

## Characteristics of “Taoism” and Its Enlightenment on Regimen

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### Abstract

The philosophical meaning of Taoism is the quintessence of Taoism thought, and also the theoretical basis of regimen thought in Taoism. The quintessence of regimen extracted from Taoism is the starting point and the end. Thus, this paper mainly absorbs quintessence of Taoism from *Tao Te Ching* and discusses its enlightenment on regimen. This paper starts with the observation of Lao Tzu's Taoism, and then further reveals the theoretical origins of philosophical thought of regimen, the core of which is the nature law that emphasizes “theory that man is an integral part of nature” and “holism of body and spirit”. Human, as one part of the universe, should obey and follow laws of “Taoism”, namely naturally regular survival and living, and achieve the unification with “Taoism” and harmony with nature. Only in this way can be the overall preservation to individual and group life be realise.

**Key words:** *Tao Te Ching*; Taoism; Regimen

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### INTRODUCTION

The Taoism thought is complicated and overloaded, and can be written in an immense number of books. It's not

possible to see the whole from a glimpse in a short time, and not practical to study its thought comprehensively. But no matter in what kind of ancient books and records of Taoism, they all reflect the quintessence of its religious philosophy—Taoism. As long as we grasp this principle, we grasp the principles and laws of its thought, and then the theoretical research and practical operation of Taoism could get twofold results with half the effort. Moreover, it also has to guid significance on how to practice comprehensive regimen in modern society—dealing with relationship between us and ourselves, us and others, and us and society. This paper starts from the elaboration of “Taoism” in *Tao Te Ching*, and then tries to extract and purify the enlightenment of “Taoism” on regimen in modern society.

### 1. CHARACTERISTICS OF TAOISM

“Taoism generates Tai Chi, Tai Chi generates Yin Yang, Yin Yang generates universe, universe generates all living things,” In *Tao Te Ching* (2012), “Taoism” was turned into cosmic inventory, which included all the material forms, energy information, and even the human spirit thought based on the former two. Then what on earth is this “Taoism” that generates all these things? A sort of material, or the energy, or supreme spiritual power?

The answers for all these things could be found in *Tao Te Ching*. The openings of it said that “Taoism that can be expressed is not the permanent Taoism, and the Ming that can be named is not forever”. We can see from it that “Taoism” is not invariable and stationary. On the contrary, “Taoism” is the antonomasia for things that are constantly changing and dynamic. Even the name of all the universe of Taoism generates—“Ming” is also not constant, and will change with all the universe's changing, so the universe reflects the changing of “Taoism”. After all, “change” is its characteristic. And “Taoism” and “Ming” were just the temporary addresses Lao Tzu gave,

because “I did not know its name, thus calling it Taoism, if had been to, then name it Da”. In this sentence, Lao Tzu also put forward the concept of “Da” which was equal to “Taoism”, and said “there was one thing existing before all living things, invisible, alone but independent and permanent. It kept moving, and could be the essence of living things. I did not know its name, thus call it Taoism, if had to, then name it Da. It was broad, kept moving far, and returned to essence.” This is the operation laws of “Taoism”, namely developing from the initial phase and moving far, and then returning to its initial phase when reaching a critical point, which is apparently the process of simple dialectics.

Consequently, the operation process of “Taoism” is actually the circling process of simple dialectic nature. The life, prosperity, decline and death of all living things all present Taoism’s operation laws— “the contradictions keep Taoism operating”. “The universe lets all living things go through prosperity and declines without showing any mercy”. So from the level of Taoism, all living things should go through life, prosperity, decline and death according to the laws of Taoism without any exceptions. Taoism is not biased on anything. “Taoism is the start of the world, and then all living things appear”. The abstract space begins from Taoism, and then specific living creatures are created. “No desire helps us observing all living things objectively”, and we should abandon personal desires to purify our mind and observe objective laws of living things, in order to let ourselves be close to Taoism’s asking for nothing, consequently we shall reach the realm “blend in Taoism”. So “human adapts the environment, and human’s position decides how he acts complying with objective laws. The destiny is decided by the Grand Taoism, and Taoism comes from the nature”. On the contrary, we will sway too far from Taoism and can only see the presentation. “The contradictions are inseparable and convertible, which is the laws of Taoism”. This indicates “You” and “Wu”, the two sides of contradictions are different in names yet same in essence, and are respectively the specific presentation and abstract presentation of “Taoism”; to inquire further deeply, they are the unfathomable and changeable noumenon of universe. Besides, based on the view that Tai Chi generates Yin and Yang in *the Book of Changes*, all the living things that Taoism creates possess the characteristics of “reinforcing each other”, namely the “unity of opposites” in philosophical themes. Yin and Yang are depending on each other for existence, in opposition to each other, trading off and taking turns, and inter-being. All living things realize conversion of energy, and complete circle of life, prosperity, decline and death, as well as carry the flame in “unity of opposites”.

