TAOISM

An Essential Guide

Eva Wong

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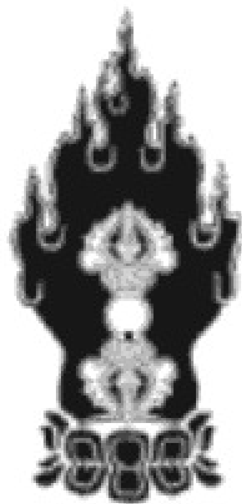

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"Spring Dawn Over the Elixir Terrace." China, Yuan dynasty, ca. 1369. Hanging scroll; ink on paper. Image: 24¼ x 10¼ in. (61.6 x 26 cm). Overall with mounting: 87½ x 17⅝ in. (222.3 x 44.8 cm). Overall with knobs: 87½ x 20⅝ in. (222.3 x 52.4 cm). Photographed by Malcolm Varon. Image © The Metropolitan Museum of Art / Art Resource, NY.

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Introduction

MANY PEOPLE WILL EXPERIENCE, at least once in their lifetime, the urge to venture beyond the everyday world of the mundane into the world of the spirit. These journeys into the spiritual world often take us into a universe we normally do not encounter in our daily lives, and allow us to explore regions of our consciousness that we have not before known.

This book is a guide to the spiritual landscape of Taoism. In it you will encounter events in the history of Taoism, meet the sages who wrote the Taoist texts, be introduced to the various schools of Taoist thinking, and get a feel for what it means to practice Taoism today.

The spiritual landscape of Taoism is a kaleidoscope of colors and sounds. It is also a land of silence and stillness. It can be friendly and attractive, and at the same time challenging and dangerous. In this book, you will be traveling through the spiritual terrain of Taoism. On your journey, you will see shamans dressed in animal skins dancing the patterns of the stars as they fly to the sky and tunnel beneath the earth; you will see talismans displaying symbols of power that are designed to heal, protect, and ward off malevolent spirits; you will see people sitting, standing, or sleeping in unusual postures, cultivating the breath of life and longevity; you will see colorful tapestries, images of deities and immortals, huge brass cauldrons, altars with

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sticks of incense, and oil lamps burning eternal flames. On this journey, you will see, etched on bamboo sticks, hexagrams, the symbols of change, used by diviners to interpret the pattern of events in the universe; you will also see ordinary people tending the aged and the sick, teaching the young, and helping others who are less fortunate than themselves; you will hear the loud clang of cymbals and drums, the shrill and melodious sound of flutes, and slow, rhythmic voices chanting to the beat of a wooden block. You will hear the silence of a meditation hall, the soft gait of feet walking on the flagstones of monastic cloisters, and the occasional sound of a bell amid the rustle of leaves. All these are features in the spiritual landscape of Taoism—a tradition of wisdom accumulated over thousands of years that has changed human consciousness, and yet been changed by it.

This book is a guide, and a guide differs from a textbook or an anthology of translated texts.

First, a true guide is based on the personal experience of someone who has traveled the terrain; one cannot write a guide about places one has not been to. Information contained in a guide is not based on book knowledge alone but on experience.

Second, a true guide has a perspective and does not pretend to be objective. What is seen is never independent of the observer. As a guide to the spiritual landscape of Taoism, this book shows things that I have experienced and enjoyed.

Third, a true guide does not pretend to be complete. Any landscape, physical or spiritual, is rich beyond imagination. This book is meant to give you enough information to get started. It is a map and field guide to a territory; it is not the territory itself.

Finally, a guide alerts travelers to possible dangers. The spiritual landscape is both attractive and forbidding, and travelers need to be aware of hazards along the way. Therefore, throughout the book, I shall point out which are the safest paths and which are the hazardous routes in the spiritual terrain of Taoism.

This book is divided into three parts: History of Taoism, Systems of Taoism, and Taoist Practices.

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History of Taoism

It is important to know the history of a wisdom tradition and be connected to its origins. Part One presents a brief history of Taoism.

We begin by looking at how the shamans of ancient China laid down the foundations of Taoism. Several thousand years ago, before there was the idea of *the Tao* and before a philosophy was built around it, tribal leaders made offerings to the sky, earth, mountains, valleys, and rivers to renew the bond between humanity and the sacred powers. They danced movements of power that took them to distant realms to gain knowledge and wisdom. We can still see some of these practices today in Taoist religious ceremonies and in the "moving meditation" and exercises of internal health.

Next we turn to the Classical Period—that span of Chinese history between the eighth and third centuries BCE. During this time lived some of the greatest philosophers of China: Lao-tzu, Confucius, Han-fei-tzu, Chuang-tzu, Sun-tzu, and Mo-tzu. This era gave us the *Tao-te ching* and its philosophy of nonaction (*wu-wei*) and harmonious living. The *Tao-te ching* is still the most widely translated Chinese book, and for many Westerners the book that gave them their first glimpse of Taoism.

The history of Taoism took an interesting turn between the first and seventh centuries CE: a form of Taoism that combined magic and devotion emerged. Under the influence of a charismatic spiritual leader, Chang Tao-ling, Taoism became a religion. Chang's descendants completed the transformation of Taoism from a philosophy to an organized religion, creating a system of rituals, liturgies, and a priesthood. Others, inspired by Chang's form of Taoism and impressed by Buddhism's growing collection of scriptures, compiled a large number of "sacred" texts and claimed that these writings were transmitted by the deities. These scriptures are some of the oldest texts in the Taoist canon.

While the peasants followed the popular religious leaders and entrusted their welfare to talismans and amulets, the middle class and nobility were attracted to another kind of Taoism. Around the end

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of the third century CE, a noblewoman by the name of Wei Hua-ts'un founded the Shang-ch'ing (High Pure) school of Taoism. The Shang-ch'ing practitioners visualized images of deities, invoked the deities' names, drew talismans, and entered into a mystical union with the sacred powers. Although this form of Taoism is now rarely practiced, its influence can be seen in today's Taoist sacred ceremonies and health arts.

Parallel to the rise of Taoist mysticism was the development of Taoist alchemy. Alchemical Taoism is concerned with cultivating health, longevity, and immortality, and is divided into external and internal alchemy. The School of External Alchemy believed that immortality could be attained by ingesting the appropriate minerals and herbs. It emerged in the third century CE and rose to the height of its development in the seventh and eighth centuries CE. The School of Internal Alchemy did not believe in ingesting external substances and held that longevity and immortality could be attained by transforming body and mind from within. The beginnings of internal alchemy could be traced to the third century CE. However, the movement did not come into its own until external alchemy declined, around the tenth century CE. Alchemical Taoism introduced the idea of ch'i, or internal energy, and was responsible for giving Taoism its reputation as an art of health and longevity.

Finally we look at the synthesis of classical Taoist philosophy, internal alchemy, Buddhism, and Confucianism. By the eleventh century CE, alchemical Taoism had sunk into a quagmire of esoteric terminology and abused practices. Tired of the empty jargon and realizing that spiritual development required a balance of physical health and mental clarity, sages like Wang Ch'ung-yang, Chen Hsi-yi and Lü Tung-pin began to teach a form of Taoism that advocated the cultivation of both body and mind. Inspired by the Confucian philosophy of the original nature of goodness and the Zen techniques of stilling the mind, a synthesis of the three philosophies—Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism—was reached. This form of Taoism is found in the teachings of two major Taoist sects today: the

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Complete Reality School (Ch'üan-chen) and the Earlier Heaven Way (Hsien-t'ien Tao).

Systems of Taoism

Part Two discusses different paths within Taoism. Although these paths are sometimes called schools, their teachings are not mutually exclusive.

Magical Taoism, the Way of Power, is the oldest form of Taoism practiced today. In Magical Taoism, power from the natural elements and from the spirits, immortals, and deities is invoked and channeled by the practitioner. Talismans are an important part of Magical Taoism: power can be channeled into objects for protection and healing. This path of Taoism is the least known to Westerners, and is often shrouded in mystery and misunderstanding. It is also the most demanding and difficult path to follow.

Divinational Taoism, the Way of Seeing, is based on understanding the workings of the universe and seeing the patterns of change. Celestial divination is based on skylore and the observation of the sun, moon, and stars; terrestrial divination is based on earth science and the observation of the features of landforms. Divinational Taoism believes that seeing and understanding the patterns of the universe will help us live in harmony with change, and to live in harmony with change is to live according to the principles of the Tao.

Ceremonial Taoism, the Way of Devotion, believes that the destiny of humanity is governed by sacred powers. By performing the correct ceremonies, humanity enters into a bond with the sacred powers and receives blessings and protection from them. Liturgies and rituals are integral to this form of Taoism. There is a clear distinction between practitioner and believer. In Ceremonial Taoism, the practitioner is a person trained to perform the ceremonies; the believer is the individual who trusts the leader of the ceremony to represent him or her before the sacred powers.

Internal-Alchemical Taoism, the Way of Transformation, advo-

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cates changing mind and body to attain health, longevity, and immortality. Central to its beliefs is the idea that internal energy, or ch'i, in the body is the foundation of health. Thus, Internal-Alchemical Taoism advocates cultivating, gathering, and circulating energy. Of all the paths of Taoism, this one is the most dangerous.

Action and Karma Taoism, the Way of Right Action, focuses on accumulating merit by doing charitable works. Its origin lies in the traditional Chinese belief that good deeds bring reward and unethical deeds invite retribution. After Buddhism was introduced into China, the belief in karmic retribution was incorporated into this form of Taoism. Action and Karma Taoism became a sophisticated system of ethics in which the rewards of an ethical life are health and well-being.

Taoist Practices

In Part Three we look at four kinds of practices: meditation, cultivation of the body, sacred ceremony, and the magical arts.

There are many forms of Taoist meditation, different sects practicing different styles. Sometimes, even within the same sect, the form of meditation changes as the practitioner advances spiritually. For example, Shang-ch'ing meditation uses visualizations to help the practitioner achieve a mystical union with the deities. Insight meditation, or internal observation, another style of Taoist meditation, is very similar to Buddhist vipassana meditation. A form of quiet sitting, like Zen meditation, is used by Taoists of the Complete Reality School to still the mind and tame the emotions. There are also forms of Taoist meditation for gathering, cultivating, and circulating internal energy. These types of meditation are most similar to kundalini yoga.

