



Handbook of Research on Development and Religion

Edited by **Matthew Clarke**



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8 Daoism and development

James Miller

INTRODUCTION

Daoism, also spelled Taoism, is China's organized, indigenous religious system. Daoists take as their focus the goal of obtaining the Dao, or Way, the unnameable source of generative vitality in a universe of constant transformation. The methods for realizing this goal have been revised and reinvented throughout Daoism's 2000-year history but can be generally understood in terms of mediating between the fluid energies of the body, the community and the cosmos. Daoists pay attention to the subtle energies of the inner body and engage in meditative cultivation practices that aim to restore and enhance the functioning of the body with the goal of bringing about long life and spiritual transcendence. They also worship a complex hierarchy of sacred powers that includes at its apex the Three Pure Ones, impersonal instantiations of the Dao itself, and also a wide variety of personal gods who were once human beings but who, over the course of their lives, achieved transcendence, sometimes understood as immortality.

From the perspective of an outside observer, Daoism has two distinct characters: an elite tradition of monks and priests who are dedicated to the quest of obtaining the Dao, and a communal tradition integrated into local society and patronized by non-initiated lay people. The elite tradition is focused on maintaining and transmitting the teachings of the various lineages to a relatively small number of initiates who are deemed to be suitably qualified by virtue of their religious commitment. This elite tradition is esoteric, in that the contents of its teachings are not generally transmitted to non-initiates, and it generally has a hierarchical structure so that initiates must demonstrate their accomplishment at a lower level of teaching before receiving transmissions of a higher level of teaching. This elite tradition is by definition somewhat obscure and tends to jealously guard its distinct identity and sacred authority.

At the same time, however, Daoism also embraces the common Chinese religious tradition that pays little heed to religious distinctions. In this tradition, non-initiated lay people patronize temples to pray for good fortune, to mark the changing of the seasons, and to conduct rituals for the departed. The patrons of such temples and services may not be aware whether their temple is run by Daoists, Buddhists or other local religious traditions. The main thing is that they regard the temple as having spiritual efficacy. Within this common religious framework, however, there are specifically Daoist rituals for funerals and exorcisms that call upon distinctively Daoist gods and have specific Daoist characteristics that can be easily detected by the trained observer. The most distinctive Daoist ritual is the *jiao*, generally a complex multi-day event aimed at restoring the balance between the community and the cosmos. The most lavish of these is the rite of cosmic renewal, staged only once every 60 years, to mark the beginning of a new cycle of the Chinese calendar.

From an internal perspective, however, Daoists generally categorize themselves

according a variety of distinct lineages, each with its own genealogy of sacred authority. Daoists are initiated into a tradition by a master, receiving sacred texts and teachings into the methods taught by that tradition. Historically these various traditions were often centred on particular sacred mountains, and are frequently referred to by the name of the mountain. For this reason, some Daoist lineages tended to have strongholds in distinct regions of China and, at times these affiliations have maintained their various historical and geographic distinctions. In the modern period, however, all lineages and forms of Daoism have been increasingly subjected to mechanisms of centralization, nationalization and bureaucratization under the aegis of a single organizational framework, known as the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA). The CDA is based at the White Cloud Monastery in Beijing, which is one of the most important monasteries associated with the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen) tradition of monastic Daoism that dominates northern China. For this reason contemporary Daoism at the national level tends to reflect this elite monastic form, though, historically, this is a relatively late Daoist movement that does not really represent the whole of the tradition. The CDA is itself supervised by the State Administration for Religious Affairs (SARA).

MODERNITY, HARMONY AND DEVELOPMENT

The concepts of development (*fazhan*) and, in particular, scientific development (*kexue fazhan*) are key terms in the ideology espoused by China's modernizers since the beginning of the twentieth century. Such revolutionary terms were developed, however, in direct opposition to earlier conceptual frameworks regarding the basic functioning of human society, its relationship to the natural environment and the cosmos. The modern concept of development is, essentially, predicated on a linear theory of time, in which human activity contributes in a cumulative, meaningful way towards some final goal or purpose. This was not the generally received view of traditional Chinese governance, set in place some 2000 years earlier in the dominant theory of Han dynasty Chinese scholar Dong Zhongshu, which held that the relationship between the three realms of humanity, earth and heaven should ideally be one of reciprocity or mutual resonance (*ganying*; see de Bary, 1960, p. 208). The sacred duty of the emperor in this view was to conduct rituals to ensure the positive correlation between humanity, earth and heaven so as to bring about the most optimal flourishing. Indeed, the success of the empire was thought to depend in part upon the ritual activity of the emperor, which sought to correct periodic imbalances in the relationship between humans and the cosmos (see Miller, 2012). In such a view, the function of religion was a mediating one: to bring everything back into alignment so as to create a balanced, homeostatic organism. This cyclical view can even be seen in the traditional Chinese system for measuring time based on the 12 animals of the Chinese zodiac and the five elements, according to which the clock is reset every 60 years.

