

= Taoism =

Taoism , also known as Daoism , is a religious or philosophical tradition of Chinese origin with an emphasis on living in harmony with , and in accordance to the natural flow or cosmic structural order of the universe commonly referred to as the Tao (道 , also romanized as Dao) . Taoist thought and philosophy was later incorporated into the religious traditions and practices of the ancient Chinese religion hundreds of years after its original development . The term Tao means the " natural way of the universe " , " the way " , " path " , or " principle " , and can also be found in other unrelated ancient Chinese philosophies and religions other than Taoism . In Taoism , however , Tao denotes something that is both the source of , and the force behind , everything that exists .

Taoism drew its cosmological notions from the tenets of the School of Yin Yang , and is heavily influenced and informed by the acknowledged oldest text of ancient Chinese classics , the I Ching , which prescribes a system of philosophical thought on the ethics of human behaviours based on articulating cycles of change in the natural and social worlds by means of hexagrams , and includes instructions for divination practice still adhered to by modern @-@ day religious Taoists . Daoism , as Taoism is sometimes referred , diverged sharply from Confucian thoughts by scorning rigid rituals and social classes . The Tao Te Ching , a compact and ambiguous book containing teachings attributed to Laozi (Chinese : 老子 ; pinyin : Lǎozǐ ; Wade ? Giles : Lao Tzu) , is widely considered the keystone work of this philosophy . Together with the writings of Zhuangzi , which interprets and adds to the teaching of Laozi , these classic texts provide the philosophical foundation of Taoism deriving from the 8 trigrams (bagua) of Fu Xi in the 2700s BC in China , the various combinations of which creates the 64 hexagrams as documented in the I Ching .

Taoist propriety and ethics may vary depending on the particular school , but in general they tend to emphasize wu @-@ wei (action through non @-@ action) , " naturalness " , simplicity , spontaneity , and the Three Treasures : jing (sperm / ovary energy , or the essence of the physical body) , qi (energy , including the thoughts and emotions) , and Shén (spirit or spiritual power) .

Taoism has had a profound influence on Chinese culture in the course of the centuries , and clerics of institutionalised Taoism (Chinese : 道士 ; pinyin : dàoshi) usually take care to note distinction between their ritual tradition and the customs and practices found in Chinese folk religion as these distinctions sometimes appear blurred . Chinese alchemy (especially neidan) , Chinese astrology , Chan (Zen) Buddhism , several martial arts , traditional Chinese medicine , feng shui , and many styles of qigong have been intertwined with Taoism throughout history . Beyond China , Taoism also had influence on surrounding societies in Asia .

After Laozi and Zhuangzi , the literature of Taoism grew steadily and was compiled in form of a canon ? the Daozang ? which was published at the behest of the emperor . Throughout Chinese history , Taoism was several times nominated as a state religion . After the 17th century , however , it fell from favor .

Today , ancient Taoist thought incorporated into the ancient Chinese religion is one of five religions officially recognized in the People 's Republic of China (PRC) as well as Taiwan , and although it does not travel readily from its East Asian roots , claims adherents in a number of societies . Taoism also has sizable communities in Hong Kong , Taiwan , Japan and in Southeast Asia .

= = Definition = =

= = = Spelling and pronunciation = = =

English speakers continue to debate the preferred romanization of the words " Daoism " and " Taoism " . The root Chinese word ? " way , path " is romanized tao in the older Wade ? Giles system and dào in the modern Pinyin system . In linguistic terminology , English Taoism / Daoism is formed from the Chinese loanword tao / dao ? " way ; route ; principle " and the native suffix -ism . The debate over Taoism vs. Daoism involves sinology , phonemes , loanwords , and politics ? not to mention whether Taoism should be pronounced / ?ta??.z?m / or / ?da??.z?m / .

