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The Creation of Daoism

PAUL FISCHER

Abstract

This paper examines the creation of Daoism in its earliest, pre-Eastern Han period. After an examination of the critical terms “scholar/master” (*zi* 子) and “author/school” (*jia* 家), I argue that, given the paucity of evidence, Sima Tan and Liu Xin should be credited with creating this tradition. The body of this article considers the definitions of Daoism given by these two scholars and all of the extant texts that Liu Xin classified as “Daoist.” Based on these texts, I then suggest an amended definition of Daoism. In the conclusion, I address the recent claim that the *daojia* 道家/*daojiao* 道教 dichotomy is false, speculating that disagreement over this claim arises from context in which Daoism is considered: among the other pre-Qin “schools of thought” or among other world religions.

Daoism is of fundamental importance to East Asian intellectual history, its influence pervasive across a broad spectrum of cultural endeavors, from cosmogony and art to politics and health. For two and a half millennia, it has never been far from the collective mind of China’s long line of scholars. It would follow, then, that the history of Daoism would more or less be set in stone. But in recent decades some Western scholars have described early, “philosophical” Daoism in rather non-traditional ways that have left some of us puzzled. In this article, I describe the creation of Daoism, while arguing *against* some modern depictions and insinuations, and *for* a new definition (albeit based squarely on the old one). My intended audience consists, I hope, of peers, colleagues, and students, with the intention of facilitating a few friendly conversations on this sublime and robust philosophy. Among the great traditions studied in Western academia, I think “philosophical Daoism” has been relatively underappreciated, and still awaits its proper place in our ever-more-globalized

aesthetic. Perhaps the growing rapprochement with China will soon facilitate a higher profile for this tradition in the West.

In this essay, I first present a context for the creation of Daoism by examining two important terms, often translated as “master” and “school.” These are important because putative masters narrate, write, and/or transmit texts within ostensible schools of thought, of which Daoism is of course only one. Then I present the two earliest definitions of Daoism, those given by its creators, Sima Tan 司馬談 (d. 110 BCE) and Liu Xin 劉歆 (46 BCE-23 CE), two early scholars well known to sinologists. Next, I analyze the earliest collection of books to be labeled “Daoist.” I include here the nine fragmented texts that have received less attention than the six received texts of this tradition. These latter two sections may be thought of as the theory and practice of early Daoism. Last, I argue for an amended description of Daoism, in which I revise the earlier definitions with a few ideas gleaned from the texts they purport to describe.

I might begin with the first thing many of us tell undergraduates in our Daoism courses. Which is: there is no such thing as Daoism. While the terms “Dao” and “ism” exist in Chinese, there is no such word as “Daoism” in Chinese: it is a Western invention. There only is, and only ever has been, *daojia* 道家 (literally, “Daoist school” but usually rendered “philosophical” or “literati Daoism”) and at least a dozen kinds of *daojiao* 道教 (literally “Daoist teachings” but usually translated as “religious” or “organized Daoism”).¹ There are also other objects of inquiry that might

¹ Some people now prefer to translate *daojia* as “early” or “classical” Daoism, but I retain the older translation for three reasons. 1. It mirrors the fact that in China *daojia* is taught in Philosophy Departments and *daojiao* in Religion Departments. 2. While I agree with the complication that most ancient philosophies are somewhat religious and most ancient religions are somewhat philosophical, the common usage of the term “philosophical” is simply “a system of thought,” which works well here. 3. “Early” and “classical” are both temporal terms that inevitably lead to confusion. For example, when Wang Bi 王弼 (226-249) and Guo Xiang 郭象 (d. 312) spoke of the Dao, they were certainly not referring to the Dao “revealed” to Zhang Ling 張陵 (d. 156) in “sacred scriptures” brought to him by a “heavenly being” a century before. The first half of the “*daojia*/literati-*daojiao*/organized” locution seems a good choice, but “organized” or “communal” Daoism implies that there is no difference in content (only in social organization), whereas I will argue in the conclusion that the difference is significant. A

be put under the umbrella of Daoism: "transcendence Daoism" (also known as "immortality Daoism") say, or Huang-Lao Daoism. Some argue that some or all of these things do constitute a coherent entity that might be called "Daoism," (or, in recognition of this being a modern construct, "Taoism"), because "they all follow the Dao," but this is like claiming that Christianity and Islam are the same thing because they both worship "God." It may be true in some essential or meta-sense, but it is historically inaccurate and I suspect it obscures more than it clarifies. At any rate, this article deals only with the earliest of the several things that may or may not constitute a unified "Daoism": philosophical Daoism. There are no gods or priests, liturgies or confessions of sin here; all that lies outside the purview of this essay. The temporal and geographical scope of this article, already hinted at in the title, is the five hundred years prior to the common era in China.

Context

There is ambiguity in the terms "scholar/master" and "author/school" in early China, and this ambiguity sometimes leads to the idea that masters (with students) and schools (with lineages) were the norm. But if we keep in mind that not all scholars were masters, with implied students or disciples, and not all authors engendered schools of thought that transmitted what they said or wrote, then we will not automatically see social organizations where there may have been none. That these two Chinese words have these four English translations should be uncontroversial, but let me nevertheless provide some examples for clarification.

