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The Journal of Daoist Philosophy and Practice

Fall 2013

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photo by Richard Marks

Bruce Frantzis, Ph.D., is a Taoist Lineage Master with over 40 years of experience in Eastern healing systems. He is the first known Westerner to hold authentic lineages in tai chi, bagua, hsing-i, qigong and Taoist meditation. He has taught Taoist energy arts to more than 15,000 students. Frantzis trained for over a decade in China and also has extensive experience in Zen, Tibetan Buddhism, yoga, Kundalini, energy healing therapies and Taoist Fire and Water traditions.



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What is Daoism?

"The Dao that can be described is not the eternal Dao." So begins the *Daodejing* of Laozi written some 2,500 years ago. How then, to describe the indescribable? How to fit into words that which is beyond words? The Dao can only be pointed to, or referred to, say the ancient sages. It cannot be held, only experienced. It cannot be touched, only felt. It cannot be seen, only glimpsed with the inner eye.

Dao, then, is the Way, as in direction, as in manner, source, destination, purpose and process. In discovering and exploring Dao the process and the destination are one and the same. Laozi describes a Daoist as the one who sees simplicity in the complicated and achieves greatness in little things. He or she is dedicated to discovering the dance of the cosmos in the passing of each season as well as the passing of each precious moment in our lives.

Daoism was already long established when Laozi wrote the *Daodejing*. It originated in the ancient shamanic roots of Chinese civilization. Many of the practices and attitudes toward life were already established before Laozi's time. For many centuries Daoism was an informal way of life, a way followed by peasant, farmer, gentleman philosopher and artist. It was a way of deep reflection and of learning from Nature, considered the highest teacher. Followers of the Way studied the stars in the heavens and the energy that lies deep within the earth. They meditated upon the energy flow within their own bodies and mapped out the roads and paths it traveled upon.

It is a belief in life, a belief in the glorious procession of each unfolding moment. It is a deeply spiritual life, involving introspection, balance, emotional and spiritual independence and responsibility and a deep awareness and connection to the earth and all other life forms. It requires an understanding of how energy works in the body and how to treat illness in a safe, non-invasive way while teaching practical ways of maintaining health and avoiding disease and discomfort. Daoist meditation techniques help the practitioner enter deeper or more expansive levels of wakefulness and inner strength. But most of all, it is a simple, natural, practical way of being in our bodies and our psyches and sharing that way of being with all other life forms we come into contact with.

Today in China and in the West, Daoism is often divided into two forms, *dao jiao* and *dao jia*. Or religious Daoism and philosophical Daoism. Many scholars argue that there are not two distinct forms of Daoism and in many ways they are right. There is really a great intermingling of the religious form of Daoism and its various sects and the philosophical Daoism of Laozi and Zhuangzi. But many people who follow the Dao do not consider themselves religious people and do not go to temples and are not ordained as priests. Rather these two forms exist both side by side and within each other.

As it says in the opening lines of the *Daodejing*: "Dao or Way that can be spoken of or described in words is not eternal Dao." It is up to each of us to find the way to the Way in our own way. What we try to do with *The Empty Vessel* is offer articles and information to help you, our dear readers, to do that.



The Empty Vessel

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Publisher
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Editor and Design
Solala Towler

Proofreading
Jack Woltz

Contributing Editor
Kurt Levins Sr.

Copy Editor
Shanti

Technical Consultant
Darrell (Tandava) Klette

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Statement of Purpose
The Empty Vessel is dedicated to the exploration and dissemination of Daoist philosophy and practice. It is open to sharing the various traditional and contemporary teachings in a nondiscriminatory manner. We at The Empty Vessel believe that it is in using these practices and attitudes of the ancient achieved ones in a timely and contemporary manner that we can best benefit from them and in doing so, be able to effect change in the world around us.

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Join us in May when we travel to the sacred mountains of Daoism – Wudang Shan – home of Daoist taiji, qigong and martial arts. We will spend days hiking and visiting some of the many Daoist temples there, attend classes with a local master, drink tea in the temple teahouse and practice Wuji Qigong, a 600 hundred year old qigong form, created by the famous Wudang Daoist master Zhang San Feng. We will also be visiting Maoshan, an ancient Daoist mountain. We will visit the Qianyuan Guan, a Daoist nunnery, famed for the purity of their practice and the wonderful sounds of their orchestra. The abbess, Yin Xinhui, is one of the few heads of temples who does not take government money for rebuilding (which means fewer tourists) but works to maintain her temple through ceremonies (which, hopefully we will get to witness while we are there.)

We will also be spending time in Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful cities in China. Hangzhou, circling around West Lake, has long been revered for its beauty and culture. While there we visit a tea plantation (where the famous Dragon Well tea is grown), as well as the museum of Chinese Medicine and take in an awe inspiring lake show by Zhang Yimou, the well known Chinese film director, called *West Lake Impressions* (check it out on youtube).

The last few days will be spent in Beijing, where we will visit the White Cloud Temple, the Great Wall and the fabulous tea market as well as attend some amazing acrobat shows. All along the way we will eat amazing food, meet qigong masters, artists, musicians, tea masters, and one cave dwelling hermit.

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Along the Way

This issue begins our 21st year of publishing *The Empty Vessel*. To say it has been a long and amazing journey is an understatement. I have met so many wonderful teachers and authors on this journey, both in China and in our own lovely corner of the planet. And I have also met many wonderful and delightful students of the Way along this way as well. "A journey of a thousand miles," says Laozi, "begins with the first step."

Jumping into this project of starting and continuing a Daoist journal has been a big, big step and has taken me places I could not have foreseen 20 years ago. Each issue is like one of my children and putting each one together is like giving birth to them. Gathering the material, doing the interviews with fascinating teachers, putting together the images that will go just right with each piece, is always an interesting and sometimes demanding job. Keeping things going during the economic meltdown has been challenging. But the support I have gotten from our readers has played a big part in keeping the journal going.

The move into the digital world has been very interesting and fun. It is nice to be able to bring color into every page, which has always been prohibitively expensive to do in the print version. Many of our readers are very comfortable in that realm and to download the magazine onto their ipads is no big deal. On the other hand, many of our readers enjoy having something solid in their hands. So we have kept both versions going.

It is also always fun to actually meet some of you at various conferences and workshops around the country. It means a lot to me to know how much *The Empty Vessel* means to you. So keep those letters and phone calls coming! It is always such a thrill to have someone come up to me at an event and tell me how much *The Empty Vessel* has meant in their lives and their own journey. Names that I have seen for years on our mailing list suddenly take on a new face and a new presence.

The more I travel on my journey into the Daoist arts the more I learn that I have much more to learn. It is such a rich and many layered world, full of surprises and interesting and moving vistas along the way. It is a journey of the heart and the mind (actually the same in Chinese thought) and of the shen or spirit. It takes us up to the highest level of achievement while also grounding us in our rootedness to the earth. It is never boring, always interesting, sometimes even scary. We can come face to face with our deepest fears and our wildest dreams. And for every person who takes that first step on this long and fruitful journey — the rewards are great, the company you get to keep always fun and interesting, the landscapes you get to travel through always moving and inspiring, the lessons learned always powerful and life-changing, and the rewards great and humbling. This journey "of a thousand miles," with each step building on the last one and flowing into the one after, is an endless and magical and wondrous journey of the spirit, we call the Way.

Solala Towler, editor



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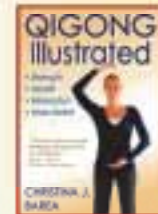
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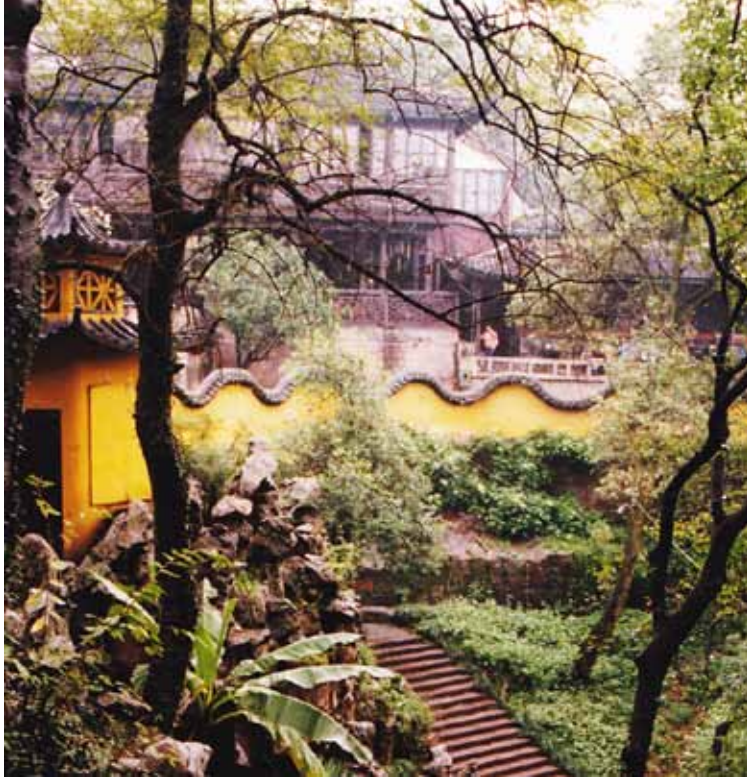
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Autumn/Winter Season

Solala Towler



Throughout millions of years, human beings developed from the constant cycle of nature. By observing the hibernating insects and animals around them and the yearly cycles of vegetation, they responded naturally to all the seasons. In Spring they were lively, in Summer vivacious, in Autumn they gathered themselves, and in Winter they prepared for return. Thus mankind achieved an existence here on earth that was in harmony with the divine order of the universe.

Hua Ching Ni, *The Book of Changes and the Unchanging Truth*

When paying attention to the various seasons and their energetic influences we usually take into consideration not only the season we are currently enjoying but the next one as well. This is because each season is influenced by and influences the ones before and after it. For this issue we will look at the season we are in now, Autumn, as well as the one following, Winter.

Autumn is associated with the element usually translated as metal. But in alchemical terms the correct translation would be gold. In *wu xing* or Five Transformational Phases system (often translated as Five Elements or the Five Agents) the element of gold is associated with

the color white, the organs lung and large intestine, the direction west, the animal White Tiger and the planet Venus.

Winter is associated with the element water, the color blue/black, the organs kidneys and bladder, the direction north, the animals Turtle and Snake and the planet Mercury.

Traditionally, Autumn is seen as the season of "Bringing In the Harvest." It is a time to gather not only the fruits of our garden, but the fruits of our cultivation practice as well. Winter is the season called "Returning to the Root." It is a time to go deep within and an excellent time to do deep self-cultivation.

So what does this all mean? In ancient times China was an agrarian culture. This means that the people closely followed the seasons, the phases of the moon and the energetics of each one of these. They needed to know when to plant and when to harvest. Their lives depended on it.

Today in China, many people are leaving the land to move to the cities to find new opportunities. It has been called the largest mass migration in history.

In modern urban culture people are losing these ties to the cycles and many of them are becoming unhealthy. Of course there are many other factors in their lifestyle that is producing their ill health but the disconnection with the land and the natural cycles are a big part of it.

Of course in the West we are several generations removed from being farmers. Not to mention that modern farmers rely less on the cycles of nature and more on the use of chemical sprays and fertilizers.

So what can we modern, urban practitioners do to make up for this nature deficit? Actually, there are many things we can do. One of the most important things is to have a self-cultivation practice. This can include things like stillness practice as well as movement practice. It can also include eating a healthy and natural diet, not spending too much time watching tv, studying the ancient works of Daoist sages like Laozi and Zhuangzi and allowing time for reverie and meditation. We need to make sure we get enough exercise and rest. The season

we are going into Winter, is an especially important one in which to make sure we get enough sleep in order to recharge our energetic batteries.

Here's a very simple practice to recharge our connection to the natural cycles.

Stand shoulder width apart with knees slightly bent, gaze straight ahead. You can close your eyes or not. Breathe deeply and slowing into the lower dan tien (field of elixir). Then, from the Bubbling Wells point on the ball of your foot, which is also the beginning of the kidney meridian (connected to the adrenals as well), use your mind to send roots down from this point deep into the earth, at least three times the length of your body. (An old saying in qigong practice is "qi follows yi" or energy follows the mind.)

Send these roots down, down into the earth, burrowing through all the layers of soil, plant, animal homes etc. This can work even if you are standing on concrete or a floor in a building. Feel your roots intertwining with the roots of all the trees in the area. Again, even if you are in the middle of a large city there are still trees somewhere you can tap into.

Now begin to draw earth energy up through your roots into your body. Fill yourself up with the good rich yin energy of the earth. Let it permeate your whole body, making you strong and grounded.

You can do this practice whenever you feel unbalanced or ungrounded. It is a powerful way to connect with primal yin energy as well as a way to pay deep attention to your connection to the earth and its natural cycles.

Autumn is also a good time to begin wrapping up projects begun in the expansive, creative time of Summer. This does not mean that we cannot continue or even begin new projects at this time but it is good to pay attention to making sure we are enjoying the fruits of our labor.

As our energy begins to move inward so too does the whole earth (unless you are living in the tropics, but even there one can feel an energetic shift with each season). It is a good time to begin or deepen an already established meditation practice.

