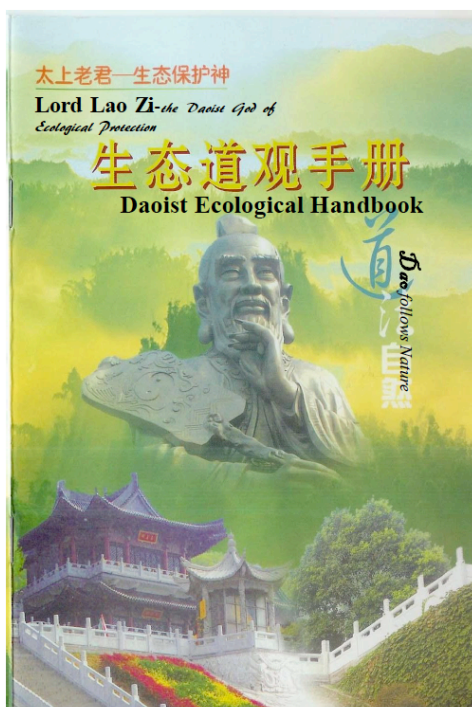


Daoist Ecological Temple Handbook



The Dao follows Nature

“The *Dao De Jing* proposes that ‘the Dao is the origin of everything’ and sets the scene for the important Daoist principle that the apparent duality of heaven and humanity is in actuality one. In Daoism, heaven, earth and humanity are also all part of an integral entity, and humanity shares its origin and laws with the rest of nature. It is only when we obey the rules of nature that we can achieve harmony with heaven and earth. These thoughts are the insights of ancient Chinese sages, gained through observing the world around them....”

(Liu Yan Dong. Keynote speech, 2007 *Dao De Jing* International Forum)

“The Dao follows Nature”. “Nature’s Dao” is the ultimate law of this universe. This is a law that should be followed in everything, and in the Mao Shan Daoist Temple it is the principle both of its architecture and its infrastructure.

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Part 1: Ecological Teachings from Great Daoist Philosophers

This is divided into sections for the morning, afternoon and evening. The material can be chanted, spoken, or simply read.

a) Morning Prayers

— Dao De Jing Chapter 51

Everything streams from the Dao (the way),
Everything is nurtured by De (virtue).
Everything is made out of substance.
Everything is created by the Dao of Nature
– and from everything on earth that surrounds it.
So every living thing should bow to the Dao and the De
Because they are what it is.
Everything that breathes comes from the Dao
And the Virtue feeds and takes care of it.
They grace things without possessing them,
They benefit everything but ask for nothing back,
They give themselves into everything without seeking control.
This is the essence of the original intention.

When the great Daoist master Laozi spoke of Dao and De in what became known the Dao De Jing (the Scripture of the Way and of Virtue) he was from the very beginning implying that people should be conscious of our behaviour towards nature, as part of our search for the essential meaning of our lives. Gracing things without possessing them, benefiting everything but asking for nothing back: these are great models for our relationship to each other and to the natural world.

— Taiping Jing, the Classic of Great Peace

Heaven, in charge of birth, is called “Father”.
Earth, in charge of nourishment, is called “Mother”.
Humanity, managing everything that the Father gives birth to, is called “the Son”.
Father gives orders to humanity through the shifting of seasons and winds,
Mother follows the Father to provide nourishment,
“Son” bears the authority of his Father since birth, and takes nourishment from his Mother...

Heaven gives birth to humanity, and earth nourishes his form;

But humanity is stupid and foolish — he disrespects his Father and Mother.
His Father and Mother are both unhappy;
Millions of living things, including people, are dying.
Humanity did not apply the rule of Dao and Reason — that is the root of all the blame.

Heaven and Earth are Father and Mother to humanity.
The Son, instead of loving his Father and Mother, steals from them, hurts them, and sickens
them — all of these are not small crimes.

The *Taiping Jing* observes that the survival of humankind depends on nature. It recognises the damage that many of human activities have caused, and warns against any future disrespectful behaviour, and encourages people to show their awe and love to nature. It was written more than 2,000 years ago

b) Afternoon Prayers

— The Yellow Emperor's Book of Hidden Harmonies

Heaven and Earth are the plunderers of all things: all things are the plunderers of humans; and humans are the plunderers of all things. When the three plunderers mutually act on each other, they are at rest. Hence it is said, 'One who lives eating and drinking according to time and season will be in good health. Taking action at key time brings peace to all things.