When Shizi 尸子 (ca. 390-330) lists six masters and their talking points he clearly has in mind their status as the progenitors of lineages

"dao/jia/literati-dao/jiao/religious" taxonomy makes sense to me, but I retain "philosophical" in this paper for four (admittedly rather marginal) reasons. 1. It is already established, and I find the arguments to disestablish it unconvincing. 2. It tracks the way it is taught in academia (at least in China—American philosophy departments by and large remain shamefully Euro-centric). 3. "Literati" is a socio-economic term, so while anyone can sometimes be "philosophical," it sounds slightly classist to refer to an uneducated person as "literati-ish." 4. "Philosophical/religious" highlights the lack/abundance of supernatural elements in the two systems more clearly than "literati/religious." I will return to this puzzlingly contentious issue in my conclusion.

with specific ideas transmitted across time.² Yet the *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (ca. 241 BCE) uses a similar list of people, in a similar context, and refers to them not as masters but as individuals.³ Further, Kongzi 孔子 (551-479) is the best-known master in Chinese history and the titular *zi* typically implies his status as a master, with many students. However, as the *Shiji* 史記 (Scribal Records) documents, dozens of his top students were also called *zi*, and no one takes this to mean that they all necessarily had students of their own (ch. 67; Nienhauser 1994, 63-85). Thus, the protagonists in the story of the creation of Daoism should be conceived as a group of scholars, some of whom attracted students that passed on their teachings.

The semantic range of “scholar” (*zi*) and “author” (*jia*) overlap, in English as in Chinese, given that the former may imply—but does not necessitate—the latter.⁴ One way to accommodate this is to translate either, in certain contexts, as “expert” (see Petersen 1995). Nevertheless, a more contentious issue lies in the other direction: the degree to which “author” can also mean “school [of thought].” I think it can mean either. No one assumes that *jia* as “school” refers to a physical school building or even to something that one might “attend.” The sticking point seems to be over whether or not it can be any kind of social institution.

Thus, in the case of *daojia*, it is incontestable that there were a number of Daoist *authors*—even if they did not self-identify as “Daoist,” since

² *Shizi* 10 (dat. 330 BCE): “Mozi valued impartiality, Kongzi valued public-mindedness, Huangzi valued centeredness, Tianzi valued equanimity, Liezi valued emptiness, Liaozi valued dispelling closed-mindedness. Their students mutually denied each other, stopping [only] after several generations: [but] all were trapped in selfishness.”

³ *Lüshi chunqiu* 17.7 (dat. 241 BCE): “If you heed the arguments of a multitude of individuals as a means of ordering the state, it will be endangered in no time. How does one know that this is so? Lao Dan esteemed softness; Kongzi, benevolence; Mo Di, wholeness; Gatekeeper Yin, purity; Liezi, emptiness; Tian Pian, equanimity; Yang Zhu, the self; Sun Bin, strategic position; Wang Liao, going first; and Ni Liang, going last.” Slightly modified from Knoblock and Riegel 2000, 433.

⁴ This is why the *zhuzi* 諸子 (many masters) are often the same as the *baijia* 百家 (hundred authors). This is also why it is no exaggeration to speak of a *baijia* in early China: there certainly were a hundred, or hundreds, of authors, even while there were clearly not that many schools.

the term had not yet been invented—but what do we mean when we say there was a Daoist *school*? I am content with “school” insofar as it implies “school of thought,” because this English phrase does not necessarily imply any social institution. There may be a “school of thought” in this country that holds that cooking with butter is better than cooking with oil, but this does not necessarily mean that its “members” get together on Tuesday evenings to discuss the matter.⁵ With Daoism, all evidence that the authors of Daoist texts ever congregated as such is ambiguous.⁶ On the other hand, somebody wrote those texts, and somebody put in the

⁵ Several scholars have recently argued that “school” is too “confusing” or “misleading” a translation for *jia*. However, their arguments are either overstated—insisting or implying that a “school (of thought)” must denote a textual lineage, which I contend, by appeal to ordinary English usage, it does not—or are undermined by the unstated necessity of using some other phrase synonymous with “school (of thought).” Peterson uses “areas of thought” or “kinds of specialists” (1995, 36-37). Queen uses “intellectual tendencies” (2001, 56n14). Smith has “traditions” (2003, 138), “conceptual areas,” and “people with a particular ideology” (2003, 148). Csikszentmihalyi and Nylan speak of “individuals and their methods” (2003, 65) and “experts in a particular discipline, technique, or field” (2003, 69). These scholars remind us to conceive of these schools of thought as retrospective categories that unite scholars who may not have belonged to an eponymous social organization—as with the “school of thought” that prefers butter to oil, or Dalmatians to Dachshunds—but this caveat is far easier to countenance than the dismissal of the term “school” altogether. A final example. The opening sentence of the last article states: “One major obstacle to understanding the early history of China is the still-prevalent notion that discrete schools of thought contended in the Warring States and Han periods, and that these schools of thought were text-centered.” While I agree with this sentence as it stands, if one were to remove “discrete” and change “centered” to, say, “influenced,” then I must disagree.

⁶ Harold Roth has spent much of his career presenting evidence for a social organization in early Daoism. I find his arguments interesting and compelling but ultimately speculative and hence, not “unambiguous.” By “speculative” I mean, it is a fact that some early Daoist texts refer to self-cultivation, and it follows that actual people practiced such self-cultivation. Still, it is less clear that such people *congregated* to practice these techniques (though this is not an unreasonable assumption), or that they congregated *as self-identified Daoists* (though, again, they may have). In any case, Roth argues for the existence of a particular strand within Daoism, while in this article I seek to define it as a whole. For one early instance of his work in this area, see Roth (1991).

effort to transmit them over the past two and a half millennia. So, while I do not argue for early Daoism as a social entity, I would not argue against it either.⁷

