THE GREENING OF CHINESE DAOISM

Modernity, Bureaucracy and Ecology in Contemporary Chinese Religion

By

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Abstract

This paper seeks to examine the role of Daoism as a green religion. It analyzes a variety of sources which report an overall trend of greening within Daoism in China, including academic literature, primary source material from Daoist groups and my own research from visits to sacred sites at Maoshan and Taibaishan. The analysis reveals that the green trend within Daoism is multifaceted, serving a variety of functions and is intimately bound up with the history of state-religion relations and the process of modernization within China. I contend that the current green agenda being pursued by the Chinese Daoist Association (CDA) represents an attempt by the CDA to transform Daoism into the definition of a modern Chinese religion. The CDA achieves this transformation by emphasizing humanist language and stressing the role of the natural environment, through the institution of a hierarchical structure which regulates temple activities and by distancing itself from so called superstitious practices in adopting a more scientific discourse through ecological principles. This greening process has implications for both environmentalism in China and Daoism as a living tradition.
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<td>ARC</td>
<td>Alliance of Religions and Conservations</td>
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<td>CDA</td>
<td>中国道教协会 (Chinese Daoist (Taoist) Association)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CCP</td>
<td>中国共产党 (Chinese Communist Party)</td>
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<td>Environment Management Foundation</td>
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**Introduction**

This paper seeks to examine the role of Daoism as a green religion. It will analyze a variety of sources which report an overall trend of greening within Daoism in China, including academic literature, primary source material from Daoist groups and my own research from visits to sacred sites. The analysis will reveal that the green trend within Daoism is multifaceted, serving a variety of functions and is intimately bound up with the history of state-religion relations and the process of modernization within China.

Significant evidence in the last fifteen years has emerged to suggest Daoism has become China’s ‘Green Religion.’ Academic scholarship in the West has a long history of touting the relevance of Daoist cosmology in terms of an environmental ethic. But while this trend in scholarship is important and useful, of particular interest is the recent trend within China to promote the values of Daoism as an antidote to environmental woes. The Chinese Daoist Association (Zhongguo daojiao xiehui 中国道教协会; hereafter CDA) is the national association responsible for overseeing the management of all registered Daoist temples of both the Quanzhen 全真 and Zhengyi 正一 orders of Daoism. It serves as a bridge between Daoist organizations and the government to encourage cooperation with legislation and regulations on religion (Chan 2005:93). Since 1995, it has actively been promoting Daoism as a green religion (Zhang J. 2001: 370). In its bid to be recognized as such it has issued a series of statements and declarations which aim to showcase Daoism’s commitment to an ecological agenda as well as its role in educating people in China in sustainable methods. In so doing it has committed itself to a variety of ecological practices, including reducing incense used by pilgrims, reducing
waste and promoting waste management, encouraging energy efficiency at all temples and pilgrim sites and conserving natural areas such as mountain temples and the area surrounding them. The statements and declarations issued by the CDA advocate a harmonious relationship between human beings and the natural world. The CDA, along with the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), which has been active in supporting the CDA’s endeavors, constructed its first ever Ecology Temple on Mt. Taibai (Taibaishan 太白山) in 2006 along with an ecology center to facilitate education and the promotion of sustainable methods for all visitors to the temple (ARC 2005 :np). Similarly, Mt. Mao (Maoshan 茅山) the famous Shangqing 上清 Daoist peak, has constructed a scenic area as part of the mountain tourist park that houses a brand new temple dedicated to Laozi, the newly crowned God of Ecological Protection (Shengtai baohu shen 生态保护神). The scenic area emphasizes sustainability and environmentally friendly actions for all visitors. These two sites reveal a new trend in Daoist sacred sites that combine temple visits with ecological education. They represent a more practical application of the green agenda and the first steps towards educating the public on a national scale.

This transformation of Daoism raises some important questions in regards to the influence of modernity on Daoism and the role of religion in addressing the ecological crisis. In analyzing these various components of the greening of Daoism, I will take into consideration three different components. First, I will briefly look at the some of the scholarship surrounding the role of Daoism and its cosmology in creating an environmental ethic. The academic study of Daoism’s textual tradition offers important
insight into Daoism’s commitment to an ecological worldview. Second, I will investigate the rhetoric being put forth by the CDA through their statements and declarations in regards to their ecological agenda. In order to do this I will examine primary sources which include statements and declarations issued by the CDA which outline their commitment to promoting an environmental ethic and the steps they are taking in order to realize this green agenda in all temples. I will analyze the ways in which this rhetoric has been constructed in terms of the history of state-religion relations and how the modern state conception of religion has influenced this agenda. Finally, I will offer evidence from research conducted at two sites in China to investigate the extent to which the CDA is undertaking an ecological agenda. The first site is Maoshan, the site of the most recent conference on ecology hosted by the CDA where the Maoshan declaration was issued as well as the Eight Year Plan, the most comprehensive undertaking of the CDA to date and outlines a detailed agenda for all Daoist temples over the next eight years. The second site is Tiejia Ecology Temple, a mountain temple that has recently been rebuilt as an ecological temple along with an ecology centre that promotes sustainable practices and services as an education center for pilgrims and adherents. Through this investigation I hope to be able to generate discussion about the role of modernity in shaping this new trend in Daoism and as well as Daoism’s influence in the larger discussion of religion and the environment.
Chapter 1: Historical Background

The study of religion and ecology is not a self-evident field. These two disciplines have often seemed at odds with one another. However, the modern study of religion increasingly demands a more interdisciplinary approach and more and more the presence of ecological concerns is on the rise in religious circles. That religion, historically considered a contributing factor of the ecological crisis in the West, could be considered a valuable resource in combating environmental malaise, is a recent development. Increasingly, however, religion around the world is contributing to the fight against ecological disaster.\(^1\) Nowhere is this ‘greening’ of religion more apparent than in China where the CDA is making concerted efforts to identify Daoism as the nation’s preeminent ‘green’ religion. This essay explains the CDA’s shift in terms of two factors. The first is a global factor, that religions across the world are now seen as playing significant roles in combating the ecological crisis. Daoism has a unique role to play in this regard because of its perceived affinity for the natural environment. The second is more of an internal factor: the process of modernization in China has provided the groundwork for Daoism to transform itself from a collection of independent, community run temples and shrines into a network of organized and hierarchically bound temples with a nationwide agenda. Using the ecological agenda as a rallying point for Daoism serves to reinforce a perception of Daoism as an official religion that is responsive the modern Chinese state’s interest in sustainable development.

Considerable debate has taken place in recent years regarding the nature of the ecological crisis. It is not my intention to engage the debate on whether or not the world

\(^1\) See for example, Gottlieb (2006), ARC website www.arcworld.org, the series *Religions of the World and Ecology*, Mary Evelyn Tucker and John Grim, eds.
can be characterized as being in a state of ecological crisis but rather to examine the responses from stemming from a religious perspective on what is perceived as the ecological crisis. What follows is a brief history and characterization of how religious environmentalists see the ecological crisis.

