

Are You an Authentic or a Fake Taoist?

Imperial Temple Lineages

vs.

Wandering Taoists, Chinese & Western

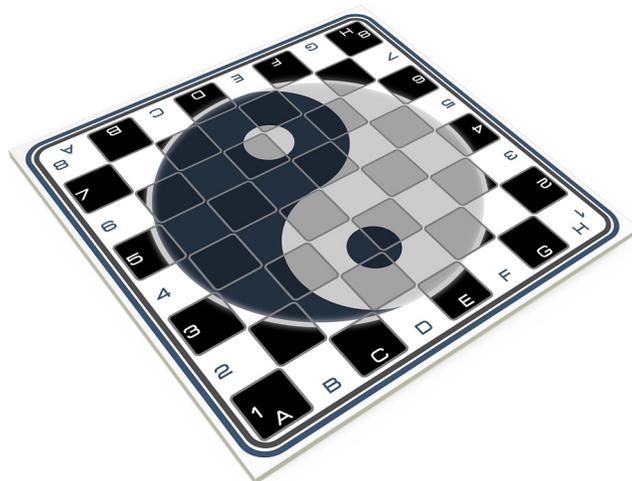
Book review by Michael Winn

Dream Trippers:

Global Daoism and the Predicament of Modern Spirituality

by David Palmer and Elijah Siegler

University Chicago Press 2017



August, 2024.

If you are exploring Tao as a path or have already integrated Taoist principles into your core belief system, *Dream Trippers* (U. Chicago Press, 2017) is mandatory reading. The authors spent 12 years writing this masterpiece. Both are accomplished Western scholars with Chinese wives, bi-racial children, and fluent language skills.

It is so densely packed with riches, some chapters deserves re-reading. Palmer's 2007 book *Qigong Fever: Body, Science, and Utopia in China* is a classic in qigong circles. *Dream Trippers* drills much deeper in ways valuable to Western seekers.

(Note: most Westerners use Wade-Giles "Tao" vs. pinyin "Dao". Pinyin was invented in the 1950's by a Chinese professor who spoke Russian, which is based on Cyrillic alphabet (weird "X" and "Q" words).

I use "Tao", and "Taoist", except in quoting scholars (Tao is pronounced "dow"). Curiously, pinyin "Qi" has overtaken "Chi" in American qigong circles. This essay is written primarily for adepts, not scholars, hence no footnotes. EDU references: see www.academia.edu, a site that post millions of academic papers. You can easily find any EDU paper referenced.

SUMMARY: *Dream Trippers* ("DT") explores how Taoists from different cultures and lineages use Qi theory, and evaluates Chinese and Western claims to authenticity.

DT's brilliant framework contrasts Taoist Qi cosmology with. Western Ego ontology. This allows the reader to examine their unconscious cultural beliefs and how they shape one's spiritual path.

DT authors came on the Mt. Hua (Flower Mountain) portions of four of my China Dream Trips. It's the Taoist "sacred mountain of the West". They recorded interactions between Chinese and Western Taoists, asking tough questions, exposing superficialities. They leave it to the reader to decide who is an authentic Taoist.

DT is a springboard to explore global issues about the Tao of Authenticity. Unfortunately, Westerners are easily fooled into thinking the highly visible uniformed Imperial Temple Taoists in China set the standard for authenticity of all Taoists.

DT reveals it's rare for most monks to ever get ordained. Westerners wrongly assume anyone in a monk or nun outfit is a Taoist priest. They are mostly novitiates, total beginners, no or low training.

There are two major flaws in DT.

DT Flaw #1

One is a bias to favor temple lineages, common amongst Western scholars. They make their living writing books and PhD theses about these well documented lineages.

In the first six chapters, the term "Daoism" refers exclusively to Imperial Temple Taoism. *Dream Trippers* are repeatedly criticized for not studying lineage temple Taoism or including their teachings in their practice.

Only in the final Chapter Seven do the authors admit Westerners are mostly interested in Original Wandering Taoists like Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

They still do a fair job of presenting alternative views, including my own. Most Westerners have no idea that historically there are two vastly different streams of Taoism, original Wandering Taoists and later Imperial Temple Taoists.

Admittedly, it is very hard to do research on Wandering Taoists, apart from a few key early texts. Most early and modern Wandering Taoist leave no trace of their existence.

Most Westerners seek non-group, non-institutional, non-deity Tao meditation, tai chi and qigong. It is exactly what a Healing Tao USA China Dream Trip offers.

The bias in DT is like writing a book about Christianity, and in the last chapter admitting not all believers are Catholic. In fact, there are 45,000. Christian sects globally, each with different beliefs. There is a similar proliferation of Taoist sects.

China's first Tao imperial temple sect arose in 142 c.e. – 600+ years after Lao Tzu. Early Taoist temple sects were designed to compete with Buddhism, which arrived with colorful images, statues, and a temple pantheon of gods.

Quanzhen (“Chuan-jen”), the largest surviving imperial sect. It means “Complete Perfection”. It was launched as a national religion in 1223 c.e. as a medieval amalgam of 25% Taoism, 25% Buddhism, 25% Confucianism, and 25% imperial ownership.

Quanzhen is the most visible public face of Taoism in modern China, but lacks Taoism's original heart essence. I had to train my Dream Trip translator-guides to grasp that we were not the aging, fuddy-duddy temple Taoists they thought only old people visited. They got excited when we brought Wandering Taoist methods to life for them.

DT Flaw #2

DT's other major flaw is to ignore that the daily practice in China on my Dream Trips includes two lineage forms that are not of imperial temple origin. An 850-year old Primordial Tai Chi movement form, and a 2500-year old shamanic Big Dipper Star Stepping qigong.

Dream Trippers respectfully try Imperial Temple methods of worship –attuning to hypnotic chanted liturgy, burning incense, bowing to statues of gods and praying to them for boons.

But, as the leader of more than twenty Dream Trips, I can attest temple methods never replace the energetically more powerful practice of qigong and inner alchemy meditation taught by Healing Tao USA.

Amongst hundreds of Dream Trippers, not one has ever sought to join Quanzhen, nor Celestial Masters Taoism, the two main imperial temple sects.

This review is also an essay that completes what DT did not fully cover. I challenge Imperial Temple lineage claims of superior Tao authenticity by American scholar Louis Komjathy.

Komjathy is a personal friend of both authors, and is favored in DT with an entire Chapter Six, with his full life biography. He uses this pulpit he denigrates me, Prof. Livia Kohn, and all Western Wandering Taoists as fake, self-invented Taoists.

Komjathy refused to let any of the actors in DT read his chapter prior to publication. He did this to prevent critical response. He brazenly admits in DT to being “self-ordained”, not official, i.e. a fake, self-invented Quanzhen priest.

He tries to lessen this fraud with an elaborate two-page rationalization justifying his self-ordination claim. It would not fool any university ethics committee from convicting him of publicly lying for the last 15 years about his credentials as a priest.

Komjathy's website claims he is an ordained priest of the Huashan Quanzhen sect. This is an outright lie, documented in DT. The Huashan sect officials refused to give him any document, bar the equivalent of a “library card”. The card proves only that he is an outsider who studies Quanzhen.

“Priest Komjathy” further destroys any lineage authenticity by breaking major Quanzhen rules strictly enforced in China. He is married, is not monastic, and not sexually celibate. I asked him if he chants Quanzhen’s morning or evening liturgy.

He refused to answer, which is an admission he does not chant their liturgy. If he did, he would proudly advertise it. His wife Kate also falsely claims priestly ordination, as she was present during ChenYuming’s 2-minute transmission in aChengu teahouse.

They’ve reduced the 800-year old state religion to a private family cult, but masquerading as its legally state-ordained American branch. It is this lack of integrity that contributes to the slow death of Quanzhen as a religion – not Western Taoists who wander on their own Way with integrity..

Parts FIVE thru EIGHT are a historical analysis of Quanzhen, its origins as a form of monastic neo-Buddhism, and its failed attempt to prove China’s “Three Teachings Are One”.

Mostly known in the West by its Dragon Gate sect, Quanzhen is certainly an authentic Chinese religion. It was elevated to national status by mass-murderer Genghis Khan in 1223 c.e. to promote his acceptance as invading new emperor of Northern China.

But the authenticity of its partial Taoist identity is wholly dependent on Wandering Taoists. It borrows the principles and meditations laid down by Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Tang to Song dynasty (7 – 12th century) teachers of inner alchemy (neidan), such as Lu Dongbin.

Quanzhen added nothing – no new texts or meditation methods - to what Taoists of earlier centuries had created.

Komjathy wrongly dated a neidan text, The Gold Pass and Jade Lock. He based his Phd thesis on the false assumption the text was written by Quanzhen’s founder. It was written 300 years earlier, invalidated his thesis that Quanzhen is a “novel neidan” Taoist religion.

There is no evidence Quanzhen’s founder Wang Zhe, a recovering-alcoholic and failed military officer, had any Taoist teacher. He made up stories of immortals visiting him and borrowed what he knew from books.

Over the past eight centuries Quanzhen has added no new Taoist spiritual methods nor deep insights into Qi self-cultivation. Quanzhen’s main value?

It has served as a placeholder for “Taoism” in Chinese culture, with its temples as physical evidence of China’s oldest teaching. Specifically, it ironically became a placeholder for inner alchemy, even though its monks taught only very basic methods.

By contrast, prior to religious Taoism, Wandering Taoists used raw Nature as their temple for seeking “Return to Origin”. Today, imperial temples offer a quiet, aesthetic, therapeutic place for urban Chinese who won’t or can’t retire into the wilderness.

An imperial temple lineage may have marketing value to sell “authenticity” to naïve Westerners, but claims that its communist party controlled “lineage Qi” is transferable to the West is spiritual vaporware.

Transmission power is wholly dependent on any teacher’s personal “de” (inner power) and skill, not government lineage. If there are powerful Qi patterns as “souvenirs” left by ancient adept, anybody can focus their intent and tap into them without joining Quanzhen.

Place-holding temples filled with statues in faraway China are of little value to most Westerners seeking authentic Qi cultivation and practical guidance on a modern Tao path.

Chapter Seven of DT belatedly admits the authenticity of the Taoist practices done in China by the Dream Trippers.

Index of Major Topics

SECTION A:

Part ONE

DT's Six Main Actors.

3 Chinese monks, Winn, Komjathy, & Mt. Hua

Part TWO

History of “orthodox” Tao movements in USA and their fraudulent lineage claims.

Seed of DT: Vashon Island conference 2001. Charles Belyea, founder of Orthodox Daoism in America, renounces Tao orthodoxy on his deathbed in 2015. Komjathy, a follower of Belyea, perpetuates a false orthodoxy.

Part THREE

Early Taoist definition of “authentic person” (zhenren).

Can “de” (inner power), key to Tao authenticity in the “Dao De Jing”, be held by a religious institution? Does Western qigong and tai chi cultivate de?

Winn's personal quest for authenticity via Wandering Taoist inner alchemy tradition.

Part FOUR

DT'S Main Thesis:

Taoist Qi cosmology vs. Western Ego ontology as measure of authenticity.

Komjathy as “Tao Fundamentalist”. His dialectic with Winn: Are non-temple Westerners “colonialists” killing true Taoism, or revitalizing it?

Exposing hypocrisy of scholars who denigrate popular Western Taoism, but not the 500 million Chinese popular “folk Taoists”. Scholars as “colonizers” of Imperial Temple Taoism, using it for career advancement.

Winn's Mt. Hua 2012 wedding: was it a real or fake Tao ritual?

SECTION B
(NOT included in this paper)

Part FIVE

Quanzhen's Mission Doomed to Failure:

Why the Three Teachings in China - Taoist, Buddhist & Confucian - will never be "One". Their cosmologies are incompatible, despite centuries of cultural attempts by Quanzhen to merge them.

Part SIX

Imperial Statism. Is mass murderer Genghis Khan (killed 45 million people), the first imperial-owner and popularizer of Quanzhen, a moral stain on its karma?