As our gaze shifts from outward focus to more inward focus, we can enjoy these golden days of Autumn when cooler weather chases off the hot days of Summer. It is a good idea to pay some extra attention to dressing warmly and avoiding getting chilled as the cooler nights of Autumn hold sway.

Enjoying warming soups and stews and eating the delicious squashes and sweet potatoes are also wonderful things about this season.

It is by aligning ourselves with each season that we can stay healthy, happy and in tune with both the outer as well as the inner changes of each season. ☯

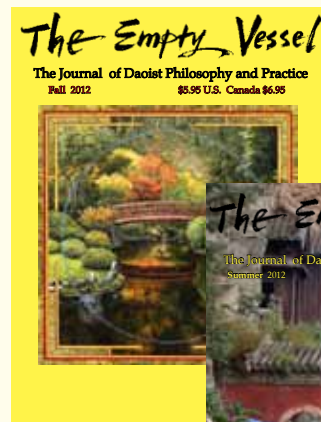
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Learning from Nature: The Storm

Kurt Levins Sr.

Last year, my home state of New Jersey along with New York was devastated by Hurricane Sandy now known as Superstorm Sandy. Towns were washed away. People could not rebuild many homes simply because the earth upon which they stood no longer existed, now replaced by the sea.

I have long loved storms: sitting in hurricanes and nor'easters, doing qigong before and after lightning storms. It was while meditating in the aftermath of one of these storms that I found myself walking through the pine forest I know as well as my home.

As I walked I saw trees uprooted, others split by lightning strikes, branches knocked down. This all led me to a conclusion different from others about storms. First, they are nature pure and through. The devastation they create is usually not by the storm but by man's insistence on controlling nature rather than learning from it and living in accord with it.

The barrier islands of New Jersey, which are known as our shore resorts, all are extremely vulnerable to storms. But because of the allure of the beach, boardwalks and other things man, has insisted on living and building there. It is odd that Native American artifacts are never found on these barrier islands. Why? Because the Native Americans didn't live on them. The Native Americans would visit them for hunting and fishing and religious reasons, but never established villages there. Why? Because they recognized the inherent danger of living there.

Storms are nature's house cleaning. Old, dead or weak trees are knocked down becoming logs. It is from the decaying of these logs that new life springs.

"Okay, I know enough, storms are part of nature, okay I get it," you say. But if you stop there, you are "not seeing the forest for the trees."

What is outer is reflected in the inner is a basic Daoist precept held through martial arts and Traditional Chinese Medicine. If we see a truth of nature in the external world does that not reflect into our inner world? What can we learn, other than don't live on barrier islands?

Do we not each and every one of us experience storms in our lives: deaths, births, retirement and other major or crisis situations? Are these not storms? They can rip us up, make life miserable or incredibly joyous. In the storm we can rarely maintain the non-involvement of wu wei, but in reflection we certainly can learn.

After each of life's storms I take stock. Are there things I should have eliminated? Areas where I could or should

have been stronger? Are there people who should be eliminated from my life or others whom I can welcome and embrace?

I have learned that it is better to regularly do these housecleaning reflections several times a years rather than trying great changes at once. If you have a little "life storm" it is a perfect time for reflection and growth.

Hurricane Sandy was truly a disaster. However, my eldest son, who is a civil engineer, pointed out to me that one year earlier we were hit with Hurricane Irene. Irene caused massive flooding and damage to the state's infrastructure. As a result, electrical grids were enhanced, storm drainage systems upgraded. Many trees were knocked down and cleaned up. That earlier hurricane actually helped to save us during Sandy. Without the housecleaning of

Irene, Sandy would have been much more devastating.

I also learned a lesson in preparing for disaster from Hurricane Sandy. For two days before the hurricane struck, I observed flocks of birds of all kinds gathered in fields. What were they doing? They were eating as if it was going to be their last meal. Somehow these birds knew that they may not be eating for a while and so were stuffing themselves. That is when I truly knew this was going to be a bad storm.

Sure it is easy to read the Daoist classics, to know all the catch phrases, but can you apply this to your life? Daoism is not academic theory, it is for experiential living: to learn, to grow to improve our lives. In fact one nice thing about Daoism is that Daoism has the greatest free university in the world. It is outside your door wherever you live—nature. But don't just look at nature. Sure it is good to experience nature, but it is far better to learn the lessons that nature teaches and use them to improve our lives.

A serious student of martial arts for 37 years, Kurt Levins holds the rank of Master in the Lu Shan Taoist Lineage. He holds a Masters ranking in Tai Chi Chuang in the lineage of Li I Yu and Internal Kung Fu under master Lein Cheng Chen of Taiwan. Levins has also complete studies at the Philadelphia Institute of Chinese Medicine. Asd Director of the Pinelands Institute for Taoist Studies he conducts training in the New Jersey Pine Barrens. Mr. Levins teaches several forms of tai ji, qigong and other Taoist arts. He can be reached at intao@hotmail.com or 856.797.5987.

Daoism has the greatest free university in the world. It is outside your door wherever you live—nature.

The Watercourse Way

Solala Towler



One fine afternoon, after Li Bai had run Zhang Wu through his endless exercises with his small sword, he suggested they go for a walk. Lianhua had gone back to her work for the day as she was beginning to be afraid she would be fired if she were gone too long from the kitchen.

And so Li Bai and Zhang Wu walked together awhile, until they ended up at the river. On the way Zhang Wu had seen how Li Bai carried his sword, over one shoulder, with his hand on the grip and the other end of the sword pointing behind him. But when Zhang Wu tried to do the same with his little sword he found it was both too short and a bit too heavy for him to carry that way without it hurting his bony shoulder, so he just carried it along the best he could.

There was no sign of Windrider that day so Li Bai and Zhang Wu sat down together on the bank and just watched the slow and stately current of the river pass by.

"You know," said Li Bai. "Our master Lao Tzu says that we should all emulate the ways of water."

"In what way?" asked Zhang Wu.

"In his *Tao Te Ching* he says:

'Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.

Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better;

It has no equal.

The weak can overcome the strong;

The supple can overcome the stiff."

"That doesn't make any sense," said Zhang Wu. "How can the weak overcome the strong? I'm weak and I don't think I could overcome you."

"What the master is saying here," said Li Bai, "is that if we use the qualities of water such as patience, humility, and flexibility we can overcome someone much stronger than ourselves."

"I don't understand this way of thinking," said Zhang Wu. "All I know is that I am weak and you are strong. There is no way that I will ever be able to beat you." And here he looked at Li Bai with such a pitiful look on his small face that Li Bai felt his heart open to him.

"It is not a matter of physical strength," he said to the boy. "It is also a matter of will and, more importantly, of flexibility. It is like when a plant is young and is soft and flexible. You can bend the grass shoots over but they always spring back up. But when the plant is old it becomes dried out and brittle and breaks easily.

"People are like these plants. When we are young we are so much more flexible than when we are old. Most people become set in their ways as they grow older. They cannot



adapt to new conditions and so, if things change drastically in their lives, they just become brittle and die. In their minds they are too old and too dry like the old plants. When they are challenged they cannot bounce back.

"It is so important that we stay young in our minds and in our hearts. In this way, when we are challenged in our lives, as all people are, we can be flexible enough to bounce back and start over."

"But what does this have to do with the weak overcoming the strong?" asked Zhang Wu.

"Well," said Li Bai, "you can think of flexibility as a kind of strength. If we are too stiff in our bodies we cannot fight and if we are too stiff in our minds we cannot learn new things. Both of these are essential for the warrior.

"Another thing that water can teach us is its ability to take the shape of the container it finds itself in. If it is put into a square container it becomes square. If it is put into a round container it becomes round.

"A true warrior must be able to take on whatever shape the situation demands of him. He must be able to take on the qualities that are needed in any situation. If he needs to be quiet and secretive he is. If he must be loud and forceful, he is. If he needs to be invisible then he makes sure no one is able to track him. If he must overcome great odds he calls upon the strongest part of himself and rises to the occasion.



If he must appear weak to gain advantage over his enemy then he allows himself to be mocked and derided. This is a true sign of strength."

Zhang Wu did not understand this last part. He tried to image Li Bai ever appearing weak but he could not. He could never imagine anyone mocking Li Bai for weakness, unlike himself.

Li Bai could see that his young friend still did not understand. "Master Lao Tzu also tells us that:

'Under heaven nothing is more soft and yielding than water.

Yet for attacking the solid and strong, nothing is better. It has no equal.'

What this means is that we cannot hold ourselves too tightly. To be strong does not mean to be stiff and unyielding. Actually, the more yielding we can be within ourselves the stronger we will be on the outside. In order to truly defeat our enemy we must yield to him at the same time."

"What do you mean?" asked Zhang Wu. "How can we beat someone if we are yielding to them?"

"What this means," answered Li Bai, "is that we actually yield to the moment. We allow ourselves to be totally present. We do not think of the past, what brought us to the fight, and we do not think of the future, and whether or not we will win. We must yield to our wish to win as well. We must empty ourselves of all yearning and all expectations. Whatever happens in the future has no importance for us now. Whether we win or lose is not important. What is important is that we are totally ourselves, without holding anything back. We must give up all attachment to winning. It is only in this way that we can truly win."

Zhang Wu looked up at his formidable friend. He thought

he understood a part of what Li Bai had said but he was sure he did not understand it all. How could someone win by giving up wanting to win?

Li Bai, as if he could read Zhang Wu's thoughts, went on. "What I mean is that a true warrior must give up all attachment to winning. Not only that, but he must give up all *hope* of winning. It is only in giving up all hope that the true warrior is freed from the awful tyranny of having to win and, instead, can yield to each moment, whether he wins or loses. It is only in this yielding that the true warrior is able to win the most important battle of them all, with himself. If a warrior cannot defeat himself then he has no hope of defeating another."

"But how can you defeat your own self?" asked Zhang Wu.

"By facing the truth of who you really are," answered Li Bai. "You must be willing to see yourself in all your strengths as well as weaknesses. You must be honest about who you really are, not who you have been led to believe you are by others. Master Lao Tzu calls this kind of person Zhen Ren, the Natural Man or Woman. This is the kind of person who is ready to see what our Buddhist friends call their Original Face. This is the face you had before you were born, before you came into this world of dust.

"And if you are strong enough and fearless enough you will see your Original Face and know who you are. And then you can become a great warrior or healer or artisan or whatever else you want to be.

"But if you do not have the courage to look upon this Original Face you will never truly know who and what you are. And you will certainly never be a great warrior.

"Remember, Young Master, that the true warrior's strength comes not from here" and here Li Bai grabbed Zhang Wu's hand and placed it on his own well-formed forearm, "but from here," and then he placed it on his belly.

"It is from here, the *dan tien*, that your strength comes. And also from here," and he placed Zhang Wu's hand over his heart. "It is here in the heart, or the *shen*, that our spirit resides and it is from here that our vision and our willingness to face our challenges comes. And it is from here that our deep understanding and intuition comes. Without understanding and vision a warrior will only be a fighting machine and not a Natural Person.

"We must open this and this," said Li Bai, placing Zhang Wu's hand over his own belly and then his heart. "You my friend, have lived too long in here," and he placed his hand

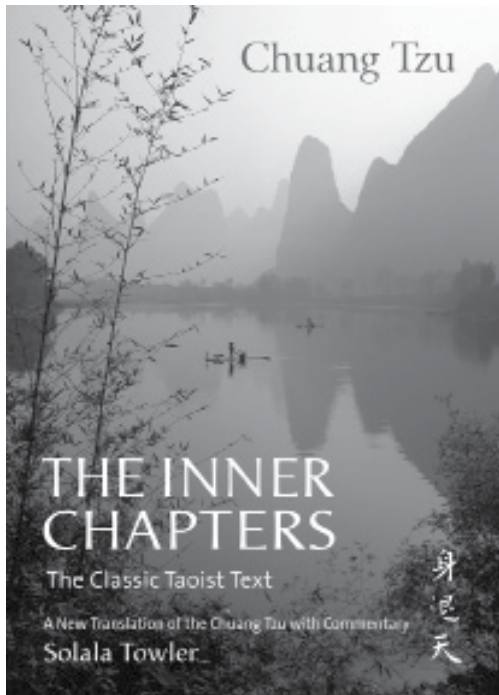
on Zhang Wu's head, "and not enough from here," and he placed his hand over Zhang Wu's belly.

"Now," said Li Bai, "let us breathe together for a bit and see if we can build your *dan tien* a little."

Zhang Wu's head was spinning but he did as Li Bai told him and sat up straight with his palms enfolded within each other, making a yin/yang symbol of them.

