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Medicine, Philosophy and  
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Researches and reflections

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ON THE WORD  
"TAOIST" AS A  
SOURCE OF  
PERPLEXITY.  
WITH SPECIAL  
REFERENCE TO THE  
RELATIONS OF  
SCIENCE AND  
RELIGION IN  
TRADITIONAL  
CHINA

I have been asked to contribute to this special volume my thoughts on the relations between religion and science in traditional China. This great congeries of issues can be explored in many ways, but one theme of a general kind calls for prior reflection. "Taoist" is a familiar term, and will perhaps seem to some readers too straightforward to pose methodological problems; but my own experience

This essay is best seen as the tentative effort of a generalist, offered in the hope of encouraging specialists in Taoism to replace it by an account more adequate to the needs of scholars in other fields. I am grateful to participants at two international conferences on Taoist studies (see nn. 2 and 4) and at the inaugural meeting of the Society for the Study of Chinese Religions for discussions of ideas I will present. I also thank James R. Bartholomew, Steven J. Bennett, Mark Elvin, Barbara Ruch, Michel Strickmann, and Dorothy Yep for aid not detailed in the footnotes, and the John Simon Guggenheim Memorial Foundation and the National Library of Medicine for support.

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## *On the Word "Taoist"*

and that of my colleagues suggest that in practice it is not so manageable. My theme will be the confusion in our understanding of Chinese science wrought by the frequent use of the word "Taoist" to denote nothing more specific than a frame of mind—nature-loving, perhaps, or mystical in a naturalistic way, or unconventional—in discussions that are meant to be about a religion—an association of persons who hold a body of beliefs.

I will demonstrate that such vagueness affects current discussions of the relations between Taoism and science (in which the roles of Taoism and Confucianism are often considered antithetical), that the equally vague results of those discussions have spread into general writings about China, and that all of this vagueness is related (as both a cause and an effect) to a lack of consensus about the most fundamental characteristics of Taoism—not unexpected in such a young discipline. I will then examine more closely two sorts of confusion which typically arise from the failure to ask whether a given instance of "Taoism" is sentimental, intellectual, social, or bibliographical.

The first example is the tendency, many centuries old, to regard as "Taoist" practices and beliefs which originated in popular religion and were very widely distributed. This often happens even in circumstances where no connection to Taoist organizations or writings can be demonstrated. The second example is the curious case of Ko Hung (283–343), whose modesty has failed to deflect hyperbolic assertions of historians about his stature as a Taoist and alchemist. Finally I will argue that a more satisfactory state of affairs will depend not on imposing a standard definition but on being explicit about which of the many senses of Taoism we are invoking in each instance.

### DEFINITIONS AND THEIR LIMITS

In keeping with this last intention, and recognizing the limits of present knowledge and of my own understanding, I will not attempt to encompass all of Taoism in a single definition, though attempts of others to do so are cited below. Instead, I will attempt to use the much more specific terms "philosophical Taoism" and "religious Taoism" in a reasonably consistent way.

I do not mean them to correspond to the distinction between *tao chia* and *tao chiao*, known to every undergraduate who has dabbled in Chinese history. In a popular formulation, "the Chinese themselves sum up Taoism by dividing it into *Tao chia*

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and *Tao chiao*—the ‘Taoist school’ and ‘Taoist sect.’ The first category they restrict to partisans of the philosophy of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu. In the second they include all those groups that have taken immortality as their goal—alchemists, hygienists, magicians, eclectics, and, in particular, the members of the Taoist church.”<sup>1</sup>

This neat distinction is the creation of modern historians. It is vague as a basis for synthesis and of little use in textual studies. “*Tao chia*” became current from the Han on as a bibliographic rubric, and in that capacity eventually came to cover works on alchemy, hygiene, magic, and religious ritual—everything in the imperial libraries connected with Taoism in any sense, however loosely. As a designation of persons, it was applied to ordained priests of “the Taoist church” at least through the Six Dynasties, and is even occasionally so used today. As for “*tao chiao*,” before modern times it meant simply “the teachings of the Way.” It was first applied in section 39 of the *Mo-tzu* to Confucian beliefs. By the Southern Dynasties it referred to Taoist teachings of every sort, not in contradistinction to the *Lao-tzu*, which in this sense it subsumed, but to Buddhism and Confucianism. As for the *Chuang-tzu*, although it was often read together with the *Lao-tzu* for its quietist ideals in the Han and afterward, it was not generally considered a canonic scripture until imperially sponsored for that purpose in the T’ang.

As I use it, “philosophical Taoism” has no sociological meaning. It refers to the content of the *Lao-tzu* and a few similar philosophical writings which bibliographers have classified with it. The philosophical Taoists were not a group, but a handful of authors scattered through history. I prefer not to apply the term to individual readers who used these books for moral or mystical inspiration, except in cases when I know a great deal about where this attitude was situated in their minds and careers. I also avoid the crippling assumption that the *Lao-tzu*, *Chuang-tzu*, and so on, had a fixed intellectual content independent of time and place. They meant one thing to their writers, another to their compilers, another to each reader, and quite another to moderns. None of these brings the same assumptions to them, and each finds different “original meanings” in them.

<sup>1</sup> Holmes Welch, *The Parting of the Way. Lao Tzu and the Taoist Movement* (Boston, 1957), reprinted under the title *Taoism. The Parting of the Way* (Boston, 1966), pp. 162-63.

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By "religious Taoism" I refer to groups (also called "the established Taoist sects," or, better, "orthodox Taoism") whose liturgy was directed to the Tao as absolute divinity and to its emanations (*t'ien tsun*, etc.), which reveal or manifest it to man. The safeguarding and perpetuation of orthodox scriptural traditions depended on esoteric rites of transmission, specifying a line of predecessors never contaminated by people uninitiated into worship of the Tao. In addition to special objects of worship and spiritual genealogies, members of orthodox Taoist organizations, despite rivalries which sometimes led them to deny the legitimacy of each other's traditions, shared a recognition of Chang Tao-ling as the founder of true Taoism.

Although the *Lao-tzu* has been accepted by all Taoist sects as a central revelation, the religion was not scriptural in the same sense as Christianity. The spiritual orientations of orthodox Taoists gave meaning to the *Lao-tzu* text—a gnostic meaning very different from what outsiders found in it—to a much greater extent than the philosophy of *Lao-tzu* shaped the orthodox faith. There were too many revelations, accumulating century after century and winning attention away from the *Lao-tzu*, for Taoism to have been a religion of the book. Looking at records in the Taoist patrology, one might argue that individual faith was most decisively shaped by ritual and practice, which the scriptures served primarily to justify, prescribe, guide, and support. The canons can no more be read as pure philosophy, without reference to their use in religious activity, than can the written legacy of meditative Buddhism or Christian mysticism.

The term "religious Taoism" (but not the alternative terms) also refers to people initiated into a line of scriptural transmission which branched out of an orthodox group, whether or not these initiates took part in communal activities.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> In "Taoism in the Lettered Society of the Six Dynasties" (paper presented at the Second International Conference on Taoist Studies, Tateshina, Japan, September 1972), Michel Strickmann emphasized that rituals which accompanied the transmission of texts are an important—although ambiguous—element in a definition of Taoism in the Six Dynasties.

This essay has been published in Japanese translation as "Bōzan ni okeru keiji: Dōkyō to kizoku shakai," in *Dōkyō no sōgōteki kenkyū* [Comprehensive studies in Taoism], ed. Sakai Tadao (Tokyo, 1977), pp. 333–69. In Strickmann's forthcoming "On the Alchemy of T'ao Hung-Ching" he has noted that the position accorded to Chang Tao-ling is another trait common to all orthodox groups. Although Strickmann deserves credit for putting together the elements of this definition, I am grateful for discussions with K. M. Schipper and Anna Seidel which helped greatly in the formation of my own understanding of this matter.

I do not mean to urge that the definitions I have given above be generally adopted; they are merely meant to clarify my uses of words. There has not yet been sufficient study of the Taoist literature to make any attempt to fix definitions profitable.

