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Acknowledgments

This book is part of a project entitled “Dao and Time.” It gaccemerged from the 13th International Conference on Daoist Studies, “Dao and Time: Personal Cultivation and Spiritual Transformation.” Organized by myself and Robin Wang, the conference took place in June 2019 at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, beginning—of all times—on the summer solstice. Both time and place, moreover, of the meeting were arranged to be in close proximity to the 17th Triannual Conference of the International Society for the Study of Time, a pioneering organization and major driver in the study of time. I am deeply indebted for their inspiration and support.

The conference’s challenge was to look at time in a Daoist context, covering all sorts of different dimensions. In the course of planning, three major areas of inquiry emerged, represented by the three keynote speakers: classical philosophy—Lisa Raphals (University of California, Riverside); comparative perspectives—Paul Harris (Loyola Marymount University); and cultivation practices—Hervé Louchouart (Instituto Daoista para la Salud, Guernavaca, Mexico). All three were covered widely during the conference, and a call for papers resulted in a number of further contributions, making the creation of this and other edited volumes possible.

As editor, I am deeply grateful to my co-organizer Robin Wang as well as the keynote speakers and participants at the conference. The contributors have been wonderful to work with, and I am excited and pleased to be able to offer this volume to the scholarly community.

—Livia Kohn, November 2020

Introduction

Dimensions of Daoist Time

LIVIA KOHN

Time, literally, is of the essence. It is a key feature in all cultures, determining human thought, expectations, actions, and developments. A major factor of human life, it is at the core of everything people do, in one way or another ruling human lives: establishing precedents, determining choices, and setting goals. From a broader perspective, as outlined by J. T. Fraser (1923-2010), it appears in six major temporalities, central reference frames of time or chronotypes that are all present within each of us, moving at different speeds and creating both progress and conflict.

Matching the overall evolution of the universe, which increased in complexity and energy rate density with every major step, the six chronotypes are: (1) the atemporal or timeless state of primordial chaos; (2) the prototemporal realm of quantum simultaneity; (3) the eotemporal long-term rhythms of the stars and planets; (4) the biotemporal dimensions of the human body; (5) the noötemporal phenomena of brain and mind, and (6) the most complex, the sociotemporal world of clocks and calendars, history and society, as well as analysis and philosophy (Fraser 1987, chs. 3-4).

These six temporalities each work with different types of causation and require different terminologies and modes of thinking, thus leading to a fundamental tension and a continuous state of unresolvable, creative conflict (Fraser 1999, 26). They remain in constant, dynamic flux, so that "all balance is but unperceived conflict," which may either be maintained for a period, give rise to a new integrative level, or be eliminated by collapse into the level from which it came (1999, 39). In other words, while human beings participate in, and have access to, all six temporalities, they do so at their peril. The very multiplicity of time is not only the root of creativity and ongoing evolution, but also forms the source of deep-seated insecurity and discontent, of an ongoing struggle between the demands of social, biological, natural, and cosmic time patterns.

Previous Studies

Much of ancient Chinese and also Daoist thought can be understood in terms of time, but only few studies have focused on the issue to date. The first to bring it into the scholarly debate was the British biochemist Joseph Needham (1900-1995), who was initially confronted with Chinese philosophy when several graduate science students from China came to pursue research at Cambridge University in 1937.

Intrigued by the question of why the Chinese despite great inventiveness and cultural incentives did not develop the kind of science known in the West, he inaugurated a massive project that has resulted in numerous volumes under the heading *Science and Civilisation in China* (see Winchester 2008). His first specific venture into issues of time occurred in the early 1960s, when he gave a lecture on the topic at the Royal Anthropological Institute in Edinburgh, which was subsequently published (1965), then reprinted several times (1966; 1969).

Here he distinguishes cosmic spacetime (*yuzhou* 宇宙) from seasonal time (*shi* 時) and duration (*jiu* 久), citing several Daoist sources but mainly focusing on the Mohist canon, which contains the most analytic presentation of the issue (1966, 92-94; 1969, 219-20). Referring back to Marcel Granet's early assessment (1934, 88-89), he notes that time in traditional China is rarely considered in abstract terms or apart from concrete actions, but appears mostly connected to clocks, calendars, and life events. It tends to be "always divided into separate spans, stretches, blocks, or boxes, like the organic differentiation of space into particular expanses and domains" (1966, 98; 1969, 225).