"This is what we call the Warrior's Breath," said Li Bai. "Actually all Taoist practitioners, whether they are martial artists or monks, use this same practice. ☯"

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The Great Profoundly Beloved Nameless Tao

Bob King



At 83, this is my
experience for my self.
For many years
I prayed to and
meditated on the
word Buddha
and the word God.
It's odd, for me,
they are all Empty!
In Zen Taoist Meditation
without agitation
I experience the Infinite
Great Profoundly Beloved Nameless Tao!
It covers all with its Love
Deep Harmonious
Compassionate Merciful Peace
from below or above,
in all directions,
in all levels,
in all realms,
not demanding to be lord!
It doesn't contend or pretend!
For me at 83, this is how,
there is only Now
with no beginning and or end!
Boundless Dragons,
Boundless Tigers
abound, surround,

the Infinite Great
Profoundly Beloved
Nameless Tao Now!
Profoundly Beloved
Lady Quan-Yin,
Profoundly Beloved Iron Crutch Lia,
Li-Tie-Kuai, my favorite of the eight Beloved
Chinese Taoist Immortals,
Deeply Beloved
Laughing Pu-tai,
Yakushi Medicine Buddha
all with Clear Mind
No trance, laugh and dance
among the Boundless Dragons,
the Boundless Tigers
in the beginningless
and endless Now!
Na-Mu-Amida Bu!

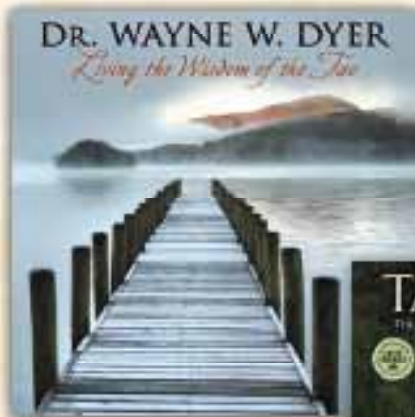


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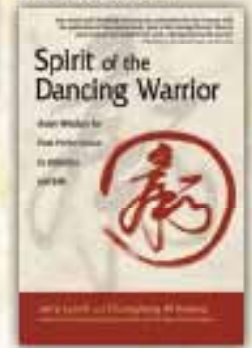
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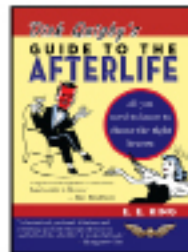
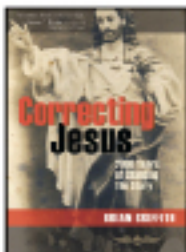
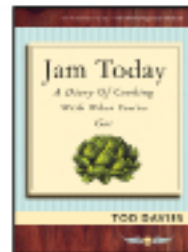


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Tea Time with Old Po (Paul Rosenberg)

The Empty Vessel Interview



I spent a wonderful afternoon with my tea brother up in Portland. His place, bordering on a botanical garden, is tucked away into a section of Portland I was not familiar with. But once I found my way there I was greeted by Paul in his newly formed tea temple. Shelves of various teas, many quite rare, line the walls, along with beautiful tankas and sacred statues. The whole feeling is quite lovely and gave me a sense of the sacred just walking in the door. Then, when I sat down at the beautiful, natural, burl table and Paul started pouring us delicious and magical teas I was transported to the holy mountains of China (and Oregon) to sip tea with the ancient Daoist (and Buddhist) masters. Paul has been studying the Way of Tea for many years and is able to transmit deep experience and teaching just by pouring the tea in just the right way, with the right intention and spirit. I

certainly left his temple “tea drunk” for my drive home that day!

(Po) Hello my name is Po and I am the head of Heaven’s Tea School of tea medicine in Portland, Oregon. This is a tea school devoted to use of tea in support of healing, self-cultivation, music, poetry, painting, and the arts tea, not as a thing in itself, but in support of creative life on earth. So thank you having me Solala, it’s always fun to see you and to have tea together.

Empty Vessel: Yes, I am interested in talking to you about your work with the alchemy of tea.



Yes, it's interesting with tea. A lot of this knowledge has been lost for a while: that tea should be from good sources, what I mean by that is biodiverse, natural places with clean water and clear air. This kind of tea can really support the development of qi and so I use what I call "living teas" and each of the teas I use will change the meridian system of the body. They will shift your physiology; they'll shift your state of being. Each tea will actually shift your eyesight to different qualities. These teas are beautiful and they have a transformative effect on the human spirit. I use a lot of aged teas, such as aged pu-er and aged oolongs, that are especially transformative and alchemical.

So when they are aged they become stronger?

Yes, if you have good tea to start with, as it ages the tea becomes more potent with qi and the caffeine dies out over time. But you have to start out with good leaf. I always tell people it's like going out and buying cheap wine. You can age that for twenty years and you won't end up with a better wine, you will end up with vinegar!

So plant quality is everything when you're talking about tea or any other herbal plant that you are using for cultivation work. It's the same with ginseng, if you can get wild ginseng from older roots, it's incredibly potent

but most ginseng is very mono-cultured grown and can actually be toxic.

I think people in the West, even people who drink a lot of tea, are not aware of this idea of aging tea, of drinking old tea. They think, "This tea is three months old, we need to get some new tea."

It's simply because this country has been using almost solely commercial tea, which has very little qi. A month or two after you open the bag any life that was in it is gone. Any type of tea, even green tea, if it's from good plants, will age well. And every one of the five hundred teas I have in this room will never go bad. They'll simply get more potent over time. The flavor profiles and the aroma may change, the energetics will change, but in an amazing way. So, you really can work alchemy with these teas and transform people's systems in different ways.

You have a practice of serving tea, you are a server and people come to this beautiful sacred space for you to offer them this experience of tea at many different levels.

We are trying to create a sacred space here, a tea temple and a tea school devoted to human growth and spirit



cultivation. So when people come I want to offer them a special place that even before they sit down for tea they will be affected by the beauty and high vibration of this space and start to drop out of their mind, down to the dan tien. When you come into openness and presence, all of a sudden the whole world opens up. Because you can get beyond your own mind, and when you add the layer of tea it's so beautiful and gives you an infinite palette of vibrations to work with.

Because different teas have different vibrations, different effects?

Absolutely. Every tea has a different vibration, even the same tea from the same mountain; a different season of picking will have a different energy to it and work differently in the channel system. But there are some teas that, if their mind is really chattering, you can serve an aged black tea, 23 year old tea called *lui an* and usually within 90 seconds often their mind will quiet right down. It sinks the qi so quickly and firmly. There are other teas that, if people are blocked emotionally or stuck in some way, will open the emotional centers and clear your whole energetic system.

Most people are not used to seeing tea in that way. Even people who study taiji and qigong don't know about this tea alchemy.

Well tea is really beautiful when it's in support of these other creative arts. It's like you drink tea and then you use that beautiful energy that is opened up to create or to cultivate. I think tea wants to be reborn in this culture to become an integral part of the culture. It's spreading rather quickly on the west coast. If you go to music festivals now or gatherings or so many young cultural events there'll be like four or five kids doing gongfu tea. It's so wonderful to see these young kids break out their gear and do tea. Even in the most simple way, they are doing it so beautifully — even if they're not aware of the energetics completely they're doing tea as a simple ritual to bring people into presence and to hold space as a container for cultivation.

The Daoists that I work with in China use gongfu tea as a part of their practice. Actually, gongfu tea has been part of the Daoist tradition for hundreds if not thousands of years.

Yes and it's simply been unrecognizable in the West because there hasn't been good tea around. Anyone who does self-cultivation will already be so sensitive to this medicine and you will be able to use it immediately for your practice. And the real truth of the matter is if you have decent tea, it doesn't matter if you've never sat on a mat in your life or ever wanted to, it will change your meridian system, it will change your state of being, it will bring you into quiet. So don't let anybody ever tell you that you're not feeling a tea because you're not cultivated

enough. That's simply salesmanship.

But for those who do cultivate there are worlds upon worlds of energetic discrimination and different states of awareness that you will experience. Self-cultivation goes so hand in hand with tea and the ancient Daoists knew this. Tea brings you into the Dao. If you drink the *zheng wen wuyi* teas from a very sacred place you will experience this. This is one of the most famous teas in China and if you drink a good quality one, a few cups and you feel that the arms of nature are viscerally supporting you and you drop into the Dao. If you go out for a walk in nature after drinking this tea you'll feel every leaf, flower, cloud as if you're part of it, which we are.

Traditionally, all cultivators knew that good tea can immediately bring you into deep states of cultivation. After you get more energetic discrimination with tea you can use it as an amazing tool in your cultivation practice.

The tea ceremony gives you license to pay attention to your cultivation and you can simply be with people in a natural state. This is all about being natural. Daoism is about being natural, your true self. So sometimes the ceremonies may be laughing, sometimes it may be meditative, sometimes it may be a mixture, sometimes people cry. Whatever comes up in our natural self. Your true natural personality should be there.

And when you can be yourself when you're serving tea you give everyone else a license to take a chill, to relax, take a breath and to be themselves. This is the Watercourse Way.

There's an old saying in the Zen tradition that if you want to know the taste of Zen you must first know the taste of tea.

I don't know. I am not a Zen practitioner but I know that if you drink good tea you will start saying stuff like that. (laughter)

Now am I wondering, since our readers are all over the country, how do they go for tea and how do they know if it's good tea. Can they order it from you?

I only sell to people who come and sit with me first and learn a little bit, because tea I consider sacred medicine. I'm very happy to sell tea to people who come here first and work with me. People can also come and take a few classes here if you can or find somebody local who can simply show you what clean living tea is about. It doesn't need to be expensive, it doesn't need to be rare, it just needs to be clean tea from a clean integral place. This will give you, when you drink it, that sense of integrity, that sense of connection with your deeper self.

Serving tea is an art and there are not so many people out there right now who have this knowledge. I don't just want to promote myself, I am sure there are other people out there who can do this. But what I am saying to all of your readers around the country is find someone who has a real connection to tea energetically and as a plant medicine. Many people who work with tea are just merchants



and are trying to sell you something. Either find someone who knows this or come visit me. You do need somebody to just show you the way. A real tea person's job is only to open the doors and the windows of this art. Then you walk through yourself, you do the work, you cultivate to unfold this art from within yourself.

How long have you been studying this Way of Tea?

I've been working with tea every day for 16 or 17 years now, so it's really like breathing for me.

You lived in an ashram in India for quite a few years didn't you?

It was actually in the States, in a Hindu lineage, a very old style of kundalini yoga. It's the lineage of Nityananda of Ganeshpuri. I lived in a monastery for 15 years. What that deep sort of cultivation gives you that lent itself to tea was a deep ability to discriminate energetically both in other people's systems and in my own.

The art of tea is really about learning to listen; listen to the tea, listen to your own body, listen to your guest's body, what is their state of being, what do they need, what vibrations to they need to shift into a higher place?

You are in the middle right now of building a tea school.

Yes, we just moved into a new place that's three times the size of my old tea temple and I am creating an interna-

tional school where people can come and study traditional Chinese Cha Dao, both the inner and outer aspects of it. They can study tea as vibrational medicine and tea as plant spirit medicine. So there are a lot of levels. We also do public classes of all sorts. We have full moon ecstatic tea gatherings with poetry and old Chinese and Japanese games with tea like where you give people tea and don't tell them what it is and everyone has to write a poem about how it makes them feel. Many beautiful things.

We have public classes and public tea sessions. Many people also come here for private classes or private tea journeys, as I call my tea experiences, where we will drink anywhere from 6 to 8 teas in a night. Each one will shift you and we go on a whole journey with tea. It's kind of hard to speak about. There's not much context that people have for this but it's definitely fun and no one leaves without wings on their heels.

Yes, the goal is to build a tea temple school that will be a center for deep understanding of the way of tea, deep healing, self cultivation and the arts. So we will have sacred tea and meditation mornings every week, classes on chi and tea, healing sessions by myself and others, and many events involving tea and music, poetry and arts. The school has a whole curriculum for guiding dedicated students through the depth and breadth of using tea for cultivation and alchemy. But people can interact with the school in many ways: weekly public tastings, journeys, classes or private sessions. Once a month we will offer whole weekend intensives to train people in depth and 4 times a year we will offer whole retreat weeks. People can also contact me about private retreats to learn in depth one on one.

Well, being here with the place only halfway finished is amazing. It's like a magical wonderland here. (See photos) Can you tell me about what else is coming? It really seems like it will be a totally unique experience.

Yes I think this is something very special and I am sure that there are little out of the way places in China, Taiwan and Korea that are amazing. I really don't advertise at all, it's just by word of mouth. I'm not concerned about selling tea to people or making them buy something. What I am trying to do here is really give something of quality; it's really a transmission of this lineage and with these plants and to really give something on the soul and spirit level. I need to earn a living too and so I charge for my sessions. But I very interested in giving a very high quota experience.

It's like if you went to a five star restaurant in France and every part of the experience is glowing and people remember it for the rest of their life. I want to offer, in my humble way, an experience that people will remember for the rest of their lives.

So if someone is traveling through the Northwest and would like to contact you and come for a tea session, how would they do that?



You can contact me, Paul Rosenberg, and you can look me up at Heaven'sTea.com on the internet or call me at 503.230.0953 and my personal page (look for Olde Po) where I post tea pictures and poetry and art every day. The first thing I tell people who come to study with me is to not listen to anyone else, not even me. Learn to listen to the tea, listen to your body, listen to your being, it will never lie. This is an art of self cultivation, of energetic discrimination and of connecting to your innermost truth through your *own* being. This is not an art about being more overtly "spiritual", or more "Asian" or more anything. This is an art of becoming more you, more the innermost self.

The first thing I tell people who come to study with me is, "Don't listen to what anybody says, not even me. You should listen how to learn from your body. Your body will never lie. If it's (the tea) toxic you'll feel it, if it has pesticides you'll feel it. It takes very little training to know what the signs are of wild tea or biodiverse tea. Don't let anybody tell you it's mysterious either. It's not and you can learn so easily.

