

Daoist Seeds of Contemplation¹ from an Asian Christian Perspective

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Prologue: Contemplation

'Contemplation is, above all,
awareness of the reality of the Source.' (T. Merton)²

Contemplation
is wonder
and wander!

Contemplation is coming Home,
'whose center is everywhere
and whose circumference is nowhere.'

I. Dao (Way)/Heaven

Dao/Heaven is the Spring of life and gi (vital energy),
and of compassion and wisdom.
'It is like a deep spring that never dries.' (Cf. *Dao De Jing* 4)³

'The highest good is like water.
It benefits all things.
It seems quite content with the [lower] places that people disdain.' (*Dao De Jing* 8)

Dao is like compassionate water.
It flows throughout the land,
and nurtures all creatures;
yet itself hardly puts on airs. (Cf. *Dao De Jing* 8.)

'Dao, that can be talked about, is not the real Dao.' (*Dao De Jing* 1)
Reach Dao beyond Dao.⁴
Dao is the Mystery.⁵

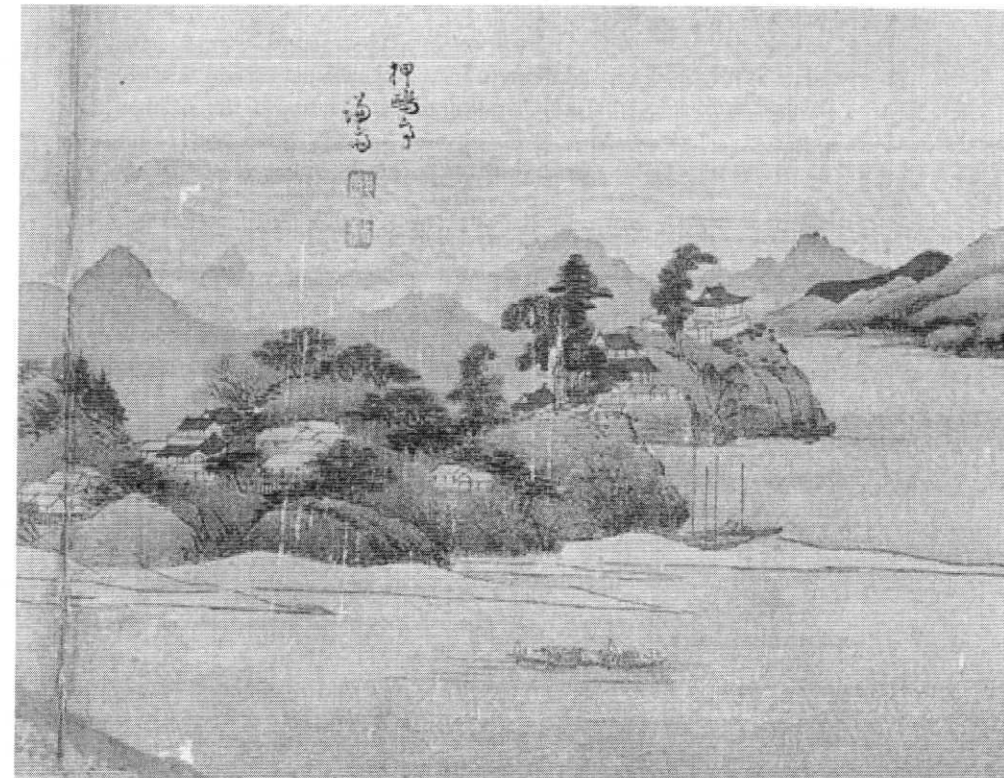
2. Earth and Humans

Earth and heaven are the contemplation hall.
We are invited to contemplate here.

Heaven embraces the earth,
and the earth, in turn, does the human beings.

Jeong Seon's *Abgujeong* (a village name in Korea) depicts Daoist view of heaven, earth and humans.⁶

Picture: *Abgujeong* by Jeong Seon (1676-1759), a Korean painter.

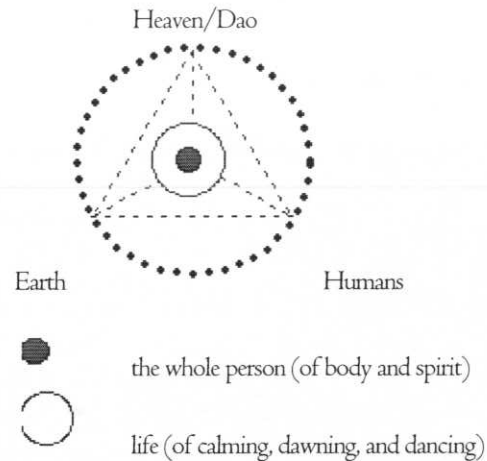


In the lower middle part of the picture are two persons in a small boat.

'Fishes are born in water
humans are born in Dao.
Fishes forget one another in water,
humans forget one another in the arts of Dao.' (*Chuang Tzu* 6.11)

The contemplative is on the way
to the aulim (harmony)⁸ with Heaven/Dao⁹, earth/nature, and humans.

Aulim (harmony) with Heaven-earth-humans



3. The Whole Person

The whole person
participates in contemplation,
by tuning body, breathing, and spirit (mind-heart)¹⁰

Walk and breathe
in a refreshing forest.