To him, the key contribution of Daoism is its concept of return, reversal, or revolution, that is, its overall cyclical vision of never-ceasing circulation, described as the core quality of naturalness (*ziran* 自然) and classified by cyclical markers such as yin and yang and the five phases (*wuxing* 五行).

The first reprinting of Needham's seminal work appeared in 1966, in J. T. Fraser's path-breaking volume of close to 700 pages, *The Voices of Time*, together with twenty-four other contributions that cover multiple disciplines and geographical areas. Fraser, born in Hungary in 1923, was trained as an engineer. He emigrated to the U.S. after World War II, worked for various companies, and filed patents on a number of inventions. Fascinated by the complexity of time, he reached out to scientists, thinkers, and writers who shared his concerns and, in 1966, not only published *The Voices of Time* but also founded the International Society for the Study of Time (www.studyoftime.org). He then acquired academic qualifications by earning a Ph. D. from the University of Hanno-

ver in Germany, submitting a dissertation entitled “Time as a Hierarchy of Creative Conflict” that outlined his core vision of multiple temporalities.

The Society since then has organized international conferences on various topics related to time, usually in three-year intervals. Inspired by Needham’s work, Fraser in cooperation with Nathaniel Lawrence and F. C. Haber, sponsored a special meeting in 1983 on “Time, Science and Society in China and the West.” Held in Monte San Savino, Italy, it created a first forum to bring together Chinese and China scholars with Western thinkers and scitists specially dedicated to issues of time. The resulting conference volume of the same title, besides more general works, contains studies on time in Chinese medicine (Hans Agren), calendar organization (Lo Huisheng), traditional science (Nathan Sivin), Daoist ritual (Kristofer Schipper and Hsiu-hui Wang), poetry (Frederick Turner) and Mohist philosophy (Zhang Yinzhi) (Fraser et al. 1986).

Inspired by this, the leading Buddhist scholar Erik Zürcher (1928-2008) in cooperation with the Confucian historian Huang Chun-chieh 黃俊傑 (b. 1946) in 1991 organized an international conference at University of Leiden, on “Time and Space in Chinese Culture.” The resulting volume presents fifteen essays in four parts, focusing on time and space in general, their lived expression, ways of management, and their effects in politics and social life (Huang and Zürcher 1995).

The sources here tend to be largely literary, with few philosophical materials, notably Confucian works and the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes), aka *Zhouyi* 周易 (Zhou [Book of] Changes). Daoism is represented again by Kristofer Schipper, who focuses on time in self-cultivation and ritual as presented in the 4th-century visualization manual *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Scripture of Laozi).

Last but not least, Huang Chun-chieh, in cooperation with cosmology scholar John B. Henderson, organized another conference on time in 2000 at the National Taiwan University in Taipei. Entitled “Notions of Time in Chinese Historical thinking,” it focused dominantly on issues of history. Its edited volume contains nine articles in four divisions—general conceptualizations, historical consciousness, philosophy of history, and modern visions (Huang and Henderson 2006).

None of these meetings or studies has focused specifically on Daoist thought. They have made only minor contributions on issues of time in Chinese philosophy, which—with some exceptions, such as Tu Weiming’s “Introductory Note” (1974)—has lingered on the margins of scholarly awareness. This collection is a first step to remedy this situation, focusing strongly and specifically on classical Daoist thought.

Core Concepts

The volume begins with David Pankenier's "Timeliness in Pre-Daoist Consciousness." He argues that metaphysics and cosmology in early Daoism are not *sui generis* but have a history in the empirical study of the heavens. He traces the emphasis on conforming with change and "time as it passes," so characteristic of Warring States thought, to similar preoccupations into the Neolithic, to "proto-Daoists" who were astronomers and calendar masters, crucial practitioners of time management. They fulfilled the vital cultural task of maintaining conformity with the seasons and gave rise to the understanding that the workings of heaven were comprehensible and its Dao could be comprehended—becoming forerunners of both classical thinkers and later Daoist masters.

