

Qiguang Zhao Series Works

Do Nothing & Do Everything

An Illustrated New Taoism

Qiguang Zhao



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图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

无为无不为：画讲新道家 / 赵启光著绘. — 北京：海豚出版社，2013.7

ISBN 978-7-5110-1397-2

I. ①无… II. ①赵… III. ①道家—通俗读物 IV. ①B223-49

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2013) 第166024号

无为无不为：画讲新道家 (英)

作者：赵启光

责任编辑：孟科瑜

出版：海豚出版社

地址：北京市西城区百万庄大街24号

网址：www.dolphin-books.com.cn

印刷：北京天宇万达印刷有限公司

版次：2013年9月第1版 2013年9月第1次印刷

书号：ISBN 978-7-5110-1397-2

总发行人：俞晓群

责任印制：回智明

邮编：100037

电话：010-68998879 (总编室)

010-68997479 (销售)

开本：16开 (710mm × 1000mm)

印张：14.25

007500

Do Nothing & Do Everything: An Illustrated New Taoism

First Edition 2013

Published by Dolphin Books Co., Ltd

24 Baiwanzhuang Road, Xicheng District, Beijing 100037, China

<http://www.dolphin-books.com.cn>

ISBN 978-7-5110-1397-2

©Dolphin Books Co., Ltd, Beijing, China, 2013

Distributed by China International Book Trading Corporation

35 Chegongzhuang Xilu, Beijing 100044, China

P.O. Box 399, Beijing, China

Printed in the People's Republic of China

To Litao

The stars of wisdom shine over us.

The winds of humor dance between us.

The seas of knowledge carry us to the land of miracle.

Qiguang

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I would like to express my gratitude to my family for their loving support. I thank my parents for teaching me culture, literature, and life philosophy through a scientific approach. With a wise sense of humor, my father, Professor of Physics Zhao Jingyuan, gave me a love of Chinese tradition and its application to modern life. Also a Professor of Physics, my mother, Wang Shuxian, loved and wrote Chinese classical poems. We had discussed some of the ideas and illustrations in the book a few months before she passed away. My deepest thanks go to my other family members, especially Zhiming, who edited some of my writings and provided numerous technical supports, Qizheng, who encourages me to present my ideas to a broad audience, and Qida, from whom I learned drawing pictures while telling stories.

I thank Carleton College for the financial and academic support for the project. Beautiful lakes and forests on campus, together with thought-provoking faculty, staff, and students, provide a most serene environment for talking, writing, and thinking. I greatly appreciate my students' support and involvement. Through the years, students in my course, "Taoist Way of Health and Longevity: Tai Chi and Other Forms" spoke intelligently in crowded classrooms and performed Tai Chi on campus islands. Sophie Kerman organized primary materials.

Jessica Taylor, edited the writing and scanned the illustrations. Kaitlin Justin, Jane Caffrey, and Zheng Zhu enthusiastically helped me to complete the final manuscript and gave me wise input.

Dr. Andrew Weis was enthusiastic about my manuscript and shared ideas on Taoism with me. He carefully read through the manuscript and gave me valuable comments and suggestions. My thanks extend to Mr. Roger Lasley, who read my manuscript and gave me helpful advice. I am deeply grateful to my colleague Professor Hong Zeng, who offered consistent support for this manuscript.

Many of the opinions in this book were formed when I was featured on a talk show series about Lao Tzu, aired on Shanghai Television in 2007. I thank Professor Qian Wenzhong of Fudan University for recommending me for the series. Producer Yu Yongjin, anchorman Jin Bo, and director Xia Ning of Shanghai Television made the show come to life for an audience of millions.

It is impossible to mention all of the people who have helped and inspired me. To all of them, I give my sincere thanks.

Qiguang Zhao

PREFACE

When I was completing this book, my mother passed away. She was a professor of physics, a poet, an athlete, and a great mother. Suddenly life and death stand in front of me not as a theoretical discussion in the classroom but as a challenge to reality. It is so difficult for us to accept the deal that life offers us. It seems unfair and crazy. We are given life, and then life is taken away without our agreement. Without a wise mother to protect me, I feel I have an immediate call to figure out the puzzle of life and death.

