

THE TAOIST TRADITION



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

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



THE PURPOSE OF THE COURSE

The academic study of religion is a systematic exploration of the visions, values, and activities by which individuals and societies of past and present have understood and shaped their life-experiences. The goal of such courses is to promote a mature sensitivity to religious traditions, personalities, issues, and institutions, within their proper historical contexts. Such courses are not intended to persuade students either toward or away from any specific tradition, nor are they intended to serve as an element of any personal spiritual search in which students might already be engaged. Rather, the goal of such courses is for students to achieve an accurate understanding of certain cultures' religions on those cultures' own terms, and to evaluate those religions in a manner that is both properly critical and properly sympathetic. Should you want an experience that is "spiritually fulfilling" to you personally, please go to a religious center of your choice and practice there. You are in this course to study religion: if you wish to practice religion, or to learn how to do so, you are in the wrong place.

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

In this course, you will learn that Taoism is an ancient and immense tradition of great subtlety and complexity. You will see how its many dimensions evolved to answer the needs of people of different periods and different propensities, and you should learn respect for, and understanding of, the teachings and practices of all those people. Taoism is not some abstract "timeless wisdom" that simply consists of a set of

warm, fuzzy ideas. Rather, Taoism is a specific set of cultural traditions that evolved within the historical context of ancient, medieval, and modern China, evolving to meet the spiritual needs of people in specific historical situations. In medieval times, that tradition was quietly exported to Korea. But Taoists *never* formulated teachings designed to be marketed in foreign cultures. Westerners who delude themselves that they are "following the Tao" are often simply in love with ideas created by other deluded modern Westerners, not by the authentic Taoist masters of China. In this course, we will explore the nature and evolution of "REAL TAOISM" — the Taoism that

- flourished at all social levels in China—even among scholars, officials, and emperors—up until the time of the Western disruption of Chinese society in the mid-19th century;
- survived—in somewhat fragile condition—the vicissitudes of the 20th century, including rabid government-sponsored persecution between 1966 and 1976;
- was not taken seriously by scholars in the West until the late 1970s;
- is seldom found on American websites or in American bookstores; and
- remains generally unknown, even among most people in China today.

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

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

The course syllabus is a general plan for the course. Changes and variations, as announced to the class by the instructor, may be necessary. All academic work must meet the standards contained in the document titled *A Culture of Honesty*. All students are responsible for informing themselves about those standards before performing any academic work.

You are welcome to chat with the instructor *after* class, during *office hours*, or at other *arranged times*. The time *before* class, however, is *not* a good time for any discussion.

The classroom is not a lunchroom: please do your snacking and enjoyment of beverages before you come to class or after you leave. It is also not a phonebooth, so please make sure that any phones that you bring into the building are turned off. In sum, it is your responsibility to refrain from activity that needlessly interferes with the learning process.

Course Objectives:

1. To illumine the hermeneutic issues involved in understanding religion across cultures. Prof. Mark MacWilliams of St. Lawrence University calls this process "gaining cross-cultural religious literacy."
2. To introduce the Taoist traditions of China, in relation to other Chinese traditions.
3. To illustrate that religious traditions evolve, and that such evolution can be understood by reference to historical, intellectual, cultural and existential phenomena.
4. To sample the cultural riches of Taoism by reading important selections from Taoist texts.
5. To stimulate meaningful comparison, and contrast, of Taoist traditions with those more familiar to students from their own cultural heritage. As Prof. Mark MacWilliams says, this means: "*To learn more about religion and about one's self. Max Müller, a famous historian of religions, once said, "One who knows one religion knows none." The same can be said about human life. One who knows only one culture or one way of living knows none. To know ourselves—who we are, who we could be—means we must know others. And to know others means we must study that which informs and guides their sense of self, society, and world. To study what people believe is ultimately real, good, beautiful, true, and the way they put this into practice is to study religion.*"

TEXTS

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

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

Required:

Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition*
Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology*
Victor Mair, trans., *Lao-tzu: Tao-te ching*
Victor Mair, trans., *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang-tzu*
Eva Wong, trans., *Seven Taoist Masters: A Folk Novel of China*

