[Template:Infobox Chinese](/wiki/Template:Infobox_Chinese" \o "Template:Infobox Chinese) [Template:Taoism](/wiki/Template:Taoism) **Taoism** or **Daoism** is an ancient modality of philosophical thought and an ancient precursor of modern [science](/wiki/Science), based on [empirical observation](/wiki/Empirical_observation), that was originally invented by [ancient Chinese](/wiki/History_of_Science_and_Technology_in_China) philosophers to explain human life, natural patterns of the world as well as the [cosmology](/wiki/Cosmology) of the [universe](/wiki/Universe) 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*](/wiki/Tao) ([also romanized as *Dao*](/wiki/Taoism#Spelling_and_pronunciation)). Taoist thought and philosophy was later incorporated into the religious traditions and practices of the [ancient Chinese religion](/wiki/Chinese_Folk_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](/wiki/History_of_Science_and_Technology_in_China) 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](/wiki/School_of_Yin_Yang), and is heavily influenced and informed by the acknowledged oldest text of ancient Chinese classics, the [*I Ching*](/wiki/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.[[1]](#cite_note-1) Throughout the history of religious Taoism, the *Tao Te Ching* has been used as a ritual text.[[75]](#cite_note-75) The famous opening lines of the *Tao Te Ching* are:

道可道非常道 ([Template:Zh](/wiki/Template:Zh))  
"The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao"  
名可名非常名 ([Template:Zh](/wiki/Template:Zh))  
"The name that can be named is not the eternal name."[[76]](#cite_note-76)

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.[[77]](#cite_note-77) 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.[[78]](#cite_note-78) 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.[[79]](#cite_note-79) Ancient commentaries on the *Tao Te Ching* are important texts in their own right. Perhaps the oldest one, the [*Heshang Gong*](/wiki/Heshang_Gong) commentary, was most likely written in the 2nd century CE.[[80]](#cite_note-80) Other important commentaries include the one from [Wang Bi](/wiki/Wang_Bi) and the [Xiang'er](/wiki/Xiang'er).[[81]](#cite_note-81)

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### Zhuangzi[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=16)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Taoist book *Zhuangzi* ([Template:Zh](/wiki/Template:Zh)), named after its purported [author](/wiki/Author) [Zhuangzi](/wiki/Zhuang_Zhou), is a composite of writings from various sources, and is considered one of the most important texts in Taoism. The commentator [Guo Xiang](/wiki/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](/wiki/Chapter_(books)) (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.[[82]](#cite_note-82)[[83]](#cite_note-83)

### I Ching[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=17)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [thumbnail|200px|The 8 trigrams of the *I Ching*](/wiki/File:Pakua.svg) The [*I Ching*](/wiki/I_Ching)*,* or *Yijing,* was originally a divination system that had its origins around 1150 B.C.[[84]](#cite_note-84) 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.[[85]](#cite_note-85) The 64 original notations of the hexagrams in the *I*[*Template:NbspChing*](/wiki/Template:Nbsp) can also be read as a meditation on how change occurs, so it assists Taoists with managing [yin and yang](/wiki/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](/wiki/Liu_Yiming) continued to advocate this usage.<ref name=ClearyTIC>e.g. Cleary, Thomas, tr. [*The Taoist I Ching*](https://books.google.com/books?id=w9NFEyUKfQkC&pg=PT17). Shambhala, 1986. p. 6.</ref>

### Daozang[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=18)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) The Daozang ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang), *Treasury of Tao*) is also referred to as the Taoist canon. It was originally compiled during the [Jin](/wiki/Jin_Dynasty_(265-420)), [Tang](/wiki/Tang_dynasty), and [Song](/wiki/Song_dynasty) dynasties. The version surviving today was published during the [Ming Dynasty](/wiki/Ming_Dynasty).[[86]](#cite_note-86)[[87]](#cite_note-87) The Ming *Daozang* includes almost 1500 [texts](/wiki/Sacred_text).[[88]](#cite_note-88) Following the example of the Buddhist [Tripiṭaka](/wiki/Tripiṭaka), it is divided into three *dong* ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang), "caves", "grottoes"). They are arranged from "highest" to "lowest":[[89]](#cite_note-89)[[90]](#cite_note-90)

1. The [*Zhen*](/wiki/Reality) ("real" or "truth" [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) grotto. Includes the [Shangqing](/wiki/Shangqing_School) texts.
2. The *Xuan* ("mystery" [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) grotto. Includes the [Lingbao](/wiki/Lingbao_School) scriptures.
3. The [*Shen*](/wiki/Shen_(Chinese_religion)) ("divine" [Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) grotto. Includes texts predating the Maoshan ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang)) revelations.