The term *jia* as “author/expert” goes back at least to Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 300 BCE)⁸ and Han Feizi 韓非子 (ca. 250 BCE).⁹ This use is later reflected in Liu Xin’s library catalog (6 BCE), famously reprinted with only minor alterations by Ban Gu 班固 (32-92) in his own catalog (90 CE). But Sima Tan certainly was not referring to six “authors” or “experts” when he formulated his “Six schools” (*liu jia* 六家). As has been noted elsewhere, these six “schools” were of at least two types: those with known lineages, and those presumably without.¹⁰ It should also be repeated that Sima Tan’s “Six schools” is not a comprehensive account of the intellectual climate of the time, because he specifically says that he was discussing these schools due to their views on government. Thus, of the total possible number of schools extant in his day, these six, to his mind, were the ones that had views on government that he wished to discuss. And although Sima Tan’s list of schools is often considered to be the earliest, there is reason to think that he may have drawn upon precedent, as the

⁷ I hope the hackneyed assertion “absence of evidence is not evidence of absence” might still apply here.

⁸ *Zhuangzi* 25: “Little Knowledge said, ‘Jizhen’s “no one does it” and Jiezi’s “something causes it”: of these two expert’s/author’s theories, which is true to his situation and which is (merely) partial in his order (of things)?” Watson 1968, 292; Graham 1981, 152; Mair 1994, 265 all translate *jia* as “school.” Legge 1962, 129 and Ziporyn 2009, 111 avoid translating it altogether; but Guo 1961, 915 cites Cheng Xuanying’s 成玄英 (fl.631-652) *Zhuangzi shu* 莊子疏 as referring to them as “two worthy people” (*er xian ren* 二賢人) from Jixia 稷下; at any rate, it is clear from context that these are two people or two authors, not two “schools”. The *Zhuangzi*, like most early Chinese texts, coalesced over time with multiple authors and editors; I will not attempt to date this particular passage (and remain not entirely persuaded by other well-known attempts to parse the text).

⁹ *Hanfeizi* 43 (dat. 240 BCE): “Someone asked: ‘Shen Buhai and Gongsun Yang: (regarding) the doctrines of these two experts/authors, whose is more urgent for the state?’” Liao 1959, 212 translates *jia* as “authorities.”

¹⁰ These may well be indicated in the first paragraph in *Shiji* 3289, where he uses *ruzhe* 儒者 and *mozhe* 墨者 but *fajia* 法家, *mingjia* 名家, *daoia* 道家, and *yinyang zhishu* 陰陽之術.

Yinwenzi 尹文子 has a matching list of five.¹¹ Thus, we should probably translate *zi* first as "scholar" and only secondarily as "master," if we have evidence of students (or make it clear that "scholar" and "master" derive from the same word in classical Chinese). We also need to keep in mind the three meanings of *jia* (author; loosely-defined school of thought; and later: teacher-student lineage school) in these contexts and translate accordingly.

The context within which Daoism was created, then, was one of great intellectual ferment. There were many scholars (the *zhuzi*) with more or less specific philosophical positions, a good number of which had written texts (the *baijia*). Some of these scholars attracted students while others did not. Thus, when it seemed helpful to group some of these scholars into categories, called "schools of thought" (*jia* 家), some had lineages of students while others did not. Yet, as helpful as these groupings may have been, they must be seen as generalizations, and not as discrete entities. They overlapped with each other and splintered within one another. Correlativists (*Yin-Yang jia* 陰陽家) did not have a monopoly on Yin-Yang ideology or correlative thinking, nor Ruists (*Ru jia* 儒家) on filiality or loyalty, Mohists (*Mo jia* 墨家) on hiring worthies or anti-aggression, Designatists (*Ming jia* 名家) on correctly designating titles or actions, Legalists (*Fa jia* 法家) on having laws or using rewards and punishments, or Daoists (*Dao jia*) on the Dao or changing in response to things.¹² Schools of thought also split, as Han Feizi famously noted (ch. 50; Watson 1964, 119). It was within such a vibrant intellectual matrix as this that Sima Tan and others first made their school distinctions.

Theory

Sima Tan was the first person we know of to define Daoism. Thus, since the Daoist authors later identified as such by Liu Xin did not, as far as we know, self-identify as "Daoist," and even though the earlier author of the *Yinwenzi* plainly implied the category, we may say that Sima Tan created

¹¹ Xu 1996, 6. Li 2011, 17-19 argues that the relevant section of the *Yinwenzi* predates Sima Tan.

¹² Though "Correlativist" and "Designatist" are unlovely translations, they are the best I currently know of, and succeed only in signaling the focus on correlative thinking in the former and on designating titles and actions in the latter.

Daoism. That is, although the *Yinwenzi* may be the earliest text to implicitly *identify* a school of thought called Daoism, we may say that Sima Tan created it by explicitly *defining* it. Sima Tan's definition is well-known, but bears repeating. I have analyzed twelve specific precepts from the two places where he describes this nascent school (*Shiji* 130.3289, 3293). If you are a successful Daoist, then:

1. your quintessential spirit should come together in unity (*jingshen zhuan yi* 精神專一); further below, we are recommended to stabilize our spirit (*ding shen* 定神), which I take to be the same thing;

2. your actions should harmonize with the formless (*donghe wuxing* 動合無形);

3. you should feel sufficient and satisfied with the myriad things (*shanzu wanwu* 贍足萬物);

4. you should shift and move with the seasons (*yushi qianyi* 與時遷移); below it says you should have the method of no-method and (thereby) accord with the seasons for accomplishing tasks (*youfa wufa, yinshi weiye* 有法無法，因時為業), which I take to be the same;

5. you should change and transform in response to things (*yingwu bianhua* 應物變化);¹³ below it says you should have a standard of no-standard and (thereby) accord with things and harmonize with them (*youdu wudu, yinwu yuhe* 有度無度，因物與合), which I take to be the same;

6. you should act without contrivance, but leave nothing undone (*wuwei... wu buwei* 無為... 無不為);¹⁴

7. you should take emptiness (i.e., an open mind) and indeterminacy as the root (*yi xu wu wei ben* 以虛無為本);

¹³ The final sentence of this paragraph I take to be Sima Tan describing how Daoists actually are, and not as goals that Daoists should strive for. "In establishing practices and carrying out projects, there is nothing inappropriate; (their) directives are concise and easy to perform: (thus their) projects are few but achievements are many."

