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Daoism and Peacebuilding

Toward an Agenda for Research and Practice¹

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There are profound yet underexplored connections between Daoism and peacebuilding. The yin-yang symbol represents the dynamic unity of distinct yet interrelated forces; the borders between yin and yang are fluid and, at certain points in cycles of energy, interchangeable.² This is a recognition of difference within a broader understanding of complementarity. Yin-yang theory recognizes the inevitability of change and the need for skillful management and transformation of conflicts. Peace is a key concept in Daoist philosophy—not as static harmony but as vibrant and living balance—and the Daoist classics have much to say about warfare, both in principle and in practice.

There are some striking similarities and comparisons between the rich tradition of Daoist practices, philosophy, political theory, and literature and applications in the field of peacebuilding as developed in the context of peace studies and international relations in Western academia

¹ Many thanks for help and suggestions to my taiji teacher, Keith Lorenz; to Professor John Rudy; and to my dear friends and teachers, Mark Raudva and Caroline Ross. Thanks also to Michael Woods and Norman Ware for help with manuscript copyediting.

² The ultimate reality of Dao is one, but there is little we can know or say about this; phenomenal reality begins with dualism (*taiji*—the concept) and proceeds toward multiplicity or the ten thousand things (*Daode jing* 1, 42).

and by aid agencies (nongovernmental organizations [NGOs], the UN, etc.). These connections have not previously been analyzed beyond general comments. This article offers some tentative perspectives from which the Daoism/peacebuilding nexus might be explored, and sketches elements of a proposed agenda for research and practice.³

Peacebuilding

Daoist visions of peace appear mainly in the classics, particularly the *Daode jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and the *Sunzi bingfa* (*Art of War*). Here as elsewhere peace is an “essentially contested concept,”⁴ meaning different things to different actors. It looks different to a villager in a war zone, to a refugee, to a government—or rebel—soldier, to a businessperson looking to invest, to an NGO aid worker, or to an international diplomat (Richmond 2007). Definitions of peace often include notions of tranquility and calm; a more limited definition, and the primary one adopted here, is the idea of peace as the absence of violence—peace does not imply lack of conflict but, rather, the nonviolent management (and potential resolution) of differences.

For the purposes of this essay, peacebuilding is taken as aiming to reduce and control levels of violence without necessarily addressing its root causes. Going beyond conflict management to address the underlying issues and inequalities that structure conflicts, its activities generally involve a commitment to transformative action on the understanding that conflict is caused not only by direct violence but also by underlying systems of structural violence. These terms were first developed in the 1970s by the Norwegian sociologist Johan Galtung, who argued that peacebuilders must address the root causes of conflict by building capacities for conflict management/resolution and transformation among other

³An example of the “plural integration” of (ancient) Chinese and (modern) Western political theory is provided by Alex Karmazin (2016)

⁴“Essentially contested concepts” reveal different meanings, with different implications, for different actors; see Gallie 1962, 121–80. On different nations of peace from a multicultural perspective, see Dietrich et al. 2011.

strategies. Galtung (1996) developed an agenda aimed at transforming unjust social and political structures, in order to build equitable peace.

Another key founder of peacebuilding as an academic enterprise and field of practice is the sociologist John Paul Lederach (2003). For him, peacebuilding needs to engage both with political elites and with mid-ranking and grassroots actors, including (but not limited to) NGOs and other civil groups. Although less explicitly political than Galtung, Lederach introduced the concept of "conflict transformation," holding that conflict is a natural and normal part of life and that these energies can be changed in positive ways (in the personal, relational, structural, and deep cultural dimensions). Over the past two decades, peacebuilding practice has become diverse and somewhat professionalized.

However, the field is not without its critics (Richmond 2007). International acknowledgment—or co-optation—of the peacebuilding agenda owes much to UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali's 1992 *Agenda for Peace*, which defined post-conflict peacebuilding as "action to identify and support structures which will tend to strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict", and called also for greater efforts at 'preventative diplomacy'.

There is broad agreement and extensive scholarly exploration regarding how religious ideas and practice can contribute positively toward peacebuilding (Dietrich et al. 2011). There is also a good deal of historical and contemporary evidence indicating that religion can exacerbate and drive violent conflicts (Jeong 2000). This seems to be particularly—although not exclusively—true for the exclusionary or fundamentalist elements of the Judeo-Christian and Islamic faiths.