[Daoshi](/wiki/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.[[91]](#cite_note-91) 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.[[92]](#cite_note-92)

### Other texts[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=19)]

While the Tao Te Ching is most famous, there are many other important texts in traditional Taoism. [*Taishang Ganying Pian*](/wiki/Treatise_On_the_Response_of_the_Tao) ("Treatise of the Exalted One on Response and Retribution") discusses sin and [ethics](/wiki/Ethic), and has become a popular morality tract in the last few centuries.[[93]](#cite_note-93) 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.[[79]](#cite_note-79)

## Symbols and images[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=20)]

[thumb|250px|A](/wiki/File:文光塔-二层藻井.JPG) [*zaojing*](/wiki/Caisson_(Asian_architecture)) depicting a [*taijitu*](/wiki/Taijitu) surrounded by the [*bagua*](/wiki/Bagua). [thumb|250px|](/wiki/File:Ruyi.rooftop.altonthompson.jpg)[*Ruyi*](/wiki/Ruyi_(scepter)) motifs of a [Taoist temple](/wiki/Taoist_temple) roof in [Kaohsiung](/wiki/Kaohsiung), [Taiwan](/wiki/Taiwan). The [*taijitu*](/wiki/Taijitu) ([Template:Zh](/wiki/Template:Zh); commonly known as the "yin and yang symbol" or simply the "yin yang") as well as the [*bagua*](/wiki/Bagua) 八卦 ("Eight Trigrams") are associated with Taoist symbolism.[[94]](#cite_note-94) 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.[[95]](#cite_note-95) Previously, yin and yang were symbolized by a tiger and dragon.[[95]](#cite_note-95) 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.[[96]](#cite_note-96) Other flags and banners may be those of the gods or immortals themselves.[[97]](#cite_note-97) A zigzag with seven stars is sometimes displayed, representing the [Big Dipper](/wiki/Big_Dipper) (or the Bushel, the Chinese equivalent). In the [Shang Dynasty](/wiki/Shang_Dynasty) the Big Dipper was considered a deity, while during the [Han Dynasty](/wiki/Han_Dynasty), it was considered a *qi* path of the circumpolar god, *Taiyi*.[[98]](#cite_note-98) Taoist temples in southern China and Taiwan may often be identified by their roofs, which feature [dragons](/wiki/Chinese_dragon) and [phoenixes](/wiki/Fenghuang) 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](/wiki/List_of_Celestial_Masters).[[99]](#cite_note-99) In general though, Chinese Taoist architecture has no universal features that distinguish it from other structures.[[100]](#cite_note-100)

## Practices[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=21)]

### Vegetarian diet[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=22)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) Taoist diet encourages [fasting](/wiki/Fasting) and [vegetarianism](/wiki/Vegetarianism).

### Rituals[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=23)]

[thumb|300px|A hall of worship of the](/wiki/File:二王庙内殿.jpg) [Erwang Temple](/wiki/Erwang_Temple), a [Taoist temple](/wiki/Taoist_temple) in [Dujiangyan](/wiki/Dujiangyan_City), [Sichuan](/wiki/Sichuan). There are elements of the [*jingxiang*](/wiki/Jingxiang) religious practice ([incense](/wiki/Incense) and [candle](/wiki/Candle) offerings). [thumb|300px|An](/wiki/File:张挥公大殿2.jpg) [ancestral worship ceremony](/wiki/Ancestor_veneration_in_China) led by [Taoist priests](/wiki/Daoshi) at the [pyramidal](/wiki/Pyramid) shaped Great Temple of Zhang Hui (张挥公大殿 *Zhāng Huī gōng dàdiàn*), the main [ancestral shrine](/wiki/Ancestral_shrine) dedicated to the progenitor of the [Zhang](/wiki/Zhang_(surname)) lineage, located at Zhangs' [ancestral home](/wiki/Ancestral_home_(Chinese)) in [Qinghe](/wiki/Qinghe_County,_Hebei), [Hebei](/wiki/Hebei). At certain dates, food may be set out as a [sacrifice](/wiki/Sacrifice) to the spirits of the deceased or the gods, such as during the [Qingming Festival](/wiki/Qingming_Festival). This may include slaughtered animals, such as pigs and ducks, or fruit. Another form of sacrifice involves the burning of [Joss paper](/wiki/Joss_paper), or [Hell Bank Notes](/wiki/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](/wiki/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](/wiki/Lion_dance) and [dragon dances](/wiki/Dragon_dance); human-occupied puppets (often of the "[Seventh Lord](/wiki/Seventh_Lord)" and "[Eighth Lord](/wiki/Eighth_Lord)"); [*tongji*](/wiki/Tongji_(spirit_medium)) ([Template:Lang](/wiki/Template:Lang) "spirit-medium; shaman") who cut their skin with knives; *Bajiajiang*, which are [Kungfu](/wiki/Kungfu)-practicing honor guards in demonic makeup; and [palanquins](/wiki/Palanquin) carrying god-images. The various participants are not considered performers, but rather possessed by the gods and spirits in question.[[101]](#cite_note-101) [Fortune-telling](/wiki/Fortune-telling)—including [astrology](/wiki/Astrology), [I Ching](/wiki/I_Ching), and other forms of [divination](/wiki/Divination)—has long been considered a traditional Taoist pursuit. [Mediumship](/wiki/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](/wiki/Fuji_(planchette_writing)).[[102]](#cite_note-102)