Daoism is pronounced / ˈdaʊ.ˌzɪzəm / , but English speakers disagree whether Taoism should be / ˈdaʊ.ˌzɪzəm / or / ˈtaʊ.ˌzɪzəm / . In theory , both Wade ˈ Giles tao and Pinyin dao are articulated identically , as are Taoism and Daoism . An investment book titled The Tao Jones Averages (a pun on the Dow Jones Indexes) illustrates this / daʊ / pronunciation 's widespread familiarity . In speech , Tao and Taoism are often pronounced / ˈtaʊ / and ˈtaʊ.ˌzɪzəm / , reading the Chinese unaspirated lenis (" weak ") / t / as the English voiceless stop consonant / t / . Lexicography shows American and British English differences in pronouncing Taoism . A study of major English dictionaries published in Great Britain and the United States found the most common Taoism glosses were / taʊ.ˌzɪzəm / in British sources and / daʊ.ˌzɪzəm , taʊ.ˌzɪzəm / in American ones .

= = = Categorization = = =

The word " Taoism " is used to translate different Chinese terms which refer to different aspects of the same tradition and semantic field :

" Taoist religion " (Chinese : 道教 ; pinyin : dàojiào ; lit . " teachings of the Tao ") , or the " liturgical " aspect ? A family of organized religious movements sharing concepts or terminology from " Taoist philosophy " ; the first of these is recognized as the Celestial Masters school .

" Taoist philosophy " (Chinese : 道家 ; pinyin : dàojiā ; lit . " school or family of the Tao ") or " Taology " (Chinese : 道学 ; pinyin : dàoxué ; lit . " learning of the Tao ") , or the " mystical " aspect ? The philosophical doctrines based on the texts of the I Ching , the Tao Te Ching (or Daodejing , Chinese : 道德经 ; pinyin : dàodéjīng) and the Zhuangzi (Chinese : 庄子 ; pinyin : zhuāngzi) . These texts were linked together as " Taoist philosophy " during the early Han Dynasty , but notably not before . It is unlikely that Zhuangzi was familiar with the text of the Daodejing , and Zhuangzi would not have identified himself as a Taoist as this classification did not arise until well after his death .

However , the discussed distinction is rejected by the majority of Western and Japanese scholars . It is contested by hermeneutic (interpretive) difficulties in the categorization of the different Taoist schools , sects and movements . Taoism does not fall under an umbrella or a definition of a single organized religion like the Abrahamic traditions ; nor can it be studied as a mere variant of Chinese folk religion , as although the two share some similar concepts , much of Chinese folk religion is separate from the tenets and core teachings of Taoism . Sinologists Isabelle Robinet and Livia Kohn agree that " Taoism has never been a unified religion , and has constantly consisted of a combination of teachings based on a variety of original revelations . "

Chung @-@ ying Cheng , a Chinese philosopher , views Taoism as a religion that has been embedded into Chinese history and tradition . " Whether Confucianism , Daoism , or later Chinese Buddhism , they all fall into this pattern of thinking and organizing and in this sense remain religious , even though individually and intellectually they also assume forms of philosophy and practical wisdom . " Chung @-@ ying Cheng also noted that the Daoist view of heaven flows mainly from " observation and meditation , [though] the teaching of the way (dao) can also include the way of heaven independently of human nature " . In Chinese history , the three religions of Buddhism , Daoism and Confucianism stand on their own independent views , and yet are " involved in a process of attempting to find harmonization and convergence among themselves , so that we can speak of a ' unity of three religious teaching ' (sanjiao heyi) " .

= = = The term " Taoist " = = =

Traditionally , the Chinese language does not have terms defining lay people adhering to the doctrines or the practices of Taoism , who fall instead within the field of folk religion . " Taoist " , in the sinological literature of the 19th and early 20th centuries , was used as a translation of daoshi (道士 , " master of the Tao ") , or " Taoist priest " , that is applied to the ordained clergymen of a Taoist institution who " represent Taoist culture on a professional basis " , are experts of Taoist liturgy , and therefore can employ this knowledge and ritual skills for the benefit of a community .