This text describes the inter-dependent relationships of heaven, humanity, and nature. Even two thousand years ago there was already an ancient wisdom that realised the importance of ecological systems and a dynamic balance of nature's elements.

c) Evening Prayers

— The One Hundred and Eighty Commandments of Laozi

Do not kill or hurt any life.
Do not cage birds and animals.
Do not casually climb trees to destroy nests.
Do not whip domestic animals.
Do not casually cut trees.
Do not remove and steal the flowers.
Do not burn wild fields and forests.
Do not reclaim land casually,
and do not thereby damage the mountains and rivers.
Do not dry the water courses.

The One Hundred and Eighty Commandments of Laozi is the most important book of commandments in Daoism. It includes many ecology-related rules and guidelines. For instance, a good person should have compassion for all living things, protect natural resources, and preserve the environment that nurtures and sustains our lives.

Part 2: Case studies

The following are among the many traditional Daoist Temples that have instituted good ecological management and can act as models for others.

1. The Longmen Cave Daoist Temple

The temple is located on Mt Longmen, in Shaanxi Province. The mountain is a typical karst landscape, with 35 natural caves and 24 lakes. Local legend tells of how every cave houses a *xian* (fairy immortal), and every lake a dragon. Trees thrive over the mountain, and it is lush with wildflowers. The beauty of this place attracts believers and pilgrims to come and meditate, as they have done since ancient times.

The temple is beautifully adapted to the local topography and scenery. Where there is water, a bridge was built; where there is a cave, a shrine was built; by the road along which pilgrims travelled, taverns were set up, and on large rocks, poems and characters were engraved. The entire temple is hidden among thick trees and bamboo, and its buildings share and enhance the beauty of its surroundings.

Although other Daoist temples do not have such an ideal environment as this one, the monks and nuns who have lived there over the centuries have often tried to better their surroundings by creating peaceful and beautiful gardens, and planting trees and flowers. Planting trees and guarding forests have become traditions of Daoist temples. Indeed, many temples tell stories of how fairy immortals and men with great virtues used to plant trees to show their respect to nature.

2. The White Cloud Temple

The Yellow Earth Plateau has experienced serious soil erosion. Where thousands years before there were forests, today there are just barren ditches and trenches resulting from years of ecological damage. However, the White Cloud Temple in Jia County, Shaanxi Province, is blessed by lush plants and enchanted by the singing of birds attracted by its serenity. It was enshrined as the “Green Pearls of the Yellow River Valley”. Now, the temple covers an area of 81 thousand *mu* (5,400 hectares),

of which two thirds are green, planted by Daoists over hundreds of years.

3. Zhen Wu Guan

The Mountain of Five Phoenixes is located in Gansu Province in northwest China. Its steep and rocky topography makes it very difficult to plant trees. In order to bring peace to this area, a Daoist temple, Zhen Wu Guan, was built on the top of this mountain in the mid-Qing period (around the 18th century). From the very beginning, the Daoist master of the temple “searched for suitable seedlings of cyprus and pine trees, and planted them, where suitable, with wintergreens, poplars and flowers such as peonies, which are native to this area. From the top of the mountain to the Hall of the God of Wind, he planted one hundred and fourteen trees.”

Later on he created rules prohibiting people from doing anything damaging to the forest; and to remind them, he preached regularly to the local villagers and engraved these prohibitions on rocks. Today, more than 200 years later, the young trees he planted have grown into forests that cover thousands of *mu*, and serve as green barriers protecting the neighbouring areas.

Ancient Daoist temples, blessed with the authority of God, and sometimes assisted by the power of local authorities, built around themselves natural conservations and forest reserves. Emperors throughout Chinese history issued laws and instructions to protect these Daoist sacred lands, forbidding people from cutting trees and hunting animals in these areas.

4. The Kongtong Mountain

The plateau to the northeast of Shaanxi province is piled up by thick yellow earth, on which many barren mountains stand. Only the sacred Kongtong Mountain, a few kilometres west of Pingliang City, on the edge of Gansu Province, is covered by thick forest. The lovely thriving greenery is no less lively than the fertile river towns south of the Yangzi River, and the scenery with its peaks and pines and jagged rocks is an important destination for pilgrimage. In the Book of Zhuangzi it is told that the Yellow Emperor heard of Master Guangcheng, who was living on top of the Kongtong mountain, and he went to see him saying: “I understand that you have found the perfect Dao: I dare to ask you what is the essence of the perfect Dao?”

And the Master replied: “What you ask about is the true element of all things: what you seek control over is in essence divided. Since you began governing all below Heaven, the breath of the clouds has not yet formed and yet it rains; the trees and bushes drop their leaves before they have turned yellow; the light of the sun and moon grows ever weaker. You are a man whose heart has become numbed by words... It would be unworthy to teach you the Dao.”

