

# Towards a Transpersonal Psychology of Daoism: Definitions, Past Research, and Future Directions

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This paper is aimed at facilitating the study of Daoism, a collection of Chinese philosophical beliefs and psychospiritual practices with a history of thousands of years and a living community that stretches throughout East Asia, from a transpersonal psychology perspective. Transpersonal psychologists who wish to embark upon a study of Daoist phenomena must first be cognizant of the often nebulous parameters of the Daoist field of inquiry. Therefore, an overview is offered of the two primary Daoist informational sources: the living Daoist tradition as represented predominantly by the *Quanzhen* and *Tianshi* traditions, and textual sources in collections such as the *Daozang* and the *Zangwai Daoshu*. Some critical issues are highlighted, such as the fact that transpersonal psychologists need to be mindful of various inherent difficulties associated with the study of Daoism (e.g., problems interpreting allegorical and even deliberately encoded texts in the absence of the necessary oral transmissions). Finally, a number of avenues for future research are put forward in the interest of facilitating the transpersonal study of Daoism.

## Introduction

In recent years, there has been a growing interest in the West in psychological theory and practice developed outside of the domain of Western psychology. Buddhism, for example, has received a great deal of attention in this regard, with a plethora of papers published in psychological journals (see De Silva, 2001). However, one area that has been neglected by Western psychology, despite its apparent potential, is Daoism (also, Taoism). Daoists, like the Buddhists, have produced sophisticated methods of psychospiritual cultivation aimed at developing the practitioner to an ostensibly elevated mental and spiritual state of being (see e.g., Kohn, 1989, 2008a, 2008b). Furthermore, Daoism also includes coinciding methods designed to enhance physical health and wellbeing (see e.g., Engelhardt, 2000). Scientific study of the benefits of these physiological practices is in its infancy, but the field is expanding and results to date are quite promising (Chen, 2004; Sancier, 1996). Daoism also has an alternative theoretical basis to Buddhism and other non-Western psychologies such as *Advaita Vedanta* that have been studied by Western psychologists to date, and may therefore offer valuable new perspectives regarding non-Western modes of thinking concerning the philosophy of mind and spirituality. In addition, millions of Chinese, Koreans, and others consider themselves to

be Daoist, at least in part, and Daoism is in many ways a fundamental background to the Chinese way of thought (Nisbett, 2003). The psychological study of Daoism may therefore contribute to a greater understanding of the Chinese cultural milieu in particular and cross-cultural psychology in general. These points provide adequate rationale to grant Daoism a more prominent place in the field of psychological science than it has enjoyed to date.

Given that Daoist practices are often associated with ostensibly trans-egoic experiences, one might expect transpersonal psychologists to be at the forefront of Western science's exploration of Daoism. In his transpersonal psychology textbook, Daniels (2005) proposed two methods aimed at defining transpersonal psychology. The first, or *lengthy way*, is to list a variety of transpersonal phenomena, allowing the lay-individual to gradually develop their own understanding of what exactly constitutes the transpersonal. The second, or *short way*, is to use what Daniels calls the "s" word (i.e., spiritual). In reference to Daniels' lengthy way, one finds that numerous transpersonal phenomena are also found in Daoism. For example, reports of unitive absorption are common in Daoist texts such as the *Zuowanglun*<sup>1</sup> (a classic on meditation by the famous *Shangqing* patriarch Sima Chengzhen; *DZ 1036*<sup>2</sup>; Kohn, 1987). Alternatively,

regarding Daniels' short way, it is perhaps self-evident that much of Daoism may be considered to be spiritual.

Daoist phenomena may also be situated within Grof's (1975, 1988) transpersonal map. Grof developed his cartography to assist in categorizing the variety of experiences he witnessed during his research with the hallucinogen LSD and later with holotropic breathwork (a technique Grof developed after LSD was made illegal, which purportedly mimics the effects of LSD; Grof, 1993). Grof's map includes three broad categories of phenomena: (a) phenomena that take place within consensual space-time reality but transcend its normal boundaries; (b) phenomena that take place beyond consensual space-time reality; and (c) phenomena of a psychoid nature, whereby the distinction between mind and matter is transcended (Grof, 1975, 1988, 1993). Reports of examples from each of these categories may be found in Daoist textual sources. For example, in the closing passages of the *Xing Ming Fa Jue Ming Zhi* (Lu, 1973)<sup>3</sup> one finds that the adept "lets the all-embracing positive spirit leave his bodily form to appear in the world and to perform its work of salvation such as alleviating human sufferings, curing the sick, etc." (p. 174). The preceding experience might be interpreted as a phenomenon that occurs within consensual space-time reality but transcends its normal boundaries. Examples from the second category include reports of travels to heavenly realms and interactions with gods and spirits. These are common in *Shangqing* (see below) texts such as the *Shangqing taishang dijun jiuzhen zhongjing* (DZ 1376) and the *Shangqing jingque dijun wudou sanyi tujue* (DZ 765; Wong, 1997). Finally, an example of reference to psychoid phenomena can be found in Zhang Sanfeng's (the legendary creator of *Taijiquan* or Tai Chi) commentary on Lu Dongbin's *Baizi Bei*,<sup>4</sup> where he stated regarding completion of the final stages of practice, "You see for myriad miles and have the subtle psychic faculties available to complete human beings" (Cleary, 1991b, p. 191).

It may also be observed that various Daoist phenomena appear consistent with the key definitional elements of the term, transpersonal psychology. For example, Hartelius, Caplan, and Rardin (2007) conducted a thematic analysis of 160 definitions of transpersonal psychology from 1968 through 2002, collected from the published literature and from colleagues within the field. Three themes emerged from their analysis, which broadly capture the fundamental constituents of definitions of transpersonal psychology.

