

**Daoism and Ecology**  
**PHP 4990**  
**T/TR 12:30-1:45**  
**D135**

**Purpose:** This course examines the history and major concepts of Daoism and relates them to ecology and issues involving the environmental movement. Emphasis will be placed on the variety of texts, concepts, and thinkers that constitute the multifarious tradition called Daoism; ecological readings of Daoist texts and interpretations of those readings as they relate to a variety of contemporary cultural contexts; and the construction of a theoretical framework toward a Daoist environmental philosophy that can be applied viably to practical ecological issues that concern us today. Concepts such as Dao, balance, qi, wuwei, ziran, wuxing, xiangsheng, yin-yang, ecosystems, interconnectedness, and an ecological self will be examined.

**Texts:** *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape*, Eds. Girardot and Xiao. *The Way: According to Lao Tzu, Chuang Tzu, and Seng Tsan*, Ed. Schoenewolf. Reserve readings and online sources.

**Requirements:** Attendance and Participation (10% and no more than 1 unexcused absence), two exams (25% each), one paper (35%), and two presentations (5%).

**Learning Outcomes:** Upon completion of the course the student should have knowledge of the ways in which Daoist philosophy and contemporary ecological perspectives share theoretical and practical approaches to the human-nature dialogue. Students will be expected to grasp, discuss, and write about the fundamental similarities in the ways in which Daoist texts, concepts, and rites relate to ecological notions such as the self, nature, and the sacred. Students will be charged with contemplating how those notions mirror the aims of disciplines such as deep ecology, ecofeminism, and ecopsychology. Along with a formal paper and presentation regarding those perspectives, students will be encouraged to discuss passionately and tolerantly many of the issues that concern human purpose in an environmental context. Besides gaining familiarity with major names and concepts involved in the area of study, students will engage their own views and values in regard to the material.

**Topic Schedule:**

**Week One:** Course introductions and handouts from the *Yijing*, *Deep Ecology*, and Alan Watts. We will discuss traditional and contemporary perspectives regarding the relationship between religious traditions and nature as well as the role of environmental stewardship and/or partnership in that dialogue. We will share informal reports on the nature, focus, and scientific methods that constitute the study of ecology.

**Week Two:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Preface and Series Forward. "Change Starts Small: Daoist Practice and the Ecology of Individual Lives," compiled from the Roundtable discussions. Discussion of the aims and methodologies used in integrating issues related to ethics, ecology, religious beliefs, and the environmental crisis. *The Way*, Preface and Introduction. Discussion of the history and evolution of

Daoism, major concepts, texts, and figures. We will listen to a tape of Michael Murphy and Alan Watts discussing the relationship of Daoism and emerging forms of environmental thinking.

**Week Three:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Jordan Paper's "Daoism and Deep Ecology: Fantasy and Potentiality," and Jonathan Herman's "Daoist Environmentalism in the West: Ursula K. Le Guin's Reception and Transmission of Daoism." Discussion of how "Daoism" is used yesterday and today, ways that do and do not relate to deep ecology, and why an adulterated version of Daoism could be antithetical to resolving Western forms of anthropocentric thinking and environmental issues. *The Way*, the first 12 books of the *Daode jing*. Group reports on ways to interpret the aphorisms relevant to our topic.

**Week Four:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Joanne Birdwhistell's "Ecological Questions for Daoist Thought: Contemporary Issues and Ancient Texts." Discussion of the various narratives that link Daoist texts and concepts to one another, and to potentially informed Western religious and scientific perspectives. We will attempt to relate the human story to the cosmic story. *The Way*, the next 12 books of the *Daode jing*. We will analyze not just the aphorisms, but the experiential dimension of their "meanings," as well as the nature of the Chinese language.