Ordained priests pledge allegiance to State owner, not to Lao Tzu or Tao. Ordination transmits a family genealogy, not lineage Tao methods. It's decline and precarious status under atheist communist owners.

Part SEVEN

What has Quanzhen contributed to Taoism? Komjathy's discredited PhD theory of it as a "novel neidan religion", his 300-year wrong dating of alleged Quanzhen texts.

Chen Yingning on corruption of body-centered Tao alchemy by emptiness-obsessed Buddhism. Confucian and State hier-archy rule rigidly from above. Tao sphere-archy arises spontaneously from primal space within and below.

Part EIGHT

Quanzhen's outdated medieval precepts and top-down extremism: burning alive head abbot An Shilin and his assistant in 1946 for minor sins highlights temple Taoism lack of moral integrity.

Part NINE

Refuting accusations of popular Western Taoism as a "commodity" vs. Quanzhen as a "religion". How everyday "authentic Taoist religious feeling" in China differs from "joining" a patriarchal Big Box Western religion.

The multi-billion-dollar marketing of Big Box religions and products in the West. Sale of secular Redemptive Society books as its main way to spread Tao methods in 20th century China. Why has Quanzhen failed to spread to Taiwan and the West? Loss of its "imperial commodity" status.

SECTION A

PART ONE

Six Main Actors in Dream Trippers

DT's first chapter may seem a bit academic to lay readers, but lays the conceptual groundwork for understanding the difference between Western ontology and Tao cosmology. Later chapters are filled with juicy personal interviews and insights into various Taoists following their Way, East or West.

The cast of characters in DT involves six identity groups, whose paths all cross on Mt. Hua:

1. Modern Taoist monks of the 13th cen. Complete Perfection Imperial temple sect, aka Quanzhen. They wear a black or white uniform, tie hair in a topknot, and live as monks or nuns in government-owned monastery-temples on Huashan.

DT tracks three monks over 12 years: Chen, Hu, and Hao. Each go different ways. All are personal friends of Michael Winn. One becomes a Wandering Taoist hidden in a big city, one a hermit on a peak facing Huashan, one stays a monk in the Huashan Order.



Monk "Hao", a beautiful soul and dear friend who was arrested for teaching Tao to my Dream Trippers (monastery politics, not a real crime). But he still stayed with Quanzhen.



Monk “Hu” in DT quits Quanzhen to become a hermit living on a mountaintop in a 2000 year old cave-temple dedicated to the Pole Star deity. A dear friend of mine since 1998, the real life Master-Stone-of-Perfection assisted countless Dream Trippers seeking cave solitude.

2. Chinese Wandering Taoists who live hidden amongst the Chinese people. Chen Yuming (his real name) was the Vice Abbot on Huashan who abandoned Quanzhen “to pursue Dao rather than Daoism”.

He’s the major character in DT, as he transitions from Temple Taoist to Wandering Taoist, and knows all the other actors, Chinese and Western. Fake priest Louis Komjathy is his disciple.



Chen Yuming in 2004.

Chen tired of monastery politics and quit to become a Wandering Taoist in 2006. Painting of Wang Zhe (died 1170 at age 58), who inspired a teen age disciple to transform Quanzhen from a band of cave hermits into a national religion fifty years after Wang’s death.

3. Michael Winn & Healing Tao USA adepts of qigong & inner alchemy meditation. Many have decades of Tao practice, and come on Winn’s Dream Trips to Mt. Hua.



Michael Winn, founder, Healing Tao USA. A Wandering Taoist of 44 years (since 1980), teaching internal alchemy & qigong. Wrote Mantak Chia's first seven books, most famously Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy (1984). Founded largest retreat program in West, Healing Tao University, for 20 years (since 1995).

Winn full bio: <https://healingtaousa.com/about-michael-winn/long-bio/>

4. New Age Taoists: Westerners who typically read Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching and taken a tai chi or qigong workshop. Some visit Huashan as "energy tourists" on my Dream Trips.



China Dream Trip group at base of Mt. Hua, by statue of Chen Tuan, patron Tao alchemist of Huashan and "dream practice immortal". Tip of West Peak is visible in distance.

5. Louis Komjathy, ultra-orthodox believer in Quanzhen and author of eight books on Taoism, falsely promoting himself in every book as "an ordained Quanzhen priest".

Taught Asian religion at private Catholic college in San Diego. Was forced to resign in 2019 after he threatened colleagues after he failed to get tenure. Komjathy subsequently taught at University of the Underground, with head offices beneath nightclubs in London and Amsterdam.



Louis Komjathy, Quanzhen scholar and fake ordained priest.

DT reveals Komjathy is merely a “formal disciple” (NOT a priest), the lowest entry level status in Quanzhen. This was granted after staring mystically into his teacher Chen Yuming’s eyes for two minutes in a Chengdu teahouse in 2006. The fact Chen renounced Quanzhen one year earlier makes even his discipleship officially tenuous.

DT points out Quanzhen ordination used to take 3 years, and were famous for brutal tests of physical endurance in which candidates sometimes died. Recently it was reduced to 30 days training in Beijing headquarters.

Despite Komjathy admission in DT of being refused ordination or any legal status by multiple Quanzhen officials, his website www.DaoistFoundation.org still claims he and his wife are “ordained Daoist priests of the Huashan lineage of Quanzhen”.

6. Mt. Hua itself, as a spiritual being.

Flower Mountain, sacred Tao mountain of the West, 72 miles east of Xian, ancient capitol. Has 3000-year history as Taoist pilgrimage site.

Famous for 72 caves carved from solid granite by adepts who were breatharians - no cooking fire or smoke deposits blacken their caves.

More Taoists are said to have achieved “spiritual immortality” on Huashan than any other site in China. Dream Trippers stay in those ancient caves or monasteries, some perched high on Yosemite-like sheer cliffs.



Huashan is the most important and central of all the “actors” in DT. The mountain itself is correctly treated as a living entity with a unique spiritual identity. Its five peaks resemble a 5-petalled flower, the embodiment of Tao Five Elements cosmology.

DT honors a long tradition in China of viewing sacred mountains as portals to higher heavens via sacred grottos leading to inner earth. This cosmology was first codified in Du Guangting’s Heavenly Mountains & Grottoes (Tang Dynasty, 901 c.e).

Mt. Hua as a Live Character in DT

Dream Trippers are repeatedly admonished by DT authors for not studying imperial temple Taoism. It’s true: most do not. Dream Trippers are more focused on experiencing Huashan’s natural Tao essence.

They are Wandering Taoists cultivating non-institutional authenticity. They are friendly and very eager to engage with monks or nuns living on Mt. Hua. But Imperial Temple Taoism itself is merely a cultural curiosity with no direct relevance to their path.

I contend a person’s relationship to the living entity of Flower Mountain is the best standard of “authenticity” amongst the six DT actors.

It reveals if one has transcended the many cultural Taoist identities attracted over the last three thousand years to Mt. Hua. The mountain has the power to connect a serious cultivator directly to higher Qi levels of Tao cosmology.

Hence Mt. Hua’s natural spiritual Qi power is the central focus of my Dream Trips – not the culturally and imperially inspired Temple Taoism perched on the surface crust of the mountain. The Chinese written character for “immortal” is a pictograph of a “man in the mountains”.

China’s identification of Five Sacred Peaks dates back to the 2nd century b.c, as the earthly mirror of the heavenly Five Elements/Phases.

DT references other “sacred mountain” literature, but missed my favorite. Fourth Uncle on the Mountain by my student Marjorie Pivar and shaman Quang Van Nguyen. It describes 20th century Vietnamese Tao immortals who spend decades deep within mountain caves.

North Vietnam used to be a province of China. On a visit to Vietnam I found wood carvers still selling statues of Lao Tzu. Fourth Uncle parallels my view of Huashan as a deep portal to inner Earth. Entering Mt. Hua's deep earth mingmen (Gate of Destiny) is a direct path to Origin. But my passion for Mt. Hua's sacredness is not merely for its well documented role in Chinese history as the place the most Taoists attained spiritual immortality.

In 2001, I spent a week in a Huashan cave without food or water. Vice Abbot Chen Yuming chose the hand-carved "Winter Flower" cave for me. I had to climb 200 feet up a sheer cliff to get to it, clinging to vines and crumbling footholds.

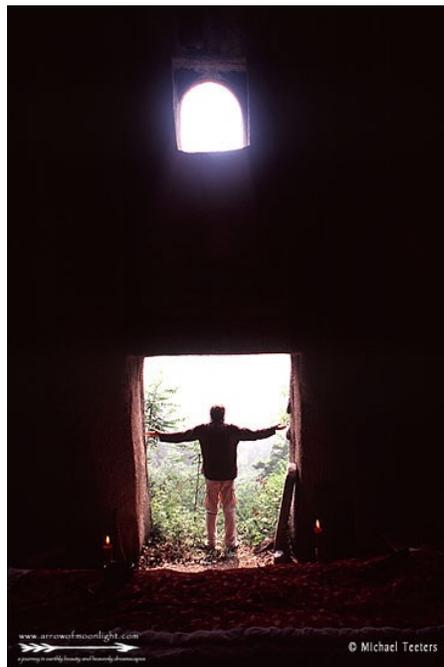
On the first day, as I sat in the mouth of my cave, a luminous bright Yellow Pearl spontaneously appeared before me and entered into my mouth. It went down my throat and into my stomach, where it remained all week.

Its power was obvious – I never got hungry or thirsty. My account of bigu (no food or water fast) in a Huashan cave is one of my deepest writings on Tao cultivation:

https://healingtaousa.com/tao_article/taoist-alchemy-breatharians/

Drone Video of Mt. Hua

For a dramatic aerial drone video of Huashan (12 min.). Watch a few minutes to get a taste of its famous cliffs): https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tg_QDioyFM8



L. Huashan's famous "boardwalk" goes 100 feet across a cliff face (with 3000 ft. drop) to a cave dug into the cliff face. It is unreachable by rope from above. With no wire-chained boardwalk, how did the first Tao adept reach it to dig the cave out of solid granite, a multi-year process? A flying immortal?

R. 2-Story cave, likely used as a temple at some point. Many Dream Trippers staying in caves report visitations from spiritual beings, dragons, and nature spirits.

Question:

Why did DT's authors choose Mt. Hua as the focal point to explore global Taoism?

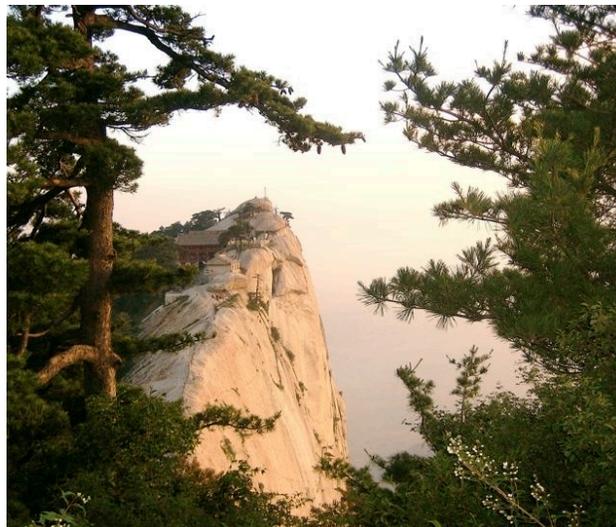
Former vice abbot Chen Yuming captures the special magic of its inter-dimensional grottoes:

“For Master Chen...the Huashan that we can see is only one space of the mountain; it has many other spaces. Because Huashan is such an incredible place, it attracts the attention of many beings, including humans, tourists, animals, and Immortals, as well as ghosts and amazing energies

“There are many spaces in this world, and there are many links and passages between these spaces. There are ways and passages for a person to travel from one space to another space”. – DT, Chen Yuming

It was during a two-week retreat in a Huashan cave in 2006 that Chen Yuming got a message from a Tao immortal that he should leave the Quanzhen order. That it was time to pursue his true path to immortality as a Wandering Taoist.

Dream Tripper's Mystical Experience on Mt. Hua



Many Westerners have intense mystical experiences on the Dream Trips. I attribute it to Huashan's powerful Qi, infused from the many Taoists recorded as achieving spiritual (not physical) immortality there over the last 3000 years.