This role of Taoist priests reflects the definition of Taoism as a " liturgical framework for the development of local cults " , in other words a scheme or structure for the Chinese folk religion ,

proposed first by Kristofer Schipper in *The Taoist Body* (1986) . Daoshi traditions are comparable in their role to the non @-@ Taoist fashi (?? , " ritual masters ") traditions (Faism) .

The term dàojiàotú (Chinese : ??? ; literally : " follower of Taoism ") , with the meaning of " Taoist " as " lay member or believer of Taoism " , is a modern invention that goes back to the introduction of the Western category of " organized religion " in China in the 20th century , and the creation of the Chinese Taoist Association , but it has little application in the fabric of Chinese society in which Taoism continues to be an " order " of the larger structure of Chinese religion .

= = Origins and development = =

Laozi is traditionally regarded as the founder of Taoism and is closely associated in this context with " original " or " primordial " Taoism . Whether he actually existed is disputed ; however , the work attributed to him ? the *Tao Te Ching* ? is dated to the late 4th century BCE .

Taoism draws its cosmological foundations from the School of Naturalists (in the form of its main elements ? yin and yang and the Five Phases) , which developed during the Warring States period (4th to 3rd centuries BC) .

Robinet identifies four components in the emergence of Taoism :

Philosophical Taoism , i.e. the *Tao Te Ching* and Zhuangzi

techniques for achieving ecstasy

practices for achieving longevity or immortality

exorcism .

Some elements of Taoism may be traced to prehistoric folk religions in China that later coalesced into a Taoist tradition . In particular , many Taoist practices drew from the Warring @-@ States @-@ era phenomena of the wu (connected to the shamanic culture of northern China) and the fangshi (which probably derived from the " archivist @-@ soothsayers of antiquity , one of whom supposedly was Laozi himself ") , even though later Taoists insisted that this was not the case . Both terms were used to designate individuals dedicated to " ... magic , medicine , divination , ... methods of longevity and to ecstatic wanderings " as well as exorcism ; in the case of the wu , " shamans " or " sorcerers " is often used as a translation . The fangshi were philosophically close to the School of Naturalists , and relied much on astrological and calendrical speculations in their divinatory activities .

The first organized form of Taoism , the Tianshi (Celestial Masters ') school (later known as Zhengyi school) , developed from the Five Pecks of Rice movement at the end of the 2nd century CE ; the latter had been founded by Zhang Daoling , who claimed that Laozi appeared to him in the year 142 . The Tianshi school was officially recognized by ruler Cao Cao in 215 , legitimizing Cao Cao 's rise to power in return . Laozi received imperial recognition as a divinity in the mid @-@ 2nd century BCE .

Taoism , in form of the Shangqing school , gained official status in China again during the Tang dynasty (618 ? 907) , whose emperors claimed Laozi as their relative . The Shangqing movement , however , had developed much earlier , in the 4th century , on the basis of a series of revelations by gods and spirits to a certain Yang Xi in the years between 364 and 370 .

Between 397 and 402 , Ge Chaofu compiled a series of scriptures which later served as the foundation of the Lingbao school , which unfolded its greatest influence during the Song dynasty (960 ? 1279) . Several Song emperors , most notably Huizong , were active in promoting Taoism , collecting Taoist texts and publishing editions of the Daozang .

In the 12th century , the Quanzhen School was founded in Shandong . It flourished during the 13th and 14th century and during the Yuan dynasty became the largest and most important Taoist school in Northern China . The school 's most revered master , Qiu Chuji , met with Genghis Khan in 1222 and was successful in influencing the Khan towards exerting more restraint during his brutal conquests . By the Khan 's decree , the school also was exempt from taxation .

Aspects of Confucianism , Taoism , and Buddhism were consciously synthesized in the Neo @-@ Confucian school , which eventually became Imperial orthodoxy for state bureaucratic purposes under the Ming (1368 ? 1644) .

The Qing Dynasty (1644 ? 1912) , however , much favored Confucian classics over Taoist works . During the 18th century , the imperial library was constituted , but excluded virtually all Taoist books . By the beginning of the 20th century , Taoism had fallen much from favor (for example , only one complete copy of the Daozang still remained , at the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing) .