A survey of the literature reveals little on the relationship between peacebuilding and Daoism, beyond some discussion on the importance of understanding local contexts and the valuable resource that religion in general can be toward resolving conflicts and building peace. For example, the *Palgrave International Handbook of Peace Studies* explores the notion of "transrational peace," in which non-Western ideas and influences are deployed to extend and deepen the meaning and practice/experience of "peace," moving the concept toward a more spiritual, postmodern dimension. Despite a passing reference to Dao (Dietrich et al. 2011, 13), the emphasis is on other religions and traditions. Similarly, the Wikipedia discussion of religion and peacebuilding includes subsections for

Judaism, Christianity, Islam, Baha'i, and Buddhism but nothing on Chinese religions or cultural traditions.⁵

Despite the lack of in-depth case studies, I assume that individuals, groups, and networks are engaged in Daoist peacebuilding, but this work is not in the public domain. In the project sketched here, it will be important to respect confidentiality and privacy, particularly in the context of an esoteric tradition such as Daoism, and the need to protect sensitive peacemaking and peacebuilding activities in conflict-affected areas. Nevertheless, it should be possible to develop a body of analysis and some guiding principles. As an initial contribution, this essay sketches some parameters of what the study of Daoism and peacebuilding might look like.

Daoism

According to the Daoist classics, the sage cultivates "virtue" (*de*): the quintessence of positive characteristics, a combination of refined personal traits and skillful abilities. The sage is characterized by an ability to identify phenomena, including potential conflicts, at an early stage of manifestation, making limited and strategic interventions in order to guide developments in a fruitful manner and direction rather than waiting until disaster has struck or fruit is already overly ripe.

The cultivation of skillful perception regarding the causes, dynamics, and unfolding of events may be likened to the notion of conflict sen-

⁵ Of the other major world religions, Buddhism arguably has most in common with Daoism, both historically and in spiritual-philosophical terms. In the present age, activist scholars such as Sulak Sivaraksa have developed philosophies of Buddhism and peace within a radical framework of spiritual and social transition. He distinguishes between "priestly," conservative aspects of religion and the visionary "prophetic" tradition, with its emphasis on universal love and altruism. In *The Wisdom of Sustainability: Buddhist Economics for the 21st Century* (2009), Sulak argues that the transformation of unjust social relations "requires personal and spiritual change first, or at least simultaneously. ... Valuing the spiritual dimension gives voice to humanity's depth. All descriptions of religious experience come down to being less selfish" (89).

sitivity in the field of peacebuilding.⁶ Only a careful and well-informed reading of contexts and conditions (at the local level in particular) can produce an analysis sufficiently attuned to the possibilities of emerging conflict. As a body of practice and reflection, Daoism fits well with peacebuilding, understood as a multifaceted and flexible art rather than just a toolkit of techniques.⁷

Peacebuilding interventions must be carefully timed. There are situations in which intervention is unlikely to produce a successful outcome, and may expose would-be peacebuilders to harm; skillful interventions need to be timed and targeted. In some contexts, a realistic assessment may lead to the conclusion that no positive intervention is possible; rather, it is necessary to wait for the right circumstances and the best location. It is better, therefore, to intervene early, at the first signs of trouble, rather than wait until large-scale violence and conflict have already attracted media and political (diplomatic) attention, by which time violent conflicts may be far more intractable and difficult to resolve.⁸

Daoism is sometimes called the "watercourse way" (Watts and Huang 1975). Like water, the Dao flows through the courses of least resistance. Energy (*qi*) can be dammed or pent up, but this is generally considered unhealthy, leading to resistance and possibly the unleashing of destructive energies. Rather than encountering confrontation, energy wants to be led by the skillful sage (or politician) and directed toward more creative channels. Daoist techniques—including forms of meditation, taiji quan, qigong, acupuncture, fengshui, some martial arts, and other energy-oriented practices—are tools for guiding or leading energy toward healthy dynamics. i. e., the unobstructed flow of *qi*.

⁶ Conflict sensitivity involves understanding the context and dynamics in which violence plays out and in which external interventions operate. See Handschin, Abitbol, and Alluri 2016.

⁷ Thanks to Jon Rudy for this insight (personal communication, October 27, 2016).

⁸ On the level of interpersonal relations (intersubjective psychology), disputes are better resolved after one or both parties' emotional force has been somewhat spent, rather than trying to engage head-on with a torrent of feeling during the height of arousal. In the words of my teacher, Keith, "we empty behind the forcible opponent, letting that force spend itself; then very little effort is needed to lead the opponent" (or, if necessary, to send him or her tumbling).

