

THE TAOIST TRADITION



RELIGION 4403 / 6403
UNIVERSITY OF GEORGIA
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"Were one asked to characterize the life of religion in the broadest and most general terms possible, one might say that it consists of the belief that there is an unseen order, and that our supreme good lies in harmoniously adjusting ourselves thereto."

— William James (1842-1910), *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (1902)



THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The academic study of religion is a systematic exploration of the visions, values, and activities by which individuals and societies of past and present have understood and shaped their life-experiences. This course is a course in "the history of religions." The goal of such courses is to promote a mature sensitivity to religious traditions, personalities, issues and institutions, within their proper historical contexts. Such courses are not intended to persuade students either toward or away from any specific tradition, nor are they intended to serve as an element of any personal spiritual search in which students might already be engaged. Rather, the goal of such courses is for students to achieve an accurate understanding of certain societies' religions on those societies' own terms, and to evaluate those religions in a manner that is both properly critical and properly sympathetic. Any student who wants an experience that is "spiritually fulfilling" to her/him personally should go to a religious center of her/his choice and seek that experience *there*. The college classroom is not intended to play such a role in students' lives. You are here to *study* religion; if you wish to *practice* religion, you are in the wrong place.

Taoism (now often written "Daoism") is a Chinese cultural tradition focussed primarily on methods and strategies for personal and socio-political integration with the totality of reality, including its transcendent dimensions. Taoism encompasses a broad array of moral, social, philosophical, and religious ideas, values, and practices. Over the long history of China, Taoism incorporated the teachings and practices of people whose interests and concerns were often quite different. Like other religions around the world, Taoism included some contemplatives, whose orientation often seems attractive to modern people—particularly to Westerners looking for alternatives to their own cultural traditions. Many Westerners, misled by writers who know *nothing* about the authentic traditions of Taoism, misunderstand Taoism: ignorant of the richness and depth of nearly 2500 years of Chinese Taoism, these people have often fallen victim to commercializations that are falsely marketed as "Taoism"—such as that found in mindless fluff like *The Tao of Pooh*, or in pseudo-translations of the *Tao te ching* by self-absorbed dilettantes who have *never even read* the text in its original language, and don't even think that they, or you, ought to bother.

In this course, you will learn that Taoism is an ancient and immense tradition of great subtlety and complexity. You will see how its many dimensions evolved to answer the needs of people of different peri-

ods and different propensities, and you should learn respect for, and understanding of, the teachings and practices of all those people. Taoism is not some abstract "universal wisdom." Rather, it is a specific set of cultural traditions that evolved within the historical context of ancient, medieval, and modern China, evolving to meet the spiritual needs of people in specific historical situations. In medieval times, that tradition was quietly exported to Korea. But Taoists never formulated teachings designed to be marketed in foreign cultures. Westerners who delude themselves that they are "following the Tao" are actually in love with ideas created by other deluded modern Westerners, not by the authentic Taoist masters of China. In this course, we will explore the nature and evolution of "**REAL TAOISM**" — the Taoism that

- was not taken seriously by most scholars until the 1980s;
- is hardly ever found on American websites or in American bookstores; and
- remains generally unknown, even by most people in China today.

Despite the persecution of Taoists (and practitioners of other religions) during the "Cultural Revolution" of the 1960s-1970s, Taoism is still practiced by men and women in China today (though they usually "keep a low profile"). Most American books and websites about Taoism are the product of people who have never actually *met* a living Taoist, and have no idea that *authentic* Taoist traditions are still being practiced in China today. Many Chinese people today are curious to learn more about this long-suppressed tradition.

Since a full exploration of the entire Taoist tradition is impossible in one semester, we will focus upon certain enduring themes, especially the diverse Taoist approaches to self-cultivation. As we study Taoism, we will attempt (1) to learn to *distinguish* among the many historical forms of Taoism, and (2) to discern what common themes and ideals are *shared* among those traditions.

TEXTS

1. **COURSE READER** (Available at Bel-Jean's Printers, downtown)

2. **TEXTBOOKS AND OTHER RESOURCES** (Available at local bookstores)

"Required":

Livia Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*

Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*

Robert Henricks, trans., *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching* [1989: the Mawangdui ed.]

