

The Path to the Profound in Lao Zi

A research on the grounds of Silo's Message

*...it is always from the Being-without-form
that the subtlety of the Dao can be contemplated;
Similarly it is always from the Being-within-form
that the manifestations of the Dao can be perceived.
These two have the same source but different names,
They both may be called deep and profound.
The Deepest and most profound
Is the doorway to all subtleties.*

Lao Zi - Dao De Jing [tr. Wang Keping 2008]

Abstract

Taking as a starting point the hypothesis asserting the historic existence of Lao Zi during the 6th century BCE and his authorship of the *Dao De Jing*, it has been conducted a research aimed to identify in the Legendary Sage's techniques of mystical work, the steps of an ascesis that may have led to states of inspired consciousness, including the access to the profound.

For this research, different versions of the *Dao De Jing* and other Chinese writings, whose contents are ascribed to the Old Master, as well as references in the classic Daoist Literature have been considered. Its study, conducted on the grounds of the conceptual schema submitted by Silo in his *Psychology Notes* and applying as validation criterion the registers of the own experience with the practices suggested in *Silo's Message*, has permitted the distinction of unmistakable meditative and energy procedures that may be attributed to Lao Zi.

The most meaningful procedures ascribed to Lao Zi for the accomplishment of spiritual immortality comprehends: to calmly achieve the supreme Emptiness through the attitude of *wu wei* (non-action) applied to meditation techniques as a mental way of being of detachment; equanimity; progressive deepening of the observation point and increasing "letting go" leading to the suspension of the 'I', by then, contemplating from the being-without-form, to open the path towards "enlightenment". And also: return to the Void, to the chaotic womb of Mother-Dao, to the "origin of all things" by means of the mastering, concentration and transformation of vital energy so as to experience the ineffable *Dao* that *initiates all things and brings them to completion*. In both procedures can be identified the steps of an ascesis leading to states of inspired consciousness including the access to the profound and the experience of the sacred.

All the previously said strongly resonate with the procedures developed by Silo, particularly in certain parts of his *Message*, with the purpose of connecting with the profound and of achieving the fundamental experience that brings unity and continuity beyond the physical body. On the one hand, in the chapter "The Inner States", the author suggests the path of ascension towards void mental space where it is essential to stay calm, patient and full of faith until the actual essence of things –the Plan living in all the sentient beings– becomes evident to the inner look of the one contemplating it. On the other, and mainly in the experience of the Force included in the Service ceremony, by which the energy raises up to a midpoint behind the eyes where it turns into light, leading to the broadening of consciousness and internal unity in the one who advances towards spiritual birth. Likewise, in the *Commentaries on Silo's Message* where the author describes the "inner look" and the "return on itself" of consciousness to achieve completeness with the profound, an experience of Meaning that enlightens consciousness and life.

These suggestive coincidences in the teachings of both Masters awake the clear-cut intuition of being in front of two messengers that, in crucial moments of history, reached our times in a double nature to restore the unity with the sacred, lost in the obscure segments of human evolution.

Hugo Novotny - Center of Studies Carcarañá Park
Rosario, Argentina, July 2015 - hugonov@gmail.com

This research is aimed to unveiling techniques in spiritual practices that Lao Zi may have developed; intending to trace the steps of a path leading to inspired states of consciousness, including a possible access to profound levels. The study is conducted on the grounds of the conceptual schema submitted by the Latin-American philosopher and writer Silo in his *Psychology Notes* and applying as validation criterion the comparison of registers from the own experience with the practices and meditations suggested in *Silo's Message*.

About the author's vision, hypotheses and sources

This research is not meant to be more than an approximation, an interpretation and the author's personal current vision about the subject matter, given a certain knowledge and experience as constituents of said vision, and also considering the quantity and quality of the available texts. Examples of these are the findings in last decades of ancient versions of the *Dao De Jing* ascribed to Lao Zi and the growing specialization of researchers and translators who have allowed their reading. Some of these translators and researchers have incorporated their own experiences in the mystical field as well.

To begin with we support the hypothesis concerning Lao Zi historical existence in China during the 6th century BCE according to Silo's commentaries in his *Complete Works, Universal Root Myths* Note 1 in Chinese Myths: *The doctrine of the Tao is much older than either Lao Tzu or Confucius (both of whom lived in the sixth century BCE)* [Silo 2004].

Likewise, we support the stand of Lao Zi as the actual author of the *Dao De Jing* consistently across the majority of the bibliographical sources consulted for this paper. At the same time, however, we recognize the existence of a process in which the book contents have been widened, modified and updated. In this sense it is possible to identify at least three "generations" commonly known as 1) from Guodian manuscripts; 2) from Mawangdui manuscripts; and 3) late versions, which in turn have innumerable variations and translations.