Recommended:

Livia Kohn, *Cosmos and Community: The Ethical Dimension of Taoism*
J. J. Clarke, *The Tao of the West: Western Transformations of Taoist Thought*
Bill Porter, *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*

Most of the required readings will be found in the **READER** and in the "required" textbooks. A certain number of *required* readings, however, will be found in the two "recommended" books. Thus it is expected that you *will* acquire the first four, and that many of you will also have the latter two. In addition, other assigned readings will be made available (1) on reserve, in hard-copy or as "e-texts" (accessible from any computer); (2) on specified internet sites; and/or (3) as handouts.

THE ACADEMIC VALUE OF THE INTERNET

Your instructor's webpage (www.uga.edu/religion/rk) includes many pertinent

- **STUDY GUIDES**
- FULL-TEXT **PUBLICATIONS**
- **LINKS** TO OTHER GOOD SITES ON ASIAN RELIGIONS.

However, like many other good sites, this one has its limitations. First, it is now quite outdated. Secondly, it has never provided all the material that even your instructor would like it to provide. And thirdly, it was not constructed, in the first instance, to serve as a pedagogical tool. Even such a website tries to fulfill different functions for different people: some are intended as professional connections for other scholars, others are designed to appeal to the general public. The latter may be more colorful or amusing, but are not necessarily more reliable or more informative. Remember to *think critically about what you are seeing*: many sites have an unexpressed agenda, just like movies and TV shows, and some may be well-intentioned but insubstantial and/or unsound. **So beware attempting to use the internet as an educational tool** — *particularly* in regard to non-Western religions — **without expert guidance**. Remember that all a person has to do to create, for example, a website on Taoism is to set up the website: he or she does not really have to *know* much, or anything, about Taoism! And for psychological and/or economic reasons, some people construct such sites just to get attention, or to get a reputation that they have not bothered to earn through hard work or proven expertise. Newcomers can easily mistake such a site for a reliable resource. See the instructive guide to "Evaluating Websites" from a committee of the American Library Association at <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/EvaluatingWebsites1.htm>.

With a very few exceptions, responsible scholars do not put their actual research on the web. Few professors' webpages, for instance, even provide full bibliographic data telling you what they have published. And only a handful post unpublished research findings, or provide full-text reprints of any of their publications, the way that your instructor and a few others do on their own webpages. So despite the immense amount of *stuff* that you can find on the internet, it is unreliable as an educational resource.

Solid and reliable studies of Confucianism, and other non-Western traditions, generally appear

only in your university **LIBRARY**, within the pages of **scholarly books and journals**. Such publications—**unlike internet websites**—undergo a careful **peer-review process**, by which today’s knowledgeable authorities confirm the substance and value of good scholarship and screen out shoddy material. So **DO NOT** attempt to “do research” on the web! Your instructor will recommend particular websites that are useful and dependable. But unless instructed otherwise, you should plan to do **all** of your research in your university **library**, informed by your instructor and guided by trained reference librarians.

For the study of Taoism, the prime internet sites that provide an abundance of reliable material are:

1. “TAOIST CULTURE AND INFORMATION CENTRE”: <http://www.eng.taoism.org.hk/>
2. Professor James Miller’s “DAOIST STUDIES”: <http://www.daoiststudies.org>.
3. Professor Fabrizio Pregadio’s complementary sites:
 “TAOIST STUDIES ON THE WORLD WIDE WEB”: <http://venus.unive.it/pregadio/taoism.html>.
 “GOLDEN ELIXIR”: <http://venus.unive.it/dsao/pregadio/>.
4. Louis Komjathy’s “CENTER FOR DAOIST STUDIES” website: <http://www.daoistcenter.org/>
5. Russell Kirkland’s website: <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk>
6. THE TAOIST RESTORATION SOCIETY: <http://www.taorestore.org/>
7. THE BRITISH TAOIST ASSOCIATION: <http://www.taoists.co.uk/>.