¹⁴ This makes more sense in Chinese: "uncontrived" means "without artifice" (*wei* 為 = *wei* 偽), and since human action is perhaps usually a calculated response to our environment, the injunction to act without artifice is followed by the caveat that this does not mean that we should withdraw from the world. On the contrary: we should act *with* it.

8. you should take accordance and reliance as the means (*yi yin xun wei yong* 以因循為用);

9. you should have no fixed position or abiding form so that you can see the actual disposition(s) of the myriad things (*wu chengshi, wu changxing, gu neng jiu wanwu zhi qing* 無成執，無常形，故能究萬物之情);

10. you should treat emptiness (i.e., an open mind) as the constancy of the way (*xuzhe dao zhi chang* 虛者道之常);¹⁵

11. you should harmonize with the great Way (*he da dao* 合大道);

12. you should not over-use your spirit or belabor your body (*shen da yong ze jie, xing da lao ze bi* 神大用則竭，形大勞則敝).

A century later, Liu Xin (or his father) described the Daoists with three principles:¹⁶

13. you should be pure and empty in order to maintain yourself (*qing xu yi zi shou* 清虛以自守);

14. you should be humble and flexible in order to sustain yourself (*bei ruo yi zi chi* 卑弱以自持);

15. you should beware rejecting protocol and learning, and of abandoning goodness and propriety (*juequ li xue, bing qi ren yi* 絕去禮學，兼棄仁義).

Here I will take the liberty of summarizing these fifteen "commandments" into six: relax (#12); know contentment (#3); focus (#1); keep a pure and open mind (#2, 7, 10, 13, 15); be humble, flexible, and responsive to your changing environment (#4, 5, 8, 9, 11, 14); and act with grace and perseverance (#6).¹⁷ Here we have, even before any names of Daoist

¹⁵ There follow two precepts for the ruler, which I do not include in my list because they are not applicable to Daoists who are not rulers: "Accordance is the ruler's principle. (When) the various ministers arrive together, (he) makes each one clarify himself." He does this so that he can ascertain whether or not their claims accord with their actions.

¹⁶ I realize that both Sima Tan and Liu Xin had their own biases that may have made their descriptions less than perfectly objective. But given just how little we know about those biases, I am giving them the benefit of the doubt.

¹⁷ One might ask how many of these does a person need to follow or a text need to evince to be counted as "Daoist"? But such a question would surely be pedantic or naïve, as one might as well ask whether or not a "true" Hindu must read the *Vedas*, a "real" Muslim must pray five times a day, or an "authentic" Platonist must believe in reincarnation.

people or texts, a theoretical description of Daoism. To those familiar with the transmitted texts of philosophical Daoism, none of these characterizations will be the slightest bit surprising.

Practice

But how does theory fit with practice? That is, how do these two earliest definitions of Daoism fit with the narrative of the earliest Daoist texts? Liu Xin is the first person we know of to create a library catalog with a section labeled “Daoist.” In it, he listed thirty-seven Daoist texts (*Hanshu* 1732). Unfortunately, twenty of them are lost. Six of the remaining seventeen are more or less fully extant, with all six available in English translations. Let us briefly review these six, before moving on to the eleven that survive only in fragments. I follow the order given by Liu Xin.

1. *Guanzi* 管子: W. Allyn Rickett, the foremost Western scholar of the *Guanzi*, said the text is a mix of Daoist, Correlativist, Huang-Lao, and Legalist writings authored from the fifth to first centuries BCE (Rickett 1985, 3, 37). The text is too long and varied to be amenable to a simple argument of why Liu Xin might have classified this text as Daoist; in fact, imperial catalogs since the *Sui shu* 隋書 (656 CE) classed it as Legalist. But the text does open with a line reminiscent of the “you should shift and move with the seasons” advice given above: “All those who possess territory and shepherd people must pay heed to the four seasons....” More importantly, it contains three seminal chapters on mental and physical self-cultivation: *Xinshu shang*, *xia* 心術上下 (Mental Techniques I, II) and *Neiye* 內業 (Inner Workings; see Roth 1999, 27).

2. *Laozi* 老子: The premier text of Daoism, and one of the greatest works in the “wisdom tradition” of world literature, the *Laozi* poetically discloses themes of mystery (*miaoxuan* 妙玄), introspection (*fanben* 反本), holding to the One (*bao yi* 抱一), naturalness and spontaneity (*ziran* 自然), ingenuousness (*wuwei* 無為), flexibility and humility (*rou* 柔 / *ruo shui* 若水), and contentment (*zhizu* 知足).

3. *Wenzi* 文子: According to Paul van Els, the original *Wenzi* was extensively altered sometime between the 3rd and 5th centuries CE (van Els awaiting publication).¹⁸ In its basic worldview the original *Wenzi* was

¹⁸ This argument was made possible by the 1973 excavation of a tomb in Dingzhou 定州 that contained fragments of what appear to be the original *Wenzi*.

similar to the *Laozi*, but was more amenable to traditional Ruist virtues and was more overtly aimed at a political ruler. The revised *Wenzi*, which is also the received *Wenzi*, presents an even more syncretic vision of Daoism and Huang-Lao thought, as it is heavily laced with revised passages from the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (dat. 139 BCE).