It is entirely understandable, therefore, that China's modernizers should see 'development' as a revolutionary concept that aimed not towards the continuous cyclical alignment of humanity, earth and heaven, but rather the relentless transformation of the same towards some positive goal. This view placed progress in opposition to Chinese traditional views, especially Confucianism and Daoism, and was one reason why these

traditions were particularly scorned by revolutionary modernizers. A prime example of this can be seen in the work of Chen Duxiu (1879–1942), a founder of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) who, in a now-famous essay ('Call to youth', 1915), advocated four chief characteristics among China's revolutionaries: that they be independent, not servile; progressive, not conservative; aggressive, not retiring; and cosmopolitan, not isolationist (Lawrance, 2004, pp. 2–3). In all four cases, Chinese religions in general, and Daoism in particular, were found wanting.

Daoism, like all religions, contains a conservative element within it. While, from a spiritual perspective, Daoists might believe they advocate independence rather than servility, the institutional structures of Daoism are designed along a hierarchical basis in which students cannot simply 'think' their way into enlightenment, but must generally be guided by teachers and have their progress validated by the religious community. Second, Daoist elites aim to preserve their authority through the transmission of classic scriptures, and seek to indoctrinate new generations with values and beliefs developed centuries ago. From this perspective it can hardly be regarded as a 'progressive' movement. Third, Daoists are noted for seeking sanctuary in remote mountain areas and in withdrawing from the conventions of ordinary human society. At the same time, Daoists explicitly deprecate aggression and value non-interventionist ways of acting in the world. Finally, Daoists tend to value the inner, spiritual life. They are not missionaries, nor generally do they seek to transform the external world. Doubtless Chen Duxiu would regard them as isolationist in attitude. In all four aspects that he enumerates, it is easy to see how Daoism can easily be classified in the negative of the binary pairs. From Chen's perspective, therefore, it is well nigh impossible to imagine how Daoism might contribute something to development.

The classification of religion as a hindrance to development was only made worse by Marx's view of religion as a narcotic. From this point of view, Daoism, like other religions, is not simply a set of values and beliefs that may be regarded as ideologically opposed to the values of social development. Rather, religions also have the social function of hindering historical progress. Given the widespread adoption of these views of religion by China's modernizers, it is not surprising that they came to view religion as an enemy in the goal of political revolution, social and economic progress and scientific development. It is also hardly surprising, therefore, that Chinese communist revolutionaries engaged in iconoclastic campaigns to destroy temples, denigrate Confucius and eradicate all forms of what they perceived to be superstitious thinking that was opposed to scientific materialism.

Such anti-religion thinking was by no means confined to communist modernizers. Duara (1991) details how nationalist aspirations conflicted with the local networks of religious power in the first half of the twentieth century. Chinese general and second President of the Republic Yuan Shikai, for instance, 'sought to systematically dismantle the institutional foundations of popular religion' by appropriating local temple property and establishing schools and government offices in their stead (Duara, 1991, p. 76). Nationalist modernizers further made use of the political distinction between religion and superstition in their attempt to centralize the power of the newly emerged Republican state. The anti-superstition campaigns of the late 1920s and early 1930s proscribed popular religious practices such as geomancy and physiognomy while simultaneously advocating the cult of national figures such as Confucius and Laozi. As Duara

(1991, p. 80) demonstrates, the effect of this was to consolidate national power over local society by bringing 'legitimate' religious activities under state control while at the same time excluding from the definition of religion those popular practices that it could not easily control. 'Superstitious' practices involving charms and talismans were also associated with secret societies and local religious organizations, which had also historically functioned as networks of dissent against central state power.

