Chapters, Mixed Chapters.

As mentioned earlier, its only evident the "Inner Chapters" are surely written by him, while it seems that parts of the Outer Chapter and the complete Mixed Chapters were written by his students.

Sometimes another early author of Daoist texts being mentioned is Liezi, who supposedly lived in between Laozi and Zhuangzi.

However, his persona is a curious case and the current common understanding is that his scriptures originate from a much later time around 300 AD, making him not one of the original early authors and recycling quite many ideas of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

At the time of Laozi and Zhuangzi, they would not call themselves "Daoists", as this category of philosophical school has not been established yet. It has been no earlier than during the Han dynasty (especially past 200 CE) and onwards, that state scholars started grouping together coherent schools under the umbrella term of "Daoism".



Fig. 5 Laozi impression, author of "Dao De Jing"



Fig. 4 Zhuangzi impression, author of "True Scripture of Southern Florescence"

Q5: What is the difference between the scriptures of Laozi and Zhuangzi?

Laozi's Dao De Jing is rather concise, cryptic and minimalistic while Zhuangzi's writings utilize fictive stories within stories and parables to express Daoism.

Both scriptures are absolutely compatible and complement each other.

The philosophical Lao-Zhuang Daoism is completely based on those two authors.

However, both authors have an important different interpretation of "virtue".

"Virtue" in Lao-Zhuang Daoism can be understood as "integrity to act within your nature".

Now comes the difference: Laozi emphasizes that this "virtue" should be in consideration with your place in the society.

Taking a ruler for example, should not only act within his "personal virtue" (as an individual), but also within his social role as a ruler.

Zhuangzi on the other hand emphasizes much more the truly individual "virtue" / nature and even renounces the social influence.

He very clearly says that established social morals and "virtues" (in the Western sense) are to be challenged.

Essentially, they differ in how Laozi thought in society level and Zhuangzi on the individual, personal level.

Following is a little text comparison of their individual, typical style ("concise" vs. "parable"):

Quote Q5.1 Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 27

A good traveler has no fixed plans
and is not intent upon arriving.

A good artist lets his intuition
lead him wherever it wants.

A good scientist has freed himself of concepts
and keeps his mind open to what is.

Thus the Master is available to all people
and doesn't reject anyone.

He is ready to use all situations
and doesn't waste anything.

This is called embodying the light.

What is a good man but a bad man's teacher?

What is a bad man but a good man's job?

If you don't understand this, you will get lost,
however intelligent you are.

It is the great secret.

Quote Q5.2 Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters, "The Great and Most Honoured Master"

Nan-po Tzu-k'uei said to the Woman Crookback, "You are old in years and yet your complexion is that of a child. Why is this?"

"I have heard the Way!"

"Can the Way be learned?" asked Nan-po Tzu-k'uei.

"Goodness, how could that be? Anyway, you aren't the man to do it. Now there's Pu-liang Yi - he has the talent of a sage but not the Way of a sage, whereas I have the Way of a sage but not the talent of a sage.

I thought I would try to teach him and see if I could really get anywhere near to making him a sage. It's easier to explain the Way of a sage to someone who has the talent of a sage, you know. So I began explaining and kept at him for three days, and after that he was able to put the world outside himself.

When he had put the world outside himself, I kept at him for seven days more, and after that he was able to put things outside himself. When he had put things outside himself, I kept at him for nine days more, and after that he was able to put life outside himself.

After he had put life outside himself, he was able to achieve the brightness of dawn, and when he had achieved the brightness of dawn, he could see his own aloneness.

After he had managed to see his own aloneness, he could do away with past and present, and after he had done away with past and present, he was able to enter where there is no life and no death. That which kills life does not die; that which gives life to life does not live.

This is the kind of thing it is: there's nothing it doesn't send off, nothing it doesn't welcome, nothing it doesn't destroy, nothing it doesn't complete. Its name is Peace-in-Strife. After the strife, it attains completion."

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This is the kind of thing it is: there's nothing it doesn't send off, nothing it doesn't welcome, nothing it doesn't destroy, nothing it doesn't complete. Its name is Peace-in-Strife. After the strife, it attains completion."

Q6: What is the difference between philosophical and religious Daoism?

Commonly in Western understanding, there are two interpretations of Daoism, one being the philosophical Daoism (Daojia), the other being religious Daoism (Daojiao).

This division, however, is more a product of modern scholarship than an indigenous Chinese classification. Please note the prefix “philosophical” and “religious” are only prevalent in English. The Chinese names of those two do not actually indicate the meaning “philosophical” and “religious” respectively, but are simply proper names, indicating different lineages or teachings. However, we will use those English terms in the further explanation.

It is highly debated where do draw the line between the philosophy and religion in Daoism or whether there is a line at all.

In the current academic discussions, approaches to establish different models are described (e.g. literati, communal and self-cultivation by Livia Kohn).

Even the definition of "classic Daoism" is tricky, since there are scriptures that pre-date Laozi and could be allocated to Daoism.

Because of those difficulties to categorize Daoist lineages, we specifically talk about the "Daojia of Laozi and Zhuangzi", or in short "Lao-Zhuang Daojia" in this FAQ.

Three major factors influenced the development of religious / post Lao-Zhuang Daoism:

1. Wu Shamanism (Wu Jiao)

At the time, various natural religions were widespread and among them, was Wu Shamanism. A classic element of Wu Shamanism is the belief in supernatural entities, such as ghosts and demons, that would cause sickness and misfortune. Those malevolent entities were driven away by rituals and exorcised by the means of ceremonial dances, Fu talismans (Fu Lu) and plant-based elixirs.

2. Fangshi “magic”

Another natural religion that was commonly met at the time, was the Fangshi magic, elements of which go back to approx. 1100BC. Usual elements were the usage of astrology to predict the future, exorcism, magic, alchemy, ways to become immortal, breathing techniques and rituals that had a sexual component.

3. Celestial Masters

Lastly, the religious branch of Daoism began to peak in popularity with a rebellion against the emperor of the Han dynasty that has started in about 140 CE.

It started with the rebellion of the Daoist sect “Five pecks of rice”, lead by Zhang Daoling (the name originates from the membership fee of 5 斗 of rice, which equals about 50 metric liter). Zhang Daoliang claimed he himself was visited and chosen by Laozi (note: Laozi lived about 500 years earlier) and has received the task to cleanse the world of decadence and establish a new country with only chosen people. Due to this idea, Laozi has become a divine figure to lead people, instead of a mortal human (“Divination of Laozi”).

The movement of the “Five pecks of rice” combined the elements of Wu Shamanism and Fangshi magic with the teachings of Laozi and synthesized what would be known as “Way of the Celestial Masters” (Tianshi Daoism).



The rebellion later escalated into a full-scale revolt, known as the “Yellow Scarf” or “Yellow Turban” insurgency, led by Zhang Jue and his brothers.

For a short while, the rebels were quite successful and had their own, independent theocratic state.

About 210 CE, the rebels were beaten by the warlord Cao Cao of the Han dynasty.

In exchange for their immediate surrender, the “Celestial Masters” asked for Tianshi Daoism to become a state religion, which was the birth of what will be later known as religious Daoism.

Summary religious / post Lao-Zhuang Daoism

Religious Daoism is a synthesis of elements of Wu Shamanism, Fangshi magic, scriptures of Laozi, as well as a hierarchic system defined by the “Celestial Masters”, that includes deity-like central authorities (Zhang Daoling declared himself to be the first “Celestial Master”). It’s a Syncretism of the original philosophical Daoism, with elements of local nature religions (ghosts, demons, exorcism, elixirs, concept of immortality, rituals to predict the future, breathing techniques), a divine / supernatural Laozi and central authorities, that are to be worshipped.



Fig. 6 Wu Jiao depiction: Masks, long dresses, carrying weapons



Fig. 7 Modern Wu Jiao ceremony: Masks, long dresses, carrying weapons





Fig. 9 Zhang Daoling (First "Celestial Master"):
Typical depiction riding a tiger and wielding a sword



Fig. 8 Modern Fu Lu (talismans), charms for different purposes (love, success, health etc.)

