

Daoism

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Beginnings and History The history of Daoism can befittingly be separated into four periods: Proto-Daoism, Classical Daoism, Modern Daoism and Contemporary Daoism. The first period, Proto-Daoism, is the time from antiquity all the way to the 2nd century C. E. The intention behind this period being called "proto-Daoism" is that we have no information of any official Daoist religious organizations at this time. The classic works that were inscribed in the course of this period, the Daode jing and the Zhuangzi in particular, they were highly significant upon the flourishing of the classical Daoist tradition.

Many textbooks on world religions still take this period as representing the essence of Daoism. This is simply an dull-witted and ambiguous interpretation of the entire history of Daoism. The second period, that of classical Daoist religion, starts in 142 C. E. when Zhang Daoling established the Way of the Celestial Masters, also known as the Way of Orthodox Unity, the first successful organized Daoist religious system. Daoist priests today claim to be ordained in a lineage that stretches back to this original founder.

Two other important movements developed later during this period of classical Daoist religion: the Way of Highest Clarity (Shangqing Daoism) and the Way of Numinous Treasure (Lingbao Daoism). This period, between the 2nd and the 7th centuries can be called the classical period because scholars of Daoism look back to this time (known also as the medieval period of Chinese history) as the era in which many Daoist practices, texts and rituals initially took shape. Also during this period, Buddhism was brought to China by missionaries from India and Tibet.

Buddhist ideas and practices were absorbed into Daoism (and vice-versa) but there were also periods of intense rivalry between Daoists and Buddhists. The classical period of Daoism ends with the Tang dynasty (618-906), one of the high-points of Chinese civilisation from the point of view of the development of art and culture. During the Tang dynasty Daoism became fully integrated with the imperial court system particularly under the reign of the Xuanzong Emperor (713-756). During this time Daoism functioned as the official religion of the imperial court and exerted complete supremacy over Buddhism.

The period of modern Daoism begins with the Song Dynasty (960-1279), during which time the boundaries between elite Daoist religion, Buddhism, and local cults begin to be increasingly blurred. Based on the syncretism that began in this period, it becomes increasingly difficult to separate out Daoism as a religious category from the popular Chinese religious culture as it functions on the ground. In terms of elite Daoism, however, the most significant event was the founding of the Way of Complete Perfection (Quanzhen dao) by Wang Zhe (1113-1170).

The Way of Complete Perfection is the major monastic form of Daoism that exists to this day alongside the more community-based priesthood of the celestial masters. The Way of Complete Perfection is devoted to the practice of internal alchemy, in which the energies of the body are refined through breathing and other forms of meditation into ever subtler forms, thus promoting longevity and even, in a few rare cases, the possibility of totally transcending the ordinary finitudes of human existence.

The Way of Complete Perfection is also marked by its aim to "harmonise the three teachings" of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism, and became highly influential under the Mongol Yuan dynasty after Wang Zhe's disciple Qiu Changchun (1148-1227) undertook a three-year journey to the court of the Mongol warlord, Chinggis Khan. Despite the rhetoric of harmonization, further acrimonious debates with Buddhists developed at this time, and when the Daoists lost a series of these debates in 1281 many Daoist texts were burned.

Despite this setback, Daoism flourished during the subsequent Ming dynasty (1368-1644) and the year 1445 saw the compilation of the Daoist Canon (Daozang), a compendium of some 1,500 Daoist texts, under the patronage of the Yongle Emperor. In the Qing dynasty (1644-1911) Daoist ideas and practices became more entrenched in popular religious culture.

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that we have better historical evidence of the way popular religion functioned since many popular Daoist morality texts were published and the practice of Daoist-inspired arts such as Taiji quan (Tai Chi) and Qigong (Ch'i-kung) became increasingly widespread. The fourth period, since 1949, has been a near-total catastrophe for Daoism, particularly during the period of the Great Proletarian Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when many Daoist temples were destroyed and the overt functioning of the religion to all intents and purposes ceased to exist in mainland China.

Since 1980 Daoism has begun to be practiced openly again in China and a new generation of Daoists are struggling to rebuild their temples and recover their tradition. On the other hand, through the emigration of many Chinese

people across the world, Daoist temples have been established in Europe, the Americas and elsewhere and many popular Daoist practices such as Qigong and Taiji quan (Tai-chi) have taken root in the West. Until recently it was not certain that Daoism had survived this cataclysmic upheaval, but the study and practice of Daoism is beginning to flourish once again in China and throughout the world.

Beliefs The primary belief is in learning and practicing “ The Way” (Dao) which is the ultimate truth to the universe. The Dao has several meanings. It is the basis of all living things, it governs nature, and it is a method to live by. Daoists do not believe in extremes, instead focusing on the interdependence of things. There is no total good or evil or negative and positive. The Yin-Yang symbol exemplifies this view. The black represents the Yin the white represents the Yang. Yin is also associated with weakness and passivity and Yang with strength and activity.