The ideological distinction between legitimate religious organizations and popular 'superstitious' activities was maintained in the Deng Xiaoping era after the hard-line leftist policies associated with the Cultural Revolution (1966–76) came to an end. National religious associations were revived and placed under the oversight of the Religious Affairs Bureau, now the State Administration for Religious Affairs. More recent times, however, have seen the emphasis placed on pragmatic, rather than ideological, considerations regarding the role of religious activities in China's continued development. Religious leaders now form part of the Central People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and the Communist Party has instead formed a broad coalition of ruling elites, including religious figures, on whom it depends for its continued legitimacy. This has led to a renewed understanding of religion from a broad socio-cultural perspective rather than in purely ideological terms, and a rethinking of what religion might positively contribute to social development. Following Marxist thinker Gramsci in recognizing the value of the 'cultural' sector (Zeng, 2011, p. 773), China's leaders have reconsidered the value of traditional Chinese culture, rehabilitated Confucius, and permitted the overt functioning of authorized religion, while maintaining an ever closer watch on undesirable religious and cultural phenomena. The resultant 'religious boom' has cost the government considerable sums of money in terms of vacating and restoring confiscated religious properties and subsidizing the operating expenses of authorized religious organizations (*ibid.*, p. 768).

At the same time, the goal of rapid economic development has come to be supplemented once again with 'back-to-the-future' virtues such as 'harmony' (*hexie*) and 'spiritual civilization' (*jingshen wenming*). Such emphases on spirituality and culture are designed to help ensure broad social stability, and crack down on official corruption and dissident social movements.

COMMUNITY WELL-BEING

Putting aside the dominant narratives that have come to frame Daoism in the modern period, it is possible to examine the ways in which Daoists have historically interacted with local communities in terms of social and economic development. The earliest Daoist community of which we have a clear understanding was known as the Way of the Orthodox Unity (*Zhengyi dao*), and functioned as a theocracy in south-west China for about 70 years from 142 CE. Common to most traditional Chinese communities it operated on a collective basis, collecting an annual tax from each household and imposing regulations governing the upkeep of the communal environment, such as not wantonly felling trees, picking flowers, digging holes or drying marshes (Schipper, 2001, p. 81). Such concern for the common spaces was no doubt advantageous for the well-being of the community as a whole and may be regarded as characteristic of Chinese society in

which the interests of the group are accorded a high priority. In Schipper's (2001, p. 89) analysis, however, these injunctions draw on an older tradition 'rooted in the rejection of the feudal society and the ritual practices of the public cults of the city-states'. That is to say, the ethical foundation for the community was one predicated on a sense of being a different kind of society with a different kind of ritual life. These earliest Daoist communities thus tended to be in this sense peripheral communities, predicated on a rejection of the conventional social order and embracing a life based on simple communities and natural sacred spaces.

As Daoism became more integrated into mainstream Chinese society, however, it tended to merge with local religious organizations and embedded itself in the common religious life of Chinese people. In a later publication, Schipper (2008) makes the argument for understanding Daoism as the primary framework within which Chinese religious life takes place. In its transition from the periphery to the mainstream, however, it brought about a change in the relationship between local communities and religious institutions. In particular, the 'covenants of purity' (*qingyue*) specified that Daoist gods were not to be offered animal sacrifices and Daoist priests were not to receive salaries. As a result of the latter, temples came to be owned and funded by the collective rather than by priestly lineages. Thus, in contrast to affiliation-based religions in which people pay tithes to a religious organization that is distinct from secular society and governed by a special class of religious professionals, Chinese people founded community associations (*hui*) or common management organizations (*gongsi*, now the term for 'corporation') in order to manage their collective religious lives. As a result, the gap between 'religious' activities and other local economic, educational or charitable activities becomes harder to discern. These communal associations, for instance, became significant managers of local wealth held in trust for the benefit of the community. In keeping with their originally religious motives, some of these funds are typically devoted to religious activities, but in many cases a significant proportion could be channelled into local enterprises or educational activities.

Despite the attacks against local religions and 'superstitious' activities throughout the twentieth century, local religious collectives are still important drivers of development in rural China. Tsai (2002), for instance, provides evidence of how rural development projects at the village level in mainland China are actively initiated and managed by temple or lineage organizations. At one research site in Fujian Province, for instance, a village temple committee took over the responsibility of building roads. From the 400 000 yuan in annual donations to the temple in 2000, the temple committee paid for four roads to be paved, and village basketball courts to be constructed (*ibid.*, p. 11). Tsai makes the positive conclusion that 'the use of community social institutions to provide village services makes coercive strategies unnecessary while empowering citizens to participate in civic life' (p. 24). Where religious institutions are owned by the community as a whole they are able to play a role in local development. In these cases, government authorities do not wish to condemn such local religious organizations as 'superstitious' but rather bring them under the wing of the state as officially authorized 'venues for religious activities (*zongjiao huodong changsuo*)' (Chau, 2005, p. 245).