**Religion and Ecology**

Western scholarship on religion and ecology has generated a narrative to explain the rise of environmental problems, attributing the larger ecological crisis to values associated with modernity in the West. The ecological crisis has been characterized by most as a result of the enlightenment mindset of unstoppable progress and industrial growth. The humanist values embedded in the project of modernity rejected an interconnected model of the cosmos and elevated humanity above the rest of the natural world. The “religion” of modernity insisted on dominion over nature, a perception that led to locating the value of the earth and its resources only in their ability to provide for human needs and desires (Gottlieb 1995: 579). It saw progress as unstoppable, earthly resources as inexhaustible and economic growth as limitless (Tu 1994: 20). The exaltation of humans over nature created an alienation from the natural world, a dualistic mindset according to advocates (Berry 2009: 131). Thomas Berry, an important voice for the Deep Ecology movement, targets Rene Descartes specifically, locating the beginning so a dualistic mindset in his claims that the universe was composed of only mind and mechanism (Berry 2004: 492). According to this framework, dualism allowed for the unprecedented destruction of the planet and its ecosystems bringing humanity to a point of complete degradation of all life systems (Taylor and Zimmerman 2008: 457). Tu Weiming, a contemporary Confucian scholar, has written of the “disastrous consequences”
of the environmental abuse the planet has suffered at the hands of humanity, and stresses that the problem extends far beyond the human community, where the “serious loss of species, genes and ecosystems is endangering the equilibrium of life support systems” (Tu 1994: 20). Bill Devall, another prominent supporter of the Deep Ecology movement, has also weighed in stating that the dominant paradigm in the modern West measures progress by economic growth, and sees “nature as a storehouse of resources” to be manipulated to suit our purposes (Devall 1980: 300). Intimately tied to these ideas is the role Christianity played in shaping ideas of dominion in the modern paradigm. Lynn White’s damning portrayal of Christianity as the underlying cause of the ecological crisis went a long way to condemning religion. In his pivotal article, The Historical Roots of Our Ecologic Crisis, White situated the cause of environmental degradation in the Judeo-Christian framework of dominion over nature (White 2004 [1966]: 196). According to White and his advocates, this perspective led to a sense of dualism that separates humanity from nature, one that was not only supported but encouraged by reference to scriptural passages describing the dominion of humans over the natural world (197). This anthropocentric outlook gave rise to an ethos in which nature is continually devalued, seen only as a resource to support the lifestyles of the modern western world. White comments “we shall continue to have a worsening ecological crisis until we reject the Christian axiom that nature has no reason for existence save to serve man” (201). Both the criticisms of modernity and Christianity demonstrate that religious environmentalists view the underlying paradigm of the modern world as the cause of the ecological crisis. In order to overturn this mentality, the world is in need of a paradigm shift, for as Tu as
has pointed out “[w]e are so seasoned in the Enlightenment mentality that we assume that
the reasonableness of its general ideological thrust is self-evident” (Tu 1994: 21).

The above historical context makes clear the relationship between perceptions of the
ecological crisis, modernity and Christianity according to the narrative that has arisen in
modern Western scholarship. The ecological crisis arose from values rooted in
Christianity’s claim to dominion over nature which allowed a dualistic worldview to
develop in the West. This logic is also evident in prominent Chinese intellectuals such as
Tu Weiming (2000) and Pan Yue (2007: 2), who notes that Western industrialization
"broke down the natural cycle and upset the equilibrium of the global ecosystem, and
poisoned the relationship between man and nature" This narrative has led
environmentalists to investigate non-Western religions in the quest for alternative
paradigms and worldviews in order to imagine how to reintegrate human beings in to the
natural environment.

**Daoism and Ecology**

This line of analysis has therefore opened a space for perceiving Eastern religious
traditions as innately eco-friendly, a perception that is supported by early Western writing
on Daoism and other Eastern traditions. Daoism came to popular attention in the West in
the 1960s, and was portrayed by alternative religious ‘seekers’ as a harmonious, life
affirming philosophy. This portrayal ensured its place among the New Age traditions and
environmentalists, and contributed to the perception in the West that Daoism is an
inherently nature-loving, environmental religion. A particularly telling example of this
perception of Daoism is Delores LaChapelle who in her book *Sacred Land, Sacred Sex—
Rapture of the Deep* exalts the salvational qualities of early Daoist texts:
Now after all these years of gradual, deepening understanding of the [D]aoist was, I can state categorically that all these frantic last-minute efforts of our Western world to latch on to some ‘new idea’ for saving the earth are unnecessary. It’s been done for us already – thousands of years ago – by the [D]aoists. We can drop all that frantic effort and begin following the way of Lao Tzu [Laozi] and Chuang Tzu [Zhuangzi] (qtd. in Paper 2001: 10).

Similar sentiments are echoed by Peter Marshall who claims “[t]he first clear expression of ecological thinking appears in ancient China from about the sixth century BC. …The [Daoists] … offered the most profound and eloquent philosophy of nature ever elaborated and the first stirrings of ecological sensibilities” (qtd. in Paper 2001: 11).

It is not my intent here to pass judgment on this perception of Daoism, but to note that the ways in which Daoism has been represented in the West are directly informed by the discourse of modernity and the orientalist desire to project Romanticism onto Eastern philosophy (see also Said 1978; King 1999).

The means by which Daoism became associated with the environmental movement was through its foundational texts, namely the Daode jing 道德经 and the Zhuangzi 庄子. These two texts, along with the Yijing 易经 formed the basis of what Elijah Siegler (2006) terms “American Daoism,” a particular brand of Daoism unique to the Western world, which transformed Chinese Daoism from a religion focused on its immortality, rituals, canonized scriptures and hagiographies to a humanist, nature based philosophy based on physical practices such as taiji quan and qigong. Western Daoism espoused a narrow canon of early Daoist philosophy, choosing to leave out those scriptures that made reference to deities and immortals (see also Siegler 2006). The Daode jing and the Zhuangzi also influenced many New Age movements as well as
environmental groups such as Deep Ecology (Paper 2001: 9). These texts in particular were adopted due to their emphasis on following the natural course of the cosmos and allowing all life forms to exist according to their own nature. As Paper has convincingly demonstrated, the Eastern religious traditions were often romanticized in the West and viewed by these groups as superior “green” religions because Westerners perceived their cosmology in terms of human beings interconnected and interdependent with the natural world, a perception which supposedly translated into a more responsible and sustainable lifestyle (Paper 2001: 9-12). He notes, however, that “the Daoism of the deep ecologists is utterly a modern Western one. That a Western Daoism can solve a crisis assumed to be brought on by and unredeemable through Western thinking implies a logical contradiction” (Paper 2001: 12). Paper’s remark suggests that seeing a Western style environmental ethic in these early texts is the product of Western imagination rather than historical reality, a line of argument supported by contemporary scholarship (e.g. Kirkland 2001: 284).

More recently, scholars have begun to assess the environmental value of Daoist religion based on historically-informed studies of Daoism rather than simply the demands of Western culture. One of the first attempts to produce a more informed scholarship lies in the anthology *Daoism and Ecology: Ways within a Cosmic Landscape*, which emerged out of the conference series on Religion and Ecology initiated by the Center for the Study of World Religions at Harvard. According to the introduction, *Daoism and Ecology* concerns itself with “the fullness of the Daoist tradition …the incredible corpus of ‘revealed’ texts, the complex ritual and meditational practices, composite sociological forms, practical eclectic ethics, and soaring cosmic vision associated with the eighteen-
hundred-year history of the living Daoist religion” (Girardot, et al., 2001: xlv). While the popular view of Daoism was informed by only limited sources, this anthology delved deeply into the historical tradition of Daoism to investigate the possibility of Daoism and Ecology intersecting from a non-Orientalist perspective. The result is rather varied and multifarious. While most scholars are in agreement that there is a potential for Daoism to integrate with ease an ecological agenda due to its cosmological principles, some show concern that reading a modern day environmental ethic into ancient texts is at best reductionist and at worst Orientalist. Russell Kirkland and Jeffrey F. Meyer are two examples from this anthology (see Kirkland 2001: 283-284 and Meyer 2001: 231) but also David Cooper, who elsewhere has argued that despite similarities to current issues, it would be anachronistic to suggest that the pleas in the Daodejing are actually pleas for ecological sustainability (Cooper 1994: np). With these warnings in mind, the fruitfulness of the articles in *Daoism and Ecology* is in illuminating ways in which the textual tradition and the living tradition of Daoism do interact with Ecology albeit in very different ways than originally perceived in the West. To this end, articles such as Meyer’s discuss the role of scholar and container gardens in harnessing the power of the natural landscape while Thomas H. Hahn’s article reviews Daoist notions of wilderness in cultivation practices and the role of mountains as places of great spiritual power.

Most germane to my own research is the section in *Daoism and Ecology* entitled “Practical Ecological Concerns in Contemporary Daoism.” In his article entitled ‘Respecting the environment, or visualizing highest clarity,’ James Miller demonstrates how the visualization process in Shangqing meditation can help foster a more harmonious relationship between the practitioner and the natural world around them. In offering a
description of Shangqing visualization practices, Miller demonstrates how an emphasis on integrating the mind and body with the surrounding environment could form the basis for a modern day “respect” and responsibility for the environment (Miller 2001: 358-359). Also included in this section is “A Declaration of the Chinese Daoist Association on Global Ecology” which outlines the first statement issued by the CDA on the environment. The article, written by Zhang Jiyu, also discusses the innate aspects of Daoism which lend themselves to environmental responsibility, drawing mainly on passages from the *Daodejing* (Zhang J. 2001: 362, 364). Both the article and the statement (included within the text of the article) detail the practical approaches the CDA will take to promote an ecological agenda. These approaches include promoting sustainable practices through education, planting trees and cultivating forests and using Daoist mountains “as exemplars of the systematic task of environmental engineering” (370). Through these endeavors, the CDA, according to Zhang, hopes to achieve a harmonious and balanced world.