More advanced practices, including inner alchemical meditation, go further, seeking to transform energies—including the refinement of base impulses into higher spiritual currents and the transformation of pain and hatred into creative love.¹⁵ This body of theory and practice developed and elaborated over millennia, can be applied to the management and transformation of violent conflicts. The approach is already richly distributed throughout Chinese history, including symbolic and metaphorical references in some texts and ritual or religious practices. However, the Daoism of peacebuilding has not been explicitly articulated or associated with theories and practices developed within the primarily Western-originated and -oriented field of peacebuilding.

Internal alchemy studies and practices the transformation of emotional energies (e. g., from hatred to love, from pain to joy), and by extension the transformation of values, identities, and interests (“changing hearts and minds”).⁹ It focuses mostly on transformation of the personal as well as interpersonal; less well explored at the alchemical level is the application to politics and social structures¹⁰—although this is a major concern of Daoist philosophical texts such as the *Daode jing*. Thus, Daoist philosophy and practice are also relevant to the study and transformation of societies, through wise leadership, the cultivation of virtue, and the avoidance of distractions/desires.

As a holistic philosophy, Daoism eschews monocausal explanations, working with complexity in a manner compatible with modern systems theory.¹⁹ This includes identifying timely junctures for action and finding opportunities to reframe narratives. Such analysis and activities would conceivably form part of the larger project, envisioned to explore the connections between Daoism and peacebuilding.

Daoist peacebuilding should not be about the suppression of conflict and the imposition of a particular view of peace, but rather about the skillful and nonviolent management of differences. Daoist approaches would recognize and work with politics and contention rather than seek to redefine contested sites and issues as technocratic problems.²⁰ As such,

⁹ See Cleary 1986; Chia 2008. I am indebted to Walter Kellenberger for this insight.

¹⁰ Arguably, one of the great “problems of religion” is how to move from personal enlightenment toward social transformation. Thanks to Miomir Arandelovic for this insight.

the emphasis would be on identifying and working with (and upon) underlying causes rather than being distracted by surface phenomena. This would be in line with "deep" approaches to peacebuilding (as per Galtung), seeking to address structures and cultures of violence, rather than surface-level attempts to stop fighting and build peace. As Alan Watts argues,

[T]he Taoists are saying, then, that seen as a whole the universe is a harmony or symbiosis of patterns which cannot exist each without the other. However, when it is looked at section by section we find conflict. The biological world is a mutual eating society in which every species is to prey of another. But if there were any species not preyed upon by another, it would increase and multiply in its own self-strangulation, as human beings, through their skill in defeating other species (such as bacteria), are in danger of disrupting the whole biological order (Watts and Huang 1975, 51–52).

Watts here claims Daoist endorsement for the notion that some forms of violence may be inevitable in order for ecological systems to be balanced. Failure to recognize this and act accordingly would block the natural development or working out of energies and potentially cause more harm than good as, for example, in the form of an overflow of potentially violent energies. Watts invokes the Daoist principle of mutual arising: "[T]he Taoist view of nature was not sentimental. It recognized that violence had sometimes to be used, but always with regret" (Watts and Huang 1975, 53, 82). Furthermore, evil and suffering can only be known because of their opposites (*Daode jing* 2).

"Just War"

What does Daoism have to say about the causes and conduct of armed conflict?¹¹ The subject can be approached through an examination of just war theory (Jeong 2000, 62–64), a doctrine of military ethics developed

¹¹ Ferguson (1990), argues that development assistance tends to depoliticize contentious issues by reframing them as amenable to technical solutions implemented by government in partnership with aid professionals, rather than as sites of political struggle, as is often the reality experienced by local communities.

initially by Western medieval (and arguably earlier) theologians. The doctrine seeks to ensure that wars are initiated and conducted in an ethically defensible manner. While the horror of war is acknowledged, Just War theory regards this as potentially the lesser of two evils under certain circumstances (i. e., in order to prevent even worse suffering such as massive human rights abuses) and thus becomes a rationale for liberal interventionism. The doctrine consists of two sets of criteria: *jus ad bellum* (the right to go to war) and *jus in bello* (right conduct within war).