From a female American Dream Tripper, a “New Age Taoist” that academic Komjathy despises as fake:

“I spent two days at our group's “secret spot” atop Mt. Hua. During Primordial Chi Gung I saw the clouds mystically rise like angels and dragons. I sensed the clouds as dragon breaths. I

stripped naked once, and laid down on the rocks, my spine aligned with the spine of the granite mountain.

“Now I am home in the USA, I still feel my spine aligning with the mountain. I rode a cloud dragon up a spiral to heaven. My wild mind was tamed by the wind washing through me, playful & euphoric.

I thought: THE IMMORTALS ARE THE MOUNTAINS. I saw them through the eyes of the dragon, a bat, and a butterfly. I feel altered forever. I still ride the dragon in my home in the USA”. – DT, female Dream Tripper

Why Can't Westerners on Mt. Hua

Have Authentic Tao Experiences?

Her experience feels authentic to me. Mt. Hua opened up the path to Tao immortality for her. Why is she any different, less authentic, than the countless Chinese pilgrims, painters, and poets who climbed Mt. Hua over the last 3000 years, seeking spiritual inspiration from a sacred mountain?

Yet in DT, Komjathy sees her as a fake, a colonialist who, because she is not wearing a Quanzhen uniform, is ripping off and destroying Temple Taoism.

It brings into sharp focus the question: do imperial lineages control Taoist authenticity, or does Tao itself (separate from culture) determine a person's authenticity?

This woman's experience is especially interesting since Chen Yuming claims that connection to Taoist immortals is key to being an authentic Taoist. Which Komjathy clearly does not have.

DT quotes my experience of meeting a Tao immortal in broad daylight in 1981 that propelled me on a lifetime path of exploring Taoist inner alchemy and qigong. My acceptance of Tao immortals is a strong bond in my friendship with Chen.

Komjathy cannot accept Chen's definition of Tao authenticity, even though Chen is his mentor and initiator into Quanzhen. He has academic blinders on.

In DT Komjathy denounces my wasting time in caves seeking immortals: “better to drink tea in a comfortable monastery and chat with friends”, he says. He is describing himself as a spiritual bore, dumbed down by his petty academic obsessions.

Part TWO

History of Fraud in USA “Orthodox” Tao Lineages Vashon Island Conference 2001: Seed of Dream Trippers Book

Dream Trippers book had its genesis in a 2001 Livia Kohn-organized conference of Daoist Scholars and Adepts on Vashon Island near Seattle. Winn, Elijah Siegler (co-author of DT) and Komjathy were there.

Komjathy dressed up in the blue uniform of a sect called ODA, Orthodox Daoism in America. ODA was created by Charles Belyea, aka Liu Ming, who claimed to be an ordained Celestial Masters lineage temple priest.

Komjathy rooted for Belyea as he viciously insulted the other American Taoists present as “new age wannabe Taoists, but actually wishy-washy Protestants”.

I countered there was no such thing as “Tao orthodoxy”, that every expression of Tao is an experiment. I challenged the “ODA bullies” with a paper “Daoist Alchemy as a Deep Language for Communicating with Nature”.

My paper described One Cloud’s Seven Inner Alchemy Formulas for Immortality that I teach to Westerners. I attribute its origin to Wandering Taoist Lu Dongbin, orally handed down one by one for 1000 years.

Lu Dongbin is widely considered the “patron saint” of Tao inner alchemy, which has principles, but no “orthodoxy”.

My paper was far more detailed and “authentically Taoist” than anything presented by Belyea, who mostly crowed about his 2000-year lineage. He spun colorful tales about his Taiwan Tao teacher who self-combusted his body after 30 years in his cave.

Belyea’s arrival at his Taiwan cave was the signal his teacher could now ascend to immortality. Belyea claimed lab tests (never seen by others) on his ashes revealed substances not found on earth.

My paper was enthusiastically received by the traditional academics. My neidan skills have grown much deeper since 2001. Yet this Vashon paper survives the test of time, comparing neidan’s natural Yin-Yang, 5-phase Qi language to invented human languages, and highlighting unique power of neidan.

Neidan systematically crystallize Yuan Jing-Qi-Shen (= particle-wave-field in quantum language). My notion of “Qi as Nature’s language” presaged a shift by some quantum theorists to see processing of sub-atomic particles as conscious information, i.e. Nature’s meta-language:

“An intrinsic cosmic connectivity is mirrored by Information processing in the human brain of a proposed superfluid background field. Quantum wave information is transferred over long distances into cerebrospinal and inter-neuronal spaces. This guides the ongoing fabric of reality through a quantum meta-language.”

- Dirk K. Meijer. Consciousness in the Universe is Tuned by a ...Superfluid Quantum Code, 2020, EDU

My paper: https://healingtaousa.com/tao_article/daoist-alchemy-as-a-deep-language-for-communicating-with-nature/

ODA Fraud Exposed

A few years after Vashon, Belyea was “outed” as a fraud, having falsely claimed to have 72 Taoist texts he’d received in Taiwan that “authenticated” his lineage and claim to priesthood.

Pressured by a Chinese ODA follower to examine his texts, Belyea suddenly announced he threw all 72 texts into the sea. No one believed his outlandish story. ODA was exposed as a sham, and quickly fell apart.

The irony is that Belyea was actually a very gifted spiritual teacher with many brilliant insights into Taoism. He had the rich imagination of a gifted story teller.

I prophetically told him he should be writing Taoist novels instead of pushing rigid orthodoxy. He had much to offer, and did not need a bogus orthodox lineage story to establish his own authenticity.

But he was spiritually insecure. He did not fully trust his connection to the Tao, and felt the need for fake Chinese credentials. All this foreshadows Komjathy’s story in DT as needing a fake ordination to boost himself spiritually as an ordained Tao priest.

Elijah Siegler went on to publish a thesis on American Taoist priests, revealing nearly all used questionable claims to ordination to market themselves.

DT notes that very few Quanzhen monks in China are actually ordained, yet monks coming to the West usually claim they are priests. They are just novitiates, equivalent to an “altar boy” who is allowed to watch priests conduct rituals.

Belyea changed his name to Lui Ming after leading a trip to China with twenty ODA followers in 1996. Komjathy’s orthodox mentor was guilty of running a “dream trip” of the very kind that he attacks in DT.

After that single trip, Belyea began wearing a Taoist costume – robes, hair in a top knot, Chinese name – all designed to make his orthodox priest story seem plausible.

Komjathy followed Belyea’s script closely to bolster his own fake ordination as a Quanzhen priest, using it to promote his academic career and sell books.

Most of Komjathy’s criticisms of Dream Trippers and Healing Tao USA in DT are a rehash of Belyea’s. I find them both very intelligent and personable, but spiritually insecure. They are guilty of hiding behind the illusion of imperial temple orthodoxy, using Big Religion to inflate their Small personal authority.

Komjathy suffers from an academic illusion that “book information about Taoism” = spiritual mastery. It’s an empty mental fantasy. I read his PhD thesis on neidan. It’s so dry and devoid of life that it’s clear he hasn’t experienced or activated any real inner alchemy process.

He admits he “mostly practices zuowang emptying-the-mind meditation”. Which was adopted by Chan Buddhists as their basic meditation.

Livia Kohn’s Seven Steps to the Tao (1987) is her translation of Sima Chengzhen’s Tang dynasty (8th cen.) classic Zuowang lun that re-popularized the method. Sima says “fasting of the mind” is just the foundation for more advanced neidan methods.

The zuowang method taught by Quanzhen is similar to beginner level zen meditation. It's not ground for claiming greater authenticity than Western Tao practitioners of neidan. For a comparison of zuowang to Healing Tao USA entry level Inner Smile and advanced neidan, see my essay in Journal of Daoist Studies (2009) on different Tao methods of dissolving the heart-mind:

<https://healingtaousa.com/articles/daoist-methods-of-dissolving-the-heart-mind-2/>

Belyea Abandons Tao Orthodoxy on his Death Bed



Charles Belyea, aka Liu Ming, founder of the discredited Orthodox Daoism in America

Charles Belyea passed away from cancer in 2015, at age 67. His story parallels that of Chen Yuming in DT, who abandoned orthodox Quanzhen to become a Wandering Taoist.

Belyea shifted from rigid Tao orthodoxy to become a Wandering Taoist, promoting a philosophy of living life as free-flowing wu wei.

On his deathbed Belyea shared his remarkable 180-degree turnaround, from rigid ultra-orthodox fake to authentic Wandering Taoist, recanting the falsity of the Temple lineage path:

“As radical as this may sound, there is no intrinsic value to religion, sermons, scriptures, prayers or meditation. Only when the great religious systems inspire us to directly engage in overcoming our limitations do we find their value. For Lao tzu, paradox is the sublime teaching. What is profound about being human is that we create AND overcome our dualistic limits.

Wu wei dao suggests we acknowledge and honor that profundity first and then use the heritage of our chosen dao (system/path) to play with our remarkable capacity to “uncreate” dogma and overcome our personal and collective limits. This is classic white shamanism (wu wei dao).

None of us, teacher or student, ever really needs to give or transmit anything to anyone else. We need to simply try our best to be who we are – as openly as possible. It is through this openness to others that we realize the depth and nature of our own experience.

The Dao path is about working with layers of doubt in our tradition. It is not a desperate need for salvation, a means of escaping or even refining or perfecting our experience.

As doubt resolves, through meditation and conduct our plain naturalness that has been there all along invites us to simply continue. Continuing has the connotations of practice but not the strict notions of vows.

The teacher that offers this {transmission} is not an evangelist. It follows no fixed pattern and brings a sense of enormous equality to our experience. It could be a tradition of cobblers, mothers, the dao of shoes, or the dao of loving - all are all Equal Opportunity Paths.”

- Charles Belyea in **Scott Phillip, Profile of American Daoist Charles Belyea, Journal of Daoist Studies, 2016.**

Belyea’s eloquent summary of his life wisdom would serve well as a guide for Western Wandering Taoists so despised by Komjathy and denigrated by other scholars. Komjathy ignored the advice of both his Quanzhen mentor Chen Yuming and his PhD advisor Livia Kohn.

Will it take until his deathbed to accept the lifetime realization of Charles Belyea, his first Imperial Temple lineage teacher?

Part THREE

“De”: Personal Inner Power vs. Big Religion Divine Authority



Tao has its own self-guided, spontaneous order of natural unfolding. The less interference from man-made institutions, the more authentic the human Way, according to Lao Tzu:

The more prohibitions you have,
the less virtuous people will be...
I let go of the law,
and people become honest.
I let go of religion,

and people become serene.

— Tao Te Ching, 57

The Taoist reasoning behind this famous passage is very simple. A key component of authenticity arises from “de” (the “te” in Tao Te Ching).

“De’ is our human “inner power”, or “integrity”, also translated as “soul mission” and ‘virtue’. When we unfold our de, we are living an authentic life, and fulfilling our “mandate from Heaven” (ming).

If we defile it or go against our de, we increase our suffering and separation from Origin, the consequence of living non-authentically and non-spontaneously.

In Early Tao cosmology, there is no hierarchy (pantheon of deities), no external God judging us. We effectively judge ourselves, in each moment. The moment of death becomes an acute moment of Self-Judgement, not judgement by a deity.

We use the degree of harmonic resonance (gan ying) between our personality (xin, heart-mind) and our soul’s “de” as the measure of the authenticity of our worldly destiny.

If we mis-use our “de” to create evil and disharmony, our internal self-judgment will impair our Return to Origin (xing). Return to Origin is the main theme of Lao Tzu.

This is why “demon immortals” are trapped in the low astral plane surrounding earth. The vibrational frequency of their de is too disharmonious to allow them passage to higher dimensions or heavens of Tao.

