

# DAOEXPLORE LECTURE SERIES

## SUMMARIES

### 1. Daoism and Ecology

Based on a chapter in *Zhuangzi: Text and Context* (2014)

Daoists have a deep admiration and close connection to nature. Among the various modern schools of ecology, they resonate most with Deep Ecology: developed by the Norwegian thinker Arne Naess, it focuses on the system of environmental cooperation as a whole and can be described as a form of biospherical egalitarianism or organic holism. Daoists accordingly integrate all natural features, plants and animals, in a comprehensive coexistentialism. They see everything as interconnected in a natural pattern of complementarity, described in terms of yin and yang. In contrast to the prevailing view of nature in the Western world, determined by the Biblical injunction in Genesis that “man have dominion over every creeping thing” on earth, Daoists propose to merge with the flow of Dao, that is, return to organic harmony, a stable, homeostatic order.

### 2. Daoyin among the Daoists

Based on *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin* (2008).

*Daoyin*, literally “guide [the qi] and stretch [the body],” is the traditional forerunner of qigong. First documented in several manuscripts of the Former Han period, it formed part of Chinese medicine, serving both as rehabilitation and prevention of disease. Working in all positions of the body, it can be compared to Indian yoga, with which it connected in the middle period under Buddhist influence. Daoists, notably of the Highest Clarity school, adapted daoyin methods to enhance their physical and sensory functioning, which would enable them to engage in deep meditations and otherworldly excursions. They used the same methods, but placed them into a quite different context, restructuring and enhancing the tradition.

### 3. The Songs of Laozi: Adaptations of the *Daode jing*

Published under the title “The Inspirational Laozi: Poetry, Business, and the Blues” in *Journal of Daoist Studies* 8 (2015), 137-51.

Among many renditions of the *Daode jing*, the “Songs of Laozi,” a vocal presentation set to blues and jazz music stands out. It uses the translation by the poet Witter Bynner, published in cooperation with a Chinese scholar as part of the War effort in 1944. In the 1970s, the communication and education specialist Stephen Josephs picked it up and set it to music, arranging for Paula Dudley, his therapist’s girlfriend, to serve as the vocalist. The recording is unique and powerful, making the text approachable in a completely new way. Stephen Josephs later moved on to become a corporate coach (“Dragons at Work”) and uses taiji quan in conjunction with *Daode jing* visions of enlightened leadership to inspire business people of all walks and levels.

### 4. Attaining Authenticity: Skillful Spontaneity

Based on *Full Potential: Daoist Wisdom Meets Western Psychology* (2019).

Blending modern psychology and Daoist wisdom into a recipe for the fully actualized person, this talk shows how human beings form an integral part of the greater universe. Partaking in Dao to the fullest, they can experience a sense of well-being, inner harmony, and overarching excellence. Daoist classics describe this realization of full potential in terms of free and easy wandering or skillful spontaneity. Western psychologists similarly speak of personal fulfillment in work and play. Most important among them are Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi with his concept of flow, Martin Seligman with his studies of authentic happiness, and Howard Gardner with his system of multiple intelligences. Activated differently in the brain, subject to both genes and training, these psychological dimensions become apparent in different stages of childhood development and are enhanced by optimal learning conditions, manifold forms of play, and conscientious parenting—leading to the realization of full potential and attainment of Daoist harmony. This book offers a unique presentation: none other pulls the same level of information together, let alone present it in such a vibrant and engaging way.

## 5. Dao and Time

Summary presentation of four 2021 publications: *Dao and Time*, *Taming Time*, *Time in Daoist Practice*, *Coming to Terms with Timelessness*

Time is a key feature in all cultures, determining thought, actions, and developments. J. T. Fraser, describes it in six temporalities that move at different speeds in unique environments: the atemporal state of primordial chaos, the prototemporal realm of quantum simultaneity, the eotemporal rhythms of the stars, the biotemporal dimensions of living creatures, the noötemporal phenomena of the mind, and the sociotemporal world of calendars, history, and philosophy. The four books on “Dao and Time” introduced here examine Daoism in all these modes, first discussing language, the “architect of time,” then moving through all six types, in each chapter offering also modern scientific and comparative perspectives. Daoists, it turns out, often match science in terms of basic concepts, but offer different practices to reverse entropy, overcome limitations, and ultimately tame time by going beyond it. *Taming Time* is encyclopedic in scope and global in outlook. It challenges preconceived notions and raises new perspectives in the study of time as it expertly clarifies Daoist visions.