4. *Zhuangzi* 莊子: The other beloved classic of undergraduate classes on philosophical Daoism, the *Zhuangzi* is a celebration of vivacious anecdotes characterizing the Daoist sage. It illustrates leitmotifs of relativity (*xiangdui zhuyi* 相對主義), selflessness (*wuji* 無己), mind-fasting (*xinzhai* 心齋), and skillfulness (*shulian* 熟練).

5. *Liezi* 列子: A. C. Graham, who translated this work into English, was of the opinion that much of the received version of this text also dates to just after the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE). Its topics, by his reckoning, include the smallness of humans in a vast universe, a non-anthropomorphic Dao, the transience of life, the impossibility of knowing what comes after death, unending change, and the relativity of values (Graham 1960; 1990, 13).

6. *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子: Carine Defoort, in her analysis of its textual history, said that the text, although probably influenced by Huang-Lao thought, "fits remarkably well" with Sima Tan's description of Daoism (Defoort 1997, 39). Marnix Wells, a recent translator, said "It may be called 'Daoist' in an ecumenical sense, but it articulates political programs of universal resonance" (Wells 2013, 2). Outside of its chapters on government and warfare,¹⁹ it speaks of cosmology (with a clear articulation that everything derives from *qi*-substance: *mobu fa yu qi* 莫不發於氣), the role of spirits (*shen* 神), specific and unusual sage rulers like Cheng Jiu 成鳩,²⁰ five modes (*wu xing* 五行) theory, and the importance of one's situation/disposition (*qing* 情).

No surprises here, as all six of these texts fit comfortably within the framework sketched by Sima Tan. But what of the remaining eleven ti-

¹⁹ They belong to either or both *Pang Xuan* 龐煖 texts listed in the *Hanshu* catalog's "Diplomatic" (Zongheng 縱橫) or "Military Strategist" (*Bingquan mou* 兵權謀) sections (*Hanshu* 1739, 1757; Defoort 1997, 37). These chapters do promote some rather un-Daoist ideas, like prioritizing humans over heaven, and not following the seasons, because they are "hard to know" (*nanzhi* 難知).

²⁰ Taiyi 太一, interestingly, is considered a "sage ruler" by Defoort (1997, 120), but a "god" by Wells (2013, 156).

tles on Liu Xin's list? Two of them we can set aside at the outset; one due to its extreme brevity, the other to the fact that it was only recently excavated and a transcription has not yet been published.²¹ Thus, I will summarize my readings of nine fragmented Daoist texts.²²

1. *Yi Yin* 伊尹: There are six short sections of what remains of this text. While the first specifies which tribes should present which tributary gifts to Shang King Tang 湯王 (ca. 1550 BCE), the second describes from where the best cooking ingredients—ape lips, phoenix eggs, and the like—derive. The explicit point of the latter is that if one follows the Dao and becomes a true Heavenly Scion, then all of these foodstuffs will be forthcoming as tribute, the realm will be tranquil, and the ruler's dinner exquisite. The third section avers that for a ruler to follow the Dao, he must first practice physical self-cultivation (*zhishen* 治身). The fourth section is brief and describes the nine types of administrators that King Tang had.²³ The fifth chronicles how Yi Yin during a drought divided the fields and taught the people better farming methods. The last section is a brief, generic miscellany of stories about why a ruler should choose worthy ministers and how a ruler should heed omens. Only the first half of this text seems particularly Daoist.

2. *Yuzi* 鬻子: The *Yuzi* has a dozen or more sections, depending on how you divide them, plus a number of sayings culled from other texts, like the *Liezi*.²⁴ Except for the *Liezi* citations, it does not read like a specifically Daoist text, which may be due to the fact that Liu Xin listed both a Daoist *Yuzi* and a Miscellaneous *Sayings of Yuzi*, and those who have reconstructed the text have put them all together.²⁵ It counsels rulers to

²¹ The *Xinjia* 辛甲 is only a few sentences long. See Ma 2004, 2686. A *Zhouxun* 周訓 is part of the Beijing University Western Han bamboo strip collection, acquired in 2009, and is not yet published.

²² These reconstructions come from Ma (c.1885; 2004), except the *Yuzi*, *Guanyinzi*, and *Huangdi ming*. A "reconstructed" text is usually just a collection of quotations from other sources.

²³ Some scholars think that a text called "Yi Yin and the Nine [Types of] Rulers" (*Yi Yin jiuzhu* 伊尹九主) excavated in 1973 at Mawangdui is another version of this chapter. See Yates 1997, 38-39, 179-91.

²⁴ Much of what has been reconstituted of the *Yuzi* derives from the *Qun shu zhiyao* 群書治要 (631 CE), but there are several other sources besides this one.

²⁵ The *Sayings of Yuzi* (*Yuzi shuo* 鬻子說) is in the Miscellany (*Xiao shuo* 小說) section (*Hanshu* 1744).

appoint officials²⁶ that are liked and respected by the people, and that they should operate with a degree of transparency ("make plans along with the people": *yuren mouzhi* 與人謀之). It also notes that worthy officials are more important when the ruler is less than sagely and that rulers should emulate the good kings of antiquity. Actions speak louder than words, rulers should make use of the way (Dao), harmony (*he* 和), faithfulness (*xin* 信), and goodness (*ren* 仁), always listening to the complaints and suggestions of the people. All of this is rather standard fare for early Chinese scholars' texts (i.e., *zishu* 子書). One line says: "Only after heaven was there earth, only after earth were there discriminations, only after discriminations was there propriety, only after propriety was there teaching, only after teaching was there the way, only after the way was there principle, only after principle were there calculations" (Zhong 2010, 20). Placing the "way" after "propriety" and "teachings" does not seem particularly Daoist.²⁷ On the other hand, the four quotes of *Yuzi* in the *Liezi* are about constant change, flexibility, naturalness, and the bother of reputation.