To sum up, since Taoism creates all living things, it’s sure to be different with specific material, but is the abstract noumenon that all living things all possess; Taoism realizes mutual promotion and restraint between Yin and Yang through energy conversion, so the energy

becomes the carrier for abstract noumenon to change and exercise. But the changing forms of Taoism are presented as the circles of living and death of all living things, and comply with objective laws without spiritual colors. Therefore, Taoism is more than any one of material, energy information, and spirit, but a combination of abstract material with regulated changes and the energy information. Based on this, the author tries to put up that the essence of Taoism is “an abstract and objective noumenon of the universe. It realizes circles of living and death of all living things in the way of energy conservation, conversion and through unity of opposites of internal contradictions, and would not transfer by human’s will”. For further deduction, it’s a very delicate thing that creates and combines to all living things in the world per certain laws as well as determines its changing process. Its laws are presented as the circles of living and dead, unity of opposites of mutual promotion and restraint between Yin and Yang. This sort of imperceptibility is colorless, odorless, soundless and stirless yet everywhere, stopping at nothing, not excluding anything and almighty.

Taoism is the universal law of the universe (objective, not transferred in the event of human’s will), and energy information (in circulation and conversion, and energy conservation), as well as the abstract noumenon of all living things. Human, as one of the living things that Taoism creates, its life path will definitely run per this universal law. Therefore, regimen thought of Taoism will certainly regard “Taoism” as its philosophy basis of human life science, and put forward regimen theory, principles and methods accordingly. Taoism coexists with life, and life reflects laws of Taoism. If we could unit life maintenance and Taoism’ operation laws as one, then we could be immortal. Combining regimen and Taoism together is the one and only way to be immortal.

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## 2. MAIN BODY OF TAOISM AND REGIMEN: HUMAN

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As to the cognition of the main body of regimen—human, Yang Yuhui thinks that, “as humans, we not only need to possess body consisting of viscera and vessels, but also should possess protecting pneuma and soul spirit. Only the organic unification of form, pneuma and spirit could make us lively and real.” (Yangi, 2011) The theories that separate the unification of form, pneuma and spirit, fail to effectively distinguish human and material human and vegetables. “ Meanwhile, human consists of form, pneuma and spirit on the vertical, and has the viscera and other functional systems in the transverse. The vertical and transverse are connected to be an organic integration through main and collateral channels.” (Yang, 2011) Secondly, for the definition of “regimen”, Yang Yuhui believes that it should be differentiated from “nurturing the body”. Since human’s life consists of form, pneuma

and spirit, so “regimen” means maintenance of these three together. Besides, he also holds that regimen is confined to the healthy people, and it cannot be equal to recuperate and healing. From this perspective, the narrow regimen refers to that human deals with himself, while generalized regimen includes relations between human and nature, human and others. The popular “regimen” in modern society is actually “nurturing the body”, which only pays attention to recuperate the physical body, but ignores the maintenance and sublimation of spirit and emotions, as well as the harmonious relation between human and outer environment.

Since human is one of the living things that Taoism creates, so the form, pneuma, spirit that constitutes life are all from Taoism. “Form” means the physical forms of human, and the material basis of vital movement; “pneuma” is the power of vital movement; “spirit” is the leading of vital movement. These three have their own positions and each performs its own functions. None can be dispensed with, and they orderly consist of human’s vital movement. Besides, the circulation law that “Taoism is in constant change” leads to human’s birth, death, illness and old age. If Taoism represents the big universe, then the life coming from Taoism is a delicate small universe, whose law of motion is consistent with the bigger one. Therefore, regimen thought of Taoism definitely adheres to the theory that “man is an integral part of nature, complying with the nature”, and puts forward the principle of “regimen of form, pneuma and spirit” so that makes those three in a “safe, peaceful and proper” state in order to keep a healthy life that form is in shape, pneuma is preserved and spirit doesn’t go dark.

As long as we’re clear about Taoism, and the theory that “man is an integral part of nature, complying with the nature”, as well as human’s nature and definition of regimen, we can understand the regimen theory that Taoism advocates. The regimen principle that Taoism promotes is the preservation of form, pneuma and spirit. Except the explanation of human’s nature— “form, pneuma and spirit” by Yang Yuhui, Zhang Qicheng (2004) points out that “form” refers to the whole physique and body, “spirit” means mind, will and thought etc. Human is the organic combination of physiology, mentality and body. Form and spirit coexist, complement each other, coordinate and unify, forming the view of “unification of form and spirit”, which means the body and mentality should be harmonious and unified, and reach the “harmonious mind and body” state, which is beneficial to regimen and health care.

