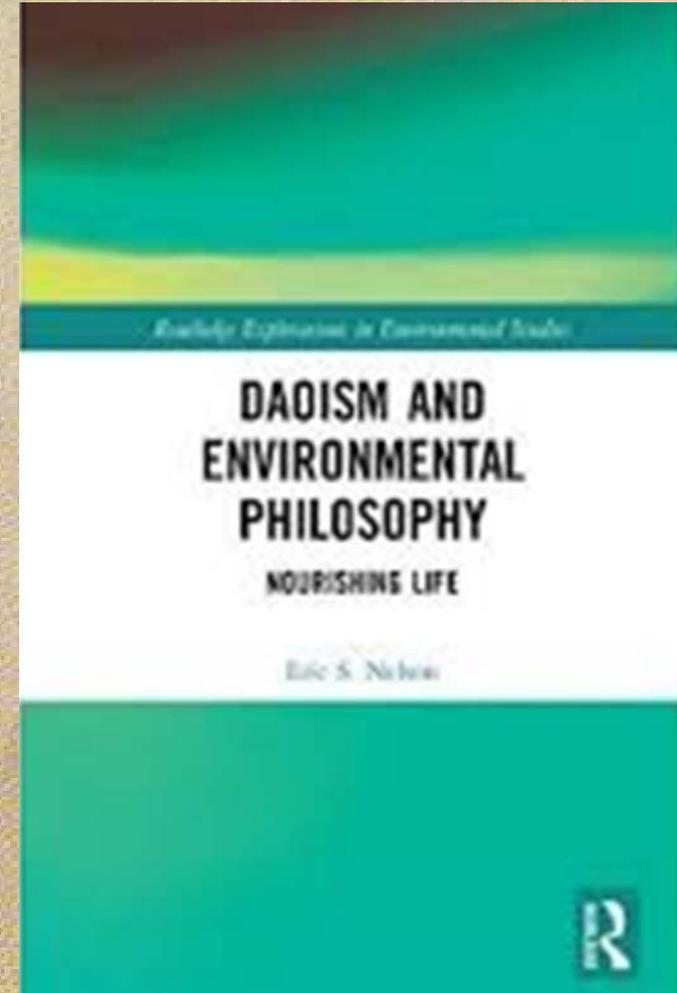


Daoism and Environmental Philosophy: Nourishing Life

Eric S. Nelson

(London: Routledge, 2020)

閑來隱几枕書眠
夢入壺中別有天
彷彿希夷親面目
大還真訣得親傳
晉昌唐寅為
東原先生寫圖



topics of the book and the talk

1. Introduction: Early Daoist Ethics and the Philosophy of Nature
2. Nourishing Life, Cultivating Nature, and Environmental Philosophy
3. *Wuwei*, Responsive Attunement, and Generative Nature
4. Emptying Ecology: Nothingness, Language, and Encountering Things
5. Early Daoist Biopolitics and a New Daoist Political Ecology
6. Epilogue: Emptying Ecology and Chan Buddhism

Chapter one – Daoism and Ecology?

- **Popular understanding:** of course, yes! Daoism embraces nature and is highly ecological.
- **Scholarly interpretations:** no way! Various forms of Daoism have their own concerns and strategies that are distinctive from modern ecological and environmental issues and discourses.
- **Philosophical reflection:** yes and no; it is up to contemporary interpreters to conceive and reimagine Daoist concepts, strategies, and practices in relation to their own times and to the issues and tasks of our own hermeneutical situation

Historical Questions and Problems

- ▶ Is there such a thing as early “Daoism”?
- ▶ Does it have an appropriate conception and experience of nature to speak to modern environmental and ecological issues?
- ▶ Does Daoism teach a form of neutrality or indifference or a form of responsiveness and nurturing care of life?
- ▶ What are the implications of the practices of early Daoism?
- ▶ Can they be models for ecological reflection and practice?



What is “Daoism”? complications and problems

- No such expressions in early pre-Qin contexts.
- surviving early texts linked with Laozi 老子 and Zhuangzi 莊子 are composites of various ideas, images, and arguments and heavily edited and redacted into the three kingdoms period.
- surviving classic texts not sufficiently related / integrated to speak of a common school.
- the expression “Lao-Zhuang” 老莊 is fairly late.
- early texts are intertextual (refer to common words and concepts) and each text overlaps with diverse tendencies and what are later distinguished as schools (*jia* 家).