The symbol shows that within the Yang there exists the Yin and vice versa. All nature is the balance between the two. Daoist beliefs have undergone a series of changes in its history. In the 2nd Century the Shangqing school of Daoism emerged that focused on meditation, breathing and recitation of verses. This was the dominant practice of Daoism until about 1, 100 AD. In the 5th Century AD, the Lingbao school emerged which borrowed much from Buddhist teachings such as reincarnation and cosmology. The use of talismans and the practice of alchemy were also associated with the Lingbao school.

This school of thought was eventually absorbed into the Shangqing school during the Tang Dynasty. In the 6th Century, Zhengyi Daoists, who believed

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in protective talismans and rituals, emerged. Zhengyi Daoists performed offering rituals for showing thanks and the retreat ritual that includes repentance recitations and abstinence. This school of Daoism is still popular today. Around 1254, Daoist priest Wang Chongyang developed the Quanzhen school of Daoism. This school of thought used meditation and breathing to promote longevity, many are also vegetarian.

The Quanzhen school also further combines the three main Chinese teachings of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism. Due to the influence of this school, by the late Song Dynasty (960-1279) many of the lines between Daoism and other religions were blurred. The Quanzhen school is also still prominent today. Another key component of Daoism is the De, which is the manifestation of the Dao in all things. De is defined as having virtue, morality and integrity. Historically, the highest achievement of a Daoist is to achieve immortality through breathing, meditation, helping others and the use of elixirs.

In early Daoist practices, priests experimented with minerals to find an elixir for immortality, laying the groundwork for ancient Chinese chemistry. One of these inventions was gunpowder, which was discovered while searching for an elixir. Daoists believe that influential Daoists are transformed into immortals who help guide others. Tao, originally, meant 'road' and then implied 'to rule' and 'principle'. Lao Zi used Tao to propound his ideological system; therefore his school of thinking is called Taoism. At the time Lao Zi created this religion, it was simply a school of philosophy.

During the Eastern Han Dynasty, it became a religion. Tao is the origin of the eternal world. It is boundless in time and space. Ordinary people can become

gods when they have Tao. This religion pursues immortality and preservation of health; its uttermost goal is to become an immortal being. This can be obtained through cultivating one's moral character and perfecting one's moral integrity. A Taoist phrase is to say an ordinary man can become immortal if he does good 3, 000 times and accomplishes 800 exploits. Of course the number is symbolic.

It requires people to do good without making it known to others as the gods will know it naturally, much like the Christian principle expressed in Matthew 6: 3-4, " But when you give alms, do not let your left hand know what your right hand is doing, so that your alms may be done in secret; and your Father who sees in secret will reward you. " 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. Daoism Today The Taijitu ("yin and yang") symbol as well as the Ba gua ("Eight Trigrams") are connected with Daoist symbolism. While almost all Daoist societies make use of the yin and yang symbol, one could also call it Confucian, Neo-Confucian or pan-Chinese. The yin and yang make an "S" shape, with yin (Black or Red) on the right. One is likely to see this symbol as beautifications on Daoist organization flags and logos, temple floors, or stitched into clerical robes.

In accordance with Song Dynasty sources, it originated around the 10th century. Previously, yin and yang were symbolized by a tiger and dragon. 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. Daoist temples in southern China and Taiwan may often be identified by their roofs, which feature Chinese dragons and phoenix 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 <https://assignbuster.com/daoism/>

general though, Chinese Taoist architecture has no universal features that distinguish it from other structures. Daoist 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 p, etc. Other flags and banners may be those of the gods or immortals themselves.

Today Taoism is mainly practiced in China and Taiwan. It has also spread to other parts of Asia and even around the world. There are about 20 million followers worldwide--most of them living in Taiwan. About 30, 000 North Americans practice Taoism. The Chinese government has tried to suppress Taoism (severely at times in the past), but its teachings and practices still thrive and remain strong... One thing that keeps Taoism popular is its flexibility--it almost isn't a religion, but a philosophy. Most followers practice Taoism in conjunction with Confucianism, Buddhism, and other religions.

Many Chinese practice a mix of Confucianism and Taoism. Evangelization to Daoism Daoist are very involved in their own historic culture much like most other religions, things have always been a certain way for them, so they are comfortable in dealing with the “ Dao” and in saying what’s life is life. Which brings a hard pint top bring across when a Christian makes it their goal to show a Daoist that there is value to life, and things do not simply happen for no reason. Many Christians, including me before this class, have no connection with Daoism like they would with Islam or Buddhism.

But with 30 million followers Daoism is making a name for itself in the religious world. Daoist are far opposites from extremist, believing that is simply no evil and no good. So with a start I think as a Christian you have to

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hear them out and understand their beliefs as to why there is no good or why there is no evil. Otherwise it will just come across as you attacking them and having no care for their soul, and just talking to prove wrong. Once you are comfortable with one another, it's your turn! You begin to show the good things in the world, and explain how they came to be and how God had a hand in all of it.

Now I know this won't work for every single individual you come across, but any reasonable person will give you a shot and that is all our God needs!

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