Today , Taoism is one of five religions recognized by the People 's Republic of China . The government regulates its activities through the Chinese Taoist Association . Taoism is freely practiced in Taiwan , where it claims millions of adherents .

= = Doctrines = =

= = = Ethics = = =

Taoism tends to emphasize various themes of the I Ching , the Tao Te Ching and Zhuangzi , such as naturalness , spontaneity , simplicity , detachment from desires , and most important of all , wu wei . However , the concepts of those keystone texts cannot be equated with Taoism as a whole .

= = = = Tao and Te = = = =

Tao (Chinese : 道 ; pinyin : dào) literally means " way " , but can also be interpreted as road , channel , path , doctrine , or line . In Taoism , it is " the One , which is natural , spontaneous , eternal , nameless , and indescribable . It is at once the beginning of all things and the way in which all things pursue their course . " It has variously been denoted as the " flow of the universe " , a " conceptually necessary ontological ground " , or a demonstration of nature . The Tao also is something that individuals can find immanent in themselves .

The active expression of Tao is called Te (also spelled 德 and pronounced 德 De , or even Teh ; often translated with Virtue or Power ; Chinese : 德 ; pinyin : dé) , in a sense that Te results from an individual living and cultivating the Tao .

= = = = Wu 无为 wei = = = =

The ambiguous term wu 无为 wei (simplified Chinese : 无为 ; traditional Chinese : 無為 ; pinyin : wú wéi) constitutes the leading ethical concept in Taoism . Wei refers to any intentional or deliberated action , while wu carries the meaning of " there is no ... " or " lacking , without " . Common translations are " nonaction " , " effortless action " or " action without intent " . The meaning is sometimes emphasized by using the paradoxical expression " wei wu wei " : " action without action " .

In ancient Taoist texts , wu 无为 wei is associated with water through its yielding nature . Taoist philosophy , in accordance with the I Ching , proposes that the universe works harmoniously according to its own ways . When someone exerts their will against the world in a manner that is out of rhythm with the cycles of change , they may disrupt that harmony and unintended consequences may more likely result rather than the willed outcome . Taoism does not identify one 's will as the root problem . Rather , it asserts that one must place their will in harmony with the natural universe . Thus , a potentially harmful interference may be avoided , and in this way , goals can be achieved effortlessly . " By wu 无为 wei , the sage seeks to come into harmony with the great Tao , which itself accomplishes by nonaction . "

= = = = Naturalness = = = =

Naturalness (Chinese : 自然 ; pinyin : zìrán ; Wade ? Giles : tzu 自然 jan ; lit . " self 自然 such " ? " self organisation ") is regarded as a central value in Taoism . It describes the " primordial state " of all things as well as a basic character of the Tao , and is usually associated with spontaneity and creativity . To attain naturalness , one has to identify with the Tao ; this involves freeing oneself from

selfishness and desire , and appreciating simplicity .

An often cited metaphor for naturalness is pu (simplified Chinese : 朴 ; traditional Chinese : 樸 ; pinyin : pǔ , pú ; Wade ? Giles : p 'u ; lit . " uncut wood ") , the " uncarved block " , which represents the " original nature ... prior to the imprint of culture " of an individual . It is usually referred to as a state one returns to .

== = Three Treasures == =

The Taoist Three Treasures or Three Jewels (simplified Chinese : 三宝 ; traditional Chinese : 三寶 ; pinyin : sānbǎo) comprise the basic virtues of ci (Chinese : 慈 ; pinyin : cí , usually translated as compassion) , jian (Chinese : 俭 ; pinyin : jiǎn , usually translated as moderation) , and bugan wei tianxia xian (Chinese : 不敢為天下先 ; pinyin : bùgǎn wéi tiānxià xiān , literally " not daring to act as first under the heavens " , but usually translated as humility) .

As the " practical , political side " of Taoist philosophy , Arthur Waley translated them as " abstention from aggressive war and capital punishment " , " absolute simplicity of living " , and " refusal to assert active authority " .

