DAOISM IN BRAZIL

THE GLOBALIZATION OF THE ORTHODOX UNITY (ZHENGYI) TRADITION

by

Daniel Murray

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Abstract

The Daoist Society of Brazil (Sociedade Taoista do Brasil) was founded by Wu Jyh Cherng (Wu Zhicheng 武志成), a Taiwanese immigrant, in 1991. Today the Society operates two temples in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo, and is the only religious organization in South America that is affiliated with the Daoist Society of China in the Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正一) lineage. The group, however, is not made up of other immigrants or Brazilians of Chinese descent; rather the entire group and current priesthood consist of Brazilians of non-Chinese ancestry.

This essay examines the history and development of the Daoist Society of Brazil and its members’ understandings of Daoism through site visits and interviews conducted in December 2009. From this I develop a theory of the particular characteristics of Brazilian religious culture that enabled the formation of a Zhengyi Daoist community outside of ethnically Chinese people. The practices of the two temples thus represent a hybrid of Chinese and Brazilian cultural forms that have been negotiated through a complex assessment of how to maintain authentic religious traditions in a non-traditional cultural context. Although the transcultural practices of the Daoist Society of Brazil can only be fully understood in these particular terms, the Society also represents an important case study in the more general phenomenon of the globalization of religious cultures and the formation of transcultural religious identities.
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1.1 A Brazilian Daoist Ritual

In Rio de Janeiro, outside of the Temple of Sublime Transparency a small sign to the left of a locked metal gate reads Sociedade Taoista do Brasil, with a Chinese translation above, Baxi Daojiao Hui 巴西道教會, and a yin-yang symbol. It is one of two Brazilian temples that are a part of the Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正一) Daoist lineage and make up the society that was formed in 1991.

James Miller and I arrived that morning, Sunday December 13, 2009, to attend the temple’s monthly service and purification ritual, and were soon greeted by Hamilton Fonseca Filho, the high priest (gaogong fashi 高功法師) of the temple, wearing a dark blue robe and black slip-on shoes. He cheerfully showed us around parts of the building that we had not seen during our first visit earlier that week and told us that he had performed a fa 法 ritual in the temple earlier in the morning. The people here do not like the fa, he told us, but he performs it so the people at the temple that day can participate without worrying or thinking too much. In Taiwan, he added, such a ritual would not be necessary. Soon someone called out to Fonseca Filho from the lower floor telling him to come down, as the service will begin soon.

We walked down the stairs and entered the temple that is based out of a large room in the building. The walls were painted red, there were 50 or so chairs set up in straight rows, five speakers attached to the walls, and a shrine in the front with a number of deities, including Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, Taishang Laojun 太上老君, and Guandi 關帝. When we took our seats there were a number of other people already sitting quietly waiting for the service to start, while others made offerings of incense to the main shrine or to a smaller one to Guandi in the back of the room. A couple waited outside until they finished having a conversation, and anyone speaking inside was whispering.
The service began when the priests entered the temple chanting in Chinese and playing a bell. The high priest, four additional priests (daoshi 道士), and two lay helpers approached the front of the temple and made prostrations to the altar. The chants continued with the sounds of the bell, singing bowl, and wood block, and the high priest started to burn a talisman (fu 符) and perform mudras. When the chanting stopped, one of the priests explained in Portuguese that they were offering incense as a token of sincerity of our lives, and another priest added that their prayers were invoking blessings and prosperity from the spirits.

A faster paced chant then began, reciting the names of different deities, and a temple volunteer started to help people form a line down the aisle between the rows of chairs. When the chant ended, the head priest held incense sticks and a sword, and began to carve fu in the smoke. As the people from the line approached him, he wrote a fu for each person using smoke from the incense sticks. The other priests continued to chant quietly, and a temple helper showed people which door to exit once the ritual is finished.

After everyone in attendance had gone through this ritual, the high priest drew another fu using the sword and the other priests knelt in front of the altar, and begin to chant again. Once the chanting ended, the high priest put on a microphone and began to talk about how Daoism can remove obstacles and prevent energies that stop people from completing their personal and spiritual journeys. He added that it also helps to maintain good relationships with friends and family. Daoism, he told the crowd, helps to maintain a balance between the self and the world. When he finished talking, the priests and lay volunteers bowed to each other, and then exited followed by the high priest.

