

SACRED MOUNTAINS

How the revival of Daoism is
turning China's ecological
crisis around

Sacred Mountains

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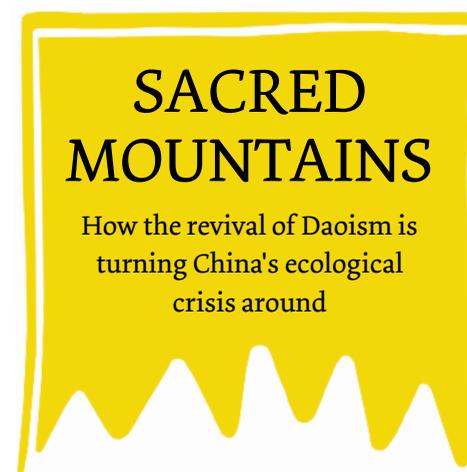
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Allerd Stikker



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Contents

Foreword by Martin Palmer	VII
Introduction by Allerd Stikker	IX
1. A Journey into Daoism <i>A Personal Story</i>	3
2. The Price of a Miracle <i>The Ecology Issue on Taiwan</i>	33
3. The Way to Taibai Shan <i>Building the First Daoist Ecology Temple</i>	49
4. The Birth of an Alliance <i>Daoist Temples Protecting Nature</i>	85
5. Nationwide Commitment <i>Spectacular Moves from the Top</i>	107
6. What Next? <i>China's Balancing Act</i>	133
Pictures	150
Appendices	157
Acknowledgements	175

Foreword

In classical China, there was a model for the life of a powerful, successful man. He would start as a Confucian scholar, working tirelessly to become a master of his art. From this, he would progress through the hierarchy of power, rising ever higher and taking on more and more responsibility. Hard, tough decisions would be his to make. Then, at a certain point all this would cease to matter. There would come a time when the pen of authority was laid aside and the pen of poetry and reflection would take its place. Often, this involved a shift from the worldly view of the Confucian bureaucrat to the metaphysical, spiritual world of Daoism.

The journey of Allerd Stikker is in a way an example of this ancient Chinese way of living. But Allerd has brought a Protestant Dutch dimension to the story. His move from power and authority to the world of reflection inspired by Daoism did not mean a disengagement from the material world. Instead, he has brought these worlds together in a most extraordinary way. His journey along the Path of the Dao has taken him from ridicule in Taiwan in the late 1980s, when he first suggested that Daoism might be relevant to the crises of ecology, to the status of a leading personality in the Daoist world in modern China.

The reason? He saw that deep within Daoism lay insights, wisdom and a way of life which held the seeds for an alternative future, not just for China but for the world. He saw that the ecological crises that have come upon us all could be tackled using the best of modern science and

the deepest of the ancient wisdom of China. So he set off with only the vaguest sense of where this might go but with a doggedness and a sense of optimism which has fuelled not just him but all those who have worked with him.

Firstly, through founding the Ecological Management Foundation (EMF), he sought to bring the world of commerce and business together with the world of the environmental movement. Not an easy task. Many people in the environmental movement work on rather simplistic models of good guys and bad guys, and business—especially big business—was definitely classified as the bad guys. But Allerd has helped break through such divisions.

Next, he sought to bring the worlds of Chinese tradition, especially Daoism, into alliance with the worlds of science and the environmental movement. A tougher path but one for which he found an ally in the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC) and especially in me, as not just head of ARC but also as a China scholar.

It has been my delight to work with Allerd for a decade as (often literally) side by side we have watched the Daoist leaders and thinkers of today delve deep into their teachings and begin to apply their insights to tackling the huge crises that face China's ecology. We have seen the Chinese government move from initial doubt to the situation now where they see the Daoists as among their strongest allies in the struggle to convince the people of China to protect nature. We have helped the Daoists build eco-temples. We have assisted in the founding of new Daoist and Confucian movements dedicated to protecting nature and the people. We have helped as declaration after declaration has sharpened the Daoists' vision of the role they can play in building a conservation ethos across China.

Without Allerd, ARC could never have achieved a fraction of what this book will tell you about the developments in China. Without his friendship, neither I nor my colleagues could have been able to help the Daoists rise to be one of the greatest environmental champions of China.

Thank you, Allerd. This is your story, of which we are honoured to have been part. And the story you have started has only just begun...

Martin Palmer

Secretary General of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC)

Introduction

A journey of 1,000 miles begins beneath one's feet. The words of Chinese philosopher Lao Zi perfectly capture my wonderful journey through the world of Daoism over the past thirty years. What began as a casual acquaintance with Daoism on the island of Taiwan, which I visited on many business trips in the 1980s, has led to a close partnership with the China programme of the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a British non-governmental organisation that since 1995 has collaborated with the world's faiths to protect nature and create ecological awareness.

On the way, I discovered how the Daoists' cosmological view of the world, where humanity and nature are inextricably linked, fits in beautifully with my personal ambition to achieve a better global balance between economy and ecology. And I also discovered how well this ambition dovetailed with the mission pursued by ARC.

It's been a privilege to work with ARC and together contribute to the restoration of a Daoist temple in China and the development of the Daoist Ecology Temple Alliance. It's been fascinating to see how these achievements have given the Daoists some room for manoeuvre in Chinese society and how Daoism is even openly cited by the political establishment as the answer to the immense ecological and social problems facing modern China. And it's all the more amazing when you realise that the country is officially atheist with absolute rulers who, in the past century, have tried their very best to wipe Daoism off

the map as a 'backward superstition'.

But the cultural and spiritual tradition of Daoism has withstood the storms of history. It has proven to be just as solid and unyielding as the rocks of the sacred mountains, a traditional Daoist symbol of the link between heaven, earth and humanity since time immemorial. These mountains have become a source of inspiration for my journey, for ARC's journey, for the future of China and for the harmony between ecology and economy worldwide.

We have not yet reached our final destination, but every step towards the top of the mountain is another step closer and the views along the way are simply breathtaking.

Allerd Stikker

January 2014, Bonaire

*The Dao exists, Dao is
but where it comes from I do not know.
It has been shaping things,
From before the First Being,
From the before the Beginning of Time.*

Chapter 4 of the Dao De Jing

1

A Journey into Daoism

A Personal Story

Is there such a thing as a beginning or does everything flow from something else, from something that happened earlier? This is not just a philosophical thought but a practical dilemma I ran into when I embarked on this book. How should I begin a story that lies so close to my heart? How should I describe my introduction to a world view that goes back to well before the modern calendar and yet fits in seamlessly with my outlook on life 2,500 years later? How should I relate the incredible journey I was fortunate enough to share with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), a journey that has not only awakened ecological awareness in China but also contributed to the restoration of Daoism right at the core of Chinese society? Does it begin in Taiwan, where I first encountered Daoism over thirty years ago? Or does it begin with the tragic loss of Daoism in China in the last century, culminating in the complete destruction during the Cultural Revolution of all that smacked of religion? Or does it begin with the establishment of ARC, a passionate British NGO that countered conventional wisdom and showed the world how religion and nature conservation can form an effective partnership for the care of our planet?