For better or for worse, the West has played integral part in constructing an image of Daoism’s affinity to the natural environment. Whether through popular association or interested scholarship, Daoism has emerged as a cultural resource for religious environmentalism. This is part of the global enterprise of examining religion and ecology and part of the attempt to locate environmental ethics outside of Western religions. With China’s opening to the West in the 1980s and the rapid translation of Western scholarship into Chinese it is inevitable that Chinese Daoism has begun to be influenced by Western perceptions, and vice-versa. However, the present form of Chinese Daoism cannot be understood purely in terms of external factors, and it is important to place the greening of
Chinese Daoism in the context of the Chinese state’s engagement and transformation of religion in the 20\textsuperscript{th} century.

**Religion in Modern China**

The most significant feature of state-church relations in modern China has been the establishment of national associations that form the bridge between local religious practice and state supervision. These associations were created in 1912 following the establishment of the Republic of China, and included the Chinese Daoist Association along with national associations for four other religions, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam (Goossaert 2008: 218). The creation of these associations represents a significant shift in the understanding of religion and the relationship between religious groups and the state in China. The religious climate of China prior to any modernizing attempts was predominantly locally based with community run temples in most villages and towns that often joined Daoist, Buddhist and Confucian practices and deities together within the same temple (Chan 2005: 103). National religious organizations thus paralleled the creation of the modern Chinese secular nation state which has consistently sought to define and control religious life through a rational bureaucratic process (Potter 2003: 318).

The current Chinese Daoist Association was formalized in 1959 and made up largely of abbots from the Quanzhen sect and based at White Cloud Monastery (Baiyun Guan 白云观) in Beijing (Goossaert 2008: 218). Contemporary Daoism exists to this day in two sects, Quanzhen and Zhengyi. Quanzhen is predominantly more monastic, espousing more ascetic practices and establishing monasteries for its practitioners while Zhengyi represents a more community based priesthood, offering services to the lay
community, running temples and major festivals (Chan 2005: 93). The Zhengyi priests have often resisted a more standard or orthodox structure and maintained a high level of independence and individualization from one community to the next, often displaying a certain amount of local cultural influence, while the Quanzhen sect has established a certain degree of standardization (Chan 2005: 93). Quanzhen’s predisposition to a more hierarchical organization lends itself more to the character of the religious associations and as a result, the Quanzhen abbots and temples tend to be more prominent and officially recognized by the association. Zhengyi’s more family orientated lineage tends to be at odds with the overarching, hierarchical nature of the association. Officially there are 2500 priests who provide services to the communities at over 1700 temples (Chan 2005: 93). Unofficially there are still a significant number of Zhengyi priests who adhere to the traditional hereditary means of ordination that remain outside the structural authority of the CDA (Chan 2005: 93). Vincent Goossaert has convincingly argued that the push towards a secular government that so characterized both the republican period as well as the current communist regime necessitated a shift from this older, traditional and non-institutional form of transmission to the creation of religious institutions, such as the CDA, which did not previously exist in China (Goossaert 2008: 210). The structural transformation that resulted from these transitional years provided the necessary framework for the CDA to promote Daoism as a unified tradition with a nationwide green agenda, something that would have been nearly impossible before the creation of the religious associations.

Nationalists at the start of the 20th century located the source of China’s inequality with Western puissance in the continued presence of widespread religious belief that
shaped the day to day experiences of the entire population (Palmer, D 2008: 115).

Goossaert demonstrates that in order to create the Western based model that promoted secularism through the separation of state from religious institutions, China needed to create the structure of religious institutions. This need gave birth to the modern religious associations that still exist today. The state tolerated those religious organizations with authoritative texts which were also, traditionally, amenable to state control, such as Buddhism and Daoism which share a long history of state patronage and regulation. It distinguished them from local religion which lacked overarching organization and central doctrine and came to be labeled as superstition (mixin 迷信; Duara 1991: 79). The national religious associations, which instituted hierarchical structures within each religious tradition, were modeled on a more Western Judeo-Christian structure (Goossaert 2008: 210). Local temples were made to register with the larger associations in order to gain legal protection by asserting their segregation from superstitious practices. The benefit of these associations for the state lies in their ability to control religious groups from a top down hierarchy and to create a more unified and coherent structure. In so doing the state was better able to regulate and manage religious practices and activities and continue to criminalize those traditions it deemed superstitious. Thus the religious associations served two important roles in the process of modernization in China. First, they created an oppositional entity from which the state could distinguish itself as an atheist government. Second, in insisting on a strict definition of religion, to which the associations were bound, the state was able to differentiate religious practices from more benign cultural practices. This allowed for a continued and definitive campaign against religion in favor of an atheist state.
The current religious climate in China has been shaped by a shift from the staunch anti-religion outlook of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) during the Cultural Revolution to a more tolerant stance. While Nationalists at the start of the 20th century mainly targeted those religions labeled superstition, the Communist era went a step further. The Cultural Revolution successfully halted religious practice and caused the desecration and destruction of large numbers of temples (Tam Wai Lun 2006: 61). Those that were not destroyed were converted in to workshops in the name of production and progress (Yang, M 2008: 25). During this period the CDA ceased all operations (Jackson 2009: np). It wasn’t until the beginning of the 1980’s that the anti-religion campaigns were halted altogether and some of the more stringent policies against religion were relaxed allowing the CDA to reclaim and reconstruct temples and temple grounds (Potter 2003: 319). A more tolerant stance on the part of the state has created the space for religions to create a more modern identity and engage with current issues, such as ecology.

The CCP came to recognize the persistent nature of religious adherence within the general populace and took measures to be able to regulate and control it. In 1982 the CCP issued Document 19 which granted the right to religious freedom to Chinese citizens. This right, however, was largely curtailed by the vague language of the document and the rigid definition of religion espoused by the CCP (Potter 2003: 319). Notably, the protection of this freedom was offered with the understanding that it was necessary only until religion itself was no longer necessary (MacInnis 1989: 10, “Document 19” sect. I). Document 19 recognized only five official religions, Daoism, Buddhism, Catholicism, Protestantism and Islam, only religions that had formed national associations (MacInnis
1989: 11, “Document 19” sect. II) effectively making all practices that fell outside of these traditions illegal, namely folk traditions, superstition and cults. Party policy also dictated that all religious structures were under the administrative control of the Bureau of Religious Affairs (recently reconstituted as the State Administration for Religious Affairs); however the management of these buildings was left to the national associations (MacInnis 1989: 18, “Document 19” sect VI).

Party members were restricted from affiliation with any religion, official or otherwise as Document 19 insisted that Marxism remained incompatible with theism (MacInnis 1989: 20, “Document 19” sect. IX). Despite its recognition of the right to religious freedom and these five religions, Party policy continued to stress the value of atheist education and supported atheist propaganda through the education system (Potter 2003: 320). The underlying theme of Document 19 is well summarized within the document itself:

the basic starting point and firm foundation for our handling of the religious questions and for the implementation of our policy and of religious belief lies in our desire to unite the mass of believers and nonbelievers and enable them to center all their will and strength on the common goal of building a modernized, powerful Socialist state. Any action or speech that deviates in the least from this basic line is completely erroneous, and must be firmly resisted and opposed by both Party and people (MacInnis 189: 15, sect. IV)

The CCP’s language suggests they view religion as a potentially valuable resource for promoting the socialist state and supporting government policy which could have acted as a contributing underlying factor in granting religious freedom. This is well reflected in the mandate for the CDA which is to “unite Daoists from all over the country, promote
patriotism and love of Daoism, and have Daoists contribute to the construction of a socialist society” (qtd. in Jackson 2009: np).

