

# [Free research paper on perspectives on the individual in taoism](https://assignbuster.com/free-research-paper-on-perspectives-on-the-individual-in-taoism/)

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Although Taoism has principles as any philosophy or religion, these are not strict, as they are subjected to the customization. As there are over 6. 5 billion individuals in the world, there could also be 6. 5 billion ways to practice it, because everybody can understand it and practice it differently, teaching the others what they have learned about Taoism and in the same time absorbing the Taoism knowledge from others (“ Taoism 101: Introduction to the Tao”). Therefore, by its nature, Taoism focuses on individual, having the purpose of enlightening him, putting him in harmony with himself and with the surrounding world, by connecting with the world as it is, accepting both its positive and its negative aspects, without trying to reject them, by embracing and valuing the present without setting expectations other than smiling, breathing and being at peace with oneself (Kirkland 158).
Taoism marks the “ awakening of the individual awareness” (Little & Eichman 34) and this means the understanding and knowing of self beyond the social structures with which individual is accustomed. However, there is no right or wrong way of practicing Taoism, and it can be integrated in various social or even political aspects of life, following one’s nature and adjusting upon it (Fowler 147).
Taoism follows individuals and it becomes a reflection of how they are evolving, keeping up with the changes that appear within individuals, as a result also of the social changes (Fowler 100); nevertheless, this philosophy advocates for serenity and for peace and silence and it becomes natural that individuals practicing Taoism need to escape from time to time from the noise, crowd, tumult of the world they live in, for going somewhere quiet, where they can be only with their thoughts, meditating (“ Taoism 101. Introduction to Tao”).
The classical forms of Taoism follow stricter guidelines, which demand for the refraining of consuming animal products, as the Taoist practitioners are considered nurturers not destroyers of life and according to this philosophy any form of life should be protected and respected, not treated with violence; the classical Taoist guidelines also demand for reading Taoist scriptures twice a day or for devoting time to cultivating the Ch’i, (Hu & Allen 49). Moreover, in relation to the alimentation, Taoism sustains the refraining from consuming animals first of all because killing another being for food is in conflict with Tao (the way to reintegrating in the whole, in the universe) and second because it is believed that the animal food (which is considered to instigate attachment of artificial tastes) imposes difficulties in concentrating. In Taoism concentration is highly important for the individual because it helps the practitioner to gather the positive energy from the universe while releasing the negative one gathered, through respiration and meditation exercises (Hu & Allen 50).
The adepts of Taoism are kind to others, considering that people are compassionate by nature, expressing it without expectations of rewards (“ Taoism”), as an affirmation of the fact that Taoism does not encourage individuals’ expectations, as these determine the source of their unhappiness and leads them towards desiring to change the natural order of life for achieving the proposed expectations (“ Taoism 101. Introduction to the Tao”).
Individual in Taoism is just like water, flowing along the paths set by the universe, without seeking to interfere in any way for modifying the course of the world, because this would lead to disharmony and only by accepting the tao/dao (way) and wu - wei (non - intervention) principles the individual will eventually reach a communion with the cosmos, experiencing peace and fulfillment (Moss & Perryman 1).
Regarding the reading of Taoism scriptures, practitioners are believed to participate directly in the cosmic processes, where they re-harmonize by reciting the texts of the scriptures, from which Tao itself emanates, contributing like this to the instauration of the cosmic order, as the text of the scriptures that they recite act as incantations for attaining universal harmony (Kirkland 9).
But this attitude towards the cosmic is a non - personalized one, where the individual is part of the cosmos, part of a community. The more recent form of Taoism, entitled the liturgical Taoism indicates that the individual participates at the cosmic process not simply as an element of the cosmos, but as a separated individual, located in a specific space, possessing individual traits that makes him unique, hence, re-valorized, returning from the cosmic process renewed from a moral and spiritual point of view, with new experiences regarding the sacrality, which became inherent to individual following this experience (Kirkland 9).
The Taoism philosophy views Te/De (the virtue) as a component part of the individual, and individuals must seek to find it, for living in harmony with Tao and with themselves, obtaining salvation, immortality by reaching this harmony (Cox 2). The wu – wei principle means “ to do without ado”, implying taking actions without having inner, egoistic purpose and involvement within the undertaken action (Fowler 119).
For individuals, Taoism is the liberation from a system of structured beliefs and social standards, which offers the opportunity to practice processes of re-discovery of self by allowing the communion with the true self, the recognition of one’s real values and worth and the embracing of one’s true nature, liberated from the patterns of the surrounding world (Watts xviii).
Te, inherent to individuals is the “ charismatic power” and it is achieved through self – cultivation processes, which leads to experiencing softness and harmony, or on the contrary, it is the expression of raised frustrations as a result of forcing into doing something that does not make the individual happy (Fowler 117). There is no perfect Te, it is just the one that a person possesses as a result of his self – actualization processes or the lack of these processes, which makes the individual at peace with himself or unhappy. The estate of unhappiness comes from resisting the nature. Individuals should follow the course of the nature for reaching their harmony, not to force things, otherwise their virtue suffers. This is why, Taoist philosophy sustains that operating from the heart is much more valuable than acting in accordance with the rationale processes (Fowler 117).