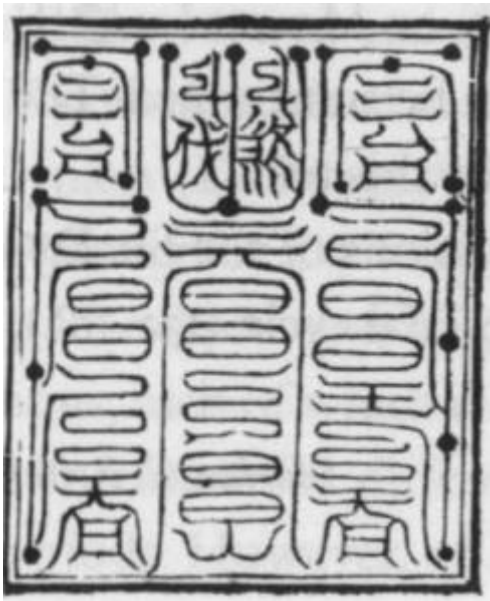


Fig. 10 Ancient Fu Lu (talisman), insignia used for exorcism (~1200AD)

Q7: How are philosophical and religious Daoism contradicting each other?

Some Western scholars, even famous ones like Kristofer Schipper or Russel Kirkland, claim there is no distinction between philosophical Daoism and religious Daoism.

Personally, I do agree to not separate by simply stating a dichotomy of only those two and its complicated where to draw the line.

However, I disagree there is no difference between the scriptures of Laozi and Zhuangzi as a whole and the Daoism that was established by the “Way of Celestial Masters” and cultivated thereafter.

Lao-Zhuang Daojia:

- No central authority
- No specific gods
- No normatively positive morals
- No rituals
- You live, you die, unknown what happens afterwards
- Intent of author: Breaking dogmata without creating a new dogma

Way of Celestial Masters:

- Strict hierarchy with central authority
- Gods, pure ones, immortals
- Incorporation of myriad of rituals from Shamanism (Wujiao, Fangshi)
- Techniques to prolong life / indefinitely
- Intent of author: Gaining influence / ruling people

It is ironic, that Lao-Zhuang Daojia put heavy emphasis on living in tune with nature and proposes a way for humans to live in harmony with their own nature, yet misses elements, that are typical for humans.

We are social beings and as such, seek hierarchy and social groups. The belief in higher beings such as gods, has developed in all of human societies throughout history, independently from each other and is another expression of looking for a higher authority and hierarchy.

In a way, the development of Daoism that took path after the “Way of Celestial Masters” is to be expected considering human nature. Without that development, it is likely that the original Lao-Zhuang Daojia might have been forgotten throughout the ages.



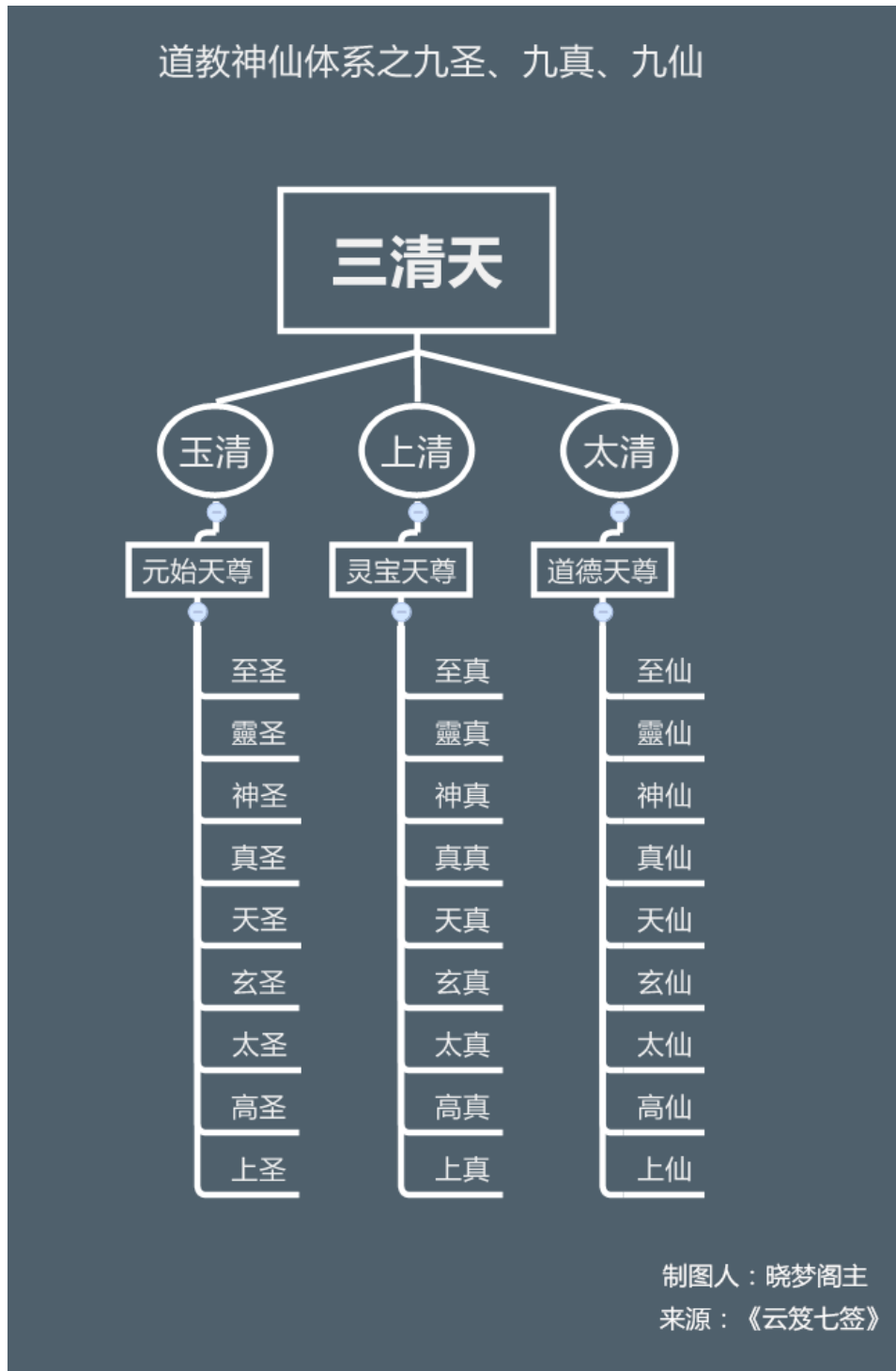


Fig. 11 Religious Daoism: Hierarchy of the Daoist pantheon (三清天, Three Pure Ones) and their respective sub-divisions