With none in particular and with all simultaneously, I concluded. The stories run concurrently and converge or intersect somewhere in my tale. My dilemma illustrates why we should move away from a strict adherence to the linear concept of time familiar to us in the

West. In good Daoist tradition, we should view time as relative and experience it whenever the story calls for it.

To keep things simple, let's take my business trips to Taiwan at the end of the 1970s as our point of departure. In that period, I was at the helm of RSV, a large Dutch shipbuilding company that produced naval equipment, and I travelled around the world to secure new orders. This also took me to Taiwan. Negotiations there always required patience and frequent meetings at the highest ministerial and military levels. They could easily be thwarted by more urgent government meetings and various other affairs and would then be postponed. This may have been inconvenient on some occasions but the unexpected gaps in my schedule gave me the opportunity to get to know the country, its people and its culture a little better. So I spoke to my negotiation counterparts about their daily lives, I asked around for tips about sights worth visiting, I often went out exploring and spent many hours reading in my hotel room or in the lobby. I relished being away from the rough and tumble of hectic meetings and being able to experience for a moment the perspective of local everyday life.

Taiwan opened my eyes in more than one way. At that time, the country was known as the Economic Miracle of the Far East. But I felt it was turning into the Ecological Disaster of the Far East: the impressive double-digit economic growth appeared to have a dark downside. At certain times, the streets of Taiwan were blanketed in a thick cloud of smog that had the millions of inhabitants reach for their face masks. The myriad cars and scooters that snarled up the roads during rush hour relentlessly spewed exhaust fumes into the air. The northern suburbs of the city, in particular, showed a skyline silhouette of large-scale industry, a very likely contributor to the pollution of air, soil and water. In the absence of a proper sewerage system, the many canals and rivers on the island were treated as *de facto* sewers, and not only by households. It gave the waterways in the city and far beyond an unsavoury look. I wasn't surprised to read at the time that Taiwan had the highest incidence of hepatitis patients in the industrialised world.

I was shocked by the magnitude of the ecological disaster that appeared to be in the making here. But I was equally amazed by the matter-of-factness with which people seemed to put up with the situation. It was as if an unwritten law made environmental pollution

some kind of inevitable, collateral damage of economic growth. I began to realise that ecology was a complete non-issue in the average Taiwanese boardroom and that this was in fact no different in Europe. The global paradigm of economic growth and a rising standard of living left little room for ecological considerations. And on this island, the consequences of such a denial were patently visible.

Somewhere, something had gone wrong. Surely, humankind, *Homo economicus*, did not mean to destroy the earth, a planet that had existed for billions of years and had reinvented itself time and again. Could it be that we, human beings, had lost sight of things? Were we allowing economic considerations to weigh too heavily vis-à-vis any concern for our habitat? Perhaps I wouldn't or couldn't quite accept that, as the CEO of a large company, I was myself part of the economic apparatus. But one thing's for sure: these thoughts planted the first seeds that grew into my subsequent outlook on life.

Taiwan was also the very place where I became acquainted with the more than 2,000-year-old tradition of Daoism, a view of the world where the link with nature plays a pivotal role and a view that I would come to cherish. My negotiation counterparts were highly educated Taiwanese people, many having attended the prestigious United States Naval Academy, where they had been tried and tested. And yet they had remained firmly rooted in their own Taiwanese culture, which still had close links with Daoist tradition, as it turned out. I was very surprised to observe that, apart from a rational side, they also had a more intuitive approach to life. They told me, for instance, that in Taiwan palm-reading is generally considered an appropriate way of determining an individual's well-being and providing medical advice. It seemed an amazingly simple way of monitoring and promoting people's health. My interest was aroused and I immediately suggested that they should look at my own hand. This was not as easy as I thought. An integral part of the ritual was that I should first join them for dinner one evening, so they could evaluate my constitution and movements properly. No sooner said than done: I spent an agreeable evening at the dinner table and the next day, to my surprise, was given a detailed analysis of my physical and mental health in the past, present and future. My hand told them that I was in good health but that I would have to be particularly careful between the ages of sixty-

eight and seventy-eight. Furthermore, the first half of the 1980s would be a difficult period for me, after which my life would follow a completely different but happier path. I have to confess that, little by little, I came to realise that their predictions were surprisingly close to the truth.

I learnt subsequently that the palm-reading ritual was part and parcel of the Daoist tradition that still flowed through the veins of these officers despite their many years in the West. There was a bond with Daoism up to the highest levels. During the negotiations, I met General Wego Chiang, one of Chiang Kai-shek's two sons. Wego Chiang had also completed an education and military training in the West and was the author of many books on military strategy. More surprising was that, in 1981, he also wrote a book called *Dao and Human Nature* on Daoism. In one of our meetings, he gave me a copy of the book, complete with a personal message, as a present.

These very same officers put me onto the Long Shan Temple, a massive and colourful temple complex right in the busy centre of Taipei. The Cultural Revolution may have destroyed the cultural and religious heritage of mainland China, but had spared Taiwan. Its religious buildings and practices were still intact. When the officers told me about the Long Shan Temple, I didn't have the faintest inkling that here I would make a life-changing acquaintance.

On my way to the temple, I wandered between the blocks of flats, as dull as the many others I had seen in this huge city. And all of a sudden, a colourful, richly decorated entrance appeared out of thin air like a boundary between the drab asphalt of the busy road that ran alongside the temple and, on the other side, a courtyard resembling a kind of market. It appeared to be thriving with tiny stalls selling religious paraphernalia, incense sticks and traditional Chinese medicine. The square was crowded with people. I saw many Asians though very few Westerners. Just momentarily, I felt part of the personal lives of the local population, for whom this place played a key role—so I was told. I had read that the temple was built in 1738 by Chinese immigrants as a copy and remembrance of a Buddhist temple in Fujian province, their homeland. The original complex was rebuilt and renovated many times as a result of natural catastrophes and wars and, over time, the original Buddhist design was supplemented with references to Daoism and folk religions. Religious division and discord seemed to be a non-issue here.