- no “schools” (*jia* 家) and classification of schools until Han dynasty (e.g., Sima Tan 司馬談 and Sima Qian 司馬遷).
- The Simas prioritized *Huanglao* 黃老 thought that heavily overlaps with (forms of) legalism (*fajia* 法家): Hanfei 韓非.
- eclectic Daoist-legalist Huang-Lao (黃老) thought older than Zhuangzi and more prevalent until post-Han period
- overlapping tendencies with legalism, egoism, primitivism, agriculturalism, etc..
- philosophical / religious Daoism: *Daojia* 道家 and *Daojiao* 道教 or masters of the way (*daoshi* 道士)
- significant role in eclectic mysterious learning (*xuanxue* 玄學) “Neo-Daoist” discourses such as in Wang Bi 王弼, Guo Xiang 郭象, Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove (竹林七賢)

Is there an early Daoist conception of “nature”?

- *dao* 道 – the “way” is generative from nothingness (*wu* 無) and has maternal aspects as “mother of all life”
- *zi* 自 – self and *ran* 然 – so / so-ness – *ziran* as self-generation of *dao* and of the myriad things (萬物)
- *Ziran* – as the qualities and functions that make something (things, patterns, reproductive systems) what it is.
- *tiandi* 天地 - heaven and earth as dominant forces and as models for sagely and human behavior and practices.
- Are any of these “nature” in the Western or modern sense?

Chapter two - *yangsheng* 養生

Nourishing / Nurturing Life

- Nurturing life (*yangsheng*) is frequently taken as a Daoist practice with ecological significance.
- Daoist transmissions have two different approaches
 1. Purposive internal and/or external means and instruments to achieve health, longevity, or a form of biospiritual perfection – for instance, *Heshang Gong* 河上公 *Daodejing* commentary or Ge Hong 葛洪.
 2. Non-purposive nurturing of life in contrast to artificiality of purposive practices – for instance, the *Zhuangzi* or Wang Bi's *Daodejing* commentary.

yisheng 益生 in DDJ 55

- **DDJ 55:** 含德之厚，比於赤子。蜂虿虺蛇不螫，猛獸不據，攫鳥不搏。骨弱筋柔而握固。未知牝牡之合而全作，精之至也。終日號而不嗷，和之至也。知和曰常，知常曰明，益生曰祥。心使氣曰強。物壯則老，謂之不道，不道早已。
- Roughly - Be as a child, then you will not become old; flexible, then not stiff; vital without trying to be vital, etc.
- “益生曰祥” / *xiang* 祥 more usually “auspicious”
- Heshang Gong: To extend life beyond its natural span is called “auspicious.”
- This extending is about biospiritual practices that make one like a child and natural, prolonging life...

Auspicious or Inauspicious?

- **Wang Bi:** To extend life beyond its natural span is called "inauspicious."
- **生不可益，益之則夭也 / Life must not be extended, for if one tries to extend it, he will suffer an early death.**

For the heart/mind to control the vital force is called "forcing strength."

- **心宜無有，使氣則強 / The heart/mind [xin] should consist of nothingness [wuyou 無有]. If it controls the vital force [qi], this is called "forcing strength" [qiang]**
- Once a thing reaches its prime, it grows old. We say it goes against the Dao, and what is against the Dao comes to an early end.

Chapter three - *wuwei* 無為 as non-action and as responsiveness

- Critics of Daoism claim it teaches fatalism, indifference, and inaction, and so cannot be a model for ecological and environmental thought and practice.
- *wuwei* 無為, literally non-action, implies doing nothing or minimal activity and effort and the current environmental crisis demands action.
- Does Early Daoism teach this kind of indifference to nature or a practice that is in accord with naturalness and could thus indicate an ecological model?

Does Early Daoism teach indifference or responsiveness? Example one

1. Heaven and earth should not be considered as humane or benevolent (不仁), they and thus the sages treat things as straw dogs: 天地不仁，以萬物為芻狗；聖人不仁，以百姓為芻狗。天地之間，其猶橐籥乎？虛而不屈，動而愈出。多言數窮，不如守中。(DDJ 5)
2. Heaven-and-earth are enduring not by living for themselves but by benefiting others, and thus the sages place their own persons and personal ends last: 天長地久。天地所以能長且久者，以其不自生，故能長生。是以聖人後其身而身先；外其身而身存。非以其無私耶？故能成其私。(DDJ 7)

Indifference or responsiveness?

Example Two

- ▶ Early mysterious learning (*xuanxue*): the sage is affectively indifferent and without emotions
- ▶ WANG Bi argued for the significance of affectivity in responding to the myriad things and their changes, which the affectively indifferent lacks.
- ▶ According to HE Shao's account of Wang Bi: "Since the sage was same as other people in having the five emotions, he could **not fail to respond** (*ying* 應) to things without feeling sadness or pleasure. Nevertheless, the emotions of the sage are such that he **may respond to things without becoming attached to them.**"

the sage has the affective capacity to respond (*ying* 應) without entanglements, integrate qi, and harmonize with nothingness

- "It was **HE Yan's** opinion that the sage is free of pleasure, anger, sadness, or happiness, and his discussion of this issue was meticulously argued. **ZHONG Hui** and others passed around what he had to say,
- **WANG Bi** thought that it was numinous intelligence (*shenming* 神明) that the sage was more richly endowed with that made him different from people in general, and what made him the same as people in general was that he too had the five emotions. As the sage was so richly endowed with numinous intelligence, he could embody perfectly fused *qi* and thereby integrate flawlessly with nothingness (*ti chonghe yi tongwu* 體沖和以通無)."