The criteria for just cause include that 1) the primary reason for going to war must be just (obviously arguable, depending on how the terms are defined, it might be argued that war is always unavoidable); 2) innocents must be in imminent danger and can be helped by military intervention; 3) the injustice suffered by one party must be significantly outweighed by the suffering of the other (comparative justice); 4) only duly constituted authorities may wage war (competent authority); 5) force may not be used for subsidiary. i.e., unjust reasons (right intention); 6) the likelihood of a successful outcome must outweigh the suffering caused (probability of success); 7) force may be used only after all peaceful and viable alternatives have been tried and exhausted, or assessed as unworkable (the principle of last resort); and 8) anticipated benefits are proportionate to the endeavor's expected evils or harms (the principle of proportionality).

The criteria for just conduct of war include: 1) acts of war should be directed toward enemy combatants and not at civilians (distinction); 2) combatants must ensure that any harm caused to civilians or their property is not excessive in relation to anticipated military advantages (proportionality); 3) an action must be intended to help in the defeat of the enemy (military necessity); 4) aggression must be launched against a legitimate military objective; that the fair treatment of prisoners of war and civilians is ensured; and 5) combatants may not use such vile methods or weapons as rape or weapons of mass destruction.

The *Daode jing* admonishes:

Counsel [the ruler] not to use force to conquer the universe
For this would only cause resistance.
Thorn bushes spring up wherever the army has passed.
Lean years follow in the wake of a great war. (ch. 30)

Weapons are instruments of fear;
 They are not a wise man's tools.
 He uses them only when he has no choice ...
 If you rejoice in victory, then you delight in telling; if you delight in killing
 you cannot fulfill yourself ...
 That is why victory must be observed like a funeral. (ch. 31)

Sunzi's *Art of War* is required reading for students at many military colleges. In the introduction to his translation, Thomas Cleary argues that "in Sunzi's philosophy the efficiency of knowledge and strategy is to make conflict altogether unnecessary. ... The Superior militarist foils enemies' plots; next best is to ruin their alliances; next after that is to attack their Armed Forces; worse is to besiege their cities" (1991, xi). Again, according to Cleary, "*Art of War* wars against war. ... It infiltrates the enemy lines, uncovers the enemy's secrets, and changes the hearts of the enemy's troops" (1991, xiv). Strategies of deception (e. g., ch. 2) are seen as utmost strategic wisdom on the part of Chinese generals (although secrecy may be antithetical to peacebuilding practitioners' agenda of transparency and openness).

In introducing the alchemical *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*, Cleary provides a near characterization of Daoist "just war" theory:

Taoism is not sentimental and has always recognized the reality of war. Rather than simply make moralistic pronouncements against war, Taoism approaches this problem realistically, using two basic strategies. The first of these is preventative, minimizing the causes of war existing in the human psyche; the second is palliative, minimizing the trauma of war when it actually does take place. (1986, vii–ix)

The *Art of War* has attracted numerous commentaries, many of which have themselves achieved classic status. It states that "war must be pondered carefully. The man who takes pleasure in war will perish. ... War is not a thing to be enjoyed" (ch. 2).¹²

¹² Similarly, "[T]he true gentleman ... [uses weapons] only as a last resort, esteeming instead peace and tranquility. He sees no beauty in victory, to see beauty in victory is to rejoice in the killing of others" (ch. 31).

The text and its commentaries regard warfare as a great evil, often producing appalling suffering, particularly on the part of women and children, who usually constitute the majority of victims. Nevertheless, like much of the Daoist canon, the approach is pragmatic: war may be terrible, and everything should be done to reduce suffering to a minimum. But sometimes armed conflict might be seen as the lesser of two evils. Refraining from war can allow injustice even including mass atrocities, to prevail, potentially entailing far greater suffering than the limited damage caused by a quick, “surgical” strike.

The “art” of war thus lies in achieving legitimate military-political objectives while causing minimal suffering. Sunzi’s approach is in line with other forms of Daoist philosophy and practice, such as internal forms of taiji quan, which uses softness and subtlety to deflect and defeat the force of an enemy.¹³ This conception of warfare echoes the importance in Just War theory of armed conflict having a just cause and being undertaken only as a last resort (*jus ad bellum*), and advocating the right conduct within war, which should be undertaken in a way that minimizes suffering (*jus in bello*).

In the case of just cause, there remain important political questions regarding who determines this, how, and why. It could be argued that most wars are unjust (both causally and in practice) and launched for less than honorable reasons. Nevertheless, a high threshold is required to argue that this would be the case for *all* conflicts (World War II against Nazi Germany is often held up as an example of a just war against an evil tyranny).