The positive effect of local religious activities perhaps goes against traditional theories of the social function of religious activities, whereby religious rituals are most commonly associated with 'festival time' in Chinese rural society. As Tam (2006, p. 78) explains,

the rhythms of rural Chinese life are traditionally divided into an 'ordinary time' where labour and commerce are paramount, and a 'festival time' that emphasizes play, theatre and social exchange. From the perspective of economic development, therefore, the ritual activities of local festivals might seem to function in opposition to significant economic development. Festival time does not produce a vast amount of direct economic activity, except for the expense of mounting religious rituals, staging operas and hosting lavish banquets. The traditional Chinese understanding of the value of these times of relative economic inactivity was that they were a time to 'keep the bow unstrung' (ibid., p. 79), that is to say, times of quiet and passivity rather than intense economic activity.

Chau (2005), however, challenges this traditional view of religious activity as economically otiose. His fieldwork in northwest China demonstrates how the local temple association used community donations to engage in a wide range of economic, philanthropic and educational activities:

Besides being a site of both individual and communal worship, a temple is also a political, economic, and symbolic resource and a generator of such resources. A beautifully built temple and a well-attended temple festival attest not only to the efficacy of the deity but also to the organizational ability of the temple association and the community. (Chau, 2005, p. 238)

As Laliberté et al. (2011, p. 148) note, although it might seem that festival activities such as opera troupes and folk music performances organized by local temples are not directly related to philanthropic endeavours, the money spent on candles and incense, plus the funds left in donation boxes during these times can generate substantial revenues. In the case of the area studied by Chau, these funds were used to build a primary school and launch a reforestation project that attracted international acclaim. In these cases, 'temples are like enterprises that generate prosperity for the local economy (especially if they are regional pilgrimage centers) and income for the local state. It is thus in the interest of the local state to protect local temples as they would local enterprises' (Chau, 2005, p. 245).

Although it is important to pay attention to the 'hard' economic value contributed by Daoist and other Chinese community religious associations to local development, the 'soft' value of such organizations should also not be underestimated. Tam (2006) emphasizes the way in which religious activities play an important role in creating and performing networks of interaction within and between local communities, and notes, for instance, how religious festivals in south-east China contribute to a broader sense of community by bringing together various extended family networks and local ethnic groups, even to the extent of overloading local cellphone networks (Tam, 2006, p. 71). From this example, we can see that Daoist ritual activity functions as a kind of social lubricant, orchestrating and coordinating the mutual interaction of various communities. The work of contemporary anthropologists such as Chau and Tam, therefore, plays an important part in demonstrating the significance of Daoism for development not only in economically quantifiable terms, but also in terms of the development of social capital.

In both these cases the value that religion brings to the table is not characterized in terms of values or beliefs, but rather in the way that ritual activities serve the social function of maintaining healthy networks of community association. There is, however, an underlying set of values that reinforce Chinese religious approaches to community

organization, and which deserves further explanation. In this regard it is important to understand that Daoists have not tended to regard the communities with which they engage as monolithic, unchanging entities. Rather, the normative model for understanding community has been that of the body, that is, an organism whose well-being is constituted by the proper functioning of its internal systems as much as external or environmental factors.

In the Daoist view, the outward health of the body is determined by a complex internal system in which *Qi*, or vital energy, is distributed via a network of meridians, each associated with the major organs or viscera: heart, liver, lungs, spleen and kidneys. Health obtains when *Qi* flows smoothly through the entire system and all the organs are in communicative reciprocity with each other. This view of the body is the foundation for Chinese medicine and also for Daoist meditation practices. It relies on a theory of well-being defined as optimal harmony that obtains within a system. In principle, this theory can be applied to define what is good and bad in a wide range of analogous systems: good can be defined as what brings about the flourishing of the whole system; evil can be defined as deviations of *Qi* that produce negative effects upon the whole system. From this systems perspective, good is a function of the relationships between the various actors, and is something that is distributed across the network rather than isolated in one particular area.