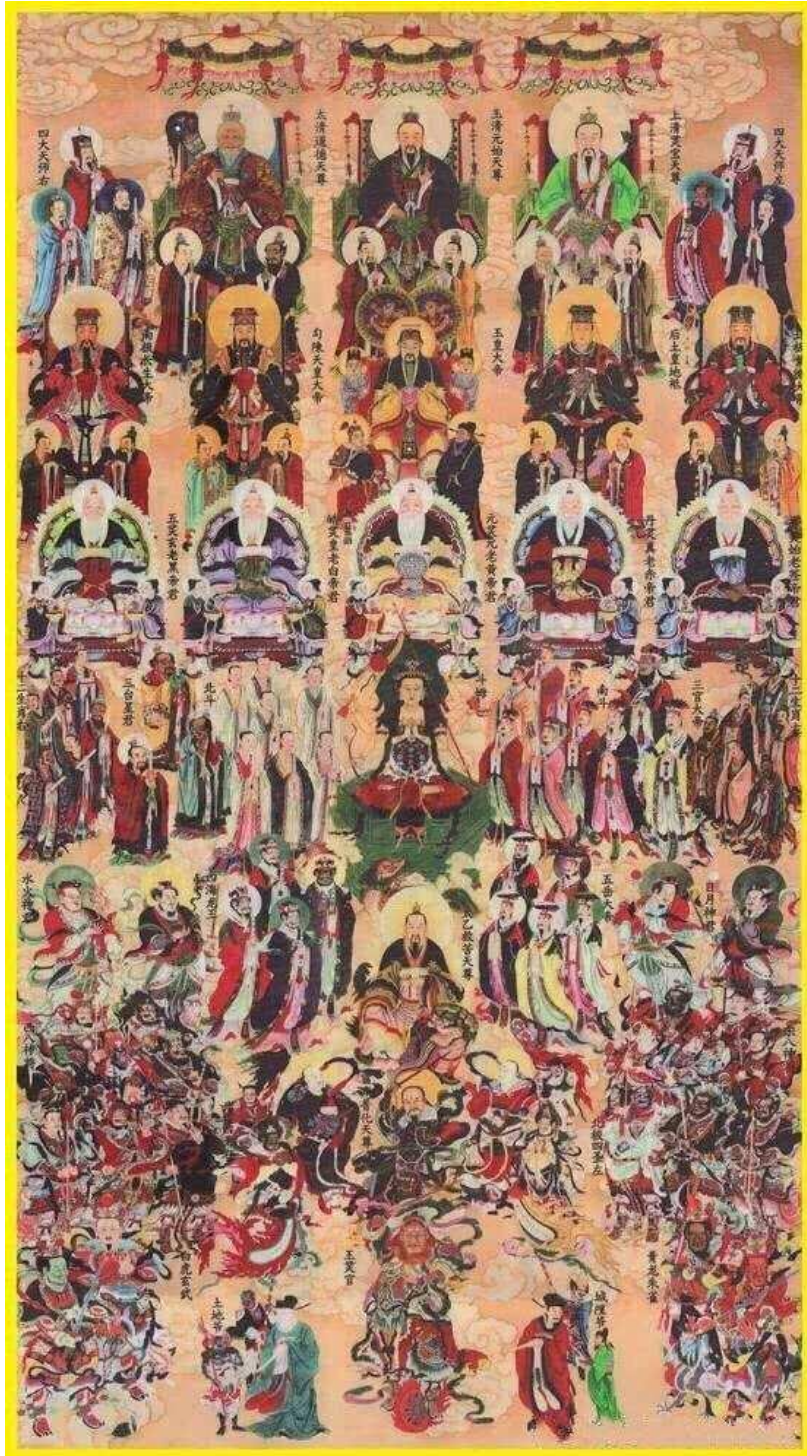


Fig. 12 Religious Daoism: Heavenly pantheon (Celestial beings)

Q8: What is the core idea of Daoism?

Probably the first most important statement the idea of Daoism is based on:

There is permanent change in this universe.

The universe is in a state of flux and transformation, nothing is permanently absolute.

This permanent change is driven by the idea of a cosmic balance.

However; that balance should not be understood as something that has to be well... balanced in the middle or in a resting position.

It just means that something will always cause something else to be influenced, a kind of cosmic interrelation ever driven by a force that causes everything that happens.

The permanent change is considered to be a peaceful and natural process, it does not have a will or morality, but will happen spontaneous and impartial.

Example E8.1: A drop of water is impartial

Take a drop of water for example. It will always freeze as soon as it reaches a certain temperature and it will always melt as soon it reaches a certain higher temperature – it doesn't decide that it will not do that today for whatever reason.

(Please note: Simplified as an example, many conditions such as ambient pressure and a nucleus to enable a beneficial energetic state for crystallization are required to freeze water.)

Quote Q8.1: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 5

Nature is not benevolent.

It regards all masses as the wind regards straw dogs.

The (daoistic) Sage is not benevolent.

He regards the masses as the wind regards straw dogs.

(...)

(note: Dog-shaped puppets made of straw were a commonly used as sacrifices or sometimes as toys for children)

Quote Q8.2: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 16

Empty yourself of everything.

Let the mind become still.

The ten thousand things rise and fall while the Self watches their return.

They grow and flourish and then return to the source.

Returning to the source is stillness, which is the way of nature.

The way of nature is unchanging.

Knowing constancy is insight.

Not knowing constancy leads to disaster.

Knowing constancy, the mind is open.

With an open mind, you will be openhearted.

Being openhearted, you will act royally.

Being royal, you will attain the divine.

Being divine, you will be at one with the Tao.

Being at one with the Tao is eternal.

And though the body dies, the Tao will never pass away.

The very core idea of Daoism is to have your own actions and thoughts to be in tune with that harmonic driving force and thus be connected with all of what is part of that "natural order".

Q9: That sounds pretty cool, how can I become a Daoist?

5 hours of meditating.

3 hours of praying.

5 hours of trance dancing.

3 hours of jogging towards south.

8 hours of sleep under the night sky.

Every day. For 2 years. You might turn bald, but it will only make you stronger.

Why do you think so many monks are bald?

After that, you may apply for an official junior membership at the Daoist society for just 1.000RMB / month. We will then write your name in the official register and you are allowed to call yourself a Daoist.

In a philosophy that deals with the many ways, which is based on permanent change, how could there be such a manual or fixed way?

What makes someone a Christian?

Usually, it involves a special ceremony, following Christian rules and behaviors, and using Christian language. Other Christians then see them as part of the Christian group.

But what about someone who does all these things just because others told them to, without really understanding why?

They might be part of the Christian group, but does that really make them a true Christian?

On the other hand, imagine someone who really lives by Christian values and truly believes in them, but never went through the ceremony or rituals. They really act like a Christian, but they might not be recognized as part of the official Christian group.

I forgot where I read the following lines, but it befits the idea very well:

You cannot decide to become a Daoist, you will one day just discover that there is a word for what you have been doing all along.

Nevertheless, we are humans and we define our identity by membership of different social groups. That seems to be an inherent human nature in our current environmental circumstances.

If you want to be part of a social group of Daoists, beside *actually being a Daoist*, you are gladly invited to join our Discord server: <https://discord.gg/ga3yCMyPnB>

Q10: So is there nothing I can do to follow Daoism / can you recommend some literature?

There is but it might not be as clear and defined as in other philosophies or religions.

As mentioned earlier, Lao-Zhuang wanted to break existing dogmata without establishing new ones.

First and foremost:

Be sure to read the scriptures of Lao-Zhuang Daoism.

They are a short read, it can be done within 1-2 days.

I will link some sources at the end of the FAQ.

I strongly recommend the following order, which is not the chronologically correct order:

First Zhuangzi, then Laozi.

Finally, here a short quote on how to “attain the Dao”:

Quote 10.1: Zhuangzi’s Outer Chapters, Knowledge travels north (chapter 22)

(Hint: “Knowledge”, “Not Conscious of What He Says”, “Crazy Intractable”, “Yellow Thearch” are fictional names of beings in this passage)

Knowledge wandered north up to Dark Waters, where he climbed Recluse Rise Hill and there happened to meet Not Conscious of What He Says. Knowledge said to Not Conscious of What He Says, “I have something I’d like to ask you. What should I think and how should I reflect on it so that I may know the Dao? What should I settle on and how should I deal with it so that I may find the Dao my refuge? What path should I take and how should I follow it so that I may attain the Dao?” Although he asked these three questions, Not Conscious of What He Says did not answer; it was not that he would not reply, he knew not how to reply.

Since Knowledge did not get any answer, he went back down south to White Waters, where he climbed to the summit of Wily Vacuity and there happened to see Crazy Intractable. Knowledge put the same questions to Crazy Intractable, but Crazy Intractable said, “Alas, I knew what you wanted and was going to tell you, but just as I was about to speak, I forgot what I wanted to say.”

Since Knowledge did not get any answer, he went back to the imperial palace, where, in audience with the Yellow Thearch, he put the questions to him. The Yellow Thearch replied, “Don’t think and reflect not and you shall begin to know the Dao. Settle on nothing and deal with nothing and you shall begin to find the Dao your refuge. Take no path and follow nothing and you shall begin to attain the Dao.”

Knowledge then asked the Yellow Thearch, “You and I know this, but both those others did not know it, so who is right?”

The Yellow Thearch replied, “Not Conscious of What He Says was undoubtedly right, and Crazy Intractable seemed to get it, but you and I are nowhere near it, for

‘He who knows does not speak.
He who speaks does not know.’



