

# TAOISM

**Overview:** It is important to understand the philosophies of Taoism if you want to understand the concepts that lie at the heart of all Asian nations, i.e. China, Korea, Japan, and Vietnam. Taoism began over 2500 years ago when Lao-Tzu wrote the scriptures of Taoism, *Tao Te Ching*. Lao-Tzu was responding to a chaotic period when the feudal states in China were fighting over land and power after the harmonious first four centuries of the Chou Dynasty (1111-249 B.C.). Lao-Tzu was a contemporary with Confucius (551-479 BC), and legend has it that Confucius met with him to ask about his understanding of the “rituals”. Lao-Tzu is reported as saying “Give up, sir, your proud airs, your many wishes, mannerisms, and extravagant claims. They won’t do you any good, sir! That’s all I have to tell you.” The “rituals” or *li* refer to the “ways” of doing things mandated by heaven (the *Tao*). The rituals were the result of the principles of the Ritual-Music Culture that the Chou Dynasty used for centuries. Lao-Tzu wrote in the *Tao Te Ching* “When righteousness is lost, only then does the doctrine of propriety arise. Now, propriety is a superficial expression of loyalty and faithfulness, and the beginning of disorder”(chap,38; Chan, 158). Lao-Tzu was saying that the imposing of external laws reflects the breakdown of internal goodness and harmony will not result when laws are imposed on people.

## **History:**

Lao-Tzu’s life is clouded in legend. There is considerable doubt that a person named Lao-Tzu actually existed. Lao-Tzu which means “the old philosopher” or “the old master”, is a term of respect rather than an actual name. Therefore, there are disagreements over the origin of the *Tao Te Ching*, some say it is a collective work of many authors over many centuries, others say it is the work of Li Her who was given the honorary title of Lao-Tzu.

Chuang-Tzu (399-295 BC) took the *Tao Te Ching* and developed them further, emphasizing the mystical nature of the *Tao*. Chuang Tzu placed more emphasis on the

ability of the individual to transform himself through the realization of the *Te* (pronounced as "duh") which is the universal *Tao* manifested in the individual. His writings are called after his name..

Lao-Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Lieh Tzu (another teacher who came after Chuang-Tzu) form the foundations for philosophical Taoism.

Religious Taoism develops over the next couple of centuries. It might be better understood as magical Taoism since its main concern is developing techniques to utilize the forces of the Tao in order to attain magical powers and immortality. Out of the religious Taoism came three important thoughts and practices; ~Hygiene: one can use the ch'i (breath or vital energy) within to purify oneself and attain immortality. ~Alchemy: the attempt to change the natural elements into an elixir of life to make one immortal. ~P'eng-lai: the name of an island or islands that was actually being searched for at the time, the belief was that immortal beings and a drug that prevents death would be found there.

Around the 3<sup>rd</sup> century AD, philosophical Taoism made a resurgence through a movement called "Pure Conversation". The resurgence of philosophical Taoism continues to this day.

### **Views of God:**

Tao produced the One.

The One produced the two (Yin and Yang)

The two produced the three (Yin, Yang, Ch'i)

The three produced the ten thousand things (chap. 42; Chan, 160)

The force behind all things is mysterious, unknowable, and beyond description. If you think you understand it, it is because you have oversimplified it.

### **Views of Humanity:**

The *Te* is the unique pattern within all things. It is our individuality and must be accepted in ourselves and others to live in harmony with the Tao.

### **Views of Sin:**

There is no sin concept as in the Bible. But what is bad is living out harmony with the Tao or the way that flows through nature.

### **Views of Scripture:**

Their scriptures are Tao Te Ching, Chuang Tzu, and writings of Lieh Tzu.

### **Views of Salvation:**

One of the ultimate goals is to attain immortality.

### Views of Life After Death:

The individual's consciousness ceases to exist, but their life force returns to the Tao. Through remembrance family keeps them immortal.

### Other Major Teachings:

- **Wu-Wei:** the principle of inactivity. The idea is to not force your will upon something or someone but rather to let nature (or the Tao) take its course. Lao Tzu wrote, "Violent and fierce people do not die a natural death"
- **Yin/Yang:** the yin and yang are two opposing, but at the same time balancing and interacting forces. Here are some examples:
 

○ <b>Yin</b>	<b>Yang</b>
Female	Male
Cold	Hot
Passive	Active
Negative	Positive
Dark	Light
Death	Life
Good	Evil
Right	Left
Weak	Strong
Responsive	Aggressive
Contraction	Expansion

### Approaching Taoists With The Gospel:

- Point to the evidence for a God who is Personal
  - What is the foundation of our uniqueness and complexity?
  - What is the "Deep Love"? Chuang Tzu wrote, "When heaven is to save a person, heaven will protect him through deep love" (chap. 67) How could an impersonal Tao show love? Yet God has demonstrated his love for us. "Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends" John 15:13; See also Romans 5:8, 1John 4:8-10
- Raise the issue of sin:
  - Point to the impossibility of meeting the standards of the Tao
  - Desiring to do what is right but not being able to do it. Lao-Tzu wrote, "the soft overcomes the hard, But none can practice it." (chap. 78)
- Appreciate the "soft" way of Jesus:
  - When arrested, he did not resist. Mt 26:50-56
  - When put on trial, He did not speak in His own defense. Mt 26:60-63, 27:12-14
  - When stripped, mocked and tortured with crown of thorns, He did not defend Himself. Mt 27:28-30
  - When crucified, He responded, "Father forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing" Luke 23:34

## **Works Consulted**

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