The principle of non – intervention mingles with the principle of Te and together they follow the way (Tao). This is not to say that these processes are static. As the world changes, they adapt to the permanently changing aspects of life, and therefore these principle follow the evolution of the Taoism practitioner, pursuing the novelty that orbit around the character of the individual, just as water takes the shapes of the stones that it meets as it flows (Fowler 117).
Taoism advocates the health and vitality of individual, by sustaining as guiding principles for achieving these desiderates a proper alimentation, concentration, meditation, but also the practice and the discipline of Ch’i, either in an Yin form (meditation, or practicing Tai Chi for cultivating the intrinsic energy) or in a Yang form (external expression, movement) (“ Taoism”).
Creel differentiates between the contemplative and the purposive Taoism, where the contemplative Taoism promotes the individual’s detachment from the worldly things into achieving serenity, enhancing him with the virtues of Tao, which incorporates the reality as a whole and in the purposive Taoism the wu-wei or the non – intervention principle is a virtue of Heaven, whereas the action and involvement (in affairs) is the virtue and the way of man (70). But Taoism is not just a philosophy or a religion, is a way of living, an attitude, a feeling of being at peace with oneself, with the people that are surrounding the individual and of accepting the ones who are against the individual, without striving to change their opinions/attitudes, but allowing them to be who they are and think what they consider, applying like this the principle of non-intervention.
In Taoism, the individual is in harmony with nature when he is spontaneous, disregarding the social conventions or social imposed hierarchy, achieving his Te by living in accordance with the Tao, achieving like this his individual freedom (Ho 5).
As the discussion about the perceptions of individual in Taoism advances, one cannot refrain from noticing that this philosophy is self – centered, setting the individual in relation to the others, by showing the virtues that the Taoist practitioner possesses as compared to others, who do not search for Tao (the way of integrating with the cosmos), to which we belong. In a way, Taoism is a manifestation of the supremacy of the practitioner over the others, who do not practice this spirituality. As such, the wisdom, the harmony, the liberation are achieved by Taoism practitioners, who become enlightened as a result of their Taoist experiences, returning to life renewed, aware of themselves and at peace with their nature, compared to those who have not experienced Taoism, who are entrenched in their worldly routine, social standards and somehow slaves of their own rationale.
However, Ho challenges this idea by arguing that in fact, Taoism is a negation of the centrality of the self, because, according to the classical Taoism, a man reaches perfection when he lets go of his self and he reaches spirituality when he understands that he has no achievements; therefore, in Taoism, individuals tend to liberate from their self as they escape from the social imposed norms and status quos, becoming “ sage in tranquility, and a king in activity” (Ho 6).
The stage of tranquility and the balanced life is achieved by finding the Te in oneself and practicing the wu – wei principle, which implies that the individual must forget about the constraints of social life such as improving the material existence, facing the challenges of the postmodern world, juggling between the work and family and pursuing personal goals and expectations and dedicate themselves to acting without acting (or knowing when to act and the right amount of action that needs to be taken or when it is time to withdraw from acting), aligning with the natural laws, rather than opposing them (Fowler 120). Creel observes that the principle of wu – wei suggests to only dedicate to the natural activities in life, which automatically implies that there are such activities which are unnatural or unnecessary in order to act upon them, making it difficult for Taoist adepts to comprehend which action is necessary and which unnecessary, or which one is good and which is wrong (53).
In fact, Taoism incorporates probably the best know paradox that describes the individual and his nature: Yin and Yang, wherein Yin is soft, calm, passive, symbolizing the night and femininity and Yang is hard, energetic, dynamic, aggressive, symbolizing the day and masculinity. The symbol is the essence of Taoism, defining the individual’s nature, as formed of Yin and Yang, and in every Yin there is a dot of Yang and in every Yang there is a small piece of Yin, indicating that in every softness there is hardness and in every hardness there is softness or that day cannot be without night, just like a female must coexist with a man (“ Taoism”). The Yin and Yang Taoist principle indicates that individual is dual and if either Yin or Yang is more representative in his nature, than he is imbalanced, and he must seek to equalize them for achieving harmony.
Nevertheless, as stated in the beginning of this essay, Taoism is an expression of self, of how individual chooses to practice this philosophy, therefore, the individual is the one to consider what is necessary and what is unnecessary, what is natural and what is unnatural, as long as he finds his balance and in harmony with nature, identifying in himself the virtues for reaching the Tao. Taoism perspectives upon individual state that Tao (the way to the whole, to the universe) is in everybody and everybody can reach it by searching to liberate from the quotidian constraints, by renouncing at selfish purposes, and by living in harmony with others and with the nature.

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