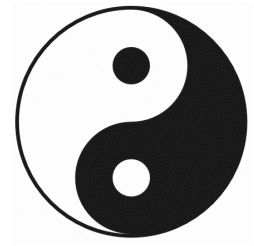


Daoist Faith Statement



The China Daoist Association, based at White Cloud Temple in Beijing, is the leading body representing all Daoists in mainland China. This piece is an authoritative statement by the Association. It was printed, along with statements from ten other faiths, in the book [Faith in Conservation](#) by Martin Palmer with Victoria Finlay, published by the World Bank in 2003.

Daoism emerged on the basis of what are known as the One Hundred Schools of Thought during the period 770–221 B.C. Starting with the formal setting up of Daoist organizations in the East Han period (A.D. 25–220), the faith has a history of nearly 2,000 years. Daoism has been one of the main components of Chinese traditional culture, and it has exerted great influence on the Chinese people's way of thinking, working, and acting. It is no exaggeration to say that in every Chinese person's consciousness and subconscious, the factors of Daoism exist to a greater or lesser degree.

Because of its deep cultural roots and its great social impact, Daoism is now one of the five recognized religions in China (the others are Buddhism, Catholicism, Islam and Protestantism). Even more, the influence of Daoism has already transcended the Chinese-speaking world and has attracted international attention.

According to our statistics, more than 1,000 Daoist temples have now opened to the public (this number does not include those in Taiwan, Hong Kong, and Macao), and about 10,000 Daoists live in such communities. There are about 100 Daoist associations all over China, affiliated to the China Daoist Association. Several colleges have also been established to train Daoists, and many books and periodicals on the study and teaching of Daoism have been published. All Daoists work hard in order that Daoism should develop and flourish. They take an active part in mobilizing the masses, carrying forward the best in Daoist tradition, and working for the benefit of human society.

Like every major world religion, Daoism has its own outlook on the universe, human life, ideals of virtue, and ultimate purpose. Due to its distinctive cultural and historical background, it has its own striking characteristics. It can be briefly summarized in the following two precepts:

"If all things in the universe grow well, then a society is a community of affluence. If not, this kingdom is on the decline."

1. Give respect to the Dao above everything else.

Dao simply means "the way." Daoism considers that Dao is the origin of everything, and Dao is the ultimate aim of all Daoists. This is the most fundamental tenet of Daoism. Dao is the way of Heaven, Earth, and Humanity. The Dao took form in the being of the Grandmother Goddess. She came to Earth to enlighten humanity. She taught the people to let everything grow according to its own course without any interference. This is called the way of no action, no selfishness (wu-wei), and this principle is an important rule for Daoists. It teaches them to be very plain and modest, and not to struggle with others for personal gain in their material life. This kind of virtue is the ideal spiritual kingdom for which the followers of Daoism long.

2. Give great value to life.

Daoism pursues immortality. It regards life as the most valuable thing. Master Zhang said that life is another expression of Dao, and the study of Dao includes the study of how to extend one's life. With this principle in mind, many Daoists have undertaken considerable exploration in this regard. They believe that life is not controlled by Heaven, but by human beings themselves. People can prolong life through meditation and exercise. The exercises include both the moral and the physical sides. People should train their will, discard selfishness and the pursuit of fame, do good deeds, and seek to become a model of virtue (De).

Daoism considers that the enhancement of virtue is the precondition and the first aim of practicing the Dao. The achievement of immortality is a reward from the gods for practicing worthy acts. With a high moral sense and with systematic exercise in accordance with the Daoist method and philosophy of life, people can keep sufficient life essence and energy in their bodies all their lives. The Daoist exercise of achieving immortality has proved very effective in practice. It can keep people younger and in good health. But there is one point that cannot be neglected: a peaceful and harmonious natural environment is a very important external condition.

Daoist ideas about nature

With the deepening world environmental crisis, more and more people have come to realize that the problem of the environment not only is brought about by modern industry and technology, but also has a deep connection with people's world outlook, with their sense of value, and with the way they structure knowledge. Some people's ways of thinking have, in certain ways, unbalanced the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, and overstressed the power and influence of the human will. People think that nature can be rapaciously exploited.

"It is obvious that in the long run, the excessive use of nature will bring about disaster, even the extinction of humanity."

This philosophy is the ideological root of the current serious environmental and ecological crisis. On the one hand, it brings about high productivity; on the other hand, it brings about an exaggerated sense of one's own importance. Confronted with the destruction of the Earth, we have to conduct a thorough self-examination on this way of thinking.

We believe that Daoism has teachings that can be used to counteract the shortcomings of currently prevailing values. Daoism looks upon humanity as the most intelligent and creative entity in the universe (which is seen as encompassing humanity, Heaven, and Earth within the Dao).

The Four Main Principles

There are four main principles that should guide the relationship between humanity and nature:

1. In the *Dao De Jing* (Tao Te Ching), the basic classic of Daoism, there is this verse: "Humanity follows the Earth, the Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is natural." This means that the whole of humanity should attach great importance to the Earth and should obey its rule of movement. The Earth has to respect the changes of Heaven, and Heaven

must abide by the Dao. And the Dao follows the natural course of development of everything. So we can see that what human beings can do with nature is to help everything grow according to its own way. We should cultivate in people's minds the way of no action in relation to nature, and let nature be itself.

2. In Daoism, everything is composed of two opposite forces known as Yin and Yang. Yin represents the female, the cold, the soft and so forth; Yang represents the male, the hot, the hard and so on. The two forces are in constant struggle within everything. When they reach harmony, the energy of life is created. From this we can see how important harmony is to nature. Someone who understands this point will see and act intelligently. Otherwise, people will probably violate the law of nature and destroy the harmony of nature.

There are generally two kinds of attitude toward the treatment of nature, as is said in another classic of Daoism, *Bao Pu Zi* (written in the fourth century A.D.). One attitude is to make full use of nature, the other is to observe and follow nature's way. Those who have only a superficial understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature will recklessly exploit nature. Those who have a deep understanding of the relationship will treat nature well and learn from it. For example, some Daoists have studied the way of the crane and the turtle, and have imitated their methods of exercise to build up their own constitutions. It is obvious that in the long run, the excessive use of nature will bring about disaster, even the extinction of humanity.

3. 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. So people should remember that to be too successful is to be on the path to defeat.

4. Daoism has a unique sense of value in that it judges affluence by the number of different species. If all things in the universe grow well, then a society is a community of affluence. If not, this kingdom is on the decline. This view encourages both government and people to take good care of nature. This thought is a very special contribution by Daoism to the conservation of nature.

In conclusion

To sum up, many Daoist ideas still have positive significance for the present world. We sincerely hope that the thoughts of all religions that are conducive to the human being will be promoted, and will be used to help humanity build harmonious relationships between people and nature. In this way eternal peace and development can be maintained in the world.