Quote 10.1: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, Knowledge travels north (chapter 22)

Thus it is that 'the sage practices the teaching that is not expressed in words.'
To give oneself over to its spontaneous practice, this is "the teaching that is not expressed in words."

The Dao can't be got at, Since the Dao consists of what is just naturally so, it can't be got at through words.

(...)

Thus it is also said,
'The pursuit of the Dao means having less each day.'
Its superficiality and inauthenticity are diminished.

'Having less upon having less, eventually one reaches the point where one engages in no conscious action, yet nothing remains undone.'
Once superficiality is all gone and only pristine simplicity is left perfectly intact, though one might act, no self-conscious effort is involved.

Q11: And after I have read the literature, what should I do / how should a Daoist behave?

Let's start with the goal: You want to think and act in accordance with a cosmic balance.

WARNING: Anecdotes intensifying!

Example E11.1: Rulers will be rulers will be rulers

Let's take a ruler of a kind of kingdom for example.

Our exemplary ruler has been living a lavish lifestyle, while his people were starving recently. Naturally, the people are starting to complain about that injustice and no longer support their ruler.

The ruler is well aware of that, but does not want to give in. He suspects people of conspiracy and starts introducing a curfew and increases the presence of the military.

His people now feel all the more subdued and start revolting against such treatment. Of course, the ruler will feel pressured and commands the military to use force. The people, confronted by such violence will react by weaponizing and organizing themselves.

A civil war that lasts for years breaks out.

The entire ordeal spirals into a constant back and forth of reaction to an ever-changing balance.



Quote Q11.1: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 30

(...) Good leaders reach solutions, and then stop. They do not dare to rely on force. (...)

Quote Q11.2: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 32

(...) If princes and kings could follow it (Dao), all things would by themselves abide, Heaven and Earth would unite and sweet dew would fall. People would by themselves find harmony, without being commanded. (...)

Quote Q11.3: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 32

(...) When the sage stands above people, they are not oppressed. When he leads people, they are not obstructed. The world will exalt him and not grow tired of him. (...)

At the end of the day, the cosmic balance always wins.

The ruler can try to lean against that with all his might, which will cause unforeseeable consequences and usually a lot of suffering, but the outcome will be the same:

Sooner or later he will not be ruler anymore.

So how can I act in accordance with the cosmic balance?

Firstly, you need to develop a sense for the balance.

In the beginning, it is a very conscious process of awareness.

Later, it will become an instinct.

To get to that point, it is imperative to understand the concept of "true nature" of things.

And that's where the awareness becomes important: Very often we expect things to behave in a certain way which is against their true nature and are baffled, frustrated and angry because suddenly they don't behave as we expected.

Simplified example: Your hands feel quite warm and you want to cool them down. Your expectation of a fire is, that it is cold. Putting your hands into the fire will cause you nothing but disappointment in that case.

Sounds far-fetched and way too obviously wrong?

How about this:

Example E11.3: Love matters

You find yourself dissatisfied with life, harboring a belief that if only you could be with the person you're enamored with, everything would improve. You imagine that being with her would not only enhance your life but also elevate your sense of self-worth.

As fate would have it, the two of you come together, and for a while, the world seems brighter, filled with the excitement and joy of new love. However, as the initial euphoria fades, a familiar sense of discontent resurfaces. The relationship, which you hoped would be the solution to your unhappiness, hasn't fulfilled this expectation. Concluding that it must be the relationship that's lacking, you decide to end it, resuming your quest for that elusive partnership that will bring the contentment you seek.

Or an actual example of Zhuangzi:

Example E11.4: Useless tree

A carpenter angrily told his friend about how useless that big ass tree on his field is. Its trunk and branches are all twisted and when he tried to make wooden planks out of it, they would turn out to be all crooked. He would have to steam-bend the planks, which is so much work.

Such a foolish tree and waste of space!

The friend simply told the carpenter that he is foolish one.

Instead of making wooden planks out of the tree, which you can do with a straightly grown tree, why not simply enjoy sitting in the shadow of that big tree in the hot summer?

The story tells us at least two things:

If something is used in accordance with its true nature, it's very easy to be used in that way (and a lot of effort if it's not used in that accordance).

Secondly, the beautiful straight tree got cut down because it's so straight, but no one is interested in cutting down the crooked one, so it might stand there for hundreds of years.



Or another quote of Zhuangzi, to show that a formerly correct expectation, can suddenly be wrong, given the situation:

Example E11.5: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, The revolution of Heaven, paragraph 4

Nothing is as good as a boat for crossing water, nothing as good as a cart for crossing land. But though a boat will get you over water, if you try to push it across land, you may push till your dying day and hardly move it any distance at all. And are the past and present not like the water and the land? (...)

Another story is behind the Chinese proverb “塞翁失马”.

It means literally: Sai Weng's lost horse and figuratively: a blessing in disguise.

Quote Q11.4: Chinese proverb Sai Weng's lost horse

A long time ago, a poor Chinese farmer named Sai Weng lost a horse, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's too bad.” The farmer said, “maybe.”

Shortly after, the horse returned bringing another horse with him, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's good fortune,” to which the farmer replied, “maybe.”

The next day, the farmer's son was trying to tame the new horse and fell, breaking his leg, and all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's too bad,” and the farmer replied, “maybe.”

Shortly after, the emperor declared war on a neighboring nation and ordered all able-bodied men to come fight—many died or were badly maimed, but the farmer's son was unable to fight and spared due to his injury.

And all the neighbors came around and said, “well that's good fortune,” to which the farmer replied, “maybe.”

Now we had a lot of examples of observations and thoughts Daoists deal(t) with concerning “true nature” of things and what implication they bring forth.

While “true nature” sounds like an absolute term; it is important to keep in mind that very nature is ever changing. In mathematics, it would be a function with situation as variable, that's heavily influencing the equation.

There are concepts in Daoism to attune your mind to develop the sense of that true nature and to act / expect in accordance with the cosmic balance. The most famous one is called “Wu Wei”, which is something a Daoist usually does.

Q12: What is Wu Wei?

Wu Wei literally translated means “Non doing” as in “Non acting”.

Easily misunderstood it might be interpreted as “Inaction” or “just let it flow”, however it’s more a concept of “Action by inaction”.

Anything that is “done without doing something” is in accordance with the natural driving force.

To “Wu Wei” means to not do something against the naturally happening process and when something is done in that way, it is effortless and very easy.

Such actions are without desire, planning and consideration.

Quote Q12.1: Laozi’s Dao De Jing, Chapter 43

The softest in the world

Surpasses the hardest in the world.

What has no substance

Can penetrate what has no opening.

Thereby I know the value of non-action (wu-wei)

The value of teaching without words

And accomplishing without action

Quote Q12.2: Laozi’s Dao De Jing, Chapter 57

Use justice to rule a country.

Use surprise to wage war.

Use non-action to govern the world.

How do I know this?

I’ve seen it happen:

The more restrictions you have,
the less virtuous people will be.

The more weapons you have,
the less secure people will be.

The more ingenious and clever men are,
The more strange things happen.

The more rules and regulations,
The more thieves and robbers.

Therefore, the sage says:

I take no action and people are reformed.

I am at peace and people become honest.

I do not interfere and people become rich.

I let go of all my desires,
and the people return to the Uncarved Block.



Quote Q12.3: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 3

If you overly esteem talented individuals,
people will become overly competitive.

If you overvalue possessions,
people will begin to steal.

Do not display your treasures
or people will become envious.

The Master leads by
emptying people's minds,
filling their bellies,
weakening their ambitions,
and making them become strong.
Preferring simplicity and freedom from desires,
avoiding the pitfalls of knowledge and wrong action.

For those who practice not-doing (wu-wei),
everything will fall into place.

Quote Q12.4: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 37

The Dao in its regular course does nothing (for the sake of doing it) (wu-wei),
yet nothing is left undone.

If powerful women and men can abide by this,
the whole world would be transformed
by itself, in its natural rhythms.

People would be content
with their simple, everyday lives,
in harmony, and free of desire.

Nameless simplicity will indeed free them from desires.
When there is no desire,
all things are at peace.

Quote Q12.5: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, chapter 7 (應帝王), paragraph 6

Do not be an embodier of fame; do not be a storehouse of schemes; do not be an undertaker of
projects; do not be a proprietor of wisdom.