So you want to start with good quality tea and then you want to come to the tea session with a certain kind of mind frame or heart frame.

This is really important. The other thing I say to new students is you should be able to take a tin can and put a Lipton tea bag in it and serve it to someone you care about across the table with absolute presence, love and a sense

of deep quiet and it can be a magical experience. You can also drink one-hundred-year-old rare tea with someone who is not working from that deep place in them and it's not very fun. I would rather drink the tin can any day and be with someone who is in touch both with their humanity and their divinity.

You can often find someone in your area who can teach you *gongfu cha*. It's an extremely simple ritual. You don't need to spend a lot of money to get the equipment. You can even go to Goodwill. It's a simple ritual way to sit with tea. One other thing I want to say about spirit, is that there is nothing more powerful than your cultivation of human spirit so it really doesn't matter what kind of tea you drink, if you cultivate yourself, cultivate your own presence, your own love, your own sense of service of making tea for someone, your own sense of being in the present moment, then any tea that you ever make will be beautiful and you don't need to worry about tracking down rare teas or knowing this or not knowing that. This is absolutely the most fundamental thing about tea. It's spirit.

Good point! I was also fascinated by your new practice this summer of taking people into the wilderness on hikes and serving them tea by beautiful waterfalls and other gorgeous locations.

Yes, once or twice a week, all summer long, which in Oregon is about two months, we go to old growth forests along old rivers and waterfalls in deep canyons and wild places. We pack out a whole tea set and we lay down a piece of kimono silk and do tea ritual in the forest and it's an amazing cultivating experience because the qi from these old teas is from biodiverse forests. When they unfold in this setting, the qi unfolds very quickly, your state changes and you become part of the living web of life in that forest. Many of us have had incredibly profound experiences working this way.

You can do tea and then do your practice of qigong or yoga or meditation. This is the way people have done for millennia and there's a reason they do that. Because it works!

It sounds great. I love to be able to offer people that this is a part of Daoist practice. People often think of Daoist practices is that I read the Daode Jing and I do qigong or meditation practice, but it is really a much bigger world than that. It's calligraphy poetry, painting and tea. Of course, in ancient times a real master would know all these things.

Yes, it's always about cultivating your own humanity. Maybe a better way to put that is to cultivate your spirit by cultivating your expression in your human form in your life. What we're trying to do with tea and with cultivation is weave heaven into earth. We're learning how to open to heaven and to ground it into earth, into this life. So it's not a dream. Every one of you is working to open up to higher energies, so that they can be brought into this earth and raise the vibration of everything. And this is really the

only way to help our civilization at this point.

I have traveled around quite a bit and met a lot of tea masters and I feel Paul is a very high-level tea master. And one of the ways you can tell he is a high-level tea master is that he doesn't claim to be a high-level tea master!

I'm a tea drunk!

Is there any point where you see your tea teachings, your tea offering, to extend beyond Portland so that people in other parts of the country can connect with you?

Yes, in the next two years this should unroll and so my goal will be to travel to places where people are doing intense cultivation so that I can work with all of you. If anybody wants to fly myself and my assistant out to do a week of teaching you just simply contact me at my school. The whole point for us now is to help spread these tools so that your lives can be richer and better. Especially for beginners, there are experiences I need people to *have* and not *tell* them about. It's not verbal; it's giving you the experience of what it's like to drink tea out of Chinese jade or old Chinese clay or Oregon clay. Or what it's like to drink a 20-year-old Pu-er or an oolong that's been aged or a new tea from Taiwan. So I have to bring a library of things. It's not a lot but it's not a little.

One of the things I like about your tea presentations is that you are able to mix different teas to give different experiences.

I have the ability to do that a little bit. I mix different Chinese tonic herbs with tea and sometimes I will blend different puerhs or different teas that I know the energetic properties of to create a different effect in the body. After a number of years I am getting very good at reading people's energy systems and being able to find teas to open them no matter who they are.

I saw you at a summer music festival and you had combined rishi mushrooms, a pu-er and I think perhaps some ginseng. It was a really lovely combination.

Yes, that tea was grounding and it helped people form a container in that festival atmosphere. My job as a tea person is to find the right tea for the right person at that moment, what's aligned universally with them.

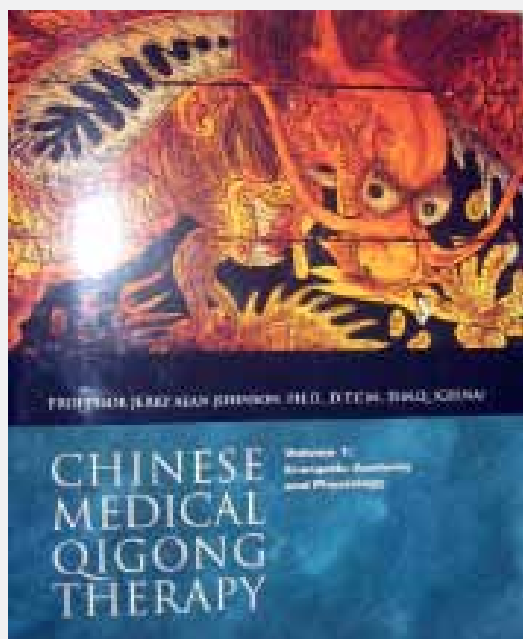
When I do my tea journeys I tell people it's often like composing music, you're picking different notes that will create a total harmony all strung together in people's systems and in that way you are learning to sing people's bodies with tea.

So is there anything you'd like to leave us with?

Only that a real tea master knows that serving tea has nothing to do with tea. ☯

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Is This the "Real" Tendon Changing Classic?

Yi Jin Jing

Hirsh Diamant

Before coming to China, in the Summer of 2012, I thought that all tendon changing practices were inspired by translations of the text left by Bodhidharma Damo (達摩), the legendary Indian monk, founder of Chan (Zen) Buddhism and Shaolin martial arts.

In the Summer of 2012 I spent several days at the Daoist monastery *Tong Bo Gong* in the Tian Tai mountains. I wanted to be in that monastery because of my continued interest in translating and understanding the text of Wu-zhen Pian (悟真篇), *Awakening to Reality*, written by immortal and mystic Zhāng Bó Duān (張伯端) who lived in this location in the 10th century. When I was in the temple, I learned that Zhāng Bó Duān also wrote the *Yi Jin Jing*:

I started practicing this form of Tendon Changing while also translating the text of *Yi Jin Jing*. I liked this practice a lot and was fascinated by the beauty and structure of the text with its numerological symbolism of eight sections with 5 lines in each section consisting of the title, two lines for movement and two lines for mystical amplification, and with four characters in each line.

Studying the text, I was wondering about the relationship of this text to Da Mo's legacy. My Daoist friends laughed when I asked them this question. According to their explanation, Buddhists have adopted the Daoist practices of *Yi Jin Jing* and to give them "legitimacy," affiliated them with Da Mo!

Today, one can find many versions of *Yi Jin Jing* on youtube; I think they are coming from the Shaolin/Da Mo tradition. I don't know who's version is the "correct" one and I hope that interested readers will study this text from Tong Bo Gong temple and will find it to be a beautiful, poetic, and profound practice. ☯

Hirsh Diamant, PhD, is teaching arts, education, and cultural studies at The Evergreen State College in Olympia, WA. His research interests include Daoism and Silk Roads Studies. More of his work can be found at <http://blogs.evergreen.edu/diamanth/>



In China, people think that health is important; health means long life. Chinese alchemists and mystics were always very interested in practices that could change, transform, and rejuvenate tendons. Tendons connect bones and muscles and are responsible for flexibility and strength of the whole organism. The Chinese word for tendon, *jīn* (筋) shows this concept clearly: the top of the character is 竹 (zhú) bamboo, also symbolically means joints. Below is 月(肉 ròu), flesh, plus 力 (lì), strength.

Zhāng Bó Duān 張伯端 (987-1082 CE)



易筋经

Yì Jīn Jīng

沐浴守中：双手合十，冥心泯意，融入虚空，洗清万念

铁牛犁地：双手握拳，拇指力挺，虚顶垂尾，拔背含胸

海底归元：双手推下，真意贯充，任督中通，玄关神开

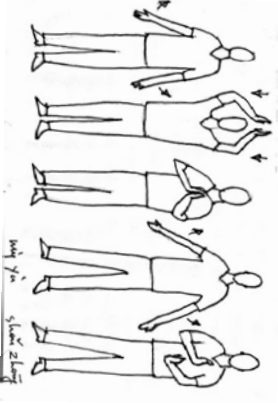
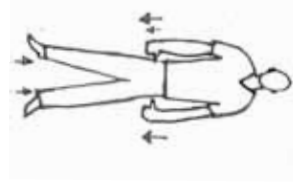
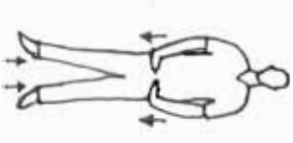
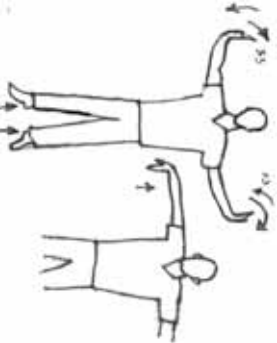
两仪融清：双手平推，疏胸开节，肝胆利导，金木交化

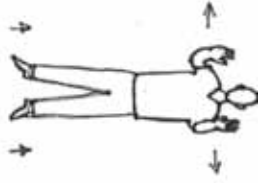
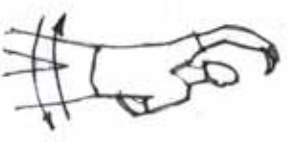
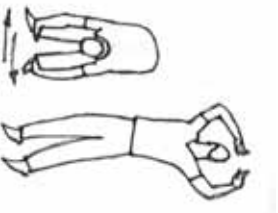

神象飞精：双掌前推，三阳通利，舒中强筋，返元还精

摘星望月：单掌探月，掌护命门，紫霄抚龙，坎宫守元

鼎立乾坤：下捞海川，上推天顶，水火即济，天地混合

归元丹田：双手合掌，归胞丹田，储立清心，复归寂静

<p>1 mǔ yù shǒu zhōng 沐浴守中： wash bathe guard center</p> <p>Shuāng shǒu hé hé shí míng xīn mǎn yì 双手合十，冥心泯意， couple hand combine ten deep heart vanish idea</p> <p>róng rù xū kōng xǐ qīng wàn niàn 融入虚空，洗清万念 melt enter empty space wash clean 10,000 ideas</p>	<p>Cleanse yourself and guard center: Put hands together, all ten fingers touching. Keep heart and mind steady, Enter the void, Abandon all concepts and ideas.</p>	
<p>2 Tiě niú lí dì 铁牛犁地 iron ox plow earth</p> <p>shuāng shǒu wò quán mǔ zhǐ lì tǐng 双手握拳 拇指力挺 both hands grasp fists thumb finger strong stand</p> <p>xū dǐng chuí wěi bá bèi hán xiōng 虚顶垂尾，拔背含胸 empty top droop tail pull back contain chest</p>	<p>Iron Ox plows the earth: Make fists with both hands, Stick out thumbs forcefully. Elevate head, drop down tail, Expand back, hollow chest.</p>	
<p>3 hǎi dǐ guī yuán 海底归元 ocean floor returns origin</p> <p>shuāng shǒu tuī xià zhēn yì guàn chōng 双手推下 真意贯充 both hands push down true meaning connected full</p> <p>rèn dū zhōng tōng xuán guān shén kāi 任督中通 玄关神开 appoint direct center go through mystery connection spirit open</p>	<p>Ocean floor returns to origins: Push down with both hands; True meaning revealed completed Govern yourself through the center Spiritual vision of mystery opens.</p>	
<p>4 liǎng yí róng qīng 两仪融清 two polarities melt clear</p> <p>shuāng shǒu píng tuī shū xiōng kāi jié 双手平推 疏胸开节 both hands level push sparse chest open joints</p> <p>gǎn dǎn lì dào jīn mù jiāo huà 肝胆利导 金木交化 liver gallbladder benefit lead metal wood join transform</p>	<p>Polarities of Yin Yang melt and dissolve: Push horizontally with both hands, Unclog chest, open joints. Liver and Gallbladder effectively lead; Metal and Wood embrace in transformation</p>	