Transpersonal psychology is: (a) beyond-ego, (b) integrative/holistic, and (c) transformative. Examples of how Daoism relates to the first theme can be found in the *Wudao Lu*<sup>5</sup> by the famous *Quanzhen* (see below) patriarch Liu Yiming, where he stated "When inward and outward are illumined, and all is clear, you are one with the light of the sun and moon...the subtle body of a unified spirit, pervading the whole universe" (Cleary, 1988, p. 4). Perhaps the obvious textual example of how Daoism is integrative/holistic is the *Yi Jing* (also, *I Ching*; Book of Changes).<sup>6</sup> In Daoism, the *Yi Jing* is as much a guide to the internal world of individual cultivation as it is a guide to the workings of the external world of society and the cosmos. Indeed, a holistic worldview is not limited to texts such as the *Yi Jing* and its Daoist commentaries, but pervades the entirety of Daoism as a fundamental, underlying principle. In other words, the underlying principles of Daoism relate to all aspects of human psychology and beyond. Similarly, the majority of Daoist praxis is transformative, aiming to progress the adept from an ordinary state of being to an elevated spiritual and mental existence. Textual examples of methods of transformation typical of Daoism can be found in the *Wu Zhen Pian* (a classic on meditation by the *Quanzhen* patriarch Zhang Boduan), in *Xiu Zhen Shi Shu* (DZ 263; Cleary, 1987) and Wei Boyang's *Cantong Qi* (e.g., DZ 1002; Bertschinger, 1994).

Thus, by utilizing the various aforementioned definitions or conceptualisations of transpersonal psychology, it can clearly be seen that Daoism contains a great deal of what might be considered transpersonal phenomena. Despite these obvious points of intersection between Daoism and transpersonal psychology (e.g., a mutual interest in phenomena typically referred to as altered states of consciousness),<sup>7</sup> to date transpersonal psychologists have neglected to investigate Daoism to any significant degree. The majority of published research concerning the relationships between Daoism and Western psychology has been undertaken from within the Jungian analytical and humanistic psychological movements (e.g., Cambray, 2005; Lee, 2003). The humanistic movement in particular, through the work of Rogers and Maslow, has been significantly influenced by Daoist philosophical theory (e.g., Cleary & Shapiro, 1996; Hermsen, 1996). Furthermore, Jenni (1999), a scholar with a sophisticated understanding of both contemporary and historical Chinese society, has pointed to the influence a social background in Daoism and Confucianism has had on the development

of modern psychological theory and practice in China. Similarly, Fujio Tomoda, one of the forefathers of modern psychology in Japan, drew heavily on Daoist philosophy and terminology in his interpretation of client-centred therapy (Hayashi et al., 1998). However, a great deal more work is needed if modern psychology is to gain the full benefits Daoism has to offer, while avoiding the misunderstandings and misinterpretations (see note 8) that have been characteristic of much of the literature to date.

The present paper will begin by providing a summary of what might be considered appropriate source material for the psychological study of Daoism, thereby attempting to define the field of inquiry. This will be followed by a review of past psychological research concerning Daoism, beginning with Jung and analytical psychology, then moving on to humanistic psychology, and finally to more recent empirical studies. Following this review of the literature, various proposals for future research aimed at facilitating the transpersonal psychological study of Daoist phenomena are set forth.

#### **Defining the Field of Inquiry**

Any psychologist, transpersonal or otherwise, who wishes to study Daoism must be aware of the source material from which to draw their data. There are two primary sources of Daoist material potentially amenable to study by the psychological community: (1) the living Daoist tradition; and (2) textual sources such as those included in the *Daozang* (Daoist canon). The purpose of this section is to elucidate these two sources in order to provide a background for those wishing to study Daoism from a psychological perspective.

Despite its 2000 year history, leading up to the present day, and widespread influence on one of the most populous nations on the planet (i.e., China), Daoism is one of the least understood religious and philosophical traditions. However, scholarship in the last 20 years has gone a long way toward addressing this issue, thanks to the contributions of Kirkland (2004), Kohn (2000a), Pregadio (2008a), Robinet (1997), and a multitude of others. Without delving too much into the political, cultural, and academic reasons for the misinformation about Daoism that permeated much of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century scholarship,<sup>8</sup> what is presented here is a brief overview of what might be considered Daoist for the purposes of psychological study.

Daoism is a complex syncretic tradition (i.e., it has absorbed outside elements and ideas, which then became identified with Daoism), that has evolved over

thousands of years within a complex cultural, social, and political climate. The term, Daoism (*Daojia*), was first used in the second century B.C.E. by historians and bibliographers to bring together a collection of writings that they concluded belonged together (Kirkland, 2004). These included the famous *Dao De Jing* (otherwise known as the *Laozi* after its alleged author; e.g., *DZ 664*) and *Zhuangzi* (e.g., *DZ 670*), but it is important to note that these texts were grouped together retrospectively and that there was no coherent Daoist tradition before this time. This is not to say that the *Dao De Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and other early Daoist texts are not related through common themes. Indeed, eminent scholars of Daoism such as Kirkland (2004) and Robinet (1997) have suggested that there may have existed a tradition of mystical and psychospiritual cultivation, which included meditation and other *yangsheng* (nourishing life) techniques found in much later Daoist movements. They have further suggested, giving examples, that references to the techniques common to this tradition can be found in the *Zhuangzi* (e.g., *zuowang*—sitting and forgetting), the *Dao De Jing* (e.g., *baoyi*—embracing unity), the *Neiye* and *Xinshu* sections of the *Guanzi* (e.g., *xiuxin*—cultivating the mind [heart]), and several other texts of around the same period (circa fifth to third century B.C.E.), including works related to the *fangshi* (court magicians) and *wu* (shamans) such as the *Chuci* (Songs of Chu).<sup>9</sup> Thus, while Daoism as a distinct tradition did not exist prior to the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E. to 220 C.E.), texts like the *Dao De Jing* may represent a movement loosely based around a set of beliefs and practices that became the basis for, and indeed permeated much of, what later became known as Daoism.

Over the next 2000 years Daoism continued to develop, producing four relatively distinct movements; *Tianshi*, *Shangqing*, *Lingbao*, and *Quanzhen* Daoism. Two of these (*Tianshi* and *Quanzhen*) continue to exist today. Furthermore, the *Lingbao* school was later subsumed under the *Shangqing* school (Yamada, 2000), which was subsequently subsumed under the *Tianshi* movement (Robinet, 2000); thus the beliefs and practices of all four movements survive today in some form or another.