Embody to the fullest what has no end and wander where there is no trail.

Hold on to all that you have received from nature but do not think you have gotten anything.

Be empty, that is all.

The Perfect Man uses his mind like a mirror - going after nothing, welcoming nothing, responding
but not storing. Therefore, he can win out over things and injures none.

Q13: How do I learn how to “Wu Wei” and how does it help me to gain awareness for the balance?

Let’s take the drop of water as example again.

It does not act in a certain way because of ulterior motives.

It reacts to the temperature and pressure, its surrounding humidity, whether or not it’s in contact with solid material in any given moment.

When you do something as “Wu Wei”, it will be the right thing in that very moment, without much thinking and consideration, it will be easy and not complicated. It will always be right and you will never be disappointed acting “Wu Wei”.

You might do things as “Wu Wei” already without noticing it:

Example E13.1: Am I sleeping right?

For example: Did you ever sleep because you do not want to be sleepy anymore?

If we expect sleep to solve the sleepiness, we might be disappointed. We could have sleep apnea or terrifying nightmares or heartburn which will make us all the sleepier after having slept.

But what if we slept, simply because we were sleepy? Its without expectation, because we felt like it and without intent and goal. And you probably are doing it already every day.

Another example is meditation.

In some philosophies and religions fresh followers might expect to gain positive benefits from meditation, maybe even to get enlightened.

It might lead to that.

But it might more likely lead to frustration with that mindset, because you meditate and you meditate hard for years and years, yet there is no enlightenment.

While this is an oversimplification, I am using it to give an example of wrong expectations, against the nature of things.

Why not meditate for the sake of meditating, just like the sleeping when you are sleepy?

You will never be disappointed, because you wanted to meditate and you meditated. How can that possibly frustrate you?

In the beginning acting by “Wu Wei” you might have to ask yourself very often if you are doing something truly free of intent. It is important to be honest and not try to convince yourself of that being the case. If you have doubt, it’s very likely not “Wu Wei”.

Acting in that way is a great exercise to get a sense of true nature and at the same time to awaken your instinct for natural behavior.

It is my suggestion for a first step.

And as a first exercise, you would have to ask yourself truly:

Why do I want to follow the path of the Dao and why do I “Wu Wei”?

If the answer still has an intent, such as “to feel better” or “I don’t want to suffer anymore” or “same thing we do every night Pinky, try to take over the world!”, you are not quite doing it “Wu Wei” yet.

Q14: Does “Wu-wei” mean that I don’t have to go to work today?

“Wu-wei” does not mean to do nothing.

It means to react accordingly to what’s necessary and natural in any given moment instead of acting with intent or ulterior motive or desire / desired outcome.

Stopping to do something is also doing something, it is interfering and it will cause reactions and will make things more complicated.

So please kindly get up and go to work, school or your appointment as the honorary judge at the International Ice Cream Tasting Championship!

Quote Q14.1: Laozi’s Dao De Jing, Chapter 63

Act by not acting;
do by not doing.

Enjoy the plain and simple.
Find that greatness in the small.
Take care of difficult problems
while they are still easy;
Do easy things before they become too hard.

Difficult problems are best solved while they are easy.
Great projects are best started while they are small.
Because the sage always confronts difficulties,
so she never has to deal with them.

Q15: How to deal with emotions in Daoism?

In the chapters before we discussed about how to align our actions with the natural course by applying Wu-Wei, instead of being driven by desire.

But what about feelings?

For humans to have emotions is perfectly normal and an important part of being human in the first place. Yet, feelings and emotions can cause all kinds of confusion to us.

Just like Daoists act by “Wu-Wei”, they feel by “Wu-Qing”.

Q16: What is “Wu-Qing” and how does it help me to deal with emotions?

“Wu-Wei”, literally “non-action”, is an action, that is not acting against the natural course.

In a similar style, Zhuangzi describes “Wu-Qing” (無情), which literally translates as “non-emotion”.

Just like “non-action” does not mean to not act, “Wu-Qing” does not mean “not to feel”, but rather also means to feel in accordance with the natural course.

But unlike actions, we humans cannot just “not feel” feelings and emotions.

Since that is just our nature, the approach to “Wu-Qing” is a little different than “Wu-Wei”.

Instead of “not feeling”, we accept what we are feeling and don't try “not to feel”.

That is easy for “positive” emotions (love, protected, to be full up, happiness), but counter-intuitive for “negative” emotions (loneliness, starving, pain, depression).

Quote Q16.1: Zhuangzi's Inner Chapters, Chapter 5 (德充符)

(...)

So the sage has his wanderings.

(...)

He has the form of a man but not the feelings of a man. Since he has the form of a man, he bands together with other men. Since he doesn't have the feelings of a man, right and wrong cannot get at him. Puny and small, he sticks with the rest of men. Massive and great, he perfects his Heaven (authors note: Heaven = inherent nature) alone.

Huizi said to Zhuangzi, "Can a man really be without feelings?"

Huizi: "But a man who has no feelings-how can you call him a man?"

Zhuangzi: "The Way gave him a face; Heaven gave him a form - why can't you call him a man?"

Huizi: "But if you've already called him a man, how can he be without feelings?"

Zhuangzi: "That's not what I mean by feelings. When I talk about having no feelings, I mean that a man doesn't allow likes or dislikes to get in and do him harm. He just lets things be the way they are and doesn't try to help life along."

Huizi: "If he doesn't try to help life along, then how can he keep himself alive?"

Zhuangzi: "The Way gave him a face; Heaven gave him a form. He doesn't let likes or dislikes get in and do him harm. You, now - you treat your spirit like an outsider. You wear out your energy, leaning on a tree and moaning, slumping at your desk and dozing - Heaven picked out a body for you and you use it to gibber about `hard' and `white'!"



We put emotions in two categories: Positive (love, happiness etc.) and negative (pain, sorrow etc.). By doing that, we cause a tendency to either accept (the positive ones) or refuse (the negative ones) those emotions.

However, that leads to a cognitive discrimination, meaning it makes us believe positive emotions are right and negative emotions are wrong.

Having negative emotions that we consider wrong, but having them nevertheless, although we think it's wrong, leads to a cognitive dissonance, which can result in emotional turmoil and ongoing inner conflict.

The approach Zhuangzi suggests, is to stop judging emotions as good and bad and have empathy with yourself and your own feelings.

Yes pain, sorrow, unhappiness do not make you feel good, but it's as much of a driving force to change something as happiness and love are a driving force for wanting to achieve them or to keep it.

Q17: Are there any other “Wu’s” I should know about?

I'm glad you are asking, there are!

We already covered:

Wu Wei	无为	Action in harmony with the natural path
Wu Qing	无情	Feeling in harmony with the natural path

Further “Wu’s” are:

Wu Yu	无欲	Desire in harmony with the natural path
Wu Zhi	无知	Knowing in harmony with the natural path

With the earlier explanations for Wu Wei und Wu Qing, you should already have a pretty good idea about how to interpret Wu Yu and Wu Zhi.

Q18: Don't act, don't feel, don't desire, don't know... so many restrictions, I thought you were cool?

As explained in earlier questions, the character for „Wu“ (without) does not mean “Do not” (act, feel, desire, know).

It very much encourages you to act, feel, desire, know, we are lively human after all!

However, the Wu's ask you to commit those acts genuinely spontaneously, because the outer circumstances as you perceive them in that moment incite you committing them.

No matter how fast the equilibrium of the infinity of interacting things in this world is changing: By exercising the Wu's, you can interact with, or rather react to the million things happening all around us without any friction, instead of being torn apart by it.

What's more cool than that!?

Q19: Buddhists keep bullying me about my practices. How do you practice Daoism?

Specific exercises and rituals to progress in and attain an understanding or reaching a certain state are common in, but not limited to, different branches of Buddhism, for example various kinds of meditation, Zazen, Koans, chanting and rituals.

Christian practices can be for example participating in the Mass, praying and confession.

Daoists believe in spontaneous actions, that nothing can and should prepare us for.