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This may seem like a precise definition, but it is not. The ordination of the orthodox priest, which made him a member of the bureaucracy of gods and provided him with a roster of subaltern divinities on which he could call for help (*lu*), is unambiguous.<sup>3</sup> Submitting ritually to the gods petitions written in the classical language is hardly less sure a sign of orthodoxy, for only members of the Taoist priesthood could rightfully initiate such documents. Even in Taiwan today, where the norms of traditional culture exert only the most vestigial power, this practice is usually avoided by popular priests.<sup>4</sup>

The ambiguity that begins just outside the small circle of ordained priests and their acolytes spreads and ramifies with great speed as we move outward in society. Priests of the popular religion avidly incorporated rites that did not require written petitions. In the eyes of the orthodox they were pretenders. But it is well to remember that this borrowing was part of a reciprocal process. The orthodox liturgy was built up through adapting and incorporating popular rites, a process that, like its inverse, continues today.<sup>5</sup> In this respect Taoists were as catholic as those who shaped Buddhist sects and Confucian doctrines in the last two millennia. From the dynamic interplay between the Taoist and the village exorcist or medium the road runs downhill to the quack "adept" peddling a nostrum, or the alchemical confidence man

<sup>3</sup> This is the situation in modern times, but in earlier Taoism a succession of *lu* was associated with different stages of initiation. This complicated matter has been sorted out in K. M. Schipper, "Some Remarks on the Function of the 'Inspector of Merits'" (paper presented at the Second International Conference on Taoist Studies).

<sup>4</sup> K. M. Schipper, "The Written Memorial in Taoist Ceremonies," *Religion and Ritual in Chinese Society*, ed. Arthur P. Wolf (Stanford, Calif., 1974), pp. 309-24, esp. 309-10. Basic distinctions between orthodox Taoism and popular religion were drawn by Schipper (a Taoist priest as well as a sinologist) at the First International Conference on Taoist Studies (Bellagio, Italy, September 1968). They are summarized in Holmes H. Welch, "The Bellagio Conference on Taoist Studies," *History of Religions* 9 (1969-70): 107-36; see also *ibid.*, 12 (1973): 392. The table presented on p. 125 of the summary does not accurately reproduce all of Schipper's main explanations. The statement that the priesthood of popular religion "was wholly unorganized" misses the point that there was no *single* organization to enforce orthodoxy, but various organized sects were recorded and can be seen today in Taiwan and expatriate communities. The association of orthodox Taoism solely with the Cheng-i (or Celestial Masters) sect, and folk religion with the Mao Shan sect, also misrepresents a complex situation.

<sup>5</sup> The process has been described eloquently by Schipper in "Some Remarks on the Function of the 'Inspector of Merits.'" The blurring of distinctions between Taoist priests and popular exorcists in contemporary Taiwan, where the latter no longer need observe traditional constraints, has been documented by Michael Saso, who follows current laymen's practice in north Taiwan by referring to the latter as "'red-head' Taoists" (see his introduction to *Chuang Lin hsu tao tsang* [The Chuang and Lin clans' supplement to the Taoist patrology] [Taipei, 1973]).

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who can recite imaginary canons at naive believers by the hour—a figure not peculiar to China, as Ben Johnson attests.

There are many figures in history and literature who call themselves Taoists for reasons of their own. Are they not entitled to that choice, and are we not bound to accept it?

To accept such claims at face value would be naive, but to ignore them would be equally naive. Sometimes they are merely a product of sinological oversight, as when the term *tao jen*, which in Six Dynasties texts refers to Buddhist priests, is literally translated "man of the Tao." In cases where they reveal nothing about collectivities or traditions they are powerful indices to individual motives. In one case the claim to be an adherent of the Tao may signal isolated but fervent devotion to the goal of transcendence (although written traditions emphasized the need for mutual support in the endeavor, and companions were seldom hard to find in traditional times); in another, an imagination caught by esoteric imagery; in another, possession of an arcane text of one kind or another received in a hazy transaction from a "remarkable person" (*i jen*), about whose background the writer says nothing; and in another, a sound knowledge of the sort of persona that helps one to succeed as a swindler. Vague terms paraphrasable as "Taoist" were free for the taking, just as the romantic association of "woodcutter" with rustic sagehood was frequently appropriated by retired civil servants who had no intention of touching any tool of forestry. Such terms always tell us something. Like the modern term "executive," without particulars they tell us very little.

### PERPLEXITY

My own perplexity about the ways the word "Taoism" is used was first aroused by a type of argument that has become rather popular over the last half-century. Since Homer Dubs in 1929 claimed that abstract theory was ruled out by Confucian practicality, authoritarianism, and distaste for change, many writers have tried to explain what limitations of orientation or attitude made the Chinese incapable of developing systematic philosophy, especially natural philosophy of the kind that has become associated with the origins of modern science.<sup>6</sup>

More recently this discussion has taken a new turn as people have finally begun reading the enormous scientific literature that the

<sup>6</sup> Homer Dubs, "The Failure of the Chinese to Produce Philosophic Systems," *T'oung pao* 26 (1929): 96-109, esp. 108-9.

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Chinese were supposedly unable to write. They have found elaborate abstract theories of natural change, based on such concepts as yin-yang and the Five Phases that no one had bothered to understand before.<sup>7</sup> They have begun to reconstruct from historical records the large part science and technology played in traditional institutions, economy, and thought.

A number of Western scholars now see a race between traditional China and traditional Europe toward the scientific revolution that transformed man's view of nature and his place in it, Confucianism is now held responsible by some, and "bureaucratic feudalism" by others, for China's failure to win this race, despite what seems to have been an excellent head start—for which Taoism is given much of the credit.

Fifty years ago Taoism was still considered in part too irrational a mysticism and for the rest too degraded a superstition even to be mentioned in such discussions. Now it has been transfigured, made a milieu for objective and experimental science and technology. As Joseph Needham puts it, "Taoism was religious and poetical, yes; but it was also at least as strongly magical, scientific, democratic, and politically revolutionary."<sup>8</sup>

Anyone familiar with Needham's work will acknowledge his awareness of such differences as that between the metaphysical poetry of the *Lao-tzu* and the sacerdotal rites of the Celestial Masters. Yet at crucial points in his arguments that "the Taoists . . . affirmed their science and their democracy at the same time"<sup>9</sup> the distinctions tend to blur: ". . . the Taoists show certain characteristic differences from any analogous groups in occidental history. They formed a much more organized element than the Cynics or the Stoics, and their combination of political anti-feudalism with the beginnings of a scientific movement has no parallel in the West."<sup>10</sup> The "organized element" can only be the orthodox Taoist sects. Neither Needham nor anyone else has produced persuasive evidence that they were politically anti-feudal or that they might be identified with the beginnings of a scientific movement. Needham's emphasis on "the enmity of the Taoists not only for Confucianism but for the whole feudal system" is pri-

<sup>7</sup> The best current understanding is conveyed in Manfred Porkort, *The Theoretical Foundations of Chinese Medicine. Systems of Correspondence*, M.I.T. East Asian Science Series, vol. 3 (Cambridge, Mass., 1974).

<sup>8</sup> Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge, 1954- ), 2 (1956): 35.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 103.

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 129.



marily supported by his interpretations of the *Lao-tzu*, *Chuang-tzu* and *Huai-nan-tzu*, the basic ideas of which are conventionally associated with early Taoist philosophy, not the organized religion.<sup>11</sup> As for the beginnings of a scientific movement, the theoretical and practical work of disparate individuals who may be called Taoist in one sense or another does not warrant generalizations about Taoism as either a religion or a philosophy. It remains to be proved through close study of each individual that these accomplishments were in some special sense due to Taoist connections or sentiments. It also has yet to be demonstrated that these associations and feelings formed a consistent pattern more significant for scientific accomplishment than that formed by the intellectual and social allegiances of equally important scientists who were in no sense Taoists.<sup>12</sup> As this example shows, many of Needham's general statements about Taoism are sociological in tone, but the more I ponder what social entity they may have referred to the more I am perplexed.

This vagueness is no cause for alarm in a "reconnaissance" (as Needham has called his project) of such vast scope, concerned largely with proposing "hypotheses for further research."<sup>13</sup> In view of the tentative nature of Needham's proposals about the connections of religion and science, and the enormous philosophic and historical difficulties they raise, one might expect sinologists

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 100-132. The quotation is from p. 100. This theme is clearly presented as hypothetical, and indeed the sources are susceptible of interpretations very different from Needham's. A passage in the third source, for instance, is described as "giving in enlarged form a picture of primitive collectivism" (p. 108). I am unable to find in the Chinese text any reference to collectivism in either the political sense (governance by all) or the social sense (common ownership of the means of production and distribution). Its theme is, to be sure, primitivity; it describes the happy and harmonious state of nature and man before this pristine simplicity was spoiled by human artifice (see *Huai-nan-tzu*, *Ssu pu ts'ung k'an* ed., 8:1a-1b; inadequate translation in Evan Morgan, *Tao the Great Luminant. Essays from Huai Nan Tzu with Introductory Articles Notes Analyses* [Shanghai, 1933; reprint ed., Taipei, 1965], pp. 80-81).