Another of Cleary’s translations collecting materials on *Leadership and Strategy*, distills further dimensions of Daoist wisdom. In his introduction, he argues that “warfare is one of the paradoxical symbols of ancient Daoism, being the epitome of conflict and violence but also representing a way of ending violence. ... [The Taoists’] conceptions of just and unjust wars [are] parallel with their comparisons between balanced

¹³ “A force of four ounces deflects a thousand pounds”; see Wang (1985, 37). Another important concept in taiji is that if energy is resisted, it tends to push back. “The softest thing in the universe / Overcomes the hardest thing in the universe” (*Daode jing* 42, 76). In the words of my teacher, Keith: “Energy prefers to be led, rather than forced” (personal communications, April and September 2016).

and exaggerated individuals" (1992, ix–x). Among the pithy statements recorded are that "a degenerate society is characterized by expansion as imperialism. ... [K]illing innocent people ... is not what armies are really for. A militia is supposed to put down violence, not cause violence" (1992, 26–27).

Furthermore, the "sage's use of arms is like combing hair or thinning sprouts: a few are removed for the benefit of the many" (1992, 59).¹⁴ Echoing *Art of War* (and taiji practice), according to Cleary the ancient masters argue that "the supreme attainment of a just military action is to finish its mission without fighting" (1992, 61)—an achievement that requires "unfashionable wisdom and an unfailing Way" (Dao) (1992, 64). In their writings "On Peace," the Masters observe the importance of what modern-day humanitarians might call "resilience": "[I]f you are modest, frugal, and disciplined, that will produce wealth for you" (1992, 77). Throughout this and other Daoist classics, wisdom—and not being overly damaged by conflict—is repeatedly stressed as coming from the elimination of desire and escape from attachments and anxieties (e. g., 1992, 79–81; nonattachment is also a key concept in Buddhism).

As noted above, the sage or wise ruler is characterized by sensitive attention to developing phenomena, so that problems can be headed off, or positive developments cultivated, before they reach the critical level: "refinement of attention means to consider problems before they arise, to prepare against calamities before they happen, to guard against faults" (1992, 106)¹⁵—doctrines that may be compared to notions of preventative

¹⁴ An argument for liberal/humanitarian interventionism might be: "[W]hen they hear that a neighboring nation oppresses its people, they [effective leaders] raise armies and go to the border, accusing that nation of injustice. ... The coming of the armies is to oust the unjust and restore the virtuous. ... The conquering of the nation does not extend to its people; it removes the leadership and changes to government, honoring excellent knights" (1992, 61). However, a note of somewhat cynical realism is also apparent: "When large groups attack small groups, that is considered bellicose; but when large nations annex small nations, that is considered smart" (1992, 88).

¹⁵ "Sages do things while they are still small and thus can overturn the great" (1992, 115). "The beginnings of fortune and calamity are subtle, so people are heedless of them. Only sages see the beginning and know the end" (1992, 117).

diplomacy, or early warning of emerging conflict (Boutros-Ghali 1992; Jeong 2000, 202-03).

Conflict Transformation

The conflict transformation approach is best illuminated through two peace processes I am most familiar with: Mindanao (southern Philippines) and Myanmar (see South and Joll 2016). In both countries, Ethnic Armed Organizations (EAOs) have long struggled for self-determination against states that are experienced by ethnic minority communities as culturally alien, and economically and politically dominant. EAOs in both contexts are characterized by complex combinations of “greed” and “grievance” factors but nevertheless enjoy significant (albeit contested) political legitimacy among the communities they seek to represent, on the basis of the grievances and political aspirations they articulate.

In both contexts, moreover, EAOs face significant challenges moving from insurgency to reinvent themselves as credible political actors and governance authorities. Thus, the peace process between Manila and the Moro Islamic Liberation Front represents a rare example of a Muslim minority pursuing its political objectives through structured dialogue. Also, in both contexts, peace processes underwent significant setbacks in 2015–2016.

In the Philippines, there was a failure to translate a political settlement to decades of armed conflict into necessary enabling legislation. As well as unfortunate incidents on the ground, lack of support for the legislation among legislators also reflected the Filipino public’s unfamiliarity with the Moro cause and an absence of understanding and sympathy for it. The history of Mindanao is not covered sufficiently in history textbooks or the mainstream media, and Moro figures are mostly written out of historical narratives of the Filipino nationalist movement. Most Filipinos, particularly outside Mindanao, do not appreciate the historical injustice and struggle of the Moro people and the legitimacy—and reasonableness—of their political claims. The establishment of the Bangsamoro autonomous region and a sustainable solution to the armed conflict will only be possible with a significant attitude change among the Filipino majority.