To give a very cursory overview, *Tianshi* (also, *Wudoumi*, also, *Zhengyi*) was the first institutionalized form of Daoism, emerging during the second century C.E. It places great emphasis on the *Dao De Jing* and the *Tianshi* commentary on it, the *Xiang'er* (approximately half of which survives today thanks to textual fragments uncovered at the *Dunhuang* archaeological site and

reconstructions from quotations in other sources; Kleeman, 2008). *Tianshi* has strong moral and liturgical elements, and individual practice is limited when compared with other Daoist movements (e.g., Chen, 2008; Nickerson, 2000; Robinet, 1997). The second tradition to emerge was *Shangqing*, which began with a series of teachings and texts purportedly revealed toward the end of the fourth century C.E. *Shangqing* practices are largely individual and involve, among other elements, a great deal of visualization and so-called ecstatic journeying, reminiscent of much earlier traditions such as those expressed in the *Chuci* (e.g., Robinet, 2000, 2008).

The *Lingbao* tradition is somewhat more difficult to trace. *Lingbao* texts began to appear around the late fourth century and early fifth century C.E. (possibly as a reaction to *Shangqing*, just as *Shangqing* may have been a reaction to the import of *Tianshi* into southern China). However, some of these were redactions of earlier texts and there existed texts prior to this time with *Lingbao* in their title, such as the *Lingbao Wufu Jing* cited in Ge Hong's (283-343 C.E.) *Baopuzi* (DZ 1185; Bokenkamp, 2008a). *Lingbao* texts borrowed heavily from a wide variety of sources, so much so that they were sometimes accused of plagiarism by Buddhists and even other Daoists, such as the famous *Shangqing* patriarch Tao Hongjing (Bokenkamp, 2008b). Influences on *Lingbao* thought and practice include *fangshi* practices, Han dynasty apocrypha, the tradition of psychospiritual practices and immortality techniques represented by Ge Hong, *Tianshi* and *Shangqing* Daoism, and *Buddhism* (see e.g., Bokenkamp, 2008a; Robinet, 1997; Yamada, 2000). Finally, *Quanzhen* was originated around 1170 by Wang Zhe. *Quanzhen* has a strong tradition of individual practice, in particular *neidan* or internal alchemy (a form of energetic meditation utilizing the terminology of alchemy to describe internal processes), and it was not uncommon for Daoists of other schools to spend time in *Quanzhen* communities in order to gain access to this tradition (e.g., Goossaert, 2008; Yao, 2000).

To facilitate study and understanding of these four main lines of Daoism and their companion texts, Kohn (2000b) suggested a categorical simplification into four main subject areas: philosophy, history and literature, ritual, and practices and techniques. The philosophical element is already largely addressed by scholars such as Graham (1989) and Hansen (1992), and will no doubt continue to be addressed by many more. Similarly, the historical and literary elements of Daoism

are receiving a great deal of attention from scholars such as Kohn (2000a), Kirkland (2004), Robinet (1997) and others. Daoist ritual may be of some interest to psychologists, especially from a social or cross-cultural psychology perspective. However, the area that is likely to be of most interest to transpersonal psychologists is the practices and techniques of Daoism. These practices (and the beliefs upon which they are based), as they are represented in the living tradition of Daoism (i.e., in *Tianshi*, *Quanzhen*, and in some of the smaller yet no less important lines of Daoism that still exist), are perhaps the most valuable source for transpersonal psychologists wishing to engage in a serious study of Daoism.<sup>10</sup>

Aside from this living tradition, one further source of Daoist material is textual data, in particular as represented in the *Daozang*, the Daoist canon.<sup>11</sup> While several Daoist canons have been compiled over the history of Daoism the only one that survives has an extremely convoluted organizational structure, making it difficult to study even for scholars devoted entirely to the task. Fortunately, through the efforts of the Tao-tsang Project, including scholars such as Despeux, Goossaert, Pregadio, Robinet, and Schipper, and culminating in a three volume work edited by Schipper and Verellen (2004), the canon has become somewhat more accessible. Schipper and Verellen re-organized the canon into chronological divisions, which are, in turn, organized into typological classifications, making it much easier to find and relate texts from a certain era, within a certain tradition, regarding a certain topic (e.g., Litanites, of the *Lingbao* tradition, from the Sui, Tang, and Five Dynasties eras). Furthermore, for each text in the received *Daozang*, there is a title in both *pinyin* and Chinese characters, a work number indicating their original order in the *Daozang*, an approximate date, where applicable an author, and an article discussing historical information relating to the text and summarizing its contents.

Needless to say, the majority of the texts present in the *Daozang* have not been translated in full, but Schipper and Verellen (2004) have gone a long way toward opening up the *Daozang* for study. Furthermore, many of the important Daoist texts have been translated and these present a preliminary source of data pending further translations. However, caution must be taken when interpreting textual data relating to Daoism. There is a strong tradition of oral transmission in Daoism, and an equally strong tradition of secrecy. Thus, many Daoist texts are either incomplete or deliberately scrambled in such a way that they cannot be interpreted without

the corresponding oral transmission. This further emphasizes the importance of textual studies being conducted in conjunction with studies of the living tradition of Daoism, as outlined above. The potential difficulty in using textual sources in the study of Daoism from a transpersonal psychology perspective does not negate their usefulness, however they must certainly be approached with appropriate care and caution.

In summary, given the preceding outline of Daoist source material, transpersonal psychologists wishing to study Daoism have two primary sources at their disposal. The first is the living Daoist tradition as represented primarily by the *Quanzhen* and *Tianshi* lineages that exist today. The second is the textual tradition as preserved in the *Daozang* and other smaller collections such as the *Zangwai Daoshu*. The next section will review previous psychological research that has investigated the living Daoist tradition and/or the textual tradition.