Trustworthy reviews of many books on Taoism may be found at:

1. <http://rels.queensu.ca/dao/reviews.php>
2. <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/pdf/booknotes.html>

A good glossary of terms associated with Taoism is found at <http://rels.queensu.ca/dao/glossary.php>.

Sometimes inaccurate, but often useful, are the following sites:






1. St. Martin’s College, England, “PHILOSOPHY, THEOLOGY, AND RELIGION: TAOISM: <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/trans-cultural/taoism>; and <http://philtar.ucsm.ac.uk/encyclopedia/taoism/index.html>.
2. Professor Gene Thursby’s <http://www.clas.ufl.edu/users/gthursby/taoism/intros.htm>
3. “Dao House”: http://www.geocities.com/dao_house/later.html.

For readers of Chinese, another place to start is “ZHONGGUO DAOJIAO” <http://www.chinataoism.org/>. See further the “Web Links” page from Louis Komjathy’s site, reproduced in your course reader.

On the divergent systems for the romanization of Chinese words, see The “Chinese Romanization Guide” at <http://www.edepot.com/taoroman.html>. A guide to “Major Periods in Chinese History” appears at <http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/ReIn270/History.htm>. Other useful links appear at <http://www.asianstudiesarena.com/asianstudiesarena/links.html>.



REQUIREMENTS

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

See “Criteria for Evaluation of Papers,” in your course reader. If a student’s written work seems to indicate that he/she failed to do the assigned readings, or if her/his attendance is irregular, such facts will seriously affect her/his grade on specific assignments and in the course overall. Graduate students will write a research paper on an approved topic, in lieu of the final exam.

NOTE: The course **READER** also includes:

- ❖ Kirkland, “THE WRITING PROCESS AS PARTNERSHIP”
- ❖ Kirkland, “A GUIDE TO WRITING ACADEMIC PAPERS.”

Following the advice provided there will help you write good papers in this and other courses. Papers that

do not reflect attention to that advice are unlikely to receive very high grades. You are also urged to visit:

1. "Writing the Religion Paper":
<http://www.dartmouth.edu/~compose/student/humanities/religion.html>; and
2. UGA Writing Center, "Writing Resources":
<http://www.english.uga.edu/writingcenter/writing/index.html>.

As the Writing Center says (<http://www.english.uga.edu/writingcenter/about/contact.html>): "Please, by all means, feel free to contact us if we can help you in any way....Whatever your needs, we are eager to help."



COURSE OUTLINE AND READINGS

[NOTE: RECOMMENDED readings are listed in square brackets; all other readings are REQUIRED]

INTRODUCTION

READER: "On the Academic Study of Religion in American Colleges and Universities"
"A Definition of Religion": <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/guides/RELDEF.html>
[For a fuller discussion of the issues, see Kirkland, "Defining Religion":
<http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/guides/RELDEFINE.html>]

READER: Fuller, *Religion and the Life Cycle*, 1-13, 136-40

CHINA AND ITS RELIGIONS

READER: "ELEMENTS OF CHINESE RELIGION"
[Stephen Teiser, "The Spirits of Chinese Religion":
<http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu/core9/phalsall/texts/lopez.html>]

TAOISM — "ANOTHER FINE MESS..."

THE "TAOISM" OF THE WESTERN IMAGINATION

Kirkland, *Taoism*: xiv-xx

Kirkland, "The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China: De-Colonializing the Exotic Teachings of the East": <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/pdf/pubs/pres/TENN97.pdf>

READER: Girardot, Abstract of "Finding the Way": James Legge and the Victorian Invention of Taoism"
[full-text available online through the ATLA Religion Database, accessible through

GALILEO]

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 1-4bot. [4bot.-9] 9-15, 16-22, 27-40top [40top-47mid] 47mid.-51mid., 52mid.-53bot.