The understanding and state present during the practice might be of no use for Daoists in a different situation. Of course, that does not mean that the practices cannot be fully enjoyed while doing them, for the sake of doing them.

While a little different, the Wu's are what comes close to Daoist practices.

In its basis the Daoist practice is more of a "way of living" and it's exercised in literally every daily action, feeling and thought.

Next time a Buddhist bullies you for "not having practices", you tell them to kindly unconditionally love themselves.

Q20: Daoism sounds very deterministic. If I just follow a cosmic balance, is there no free choice and is everything predetermined?

No, there are many free choices. However, not at any given time.

Timing is everything in Daoism.

Example E20.1: Nothing is softer or more flexible than water, yet nothing can resist it

Imagine you dropped into a raging river, you somehow were able to grab a piece of wood, but the river is very broad and the current forces you to follow the flow of the river mercilessly.

What are the options?

You can try to swim to the sides to get to the saving land without avail.

The current is strong and you become exhausted after some hours. You pass out. When finally, you arrived at a spot at which the river is much narrower and the land within an armlength's reach, you are still passed out and you miss the chance. A few hundred meters you slip from the wood.

You can also simply wait on your flotsam, using only minimum effort to hold yourself onto it. It is what in this very moment is the easiest thing.

Some hours later, you arrive at the spot where the river is narrower. You can simply grab onto the land and get off the river, without any effort.

But, there are options here as well. You can get off the river on the left side, on the right side or even not at all, to see what else is ahead.

Your choices matter.

But depending on the ever-changing situation, you need to adjust.

What is easy to do when having dropped into a quiet pond, might be exhausting and counterproductive to do when having dropped into a river.

Q21: What about morals in Daoism? What is good and what is bad?

Unlike in other Chinese philosophies such as Confucianism, morals are not of focus in Daoism. Any moral, that would be considered “good” these days, can be negative, depending on the situation and vice versa.

Thus such a fixed definition of what is good and what is bad has no place in Daoism.

Q22: Does that mean Daoism is amoral or immoral?

Daoism is often wrongfully thought of being amoral and to an extent immoral.

Firstly, Daoism does not endorse normatively positive morals, but it does also not specifically advertise normatively bad actions either.

Secondly, most humans are not monsters. Our inherent nature is that of a social being, depending on others and having compassion. The currently socially accepted morals and laws are not what made humans behave that way, but are the logical consequence of that very human nature.

Thus modern morals are nothing more than human nature written down.

Q23: How about a god in Daoism?

Just as with morals, the existence of a god is neither denied nor encouraged in Daoism.

However, if there was a god, then it’s existence would have paved by the Dao as well.

Quote Q23.1: Laozi’s Dao De Jing, Chapter 4

The Dao body is empty,
yet its functioning is inexhaustible.
So profound!
It seems to be the ancestor of the myriad things.
So hidden!
As if gone and at the same time actually there.
I do not know whence it is produced,
but it can be called the forebear of the heavenly god(s).

Q24: I keep reading the expression “heaven”, what does it mean?

Whenever the term "heaven" or "heavenly" is used in Lao-Zhuang, it refers to a kind of cosmic, natural, grand order. It's a fundamental, underlying principle.

"Earth" and "earthly" also follow or underlie that grand principle, but are more tangible, more material, not abstract.

An example:

The observation that day and night are shifting (thanks to the earth rotating around a bright star) is a fundamental principle that we are living with. That is “heavenly” (tian).

The observation that (most) plants, maybe those that we want to cultivate to eat them, need enough sunshine to grow, that is also “heavenly” (tian)

Finally, our action to live in harmony with that heavenly facts and planting our crops at a place where they can get enough sunshine, that is “earthly” (di).

Q25: What happens after death in Daoism?

Let's start with a little story:

Quote Q25.1: Zhuangzi Inner Chapters, Chapter 2 (齊物論)

How do I know that to hate death is not to suffer youthful loss and thus know not where to return?

To lose one's native place when young is called youthful loss. One who suffers youthful loss tends to become so content with where he consequently finds himself that he knows not to return to his native place. So how do I know that life is not such youthful loss! And how do I know that death would not be such a return that we instead hate!

Concubine Li was the daughter of the Ai district border defense commandant. When the state of Jin first captured her, she cried so much that tears soaked the whole front of her garment, and it was only after she had arrived at the palace, shared his master bed with the ruler, and eaten his fine meats that she regretted she had ever cried.

Throughout a lifetime, one's emotions change as much as this. Since on any given day one never knows how he might feel on any other day, how much the less can one know what the change between life and death might bring!

We do not know what happens after death, aside of being able to observe the body rots away. It is human nature to be afraid of uncertainty. But any change is just that: Change.

Q26: How about you have not even once mentioned the Yin and Yang? What does it mean?

The symbol itself is referred to as “Tai Ji Tu” (太极图) and consists of the hollow circle “Wuji” (无极) around it, the dark color of “Yin” (阴) and the white color of “Yang” (阳).

You will not find much about the Yin and Yang in philosophical Daoism, except one chapter in the Dao De Jing, where it is briefly used as a comparison.

It serves as an example, that for the existence of everything there is a reason, even if the reason is simply for the opposite to exist and also both can not-exist (yet), but are still possible.

The idea is that for something to be perceived, you will require a contrast, something that is different.

If for example the only color in existence was red, you would not be aware of it, because you could not find something that is not red.

Thus there are common thoughts on the Yin Yang symbol:

The existence of light causes the existence of shadow. But light would not exist with shadow in the first place.

And on the hollow circle (Wuji) around it: Without neither light or shadow being able to be perceived, they both exist and have the potential to be perceived, but cannot be perceived yet, because there is no contrast. Thus, the inside of the Wuji (which is just “nothingness”) has the potential to be “everythingness” and that is part of the inherent nature of nothingness.

This “everythingness” also carries the idea of everything having been connected once and because both parts of the contrast are born out of that “everythingness” are still connected.

Quote Q26.1: Laozi’s Dao De Jing, Chapter 42

The Tao gives birth to One.

One gives birth to Two.

Two gives birth to Three.

Three gives birth to all things.

The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.

(...)



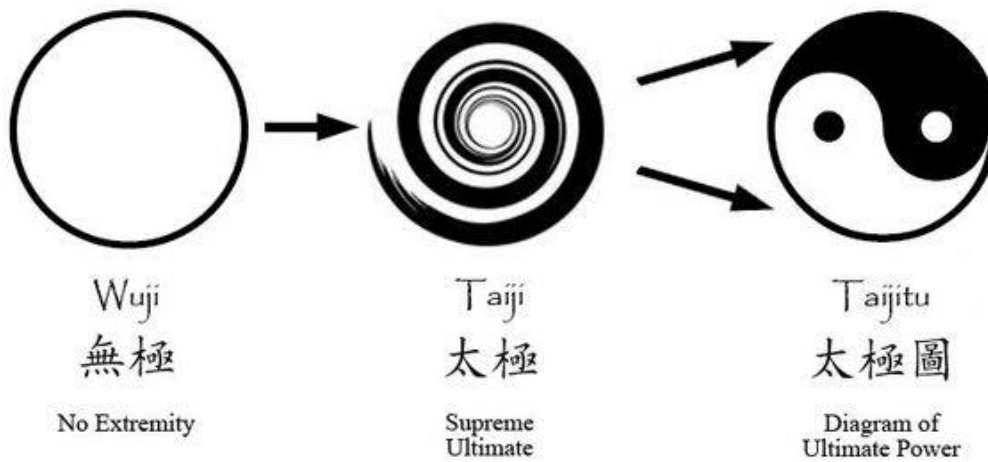


Fig. 13 Yin-Yang: From Wuji ("One") to Taijitu ("Three"), NOT created by the author of this text

First, there is only "emptiness", or rather "non-perceivability", because there is no contrast (Wuji). That's the "one".

Next, for reasons unbeknownst to us, another thing is perceivable beside the "one". Now, we realize there are actually two things! We can see something that's "not the one" and because of that, we can see that thing that is "the one". Thus, two things are born (Taiji).

Those two things are depending on each other. If one of them disappeared, the other would too. This interdependence between the two, or, in other terms, this "couple", makes the three.