**Week Five:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Michael Lafargue's "Nature as Part of Human Culture in Daoism," and Terry Kleeman's "Daoism and the Quest for Order." Discussion of "confrontational hermeneutics" and how the notion of "otherness" relates to a potential dialogue between Taoist mystical thought and ecological inquiry. An examination of the Taoist and ecological notions of "order." *The Way*, the next 15 books of the *Daode jing*. Student perspectives regarding the preeminence attributed to the "mysterious female" in the Daoist texts. Film on health, diet, and ecology.

**Week Six:** *Daoism and Ecology*, James Miller's "What Can Daoism Contribute to Ecology?" and Kristofer Schipper's "Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation. A Study of the Precepts of the Early Daoist Ecclesia." Ideas surrounding the potential creation of a manifesto of Daoist Ecology, and a discussion of the ecological issues presented in *The One Hundred and Eighty Precepts*. *The Way*, the rest of the *Daode jing*. Reports on the socio-political as well as eco-spiritual messages found in the text. Film on Daoism.

**Week Seven:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Chi-Tim Lai's "The Daoist Concept of Central Harmony in the *Scripture of Great Peace: Human Responsibility for the Maladies of Nature*," and Zhang Jiyu and Li Yuanguo's "Mutual Stealing among the Three Powers in the *Scripture of Unconscious Unification*." Discussion of the nature and evolution of the Taoist notion of "Central Harmony" and its self-evident relation to the interdependence of humans and nature. The relationship of human and cosmic evolution as implied in *Unconscious Unification*. *The Way*, the first part of the *Zhuangzi*. Discussion of the historical and thematic relationship between the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, and the overall aim of both.

**Week Eight:** Review and **Midterm Exam. Outline** of paper due.

**Week Nine:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Robert Campany's "Ingesting the Marvelous: The Practitioner's Relationship to Nature According to Ge Hong." Discussion of Ge Hong and ch'i as they relate to ancient alchemical practices, holistic health, and the human-nature relationship. James Miller, Richard Wang, and Edward Davis' "What Ecological Themes are Found in Daoist Texts?" and E. N. Anderson's "Flowering Apricot: Environmental Practice, Folk Religion, and Daoism." Discussion of how Westerners perceive

ecological messages in Daoist texts, and how the folk religion component of Daoist traditions can be re-mythologized in environmental language. *The Way*, part two of the *Chuang Tzu*. Discussion of Chuang Tzu's understanding of nature and the self.

**Week Ten:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Stephen Field's "In Search of Dragons: The Folk Ecology of Fengshui," and Thomas Hahn's "An Introductory Study on Daoist Notions of Wilderness." Discussion of the nature and evolution of feng shui and its use and relevance to contemporary Western practice and environmental concerns. Examination of the difference between Taoist and European/American notions of wilderness, and the relevance of the former to the latter. *The Way*, part three of the *Zhuangzi*. Discussion of Zhuangzi's description of the perfect time of nature before distinction and his utilization of animals as key figures in his work.

**Week Eleven:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Jeffrey Meyer's "Salvation in the Garden: Daoism and Ecology," and John Patterson and James Miller's "How Successfully Can We Apply the Concepts of Ecology to Daoist Cultural Contexts?," and David Hall's "From Reference to Deference: Daoism and the Natural World." Discussion of the garden as a metaphor of the Chinese reverence for and care of nature, including the iconic symbols of mountains and water. An overview of the theoretical components of understanding ecological concepts in Taoist contexts, with special emphasis on the use of metaphors. *The Way*, the first half of *Seng Tsan*. Discussion of the life, times, and message of Seng Tsan.

**Week Twelve:** *Daoism and Ecology*, Roger Ames' "The Local and the Focal in Realizing a Daoist World," and Liu Xiaogan's "Non-Action and the Environment Today: A Conceptual and Applied Study of Laozi's Philosophy," and Russell Goodman and James Miller's "What Are the Speculative Implications of Early Daoist Texts for an Environmental Ethics?" An overview regarding the areas in which ecology and Taoist themes overlap in terms of epistemological and spiritual truth claims. Discussion of wuwei and its applicability to ways of healing the West's dysfunctional environmental relations. The role of environmental ethics and deep ecology in determining textual resonance within Taoist texts. *The Way*, the second half of *Seng Tsan*. Discussion of the ecological relevance of Seng Tsan's teachings.