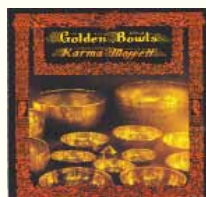
<p>5 shén xiàng fēi jīng 神象飞精 spirit image fly essence</p> <p>shuāng zhǎng qián tuī sān yáng tōng lì 双掌前推 三阳通利 both palms front push three yang through benefit</p> <p>shū zhōng qiǎng jīn fān yuán hái jīng 舒中强筋 返元还精 stretch center strong tendon return origin return essence</p>	<p>Essence and spiritual image are flying: Two palms push forward, Three Yang lead in triumph. Expand center, strengthen tendons, Return to foundations and original essence.</p>	
<p>6 zhāi xīng wàng yuè 摘星望月 pick star look moon</p> <p>dān zhǎng tàn yuè zhǎng hù mìng mén 单掌探月 掌护命门 alone palm look for moon palm protects destiny gate</p> <p>zǐ xiāo fū lóng kǎn gōng shǒu yuán 紫霄抚龙 坎宫守元 purple cloud nurture dragon kan palace guard origin</p>	<p>Pick a star, look at the moon: One palm reaches for the moon, The other palm protects Ming Men. Purple cloud nurtures the dragon, Water palace guards the origins.</p>	
<p>7 Dǐng lì qiān kūn 鼎立乾坤 cauldron stands qian kun</p> <p>xià lāo hǎi chuān shàng tuī tiān dǐng 下捞海川 上推天顶 below dredge sea river above push heaven top</p> <p>shuǐ huǒ jí jì dì hùn hé 水火即济 天地混合 water fire reach benefit heaven earth vanish harmony</p>	<p>Cauldron positioned between Heaven and Earth: Dredge seas and rivers below, Push the top of heaven above. Water and Fire benefit each other, Heaven and Earth dissolve in harmony.</p>	
<p>8 guī yuán dān tián 归元丹田 return origin dan tian</p> <p>shuāng shǒu hé zhǎng guī bào dān tián 双手合掌 归胞丹田 both hands join palm return womb dan tian</p> <p>chù lì qīng xīn fù guī jì jìng 储立清心 复归寂静 reserve establish clear heart restore return quiet still</p>	<p>Return to the original Elixir Field (Dan Tian) With both palms joined, Return to womb of Dan Tian. Preserve clear heart, Return to tranquility.</p>	

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Women's Powers in Popular Daoism

Brian Griffith



Most religions are psychologically split into Janus-faced, contradictory versions of themselves. Usually, one face calls for partnership between equal souls, while the other requires subordination of some souls to others. These faces of religion don't just represent different moods; they uphold different values. And the competition between different values usually makes for ongoing culture wars. China has a reputation for peaceful religious pluralism, with a supposed absence of murderous holy war. But actually, its culture wars have often been nasty. The three main religions (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism) have competed for influence, not always peacefully. And each tradition has always been divided internally over which values, or which people, are most important.

In the general split between orga-

nized and popular religion, powerful men have usually controlled China's "official" religious institutions. But outside these organizations, the informal sector of "popular religion" has remained a forest of counter-cultures, many of them created by women. In organized Confucianism the leadership was all male, so the official goals, values, and rules of that religion were set by males alone. On top of that, Confucianism was the official state-backed religion over most of the past 2,000 years. But even in Confucianism, women's values always contended for influence. After all, obedience to mothers was a fundamental Confucian value.

In Daoism or Buddhism, men have usually occupied around 90% of all formal leadership positions. But at least some women have held every kind of leadership role, be it teacher,

priest, abbot, realized master, lineage founder, head of clerical training, or living goddess. And beyond the organizational leaders, perhaps a majority of local holy people have been women. Many male religious leaders lamented the influence of "stupid, superstitious women." But usually they could only complain. According to the *History of the Jin Dynasty* (of 265–420 CE), a Confucian scholar named Xia Tong objected that his relatives hired shamanesses to perform their ancestral rites. He admitted that the shamanesses were beautifully skilled in music and dance. They started their ceremony in a respectable way, playing drums and bells. But soon they were swallowing swords and spitting fire, which reportedly caused a dense fog to envelop the area, punctuated by flashes of lightning. For the scholarly

Xia, the whole display was “lewd” and disgraceful, but his foolish relatives were enthusiastic (Chan, 1990, 21). Though Confucian scholars were official guides to the people, the villagers spoke of shamanesses as “the other clergy.”

It’s commonly remarked that many Daoist deities resemble government bureaucrats. And to a large extent, the emperors and officials did co-opt popular religion and remold it in their own image. It happened in roughly the way that Europe’s medieval rules made Christianity into a cosmic hierarchy to uphold the divine right of kings. In this type of religion, Chinese men increasingly modeled themselves on the rulers, like small emperors over their families. In Daoist sects, the leading men slowly squeezed out female leaders. But where the village wise women in Europe were commonly labeled as witches serving Satan, China’s wise women retained a certain popular respect. According to a traditional joke, there are nine kinds of Chinese religious women—the “three aunts and six grannies.” These are the Daoist nuns, Buddhist nuns, fortunetellers, matchmakers, shamans, healers, spirit mediums, herb or drug sellers, and midwives (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 151). As the joke suggests, probably most women doing these sorts of work are mature, and often past child-bearing age. They are common local women, doing common wise-woman work, and the crafts they practice are probably older than recorded history. To this day most Chinese villages have their aunts and grannies, who often do good business. Some of them achieve regional fame as saints or living goddesses, however strange their ways may seem to outsiders.

A Folklore of Women’s Spiritual Adventures

In reading the lives of immortal women we find broad patterns and variations on common themes—as in Joseph Campbell’s hero journeys. Each immortal has a kind of life story,



which tells her deeds and how she attained goddess-hood. The stages of these journeys often reflect the natural phases of women’s lives. In youth and child-bearing years, they are often idealistic rebels with a passion for righting wrongs. They often refuse arranged marriages, or defiantly choose their own mates. In maturity they generally turn to disciplines of meditation, fasting, inner alchemy, or sexual abstinence. In old age they might leave home and devote themselves completely to a spiritual quest. After attaining the Way, they become spiritual teachers (Cahill 1993, 240). Some became founders of multi-generational teaching lineages, such as Cao Wenyi’s Purity and Tranquility lineage. They sometimes formed associations of female teachers, like the College of Priestesses at Linjin (Blumenberg, 2006, 43). Of course some immortals were child prodigies like Chen Jinggu, who rose through all these phases of inner growth by early adulthood.

These goddesses were usually prodigal daughters, divorced wives, or widowed mothers. Their actions showed strength and independence rather than duty or obedience. They were people with a calling, and if their families could not accept that calling, the goddesses often ran away. So the Han dynasty saint Zheng Wei (Cheng Wei) was abused by her army officer husband, feigned

madness, and vanished into a new life as an independent holy woman (Cleary, 1989, 8–9). The Buddhist saint Miaoshan defied her father’s orders to marry, and let herself be thrown out of the family. When Qi Xiao Yao’s father tried to teach her “rules for women,” she said those were for ordinary people. Her focus on spiritual practice caused conflict, and her parents had difficulty marrying her off. After she got married, her husband’s family couldn’t control her, and said she was possessed by a devil. She ignored them all and became a Daoist immortal. The Holy Mother Dongling studied the Way and gained amazing powers of self-transformation. As a teacher and healer, she spent most of her time visiting and helping other families. But her husband grew jealous of her rising fame, not to mention her neglect of wifely service to himself. In a huff he denounced her to the police for lechery and witchcraft. The authorities slammed her in jail, but she escaped into immortality like a bird through the bars, leaving only her slippers behind.

Such snippets of folklore offer glimpses of the goddess legends. But many stories are far richer in detail and depth. To illustrate the folklore better, let me describe the legends of two South Chinese goddesses, and the religions they founded.

Guanyin’s Fighting Daughter

Long ago, in the 700s CE, the prefect of a district near Quanzhou (on the Fujian coast) tried to build a bridge across a tide-swept arm of the sea. The passage was dangerous, and travelers had drowned there every year. But where the bridge was most needed, there it was most difficult to build. The foundations for pilings across the bay had to be huge, and it was bound to be expensive. The prefect therefore prayed to the goddess Guanyin for help in the enterprise. The goddess answered his prayers, appearing wondrously in a boat before the fishing villages. As the local people flocked to the shore to see

this marvel, Guanyin announced she would marry whoever could throw a coin and touch her. Hundreds of men rushed forward, throwing coins out to her boat. The coins landed about her feet, filling the bottom of the craft. The fund-raising gambit was working very well, till one vegetable seller managed to hurl a handful of silver powder which touched the goddess on her hair. Realizing what had happened, Guanyin promptly disappeared. Desperate to claim his prize, the vegetable seller hurled himself into the sea after her, and was drowned. At this, the goddess reappeared. Pulling out the silver-coated hair from her head, she cast it on the sea. Then she bit her finger, sucked the wound, and spat blood into the water. Unknown to the amazed observers, she sent the soul of the vegetable seller to be reborn as a scholar in Gutian.

As a chain of results, the bridge was built with the money in the boat. The silvered hair from Guanyin's head came alive as a white female sea snake. The blob of blood floated to the lower ford of the Min River, where a childless woman was washing clothes. She saw the curious red clot in the water, ate it, and conceived a girl prodigy.

The girl, named Chen Jinggu, could talk soon after her birth. She could write soon after learning to walk. A few more years, and she announced herself ready to leave home on a quest to learn magic from the spiritual adepts on Mount Lu. In her apprenticeship as a shaman, the girl mastered every magical art save childbirth. She didn't bother with that because she wasn't interested in getting married.

On returning home, Chen Jinggu rejected her mother's efforts to find her a husband, and set up practice as a professional shaman. She was hired for traditional jobs like rain-making, spirit-calling, or exorcising demons. Beyond that, she trained a group of sworn sisters, forming a shamanic band of heroines. Her *yinbing* (soldiers of yin) helped lift a siege of Fuzhou city, overcoming forces of the

king's rebellious brother. The sworn sisters also saved the kingdom of Min from an assault by evil spirits. But of all the enemies Chen Jinggu fought, the worst was the white water snake born from Guanyin's hair. Once it attacked the king's palace, and Chen Jinggu managed to drive it away only after it ate all the king's consorts. Another time it attacked a brilliant young official named Liu Qi, who happened to be the man reincarnated from the drowned vegetable seller. After a desperate struggle, Chen Jinggu was able to save him. The two promptly fell in love, and so the great shamaness married. The vegetable seller was granted his wish to marry the goddess, but only on the other side of death.

Some time afterwards, the Kingdom of Min suffered a deadly drought, and Chen Jinggu was called as chief shaman to invoke rain. This ritual involved the difficult and strenuous feat of dancing on the waters. It had to be done, and couldn't be delayed. But Chen Jinggu was pregnant at the time, and in no condition to undertake the arduous dance. Therefore, she magically took the fetus from her womb, sealed it against injury, and kept it at her mother's house. Then she returned to perform the ritual.

While she was out on the waters dancing, the white snake broke into her mother's house and swallowed

the fetus "to feed its life." At that moment, Chen Jinggu began to hemorrhage badly. Realizing what had happened, she staggered back to her mother's house to engage the snake in mortal combat. With her strength almost gone, she managed to kill it. But when it died, she died as well—because it was the other half of her own soul.

After dying at age 24, Chen Jinggu went in spirit back to her teachers on Mount Lu. There she finally learned the wise woman's arts of childbirth. She took back the spirit of her unborn child, and transformed him into the child-god San Sheren, otherwise known as the Third Secretary Who Rides the Unicorn. Chen Jinggu herself received the title of the Lady Linshui.

The first temple to Lady Linshui was dedicated in 792 CE, in Daqiao village. Legend says the temple was built on the site of a cave where an older python goddess had been worshipped. Originally, this python goddess may have been a creator snake-woman, like the goddess Nü Wa. But in some split of roles, this python had become a goddess of death as opposed to birth. Every year it had taken two children back to the realm of death, till Chen Jinggu fought and killed it. And so, in the cave beneath Lady Linshui's enthroned image, the mummified body of Chen Jinggu reportedly lay on the slain serpent's head. So these ancient goddesses of life and death, after their struggle as opposites, lay together in eternity.

Lady Linshui was officially recognized in the emperor's Register of Sacrifices around the year 1250. Perhaps the rulers of the Southern Sung dynasty sought her aid against the advancing Mongol horde. Her shamanic lineage, called the Sannai Lüshan, practiced healing, exorcism, soul-calling, seasonal rituals, and funerals down the centuries. The primary temple in Daqiao burned in 1875, but was carefully restored. Then in 1950, Communist anti-superstition rioters defaced statues of the goddess. The Red Guards inflicted more damage in the 1960s.



The Communist government passed laws against feudal superstition, as if all the spiritual heroes of village China had been fronts for the people's oppressors. But most local women trusted their own traditions and values. Since 1980 they restored and expanded the Lady Linshui's temples. Her devotees argued that the laws against superstition did not apply to them, because their goddess is real.

In the past few decades, a number of books and movies about Chen Jinggu sold well. She featured in a 1980s TV series, but her mediums and shamanesses felt it failed to do her justice. In 1993, an organization called the "Association of Research on Civilization and the Association of Research on Popular Literature and Arts of Fujian" hosted an international conference on "Research into Chen Jinggu's Cult." The cult's temples received a rising flow of guests and pilgrims, many of them from overseas. Worshippers of the goddess claim that she and her sworn sisters still rove the world, fighting injustice wherever it appears. It is said they fought in Vietnam against the Americans, side by side with their Vietnamese sisters (Baptandier, 1996, 105–135).

The Queen of the Seas

Another goddess story from South China illustrates the constant emergence of new cults over time. Mazu (Ma Tsu) is famous as a savior of sailors at sea. She saved people in her sleep by the power of her dreams. According to legend, she was a boat person on the coast of Fujian in the 900s CE. She died at age 27 in a hunger strike, because she refused to submit to an arranged marriage.