As an example of this, we can turn to ancient Chinese political theory in which the operations of the state were understood by analogy with the body. Just as the health of the body depends on the free flow of the various fluids, so also the health of the state was thought to depend on the free circulation of power and knowledge among the various ranks of government. In the view of the third century BCE document, known as the *Springs and Autumns of Mr. Lü (Lüshi Chunqiu)*, the 'virtue' of the ruler is viewed as a kind of fluid that circulates throughout the organism of the state:

When the ruler's virtue does not flow freely [i.e., if he does not appoint good officials to keep him and his subjects in touch] and the wishes of his people do not reach him, a hundred pathologies arise in concert and a myriad catastrophes swarm in. The cruelty of those above and those below toward each other arises from this. The reason that the sage kings valued heroic retainers and faithful ministers is that they dared to speak directly, breaking through such stases. (Sivin, 1995, p. 6)

Here we can see clearly a notion of what disorder consists of, namely, the 'hundred pathologies' and 'myriad catastrophes' that 'swarm in' when the fluid, charismatic virtue of the ruler does not flow smoothly throughout the nation. Conversely, communal well-being obtains when the ruler's virtue flows unhindered throughout the nation.

Throughout Chinese history, Daoists have consistently emphasized the well-being of the individual body and the communal body in these terms, seeking to bring about healing within the body (of the individual or the community) and also to defend the body from negative environmental factors characterized in Chinese mythology as demons and ghosts. Thus as Laliberté et al. (2011, p. 142) explain, 'Daoist priests were expected to provide protection against diseases and demons through rituals, exorcism, and healing. The most common form of Daoist charity was to provide free medicine and medical care to the needy'. Daoists have thus undertaken significant work in the area of health care, regarding it not so much as an adjunct charitable activity directed towards helping

the needy, but as a part and parcel of their worldview in which health and long life are regarded as fundamental virtues.

To give two examples of the involvement of Daoists in healing arts and science, the first general classification of Chinese herbs was undertaken by the Daoist Tao Hongjing (456–536). This work, the *Divine Farmer's Materia Medica* (*Shennong Bencao Jing*) contains 365 recipes for drugs classified in three levels (Kohn, 2005, p. 171). Tao's work drew on a long tradition of Daoist preoccupation with herbs, fungi, minerals and animal parts whose properties were thought to aid the promotion of long life and even immortality. Similarly, the later physician and Daoist master, Sun Simiao (601–693) compiled an even more extensive compendium, *Beiji Qianjin Yaofang* (*Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand, for Urgent Need*), and is widely revered in Daoist temples across China as the God of Medicine. Daoism and health are thus firmly intertwined in the popular imagination in China, and in the West, so much so that there is often much confusion about whether various concepts or practices ought to be understood as 'Daoist' or 'medical' or 'religious' (Kohn, 2005, pp. 7–8). This confusion is indicative of the fact that the Western category of religion does not always make sense out of the Chinese cultural situation, in which the lines between what we would call religion, culture, economy, politics and medicine are often drawn in different ways than in the West. Thus, Daoists are not known for establishing hospitals as discrete centres of medical treatment in which the body is treated separately from an emphasis on religious or spiritual matters. Rather, community temples and temple associations form nodes in the networks through which Chinese people deal with health issues.

This interconnection of Daoism and health continues to play a role in shaping Chinese people's values in regard to public policy. Using data from the 2006 Taiwan Social Change Survey, Chang (2010) performed a statistical analysis of religious values and preferences for various redistributive social policies in contemporary Taiwan. Part of the impetus for conducting this research was that although spending on social care has grown substantially in Taiwan, the country has also been facing increased economic inequality as the result of globalization and economic liberalization (*ibid.*, p. 102). In such a context, understanding the motivations for public attitudes towards redistributive social policies becomes all the more important. The key finding was that Protestant Christians tended to favour social insurance and welfare programmes, whereas Buddhists and Daoists favoured the government's role in providing health care (p. 81). While Chang's article does not offer any specific evidence about Daoism, it does conclude that inheriting the values of Confucianism, Daoism and Buddhism 'leads to differences in preferences for redistributive policies [compared] with those of Western Christian societies' (p. 102). There is at least initial evidence for supposing that in a modern East Asian society, Daoists continue to hold identifiable values regarding these key aspects of public policy, and that health care is a particular focus for them.