For this study, it will be considered, on the one hand, the three versions included in the work *Los Libros del Tao* (The books of the Tao) written by the Spanish philosopher and translator Iñiqui Preciado Idoeta [Idoeta 2006]. Among the above, the priority is focused on the version known as the Guodian *Dao De Jing*, considered as the closest matching to the original because it is the nearest in date and place with Lao Zi historic existence, according to the hypothesis this study is grounded. On the other, this research considers among the most reliable sources, the Mawangdui *Dao De Jing* manuscript in the version of Doctor Wang Keping, Chinese researcher, Philosophy professor and translator specialized in Daoism, who holds that one of the copies found in Mawangdui is the most faithful version of Lao Zi authorship; as well as the commented translation by Robert Henricks, North American professor of Religion, a renowned scientist on Classic Asian Literature today.

Main concepts

Dao: The compound ideogram *Dao* combines two ideas: 'head' and 'moving forward' which can be translated as 'leading the way' or 'opening the path'. Thus, originally and till the appearance of the *Dao De Jing*, the *Dao* was understood as a 'Way', a 'Method' or 'Rule for a proper way of existence'. Already in the *I Ching*, the *Dao* encompasses *yin* and *yang*, regulates and orders its alternations. At the beginning of the Spring and Autumn Period the expression *Tiandao*, meaning 'Way of Heaven' comes to light ruling over the celestial orbits and human fate. With Lao Zi, for the first time the *Dao* takes on the meaning of ultimate Truth; the eternal, imperceptible and ineffable one. The *Dao* is 'the origin of all things'. Its mysterious and evanescent presence cannot be neither seen nor touched; it can only be intuited or experimented through meditative practices.

De: The ideogram *De* is composed of 'go', 'mind' and 'rectitude or righteousness', hence, it could be translated as "to go or walk leaded by a righteous mind" or, more synthetically, 'virtue'. For the *Dao De Jing*, the *De* stands for 'power', the *Dao* "efficiency" that is manifested when it particularizes in the Beings. The *Dao* is Totality, the *De* is Particularity, it bridges the gap between the *Dao* and the Beings.

Yin-Yang: Both principles constitute everything that exists, for instance, feminine-masculine, passive-active, tough-soft, though described as an opposing unity where one cannot exist without the other.

You: Being, Being-within-form.

Wu: not-Being, Being-without-form.

Wu wei: the way of action without action or non-doing, calm, equanimity.

Xu: void, emptiness, vacuity. In the *Dao De Jing*, emptiness has different levels of significance. It represents the interstice that allows movement, the hollow space in a vessel conferring its usefulness. It also has a cosmic meaning; the essential void which is both the matrix, the uterus of the world, and the place from where the Original Pneuma is able to sprout and circulate. At a human level, it may represent, psychologically, the absence of desires, expectative, prejudices and partialities; and in meditative practices, the state of cessation of perceptions and mental representations.

Chi: the vital energy forming part of any living being, breath, animus, pneuma.

The experience of the Profound in Lao Zi: antecedents and consequences

The Yellow River Valley is said to be the cradle and settlement of Chinese Civilization. In late Neolithic times, the Valleys of the Yellow and Wei rivers were inhabited by tribes that finally became confederated under the guidance of the mythical Yellow Emperor (Huang di). Later, the Daoists will consider him as the first emanation of the Dao, founder of *wu wei* doctrine, ancestor of the philosophical Dao.

Back then, the spiritual universe of the population living along the Yellow River Valley was essentially shamanic and divination practices had a key role. The Yellow Emperor was the Great Shaman and the following legendary personages leading the tribes of the Yellow river were great shamans as well [Idoeta 2006].

In Mircea Eliade words, [it is important]... *to emphasize the cultural and religious complexity of archaic China. As is the case with so many other nations, the Chinese ethnic stock was not homogeneous. In addition, in the beginning neither its language nor its culture nor its religion represented unitary systems. Wolfram Eberhard has brought out the contribution of peripheral ethnic elements —Thai, Tungus, Turco-Mongol, Tibetan, etc.— to the Chinese synthesis. For the historian of religions, these contributions are precious: they help us to understand, among other things, the impact of northern shamanism on Chinese religiosity and the “origin” of certain Taoist practices.* [Eliade 1982].

The Wei River Valley, in particular, developed as a major cultural and economic centre by the exchange with the West through the Silk Road, being its eastern starting point.

In the Yellow River civilization, the king worshipped his ancestors, mainly the supreme sky divinity Shangdi ('the highest emperor'). They also made sacrifices and offerings to various natural deities such as the soil, the grain, the mountains and rivers, in general, to all the natural phenomena. The cult of four animals was predominant: the dragon, the phoenix, the unicorn and the tortoise. Eventually, Shangdi lost his anthropomorphic and personal features and evolved into *tian*, the Heaven.