Taoism's preoccupation with physical health has inspired the development of techniques that cultivate the body. The best-known of these techniques is *ch'i-kung,* or the work of energy. Some ch'i-kung techniques are breathing exercises; others involve massaging various areas of the body; some are static postures, not unlike those of hatha

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yoga; and some incorporate methods of circulating energy into natural activities such as sitting, standing, walking, and sleeping. Another method of cultivating the body is known as tendon-changing. This technique is said to have been introduced by Bodhidharma, the Buddhist, to the Shaolin Temple in the fourth century CE. Designed to strengthen and relax the muscles, tendons, and ligaments, these exercises were originally used by Buddhist monks to prepare themselves for long sessions of zazen, or sitting meditation. The techniques were adopted by the Taoists, who saw their value in strengthening the muscular and skeletal system. Internal martial arts, such as t'ai-chi ch'uan and pa-k'ua chang, are also methods of cultivating the body. These systems of movement are designed to correct unhealthy body postures and facilitate the natural flow of energy.

Ceremony is an important part of Taoist practice. All Taoist ceremonies are preceded by rituals of purification designed to cleanse the bodies and minds of the participants. Ceremonies are performed to honor the deities and renew the bond between humanity and the sacred powers. Typically, a ceremony involves chanting, invocation, and other ritualistic performances, such as dancing and drawing talismans.

The final category of Taoist practices is the magical arts. The most popular form practiced today is talismanic magic. Using symbols and words of power written on a strip of paper, this magic invokes the deities and spirits to heal and protect, warding off malevolent forces. The preparation and use of talismanic magic require not only skill but also trust in the known and unknown powers of the universe.

Each chapter in this guide is divided into two sections: the first presents an introductory survey of the subject matter; the closing section contains a list of recommended readings to help you in your exploration of Taoism.

This guide will have been successful if it stimulates your interest. It will also have been successful if it tells you that an investigation of Taoism is not what you want—and in that case, you can stop

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immediately and save your resources. Most of all, this guide will be successful if you enjoy what you see in your travels.

As with visiting unknown regions of the world, when you journey through a spiritual landscape, you must let go of expectations. Be prepared to be rattled, enticed, excited, awed, and dumbfounded. There is no set way on how you should react to what you see. The richness of a spiritual tradition is best experienced when you let your thoughts, feelings, and senses participate fully.

The information in this guide is not the final word: it is impossible to document every detail in a spiritual landscape; moreover, as more people connect with the spiritual terrain, better guides will be written. Meanwhile, I hope you will enjoy this spiritual armchair journey. May this guide serve you well!

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PART ONE

History of Taoism

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1
Shamanic Origins
(3000–800 BCE)

FIVE THOUSAND YEARS AGO, a tribal people settled along the shores of the Yellow River in northern China. These people had not developed a national identity, nor did they venture far from the banks of the river that carved its path through the dusty plateau. Their daily activities consisted of hunting, fishing, tending their herds, and planting small plots of wheat and millet. At night they gathered by their fires and looked up into the mysterious dome of faint, twinkling lights. Sometimes the howling of wild animals in the dark would remind them of having lost their herds to powerful beasts; at other times they would recall fleeing from the raging river that overflowed its banks and wiped out their crops. But they would also talk about how their chiefs pursued the wild animals and fought back the floods. These chieftains possessed unusual powers: they had mastery over the elements, the rivers bent to their will, plants and animals yielded their secrets to them, they talked with invisible powers, and they traveled across the sky and beneath the earth to gather knowledge that would help the tribe. The greatest of these chiefs was Yü.

The Legendary Yü

Legends tell us that Yü was no ordinary mortal. He had no mother and he came directly from the body of his father, Kun. Kun was

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selected by the tribal leader, Shun, to battle the floods. When Kun failed, he was punished by the powers, and his dead body was left abandoned on a mountain side. For three years, Yü lay inside his father's dead body. When Kun was revived, he was transformed into a brown bear, and he opened up his own belly and brought out his son, Yü. Immediately, Yü also changed himself into a bear, and we are told that, throughout his life, Yü shape-shifted between man and bear, and always walked with a shuffle that was known as bear's gait. In the Chou dynasty, a thousand years after the legendary times of Yü, priests still dressed in bearskins and grunted and shuffled as they danced the gait of power to honor Yü the Great.

We are told that, when Yü grew up, he carried on the work of his father. Yü was able to succeed where his father had failed because the sacred powers gave him the mythical book *Shui-ching* (The Book of Power over Waters). Yü also journeyed frequently to the stars to learn from the celestial spirits. The Pace of Yü (fig. 1.1), a dance of power that carried Yü to the sky, is preserved in the Taoist texts. These movements were danced by generations of Taoist priests, mystics, and sorcerers, and by the practitioners of the internal martial arts today.

Yü was able not only to assume the shape of animals, he also trusted and understood them, and in return they yielded him their secrets. When the flood waters receded, Yü saw a tortoise emerge from the river. On its shell was the pattern of the Lo-shu pa-k'ua that described the nature of flux and change in the universe. This pattern was to become the basis of the divination arts of China.

Everything that legend has attributed to Yü characterizes him as a shaman. Mircea Eliade, in his classic study on shamanism, described the following features as part of the shamanic experience: flight to the sky, the journey underground, the dance of power, ecstasy and sudden revelation, the power to converse with animals, power over the elements, healing, and knowledge and use of plants. In fact, in ancient Chinese society, there was a class of people, called the *wu,* whose abilities resembled those typically attributed to sha-

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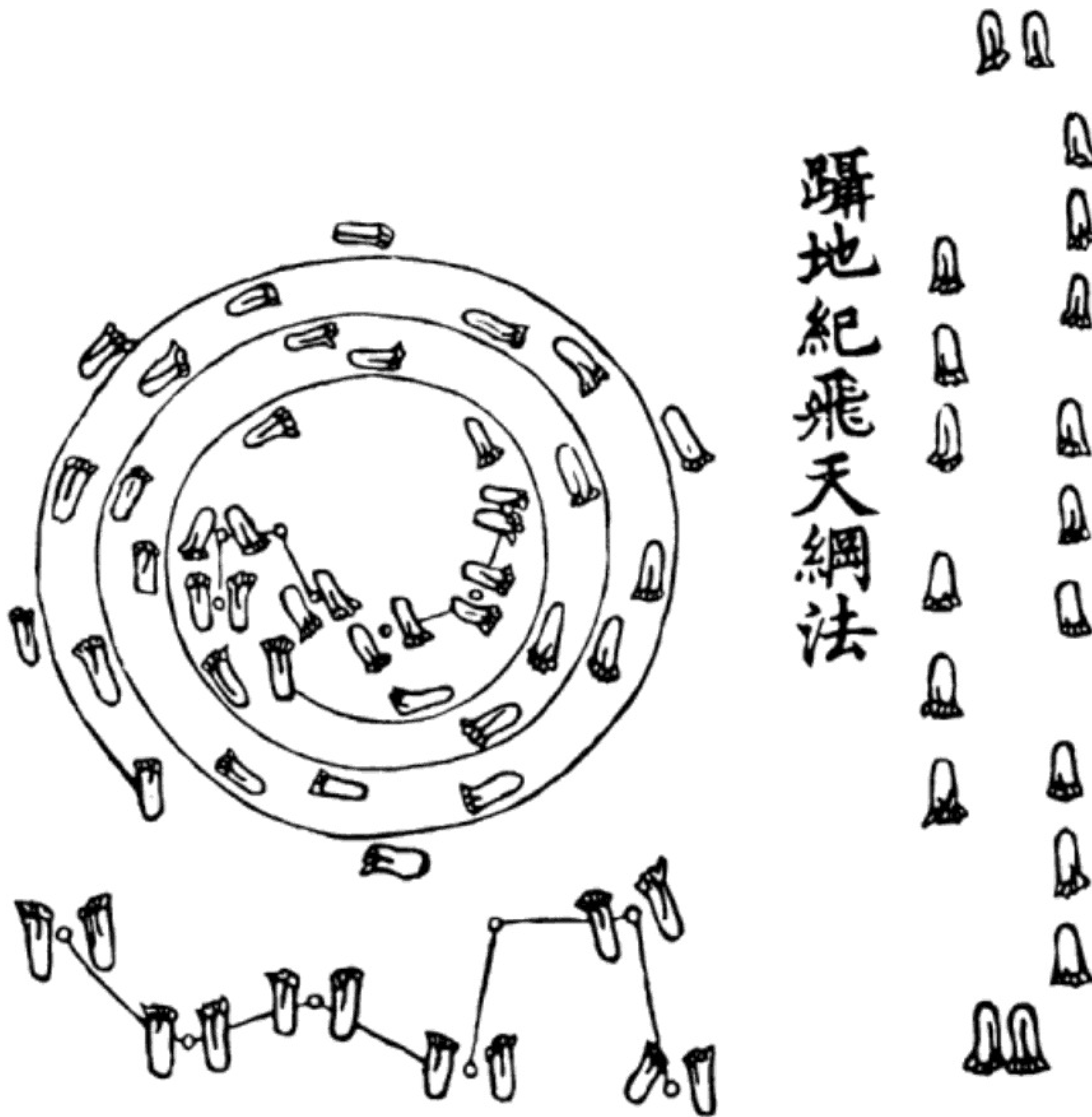

FIGURE 1.1. The Pace of Yü. Also called the Steps of Yü. From the *T'ai-shang chu-kuo chiu-min tsung-chen pi-yao* (The Great One's True Secret Essentials of Helping the Nation and Saving the People). The pattern on the right—called the Steps of the Celestial Ladder—is used to lift the dancer up to the sky. The pattern at the foot of the illustration traces the configuration of the Northern Bushel (the Big Dipper)—a pattern used to take the dancer to the Northern Bushel stars. In the pattern at top left—the spiral—the dancer starts at the outermost part of the circle and spirals progressively toward the center—traveling to the North Pole Star and the Northern Bushel stars. The inscription (center) reads, Method of Walking the Earth's Pattern and Flying Through the Celestial Net.

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mans. This has led Eliade to identify the wu of ancient China as shamans.

Yü was a wu, or shaman, and he lived in a society where shamans were important members of the tribal community. His father, too, was a shaman capable of shape-shifting into a bear. Shun, the tribal king who rewarded Yü's success in taming the flood with a kingship, was also a shaman. It was said that Shun was the first person to journey to the sky, and he was taught by the daughter of his predecessor, Yao.

Shamanism in Literate China

Shamanism entered a new phase in ancient China with the development of literacy and a sedentary society. By the twelfth century BCE, in the early part of the Chou dynasty, kings and nobles employed shamans as advisers, diviners, and healers. Shamanism became an institution, and shamans were expected to exercise their ability as a duty. Shamans employed by the state or by individuals were expected to fulfill certain functions, and failure in an assignment was often punishable by death. The historical records of the Chou dynasty document many failures of shamans, suggesting that many so-called shamans did not have the powers of Yü. Although they dressed in bearskins and danced the Pace of Yü, these ceremonial shamans did not acquire the power of the animal spirit in the dance.