Burton Watson, trans., *Chuang-tzu: Basic Writings*

Eva Wong, trans., *Seven Taoist Masters: A Folk Novel of China*

"Recommended":

J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*

Bill Porter, *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*

Other assigned readings will be found on reserve or on the instructor's webpage. Of greatest importance is a major new reference work: Livia Kohn, ed., ***Daoism Handbook*** (2000).

Beware trying to use the internet as an educational tool, particularly in regard to non-Western cultures. Much of what you will find there is garbage. In academic terms, the quality of what you find about non-Western religions on the web is worse than what you find in the average public library (which are virtually useless for those involved in higher education). Most responsible scholars do **not** put their research on the web; such solid and reliable material appears **only** in your university **library**, in scholarly books and journals. So **do not attempt to "do research" on the web!** Except for sites specifically commended by your instructor, you should plan to do **all** of your research in your university **library**.






For the study of Taoism, the one internet site that provides an abundance of reliable material is

"DAOIST STUDIES": <http://www.daoiststudies.org> (by Professor James Miller).

Another excellent site that contains much reliable information about Taoism is
"GOLDEN ELIXIR": <http://helios.unive.it/~dsao/pregadio/index.html> (by Professor Fabrizio Pregadio)



REQUIREMENTS

-  Regular class attendance
-  Timely completion of **all** required readings
-  Two in-class tests [each 20% of course grade]
-  One essay on an assigned topic [30% of course grade]
-  A final exam [30% of course grade]

If a student's written work seems to indicate that he/she failed to do the assigned readings, or if her/his attendance is irregular, such facts will seriously affect her/his grade on specific assignments and in the course overall.

Graduate students will have additional readings, and will write a research paper on an approved topic, in lieu of the final exam.

COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

[Recommended readings are in square brackets; all other readings are **REQUIRED**]

INTRODUCTION

READER: "On the Academic Study of Religion in American Colleges and Universities"

THE "TAOISM" OF THE WESTERN IMAGINATION

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 1-4bot. [4bot.-9] 9-15

[WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China: De-Colonializing the Exotic Teachings of the East"]

[RESERVE: Bradbury, "The American Conquest of Philosophical Taoism"]

TAOISM — "ANOTHER FINE MESS..."

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 16-22, 27-40top [40top-47mid] 47mid.-51mid., 52mid.-53bot.

READER: Kirkland, "Explaining Daoism," and Barrett, "Daoism: A Historical Narrative" (from *Handbook*)

Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: 1-7

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 1-7

READER: Kirkland, "The History of Taoism: A New Outline"

READER: Kirkland, "Women in Taoism" (from *Encyclopedia of Women and World Religions*)

READER: Kirkland, "Tao" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)

THE CLASSICAL CONTEXT
SPECIAL GUEST LECTURER:
DR. THOMAS GANSCHOW
PROFESSOR EMERITUS OF CHINESE HISTORY

READER: Kirkland, "Taoism and Early Chinese Thought" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)
Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 12-15, 28-29

READER: Kirkland, "Taoism and Confucianism" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)

READER: Kirkland, "Taoism" (from *Philosophy of Education: An Encyclopedia*)

VARIETIES OF CLASSICAL TAOISM

THE VOICES OF THE "FIRST TAOISTS"? THE NEI YEH

READER / WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "Varieties of 'Taoism' in Ancient China"

READER: Kirkland, "The Neiye" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)

[RESERVE: Roth, "Inward Training"]

[WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "Meditation and 'Spiritual-Hygiene' in Late Classical Texts"]

THE VOICES OF "THE ELDERS": THE TAO TE CHING (*Daode jing*)

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 18-19

READER / WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "Daode jing" (from *Great Literature of the Eastern World*)

READER / WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "The Kuo-Tien (Guodian) 'Lao-tzu' Texts"

[RESERVE: Csikszentmihalyi, Translation of the "Guodian Laozi/Kuo-tien Lao-tzu"]

[WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "The 'Laoist' Community and the Creation of 'Lao-tzu's' Thought"]

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 19-25

Henricks, *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching*: 1-89, xii-xxxi

THE VOICE OF A DELIGHTFUL ECCENTRIC: CHUANG CHOU ("Chuang-tzu"/"Zhuangzi")

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 29-39

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 57-59, 175-184

Watson, *Chuang-tzu: Basic Writings*: 1-140

THE ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF TAOISM

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 90-95 [95-102mid.] 102mid.-108mid.