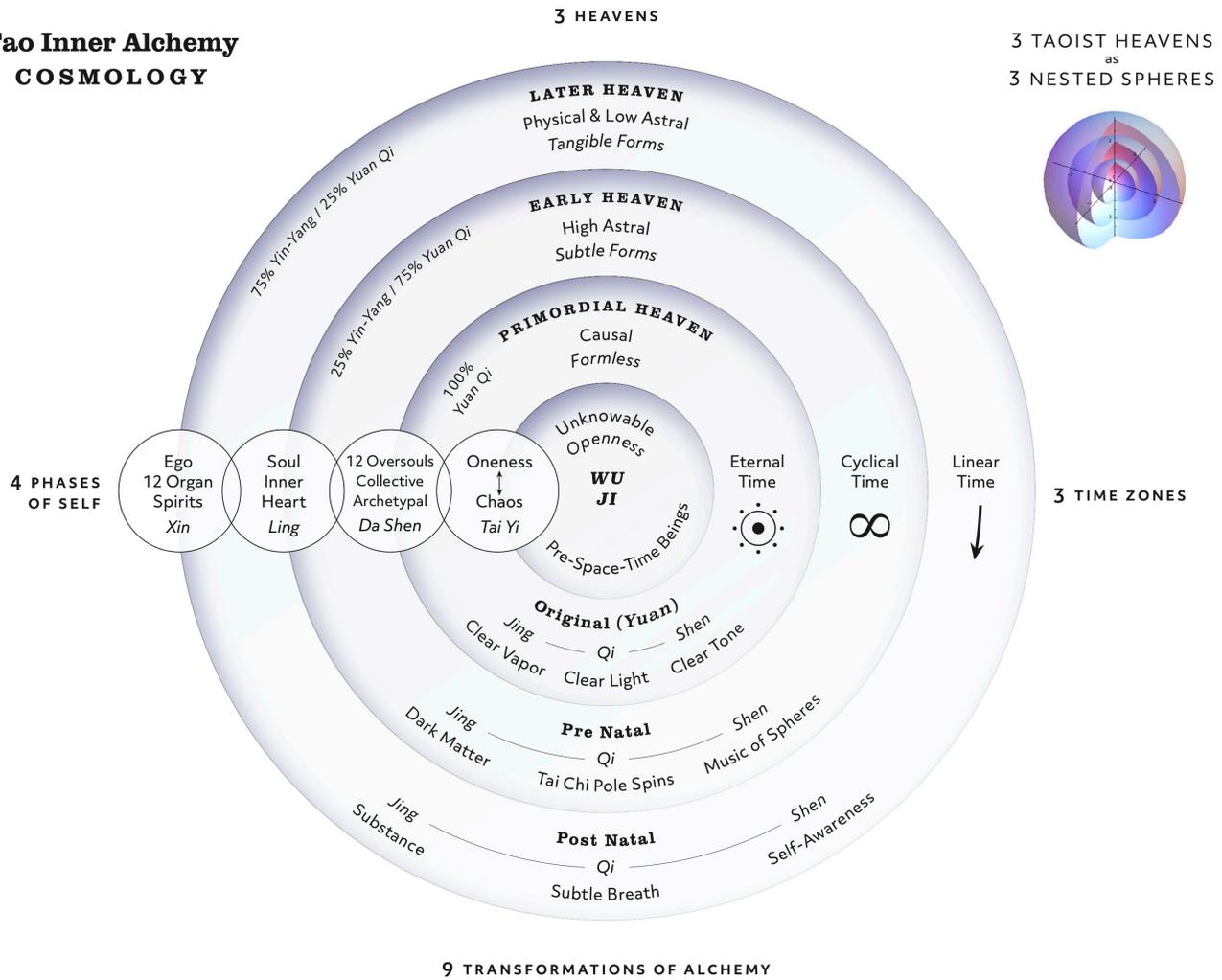
De functions like a “memory chip” within our soul that holds stable in our body-mind the Pure Love – Unity vibration of Great Oneness (taiyi).

De is the substantial (Yuan Jing) aspect of the Original Jing-Qi-Shen trinity within Great Oneness. Jing is our expression of Free Will. Shen and Qi convert into Jing to shape themselves from spirit and energy into substantial form.

De, as our soul’s Original Will (Yuan Jing), acts as a kind of spiritual GPS to help us navigate our entry into Creation. During our life, it sits there as a silent witness as we flounder about trying to figure out who we are. It then guides us on the return journey to Origin.

Thus cultivating de is key to determining our worldly and spiritual authenticity. De is not “fixed”. We can raise or lower its vibration by our behavior and good vs. evil intent.

**Tao Inner Alchemy
COSMOLOGY**



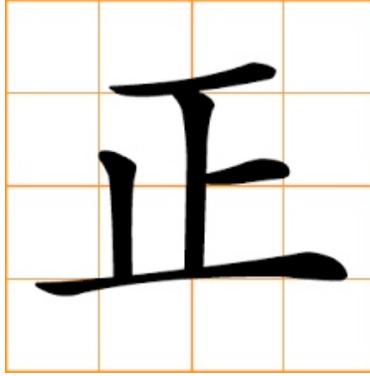
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This diagram is the result of 40 years of inner alchemy exploration by Michael Winn. It cannot be found in any Taoist text. Double-click to enlarge.

It depicts a three Tao Heavens sphere-archy, with inner sphere of taiyi's Original (Yuan) Jing-Qi-Shen radiating omni-directionally into Creation.

Yuan Jing – Original Substance delivers the “Mandate of Heave” embedded into each human soul as our personal “de”.

Classical Taoist Definition of “Authentic”



Zheng: Authentic, Upright

“Authentic” (zheng or zhen) and “authentic person” (zhen ren) are Wandering Taoist terms, adopted by later Imperial Temple Taoists, to describe spiritual achievement that some claim is even higher than a Sage or Immortal.

The entire world is my true personality.” - Anonymous Taoist Sage

Lao Tzu, the first writer to employ the root term zhen (“true, real”), used it three times in the Tao Te Ching. He gave it the special Taoist meaning of “original, undamaged character”.

Zhen ren was coined by Chuang Tzu. He used it 19 times (and zhen 47 times) to describe what moderns might call “self-realized”. It’s someone who internally embraces change as a fluid alchemical process of balancing Yin-Yang polarities.

His notion of authenticity did not arise from adopting any fixed philosophical principle or religious moral precept imposed by outsiders.

An Authentic Person (aka True Human) is imperturbable, inwardly detached yet engaged with the world. Ethical decisions are situational, and cannot be codified. Here’s an eloquent definition of the Chinese terms, revealing their relationship to Water-and-Fire Taoist alchemy:

“The pictograph for zheng (true, authentic) can mean ‘crusading for one truth’, or ‘walking toward Heaven’ while staying grounded and connected to Earth.

Zheng literally means ‘upright.’ It is related to ‘de’ - to ‘rectify or make the heart straight’, ‘to be moral’. It signifies ‘going from one shore to another without stopping half way’. The two shores are heaven and earth. Earth is Yin, the ‘conditioned’ body...Heaven is Yang, spirit, shen, both inspiration and destination.

Zheng qi in our body is the straight axis line between heaven (heart) and earth (kidney). It is unconditioned - the undistorted, core self that does not move in the face of adversity. It holds the primordial (yuan) source of self, the part of us never wounded, traumatized, or victimized. We use zheng qi to hold our vessel upright.

Through the alchemy of heart-kidney, shen-jing, and fire-water, we manifest our soul virtues and spiritual self-confidence. Zheng qi manifests in two directions simultaneously; transcendent and immanent.

We transcend the status quo, our self-image, by returning to our root of quiescence. We also liberate and manifest our passion for what is true, good, and beautiful.”

-- Lonny Jarrett, Zheng Qi and the Authentic Self, EDU.

真人

Zhenren: True Human, Authentic Person

Chuang Tzu’s Authentic Person is not linked to an unchanging reality, but rather with change and self-cultivation of Qi. A True Human meets challenges in the present moment, calmly accepting any situation as the ordinary flux of life and death.

S/he (classical Chinese has no gender pronoun) expresses an elusive but ever-present quality arising from the deep Qi field of Tao process. Tao is always authentic, but has no fixed nature. From Chuang Tzu’s Inner Chapters:

“True knowledge comes only from a True Human. The True Human of ancient times did not rebel against want, did not grow proud in plenty, nor plan his/her affairs. S/he could commit an error and not regret it, meet with success and not make a show. His/her knowledge was able to climb fully up to the Way.

S/he slept without dreaming and woke without care. His/her breath came from deep inside. S/he breathes from the heels; most breathe with their throats. Crushed and bound down, they gasp out their words as though retching. Deep in passions and desires, they are shallow in the workings of Heaven.

S/he knew nothing of loving life nor hating death. S/he came briskly, and leaves briskly. S/he received something, took pleasure in it, then forgot it. S/he used the eye to look at the eye, the ear to listen to the ear, and the mind to restore the mind.

The True Human of ancient times appeared to lack, but accepted nothing. S/he was dignified in his/her correctness but not insistent. Mild and cheerful, s/he seemed to be happy; reluctant, s/he could not help doing certain things. Relaxed, s/he rested in virtue. Tolerant, s/he was part of the world. Towering alone, s/he was checked by nothing.

His/her liking and not-liking were one. In being one, s/he was the companion of Heaven. In not being one, s/he was a companion of Human.

S/he used Heaven to deal with human affairs, but did not use humans to work his/her way into Heaven. When Human and Heaven do not defeat each other, then we have a True Human.

- adapted from Burton Watson, Chuang Tzu Complete Works, 1968

Authenticity Requires “Truth and Transformation”

Early China scholar Roger T. Ames clarifies an important nuance of Chuang Tzu’s True Human:

“Etymologically zhen implies both "authenticity" and "transformation". The human exemplar is able to express personal integrity and uniqueness in the context of a transforming world.

The Authentic Person must "author" the world to "know" or "realize" it, Zhen thus has metaphysical and epistemological significance: what is "authentic" is both "real" and "true".
- Wandering at Ease in the Zhuangzi, SUNY Press 1998

Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu suggest that Wandering Taoists - Chinese or Western - are closer to the classical meaning of "authentic person" than people who join a temple lineage sect with pre-set beliefs, moral precepts, and regulated behavior.

Quanzhen monks in China have complained to me many times about restrictions in diet or sexuality they do not resonate with as being Taoist. DT describes how monks often steal money from donation boxes, and go whoring and dining on meat and wine in town.

But Quanzhen is like the Catholic Church. It is not going to change its neo-Buddhist rules to become more authentically Taoist. The only change the sect's owners will allow is to sing greater praises to the communists, that party doctrines are endorsed by the Tao.

Rebel monks have only one option. Like Chen Yuming, they can find greater authenticity by leaving the Order and become a Wandering Taoist, in the lineage of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu.

Why Judge the Authenticity of Anyone?

Ultimately, I feel it is both silly and impossible to judge someone as an "authentic" or "fake" Taoist. Komjathy can be a fake priest and still have authentic Taoist beliefs and experiences. Everyone is in the flow of the Great Way and an authentic part of its cosmic process.

Every human life is a unique path unto itself. Who is to judge the fake-ness or real-ness of someone's life process, or deny their inner truth and spiritual beliefs?

Wandering Taoists in China and the West do not claim imperial temple Taoists are fake. In DT, it's only an academic-fundamentalist who makes rigid judgements.

I embrace all the actors in the DT story, including Komjathy. Spiritual beliefs are never neatly right or wrong, so arguments about the authenticity of different paths are un-winnable.

I accept Komjathy's rigid fundamentalism as a great teaching for Westerners -- of how NOT to pursue Tao authenticity. I feel truly grateful for his stimulating this dialectic, even though I find his views untenable.

It will stimulate scholars and adepts to examine their beliefs and unconscious assumptions about global Taoism.

Lao Tzu & Chuang Tzu - Model of Personal Authenticity

The irony of Komjathy's attacks on Western Wandering Taoist cultivators is that his own meditation practice, Sitting in Forgetfulness (zuowang), originated from Wandering Taoist Chuang Tzu. It's not an "orthodox" practice.

As an Amazon reviewer of Komjathy's Quanzhen book asked: "Why do I need to join an orthodox Chinese religion in order to sit and empty my mind?".