The first literary testimonies, written on bones and tortoise-shell that trace back to the Shang dynasty tell about the engraving in this culture of the sun worship. Two texts dated in the late Shang dynasty are of special interest. One of the former is the well-known *I Ching*. In Silo's opinion *important antecedents to the development of Confucianism and Taoism can be found in The I Ching: The Book of Changes (possibly pre-tenth century BCE)* [Silo 2003]. Richard Wilhelm, in the introductory notes to his translation of the *I Ching*, states: *The book sheds new light on many a secret hidden in the often puzzling modes of thought of that mysterious sage, Lao-tse, and of his pupils [...] He who has perceived the meaning of change fixes his attention no longer on transitory individual things but on the immutable, eternal law at work in all change. This law is the Tao of Lao-tse, the course of things, the principle of the One in the many* [Wilhelm 2009]. The *I Ching* deals with the origin of the universe and the changes occurring in it as from eight trigrams (*ba gua*), which came into being from two lines representing the *yin* (broken line) and the *yang* (unbroken line). The interaction between these vital forces —the fundamental law of nature— faithfully represents the relations among heaven, human being and earth, and divination basis. Later on, in the *Dao De Jing*, Lao Zi states: *The myriad things contain the Yin and the Yang as vital forces, which achieve harmony through their interactions* (ch.42) [tr. Wang Keping 2008].

The second text mentioned above is the *Hongfan* included in the *Shangshu* (also known as *The Book of Documents*). Its primary interest lies in that the five elements (*wu xing*): earth, water, fire, metal and wood, are mentioned for the first time as foundation of the universe and phases of every process. These are the

components of the process in the creation of the universe. The quietude of the Absolute, of the infinite, of the Dao, this is the *Wu ji* (Not-being) that, at the moment it starts moving and begins the emanative process, turns into *Tai ji* (Being). Said process has a starting point –The Dao– and an ending point –the infinite beings. In the middle, lie successively The Great One (*or Tai ji*), the *yin-yang* and the five elements.

The archaic mythological traditions regarding the origin and formation of the world lead back to Lao Zi and his disciples. According to M. Eliade, *the origin of the world according to Lao Tzu repeats, in metaphysical language, the ancient cosmogonic theme of chaos (hun-tun) as a totality resembling an egg* [Eliade 1982].

Resuming the historical sequence, in the late 11th Century BCE, the Zhou dynasty, the longest lasting one in the Chinese history, begins. By the 770 BCE, the Eastern Zhou lineage came into being as well as the historic period known as *Spring and Autumn*. The capital of the Empire was the present Luoyang, located at the middle reaches of the Yellow River. Paradoxically, it is in this period wounded by cruel wars and a strong socio-political instability that the classic Chinese civilization flourished and specially the philosophical thinking influenced by great figures such as Lao Zi, Confucius, Mozi and Sun Zi; who in turn originated their respective schools of thought.

The critical social context of the Chinese feudal system –conflicts among the states, internal squabbles and a general instability– characterizes the historical moment in which, following our hypothesis, Lao Zi lived, that is the 6th century BCE during the Eastern Zhou dynasty, in Chen State. These spatial-temporal coordinates would set the time in which seem to have taken place Lao Zi access to profound states of inspired consciousness.

In the next period –known as the Warring States period– the endless conflicts and the urgent need of new socio-political models lead to the emergence of numerous philosophical doctrines giving birth to the Hundred Schools of Chinese Thought. Among these, the most influent ones were Daoism, Confucianism, Mohism and the Militarism of Sun Tzu. In the 2nd century BCE, the school of Huang Lao –in reference to Huang di (The Yellow Emperor) and Lao Zi– gave rise to Daoism. These great sages are known until today as the founders of the doctrine by the Daoists.

Henceforth, the milestones of note are: in the 2nd century CE the emergence of religious Daoism –a syncretic system of beliefs incorporating elements of Confucianism, Buddhism and Chinese local cults– and later on, in the 8th century, the Internal Alchemy (*Neidan*) –a complex system of meditation, energetic and breathing practices aimed to the creation of a new spiritual body, transcending the individual's physical existence. Both Daoism and Neidan Alchemy acknowledge Lao Zi and the *Dao De Jing* as their primary source of inspiration and have been spread until today in a great variety of schools and lineages reflecting the powerful Daoist mystical experience and deploying the common doctrinarian root in manifold fields like Chinese Traditional Medicine, Martial Arts and Science, in several disciplines such as Qigong, Taiji chuan, Feng shui or Calligraphy.

Historic situation and concomitant cases

Following our hypothesis, we support the stand concerning Lao Zi historical existence during the time known as *Spring and Autumn Period*, in the Chen State, Huai River Valley. It was a turbulent period in the history of China crossed by wars between states and by a process of sharp deterioration and decline in the ruling elites, marked by generalized intrigues and conflicts for power. At the same time, it was an utmost significant moment due to the simultaneous emergence of philosophers such as Lao Zi, Confucius and Sun Tzu among many others, founders of their respective schools.

Confucius, also known as Master Kong (*Kongzi*), founder of the Rú School of Chinese Thought (*Rújiā*), widely known as Confucianism, was a teacher and philosopher that, according to the documents, lived in the Lu State between 551 to 479 BCE. His teachings were essentially focused on consolidating a behavioural ethics both in individual's daily life and in his participation and ruling of society. The initial purpose was conservative mainly oriented toward recovering the former splendour of the dynasty Zhou, whose court had fallen into a franc decay, by means of restoring traditional rituals and social hierarchy.