<sup>12</sup> Nor has Needham ever put forth a documented claim that Taoist scientists or technologists were predominant in either quantity or quality. Any list of major figures over the last 2,000 years would be drawn primarily from the scholar-official class for science and from artisans for techniques, with few Taoist connections demonstrable except in alchemy, often considered a heterodox art (see, for instance, the representative sample of twenty-nine men and women in *Chung-kuo ku-tai k'o-hsueh-chia* [Ancient Chinese scientists] [Peking, 1959]; the scope of the book includes engineering). In connection with this issue I have examined closely the careers of two great scientists whose major formative intellectual influences were Confucian in "Shen Kua" and "Wang Hsi-shan," in *Dictionary of Scientific Biography*, ed. C. C. Gillispie (New York, 1975), 12:369-93, and (1976), 14:159-68, respectively. The essay on Wang, revised to include data on the connections of science and Neo-Confucianism in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, will appear in Monica Croghan et al., eds., *Nothing Concealed* (Taipei, in press), vol. 2.

<sup>13</sup> Needham, 1:5 and 2:119.

to be much concerned with testing and refining them. Some caution there certainly has been, and, as other papers in this volume will no doubt indicate, the challenge has been taken up by a few. But the more common tendencies in the United States have been either to ignore the problem or accept Needham's hypotheses as proven. The first is no doubt a prudent course; the second an open-minded one. But both, particularly the second, remind us that vagueness about Taoism is typical, although by no means universal,<sup>14</sup> in American scholarship.

I will give only three examples, chosen from different sorts of writings. The first is from Holmes Welch's *The Parting of the Way* (1957), an original and commonsensical introduction to the philosophy of the *Lao-tzu* for a broad public, and incidentally a historical sketch of the Taoist movement from available secondary sources. We are told that "to a large extent the Taoists practiced experimental science. They were reluctant to alter their premises in the light of logic and experimentation, but they did at least experiment. They were ultimately responsible for the development of dyes, alloys, porcelains, medicines, the compass, and gunpowder. They would have developed much more if the best minds in China had not been pre-empted by Confucian orthodoxy," and so on, not a sentence of it (given the normal meanings of "to a large extent" and "ultimately") yet demonstrated to be true of any group that might conceivably be called "the Taoists."<sup>15</sup>

A second example is the introductory textbook *East Asia. Tradition and Transformation* (1973), probably the most discriminating synthesis of scholarship to date. The entire treatment of pre-Ch'ing Chinese science in this 969-page volume is as follows: "The many protoscientific discoveries and inventions in China were associated more with the nature-loving Taoists than with the scholarly Confucians. The promising beginnings of nature lore in China were never consciously rationalized and institutionalized like modern science in the West."<sup>16</sup> The first sentence is too vague

<sup>14</sup> For instance, the late Arthur Wright was sufficiently familiar with the excellent historical scholarship on Taoism of what might be called the School of Paris to write with salutary clarity on the subject (see his "A Historian's Reflections on the Taoist Tradition," *History of Religions* 9 [1969-70]: 248-55). The strength of European Taoist studies largely derives from the pioneering work of Henri Maspero and his colleagues at Paris, extended and refined in recent years by Max Kaltenmark, Rolf Stein, Schipper, and their associates, to the point that it provides a model of the critical approach which this essay seeks to further.

<sup>15</sup> Welch (n. 1 above), p. 134. It should be noted that Welch cautions the reader about the tentative nature of his generalizations (see "Foreword").

<sup>16</sup> John K. Fairbank, Edwin O. Reischauer, and Albert M. Craig, *East Asia. Tradition and Transformation* (Boston, 1973), p. 232. This is not exactly Need-

to be translated into a testable assertion. The second is misleading when it implies that early Chinese science was not consciously rationalized and institutionalized in its own way, in a pattern very different from that of modern science but perfectly comparable with that of early Europe.

My final example is the attempt of a most intelligent scholar, writing for historians of religion, to restate the kernel of Needham's thesis: "In Joseph Needham's evaluation, the religious Taoists were scientists and activists who defied fate and any passive fatalism." Here the Taoist group is positively identified in a way that Needham has never attempted. The writer is obviously motivated by a desire for clarity. The resulting equation of religious Taoist and scientist is so clear-cut as to be unrecognizable to anyone familiar with the primary literatures of science and orthodox Taoism, which support only the vaguest generalizations about overlaps.<sup>17</sup>

The point of these examples is not to remind readers that life is short and our craft long. That truism could be illustrated as easily from my own writings.<sup>18</sup> The prevalence of vagueness in discussions about the relations of Taoism and science reminds us rather that little precision and consensus can yet be found in our more general understanding of Taoism.

#### BONES OF CONTENTION

*Is Taoism one?* Norman Girardot has recently pointed out the dissonance between two positions held by scholars of Taoism. The

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ham's position. He believes that responsibility for sterilizing "the sprouts of natural science" is to be "laid at the door, not so much of the Taoists' complacent and conventional rival, social-minded Confucianism, as of the socio-economic system of feudal bureaucratism itself" (Needham, 2:162).

<sup>17</sup> Whalen W. Lai, "Toward a Periodization of the Taoist Religion" (essay review), *History of Religions* 16 (1976): 75-85, esp. 77, n. 7; compare Needham's discussion of "Taoism as a Religion" (Needham, 2:154-61).

<sup>18</sup> For instance, in *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies*, Harvard Monographs in the History of Science, no. 1 (Cambridge, Mass., 1968), esp. chap. 3, I wrote repeatedly of the great alchemical and medical author Sun Ssu-mo (alive 675) as a Taoist. Although I showed that early accounts of his Taoist and Buddhist connections were legendary, my understanding of the history of orthodox Taoism was too limited to specify in what sense he could be called a Taoist. Only one sense withstands scrutiny. In his therapeutic compendium *Ch'ien chin i fang* [Supplement to prescriptions worth a thousand] there is an extensive Canon of Interdiction (*Chin ching*). Its exorcistic formulas were plainly meant to be recited by a priest. They contain such phrases as "I am a libationer [i.e., priest] of the Celestial Masters (*Wu wei t'ien-shih chi-chiu*)" and "I am a son of the Celestial Master, dispatched by the Master" (Mei-ch'i ed. of 1307; reprint ed., Peking, 1955), 29:14a (p. 347) and 30:2a (p. 353). The canon is still learned from Sun's book by priests of the Celestial Masters sect in Taiwan today (private communication, K. M. Schipper 1971). It is unlikely that Sun would have had access to these formulas had he not been an initiated member of a Taoist order.

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issue is "the relationship of the 'philosophical' nature of the *Tao Te Ching*, the *Chuang Tzu*, and other works such as the *Lieh Tzu* to the 'religious' Taoism of hygiene, liturgy, alchemy, and other subtraditions concerned with a type of soteriology or quest for 'immortality.'" One position "essentially holds that the Taoism of Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu is an isolated phenomenon of 'pure philosophy' completely distinct from the goal of *hsien* immortality." The second "holds that an essential unity must be seen among the various historical forms of Taoism," without denying the distinctions between these forms.<sup>19</sup> Since Girardot has already mentioned leading European and American proponents of these two views, I will examine a few instances of the same contention in Japan:

To my mind the case for the underlying unity of Taoism has been most eloquently stated by Yoshioka Yoshitoyo: "... in the simplest axiomatic sense, Lao-tzu is the embodiment of the 'Tao'; the *Tao te ching* represents the teachings of the 'Tao.' The masses assimilated this artless logic and transformed it into action. This was the origin of organized Taoism. . . . Generally speaking, the relation between orthodox Taoism (*Dōkyō*) and the Chinese people, and between orthodox Taoism and Lao-tzu and the *Tao te ching*, has been of this kind. If we ignore this fundamental interrelationship, and merely consider superficially the diverse forms of Taoist belief, it will be impossible to reach a true understanding."<sup>20</sup>

As the proponents cited by Girardot indicate, on the whole the first position has been adopted by sinologists whose study has concentrated on the pre-Han philosophic classics and on views of the Taoist traditions recorded in historical sources, and the second by those who have gone on to become familiar with the scriptures preserved in the Taoist patrology (*Tao tsang*). It may be that as thorough study of this literature becomes the rule in Taoist studies the issue will be laid to rest. It is equally likely that the dichotomy

<sup>19</sup> Norman Girardot, "Part of the Way: Four Studies on Taoism" (essay review), *History of Religions* 11 (1972): 319-37, esp. 320-24.