Duties of Shamans in Chou Society

During the Chou dynasty, the duties of the shamans were inviting the spirits, interpreting dreams, reading omens, rainmaking, healing, and celestial divination.

1. *Inviting the spirits.* A major task of the shamans of the Chou dynasty was to invite the spirits to visit the mortal realm and offer themselves as a place for the spirit to stay temporarily. The visitation of the spirit generally began with a dance, which put the shaman in

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a trance and allowed the spirit to enter the shaman's body. This is different from possession, in which the spirit enters the body of the possessed, which then causes the trance. The shaman's trance is the state of consciousness necessary for the visitation, rather than the result of the visitation. As Eliade asserts, this is the hallmark of a shamanic experience, making shamans different from psychic mediums and sorcerers whose magic is based on possession.

2. *Interpreting dreams.* Dreams are considered to be carriers of omens, and one of the shaman's tasks is to interpret these messages from the spirits. In ancient China, the dream was also linked to the shaman's journey to the other realms. The ceremony of summoning the soul of the dead was conducted by a shaman called "the dream master." This suggests that although dreams of nonshamans were messages from the spirits, they were not under the dreamer's control, whereas the dreams of the shamans were journeys to other realms of existence in which the shamans were in full control of the dream journey.

3. *Reading omens.* Another task of the shaman was to observe the changes in nature, predict the course of events, and decide whether it was auspicious or not to engage in a certain activity. Thus, shamans in the Chou dynasty were adept in the knowledge of the *I-ching* (the classic work of divination from ancient China known as the Book of Change) and were the forerunners of diviners.

4. *Rainmaking.* It was also the task of the shaman to pray for rain. The rainmaking ceremony involved dancing and singing. The Chinese word for spirit (*ling*) consists of three radicals: one meaning *rain*, another (showing three mouths), *chanting*, and the third, *shaman.* Often, the shaman would be exposed to the sun, using his or her suffering to "persuade" the sacred powers to send rain. Although the specifics of the ceremony have changed down the years, praying for rain has continued to be an integral part of Chinese religious ritual, and today the ceremony is performed by Taoist priests.

5. *Healing.* Healing was another major task of the shaman. In the earliest times, this was primarily the responsibility of the shamaness. We are told that, in the healing ceremony, the shamaness grasped a

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green snake in her right hand and a red snake in her left hand and climbed into the mountains to gather the herbs that would restore life and health to a sick or dying person.

The ancient Chinese believed that illness was the result of malevolent spirits invading the body; it was therefore logical that the task of healing should fall on the shoulders of the shaman, who had the ability to deal with both good and malevolent spirits.

6. *Celestial divination.* During the latter part of the Chou dynasty, celestial divination was very popular. It was believed that, given harmony in the skies, there would be peace, prosperity, and harmony on earth. The key to peace and prosperity lay in following the Celestial Way, or will of heaven, and for the Celestial Way to be followed, the meaning of celestial phenomena must be interpreted; thus, shamans were employed in the court to observe the skies and interpret celestial events.

The Shamanic Tradition of Southern China

When shamanism declined in the mainstream society of the Chou dynasty, pockets of shamanic culture remained in regions around the river valley of the Yang-tze and China's southeastern coast (for a map of China, see appendix 2). These areas were occupied by three feudal kingdoms: Ch'u, Wu, and Yüeh.

The land of Ch'u was situated along the Yang-tze valley—a region considered barbaric and primitive by the sophisticated northerners of the ruling dynasties. Vast cultural differences existed between the north (Yellow River valley) and the south (Yang-tze valley): the people of Ch'u were passionate; the northerners were reserved; when the northern people abandoned their beliefs in the spirits of the land after they had developed literacy, the southern people continued to believe in the powers of nature.

The lands of Wu and Yüeh, farther to the east, were even more removed from the mainstream of Chou civilization. The shamans of Yüeh used incantations and mantras to ward off malevolent spirits, restrain wild animals, and battle other humans. Moreover, it was in

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Wu and Yüeh that talismans were used as objects of power. These talismanic scripts later became an integral part of Taoist magic and sorcery.

Throughout China's history, even after the the kingdoms of Ch'u, Wu, and Yüeh disappeared as political entities, their regional cultures continued to influence the wider culture's philosophy, religion, and spiritual practices.

The Legacy of Shamanism in Later Developments of Taoism

The most obvious incorporation of shamanic practices into Taoism was found in the religious and magical aspects of Taoism that emerged in the Han dynasty (206 BCE–219 CE). Like the Yüeh shamans, Taoist magicians used incantations and talismans to ward off malevolent spirits and heal the sick. Indeed, the use of water and mirrors to combat malevolent and destructive forces, which can be traced back to the Yüeh shamans, is seen in the practice of Taoist magic today.

Another legacy of shamanism is the Pace of Yü and the flight to the stars. This aspect of shamanism found its way into a form of Taoist mysticism known as Shang-ch'ing Taoism in the fourth century CE and inspired writings that would become a major part of the Taoist canon.

The shamanic journey underground would also become central to Taoist magic and mysticism in the hands of Tung-fang Shuo, a Han dynasty Taoist, who wrote a guide to journeying through the roots of China's five sacred mountains. Today, we find elements of these underground journeys in Taoist ceremonies: priests still enter the underworld to rescue dead souls who have been abducted by malevolent spirits.

An even greater influence on Taoism came through shamanism's impact on the philosophy of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu. This influence is often unrecognized, because many scholars consider the Tao-chia (philosophical Taoism) and the Tao-chiao (religious Taoism) as opposing branches of Taoist thinking. A little-known entry in Ssu-

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ma Ch'ien's monumental work of history titled *Shi-chi* (Historical Records) in the biography of Lao-tzu, reads, "Lao-tzu was a native of Ch'u, of the county of Fu, of the village of Li." Lao-tzu, the founder of the philosophy of Taoism, lived in a society that had a strong shamanic culture. Moreover, several prominent Chinese scholars have also recently noted similarities in language construction between the *Tao-te ching* and the literature of the Ch'u culture.

Similarly with Chuang-tzu: the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu* (Lü's Spring and Autumn Annals), a history of the Spring and Autumn Period of the Chou dynasty (770–476 BCE) written during the Warring States (475–221 BCE), tells us that Chuang-tzu came from the township of Mong, in Sung, a vassal state of Ch'u. Ssu-ma Ch'ien, the Grand Historian, concurred; Chuang-tzu, he wrote, was a native of Sung, a small kingdom that got amalgamated into the state of Ch'u. In the next chapter we shall see how Lao-tzu's and Chuang-tzu's philosophy grew out of the shamanic culture that prevailed in regions south of the Yang-tze.

Further Readings

Michael Harner's book *The Way of the Shaman* is probably the best introduction to the theory and practice of shamanism. Harner, who received his training from South American shamans, presents shamanism in a way that is very accessible to people who have no previous knowledge of the discipline.

For more detail about shamanic practices of various cultures, Mircea Eliade's classic work, *Shamanism,* is still the most authoritative source around. However, unlike Harner's work, which focuses on the *practice* of shamanism, Eliade's research is purely scholastic.

Of all the Chinese sources, the *Ch'u-tz'u (Songs of the Land of the South)* is the most colorful and fascinating. Four poems in the collection have a strong shamanic flavor: "The Nine Songs," "Summoning the Soul," "Far-off Journeys," and "Questions to Heaven." The tales of Yü the shaman are found in the poem "Questions to Heaven." There is a full translation of the *Ch'u-tz'u,* titled *The Songs of the South,* by David Hawkes.

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Another translation of one of the poems, titled "Far-off Journey," can be found in Livia Kohn's Taoist anthology *The Taoist Experience*. I prefer Kohn's translation over that of Hawkes: Kohn conveys a better feel of the original.

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The Classical Period (700–220 BCE)

WE NOW MOVE to historical time. A thousand years have passed since Yü the Great danced his gait of power, traveled among the stars, and journeyed beneath the earth. By now, the tribes who lived along the banks of the Yellow River have built cities and have become citizens of a large and prospering empire. Families who had helped the king secure his power were given lands and titles. The kings were no longer shamans; the duties of performing the sacred rites have been delegated to professionals—shamans employed by the court. The king was involved in only two ceremonies—the most important, those of Spring Planting and Autumn Thanksgiving.

As long as the emperor was powerful and assertive, the feudal system worked well. The nobles helped with local administration and defended the nation against border tribes. These tribespeople were becoming envious of the wealth of the Chou empire. But not all the emperors were conscientious and virtuous, and after three hundred years of strong and centralized rule, things fell apart for the ruling house.

In 770 BCE, the political and social structures of the Chou empire were disintegrating. For the next five hundred years, the people of China would live through political chaos and civil war. This era of internal war began with the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476

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BCE), when powerful feudal lords expanded their territory through military conquest and political intrique, to be followed by the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE), when the large number of feudal states was reduced to seven superpowers. The period ended when one of the seven, Ch'in, defeated its rivals and reunited China.

Within this period of five hundred years lived the greatest philosophers that China, and the world, had ever known: Confucius and Mencius, the upholders of social order and virtue; Mo-tzu, the philosopher of universal love and self-sacrifice; Han-fei-tzu, the legalist; Kung-sun Lung, the sophist; Sun-tzu, the military strategist; and the giants of Taoist thinking, Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and Lieh-tzu.

This part of the history of Taoism is known as the Classical Period, so named because the three classics of Taoism—*Lao-tzu* (also known as *Tao-te ching*), *Chuang-tzu*, and *Lieh-tzu*—all came from this time. The Classical Period can be divided into two parts—one earlier, in the Spring and Autumn Period, and the other later, coinciding with the Warring States Period.

The Political and Historical Background of the Spring and Autumn Period (770–476 BCE)

The distinguishing feature of the Spring and Autumn Period is the rise of semiautonomous feudal states. By about 800 BCE, the nobles who had been given titles and land for helping the Chou establish its dynasty had become so powerful that they lived like petty kings. Five great noble houses emerged: Ch'i, Ch'in, Sung, Chin, and Ch'u. They were known as the Five Warlords of the Spring and Autumn Period.

During the Spring and Autumn Period, the great feudal lords used their resources to build military strength and expand their territory, subjugating the smaller fiefs. In the beginning of the Spring and Autumn Period, there were some one hundred and forty feudal states; three hundred years later, when that period ended, only forty-four were left.

These warlords were fully aware that a strong state was not built

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by military power alone. Diplomacy and statesmanship were equally important. How and where would they find qualified political advisers?