The historian Sima Quian, in his monumental work *Records of the Grand Historian*, brings us testimonies about the moral chaos and decay in Confucius' times, as well as the hostility against him and his ideas shown by his contemporaries. According to the great Chinese historian, Confucius, anguished by the rejection to his ideas, writes the *Spring and Autumn Annals* chronicles in search of acknowledgment in posterity. Indeed, after his death, his writings started being taken into consideration. So much so that already during the Han dynasty, his disciples made use of the Confucian Classics in the ruling elite

education.

Furthermore, narrations and dialogues between Confucius and Lao Zi have reached our times, thus reinforcing the hypothesis of their contemporaneous existence in nearby geographic spaces. In his work *Che-Ki ('Historic Memories')* Sima Qian narrates that Confucius went to Lao Zi to ask him about the rites. The narrations of this encounter shows with simplicity and humour the incompatibility between the two thinkers because as the historian describes, Lao Zi cultivated the *Dao* and the *De*; according to the doctrine [a disciple] shall apply to live concealed and anonymous. However, to set aside public life and to despise honours was exactly the opposite to the ideal of the 'perfected man' proposed by Confucius.

Lao Zi "concealed and anonymous" existence explains the absence of authentic information about his biography. According to traditional accounts, he worked as the keeper of the Archives for the royal court of Zhou, but, discouraged by the royal house decay, he resigned and ventured west. When crossing over the Hien-ku pass out, before permitting him to pass, the sentry of the gate, Yinxi, requested Lao Zi to write a book explaining his ideas about the *Dao* and the *De*. The final product comprised more than five thousand words. After finishing he left never to be seen again [Eliade 1999].

The *Lie Sien* adds that, as a keeper of the Archives, his function allowed Lao Zi broad access to the books related to, among others, astrological and medicinal techniques, in a wider sense to all the texts related to communication with celestial matters. The sage appreciated nurturing his breathing; he mastered the art of obtaining vital energy and conserving it [Kaltenmark 1953].

As regards Yinxi, the sentry of the Gate, the *Lie Sien* tells that he was a scholar of esoteric sciences and that always nurtured his body with the most pure essences. He kept his virtue in secrecy and organized his activities carefully so that anyone would take notice of him in his times. Yinxi wrote the *Kuan Yin-tzu*, a book comprising nine chapters.

Finally, Sun Tzu, founder of the school known as Militarism, was a military strategist and philosopher traditionally credited as the author of *The Art of War*. *The Spring and Autumn Annals*, the classic ascribed to Confucius, and Sima Qian *Record of the Grand Historian* coincide in that Sun Tzu lived during the late Spring and Autumn period and served to the King Helu of Wu as a general and strategist.

Clearly, the most widely known legends about Lao Zi, Confucius and Sun Tzu are illustrative enough of the chaotic atmosphere prevailing in the Eastern Zhou dynasty during the significant 6th century BCE as well as of the diverse ways developed in response to it by the great sages of the time. Nevertheless, when trying to trace the masters that, besides Lao Zi, would have developed some kind of asceticism for the entrance to the profound at that time and cultural space, the only evidences found are those mentioned in the biography of the guardian of the Gate, Yinxi, who is even pointed out as a Lao Zi disciple by some sources. But, once more, the concealed and anonymous nature characterizing every Daoist sage as well as the destruction of written sources occurred in many different moments of the Chinese history as a consequence of religious and political conflicts preclude further investigations. It has not been found any copy of the *Kuan Yin-tzu* by Yinxi till today.

For all the above mentioned, and considering the aim of this research, it will be focused on elucidating possible experiences of access to the profound, the procedures and translations of deep impulses in the case of Master Lao Zi.

Possible procedures to reach the profound in Lao Zi

According to an anecdote narrated by Chuang Tzu, Confucius one day found Lao Tzu "completely inert and no longer having the appearance of a living being." After waiting for some time, he spoke to him: "Have my eyes deceived me, or was it real? Just now, Master, your body looked like a piece of dry wood, you seemed to have left the world and men and to have taken refuge in an inaccessible solitude." "Yes, – Lao Tzu answered – I went to frolic at the Origin of all things." As Kaltenmark observes, the expression "journey to the Origin of all things" sums up the essence of the Taoist mystical experience. This ecstatic journey constitutes a return "to the beginning" of all things; by freeing itself from time and space, the spirit recovers the eternal present that transcends both life and death [Eliade 1982].

The possibility of accessing the experience of the *Dao*; of creating a path of individual asceticism to cultivate the *Dao*, of "returning to the origin of all things" and thus to reach spiritual immortality seem to have been Lao Zi's major contribution to the mystical path of human kind.

However, at the moment of describing accurately the procedures used by the Mysterious Sage for the access to profound states of inspired consciousness in his experience of the sacred, at least two significant cases arise:

1. References found in the *Dao De Jing* regarding meditation techniques for the access to the experience of the *Dao*, as well as to the subsequent highly abstractive translations of the deep meanings perceived in the experience.
2. Mentions regarding energetic and respiratory techniques found in the *Dao De Jing* and other works such as the *Nei King* or the *Lie Sien*, either in reference to the legendary Yellow Emperor or, from then on, to Lao Zi, Chuang Tzu and other wise men and masters in the mystic Daoism.