In 1919, the complex was given its current form by Wang Shi Yuan, a famous architect from Fujian and, in his day, a master of traditional Chinese temple design. Since that time, the temple has come to be regarded as one of the finest specimens of traditional Chinese temple architecture. One look at the gate and main hall opposite was sufficient confirmation. The beautifully painted wood and stone engravings and the statues adorning the roofs and walls each told its own story in the minutest detail. From the rooftops, the carved wood dragons kept a close eye on the neighbourhood. This was a reference to Long Shan or Dragon Mountain, the name of the temple. It suddenly dawned on me that I had been negotiating about submarines in the so-called Sea Dragon Class the entire time, that I had invariably stayed in the Dragon Wing of the Grand Hotel, where I was a regular, and that my Chinese zodiac sign is the Dragon. Coincidence or omen? I entered the main hall and my attention was caught by an immense, golden statue. There, standing right before me, was Guan Yin! Her eyes were closed, her smile friendly yet mysterious, the envy of Mona Lisa, and her soft face completely overlaid with gold—I was riveted! And I wasn't the only one because people all around me showed their devotion in a multitude of ways, almost in a trance. Among the sometimes ferocious-looking gods I had seen here and elsewhere, she was a welcome relief. Such ineffable and timeless beauty. Was it love at first sight?

The Long Shan Temple was specially dedicated to her—it certainly explained her prominence in the main hall. In the course of time, all sorts of other gods had gathered around her, particularly from the temples in the areas that had been demolished as part of the city's sweeping development plans. The statues found at least temporary accommodation in Long Shan. And Guan Yin clearly felt at home. Even a bombardment by the US Air Force in 1945 had not dislodged her. Among the smoking remains of the temple, she had been the only one still proudly standing. When I got to know her better, I discovered that she had once been the male Buddhist *bodhisattva* Avalokitesvara and had crossed China's northern border. In the course of his mythical existence, he metamorphosed into the female Daoist deity Guan Yin. She is the goddess of compassion who hears all the sounds of the world. And she is the goddess who, since the day I first saw her, has accompanied me on the path of my life, whispering to me in many guises.

Meeting Guan Yin aroused my interest in Daoism. Whenever I had time, I read as much as I could about this view of life, acquired translations of the Dao De Jing and Zhuang Zi, and tried to immerse myself in the sometimes incomprehensible verses. The metaphors and parables teach you new things time and time again and their meaning seems to lie *between* more than *in* the lines. For a trained scientist like myself, it was a mystical literary-cum-philosophical experience. I had a degree in chemical engineering from Delft University of Technology in the Netherlands and a flourishing career in the chemical industry but had never been able to shake a nagging feeling that something wasn't quite right with Western science. It had taught me that the world is measurable and makeable and that scientific progress is making that world increasingly tangible and intelligible. But if this was the case, then why did I, as a student, have to plod my way through complex formulae and ingredients to create a particular dye, while nature allowed the plant in my student room to grow a beautiful red flower simply with sunlight, soil, air and water—no controlled laboratory conditions, no carefully selected substances and no bulky manuals. Somewhere, nature had access to processes of change whose origins were incomprehensible to us, the human race, notwithstanding all our scientific wisdom. The best we could do was to produce an unnatural copy of nature. Somehow, a yawning gap separated the scientific world of theoretical models and the real world of unpredictability. This gap had always intrigued me and made me conjecture that there was more between heaven and earth than what our ingenuity could only achieve imperfectly.

The gap between science and reality didn't stop us, rational beings, from exercising control over the world. From chemical processes that produced life-saving medicines to physical processes that allowed us to convert matter into energy—together these inventions laid a fertile foundation for an age of incredibly rapid and major industrialisation. In the short term, it clearly brought us higher standards of living in the West; but in the long term, the large-scale manipulation of transformation processes was starting to take its toll. Despite its enormous resilience, nature could barely keep up with the exponential increase in our consumption and pollution of natural resources. We were well on our way to making our planet, our own habitat, unliveable. I had

seen, smelt and felt the unmistakable signs in Taiwan.

It led me to wonder about the human role in the transformation processes that drive evolution. Or for the more philosophically inclined: how did we arrive on earth and why—two basic questions about life that, at unguarded moments, invade our thoughts. In my own case, perhaps because of an innate desire to seek and find connections, such questions always lingered at the back of my mind.

The picture that gradually emerged from all the books and Daoist texts fit in perfectly with the answers I had formulated for myself over the years. I saw my own intuition articulated in the Daoist notion of the Dao, a source and driving force giving rise to everything—to life, the earth and the universe—and where everything returns. As if to challenge the knowledge I had assimilated throughout a lifetime, I had somehow always wondered about the overwhelming beauty, power and complexity of the earth and all that flowers and flourishes. Not having any definite scientific answers, I had concluded that everything originates from an ingenious pattern. There was no religious conviction in this belief as I had never felt comfortable with explanations based on an omniscient Creator responsible for the story of Creation. But it was very close to the Dao. This notion, moreover, encompasses unity and the interrelation between the universe, the earth and man as well as between the material and non-material worlds. What an eye-opener for the Western world, where mind and matter were treated as distinct and the human race had done all it could to wean itself from its environment.

On my journey through the Daoist mindscape, my own notions and ideas kept staring back at me. What's more, somewhere between the lines, I was beginning to suspect a link between this centuries-old Chinese cosmological view of the world and the world view of Teilhard de Chardin, a French Jesuit priest and palaeontologist who had lived in China—of all places—from 1923 until 1946 (on and off) and contributed to the research on *Homo pekinensis* or Peking Man. I had come across his work in 1963, when my mother gave me a copy of *Le Phénomène humain* (The Phenomenon of Man). The book was utterly amazing, taking me by complete surprise with its insight into the interdependence in the world around me. It gives a glimpse of Teilhard's search for an evolutionary theory that does justice to his scientific as well as Christian convictions. We see him build solid bridges between scientific, religious, social and

mystical beliefs—a clever piece of creative and critical thinking, though it was not appreciated by the Catholic Church at the time. The book carefully maps the scientific knowledge available in Teilhard's day about the emergence of the universe, life on earth and the phenomenon of man. With my science background, I had great admiration for his solid scientific approach. Teilhard then shows that the evolutionary process advances in leaps and bounds according to a certain pattern. Substances and life forms develop into increasingly complex combinations with a growing level of consciousness, until they reach saturation as it were. At this point, the process jumps to a new model of growth with new forms of still greater complexity, though nobody can explain how it works even today. The earth thus came into being as an inanimate planet (the inorganic geosphere). At some stage, life originated as a sudden, one-off event (the organic biosphere). And then, in the relatively recent history of our planet and seemingly from nowhere, self-reflective consciousness emerged in the human race, or *Homo sapiens* (the cultural or spiritual noosphere).