While the new regulations that formed the 2004 Religious Affairs Regulations which took effect in January 2005 have clarified to a certain extent the roles and responsibilities of government agencies in the management of religious affairs, the state still maintains significant control over religious affairs and the structure of religious life in general (Carlson 2005: 1). Regulations are still firmly in place for religious institutions for education and the publication of religious materials (State Council of People’s Republic of China, 2004: np, Articles 7 & 8). The 2004 regulations still maintain that religious groups have a professional clergy and that their members must continue to “uphold the leadership of the Chinese Communist Party, uphold socialism, [and] be patriotic” (qtd. in Carlson 2005: 10). As these regulations demonstrate, the CCP supports religious traditions which display strong hierarchical, bureaucratic structures, along with support for the overall national agenda that stresses the importance of the state and communist party. Most importantly, official religions must be distanced from the so-called superstition of the local or folk practices which remain illegal.

These definitive regulations on the nature of religion, coupled with the state’s insistence on national religious associations, created the framework necessary for the CDA to emerge as the nation’s green religion. The ecological agenda currently being pursued by the CDA espouses many of these official traits and allows Daoism to promote itself an official religion based on the regulations set out by the CCP in three important ways; the green agenda emphasizes humanistic languages and concepts by highlighting the role of nature; it supports a hierarchical structure through the promotion of its
regulations on ecological sustainability throughout all temples; and it distances itself from superstition by adopting the scientific language ecology and environment. The following chapter seeks to demonstrate how these three features of modernity—humanism, hierarchy and science—are vital constituents of the contemporary project of the greening of Chinese Daoism.
Chapter 2: The Greening of Chinese Daoism

The greening of Chinese Daoism is a product of both the Western narrative of religion and ecology and the discourse present in the modernization of China through which it seeks to legitimize itself. In speaking about the nature of the ecological crisis, the CDA harbours similar concerns about a dualistic worldview and endeavors to repair the gulf between humanity and the natural world. The Western construction of Daoism, valid or not, has laid the groundwork for the CDA to showcase its cosmology offering it up as possible solution to environmental woes. Yet the response is also characterized by an indigenous component in which the ecological agenda serves to validate Daoism as a modern Chinese religion in line with state regulations on the nature and role of religion.

The CDA’s response to the ecological crisis can be divided into two main components: official policy statements and concrete environmental projects guided by those official policy statements. Since the first official statement was issued in 1995 there have been a variety of statements and declarations issued by the CDA regarding their interpretation of the ecological crisis as well measures they are taking to combat it.

Initially the statements were rather vague in nature, broadly outlining concerns with the current worldview regarding the environment and Daoism’s unique response based on its interpretation of the role of humanity in the natural world. They have progressed towards more concrete proposals that outline substantial plans to create sustainable temples and minimize the effect of religious tourism on the environment. They also lobby to bring widespread education about sustainable practices to people all over China. They are as follows:

trans. in Zhang 2001),


5. The Eight Year Plan (2008; trans. CDA 2008)

In terms of concrete environmental projects, two temple complexes in particular reveal the progress of this new agenda; Maoshan 茅山 in Jiangsu 江苏 province and Tiejia 铁甲 Ecology Temple in the Heihe National Forest Park 黑河国家森林公园 at the base of Taibaishan 太白山 in Shaanxi 陕西 province, both of which I was able to visit in May 2010. Maoshan has recently been developed into a scenic tourist park that highlights the caves and springs that naturally occur on this mountain. Also newly constructed is a large Daoist temple, Yuanfu wanning gong 元符万宁宫, which houses a giant, golden Laozi statue, some 33m high. The mountain is also home to the older Jiuxiao wanfu temple 九霄万福宫 which is located at the top of the mountain as well as two military monuments and a few hiking trails. The entrance fee, 70RMB per person, allows tourists access to all three components of the park: the military monuments, the scenic area with the newer Laozi temple, and the older Jiuxiao wanfu temple at the top. The Tiejia Ecology Temple was completed in 2006 with the assistance of the Alliance for Religions and Conservation (ARC) and the Ecological Management Foundation (EMF) (He 2007:
The grounds hold a newer temple and an “ecology center”, both constructed, according the ARC website, from local materials by local builders held to a high ethical standard (ARC 2007: np). The nearby temple Louguantai 楼观台, which I was also able to briefly visit, has also been instrumental in supporting the construction of the ecology temple as well as in the promotion of the ecological agenda (He 2007: np). In visiting these locations I was able to ascertain the extent to which the greening process was taking place on the ground. Analyzing these spaces as examples of new Daoist sacred spaces allows for an elucidation of the role that the environment and its protection are playing in the modernization of Daoism. Together with the statements and declarations these sacred sites paint the picture of a new component of Daoism operating in China.

**Statements and Declarations**

With the above historical context in mind, it is now possible to turn to an examination of the CDA’s response to the ecological crisis through statements and declarations it has issued since 1995. After the initial declaration, the ARC published the Daoist Faith Statement on its website in 2003. In November 2006 the CDA opened the Taibaishan Ecology Temple and Ecology Center, the first of its kind. The Ecology center hosted the first two annual ecology conferences organized by the CDA, ARC and EMF in 2006 and 2007 to educate monks and nuns in sustainable practices. At the conference in 2006 the attendees, who included monks and nuns from 10 monasteries and temples in Shaanxi and Gansu provinces, signed the Qinling Declaration. The Conference in 2008

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2 The ARC, according to the mission statement on their website, “is a secular body that helps the major religions of the world to develop their own environmental programmes, based on their own core teachings, beliefs and practices” ARC has worked closely with the CDA in China since the initial declaration in 1995. [www.arcworld.org/about_ARC.htm](http://www.arcworld.org/about_ARC.htm)
was held in Jurong, near Maoshan in Jiangsu province. The attendees at the conference increased from 18 in 2007 to 69 monks and nuns (ARC 2008a: np). Also in attendance were 120 government officials and high ranking UNDP representatives. The Maoshan conference produced the *Maoshan Declaration* as well as establishing the *Eight Year Plan*. The rhetoric employed by the CDA throughout these documents suggests an agenda beyond mere care for the environment. I contend that this green agenda is influenced by the modern Chinese state’s construction of the category of religion and serves to present Daoism as a religion innately suited to this definition. The green agenda accomplishes this in three important ways. First, in issuing a series of statements on its environmental policy, the CDA has adopted language that often mirrors that of the government and official agencies. The language emphasizes humanist, life affirming philosophies aimed at creating a harmonious world, and deemphasizes ritual and religious practice. Second, in creating a substantial program to address and counteract environmental degradation to be instituted in all temples across the country, the CDA is highlighting its strong institutional and hierarchical structure, which represents a significant change from pre-Communist China in which temples were frequently community run and organized. Finally, its green agenda adopts many components of the science of ecology, thereby aligning Daoism with a modern worldview that prioritizes science and distances itself from the so-called superstitious traditions which form the basis of illegal religious practices in China. It is my contention that in adopting this discourse, the CDA is in the process of transforming Daoism into what can be considered a legitimate modern religious tradition in the new China, as well as establishing itself as a valuable organization that both supports and promotes a government agenda.
The Ecological Crisis

The CDA characterizes the ecological crisis as the result of a flawed worldview that views human beings as separate from the natural world. The green agenda currently being pursued responds directly to the threat perceived as inherent in this worldview.

According to the Daoist Faith Statement, issued by the CDA in 2003,

the problem of the environment not only is brought about by modern industry and technology, but also has a deep connection with people’s world outlook, with their sense of value, and with the way they structure knowledge. Some people’s ways of thinking have, in certain ways, unbalanced the harmonious relationship between human beings and nature, and overstressed the power and influence of the human will. People think that nature can be rapaciously exploited (CDA 2003: np)

The problematic nature of the current worldview, as understood by the CDA, lies in the great divide between humanity and the natural world. Human beings espousing this worldview treat nature as subservient, expecting not only limited consequences but also a limitless and boundless world in which to perpetuate these activities (Zhang, J 2001:364). This perception has led to an unbalanced, unharmonious relationship between humanity and nature and has allowed humanity to view itself in a position of power over the natural world, exploiting its resources and systematically destroying the planet (364). This, in turn, has led to the ecological crisis currently being experienced all over the world.