Chapter four - emptiness and becoming empty (xu 虛) is a key practice in the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi*

- ▶ the passages on emptiness, vacancy, and becoming empty (xu 虛): DDJ 3, 5, 16, 22, 53
- ▶ What does emptiness mean in these contexts?
- ▶ Are the uses of xu 虛 all consistent with one another?
- ▶ Let's look at DDJ 16 on emptying and quieting

➤ 致虛極，守靜篤。萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是謂復命。復命曰常，知常曰明。不知常，妄作凶。知常容，容乃公，公乃王，王乃天，天乃道，道乃久，沒身不殆。

1. This appears as a meditative like claim (disposition to be empty and still) - utmost emptiness, guarding stillness: 致虛極，守靜篤

2. The next lines appear as a bodily and also a cosmic / cosmological teaching of reverting to emptiness and stillness [an unknowable formlessness or a form of nothingness?]:

➤ 萬物並作，吾以觀復: all things are activated and revert [to emptiness and stillness]

➤ 夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是謂復命: things revert to the roots. Returning to the root of stillness / tranquility and fulfilling their end / fate.

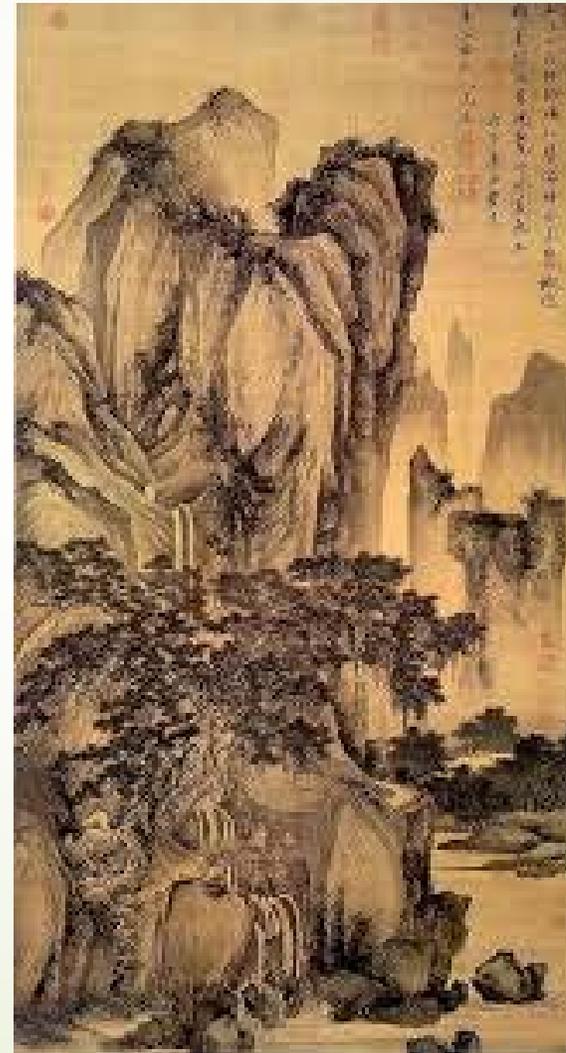
3. The final lines concern the ruler being heavenly-like and dao-like: generative and nourishing life.