**Week Thirteen:** *Daoism and Ecology*, James Miller's "Respecting the Environment, or Visualizing Highest Clarity," Zhang Jiyu's "A Declaration of the Chinese Daoist Association on Global Ecology," and James Miller's "Daoism—A Vital Tradition for the Contemporary Ecological Consciousness." Discussion of the Highest Clarity tradition and notion of self-transformation in relation to current attempts to heal the self as nature. An overview of current Chinese environmental activities and the impact of the Taoist tradition in China and concluding views regarding the Daoism and contemporary environmental awareness.

**Week Fourteen:** Student presentations.

**Week Fifteen:** Student presentations.

**Week Sixteen:** Review, **Final Exam, and Paper Due.**

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Office Hours: 9:30-12 MW; 9:30-11 T/R; 9:30-11:30 F

If you have special needs or a disability for which accommodations may be appropriate to assist you in this class, please contact Barbara Fitzpatrick, Director of Disabled Student Services (DSS), [dss@uwf.edu](mailto:dss@uwf.edu), (850) 474-2387. DSS will provide the student with a letter for the instructor that will specify any recommended accommodations.

The schedule, requirements, and procedures in this course are subject to change in the event of unusual or extenuating circumstances. In such cases, students will be provided with written notice sufficient to plan for and accommodate the changes. If the college closes for inclement weather or other emergency, any exams, presentations or projects or papers due during the closure period will automatically be rescheduled for the first regular class meeting held once the college re-opens.

Expectations for Academic Conduct/Plagiarism Policy:

Academic Conduct Policy: (Web Format) / (PDF Format) / (RTF Format)

Plagiarism Policy: (Word Format) / (PDF Format) / (RTF Format)

Student Handbook: (PDF Format)

## Word Bank for Taoism and Ecology

Romanizations of Chinese terms follow the Pinyin system except for those marked by an asterisk (\*), which follow Wade-Giles

### Terms

animism  
anthropocentrism  
biocentrism/ecocentrism  
Being/Not-Being (*you/wu*)  
biophilia/bioempathy/topophilia  
calabash, or bottle gourd  
Confucianism  
*Dao*  
*Daojia*  
*Daojiao*  
*de*  
Deep Ecology  
dialectic  
dualism  
ecofeminism  
ecology  
ecosystem  
environmentalism  
*fengshui*  
hermeneutics  
hieros gamos (world parents) myths  
*hsiang sheng\**  
*K'un and Ch'ien\**  
*li*  
*neidan* (internal alchemy)  
*q i (chi\*)*  
*qigong*  
return to the beginning  
*shamanism*  
*Shangqing* (Highest Clarity)  
syncretism  
*Taiji (Tai chi\*)*  
*Ti*  
*Tien*  
uncarved block  
water (as a metaphor for Dao)  
*wuwei*  
*yin/yang*  
*wuxing*  
*ziran (tzu-jan\*)*

### Texts

*Baopuzi*  
*Huainanzi*  
*Liezi*  
*Taiping jing*  
*Daode jing*  
One Hundred and Eighty Precepts  
*Yijing (I Ching\*)*  
*Zhuangzi*

### Mythological figures

Fu Hsi and Nu Kua\*  
*Huangdi (yellow emperor)*  
*Huang-Lao*  
*Hundun*  
Laozi  
Shu and Hu  
*Zhuangzi*

### Related authors

Roger Ames  
Thomas Berry  
J. Baird Callicott  
Bill Devall  
Norman Girardot  
Ge Hong  
Ursula K. Le Guin  
Aldo Leopold  
Arnae Naess  
George Sessions  
Alan Watts

