

*Living Authentically: Daoist Contributions to Modern  
Psychology*

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## Immortality and Psychology in Mortal Life

REGGIE PAWLE, pp. 123-140

### Abstract

Several aspects of mind in the realization of Daoist immortality are relevant to the psychology of ordinary mortals in this world. They include: the functions of mind utilized in cultivation practice, the relationship of mind to body and to the world, the understanding of mind itself, and cultural considerations regarding mind. These aspects are relevant both to mental pathology and to psychological healing in daily life. Daoist ideas of life energy, yin-yang, nature, causality, and nonaction can be successfully applied in a psychological context. They are also comparable to yoga, Buddhism, Freudian psychology, and Jungian psychology, especially with regard to adapting their key concepts to the psychotherapeutic situation while yet maintaining regard for specific cultural concerns.

Daoism is not a psychology, but a religion. There are many differences between the two fields. The activities and methods of a Daoist monastery and a mental hospital have little in common. However, a basic commonality between both is the mind. Daoism, as do all human activities, engages the human mind, and naturally does so in particular Daoist ways. Psychology focuses specifically on the study of the human mind. For psychology, interest in Daoism stems from what can be learned about the human mind by studying the practices and teachings of Daoism.

The primary theme of this chapter is the relevance of Daoist practices and theory to psychotherapy with ordinary people around the globe who are grappling with the problems and challenges of life. Within this basic theme, there are two focal areas to be considered as both are highly relevant. First: which important functions of mind are engaged in Daoist practices and how are these functions engaged? Here the focus is on the conscious mind, but other parts, specifically the unconscious and the higher mind, are also considered. Second: how is the Daoist engagement of mind activated in the context of Chinese culture? This is important because both psychology and Daoism originated in their own, unique cultural contexts. In addition to the differences between the fields of psychology and religion, there are also cultural gaps that need to be considered if psychotherapy is to benefit from a study of Daoism. Un-

derstanding the respective cultural backgrounds is a starting point to understanding the relevance of mind in Daoism for ordinary mortals.

### *Psychology and Daoist Culture*

Psychology originated in a European cultural context. Particularly important for a discussion of Daoism is the view that arose in Europe that the mind and body were different parts of a human being and that they could be treated separately. The ideas of René Descartes (1596-1650) are a prime expression of this view. He attempted to resolve a conflict between the Catholic Church and science by dividing the world into matter and mind, matter being the realm of science and mind being the realm of religion (Tarnas 1991). As the cultural strength of science increased from the time of Descartes, Freud, Jung, and others expressed the view that mind was also best studied by science, rather than being the domain of religion. This led to the birth of psychology. Thus, psychology arose out of a cultural context that came to view mind by itself, separate from body or soul, as being a specific focus of scientific study. The cultural context in which Daoism arose and has flourished is very different. In China (and in Korea and Japan) mind has not been viewed separately from the body, but rather has been viewed as part of a body-mind-spirit inseparable system. Any one part is viewed and worked with in terms of its relationships with the other parts. The Western psychological sense of mind as a focus of scientific study has been de-emphasized, so there has not been a tradition that has led to mind being a specific focus of study.

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One result of this is that mind has been cultivated through a variety of methods that Western psychology would not consider strictly psychological, such as training the body, regulating the breath, and harmonizing the flow of energy. Another result is that functions of mind have often been spoken of in either non-mental ways (meaning in terms of their related or connected body/behavior/spirit/environmental aspects) or less precise (meaning less of the specific attributes of mental functions) psychological ways. An example of the first is that in Chinese medicine emotions were connected to the internal organs and were spoken of in terms of the functioning of their respective organ. An example of the second is that emotions were not distinguished from thoughts; they were viewed as the same event, as reflected in the Chinese word *xin*, which literally means “heart-mind.”

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1 See Tarnas 1991 for an account of the history of Western thought from a Western perspective. See Yuasa 1993 for an Asian perspective.

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I used the wording “less precise psychological ways.” However, it also can be said that mental functions are seen more precisely in their connections to other mental and non-mental phenomena. The concept of *xin* asserts that emotions and thoughts function together synchronistically. A person thinking based on this idea would say that what gives the

effectiveness to the popular Western cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy (Beck, Emery, and Greenberg 2005) is this synchronistic interaction of thoughts and feelings. If you change one, you necessarily change the other. This reflects what Nisbett (2003) refers to as the Chinese tendency to see things in connection or relationship to other things, that is, to see things wholistically.