### Physical cultivation[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=24)]

[Template:Main](/wiki/Template:Main) [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) 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.[[103]](#cite_note-103)[[104]](#cite_note-104) Enlightened and immortal beings are referred to as [xian](/wiki/Xian_(Taoism)).

A characteristic method aiming for longevity is [Taoist alchemy](/wiki/Taoist_alchemy). Already in very early Taoist scriptures - like the [*Taiping Jing*](/wiki/Taiping_Jing) and the [*Baopuzi*](/wiki/Baopuzi) - alchemical formulas for achieving immortality were outlined.[[105]](#cite_note-105)[[106]](#cite_note-106) A number of martial arts traditions, particularly the ones falling under the category of [Neijia](/wiki/Neijia) (like [T'ai Chi Ch'uan](/wiki/T'ai_chi_ch'uan), [Bagua Zhang](/wiki/Bagua_Zhang) and [Xing Yi Quan](/wiki/Xingyiquan)) embody Taoist principles to a significant extent, and some practitioners consider their art a means of practising Taoism.[[107]](#cite_note-107)

## Society[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=25)]

### Adherents[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=26)]

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](/wiki/Religion_in_China) in the year 2010, the number of people practicing some form of [Chinese folk religion](/wiki/Chinese_folk_religion) is near to 950 million (70% of the Chinese).[[108]](#cite_note-108) Among these, 173 million (13%) practice some form of Taoist-defined folk faith.[[108]](#cite_note-108) Further in detail, 12 million people have passed some formal initiation into Taoism, or adhere exclusively to it.[[108]](#cite_note-108) 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](/wiki/White_Cloud_Temple), of the [Longmen](/wiki/Longmen_Taoism) branch of [Quanzhen Taoism](/wiki/Quanzhen_Taoism).[[109]](#cite_note-109) Since 1980, many Taoist monasteries and temples have been reopened or rebuilt, most of them belonging to the [Zhengyi](/wiki/Zhengyi_Taoism) or Quanzhen schools. For these two schools, [ordination](/wiki/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."[[110]](#cite_note-110) Taoist literature and art has influenced the cultures of [Korea](/wiki/Taoism_in_Korea), [Japan](/wiki/Taoism_in_Japan), and [Vietnam](/wiki/Taoism_in_Vietnam). Organized Taoism seems not to have attracted a large non-Chinese following until modern times. In [Taiwan](/wiki/Taiwan) 7.5 million people (33% of the population) identify themselves as Taoists.[[111]](#cite_note-111) Data collected in 2010 for religious demographics of [Hong Kong](/wiki/Hong_Kong)[[112]](#cite_note-112) and [Singapore](/wiki/Singapore)[[113]](#cite_note-113) show that, respectively, 14% and 11% of the people of these cities identify as Taoists.

### Art and poetry[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=27)]

[thumb|200px|](/wiki/File:Muqi-persimmons.jpg)[Six Persimmons](/wiki/Six_Persimmons), a Taoist-influenced 13th-century Chinese painting by the monk, [Mu Qi](/wiki/Mu_Qi). Throughout Chinese history there have been many examples of art being influenced by Taoist thought. Notable painters influenced by Taoism include [Wu Wei](/wiki/Wu_Wei_(painter)), [Huang Gongwang](/wiki/Huang_Gongwang), [Mi Fu](/wiki/Mi_Fu), [Muqi Fachang](/wiki/Muqi_Fachang), [Shitao](/wiki/Shitao), [Ni Zan](/wiki/Ni_Zan), T'ang Mi, and Wang Tseng-tsu.[[114]](#cite_note-114) 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.[[115]](#cite_note-115)

### Political aspects[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=28)]

Unlike Confucianism, Taoism favors philosophical [anarchism](/wiki/Individual_anarchism), [pluralism](/wiki/Pluralism_(philosophy)) and [laissez-faire](/wiki/Laissez-faire)-government.<ref name=sep>[Taoism](http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/taoism/), Hansen, Chad, The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Spring 2012 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.)</ref> Laozi has been cited as an early example of a proponent of [liberalism](/wiki/Liberalism).<ref name=liu>[Don't Discount Chinese Liberalism](http://online.wsj.com/article/SB10001424052702304803104576425364242777554.html), Liu Junning, Wall Street Journal, July 6, 2011</ref>[[116]](#cite_note-116) On the other hand, politics never have been a main issue in Taoism.