Mazu's career as a savior started when she dreamed one night that her fisherman brothers were sinking in a storm at sea. She reached out to save them, and stopped the hurricane. The next day her brothers returned, saying they had nearly died in a storm. Then they saw a woman coming to them on the water, quieting the waves.



In medieval Europe, witches were believed to travel by night, and to have power over the forces of wind, lightning, or fertility. The old-fashioned villagers often revered such people as wise women, but the authorities feared them. Women accused of having such powers were commonly killed. But in medieval Fujian, the villagers began turning to Mazu for help. Rumors spread down the coast, that in case after case, this woman saved sailors in distress. It seems that Mazu was an adept in lucid dreaming, like some other Daoist or Buddhist saints who practice healing or teaching from a dream state. Soon she was in great demand, intervening like a traditional trance-born shamaness to deal with droughts, storms, or plagues. Under her protection, sea commerce flourished on the South China coast, despite the emperor's restrictions on international trade (Gernant, 1995, 263–269).

When she was 27 years old, Mazu's parents grew desperate to marry her off. They arranged an engagement against her will, and she defied them by refusing to eat. An inflexible code of family duty met an adamant woman, and neither one budged. Mazu actually starved herself to death, which by the standards of conventional Confucianism, was close to the worst of sins. Here was a

daughter who would rather be dead than follow her parents' wishes for the family's good. In another culture she might be cursed as a soul bound for hell. But there must have been more than Confucian orthodoxy in the culture of medieval Fujian, because Mazu transcended this death like a saint. She was soon reported appearing to more sailors than ever before. In some accounts she came wearing a red dress, which was a garb associated with suicide. Such an apparition might normally be the stuff of nightmares—yet she was deemed a powerful savior.

Temples dedicated to Mazu soon appeared, and growing numbers of people paid her worship. Her temples were often built over older buildings, stones, or statues, which had been dedicated to more ancient local goddesses. As Mazu literally absorbed these holy places, her folklore picked up the attributes of other goddesses. She became a protector of mothers in childbirth. Both pirates and wealthy traders called on her to protect their ships. She saved the Ming navy in the late 1300s, using miraculous balls of fire to guide Admiral Zhou Zuo's battleships through dangerous reefs. The great explorer Zheng He invoked her protection for his 60-ship, 30,000-sailor expeditions to India, Africa, and the South Pacific in the 1400s. When waves of pirates infested the coast, Mazu helped sink their ships or poison their water. Some researchers, however, claim there was a connection between pirate outposts and Mazu's temples, like the one on Lantau Island. Anyway, even the emperor eventually found it prudent to honor Mazu's cult. He offered her homage, recognizing Mazu with the slightly inaccurate title of Tian Hou—Queen of Heaven (Watson 1985, 294–320). So well was an utterly non-filial shamaness respected.

Today, Mazu's temples are among the busiest in China. She is worshipped by a total of around a hundred million people, especially on the south coasts of China and in Taiwan. From there, immigration

spread her followers to perhaps most countries in the world (Zhao Zewei, 1995, 406–415). Her cult is therefore a world religion, which is considerably larger than Judaism.

The Possibilities for Deviant Women

In many other cultures around the world, such deviant wise women were barred from leadership by every means available. For example, in Spain during the 1500s, numerous women took religious vocations independent of the church. These were called “beatas,” and they often operated like Mother Teresas in the streets—at a time when church-sanctioned nunneries were carefully cloistered from the world. The church responded to these beatas with cautious concern. The women were usually summoned to public hearings, where priestly psychologists carefully discredited their apparent delusions of grandeur. For presuming to take religious initiative without God’s authority, many of these women were taken away, and sentenced to solitary penance for the rest of their lives.

But in China, the authorities never managed such control over popular religion—at least not until the brief Maoist period. Confucian orthodoxy exerted expectations on women mainly through their families. But if a holy woman could avoid domination by her family, she was usually free to build any career the market would bear. If she ran away from home, she was free to starve or found a new religious sect. The public commonly supported independent holy women, and many were able to live on the offerings of their admirers (Gernet 1962, 163–164). If they acquired a reputation and many followers, their leadership was seldom repressed by any civic or religious authority. Under ambiguously “open” conditions, they could teach their own answers to their own questions, with little pressure to fit their teaching to a male-made orthodoxy.

The Spiritual Journeys of Daoist Women

What generalizations can we make about the practices and insights of female saints? Maybe the main thing is that their religions were clearly built from their own experience. For example, they sometimes describe the process of inner growth as spiritual pregnancy and childbirth, or the conception and nurture of an “immortal embryo.” The Daoist female sage Sun Buer (b. 1124 CE) described a process which resembles spiritual insemination from a woman’s point of view. As her teaching is explained by Chen Yingning.

Every morning before sunrise they would still their minds and sit quietly, waiting for the sun in a state of empty openness. Inwardly laying aside ideas and thoughts, outwardly disengaging themselves from objects, all at once they forgot about the universe and broke through space.

Then a point of positive energy, like a drop of dew, like lightning, would spontaneously appear in the great void and enter their bellies, passing into the spine and rising to the center of the brain; there it would turn into sweet rain and shower the inner organs. The sages would then cause this energy to circulate throughout their bodies, cleaning them out and burning away pollution, to change their bodies into masses of pure light. (Cleary 1989, 43)



If this sounds like kundalini yoga, the parallel is often drawn. But Chinese women often compared their spiritual energy, not to a rising snake, but to an embryo growing in its mother’s womb. They described the stages of spiritual development in terms of pregnancy, childbirth, and nurture of an inner child. As the Daoist mystic Wei Huacun (d. ca. 330 CE) explained in her *Gold Pavilion Classic*,

How keep body and mind one?
Be like a child.

Be aware of breathing, soft and pliant.

To see the transcendent Dao, have a pure mind ...

Don’t say No.

To receive heaven’s blessing, be empty like a mother’s womb.

Give birth and nurture, then let go. (Saso, 1995, 80–81)

Daoists commonly speak of merging male and female energies in a process of “inner alchemy.” The practice usually involves controlled breathing, yoga-like physical exercise, and various kinds of meditation or visualization. The type of union it works toward resembles the sense of “ha-tha” (in hatha yoga), which means a union of sun (masculinity) with moon (femininity) in a greater wholeness (Sovatsky, 2009, 209). According to the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen) school of Daoism, the spiritual journey starts with “external and internal strengthening” exercises—to unblock the body, stimulate vitality, and still the mind. When that foundation is built, a “firing process” of deep breathing and meditation incubates the internal energies. As a text called the “Diagram of the Ascent and Descent of Yang and Yin in the Human Body” explains,

Heaven and earth are the great forge, yin and yang are the pivots of transformation, and the unified *qi* [vital energy] is the great medicine. To refine the elixir, use your inner male and female, yang and yin *qi*, and circulate them all around the inner stars until they form the alchemical vessel. The Metal Mother [the Queen Mother of the West] resides right there, and through wondrous transformations

stimulates the qi of life. (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 187)

These exercises are sometimes called “the dragon and the tiger swirling in the winding river.” The dragon and tiger are terms for the inner male and inner female, and the winding river is the energy path up the backbone. When these circulating energies rise to the heart, they are called “the sun and the moon reflecting each other in the Yellow Palace.” When they reach the forehead, they are termed “the union of husband and wife in the bed chamber.” And this is just the beginning. Because then follows an incubation period called “the ten months of pregnancy.” It is said that those who embark on this journey cannot simply stop and turn back. Because next comes “the birth of the immortal child” (which happens through the crown of the head as in kundalini yoga), “three years of breast-feeding,” and raising the inner soul child to maturity. As the inner child’s capacities unfold, it grows capable of leaving its mother’s body in a kind of soul projection. Ultimately, the old sense of identity is transcended in a merger with the entirety of life (Wong, 1997, 173–176; Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 19–21). Of course this little outline is simplistic, and for real explanations I’d suggest *Internal Alchemy* by Livia Kohn and Robin Wang, or Eva Wong’s *Cultivating Stillness: A Taoist Manual for Transforming Body and Mind*.

In recent decades, many Christian denominations sought to remove sexist language from their worship services, hymns, and prayers. But it is far more than words that accommodate women in some of these Chinese traditions. These are schools of religious wisdom built largely by women, for women. Their poetry and teachings are created through women’s explorations of their own inner continents. In surveying their evocative words, we have to wonder what was ever gained by excluding female experience from religion.

The Dao of Sex

Some Daoist adepts include

The Empty Vessel



Tantra-like sexual practices among their spiritual disciplines. It’s even possible that Tantric practice evolved first in China, then influenced Tibetan Buddhism, and later gave rise to Indian Tantrism (Ching and Küng, 1989, 150). Most texts about these practices are written by men, and these often portray the female partners as a means to the male adept’s goals. But though the women’s experience is not so well published, certain texts describe sacred sex from a woman’s point of view. The following passage describes the sex life of a goddess in terms designed to toy with male fears:

The Queen Mother of the West is a good example of a woman who obtained the path of immortality by nourishing her yin. Each time she had relations with a man, he fell sick, while she herself kept a polished, transparent face of a sort which had no need of makeup. She fed herself continuously on milk, and played the five-stringed lute, always keeping harmony in her heart and calm in her thoughts, without any desire. So, the Queen Mother of the West never married, but she loved to couple with young men. The secret could never be divulged, for fear that other women would get it into their heads to imitate her methods. (Baptandier, 1996, 134–135)

According to legend, sacred sex was first taught to the Yellow Emperor by a series of celestial ladies called the Plain Maiden, the Colorful Woman, and the Mysterious Woman. These teachers reportedly left texts on the “art of the chamber” which were later lost. But other texts abounded on the arts of generating health, vitality, and inner awareness through sex. These include the “Yellow Emperor’s Basic Questions,” “Secret Instructions of the Jade Chamber,” “Ten Rules of the Queen Mother of the West on the Proper Path of Women’s Cultivation,” or the “Great Unity’s Instructions on [Developing] Golden Fluorescence” (which Carl Jung and Richard Wilhelm translated as “The Secret of the Golden Flower”) (Despeux and

Kohn, 2003, 39, 203–206). We might assume these teachings were hedonistic celebrations of sexual pleasure. But actually most of them were single-mindedly focused on attaining mental and emotional self-mastery. As a Celestial Masters' text (called "Esoteric Rites of the Perfected") instructs, "Do not fail to observe the proper order of attendance in the inner chamber. Do not harbor desire for the ordinary way [of intercourse] nor fail to observe the teachings of control ... Do not lust to be the first nor fail to observe the rules of cultivation of the inner chamber" (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 107). The "Heart to Heart Transmission of the Mysterious and Delicate" instructed,

[When the Numinous Father and the Holy Mother] are at work, their spirits are in union, but not their bodies. Their qi energies are in coition, but not their forms. The male must not loosen his garb and the female must retain her robe. They mutually respect each other like divine deities; love each other like father and mother. They keep still without moving until they feel moved by each other, and only then become interconnected. (Xun, 2009, 130)

By such methods, the Daoist female adept Nü Ji reportedly attained the Way.

In recent decades, these kinds of teaching were popularized in numerous "Dao of sex" manuals, for general rejuvenation of couples. The popularized versions of such teaching generally omitted guidance from a personal teacher, and made the practice a set of self-help generalities. Modern people heard of such things from couples counselors, or books in the library such as *The Tao of Love and Sex*, by Jolan Chang, *Sex, Health, and Long Life*, by Thomas Cleary, *Healing Love Through the Tao: Cultivating Female Sexual Energy*, by Mantak Chia, *Sexual Teachings of the White Tigress*, by Hsi Lai, or *The Tao of Seduction: Erotic Secrets from Ancient China*, by Liao Yi Lin. Perhaps the most scholarly treatment of the subject is *Sex in the Yellow Emperor's Basic Questions: Sex, Longevity, and Medicine in Early*

China, by Jessica Leo.

Of course most women of past centuries were illiterate villagers, who were consumed in their rounds of daily work. If they learned anything of sacred sex, they applied it in relation to their husbands. Few village women found the time or privacy for any concentrated spiritual practice, at least till their children were grown. But those who did manage it were often able to learn women's wisdom from female teachers.

Women in Primitive Daoism

Like other saviors, Laozi (Lao Tzu) had a mother, and as her son was increasingly deified, she became a virginal mother of the deity. Reportedly, the mother of Laozi was none other than the Jade Maiden of Profound Wonder, who may be the same Jade Maiden who lived with Peng Gu, the first man (Chan, 1990, 39). As first described in Han times, Peng Gu had hatched from an egg, and then wandered the world for countless eons. One day, however, he found he was not alone. With amazement and delight, he discovered the Jade Maiden was also wandering the universe. Peng Gu asked for her love, and the first couple began the lineage of divine ancestors.

According to the *Wide Sagely Meaning of the Perfect Scripture of the Dao and its Virtue*, "The Holy Mother Goddess was the Jade Maiden of Mystery and Wonder as long as she resided in heaven. After she had given birth [to Laozi], she was promoted to Goddess of the Great One. As such she taught Lord Lao the basic principles of reforming the world and spreading the true teaching" (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 50). She reportedly taught Laozi the cosmic nature of the human body, the course of its spiritual growth, and the arts of inner alchemy. Perhaps this is where Laozi got lines like "Know the eternal and forgive / Forgive and be altruistic / Be altruistic and embrace all / Embrace all and be like heaven" (stanza 16), or "Concentrating the breath to the utmost softness, can you

become like an infant?" (stanza 10).