Here, Teilhard indirectly expresses the doubts and questions I had always had about a purely scientific approach to the world around us. We may be perfectly capable of using conventional science to capture observable phenomena in positive and normative models. But they don't help us explain at the most fundamental level why these phenomena exist. Why did the universe, life, the human race and our self-reflective consciousness emerge? Our current scientific models focus exclusively on what is measurable and they compartmentalise our observations so that we lose sight of the unified whole. Teilhard gives these gaps in our knowledge meaning in his conclusion that the evolutionary process has an unmistakable pattern, direction and purpose, and leads to advancement whenever the process jumps to a more complex model. This process seems to be the result of non-material energy, a universal consciousness that can be traced back to all phenomena, of both mind and matter. Furthermore, the evolutionary process is not a static given but the outcome of a dynamic, creative interaction and connectedness between its constituent elements. The apex is the human race, the most complex organism: human beings with a self-reflective consciousness and the ability to transform their own micro world and thereby the macro world as well. In Teilhard's

view, this self-reflective consciousness of humankind, and creation along with it, moves irrevocably towards the 'Omega Point', the maximum degree of consciousness and complexity where human self-reflective consciousness is absorbed into an ultimate divine unity. Teilhard believed human beings had the capacity and responsibility to look after their environment, the unity to which they all belonged. And although I didn't share Teilhard's Christian interpretation of the Omega Point, I thought his ideas helped underpin my own observation that humanity had the ingenuity—though not unlimited—to influence and steer transformation processes. As far as I was concerned, humanity had used this capacity in an unbridled and one-sided fashion, causing long-term harm to the environment. It was now time to sit up and redirect our ingenuity. We needed to mend what had been damaged through the ages.

I read Teilhard's book in one sitting and it has been etched on my mind ever since. And as I continued reading about Daoism, I began to sense that there were parallels between Teilhard and Dao and that these ways of thinking might well answer the unsettling questions I still had about the Western approach to science. A different question that kept running through my mind was why Teilhard's works didn't display any link with the Daoist view of life he had seen around him in China all those years.

It would take several more years before I had the time and space to weigh this question more carefully—until 1983 to be precise. This was the year the shipbuilding company I headed collapsed, dragging me down with it. The company was established in 1972, when political and trade union pressure led to a merger of the main shipbuilding companies in the Netherlands. The merger provided jobs for some 15,000 people and was expected to weather the growing foreign competition from countries like Korea and Japan, thereby safeguarding the future of Dutch workmanship. The merger was created with financial support from the state and was based on a new, comprehensive model of employee participation. One outcome of the democratisation process was a central works council consisting of twenty-two representatives of the participating companies. In 1973, I was invited to manage this challenging megamerger, catapulted from the board of what was then Dutch chemical company AKZO.

Reflections on Guan Yin

Guan Shi Yin, the goddess of compassion, who I met in Taiwan in the early 1980s and who has been with me ever since, has shown many faces in the long course of her enigmatic presence.

Many Western scholars believe that *she* started as *he* in the form of the male Hindu deity of compassion, or Avalokitesvara in Sanskrit, well before the Common Era. In the 1st century CE, Avalokitesvara gradually entered Indian Buddhism as a *bodhisattva*, as a being who, out of compassion, wishes to reach enlightenment, not just for himself but for the benefit of all sentient beings. Avalokitesvara was seen as the embodiment of infinite compassion: he vowed to postpone his own enlightenment until he had helped all sentient beings realise buddhahood. It was this *bodhisattva* who won the hearts and souls of the Chinese people when Mahayana Buddhism entered north-west China around 25–220 CE during the second (or Eastern) Han Dynasty. One of the central texts in Mahayana Buddhism, the *Saddharma Pundarika Sutra* or 'White Lotus Sutra', describes the works and ways of Avalokitesvara and was translated into Chinese

at the beginning of the 3rd century CE. The name Avalokitesvara thus became its Chinese equivalent: Guan Shi Yin. During the Tang Dynasty, under Emperor Taizong (626–649 CE), Shi was dropped from his name in order not to offend the emperor whose personal name had been Li Shi Ming. Other sources say that Shi, which is generally translated as 'the world', belonged to the jurisdiction of the emperor and this word should not be used by the common people. After the Tang Dynasty (618–907 CE), Guan Yin was gradually depicted as a female deity in images, statues and prints. It was not uncommon for Buddhist deities to incorporate elements of Chinese belief and folk tradition as they entered Chinese territory, but none of them underwent such a profound transformation as Guan Yin. In 1119 CE, she was conferred the title of Daoist Goddess Cihang Pudu Yuantong Zizai by Emperor Huizong. Nowadays, she is revered by both Daoists and Chinese Buddhists as Guan Yin, the goddess of compassion.

Bit by bit, I am beginning to understand that this process of gender transformation stemmed from a need and desire for feminine

compassion in a world of male-oriented Confucianism, ritual, hierarchy, power and fear. It was a need that seemed universal, leading not only to Guan Yin in Asia but also to the mythology of Isis in Egypt and Mary in Europe. China had not been entirely without a female deity: there was the Queen Mother of the West, a goddess rooted in shamanic culture. She had survived the Confucian removal of shamanic and feminine traditions and is still an important deity today. But she was distant and stern and did not fulfil the role of a compassionate goddess. Chinese cultural history lacked an element of genuine compassion until Guan Yin entered the Daoist pantheon.

So how does an ordinary Dutch businessman, who visited Taiwan in the early 1980s and knew nothing about Buddhism and Daoism, become spellbound and inspired by such a mysterious symbolic figure for the rest of his life? The answer is not easy, but a better understanding of who she is might shed some light on my fascination for her. I say *her*, because that is what she is to me: a woman of compassion, who connects with humanity in ways we often deny or are unaware of in our busy daily lives.

What attracts me in Guan Yin is that she is not a historic person, but a mythical *bodhisattva*, as described in the *White Lotus Sutra*. The *Lotus Sutra*, as it is generally known, depicts how Avalokitesvara arose from a light ray exiting the right

eye of the Buddha Amitabha, as a symbolic messenger from beyond the material world, enlightened and pure. The name of the sutra is derived from the white lotus flower that emerges unstained and white from a muddy pool, as a symbol of purity and integrity arising from a messy world. Lotus flowers may come in many different colours but the lotus in the *Lotus Sutra* always stands for the white lotus. This symbolism is essential to the text.

The name Guan Shi Yin can be interpreted in different ways in both Sanskrit and Chinese and we cannot easily translate the words and symbols into our Western languages. Judging from a variety of translations, scholars agree on the following meaning: Guan represents 'see/hear from all around', Shi is the word for 'world' and Yin means 'sounds/cries/noises'. In my own interpretation, her name refers to 'she who listens to the sounds of the world'. And by sounds I mean happy as well as sad sounds. This is very much my personal perception because in the vast literature about her, including the old scriptures, the emphasis is on listening to people who are suffering, who are being threatened and who are in great need of help and hope. In Chapter 25 of the *White Lotus Sutra*, there is an extensive description of thirteen kinds of critical circumstances where Avalokitesvara will assist in solving your problems. Although ultimately, you will have to solve them

yourself, he guides you through the process. The sutra then goes on to say that he can appear in your life in thirty-three different embodiments, depending on the kind of advice you need, on the moment he hears you and on the time you are receptive to his presence. He may appear as a male or female, as someone from a whole range of professions and even as an animal. Here, Avalokitesvara (or Guan Yin) is certainly a saviour of people in need. But I think Guan Yin hears and whispers sounds more generally. She is a companion who shares special moments in people's lives, guiding and inspiring those who listen to her. This symbolism has worked miracles in the last thirty years of my own life, consciously and sometimes unconsciously, but always with an awareness of her presence.