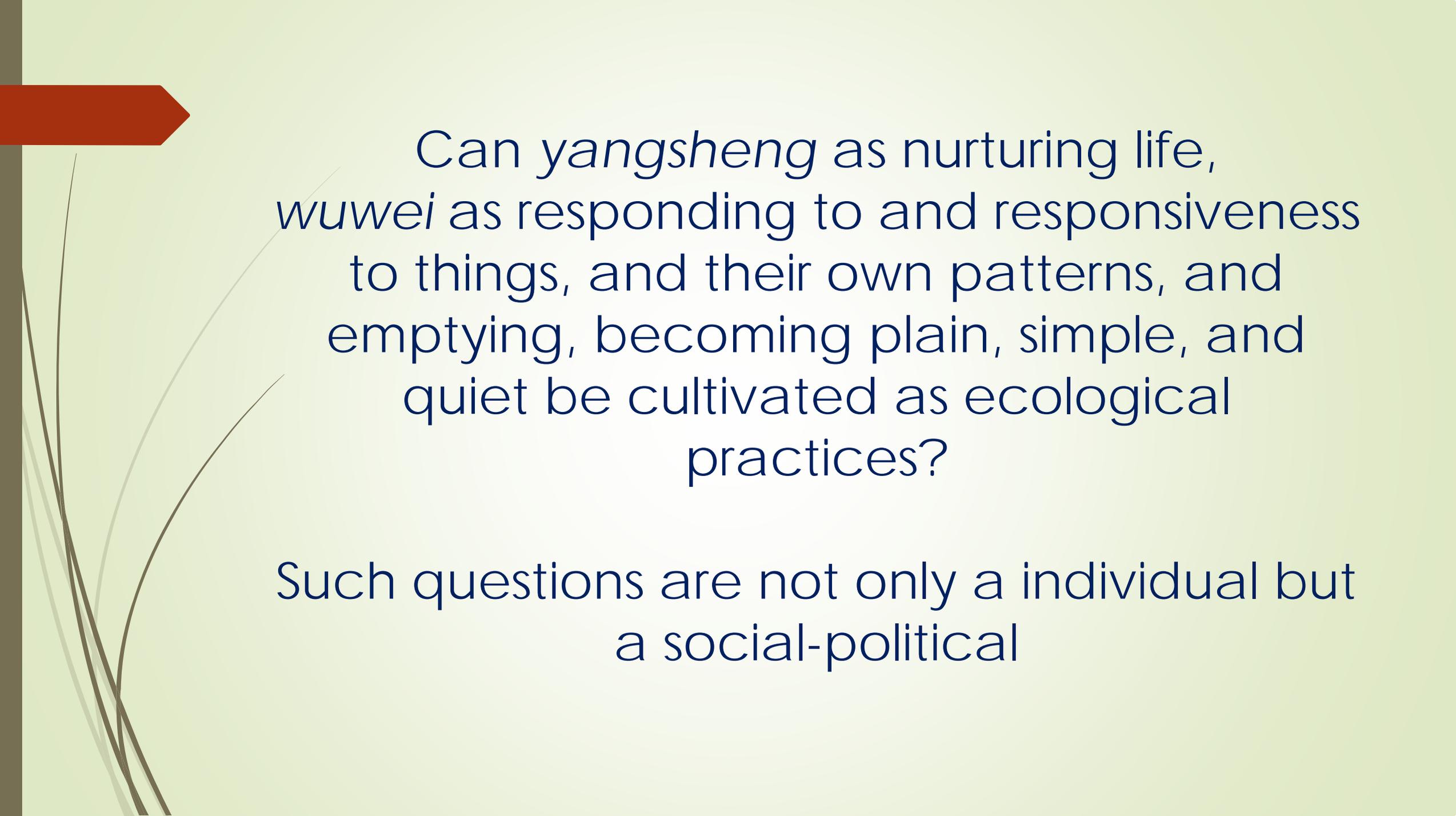
Becoming plain, simple, and quiet

DDJ 19: jian su bao pu, shao si gua yu 見素抱樸，少私寡欲

- plainness and simplicity without selfishness and desire
- plainness (su 素)
- simplicity (pu 樸)
- stilling /quieting (jing 靜)
- Like emptying (*xu*), they can refer to state or to practice of becoming it.
- Taken up in this way in later forms:
- Huanglao "Daoism": *Huainanzi* 淮南子, *Guanzi* 管子: 內業 Nei Ye; 心術上 Xin Shu I; 心術下 Xin Shu II; 白心 Bai Xin
- Early religious daoism, inner alchemy, etc....

Daoist aesthetics and poetics of nature can this indicate an ecological ethos?





Can *yangsheng* as nurturing life, *wuwei* as responding to and responsiveness to things, and their own patterns, and emptying, becoming plain, simple, and quiet be cultivated as ecological practices?

Such questions are not only a individual but a social-political

Chapter five - Daoist political models

- Legalist (*fajia*) and Huang-lao models – highly authoritarian, monarchs empty in order to rule better.
- Daoist Sage-kings who rule through non-ruling (*wuwei*), empty and allow things and persons to self-order.
- Yang Zhu 楊朱 and Yangist models : Nurturing life as nurturing one's own individual bodily life without regard for others – highly anti-political, perhaps anarchistic / libertarian but also egotistical.
- Primitivists and agriculturalists models – self-organizing communities without social-political stratification and inequality.

Daoist, Democracy, Ecopolitics

- Daoism would maximize self-ordering tendencies and self-organization of communities in accord with their natures (*ziran*).
- Given social-political complexity, agriculturalism or anarchism might be ideals but are not present options.
- Daoism suggests that an ecological civilization should allow unrestricted communication and circulation in order to flourish.
- Democratic self-ordering and self-organization with guaranteed constitutional rights and participatory and communicative processes best approximate a Daoist self-generative system.

多謝!
Thanks!

閑來隱几枕書眠
夢入壺中別有天
彷彿希夷親面目
大還真訣得親傳
晉昌唐寅為
東原先生寫圖