### Prior Research

#### Analytical Psychology and the Contribution of Jung

Perhaps the first Western psychologist to attempt a serious study of Daoism was Jung, in his commentary on the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi*<sup>12</sup> (translated as *The Secret of the Golden Flower*; Wilhelm & Jung, 1931/1962), a classical Daoist text translated by Richard Wilhelm. Jung essentially interpreted this text as a commentary on the nature and function of what he deemed to be psychological constructs, namely *hun* and *po* (also, *p'o*). Wilhelm and Jung disagreed to some extent regarding whether *hun* should be translated as *animus* or *logos*. Jung rendered *hun* as *animus* in females and *logos* (i.e., the “masculine clarity of consciousness and reason”; p. 117) in males, and *po* as *anima*, the feminine, emotive aspect of man, unthinking and independent of the conscious mind (Jung & Storr, 1983). It would seem Jung decided to render *hun* differently for males and females because, he suggested, the Chinese neglected to address the “female mind” (Wilhelm & Jung, 1931/1962, p. 117) in any great detail and consequently overlooked the need for such a distinction. Despite considerable evidence to the contrary,<sup>13</sup> if one accepts Jung’s position that Daoists tended to only consider the male mind, then the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* is likely to only be discussing male psychology and so *hun* may be rendered as *logos* and *po* as *anima*.

Jung’s (and Wilhelm’s) decision to render *hun* and *po* as *logos* and *anima*, respectively, was in the current authors’ opinions an error, as from this point

on the terms of Jung’s textual analysis were vis-à-vis set *a priori*. In other words, if Jung were conducting a qualitative analysis of the text, his approach imposed certain limited criteria on the text, rather than allowing the meaning of terms such as *hun* and *po* to be drawn from the text itself. Furthermore, a new translation of the text (Cleary, 1991a) has demonstrated Wilhelm’s translation of the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* not only to be incomplete but, in many places, textually inaccurate. Thus, the use of an inaccurate translation and a constrained qualitative methodological approach, coupled with lacunae in Daoist scholarship prior to the past 20 years or so (see above), led to an inevitably limited interpretation of the text.

Based on the new translation by Cleary (1991a), and facilitated by personal communications with Daoist teachers (e.g., Verdesi, 2008, 2009), the present authors would tentatively interpret the text of the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* as follows: Rather than purely psychological constructs, *hun* and *po* are two of the five souls of some Daoist worldviews, to which Daoists attribute a metaphysical reality (e.g., Pregadio, 2008b). *Hun* facilitates seeing by day and dreaming by night, and thus appears to be related to the conscious experience of something, particularly in relation to visual phenomena. *Po* is the source of emotions and desires and is what binds the self to the physical body and ordinary worldly experience. Interestingly, if one interprets *logos* as essentially relating to consciousness and *anima* as relating to the individual unconscious, then Jung has effectively attributed consciousness to *hun* and unconsciousness to *po*. However, as the text clearly stated, “The lower soul (*po*) functions in association with consciousness, and consciousness develops based on the lower soul” (Cleary, 1991a, p. 14). Of course Jung did not have access to this particular translation, but this passage would seem to suggest that the majority of human psychological experience, under ordinary circumstances, is the domain of the *po*. Indeed, under ordinary circumstances the *po* is allowed to subjugate the *hun*, resulting in the *ordinary mind*, the *conscious spirit*, the *light of consciousness*. What the text compels the reader to do is to invert the position of *hun* and *po*, refine the *hun* and control the *po*. This configuration will, in turn, bring about, rather than the ordinary mind, the *celestial mind*, rather than the conscious spirit, the *original spirit*. This celestial mind is the final goal, and the text associates it with a multitude of lofty spiritual attainments. While this is a rather cursory summary, it would appear that there is certainly room to

correct and expand on Jung's initial interpretation of the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi*.

Following upon Jung's initial work, several authors (e.g., Cambray, 2005; Zabriskie, 2005) have commented on the significance of Daoism to Jung in particular and analytical psychology in general. The primary focus of these authors has been Jung's work with another classical Chinese text, the *Yi Jing*, and its influence on his concept of synchronicity. Jung argued that the *Yi Jing*, a manual for understanding the laws of nature and forecasting the changes they bring about, relied not on causality, but on a principle of *acausal correspondence* between the internal world of the individual and the external world of the cosmos (Jung, 1930). It was this principle, asserted Jung, that led to momentary acausal correlations between the internal and external, an event for which he coined the term synchronicity. Jung contended that this principle was essential to understanding the relationship between the collective unconscious and the external world, in that, through some sort of harmonic resonance it formed an implicit link between the two domains (Coward, 1996). Consequently, it was through understanding this principle of synchronicity that a balance could be found between tendencies toward introversion (or excessive focus on the internal world and, at its extreme, the collective unconscious) and extroversion (or excessive focus on the external world; Coward, 1996). Indeed, Coward has argued that the movement from ego to Self in Jung's psychotherapy could only occur once this balance was achieved.

Undoubtedly, the initial work of Jung paved the way for Western psychologists to learn from the philosophies and religions of the East, and this trend continues today. Shifting focus from analytical psychology to what has been called the third force in psychology, one can see that the humanistic psychologies of Rogers, Maslow, and others seem to be even more closely related to traditional Eastern trends and, in particular, Daoism.

### **Humanistic Psychology**

A prime example of comparisons between humanistic theories and philosophical Daoism can be found in Lee (2003). Lee contrasted humanistic psychology with seven principles of classical Daoist philosophy: *wu wei*<sup>14</sup> or non-interference, allowing nature to take its course and answers to appear of themselves; openness and tolerance; a water personality, water flowing downward to assume the lowest position and yet benefiting all, while its softness is able to overcome even the hardest things (such as stone); high

regard for females and the female principles of softness and receptivity; moderation in all things; concern for the welfare of others and the world; and opposition to war and conflict. Lee contended that sensitivity to these principles will serve to advance modern, Western humanistic psychology and bring it closer to a global, acultural psychology. The contribution of Lee and others like him is certainly a service to Western psychology and may assist in furthering our understanding of the human condition. However, as stated above, the present authors would caution against placing too great an emphasis on a few, early philosophers (e.g., Laozi in the case of Lee, 2003) at the risk of overlooking the rest of Daoism's rich 2500 year history. The principles expounded in texts such as the *Dao De Jing* are without a doubt fundamental to Daoism, but to focus solely on these would result in the oversight of a great deal of valuable philosophical and psychological material.