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

## Taoism and Ecology Midterm

### I. Fill in the blanks (2 points each).

1. The Chinese term for the philosophical (as opposed to the religious) tradition in Daoism is known as \_\_\_\_\_.
2. The term “\_\_\_\_\_”, coined by Ernst Haeckel in 1866, refers to the branch of science that studies the distribution of living organisms and especially their interactions with their environment.
3. \_\_\_\_\_ is the Daoist art of “site orientation methods [that] purport to locate and characterize qi in the physical plane”.
4. Sought as the ultimate goal of Ge Hong’s alchemical practices, \_\_\_\_\_ (the Chinese term for ‘immortality’) could be achieved by “ingesting the marvelous”.
5. “Cultural strip mining” and “confrontational” describe two kinds of \_\_\_\_\_.
6. The contemporary deep ecologist, \_\_\_\_\_ “maintain[s] that Daoism is the ideology we need if we are to save the environment”.
7. One who has ‘returned to the beginning’ achieves a primordial state of unity that precludes all distinctions, a condition known as “\_\_\_\_\_”.
8. The Chinese term, “\_\_\_\_\_” might be translated as ‘doing without doing’ or ‘non-action’.
9. Characterized as feminine, dark, and mysterious, \_\_\_\_\_ complements \_\_\_\_\_, the male, rational side of the Daoism’s most well-known symbol of nature’s bipolarities.
10. According to chapter 6 of the *Daode jing*, “The valley has a spirit that will never die; it is called the primal \_\_\_\_\_.”
11. The legendary Yellow Emperor, known as \_\_\_\_\_, wrote the *Yinfu jing*.
12. The \_\_\_\_\_ is a collection of rules that includes a number of environmental proscriptions such as “You should not dry up wet marshes.”
13. \_\_\_\_\_ and Fu Hsi are the world parents in Daoist mythology.
14. Qi flows through meridians called in Daoist mythology “\_\_\_\_\_”.
15. \_\_\_\_\_ is said to have written the *Daode jing*.

II. **Minor Essay (20 points)**. With an eye to examining both the elements of the Daoist tradition as well as current ecological value, interpret **ONE** of the following verses from the *Daode jing*:

1. Chapter 42. *Dao gave birth to the One. The One gave birth to the Two. The Two gave birth to the Three. And the Three gave birth to the ten thousand things. The ten thousand things carry yin on their backs and wrap their arms around yang. Through the blending of qi they arrive at a state of harmony.*

2. Chapter 28. *Know the male, yet keep to the female: Receive the world in your arms. If you receive the world, the Dao will never leave you, and you will return to the state of infancy. Know the white, yet keep to the black: Be a pattern for the world. If you are a pattern for the world, virtue will be yours, and you will return to the simplicity of the uncarved block.*

III. **Major Essay**—answer **ONE** of the following (**50 points**).

1. Describe the evolution of Daoism and its ecological foundations in terms of the World Parents myth, shamanic practices related to health and ‘immortality’, and the divination practices of the *Yijing (I Ching\*)*.

2. Discuss the hermeneutical concerns pertinent to addressing Daoism through an ecological lens. Address the complexity of Daoism, its exploitation in academia and popular culture, and the need for recognizing our roles as interpreters and shapers of cultural narratives.

3. Discuss the ecological themes found in two of the following texts: the 180 Precepts, the *Taiping jing*, the *Baopuzi neipan* (by Ge Hong), and the *Yinfu jing*. Include in your discussion the role of human beings in the cosmic ecology, the spiritual ecology of the inner landscape, and the Daoist religious problematic of the human transcendence of nature and our implication in it.

4. Describe the relationship between ecological and Daoist contexts and concepts in terms of survival through cooperative adaptation, mutualism and identification, and survival through benefiting our hosts. Include in your discussion folk ecology, bioempathy, the philosophy of qi, and the metaphor of the garden.