Sharon Small studies "Time and Timelessness: Early Daoist Theories of Cosmic Generation," focusing on excavated texts of the 4th century BCE, such as the *Hengxian* (Primordium of Constancy) and the *Taiyi shengshui* (The Great One Generates Water). They describe a cosmometaphysical realm of infinity, where Dao or other "ultimate origins" (such as Heng or Taiyi), remain in stillness without movement: they have neither beginning nor end. But the texts also outline a cosmogonic generation of the universe: it has a clear beginning, unfolds through movement, and works with the interaction of complementary forces. Daoist thinkers integrate the two through concepts of nonbeing, stillness, and constancy in reference to the ultimate origin plus ideas of being, movement, and return—as well as age and time—in description of its concrete manifestations in the world.

Jinhua Jia expands on this in her "Primordium of Constancy: Time, Space, and Dao in Warring States Cosmology," noting that *Hengxian*—as much as its synonyms Grand One, Grand Ultimate, Heaven's Course, and Dao—is described as a constant root space-time continuum, a still, undifferentiated, ever-lasting grand void. Impregnated with infinite potentiality and vitality, it is the source of universal spacetime and the root that proliferates the myriad things. After the generative completion of the macrocosm, this root space-time continues to function as the cosmic pivot guiding the universe to circulate around it, as the inexhaustible source of the ceaseless regeneration of the myriad things, and as the eternal spiritual homeland for humans to return to.

In addition, her work connects to David Pankenier's study as she shows how the root space-time continuum connects to ancient Chinese astronomy, notably the observation, imagination, and belief about the Pole Star and the North Pole area. As the understanding of time evolved, this central sphere of the sky gradually transitioned from a phenomenal,

natural, and religious understanding to more abstract, rationalistic, and philosophical concepts, all indicating the source, order, and principle of the cosmos.

Moving on to more specific issues, Jing Liu's presentation centers on "Permanence and Transience: Time in the *Daode Jing*." Unlike in Greek thought, where permanence and transience are separate and form two different realms, early Daoist philosophers saw time as the unity or sameness of the two. It unfolds through the course of nature or naturalness, with nonbeing as its root-source and the power of generativity as its core expression—yet indivisible and closely fused together in time. Time's ultimate nonbeing, moreover, makes its being possible. This manifests in particular time, the specific conditions and circumstances of temporal change or transience, which in turn allow the experience of permanence. Transience, furthermore, includes a great deal of uncertainty, an issue addressed by Lisa Raphals in her "Time, Chance, and Fate in Early Daoist Texts." Chance or randomness connects to modern physics and has been extensively studied in game theory. In Chinese thought, it is usually associated with mantic practices and divinatory works such as the *Yijing*. Classical Daoist thinkers connect it to ideas of development, opportunity, and timeliness, that is, chance as the possibility of matching action to time. Somewhat less predictable, they link chance with fate, events ordered by the stars or destined by vital energy that people yet have to respond to. On the other end of the spectrum, Daoists also propose the possibility of self-caused actions that match intention, follow convenience, or—more radically—are spontaneous and expressions of free and easy wandering. Overall, classical accounts of time and timing intersect with claims that a true sage is characterized by the ability to respond efficaciously to random events, in contrast to rigid systems of text-based learning.

Modes of Application

The way Daoist sages work with time is also at the center of Shuwen Wang's "Time and Self in the *Zhuangzi*." Her base line is that Zhuangzi's philosophy of life is about helping people to break free from mental conditioning, transcend all distinctions, and reach a high spiritual state of cosmic oneness. Within this context, the text distinguishes spacetime (*yuzhou*) from seasonal time (*shi*), not unlike the Greek division of *chronos* and *kairos*, indicating cosmic and concrete dimensions. The self, then, is composed of three layers, the sensory desires of the body, the conventional processes of knowledge and the mind, plus a level of no-self, of flowing along with Dao in spontaneity. Time here is a concept

shaped by the self in the individual mind of people. It arises due to the illusory distinction between self and no-self, beginning and end, duration and perishing, gain and loss. The sense of time originates with the experience of entropy and the desire of the self for owning a longer life. The key to working with time in a positive way is to attain a perspective of Dao, of ultimate reality. Only if people forget the self and transcend all distinctions, can they enter into the realm of no-self and no-time, attaining a high spiritual state