<sup>20</sup> Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, *Eisei e no negai. Dōkyō* [Taoism. The aspiration toward eternal life], *Sekai no shūkyō* [Religions of the world], vol. 9 (Kyoto, 1970), pp. 23-24. This work is summarized in Lai. The original Japanese does not imply that what came to be called the *Tao te ching* was the sole teaching of Lao-tzu. It was the oldest revelation by that divine figure, but there were many others. See, for instance, the texts in the *Tao tsang* listed in K. M. Schipper, *Concordance du Tao-tsang. Titres des ouvrages*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, no. 102 (Paris, 1975), p. 67, and the Tun-huang scripture reproduced, translated, and discussed in Anna K. Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao tseu dans le Taoïsme des Han*, Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, no. 71 (Paris, 1969).

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will be translated into more refined distinctions (for instance, greater awareness of the diversity of concepts that today tend to be lumped into the notion of *hsien* immortality).

*Is Taoism to be defined by sentiments alone, or must institutions be considered as well?* Even in Japan, where the study of Taoist literature has been more thorough—and better organized—than elsewhere, there is no agreement. A catholic definition, in which organization plays a due part, has been given by Kubo Noritada: "Taoism . . . was founded on a variety of ancient popular beliefs; was centered about immortality lore; incorporated the lore of philosophic Taoism, the Book of Changes, yin-yang, the Five Phases, divination and apocalyptic prognostication, astrology, and so on, as well as shamanistic beliefs; and was given religious forms modeled on the style and organization of Buddhism. Taoism is a religion of benefit in this world, the chief goal of which is eternal life, exempt from aging."<sup>21</sup>

Kimura Eiichi, a leading interpreter of the *Lao-tzu*, has constructed his definition very differently:

There are cases where various religions were unified into one standard and major religion for a people. . . . When such varied racial faiths were not quite unified into one organized body, but had prominent features peculiar to and common among all of them, a certain name could be given to the common features to indicate the major religion of that people. . . . Judaism for the Jewish people, Hinduism for the Indian people, Taoism for the Chinese people and Shintoism for the Japanese people are the major racial religions. They are closely related to the living customs of their respective society *whether individuals are ardent or conscious believers in the religion or not*. . . . Needless to say, a national religion does not spread to another race, though it colors the life of all the members of the homogeneous society from which it springs.

Here the essence of Taoism is a congenital sentiment that need not even be conscious. This view has survived documentation by Japanese historians of the spread of Taoism to Korea and Japan. Kimura does not, in fact, use systematically the distinction between orthodox Taoism (the Taoist sects) and popular religion.

<sup>21</sup> Kubo Noritada, *Kōshin shinkō no kenkyū* [Studies in *ken-g-shen* beliefs], 3 vols. (Tokyo, 1961-69), vol. 1. Although immortality is usually stressed by modern scholars as the end of individual Taoist practice, it is only one of several ways to express the chief goal of Taoism. Taoists also thought of this goal as union with the Tao—godhead immanent in the cosmic order and absolute beyond it—or as appointment to the celestial hierarchy. An outsider might see the goal as harmony with the social as well as the divine order, but a functionalist sociological view tends to lose sight of the core of religious striving. One might say that the practices and beliefs of Taoism (including immortality lore) conditioned the imagination and thus prepared the individual to embody the perfect order which the Tao implies.

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His definition is easily understandable if it is referred to the latter.<sup>22</sup> Despite the virtues of this definition—for instance, its attention to the fundamentally religious impulse of Taoism—it could hardly be employed to study the relations between scientific and religious activities in China.

The great student of the Taoist patrologies, Ōfuchi Ninji, has avoided these difficulties by defining not Taoism itself but what underlies its manifestations:

Insofar as we use the word "Taoism" (*dōkyō*), and insofar as we attempt to deal with Taoism over a period of hundreds and thousands of years, we must be presupposing something common and fundamental that has remained unchanged over time. . . . If we cannot find a single system that can be objectively delineated, we have no choice but to explore . . . more subjective territory, namely, the hearts and the minds of the Chinese people. Taoism, in my view, cannot be explained except by reference to the timelessly unchanging, realistic, and optimistic sentiments of the Chinese people who, concerned solely with reality and placing their trust entirely in man's present life, unashamedly regard man's happiness in this world as the ultimate value.<sup>23</sup>

This characterization conveys the common foundation of Confucianism, folk religion, and certain characteristically Chinese types of Buddhism as well as that of Taoism. Popular belief shaped them all.

To sum up, an important reason for the prevalent vagueness about the relations of Taoism and science is that the field of Taoist studies is still too young to have settled even the most general questions about its content and scope. Those questions

<sup>22</sup> The quotation is from Kimura Eiichi, "Taoism and Chinese Thought," *Acta asiatica* 27 (1974): 1-18, esp. 2-3; my italics. The passage immediately preceding the one cited occurs with somewhat different wording in an earlier essay of the same title by Kimura in Japanese; there it is introduced by the statement, "First and foremost there is the question of popular religions and world religions" (see his "Dōkyō to Chūgoku no shisō" [literally, "Taoism and Chinese Thought," but given in the English table of contents as "The Position of Taoism in the History of Chinese Thought"], *Tōhō shūkyō*, no. 38 [1971], pp. 1-20, esp. 2). The secondary literature on Taoism in Japan is massive, but a good deal of it is about popular beliefs for which the role of Taoism in transmission to Japan is undocumented. An excellent survey which pays a good deal of attention to Taoist liturgy and organization is Shimode Sekiyo, *Dōkyō. Sono kōdō to shisō* [Taoism in thought and action], *Nihonjin no kōdō to shisō* [The Japanese people in action and thought], vol. 10 (Tokyo, 1971). On Taoist institutions in Korea, where the penetration of the religion was deeper and more abiding, the standard historical account is Yi Nung-hwa, *Han'guk togyosa* [A history of Korean Taoism] (Seoul, 1958), in literary Chinese. An important recent study is Kubo Noritada, "Chosen no dōkyō" [On Taoism in Korea], *Tōhōgaku* 29 (1965): 118-31.

<sup>23</sup> Ōfuchi Ninji, "Dōkyō no keisei" [The formation of Taoism], in *Shūkyō [Religion], Chūgoku bunka sōsho* [Chinese culture series], no. 6, ed. Kubo and Nishi Junzō (Tokyo, 1967), p. 32. This work of popularization contains essays by leading authorities on every aspect of Taoism, Buddhism, and popular religion, with some interesting articles on religion in recent Chinese history.

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will be settled not by protracted debates on abstract issues such as those I have just raised, but by thorough and critical studies of the *Tao tsang* and other sources. With that in mind, I will return to issues that bear directly on science.

### TAOISM, CONFUCIANISM, AND SCIENCE

On a certain level there is no reason to disagree with the observation that an undeniable tension in Chinese scientific and technological viewpoints was due to the opposition of Taoist and Confucian values. "Confucian" is a defensible one-word code for the hierarchic, bureaucratic, and bookish values that in traditional times were regularly invoked against change (and also, lest we forget, for change). The rhetoric of the *Lao-tzu* and *Chuang-tzu* was adopted by various people on one or another margin of society who wished to justify their receptiveness to novelty, or who found it esthetically satisfying to contemplate nature and man's relation to it, or who wanted others to think of them as men of wisdom, or who simply found conventional stuffiness laughable. Whatever else they may have meant, "Taoist" and "Confucian" in the popular imagination were vague clumps of sentiments, as fuzzy and as handy as "counterculture" and "conservative" are today. The study of such clichés certainly deserves a place in the history of Chinese sentiments.

If, on the other hand, we want to understand what efforts of human beings formed the doctrines, mental sets, and practices of Taoism and Confucianism, made a place in society for them, and modified them in changing circumstances, then studying their currency as universal clichés becomes a very minor issue. Generalizations about people who accept a certain doctrine have no significance for social history unless such people can be shown to act as a group, or at least to identify themselves as a group.