This highlights the wide gap between Komjathy's personal practice of a Wandering Taoist meditation, his daily tai chi (taijiquan) practice, and his need for a fake temple priest title.

What glues the three together?

Komjathy was denied ANY status by every Huashan official. If his meditation practice was working, he wouldn't care, and would move on. My hope is that Tao process will eventually move him to integrate this big split in his ego.

Charles Belyea's life journey from rigid Imperial Temple Taoist to free-flowing Wandering Taoist was simply his struggle to accept Lao Tzu's wisdom that wu wei (spontaneous self-arising) is the highest principle of Tao.

Belyea's journey, and my dialectic with Komjathy in DT, raise a simple question. The original Wandering Taoists Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu never accepted the moral or spiritual authenticity of any organized temple religion or political group.

They describe control by external law or religious rules as a degradation of wu wei spontaneity, a dumbing down of Tao natural order. The issues can be boiled down to one simple question:

Why should modern Western Taoists seeking authenticity hold to a lesser (orthodox) standard, instead of following Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu?

DT authors define authenticity as "intent to embody the principles of Daoist Qi cosmology". Both of the lineage forms (Primordial Tai Chi and Big Dipper Star Stepping Qigong) done daily by Dream Trippers is based on multiple, spiral-nested levels of Tao cosmology. They are the most sophisticated cosmological forms I've found from the hundreds I studied.

It is far more embodied and self-empowering for Westerners seeking to attain Tao than staid medieval Quanzhen methods. It offers an awkward cultural mix of Taoist ideals, ascetic anti-body monastic Buddhism, paternalistic Confucianism, and rigidly oppressive anti-Free Will state authority.

It's nearly impossible for 21st century Westerners to integrate their modern identity into this medieval 13^h century amalgam. An additional barrier is that to authentically join this religion deeply embedded in Chinese culture, and chant its liturgy, requires learning Chinese, an alien pictographic language with no alphabet.

That is just half of the difficulty. The other half – as Chinese-speaking "PhD in Quanzhen" Komjathy found out – is that Quanzhen national authorities will reject Westerners trying to join its priesthood. Its inner circle is permanently closed-to-foreigners.

This makes any claim to higher Tao authenticity tainted by an assumption of racial superiority. It's fine to worship in their temples and submit to their teachings, but only native Chinese may attain high political-spiritual status.

Can an Institution Hold "De" (Inner Power)?

DT fails to discuss the key issue of "institutional de". Does a religious organization like Quanzhen have any "de" to cultivate, or transmit to its followers?

An implicit claim to “divine authority” underlies all religious organizations and priesthoods. Is the claim valid? As one modern Wandering Taoist put it, “Religion has the best business model in the world. They sell tickets to eternity, but no one can ever check to see if they delivered the goods”.

In Lao Tzu’s Tao cosmology, Origin births human souls, but not institutions. Those are secondary creations of humans; no social organization has a “living soul” that returns to Origin. This denies all institutional claims to divine authority.

Mircea Eliade points out in his definitive *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structure of Alchemy* (1956) that mass religions and priesthoods are a relatively late invention of urban social organization.

Mass religion arose after millennia of alchemy being the primary mode for individuals to engage authentically with the divine via transmutation of matter into spirit.

Outer alchemy was the sexual process of male penetrating (digging) into female earth, mining metals, and refining them with fire. Recovering the luminous solar power of gold buried within earth was the highest level of authenticity.

Taoist inner alchemy is a parallel path to external laboratory alchemy. Condensing the “gold elixir” within our physical body is the achievement of spiritual immortality.

Organized religions are born on earth, and die on earth. They are a human invention, not arising (ziran) spontaneously from primordial Tao as part of the body of Nature. Any religious organization’s power is thus limited to a Later Heaven (post-natal Qi) earthly reality.

That’s an observation, not a judgment. There may be authentic or non-authentic people in any organization who personally connect to Origin. Followers may feel inspired by the group energy, and have experiences they define as divine.

But joining a religious organization does not automatically transmit any “de” or inner spiritual power of the organization from Origin. That might explain why neither Jesus, nor Quanzhen’s Wang Zhe, nor most spiritual prophets, found group religions with temples.

Rather these spiritual teachers focus on delivering their divine message to individual souls, who can be awakened to resonate directly to remember their pre-birth arising from Origin.

Komjathy cannot grasp this fundamental Taoist principle, perhaps because he is blinded by his Quanzhen fundamentalism. This causes him to project “divine authority” onto the cultural institution and its priesthood.

It made him co-dependent on a state-owned religion, which for political reasons refused to recognize Komjathy’s authentic personal “de”. On a practical level, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) does not want foreigners infiltrating their tight control over domestic religious movements.

It appears this unfortunately drove Komjathy to fantasize he was ordained, because he felt internally it was his soul mission to become a Quanzhen priest.

That’s the gist of his two-page rationalization in DT: the Chinese state is corrupt, thus Komjathy righteously calls upon his own divine authority to ordain himself as a priest of the Huashan sect, without the approval of the Order.

**The Authentic Heaven Ye Seek
is the Heaven Ye Shall Find**

Authenticity arises when we use everything in life to fulfill our unique soul mission. This is the Tao of cultivating ming, our highest worldly destiny. This is the process of fulfilling our “mandate from heaven”, inspired by the “sprouting” of our soul seed (de).

Its complement is cultivating xing (pronounced “shing”), our original or innate nature Xing is what Lao Tzu calls Return to Origin. Ming and Xing ultimately merge into one process, a proto-cosmic orbit that flows eternally between Origin and Creation and back. An adept’s ability to internalize that is the final and highest stage of authenticity.

Accepting any spiritual figure into one’s heart can be a powerful impetus to spiritual growth. It could be Jesus, Buddha, Krishna, Mohammad, Lao Tzu, Wang Zhe, your grandmother, or a local teacher with charisma.

The risk of joining spiritual groups is that they can only offer salvation of a “group half-way house” in the astral plane. The group does not have a “home office” in Origin, because it did not arise from Origin.

This is esoteric knowledge about the nature of Free Will and human power to create its own reality. Every religious group builds a Group Energy Body by intense prayer and collective emotional projection.

When you die, your soul will join that group in their unique astral plane reality, which will define your experience of “heaven”. If you are Catholic, it may be St. Peter and pearly white gates. If Moslem, you may find a flowing river, greenery, and a sexually available harem. Women arriving there are out of luck.

In Taoist Qi cosmology, everything happens by harmonic resonance (gan ying). There are three heavens – Later, Early, and Original (Primordial). “Return to Origin” requires aligning the vibrational frequency of one’s Personal Energy Body with the Original Energy Body of the cosmos and its heart of oneness (taiyi).

Groups of humans by definition are a Many-ness collected together. That is different from a true One-ness. You cannot “erase” your personal essence nor destiny by joining a group. That’s why entire groups never Return to Origin en masse. It requires one’s unique virtue and personal effort (perhaps an act of surrender) of each individual soul.

There’s no free-ride, no “salvation by association”, no “group return ticket” to Origin, despite the marketing promises of Big Box religions. Likewise, joining a Tao temple lineage as a monk or nun does not ensure spiritual immortality.

Spiritual immortality has to be personally cultivated, and few have the will or discipline to achieve it. DT graphically describes the many “temple rats” who hang out in Quanzhen monasteries, doing nothing, hungry for a free meal. There are no “rat immortals”.

The Wandering Taoists are seekers who realize their highest worldly destiny does not require group “training wheels” or external rules to enforce self-discipline.

Likewise, an independent Christian may accept the Ten Commandments, but doesn’t need to join an Order to obey them. There are different levels of authenticity, that depend on how “awake” the seeker is.

Appropriating vs. Importing a Foreign Religion



Mt. Wudang monks performing rare “9 Steps of Yu” ceremony in 2010. I hired them for \$750. on my Dream Trip to celebrate 30th birthday of Healing Tao in USA. Photo: Michael Winn

“Every time a religion crosses a national boundary, by definition it undergoes appropriation into a new culture and language.”

– Prof. Robert Gimello, past President, Society for Study of Chinese Religion

Appropriating elements of temple Taoism into Western Taoism is legitimate, and very different from Komjathy’s failed attempt to import Quanzhen to the West intact, in a glass box sealed tight to prevent any change.

But he misses the major point in DT -- that Quanzhen is so deeply embedded into mainland Chinese culture that it is impossible to export it intact. That could only happen if the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) decided to open and operate branches of its vassal Quanzhen Temple sects abroad.

But the CCP is Marxist and atheist. Why would it export any religion? It wants to control and limit the religious impulse, not promote it.

Unlike previous imperial owners, the CCP doesn’t need the endorsement of religious leaders to approve their status as the “Son of Heaven”. The CCP simply demands their allegiance. It has spies in the temples (documented in DT) to make sure there is full compliance.

State-controlled religion is the antithesis of Lao Tzu’s ideal of “hands-off rulership” and wu wei principle of living spontaneously.

Komjathy accuses Westerners of “appropriating” Taoism, as if it were a dirty word, rather than an inevitable reality. DT authors wrongly confuse the difficulty of exporting authentic temple Taoism with the issue of determining Tao authenticity in an individual seeker.

Quanzhen’s status as “an authentic Chinese religion” does not make it the yardstick for measuring ‘authentic Taoism’ in China or the West. There is a huge difference between “cultural authenticity” and “divine personal experience of the Tao” as a measure of authenticity.

There is no intrinsic difficulty in appropriating Wandering Taoism into the West. Nature and its Qi field are universal, and do not come from China. Lao Tzu and others simply named it and tried to describe it.

To appropriate Wandering Taoism, the main challenge is language. By example, the West does not have a term equivalent to “Qi”. It is commonly translated as “energy”, but that does not

capture the nuance of “subtle breath” that implies living cosmic intelligence and free will. It is totally different than the behavior of sub-atomic “energy” described in Quantum Mechanics.

This language barrier has slowed the growth of Taoism in the West in any form. How do you pronounce Qigong? Why are there over 800 commentaries on Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching? Many are in Chinese, showing it is difficult to make the ineffable Tao clear in a practical way.

The “ineffable” multi-dimensional qualities of Tao are compounded when describing them in a foreign language. I have faced this challenge for for many decades in trying to teach Taoist principles and ideas.

Effective Qi cultivation methods cannot be limited to mimicking simple qigong or tai chi movements. The quality of the Qi, it’s direction of flow within meridians or between dimensions, the interaction of Yin-Yang or Five Phase elements, the intent Qi carries – all this must be linguistically re-invented for Westerners to grasp the Tao at a deep level.

Other Western Ways to Integrate Quanzhen

Komjathy had other options that would have preserved his inner power (“de”), and served to authentically fulfil his soul mission.

Quanzhen sects based on other sacred mountains have lower barriers to “local ordination”. These bypass scrutiny by the CCP bureaucrats in Beijing (see Bernard Shannon example below).

The fact the Huashan sect officials adamantly refused Komjathy this local option reveals they did not feel he was qualified. Why didn’t Komjathy form his own American Quanzhen sect? He was already breaking its core rules by being married and not living in a monastery.

This is exactly what Michael Rinaldini did when he founded American Dragon Gate Daoism in Sebastopol, California. Rinaldini, on a Dream Trip-like group led by Francesco Garripoli, felt a strong spiritual connection to a Dragon Gate teacher. I’ve known Rinaldini for years as a members of the National Qigong Association (NQA), which I helped found in 1997.

“My American Dragon Gate sect has no legal connection to China”, Rinaldini told me. “I’m a religious non-profit. I legally certify priests, some chant the Quanzhen liturgy and wear Taoist silk robes. We adopt the Tao principles that work for Americans.”

“We’re not monastic, not celibate, diet is personal. I’ve made qigong a major part of my years-long priest training. We don’t claim spiritual superiority over other kinds of Taoists. We embrace any Taoist as authentic if they have an open heart”.