Daoism generally has reflected this Chinese cultural view of mind. Mind is often spoken of indirectly and symbolically. Symbols in Daoist texts can have a plurality of meanings as Daoist texts can express several simultaneous levels of meaning (Robinet 1993, 52). The view is that everything takes place synchronistically on different levels at the same time. Mind viewed in this way functions in complex resonance in different systems on different levels—body, spirit, environment, cosmos—and cannot be viewed as a separate entity. This is a view of mind that is fundamental to understanding mind from a Daoist perspective.

One way that practice in Daoism is described is as the cultivation of the “Daoist body.” Some aspects of this Daoist body can be understood as symbolic of mental functions. When mind is referred to directly, for example, by Zhang Boduan of the Southern School (Lu 2009), generally what is discussed are mental states and mental practices rather than functions of mind. In addition to the cultural influence, that Daoism is also a religion contributes to this orientation to mind. Daoism has a soteriological goal of immortality and is not focused on detailing the functions of mind. However, this is precisely what gives value to psychology for the study of Daoism. Daoism has the potential to provide new understandings of mind that reflect both cultural and religious considerations. Through this study psychotherapy can be broadened and thus be applicable to more diverse people worldwide.

### *Immortality Mind*

Every psychology has what I call the “root of mind.” What I am referring to as the “root” is the key function of mind, the mental function that a particular psychology focuses on as the important or pivotal function in psychotherapeutic work. Identifying the root of mind of a psychology serves both as a way to understand a psychology and to compare this psychology with other psychologies. For example, Freud asserted that the “drives,” which he said were demands made on the mind by its connection with the body that activate mind, of a person were fundamental (Freud 2001). Jung believed that the complexes

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of the unconscious, which he called “archetypes,” were fundamental to mind (Jung 1968). Other Western psychologists, such as Kohut (1971), have asserted that it is a person’s relations with others that are the pivotal function.

Turning to Asia, in the psychology of yoga consciousness itself, without any “form” such as drives, archetypes, or relationships, is viewed as the critical factor of mind (Rao 2008). In the psychology of Buddhism it is the self, or the “ego” in modern psychology terminology, that is focused on as the fundamental factor in mind (Pawle 2003; 2009).

What Daoism focuses on as the root of mind is what is cultivated in order to realize its goal of immortality. This is stated variously as the life-force, the life impulse, or the vital principle within a person. Radically Daoism asserts that if ordinary mortals cultivate their inherent life-force to the extent that life completely permeates a person's body-mind, certainly longevity and maybe even immortality is possible. A person's life-force is seen as the key to their health—mind, body, and spirit. Thus, the key to the psychology of mortal life from a Daoist perspective is the life-force that is inherent in every human being.

Immortality seems in many ways of little or no relevance to the masses of people around the globe living ordinary mortal life. It even seems absurd to spend much time with it. How many immortals has the average person met? Everyday daily life, with its challenges, sufferings, and happiness, is the concern of most people. Fundamentally psychology, despite its countless volumes of illegible texts, is oriented to this concern. Daoism also, to have a place in the world, must be relevant to these concerns of mortal life.

One approach in psychotherapy to working with an ordinary person's concerns is to focus on how a person can improve their mental functioning from ordinary to more positive functioning. This is juxtaposed with an approach that focuses on the below ordinary functioning of a person and tries to improve their functioning to ordinary. Daoism, with its goal of immortality, is implicitly a very positive psychology. It is saying, "To deal with your life concerns, what you need to do is to nurture the life-force within you. Doing so, you can live better and longer, and maybe you don't even need to die."

This Daoist focus on life also distinguishes it from the India-originated yoga and Buddhist practices. Both of these assert that a person's desire to live is an attachment that must be let go of in order to realize their goal. Daoism, however, asserts that letting go of the attachment to life is not necessary. Rather what is needed to harmonize this attachment with the life-force that permeates the universe.

The history of Daoism is full of discussions about whether immortality is universally attainable or only the fate of a select few (Penny 2000, 123). For ordinary mortals what is important is not whether immortality actually is a possibility, but rather how in this present condition, in this present life, to live

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healthily. Immortals embody that the more a person harmonizes their life with their life-force, with the root of their mind, the healthier their life will be.

How are those who have become immortal described? While there are many attributes ascribed to Immortals, for ordinary mortals what is most relevant is that Immortals are described as humans who are free of that which bonds the ordinary person. They are fully alive, full of light, humor, and energy. Schipper describes them as "liberated elves" (1993, 166). Kohn writes they are in a "state of radiance and surging activity" (2009a, 12). Particularly relevant, they are truly happy and at peace. How Immortals embody this happiness is the Daoist cultivation practice of life and is a most positive psychology. For ordinary mortals how this is done is most relevant.