The demand for political and military advisers produced a new social class that was unique to the latter part of the Chou dynasty. These were the mercenary statesmen and itinerant advisers who traveled from one state to another, offering their skills. Fame, wealth, and power that had been limited to the hereditary nobility were now accessible to common citizens. Of course, politics was a risky business, for intrigues were rampant and competition was fierce. An adviser could be in favor one day and out of favor the next. While many were attracted by fame and power, some truly had the vision of building a better society, and tried to counsel the rulers to be virtuous and benevolent. Confucius was one of them; Lao-tzu was another.

Classical Taoism in the Spring and Autumn Period: Lao-tzu and the Tao-te ching

Lao-tzu is generally acknowledged as the founder of the philosophy of Taoism. We know little more about Lao-tzu the person than what has already been mentioned: he was named Li Erh and was a native of the southern feudal state of Ch'u; he was born into the educated upper class and held a minor government post, serving as a librarian in the imperial archives. We do not know his reasons for retirement from the civil service, but we could guess that, like Confucius, he became disillusioned with the political intrigues and the ruthlessness of the feudal lords. The next thing we hear about Lao-tzu is more legendary than historical: it was said that he came to some kind of enlightenment, traveled to the western frontier, and disappeared (or became immortal). Before his departure, he dictated a treatise of five thousand words to a frontier guardsman (called a gatekeeper). The treatise is now known as the *Tao-te ching*, or *Lao-tzu*, and the gatekeeper was Wen-shih (also known as Wen-tzu), who became the first disciple of Lao-tzu.

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The *Tao-te ching* is the first text of Taoism, and it is certain that the book was written by more than one person. Most historians and scholars now agree that the *Tao-te ching* was a product of the Spring and Autumn Period. Like its contemporaries, the text discussed statecraft and offered political alternatives. It was only in the Taoism of the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Lieh-tzu* that noninvolvement was advocated. The Taoists of the *Tao-te ching* were not social dropouts. For them, the sage was an individual who understood the natural way of things (the Tao) and lived in harmony with it; therefore, changes in society must come from changes within individuals, and changes in individuals could come only from following the principles of the Tao. It is this feature that distinguished the Taoism of the *Tao-te ching* from the teachings of Confucius. For Confucius, a peaceful and harmonious society was one in which people observed and followed the correct rituals and codes of interpersonal behavior; it did not matter what the nature of the universe was. For the Taoist philosophers, understanding the natural order of things was paramount, because only by knowing the principles of the Tao could people live in harmony.

The Teachings of the Tao-te ching

ON THE TAO

The Tao is the source of life of all things. It is nameless, invisible, and ungraspable by normal modes of perception. It is boundless and cannot be exhausted, although all things depend on it for existence. Hidden beneath transition and change, the Tao is the permanent underlying reality. These ideas will become the center of all future Taoist thinking.

Although the Tao is the source of all life, it is not a deity or spirit. This is quite different from the shaman's animistic view of the universe. In the *Tao-te ching*, the sky, the earth, rivers, and mountains are part of a larger and unified power, known as Tao, which is an impersonal and unnamed force behind the workings of the universe.

However, in the *Tao-te ching*, this unnamed and unnameable

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power is not entirely neutral; it is benevolent: "The Celestial Way is to benefit others and not to cause harm" (chapter 81, *Tao-te ching*); and since the "Celestial Way follows the Way of the Tao" (chapter 25, *Tao-te ching*), we can assume that in the *Tao-te ching*, the Tao is a benevolent force.

ON SAGEHOOD

Some parts of the *Tao-te ching* show strong influence from the shamanic culture of Ch'u; they are to be found in the discussions on sagehood and on cultivating life.

Recall that Lao-tzu was a native of Ch'u. The students who recorded his teachings were most likely natives of the same region. Philosopher-teachers of the Spring and Autumn Period rarely established schools outside their native states: most of their students came from the local or neighboring towns. That is why the students of Confucius, who was a native of the state of Lu, and lived and taught there, were called the "gentlemen of Lu." Similarly, the students of Lao-tzu were most likely people from his native state of Ch'u. This has led many Chinese scholars to assert that Taoism was rooted in the culture of the south, because Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu were natives of Ch'u and their followers came from the same cultural background.

The Taoist sage had abilities similar to those of the shaman of Yü's times. He or she was immune to poison, talked to the animals, and had a body that was as soft as an infant. Sexual energy was strong, and the sage practiced methods of prolonging life. These shamanic qualities of the sage remain a permanent feature of Taoism up to this day.

The Taoist sage was also a very involved member of the community; in fact, Taoist sages made ideal rulers. One of the most famous ideas of Taoism, and also the source of a lot of misunderstanding, is *wu-wei*. This word, used in describing the sage and often translated as nonaction, gives the impression that the Taoist sages "did nothing." This is inaccurate, and could not be used to describe all Taoists. Wu-wei had different meanings for different Taoist philosophers.

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The wu-wei of the *Tao-te ching* is different from the wu-wei of *Chuang-tzu,* which is different again from the wu-wei of *Lieh-tzu.*

Wu-wei in the *Tao-te ching* is "going with the principles of the Tao," and the path of the Tao is a benevolent one. Thus, wu-wei in the *Tao-te ching* is not "doing nothing"; it is not even the noninterference advocated in the *Chuang-tzu.* In the *Tao-te ching,* wu-wei means not using force. The sagely ruler who cares for his subjects in a nonintrusive way also practices wu-wei. Far from doing nothing, the Taoist sage of the *Tao-te ching* is an active member of society and is fit to be a king.

ON CULTIVATING LIFE

In the *Tao-te ching,* the sage is one who cultivates life. The *Tao-te ching* describes two methods of cultivating life: physical techniques and attitude.

The physical techniques included regulation of breath, physical postures that are the precursors of calisthenics, and possibly techniques of retaining and cultivating sexual energy for the return to youth and vitality.

On the matter of lifestyle and attitude, the *Tao-te ching* states that desire, attachment to material things, and activities that excite the mind, rouse the emotions, tire the body, and stimulate the senses, are all detrimental to health.

In the early form of Classical Taoism, it was possible to be active in politics and not sacrifice physical and mental health. The problem arises only when one gets attached to fame and fortune and does not know when to stop. The message in the *Tao-te ching* is: Cultivate the physical and mental qualities of the sage; get involved and help in a nonintrusive way; retire when the work is done.

The *Tao-te ching* values shamanic qualities and personal power, but it does not share the animistic worldview of the shamans. Instead of accepting a world of diverse spirits, it sees the Tao, a unified and unnameable force, as the underlying reality of all things.

The philosophy of the *Tao-te ching* grew out of the Spring and Autumn Period; however, it was also a cultural product from the

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region of Ch'u. In shedding the shamanic world of diverse spirits and retaining the personal power of the shaman, the *Tao-te ching* represents a transition from shamanic beliefs to a philosophical system with a unified view of the nature of reality (the Tao), the sage, and the cultivation of life.

The Political and Historical Background of the Warring States Period (475–221 BCE)

As the Spring and Autumn Period was drawing to a close, in 475 BCE, there were forty-four feudal states. In 390 BCE, this number was reduced to seven large states and three small ones. With fewer small states to act as buffers between the large and powerful ones, territorial expansion came to a halt, because military conquest would henceforth involve a major confrontation between superpowers. However, with the Chou imperial lands reduced to the size of a small county, the possibility for another entity to conquer the rival powers and establish a unified rule became a possibility; thus, the demand for quality statesmen, diplomats, and military advisers in the Warring States Period surpassed even that of the Spring and Autumn Period. In fact, many of China's most famous philosophers lived during the Warring States Period. They included Mencius, the successor to Confucius, Mo-tzu who taught self-sacrifice and universal love, Kung-sun Lung, the legendary Kuei-ku Tzu, from whose school came some of the best military strategists and diplomats, and Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu, the Taoists.

By the time of the Warring States Period there had been more than three hundred years of war and political conflict, and some people were beginning to be convinced that any reform within the government was hopeless. Everywhere they looked they saw power-hungry nobles and unscrupulous ministers waiting for the chance to conquer their rivals. These people did not want to be involved in politics; in fact, they believed that the pursuit of fame and fortune was inherently opposed to the cultivation of health and longevity. Chuang-tzu was one of them, and he was open in his critique of all

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those who served the interests of the feudal lords. Lieh-tzu, another Taoist philosopher, also advocated noninvolvement, and both men regarded social conventions as the greatest enemy of personal freedom and integrity.

Classical Taoism in the Warring States Period

With Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu, Classical Taoism entered a new phase. Several features distinguished the Classical Taoism of the Warring States from the philosophy of the *Tao-te ching:*

First, the talk of sagely rulers and ideal governments is gone. Politics were dirty and dangerous; fame and fortune were not worth the sacrifice of freedom and longevity. Even the Yellow Emperor, a most respected figure in Chinese history, was called a meddler of people's minds. In fact, all the Confucian models of a benevolent ruler, like Yao and Shun, were mocked. This was very different from the Classical Taoism of the Spring and Autumn Period.

Second, the sage was no longer interested in ruling a country, or even offering his skills to one. In the *Tao-te ching,* the sage minimized his desires, lived simply, and attained longevity, while functioning as the head of the state. In the Warring States, the Taoists of the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu* believed that political involvement and longevity were inherently incompatible. With this change in the image of sagehood, the meaning of wu-wei also changed. Wu-wei now meant noninvolvement, or letting things be. The sage was no longer involved with or concerned about the matters of the world. While other people trapped themselves in fame, fortune, and socially accepted behavior, the sage ignored them, and was completely free.

Third, the Taoism of the Warring States came up with a different conception of the Tao. In the *Tao-te ching,* although the Tao was not a deity or a spirit-being, it had a benevolent nature. This quality disappeared in the *Chuang-tzu* and the *Lieh-tzu.* The Taoist philosophers of the Warring States saw the Tao as a neutral force. It was still the underlying reality of all things, but it was no longer a benevolent

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force. Moreover, the Tao had no control over the course of events: what would happen would happen, and nothing could be done to facilitate it or prevent it.

However, despite the differences, the Taoism of the Warring States Period and of the *Tao-te ching* had much in common. The Tao was still that nameless, formless source that was the foundation of all existence. It could not be perceived through normal sensory channels nor understood by rational thinking. The individual who understood the nature of the Tao and its workings was an enlightened being, or sage.

In the *Tao-te ching,* the Tao was regarded as the origin of all things; thus, everything shared a common ancestry. This thinking was developed further in the Taoism of the Warring States Period to imply that all things had equal standing in the universe. No one thing was more valuable than another, and no one species of animal (including humans) was more privileged than another. This famous "principle of the equality of all things" was introduced in the *Chuang-tzu.*

Like the *Tao-te ching,* the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu* contained descriptions of the sage that were unmistakably shamanic. The sage had power over the elements, communicated with animals, could soar through the skies, and perform incredible feats of power. The authors of the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu,* however, were not sympathetic to the "institutional" form of shamanism. Their views of shamans and sorcerers as charlatans are often taken to mean that Classical Taoism was hostile to shamans, but this is quite contrary to the truth: it was only the superficial form of shamanism that they had no patience for.