We do not get to choose when we are going to die, or how to die. Yet we can decide when we are going to live. The time is now. Seize today and trust not in tomorrow. Eternity does not begin after death. It extends to all of the time in our lives. We are in it now. We can have it if we give up – give up our imagined ability to control life. The moon shines over snow; a planet swings around a star; a black hole devours a constellation. We cannot affect these big phenomena, and we let them be. Our daily life is part of the universe, as every small drop of ocean water reflects the enormous sun. If we cannot change the orbit of the sun, we cannot decide everything in our life either. Therefore, we should accept the pain, treasure the joy, and appreciate life now.

Nowadays, people do not live fully, and get only about 20 percent out of their lives. This hard-to-get 20 percent of life is

composed of success, fortune, and fame. The other 80 percent can be reached effortlessly. Just follow the course of nature, and life will reward you generously. Between your house and your shop, there are numerous little spots of happiness: a squirrel running away from you, a raindrop falling on you, and a stranger greeting you. Just acknowledge them. They always come to you. You do nothing, and nothing is left undone.

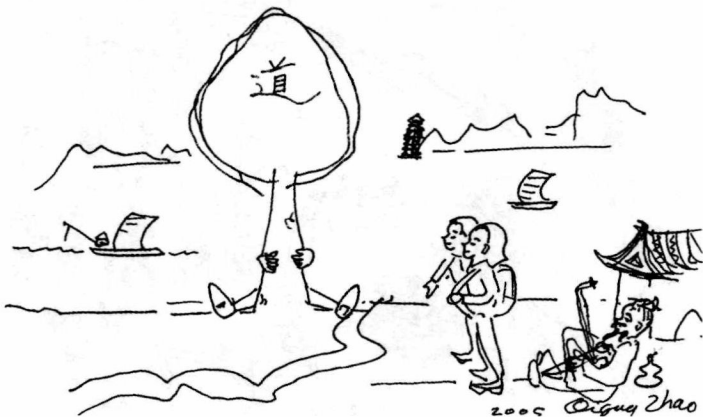
A life of reaction is a life of bondage. I believe that one must strive for a life of nonaction or action, not one of reaction. Doing nothing leads to courageous liberation. We should act effortlessly, without anxiety and hesitation. Sitting on the beach quietly is doing nothing. Swimming in the ocean bravely is doing everything. There are no forbidden walls between doing nothing and doing everything. We are free, as long as we cross the walls between the two without anxiety or hesitation.

Do not hesitate when crossing. Do not be bothered by the opinions of others. Hear the call of nature, and act for yourself. You do not want to come to the last moment of your life and find that you have simply lived life's length. You should also have lived the life's width. So when you leave the world, you will not say, "I didn't do this" or "I did that wrong." You are going to say, "I regret nothing. I came. I did nothing. I did it all. As a happy guest, I leave now."

Qiguang Zhao
Northfield, Minnesota
August, 2008

INTRODUCTION

This book is based on a course I have taught since 1997, “The Taoist Way of Health and Longevity: Tai Chi and Other Forms.” It started out with only six students; after 15 years, it had grown to about 60. The class has become one of the most popular courses at Carleton College. In this class, the students and I got lost in the mysterious and serene atmosphere of Taoism. With Lao Tzu, we ride green bulls through Hangu Pass; with Zhuangzi, we watch the fish from the bank of a river; with Liezi, we ride on the wind; with Zhang Sanfeng, we perform Tai Chi by the Cannon River. We promise to meet again in 200 years at the legendary mountain, Dahuangshan .



Could you tell us where to find the Tao?

On the islands in the campus' two lakes, the students and I get along well. The generational and cultural gaps disappear before the ancient philosophical giants. We even use the first paragraph of the *Tao Te Ching* as our class password. The first student says, "The Tao that can be said..." The second student answers, "...is not the eternal Tao." The first student says, "The name that can be named..." The second student says, "...is not the eternal Name." When they meet again in 200 years, they may not recognize each other, but they will know each other by this password.

One year, on the last day of our class, some students jumped into the lake and performed Tai Chi to show their Taoist love of water. I realized that American students can really appreciate Taoism, even though their textbook was written in English. This gave me confidence in the cross-linguistic and cross-cultural power of Taoist thought. Thought does not belong only to its birthplace; it belongs to anyone who studies and understands it. Anyone can



Let's get another perspective on things.

drink from the source and gain inspiration, health, and longevity.

About the spelling of the Chinese terms: I use the old system for important names and words like *Taoism*, *Lao Tzu*, *Confucius*, and *Tai Chi*, because they have become part of English language. I have moved to the modern *pinyin* system for less familiar names and words, such as *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, and *Xiang Yu*. The mixture of the old and new romanization systems reflects the rapid cultural changes that have taken place in China during the past 50 years.