Daoist Immortals provide ordinary mortals with a vision of mental health and the way to it. Basic to this vision is an expression of the Chinese cultural view that everything is interconnected. Mind is non-separable from body, spirit, and the cosmos. In Daoism the life-force within each of us is seen as both the same life-force in all of us and that which interconnects the world. The source and the substance of this life-force is said to be Dao, that which is nameless and beyond human comprehension. Dao appears in the world as “the natural way of things” (Wong 1997, 23). The way to mental health is to model oneself on Dao and how it appears in the world through the rhythms of nature.

Daoists look to nature for patterns and correspondences, to the patterns of the wind and the water, to the patterns and movements of the stars, to time in its cycles of days and seasons, to the flow of energy, and then find these same patterns and flows replicated within their own body and mind. Harmonizing with these patterns and flows, internal and external, is the beginning of Daoist cultivation practice and also the beginning of psychological health.

The basic way that mind functions according to Dao can be understood according to the idea of yin-yang. Originally yin meant the shady side of the slope of a hill and yang meant the sunny side of the slope (Kaptchuk 2000). Yin is associated with darkness and passivity, while yang is associated with light and activity. A mountain always has both, but which side is yin or yang depends on the relationship of the mountain with the sun. This relationship is always changing and moving. This movement is cyclical, orderly, rhythmical, and not vague. In any moment a person using their everyday mind can determine what of the mountain is yin and what is yang.

Movement according to yin-yang is how mind in Daoism is understood to operate. This movement is the energy of nature and the life-force, called *qi*, in mind. The process of mind functions in yin-yang polarities. Basic expressions of this functioning are sunny (light, positive) and shadow (dark, negative) both being part of mind, so the activity of mind is seen as a play of non-conscious and conscious. Pathology is when the polarities are split, health is when they

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are integrated. Carl Jung viewed mind functioning as polarities and found support for this understanding in yin-yang (Clarke 1994).

Before I wrote that the psychology of Daoism is a positive psychology. While Daoism is positive oriented, it also strongly asserts that mind and life are a mixture and balance of opposing forces. From a Daoist perspective, Western positive psychology often comes across as unbalanced, as if it is trying to deny negative experience. While the Daoist orientation is positive, its means are utilizing both positive and negative. In the yin-yang sense Daoism is more an integral psychology than it is a positive psychology.

### *Mental and Ego Functioning*

The way that the process of mind functions as yin-yang is through resonance, a basic Chinese medicine idea (Kaptchuk 2000). Resonance is a type of causality (how events occur) that is based in the idea of yin-yang. Resonance means that causality occurs within a system by

evoking, by one part evoking a similar part in the other. One aspect of yin-yang is that in each yin, there is a little bit of yang, and vice versa. So yin evokes the yin in yang and this is how a system functions. This evoking occurs through resonance, when the yin resonates with the yin within yang and vice versa. This provides people with an easy way to understand their mental experience and is very helpful in certain situations. For example, I only respond to events according to my psychological character. When I get angry, it is because something outside of me has occurred that stimulates the part within me that corresponds to the outside event. This part within me is evoked from the non-conscious (both higher and lower) mind through correspondence into the conscious mind. If there is no such part within me, I will respond differently. Somebody else may very well respond to the situation quite differently from my response. Thus, if I want to change my mental experience, I need to change those related parts within myself. This is what I refer to as Daoist correspondence psychology.

Basic to this functioning of mind is harmonizing mind with the process of nature. Particularly important is the role of the ego, a Western psychological term. The ego has three important mental functions: (1) conscious identity, (2) subjective sense, and (3) executive or coordinator of mind. All of these functions need to not intervene with the patterns and flow of nature, but rather allow the patterns of life to manifest naturally. From a Daoist perspective this is a fundamental psychological challenge for all human beings and is the first step to mental health.

This functioning of the ego is spoken of as “nonaction” (*wuwei*) in the *Daode jing*. The ego in Daoism is more like a liaison than an executive. Through nonaction the ego harmonizes with Dao so that the natural patterns and flows

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of mind are manifested. In the *Daode jing* it is written, “By acting without action, all things will be in order” (1963, 103). Rather than the ego being a doer, when it is nonactive and becomes an empty center of mind, then the original movement of the life-force is allowed and mind as whole becomes alive with *qi*, the mysterious, invisible life-force that pervades all things. Mind becomes tranquil, thereby allowing harmonization with, blending with, adjusting to, being the patterns of nature. *Qi* links all parts of mind and body and its cultivation for immortality is where Daoist practice develops its uniqueness.