In the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu,* we continue to see the emphasis on caring for the body. Like the Taoists of the *Tao-te ching,* the Taoists of the Warring States Period advocated living a simple lifestyle with minimal desire, believing that too much excitement and satisfaction of the senses could harm body and mind. However, in the *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu,* social and cultural norms were also condemned. Rules and regulations were obstacles to the freedom of ex-

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pression and thinking and living in harmony with the Tao, or the natural way.

By the end of the Warring States Period, Classical Taoism became a voice speaking out against hypocrisy. Since society was corrupt, the only way not to be entangled in the web of truths and lies was to stay out. Thus, an alternative lifestyle, that of the hermit or recluse, emerged. Later, this lifestyle would be adopted not only by Taoists but by some of the greatest poets and artists of China. Far from being seen as escaping responsibility, hermits became the symbol of personal integrity, and their lifestyle an expression of individual freedom.

We have looked at more than five hundred years of Classical Taoist philosophy and seen how, in its early phase of development, Taoism was a voice that advocated reform with the hope of building a better society; and how, during the Warring States, Taoism lost some of its early ideals and began to take a negative view of politics, culture, and social rules, and simultaneously increased its emphasis on individual freedom and the cultivation of life. By the late Han (circa third century CE) and the Wei and Chin dynasties (in the fourth and fifth centuries CE), its distrust of the establishment—political, social, and cultural—was complete. However, whether it was optimistic or pessimistic, idealistic or disillusioned, active or escapist, Taoism was always a voice that spoke for the preservation of the natural way of the Tao.

Further Readings

There are many translations of the *Tao-te ching*. I find Wing-tsit Chan's classic translation still one of the best, because it retains the simplicity and clarity of the original text. Chan's translation is to be found in his collection of Chinese philosophical texts, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*. For those interested in Chinese philosophy in general, this is a good book to have.

Recently, archaeologists in China have discovered another version of the *Tao-te ching*—the Ma-wang-tui text, titled *Te-tao ching*. There

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are some differences between this version and the standard one of the Taoist canon. The differences are interesting, but overall each version gives the same feel for the teachings of Lao-tzu's Taoism. The translation by Robert Henricks, titled *Lao-tzu te-tao ching,* is the best rendition in English of the Ma-wang-tui text.

Burton Watson's *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu* is still the best translation of the *Chuang-tzu.* Not only is it readable, it is also scholarly, without being scholastic. I also like Watson's approach to reading the *Chuang-tzu*—an approach he discusses in the introduction to his *Complete Works.*

The *Lieh-tzu* is one of my favorite Taoist texts. Its down-to-earth approach and its literary style make it one of the best presentations of Taoist teachings. In my *Lieh-tzu: A Taoist Guide to Practical Living,* I have tried to present the voice of Lieh-tzu—to let him speak as he would to us in our times. This is a book to enjoy, and it can help you through the ups and downs of everyday life.

Another Taoist book that belongs to this period is the *Wen-tzu.* A translation of this text by Thomas Cleary is titled *Further Teachings of Lao-tzu: Understanding the Mysteries.* The *Wen-tzu* appears to be a continuation of the legacy of the *Tao-te ching.* Like the *Tao-te ching,* it has a dual focus—on government and statecraft, and on sagehood and the cultivation of life. Read the *Tao-te ching* before the *Wen-tzu.* You may also want to have both texts available so that you can compare them. Cleary's translation of the *Wen-tzu* reads well and introduces a great classic of Taoism that until recently escaped the attention of the Western public.

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The Transformation of Taoism from Philosophy into Organized Religion (20 BCE–600 CE)

IF THE PERIODS known as Spring and Autumn and the Warring States were the golden age of Taoist philosophy, then the era between the beginning of the Eastern Han dynasty (25–219 CE) and the end of the Southern and Northern dynasties (304–589 CE) was the golden age of Taoist religion. During this era, Taoism became an organized religion, instituted a priesthood, developed a set of sacred ceremonies and scriptures, and acquired a large number of followers.

The Beginnings of Religious Taoism in the Western Han (206–8 BCE)

Although it is often said that Chang Tao-ling singlehandedly changed Taoism from philosophy to religion in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–219 CE), this statement is exaggerated. Had the historical conditions that facilitated the transformation of Taoism from philosophy to religion not been in place, Chang Tao-ling's efforts would not have succeeded.

Several factors facilitated the transformation of Taoism from philosophy to religion, and these foundations were laid during the late Warring States and the early (or Western) Han.

The unification of China by the Ch'in dynasty brought an end to the demand for mercenary statesmen and itinerant political advisers.

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The Han dynasty that followed the Ch'in also ruled a unified China. Moreover, the early Han emperors were determined not to repeat the mistakes of the Chou dynasty: they centralized the government and stripped the nobility of their power; thus, mercenary statesmen could no longer make their living by offering advice to the feudal lords. Many itinerant political advisers were trained in the arts of longevity, healing, and divination, and when military and political advice was no longer in demand, the wandering philosophers offered their other skills: divination, healing, and the arts of longevity. Thus was born in the Ch'in and early Han dynasties a unique social class. This class of people were the *fang-shih,* or "masters of the formulae."

In the early Han, the fang-shih could be divided roughly into two groups: those who specialized in magic, divination, and healing, and those who specialized in the arts of longevity and immortality. The middle and upper classes were preoccupied with longevity, but the peasants and other less fortunate social classes had no use for that kind of luxury. For them, life was so miserable that longevity meant only prolonged suffering; what they wanted was assurance that storms and drought would not destroy their harvest, and that they would have a large and healthy family to work the fields. The fang-shih who answered their needs were the workers of magic. Their magic was called talismanic magic because it used symbols and words of power to invoke the spirits to heal and to protect.

Another factor that facilitated the transformation of Taoism from philosophy to religion was a belief in a hierarchy of spirits and the practice of honoring them with offerings. This primitive form of organized religion was advocated by Mo-tzu, who generally is better known for his teachings of universal love and self-sacrifice. During the late Warring States, the followers of Mo-tzu (the Mohists) had developed systematic procedures for making offerings to the sacred powers. Throughout the Warring States, there were shrines devoted to honoring the guardian spirits of a location, such as a mountain pass or a valley. The Mohists, moreover, trained people to tend them. The Mohists lost their influence in the Han dynasty, but the shrines

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remained. Thus, when Taoism began to have its shrines and religious leaders, it was only continuing an already established tradition.

Another condition that facilitated the transformation of Taoism into a religion was the decline of state-organized ceremonies. During the Chou dynasty, the state ceremonies were performed by shamans employed at the court. When the shamans lost the personal power they had held in prehistoric times, they could no longer fulfill the spiritual needs of the people. As time went on, the real meaning of the ceremonies was forgotten: the festivals became celebrations without spiritual value. The final blow to the state-organized ceremonies came from the early Han emperors, who decided to promote Taoism. The state-employed shamans ceased to exist and their positions in the imperial court and with aristocratic families were replaced by the fang-shih.

The disappearance of the court shamans and traditional ceremonies in the Han dynasty allowed religious Taoism, as a form of organized religion, with ceremonies, to develop and take hold. Religious Taoism made its appearance in the Eastern Han (25–219 CE) and reached the height of its development in the Wei (220–265 CE), Chin (265–420 CE), and the Southern and Northern dynasties (304–589 CE).

Taoism Becomes an Organized Religion: Eastern Han (25–219 CE)

In 150 CE, the Han emperor set up a shrine for Lao-tzu and conducted official ceremonies for honoring him. There are two kinds of shrines in Chinese culture: those that honor ancestors and those that honor the sacred powers. Since Lao-tzu was not an ancestor of the Han emperor, we must conclude that it was as a sacred power that he was honored. Thus, Lao-tzu had been transformed from a historical figure to a deity, or sacred power. This does not mean, however, that Lao-tzu was worshiped in the way that worship is understood in Judeo-Christian religions. In Chinese culture, the making of offerings to sacred powers or ancestors is not equivalent to worshiping them.

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Ceremonial offerings at shrines have led many Westerners to believe that the Chinese worship their ancestors. This is a misunderstanding. Ancestors are remembered and honored with offerings; they are not worshiped. Similarly, making offerings to the sacred powers is a way of honoring and thanking them for protection and help.

An understanding of this relationship that the Chinese people have with the sacred powers is central to understanding the beliefs and practices of religious Taoism. Although religious Taoism introduced new deities and spirits, the cultural meaning of ceremony and offering remained unchanged throughout Chinese history.

The appearance of imperial shrines dedicated to Lao-tzu made it natural to invest Lao-tzu with a title and identify him as the chief deity of a religion. This was what Chang Tao-ling did toward the end of the Eastern Han dynasty.

Chang Tao-ling came from the southern part of China, a region where, as we have noted, shamanism and the belief in magic had always been strong. Historical records tell us that Chang was trained in the Confucian classics, but toward his middle years became interested in the teachings of Lao-tzu and the arts of longevity. It was said that he traveled and lived in Shu, the western part of China, to learn the secrets of immortality. The region of Shu occupies modern-day Szechuan and parts of Yunnan province. This area is isolated from the rest of China. Szechuan is a river basin surrounded by mountains; its only access is through the gorge where the river flows out. Szechuan has a culture of its own, and during the time of Chang Tao-ling was populated by tribes who still practiced shamanism in the ancient way. Yunnan is even more remote and mountainous. To its people who lived in its isolated villages, spirits were real, and magic was a central part of their lives.

Chang Tao-ling claimed that the teachings were revealed to him by Lao-tzu, who also gave him the power to heal the sick and ward off malevolent spirits. We can never know the truth of this claim, but it is likely that Chang apprenticed himself to the master shamans of Shu and acquired their skills. As a native of the south, Chang was probably also familiar with the talismanic magic that came from the

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old Wu and Yüeh cultures that had survived even after these kingdoms met their end in the late Spring and Autumn Period.

Using talismanic water to heal the sick, Chang Tao-ling won a large following in Szechuan and the southern regions of China. Talismanic water is water that contains the ashes of a talisman that was burned ceremonially. The talisman is a strip of yellow paper with a special script written on it in red (fig. 3.1). Most of the scripts are incantations or invocations of spirits and deities. This is how the power of the deity is channeled into the talisman. When a sick person drinks talismanic water or is sprinkled with it, the power of the deity will enter the patient and fight off the malevolent spirits that cause the illness.