Meditation techniques

This first case seems to reflect the essential law of philosophical Daoism, the *wu-wei* (*non-action*) applied to meditation experiences as an “emptiness” technique, of mental clearance, of becoming unattached, letting go all the images emerging in the operator’s mind as a manifestation, until reaching a state of vacuity that would clear the path to the ultimate experience of the sacred.

In the Guodian manuscript of the *Dao De Jing*, chapter A8, can be read some lines that clearly suggest said procedure:

*Act without acting
get involved in nothing
taste the tasteless.* [tr. Idoeta 2007 and our]

In chapter 16 of Mawangdui *Dao De Jing*, translated by professor Wang Keping, we can find:

*Try the utmost to get the heart into complete vacuity.
Be sure to keep the mind in steadfast tranquillity.
All things are growing and developing
And I see thereby their cycles.
Though all things flourish with a myriad of variations,
Each one eventually returns to its root.* [tr. Wang Keping 2008]

Henricks version of the Mawangdui *Dao De Jing*, tells:

*Take emptiness to the limit;
Maintain tranquillity in the center.
The ten thousand things—side-by-side they arise;
And by this I see their return.* [tr. Henricks 1993]

According to professor Henricks, *the word in line 4 above that I translate as “see” is kuan, and kuan in Chinese has this sense of seeing into the true nature of something, having an insight.* (Deep comprehension, Recognition).

To empty thoughts and perceptions from the mind so as let it be filled by “enlightenment” is not only a known meditation procedure that have reached our times, but also a technique called “fasting of the mind” recalled by the Master Zuangzi –Lao Zi’s disciple according to the legend– in the book bearing his name: *Listen not with your ears but with your mind. Listen not with your mind but with your primal breath. The ears are limited to listening; the mind is limited to tallying. The primal breath, however, awaits things emptily. It is only through the Way that one can gather emptiness, and emptiness is the fasting of the mind* [Tr. Victor Mair]

Likewise, in the *Hua Hu Ching* –a compendium of oral teachings traditionally attributed to Lao Zi– it reads the following recommendations to reach a state of “emptiness”:

*The ego is a monkey catapulting through the jungle: Totally fascinated by the realm of the senses, it swings from one desire to the next, one conflict to the next, one self-centered idea to the next.
If you threaten it, it actually fears for its life.
Let this monkey go.
Let the senses go.
Let desires go.
Let conflicts go.*

*Let ideas go.
Let the fiction of life and death go.
Just remain in the center, watching.
And then forget that you are there.* [tr. Walker 1992]

Finally, in Mawangdui *Dao De Jing* chapter 1, it appears a very meaningful paragraph:

*The Being-without-form is the origin of Heaven and Earth.
The Being-within-form is the mother of the myriad things.
Therefore it is always from the Being-without-form that the subtlety of the Dao can be contemplated;
Similarly it is always from the Being-within-form that the manifestations of the Dao can be perceived.* [tr. Wang Keping 2008]

The assertion *it is always from the Being-without-form that the subtlety of the Dao can be contemplated*, alludes, in our view, to the state of suspension of the 'I' that enables experiencing the profound. It is "being without form", that is without the 'I', that the sacred space and time may be accessed.

In Silo's conception, *It is also possible to penetrate into a curious altered state of consciousness through the "suspension of the 'I'."* This presents itself as a paradoxical situation, because in order to silence the "I" it is necessary to keep watch over its activity in a voluntary way, which requires an important action of reversibility that reinforces, once again, what one wishes to annul. And so suspension is only achieved through indirect routes, by progressively displacing the "I" from its central location as object of meditation. This "I"—a sum of sensation and memory—suddenly begins to silence itself, to de-structure. Such a thing is possible because the memory can stop delivering data and the senses (at least the external ones) can also cease supplying data. The consciousness is then in a situation of finding itself divested of that "I"—in a kind of void. In such a situation, a mental activity that is very different from the habitual one can be experienced. (...) the consciousness is capable of internalizing towards "the profound" in the space of representation. "The profound" (also called "the Self" in one contemporary psychological current), is not exactly a content of consciousness. The consciousness can reach "the profound" through a special work of internalization. In this internalization, that which is always hidden, covered by the "noise" of the consciousness, erupts. It is in "the profound" where the experiences of sacred spaces and times are encountered. In other words, in "the profound" one finds the root of all mysticism and all religious sentiment. [Silo 1978]

Thus, in the series of lines directly or indirectly attributed to Lao Zi, it seems to be reflected in its highest expression the attitude of the *wu-wei* (*non-action*) as a mental way of being: of detachment; equanimity; progressive deepening of the vantagepoint and increasing "letting go" leading to the suspension of the 'I'; that, in turn, enables the access to 'the profound'. What a manifestation is and what a manifestation is not emerge as complementary parts of the same structure, feasible of being experienced, though at the same time, it is indefinable, elusive, unmentionable.