While Lee (2003) at least provided an adequate treatment of the one Daoist text he focused on (the *Dao De Jing*), others have been less thorough. Rosen and Crouse (2000), for example, contrasted the fundamental theoretical positions of Jung, Erikson, and Maslow with what they understood to be the essential viewpoint of Daoism. While there may initially appear to be considerable similarities between these four perspectives (e.g., movement toward a more integrated self concept), when examined more thoroughly it becomes evident that the similarities between Jung, Erikson, and Maslow's standpoints on the one hand, and Daoism on the other hand, are only present on a superficial level. Indeed, each point of view emphasizes the importance of one becoming a whole and balanced individual. However, the nature of this goal, and the process leading to it, is viewed rather differently within Daoism as compared to the Western approaches, especially when a broader range of Daoist material than the early texts of philosophical Daoism (e.g., *Dao De Jing*, *Zhuangzi*) are taken into consideration.

As an example, an examination of the *Jindan Sibaizi Jie*<sup>15</sup> (Cleary, 1986a) reveals a fundamental distinction between Erikson and Maslow's views of human development and one exemplary Daoist view. In brief, the Daoist conception of human development presented in the *Jindan Sibaizi Jie* consists of seven stages. The first stage is prior to birth, where there is no differentiation of individual aspects of the person, called "primordial, true, unified generative energy" (p. 60). The second stage is that of the infant, where the duality of

primordial (that which is pure) and temporal (that which is conditioned and therefore sullied) first appears, but they are still fundamentally one (the primordial is related to *hun* and the temporal to *po* in the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi*; see above). The third stage is that of the child, in which discrimination and cognition first arise, however the child is still spontaneous and primarily led by the primordial. The fourth stage is the first where discrimination truly begins to take effect, the *artificial* and *acquired* enter into the *original* and *true* and distinctions between *good* and *bad* arise. The fifth stage is where all that confuses the mind takes over, discriminatory awareness arises, the temporal takes control and the primordial is subdued. The sixth stage is the conquest of the primordial by the temporal, the pure by the conditioned, emotions and desires confuse the mind and acquired conditioning rules affairs. In the final stage the mundane gradually increases and original purity gradually decreases, until eventually it is completely exhausted, at which point death ensues. While this is the ordinary condition for humans, the author, Liu Yiming, appears to believe that by practicing their methods people can reverse the process, travel back through the seven stages and reach original, primordial purity (Cleary, 1986). This is distinct from humanistic theories not only in the appearance of the stages described, but in the concept of reversal. Maslow and Erikson put forward progressive, hierarchical models, such as progression from birth, to satisfaction of basic survival needs, social and interpersonal needs, and finally to satisfaction of personal growth and spiritual needs (Maslow, 1968). On the other hand, this particular Daoist model considers movement away from a unified center toward entanglement in the world degenerative, whereas the opposite movement, a return toward unification, is considered positive (Cleary, 1986a). Indeed, the idea of reversal has permeated Daoism from the beginning, as exemplified by the *Dao De Jing* advocating a return to the state of the infant.

Taking a somewhat different approach from Rosen and Crouse (2000), Chang and Page (1991) simply compared Rogers' and Maslow's self-actualized person with the sage of Laozi's Daoism. Unfortunately, as Piechowski (1991) pointed out, Chang and Page (1991) committed the error of assuming that Rogers' fully functioning person and Maslow's self-actualizing person are the same. Furthermore, while Rogers and Maslow may have included Daoist sages as self-actualizers/fully functioning people, Laozi may not have recognized all self-actualizers as sages, so self-actualization cannot

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necessarily be equated with sagehood. Furthermore, there is a great deal of difference between most of Daoist praxis as outlined in texts such as the *Taiyi Jinhua Zongzhi* (Cleary, 1991a), the *Zuowanglun* (Kohn, 1987), or the *Wu Zhen Pian* (Cleary, 1987; e.g., the emphasis on individual practice, and indeed the nature of such practices) and the methods used by Rogers and Maslow (such as the facilitation of others through counselling). Similarly, there are subtle distinctions that may set Daoists apart from other self-actualizers, such as withdrawal from society (not necessary but common in Daoism, as evidenced by the preponderance of Daoist hermits; e.g., Blofeld, 1978). It would therefore seem that, on a more thorough examination, self-actualizers/fully functioning individuals are not synonymous with Daoist sages.

### **Empirical Studies**

To date, the experimental study of the psychology of Daoism has been rather limited, and has primarily been in the form of *qigong* studies. The term *qigong* is used to refer to certain sets of exercises designed to develop and manipulate either the breath, and/or the *qi*, a form of subtle energy (Zhang, 2004). While not solely, or even strictly, Daoist,<sup>16</sup> studies of *qigong* phenomena may inform psychological researchers regarding concepts common to Daoism (e.g., *qi*). One of the major contributors to the study of *qigong* practices is Myeong Soo Lee and his colleagues (Lee et al., 2001; Lee, Kang, Lim, & Lee, 2004; Lee, Rim, & Kang, 2004). While primarily involved in the study of the physiological effects of various *qi* practices, Lee has conducted several studies that included psychological variables. For example, Lee et al. (2001) examined the effects of a Korean *qi* therapy (*ChunSoo* Energy Healing) on anxiety, mood, and several physiological variables such as blood cortisol levels. A *qi* master either conducted *qi* therapy (experimental condition) or mimicked the movements of *qi* therapy without any intent to heal (sham placebo control) on 20 participants. Despite the small sample size, Lee et al. found significant group-by-time interactions (across Pre-intervention, Post 1 [15min], and Post 2 [70min]) for decreases in state anxiety ( $p < .05$ ) and total (negative) mood score ( $p < .01$ ). Utilizing a similar design and the same *qi* therapy, but this time with a repeated-measures design (i.e., participants served as their own controls), Lee, Rim, et al. (2004) found higher levels of satisfaction (vs. dissatisfaction;  $p < .05$ ), relaxation (vs. boredom;  $p < .001$ ), and calmness (vs. excitement;  $p < .001$ ) in experimental vs. sham conditions. One caveat

with between groups designs such as Lee et al. (2001) is that care must be taken to avoid what may be referred to as selection-testing threat. Selection-testing threat occurs when there is a differential effect between conditions in post-test scores due to the effects of the pre-test in and of itself. That is, it is plausible that the pre-test primed the participants in each condition differently. Consequently, it is arguable that observed post-test differences cannot necessarily be attributed to the treatment; the differences could be the result of selection-testing (Trochim, 2006). One way to avoid selection-testing threat would be to include a treatment condition that is administered the pre- and post-test and a treatment condition that is only administered the post-test. If there are no significant differences between the two treatment conditions with regards to the post-test scores, then one may conclude that the results are not attributable to selection-testing (Trochim, 2006).