3. *Guanyinzi* 關尹子: Livia Kohn said that the nine chapter version of the received *Guanyinzi* is substantially a later confection, influenced by inner alchemical thought, that "dates to Song [960-1279] times and probably goes back to [the Quanzhen patriarch] Yin Zhiping (1169-1251)," an alleged descendant of Gatekeeper Yin. (1997, 87). This leaves us with only a couple of quotes each from the *Zhuangzi* and the Syncretist *Lü shi chunqiu*, but they contain some philosophical gems. Yin Xi 尹喜 was said to value purity (*gui qing* 貴清) and he therefore advised us to keep the heavenly within us intact (*qi tian shou quan* 其天守全), and to unify our nature, cultivate our *qi*-substance, and harmonize our virtues (*yi qi xing, yang qi qi, he qi de* 壹其性，養其氣，合其德). But he also pragmatically asks us to examine the reasons for things (*cha qi suo yi* 察其所以), rather than merely examine their appearance.

4. *Gongzimou* 公子牟: This only offers praise for *Zhuangzi*, advice to value life (*zhongsheng* 重生), and the observation that office-holding will

²⁶ Here I translate both *li* 吏 and *shi* 士 as "officials".

²⁷ I typically write "Way" when I think the referent is a Daoist cosmic principle that comes before all else, and "way" when it seems to refer to human endeavors, for example, the right "way" to rule. This convention, of course, does not obtain in Chinese.

lead to power. This, in turn, may lead to wealth, which probably will lead to honor, arrogance, and causing offense, which may well result in one's death (*guan, shi, fu, gui, jiao, zui, si* 官, 勢, 富, 貴, 驕, 罪, 死).

5. *Tianzi* 田子: Tian Pian 田駢 was said to value equanimity (*jun* 均) and/or equilibrium (*qi* 齊). With typical Daoist optimism, he said, "Changes and correspondences all have (their own) principles: rely on inner nature and let things be, then everything will be as it should."

6. *Laolaizi* 老萊子: Sometimes this author is conflated with Laozi, but this text rails against Ruist pride and their penchant for praising the ancients, and is for humility, hesitance, flexibility, frugality, and not talking too much. In one anecdote, he acts like a child in order to amuse his aged parents.

7. *Qianlouzi* 黔婁子: In its current state, this is a very brief work. We have none of his actual words, just two descriptions of him and a certain Yuan Xian 原襄 refusing office to remain poor recluses.

8. *Huangdi ming* 黃帝銘: The *Huangdi ming* (Yellow Thearch's Inscription), was originally in five sections, of which it seems only one is now extant. This chapter is called *Jinren ming* 金人銘 (Bronze Statue Inscription), because it was supposedly inscribed on the back of a metal statue of a person with its mouth sealed shut three times. This statue was located at the base of some steps in an imperial shrine. The import of the inscription matches both the statue itself as well as some famous lines in the *Laozi*: it is not good to talk too much. Human speech is likened to fire and water; both are quite useful in small amounts, but when either gets out of hand, then disaster follows. It also advises humility and "holding to the female" (*zhi ci* 執雌), a metaphor for humility.

9. *Zhengzhangzhe* 鄭長者 (Elder of Zheng): This is now just a brief story from the *Hanfeizi*. In it, an elder from the state of Zheng advises the ruler to be tranquil, uncontrived, and not showy (*xujing, wuwei, er wuxian* 虛靜, 無為, 而無見), all clearly Daoist virtues.

These nine fragmented texts both add to the common corpus of early Daoist literature and reinforce the picture of Daoism bequeathed us by Sima Tan and Liu Xin. The *Guanyinzi* and *Zhengzhangzhe* both emphasize tranquility (*jing* 靜); the *Laolaizi* and *Huangdi ming* both advise against too much talking; and the *Tianzi* values equanimity (*jun* 均/*qi* 齊): all of these virtues are also found in the *Laozi*.

Perhaps the most interesting addition to the Daoist vocabulary comes from the *Guanyinzi*. Since it comes from *Zhuangzi* 19, it is nothing new to those familiar with the latter text, but I nevertheless think it bears repeating. He says, "Do not develop (only) the heavenly of being human, but develop the heavenly of Heaven (too). Developing the heavenly empowers life, while developing (only) the human harms life. Do not reject the heavenly, but do not neglect the human either—then people will draw near to what is true" (cf. Ziporyn 2009, 78). This means, do not rely solely on your conscious will to follow your natural destiny;²⁸ remember to also tap into your originally good nature in order to accord with its creative spontaneity. If you rely on your originally good nature, then true virtue will effortlessly arise within you, but if you rely only on your knowledge and will, then your life will be impoverished. Always keep a connection to your originally good nature, but also develop your knowledge and will: in this way, everyone will come closer to the ideal union of poetic inspiration and prosaic deliberation.