Siegler, Review of Clarke: <http://rels.queensu.ca/dao/review.clarke.php>

READER: Kirkland, "On Coveting Thy Neighbor's Tao: Reflections on J. J. Clarke's *The Tao of the West*"
[Komjathy, "Taoist Texts in Translation":
http://www.daoistcenter.org/Articles_files/Articles_pdf/Texts.pdf]

THE TAOISM OF CHINA

READER: Bokenkamp, "The World-view of the Taoist Religion: General Perspectives and Definitions"

Miller, "Daoism: A Short Introduction": <http://www.oneworld-publications.com/samples/daoism.htm>
[Sivin, "On the Word 'Taoism' as a Source of Perplexity": <http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~nsivin/perp.html>]
Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: 1-7

Kirkland, Review of Kohn's *The Taoist Experience*:
<http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/reviews/KOHNANTH.html>

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 1-19, 211-217

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

[Barrett, "Daoism: A Historical Narrative" (*Daoism Handbook*, xviii-xxvii)]

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

THE CLASSICAL LEGACY OF TAOISM

THE "FIRST TAOISTS"? THE *NEI YEH* ("INNER CULTIVATION")

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 20-22 [23-35] 39-52

READER: Komjathy, "Inward Training": 3-28

THE "USELESS WORDS" OF CHUANG CHOU ("Chuang-tzu"/"Zhuangzi")

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 33-39

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

Mair, trans., *Wandering on the Way*: xi-xvi [xlvii-liv] 3-71 [75-151] 152-173 [174-347]

"THE ELDERS" — THE TAO TE CHING (*Daode jing*)

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 52-73

Mair, trans., *Lao-tzu: Te-tao ching*: 148-153, 3-105

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

<http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/guides/GUODIAN.html>

ETHICAL DIMENSIONS OF TAOISM'S CLASSICAL LEGACY

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

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

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

[Kirkland, "The Roots of Altruism in the Taoist Tradition":

<http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/pubs/ROOTS.html>]

Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*: 1-2, 115-20, and as assigned

THE GROWTH AND FLOWERING OF TAOISM

TAOISM IN ITS FORMATIVE PERIOD

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

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 74-84

[Bumbacher, "Cosmic scripts and heavenly scriptures: the holy nature of Taoist texts":

http://www.uni-tuebingen.de/sinologie/sino/personal/bumbacher/texte/cosm_scr.htm]

"ARISTOCRATIC TAOISM"

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 85-97

READER: Kirkland, "Daoshi/Tao-shih (Taoist Priest/Priestess)"

"Lay Organizations" and "Monastic Institutions": Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*: 9-12

"Forms of Community": Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*: 72-74

"From Community to Cosmos": Kohn, *Cosmos and Community*: 103-6 [108-111]
Newly Translated Texts of "Aristocratic Taoism":

- [A Shang-ch'ing Meditation on "The Three Ones": Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: 204-14]
- *The Scripture for Saving Humanity* (Ling-pao *Tu-jen ching*): Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*: 43-

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"DYNASTIC TAOISM" — THE VALUE OF TAOISM FOR RULERS AND OFFICIALS IN IMPERIAL TIMES

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 116-126, 144-171

[Chao, Shin-yi, "Daoist Examinations and Daoist Schools," *Journal of Chinese Religions* 31 (2003)]

"SPIRITUAL IMMORTALITY" — THE "GOAL" OF TAOIST PRACTICE

Clarke, *The Tao of the West*: 117-120mid., 123bot.-124mid.

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 172-190

Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*:

- Ascension to the Immortal Realm: 303-5
- Life in the Immortal Realm: 333-35 [336-43; 358-62]
- Stories of *Hsien* ("Immortals") in Chinese Lore and Literature: [290-99; 351-58; 325-332; for

more

on "The Flower Maiden," see Kirkland, "Huang Ling-wei"]

- The Queen Mother of the West: [56-62]

"CULTIVATING REALITY" — MODELS AND TRADITIONS THROUGH T'ANG TIMES

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 190-210

Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*:

- Meditation for Men and Women: 215-19 [319-25; 224-28—note the Buddhist influence]
- Ssu-ma Ch'eng-chen's Teachings on the Taoist Life: 236-41
- Self-cultivation in the *T'ien-yin-tzu*: 80-86
- *The Scripture on Clarity and Stillness* (*Ch'ing-ching ching / Qingjing jing*): 25-29