Lee, Kang, et al. (2004) chose to take a somewhat different approach to that described above. Instead of participants receiving treatment from a *qi* master, they learned a set of practices (from the same school as *ChunSoo* Energy Healing) aimed at self-treatment. A placebo condition was also included, whereby participants learned the same set of exercises taught in the experimental condition, but without any conscious effort to gather or move *qi*. A significant group-by-time interaction was found, whereby anxiety was reduced in the experimental group pre- to post-intervention, but not in the placebo group ( $p < .005$ ). In other words, the practice of Korean *ChunDoSunBup qi* training (but not a similar placebo version) reduced anxiety in those practicing it. As with the study mentioned above, Lee and colleagues' design does not control for selection-testing threat.

Johansson et al. (2008) also examined the effects of self-treatment. However, this study investigated a different practice referred to as *Jichu Gong*. Johansson, Hassmén, and Jouper (2008) found significant group-by-time reductions in anxiety ( $p < .01$ ), depression ( $p < .005$ ), anger ( $p < .0005$ ), and fatigue ( $p < .0005$ ). However, this study was considerably less sophisticated than that by Lee, Kang, et al. (2004), lacking, for example, a placebo condition. That is to say, instead of undertaking an alternative form of physical exercise, the control condition merely sat and watched a lecture, while the treatment condition practiced the *Jichu Gong* exercises. Furthermore, the participants in the study were self-selected, so one must be careful in interpreting these

results due to the possibility of extraneous influences on the data (e.g., bias due to vested interest in supporting the efficacy of the school to which participants belong).

In another study (Jouper, Hassmén, & Johansson, 2006), a self-report questionnaire was administered to ascertain whether *qigong* practice was associated with improved health. Positive correlations were found between the current level of perceived health and the number of *qigong* courses completed ( $p < .05$ ), level of concentration ( $p < .01$ ), the length of each *qigong* session ( $p < .01$ ), and years of practice ( $p < .05$ ). However, as participants were self-selected and every variable was self-rated on a send-home questionnaire (including current health level, concentration, etc.), there is a possibility of bias acting on participants' responses. For example, participants who have invested more time, money, and energy into their *qigong* practice may be more inclined, albeit unconsciously, to respond in the positive, regardless of actual outcomes.

Another study that warrants mentioning, as its author describes their study with references to Daoism, is a phenomenological analysis of *authentic experiences* by Rahilly (1993). However, while Rahilly proposed that authentic experiences may be fostered by the theory and praxis of Daoism, among other things, there is no theoretical or empirical basis for supposing that the authentic experiences of her participants/co-researchers (members of a psychotherapist training group) are in any way related to the authentic experiences of Daoist practitioners and those described in the extant Daoist literature. As such, Rahilly's analysis unfortunately cannot contribute a great deal to an understanding of Daoism and the results of its practices.

It should be clear from the preceding review that there is a paucity of psychological research into Daoism. The following section will provide suggestions for transpersonal psychologists who wish to study Daoism. Various first principles will be outlined and, subsequently, recommendations for future transpersonally-orientated studies will be provided.

### Future Directions

#### First Principles

To begin a thorough examination of the psychology and praxis of Daoism, several first principles must be established. Primary among these is the determination of what exactly is meant by the term Daoism. As indicated above, until very recently the majority of Western scholars, psychologist and otherwise, have focused primarily on a few early texts

(e.g., *Dao De Jing*, *Zhuangzi*) and dismissed the rest of Daoism as superstition and fortune telling (Kirkland, 2004). While this may be true for some aspects of Daoism, it is certainly not the case for all of the past 2000 years of Daoist history. Despite this unfortunate treatment, in recent years several scholars have begun to reverse this trend (e.g., Kohn, 2000a; Robinet, 1997). The *Defining the Field of Inquiry* section above might be considered a preliminary step towards facilitating an understanding of what constitutes appropriate material for the psychological study of Daoism.

Another area that requires attention is linguistic concerns and the clarification of terms. Obviously, the majority of material relating to Daoism originated from Chinese language sources. Therefore, caution is required when discussing Chinese terms; as much detail should be provided as is practical, and wherever possible, the original Chinese and a romanization (that is, the writing of Chinese words in roman characters that can be read and pronounced by Western readers) should also be included to allow for cross-referencing. This should hopefully help to avoid the confusion that sometimes arises as a result of multiple English translations being used for the same Chinese word. Researchers new to Chinese studies should also be aware that there is more than one method of the romanization of Chinese words. For example, *Lü Dongbin* and *Lu Tung-Pin* are different renderings of the same name, using the two most common forms of romanization; *pinyin* (mainland China) and Wade-Giles (Taiwan), respectively. It is easy to see how a scholar reading two different texts in which these names appeared may mistakenly believe they were discussing two distinct people, and this is by no means a unique example. Thus, care must be taken in this regard as well.

After considering the preceding limitations, transpersonal psychologists wishing to study Daoist phenomena must formulate appropriate methodologies. The following section offers several suggestions for research designs that might be used in future transpersonally-orientated empirical studies.

### **Suggestions for Empirical Research**

There are numerous avenues for future research concerning Daoism that may interest psychological researchers in general and transpersonal psychologists in particular. For example, the study of Daoist notions of selfhood and identity may have a good deal to offer to transpersonal psychology. Ho (1995) made a comparison of Eastern and Western theories of selfhood

and identity, including philosophical Daoist theories as expressed in the *Dao De Jing* and *Zhuangzi*. An empirical extension of this work would be welcomed by transpersonal psychologists. Indeed, notions of selfhood in Daoism typically display a distinct transpersonal orientation, given that the self is intrinsically relational in nature. That is, self is largely defined by other, and the epitome of self-realization in Daoism could be said to be a dissolution of self into the cosmos as a whole, or Dao. One quantitative instrument that may be of use in this regard is Friedman's (1983) *Self-Expansiveness Level Form* (SELF). The SELF purports to measure the integration of the individual's self-concept in regards to both a spatial (here) and a temporal (now) dimension. Thus, it appears to measure how much an individual's experience of self is expanded across space and time. The SELF can purportedly measure this experience quantitatively and, thus, distinguish between a localized experience of self (i.e., existing solely in the here and now), and an experience that transcends the individual's temporal and/or spatial location (Pappas & Friedman, 2007). Thus, this instrument may provide useful information regarding the experience of transcending the ordinary temporal and spatial locale of the self during certain Daoist meditative practices relative to a control condition.