The phrase "develop the heavenly of Heaven" is striking and unique. Guo Xiang glosses this as "to know without deliberation" (*bulü erzhi* 不慮而知), which I take to mean being open to creative spontaneity. This is at the center of the Daoist critique of Ruism: it may be a good thing to specifically articulate the way of sages so that we may follow in their footsteps, to an extent. But it is also absolutely crucial that we allow ourselves to be open to wherever it is that inspiration comes from, to have the freedom to follow the unintentional, the extemporaneous, the unself-conscious. Since no one really knows where artistic inspiration comes from, we might as well use the metaphor of "Heaven."²⁹ Only then can we become sagely ourselves, and not mere imitators of other

²⁸ Destiny should not be confused with fate: destiny refers to individual potential while fate refers to unavoidable circumstance. You can fail your destiny through laziness or a failure of will, but you cannot "fail" your fate.

²⁹ The adjectival "heavenly" of both humans and Heaven refers to here to "what is best in," much as "spiritous" (*shen* 神) in early Chinese texts can sometimes mean "acute" or "in the early stages of" something. Daoist Heaven is not a supernatural entity, but rather the active half of the heaven-earth dyad of which the cosmos—from our vantage point—is composed. One might also translate "heaven" as "nature" if one has a positive view of the natural world: "develop the natural within Nature...."

people. After all, destiny and fate vary from person to person, so self-cultivation is necessarily a singular process.

Conclusion

The picture of Daoism painted above is, I think, relatively straightforward. Yet it has been attacked on three fronts. First, its historicity has been denied by scholars who, in my opinion, have a too-narrow definition of “school of thought.” My defense of it as a school (of thought), such as it is—since my argument rests solely on the perceived semantic range of the word “school”—I have already given above. A second problem arises from the fact that other terms related to Daoism came, over time, to accrue many other meanings, such as the Huang-Lao theory of government prevalent in the Han. A final problem comes from the religious (and scholars of religion), who often incorrectly construe early Daoism as simply an amorphous and inconsequential nonentity upon which later believers constructed their divine confabulations.

H. G. Creel describes how philosophical and religious Daoism might have been conflated in the first place: “The immortality cult needed the shelter of a respected philosophy. Taoism was highly respected in Han times, and many of the sayings attributed to Lao Tzu were so ambiguous that they could be interpreted to mean almost anything” (1970, 20). This may have been construed as inflammatory by some. Laurence Thompson problematizes Creel’s description of religious Daoism as simply “immortality” (*xian* 仙) Daoism, acknowledging the complex range of beliefs and rituals old and new, borrowed and indigenous. However, Thompson also repeats a sentiment that was becoming popular among Western scholars of religious Daoism. He notes: “When Creel opines that Taoist philosophy and Taoist religion are two different animals, he is using Western categories to reduce Chinese phenomena to intelligibility” (1993, 19). This is only half true: the categories of *daojia* and *daojiao* are Chinese categories, while the nomenclature of “philosophical Daoism” and “religious Daoism” are Western. Thompson subsequently asserts that *daojiao*/religious Daoism is really the same as *daojia*/philosophical Daoism, insofar as “Once we see that transcendence of death is logically transcendence of those unnatural obstacles that impede the operations of Tao, the apparently irreconcilable conflict between calm acceptance and techniques of avoidance is resolved” (1993,

21). Not quite. This is like claiming that eating a healthy diet is the same as cryogenically freezing yourself so that someday in the future, once science has figured out how to extend life quite beyond its normal limits, you can be thawed out to take advantage of the new techniques. Furthermore, the differences between philosophical and religious Daoism are far more numerous than mere longevity.

Many other Western scholars of Daoist religions have similarly tried to erase the obvious line between philosophical and religious Daoism.³⁰ Robinet (1997, 3) notes that "this division has no significance." Kirkland (1997, 73) says, "The concept of 'philosophical Taoism' is, to a large extent, a modern fiction...."³¹ Raz (2012, 7) insists that "the use of these terms creates a false dichotomy between two types of texts...." Komjathy (2013, 4) finds the division "wholly inaccurate and untenable."³² Inasmuch as I have never met a philosopher or sinologist, Chinese or Western, who would agree with this claim, this matter may well be a case, within Western academia, of "if all you have is a hammer, everything looks like a nail."³³ That is, if one works in a Religion department, then "Daoism" is *daojiao*, but if one works in a Philosophy department, "Dao-

³⁰ Many, but certainly not all. For accounts that acknowledge the difference between philosophical and religious Daoism, see Bokenkamp 1997, 10-13, and Kohn 2000, xxix (though she prefers a six-stage classification scheme; see p. xxx). Elsewhere (Kohn 2009), she tries to elide the differences into a single narrative.

³¹ He also says that "most scholars who have seriously studied Taoism, both in Asia and the West, have finally abandoned the simplistic dichotomy of *tao-chia* and *tao-chiao*—'philosophical Taoism' and 'religious Taoism'" (2004, 2).

³² He further says that the claim of "two Daoisms"—that is, the referents of *daojia* and *daojiao*, in use for millennia and still current today among all Chinese speakers—are somehow "Victorian," "rooted in colonialist legacies," "endemic among non-specialist accounts of Daoism," and "should be taken *ipso facto* as inaccuracy" (2013, 4-5).