This nonactive conscious mind can be easily experienced in its basic form if a person sits quietly, focuses on their breathing, and allows the conscious mind to be awareness only without thoughts. What is required is the intention to do this. If a person does this, then mind is “brought into order” naturally, using an East Asian and a Daoist expression.<sup>2</sup> In other words, mind settles down, using the corresponding American expression. It is well known in many forms of meditation, although I rarely see this addressed in psychology, if the conscious mind concentrates on one thing, thinking slows down and can even stop.<sup>3</sup> If a therapist explains this to people and encourages them to practice it, a relaxation of mind and body occurs naturally. In Daoism this is referred to as the beginning of practice, in which the conscious mind is active. This action leads to nonaction in its fulfillment. Nonaction here is described as the completely “unmoving mind,” a mental state of deep calm that is preparatory to embodying Dao (Lu 2009, 82).

Key to the conscious mind functioning as balancer and liaison is volition. Daoist cultivation does not occur without active volition. Volition is a person's will, the focusing of their intention on an object. How volition functions is most important. People can use volition as an independent force that tries to strongly and forcefully make something happen. A second use is utilizing volition in tandem with other parts of the mind and body. Volition in Daoism is used in this second way, as a gentle guide, a function that helps mind adjust to Dao.

This use of volition has a cultural context. A clear explanation of this context is found in Kuriyama (2002, 10-11), where he compares drawings of the body, one by the Chinese Hua Shou (dat. 1341), the other by the Belgian Vesalius (dat. 1543). It is easy to see the different use of volition. The drawing by Vesalius shows clearly the muscles of the body. Muscles can be controlled directly by volition, as in I can control when my hand opens and closes. The drawing by Hua Shou, however, shows the meridians, the intersections of the passageways of *qi* in the body. These meridians cannot be controlled directly

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2 This expression can be found often in Daoist writings, as in the previous *Daode jing* quote. I have also noticed how my Japanese students repeatedly describe their experience of meditation as having brought their "mind into order."

3 For examples, see Gunaratana (2002, 70) and Lu (2009, 82).

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like muscles. Rather, they can only be influenced through having a healthy body-mind and cooperating with the flow of *qi*, gently directing its flow in the desired ways that are inherently natural.

Volition in Daoism, while within this cultural context, has its own utilization. One use is as a mental guide for the flow of *qi* in the bodymind. In this guiding intention is coordinated with breath. Breath is *qi* or pure matter energy (Schipper 1993, 34). It is through breath that the conscious mind discovers *qi* and then is able to use gentle volition to guide *qi* through the bodymind, thereby integrating a person with the energies of the cosmos. For those who wish to de-stress, Daoist breathing practice is highly recommended. Stress is one of the primary symptoms of psychological imbalance in Chinese medicine (Hammer 1990, 13) and breath is a basic antidote.

Intention is also used in Daoist cultivation in coordination with imagination as visualization. This is the conscious use of visualizing images with the purpose of transforming mind. Kohn defines Daoist visualization as "the mental focus on specific scene or sequence of events, such as energy flows, deities, cosmic patterns, saints' lives, or potential future events" (2009a, 140). Visualization opens the conscious mind to more subtle aspects, thereby allowing the corresponding energies of the non-conscious mind to manifest. Visualization is part of the beginning of Daoist cultivation, but the goal is to surpass this activity (Schipper 1993).

In utilizing intention and imagination in this way, another conscious mind function that is coordinated with these two is attention. This is a basic element in Daoist practice (Schipper 1993) and is cultivated while correspondingly the analytical or thinking function of mind is

intentionally not cultivated. Attention is the focus of the conscious mind on an object. Concentration is sustaining attention to this object over time. The ability to concentrate is necessary for Daoist practices such as visualization and breathing, so it must be developed. Doing so requires active volition. The more a person is interested in the object of attention, the easier it is. However, there are always periods when boredom or other factors take over the mind. And these times are integral to developing concentration ability. The key to attention development is sustaining attention when a person has lost interest in the object. At such times the conscious mind is full of thoughts with corresponding visuals and emotions that have nothing to do with the intended object. If the practitioner repeatedly shifts their attention from this mental content back to the intended object, then concentration ability develops. Additionally, a lack of thinking and a calmness of mind will also develop.

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### *Thinking and the Senses*

While the Daoist adept is trained to sustain attention, simultaneously they are also trained to let go of thinking and discrimination. This is another basic way that the conscious mind is used in Daoist cultivation. The *Zhuangzi* emphasizes that mind tends to analyze, to discriminate, to make judgments, all of which if engaged too much will tangle a person up and result in becoming lost in a maze of desires and complications. Such a person tends to over-value their sensory experience and not know their true nature (see Watson 2003).