Chang Tao-ling organized a religion around himself, invested Lao-tzu with the title T'ai-shang Lao-chün (the Great Lord on High), and he and his descendants became the cult's leaders. This religious movement was named the Way of the Five Bushels of Rice, because

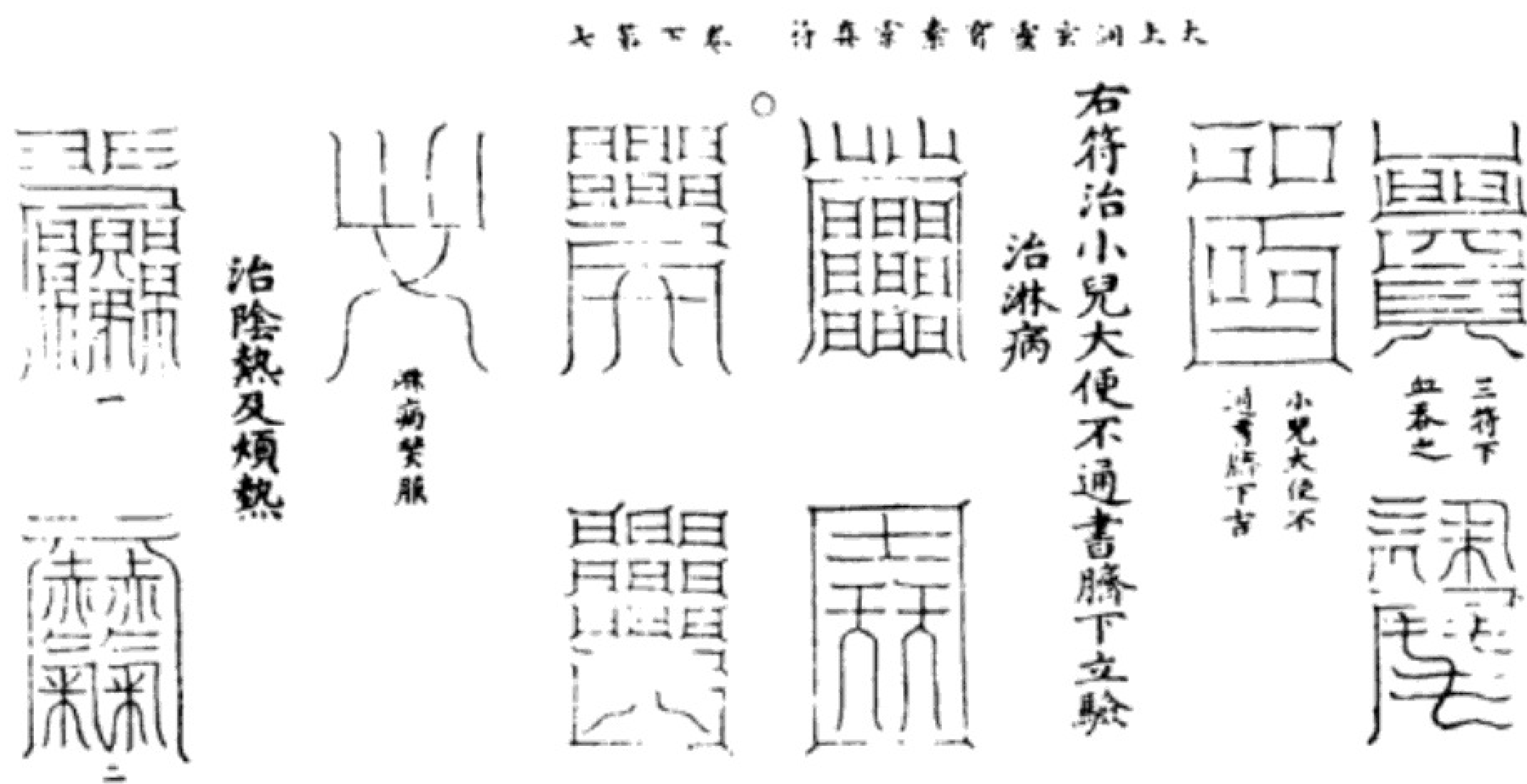

FIGURE 3.1. An example of a Ling-pao talisman of healing, from the *T'ai-shang tung-hsüan ling-pao su-ling chen-fu* (The Great One's True Basic Spirit Talismans of the Mysterious Cavern). The group of talismans on the right is for curing children's intestinal problems and constipation; the middle group is for curing gonorrhea; the group on the left is for curing fevers. Used by the Celestial Teachers.

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initiation into the organization required a donation of five bushels of rice.

In the hands of Chang Tao-ling, Taoism became a religion. It had a founder, Lao-tzu, who as T'ai-shang Lao-chün was also its chief deity. It had the beginnings of a priestly leadership, Chang Tao-ling and his sons calling themselves the Celestial Teachers and becoming the mediators between the deities and the believers. And, most important of all, this religion served the spiritual needs of the common people.

Chang Tao-ling's movement would have remained a regional cult if his grandson, Chang Lu, had not developed political ambitions and pushed his influence into the central part of China. Moreover, several events cleared the way for the descendants of Chang Tao-ling to establish a fully organized religion complete with papal-like leadership, priesthood, scriptures and liturgy, rituals and ceremony, and magic.

The first event was the appearance of a book, the *T'ai-p'ing ching* (The Book of Peace and Balance), the first known "revealed" scripture in Taoism. While the Taoist classics such as the *Tao-te ching* and *Chuang-tzu* were philosophical treatises written by mortals, the authority of the *T'ai-p'ing ching* was attributed to the deities, known as Guardians of the Tao. *T'ai-p'ing ching* not only described a utopian ideal, it had all the features of a Taoist religious text. It invested deities with titles that had obvious Taoist references, such as Great Mystery, Primal Beginning, and so on; it had a theory of the creation of the universe; it emphasized the importance of ceremony and discipline; it described a system of reward and punishment; and, most importantly, it associated health and longevity with religious observances.

The second event that contributed to the success of Chang Tao-ling's descendants was the popularity of talismanic magic among nearly all the social classes. For a long time, historians had thought that only the poor and illiterate peasants believed in talismanic magic. In the next chapter, we shall see that talismans and invocations form a major part of Shang-ch'ing Taoism, a movement of reli-

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gious Taoism among the aristocracy in the Wei and Chin dynasties (220–420 CE).

The third factor that helped the fortunes of the followers of the Celestial Teachers was a series of episodes in the dynastic history of China. This happened in the Chin dynasty. We shall look at these events in the following section.

The Golden Age of Taoist Religion: Wei (220–265 CE), Chin (265–420 CE), and Southern and Northern Dynasties (304–589 CE)

This was the golden age of Taoist religion. It was also the age of great chaos. During this period, China was broken into many small kingdoms, and—in the context of Chinese history—dynasties came and went in little more than the wink of an eye. Within a span of four hundred years, no less than twenty-five dynasties rose and fell, most of them with a life span of only twenty to fifty years. That Chinese historians were able to sort out and record what went on in this period is to be commended.

When the Han dynasty ended in 219 CE, China was divided into three warring kingdoms—Wei, Shu, and Wu—who fought each other for more than forty years. The Shu having been conquered by the Wei, the Wei dynasty took over (220–265 CE), and during the Wei, Chang Lu, the grandson of Chang Tao-ling, increased the influence of the Celestial Teachers movement. Chang Lu's religious organization was officially recognized by the state of Wei as the Cheng-i Meng-wei (Central Orthodox) school of Taoism. It was also during the Wei dynasty that a book titled *T'ai-shang ling-pao wu-fu ching* (The Highest Revelation of the Five Talismans of the Sacred Spirit) appeared. It is the earliest known Ling-pao (Sacred Spirit) text and the first of many Ling-pao texts that would be collected in the Taoist canon. The *Wu-fu ching* had the features of a religious scripture: talismans of protection, incantations, invocations of deities, a description of the administrative structure of the celestial realm, techniques of meditating and visualizing the deities, and vari-

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ous recipes for ingesting herbs and minerals for immortality. Moreover, many talismans of protection were attributed to Yü the Great. Whether or not Yü was actually the author of these talismans is not important; the fact that the authority of Yü was invoked is significant, however, because it connected religious Taoism to the shamanism of the ancient times.

The Wei dynasty was toppled by the Ssu-ma clan who established the Chin dynasty (265–420 CE) and united China by wiping out the kingdom of Wu. The founder of the Chin dynasty came to power by killing off his opponents, and his descendants continued to use force and brutality even after unification and peace. The Chin emperors also gave the Ssu-ma clan members favored treatment. This angered the nobles who although not belonging to the Ssu-ma clan had helped the Chin rulers gain power. Thus, even in the beginning of the Chin dynasty, the ruling house had lost the support of many powerful nobles. When the border tribes invaded Chin, the capital city fell, and the lands north of the Yang-tze came under the rule of tribal kingdoms. This ended what is now called the Western Chin dynasty (265–316 CE). It lasted only fifty-two years.

The Chin imperial house fled south with those followers who had remained loyal and founded the Eastern Chin (317 CE). Among its supporters were Sun Yin and Lu Tun, two practitioners of Chang Tao-ling's form of Taoism, which was now called the Way of the Celestial Teachers (T'ien-shih Tao). Although neither man belonged to the Ssu-ma clan, each received high honors for helping the Chin royal house establish its new rule. The religious organization that they belonged to, the Celestial Teachers Way, also received imperial patronage, and the social status and influence of the Celestial Teachers thence increased rapidly. A body of sacred texts appeared, formed around the *Wu-fu ching* and called the Ling-pao scriptures. These texts, mentioned above, were said to have been revealed by the Taoist deities to leaders of Celestial Teachers Taoism, and they contained invocations, talismans, and descriptions of ceremonies. Many Ling-pao scriptures are still used today in the practices of the Celestial Teachers, or the Central Orthodox (Cheng-i Meng-wei) School.

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After the Chin royal house fled south, the lands north of the Yangtze were divided into small tribal kingdoms, which fought each other. Some of the stronger kingdoms attempted to cross the river and invade Eastern Chin; they failed, however, because in its early years Eastern Chin was strong and prosperous. The dynasties of the northern kingdoms were short lived, and only two of them managed to unite the tribes under a single rule. One of them was the Northern Wei (386–534 CE).

The kings of Northern Wei conquered the rival kingdoms, and, for that time in China's history, held on to their rule for an unusually long time. This was because they adopted the language, culture, and customs of central China. Thus, the conquered peoples did not feel that they were under a foreign yoke. Moreover, Northern Wei had a prosperous trade relationship with distant nations via the silk route, and for a while it was a center of cultural exchange and learning. Buddhism flourished: monasteries were built and Sanskrit scriptures were translated into Chinese. And it was in Northern Wei that the liturgies of religious Taoism were systematized.