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### 3. ENLIGHTENMENT OF CHARACTERISTIC OF “TAOISM” ON REGIMEN

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The best way to keep physical and psychological health and live as long as possible is to comply with operational

laws of the nature, namely let nature take its course. The natural law is soft but not tough, as mild as a drizzle and as gentle as a breeze that never ever ends. The way of regimen should imitate the natural laws that always keep the humble, modest, low-key and self-effacement status.

Human is soft at its birth, while it’s stiff when it’s gone. The grass and woods are soft and crispy when they’re born, while they get withered before they’re dying. Using too many military forces result in death, and much too high or big trees bear the brunt of storms. Softness and strong are opposite, but strong and stiffness are the sign of destruction, so regimen should worship the more soft aspect, so that we can live long and avoid death.

Lao Tzu said that the saint should be like water, going where others were not willing to go, and beneficial to all living things yet striving for nothing, which made him close to the grand Taoism. Chen Guying and Bai Xi concluded three points regarding characteristic and function of water in *Critical Biography of Lao Tzu* (2007): “Firstly, it’s soft; secondly, it stays the low-lying areas; thirdly, it moistens all living things yet not striving with them.” If we say that, a saint as humble as water, is basically equal to Taoism, then the water itself could be thought as the embodiment of grand Taoism. The low-lying areas are where the water goes. Men with Taoism, are like a trench attracting water, thus with trench constantly surrounding. What is this state? It’s just like returning to the realm that is as pure and natural as babies. A man attaining Taoism is just like a new born baby who is free of bites from poisonous insects, harm from beasts, attacks from bad birds; he looks soft yet he can hold fists tight; he doesn’t know the sexual intercourse between men and women, yet his little penis erects automatically due to his full vital essence; he cries all day long yet his voice doesn’t go hoarse because of his full pneuma. A man attaining Taoism could reach such a state like a baby, looking soft yet close to Taoism. Just like the water, soft and humble, but it’s equal to Taoism.

Through the comparison of softness and strong, Lao Tzu found out the truth about the short life of strong. Using too many military forces leads to death, while much too strong trees are easy to get broken. Only those things as soft as water can be long lasting, and the soft water can defeat the most strong things. Why are the softest water and babies better than strong things? Because water and babies are equal to Taoism. The characteristic of Taoism is soft and changeable, and can be seen where softness exists. Softness, water and babies are all close to grand Taoism.

But the development of things has both starts and ends, success and failure, new born and destruction. In real life, how to keep soft instead of dying due to the fast tendency to be strong? Such principles shall be followed: keep soft and humble although knowing what is strong. Be happy to be low key and ordinary, knowing what the glory is.

Why should we be soft and low key? What goal shall we achieve? Stooping leads to compromise, bending results in stretches; low-lying area is easy to get water, the old-fashioned gets new life; asking little brings more acquisitions, greed results in loss. Therefore, the goal of softness and low profile is to "win" and "not lose". The softness and low profile are just means and methods, and the goal is to seek the opposite things. Just like stooping is for compromise, and low-lying area gets water.

However, the positive and negative sides of things are not absolute. It includes positive and negative sides, and the unification of affirmation and negation. So if we hope to keep something, we shall take advantage of it when it's soft, and keep it in a constantly unsatisfactory state, so that it can have long-lasting life and vitality.

Things are definitely declining when reaching the peak, which is an irreversible process. But as long as we know the dialectical transformation truth, this process could be prolonged, making things staying in a relatively weak state so as not to decline due to reach prosperity too far. It's better to stop where it should stop instead of making things too complete; the incompleteness leaves room for progress so that vivid vitality could be continued. But it's hard to make people satisfied, and disasters and faults are caused and inevitable. So the biggest disaster Lao Tzu believed was insatiability, and the largest crime was the desire to get. Then how can we avoid these? Lao Tzu said that we should be satisfied and have few desires, which were the laws of immortality. Of course, it was relative immortality. The process of changing, developing and dying is irreversible. Only when humans know these truth can they use them to protect himself and prolong life. After all, making oneself stay in a relatively soft state is to keep oneself for a longer time.

Humility could also help avoiding disasters and keeping safe. To be specific, we should avoid self-approbation, self-proclaimed, self-honored. Actually we should avoid "arrogance" and "overbearing".

Not showing off attracts attention after all; no self-approbation obtains recognition finally; no self-aggrandizement gets awards; no self-reserved obtains dignity. To preserve ourselves and live for long, we should quit arrogance and self-approbation, because that does not comply with the characteristic of Taoism, which will lead to death. Therefore, we should keep not robust and strong, and stay in a humble position. This is complying with characteristic of Taoism, and will lead to long lasting life.