Unless otherwise noted, all quotation from Lao Tzu are from: *Tao Te Ching: A new Translation and Commentary*, Ellen M. Chen (St.Paul: Paragon House, 1989).

Qiguang Zhao

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CHAPTER 1

A Manifesto of Modern Taoism

Students: Are you a Taoist?

Qiguang Zhao: I refuse to be named. Ancient Taoist thinkers and their works are ancient history. I am influenced by Taoism, but I keep my spiritual freedom and my right to fly without confines.

Students: What is Applied New Taoism?

Qiguang Zhao: Applied New Taoism seeks to discover the spiritual state between sleeping and waking; between life and death; between present, past, and future; and between *Wu Wei* and *Wu Bu Wei*.

Wu Wei, doing nothing, and *Wu Bu Wei*, doing everything, are our answers to the challenges of modern life. We question the existence and importance of time. *Wu* means “no” and *Wei* means “action,” so *Wu Wei* can be translated as “nonaction” or “do nothing.” For *Wu Bu Wei*, the translation is “do everything,” because *Bu* means “not,” and its combination with *Wu* creates a smart double negative. Thus, *Wu* and *Bu* cancel each other, and *Wu Bu Wei* can be simplified to *Wei* only, with an emphasis on “doing all things” or “leaving nothing undone.”

Wu Wei, “do nothing” or “doing nothing,” is to follow the course of nature. It is confidence in the universe. Since

everything happens within the universe, if you follow the wonder of nature, wonders will occur around you every day.

Wu Wei is wisdom. You tell life, "I trust you; do whatever you want." Life will always reward you with everything surprising. Wu Wei is habit.

Wu Bu Wei, "doing everything," is the creativity to build a good habit. We do not have to solve every basic question of life. We just follow the established good habit, as a mathematician follows established equations, without having to prove it every time.

Wu Wei is modesty, knowing that each person has his or her own ambition, each thing has its own owner, and nature and society have their own rules. Wu Bu Wei is courage to navigate through the rules.

Wu Wei is a delight in knowing that everything will be all right. It is not refusing to do anything, but refusing to do insignificant things. Wu Wei is efficiency. It is the precondition of Wu Bu Wei. Wu Wei requires giving up secondary matters and aiming for the key matters. You can only Wu Bu Wei because you Wu Wei.

Wu Wei is the secret of health. Only if you abandon anxiety can you do anything with a healthy mind and body.

We respect but do not totally agree with ideologies. We do not agree with anyone's opinions: we have opinions of our own.

We gaze at the stars and compare them with ourselves. We do not gloat at our neighbors, envy their successes, or become angry at our differences.

We are alone. We shut the world out as we think, feel, and move. We talk to the world, we listen, we observe, we join, but we keep Tao at the core, like a cliff hanging above the surging ocean.



When the modern meets the ancient.

Let the world make ripples, waves, or storms on the ocean; our cliff stays high and grows higher.

We think with our bodies. Usually, the body is directed by the mind. Yet when we move with uniform motion, our bodies give us a message, a biofeedback, which brings the mind closer to the uniform motion of the universe.

We create a surreal world. We fly in the clouds. We ride rainbows.

The world has waited too long for a voice with fresh ideas and new approaches to life. We hope to create such a voice by echoing an old tune, a voice that soothes the heart and strengthens the mind in a new established form. We want to create a mode of communication between humans that is beyond language.

We are not scholars who make every effort to understand books. We are artists who apply our knowledge to our lives. I invite you to creation, a forging of the missing links between ancient world and our life. Let us go through the thorns of elite

scholarship, through the bushes of vulgar devices, and visit a quiet, forgotten land.

Let us find love, in a broad sense, a love whose object is not one person called *Lover*, not a group of persons called *Class* or *Nation*, but rather a concept of ultimate beauty that extends to the ends of the universe. I want to inform you, coach you, inspire you, and then ask you to meet the challenges of the world, to form healthy, balanced ways of thinking, living, approaching, and existing.

We know how to relax and do nothing, or *Wu Wei*, because without doing anything the stars twinkle quietly numerous light-years from earth, and the earth rotates on its axis once every 24 hours. If the universe can, so can we; we know how to do everything without worrying, because we only belong to this world for a short while.