In his book *Psychology Notes*, Silo specifies some useful guidelines for the analysis of the possible procedures and registers that Lao Zi may have experienced:

Entrance to the profound states occurs from the suspension of the "I". From that suspension, significant registers of "lucid consciousness" and comprehension of one's own mental limitations are produced, which constitutes a great advance. Regarding this transit one should keep in mind some inescapable conditions: 1. that the practitioner has his or her Purpose clear—what they desire to achieve as the final objective of this work; 2. that they count on sufficient psychophysical energy to maintain their attention absorbed and concentrated on the suspension of the "I" and 3. that they can continue without interruption the continuous deepening of the state of suspension until the temporal and spatial references disappear. (...) Continuing in the deepening of the suspension until achieving the register of "emptiness" signifies that nothing should appear as a representation, or as a register of internal sensations. There should not, and cannot be a register of this mental situation. And the return from the mental situation of suspension to habitual vigil is produced by impulses that reveal the position and the discomforts of the body.

We cannot say anything about this "void". The recovery of inspiring meanings, of the deep meanings that are beyond the mechanisms and configurations of consciousness, are carried out by my "I" when it returns to its normal vigilic work. (...) We cannot speak of that world because we do not have registers during the absence of the "I"; as Plato mentioned in his myths, we have only "reminiscences" of that world.

In the *Dao De Jing* [tr. Wang Keping], there are diverse quotations regarding the *Dao* that, in our mind, express the aforesaid "reminiscences" and translations of inspiring meanings:

*There was something undifferentiated and all-embracing,
Which existed before Heaven and Earth
Soundless and formless, it depends on nothing external
And stays inexhaustible.
It operates with a circular motion
And remains inextinguishable.
It may be considered the mother of all things under Heaven.
I do not know its name, and hence call it the Dao far-fetchedly. (Ch.25)*

*Being looked at, it is imperceptible.
Being listened to, it is inaudible.
Being utilized, it is inexhaustible. (Ch.35)*

*Reversion is the movement of the Dao,
Weakness is the function of the Dao.
All things under Heaven come from Being-within-form,
And Being-within-form comes from Being-without-form. (Ch.40)*

*The greatest music sounds faint;
The greatest form has no shape;
The Dao is hidden and nameless,
Yet it is the Dao that initiates all things
And brings them to completion. (Ch.41)*

*The Dao produces the One.
The One turns into the Two.
The Two give rise to the Three.
The Three bring forth the myriad of things. (Ch.42)*

*The Dao that can be told is not the constant Dao.
The Name that can be named is not the constant Name.
The Being-without-form is the origin of Heaven and Earth.
The Being-within-form is the mother of the myriad things.
Therefore it is always from the Being-without-form that the subtlety of the Dao can be contemplated;
Similarly it is always from the Being-within-form that the manifestations of the Dao can be perceived.
These two have the same source but different names,
They both may be called deep and profound.
The Deepest and most profound
Is the doorway to all subtleties. (Ch.1)*

In his *Message*, Silo describes in an eloquent allegory the experience of 'enlightenment', the awareness about the essence of all things, the vision of the ultimate Reality, of the "Plan" dwelling in all sentient beings. Said experience, coincidentally, only could be reached by remaining calm in the 'void', in Daoist terms –in an attitude of *wu wei* (non-action). In the chapter titled "The Internal States", Silo suggests:

Climbing the stairway of Intent you will reach an unstable dome. From there, take the narrow, winding passageway known as Volubility until you reach a vast and empty space like a platform, which bears the name Open-Space-of-the-Energy.

In that open space you may be frightened by the immense, deserted landscape and the terrifying silence of this night, transfigured by enormous and immobile stars. There, directly over your head, you will see set in the firmament the suggestive form of the Black Moon, a strange, eclipsed moon located exactly opposite the Sun. Here you must await the dawn patiently and with faith, for nothing bad can happen if you remain calm. (...) If in that open space you manage to reach the day, the radiant Sun will rise before your eyes, illuminating reality for the first time. Then you will see that in everything that exists there lives a Plan [Silo 2002].

A meaningful coincidence in the description given by both Masters is the ascent towards a void mental space where the operant should wait calm, patient and full of faith until the moment in which the truthful essence of the things becomes evident to the inner look.

Likewise, close similitudes are found between Lao Zi's statements and the Buddha descriptions about the Middle Way of asceticism in reference to the impermanence (*anicca*) and non-self (*anatta*) of the phenomena and to the path leading to a "supreme wisdom" (*vipassana*).

Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of the infinitude of consciousness, [perceiving,] 'There is nothing,' enters and remains in the dimension of nothingness. (...)

Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of nothingness, enters and remains in the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception. (...)

Then again the monk, with the complete transcending of the dimension of neither perception nor non-perception, enters and remains in the cessation of perception and feeling. And, having seen [that] with discernment, his mental fermentations are completely ended [Buddha - 26 Ariyapariyesana Sutta, tr. Thanissaro Bhikkhu].

This way, the state of cessation of perception and feeling prior to the Buddhist *vipassana* ("supreme wisdom"), seem to clearly correlate with the state of "emptiness" enabling the reconnection with the ineffable *Dao*, where the wonder of the *Dao* may be contemplated from the being without form. Evidently, both cases allude to the suspension of the 'I' and the access to the profound, the *doorway to all subtleties*, which, occasionally, enables to the experience of Recognition. In Silo's conception, the Recognition is a *deep state of inspired consciousness in its experience of the sacred in which subjects believe that they comprehend everything in a single moment* [Silo 2006].