The Yellow Emperor goes into meditation, and it is only when he returns to Kongtong Mountain after this that he is allowed to learn that the essence of the perfect Dao is hidden in darkness. As is written in The Yellow Emperor's Book of Hidden Harmonies: "Be still, be pure, do not make your body struggle, do not disturb your essence."

Daoism advocates a harmonious relationship between humanity and nature's other creations. One of its important principles is "benevolence towards birds and beasts"; henceforth, it forbids killing and eating meat. Combined with the dynamic ecological balance maintained around Daoist temples, Daoists are able to enjoy a good relationship with all kinds of wildlife.

Part 3: Addressing eco-problems in Daoist Temples today

Why does Daoism pay such intense attention to ecological conservation? This is because Daoism realises, humanity, nature, and nature's other creations, are of one integral and inter-dependent entity. If any harm is done to the environment, humanity cannot escape unscathed and unpunished. We have to live together, to live better; and we have to live better, and to prosper together.

1. Incense – three sticks are enough

Some believers misunderstand some of the ancient Daoist religious practices. For instance, incense burning is a ritual which not only shows respect to the deities, but also has traditionally served the useful environmental function of expelling bugs such as mosquitoes. However, recently people have started burning huge amounts of incense, sometimes in great bonfires, in the hope of getting more attention from the gods. However, the incense they burn is sometimes of poor quality and by burning it in that quantity it damage the environment through smoke pollution as well as damaging the lungs of other worshippers and of the monks, nuns and lay staff who live in the temple all the time.

Burning incense, prayer papers and wax, and lighting fireworks and crackers, are important rituals in Daoist religious ceremonies. Today, Daoist temples advocate the practice of "burning three incense with utmost sincerity as the way to pay respect to Gods". This method has already demonstrated to be very effective in reducing pollution, as well as giving a message that high consumption and extravagance are not something that the gods support.

2. Looking after our temples

As Daoists, we need to consider it our responsibility and obligation to protect the environment around our temples. We need to develop good personal habits, keep our temples clean, recycle garbage, reduce pollution, maintain biodiversity, and protect plants and water sources. We need to also reach out to the tourists and

believers, for instance, by handing out environmental handbooks, to help them realise this is their responsibility as well.

Keeping the environment clean is the daily duty of all Daoists. They take very good care of the temple, so very little garbage is produced from within. They also voluntarily clean up the garbage outside the temple. Because of this, Daoist temples are held by many as peaceful, sacred and clean sanctuaries.

3. Greening and beautifying the environment

Planting trees and flowers are considered by Daoists as being actions of great merit and therefore are carried out voluntarily. Daoist followers are increasingly taking on responsibilities to clean the neighbouring forests, guarding them against fire, but also consciously beautifying the environment inside and outside the temple by planting and protecting trees and shrubs. If the environment is beautiful, then people will want to protect it.

4. Making a pledge

The Qinling Declaration, made in 2006 at Taibaishan in the Qinling Mountains, involved all the participants (representing monasteries and nunneries throughout China) promising to:

- 足 bring ecological education into temples
- 足 reduce pollution caused by incense burners, etc
- 足 use farmed land sustainably
- 足 protect species and forests
- 足 save energy
- 足 protect water resources.

5. Protecting animals

Daoism asks its believers to love life, and not just their own. It advocates that: “Benevolence be extended to all lives” and respect shown to all of nature’s creations. Because of this, birds and beasts are able to live happily around many temples, enjoying protection and sometimes assistance from the Daoist masters.

6. Preserving water sources

“The highest kind is like that of water”. Daoist teachings exhibit great love and respect towards water, which has the merit to “nurture all things” and is the origin of all lives. All Daoist temples adopt practices to save water, set up appropriate facilities to protect the sources and assign people to check, fix and clean the reservoirs and nearby environment. They also set up signs to remind tourists to save water and protect water sources as well.

7. Improving toilet facilities

The toilet is “the place where the food cycle ends and mosquitoes thrive”. To make Daoist temples ecological, an urgent task is to improve the toilet facilities. By using water to flush, or earth to bury, we try not to produce pollution a second time. Our slogan is, “an ecological Daoist temple does not produce flies”!

8. Personal Hygiene

To be a respectful follower of the Dao, one needs not only to cultivate from within, but also take advantage of the proper facilities to maintain physical well-being. Therefore, to build Daoist ecological temples, it is also important to improve the accommodation and bathing facilities.

9. Technological Methods

Technological support is needed in building Daoist ecological temples. The Daoist temples in northern Shaanxi Province have cooperated with many forestry experts to launch research projects and experiments in order to develop trees that can adapt to the harsh local environment; Huashan has introduced environmentally friendly toilets and sewage treatment systems from Germany to reduce pollution caused by the thriving tourist industry; Louguan Tai has installed solar lights, and Jinxian Temple has set up solar water heaters; and Mingsheng Hall is preparing to install spraying facilities to reduce the dust pollution.