The Three Treasures can also refer to jing , qi and shen (Chinese : 精氣神 ; pinyin : jīng qì shén ; jing is usually translated with " essence " and shen with " spirit ") . These terms are elements of the traditional Chinese concept of the human body , which shares its cosmological foundation - Yinyangism - with Taoism . Within this framework , they play an important role in neidan (" Taoist Inner Alchemy ") .

== = Cosmology == =

Taoist cosmology is cyclic ; relativity , evolution and ' extremes meet ' are main characters . It shares similar views with the School of Yin Yang which was headed by Zou Yan (305 ? 240 BCE) . The school 's tenets harmonized the concepts of the Wu Xing (Five Phases) and yin and yang . In this spirit , the universe is seen as being in a constant process of re @-@ creating itself , as everything that exists is a mere aspect of qi , which , " condensed , becomes life ; diluted , it is indefinite potential " . Qi is in a perpetual transformation between its condensed and diluted state . These two different states of qi , on the other hand , are embodiments of the abstract entities of yin and yang , two complementary extremes that constantly play against and with each other and cannot exist without the other .

Human beings are seen as a microcosm of the universe , and for example comprise the Wu Xing in form of the zang @-@ fu organs . As a consequence , it is believed that deeper understanding of the universe can be achieved by understanding oneself .

== = Theology == =

Taoism is practiced as a religion in various Asian communities , but its theology is not foundationally dependent on the existence of an anthropomorphic godlike figurehead (even though some communities do worship Laozi as the attributed founder of the philosophical doctrine , as well as other deities from ancient Chinese folklore) ; on a theological basis , the Taoist religion has more affinities with pantheistic traditions around the world , given its philosophical emphasis on the formlessness of the Tao and the primacy of the " Way " rather than anthropomorphic concepts of " God " .

Nevertheless , as Taoist beliefs include teachings based on various sources , and are often intermingled with Chinese folk religious practice , popular Taoist religious sects have co @-@ opted mythical figures from Chinese folklore as well as actual Taoist personages as figures of worship , with the latter better understood as analogous to " saints " in Catholic veneration rather than as divine deities in and of themselves , even though they were also often mythologised to possess superhuman or supernatural powers . Different branches of Taoism often have differing beliefs , especially concerning deities and the proper composition of the pantheon . Nevertheless , there are

certain core beliefs that nearly all the sects share . Traditional conceptions of Tao should not be confused with the Western concepts of theism , however . Being one with the Tao does not necessarily indicate a union with an eternal spirit in , for example , the Hindu sense .

Popular Taoism typically presents the Jade Emperor as the official head deity . Intellectual (" elite ") Taoists , such as the Celestial Masters sect , usually present Laozi (Laojun , " Lord Lao ") and the Three Pure Ones at the top of the pantheon of deities . The pantheon tends to mirror the bureaucracy of Imperial China ; deities also may be promoted or demoted for their actions .

While a number of immortals or other mysterious figures appear in the Zhuangzi , and to a lesser extent in the Tao Te Ching , these have generally not become the objects of worship .

= = Texts = =

= = = Tao Te Ching = = =

The Tao Te Ching or Daodejing is widely considered the most influential Taoist text . According to legend , it was written by Laozi , and often the book is simply referred to as the " Laozi . " However , authorship , precise date of origin , and even unity of the text are still subject of debate , and will probably never be known with certainty . The earliest texts of the Tao Te Ching that have been excavated (written on bamboo tablets) date back to the late 4th century BCE . Throughout the history of religious Taoism , the Tao Te Ching has been used as a ritual text .

The famous opening lines of the Tao Te Ching are :

?????? (pinyin : dào k? dào f?i cháng dào)

" The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao "

?????? (pinyin : míng k? míng f?i cháng míng)

" The name that can be named is not the eternal name . "

There is significant , at times acrimonious debate regarding which English translation of the Tao Te Ching is preferable , and which particular translation methodology is best . The Tao Te Ching is not thematically ordered . However , the main themes of the text are repeatedly expressed using variant formulations , often with only a slight difference .