Rinaldini is not comfortable with Komjathy’s rigid judgements on Western Taoists. Komjathy despises the NQA for what he sees as its role in destroying Quanzhen Temple Taoism. He claims NQA Qigong is promoting low-level Qi, while Quanzhen cultivates religious lineage “Dao Qi”,

Komjathy’s grasp of qigong seems very superficial. His teacher Chen Yuming teaches qigong when he trains Westerners who come to China. Komjathy teaches beginner qigong at his USA workshops. His attacks on qigong are hypocritical and shallow. Why does he still practice Tai Chi if it’s so low level?

Another legitimate appropriator is Bernard Shannon’s International College of Medical Qigong. He offers the option to incorporate Celestial Masters and Quanzhen calligraphic talismans and hand mudras in a parallel religious training for clinicians.

Shannon was the NQA board chairman for five years and promotes its mission of equal authenticity for all Qi schools. Shannon is married, has two kids, and eats meat. He is a poster child Western Taoist appropriator, integrating whatever works for him from various religious, medical, and martial traditions in China and the West.

Unlike Komjapthy, Shannon has successfully cultivated formal relations with Quanzhen in China. Since 2008 his 501c3 religious non profit status allows him to legally ordains American priests who complete a multi-year training at his Temple of Peace and Virtue in Nashville, Tennessee.

It includes Quanzhen morning-evening prayers in Chinese, talismans, star stepping patterns, hand seals, simple rituals, Qi cultivation and alchemy practices. Shannon's temple has a formal affiliation with a temple on Mt. Qingcheng in Sichuan, China.

It's run by a female abbot, Zhang Ming. My Dream Trips met with her many time. Sshannon's USA-ordained priests go to Mt. Qingcheng and are accepted as "disciples" in a ceremony, get a lineage name, and a certificate approved by a local province Ministry.

Dao Alchemy Research Institute, dba Healing Tao USA, is the 501c3 religious organization I filed in 2001. It is legally authorized by the federal government to ordain Taoist priests, called "masters" and "instructors" in my application.

I don't want them calling themselves "ordained priests" because it will confuse the public into thinking that inner alchemy is the same as any Big Box religion.

"Priest-hood" is the wrong credential, it sends the wrong message. Wandering Taoist Qi cultivators and alchemists in China never took on titles or inserted themselves into a state hierarchy. I want students and instructors to focus on Self-empowerment and spiritual sovereignty, not state titles.

It's important to note that tai chi and qigong beginners cultivate "post-natal Qi", the manifest Qi directly responsible for physical health and psychological well-being. It's the easiest type of Qi to feel.

But it will not deliver the deepest level of Tao cultivation, as it is not designed for that purpose. Neigong ("inner skill" meditation) and neidan gong ("inner elixir alchemy skill") require deeper discipline and internal focus. They cultivate "pre-natal" and "original" formless Qi that connects them back to a non-deity Origin (= new age "Source"), deep within their body.

To "Return to Origin", the main theme of Lao Tzu, you must traverse your body-mind's inner landscape, known in the West as the "un-conscious". Taoist alchemy goes far beyond Jung's "collective unconscious", which is limited to Humanity. It penetrates into the "unconscious" of formless Heaven and all forms of Earth as well.

Qi cultivators cannot skip levels. Popular "health qigong" lays the foundation for deeper Tao embodiment. There are exceptional movement forms of ritual alchemy that do cultivate deeper dimensions of Qi. My favorite is Primordial Tai Chi for Enlightened Whole-Body Self Love, aka wuji gong.

Part FOUR
DT's Central Theme
Taoist Qi Cosmology
vs. Western Ego Ontology

The fundamental premise of DT is that most Westerners carry deep cultural and linguistic beliefs embedded in their subconscious about human identity. They are caught in the trap of Western ego-centric ontology.

This means historically their notion of an authentic “self” is stuck in an egoic “identity bubble”, one with fixed boundaries, into which they are born and from which they can never escape.

They cannot think nor pray their way out of this ego bubble, because those efforts are also controlled by Western language. Our words and concepts are embedded in Western ontology, the branch of philosophy that defines the metaphysical properties of all Beings.

Western ontology has fixed categories: an insect is an insect, a fish is a fish, a human is a human, a god is a god. You cannot change categories.

Even if you are enlightened and love the whole cosmos as yourself, the cultural and linguistic definition of “self” is stuck in the human category, with all its limitations.

An afterlife and rebirth is not accepted by most Westerners – too speculative, unproven, counter-beliefs resulting from the strong bias of scientific materialism.

Tao cosmology defines human beings very differently. A Taoist can transcend their human identity because they identify their body-mind and soul as made of Qi patterns.

By cultivating and refining Qi, humans can freely and seamlessly merge with cosmic Qi patterns of Nature. This process eventually allows them to “Return to Origin”, the Great Oneness (taiyi) that births the multiplicity of Nature.

The underlying Taoist belief is that human nature is a micro-cosmos of Nature's macro-cosmos. Both are birthed from a proto-cosmos, the primordial state of unity. Taoists view everything – animate and in-animate – as imbued with living, breathing, intelligent Qi flowing through cycles of micro-macro-proto cosmos in an eternal play of creative harmony.

There is no fixed boundary between Taoist categories of beings and objects, be they bacteria, butterflies, rocks, animals, vital organs, ghosts, planets, or stars. Time, Space and Beings are all forms of consciousness along a Qi spectrum.

**Life Spontaneously Self-Arises,
Not Controlled by Deity**

From subconscious elementals to humans to demons, spirits and deities, all are made of vibrating Qi patterns constantly exchanging energy. They are all “self-arising” (ziran) from Origin, and self-dissolving back into it. There is no deity on top pulling the strings on the puppets below.

The fluid nature of Qi cosmology allows humans to become spiritually (vs. physically) immortal. This means highly achieved humans can continue creating new realities made of higher dimensional Qi after physical death.

To cross the life-death veil, we just need the skill to shape-shift our personal Energy Body into an authentic vessel (Elixir or Pearl) that can hold higher frequencies of Qi. A high personal vibration is all that is needed to cross dimensional boundaries.

Conscious ascension, what Lao Tzu calls Return to Origin, doesn't happen to most mortals. Their "monkey mind" is too diffuse or distracted by sensory pleasures, bogged down by ancestral trauma or other baggage acquired this life.

Most scatter their Qi at the scary moment of death, when suddenly there is no physical vessel to anchor their body-mind's 12 organ spirits.

These body-mind fragments get re-cycled in a chaotic post-death process that often traps them in the low astral plane, polluting their ancestral bloodline and adding to the suffering of the collective psyche of Humanity's 8 billion souls.

How does this relate to someone on a Taoist path? Historically, Taoists sought authenticity via self-cultivation, growing our soul (ling) in order to complete our worldly mission (de).

True Human, Soul Mission, & Spiritual Immortality

We gradually become a True Human (zhenren) through whole body/mind-soul-great spirit (dashen) integration. The core issue is "how can I authentically embody my Way?" As I put it to my modern students:

"We live in a Rent-a-Body, until we prove worthy of owning the sacred real estate we call Self."

Authentic "ownership" of our body entitles us, at the moment of death, to upload the essence of our physical body to higher subtle bodies. Those who achieve deep soul embodiment on Earth gain the trust of the cosmic heart (taiyi) in Heaven.

She (the "Mother of All Things in Lao Tzu). This trust is what allows our ascension, as she trusts that we will create harmonious realities in higher dimensions.

Impure, evil, unworthy personalities cannot be allowed to pollute the higher realms. They are prevented from crossing the dimensional veil and will remain trapped on earth until they choose to evolve.

True Humans must earn their own level of spiritual immortality (early texts describe 9 levels). Souls that aren't authentically evolved are still immortal, but will not be given the Free Will to continue creating. After death, they will become passive data-storage of a single earth life, parked eternally in the cosmic Qi-field.

My position in DT is that joining or not-joining a state-controlled religion like Quanzhen is irrelevant to the core issue of authenticity. The institutional bias of DT authors arises because they confuse temple Taoism "embedded in Chinese culture" with the Original Taoist imperative to "embed in nature".

The two kinds of embedding are totally different. It's silly to think Western Taoists seeking authenticity have to embed themselves in a foreign, culturally defined Chinese temple religion. Yet this is the untenable position of Louis Komjathy in DT - and other Western scholars.

Global Taoism's Predicament

DT summarizes the gist of differing spiritual and cultural forces facing Taoists in China and the West:

“The tension between the transcendent and the mundane is far less radical in Daoism than in other world religions. The search for transcendence in Daoism has always been deeply embedded in the immanent body, in local society, history, and memory.

“Unlike the paradigmatic moments in the lives of Buddha, Jesus or Muhammad, there is no point of rupture when “Daoism” as a universal religion broke out of the cultural matrix. It is impossible to draw clear lines between Daoist religion, the ritual structures of local Chinese community life, and the general patterns and worldviews of Chinese culture.

“At stake is the meaning of Daoist identity and authenticity. Is Western Daoism a superficial sham, or does it, as Winn claims, open up the possibility of freeing Daoism from the fetters of centuries of Chinese historical and cultural baggage, allowing it to release its full potential yo the whole planet?

“Michael Winn admits there are superficial American Daoists, but sees himself and many Dream Trippers as having attained “a deep level EXPERIENCE of Daoist cosmology from authentic inner alchemy practice. This requires years of training and a whole body/mind transformation into a higher cosmological level of causality”. As Winn put it:

“Serious adepts turn the cosmos into the solid ground of their identity. Culture is a secondary part of the human playing field. Material and social success is not their primary measure of identity. But the pull of culture is very strong. Dream Trippers may find their identity floating between Western ontological individualism and Daoist cosmological attunement.” – DT, Michael Winn

DT authors are very careful to NOT take sides in the issue of who is an authentic Taoist. They present the various viewpoints, but do not hesitate to ruthlessly expose superficiality and contradictions.

They leave it to the reader to decide who is authentic, and whether the reader's own path is authentic. Nonetheless, they admit in the afterword to a bias towards big institutions (like Quanzhen) – and towards innovators (like me).

DT's Main Dialectical Tension:

Winn vs. Komjathy on Tao Authenticity

The central dialectical tension in DT is between Chinese and Western views of Taoism. But this tension is mostly tame, as the three monks tracked for 12 years are all my good friends.

We amicably respect each other's views, even if our cultural and metaphysical perspective leads us to follow different ways of cultivating Tao.

The deepest open clash in DT is played out between two Americans, Michael Winn and Louis Komjathy. This is not a friendly academic debate. Winn and Dream Trippers are not just opposed in theory, they are strongly vilified by Komjathy.

Komjathy has never taken a Dream Trip or listened to my teachings. Perhaps it's my website that triggered him to heap pejorative denunciations on me, and all non-temple Western Taoists.

He may resent the many glowing testimonials of mystical high Qi experiences of Dream Trippers, which he derides as "commercial" and degrading real Taoism. Perhaps it's "sour grapes" over his inability to feel such bliss?

Komjathy cannot accept that Westerners not initiated into Quanzhen are able to have authentic Taoist spiritual experiences. The reason? Because his fundamentalist definition of Taoism excludes them.

It's a paradox, as it is his fake ordination as a Huashan Quanzhen priest. In his mind, after Chen Yuming stared into his eyes for two minutes in a Chengdu teahouse, then pronounced him a formal Quanzhen disciple - his "dao Qi" was now official and thus authentic.

Authentic Qualities of Dream Trips

Since my Dream Trips are the causative factor in DT, it may be helpful to read my Dream Trip site:

<https://healingtaousa.com/china-trip/current-dream-trip/>.

Dream Trips are very different from ordinary tourist trips. Every day we do an 850 year-old lineage Primordial Tai Chi (wujigong) and a 2000+ year old shamanic Big Dipper Star Stepping Qigong.

This builds group Qi and supercharges our experience of Taoist sacred sites. We spend four days on Mt. Hua. Some stay in caves carved out of solid granite by Taoist adepts 2000 years ago, others meditate in a Tao monastery.

I believe Dream Trips offer a valuable service to Westerners. But they infuriate Louis Komjathy, even though it was through me that he met his teacher, my close friend Chen Yuming.