## 6. Temporal Modes in Daoist Cultivation

Daoist Cultivation unfolds on two levels: establishing harmony with Dao as it manifests in the natural cycles of life and attaining mystical oneness with Dao as the creative source at the center of all existence. To establish harmony with the natural cycles, Daoists activate seasonal renewal (*huan*) through physical alignment in diet, exercise, and ritual celebration. They also use various medical and longevity techniques to recover (*fu*) and even enhance their inborn life expectancy and health levels. Continuing to move along the trajectory of natural entropy, they yet increase quality of physical, mental, and spiritual well-being. To attain mystical oneness, they return (*fan*) establish themselves in perfect stillness, resting in the midst of circle of all life. Going beyond this, they further work toward a reversal (*ni*) of the natural patterns. Creating a spiral of attainment, they go against the natural flow, actively and intentionally return to the original source of all.

## 7. Daoist Ways of Empowering Women

Based on a chapter in *Pristine Affluence: Daoist Roots in the Stone Age* (2017)

Daoists have always lived in a highly gendered society, Chinese culture codifying life in terms of yin and yang and seeing females as weak and inferior. Daoist balance this in three different ways. First, the *Daode jing* counterbalances male-centered culture by extolling yin-type values and forms of behavior, without however yet reversing or overcoming established stereotypes. Daoist communities, second, do away with stereotypes and actively promote gender neutrality, leveling the playing field between the sexes, classifying people on the basis of personal skill and social contribution rather than sex. Daoist monastics and immortals, third, actively ungender practitioners. Thus, all monastics wear the same hairdo and the same vestments, participate equally in the tasks of the institution, and address each other in an intentionally ungendered way. They thereby create a new level of androgynous living, actively liberating the individual from the confines of the appropriate.

## 8. Daoism and Chan Buddhism

Based on a chapter in *Zhuangzi: Text and Context* (2014).

Buddhism entered China in the early centuries of the Common Era, always closely associated with Daoism. Its meditative practices were linked to Daoist and longevity forms of self-cultivation while its thought—at first transliterated in often ambiguous ways—was connected to Daoist ideas of nonaction, unknowing, and cosmic flow. Because the Confucian establishment abhorred houselessness and begging, Chinese were not allowed to become monks for several centuries and even then had to live in communities sponsored by aristocrats, chanting and praying for their welfare. In due course they came to neglect meditation and the quest for enlightenment. Chan Buddhism developed in the 6<sup>th</sup> century as a reaction against this, focusing strongly on deep meditation, personal instruction from a master, and hard physical labor. Its thought and practice closely resemble Daoist models as interpreted by Chinese Buddhist thinkers

## 9. The Neurophysiology of Zuowang

Article published in my edited volume *New Visions of the Zhuangzi* (2015).

One of the key Daoist meditation practices is *zuowang* 坐忘, literally “sit and forget” or, more formally, “sitting in oblivion.” Typically it involves actions of release, but what does this mean neurologically? The brain consists of

three parts that manage instincts, emotions, and thinking. Memory similarly comes in three major types: muscle (procedural), episodic (implicit, emotional), and semantic (declarative, learning). Zhuangzi is in favor of the first as the center of high performance skills (like Cook Ding), suspicious of the second as the locus of a socially created self (*shen* 身), and opposed to the third as the seat of cultural evaluations (right and wrong). Long-term memory is processed by the hippocampus. Injuries or lesions to this area lead to “forgetfulness,” the inability to remember what happened even a few hours ago, which renders people detached and amused but also completely helpless and socially inadequate—not what the *Zhuangzi* proposes at all. Emotional memory, on the other hand, is processed in the amygdala, leading to neuron loops of stress. It can be altered and its responses controlled by a shift in attention, notably by focusing on a higher, more permanent value, like Heaven or life. This leads to the inhibition of automatization or emotion regulation, neurologically the core process of *zuowang*.