The leading themes revolve around the nature of Tao and how to attain it . Tao is said to be ineffable , and accomplishing great things through small means . Ancient commentaries on the Tao Te Ching are important texts in their own right . Perhaps the oldest one , the Heshang Gong commentary , was most likely written in the 2nd century CE . Other important commentaries include the one from Wang Bi and the Xiang 'er .

= = = Zhuangzi = = =

The Taoist book Zhuangzi (simplified Chinese : ?? ; traditional Chinese : ?? ; pinyin : Zhu?ngz?) , named after its purported author Zhuangzi , is a composite of writings from various sources , and is considered one of the most important texts in Taoism . The commentator Guo Xiang (circa 300 AD) helped establish the text as an important source for Taoist thought . The traditional view is that Zhuangzi himself wrote the first seven chapters (the " inner chapters ") and his students and related thinkers were responsible for the other parts (the " outer " and " miscellaneous " chapters) . The work uses anecdotes , parables and dialogues to express one of its main themes , that is aligning oneself to the laws of the natural world and " the way " of the elements .

= = = I Ching = = =

The I Ching , or Yijing , was originally a divination system that had its origins around 1150 B.C. Although it predates the first mentions of Tao as an organised system of philosophy and religious practice , this text later became of philosophical importance to Daoism and Confucianism .

The I Ching itself , shorn of its commentaries , consists of 64 combinations of 8 trigrams (called "

hexagrams "), traditionally chosen by throwing coins or yarrow sticks , to give the diviner some idea of the situation at hand and , through reading of the " changing lines " , some idea of what is developing .

The 64 original notations of the hexagrams in the I Ching can also be read as a meditation on how change occurs , so it assists Taoists with managing yin and yang cycles as Laozi advocated in the Tao Te Ching (the oldest known version of this text was dated to 400 BC) . More recently as recorded in the 18th century , the Taoist master Liu Yiming continued to advocate this usage .

== Daozang ==

The Daozang (?? , Treasury of Tao) is also referred to as the Taoist canon . It was originally compiled during the Jin , Tang , and Song dynasties . The version surviving today was published during the Ming Dynasty . The Ming Daozang includes almost 1500 texts . Following the example of the Buddhist Tripiṭaka , it is divided into three dong (? , " caves " , " grottoes ") . They are arranged from " highest " to " lowest " :

The Zhen (" real " or " truth " ?) grotto . Includes the Shangqing texts .

The Xuan (" mystery " ?) grotto . Includes the Lingbao scriptures .

The Shen (" divine " ?) grotto . Includes texts predating the Maoshan (??) revelations .

Daoshi generally do not consult published versions of the Daozang , but individually choose , or inherit , texts included in the Daozang . These texts have been passed down for generations from teacher to student .

The Shangqing school has a tradition of approaching Taoism through scriptural study . It is believed that by reciting certain texts often enough one will be rewarded with immortality .

== Other texts ==

While the Tao Te Ching is most famous , there are many other important texts in traditional Taoism . Taishang Ganying Pian (" Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution ") discusses sin and ethics , and has become a popular morality tract in the last few centuries . It asserts that those in harmony with Tao will live long and fruitful lives . The wicked , and their descendants , will suffer and have shortened lives .

== Symbols and images ==

The taijitu (simplified Chinese : 太极图 ; traditional Chinese : 太極圖 ; pinyin : tàijítú ; commonly known as the " yin and yang symbol " or simply the " yin yang ") as well as the bagua ?? (" Eight Trigrams ") are associated with Taoist symbolism . The taijitu is not an exclusive symbol of Taoism , however . While almost all Taoist organizations make use of it , one could actually also call it Confucian , Neo @-@ Confucian or pan @-@ Chinese . One is likely to see this symbol as decorations on Taoist organization flags and logos , temple floors , or stitched into clerical robes . According to Song dynasty sources , it originated around the 10th century . Previously , yin and yang were symbolized by a tiger and dragon .