Another area that may be of interest to transpersonal psychologists is the phenomenological effects of Daoist practices. One Daoist cognitive state that may be of particular interest is *jing*. *Jing* refers to a state of profound stillness and tranquility, wherein various psychological transformations are said to take place. *Jing* appears in the *Dao De Jing* in passages such as, "Take emptiness to the limit; Maintain tranquility (*jing*) in the center" (Henricks, 1989, p. 68). Another very early text also attributes special importance to *jing*. The *Neiye* was written around the same time as the *Dao De Jing* and is one of the first texts to mention elements that would become pivotal to later Daoist psychospiritual cultivation (e.g., the three treasures: *jing* [a different *jing* than the *jing* of tranquility], *qi*, and *shen*; also, body, heart, and thought; Roth, 1999). The importance of *jing* in the *Neiye* can be seen in passages such as, "Cultivate your mind, make your thoughts tranquil (*jing*), and the Way can thereby be attained" (Roth, 1999, p. 54), and "For the heavens, the ruling principle is to be aligned. For the earth, the ruling principle is to be level. For human beings, the ruling principle is to be tranquil (*jing*)" (p. 58).

Just as *jing* appears in some of the earliest texts related to Daoism, it also appears in some of the most recent. The *Xing Ming Fa Jue Ming Zhi* was written in 1933 by Daoist master Zhao Bi Chen (Baldrian-Hussein, 2008). In it is the following: “The union of the three elements (*jing* [again, a different *jing* than that of tranquility/serenity], *qi*, and *shen*) into one whole produces the elixir of immortality...When thought is reduced to the state of serenity (*jing*), the three factors mingle into one” (Lu, 1973, p. 30). So, the spiritual goal (as it is expressed in a *Jin Dan* or *Yang Shen* tradition) is achieved through the union of the three, and this in turn is brought about by a state of *jing*. Hence, *jing* is a pivotal goal in multiple schools of Daoist thought.

The problem then becomes, what is *jing*, how is it achieved, and how does one study it? It would appear from the above passages that *jing* is a relatively lofty goal, especially if its full realization is, in fact, the realization of the ultimate goal of some Daoist schools. This being the case it is unlikely to be fully manifested in all but a few of the most highly realized Daoist masters. However, a viable alternative may exist. In the Daoist school to which the first author belongs, *jing* is reached through a gradual deepening of an earlier stage, namely *song* (Verdesi, 2008, 2009). *Song* is a state or a process of relaxation, beginning with muscles and tendons and gradually deepening the effect until organs and, ostensibly, eventually even the cells begin to relax. Leading on from this physical relaxation, the mind also begins to relax (indeed in Daoism the body and mind are not as separate as they are in most Western conceptions, so this is a logical progression), resulting in a reduction in spontaneous thought. Eventually, this stilling of the mind results, in turn, in the state of *jing*. Thus, the study of *song* may be a viable alternative to the study of *jing*, at least in the preliminary stages of the transpersonal psychological study of Daoism.

In studying processes such as *song*, researchers might utilize techniques such as phenomenological analysis (e.g., Colaizzi, 1978; Elite, 1998; Giorgi, 1975). While variations in these types of techniques exist, the essential aspects of this type of methodology are qualitative. The researcher analyses a subjective report (usually elicited through a face-to-face interview) of a particular experience in order to extract from it the essential aspects of the experience without compromising the fundamental essence of the subjective report (e.g., Matsu-Pissot, 1998). These extracted themes may then be compared across multiple subjective reports and collated to produce “comprehensive constituent themes,” which

briefly and clearly summarise the essential aspects relating to a particular experience (e.g., *song*; Elite, 1998).

Alternatively, quantitative methodology could be employed. For example, an experimental methodology could be designed whereby a 53-item retrospective quantitative phenomenological assessment instrument called the *Phenomenology of Consciousness Inventory* (PCI), could be administered to “operationally define, map, and diagram” (Pekala, 1985, p. 207) the phenomenological effects of a particular Daoist practice versus a control condition (e.g., sitting quietly with one’s eyes open). This data could be used in a variety of ways, such as allowing one to quantitatively assess whether Daoist practices induce phenomena typically referred to as altered states of consciousness. Furthermore, the PCI could be used to quantitatively assess various practices commonly grouped under a single label, such as *qigong*, to ascertain whether these practices do indeed induce similar or quite distinct phenomenological effects.

Complementary mixed-method approaches may also prove advantageous, whereby qualitative data informs the interpretation of quantitative data, and vice-versa (i.e., the two forms of data are triangulated in order to reach a more accurate description of events). For example, a qualitative phenomenological analysis of a Daoist meditation practice could be paired with the PCI (Pekala, 1991) or the Abnormer Psychischer Zustand (APZ; altered states of consciousness) questionnaire (Dittrich, 1998). The essential aspects of a particular Daoist meditation experience that the PCI or APZ fails to tap may be captured by semi-structured interviews, and vice-versa. By triangulating these methods, one may be able to generate a more comprehensive understanding of Daoist meditative experiences.

Utilizing this methodology, various Daoist practices could be compared with other psychological and mindfulness practices (e.g. mindfulness meditation) regarding variables such as positive and negative mood states. The mediating influence of various personality traits (e.g., openness to experience, thinness vs. thickness of mental boundaries, transliminality) on the effects of different Daoist practices could also be examined. Such research might be crucial in identifying which personality types are most likely to gain therapeutic benefit from Daoist practices and are, thus, ideal candidates for Daoist training.