A Harmonious World

Zhang Jiyu 张继禹, sixty-fifth descendant of the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling and current vice president of the CDA, writes, in his comments on the statement issued by the CDA in 1995, that “the ancient doctrines of Daoism are eminently able to remedy the deficiencies caused by the contemporary ethical theories” (365). Since the release of this statement the CDA has been promoting Daoism as a Chinese religion that
possesses unique traits best suited to address the crisis and bring about an environmental ethic capable of saving the world. It has been carefully constructing a discourse in which Daoism is increasingly being seen as a ‘natural’ religious answer to the ecological crisis by using language that emphasizes humanist values and life-affirming aspects of the Daoist tradition. The language also often reflects similar language used by the state and state officials regarding the environment and China’s approach to ecological crisis.

The declaration issued by the CDA in 1995 made the following assertion:

We shall spread the ecological teachings of Daoism, lead all Daoist followers to abide in the teachings of self-so or non-action, observe the injunction against killing for amusement purposes, preserve and protect the harmonious relationship of all things with Nature, establish paradises of immortals on Earth, and pursue the practice of our beliefs…
We will raise the awareness regarding ecology among various social groups, resist the human exploitation of Nature and the abuse of natural environments, protect the earth upon which human survival depends, and generally make the world a better place for humans to inhabit.
(Zhang J 2001:370)

This initial statement is instructive for two reasons. It reveals a general evangelizing thrust characteristic of this new movement. It seeks not only to include all Daoist adherents under the ecological banner but also extends out to include the world at large; a notable departure for a religion that prior to the arrival of the CCP was structured largely around local communities, where temples were run with little to no hierarchical structure. More importantly however, it highlights some of the trends in Daoism that make it credible as an ecological religion, such as the notions of ‘self-so or non-action.’ Notably, the characteristics referenced speak more broadly to understandings of the natural processes of the world rather than to rituals or in depth knowledge of the presences of immortals and celestial beings.
Zhang Jiyu, in writing about the events surrounding this statement notes “Daoism, like other great religions of the world, has a religious ideology that reflects its worldview, moral precepts, and ultimate concerns. Due to its close association with Chinese culture, Daoism has characteristics different from other religious traditions” (Zhang J. 2001:362). Zhang summarizes these two distinguishing characteristics of Daoism as “Respecting Dao and Greatly Valuing De” and “The Way of Immortality Gives High Value to Life” (362-3). These same two points are echoed in the Daoist Faith Statement which appears on the ARC website, issued by the CDA in 2003.³ It likewise locates the value of Daoism in the ideas of Dao as the origin of everything and that in pursuing immortality one gains great value for life (CDA 2003: np). Emphasizing these two points allows the CDA to characterize Daoism as innately connected to nature and life affirming.

“Respecting Dao and Greatly Valuing De” is understood by Zhang in the following way “A Daoist believes in Dao, relies upon Dao, cultivates Dao, and practices Dao. De refers to the particular conduct of the believer as she practices Dao. One may say that de is the practice of Dao in the believer’s life” (Zhang J 2001: 362). Intimately bound up in this idea is the foundational teaching of ziran 自然 variously translated as self-so or naturalness. Ziran is the natural state of each being. It implies allowing things to develop according to their own nature. The idea of non interference with this course, the second important aspect at work in this understanding, is characterized in the idea of wuwei 无为 variously translated as non-action, actionless action or effortless action. Together these two concepts represent the principle of the Dao which according to Zhang “implies

³ The statement appears with the assertion that it is an official document of the CDA
purity, tranquility, and simplicity, as well as softness and noncombativeness – the spirit of humility or vacuity as expressed by the image of the valley” (Zhang J. 2001: 362).

The second element referred to by both Zhang and the Daoist Faith Statement is the pursuit of immortality and the value it creates for life. Zhang notes that Daoists’ “ultimate goal is to let their lives and spirits become one with the Dao—the way of immortality—(xiandao). This is the reason why Daoists treasure life and value it as the most worthy thing on Earth” (Zhang J. 2001: 363). The Daoist Faith Statement likewise extols the virtues of pursuing immortality, claiming it will help keep people in good health and stay younger. It notes, however, that “there is one point that cannot be neglected: a peaceful and harmonious natural environment is a very important external condition” (CDA 2003: np).

Taken together, these two aspects of Daoism form the basis of the CDA’s understanding of the workings of the universe and the role of humanity in the larger cosmological scheme. They likewise inform the reader about the kind of religion it considers Daoism to be. Both aspects are devoid of any strong supernatural religious sentiments; rather they espouse a natural ethos. More importantly however, both emphasize the importance of life and the natural order. Even when discussing the pursuit of Immortality, the emphasis, rather than on the heavenly realms, is on the health benefits and respect for life such practices cultivate. The image presented by the CDA is actually one that shows Daoism as a life affirming tradition which seeks to embrace the natural environment. Expanding upon this image, the CDA has also chosen to stress the components of the tradition which speak directly to an ecological ethic.
The *Daoist Faith Statement* stresses four main principles that promote Daoism’s inherent relationship to nature and its ecological qualities. To begin, chapter 25 of the Daodejing states “Humanity follows the Earth, the Earth follows Heaven, Heaven follows the Dao, and the Dao follows what is natural” (CDA 2003: np). The *Daoist Faith Statement* explains this rather esoteric comment in saying “[w]e should cultivate in people’s minds the way of no action in relation to nature, and let nature be itself” (CDA 2003: np). Ren Farong, current president of the CDA has expressed similar sentiments when promoting Daoism at conferences around the world. He notes “[j]ust imagine all local wars, regional conflicts and environmental degradation in the world are caused by human errors. Therefore, Taoism advocates governing by doing nothing that goes against nature” (qtd. in Xie 2008: np). His conveys the underlying sense that the natural processes of the world already possess an inherent wisdom that should be respected by human beings. This sentiment stresses the idea of the natural. The Dao and the process of the life in general are largely couched in almost secular, humanist terms, an emphasis which will continue through the remaining three points.

Second, the cosmos and everything in it are composed of two complementary forces Yin and Yang. Yin describes the female, cold, soft, etc., while Yang describes male, hot, hard, etc. The importance of these two forces is located in their dynamic: “The two forces are in constant struggle within everything. When they reach harmony, the energy of life is created. From this we can see how important harmony is to nature” (CDA 2003: np). The authors of the Statement expand this understanding of the cosmos into an environmental ethic: “Those who have only a superficial understanding of the relationship between humanity and nature will recklessly exploit nature. Those who have a deep understanding
of the relationship will treat nature well and learn from it” (CDA 2003: np). While there is an emphasis on the role of human beings within the natural world the statement also expands this cosmological worldview into a secular mandate for environmentalism that speaks to a conservation of resources and a general respect of the balance of natural environments.

The third component continues and insists upon the understanding of a balance in nature. The *Faith Statement* remarks “If anything runs counter to the harmony and balance of nature, even if it is of great immediate interest and profit, people should restrain themselves from doing it, so as to prevent nature’s punishment” (CDA 2003: np).

Finally, the *Faith Statement* suggests that Daoism “judges affluence by the number of different species” present in the world and encourages governments and people to take good care of nature (CDA 2003: np). This particular emphasis derives from the *Taiping Jing*, a classical Daoist text which speaks of three periods: the Higher August Period, in which 12,000 species flourished on earth; the Middle August Period where “the living things are less than 12,000 species;” and finally the Lower August Period, also called the era of Great Poverty “because the number of living species was less than that in the Middle August Period” (qtd. in Zhang, J 2001: 368). These four aspects of Daoist cosmology and worldview reveal an innate drive towards a harmonious relationship between human beings and the world in which they live. That Daoism possesses this quality to a certain extent is not really in question. Academic scholarship has already discussed this latent trend within Daoist texts and practices. Significant is the promotion of these elements to the exclusion of all else. That the CDA should choose to stress these proto-Daoist elements in order to establish its position on the national and
world stage as an environmental or ecological faith indicates their desire to align themselves with more secular agendas than the “superstitious” and often “illegal” elements present in many Daoist temples.