A beginning step to being healthy in the conscious mind is to let go of the thinking activity. Freedom from the constraint of conceptual thinking is what Laozi called “the thaw” (Schipper 1993, 201). Zhuangzi called this the “fasting of the heart-mind” (Watson 2003, 53), describing an emptying of the mind of all analytical thought and discrimination while learning to listen to the inner spirit rather than the outer senses. This is also a “double oblivion (*ji-anwang*),” letting go of mental projections that are believed to be reality and letting go of one’s attachment to the functions of the conscious mind (Kohn 2009b, 12; 2010). The practice of forgetting the conscious mind is “sitting in oblivion,” in which everything is put outside oneself and then a person is “able to enter where there is no life and no death” (Watson 1964, 79).

This approach to the thinking mind, however, does not deny a role for thinking in daily life. Humans need to be able to understand how Dao works and be able to function on the basis of this understanding. In Daoist practice this is what Kohn refers to as “cosmological reorientation” (Kohn 2009b, 13-17). Part of the beginning of Daoist practice is studying ideas of the self and world and how these are part of the larger rhythms of nature. Practitioners “learn to appreciate the cosmological patterns of the universe and see the world in terms of interrelated patterns, calendar cycles, complex numerologies, and intricate networks of abstract symbols” (Kohn 2009b, 13). This is part of aligning and adjusting one’s identity to being a process rather than being a solid entity.

The style of thinking that is utilized in this Daoist study is an expression of the view that mind functions according to correspondences. Daoist study uses “correlative thinking” (Kohn 2009b, 14), which is the repetition of a simple pattern in different cases. Basic to the simple

pattern used is the relationship or the association of the parts of the pattern. To think in this way is to look for patterns by examining the correspondences of different parts. My view is that correspondence thinking is the style of the unconscious. The unconscious is not rational or conceptual, but instead functions on the basis of one thing resonating with another thing. Dreams, for example, are only understandable in their associations, what an image seems like, what an image resembles.

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The relevance of correspondence thinking for Daoism to psychology is that by engaging correlative thinking, the practitioner is training their conscious mind to align with the non-conscious parts of mind. This leads mind to be harmonious with the patterns of nature and leads to health. If a person stays only within conceptual thinking, it will be impossible for them to realize Dao. Thus, psychotherapy needs to encourage and facilitate associative thinking. This has been a part of Western psychology since Freud pioneered “free association” (saying whatever spontaneously comes to one’s mind), so it is not unique to Daoism. It is, however, a foundational part of a correspondence psychology.

### *Pattern of Mind*

What, then, is the basic pattern of mind that many consider a fundamental issue in psychology? More often referred to as the “structure of mind,” this “gives an individual his or her distinctive shape, governing the regularity of behavior, events, and relationships within an individual life” (Greenberg and Mitchell 1983, 19). In the context of the correspondence psychology of Daoism, pattern is a more appropriate term than structure. This issue is very important for clinical work as a therapist’s understanding of mind is a fundamental part of how they observe, interpret, interact, and work with their client. When different views on the pattern of mind are compared, answers to basic psychotherapeutic questions such as what is pathology and what is healing emerge.

Often the basic pattern or structure of mind is viewed in three parts. Parts are distinguished from functions in that parts are areas or fields of mind within which specific functions, like attention and volition, are active. Freud asserted that the basic structure of mind was superego, ego, and id. Jung saw mind as conscious mind, personal unconscious, and collective unconscious. In yoga the mind is viewed as supraconscious, conscious, and subconscious (Vishnudevananda 1960). In Yogacara Buddhism the parts of mind are the six senses, the thinking mind, and the storehouse unconscious (Kochumuttom 1982).

To understand a Daoist pattern of mind, mind should be approached through the principle of correspondence. Mind is patterned the same way as is the body as is the world as is the universe. The basic pattern of the universe is expressed in *Daode jing* 42 (Chan 1963), where it is written that from Dao came the One (unity of the universe), which produced the Two (yin and yang), which produced the Three (interaction of yin and yang), which then produced the myriad beings (the world). In Chinese cosmology, which Daoism subscribes to, this interaction of yin

and yang is manifests in continuously moving energetic cycles that have five phases, which are rising yang, peak yang, yin-yang in bal-

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ance, rising yin, and peak yin. These are the “five prime movers” in the world (Saso 2000, 212). In the human body they are associated with five storage organs (yin) and five processing organs (yang), each of which has many correspondences that include emotions and the senses (see Kohn 2008). The pattern that is expressed here is that the Three form the basic way of functioning and this way moves in five basic phases.