SUSTAINABILITY

Cyclical models of economic activity have once again come to the fore as linear models of economic development push up against the ecological limits imposed by the natural carrying capacity of the earth. Prominent ecological economists such as Daly (1996)

argue for ‘steady state economics’ (SSE) rather than conventional growth economics. For now, however, international work towards climate change mitigation has pushed China to focus not on limiting growth in absolute terms, but in reducing the intensity of carbon emissions per unit of economic activity. The climate change policies promoted in China’s twelfth Five Year Plan (2011–15) call for the development of ‘circular economies’ in which the waste product of one economic process becomes a valued input for another process (Information Office of the State Council, 2011). Typically, two or more enterprises are co-located so as to facilitate this economic synergy. China’s Vice Minister of Environmental Protection argues that although industrialization broke through the ‘static, circulating economic pattern’ of traditional agriculture, this model is ultimately unsustainable as it demands high energy consumption and produces massive pollution (Pan Yue, 2007, p. 11). He continues:

Human beings obtain materials and energy from nature, and they must return them to the circulating system and do their best to reduce waste and destruction. Such an energy circulating system operating in line with the law of nature is exactly what was put by ancient Chinese as ‘round and round goes the divine order of things’.

This is a paraphrase of Chapter 16 of the classic Daoist text, *The Way and Its Power* (*Daode jing* or *Laozi*, after its author), which articulates a fundamental insight of the Daoist worldview, namely, a basic cosmic pattern of emergence and decay, activity and stillness, *yang* and *yin*. Daoists regard this pattern as natural, and derived it from the observation of the rotations of heavenly bodies through the sky. If Daoist philosophy has anything to contribute to notions of development, it is from within this circular perspective, in which the functioning of a system is basically understood not as a simple linear growth but as continuous exchange. Translated to an economic sphere this invites a theory of development rooted not in Christian or post-Christian faith in continuous linear development towards some ever-unattainable utopian ideal (see Gray, 2004), but rather a more realistic and holistic view that pays attention to the overall health and well-being of the community.

Given the political realities in contemporary China, however, it is not surprising that the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) has avoided the role of critiquing China’s economic policies. This does not mean, however, that it has completely avoided the issue of the environment as a key religious question. Such efforts go back to at least 1995 when the CDA issued a ‘Declaration on Global Ecology’. The final page of this declaration summarizes the whole in three bullet points:

- We shall spread the ecological teachings of Daoism, lead all Daoist followers to abide in the teachings of self-so or non-action, observe the injunction against killing for amusement purposes, preserve and protect the harmonious relationship of all things with Nature, establish paradises of immortals on Earth, and pursue the practice of our beliefs . . .
- We shall continue the Daoist ecological tradition by planting trees and cultivating forests. Using traditional hermitages as an organizational base, Daoists will conscientiously plant trees and build forests, thereby making the natural environment beautiful and transforming our hermitages into the paradise worlds of the immortals.

- We shall select some famous Daoist mountains as exemplars of the systematic task of environmental engineering. We expect to reach this goal by the early years of the new century. (Zhang, 2001, p. 370)

While this goal may have been hopelessly optimistic, there is no doubt that the seeds sown in 1995 continue to bear fruit in the present, with ongoing attempts by the CDA to preserve Daoist sacred spaces as paradigmatic locations for contemporary urban Chinese to encounter China's 'lost' nature. The CDA's Maoshan Declaration (2008) and its accompanying Eight Year Plan advocate that Daoist sacred sites be regarded not simply as places where religious activities take place but also as sites of environmental significance and locations for environmental education (Miller, 2013). Moreover, in a partnership with the Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC), the CDA established a small Daoist ecology temple in a conservation site near Taibaishan, Shaanxi. While it is perhaps too soon to be able to measure the practical effects of such policies and activities, it is at least worthwhile noting that a major national religious organization in China has embraced the preservation of specific environments as a central religious value.

Duara (2011, p. 24) speculates that what we may be seeing here is the embrace of sustainability as 'an emergent ideal, a new type of transcendence and sacrality with the capacity to motivate and mobilize persons and groups'. From this perspective, Daoism may be regarded as contributing to the development of an alternative to the conventional paradigms of secular modernization and economic development, namely, ecological sustainability. In so doing, whether it realizes it or not, the CDA is playing a certain role in contributing to a national conversation in China about what development and modernization should look like. In contrast to the Maoist 'utopian urgency' of 'Let's attack here!/Drive away the mountain gods/Break down the stone walls/To bring out those 200 million tons of coal' (quoted in Shapiro, 2001, p. vii), there is now a sense that the preservation, rather than destruction, of natural environments has not just a positive effect on the well-being of the community, but is rather one component of a transcendent value that demands attention in its own right and to which other values must ultimately be subordinate.

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