

Taoist Pantheism and Astrology

Michael P. Levine in his authoritative work *Pantheism: A Non-Theistic Concept of Deity* writes: "...philosophical Taoism is one of the best articulated and thoroughly pantheistic positions there is....Aside from some native American Indian religions, philosophical Taoism—that of the Tao Tê Ching—is the most pantheistic. Religious Taoism mixes Chinese folk religion, Buddhism, Confucianism, and very little philosophical Taoism...."

.....the concept of the Tao precludes the theory of divine creation. In his [Lao Tzu's] allusions to the process of creation there is no hint of any anthropomorphic concept of deity, and in his notion of following the natural course there is no mention whatsoever of religious observances. On the contrary, he rejects the concept of a purposeful, active Heaven, and subordinates the earlier idea of a supremely powerful and absolutely good Heaven to the heterogeneously formed Tao. Thus, in the

Tao Te Ching we have a clear statement of a naturalistic Heaven which is wholly indifferent to the struggles of human life. In Lao Tzu's philosophical system, it is man's lot to cope with the problems of the human sphere, and this can best be accomplished by emulating the pattern of the universe—the Tao—and developing according to our intrinsic natures. By developing according to what is natural, we not only realise our full human potential, but further, we do not interfere with the cosmic harmony."

Eva Wong writes in *Taoism: An Essential Guide*: "Taoist religion is pantheistic and pluralistic. Deities, spirits, and immortals are ranked according to their power and level of enlightenment."

The Encyclopedia of Taoism edited by Fabrizio Pregadio scarcely mentions pantheism, perhaps because it deals with religious Taoism rather than the philosophical variety. This book states: "Taoism also drew a distinction between itself and some forms of magic and divination. For instance, in the Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie (The Hundred and Eighty Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao), Taoist masters are forbidden to associate themselves with fengshui, astrology, and other popular divination techniques.

Although some strands of Taoism may object to the use of astrology as a practical technique of divination, it does include a complex understanding of cosmology from which modern writers like Susan Levitt have derived a "Taoist astrology". Levitt writes:

"The ancient Chinese people developed their science of astrology based on their unique spiritual view of the world. The ancient ones studied nature to make sense of the universe. They observed the sky above and the earth below. Through nature they saw growth and decay, death and renewal, strength and life. The complementary structure of the natural order became the religion of Taoism. Priests of Taoism, who were both female and male, discovered and developed astronomy, alchemy, geometry, anatomy, and animal domestication. In the distant past, humanity's relationship with animals was necessary for survival.

When animals were domesticated, Taoist priests observed the animals' traits. Over the centuries, the priests developed a system of twelve animals for a twelve-year cycle. Human physical and temperamental attributes correlated with certain years. This system became the twelve earthly branches. In the year 2637 B.C., the Chinese Emperor Huang Ti standardized this Taoist twelve-year calendar, which has been in continuous use ever since.

According to the ancient Taoists, all of life is

interconnected. This connection, the Tao, is symbolized by the familiar image known as yin and yang. Traditionally, yin is the dark, feminine, and receptive principle. Yang is the light, masculine, and active principle. Together, yin and yang flow endlessly into each other. Each creates and defines the other's opposite. Without the existence of dark, the concept of light would have no meaning. Similarly, high is defined by low, and sweet is defined by sour. In western thought, the balance of yin and yang could be seen as conflicting opposites. Yet in Taoist thought there is no such antagonism. Yin is considered the dark side of the mountain. Yang is considered the light side of the mountain. Yet it is still the same mountain." (from "*Taoist Astrology: A Handbook of the Authentic Chinese Tradition*" by Susan Levitt)

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