The discourse appears not to be limited to the CDA having also been taken up by news agencies and various other organizations both inside and outside of China. The ARC reports that it has been working closely with the CDA to help actualize its vision and in so doing has produced significant coverage of the activities of the CDA in China and at conferences worldwide. Martin Palmer the current director of the ARC frequently writes on the activities of the CDA and promotes the value of their cosmology in establishing and supporting environmental policies in China. In an article co-written with He Xiaoxin, head of the ARC’s China program and Victoria Finlay, Martin Palmer’s wife and director of communications for ARC, about the role of the *Daode jing* and the natural world, he remarks, “Daoists are inspired by the Dao De Jing 2500 years ago, by the Daoist Declaration on the Environment 12 years ago and by the many centuries in between during which Daoist believers have quietly cared for nature” (Palmer, M., He, Finlay 2007: np). Later he asserts that “Daoism understands where humanity should be in the Great Order of the Dao” (Palmer M. et al 2007: np). The article then goes on to note the role that Daoism can play in shaping the new ecological future of China. The authors, echoing the first line of the *Daode jing*, acknowledge that Daoism recognizes that “the way of exploiting this fragile world and thinking that this will cost us nothing, is not the True Way” (Palmer, M. et al 2007: np). They go on to note the practical applications of this understanding, indicating the role Daoism will play in protecting endangered species, caring for resources and training others in environmentally sound principles. In so doing
Daoists can restore the harmonious balance of the world. It is hard not to recognize the similar language and sentiments expressed in this article as that of the previously noted statements issued by the CDA. The language reflects a similar trend in presenting Daoism as a religion that offers a strong response to the environmental crisis while highlighting its harmonious vision of the world. The language of ARC recapitulates the focus on classical philosophy exemplified by early Western appropriations of Daoism.

This same language often echoes the sentiments of the Government and its various branches both in speaking about the need for a harmonious society and the role that religion can play in helping China move towards more environmentally friendly policies and practices. The rapprochement between the government and religion has been noted by Xinhua News Agency, the CCP’s mouthpiece. In an article dated October 22, 2008 it reported that “a revival of traditional religions such as [D]aoism, Buddhism, Islam and Christianity is quietly but actively taking place throughout the country. The government is also actively sponsoring various religious institutions and activities. In recent years, the authorities are also footing the bills for new churches and temples” (Zhang, E 2008: np). China View also commented on the CDA’s fiftieth Anniversary which was attended by Jia Qinglin, member of the Standing Committee of the Political Bureau of Communist Party of China Central Committee and Chairman of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) as well as Vice-Premier Hui Liangyu. It reports the following events from the ceremony:

Over the past 50 years, [CDA] has upheld the banner of loving the nation and the religion, and firmly taken a road that is in conformity with the socialist society, said Hui.

He praised [CDA] for its efforts to unite Taoist believers of the whole country, assist the Party and the government implement
the policy of religious freedom, safeguard the interests of the state and the Chinese nationality, and safeguard the legal rights of the Taoist circle.

[CDA] has also done a lot in the fields of charity, environmental Protection…

(Vice Premier Hui) urged [CDA] to play the role of bridge and connection between the Party and the government and its massive followers, help implement the Party's policy and state laws and regulations on religion (Mu 2007: np)

The rapprochement is further revealed in consideration of the similar language used by government officials who stress the idea of a harmonious society. On December 6, 2005 Premier Wen Jiabao addressed an audience at L’Ecole Polytechnique in France. Xinhua reports the following coverage of the event:

Expounding on the concept of "he," the Chinese word meaning harmony or peace, the Chinese premier said it holds the key, in the final analysis, to the coexistence and development of different civilizations -- peace among states, good neighborliness among individuals and harmony between Humanity and Nature…

As to the harmonious coexistence between Humanity and Nature, Wen stressed that it is the precondition for the development of civilizations. "The survival of humanity depends on resources and environment...It is in the common interests of Humanity to take care of and do good to Nature." (China View 2005: np)

In a similar article a member of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference wrote the following for China Daily: “In a nutshell, in the ideal state of a harmonious society, various levels of contradictions can co-exist. This is pluralism in its widest sense - as in our natural ecosystem, which is the ultimate expression of harmony. If we emulate nature, and blend in with it, we will be in harmony with nature and part of a harmonious natural symphony” (Lau 2006: np). In juxtaposing the language of the government officials and newspapers along with external
organizations with the language employed by the CDA, the common pursuit of a harmonious society that interacts without interference in the natural processes of the world is discernible as the underlying theme prominent in all sources. The use of parallel language with the government that stresses a harmonious world through respect and care for the natural environment provides one avenue through which the CDA can pursue its process of modernization and legitimization.

**Bureaucratization and Institutionalization**

The CDA has put forth a number of measures to support its ecological agenda and to promote Daoism both at home and throughout the world as a valid response to the ecological crisis. Over the past 15 years the statements and declarations issued have progressed from grand sweeping assertions of Daoism’s underlying commitment to care of the natural world to more concrete programs of greening for all temples and surrounding areas. This transition indicates a concerted effort on the part of the CDA to standardize the aims and practices of all temples under its jurisdiction and to use the power of the national association as means to secure the hierarchical structure it has created.

The statement issued in 1995 proved influential as it allowed the Alliance of Religions and Conservation to gain access to religious groups in China to an extent that it claims was previously unavailable to all foreign organizations (Palmer, M 2006: np). With the support of the ARC and the cooperation of China’s Bureau of Religious Affairs, the CDA undertook a survey of the five sacred Daoist Mountains in China (Zhang, J 2001: 370-1). The survey indicated that the spaces surveyed were more successfully preserved during the Cultural Revolution largely due to their perceived status as *natural*
sacred spaces (Palmer M. 2006: np). It further indicated that where religious communities were present the level of environmental protection was likewise higher. As a result, in order to encourage environmental protection of these spaces, the CDA was able to reclaim a number of Daoist temples on sacred mountains that had been taken over during the Cultural Revolution and used as secular spaces by the government (Palmer M. 2006: np). ARC now claims this as evidence for why the CCP is now seeking help from the Daoist and Buddhist Associations in addressing the ecological issues in China. According to Martin Palmer since the CCP is “concerned with what the party has called ‘spiritual culture’ – meaning higher values and a sense of wider responsibility – the religions have been asked to help reinstate a sense of purpose beyond just self and consumerism” (Palmer M. 2006: np). The acknowledgement of the role religion can play in the national fight against environmental degradation creates a space for the CDA to act not only as regulators but also as educators and enforcers.

The statements and declarations themselves provide instruction on rules and regulations expected of temples affiliated with the CDA and can be characterized as a means through which the CDA is able to regulate activities throughout temples. This is an important departure from pre-Communist era China where temples were generally community run rather than answering to an overarching organization. The ecological agenda provides a continued means for the CDA to maintain a presence in the affairs of the temples through education of ecologically sustainable practices and the creation of nationwide regulations.

The first priority in all of the declaration issued has been education of sustainable practices. The Qinling Declaration, the Maoshan Declaration and the Eight Year plan all
stress the value of educating people about their responsibility to the environment (He 2007: np; CDA 2008b: np; CDA 2008: np). A platform of education based on an ecological agenda allows the CDA to regulate the focus of the individual temples, and provides the opportunity to bring an otherwise disparate group of temples and followers under the banner of a common theme.

These documents also lay out a series of rules and regulations based on environmental protection which inform the day to day activities of the individual temples. They provide the opportunity to create a more coherent structure to the Daoist tradition and ensure a more unified form of practice. The CDA has the added value of being able to ensure the main activities conform to state regulations on religion and religious activities. To begin, the CDA has made using endangered animals in the use of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) an excommunicable offense (Palmer, M. 2006: np). In part E of the second section of The Plan, ‘Public Welfare and Charity,’ endangered animals and plants are specifically prohibited from use in healthcare food and medicinal recipes (CDA 2008: np). Second, in the same section dealing with resource management, part C refers to Pilgrims and Travel. It calls for a “healthier and more environmentally friendly style of pilgrimage and travel” and refers to the practice of “three stick incense burning” in which pilgrims are encouraged to burn only three sticks of incense per temple, a far cry from earlier traditions which placed no restrictions on the number of sticks burned also allowing paper objects and firecrackers to be burned (CDA 2008: np). The Plan endorses the three stick practice in order to “reduce pollution caused by burning incense, candles, papers and fireworks on Daoist premises” (CDA 2008: np). It goes on to note that people are encouraged to bring offerings of flower and fruit but also pointing
out that all articles must be environmentally friendly. While these regulations serve to protect the local environment they also ensure more streamlined temple activity.