Breathe softly and peacefully like an infant.
'Can you, when concentrating your breath,
make it soft like that of an infant?' (*Dao De Jing* 10)

'The breathing of the true man comes (even) from his heels.'¹¹
(*Chuang Tzu* 6.2)

'True human's mind-heart is free from all thought and desire.
His/her face looks solitary.
His/her forehead seems wide.
His/her loneliness is like autumn.
His/her warmth is like spring.
His/her joy and anger flow like the four seasons.
He/she is in aulim (harmony) with all.
So nobody knows the limit of his/her mind-heart and act.' (*Chuang Tzu* 6.3)

4. Contemplative Life

Contemplative life has three dimensions of calming, dawning and dancing. They form an interconnected organic whole.

Calming-dawning-dancing could be compared to:

- 1) Christian purification, illumination, and union/aulim with God,
- 2) Buddhist morality, wisdom, and meditation (which is the summary of Buddha's Eightfold Path), and
- 3) Neo-Confucian practice, study, and dwelling in piety.

5. Calming and Dawning

Walk and breathe in a sunny forest.
Be calm to contemplate.
Purify, empty, and free your body and spirit (mind-heart) from all preoccupations.
(Cf. *Chuang Tzu* 4.2)

Sit and forget! Go beyond body and senses,
and beyond small knowledges.
Forget in the mysterious darkness.
Eventually it is *dawning* with illumination or enlightenment.
Realize the aulim with Heaven-earth-humans. (Cf. *Chuang Tzu* 6: 8, 14)

6. Dancing

'At any rate the Lord plays and diverts Himself in the garden of His creation. . . For the world and time are the dance of the Lord in emptiness. The silence of the spheres is the music of a wedding feast. . . Yet the fact remains that we are invited to forget ourselves on purpose, cast our awful solemnity to the winds and join in the *general [cosmic] dance*.'
(T. Merton)¹²

'The man in whom Dao acts without impediment does not bother with his own interests.'¹³

It is not a cosmic dance
until all beings dance together.
Bring compassion and relief goods to Haiti
to heal the land and revive the people in the disaster by earthquakes.
Live again, dance again!
Dance the life of compassion-wisdom-peace,
Live the dance of faith-hope-love!

Epilogue: 'A Frog in a Well.'

Contemplation is a never-ending story, or an infinite journey.

'How can you talk about the sea with a frog in a well? It is confined to the limits of the hole.
How can you talk about ice with an insect of the summer? It does not know anything
beyond its own season, summer.' (*Chuang Tzu*, 17.1)¹⁴

Notes

1. *Daoist Seeds of Contemplation* updates and develops T. Merton's *New Seeds of Contemplation*.
2. Thomas Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, p. 1.
3. *Dao De Jing* (or *Lao Tzu*) along with *Chuang Tzu* is the foundation for Daoist philosophy and spirituality. All quotations from *Dao De Jing* and *Chuang Tzu* are translated (freely) by myself.
4. Eckhart mentioned 'God beyond God, Godhead.'
5. 'Dao is the mystery upon mystery' (*Dao De Jing*). 'God is the Absolute Mystery' (K. Rahner, *Spirit in the World*, Herder and Herder, 1968; *Heaveners of the Word*, Herder & Herder, 1969).
6. 'Heaven → earth → humans.' This is the creation/evolution story. This story is told by Big Bang theory, *Genesis* 1:1-2:4 in *The Bible*, by Zhou Dunyi (1017-1073, Neo-Confucian philosopher) in his *Taiji Tushuo* (Explanations of the Diagram of the Supreme Ultimate), by Pierre Teilhard de Chardin (1881-1955, philosopher, theologian, scientist), and by Hans Kung and others. See H. Kung, *The Beginning of All Things*, Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing, 2007.
7. Cf. Chuang Tzu, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, p. 65: 'Man is born in Dao.'
8. Aulim (harmony, getting along, intimate and beautiful relation) is a Korean word. It is a core concept of Korean and East Asian spirituality.

From a Korean Christian perspective, the Christian Trinity is the aulim (harmony, dance or *perichoresis*) of 1) God the Father, the Creator, 2) Jesus Christ Son of God, the Savior, and 3) the Holy Spirit, the Sanctifier. In Jesus Christ, humanity and divinity are in dynamic aulim like the tango.

9. Dao (Way) is the key word in Daoism. Dao could be compared to the Ultimate Reality like Logos, Li (Principle), Heaven, or God.

10. Tuning body-breathing-spirit is the triad in Daoist discipline. It is also found in Raja Yoga. The Christian Hesychasm has developed the triad to some extent.

11. It means breathing deeply. *Chuang Tzu* (15.1) also talks about deep breathing.

12. T. Merton, *New Seeds of Contemplation*, pp. 296-7.

13. Chuang Tzu, *The Way of Chuang Tzu*, p. 91. Cf. Daoists practice *Tai Chi Chuan*, a peacefully and beautifully moving/dancing contemplation. Dao acts in it.

14. Cf. op. cit., pp. 84-86: 'Autumn Floods.'

Select Bibliography

Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*.

Chuang Tzu, *The Way of Chuang Tzu* translated and edited by Thomas Merton, New York: New Directions, 1965.

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