But the Jade Maiden didn't just give away the whole shop. Some of the greatest secrets of life she required her son to figure out for himself: "I am the chief of all the immortals, queen of the wonderful Dao. The mysterious and numinous secret arts are all part of the Great Origin. How could I disgrace myself by revealing them?" After leading her son to the brink of sagehood, she avoided infringing on his own initiative, and made an exit worthy of the Virgin Mary: "She climbed into a jade carriage drawn by eight luminants and, followed by a host of transcendent attendants, ascended into heaven in broad daylight." Later the Jade Maiden became the Eternal Mother, Wusheng Laomu, who spoke to numerous women's groups through spirit writing. She assisted countless women in reaching paradise, and guided religious societies such as the White Lotus or the Unity Religion (or Yiguan Dao) (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 59–60, 50, 42–43). Those who attained the Way were said to live in "free, spontaneous wandering," like the Jade Maiden herself.

Like other sages of early Daoism, many ancient female immortals were basically yoginis, who withdrew to the mountains, practiced strict austerities, and became enlightened wild women. Their independent quests were described as "the path of higher virtue," as compared to the lower virtue of conventional religious practice in temples or nunneries (Wang, 2009, 163–164). The women of higher virtue commonly reverted to a way of life from before farming, replacing a grain-based diet with herbs and minerals gathered from the forest floor. Some lived on pine needles, mushrooms, sesame seeds, or bits of mica. Chang Rong ate only raspberry roots. Yu Jiang became a famous "hairy lady of the forest," who reportedly escaped her role as concubine for Prince Ying of the Qin state, and understandably fled to the wilds. They found her there hundreds of years later, living naked and free on a diet of pine needles and

pure *qi* energy (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 86–91). Likewise, the Tibetan master Yeshe Tsogyal reported going to the caves of Mön “to practice the extraction of the essence of various medicinal plants. I began, however, by taking the essence of minerals, knowing that the quintessence of all these is contained in chongzhi, or calcite.” On this primordial diet, Tsogyal reported, “My body became like a diamond; no weapon could harm it. My speech took on the qualities of the voice of Brahma, so that even a fierce tigress, when she heard me, became quiet and attentive. My mind passed into the immaculate vajra-like concentration” (Gyalwa and Changchub, 1999, 78). Though Tsogyal was a Buddhist, her methods were in this case indistinguishable from those of Daoist ascetics, such as the master of medicinal plants, Baogu (300s CE). Another legendary Daoist immortal was Magu, or “the Hemp Lady,” who was portrayed wearing a tiger-head pouch, a sword, and a headdress symbolizing the freedom of heaven. She had wild hair and bird-like fangs.

Clearly, some women went beyond romanticized longing for the primitive Golden Age.

Female Teachers in the Age of Organized Daoism

As the Han dynasty started to collapse in the 100s CE, various Daoist leaders began forming organized alternative communities, which soon grew into formal religious denominations. The Celestial Masters sect assigned priests to lead parishes, officiate at communal ceremonies, take confessions of sin, and accept tithes (Ching, 1993, 103). All this gave scope for the rise of patriarchal power in religious garb. But for at least the first one or two hundred years, this sect maintained a certain balance of yin and yang. The priestly leaders claimed that all members of the sect, male or female, were “priests,” and capable of receiving transmissions from spirit guides. When a member channeled a text called “Demon Ordinances of Lady Blue,” it seems the community respected it (Kleeman

and Barrett, 2005, 132–133). Though men prevailed as priests, the ritual guides were written for priests of both sexes: “When a man and a woman receive the registers of the three generals displayed on the altar, the man takes them from the left and the woman from the right.” Any member could take formal vows to study under a master. The standard vow for an unmarried girl was as follows: “Grateful for weighty kindness of the Dao from which I obtained life, I, an unmarried daughter, in such and such a year, with a devoted mind take pleasure in the Dao. Although I am ignorant I embolden myself to advance, and now take refuge at the master’s gate” (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 105–112).

All members of the Celestial Masters underwent formal initiations according to age and accomplishment. These included rituals of “harmonization of the *qi*,” which involved supervised ritual sex between non-married initiates. The rite required three days fasting, and partners were chosen by ritual supervisors. By all accounts, the men and women were treated as equal participants, and equal beneficiaries of the initiation (Robinet, 1997, 60). It seems these people viewed sexuality as a kind of sacred power, which was a means rather than a block to spiritual growth.

By around the year 200 CE, the growing Celestial Masters’ society in Sichuan sought independence from the government. The leader Zhang Lu presumed to halt military conscription, and stopped sending tax revenue to the imperial court. In due time, this quiet secession from the empire was punished. General Cao Cao arrived with 100,000 men in 215, but the Celestial Masters didn’t fight. Their leader submitted to imperial authority lest lives be lost. The Han rulers then ordered the community dispersed across China (Wong, 2007, 56–59). That way, they became a China-wide sect rather than a local alternative society. When scattered among ordinary Chinese communities, they increasingly con-

formed with mainstream patriarchal customs.

Daoism in the Dominator Age

Of course Daoism was subject to all the pitfalls of other organized religions. As the Han dynasty collapsed into chaos around 220 CE, traditional Daoism began changing into a religion of personal salvation from a cruel and violent world. As in other escapist faiths, the portals to salvation were increasingly staffed by religious professionals. Organized Daoism arose to compete with other religions, partly by claiming higher authority. Its theologians developed “a vast system of celestial bureaucracy,” reflecting the hierarchical world around them (Needham and Wang, 1956, 161). As in Christianity, some Daoist priests tried to make their founding sage into a superhuman king. They made Laozi a heavenly patron of rulers, who came to earth as a lord visits his subjects. Many people felt this was the highest form of respect, since the emperors demanded such reverence for themselves. But fortunately, this division between mortal supplicants and divine lords never seemed obvious to most villagers. As Ge Hong wrote in his *Biography of Spirit Immortals*, “If one says that Laozi was a man who realized the Dao, then people will be encouraged in their efforts to emulate his example. However, if one depicts him as a supernatural and wonderful being of a superhuman kind, then there is nothing to be learned” (Kohn, 1996, 58).

Like the Confucianists, many Daoist leaders sought patronage from their rulers. Occasionally they received it, and were employed as state priests. Then, instead of upholding ancient village traditions against the cult of state, they began preaching conventional morality to the peasants. Under Mongol rule in the late 1200s, Liu Yu founded a Pure Light Movement (Jingming Dao) which pleased the warlord rulers by pushing loyalty, respect, and obedience as the cardinal Daoist values (Robinet,

1997, 215). Somehow, the Daoist path came to involve concocting potions to ensure the emperors' eternal life.

As in other religious rivalries across the world, many Daoist leaders tried to have themselves patronized by the government. And if successful, they often tried to suppress other religious leaders. This commonly involved discrediting village wise women, while claiming their jobs for professional male priests. But over time, Daoists lost the competition for official status. Confucianism prevailed in the struggle for state backing, and Daoism was demoted to a rustic religion of village people. Popular Daoism resembled the pre-Christian cults of European villagers, which the state-backed church viewed as crude superstition or witchcraft. We hear of Confucian officials righteously destroying hundreds of "unauthorized" shrines, hoping to stamp out "weird and immoral things" that "lead astray the sons and daughters of good families" (Weller, 1994, 169–170). In the Tang dynasty court, formerly celebrated Daoist priestesses like Li Ye and Yu Xuanji were denounced by dour Confucian ministers as "next to prostitutes" (Guo, 1995, 303). Later, the Manchu Qing dynasty (1644–1911) placed all Daoist or Buddhist institutions under government control. The Ministry of Rites outlawed women from becoming nuns until they were past child-bearing age (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 64–65, 207). The Manchus grew so paranoid about rebellions from "sects," that they actually imposed a penalty of beheading for anyone "employing spells and incantations in order to agitate and influence the minds of the people" (Ownby, 2002, 229).

Still, for all this periodic censorship, popular Daoism usually escaped government control. In the villages, "superstition" prevailed. As a Guangxi province gazette reported in 1897, "When people are sick they do not take medicine but instead invite Daoists to worship the peck measure and pray to the stars, or they call in a sorcerer who wears

flowers, waves a sword and dances with plates. They call this jumping demons. There are also sorceresses called devil-women" (Weller, 1994, 65). As Min Jiayin says, "Daoism has always enjoyed the favor of women in Chinese history" (1995, 593–594). As women's wisdom is compared to water, Daoism is commonly called "the watercourse way."

Realized Women of Institutional Daoism

Though the organized forms of Daoism slowly grew to resemble organized Confucianism, a minority of important female leaders maintained alternative Daoist institutions.

In the 300s CE, a woman named Wei Huacun founded a new sect of Daoism, the Highest Clarity (or Shangqing) school. Wei was a devotee of Celestial Masters Daoism, and became a supervisor of training for clergy. She was responsible for drawing up curriculum for the sect's clerical schools. But Wei grew increasingly critical of the whole organization. She said it fostered dependence on professional clergy, and focused on goals of wealth and power, rather than honoring heaven and earth. She decided to resign her position and develop her own approach to Daoism. After a period of spiritual struggle, she received an inner guide—an old man named Wang Bo, who she credited with a new text called the *Great Cavern Scripture*. After that, Wei became an independent teacher and founded her own lineage. Her approach was a new integration of diverse practices, which included meditation, visualization, breath control, and yoga-like calisthenics. (Wong, 2007, 72–76, 80–81). After she died, Wei appeared as a spirit teacher to a male disciple named Yang Xi, who further established Highest Clarity Daoism as a major sect.

Besides Wei Huacun, Highest Clarity Daoism claimed to receive texts and guidance from several goddesses, including the Queen Mother of the West, the Lady of the Purple Tenuity (Ziwei Furen), and the Lady



of Highest Prime (Shangyuan Furen). The sect soon developed a series of large monastic communities, which women from all states of life could join. The Highest Clarity nunneries accepted women seeking to avoid unwanted weddings, wives who fled incompatible husbands, or former prostitutes. It was okay to go from courtesan to saint. Around the year 500, the Highest Clarity sect had 57 monastic houses on its holy mountain, Maoshan. Of these, 18 were supervised by female abbots (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 14, 111–118, 128).

Wei Huacun was an inspiration to women across China, and a challenge to the attitudes of most male Daoist leaders. In one folktale set in Tang times, an 11-year-old girl named Xie Xiran told her tutor, “I have an infinite admiration for Wei Huacun. I want to be like her when I grow up.” Later she left her home in Sichuan and went to the eastern mountain of Tiantai, hoping to gain enlightenment. She became the student of a male master named Sima Zhengzhen, but he withheld the more advanced teachings from her, feeling that a woman was somehow unworthy. After several years, Xie went away looking for a more open teacher. When she finally came back, he apologized, saying,

“It was my fault that I did not give you the highest teachings. Several months ago I was approached by an immortal who told me, “The Dao cannot be bound by rules and regulations. The teachings should be given to any student who is worthy of receiving them, regardless of age, sex, or social status. Don’t forget that the founder of your lineage, Lady Wei Huacun, received the Shangqing teachings from the immortal Wang Bo.” (Wong, 2007, 114–118)

Over the centuries, a series of other Daoist lineages were founded by women. Around the year 900, a female priest named Zu Shu had visionary encounters with the Holy Mother of Numinous Radiance (Lingguang Shengmu), and founded a teaching lineage called the Way of Pure Subtlety. Her sect performed

exorcisms called “thunder rites” and her priests were “thunder officials.” (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 17, 131–133). In the 1100s, a woman named Sun Buer (1119–1182) became the seventh master of the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen) sect of Daoism. After her marriage fell apart, she became a nun at Golden Lotus Hall, and received a title as “Serene One of Clarity and Tranquility.” She attained full enlightenment in 1179, and founded a sub-sect called the Clarity and Tranquility (Qingjing Pai) branch. Later, the Complete Perfection sect had other sub-lineages inspired by women. One was the Morning Cloud (Yunxia Pai) lineage, which claimed to originate with He Xiangyu, a legendary female member in the Eight Immortals of the Bamboo Grove. Another lineage, called “Purity and Tranquility,” venerated the great female poet Cao Wenyi. Cao was famously honored by Emperor Huizong (r. 1101–1126), who gave her the title “Great Master of Literary Withdrawal into Clear Emptiness.” Though most Daoist clerics were male, the female minority was always substantial. Down to the Qing dynasty (1644 to 1911), about a third of Complete Perfection sect clergy were women. (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 145–147, 18, 133–134, 157–158, 94–98).