Adding a more comparative note to the discussion, Robert Elliott Allinson in “The Whirlpool of Time” discusses its nature in various Western thinkers, demonstrating that time is not a thing-in-itself but rather exists through the filter of the human mind. Zhuangzi agrees with this and laments about the marks of time, age and its infirmities, the sorrowfulness and pitiable nature of life, and confesses his lack of understanding. He explores the cyclical nature of yin and yang, coming to the realization that the pure state of Dao is found in the harmony of transcendence with immanence. Showing how this harmony plays out in reality and allows a liberation from the prison of time, the *Zhuangzi* presents various anecdotes, featuring the Cicada Catcher, Cook Ding, the Cackling Goose, and more. Ultimately, the reality or identity of the subject knower is not important—much better to forget ourselves and lose all self-awareness. The very absence of identity is the secret of transformation, the way out of the ongoing whirlpool of time.

Continuing the water image, David Chai, in “The Temporal Experience of Fish: Zhuangzi on Perfection in Time,” examines the story of the happiness of fish from the perspective of time. Zhuangzi’s and Huizi’s observation of the fish is itself a temporal act. Zhuangzi can know the happiness of fish not because he lays claim to their minds but rather as someone who has harmonized with Dao, because there is no ontological difference between himself and the fish. Such being the case, there is no temporal disparity between Zhuangzi’s seeing the fish and his knowing of their happiness. This story as an indicator of temporal freedom is yet another example of Zhuangzi’s overall strategy for dismantling the barrier between human time and Dao time.

Shifting gears to the later Daoist work *Huainanzi* and more practical concerns in the active use of time, Abraham Poon examines “The Time of Nature and the Harmony of People.” One major dimension of time here is the dynamics and power of yin and yang, the way the light of the sun and the moon controls the structure of time. Matching actions to this rhythm, people can prevent disasters and misfortunes and lead a harmonious life.

They should follow the seasonal rules and the circadian rhythm, thereby ensuring agricultural success and bodily integrity. The ruler in particular must know the proper timing for handling affairs and deploy his subordinates following a correct time scheme. Beyond that, people can detect the tendency toward gain or loss from certain cosmic indications and should take proper advantage of various situations while also maintaining moral integrity. Like the sun is steady in its movements, they should avoid deviating from righteousness. Going even further, people should also strive to become one with heaven, selfless, innocent, weak, soft, and like infants, thereby able to spontaneously match the natural rhythm and create peace and harmony.

This, however, is easier said than done as is demonstrated in the work of Ai Yuan, "Timeliness as Moral Excuse: Morality and Success in the *Huainanzi*." She shows how actions here are not judged opportunistically by their success or failure, regardless of their accordance with moral principles. Instead, throughout the text, varied definitions and applications of the concept serve as a rhetorical tool to accommodate the theoretical and practical inconsistency between moral values and worldly success—a long-standing problem in early Chinese philosophical discourse. On the one hand, timely action in practice functions as a moral excuse that allows a violation of moral codes while maintaining efficacy and relieving its agent of moral regret. On the other hand, the responsibility of actions lies with heaven, which allows immoral people in power to be criticized. Timeliness is used as a justification for actions, making them opportunistic, yet it also functions as a moral excuse for dealing with the struggle between values, success, and moral regret.

Last but certainly not least, the volume turns to an in-depth metaphysical discussion of the concept of vital energy (*qi*), at the core of so much Daoist thinking, and its expression in the temporal, rhythmical medium of music. Yukio Mitsumatsu, in "Becoming Sounds: An Ecstatic Temporalization in Immanence," explores the ontological dimension of Dao and *qi* in relation to aesthetics and musical composition, notably in the works of the sinologist and composer Ishida Hidemi (1950-2017). He points out that the logical relation between beings, world, and Dao is one of negation, opposition, or alternation. Yet, they are also connected, as the thinkers postulate that all through the universe "there is only one *qi* and therefore the myriad beings are all one." The world consists of an absolutely immanent *qi*-flow without anything outside or beyond, while transformations emerge as the ongoing gathering and dispersal of *qi*, expressed among others as sound.