Taoist temples may fly square or triangular flags . They typically feature mystical writing or diagrams and are intended to fulfill various functions including providing guidance for the spirits of the dead , to bring good fortune , increase life span , etc . Other flags and banners may be those of the gods or immortals themselves .

A zigzag with seven stars is sometimes displayed , representing the Big Dipper (or the Bushel , the Chinese equivalent) . In the Shang Dynasty the Big Dipper was considered a deity , while during the Han Dynasty , it was considered a qi path of the circumpolar god , Taiyi .

Taoist temples in southern China and Taiwan may often be identified by their roofs , which feature dragons and phoenixes made from multi @-@ colored ceramic tiles . They also stand for the harmony of yin and yang (with the phoenix being yin) . A related symbol is the flaming pearl which may be seen on such roofs between two dragons , as well as on the hairpin of a Celestial Master .

In general though , Chinese Taoist architecture has no universal features that distinguish it from other structures .

= = Practices = =

= = = Vegetarian diet = = =

Taoist diet encourages fasting and vegetarianism .

= = = Rituals = = =

At certain dates , food may be set out as a sacrifice to the spirits of the deceased or the gods , such as during the Qingming Festival . This may include slaughtered animals , such as pigs and ducks , or fruit . Another form of sacrifice involves the burning of Joss paper , or Hell Bank Notes , on the assumption that images thus consumed by the fire will reappear ? not as a mere image , but as the actual item ? in the spirit world , making them available for revered ancestors and departed loved ones . At other points , a vegan diet or full fast may be observed .

Also on particular holidays , street parades take place . These are lively affairs which invariably involve firecrackers and flower @-@ covered floats broadcasting traditional music . They also variously include lion dances and dragon dances ; human @-@ occupied puppets (often of the " Seventh Lord " and " Eighth Lord ") ; tongji (?? " spirit @-@ medium ; shaman ") who cut their skin with knives ; Bajiajiang , which are Kungfu @-@ practicing honor guards in demonic makeup ; and palanquins carrying god @-@ images . The various participants are not considered performers , but rather possessed by the gods and spirits in question .

Fortune @-@ telling ? including astrology , I Ching , and other forms of divination ? has long been considered a traditional Taoist pursuit . Mediumship is also widely encountered in some sects . There is an academic and social distinction between martial forms of mediumship (such as tongji) and the spirit @-@ writing that is typically practiced through planchette writing .

= = = Physical cultivation = = =

A recurrent and important element of Taoism are rituals , exercises and substances aiming at aligning oneself spiritually with cosmic forces , at undertaking ecstatic spiritual journeys , or at improving physical health and thereby extending one 's life , ideally to the point of immortality . Enlightened and immortal beings are referred to as xian .

A characteristic method aiming for longevity is Taoist alchemy . Already in very early Taoist scriptures - like the Taiping Jing and the Baopuzi - alchemical formulas for achieving immortality were outlined .

A number of martial arts traditions , particularly the ones falling under the category of Neijia (like T'ai Chi Ch'uan , Bagua Zhang and Xing Yi Quan) embody Taoist principles to a significant extent , and some practitioners consider their art a means of practising Taoism .

= = Society = =

= = = Adherents = = =

The number of Taoists is difficult to estimate , due to a variety of factors including defining Taoism . According to a survey of religion in China in the year 2010 , the number of people practicing some form of Chinese folk religion is near to 950 million (70 % of the Chinese) . Among these , 173 million (13 %) practice some form of Taoist @-@ defined folk faith . Further in detail , 12 million people have passed some formal initiation into Taoism , or adhere exclusively to it .

Most Chinese people and many others have been influenced in some way by Taoist tradition . Recently , there have been some efforts to revive the practice of Taoist religion . In 1956 , the Chinese Taoist Association was formed , and received official approval in 1957 . It was disbanded during the Cultural Revolution under Mao , but re @-@ established in 1980 . The headquarters of the Association are at the Baiyun guan , or White Cloud Temple , of the Longmen branch of Quanzhen Taoism .