By "Taoist" a sinologist may mean a mystical author; a hereditary priest, whether or not ordained by the Celestial Master or the head of another orthodox sect; a monk; a lay member of a sect dedicated to worship of the Tao and its emanations; an initiate, whether isolated or a member of a coterie; any priest, operator, healer, medium, shaman, or supporter of popular liturgies; anyone who took seriously or practiced occult disciplines, even fakes and swindlers who merely claimed mastery of them; anyone who lived a nonconformist life outside Buddhist circles; or anyone who harbored anti-feudal feelings as certain historians

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define them today (over the past few years "Legalist" has begun to supplant "Taoist" in this last usage).

The term "Confucian" is used indiscriminately, sometimes even by specialists, to refer to a master of state ceremonial, a recognized teacher of Confucian doctrines, a philosopher who contributed to the elaboration of these doctrines, anyone who attempted to live by Confucius's teachings, any member of the civil service regardless of whether he lived in accordance with Confucius's teachings, any educated person regardless of official ambitions, or any conventional person (since it was conventional to quote Confucian doctrines in support of conventional behavior).

If we were to bring all the possible "Confucians" together, we would encounter everyone in traditional China who had the slightest claim to social or intellectual standing. All those so-called Taoists would make up a group just as motley and probably a great deal larger. The overlap between these two groups would defeat any attempt to generalize about their differences—unless, of course, we were to open Pandora's box by treating them, come what may, as mutually exclusive.<sup>24</sup>

What sense can we make of the statement, "Taoists were more friendly toward science or technology (or democracy, or revolution) than Confucians"? There are many ways in which the claim might be translated into a form that historical evidence can confirm or refute. One might, for instance, contrast Taoist priests with recognized teachers of Confucian texts, or initiates whose spiritual orientations were demonstrably shaped by Taoist scriptural traditions with thinkers explicitly committed in some specific sense to the ideals of Confucius and his followers. In neither case is the claim that the Taoists favored science (et cetera) proven by the evidence that has been presented for it so far, and prosopo-

<sup>24</sup> They are understood on the whole as mutually exclusive by historians in the People's Republic of China, where it is administratively feasible to keep Pandora's box closed. I might add that the identification of Confucianism with convention seems to do no harm in purely political history from the sixteenth century on, when orthodox Taoist organizations had ceased to play an important role. I find appropriate to the subject of Frederic Wakeman, Jr.'s excellent volume, *The Fall of Imperial China* (New York, 1975), his use of "'Confucian' . . . to denote the political and moral orthodoxy that prevailed after the T'ang period" (p. 17, n. 2). I would put the final crowding of Taoism and Buddhism out of the state orthodoxy considerably later than the T'ang, but earlier than the events described in Wakeman's book. More common in introductory histories is a blurring of the Confucian-Taoist distinction: "The man in power was usually a Confucian positivist, seeking to save society. The same man out of power became a Taoist quietist, intent on blending with nature around him. The active bureaucrat of the morning became the dreamy poet or nature lover of the evening" (Fairbank et al. p. 49).



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graphic studies of this kind have not been published. If, on the other hand, we translate it into oppositions between the scholarly and the nature-loving, or between the conforming and the anti-feudal, we may be left with something not very far from "educated individuals who hold unconventional sentiments are more inclined to value activities unconventional for the educated than are educated people who hold conventional sentiments." That is probably not quite a tautology, but it is sociologically vacuous and historically not very stimulating.

### TAOISM AND POPULAR RELIGION

In one study after another disciplines and concepts connected with transcendence have been called "Taoist"—the Taoist concept of immortality, Taoist amulets, Taoist breath disciplines, Taoist alchemy, and so on.

In what sense are they Taoist? Let us take the idea of *hsien* immortality and the arts of breath control as examples. Did the authors of the *Lao-tzu* invent them? Hardly. Although they and the writers of the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Kuan-tzu* were the first to leave writings about breath control that we can read today, they appear to be discussing established practice. It is generally recognized that the notion of immortality developed to the point reflected opaquely in the *Chuang-tzu* (earliest parts from late fourth century B.C.?) and clearly in the *Yuan yu* (late second century B.C.?) and the *Lieh-tzu* (fourth century A.D.?).<sup>25</sup>

Were thought about immortals and the practice of breath control subsequently restricted to people who were committed in a special way to the *Lao-tzu*? No. Was breath control practiced, or

<sup>25</sup> For an authoritative summary of current understanding of *hsien*, see Ying-shih Yü, "Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25 (1964-65): 80-122. David Hawkes's translation of the *Yuan yu* in *Ch'u Tzu. The Songs of the South. An Ancient Chinese Anthology* (Oxford, 1959), pp. 81-87, follows his understanding of it as "a Taoist's answer to *Li Sao*."

Priority in description of breath-control techniques is another issue which cannot be resolved in the light of present understanding, since all the allusions cited are ambiguous and are interpreted in very different ways. The strongest case for the practice of physical disciplines as reflected in the *Chuang-tzu*, *Lao-tzu*, and *Lieh-tzu* was made by H. Maspero in *Le taoïsme, Mélanges posthumes sur les religions et l'histoire de la Chine*, vol. 2 (Paris, 1960), pp. 201-18. There has been very little publication of high scholarly quality to carry this work further.

But then there is Mencius's famous passage about his *hao-jan chih ch'i* ("food-like *ch'i*" in D. C. Lau's rendering; 2A.2.11). Wei-ming Tu has suggested that this is Mencius's attempt to add or counterpoise a dimension of moral cultivation to established breath-cultivation techniques (private communication). Unlike the sources cited above, Mencius (no Taoist) was describing his own practice. In short, it is premature to regard the special association of breath control with early Taoist philosophy as proven.

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immortality believed in, only by Taoist initiates? There is every reason to believe that, even before the first Taoist sects originated and right up to the mid-twentieth century, immortality and breath control were taken seriously by numerous people in every segment of Chinese society. Both still can be found in the few habitations of Chinese where tradition maintains some semblance of life. Did breath-control techniques, or other arts of long life and immortality, originate in the Taoist religious organizations? We have yet to see persuasive evidence that *anything* originated in the Taoist religion outside of a particular way of embodying Godhead in the Tao and its emanations, and a number of rites devoted to these divinities. Orthodox Taoism is built largely upon beliefs and practices adapted from popular religion. As for popular religion—the communion of the ordinary people of China with their great celestial bureaucracy and the spirits of their dead—we understand it little better today than did most scholars of ancient times, who casually dismissed it under the labels “vulgar beliefs” and “folkways.”

The issue is not whether *hsien* immortality or breath disciplines had Taoist connotations in the minds of certain Chinese, but whether such beliefs and practices reliably signal Taoist influence. The alchemical or medical practices of T'ao Hung-ching (456–536), the systematizer of the Mao Shan Taoist sect, could certainly be called Taoist to the extent that they were associated with him, regardless of their origin or prevalence in non-Taoist circles.<sup>26</sup> What makes them Taoist in this sense is their context and the special character he gave them, not their nature. To transfer the label “Taoist” to another alchemical or pharmaceutical context without good cause is not sound method.

When Taoist initiates performed certain techniques (for instance, physical and breathing disciplines) which do not pass any of the above tests, it is worth asking whether they were doing them as Taoists per se or simply as Chinese in a certain time and place.<sup>27</sup> We do not, after all, assume that rice was Taoist because Taoists ate it.

<sup>26</sup> The connection between Tao's religious and medical activities has not been explored in depth, but Strickmann has studied T'ao's alchemy in connection with his establishment of the Mao Shan sect of Taoism.

<sup>27</sup> See *Taoist Yoga. Alchemy and Immortality* (London, 1970), by the learned Buddhist adept Lu K'uan Yü. It translates the work of a writer born in 1860 and describes practices often encountered outside esoteric circles in present-day Taiwan and Southeast Asia. No evidence of Taoist origin or particular association is given. The discussion of “the Taoist school” in the same author's *The Secrets of Chinese Meditation* (London, 1964) is equally vague about what makes it a school.

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Why did ancient authors habitually associate occult practices and conceptions with Taoism without being concerned with the special character of the linkage?

Chiao Hsun (1763–1820), the great classicist and mathematician, provides a clue in his argument for the extravagant hypothesis that books perish because bibliographic classification is sloppy: "I have observed that, although the Buddhists and Taoists passed through prosperity and decline, their writings have survived. This is surely not a matter of personal efforts alone. Because both schools have established clear schemes of classification, they have been able to preserve their books fervently over the generations, so that although they might be destroyed they would not perish."<sup>28</sup>

In other words, the compilers of the successive Taoist patrologies provided rubrics for classifying books of all kinds that had been collected and stored in Taoist monasteries and temples. These books soon would have perished had there been no shelter but that provided by the whims of individual collectors.<sup>29</sup> The Taoist collections were quite eclectic. They preserved many important works of medicine, materia medica, geomancy, and other sciences. It was primarily the printed *Tao tsang* that preserved the neglected *Mo-tzu* until in modern times it began to attract the attention of philologists. I have never seen any sign that the compilers of the *Tao tsang* considered the *Mo-tzu* Taoist.<sup>30</sup> It was enough that it was useful.