Since 1200 CE, Guan Yin has been exclusively depicted as female in art and literature. But when you look closely at her statues, imprints or paintings, it is clear that she has no female breasts—that there is in fact an element of androgyny. Perhaps this was how artists, who played a considerable role in the transformation process to a female goddess, were expressing the natural balance between male and female in Daoist cosmology. The transformation to a female deity coincided with the emerging Mary devotion in Europe and the arrival of the Christian Nestorian Churches in China. It is even speculated that the similarity

in statues and images of Mary and Guan Yin has been the result of mutual influence. Whether or not there is a link, I think Guan Yin is a very different deity, without a human history and with a universal presence, not linked to any single religion, and honoured and revered by lay people as well as non-religious people like myself. For me, she transcends all religions and world views: in her silence, she is accessible to all.

The story of Guan Yin is a complex and fascinating tale and I have merely outlined the essence here. To me, it is a story I needed to capture in order to understand why she is my inspiration in the search for a meaningful life. Scholars, scientists and other writers have produced numerous volumes on the history, evolution and universal dimension of the Guan Yin phenomenon and why she developed into a female goddess in China. I now understand there was a dormant—and perhaps universal and timeless—need and desire within Chinese Daoist-based culture to have a compassion-oriented female deity within a pantheon of stern and scary male deities.

When I was confronted with the overwhelming presence of Guan Yin for the first time, as she radiated in the Long Shan Temple in Taipei, such feelings penetrated my mind and soul. I knew nothing of all that I am writing now, but her silent presence, her elegant stance, her peaceful face and her obvious popularity impressed me very much. And from

that day, I have never been without her. She has been listening to my sounds and I have been listening to hers. In the past thirty-odd years, this symbolic exchange of messages has worked wonders for me. They are not expressed in written or spoken words, nor are they measured or calculated. Guan Yin has opened my ears and eyes to what I did not see before. She is my connection with the meta world, a world beyond time and space, beyond eternity and infinity.

觀音



Shortly after taking up my new position, the global recession set in, not only in the Netherlands but also in France, the United Kingdom and Sweden, where reputable shipyards felt the scourge of cut-throat competition from low-wage countries and the second oil crisis. It was clear that the new company was in dire need of major restructuring. But this was where the lack of organic unity and the artificial amalgamation of companies with different cultures, histories and rates of return started to backfire. Decisions were being hindered and discussions were never-ending. Meanwhile, the ship was starting to list dangerously. In 1979, my last attempt at fundamental change was rejected by the organisation, the political establishment and society at large. I then tendered my resignation, which was also rejected. The ship finally went down in 1983 and I had to step down. The loss-making activities of the company were shut down immediately while others continued independently in pared-down form.

As was to be expected, the downfall of the company caused a great deal of commotion. People often asked me afterwards if I wasn't shocked by the whole situation. But to be honest, it didn't take me by surprise because I had seen it coming for some four years. My primary concern was: what could be learnt from this experience? This practical response was undoubtedly driven by my practical outlook but perhaps just as much by a desire to avoid ever again being confronted by a situation of crisis where time and inertia were stuck in a deadlock. These lessons would manifest themselves over the years. Meanwhile, I had discovered the accuracy of the Chinese characters for 'crisis', symbols which can roughly be translated as 'threat' as well as 'opportunity'. This was indeed my own experience. I moved to London to put some distance between myself and the whole situation and to create some peace and quiet so I could explore the connection between the world views of Teilhard de Chardin and Daoism. The crisis had offered me the opportunity to venture along completely new paths and gain new insights. Besides, I saw the past as something we should learn from rather than suffer for. The lessons from my RSV period would form a crucial compass that guided me on every journey I undertook subsequently, something I gradually came to understand from my research into Teilhard and Daoism.

Not long after my resignation, the RSV receiver asked me to go to Taiwan so I could explain to our clients what had happened. These were tough talks, to put it mildly. I had to announce the downfall of RSV after all. I was however able to tell them that the submarines would be completed and delivered, as would indeed happen in 1985. But what I remembered mostly was the cordiality and respect with which ministers and officers continued to treat me. To my surprise, I was wined and dined on my birthday, which happened to fall in that week. What a difference from the Netherlands, where immediately after my resignation all fell silent around me. There, my 'outside', my position and status were lost. The officers in Taiwan seemed to look more to the 'inside': people first and then business.

After my introduction to Teilhard's ideas in 1963, I joined the British, American and French Teilhard Associations. At certain moments, I attended lectures about Teilhard whenever it could be combined with my business trips. One such occasion was in 1981, when the American Teilhard Association celebrated Teilhard's hundredth birthday with a large conference in Arizona and a lecture by the chairman of the association, Thomas Berry. This Catholic priest, cultural historian and eco-theologian was not only an authority on Teilhard but also on Buddhism and Daoism. He was, moreover, a lecturer in the history of religions at Fordham University in New York and had studied the language and culture of China extensively. At this point, several of the paths I had tentatively been setting out for myself were starting to converge. There were my negotiations in Taiwan, my acquaintance with Daoism and my first ideas about a link between Teilhard and Dao. In a quiet moment, I walked up to Berry and we began to exchange ideas. I was inspired and impressed by the knowledge of this amiable man and his distinguished appearance and resolved to visit him again to find out more about Teilhard. At one point, I told him that I suspected a link between Teilhard's views and the views of Daoism. This seemed the kind of hypothesis he would perhaps have considered himself. Far from it, however: Berry looked at me with enquiring eyes, interrupting for a moment what had been a lively conversation. No, he concluded, after some thought—any such link is too far-fetched and you don't want to go down that path. But I thought it was worth the effort at least to figure out whether and why there shouldn't be any link.

From 1983 onwards, I paid regular visits to Berry at his home in Riverdale on the outskirts of New York City, along the rolling east bank of the Hudson River. I'll never forget the many occasions sitting in his garden on a bench under an imposing, centuries-old oak tree, chatting and philosophising. The view of the famous Palisades on the other side of the Hudson no doubt inspired new views of our own. The 'oak-tree sessions' helped me enormously to sharpen my understanding of Teilhard's world view. Conversely, they must have given Berry new ideas because in one of the sessions he concluded that a link between Teilhard and Dao wasn't such a strange proposition after all and definitely deserved closer examination. Keep going in this direction, he encouraged me, and I'll help whenever I can.