Energy techniques and breathing practices

In several ancient Chinese texts, there are references to energy techniques and breathing practices as part of the discipline known even today as Internal Alchemy (*Neidan*) that traces its roots to the Yellow Emperor, Lao Zi and other immortals of those times.

According to the *Nei Jing*, the Yellow Emperor was specially concerned about longevity. He is the main character of the *Su Nu Ching*, the most ancient treatise known on sexual initiation. In the *Su Nu Ching*, the Yellow Emperor dialogues with his monitors, three women in this case: Su Nu, Cainu and Xuan Nu. They teach him the secrets of sexuality to enjoy a full and long life.

Besides, the *Lie Sien* tells that Lao Zi *appreciated nurturing his breathing, he mastered the art of obtaining vital energy and conserving it*; and that Jong Chang Kong knew accurately the practice of *reparation and leading*, also described as to *bring back the essence to repair the mind*. Additionally, the text affirms that his practices were identical to those of Lao Zi.

Also, In the *Dao De Jing* of Mawangdui, chapter 10, it can be found allusions to the energy techniques and breathing practices:

*Can you keep the spirit and embrace the One
Without departing from them?*

*Can you concentrate your vital force and achieve tenderness
Like an infant without any desires?* [tr. Wang Keping 2008]

In the *Dao De Jing*, the infant, the new born, represents the peak of the vital force, something similar to an androgynous that ignores the division between masculine and feminine and for that reason it is brimming with vitality.

The texts found in Mawangdui accompanying the copies of the *Dao De Jing*, describe numerous breathing exercises for the "regulation of the vital breath" and postures of Daoist gymnastics. Consequently, it could be considered that said energy and breathing practices were known at the moment in which the *Dao De Jing* was written [Torchinov 2005].

The practice "regulation of the vital breath" was and still is one of the most important Daoist procedures in order to achieve higher states of awareness. It comprehends a series of gymnastic and breathing exercises aimed to gain mental control over the energy flow in the human body.

And where should this energy be directed?

As it was stated before, the *Lie Sien*, in the chapter about Lao Zi, tells that [he] *appreciated nurturing his breathing, mastered the art of obtaining vital energy and conserving it*, as well as in other sources there are references to energy techniques and breathing practices which prove their existence at Lao Zi times. So

that, it could be inferred, on the one hand, that the techniques mentioned above provided the Sage of the necessary energy potential in order to maintain the attention constantly concentrated in the suspension of the “I” during his meditative practices. On the other, as underlined before, in reference to the master Jong Chang Kong the *Lie Sien* tells about the practice of *reparation and leading*, and expression equivalent to “bring back the essence to repair the mind”. Additionally, it is considered that the practices of Chang Kong were identical to those of Lao Zi.

From there on, it does not seem difficult to trace the historic imprints of mystical Daoism until the emergence of the Inner Alchemy in the early 8th century. Neidan Alchemy is an array of energy practices aimed to the creation of an immortal spiritual body that would survive physical death that are widely known and still existing among the present Daoist monks who, in turn, acknowledge in Lao Zi the original experiential antecedent. These techniques teaches the way of concentrating the energy and then refining it, that is, successively transform it in a more and more subtle energy carrying it along the “microcosmic orbit” that covers from the perineum (the base of the spine) through the Conception vessel (*ren mo*); the Governor vessel (*tu mai*) and the three inner “Cinnabar Fields” situated below the navel, at the level of the heart, and at the forehead. The new spiritual body is created by the subtle energy produced. Finally, it goes out through the Crown of the head returning to the Void to join the supreme energy of the Dao.

The practices of the Inner Alchemy are codified in paths that, in some cases, differ noticeable from one another, although the notion of “inversion” (*ni*) is constant in all of them. In the most common codification, the practice is characterized by the re-integration of each one of the primordial components of existence, (essence, pneuma and spirit) in the one preceding it, culminating in the “reversion” (*huan*) to the state of non-Being or Emptiness (*wu, xu, kong*). Therefore Neidan Alchemy process can be synthesized as: *refining essence into pneuma* (lianjing huaqi), *refining pneuma into spirit* (lianqi huashen), and *refining spirit and reverting to Emptiness* (lianshen huanxu) [Pregadio 2008].

The Dao gets manifested in the microcosms as well as in the macrocosms, in the One and in the Whole. For this reason, the Daoist texts show an isomorphism between the cosmogonic process, the evolution of the foetus and the birth; and in the inverse sequence, the steps for the cultivation of the *Dao* (the Daoist asceticism). According to Russian professor Evgeny Torchinov, “*for the Taoist, the returning to the womb of the Mother-Tao is not simply a metaphor, but a kind of expression of some profound essence of the isomorphous structure of the universe. It is also the reason why practicing Taoists try to imitate the prenatal states in their self-cultivation. (...) The Taoist image of coming back to the maternal womb as an unborn child in the Tao Te Ching and its ontological connotation, that is, returning to the womb of the emptiness of Tao and obtaining a new everlasting life, are also of the same kind.*” [Torchinov 1997].