He accuses me of promoting a fake Tao lineage ("likely of Hindu tantric origin"), of crass commercialization, of being a low-brow promoter of mystical Taoism for money, and a greedy marketer who has no virtue and no Quanzhen "dao Qi".

Komjathy hates Dream Trippers as he believes they are deluded, superficial new agers, exploitative neo-colonizers, guilty of self-inventing a romanticized Taoism with no connection to authentic Imperial Temple religion. His fury knows no limits.

Prof. Livia Kohn is the doyenne of Tao academics. She organized more than a dozen global Tao scholar conferences, publishes the Journal of Daoist Studies, is editor or author of 60+ books, and was Komjathy's PhD advisor.

Because Kohn supports Western Taoists and runs trips to China similar to my Dream Trips, he includes her in his hateful invectives:

"Livia Kohn and Michael Winn are collaborators in the self-perpetuating, insular cycle of the spiritual capitalist and popular construction of Daoism - "the end of true Daoism". - Komjathy, in DT.

Komjathy's Long List of Fake Western Taoists

The death of Taoism? I was honestly shocked by the extremity of these charges in DT, and wondered if Komjathy was just having a bad day.

I read through his eight books and found him heaping abuse and vitriol on Western Taoists in every book. So it's not just Dream Trippers – he hates ALL Western Taoists who fail to embrace Imperial Temple Taoism.

In Komjathy's Daoism: A Guide for the Perplexed he equates Taoism in the West with “strip-mining” and calls it a “taxidermy trophy”. They are just spiritual “souvenir collectors”.

Komjathy offers many reasons for his rage. But I find it alarming that Komjathy combines his PhD with his fake Quanzhen priest ordination as a bully pulpit to claim YOU (the reader) are a fake Taoist if:

1. You are a martial or movement artist (tai chi, qigong) whose forms make you believe you are practicing Taoism – but in fact are not. Taoism is an organized religion; you must join a major temple lineage to authentically use the Tao name. Tai Chi is Chinese, but not Taoist.

2. Anyone who reads Taoist classics (Tao Te Ching, etc.) in English renditions and uses it for spiritual guidance is likely a fake. Authentic Taoists study them in Chinese (or with the guidance of a scholar).

Note: Komjathy doesn't mention he got his start reading the Tao Te Ching in college, in English, at a summer tai chi class, just like all the “fake” Westerners he now vilifies.

3. You practice hours daily what you believe are Taoist meditation or movement techniques. But if you don't join a Chinese temple sect, with its access to true “dao Qi”, your techniques will cultivate fake or lesser level non-lineage Qi.

He sees the National Qigong Association (which I helped found in 1997), a forum with hundreds of members for sharing “Qi techniques”, as a major perpetrator of the destruction of authentic Taoism.

4. You do good deeds daily, guided by your conscience. But you are still a fake Taoist unless you follow the medieval moral religious precepts of a major Tao temple sect.

Without taking formal initiation from a temple priest you are not cultivating true Tao “virtue” (de). You are likely a wishy-washy Protestant pretending to be Taoist.

Note For perspective, Quanzhen founder Wang Zhe believed “love” was a mental attachment that blocked spiritual progress, and promoted medieval precepts of sin. These same precepts were used in 1946 to justify burning alive on a pyre the head Quanzhen abbot An Shilin for minor offences.

Western Taoists who claim to follow the Way of Virtue are likely violating medieval Imperial Temple precepts, which have precise behavioral guidelines.

Example: “it's a sin to share a spiritual text without permission from your master”. (But it's OK for everyone to read Komjathy's books on Quanzhen, as you will earn his priestly blessing).

5. The million+ Americans who identify spiritually with “Taoism” should call themselves believers in NWR, or New Western Religion, rather than Taoism.

Note: The historical evidence suggests the opposite: Quanzhen would be better named MCR “Medieval Chinese Religion”, as Quanzhen is only 25% Taoist.

6. Fake Western Taoists exploit authentic religious Taoism:

“Most of what goes by the name of ‘Daoism’ in the West, especially throughout the Internet and popular publications, are forms of appropriation and fabrication. They are rooted in colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist legacies.”

– Komjathy, in DT

Note: These hackneyed, outdated, mis-applied academic phrases are easily refuted.

7. If you sell a product (book, DVD, travel trip, or audio) that uses the name Tao to promote better health, improved Qi sensitivity, higher self-awareness, and harmony, you are an abuser. You are destroying authentic religious Taoism by commodifying its name.

This deceives your customers and distracts them from discovering a true religious faith in Imperial Temple Taoism, which alone can save their soul.

8. If you believe a principle of Taoism is to “go with the flow”, you are wrong and thus a fake Taoist.

Note: Komjathy makes this accusation repeatedly in his books – displaying his own ignorance. His fundamentalist blinders cause him to ignore that Chuang Tzu, an early Wandering Taoist in 300 b.c.e. popularized the phrase “follow the flow of Qi”. It has survived 2300 years because it is an authentic Tao principle.

**DT’s Chinese Actors All Agree:
Komjathy Has It Wrong**

Notably, no one else interviewed in DT, including all three Chinese Quanzhen monks, agrees with Komjathy’s ultra-orthodox attacks on Western Taoists. Komjathy’s own shifu (“father-teacher”) and lineage initiator Chen Yuming calls him “rigid”. Chen criticizes Komjathy’s claim that Western tai chi players are not cultivating Tao:

“Komjathy has very fixed ideas. He is too sectarian, and too strongly attached to Quanzhen. He has many dogmatic ideas about the way Daoism should be, much of which is his own ideas. This is bookish, scholastic knowledge. Real cultivation must be based on true experience, not theory.

“He always talks about how there are so many fake Daoists in America, using Daoism for their own purposes, teaching taijiquan in the name of Daoism.

I said to him, what's wrong with that? Practicing the zither can be an excellent form of cultivation, why shouldn't people practice taijiquan as a form of self-perfection?" – Chen Yuming, in DT

Quanzhen monk Hu, one of Komjathy's closest friends on Mt. Hua, agreed he has a warped perspective on American Taoists:

"He is too passionately opposed to what is happening in American Daoism. He should calm down and become more detached." - monk Hu in DT

Komjathy's PhD advisor Professor Livia Kohn tactfully put it (in a DT footnote): "his views on Western Daoism are untenable".

DT author Elijah Siegler attended a Komjathy training in California and found it little different from other Western Taoist trainings, a mix of qigong and Taoist philosophy. The main difference is Komjathy put on a Taoist priest robe to deliver a "sermon" for a few hours, consisting of a very pedantic line-by-line reading of a Taoist text.

His head-centric, austere school-master teaching style may explain why he has attracted only a tiny following in the West.

Komjathy: Self-invented Tao Fundamentalist

Before I read Kompathy's chapter 6 in DT, I didn't know that "Tao fundamentalists" even existed. It seems a contradiction of terms. His apocalyptic views on the end of Taoism suggest he has deep fears typical of fundamentalists:

Wikipedia: "Fundamentalism refers to "black-and-white" thinking that opposes modernism, or progressive thinking about religion. It opposes anything that challenges its fixed religious opinions."

My definition is even simpler: a Tao fundamentalist believes "My Way is right, other Ways are wrong." Komjathy fits the Tao Fundamentalist bill perfectly, using either definition.

Komjathy says Livia Kohn and myself are guilty of causing "the end of Daoism". What he really means is the end of his fundamentalist, rigid attachment to a dying Quanzhen temple sect in China.

See my history of the sect's decline in Section B. It is clearly dying on its own, stifled by forces within China, not because of the growing popularity of original, non-temple Wandering Taoism in the West.

If Komjathy were an authentic Taoist, he wouldn't be worried about the death of his beloved sect. Over the millennia, hundreds of Taoist lineages have come and gone without the "Tao" itself dying.

Shang Qing and Lingbao lineages are two major schools, along with hundreds of smaller Taoist movements. They have arisen, served their community, then disappeared. If Quanzhen dies, so what?

An authentic Taoist accepts Change is inevitable and good. By definition, Tao and its pulsing

Qi field is the source of all creation, of all change. It cannot “disappear” or “die”. In DT, former vice-abbot Chen Yuming speculates “the death of Quanzhen might be a good thing”.

Komjathy’s fears about the death of Taoism are an expression of his fundamentalism, and his fear of Quanzhen changing. Fundamentalists by definition don’t like change. He simply doesn’t get that Taoism is about Change.

The I Ching, the foundation text of Taoism and Chinese culture, literally means Book of Changes. If Quanzhen dies, it’s because it has not been allowed to change by its state owners, the atheist communist party.

Komjathy is the poster child for what DT describes as living in a Western ego-bubble ontology with fixed boundaries vs. an Tao Qi cosmology of continuous, boundary-less change.

But he gives it a twist, by inserting an imperial temple reality inside his western ego-ontology. He’s re-constructed medieval Quanzhen from books and himself as its high American priest within his own bubble reality, that no modern Chinese Quanzhen Taoist will agree is real.

For fundamentalists, religious belief is a powerful drug that allows one to hallucinate any desired reality.

We have examples of people who were told of a diagnosis that they had a terminal illness. They believed it, and died. Later it was discovered the diagnosis was incorrect – too late to overcome the false belief.

Bashing Western Taoists: Popular Sport of Scholars

Given how even the Chinese monks in DT dismiss Komjathy’s ultra-orthodox views, why should I bother refuting them again? It’s important because Komjathy is just the tip of a large academic iceberg.

He dares to make bold derisive attacks only because he knows many of his colleagues – who make their living from teaching and writing about Imperial Temple Taoism - agree with him. Many of them bash Western Taoists as fake.

I’m exposing this widespread negative bias because it disheartens and disempowers Western Tao seekers. Fortunately, most academic bashers don’t have a large public audience, and go unheard.

But their attacks negatively influence younger scholars and perpetuate falsehoods. They reinforce stereotypes about the superiority of medieval temple lineages over the original Wandering Taoist tradition, and its modern resurgence in the West.

Why do Academics Attack Western Taoists?

Who are these scholar-bashers? Cai Juemin names them in the *Journal of Daoist Studies*, (Feb. 2020), *A False Dao? Popular Daoism in America*:

“Erik Zürcher, Karl-Heinz Pohl, Russell Kirkland, Terry Kleeman, Steve Bradbury, Paul Goldin and especially scholars who claim to be Imperial Tao Temple priests – Kristof Schipper, Michael Saso, and Louis Komjathy”.

(Note this is her list, not mine. All posts by Michael Saso on social media and in his books have been respectful).

I’ve read many of these scholar’s works. I admire their intellectual brilliance. Their expertise on select aspects of historical Taoist culture is exemplary. They are fantastic detectives that I rely upon to delve into Taoism’s past.

Schipper’s The Taoist Body is one of the few texts I tell my students to read for its elucidation of Tao principles. But I warn them to separate principles from practice. The Taoist Body describes a public week-long ritual alchemy ceremony in Taiwan. It will never be adopted in the West, not even by overseas Chinese.

Any scholar who bashes Western Wandering Taoists deserves disdain. Their grasp of religious temple texts or rituals in China doesn’t confer any authority to evaluate the authenticity of the spiritual needs, values, practices, or process of modern Westerners absorbing Early Taoism.

It is especially egregious to criticize Western interest in early figures such as Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, other alchemists and Wandering Taoists who laid the foundation for all later imperial temples lineages. These lineages all claim Wandering Taoists as their “patriarch founders” to boost their own acceptance.

Nobody in China talks about the head abbots of Imperial Temple lineages as achieving immortality or even being spiritual exemplars. They dust and are forgotten – unlike the Wander Taoists, whose legends live on.

Some academics twist their intellectual reality and personal religious bias into a private club that seeks to control and judge the free expression of Taoism’s global expansion.

They are actually anti-Taoists, opposing Lao Tzu’s core principle of wuwei (spontaneous expression). They impose a sham standard by claiming Western Taoists should imitate the “authentic” way Imperial Temple Taoists worship or live.

It’s not the Western public that is deluded about the main principles of Taoism – surrendering to Nature’s path of least resistance, cultivating Qi flow for virtue, balance and harmony.