The attendees of the 2007 conference also identified themselves as members of the Daoist Alliance on Ecological Education which aims to develop a real ecology program to teach and really promote an ecological agenda. Members also pledged to display posters with the Qinling declaration for pilgrims to read as they visited the site as well as to progress towards making all temples into real Ecological Temples (He 2007: np ). This clause is included in the Maoshan declaration as point five: “To build ecological temples as our duty” and also incorporated into the Eight Year Plan (ARC 2008: np). The creation of Daoist temples as ecological temples would further regulate the temple community, creating a more unified religious tradition.

The Eight Year Plan (hereafter The Plan) is by far the most comprehensive commitment to an ecological agenda that the CDA has produced. It far surpasses the previous declarations in both breadth and depth and engages the entire Daoist community and all Daoist temples to engage the priorities it sets forth (CDA 2008: np). The Plan represents a significant departure from the previous declarations and statements in that it systematizes the CDA’s approach and response to the ecological crisis and symbolizes a more intense presence on the part of the CDA in measuring the activities of the temples and their followers and pilgrims. It likewise wholeheartedly embraces ecological science in the measures it is undertakes.

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4 See Jackson, 2010 for an interesting discussion on the impact of food offerings on local economies in Taiwan. The issue is not of the same magnitude at this time in China where visitors very rarely bring offerings other than incense and other objects to be burned.
The Science of Ecology

From the initial declaration issued in 1995, there has been an emphasis on the importance of the ecological mindset. The final tenet of the 1995 Declaration mentions the CDA will “select some famous Daoist mountains as exemplars of the systematic task of environmental engineering (Zhang J 2001: 370). All of the statements and declarations make reference to ecological practices or beliefs as the do the following from the Qinling declaration:

1. reduce pollution caused by incense burners
2. use farm land sustainably
3. protect species and forests
4. save energy
5. protect water resources (He 2008: np)

Likewise the Maoshan Declaration bound the signatories to the following commitments:

1. Putting great effort into ecological education and training. expanding materials and education about the natural environment, that will be open to pilgrims and ordinary people who visit our temples and mountains.
2. Advocating simpler lifestyles that will reduce energy and energy costs.
3. Participating in Social environmental activities with the community.
4. To enhance cooperation with the media to spread the word about ecology.
5. To build ecological temples as our duty.
6. Maximizing the ecological benefit we can achieve from our assets.

Both these declarations along with The Plan showcase elements of ecological thought, including resource management, conservation, energy saving and sustainable farming practices. These are well known aspects within the field of ecology and offer an excellent
opportunity to distance Daoism from the more religious components of the practice and demonstrate its compatibility with the modern scientific mindset.

*The Plan* mentions several areas of resource management, most notably those concerning water management, energy conservation and recycling. Temples are encouraged to conserve water throughout *The Plan*, by protecting “the water resources around temples to the greatest extent possible, and this includes dealing with domestic sewage in scientific and sensitive ways” (CDA 2008: np). While The Plan does not elaborate on what those scientific ways might be, the reference is instructional as it clearly demonstrates the CDA’s desire seem compatible with a modern scientific paradigm.

The 2007 conference went several steps forward in creating a more concrete sustainable agenda and concluded that all temples should undertake an audit of their environmental impact to determine where more sustainable methods could be implemented (He 2007: np). Forms were provided to all temples that were based on the surveys originally conducted by the CDA and the ARC in 1998. The temples were to be measured against the definition created at this conference of what the CDA called a Daoist Ecological Temple, which is:

1. A temple that has been planned and constructed according to Daoist teaching with the basic religious function of promoting the Daoist faith and which promotes the sage Laozi as the God of Ecological Protection;
2. A temple that uses the resources of land, forest, water, and earth, to green and beautify its surrounding landscape;
3. A temples with facilities to protect water sources an sewage treatment with regulations on sanitation and fire protection;
4. A temple that is using alternative energy technology and materials to use energy wisely;
5. A temple that has a harmonious relationship with the surrounding environment and communities
6. A temple that in itself is a base for education about the environment and ecology (He 2007: np).

This definition highlights the integration of the science of ecology with the worldview of the CDA, stressing the harmony of the temple with its natural surroundings but also engaging with modern ecological practices to make the space more sustainable. Along with the surveys the delegates discussed measures already being implemented to ‘green’ temples and their grounds. Some of the measures being considered were, installing solar panels on temple roofs, recycling water, installing clean toilets, joining together to buy eco-friendly incense and reducing the impact of nationwide shipping and bringing land use and management of the temple into the ecological protection planning of the surrounding area (He 2007: np). The 2007 conference represents a significant leap forward in addressing practical environmental concerns as well as producing a more systematic plan for temples to follow. Not only did it create a very specific definition of an ecological temple, it also instituted temple surveys on sustainability and an alliance on ecological education, thereby extending the role of the CDA in the individual temples and promoting more ecologically sound practices. Adopting these practices allows the CDA to distance itself from the “superstition” practices that threaten the religious institution by instead embracing the scientific field of ecology.

The practical applications are found not only in the statements and declarations but also in the construction of physical spaces already built and being built. The same underlying motives that inform the rhetoric present in these documents also inform the creation of new spaces.
Sacred Sites

Two main sites have been upheld by the CDA and the ARC as examples of the greening of Daoism; Maoshan and Tiejia Ecology Temple. Sites visits to these two spaces reveal a distinct effort to conform to sustainable methods, emphasizing a similar framework as the statements and declarations discussed above; they stress the role of the natural environment over the more traditional pantheon of deities and they place great emphasis on promoting ecological principles to visitors.

A Harmonious World

Similar to the statements and declarations discussed above, the newer temples and sacred spaces being constructed by the CDA also espouse a humanist discourse and stress the importance of the natural environment. The newer spaces are constructed with an emphasis on the natural beauty of the space and stress the importance of maintaining a harmonious relationship with the surrounding environment while limiting the presence of supernatural figures.

A stunning example is the first stop on Maoshan, the Xike Spring 喜客泉. This part of the scenic area leads the visitor through a series of paths through the forest up to the main pavilion which was referred to as the Prince Zhaoming’s study hall Zhaoming taizhi dushu tai 昭明太子读书台. On one side of the entrance were plaques describing the meaning and origin of the character good fortune fu 福 while on the other side was situated a small altar to the Ox God of Good Fortune Shenniu cifu 神牛赐福, a large ox seated atop a pile of gold coins. The overarching theme for this area is good fortune and scholarliness while also depicting a harmonious and beautiful natural environment. This
underlying emphasis on the natural order and general lack of Daoist figures or immortals reflects throughout the various parts of the scenic area on Maoshan with the exception of the Laozi temple which houses a variety Daoist figures along with the large statue of Laozi at the top. Significantly, the 2007 conference at the Tiejia ecology temple officially recognized Laozi, the reputed author of the *Daode jing*, the God of Ecological Protection, a distinction which highlights the preeminent position of the Daodejing in the new ecological agenda (He 2007: np). It is worth noting that the chosen figure to represent the God of Ecological Protection was the reputed author of text which has dominated the discussion on Daoism’s innate affinity with nature, particularly in the West, due largely to its compatibility with humanist, nature centered values. This text is featured in another prominent place on Maoshan, a path called “非常道” (Fei Chang Dao) at the base of the mountain. The name is taken from the first line of the *Daode jing* which reads “道可道非常道” which can be translated as “the way that can be followed is not the eternal way” and suggests that the true dao is unknowable. The entrance to this path provides plaques with a brief history of Laozi and the text of the Daodejing accompanied by the first verse. As the path ascends the mountain so do the verses of the *Daode jing* which further link the text with the natural environment.