Aside of that idea, the Yin and Yang has no further role in philosophical Daoism, but religious / mystic Daoism. As for philosophical Daoism, the Yin and Yang plays an extremely small role of essentially a foot note and has only "just" become popular in about the Ming dynasty, 1368 to 1644, which makes it rather modern.

Q27: Are Qi Gong / Taiji important Daoist practices?

Qi Gong and Taiji are first and foremost what I would call gymnastic practices. You will not find references to either in the scriptures of Laozi and Zhuangzi.

Taiji in a nutshell is consisting of a multitude of different movements that were developed over the centuries and were united in one system. Those movements will be chained together to create one long, flowing movement.

The creation of that system under the name “Taiji” can be reliably traced back to somewhat the 17th century and the general Cheng Wangting, which makes it (the system under that name) a modern thing.

The system of Qigong in its current form is even more modern and was defined in about 18th century mainly by Jiang Weiqiao. He was known to be a believer of the religious Daoist concept of “Internal Alchemy”, which gave the exercises defined by him the contribution to be part of Daoism. Later, he switched his focus to Buddhism altogether.

While they are great exercises for staying fit, they are a modern concept and are absolutely not mandatory. It can be understood as one form of meditation for focusing / clearing one’s mind, that relies on movement of using the muscle memory, instead of sitting still.

Q28: The idea of “non action” and to adjust to the current situation and the cosmic harmony reminds me a lot of Stoicism. Is Daoism not just same as Stoicism?

At first glance Stoicism and Daoism do look very similar. However, the processes are quite different and contradict each other.

In short, Stoicism is something very active, where you would actively think and work to change and adjust your life accordingly and to have control over your affects to be free of your temperamental passion.

In Daoism you would be passive, be instinctively in tune with the cosmic harmony and automatically react to that balance without thinking. Feelings are natural, so is passion. If its required, they can burn as hot as the sun, there is nothing wrong with that. You want to do things without unnatural intend. Control is impossible.

Q29: What's up with "Qi"?

"Qi" (气) literally means "steam" or "gas", but is often translated as "breath of life" or "vital energy" in the spiritual context and can be understood as "life force".

However, the concept of "Qi" as an inherent energy living in us, that can be manipulated, cultivated or utilized (Hadouken!) is not something that is covered by Lao-Zhuang philosophical Daoism, but is of great focus in religious Daoism.

The character of "Qi" will appear exactly 3 times in the entirety of the Dao De Jing and is used in different context each time.

Let us have a look at it:

Quote Q29.1: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 10

Can you coax your mind from its wandering
and keep to the original oneness?

Can you do this and not fail?

Can you focus your life-breath until you become
supple as a newborn child?

While you cleanse your inner vision
will you be found without fault?

Can you love people and lead them
without forcing your will on them?

When Heaven gives and takes away
can you be content with the outcome?

When you understand all things
can you step back from your own understanding?

Giving birth and nourishing,
having without possessing,
acting with no expectations,
leading and not trying to control:
this is the supreme virtue.

Quote Q29.2: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 42

The Tao gives birth to One.

One gives birth to Two.

Two gives birth to Three.

Three gives birth to all things.

The ten thousand things carry yin and embrace yang.

They blend their life breaths
in order to produce harmony.

(...)



Quote Q29.3: Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 55

(...)

It is not wise to rush about.

Controlling the life breath causes strain.

If too much energy is used, exhaustion follows.

This is not the way of Tao.

Whatever is contrary to Tao will not last long.

In chapter 10 "Qi" ("life-breath") refers to an earlier version of yourself and in chapter 55 it can be understood "something natural, that you cannot control", however chapter 42 gives us a great example to explain "Qi".

When we talked about Laozi's Dao De Jing, Chapter 42 in the question Q21 we have established:

Quote Q29.4: Q23: How about you have not even once mentioned the Yin and Yang? What does it mean?"

(...)

First, there is only "emptiness", or rather "non-perceivability", because there is no contrast (Wuji). That's the "one".

Next, for reasons unbeknownst to us, another thing is perceivable beside the "one". Now, we realize there are actually two things! We can see something that's "not the one" and because of that, we can see that thing that is "the one". Thus, two things are born (Taiji).

Those two things are depending on each other. If one of them disappeared, the other would too. This interdependence between the two, or, in other terms, this "couple", makes the three.

Having just a "couple" of two things and their union as a third aspect is not enough. That constellation would be static, without "life".
What gives it "life"?

Imagine a mechanical metronome or a pendulum, that is not displaced yet. Once you displace it, it will seek balance. That constant back and forth will cause an interaction within of our "three things".



One side will yield, the other will grow, that imbalance will seek to balance itself again. The two things are depending on each other and the complete overtaking of one side would mean the non-existence of it, so now the overtaking side will yield and the other side will grow again. And. So. On.

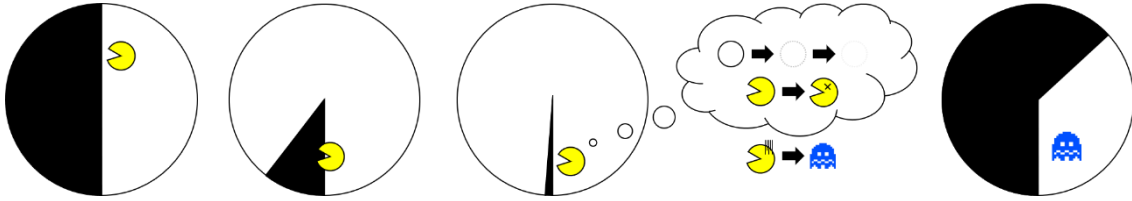


Fig. 14 Author's poor attempt to depict the fear of the Yang using a Pac-Man reference

Can we possibly grasp the complexity of all of the things interacting with each other like that within the myriad of things that make up just one atom?

And the myriad to the exponent of myriad things that interact with each other, just for you to lift a finger?

All thanks to everything seeking balance.

That's how impossibly complicated the entire nature is.

Q30: What is your personal favorite chapter / quote in the Daoistic scriptures?

If I had to choose, I would say that I generally like Zhuangzi's chapter "Autumn Flood" of his "Outer Chapters" quite a bit, especially the following part.

Quote Q30.1: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, Autumn Flood, various paragraphs:

"In this case," replied the Spirit of the River, "what am I to do and what am I not to do? How am I to arrange my declinings and receivings, my takings-hold and my lettings-go?"

"From the point of view of Tao," said the Spirit of the Ocean, "value and worthlessness are like slopes and plains.

To consider either as absolutely such would involve great injury to Tao. Few and many are like giving and receiving presents. These must not be regarded from one side, or there will be great confusion to Tao.

It would be unfair only to regard, from the receiver's standpoint, the amount given. The intention of the giver must also be taken into the calculation.

Be discriminating, as the ruler of a State whose administration is impartial. Be dispassionate, as the worshipped deity whose dispensation is impartial. Be expansive, like the points of the compass, to whose boundlessness no limit is set. Embrace all creation, and none shall be more sheltered than another. This is the unconditioned. And where all things are equal, how can we have the long and the short?

"Tao is without beginning, without end. Other things are born and die. They are impermanent; and now for better, now for worse, they are ceaselessly changing form. Past years cannot be recalled: time cannot be arrested. The succession of states is endless; and every end is followed by a new beginning. Thus, it may be said that man's duty to his neighbor is embodied in the eternal principles of the universe. All he has to do is to be.

"The life of man passes by like a galloping horse, changing at every turn, at every hour. What should he do, or what should he not do, other than let his decomposition go on?"

"If this is the case," retorted the Spirit of the River, "pray what is the value of Tao?"

"Those who understand Tao," answered the Spirit of the Ocean, "must necessarily apprehend the eternal principles above mentioned and be clear as to their application. Consequently, they do not suffer any injury from without. They never oppose, but let all things take their course.