K'OU CH'IEN-CHIH

K'ou Ch'ien-chih was a Taoist scholar and priest who lived in Northern Wei at the height of its prosperity and power. Originally trained in Celestial Teachers (or Central Orthodox) Taoism, K'ou was adept at that school's liturgies and magical practices, and Taoist historians today still marvel at his accomplishments.

K'ou Ch'ien-chih established the northern branch of the Celestial Teachers school, became the spiritual adviser to the Northern Wei emperor, and wrote and compiled liturgies that are still widely used in Taoist religious ceremonies. His branch of Celestial Teachers Taoism emphasized ceremonies and liturgies—a sharp contrast to the original Celestial Teachers, whose major focus was talismanic magic. Inspired by the Buddhist disciplines of abstinence, K'ou came up with a list of dos and don'ts for practitioners of the Taoist religion. These included what foods to abstain from and when to abstain from them, what kinds of offerings were legitimate, and what types of

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behavior were demanded by Taoist practice. He attacked the popular cults for using alcohol, meats, hallucinogens, and sexual orgies in the ceremonies, using the slogan, "purifying the spiritual practices and reestablishing morality." He designated festival days for the major Taoist deities, prescribed the ceremonies that should be performed on those days, and wrote the music and liturgies for them. It is not too far-fetched to say that K'ou Ch'ieh-chih is the father of Taoist ceremonies.

The Northern Wei emperor was so impressed with K'ou that he gave him the title of Celestial Teacher and appointed him spiritual adviser. In 420 CE, the emperor took the title True King of the T'ai-p'ing Way and made K'ou Ch'ieh-chih's form of Central Orthodox Taoism the state religion.

LU HSIU-CHING

Although 420 CE was a great year for the northern branch of the Celestial Teacher Taoism, it was fateful for the Eastern Chin dynasty, in the south. Barely one hundred years after the Chin royal house had crossed the river to reestablish its rule, the dynasty fell. In 420 CE, the Eastern Chin dynasty ended and was replaced by the Sung (not to be confused with the Sung dynasty that later ruled over a united China). This Sung dynasty was the first of what Chinese historians call the Southern dynasties, as opposed to the Northern dynasties.

The Southern dynasties were kingdoms that occupied lands south of the Yang-tze; the Northern dynasties (like Northern Wei) occupied China north of the river. Between 420 and 589 CE, six dynasties came and went in the south, most of them the result of military coups, with the commanding general of the imperial army or the royal bodyguard killing the emperor and replacing him as ruler. During this period, southern China was plunged into political chaos.

The period of the Southern and Northern dynasties would be remembered only as a time of political and social disorder if all that had happened was the rapid succession of dynasties; however, this was also the period of the flowering of the Taoist religion. In the

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Sung of the Southern dynasties lived one of the most important figures of religious Taoism—Lu Hsiu-ching. Lu is credited with compiling the first collection of Taoist scriptures that would become the core of today's Taoist canon.

Lu Hsiu-ching was trained in the Central Orthodox School of Taoism. A scholar and an adept in talismanic magic, he came from an established family in southeast China. Moreover, he had the combination of his regional culture's belief in talismanic magic and an aristocrat's attraction toward ceremonial details. We are told that Lu received a classical education and was knowledgeable in the Confucian classics, the *I-ching*, the Taoist classics, and the Ling-pao scriptures. He gained the respect and favor of the Sung court, revised the rituals and magical practices of the Celestial Teachers, and became known as the founder of the southern branch of Celestial Teachers Taoism.

During Lu's time, the number of Taoist books had multiplied. There were the old classics like the *Tao-te ching*, *Chuang-tzu*, and *Lieh-tzu*; there were books on alchemy and techniques of immortality passed down by the fang-shih; there were the Ling-pao scriptures, which in Lu's time numbered about fifty volumes; there was a new crop of texts called the Shang-ch'ing scriptures, which contained the teachings of the mystical form of Taoism (which will be dealt with in more detail in the next chapter); and there was also the *T'ai-p'ing ching*, which was more voluminous than the one we have now.

Inspired by the compilation of the Buddhist scriptures into a canon, Lu Hsiu-ching set out to collect and catalog the Taoist texts. In 471 CE, he published the first Taoist canon. It was divided into seven sections. The three major sections were the Cavern of the Realized (Tung-chen), the Cavern of the Mysteries (Tung-hsüan), and the Cavern of the Spirit (Tung-shen). The four minor sections were Great Mystery (T'ai-hsüan), Great Balance (T'ai-p'ing), Great Pure (T'ai-ch'ing), and Orthodox Classics (Cheng-i).

Lu's contribution was not limited to compiling the Taoist scriptures; like K'ou Ch'ieh-chih, in the north, he also wrote liturgies, set

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down the correct procedures for performing the sacred ceremonies, and systematized the liturgies.

When Lu Hsiu-ching died in 477 CE, Taoism had become a formidable influence in southern China. Due to his efforts, the Central Orthodox form of Taoism (the Celestial Teachers Way) became a respected and organized religion accepted by all strata of society. Moreover, Lu had brought together into the one canon teachings of the three major forms of Taoism of his time: the arts of longevity of the alchemists, the magic and ceremonies of the Celestial Teachers, and the mysticism of the Shang-ch'ing school. In chapter 4, we will examine the important Shang-ch'ing school.

Further Readings

Henri Maspero's work *Taoism and Chinese Religion* is still the most complete and authoritative work on the history of the Taoist religion. It looks at the mythology of China and its influence on Taoist religious beliefs, covers the development of Taoist organized religion, and examines the spiritual techniques of cultivating life and longevity. It is truly a great book.

Maspero's work is not the kind of book that you will want to read in one sitting; it is good to have around so that you can refer to it from time to time. A scholarly work, it nevertheless does not get bogged down in details. One does not have to be a specialist or researcher in the field to enjoy it. Book 1, "Chinese Religion in Its Historical Development," and book 5, "Taoism in Chinese Religious Beliefs of the Six Dynasties Period," are the most relevant to topics covered in this chapter.

Kristofer Schipper's delightful *The Taoist Body* presents a clear and concise approach to Taoist religion and religious practices. Schipper's chapter 1, which is a brief introduction to the nature of Taoist religious beliefs, and chapter 7, which discusses how Lao-tzu became the embodiment of the nature of the Tao, give further information on the topics discussed in this chapter. Later in the *Guide*, I will direct readers to other chapters of Schipper's.

Chapter 2 of Michael Saso's book *Blue Dragon, White Tiger* gives

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a list of events (with dates) in the history of Taoism. The list begins with the Spring and Autumn Period and brings readers all the way into the twentieth century, covering up to 1979. It is a good quick-reference resource, but you need to be familiar with the events before you can fully make use of this information.

Readers desiring more light on this period of Taoist history, and curious about other Taoist religious or revealed texts, can find a selection in Livia Kohn's *The Taoist Experience*. This anthology contains, in translation, the following texts related to the transformation of Taoism from philosophy to religion:

Scriptures Create the Universe: Scripture of How the Highest Venerable Lord Opens the Cosmos (reading #5)
Numinous Treasure—Wondrous History: A Short Record of the Numinous Treasure (#6)
The Three Caverns: The Ancestral Origin of the Three Caverns of Taoist Teaching (#9)
The Transformations of Lao-tzu: On the Conversion of the Barbarians (#10)

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4

The Rise of Mystical Taoism (300–600 CE)

THE WORLD OF Shang-ch'ing Taoism: a world where guardian spirits live inside the human body; a world where mystics fly to the sky and journey among the stars; a world where people absorb the essence of the sun and moon to cultivate immortality; a world where the highest attainment in life is to merge with the Tao in bliss and ecstasy. . . .

Mysticism and Shang-ch'ing Taoism

Shang-ch'ing Taoism is often called Mystical Taoism. Mysticism has been defined in many ways. *The Oxford English Dictionary* once called it a "self-delusion or dreamy confusion of thought" and "a religious belief to which these evil qualities are imputed." Modern views now recognize that, to understand mysticism, we need to understand the nature of mystical experience.

Although most studies of mysticism are based on mystical experiences found in Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism), with a few from Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Judaism, they can still help us to understand the form of Taoism that has been called "mystical." However, to equate the beliefs and practices of the mysticism found in the Judeo-Christian religions (or even in the ancient Greek

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religions) with Taoist mysticism is misleading. Chinese history and cultural background have created a form of mysticism that is unique among the world's spiritual traditions.

Contemporary scholars of religion have identified several features of mysticism:

1. *The cognitive component:* the belief system and worldview of mysticism. There are several beliefs that form the core of mysticism. First, mystics believe there is an underlying unity behind all things. This is commonly called the One and it is the true reality. Second, this One, or the underlying reality, cannot be perceived or known by ordinary experience. Third, this One is present in us, and by realizing it internally we can be united with everything around us. Finally, the goal of human life is to achieve unity with this One.

2. *The emotional component:* feelings that accompany the mystical experience. Bliss, joy, ecstasy, sexual excitement, and intoxication have all been used to describe the feelings of mystical experience.

3. *The perceptive component:* any visual, auditory, or other sensations that accompany the mystical experience. A heightened awareness of the surroundings and of auditory and visual images is experienced when the underlying reality of the One is directly perceived without the intrusion of rational thinking.

4. *The behavioral component:* actions that induce the mystical experience or are the result of it. The mystical experience involves action. Some actions function to induce the experience (such as, Dervish dancing in Sufism, or Islamic mysticism; body postures in yoga; and the rituals of Shang-ch'ing Taoism); other actions result from the mystical experience (such as, walking through fire; speaking in special languages).

There are many similarities between mysticism and shamanism. Each involves an ecstatic experience, transformed perception, feats of power, and a union with a force that takes the individual to a more complete existence than the mundane self. But mysticism and shamanism are not identical. For a long time, it was believed that the difference between the shamanic and mystical experience was that the former required disciplined training and was induced by

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systematic procedures, whereas the latter was spontaneous. When it became known that Sufism and yoga both employ systematic techniques to induce mystical experience, this criterion no longer held. In fact, Shang-ch'ing Taoism is another case where the mystical experience is induced by systematic procedures that can be practiced only after rigorous training.

I believe that what distinguishes mysticism from shamanism is the nature of the union between the practitioner and the sacred powers. In mysticism, the union is between two parts of ourselves—the cosmic and the mundane. The greater, or cosmic, power is a part of us. Whether we are separated from it because of cultural and social influence or because of the dominance of analytical thinking, it is still inside us. Therefore, one function of mysticism is that of undoing the conditions that separate ourselves from ourselves.