In my search for a link, I could hardly avoid the questions of whether someone else might have made the connection between Dao and Teilhard and why Teilhard had not seen the parallels himself. The only answer I could find to the first question came in the form of a French Franciscan sister, Marie-Ina Bergeron, who was an avid devotee of Teilhard's ideas and had worked in China as a missionary for over twenty years. I paid a visit to a home for Sisters of Mary in Paris, where she was enjoying her retirement. Before me stood a small woman with fine features, looking surprisingly energetic and determined—a perfect reflection of her impressive life. Bergeron had travelled to China as a missionary in 1939 during the turbulent years of the Chinese Civil War. In the following decades, the Chinese Communist Party, victorious in 1949, unleashed a veritable witch hunt against all that reeked of capitalism, religion and bourgeoisie. Bergeron ended up in prison and didn't come out for over two years. As fate would have it, a fellow prisoner turned out to be a Daoist monk. Here she could exchange ideas as much as she wanted and get a first-hand reading of Daoism. In these bizarre circumstances, she began to see a link between the ideas of Teilhard, the visionary fellow believer she had actually known herself, and Daoism, the age-old view of the world that defined the country she had begun to identify with, in spite of and also because of her experiences. After her release and return to France, she devoted herself to China. She obtained a PhD in Sinology and, in 1976, wrote a book entitled *La Chine et Teilhard*, setting out what she had learnt in a Chinese prison. In this book, she focuses on the similarities between the cosmology of

Daoism and of Teilhard. Both see a continual interaction between two poles in the universe: material forces and immaterial forces. In Daoism, the poles are symbolised by yin and yang; in Teilhard's view, the poles are the energy of physics and the energy of the psyche, also known as radial energy and tangential energy. These opposite complementary poles are continually interchangeable, emanating from an eternal source (the Tai Chi in Daoism) and returning to that source (Teilhard's Omega Point). Everything that arises from or returns to that source—the material as well as the immaterial, man, humanity, earth and heaven—is inextricably connected in a continuous flux.

Bergeron might have been of old age in body but not in spirit. She was very interested and curious to hear my findings, visibly enjoying the exchange of ideas with a kindred spirit who, like herself, was captivated by Teilhard and Dao. She was still giving lectures for Teilhard Associations worldwide and had also taught at Fordham University, where Berry had a position. The two Teilhard scholars turned out to be acquainted.

Given his death in 1955, the people who had known Teilhard personally were of course few and far between. But in Paris I found someone else who had known him and very well indeed. This was Father Pierre Leroy SJ. Like Bergeron, he was enjoying his old age, in his case in an old people's home for Jesuit brothers in Paris. He had spent many years in Beijing, living in the same house where Teilhard in his days as a palaeontologist had also lived. In 1940, they had even worked together to set up the Institute for Geobiology, whose aim was to safeguard a library and a valuable collection of fossils for future research. The two gentlemen had shared ideas over breakfast every morning. Here was someone who might have the answer to a question that had consumed me since the start of my search: how could it be that, in the very heart of Daoist society, Teilhard had not seen a link between his own cosmological views and those of Daoism? The answer was simple: as palaeontologists and scientists, they had lived in an isolated world. Their work had been miles removed from the everyday life, let alone religion, of the wider community. Their Chinese colleagues, too, had severed the link with their Daoist roots. For this generation of young intellectuals, the world of science and progress didn't leave any room for anachronistic traditions. Teilhard had branded Daoism as world-denying, passive and

non-innovative. As far as he was concerned, his conclusion that human individuals should take responsibility and actively work to make the world a better place stood diametrically opposed to the Daoist principle of *wu-wei*, or not going against the grain. With my knowledge of Daoism at that time, I could only conclude that Teilhard had indeed not really studied this Chinese view of the world.

My search also took me back to Taiwan. In one of my many conversations with scholars of Teilhard and Daoism, the name of Yves Raguin SJ had come up. This French Jesuit priest taught Daoist philosophy at the Catholic Fu Ren University in Taipei—to Chinese students but in English. He was moreover an authority on Teilhard and familiar not only with his ideas but also the person himself. Imagine my surprise when I first went to see him, the door swung open and I was welcomed by a tall, well-dressed man with strong features and friendly, enquiring eyes. This learned man was the spitting image of the Teilhard de Chardin I knew from pictures. Extremely well-read in Daoism, he wholeheartedly supported my search for parallels between Teilhard and Daoism. He even gave me a hand-written syllabus of his lectures on Daoism. I was touched by his genuine interest in the culture and religion of the country where he lived. He ardently championed 'enculturation' and felt that his fellow missionaries had the duty to do so as well and to look for ways of embedding Catholicism into the culture of their host country. A good piece of advice, I thought, that might have spared the world a great deal of grief.

That evening, back in my hotel room, I realised that it had all started here on this island: my introduction to Daoism, the vague notion that there might be a link between this view of the world and the views of Teilhard de Chardin, and finally my search for such a link. It had taken me to the remotest corners of my mind and of the world. I had arrived in a completely new world, where the sharing of ideas and insights was key and where everyone focused in their own way on the questions of how and why we occupied our place on earth and beyond. It was a world far removed from the familiar world of business and economics. Here there was room for fundamental, existential questions whose answers could not be measured in financial terms. And frankly, it was a welcome change to be received as an unknown, interested newcomer rather than a businessman. It was a world where I felt welcome and at home,

a world that challenged me to examine my own Western ideas and modes of thought. And it was a world that invited me to put my findings on paper, the only way to organise my mind and come to a conclusion. It was the birth of *The Transformation Factor: Towards an Ecological Consciousness*.

I mapped the parallels and differences between the views of Teilhard and Daoism. What I found particularly striking was that these two traditions were separated by a gap of two thousand years, yet had arrived at more or less similar conclusions. Daoism had done so intuitively and Teilhard after a long struggle with Western scientific paradigms and a Catholic background. Both views of the world embrace the notion of unity and interconnectedness between universe, earth, man and nature. Inherent in this unity is also the inseparability of the material and the non-material, matter and mind, night and day, and all the opposites we regard as irreconcilable. The same unity also encompasses the notion that in evolution there is a pattern or a source where all that exists originates and returns and that is itself subject to the creative forces through which it arose. That source and the associated phenomena might be measurable in some cases but remain mysterious in others. By this time, the whole idea was as rational to me as it was revolutionary.