A Tradition Flying Under the Radar

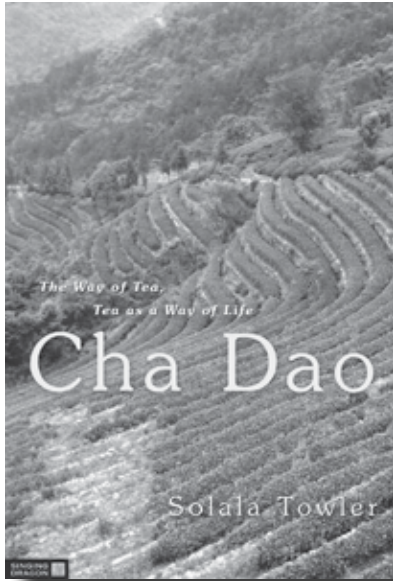
Beyond all the clerical institutions, women still prevailed in the realm of popular religion. Even the increasing segregation of the sexes under Qing-Manchu rule (1644–1911) pushed a rise in written teachings specifically for women. These texts (which were often penned or collated by male Daoists) included “Methods of Female Alchemy” (1801), “Essential Methods for the Female Golden Elixir” (1813), “The Precious Raft on Paired Cultivation of Women” (1834), or “Xi Wang Mu’s Ten Precepts on the Proper Female Path” (1834) (Valussi, 2009, 141–143). Networks of women formed to compose or convey teachings, and these associations were ba-

sically invisible to outside observers. Maybe we get a picture of how these associations worked from a collection of women’s writing, assembled in 1906 by He Longxiang. This was a series of 20 documents, all of them products of spirit writing séances conducted by women of a large extended family. The texts were reportedly received from several Daoist immortals, including Sun Buer and He Xiangyu. The writings varied between one and 20 pages long. They explained how practices for women differed from those for men, and discussed which practices were most appropriate for virginal, mature, or post-menopausal women (Despeux and Kohn, 2003, 64–65, 207). Usually, such loose networks of women and their teachings flew under the radar of recorded history.

Over the past century, Daoism supposedly died out as the headlights of modernism banished superstition. For several decades Daoist institutions declined to almost nothing. But it seems unorganized religion just went underground, then sprouted again. The aunties and grannies resumed their trades of spirit writing, inner alchemy, meditation, Tai Chi, herbal medicine, astrology, geomancy, etc. These various practices drew attention from the curious, even in big cities. By now, many North Americans are more familiar with such “eastern-style” spiritual practices than they are with worship and prayer. The less organized Daoism gets, the more popular it seems to grow. ☯

Excerpt from *A Galaxy of Immortal Women: The Yin Side of Chinese Civilization* by Brian Griffith. Copyright 2012 by Brian Griffith. Used by permission of Exterminating Angel Press: www.exterminatingangel.com. All rights reserved.

Brian Griffith grew up in Texas, studied history at the University of Alberta, and now lives just outside of Toronto, Ontario. He is an independent historian who views historical research as a means to understanding how cultural history influences our lives and can point toward contemporary solutions to the world’s biggest problems.



Cha Dao: The Way of Tea

by Solala Towler

In China, the art and practice of drinking tea is rooted in Daoism, and emerged from a philosophy that honored a life of grace and gratitude, balance and harmony, fulfillment and enjoyment – what the ancient Chinese called Cha Dao or the Way of Tea.

Cha Dao takes us on a fascinating journey through the Way of Tea, from its origins in the sacred mountains and temples of China, through its links to Daoist concepts such as *wu wei* or non-striving and the Value of Worthlessness, to the affinity between Tea Mind and the Japanese spirit of Zen. Interspersed are a liberal helping of quotes from the great tea masters of the past, anecdotes from the author's own trips to China, and traditional tea stories from China and Japan. The unique health benefits of tea are also explored, and a chapter is devoted to the history, characteristics and properties of 25 different tea varieties.

This book will interest tea lovers, as well as those who want to learn more about tea culture, Daoist and Zen thought and practice, and Asian History and culture.

A reviewer says: Cha Dao is not only a wonderful book on tea, its history, and the joy of appreciating its warmth and its many flavours, but is also an excellent primer on Daoist thinking and living. I loved this book. It informed me about tea and the customs surrounding it, lifted my spirit, and sharpened my mind. For those who enjoy tea, it deserves a place on your bookshelf.

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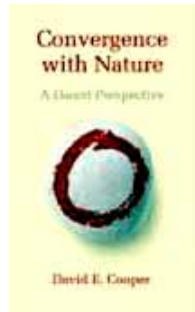
Reviews

Convergence with Nature: A Taoist Perspective

Green Books, \$24

by David E. Cooper

Review by Kent Guthrie



David E. Cooper, Emeritus Professor of Philosophy at England's Durham University, has had a distinguished career writing surveys of philosophy for his students as well as in-depth studies of Nietzsche, Heidegger, and the Existentialists.

Professor Cooper is an avid gardener and in 2006 he wrote *Philosophy of Gardening* on "nature writers" and "how humans relate to nature." Perhaps this interest led him to take up the subject of Taoism in 2012.

Attracted by the lifestyle of sages, Cooper sees philosophy as "a way of life...a path that leads and guides." As the title *Convergences* suggest, he wants us to unify with nature. To that end he has collected general principles for everyone to follow which will provide, "a scope for personal reflection...how one should act and live." Professor Cooper modestly shares anecdotes from his own contacts with nature to spur us along the path.

Not being a Sinologist, Cooper prudently steers clear of the complexities of the Chinese language and history, avoiding for example, any comparison between religious and philosophical Taoism. He does make it clear that he is not religionist and that the Abrahamic religions, with their "anthropocentric view, monotheism, mind-body dualism and estrangement from nature" are not his Taoist cup of tea.

More to his liking is his previous subject, Martin Heidegger, whom he quotes, "Solitude has the power to project our existence into the nearness and presence of things." Cooper uses a photograph of Heidegger's Backfires chalet as an illustration in his book and tells us that Heidegger enjoyed posing as a Taoist sage in front of his "hut."

Cooper defines the concept of "De" in the Daodejing as "the capacity to function properly...One endowed with "De" is a powerful influence. The sage spreads his understanding through wordless teachings, fasting of the mind, sitting and forgetting." Cooper uses extended lists to portray the Taoist sage as "relaxed, tranquil, balanced, poised, with vital energy and still power, joining effortlessly to the rhythms of the world, maintaining a modest lifestyle, drinking wine or beer, conversing with friends listening to music, playing zither or flute." Cooper touch-

ingly reveals that he himself enjoys "playing his saxophone in the moonlight."

Returning periodically to the subject of the natural world, Cooper addresses the "Wilderness Ideal" and notes that Taoism can add a spiritual element to contemporary ecological concerns. "Tranquility and contentment," he tells us, "cannot be found in the dust-filled trap of a city." He warns us, "The Daoism of today may choose not to participate in ecological activism. The sages disengagement reflects compassion for all beings...butterfly's or cockroaches."

But the sage will not be an eco-warrior. Just stay at home and tend to the garden....Gardening is the appropriate intervention in nature." The meaning of the Taoist garden is truth." Cooper quotes from James Miller, "Taoists are the gardeners of the cosmos."

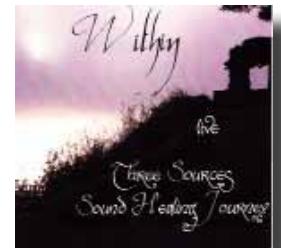
It is clear that, for Professor Cooper, I we wish to develop the qualities of a Taoist sage, qualities he has exhaustively researched, we must get out into the garden and plant something. There, perhaps to enjoy our "Convergence with Nature," we can linger in silence.

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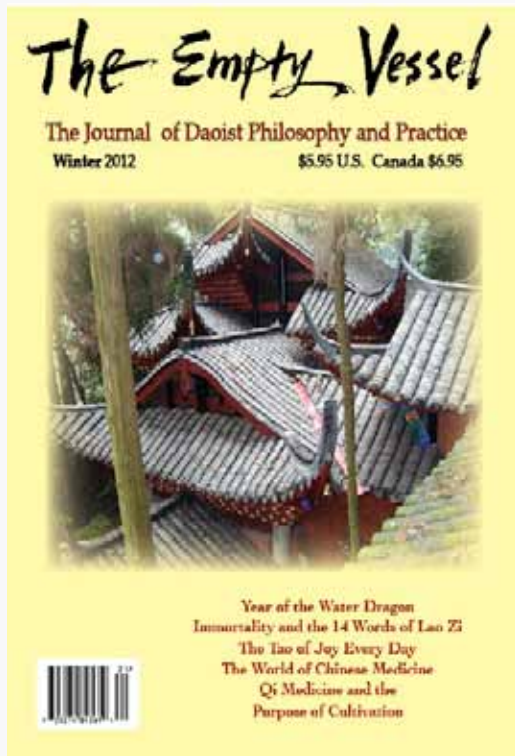
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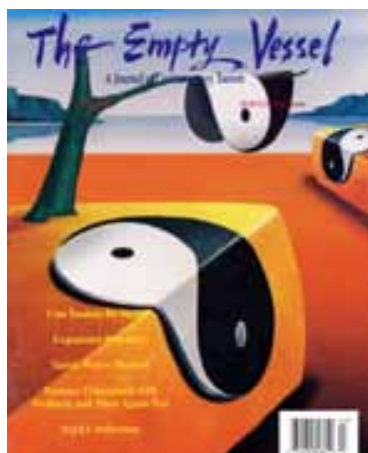
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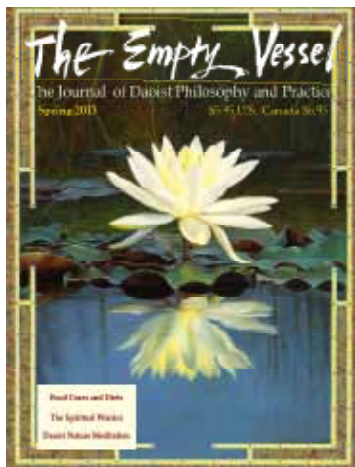
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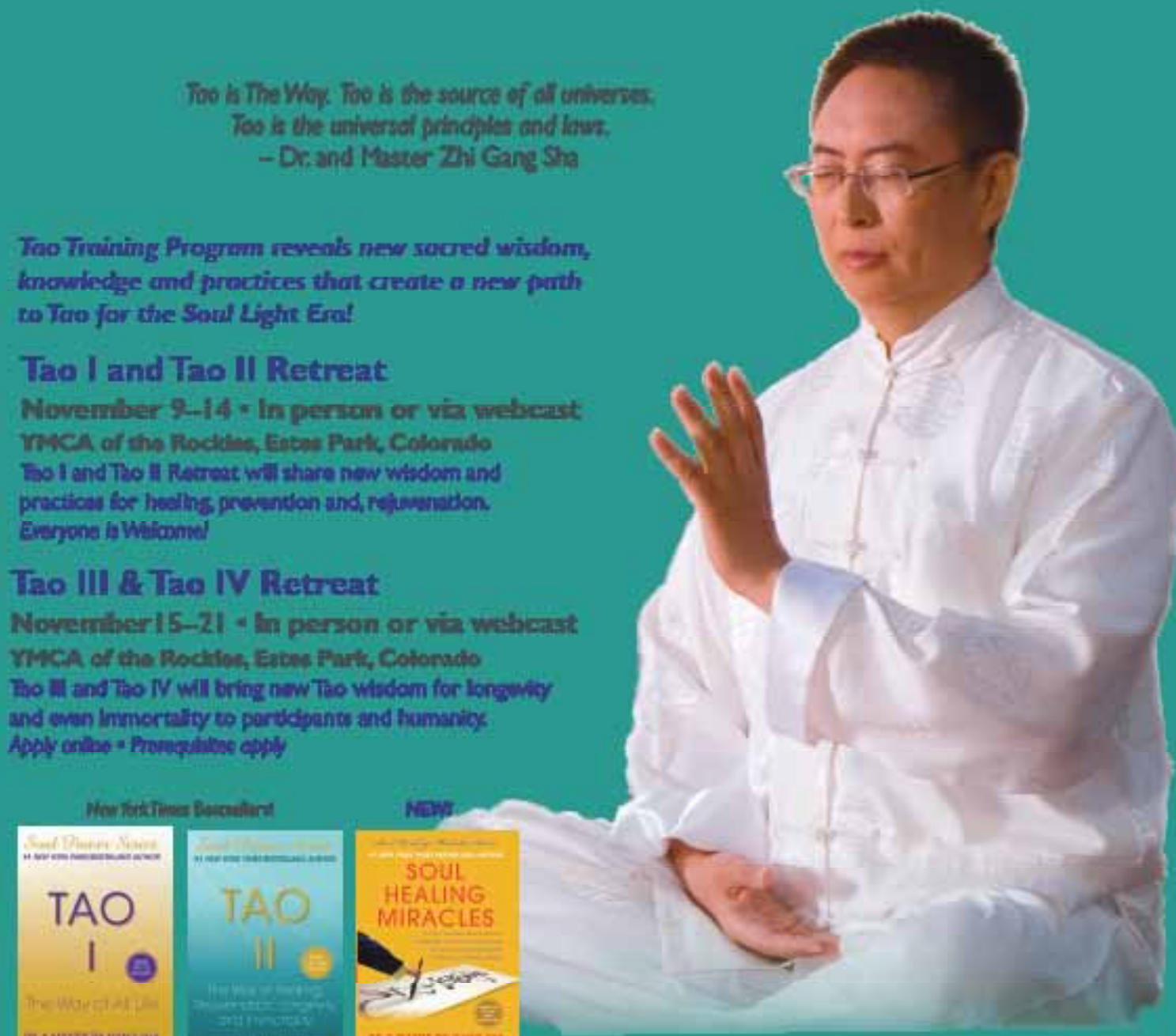
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