### Relations with other religions and philosophies[[edit](/index.php?title=(none)&action=edit&section=29)]

[thumb|300px|](/wiki/File:Huxisanxiaotu.jpg)[*Confucianism*](/wiki/Confucianism)*, Taoism, and* [*Buddhism*](/wiki/Buddhism) *are one*, a painting in the *litang style* portraying three men laughing by a river stream, 12th century, [Song dynasty](/wiki/Song_dynasty). [Template:See also](/wiki/Template:See_also) Many scholars believe Taoism arose as a countermovement to [Confucianism](/wiki/Confucianism).[[117]](#cite_note-117) The philosophical terms *Tao* and *De* are indeed shared by both Taoism and Confucianism,[[118]](#cite_note-118) and [Laozi](/wiki/Laozi) is traditionally held to have been a teacher of Confucius.[[119]](#cite_note-119) [Zhuangzi](/wiki/Zhuang_Zhou) explicitly criticized Confucianist and [Mohist](/wiki/Mohist) tenets in his work. In general, Taoism rejects the Confucianist emphasis on [rituals](/wiki/Li_(Confucian)), [hierarchical social order](/wiki/Confucianism#Relationships), and conventional morality, and favors [*naturalness*](/wiki/Taoism#Naturalness), spontaneity, and individualism instead.[[120]](#cite_note-120) The entry of [Buddhism](/wiki/Chinese_Buddhism) into China was marked by significant interaction and [syncretism](/wiki/Syncretism) with Taoism.[[121]](#cite_note-121) Originally seen as a kind of "foreign Taoism", Buddhism's scriptures were translated into Chinese using the Taoist vocabulary.[[122]](#cite_note-122) Representatives of early Chinese Buddhism, like [Sengzhao](/wiki/Sengzhao) and [Tao Sheng](/wiki/Tao_Sheng), knew and were deeply influenced by the Taoist keystone texts.[[123]](#cite_note-123) Taoism especially shaped the development of [Chan (Zen)](/wiki/Chinese_Chan) Buddhism,[[124]](#cite_note-124) introducing elements like the concept of *naturalness*, distrust of scripture and text, and emphasis on embracing "this life" and living in the "every-moment".[[125]](#cite_note-125) Taoism on the other hand also incorporated Buddhist elements during the [Tang period](/wiki/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.[[126]](#cite_note-126) For example, Wang Bi, one of the most influential philosophical commentators on Laozi (and [Yijing](/wiki/Yijing)), was a Confucian.[[127]](#cite_note-127) The three rivals also share some similar values, with all three embracing a [humanist](/wiki/Humanism) philosophy emphasizing moral behavior and human perfection. In time, most Chinese people identified to some extent with all three traditions simultaneously.[[128]](#cite_note-128) This became institutionalised when aspects of the three schools were synthesised in the Neo-Confucian school.[[129]](#cite_note-129) Some authors have dealt with [comparative studies](/wiki/Comparative_religion) between Taoism and [Christianity](/wiki/Christianity). This has been of interest for students of [history of religion](/wiki/History_of_religion) such as [J.J.M. de Groot](/wiki/Jan_Jakob_Maria_de_Groot),[[130]](#cite_note-130) among others. The comparison of the teachings of Laozi and [Jesus of Nazareth](/wiki/Jesus_of_Nazareth) has been done by several authors such as Martin Aronson,[[131]](#cite_note-131) and Toropov & Hansen (2002), who believe that they have parallels that should not be ignored.[[132]](#cite_note-132) In the opinion of J. Isamu Yamamoto [[133]](#cite_note-133) the main difference is that Christianity preaches a [personal God](/wiki/Personal_God) while Theist Taoism does not. Yet, a number of authors, including [Lin Yutang](/wiki/Lin_Yutang),[[134]](#cite_note-134) have argued that some moral and ethical tenets of these religions are similar.[[135]](#cite_note-135)[[136]](#cite_note-136) The work "Christ the Eternal Tao"[[137]](#cite_note-137)