One way that this basic pattern is applied in Daoism is in internal or spiritual alchemy cultivation practice (*neidan*). There are many systems of *neidan* and the details vary from system to system. For example, the most important points in *neidan* are the three cinnabar or elixir fields (*dantian*) (Neswald 2009). However, the specific location of these elixir fields varies according to different systems of practice (Komjathy 2009).

In *neidan* the three (interaction of yin and yang) is consistently represented as the number “3” being the three principles of life (primordial breath, original spirit, and vital essence), while the number “5” is used for the five movers or phases (Saso 2000). These three principles of life are each associated with one of the three elixir fields. Correlated to mind the three elixir fields express basic parts of mind and the five phases express basic functions of mind. The terms “fields,” “phases,” and “movers” are good ways to describe mind from a Daoist perspective, as they express the parts and functions of mind being processes rather than solid entities.

It is in the elixir fields that the immortal elixir forms and is nourished by Daoist adepts. The lower field is gender specific (Valussi 2009). It is the “Essence Chamber,” the storage center of *qi* in the body. In men it is generally found in the abdominal region and is referred to as the “Ocean of *Qi*.” In women the “lower” center is found in the *Qi* Cavity, which is between the breasts. The middle elixir field is in the heart region and it houses original spirit (*shen*) (Saso 2000). The upper elixir field is in the head region and it houses primordial breath (also called Taiji — Great Ultimate — or *hundun* -- Primordial Chaos; see Saso 2000).

The lower field corresponds to the Daoist lower mind in psychological terminology. This is the storage part of mind, out of conscious awareness, yin in nature, and shadowy. Primarily it stores “essence” (*jing*), a concentrated form of *qi* that is primal energy and is essential to the activity of all life. Essence in its most concrete form appears as sexual energy, in a man as seminal essence and in a woman as menstrual blood (Kohn 2008). This is the instinctual part of mind in a very generative sense, for it is from here that the primal life force appears in a form that fuels the bodymind. It is provocative that the lower mind is viewed as having gender differences, a view that receives little attention in psychology.

The lower field also houses what is referred to in Daoism as destiny (*xingming*), meaning a person’s biological and material elements. Psychologically this corresponds to a person’s basic character constitution, that which makes a

person who they are in life (Kohn 2009a). This is the central point around which all of the body is organized (Schipper 1993), so correspondingly it is also the center of gravity of mind. When destiny or the lower mind is cultivated, the result is a “full stomach” (Lu 2009, 82), meaning that a person’s foundation in the world becomes firm and fills with recovered primordial *qi*.

The middle field corresponds to the Daoist middle mind. It is where *qi* recovered from essence is refined into original spirit (*shen*). Its general location at the heart indicates a connection to the heart-mind (*xin*), a person’s conscious mind. In the Heavenly Master sect the symbol of spirit is the “Heavenly Worthy of Numinous Treasure” (*lingbao*) who stands for the liaison spirit between heaven and earth. “The term *ling* refers to half of a talisman kept in the heavens while *bao* indicates the precious half buried in the earth” (Saso 2000, 196). This corresponds to the liaison function of the conscious mind.

In its liaison function, in the words of Zhang Boduan, the conscious mind needs to become “empty mind” in order to realize one’s true, original nature (Lu 2009). Empty mind is non-active mind. The healthy functioning of conscious mind, rather than being either yin or yang, is that of inner clarity and utmost emptiness. If all thoughts and ideas are ceased (the “fasting of the heart-mind”) and a deeply peaceful mind is established, then it is possible for the true inner nature of consciousness to be revealed as spirit. Psychologically inner nature corresponds to a person’s identity. This asserts that there is a level of identity hidden deep within consciousness that is out of ordinary awareness and is not easily accessed by ordinary conscious mind activity. Rather than using the senses and the intellect, to realize one’s identity the conscious mind needs to open to and harmonize with the non-conscious mind.

The upper elixir field corresponds to the upper mind in Daoism. This is the field of Dao, described variously as emptiness, pure immortal spirit, primordial chaos (*hundun*), pure yang spirit (*yangshen*), and light energy. It is personified in the “Heavenly Worthy of Primordial Beginning,” who stands as a symbol for primordial breath, the basic life-giving substance within the bodymind (Saso 2000, 196). This is the field where the original spirit of a person becomes concentrated after the conscious mind is purified and stilled. Original spirit is then transformed into pure immortal spirit.