³³ Philosophers like Roger Ames, Hans-Georg Moeller, and Steve Coutinho routinely refer to the distinction between philosophical and religious Daoism. See Ames 1998, 1; Moeller 2006, ix; Coutinho 2014, 7. The latter says, "It is clear that the syncretist metapolitical movement to which Sima Tan belonged, *daojia*, and the religious institutions known as *daojiao* are significantly different."

ism" is *dao**jia*. This situation makes us look like we scholars of early China are talking past each other, which does a disservice to our students.³⁴

I presume the denial of the independent existence of philosophical Daoism came about due to anthropologists of religion coming to accept the biases of the people they study, with a resultant loss of "outsider" objectivity. A religious Daoist, ancient or modern, may well claim that philosophical Daoism was just a building block in the foundation of the complex group of edifices that make up religious Daoism. That is, they may claim that they *own* philosophical Daoism. But religions appropriate things all the time. Christianity and Islam both appropriate Judaism, and both see themselves as building upon the ("incomplete") foundation of Judaism. But that does not mean that Judaism was never an entity unto itself. Similarly, though philosophical Daoism does not have official spokespeople to come to its defense, it is simply incorrect to deny its very existence. I understand that religious Daoism has suffered ridicule at the hands of scholars who preferred philosophical Daoism to religious Daoism. I also understand that religious Daoism covers a variety of complex entities. It is also true that philosophical and religious Daoism share an interest in meditation (or at least mental concentration) and health—as do many traditions in the ancient world. However, these considerations are beside the point: the differences simply vastly outweigh the similarities. Religious Daoism has anthropomorphic gods, ordained priests, temples, liturgies, community rituals, talismans, ideas of sin, confession, forgiveness... in short, all of the things that make it religious. Philosophical Daoism has *none* of these.

I wrote this paper to bring focus to philosophical Daoism, which seems to be in danger of fading away in Western academia as a subject of inquiry. Most philosophy departments do not deal in non-Western philosophy and most Religion departments focus on religious Daoism. Some sinologists claim that since we have no evidence of a group of people, with a teacher-student lineage, who self-identified as "philosophical Daoists," we should not speak of a "Daoist school." I contend that early China had a great many scholars and authors (see Fischer

³⁴ Russell Kirkland says as much in his section of the "Introduction" to the *Daoism Handbook* (Kohn 2000, xv). Yet he too insists that the position taken in this paper is "of the deeply distorted Victorian/Confucian construct." I hope the evidence shows that my analysis is neither Victorian nor Confucian.

2008), some of whom were teachers with students. When people like Sima Tan and Liu Xin decided to organize and classify the texts these scholars and authors produced, they were justified in creating a (retrospective) Daoist school of thought based on ideological similarities. They coherently defined and gave thirty-seven textual exemplars of this entity.

I further think that the English phrase "school of thought" is a quite adequate and useful description of this group of authors, editors, texts, and transmitters, a school of thought that, while perhaps not officially organized, has persisted in China, East Asia, and the world and remains an intellectually interesting and aesthetically powerful philosophy.³⁵

Recently, some religious scholars have sought to delegitimize philosophical Daoism. But the salient facts remain. Despite the unfortunate matter of the singularity of the Western word "Daoism," there has always only ever been *daojia* and, later, *daojiao(s)*.³⁶ Perhaps someday scholars will settle on translations for these terms that are more amenable to scholars of philosophy and religion alike. As I opined above, "early Daoism" and "classical Daoism" rely on a time scheme that assumes *daojia* died when *daojiao* was born, which is incorrect, inasmuch as even today one might refer to a painting or poem or political viewpoint as "Daoist," where the referent is decidedly philosophical Daoism and not religious Daoism. More importantly, the texts and traditions these two terms denote are far more different than they are the same. To be sure, Religious Daoists do make use of the philosophical Daoist texts, appro-

³⁵ One of the best places to encounter scholars interested in philosophical Daoism is in the pages of the Chinese journal *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 道家文化研究, in print since 1992. This journal, which routinely employs the distinction between *daojia* and *daojiao*, recently had an issue (#22) devoted to philosophical Daoism and modern life (*daojia yu xiandai shenghuo* 道家與現代生活).

³⁶ These two terms have not always been used with perfect clarity and consistency in Chinese history, but their semantic parameters were generally apparent in early times and are perfectly clear in modern Chinese. Sivin 1978, 305 briefly discusses some of the problems that these terms caused across the intervening two millennia. Regarding my use of the word "later," Schipper says "During the same period of the Han [i.e., the same period as Sima Qian's use of *daojia*], we also find the name *Tao-chiao* [i.e., *daojiao*], 'Taoist teaching,' to refer to the Mysteries" (1993, 219n.16). He does not cite his source(s) for this claim, so I do not know what he is referring to. The "(s)" is to highlight the fact that there are at least a dozen kinds of religious Daoisms (not unlike other major religions).

priating parts of it for their own ends. But the textual metaphors often point to very different referents, much as Jews and Christians think very different things when they read about the “suffering servant.” Religious Daoism has several well-defined schools, multiple heavens inhabited by various pantheons of gods and goddesses (some of whom “resonate” with the bodily organs of their human adepts), revealed scriptures, secret rituals, alchemical potions, faith-healing, exorcisms, various and sundry magical abilities (which usually do not appear to be construed metaphorically), and hundreds of rules. Philosophical Daoism, again, has none of these.

Philosophical Daoism is a philosophy of remaining calm yet focused, of keeping an open and pure mind, of prizing humility, tranquility, equanimity, contentment, and silence. Most importantly, it is about acting with grace, flexibility, perseverance, and skillfulness in response to an ever-changing environment, and about harmonizing the yin and yang of the “heavenly” and the human, of integrating the mysterious spark of creativity with the hard work of rational analysis. This Daoism is often summarized as “the harmonization of the heavenly and the human into a unity” (*tian ren he yi* 天人合一). It is not a harmony of the human with the divine (as with religion) or of humans among themselves (as with humanisms such as Daoism’s sibling rival, Ruism), but rather of the human individual with the natural world, which remains, somehow, the matrix for uncontrived inspiration. This definition, this coherent and interesting worldview, provides philosophical Daoism the intellectual matrix within and behind the historical reality of its textual corpus.

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