It may also be edifying to examine the development of the individual utilizing Daoist practices. Longitudinal examinations of different stages of, for

example, Daoist meditation practices may prove useful in this regard. Alternatively, cross-sectional designs, whereby individuals at different levels of the practice are compared, could be utilized. Again, qualitative analyses such as phenomenological analysis could be employed, as could quantitative tools such as the PCI, the APZ, and measures for anxiety, subjective well-being, and so on.

### Conclusion

It should be clear from this review that Daoism contains a great deal of material that may be considered transpersonal. The present authors argued that transpersonal psychologists wishing to undertake a study of Daoism must first be cognizant of the two primary Daoist informational sources: the living Daoist tradition as represented predominantly by the *Quanzhen* and *Tianshi* traditions, and textual sources in collections such as the *Daozang* and the *Zangwai Daoshu*. Transpersonal psychologists must also be aware of the potential areas of difficulty inherent in the study of Daoism (e.g., linguistic issues such as the need for translations and difficulties in interpreting allegorical and even deliberately encoded texts in the absence of the necessary oral transmissions). Finally, transpersonal psychologists seeking to study Daoism will need to formulate appropriate research methodologies. These might include the use of qualitative methods, such as phenomenological analysis, quantitative instruments such as the PCI, APZ, or SELF, and mixed-methods approaches in both cross-sectional and longitudinal designs.

### Notes

1. Words of Chinese origin, except personal names, are italicized and written using the *pinyin* romanization system.
2. Where possible the working number of classic texts that appear in the *Daozang* (Daoist canon) have been given in accordance with Schipper and Verellen (2004).
3. This text can be found in the *Zangwai Daoshu* (872).
4. Zhang Sanfeng's commentary can be found under the title *Xuan Ji Zhi Jiang*, in *Zhang Sanfeng Xiansheng Quanji, Zangwai Daoshu* (125).
5. This text can also be found in the *Zangwai Daoshu* (268).
6. Text with commentary by *Liu Yiming* can be found under the title *Zhou Yi Chan Zhen* in the *Zangwai Daoshu* (245). A translation can be found in Cleary

(1986b).

7. Following Rock and Krippner (2007a, 2007b), the authors suggest that altered states of consciousness may be more accurately described as altered patterns of phenomenal properties.
8. Perhaps primary among these misunderstandings has been the dismissal of the majority of Daoism as mere religious superstition. Until recently a great many scholars made a distinction between philosophical Daoism as represented by the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, and religious Daoism, meaning the rest of Daoism as it developed over the past 2000 years. Modern scholars (see in particular, Kirkland, 2004; Kohn, 2000a; Pregadio, 2008a; Robinet, 1997) have exposed this as a largely false dichotomy and have begun to show the value of studying Daoism in its entirety, from the earliest texts to modern movements.
9. For a more detailed discussion of the continuities between ancient texts such as the *Dao De Jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Neiye* that suggests a common movement of psychospiritual practices see Robinet (1997). A translation of the *Neiye* can be found in Roth (1999).
10. One classificatory system relating to this practical element of Daoism that the first author has found useful is the *six great paths*. In personal communications with the first author, one Daoist teacher (Verdesi, 2008, 2009) often referred to the *Liu Da Dao* (the six great paths); *Lei Shan Dao*, *Jin Dan Dao*, *Tong Ling Dao*, *Yang Shen Dao*, *Miao Tong Dao*, and *Sha Men Dao*. The *Lei Shan Dao* works predominantly with the manipulation and combination of various forms of *yin* and *yang qi*. The *Jin Dan Dao* refers to the alchemical path, which is split into *waidan* (external alchemy) and *neidan* (internal alchemy). *Waidan* is what is generally understood by the term alchemy, namely, literally attempting to mix different minerals in an attempt to develop *dan* (medicines/elixirs) for a variety of spiritual and physiological goals. *Neidan* uses the terminology of *waidan* (e.g., alchemical ingredients, firing process) to describe internal processes, such as refining and transmuting *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* (the three treasures of the body-mind). *Tong Ling Dao* works primarily with spirits and *Ling* (spiritual essence, something like the Holy Spirit of Christianity) through prayer and incantation. *Yang Shen Dao* focuses on developing the *shen* (one of the three

treasures, a sort of spirit or soul) to higher and higher degrees and manifesting its latent abilities. *Miao Tong Dao*, also sometimes referred to as *Wu Dao* (literally translated as, no path), appears to be closely related, if not identical, to the path elucidated in early texts such as the *Dao De Jing*. It does not work with *jing*, *qi*, *shen*, but simply attempts to lead the practitioner directly to break through to enlightenment. The *Sha Men Dao* is the shamanistic path, ostensibly evolved from, and closely resembling, the practices of the *wu* and *fangshi* of pre-Daoist China. Generally a combination of several of these six paths will exist in any one school, although one will be more dominant than the rest.

11. Of course the received version of the *Daozang* is not exhaustive in regards to ancient texts that may be considered Daoist. For example, any text included in earlier editions of the *Daozang* but absent from the current one, or some texts excavated from archaeological sites that had previously been thought to be lost, such as some of the *Dunhuang* manuscripts, may also arguably be considered Daoist. Similarly, smaller Daoist collections, such as the *Zangwai Daoshu*, should also be consulted.
12. This text can be found in the *Zangwai Daoshu* (131).
13. From the outset, the importance of the feminine in Daoism was made clear. Female and maternal characteristics are held up as desirable and necessary in the *Dao De Jing*. Consequently females have had at least an equal standing in Daoist institutions throughout the history of the tradition. For a discussion of the roles of women in Daoism see Despeux (2000). For a selection of writings attributed to prominent female Daoists see Cleary (1989).
14. There has been a great deal of debate over the meaning of the term *wu wei* in the philosophical and anthropological literature, but *non-interference* is used here as this is the primary meaning Lee (2003) attributed to *wu wei*. Interested readers should refer to Graham and Charles (1989) for a useful introduction to the topic.
15. This commentary on Zhang Boduan's *Jindan Sibaizi* can be found in the *Zangwai Daoshu* (266).
16. Indeed, there is evidence to suggest that the idea of *qigong* is a modern invention, with the same or similar sets of exercises being referred to historically by different names, such as *daoyin* (Palmer, 2007; Zhang, 2004).

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