Psychologically this field corresponds to the higher functions of mind, aspects of mind that transpersonal psychology attempts to explore and integrate into psychology. This part of mind involves the higher functions of human beings. These include spiritual aspects and higher yang energies, but they also involve ordinary functions of the conscious mind that need to be oriented to this higher mind. Included in this orientation are intention, self-reflection, cultivation of virtue, conscience, self-transformation, awareness of potentials, and benevolence. These qualities are referred to as aspects of a person’s noncorporeal or spirit soul (*hun*) (Kaptchuk 2000).

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### *Comparative Perspectives*

Having examined the Daoist pattern of mind, we can now begin to compare it with the understanding of the mind in other systems, as outlined in the chart below. Part 1 in Daoism shows the upper level of mind, functioning as a higher energetic level of the life force and

comparable to the superego in Freud and the conscious mind in Jung. This Daoist upper mind includes possibilities for mind and mental health that are not part of either the Freudian or Jungian systems. It reflects a Daoist understanding of person quite different from Western conceptualizations.

Part 2 shows a level of mind that serves as an intermediary function (except in the Jungian system where the emphasis is on the interaction of conscious/unconscious), but with some variation as to what and how it mediates. In Freud, it mediates between social concerns and the drives; in Yogacara Buddhism, it mediates between the unconscious and the senses; in yoga, the focus is more on the intellectual and rational functions, which need to be trained so the higher mind can function. All this stands in contrast to the Daoist emphasis on the middle mind as nonaction, so mind can conduct *qi* or the life-force.

Part 3 shows how all these systems contain similarities in the lower mind. However, the Daoist emphasis on life force appears in the generative function of the lower mind, the Ocean of *Qi* and the Cavity of *Qi*, which serves a person's health in daily life. The idea of destiny (one's basic character) can be seen in particular to have similarities with the Jungian archetypes, although more on a personal level rather than a collective level.

	<b>Freud</b>	<b>Jung</b>	<b>Yoga</b>	<b>Yogacara</b>	<b>Neidan</b>
<b>Part 1</b>	Superego = Social concerns, Values	Conscious Mind = eEo	Supraconscious Mind = Intuition, Higher faculties	Six senses	Primordial <i>qi</i> , Yang, Light, Chaos
<b>Part 2</b>	Ego = Executive; Identity Subjectivity	Personal unconscious = Personal Archetypes	Conscious mind = Intellect, Rational	Manas = Thinking, Reified self	Conscious = Liaison - Spirit & Heart-mind
<b>Part 3</b>	Id = Drives, Repression	Collective Unconscious = Collective Archetypes	Subconscious Mind = Instincts, Emotions	Alayavijnana = Stores seeds, origin of mind states	Ocean/Cavity of <i>Qi</i> = yin, dark, essence, <i>qi</i> , destiny, assimilation
<b>Root</b>	Drives	Archetypes	Consciousness	Self / Ego	Life force

A comparison of mental patterning as based on this chart that can be fruitfully applied in psychotherapy concerns the understanding of psychological

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pathology and psychological healing. How a psychotherapist diagnoses and what they recommend for healing is most relevant to all therapy clients. The Daoist system views pathology as interference with the way of nature and healing as the cultivation of the life-force.

There are many possible applications of the Daoist cultivation practices of life and immortality in psychotherapy with ordinary mortals around the globe.

A simple approach to applying Daoist practices to everyday mind is to focus on three basic practices, that of regulation of the body, breath, and mind. The three are interrelated and if they are cultivated together, the result is asserted to be longevity and supreme happiness (Watson 2003). Important to regulation of the body are body postures, exercises, and diet. Through regulating breath, harmonization of mind with body and spirit and the conducting of *qi* (primal energy) are facilitated. Mind is regulated through tranquilization, the ways of non-intervention, and concentration.

Regulation in Daoism expresses some basic ideas for psychotherapy. The first is that healing begins with action by the conscious mind. The ordinary mind tends to be active, so the approach here is that the first step is to use that activity tendency rather than to try to willfully change it to nonaction. A second idea is that people themselves need to do something. They will not heal if they take a passive approach, such as simply taking medication. A third idea is that once a person has brought healthy ordinary functioning to their mind, then they need to let go of control and become nonactive. Full healing only occurs through conscious mind functioning as a liaison, so a person needs to learn to go with the flow of nature.

Mind, breath, and body are one in the Daoist way. A person needs to pay attention to their body and listen to it. This is somatic psychotherapy. Usually the conscious mind is the last part of mind to feel various influences. For example, the symptoms of stress or anger appear in the body often before the person is aware they are stressed or angry. Daoism with its internal emphasis and bodily practices greatly enhances a person's internal sensitivity.