READER: Komjathy, "Developing Clarity and Stillness: The Scripture for Daily Internal Practice"
(also at http://www.daoistcenter.org/Articles_files/Articles_pdf/DM.pdf)

Kirkland, Review of Wong, *Cultivating Stillness*: <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/reviews/WONG.html>

[Kohn, *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*: 125-34, 137-52, 154-56, 193-222]

[Kohn, *Seven Steps to the Tao*: 31-73, 83-111]

"COMPLETE PERFECTION" (CH'ÜAN-CHEN / QUANZHEN) AND "GENTRY TAOISM"

READER: Berling, *The Syncretic Religion of Lin Chao-en*: 38-46

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 97-109

RESERVE: "Cultivating Clarity and Purity": Eskildsen, *Teachings and Practices of the Early Quanzhen Taoist Masters*: 21-38

Kohn, *The Taoist Experience*:

- The Teachings of "Inner Alchemy"—The *Wu-chen p'ien*, "On Awakening to True Reality": 313-19
- The Teachings of Wang Che ("Wang Ch'ung-yang," Founder of the Ch'üan-chen Tradition)—
The "Fifteen Articles": 86-92
- Moral and Spiritual Discipline on the Taoist Path
 - The Story of "The Gourd Master": 95-100
 - Lü Tung-pin and his "Yellow Millet Dream": 119-132

WOMEN IN TAOISM

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 126-144

Despeux and Kohn, *Women in Daoism*, Introduction (http://www.threepinespress.com/pdf/pdf_women.pdf)

Kirkland, Review of Benn, *The Cavern-Mystery Transmission*:

<http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/reviews/BENN.html>

[RESERVE: Despeux and Kohn, *Women in Daoism*]
[RESERVE: Cahill, "Discipline and Transformation: Body and Practice in the Lives of Daoist Holy Women..."]

THE "NEO-CONFUCIAN" APPROPRIATION OF TAOIST SPIRITUAL MODELS

Adler, "**Varieties of Spiritual Experience: Shen in Neo-Confucian Discourse**":
<http://www2.kenyon.edu/Depts/Religion/Fac/Adler/Reln471/Spirit.htm>

LATE-IMPERIAL TAOISM

"Introduction to Quanzhen Daoism and the Dragon Gate Tradition": <http://www.taoists.co.uk/quanzhen.htm>

Kirkland, *Taoism*: 110-115

READER: Darga, "The Taoist Idea of Transformation in the *Xingming guizhi (Hsing-ming Kuei-chih)*"

THE TAOIST LIFE IN LATE-IMPERIAL LITERATURE

Wong, trans., *Seven Taoist Masters* (a Taoist novel of the 17th century)

Kirkland, Review of *Seven Taoist Masters*: <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/basehtml/reviews/7MASTERS.html>

TAOISM TODAY



Film: "Chinese Taoism"

"Interview with Min Zhiting, Chairman of China Taoist Association":

<http://www.taorestore.org/interview.html>

"Interview with Yin Xinhui, Abbottess of Qian Yuan Guan Monastery":

<http://www.taorestore.org/interview-yin.html>

"Interview with the Mysterious Secret Taoist Monk":

<http://www.taorestore.org/interview-smm.html>

"The Daoist World Today": <http://www.eng.taoism.org.hk/daoist-world-today/default.asp>

[Yoshioka, "Taoist Monastic Life"]

Porter, *Road to Heaven: Encounters with Chinese Hermits*: 39-59, 208-220

Kirkland, Review of Porter: <http://www.uga.edu/religion/rk/pdf/reviews/HERMIT.pdf>

Class Schedule Data

Holiday:	Mon	Sept 6 (Labor Day)
Midpoint:	Tues	Oct 12
Fall Break	Thurs-Fri	Oct 28-29
Thanksgiving	Wed-Fri	Nov 24-26
Classes End	Thurs	Dec 9
Final Exam	Tues	Dec 14 (3:30 - 6:30 pm)