Thus, the *Zhuangzi* speaks of piping. That of humanity comes and goes, waxes and wanes; modified in culturally-acquired ways, it is ac-

tive in time as *kairos*. The piping of earth is steadier, surrounding people in natural ways, expressed in sighing winds, rustling forests, and so on; bound by seasonality, it is also connected to the more cosmic dimension of time as *chronos*. The piping of heaven goes beyond all this, representing the ultimate creator whose breath or *qi* originates in the timeless realm of Dao yet manifests pervasively in cosmic time. Ishida's contemporary compositions match this in its ideal, or rather in its "natural" setting, creating a manifestation of pure becoming, letting sounds be themselves as they wander to seek the way within the greater sphere of *qi*.

Dimensions of Time

From the perspective of the six temporal modes as defined by J. T. Fraser outlined in the beginning, these thought-provoking contributions not only cover a wide range of ground within the realm of early Daoist thought and offer new ways of understanding time in traditional China, but also encourage a wider perspective. They lay the groundwork for taking research into classical Daoist philosophy to a more comparative and analytical dimension.

To begin, they all work dominantly in the realm of sociotemporality—the social definition and application of time, the overarching theoretical framework that braces the ways time is understood and used in a given culture. A classic example appears in the ancient astronomers, the makers of the calendar and managers of time, who interpret the movements of the heavenly bodies and judge the rhythm of the seasons to ensure proper agricultural and ritual procedures in society. Another classic is the expression—and overcoming—of time through literature, art, and music and its conceptualization in terms of vital energy and other key features of metaphysics and ontology.

Similarly prime materials of sociotemporality appear in the arguments about timeliness and moral opportunism as formulated in the *Huainanzi* as well as in its strong emphasis on seasonal rules and ritual rhythms. The latter, however, also work with biotemporality, seen in the text's encouragement that people match life's activities to the circadian rhythm and create harmony in their very bodies.

More specific philosophical speculations about the nature of time are similarly part of the sociotemporal spectrum, as are notions of historical unfolding in terms of cycles or linear developments. However, they typically also relate to other modes, working to integrate the levels and smooth out inherent conflicts.

Thus, the contrast between time and timelessness, the entire complex of primordality as expressed in concepts such as Primordium, Constancy, Great One, Ultimate, and more, engages humanity with the atemporal world of cosmic chaos, the state at the cusp of creation – what scientists call the singularity before the big bang. The conflict between the two appears in terms of stillness and movement, nonbeing and being, oneness and multiplicity. Thinkers explore different ways to resolve it, envisioning stages of generation and processes of integration and return.

Conceptualizing the motions of the heavenly bodies, next, establishes a human-based mode of working with the stars and planets, but they essentially function in eotemporality, lasting through vast periods of development, rigidly determined and unwavering in their orbits. Their steadiness gives guidance and in Daoism often serves as a model for continued longevity, but they are ultimately beyond reach and remain unpredictable as they may shift at odd moments, undergo eclipses, or exit their course as comets. However strong and valiant the effort, human beings can never fully comprehend or match them.

A yet completely different temporality appears in issues of chance and the calculation of fate. Prototemporality, the time of the early universe, marks the stage of plasma and energy interaction at the quantum level. Characterized by simultaneity, synchronicity, and nonlocal entanglement, this temporality can be accessed through divination and fortune-telling, in séances and trance states, as well as in the no-self oblivion of advanced Daoist adepts. Far removed from the sociotemporal laws of cause and effect as well as the rigid determination of eotemporality, here all is governed by probability and ultimate uncertainty, flux and flow at its purest.

That leaves noötemporality, the time of the human mind as determined by the workings of the brain. Manifest in concepts of self and no-self, acts of knowing and evaluation, it establishes identity through perception, personal narrative, and contrasts with other beings such as fish. To resolve the conflict with this level, Daoists pursue the harmony of transcendence with immanence and strive for liberation from the prison of time, linking to the stars in eotemporality and ultimately recovering the raw primordial power of atemporal timelessness.

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