Mind needs to be stable and tranquil before Daoist cultivation can precede. How this is accomplished is directly relevant to everyday mind. One of the primary ways that the Daoist approach to the thinking is relevant to everyday life is to aid people to let go of their obsessions. The Daoist adept who sits in oblivion is not mentally nonfunctional, but rather has reordered and transformed the functions of mind through putting priority on awareness and engagement in the present. When a person "acts in oblivion," a term I am using here in association with "sitting in oblivion," in daily life, they are whole body and mind engaged in awareness of the present, in the immediacy of experience, with attention free to be utilized as is appropriate for the situation. Attention to experience directs a person to life as it is, which in Daoism is said to be where true spontaneity arises (Schipper 1993).

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Attention to experience is an ordinary mental function. However, in Daoism attention is cultivated and raised to higher levels of functioning. This occurs through learning to concentrate, by sustaining attention through learning to shift attention back to the object of concentration. I often recommend attention-shifting to clients, especially those with attention deficit hyperactivity problems. In the case of daily life it means returning one's attention to one's activity in the moment. If a person engages attention-shifting repetitively, my clients report this helps both their task efficiency and their calmness of mind. One Japanese word for neurosis is

*toraware*, which literally means “prisoner” or “to be caught.” This is the idea that the cause of neurosis is a person’s attention being “caught” by something. They then go around and around in their thinking mind obsessing about what they are caught by, thereby becoming a prisoner within their own mind. The cultivation of concentration is based on the idea that basic to mental health is free attention, attention that functions as needed according to the situation.

Letting go of thinking also has implications for cognitive-behavioral psychotherapy. This therapy focuses on re-structuring a person’s thinking habits and self beliefs from unhealthy to healthy. Daoist ideas have been utilized in trying to develop a Daoist cognitive-behavioral therapy approach (Tseng, Chang, and Nishizono 2005). While there is value in this type of work, from a Daoist point of view there are also limitations and cautions. Cognitive behavioral therapy focuses on replacing negative with positive habits, which sometimes creates a struggle within the person, a kind of dualistic approach. Daoism is a non-dualistic approach to mind and focuses more on thinking that reflects cognition of experience as it is. Healing comes from reordering and then transforming the functions of mind. Thus, reprioritize: emphasize attention, de-emphasize thinking, and then change the quality of each. Most importantly, Daoism, with its focus on the long term (long life and immortality) asserts that full healing comes only in transcending one’s cognitive mind. Working within thinking patterns is a first step in healing. Full health cannot occur by just working within the conscious mind.

One of my Asian clients attended a Western drug detoxification center at which the therapy was based on cognitive-behavioral work. His comments were that while it was extremely helpful in getting him off drugs, it was also “too Western,” limited in depth, too rational, hard for daily life, and he was much relieved by a more Daoist approach. Tseng (“Integration and Application for Therapy” in Tseng, Chang, and Nishizono 2005, 271) writes similarly, stating that most Western therapies value rational and cognitive approaches to understanding problems and how to deal with them, while most Eastern therapies, including Daoist approaches, stress the importance of actual experience without cognitive understanding.

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The movement of energy in life-sustaining ways is basic to Daoist cultivation. One aspect of energy cultivation that is highly useful for ordinary people is the *neidan* reversal cultivation or backward-flowing method. Commonly people direct their energy down the front of their body and outward toward sensory desired objects. Daoism asserts that this results in a gradual wasting of the life force until it is used up. Those seeking immortality cultivate the reversal of this movement. Instead of throwing energy out of and off oneself, they seek to retain it within and circulate it up the back of the body to the head. In this way energy begins to flow harmoniously within a person and longer life is possible. This is specifically applicable to daily life by identifying one’s habits, both physically and mentally, that throw off energy rather than circulate it. A person then replaces these unhealthy habits by repeating new habits in the Daoist way of mind.

*Conclusion*

Daoist immortality can be sensed and lived by ordinary mortals through the cultivation of their inherent life-force. This living is not eternally focused, but rather is focused on transforming body-mind in the present life. If the average person intuits and trusts their life-force, and lives according to the forms and patterns of their life-force, then their body-mind will be transformed in healthy ways. The relevance of immortality is in life, in the cultivation of the primal life force that is pulsing at the root of each and every living being. This is where Daoist immortality is the most applicable to the everyday mind of the ordinary mortal. Those who are suffering are trapped within their suffering experience. Daoist practices with the Daoist understanding of mind provide a way for ordinary mortals to transform their suffering into health and happiness. I have discussed are both practical applications for the client in psychotherapy as well as a theoretical view for the psychotherapist to work with the client. This has been an attempt at participating in the development of a psychology with Daoism. Further developing of this psychology will broaden the scope and effectiveness of psychotherapy in the world today.

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