Equally, if not more, perplexing was how alien these conclusions were to the Western ways of thinking, which defined not only my own upbringing and education but that of the world's political and economic top. Western eyes remained closed to these ideas, notwithstanding that we were heading for a new shock or 'discontinuity'. The imminence of a new discontinuity was one of the conclusions I came to when I followed in Teilhard's footsteps and started looking for the most recent scientific knowledge about the origins of the universe and evolution. Based on many books, papers and lectures, I could only agree wholeheartedly with Teilhard's view that cosmological history is characterised by stepwise as well as gradual change. Science had not been able to explain the emergence of the universe, of life on earth and of self-reflective consciousness in the human race. Evolution kept reaching a new saturation point and then jumped to a new model. The same scientific studies had also taught me that we were on our way to the next saturation point in terms of evolution and the role there for

humankind. The first worrying scenarios about the future of the earth and humanity appeared in 1972 in a report, *The Limits to Growth*, commissioned by the Club of Rome. The authors calculated that, if the exponential growth in world population, natural resource consumption, industrial output, food production and environmental pollution were to continue at the same rate without any policy change, we would be heading straight for a scenario of ‘overshoot and collapse’, the gloomiest scenario in the report. Future generations would inherit an unliveable planet, at least for humanity. The earth, after all, had proved its robustness in the course of evolution. Humanity would thus not only be a creator but also a casualty of its own ability to steer transformation processes.

I could see storm clouds gathering in the coming decades. And I had a strong sense of *déjà vu*: this potential megacrisis contained distinct elements of the European shipbuilding ‘mini crisis’ marking my RSV years. This was an important lesson from the past and I wanted to help prevent history from ever repeating itself. In this particular case, it meant helping the world avoid a global ecological macro collapse by persuading society to stop stalling and procrastinating. In fact, it had become clear to me that I wanted to devote the rest of my life to preventing such a scenario of collapse and to smoothing the ride to a new phase in evolution.

And this is precisely where Teilhard and Daoism could offer some answers. Compartmental thinking in radical opposites—the dominant tone in the West for many centuries—had seen its best days. The pigeon-hole mentality which we had relied on to organise our world—from science to business and from society to politics—might have been successful in terms of technological advancement and unprecedented growth in Western welfare, but in the long run was jeopardising that very same success. In the radical opposition created between ecology and economy, ecology had played second fiddle for too long.

This naturally led to the question of how we could achieve a proper balance before it was too late. In my opinion, a new equilibrium would be based on a new awareness of unity and coherence that didn’t revolve around humanity but around the environment, of which humanity is an inseparable part. The human race would be aware of its place and role in evolution. With that awareness, we would be able to see the interdepend-

ence between economy and ecology and restore the balance. Elements of this new, holistic approach could already be seen in the natural sciences (quantum physics), psychology and environmental science.

Any shift in awareness would have to come from the bottom of society. A second lesson I had learnt from the collapse of the shipbuilding industry was that, in times of crisis, we can’t expect solutions exclusively from extensive, global decision-making structures. The differences in culture, history and interests across participating countries simply get in the way of quick and effective decisions. Any solution would have to be a balanced interplay between top and bottom. A new, ecological awareness would have to grow within the individual, and spread organically to communities, companies, governments and ultimately to global structures. At the time, a promising example of this movement could be seen in the bioregions in the United States. There, individuals and companies had joined forces in largely self-sufficient communities that produced food and energy and processed waste in a sustainable fashion. This bioregional approach has inspired all kinds of local sustainable food and energy initiatives worldwide today. I saw a crucial role for media, educational and religious organisations in the dissemination of ecological principles. The new way of thinking would then reach all levels of society. Ultimately, international organisations would be pivotal in piloting Western societies worldwide from the industrial era to an ecological era. We did have to make haste if we didn’t want to leave future generations with an uninhabitable planet within the next fifty years. But an initial outline of a new ecological awareness was clearly visible.

My research into Teilhard and Daoism had turned into a true journey of discovery and I spent many enjoyable evenings writing *The Transformation Factor*. In the process, I made sure to have my conclusions and interpretations continually examined by the scholars of Teilhard and Daoism I had met along the way. One was Ursula King, then lecturer in Comparative Religions at Leeds University. She was a prominent expert on Teilhard and focused on gender issues in world religions, including Daoism. She had responded enthusiastically to my idea of comparing Teilhard and Daoism, generously commenting on the chapters I sent her. She became so enthused by my project that, one day, she suggested I turn it into a thesis for an MA in theology. I was of course very

honoured that my research and findings were worthy of a masters degree but, at the same time, had completely underestimated the amount of work it would require. For a proper scientific study, I had to cite all sources on every page with great care. It was a massive job but well worth doing because it had started to dawn on me that a Master of Arts degree would be a very apt complement to the Master of Science degree from my Delft past. With one foot in the world of science and the other in the world of the arts, I seemed to be able to unite in myself seemingly irreconcilable opposites in the academic world. I saw it as a modest, symbolic step towards creating a balance between complementary opposites that in the compartmental thought process of the West had been driven so far apart.

Inspired by this achievement and in a fit of exuberance, I decided to ask Joseph Needham, Chairman of the British Teilhard Association, to write a foreword to the book. I had spoken to him before as part of my research on the similarities between Dao and Teilhard. Needham's name had invariably cropped up in all the literature and in my conversations with other scholars of Daoism and Teilhard. He was a world-renowned authority on Chinese culture and science and had authored *Science and Civilisation in China*, an enormous multi-volume work. Daoism, moreover, was his special interest. At the time, I visited him at Gonville and Caius College in Cambridge, where he was Master. His office was a grand room in the best British university tradition, crammed with books he had collected on his many travels to China. He had immediately shown enthusiasm for my plan to explore the parallels between Daoism and Teilhard, and had supported me all he could with ideas and recommendations. Still, it seemed very unlikely that this busy, world-famous scientist would take the time and trouble to write a foreword to my book. I couldn't have been more wrong. He told me that he would consider my request and I received a handwritten foreword in less than a week.

I often look back at this chapter in my personal history and it still fills me with gratitude and amazement. In search of parallels between two divergent world views that seemed to have crossed my path quite spontaneously, I had become a passionate champion of global ecological awareness. How did this happen? How did a businessman educated in the sciences and a driving force of economic activity turn into an

advocate of the green boardroom? And how did a Dutch atheist ultimately become bound up with a Daoist temple deep in the heart of China? I see the key as *serendipity*. In search of answers, I had been sidetracked by other worthy views and behaviours. Each contributed to what in hindsight might be seen as a perfectly logical story but, in the first instance, seemed to surface by chance. If you keep your eyes and ears open, life will throw unexpected opportunities in your path. It's an adage I've been only too aware of ever since my encounter with Guan Yin, the Daoist goddess who passes on the sounds of the world to me at certain moments. I sometimes feel that the serendipity in my life actually bears her name.

Daoism

Daoism, in its major forms, is a descendant of shamanism. It is China's only indigenous religion if you discount Confucianism as a religion. As such, it is little understood outside China because it has never, as a religion, sought to convert outside China, nor to have any role outside China until the last few decades. Yet one of its core books, the *Dao De Jing*, is amongst the most popular religious texts on sale in the West and its symbol of yin-yang has passed into Western culture to express a model of relationships which the West does not have or has not expressed so succinctly.

Daoism may have found its way throughout the whole world but its origins remain obscure because we simply don't have enough historical sources. The *Dao De Jing* itself doesn't give a date and Lao Zi, its putative author, is more likely to be a mythical than historical figure.