General Conclusions regarding procedures

Among the procedures identified in Lao Zi practices and based on the guidelines suggested by Silo in his *Psychology Notes (IV)*, it can be distinguished the following steps for the entrance to the Profound:

- 1- Formulation of the purpose: what is expected to achieve as ultimate objective of the practice – the experience of the Dao to accomplish spiritual immortality;
- 2- Accumulation and mastering the psychophysical energy in order to maintain the attention concentrated on the suspension of the ‘I’: practices to nurture breath, to accumulate energy and to direct it mentally.
- 3- Suspension of the ‘I’: achievement of the state of emptiness throughout the attitude of *wu wei* (non-action) applied to meditation techniques as a mental way of being of detachment; equanimity; progressive deepening of the observation point and increasing “letting go” leading to the suspension of the ‘I’; or possibly, by means of the energetical gestation of the immortal embryo that returns through the crown of the head to the chaos, to the emptiness, to the “origin of all things”.
- 4- Proceed with the deepening of the state of suspension in a continuum until all spatial and temporary references fade out: to contemplate from the being-without-form, or possibly, a fusion of the immortal spirit with the *Dao*.

The previous steps and techniques are in great extent consistent with the unexpectedly simple procedures suggested by Silo in his *Message* aimed to experiment the Force, to access the profound and reach unity and continuity beyond the physical body:

Completely relax your body and quiet your mind... (stillness, equanimity)

Then imagine a transparent and luminous sphere that descends toward you until it comes to rest in your heart...

Notice that the sphere begins to transform into an expanding sensation within your chest...

The sensation of the sphere expands from your heart toward the outside of your body, at the same time that you deepen your breathing... (the attention is focused on the expanding sensation, a progressive deepening of the observation point until the suspension of the 'I')

You will feel new sensations in your hands and the rest of your body... (energy mobilization)

You will perceive increasing undulations. Positive emotions and memories will arise... (ascension of the energy toward the head)

Allow the passage of the Force to take place freely. This Force gives energy to your body and your mind... (internal "loosening" enabling the contact with the profound)

Let the Force manifest within you... ("loosening"...) (

Try to see its light within your eyes, and do not stop it from acting by itself... (deepening of the suspension of the 'I', contemplation from the being-without-form, emptiness)

Feel the Force and its inner light... (deepening of the suspension until "enlightenment")

Let it manifest freely...

As regards the achievement of the experience with the Force, in his *Message*, Silo describes the following registers:

Upon receiving the Force, you will, depending upon your habitual mode of representation, perceive the light or strange sounds. In any case, what is important is that you experience an amplification of consciousness, among whose indicators are a greater lucidity and a disposition to understand what is taking place. (Enlightenment, Recognition)

Afterwards, Silo states: *It is interesting to recognize that many altered states of consciousness have been and almost always are achieved through the use of mechanisms similar to those described [Silo 2002].* Evidently, it is a kind of functioning and a capacity specific to the human conscious in deep search of the ultimate experience of the sacred, striving for finding answers beyond itself to the essential questions about life and its Meaning.

For the purpose of this study, the most meaningful of all the stated before regarding the procedures attributed to Lao Zi for the access to the profound are found in the calm achievement of the supreme Emptiness, the return to the Void and to the chaotic womb of Mother-Dao, to the "origin of all things" so as to experiment the ineffable Dao *that initiates all things and brings them to completion*. All the previously said strongly resonate with the *Commentaries on Silo's Message* in reference to the "inner look" and the turning on itself of consciousness to achieve completeness with the profound, to "collide with the meaning that the Mind gives to all phenomena":

The inner look is an active direction of the consciousness. It is a direction that seeks significance and meaning in the apparently confusing and chaotic inner world. This direction is previous to that look; it impels it. It is this direction that permits the activity of looking internally. And if you manage to grasp that the inner look is necessary to reveal the meaning that impels it, you will understand that in some moment the you who looks will have to see yourself. This "yourself" or "oneself" is not the look or even the consciousness. This "self" is what gives meaning to the look and the operations of the consciousness. It is previous and transcendent to the consciousness itself. In a very broad fashion we will call this "self," "Mind," in order to not confuse it with the operations of the consciousness, nor with the consciousness itself. But when someone seeks to apprehend the Mind as though it were simply one more phenomenon of the consciousness, it will escape them, for it admits neither representation nor comprehension.

The inner look will have to collide with the meaning that the Mind gives to all phenomena, even one's own consciousness and one's own life, and the collision with this meaning will illuminate the consciousness and life [Silo 2009].

It is not difficult to intuit in the terms "Self" and "Mind" some of the innumerable names of the Dao.

Conclusion

Based on the above, we affirm the existence in Lao Zi of a path structured in steps leading to states of inspired consciousness that culminate in the entrance to the profound and the experience of the sacred. This experience geared a new era of spiritual and philosophic development in Chinese civilization, additionally contributing to a significant advancement of humanity as a whole. Recalling at this point Silo's words: *Later, the redeemers brought their messages and came to us in double nature to re-establish that lost unity for which we yearned. Then, too, great inner truth was told.*

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