Even more to the point, the Taoist librarians collected records of a multitude of beliefs and practices created by the illiterate majority and by literate people who were in touch with the folk milieu. We have yet to see proof that more than a fraction of those who wrote on such subjects as breath control and immortality were connected with Taoist organizations, or were even aware of the special tenets of Taoism; but certain Taoist sects were the only large organizations (outside the central government, of course)

<sup>28</sup> Chiao Hsun, *Kuo shih ching chi chih*, end of ch. 3 in *Ming shih i-wen chih*, *pu pien, fu pien* (Peking, 1959), 2:932.

<sup>29</sup> The selection of Taoist texts freely available in traditional times depended as much on literary beauty as on intrinsic importance. There was, of course, a great bias toward books useful in self-cultivation. Important aspects of the religious Taoist literature—spiritual and magical exercises based on elaborate and fantastic image-forming meditations, and the entire basis of Taoist ceremonial—have remained almost unknown to the Chinese general reader.

<sup>30</sup> A simple test of orthodox Taoist attitudes is the priest Po Yun-chi's *Tao tsang mu-lu hsiang chu* [Bibliography of the Taoist patrology, with detailed annotations, completed 1636]. Although Sun Ssu-mo's medical writings elicit a complimentary note, the *Mo-tzu* passes without comment, T'ui-keng t'ang ed., 4:30b–31a, 33b.

motivated to collect and preserve quantities of such "heterodox" writings.

I do not mean that Taoist eclecticism was a mere matter of librarianship. Nor was it a matter of Taoism's inherent logic. Most Taoists through history—initiates of early sects, later priests conducting rituals of renewal and laying the dead to rest in the villages and towns—did not regard the *Mo-tzu*, the Travels of King Mu [*Mu t'ien-tzu chuan*], the construction of special water clocks to time meditation, and so on, with special interest.<sup>31</sup> Groups primarily oriented toward individual salvation (for themselves and their powerful patrons) were willing to ransack every current belief and practice. When those groups, particularly the Mao Shan sect and the Ch'üan-chen sect after it, classified their books, they gave structure to everything they borrowed and created.

There was no Taoism, Ōfuchi has argued—no community of interest or consciousness of shared conviction among early sects now considered Taoist—until it was created by the classification of scriptures. Ōfuchi has shown that from the beginning of such classification by Lu Hsiu-ching (406–77) and T'ao Hung-ching (456–536) a primary motive was to assert the paramount spiritual status of the compiler's own tradition.<sup>32</sup> Another aim was to preserve old religious traditions against encroaching Buddhism. A third motive was to assert in the spiritual realm the high self-estimate of the older Wu gentry as northern refugees with Celestial Masters sect traditions became politically ascendant over them. It is thus understandable that the Celestial Masters tradition, despite its greater antiquity and popularity (especially but by no means only in the north) was not even represented in the tripartite *san tung* classification of the early patrology.<sup>33</sup>

Although rivalry fueled the formation of the Taoist patrologies, the result over a long period was a stock of beliefs and practices

<sup>31</sup> *Mu t'ien-tzu chuan* (*Cheng-t'ung Tao tsang*, vol. 137; *Ch'üan-chen tao p'o chieh fa*, vol. 988) (reprint ed., Commercial Press).

<sup>32</sup> Ōfuchi Ninji, "Dōzō no seiritsu," *Tōhōgaku* 38 (1969): 49–57, esp. 50–54; translation by Leon Hurvitz in "How the *Tao-tsang* Took Shape" (paper for the First International Conference on Taoism). A good deal of the same evidence is scattered through Ch'en Kuo-fu, *Tao tsang yuan-liu k'ao* [Researches in the history of the Taoist patrologies], rev. ed., 2 vols. (Peking, 1963). See also the paper by Strickmann cited in n. 2 above. Lu was associated with the Ling-pao tradition and T'ao with the Shang-ch'ing, i.e., Mao Shan.

<sup>33</sup> The basic Celestial Masters scriptures were tacked on as one of four ancillary groups of texts (*ssu fu*). The motivations of the southern aristocrats have been explored in detail by Strickmann in "Taoism in the Lettered Society of the Six Dynasties" (see n. 2 above).

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upon which all the sects that worshiped the Tao could draw. Thus a willingness to adapt elements of popular liturgy, of Buddhist organization and scriptural form, and of the state bureaucratic ritual, was central to the formation of Taoism. This borrowing of orthodox Taoists represented only half of a complex and ill-understood dialectical relationship. For instance, Rolf Stein has investigated with his customary penetration the movement of Taoist liturgies into popular religion in early times. In the process he has shown how useless recorded accusations of heterodoxy and degenerate practices are in our endeavor to untangle established Taoist institutions from their imitators and heretics. He has accumulated an impressive array of examples in which the stigma "lewd cult" was directed against orthodox Taoist groups by orthodox rivals.<sup>34</sup>

Stein's discovery seemingly renders hopeless the distinction between Taoists and their popular competitors. To the contrary, it provides us with a powerful light by which we can read the documents critically and reconstruct the dynamics of institution-building (as well as doctrine-building) in the transitional milieu of Taoism.

It is scarcely surprising that the distinction between Taoism and popular religion was of negligible interest to conventional members of the educated elite. They read about popular beliefs and practices in books and collections of anecdotes that stressed Taoist connections. Outsiders were not concerned that the Taoists did not originate certain disciplines and rites, were not their main sponsors, and in many cases had no reason to alter them and give them a specifically Taoist flavor in use.

"Popular religion," as I have indicated, was not an acceptable cubbyhole to historians and other educated people trying to make sense of beliefs very much at odds with their own rationalist humanism. It could be all the more easily rejected as a cubbyhole because "Taoism" provided an alternative.

Taoism has usually been considered heterodox by pedants (although it is not clear whether the majority of the educated elite would have agreed with them before the end of the T'ang period). But there are heterodoxies and heterodoxies. Taoism had organization, well-defined literary traditions (with a certain number of its

<sup>34</sup> Stein, "Taoïsme religieux et religion populaire (du IIe au VIIe siècle)" (paper for the Second International Conference on Taoism), and "Etude du monde chinois: Institutions et concepts," *L'Annuaire du Collège de France* 67 (1967-68): 411-15; 68 (1968-69): 453-57.

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canons circulating in the lay world, where they were admired as fine writing), and imperial recognition. Far from being politically revolutionary, orthodox Taoist sects after the Han period played no active role in rebellions, messianic or otherwise, and never represented rebellion as desirable (it was because certain "Taoist" ideals were so thoroughly diffused among the people that rebel groups freely adapted them to their own purposes). Instead, the Taoist religious organizations consistently sought the favor of the temporal powers, provided support for the government, and modeled relations with the gods on the usages of the imperial bureaucracy.<sup>35</sup> "Taoism" was an epithet that came readily to the minds of the literati, but there was no incentive to be fastidious in its use.

### THE CASE OF KO HUNG

Nor has modern scholarship always been more fastidious. An example which bears on the study of early science is the general estimate of Ko Hung (283-343) as a major figure of the early orthodox Taoist religion and as "the greatest alchemist in Chinese history."<sup>36</sup> Let us examine the evidence with due care.

Ko claims in his Inner Chapters of *Pao-p'u-tzu* to have received several texts from one Cheng Yin, whose teacher had been Ko's great-uncle Hsuan. Ko Hsuan was reputedly the first person in South China to receive them (from the northerner Tso Tz'u). Ko Hung devotes two chapters to the alchemical procedures he had been taught. In both he assures his readers that he could never afford the ingredients to prepare them. Nor is there evidence that if Cheng Yin ever carried out an alchemical preparation Ko witnessed it.<sup>37</sup> Ko states his intention to prepare the Divine

<sup>35</sup> Anna K. Seidel, "The Image of the Perfect Ruler in Early Taoist Messianism: Lao-tzu and Li Hung," *History of Religions* 9 (1969-70): 216-47. As for the Han, when the picture is not as clear as in later periods Seidel notes that the Celestial Masters sect "did not attack the established political power" (p. 227).