What we do know is that the most important texts, the *Dao De Jing* and the *Zhuang Zi*, date back to the 4th century BCE, to the time Confucian principles were starting to take root. The authors didn't consider themselves as religious leaders at all, but more as thinkers and philosophers,

responding to the extraordinary outburst of religious and philosophical thought which blossomed in China from the 6th to 3rd centuries BCE—the so-called Hundred Schools era.

What we also know is that Daoism reflects the anti-Confucian values of the shamans: the Way of those who reject hierarchies and controls, who mock 'success' and power, who take to the mountains to meditate and who listen to the voices of the spirit world. It is the Way of the spontaneous, the humorous and the quixotic. This is wonderfully captured in the *Zhuang Zi*, a witty commentary on the Confucian focus on morality and order.

The link with shamanism is that Daoism sought to grapple with the essence of nature and its relationship to this material world and to the world of the spirits. It took the two material and spiritual worlds of shamanism and unified them through the overarching role of the *Dao*, beyond the moral force of Kong Fu Zi, to be the primal energy of the Origin of all beginnings. *Dao* is commonly translated as 'Way' or 'Path', but it has a much wider connotation. It is concisely described in Chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing*, the heart of Daoism:

*The Dao gives birth to the One,
the Origin.*

*The One, the Origin, gives birth
to the Two.*

The Two give birth to the Three.

*The Three give birth to every
living thing.*

The two referred to here are yin and yang and the three are the Triad of Heaven, Earth and Humanity. At the same time, the *Dao De Jing* gives an early warning in Chapter 1 against trying to capture the *Dao* in words:

*The Dao that can be talked about
is not the true Dao.*

*The name that can be named
is not the eternal Name.*

Lao Zi

Lao Zi is possibly one of the most elusive of all religious founder figures. All that is recorded is that he was born sometime in the 6th century BCE, became the state archivist in the state of Chou and that he met Kong Fu Zi—as described by *Zhuang Zi*.

Legend doesn't provide much more. The heart of the Lao Zi story is not really his life but his departure from China, or indeed perhaps his death. It is said that Lao Zi despaired of the situation in China and packed his bags to leave. Heading west—the direction of enlightenment, just as the East is for Europe—he stopped for the night with the gatekeeper of the pass across the mountains to the West. The gatekeeper asked him to leave a message or guideline for

those left behind and legend tells us that Lao Zi wrote the *Dao De Jing* that night. Handing it over to the gatekeeper, he then departed west and was never seen again.

Daoism as Religion

The quest for personal salvation and meaning in China only began to surface in the 3rd century BCE. Prior to this, it would appear that life after death was considered less important than just being an ancestor, and only the ancestors of the rich and powerful—especially ruling families—were considered truly significant. The ritual actions of the emperors each year at the Temple of Heaven and the Temple of Earth symbolise the old model of the human relationship with Heaven. All that was required was for the ruling Son of Heaven to speak on behalf of all people to Heaven and to Earth and all would be well. Meaning and purpose were to be found in an individual's place within the hierarchy of society and within the communal life of the extended family or clan.

The unification of China in 220 BCE under the first true emperor, Qin Shi Huang Di, brought about the gradual collapse of local states and their cultures, and the suppression of local mythologies and beliefs. These sweeping changes were instigated by the Confucian scholars, keen to superimpose a coherent ideology at the scholarly and official level. The resulting dislocation of people from their own local cultures is perhaps

one of the reasons for the growth of a desire to find meaning in new forms. Thus, in the early 2nd century CE, there emerged a new expression of religion, built upon the back of shamanism and drawing inspiration, imagery and eventually even gods from the philosophical writers of Daoism. The origins of this religious development lie in the province of Sichuan, the birthplace of Zhang Dao Ling, a remarkable man who was reputed to have mastered and understood the Dao De Jing by the age of seven. He retreated from ordinary life to a cave in the sacred mountain of Qing Cheng Shan in Sichuan, where he meditated and began to teach. There, during meditation, Lao Zi appeared to him and gave him the authority to organise religious communities, to forgive faults and sins, to heal and, most important of all, to exorcise ghosts, demons and evil spirits. Zhang organised the first full-scale religious expression of Daoism, and his Five Bushels movement, named after the entry fee of five bushels of rice, soon spread across Sichuan and into neighbouring provinces.

Daoist Movements

Over the next five hundred years, many different schools of Daoism arose focusing around revelations, healing, ritual, oracles, and shamanic practices. Together, they developed monasteries and nunneries and established a network of temples throughout southern China.

Nowadays, Daoism still comes in many different schools, of which the Zhengyi and the Quanzhen are the most prominent ones. The Celestial Masters' School (Zhengyi) is that of Zhang Dao Ling's descendants. Its main strength today lies in its network of 'parish priests' who minister to the faithful at the local level and who might be called upon to exorcise ghosts and demons, using the magic formulae of Zhang Dao Ling. The Quanzhen School only dates from the 12th century CE. It emphasises retreat from the world and hence has a strong monastic dimension. It also practises quite extreme forms of meditation and self-denial. One of its founding fathers, Wang Chong Yang, is reputed to have stood for two years in a hole in the ground, ten feet down, in order not to fall asleep.

Daoist Teachings

In practice, Daoism allows for many different forms and schools. But they all have the Daoist teachings as their starting point.

Daoism seeks to retain and maintain the balance between yin and yang, any pair of forces in the cosmos that are opposites and yet inextricably linked. Balancing yin and yang, Heaven and Earth, ensures the continuation of life itself. Through their rituals, Daoists act out the role humanity plays in this balancing act.

In order to do so, humanity needs to go with the flow, not fight against it—the principle of *wu-wei*. If you go

with the flow, you can achieve anything, but so much of human society is falsely constructed that this is very hard. Here we see the shamanic roots of Daoism. The worlds of material and spiritual must be kept in balance and it is only by sublimating the material world to the spiritual that success can be achieved. But the Daoists go beyond the shamans. The Daoists believe that, through their liturgies, they can shape both the spirit and material worlds. Indeed, they believe that through the liturgies the whole cosmos can be influenced as long as this is done within the overall flow of the Dao.

Daoist Ecology

Daoism has a natural relationship with ecology. Kristofer Schipper, the widely acclaimed sinologist and Daoist master, writes that in the early Common Era the Daoists had already developed institutions and rules whose role was to protect nature and its natural balance. This was expressed in the '180 precepts' or guidelines for the leaders of the lay communities in the early days of Daoism. No fewer than twenty of these guidelines relate directly to nature conservation and many others do so indirectly. You could argue that the Daoists are the pioneers of nature conservation. In an entirely natural way, they are the very first protectors of nature. The Daoist Ecology Temple Alliance and ARC have uncovered the roots of Daoism and, with passion and inspiration, have brought them back to life.