Similarly, the Tiejia ecology temple uses large rocks to display messages painted in large red characters to project messages to visitors about the importance of valuing the natural environment. These large stones line the walkway to the temple and are also found throughout the temple complex. The temple itself houses only three figures, the three local mountain gods of Taibaishan. Other than a small alter in front the temple is
empty. Four murals have been painted on the far walls of the space. To the left of the temple is the ecology center where conferences on ecology and conservation periodically take place and where visitors can get information regarding current ecology projects. As with the scenic area at Maoshan, this complex stresses the natural environment and downplays the more supernatural components of Daoism. Both spaces focus on common and accessible elements of Chinese life such as good fortune, scholarliness and the environment.

*The Science of Ecology*

The CDA has taken great care to ensure that newer constructed spaces emphasize care for the environment by emphasizing taking care of flowers, plants and trees. Visitors to Maoshan Scenic Area are reminded, in both English and Chinese, to “Be civil and environmentally friendly, Taking care of plants and safety,” on a sign which graces the entrance to the Xike Spring. Another sign found at the entrance to Huayang Cave 华阳洞 reads “Taking care of trees, flowers and grass; praying for the beautiful Maoshan” and is accompanied by a sign that admonishes visitors to “not disturb the monkeys.” Signs such as these are generally located at the entrance to most areas within the scenic area, including Jiuxiao wanfu temple, which notes at the bottom of its entrance map that the temple is “Environment and relics friendly.”

Similar to Maoshan, pathways at the Tiejia Ecology Temple also guide the visitor through the thick woods to the temple and ecology center. As you walk along this path, signs hanging from nearby trees tell of the compassion and importance of caring and
protecting trees (Aihu yikeke shu fengxian yipianpian ai xin 爱护一颗颗树奉献一片片爱心). A similar sign hangs on a tree in the older courtyard of Louguantai. As visitors enter the older temple complex a giant tree expands out over the courtyard and from its branches hangs a sign which reads “taking care of flowers, plants and trees is everyone’s responsibility” (Aihu huacao shumu, renren you ze 爱护花草树木人人有责).

Beyond a general care and respect for nature, the temples also engage in more concrete eco-friendly practices such as energy and water conservation and recycling. Solar panels are a very common feature around Maoshan. The road leading up to the Laozi temple was lit entirely by solar paneled street lights. “Water conservation” signs could also be seen above taps and sinks and recycling boxes made to look like small houses offered both recycling and garbage options were positioned throughout the scenic area.

Particularly important is the very construction of Tiejia itself. The temple and ecology center were built, according to statements made by the CDA and supported by the ARC, using entirely local materials. Only local workers were hired who were all held to a high ethical standard for the construction of these spaces (ARC 2007: np). The tea house at the entrance to the grounds was built from tree trunks, however, not processed and stripped of their bark but rather it is built using raw logs from the surrounding forest.

These components all represent a concerted effort to engage eco-friendly and sustainable practices. The extent to which these temples can put these practices into motion demonstrates a compatibility with the modern paradigm and an ability to distinguish between verifiable fact and superstition. Here a contrast between the older Jiuxiao wanfu temple on Maoshan and the newer scenic area with the Laozi temple is
instructive the special features of the ecological agenda. With the exception of Tiejia Ecology Temple, which is located deep in the mountains of the Heihe National Forest Park, the entrances to the temples are lined with stalls selling incense in a variety of sizes ranging from small sticks commonly seen in homes, to larger sticks around six feet long and six inches in diameter. At Maoshan, the scenic area provided very little opportunity to burn incense. The Laozi temple offered only one main incense burner accompanied by a large incinerator, which was located just outside the first hall. A man dressed as a Daoshi was present to assist with lighting and extinguishing the incense sticks, however, there was no sign present to indicate a limitation on the number of sticks. This was the only place throughout the whole temple complex, however, where people were actively burning incense. The other locations within the scenic area featured usually only one incense burner, two at most. The grounds were very well kept, recycling and garbage bins lined the streets which were lit with solar paneled lights.

The older Daoist temple, Jiuxiao wanfu, at the top of Maoshan, on the other hand, houses a large incense burner and lighting room in the main courtyard and many visitors arrived carrying the larger incense sticks. It should likewise be noted that the regulations laid out in The Plan do not stipulate any size restrictions on the incense sticks. Similar to the scenic area, no signs were posted regarding the restrictions on incense. However, unlike the scenic area, the main courtyard at Jiuxiao Wanfu was often covered in a haze of smoke due to the constant and prolific burning of incense. A steady stream of visitors, particularly on Sundays when busloads of people made their way up the mountain, ensured that the air was rarely clear of smoke. Coupled with the occasional morning firecrackers set off in one of the side courtyards, Jiuxiao wanfu seemed almost the polar
opposite of the scenic area. The contrast from the scenic area was stunning given the relative lack of smoke present in any of the stops in the scenic area. Also of note, the same boxes used in the scenic area for recycling and garbage were also used at the older temple but the recycling and garbage signs had been painted over leaving only garbage receptacles and the solar paneled lights which led to the scenic area, stopped once the scenic area ended leaving visitors going all the way to the top to walk in the dark.

This juxtaposition shows the transformation currently underway in the construction of new sacred spaces in Daoism. These spaces are increasingly stressing the ecological agenda by constructing spaces which lend themselves to humanist values and language and through promoting eco-friendly and sustainable practices. Together with the statements and declarations the CDA is poised to be considered not only a modern Chinese religion but also China’s green religion.
Conclusion

As the above discussion has highlighted, there are a number of issues at play with the current ecological trend in Daoism. This paper has highlighted three main historical factors: the implicit narrative of the role of modernity in shaping the perceptions of the ecological crisis; the role of Western academic scholarship in creating an image of Daoism as an innately eco-friendly religion; and the modernization of Chinese religion.

The current green agenda of the CDA is a product of these discourses and is now creating its own discourse about how it would like Daoism to be viewed in the future. In adopting this agenda the CDA is able to transform Daoism into a modern Chinese religion. The transformation reveals three important characteristics about the modern category of religion in China: a humanist, nature based language, often sharing similar language with the government; a strong institutional and bureaucratic nature to its organization; and finally a strong alliance with the scientific field of ecology. Together these suggest significant implications regarding the future of Daoism, its transformation into a modern Chinese religion and the broader implication for religion and ecology.

This interaction with modernity raises some important questions concerning the transformation of Daoism as a lived tradition and the future of the religion in China. The tension between the traditional and the modern is perhaps best summed up in the following account from 2007 conference at Taibaishan. During a discussion about which sustainable methods temples had already implemented, Master Ren, abbot of Luoguantai, stated that he installed solar panels on the auxiliary buildings of the temple complex but not on the ancient temples themselves. He remarked that he did not want to destroy the historical beauty of the complex by sullying the image of the ancient temples with solar panels (He 2007: np). This event raises a series of important questions about the effect of
these transformations on the current structure of the Daoist tradition. In reconstructing temples, how will the CDA reconcile the tension between preserving the original aesthetic value of the temples, the original harmonious structure of the temple and the new sustainable practices? If the older temples are unable to transform in accordance with the guidelines, will there be a push to rebuild the older temples? What kind of pressure will be put on smaller temples that lack the resources to conform to the new standards? If temples are becoming more ecologically based and thus more aligned with science and secularism to an extent, what will happen to traditional practices and rituals that do not fit with the modern agenda?

The CDA’s foray into the ecological realm also raises important questions about the implications for environmentalism and the role religion might play. Does the CDA’s push for sustainability help the environmental cause? Will environmental activism and sustainable practices be more successful if they are propagated by religious leaders? Will people be more likely to adopt practices and sustainable means they see in sacred spaces? Can religion authentically create an environmental ethic?

On March 12, 2010 Ian Johnson, a reporter for the Wall Street Journal wrote about Ren Farong as he attended the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Congress at which he filed a motion for the government to pay more attention to the drought in southwest China (Johnson 2010: np). He then asked the government to return to the control of the CDA the East Peak Temple in Beijing; an important temple to Daoists and one that remains a secular space under the management of the CCP (Johnson 2010: np). In the case of Daoism and China, adopting a green agenda allows the CDA leeway to continue to perform traditional rituals and ceremonies. In transforming Daoism into a
religion more palatable to the CCP, the CDA gains more freedom in being able to reclaim and reconstruct its temples. Its ability to protect and preserve the ancient tradition is ironically directly proportional to its ability to redefine itself in terms of a modern Chinese religion.
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