READER: Kirkland, "'Responsible Non-Action' in a Natural World"

READER: Kirkland, "Self-Fulfillment through Selflessness: The Moral Teachings of the *Daode Jing*"

VARIETIES OF LATER TAOISM

THE CONTOURS OF THE TAOIST TRADITION

READER: Schipper, "Taoism: The Story of the Way" (from S. Little, ed., *Taoism and the Arts of China*)

READER: Kirkland, "Taoism" (from *The Encyclopedia of Bioethics*, 2nd edition)

TAOISM IN ITS "FORMATIVE" PERIOD

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 28-36

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 67-80, 51-58

"ARISTOCRATIC TAOISM"

READER: Kirkland, "Daoshi/Tao-shih (Taoist Priest/Priestess)" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)
Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 82-98, 119-34
Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: as assigned

"DYNASTIC TAOISM"

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 100-112

THE "IMMORTAL" LIFE: REALITY OR METAPHOR?

READER: Kirkland, "Transcendence and Immortality" (from *Encyclopedia of Taoism*)
Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 117-120mid., 123bot.-124mid.
Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: as assigned

"GENTRY TAOISM"

READER: Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*: 38-46
Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 136-49, 153-63
Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: as assigned
READER: "'Literati Taoism': Re-Imagining the Social and Intellectual Matrices of Premodern Taoism"

SPECIAL PRESENTATION

PROFESSOR STEPHEN ESKILDSEN
UNIVERSITY OF TENNESSEE, CHATTANOOGA

"CH'ÜAN-CHEN TAOISM"

"LATE-IMPERIAL TAOISM"


Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 171-78
READER: Darga, "The Taoist Idea of Transformation in the *Xingming guizhi (Hsing-ming Kuei-chih)*"

THE TAOIST LIFE IN LATE-IMPERIAL LITERATURE

Wong, trans., *Seven Taoist Masters* (a Taoist novel of the 17th century)
READER / WEBPAGE: Kirkland, Review of *Seven Taoist Masters*

TWENTIETH-CENTURY TAOISM

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 187-98
[Yoshioka, "Taoist Monastic Life"]
Porter, *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*: 39-59, 208-220
READER / WEBPAGE: Kirkland, Review of Porter, *Road to Heaven*
Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 198-202 [205-8]; [Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 194-211]

 **Film:** "Chinese Taoism"

ADDITIONAL READINGS

Required for Grad Students / **Optional** for Undergrads
(See instructor, when necessary, for information on location)

GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "Suggested Readings on Taoism"
Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook*: as assigned

TAOISM c " ANOTHER FINE MESS..."

Sivin, "On the Word 'Taoist' as a Source of Perplexity"
Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*: xiii-xvi top, 10-13 middle, 29-32, 37-48
WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "Person and Culture in the Taoist Tradition"

IDEA-SYSTEMS SOMETIMES IDENTIFIED AS TAOIST

Kohn, *Daoism and Chinese Culture*: 43-47, 149-52
WEBPAGE: Kirkland, "The I Ching, Yin-Yang, and the 'Five Forces'"

VOICES OF LATER TAOISM

The Contours of the Taoist Tradition

Lagerwey, "The Taoist Religious Community" (in *The Encyclopedia of Religion*, vol. 14: 306-316)

Newly Translated Texts of "Aristocratic Taoism"

Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*: 6-8 top, 275-78 [281-95, 299-302] (on Shang-ch'ing texts)
Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*: 8-10, 373-76, 380-82, 389-92 [405-32] (the Ling-pao *Tu-jen ching*)
Lopez, *Religions of China in Practice*: [149-155] 166-79 [180-87] 188-202 [347-59]

Meditation and Personal Refinement

Kohn, *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*: 125-34, 137-52, 154-56
Cahill, "Practice Makes Perfect: Paths to Transcendence for Women in Medieval China"
Kohn, *Seven Steps to the Tao*: 31-73 [83-111]
Kohn, *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*: 193-222

Class Schedule Data

Holiday:	Monday	3 September (Labor Day)
Midpoint:	Tuesday	9 October
Fall Break	Thursday-Friday	25-26 October
Thanksgiving	Wednesday-Friday	21-23 November
Classes End	Thursday	6 December
Final Exam	Wednesday	12 December (3:30-6:30 pm)