

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 Mihalyi 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 6th 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*.

10. Daoism in China Today

Based on *Daoist China: Governance, Economy, Culture* (2018).

China today is full of unbridled construction and strong vibrancy. At the same time, there is an increase in political and cultural repression. What, the question arises, is going on? Where stands China today and where is it headed from here? And what, in all of this, is the role and place of Daoism? The talk present different aspects of life in China, in each case describing the current situation and connecting it to the role and changing facets of Daoism today, focusing in turn on dimensions of governance, economics, and culture.

11. Dimensions of Body and Mind

Based on a chapter in *Science and the Dao* (2016).

Classical Chinese cosmology sees the human being as originally at one with the cosmos. Only gradually does a separate sense of body and mind evolve, do the senses delimit and restrict personal experience. The most cosmic and original level of being is the body as a boundless organism (*ti* 體), interconnected with all dimensions and aspects of life, while the mind is pure flow of the vast cosmic abyss (*yuan* 淵), with a vast repertoire of expressions at its disposal. Only slight restricted and still very natural is the physical form (*xing* 形), not circumscribed by cultural norms or defined through social values. It is the lodge or residence of the spirit (*shen* 神), the active, organizing configurative force and pure energy of life. From here, people develop a personal body (*shen* 身) or socially constructed identity, which matches the heart-mind (*xin* 心), the seat of both cognitive and emotional functions. Both body and mind here work in with preference and aversion, approval and disapproval, and thus limiting perception and potential ways of being. Most common, and most limited, is the ritual body (*gong* 躬) combined with the fixed or prejudiced mind (*chengxin* 成心), alternatively described as the mechanical mind (*jixin* 機心), indicating a highly structured and constricted way of being.

12. Daoist Dietetics

Based on *Daoist Dietetics: Food for Immortality* (2010).

This lectures provides an overview of the main characteristics of the Daoist diet, distinguishing lay followers and priests from monastics and immortality seekers. While members of the first group follow the standard Chinese diet with a special emphasis on health and timing, those living in religious communities are vegetarians, avoid the five pungent vegetables, and use food in various ritual settings. Those in active pursuit of immortality, moreover, modify their diet to include more intake of qi in the form of herbs and breath, either eating or absorbing cosmic energy for a lasting spiritual transformation.

13. Hermits and Wilderness

Hermits are one class of Daoist practitioners, along with people who serve the society as officials or educators and those who keep their distance to officialdom as retirees or idlers. Officials and educators play an active role, but they are relaxed about it, maintain a playful attitude, and do not let any position define their identity. Retirees and idlers see all involvement as potentially perilous and stay removed, resting on their landed estates and engaging in leisure or cultivation activities. Hermits in contrast, leave society behind completely and move into the wilderness of the mountains, traditionally the realm of dangerous landscapes, wild animals, indigenous people, and unpredictable situations. They do so either because of moral indignation—moving away from something undesirable—or because they wish to pursue a higher and more intense form of cultivation—moving toward a positive goal. Immortals in this context have perfected hermit life to a high degree for their own attainment, while founders of Daoist schools (Zhang Daoling, Tao Hongjing, and Wang Chongyang) make isolation from society a viable alternative to ordinary life and create structures that allow hermits to be by themselves yet also fulfill a social function.

14. Alchemy and the Female Body

Based on a chapter in *Daoism and Chinese Culture* (2001)

Alchemy is the art of transforming ordinary into precious or spiritual substances—lead into gold, bodily essence into spirit. In China, it emerged under the Han dynasty in its external or operative form, then was increasingly internalized and as such as dominated Daoist meditation practice since the Song dynasty. The body here is the furnace while the energies of heart and kidneys are the alchemical fire and water. They are systematically circulated and transmuted, changing the key force that makes up the body from essence through energy to spirit.

In the latter form, the alchemical alter ego of the adept can exit the body and engage in ecstatic excursions and exchanges with the gods and immortals. In men, the main energy center is in the abdomen, while in women it lies in the chest area. Both engage in the microcosmic orbit, rotating energy through the central conduits along the front and back of the torso, but women may move up the front and down the back, while men go the opposite way. Both also grow the immortal embryo for ten months, but this part comes more easily to women, who are naturally endowed for pregnancy. Special texts on women's alchemy, from the 18th and 19th centuries, specify further moral and technical details, such as key virtues, herbal supplements, and self-massages.

15. Ethical Living

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

Traditional philosophy divide ethics into three major modes: utilitarianism (reward and punishment), deontology (the will of God), and virtue ethics (personal integrity). Daoists firmly support the latter, matching Martin Seligman's understanding of key virtues and personality strengths. They also insist on ethics of difference and situation, noting that neither two people nor two cases are ever completely alike, thus necessitating adaptation and flexibility. Key virtues are accordingly tolerance and respect, coupled with a strong emphasis on the unique needs of the other person. Thus, the Golden Rule here is "do unto others as they would have us do unto them." Another major dimension is the notion of freedom: from constraints, toward personal realization, and expressed in political liberty. Rulers should always listen and let go, never be controlling or tyrannical. The key personal relationship, moreover, is that of friendship, where like-minded people come together to join in peace and harmony, always accepting, always supporting, and without any major personal agendas.

16. Death and Dying

In Daoist understanding, death is the reversal of gestation, that is, the return of various celestial forces, including the spirit and material souls, to heaven and earth, their realms of origin. Ideally, as described in works on medieval monasteries, the process is gradual, the body weakening as the mind remains calm and focused, Good thoughts and peaceful meditations are essential, as is the presence of the deities and various helpers, both spiritual brethren and members of the Daoist's birth family. Both during and after death, there should be encouragement and support, with no sign of sadness or grief. The Daoist is buried with his or her robes and sacred paraphernalia, including copies of the scriptures. Memorial services are held at regular intervals, and direct disciples, who receive any remaining goods, remain in deep mourning for a few weeks, then in a lighter form for three years. During this time, they should not participate in major rituals involving the celestial deities but can practice self-cultivation. Many of these practices are still relevant today. In addition, there is also a type of married Daoist, called yin-yang priests, studied by Stephen Jones. They specialize in death, providing relevant services such as siting the grave, determining the time of interment, producing paper goods for the otherworld, and staging a full funeral liturgy, including extensive musical compositions.

17. Why Visualization Works

Based on a chapter in *Science and the Dao* (2016).

Visualization is the active, intentional use of imagery to alter or transform mind and emotions. It serves as a major mode of traditional Daoist meditation, documented in various early documents and prominent in both Highest Clarity and internal alchemy. All its modes have in common that they utilize colors, transform emotions, and affect on physical health. To explain why this works, the paper looks at chromotherapy, a way of directing energy of a particular wavelength into specific areas of the bodymind. It then examines visualization in terms of cell biology and epigenetics. People constantly send impulses to their cells—whether as hardwired instinctual reactions, automatized and subconscious patterns, and conscious commands. The cells respond to the quality of these impulses, and a strong flow of relaxed and positive stimuli causes them to remain in a continued growth response, thereby optimizing health and well-being. Practicing Daoist visualization thus increases immune resistance and enhances health, eases tensions and opens the person to happiness and limitless abundance.