



DAOIST

EMERGING GUIDELINES ON HOW TO INVEST FAITH-CONSISTENTLY

Daoism (Taoism) emerged in China on the basis of what are known as the “One Hundred Schools of Thought” during the period 770–221 BC and in the East Han (25-220AD) Daoist organisations were formally established. Today it is estimated that 170 million people follow Daoism, with most of them living in mainland China, Taiwan, Japan and South-East Asia. Daoism gained its name from the word for Way – Dao 道– and it teaches how to follow the Natural Way of the Universe.

In contemporary China, the quest for something deeper and more significant than consumerist capitalism is drawing millions to seek wisdom in their ancient traditions. Daoism is increasingly being seen as a storehouse of such wisdom and, more than this, a way of life that can give vision, guidance and hope to millions.

There are at least 9,000 Daoist temples in China, some in very remote and ecologically important areas. In 2006 an initial 10 of them signed up to the Qinling Declaration, promising to protect the environment around their sacred land and buildings. There are now over 200 signed up to these principles. The key action points included:

- introducing ecological education into temple programmes, ensuring sustainable resources are used only in the context of temple construction (and by extension investing in only those building projects which generally adhere to these practices);

- reducing pollution particularly that caused by firecrackers and mass incense burning;
- using farmed land in a sustainable way;
- paying close attention to protection of local species and to sustainable forestry;
- using energy-saving technology;
- protecting water resources.

This declaration laid the basis for Daoist engagement with core issues with a specific focus on ecology. In the past decade the six key action points have been taken up by many more temples and followers, and have been adapted to reflect the direction Daoism believes its assets and actions should now focus upon. As Daoists begin to create new towns and cities according to their principles, and to invest in the future of China, it is these areas where their investment and vision are significantly concentrated.

Daoism in Investing

A key concept in Daoism is the balance of Yin and Yang. They represent two opposing but complementary forces in the cosmos. Though the two forces compete with each other, inside each one is the seed of the other. Without one there would not be the other, in the same way as there cannot be death without life or shadow without light. Only when they are in balance can the world prosper.

Daoism also has a tradition of non-usury stretching back to the 2nd century AD and encoded in the Taiping Jing.

This belief shapes how Daoists view development and climate change. According to this view, the earth is Yin and the heaven is Yang. When we burn fossil fuels taken from the earth and emit greenhouse gases, we are transforming Yin to Yang, thereby disturbing the balance of the cosmos. Global warming is a consequence of this imbalance and only when it is corrected can the world prosper. Destroying nature for the sake of development also causes disruption to the natural balance of Yin and Yang and should therefore be avoided too.

Compassion is important in Daoism. Daoist followers feel the need for compassion for “all under heaven”, including humankind and all of nature.

This is because Daoism believes that the outer cosmos corresponds to the inner cosmos of the individual. Good acts will be rewarded internally with a sense of balance and peace. Therefore, Daoists strive to maintain a balance in the external world and between the external world and our human society. Certain elements of the SDGs such as peace and conservation are therefore particularly significant for Daoists.

Daoism and Prosperity

Daoism does not measure prosperity in terms of personal wealth or material abundance, but rather in the well-being of the planet and the number of species that co-exist with us harmoniously. According to Taiping Jing this puts the development of humankind at the same level as the relative well-being of all other species.

The Three Treasures of Lao Zi cast a clear light on the path to prosperity:

- to have compassion towards oneself, other people and this living planet;
- to live in simplicity, keeping our use of resources to the minimum and avoid exhausting nature's generosity;
- to refrain from competing with the others (meaning not just other people but other species and future generations) over resources.

Because the Dao concerns all life, not just human existence, biodiversity is seen as a manifestation of the wealth and creativity of the universal Dao. Protecting, treasuring and also making appropriate use of this diversity is therefore central to Daoist practice and all Daoism-consistent investment.

Daoism and Success

People should take into full consideration the limits of nature's sustaining power, so that when they pursue their own development, they have a correct standard of success. If anything runs counter to the harmony and balance of nature, even if it is of great immediate interest and profit, people should restrain themselves from doing it, so as to prevent nature's punishment. Furthermore, insatiable human desire will lead to the overexploitation of natural resources.

Areas of potential and actual Daoist investment interest

- Sustainable Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and affordable medical facilities, resources and clinical care, consistent with Goal 3 of the SDGs.
- accessible education resources for all children and virtual and environmental education, both in the classroom and beyond. (Goal 4 of the SDGs)
- accessible water saving, sanitation and grey water treatment technologies (consistent with Goal 6 of the SDGs).
- FSC forestry, land restoration (e.g. restoration of post-industrial brown sites and creation of bio-diverse habitats).
- non-animal based organic plant TCM, and businesses that create sustainable incense, ink, paper, tea and other traditional Chinese cultural products. (Consistent with Goal 15 of the SDGs)
- solar energy (many temples now run solar lamps);
- electric vehicles and other sustainable transport;
- sustainable architecture (feng shui, the traditional Chinese geomancy that gives people a sense that Daoist temples are born from both heaven and earth, can be extended to secular buildings and houses and cities as a whole to make more Daoist, more beautiful surroundings)
- ethically run nurseries, farms and forests
- sustainable water resources
- technologies that reduce pollution
- Companies promoting sustainable travel and tourism
- Hospitality companies with strong ethical guidelines

These guidelines have been approved by the China Daoist Association. They are based on the Daoist Long-term plan for environmental and sustainable development developed with the UN in 2009, and the Daoist Bristol Commitment to the SDGs published in 2015. Both documents are part of Daoist policy-making across China.