"The man of perfect virtue cannot be burnt by fire, nor drowned in water, nor hurt by frost or sun, nor torn by wild bird or beast. Not that he makes light of these; but that he discriminates between safety and danger. Happy under prosperous and adverse circumstances alike, cautious as to what he discards and what he accepts; —nothing can harm him.
(Continued on next page)



Quote Q30.1: Zhuangzi's Outer Chapters, Autumn Flood, various paragraphs:

"Therefore it has been said that the natural abides within, the artificial without. Virtue abides in the natural. Knowledge of the action of the natural and of the artificial has its root in the natural, its development in virtue. And thus, whether in motion or at rest, whether in expansion or in contraction, there is always a reversion to the essential and to the ultimate."

"What do you mean," enquired the Spirit of the River, "by the natural and the artificial?"

"Horses and oxen," answered the Spirit of the Ocean, "have four feet. That is the natural. Put a halter on a horse's head, a string through a bullock's nose, —that is the artificial.

"Therefore, it has been said, do not let the artificial obliterate the natural; do not let will obliterate destiny; do not let virtue be sacrificed to fame. Diligently observe these precepts without fail, and thus you will revert to the divine."

The walrus envies the centipede; Its many legs and nimble gait.
the centipede envies the snake; Which moves without legs.
the snake envies the wind; Which moves far more quickly even without body.
the wind envies the eye; Which travels even without moving.
the eye envies the mind; Which can comprehend the whole universe, past and present alike.

The walrus said to the centipede, "I hop about on one leg, but not very successfully. How do you manage all these legs you have?"

"I don't manage them," replied the centipede. "Have you never seen saliva? When it is ejected, the big drops are the size of pearls, the small ones like mist. They fall promiscuously on the ground and cannot be counted. And so, it is that my mechanism works naturally, without my being conscious of the fact."

The centipede said to the snake, "With all my legs I do not move as fast as you with none. How is that?"

"One's natural mechanism," replied the snake, "is not a thing to be changed. What need have I for legs?"

The snake said to the wind, "I can manage to wriggle along, but I have a form. Now you come blustering down from the North Sea to bluster away to the south sea, and you seem to be without form. How is that?"

"'Tis true," replied the wind, "that I bluster as you say; but anyone who can point at me or kick at me, excels me. As I cannot do as much to them.

On the other hand, I can break huge trees and destroy large buildings. That is my strong point. Out of all the small things in which I do not excel I make one great one in which I do excel. And to excel in great things is given only to the Sages."

Everything has its own natural qualifications. What is difficult to one is easy to another.

Q31: Do I need to join a temple for becoming a Daoist?

Most temples you will find, are focusing on the religious Daoism and you do not have to join any community if you decide to follow the path of the Daoism.

As a matter of fact, in ancient times, it was advised for beginning followers to leave their home, isolate themselves from their known society and to explore the world.

Q32: There are so many translations of Laozi and Zhuangzi, which one is correct?

There are many translations and many will translate the same paragraph completely different. The Chinese original scriptures are not written in coherent sentences, but rather single characters that form a sequence of words, thus is wide open to free interpretation.

For those reasons a literal translation of the scripture without interpretation is not possible.

Generally there is nothing wrong with reading different interpretations, since it will show many different angles.

However, beware that Daoism is free of religion, blind belief, mysticism, magic, ways to improve yourself or your life and putting anyone or anything above anyone or anything else.

If you spot such elements, it can be considered a “very far-fetched”, to the point of purposely wrong translation.

Q33: Are the “Book Of Changes” (Yijing), “The Art Of War” (Sunzi Bingfa), “Journey To The West” (Xi You Ji) Daoist books?

In Short: No, none of those books are either affiliated, nor classified as Daoist works.

Daoism is highly flexible and adaptable, in hindsight you might find the Christian Bible or any other works to contain Daoist thought as well. However, no one would call the Bible a Daoist scripture.

Book Of Changes (Yijing):

Out of the three, this one is the hardest to explain as to why it is not Daoist.

You can understand the Yijing to describe a mindset and way of thinking of a society that later would lead to the creation of Confucianism, Daoism, Mohism, Legalism and the other “Hundred Schools of Thought”.

We could say that, to be precise it’s a written testament of chosen topics of a Zeitgeist that later would give birth to the schools of thought.

The Art Of War (Sunzi Bingfa):

Hard to precisely date the text itself, we know that the author lived around 500BC.

In short, it deals with the topic of efficient warfare at the time.

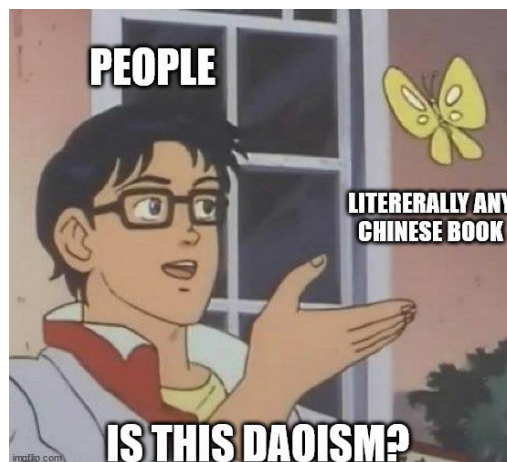
While it does contain the idea of “being flexible”, “adapting to the situation” and “using the environment”, those characteristics are for sure not exclusive to Daoism – not to mention the entire theme of attacking and war are not typically Daoist.

On top, no typical Daoist wording, nor any other Daoist topics are mentioned in the scripture, making it a historical, but not at all Daoist text.

Journey To The West (Xi You Ji):

We all know Sun Wukong and his epic adventures!

While you will find several times Daoists being mentioned in the story (which are usually the bad guys bullying the protagonist Buddhists), it is a fantastic novel, not a historic document.



Q34: There are no female protagonists in Laozi and Zhuangzi. Are they sexist?

It does not come as a surprise that most of the fictional characters, especially in Zhuangzi, are male: At the time of those authors society was predominantly patriarchal, with social, political, and intellectual spheres largely dominated by men.

However, the authors never specifically emphasized or elaborated on the fact its men, their maleness is never made of relevance.

Men were not seen as men in those stories, but as mere humans.

In summary, while the characters in Laozi's and Zhuangzi's works are predominantly male, reflecting the societal norms of their times, their stories are primarily concerned with exploring universal human experiences and Daoist philosophical concepts, rather than focusing on gender-specific narratives.

Q35: TL; DR?

1. Read the scriptures of Zhuangzi and Laozi
2. Sharpen your awareness of "True Nature" of things and humans
3. Understand the concept of the different Wu's and apply it
4. Continue doing 2 and 3 until it becomes an instinct
- 5.
6. Profit

Q36: I have further questions, where can I ask them?

I am strongly recommending the Discord community "Dying Lotus Philosophy" by Lauren for any inquiries on Daoism or other philosophies and religions: <https://discord.gg/mHExQUJXkj>

You can also personally contact me via Discord DM: Emilia#6666

Literature for further reading – History and introduction of Daoism

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Daoism:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/daoism/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Laozi:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/laozi/>

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy on Zhuangzi:

<https://plato.stanford.edu/entries/zhuangzi/>

Literature for further reading – Laozi's Dao De Jing

English, GREAT side-by-side comparison tool by Tasuki, multiple translations:

<https://ttc.tasuki.org/display:Code:gff,sm,rh>

I have preselected Gia-Fu Feng (close to literal translation), Stephen Mitchell (modern interpretation) and Ron Hogan (nonchalant, almost comical interpretation) for you, but you can select others.

Dao De Jing: A Philosophical Translation

by Ames and Hall

ISBN-10: 0345444191

ISBN-13: 978-0345444196

The Annotated Critical Laozi With Contemporary Explication and Traditional Commentary

by Chen Guying

ISBN-10: 9004421572

ISBN-13: 978-9004421578

Preferred English interpretation

Literature for further reading – Zhuangzi's Inner, Outer, Mixed Chapters

A New Translation of the Sayings of Master Zhuang as Interpreted

by Guo Xiang

ISBN-10: 0231123868

ISBN-13: 978-0231123860

Preferred English interpretation

English translation by Burton Watson:

<https://terebess.hu/english/chuangtzu.html>

German translation with interpretation by Viktor Kalinke:

Zhuangzi. Das Buch der daoistischen Weisheit

ISBN-10: 3150112397

ISBN-13: 978-3150112397

Strongly recommended for German readers