<sup>36</sup> Needham (n. 8 above), 2:437; Yuan Han-Ch'ing, *Chung-kuo hua-hsueh-shih lun-wen-chi* [Collected essays on the history of chemistry in China] (Peking, 1956), p. 180. Needham recently has modified this characterization to "the greatest alchemist of his age, and the greatest Chinese alchemical writer of any age" ([1976], 5, pt. 3:79). Note that the editors of the Ssu-k'u Catalogue state flatly that the Inner Chapters "are in their discourse purely Taoist" (*Ssu k'u ch'üan shu tsung mu t'i yao*, Kuang-tung shu-chü ed., 1868, 146:42b). There has been some confusion about Ko Hung's dates, but see N. Sivin, "On the *Pao p'u tzu nei p'ien* and the Life of Ko Hung (283-343)," *Isis* 60 (1969): 388-91.

<sup>37</sup> Ko denies performing alchemy in *Pao-p'u-tzu nei p'ien*, P'ing chin kuan ts'ung-shu ed., 4:2a, and 16:1b. Needham's assertion that Ko achieved some minor elixirs with which he prolonged his life is not supported by the source he cites, nor by any reliable source known to me (Needham, 5, pt. 3:82.)

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Medicine after his philosophic writings have been completed.<sup>38</sup> He consistently phrases his previous alchemical interests as manifested by searching for unusual writings and canonic formulas rather than by joining those who were performing the Great Work.<sup>39</sup>

Ko stood at a watershed. He was an initiated adept seeking to transcend his mortal limitations. In this restricted sense he can be considered "part of a long line of Taoist masters concerned with magic, medicine, alchemy (the T'ai-ch'ing and San-huang line)." But attempts to connect him with large-scale Taoist organizations (for which salvation was a communal matter) have been based on tenuous evidence indeed, mostly on marriage connections and his descendants' involvements.<sup>40</sup> He does not even seem to have known that the Celestial Masters or any other contemporary Taoist sect existed in his time. The expectation of an impending new order, at once cosmic and political, that brought together

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In ch. 4 Ko adds, "My teacher Master Cheng was a disciple of my great-uncle Hsien-kung [= Hsuan], and received [several canons on elixirs of immortality] from him; but [Cheng's] family was poor and he did not have the wherewithal to buy the ingredients." In 16:1a, speaking of the Medial Canon of the Yellow and White (*Huang pai chung ching*), concerned with the preparation of silver and gold, Ko states, "Master Cheng said that he had tried to prepare [these formulas] on Mount T'ung in Lu-chiang with Master Tso, and that they all were successful." This Medial Canon was not the same as the scriptures concerned with the elixir of immortality mentioned in ch. 4. Whether Cheng is believable may be assessed in the light of the fact that he convinced Ko that Tso Tz'u had performed many thaumaturgical marvels (2:4b, 5:6a, 12:5b, 15:6b, and 18:3b). Cheng was modest about his own feats in which Ko Hsuan and Tso Tz'u were not involved. In any case, Ko was acquainted with the experiment at Lu-chiang only by hearsay. Kaltenmark states explicitly that "Ko Hung admits that he never undertook any experiments," but makes Ko "after Wei Po-yang, the greatest theoretician of alchemy" (*Lao tseu et le taoïsme* [Paris, 1965], p. 168; *Lao Tzu and Taoism*, trans. Roger Greaves [Stanford, Calif., 1969], p. 131). Kaltenmark later appears to qualify his emphasis on Ko's theoretical eminence (*Lao Tzu and Taoism*, p. 132). I contend that Ko's chapters on alchemy contain very little of theoretical consequence; their value lies in the practical information he transmits from earlier sources. Ko's limited understanding makes some of his formulas indecipherable, but the operations described in the rest make sense chemically (see Sivin, *Chinese Alchemy* [n. 18 above], pp. 40-47). For a complete but often unreliable translation of the *Nei p'ien*, see James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320* (Cambridge, Mass., 1966). It is keyed to pages of the edition cited in this footnote.

<sup>38</sup> Ko, 4:17a.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 4:2a, 4a; 16:1a; *Pao p'u tzu wai p'ien*, P'ing chin kuan ts'ung-shu ed., 50:7b, trans. Ware, p. 15.

<sup>40</sup> For a thorough and judicious account of Ko's family connections and his associations with Taoist textual traditions, see Max Kaltenmark, "Religions de la Chine" (Rapport sur les conférences), *Ecole pratique des hautes études*, V<sup>e</sup> section, sciences religieuses, *Annuaire* 77 (1970-71): 125-27. I would add that the only scripture taught to Ko which was clearly of Taoist origin and concerned primarily with matters other than alchemy and cosmology was the *San Huang Nei Wen* (*Nei p'ien*, 4:1b, 19:3a). This was probably but not certainly part of the *San Huang Ching* and was devoted to disciplines for individual immortality (see Kaltenmark, "Notions sur quelques grands sutras taoïstes" [paper for the Bellagio conference, 1968], and Ch'en Kuo-fu [n. 32 above], 1: 71-81).

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believers in every early sect, never entered his consciousness.<sup>41</sup> He acknowledged the authentic knowledge and spiritual authority of no one but his teacher. The spread of the Celestial Masters into the south did not reach discernible proportions until after his time, and his direct influence on the form Taoist institutions finally took seems to have been negligible—although his vision of a Taoism designed for the needs and tastes of the aristocratic adept did turn out to be the wave of the future.<sup>42</sup>

The Inner Chapters are anything but the writings of a Taoist man of wisdom or organizer for his disciples or for other initiates. This book is a vast trove of commonplaces and hearsay about popular beliefs in which Ko's few incontestably Taoist texts play an essential but small part. Its goal is not to catalogue, synthesize, or provide a handbook of techniques. It is rather a dialogue in which Ko hurls scattershot against a skeptical anonymous interlocuter.

The Inner Chapters are a one-issue book. Ko seeks to convince his questioner, and thereby his readers, that immortality is a proper object of study and is attainable—not only by the ancients but in his own time, not only by a destined few but by anyone with enough faith to undertake arduous and dangerous disciplines. The devotion that Ko calls for implies wholesale acceptance of legends, myths, tales of prodigies, magical beliefs, religious faiths—practically every belief current in the popular imagination of Ko's time and the inverse in almost every sense of what "fundamentalist Confucian" humanists considered worthy of thought (but then they were no longer setting the intellectual style). The only notable exceptions to Ko's credulity were what he ridicules as the notions of heterodox and uninitiated self-styled Taoists

<sup>41</sup> Ko managed to copy off the titles of the books his teacher owned, and among them we find the *T'ai-p'ing ching*, associated with the major sect of Northeast China and a source of ideology for the Yellow Turban rising of A.D. 184. It was not among the texts Cheng allowed Ko to read (*Nei p'ien*, 19:2b-3a), and Ko does not refer to specific T'ai-p'ing beliefs. Ko's couple of citations from the *Ling pao ching* (17:4a, 5a) do not prove that he had been initiated into knowledge of it. In *A Gallery of Chinese Immortals* (London, 1948), pp. 60-61, Lionel Giles translates an account of Chang Tao-ling's "Taocratic" state in late second-century Szechwan, supposedly from Ko's *Shen-hsien chuan*. This would indicate that Ko was at least familiar with early Celestial Masters organization. But the ascription of this book (along with many others) to Ko is most unlikely; even if it were his, the description is not part of Chang's biography in early versions of *Shen-hsien chuan* (e.g., that in *Yun chi ch'i ch'ien, Cheng-t'ung Tao tsang* ed., 109:19a-21a), but only in spurious recensions concocted out of the *T'ai-p'ing kuang chi* (cf. reprint of the latter [Taipei, 1968], 8:32a-33b; see *Ssu k'u ch'üan shu tsung mu t'i yao*, 106:46a-46b).

<sup>42</sup> For instance, the *Pao p'u tzu nei p'ien* is not mentioned in the foundation texts of Mao Shan Taoism. See the citation lists in Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, *Dōkyō keiten shiron* [Studies in the history of the canonical Taoist literature] (1955; 2d ed., Tokyo, 1966), pp. 350-92.



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(*su tao-shih*), too ignorant of authentic arcana to overcome their skepticism about Ko's enthusiasms. He represents them as literate and owners of books, and thus not socially outside his pale.