It’s the scholars who are deluded by their own bias and notions of what a Big Box religion should be in China. They hold false beliefs about what Tao should be in the West.

It is these scholars who have intellectually colonized Chinese imperial Taoism, not the Dream

Trippers. They want to “own” Taoism, guard it as part of their academic turf. They mine it for books, theses, and to justify their jobs.

They are offended when their “sacred cow” is adopted in a different form by heart-centered Westerners seeking a free form Tao rather than following snobby intellectual nerds holding onto a rigid medieval model. This model is from China’s past and is clinging on for dear life.

Academic bashers combine two traits -- intellectual arrogance and spiritual ignorance. They form a single unsavory attitude of self-righteous judgment, and disdain for the common Western spiritual seeker.

They embody the ignorance predicted by Lao Tzu 2500 years ago:

“Tao flows like water into the lowest place, where it is despised”. Can these bashers learn to love “lowly” Westerners as modern receivers of the true flow of Tao?

These despisers of Western Taoists are like Confucian court bureaucrats who want to bully commoners. They want to regulate society from above, with state-approved rituals that meet their artificial and rigid cultural standards of righteousness.

Ironically, these Western pedants often hold an unconscious racial bias that Chinese temple Taoists are superior to Western adepts.

“Popular Taoism” in China

& West is Similar

A major hypocrisy is their failure to hold “popular Taoists” in China to the same standard of authenticity they demand of Western Taoists. These bully academics accept “popular Taoism” exists in China - estimates run as high as five hundred million vs. a mere twenty thousand Quanzhen monks/nuns.

They fail to see popular Chinese Taoism is very similar to popular Western Taoism. Both freely mixes different religions and ritual practices. Both rely on “spirit channeling” and freely blend influences from different religions and local beliefs.

Both accept a creative amalgam of spiritual beliefs, tai chi - qigong movement rituals, and meditations inspired by non-orthodox Taoists or local deities such as dragon spirits.

These academics never demand the hundreds of millions of Chinese popular Taoists join an Imperial Temple sect in order to become authentic. Quanzhen priests are irrelevant to their folk Way.

The final nail in the coffin of these academic-despisers: nobody in China agrees with them, neither popular Chinese Taoists nor imperial temple monks.

**Cai Juemin Survey
on Popular Taoism in China**

Cai Juemin surveyed 1000 people from all the provinces of China. Only 9% of them thought that foreigners could neither understand nor practice the Tao (likely the same 9% that never heard of Tao). 70% felt no ritual was needed to live a Taoist life.

“90 percent of Chinese Taoist priests accepted American Taoism as part of both Chinese Taoism and the universal Tao. One priest commented, “We can say Daoism originated in China, but its inaccurate to say the Dao is Chinese. Dao is the origin of the universe. It cannot possibly have national boundaries”.

Cai Juemin’s conclusion?

“In China, a pig farmer may not have read the philosophical works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, but his life style may be closer to the Dao than a professor in the university.

“Daoist values and life conceptions are not embodied in any one tangible form, but in the national character of the Chinese people. As such, Daoism functions as a complementary opposite of Confucianism, that brings people peace of mind in the chaotic world.

“In a word, the survey results reveal most Chinese people believe “religious ritual”, as specific teachings, practices and rites, is not necessary for a contemporary ordinary person to follow the Dao; that Dao and Daoism are not limited to China.”

She offers definitive evidence the Chinese people do not ascribe greater authenticity to Tao temple lineages. This is purely a bias of some foreign scholars and Westerners fooled by physical temples and the false claims of those marketing their lineage.

Winn's Mt. Hua Wedding: Authentic or Fake Taoist Ritual?



Winn wedding atop Mt. Hua, June 3, 2012. The officiant is wearing a traditional Taoist silk robe I had hand-sewn by a Taoist nun at 8 Immortals Temple in Xian. DT author David Palmer was present.

The minor flaw in DT is to accuse Dream Trippers of not having a link to ANY current Taoist lineage, thus raising doubts about their authenticity. DT authors failed to recognize that Dream Trip daily group practice includes TWO lineage forms. One is 2500-year old Star Stepping Big Dipper Qigong, from a Wandering Taoist lineage of Female Immortals.

The other is Primordial Tai Chi (wuji gong) from an 850-year old 12th century Wandering Taoist lineage of Chang Sanfeng. It is about one hundred years older than Quanzhen's national launch in 1223.

DT's final chapter describes my wedding in June 2012 atop Mt. Hua, over-looking a 3000 foot cliff. I chose Mt. Hua because my fifteen years experiences of its Tao-infused sacred peaks and caves made it my top choice on planet earth for a powerful ceremony.

But DT claims my wedding ceremony was "cut off" from "any" imperial temple Taoists, raising a question about its authenticity:

"The wedding was conceived by Winn as Daoist-alchemical- cosmic-energetic, and held at a secret, sacred spot on a Daoist mountain, but was completely cut off from any Chinese Daoist institution or person." - DT

This goes to the heart of the issue of authenticity raised in DT. DT does a fabulous job describing Taoist elements in my wedding vows such as taiji & 3 Pure Ones.

But DT glaringly omits the centrality of the Primordial Tai Chi form, which all 37 of the wedding attendees did together. Someone reading DT cannot even ascertain the entire form was done. Yet it took 20 minutes - one third of the wedding ceremony.

Not All Tao Lineages are Imperially Controlled

The Primordial Tai Chi supplied a historical Tao lineage monk. Who cares if it's not from an imperial temple lineage? My wedding ceremony was not intended to connect our marriage to the local Quanzhen Taoists, or to their current "imperial" owners (the communist party), but rather direct to the spirit of Mt. Hua and the Tao immortals who use it as an inter-dimensional portal.

This 850+ year old Mt. Wudang lineage form was a powerful and unifying force in the wedding ceremony. Everyone – all 37 people - moved the Qi field in unison, with a common intent of connecting our personal love to the cosmic source of Pure Love radiating from Great Oneness (taiyi).

We gathered Qi from the sacred cardinal directions (5 elements), from Heaven and Earth (taiji pole), the 12 Earthly Branches and 10 Celestial Rays (Chinese calendar's matrix of space-time) and I Ching's 8 cosmic Yin-Yang winds (8 trigrams).

These Qi patterns are the core patterns of Tao Cosmology. Our ritual alchemical dance opened the portal that allowed us to transcend the "ego bubble" of Western ontology.

This cosmological form made everyone an equal and active participant in "marrying" these cosmic Qi patterns. We infused the Qi field into our marriage vows, and into the bodies of all 37 ritual participants. By the end of the ceremony, everyone felt more married to the vast Great Tao and to their authentic personal Way.

Was the ceremony efficacious? By one measure, heaven responded. In our vows, we invited in a child, to be named Emerald. He was born 1.5 years later.

Emerald was consciously conceived immediately after we did Primordial Tai Chi, invoking Mt. Hua, Lao Tzu, Primal Star Mother (doumu) and Great Oneness (taiyi) as guardians.

Emerald exhibited exceptionally high spiritual awareness as an infant.. He expressed love for all beings at age two. All his care-givers were amazed at how loving he was. By age four he was focused on the "love dragon" in his heart.

I believe the Mt. Hua wedding ceremony opened a pathway in his soul and infused him with Qi that will shape his life destiny.

Our intent at the moment of conscious conception was for our child to remember the Pure Love Qi flowing from Origin. The Qi of Flower Mountain, a portal to Origin, was already infused into our bodies by our wedding ceremony, and thus helpful in grounding our intent during conscious conception love-making.

I believe Emerald will someday be blessed with a powerful epiphany when he climbs atop Mt. Hua and visits the secret spot where the wedding ceremony was held.

Using the DT metric of Tao cosmology, this wedding was a direct, authentic Tao process: human bodies merged with a sacred mountain. The cosmic Qi field was lovingly focused via a group alchemical lineage tai chi ceremony.

Bringing in a Quanzhen priest and ritual chants in Chinese would have been a superfluous distraction, and possibly dis-empowering.

Quanzhen priests are celibate, and know nothing of marriage nor the spiritual alchemy of sexual love. Wang Zhe, who inspired Quanzhen, taught his disciples to suppress their sexual dreams as evil demons and to stay up all night to prevent having dreams.

I did not want his rigid, body-hating neo-Chan Buddhist vibe at my authentic Wandering Taoist wedding.

Wandering Taoists have over 3000 years recorded history on Mt. Hua – far longer than Quanzhen’s 700 years. My wedding was authentically connected to the whole of Mt. Hua, not just its recent Quanzhen occupiers.

The vibrant, sacred living presence of Mt. Hua is a far more powerful lineage than Quanzhen, a time-bound sect, a cultural organization dying a slow death from asphyxiation by the communist party.

Video: Dream Trippers & Winn Wedding on Mt. Hua

Video Link:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xoo30traeuiqcpX/Huashan%202012.m4v?dl=0>

Chinese Taoists “Vote” on My Wedding Authenticity

DT author David Palmer showed a film clip of my wedding atop Mt. Hua to an international conference of Tao scholars and Chinese monks in Beijing. He called for a show of hands: was it an authentic Taoist ceremony?

One third voted Yes. Palmer asked the two-thirds “No” voters: what defines an authentic Taoist? Total silence. No one had a clear definition.

Watch this 20 minute video, a rare glimpse into life on Huashan.. Scenes are not labelled, so here is a quick guide:

1. Dream Trippers do Big Dipper Star Stepping Shamanic Qigong in the inner court of Jade Spring Temple at base of Mt. Hua.
2. Plaza in front of Jade Spring Temple, giant statue of “Dream Immortal” Chen Tuan. Loud festive western-style dancing by local people contrasts with DT lineage qigong ritual – part of global East-West cultural exchange.
3. Winn wedding near South Peak (highest point on Mr. Hua)
4. A second wedding of two Dream Trippers in front of Central Peak temple. A fascinated young Quanzhen monk takes videos of us, spontaneously invites us inside his temple.

(While hiking to Tibet, this monk met a Chinese Wandering Taoist who told him to go instead to Mt. Hua.)

5. Winn interviews “monk Hu”, DT pseudonym for Master Stone of Perfection, at the remote Pole Star cave area facing Mt. Hua. He left Quanzhen, is a hermit, assists Dream Trippers staying in caves. DT author David Palmer translates.

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/xoo30traeuiqcp/Huashan%202012.m4v?dl=0>

Decide for yourself if the Dream Trippers are authentic Taoists, or if, as Komjathy claims, you have to join an Imperial Temple sect to qualify as a genuine Taoist.

China Cannot “Own” Tao, or Nature Itself

The natural mountain spirit of Mt. Hua is not subject to the frailty of cultural cycles or imperial ownership. When one truly lives “Tao cosmology”, one treats a sacred mountain as alive and breathing Qi from Origin. It’s Qi does not derive from the parade of temple lineages that the mountain has witnessed over the millennia.

Chinese religious bureaucrats cannot “own” Taoism any more than it can “own” Nature itself, which is the body of the Tao. Authentic Taoism cannot be patented by any religious, ethnic or political group.

Taoists have many methods to merge with Nature, but everyone must choose their unique personal Way. For a Chinese person, it might be Quanzhen. If Primordial Tai Chi had been invented in America, it would still be authentically Taoist – because it directly aligns and merges the practitioner with Original Qi.

Primordial Tai Chi just happens to have a historically famous Chinese originator. But Chang Sanfeng’s “Chinese-ness” is not what makes the form authentically Taoist.

He was likely guided by Tao immortals in creating it. In my experience and many Western adepts, high spiritual beings are attracted to anyone – anywhere - who deeply surrenders to the form.

A key purpose of Dream Trips is to attract and align with immortals by doing the form on sacred mountains like Mt. Hua. One month after our weeding, my wife and I did wuji gong on Mt. Denali, the highest mountain in North America and sacred to native Alaskans. It’s considered the crown chakra of North America.

We felt Denali had very high natural Qi, but it was “raw”, harder to digest. Mt. Hua’s Qi field has been alchemically “cooked” by high level adepts practicing there for at least three thousand years, and thus is far more accessible.