Similarly in Myanmar, as a consequence of decades of military rule, many people have little understanding of the history and situation of ethnic communities, particularly those in the conflict regions. Most members of the Bama majority community have been denied opportunities to learn about the struggle and suffering of their ethnic brethren. Myanmar has already suffered intercommunal conflict in relation to widespread discrimination against the Muslim community. There is potential for cynical and populist politicians to mobilize prejudice against the "other" in relation to the Muslim community, and also potentially in opposition to ethnic nationality demands for self-determination, including federalism. There is therefore a need in Myanmar to educate the Bama majority regarding the grievances and aspirations of ethnic nationality communities to preclude potential populist and divisive efforts to undermine a political settlement.

In both contexts, deep, equitable, and lasting peace requires a transformation of individual and intercommunal relationships, including a reimagining of state-society relations and changes in basic attitude ("hearts and minds"). This type of peacebuilding will have to go beyond elite-level political negotiations, toward transformations of identity and interest and a rechanneling of psychosocial energies.

How would the sage add value in such contexts? Under propitious circumstances, he or she might advise the prince, whether a sovereign government, insurgent commander, community leader, or humanitarian diplomat, and/or contribute to media debates or academia. Timely and practical advice may be invaluable, to prevent suffering.¹⁶ On other occasions, it may be appropriate to "let them fight it out" (Luttwak 1999), and so the sage might head up into the mountains and wander in the mists, leaving the world to its own devices. Ultimately, the sage follows his or her heart-mind. Thus, in the *Zhuangzi*, various protagonists

accepted difference as given. They discoursed upon the nature of the heart and they sought a unity proceeding from the heart. By such concerns they sought to unite everyone in joyfulness and to harmonize all within the boundaries of the oceans. Their greatest desire was to see this achieved

¹⁶ "To escalate conflict is easy, to de-escalate, rare": Mark Raudva, December 9, 2016 (personal communication).

everywhere, by their efforts. They could face insults and not be disturbed; they struggled to save the people from warfare; they aimed to prevent aggression and to silence arms and thus to deliver future generations from violence. In pursuit of such ideals, they walked across the whole world, advising the high and teaching the low, and even though the world would not listen, they just continued even more strongly and would not give up. So it is said that high and low were tired of seeing them, but they never gave up putting themselves forward. (Palmer 2006, 300)

An Agenda for Research and Practice

This essay contributes preliminary thoughts toward developing a peacebuilding research agenda with a modest commentary on Daoist wisdom and ethics. It is offered on the understanding that the person who knows rarely tells, and vice versa. Next steps might include collecting concrete examples of Daoist peacebuilding in practice—including activities and interventions that could be so characterized, without necessarily being framed explicitly in these terms. The approach sketched here would be interdisciplinary in academic terms, with relevance hopefully to historians and political scientists, and scholars of Asian studies, religious studies, and peacebuilding.

This project may be of particular interest to Chinese scholars, practitioners, and policy makers. The rise of China has seen renewed interest in the soft power embodied in five thousand years of cultural history and wisdom (Jacques 2009). Chinese (in particular state) actors have mobilized elements of Confucianism and other cultural traditions (Kam-Por 2011) to enrich and empower China's doctrines and practice, including in the field of international engagement. The Daoist tradition has much to contribute toward a distinctly Chinese theory and practice of transformative peacebuilding. This may be particularly relevant as China begins to engage more in multilateral forums in the field of peacebuilding (e.g., in Afghanistan and Myanmar).¹⁷

Daoist literature and practices cultivate and express a deep connection to the natural world. The project conceptualizes the earth as a living

¹⁷ Confidential, personal communications from a senior international peacebuilding source (November 3, 2016).

being (or holistic system), and often an object of violence, exploring Daoist approaches to environmental sustainability, healing, and justice.

There is an urgent need to find ways of managing conflicts with love and compassion during a period of potentially violent readjustment in the context of widespread geo/political upheavals (including the rise of populist nationalism around the world, the growing impacts of climate change, and widespread migration crises). As a Christian, I find the threaded pearls of Daoist wisdom both inspiring and instructive, in stumbling merrily and with many errors along the Way.

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