Ko's sketchy, forced, and contradictory understanding on many points is remarkable when compared with the internal consistency and assured tone of Taoist texts of the time.<sup>43</sup> It is all the more remarkable because Ko is discussing very widespread beliefs. Whom is he trying so desperately and with so inadequate a command of his materials to convince? Hardly the people in the fields and marketplaces around him, for it was their own familiar lore of magic, gods, and spiritual power, bolstered with what he had learned of Taoism from the north, that he was trying to persuade his readers to take seriously. Who were the skeptics?

Ko Hung, "marquis of Kuan-chung, entitled to support from two hundred households of Chü-jung town,"<sup>44</sup> was writing for people of his own quality. Some of the small aristocracy, both southerners and the northern immigrants who were beginning to settle among them, knew a little of Taoism; it was they he searched out and discredited. Few, no doubt, cared to know much about the vitalistic, animistic, divinity-centered world view of the peasants whose toil supported them.

This view of Ko as an obsessed bookman and indiscriminate lore-collector may seem abrupt so soon after Liu Ts'un-yan's recent essay on the viewing of tuberculosis microbes through compound microscopes by Taoist priests in the twelfth century, in which he found occasion to elevate Ko Hung to the rank of Taoist priest.<sup>45</sup> But the image of a priest, a doer in the community of the faithful, is not what the credulous and labored preachments of the Inner Chapters suggest. Ko's style was rather that of a pedantic purveyor of occultism to the upper class. I can only think of him as the Alan Watts of his time.

Why should Ko Hung's quixotic attempt to turn the old southern aristocracy into dropouts have been taken with such deadly seriousness for so long? Because the alternative is to insist on delving into the social and historic circumstances in which his

<sup>43</sup> This point has been made by Michel Strickmann in *Encyclopædia Britannica*, 15th ed., s.v. "Taoist Literature": "For all his charm, however, the contradictory opinions that the author in his enthusiasm lets slip raise doubts as to his real understanding of the beliefs he so lustily defended." This article, Strickmann's "Taoism, History of," and Anna K. Seidel's "Taoism" are by far the best available short surveys of these topics, in point of learning, critical approach, and clarity.

<sup>44</sup> *Pao p'u tzu wai p'ien*, 50:11a, trans. Ware, p. 20.

<sup>45</sup> Liu Ts'un-yan, "The Taoists' Knowledge of Tuberculosis in the Twelfth Century," *T'oung pao* 57 (1971): 285-301.

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books were written. It is premature to expect clarity about the changing social and historic character of religious Taoism, but steady efforts in this direction are obviously called for.

### CONCLUSIONS

I have drawn attention to the frequent confusion between many things that "Taoist" can mean and have suggested that this confusion often mires us down when we try to comprehend the historic character of these phenomena and their complex interplay. I have also examined the frequent failure to distinguish between Taoist and popular beliefs and practices that are recorded in Taoist literature. This neglect has led to wasted effort in studying the evolution of Taoism.

Few of the sorts of confusion I have discussed are the creation of sinologists; most were prevalent centuries ago. To some extent the confusion reflects the complexity of the historic circumstances. A great deal of additional ambiguity was generated in traditional times by the social prejudices of people who happened to write about religion and by a general reluctance to interpret philosophic and religious texts critically, to think of them as documents produced by subjective observers in historic predicaments. It is perhaps a bit early in the development of modern studies of Chinese religions to expect everyone involved in these subjects to work out a fresh understanding unconstrained by traditional limitations of viewpoint.

What can be done now, in the present state of religious studies, to make the exploration of Taoism's connections with science more fruitful?

Although carelessness about definitions is my theme, the last thing I would propose as a remedy is that we all adopt a single operational definition of "Taoist," "Confucian," "popular religion," and so on, and apply them with merciless rigor. There is no single definition of each term that can encompass the diverse historical questions that we might want to ask of the sources. A study of the interaction between popular and Taoist liturgy might demand great precision of definition, limited finally by the ambiguity of the documents. A study of Taoism as reflected in vernacular literature might accept as Taoist everything the writers called Taoist.

My point is a modest one, inspired by a saying of Confucius himself that can hardly be improved upon as a guide to critical

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research: "When you know something, to know that you know it; when you don't know it, to know that you don't know it: that's knowledge."<sup>46</sup> I propose merely that as our learning proceeds we remain aware, and keep our readers aware, of the ambiguity in our sources and of what definitions we are applying as we interpret them.

Surely there is nothing wrong with considering Taoism religious, poetical, magical, scientific, democratic, and politically revolutionary, so long as we remind our readers that these descriptions apply to a variety of phenomena which are Taoist in very disparate senses, and that such a view of Taoism is not an assertion about any collectivity which interacted with other collectivities to shape science or other aspects of Chinese history.

It is, I believe, simple and feasible, when we speak of something as Taoist (or Confucian), to be explicit about the sense in which we so consider it and the criteria by which we so judge it. If we are concerned with orthodox Taoism and the only available sources may or may not be Taoist, it is a simple matter to maintain the distinction between what we are sure about and what we are not. There is enough blurring beyond our critical control without adding more needlessly. When we use the writings of people who were Taoist in a perfectly definable sense, it is a simple matter to specify what that sense is. It is a simple matter, when we do not know what private motives and social situations inform a writer's assertions about reality, to emphasize our ignorance. We may be specialists in the religious aspects of Taoism and thereby feel relieved of all obligation to explore in depth the political commitments or scientific interests of the people we study; but the people we study were more than disembodied Taoist consciousnesses.

It is not a simple matter, but it is essential nevertheless, to make certain that our historical reconstruction of traditional Chinese religions adequately represents their diversity, their unity with the rest of what people did and thought, and their complex textures, which span every level of spiritual experience.

### *University of Pennsylvania*

<sup>46</sup> *Analects* 2.17. *Chih* refers to understanding and recognition of significance as aspects of knowledge, not to objective factual knowledge isolated from the act of understanding and evaluating.

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## GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

Ch'en Kuo-fu, Tao tsang yüan-liu k'ao  
陳國符, 道藏源流考

Cheng-i 正一

Cheng-t'ung Tao tsang 正統道藏

Cheng Yin 鄭隱

Chiao Hsun 焦循

Ch'ien chin i fang 千金翼方

chih 知

Chin ching 禁經

Chuang Lin hsü tao tsang 莊林  
續道藏

Ch'üan-chen 全真

Ch'üan-chen tso p'o chieh fa 全真坐鉢捷法

Chung-kuo ku-tai k'o-hsüeh-chia  
中国古代科学家

hao-jan chih ch'i 浩然之氣

hsien 仙

Hsien-kung 仙公

Huang pai chung ching 黃白中經

i jen 異人

Kimura Eiichi 木村英一

Ko Hsüan 葛玄

Ko Hung 葛洪

Kubo Noritada 窪德忠

Kuo shih ching chi chih 國史  
經籍志

Lieh-tzu 列子

Ling-pao 靈寶

lu 籙

Lu Hsiu-ching 陸修靜

Mao-shan 茅山

Ming-shih i-wen chih, pu pien, fu pien  
明史藝文志, 補編, 附編

Mo-tzu 墨子

Mu t'ien-tzu chuan 穆天子傳

Nishi Junzō 西順藏

Ōfuchi Ninji 大淵忍爾

Pao-p'u-tzu nei p'ien 抱朴子內篇

Po Yün-chi, Tao tsang mu-lu hsiang chu  
白雲齋, 道藏目錄詳註

San-huang 三皇

San huang nei wen 三皇內文

san tung 三洞

Shang-ch'ing 上清

Shen-hsien chuan 神仙傳

Shimode Sekiyo 下出積興

ssu fu 四庫

Ssu k'u ch'üan shu tsung mu t'i yao  
四庫全書總目提要

Sun Ssu-mo 孫思邈

T'ai-ch'ing 太清

T'ai p'ing ching 太平經

T'ai p'ing kuang chi 太平廣記

*On the Word "Taoist"*

T'ao Hung-ching 陶弘景

Tao tsang 道藏

t'ien tsun 天尊

Tso Tz'u 左慈

Wu wei t'ien-shih chi-chiu

吾為天師祭酒

Yi Nung-hwa, Han'guk togyosa

李能和, 韓國道教史

Yoshioka Yoshitoyo 吉岡義豐

Yüan Han-ch'ing, Chung-kuo hua-hsüeh-shih  
lun-wen chi 袁翰青, 中國化學史

論文集

Yüan yu 遠遊

Yün chi ch'i ch'ien 雲笈七籤