Since 1980 , many Taoist monasteries and temples have been reopened or rebuilt , most of them belonging to the Zhengyi or Quanzhen schools . For these two schools , ordination has been officially allowed again . However , " the Chinese government prefers the celibate model of ... Quanzhen clergy " , while " Zhengyi clergy are often married , and often reside at home . "

Taoist literature and art has influenced the cultures of Korea , Japan , and Vietnam . Organized Taoism seems not to have attracted a large non @-@ Chinese following until modern times . In Taiwan 7 @.@ 5 million people (33 % of the population) identify themselves as Taoists . Data collected in 2010 for religious demographics of Hong Kong and Singapore show that , respectively , 14 % and 11 % of the people of these cities identify as Taoists .

= = = Art and poetry = = =

Throughout Chinese history there have been many examples of art being influenced by Taoist thought . Notable painters influenced by Taoism include Wu Wei , Huang Gongwang , Mi Fu , Muqi Fachang , Shitao , Ni Zan , T 'ang Mi , and Wang Tseng @-@ tsu . Taoist arts represents the diverse regions , dialects , and time spans that are commonly associated with Taoism . Ancient Taoist art was commissioned by the aristocracy , however scholars masters and adepts also directly engaged in the art themselves .

= = = Political aspects = = =

Unlike Confucianism , Taoism favors philosophical anarchism , pluralism and laissez @-@ faire @-@ government . Laozi has been cited as an early example of a proponent of liberalism . On the other hand , politics never have been a main issue in Taoism .

= = = Relations with other religions and philosophies = = =

Many scholars believe Taoism arose as a countermovement to Confucianism . The philosophical terms Tao and De are indeed shared by both Taoism and Confucianism , and Laozi is traditionally held to have been a teacher of Confucius . Zhuangzi explicitly criticized Confucianist and Mohist tenets in his work . In general , Taoism rejects the Confucianist emphasis on rituals , hierarchical social order , and conventional morality , and favors naturalness , spontaneity , and individualism instead .

The entry of Buddhism into China was marked by significant interaction and syncretism with Taoism . Originally seen as a kind of " foreign Taoism " , Buddhism 's scriptures were translated into Chinese using the Taoist vocabulary . Representatives of early Chinese Buddhism , like Sengzhao and Tao Sheng , knew and were deeply influenced by the Taoist keystone texts .

Taoism especially shaped the development of Chan (Zen) Buddhism , introducing elements like the concept of naturalness , distrust of scripture and text , and emphasis on embracing " this life " and living in the " every @-@ moment " .

Taoism on the other hand also incorporated Buddhist elements during the Tang period , such as monasteries , vegetarianism , prohibition of alcohol , the doctrine of emptiness , and collecting scripture in tripartite organisation .

Ideological and political rivals for centuries , Taoism , Confucianism , and Buddhism deeply influenced one another . For example , Wang Bi , one of the most influential philosophical commentators on Laozi (and Yijing) , was a Confucian . The three rivals also share some similar values , with all three embracing a humanist philosophy emphasizing moral behavior and human

perfection . In time , most Chinese people identified to some extent with all three traditions simultaneously . This became institutionalised when aspects of the three schools were synthesised in the Neo @-@ Confucian school .

Some authors have dealt with comparative studies between Taoism and Christianity . This has been of interest for students of history of religion such as J.J.M. de Groot , among others . The comparison of the teachings of Laozi and Jesus of Nazareth has been done by several authors such as Martin Aronson , and Toropov & Hansen (2002) , who believe that they have parallels that should not be ignored . In the opinion of J. Isamu Yamamoto the main difference is that Christianity preaches a personal God while Theist Taoism does not . Yet , a number of authors , including Lin Yutang , have argued that some moral and ethical tenets of these religions are similar . The work " Christ the Eternal Tao " by Hieromonk Damascene provides a study of " The Tao Te Ching " of Lao Tzu , in the light of Christian revelation .

= = Synthetic doctrine = =

Cao ?ài