It is expensive to install such environmental technologies; therefore it has not been the most common practice of all Daoist temples. However, we look forward to such opportunities in the future as it will help us to improve our ecological temples. Louguan Tai has solar-powered street lights, which, in the words of one Daoist Master, “take a nap under the sun during the day, and shine more brightly than the moon during the night”.

10. Environmental Campaign

Apart from getting directly involved in environmental activities, some of the Daoist temples have launched campaigns on environmental conservation, including setting up training programmes for residents inside the temple, preaching environmental concepts through prayers and ceremonies, holding exhibitions on ecological conservation, and installing environmental signs and slogans.

Part 4: Building Daoist Ecological Temples

Daoist Ecological Temples should be built taking into consideration the 10 steps outlined in the previous section. Increasing numbers of Daoist monks and nuns want

to live in, and run, their temples according to Daoist environmental principles.

1. The Tiejia Daoist Ecological Temple, 2005

This is located on the southern hillside of Taibai Mountain, in Shaanxi Province. It was built between 2005 and 2007 in a collaboration between the Louguantai Temple, which traditionally manages the sacred Taibai Mountain, together with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and Dutch funder the Ecological Management Foundation (EMF). From the very beginning, this temple has lived up to its environmentally friendly and nature-loving expectations.

It is a peaceful paradise for pilgrims, guests and tourists to come and meditate at the foot of the pilgrim trail, but it is not just that; it is also a showcase for Daoist ecological concepts. Together with the neighboring Panda Lodges, run by WWF-China, it has run several ecological training programmes and study groups. In 2006 and 2007, this place has witnessed the first Daoist ecological workshops in China. They resulted in the founding of a new and powerful Daoist ecological and educational alliance, and the publication and agreement of the Qinling Declaration, aimed at protecting the ecological system. Initiatives have also been launched to worship Laozi as the God of environmental protection.

At the base of the pilgrimage trail, and at the gate of the Ecological Temple, a thousand-year old Iron Armour tree (*tiejia*) still stands as the evidence of what Daoism has and has been, trying to protect. It has seen many ups and downs and reversals of history.

2. Wo Yunshan Daoist temple

Wo Yunshan Daoist temple is located between the southern edges of Mu Us Desert and the Yellow Earth Plateau. It was until recently surrounded by around 3,000 *mu* (200 hectares) of sandy desert-like land, with very little planted. Starting in 1995, the temple's management committee, following the suggestions of forestry experts, managed to build a collectively-owned botanical garden in this area. The botanical garden, which is also now a provincial science demonstration base for local villagers, currently grows 1,824 different kinds of plants, from 130 families and 440 genera, of which 60 are endangered species.

Part 5. Simple Advice to the followers of Daoism

Sharing effective ways of preserving our environment

- *“The goodness of water is that it benefits the ten thousand creatures; yet itself does not scramble, but is content with the places that all men disdain. It is this*

makes water so near to the Way...” — To see Dao, one must first learn from water, nurturing all things and creating a “good place”.

- *“The highest kind is like that of water.”* — Water is the origin of all lives. Please protect our water sources, and save water in your daily life. The water we used to wash vegetables can be used to water your flowers; and the water we used to wash your clothes, can be used to flush our toilets and clean our floors!
- *“The sage nurtures all, and abandons no one, he accepts (saves) everything and rejects (throws) nothing, he attends to the smallest details.”* — There exists no real “waste” in the world. Please separate your garbage and recycle it.
- *“Though there be boats and carriages, none being there to ride them.”* — Please choose transportation that does not pollute our environment. Please walk when you can, this is better for your health.
- To preserve our forest, please choose recycled paper and print your document on both sides of the paper.
- The incense you burn does not have to be big and plenty. Please choose environmentally friendly incense. Suffocating smoke could discredit your sincerity and harm your health.
- Please take away the litter you leave behind when travelling.
- Everyone has the responsibility to protect our environment. Please remember, there is always more you can do!

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

This handbook was written for the third Daoist Ecological Workshop held at Jurong in 2008. Two hundred copies of the Chinese version were distributed to the 200 Daoist monks and nuns who attended.

This very successful workshop was held with the support of Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), the Ecological Management Fund (EMF), WWF International and WWF-UK. It was held with the generous encouragement and assistance by the municipal government of Jurong, the Maoshan Management Committee, Jurong's Bureau of Ethnic and Religious Affairs and related organisations. To them, we express our sincere gratitude.

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