Shamanism, on the other hand, sees the greater or cosmic power as part of the external world. Thus, "it" has to be invited to enter the shaman before a union can be achieved. Sometimes the power comes to visit the shaman; for example, when the *awen* visits the Celtic bard, or when the nature spirits come to "court" with the Ch'u shaman. At other times, the shaman goes to the spirits by flying to their dwellings in the stars or journeying into their homes in the depth of the earth. In each case, the sacred power that the shamans wish to be united with is outside, not within.

Shang-ch'ing Taoism, with its belief that the deities, or the cosmic powers, are resident in the human body, identifies it as a mystical practice. However, the shamanic influence in Taoism had always been strong, and its imprint on Shang-ch'ing Taoism is unmistakable. In fact, this unique form of Taoism has both the features of mysticism and shamanism—the belief in the deities within and the journey to the other worlds.

The Predecessors of Shang-ch'ing Taoism

Shang-ch'ing Taoism was reputed to have been founded by Lady Wei Hua-ts'un during the early part of the Chin dynasty. Lady Wei

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received a revelation from the Guardians of the Tao (the deities) and recorded their teachings in a book titled *Shang-ch'ing huang-t'ing nei-ching yü-ching* (The Yellow Court Jade Classic of Internal Images of the High Pure Realm) in 288 CE. However, the two most important ideas of Shang-ch'ing Taoism—the notion of Keeping the One and the belief that there are guardian spirits in the body—were known as early as the Eastern Han dynasty. They can be found in parts of the *T'ai-p'ing ching* that are preserved in the *T'ai-p'ing ching ch'ao:* "If the body is still and the spirit is held within, then illness will not multiply. You will have a long life because the bright spirits protect you."

A commentary on the *Tao-te ching* by Ho-shang Kung (the River Sage), believed to have been written in the Han dynasty, also refers to Keeping the One: "If people can cultivate the spirit [i.e., the One], they will not die. By 'spirit' I mean the spirits of the five viscera. In the liver is the human spirit, in the lungs is the soul, in the heart is the seed of the immortal spirit, in the spleen is the intention, and in the kidneys is the generative energy. If the five viscera are injured, then the five spirits will leave." (Ho-shang Kung's Commentary on the Tao-te ching). That this idea of Keeping the One appeared in a commentary on a text of classical or philosophical Taoism is significant. It provides a continuity between classical Taoist philosophy and Taoist mysticism.

If the principal ideas of Shang-ch'ing Taoism were present well before the Chin dynasty, why did it have to wait until the Chin and the Southern dynasties to become a major movement in Taoism? To understand this, we must look at the lineage of Shang-ch'ing Taoism and the transmission of its scriptures in the Chin and Southern dynasties.

Shang-ch'ing Taoism in the Chin Dynasty (265–420 CE)

Lady Wei is reputed to have been the founder of Shang-ch'ing Taoism, but it was Yang Hsi who was responsible for spreading its teachings. The Shang-ch'ing texts tell us that Yang Hsi received a

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vision from Lady Wei (who had become an immortal) and then "wrote" the scriptures under the influence of a cannabis-induced trance. The scriptures were then transmitted to Hsü Hui and Hsü Mi (a father and son). The early Shang-ch'ing scriptures, in addition to the *Huang-t'ing nei-ching yü-ching*, are the *T'ai-shang pao-wen* (The Sacred Writ of the Most High), *Ta-tung chen-ching* (The True Scripture of the Great Cavern), and the *Pa-su yin-shu* (The Hidden Book of the Eight Simplicities).

The early proponents of Shang-ch'ing Taoism were related to each other by clan or marriage; all were members of established families in southeast China. Many of them were descendants of the fallen aristocracy of the state of Wu of the Three Kingdoms. Lady Wei was the daughter of a high-ranking priest of Celestial Teachers Taoism and was herself initiated into the priestly order. Yang Hsi and Lady Wei came from the same county, and their families, Yang and Wei, had a long-standing friendship. As for Hsü Hui and Hsü Mi, the father and son, they were related by marriage to the famous Ko family, whose members were known for their alchemical experiments and expertise in the arts of longevity. Two of the best-known members of the Ko family were Ko Hung, who wrote the *P'ao-p'u-tzu* (The Sage Who Embraces Simplicity), a Taoist encyclopedia, and Ko Hsüan, who was instrumental in collating the Ling-pao scriptures. These two families, Ko and Hsü, were also linked through marriage to another established family of the region, the T'ao family. Later, in the Southern dynasties, a descendant of the T'ao family, T'ao Hung-ching, would become one of the greatest scholars and practitioners of Shang-ch'ing Taoism.

Thus, the founders of Shang-ch'ing Taoism came from the aristocracy of the county of Wu, near the capital of the Eastern Chin dynasty, and the supporters of Shang-ch'ing Taoism were members of the nobility and the artistic community of the capital. One of the most famous followers of Shang-ch'ing Taoism was the calligrapher Wang Hsi-che, who penned a copy of the *Huang-t'ing wai-ching ching* (The Yellow Court Classic of External Images).

The early form of Shang-ch'ing Taoism incorporated many beliefs

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and practices of Celestial Teachers Taoism. It used talismans and adopted the Yüan-shih T'ien-tsun (Celestial Lord of the Great Beginning), another name for Lao-tzu, as its highest deity. It incorporated the *T'ai-p'ing ching,* the *Cheng-i fa-wen* (The Principles and Scripts of the Central Orthodox), the *T'ai-shang ling-pao wu-fu ching* (The Highest Revelation of the Five Talismans of the Sacred Spirit), and other Ling-pao texts into its corpus of sacred scriptures. The scriptures that were distinctly labeled as Shang-ch'ing texts numbered around fifty during the Eastern Chin.

However, two features of Shang-ch'ing Taoism distinguished it from Celestial Teachers Taoism. The first was the belief that Keeping the One and holding the guardian deities would lead to health and longevity: orthodox members of the Celestial Teachers Way were not sympathetic to the notion of Keeping the One as a method of attaining health; they maintained that talismans and incantations were *the* way to cure illness. The second feature separating Shang-ch'ing Taoism from Central Orthodox Taoism was the use of talismans: the Celestial Teachers used talismans for curing illness, exorcism, and for protection against malevolent spirits, whereas the Shang-ch'ing Taoists used them primarily for invoking and visualizing the deities inside the body and for journeying to other realms of existence.

As time went on, these differences between the two forms of Taoism overshadowed their similarities, and Shang-ch'ing Taoism began to pull away from Celestial Teachers Taoism and became a unique and distinct lineage. However, the separation of Shang-ch'ing Taoism from Central Orthodox did not invite hostility from the organized branch of religious Taoism. Unlike what happened in other cultures, where the mystics' worldview and experience of union with the sacred powers often made them heretics in the eyes of organized religion, especially in Christianity and Islam, in China, this was not so. I think there are several reasons for this.

First, the Chinese culture had always tolerated diversity in religious and spiritual practices. In the history of China, most emperors were content to leave religious groups alone as long as they did not have political ambitions. The emperors who favored one religion

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over others appointed personal spiritual advisers, but did not attempt to integrate state and religion. The zealous emperors who ordered religious persecution did not rule for long.

Second, there is a saying among Taoists, "In Taoism there are no heretics; there are only sects." Throughout the history of Taoism, differences in beliefs and practices have produced a diversity of sects that respected and tolerated each other.

Third, because of a specific historical circumstance, during the Chin dynasty, Shang-ch'ing Taoism found a receptive following among the artistic community and the upper class. When the Chin dynasty fled south, the capital was built in a region where several powerful and established families controlled the finance and commerce of the region; thus, although the empire was ruled by the Chin, members of the royal family and their entourage from the north were more like foreigners and refugees than established kings. The Ssu-ma clan was no longer strong enough to use force to subdue the powerful families of the south. But, most importantly, the Chin ruling house realized that destroying these families would destroy the economy of the empire, and an unusual relationship was therefore formed between the imperial house and the upper class: the established families of the southeast, although allowed to retain their lands and commercial enterprises, were not given high-level positions in the government; thus, families like the Wei, Yang, Hsü, and Ko were rich but politically powerless. Denied the road to high politics, many of them turned toward the arcane arts and dabbled in spiritual practices. Being wealthy, they had both the time and resources for such pursuits.

Fourth, the belief in spirits and talismanic magic had always been strong in southeast China. The region also had the heritage of the shamanic culture of Ch'u, Wu, and Yüeh, dating back to the sixth century BCE. Many founders of the Shang-ch'ing movement were already familiar with the talismanic magic and arcane arts of the Celestial Teachers; therefore, the shift from using talismans for healing to using them for achieving ecstatic union with the deities did not require a lot of retraining.

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down to the kind of robes they wore and the symbols of authority they carried.

T'ao Hung-ching's knowledge and learning were vast and deep. In addition to his study of Shang-ch'ing teachings, he was interested in physical alchemy and had a laboratory on Mao-shan devoted to the research and making of the elixirs of immortality. The first emperor of the Liang dynasty (following the Ch'i dynasty) was both a friend and patron of T'ao's. T'ao Hung-ching's laboratory was supported by imperial funds, as were his trips to other mountains in search of minerals for making the immortal pill.

T'ao Hung-ching was knowledgeable not only in the Taoist arts: he also edited and wrote treatises on herbal medicine, was adept at divination, military strategy, astronomy, geology, and metallurgy, and his forges on Mao-shan were famous for crafting some of the best swords of the time. T'ao was also a classical scholar, learned in both the Confucian classics and Buddhist scriptures. In literary endeavors, T'ao was prolific: he wrote some eighty treatises on scientific and literary subjects. His works on Taoism, including alchemy and divination, numbered about fifty. And in addition to having expertise in science and scholarship, T'ao Hung-ching was a poet and a skilled practitioner of the martial arts.

Given these wide interests, it is natural that T'ao Hung-ching's breadth was incorporated into his practice of Shang-ch'ing Taoism. In T'ao Hung-ching, Shang-ch'ing Taoism took on new dimensions. His interest in alchemy, medicine, and herbs introduced the use of herbs and minerals into the Shang-ch'ing methods of cultivating health and longevity. Moreover, he incorporated his knowledge of the *I-ching* and the divination arts into the Shang-ch'ing understanding of the human body and the circulation of energy. Internal transformations now followed the rules of transformations laid out in the principles of change, and the circulation of energy and the nourishment of the guardian spirits of the body followed the patterns of celestial movement and changes through the seasons.

By the time of T'ao Hung-ching's death, Shang-ch'ing Taoism had become a spiritual tradition with a sophisticated theory of the

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