Not fighting with others nor showing off could bring up an outstanding person of all universe. Lao Tzu believed the practiced commanders were not combative; those who were good at battling were not easy to get angry; those who vanquished conquerors were not prone to fight with others; those were good at using personnel were friendly and modest. All those were the indisputable morality

suitable for natural laws, which were the highest principle from of old.

And then for humans, can we not strive for fame and wealth without any advantages and disadvantages? The saint should be as humble as water, even if when he's in adverse situation, he wouldn't complain anything just because he's like the humble water, so that he could win the respect. So in the eyes of Lao Tzu, the reason why the saint was equal to Taoism and willing to be simply was that he realized the indisputable truth. The action of not striving for anything is also the natural way close to big Taoism and beneficial to all the universe without any harm. So the human's Taoism should follow the example of it to give instead of competition. But the human's Taoism is definitely the natural Taoism. So during the regimen process, the best way to immortality is a calm mind and taking things as they are.

The natural Taoism is winning a victory without striving for something, good at responding without talking, achieving goals without calling on and relieved but good at planning. The natural Taoism includes everything, it's sparse but leaving nothing behind. The action of not striving for something is not what it literally means. In the eyes of Lao Tzu, the only thing worth striving for was the grasp of natural laws, and only complying with natural laws can we strive for nothing. Why? Because only when we comply with natural laws, we can preserve ourselves better and live long. Besides, the saint understands natural laws, so he's talking gently, humble, not striving for anything, just like the water gathers together in the low-lying area. If we can do this, even if we do not strive for anything, we can achieve everything after all.

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## CONCLUSION

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All the universe changes to comply with natural laws. There are ups and downs, starts and ends, prosperity and downfalls. So the real potential and long lasting things is soft. Once they turn strong from softness, that means the downfall is approaching. What's more, natural laws are independent and striving for nothing, soft and permanent, just like the softness of water, but it runs through everywhere. So natural laws themselves are as soft as water.

Then, what should we do for regimen? The theory that "man is an integral part of nature, complying with the nature" is the embodiment of regimen thought of Taoism. Human is one of the universe, although they have their own characteristics, but they all should change in the event of "Taoism"—natural laws. This uniformity is the highest principle of human and the universe; the attributes of human and all the universe complement each other in the integral nature, and affect each other, being each other's precondition and condition for their existence.

“Taoism” does not have the directivity driven by benefits, nor the specific goals and standpoints. Its change is the change of nature. For humans, we should keep innate health as much as possible, namely health that brings us up. The universal rules of the world and breeds all things on earth. Human is just a drop in the ocean, and changes of all the universe are all included in the operation of the universe in harmony and unification. Human also has the initiative to respond in front of the nature and universe, and humans are trying to adapt to the nature, comply with natural changes, change the nature properly to make it more adaptable for human’s survival and development through their own efforts in the process of knowing the nature.

Humans should comply with natural laws, do soft things softly, and bring benefits to the universe without claiming credit for himself and become arrogant, just like water. Also, they should have a pure heart and few desires just like babies, and be content with his lot, which is the way to immortality. Natural laws are permanent, so complying with it will definitely preserve ourselves. From Taoism’s point of view, all the living things on earth are originated from the supreme universal noumenon “Taoism”. The universe itself is the biggest life, while the societies and human lives are the middle and small lives of the big life process of the universe. All the lives and inanimate objects in the natural world are an entirety with organic connection, affecting each other and inseparable as well as forming a symbiotic ecological system.

Yang (2011) believes that “the concept of regime is not only the maintenance of human’s physical form, but also human’s overall regimen includes physical form, information life and even spiritual emotion. It’s human’s integrated regimen, and overall regimen, fulfillment and

improvement of human’s life. What’s more, it’s both comprehensive and systematic maintenance, regimen, improvement and elevation of human’s body and spirit, relation between human and environment, relation between others.” Natural laws not only are reflected in human lives. It also extends its view to other living creatures with or without feelings in the natural world. If we extend our sight, we can see that anywhere with traces of Taoism organization’s activities is easy for us to feel the intense emissive power of life consciousness of Taoism.

To further elaborate this, regimen should attach more importance to the harmonious unification of three aspects of the human body and spirit, human and society, human and nature. Regimen is not only the maintenance of our mind and body, but also the coordination of the relationship between us and others, integral coordination of us and society, us and the nature. Only coordinating comprehensively, can we truly reach the regimen realm that “man is an integral part of nature” and “complying with Taoism”.

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