This is certainly not the typical image of Daoist practice in Western countries. Generally speaking, European and North American Daoist practice is based on qigong 氣功 and taijiquan 太極拳 groups that offer fee-for-service classes and retreats, or on individual study of translations of the Daode jing. While there are some Western initiates in traditional lineages, such
as The Way of Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真), holding a lineage is not particularly common in Western Daoist practice (Clarke 2000; Siegler 2006: 257-280).

Although the service I described only occurs once per month, these rituals are seen as important to many members of the Daoist Society of Brazil, and being part of a lineage of teachings and a community of other practitioners was said to not only add a feeling of tradition and authenticity to practices, but to benefit one’s own practices and life as a Daoist. Yet the ritual described is clearly different from what would be found in China or Taiwan: it is certainly a Brazilian experience of Zhengyi Daoism.

1.2 Methodology

This research is based on fieldwork conducted in Rio de Janeiro and São Paulo between December 8 and 20, 2010. The fieldwork consisted of a number of interviews, participant observation, and participation in the services offered. Research was conducted with three different groups that affiliated themselves with Daoism, the Daoist Society of Brazil in both São Paulo and Rio de Janeiro, a group that practices qigong and Daoist physical practices called the Grande Triade in Rio, and the Pai Lin Tai Chi Centre in São Paulo.

Group interviews were conducted with a group of six lay members of the Daoist Society in Rio, two groups of three in São Paulo, and with six members of the Grande Triade. Longer formal interviews were also conducted with five important figures in the spread of Daoism to Brazil: the two high priests (Gaogong fashi 高功法師) of the Sociedade Taoista do Brasil, Wagner Canalonga (Ka Nangu 卡南古) and Hamilton Fonseca Filho (Fang Erhe 方而和); Bony Braga Schachter, a young priest from the Rio temple; Jerusha Chang (Chang Yunyun 張芸芸) who is currently in charge of the Pai Lin Ta Chi Centre; Eduardo Alexander, the teacher and founder of the Grande Triade; and a former student of the now deceased tajiquan teacher Liu
Bailing who founded Pai Lin Tai Chi. Shorter informal interviews were also conducted with a number of priests and lay people at the Rio temple. Although all of these interviews helped to shape the direction of this research, this paper focuses on the Daoist Society of Brazil and uses the data collected from the interviews with Jerusha Chang and the Grande Triade solely to provide context.

During the fieldwork we attended and participated in two services by the Daoist Society of Brazil, one in Rio on Sunday, December 13, 2010; and one in São Paulo on Sunday, December 20, 2010, which was followed by a year-end social event. We also attended and participated in a Grande Triade qigong class and a Pai Lin taijiquan class, which was also followed by a year-end social, however, like the interviews these will not be the subject of this paper. The locations of these services and Hamilton Fonseca Filho’s acupuncture clinic where an additional interview took place were all photographed and audio recordings were made of all the interviews and sections of the services.

Although the period of fieldwork lasted only ten days, it did provide us with a wealth of information on Daoism in Brazil and Brazilian understandings of Daoism. Both the global spread of Zhengyi Daoism and the spread of Daoism to Brazil are subjects that have thus far only received minimal attention from researchers both inside and outside of Brazil, and in this paper I hope to shed light on these topics.

1.3 Daoism and Globalization

In this paper I will look at the development of the Daoist Society of Brazil and the members’ understandings of Daoism. From this I will develop a theory of what is peculiar to Brazil that allowed for the formation of a Zhengyi Daoist community outside of ethnically Chinese people. While in some ways this is a specifically Brazilian Daoist practice, many of the developments and changes to the tradition relate to the process of globalization of cultural and religious
traditions. Daoism or any other religious practices have never been static things, but globalization has certainly intensified the speed and degree of change.

Globalization refers to the increased global interdependence, consciousness of the world as an interconnected whole, and the compression of the world (Robertson 1992: 8). These are seen within increased trade due to global capitalism, faster and denser communication networks, and increased tensions between and within cultural groups as a result of increased exposure to each other (Eriksen 2007: 3-4). Globalization does not mean the creation of one unvaried standardized (or westernized) culture; localities remain important. Individuals can form identities without direct reference to global connections and the local can impact other distant localities. Therefore the specific localities can be sources of not only variation within the global setting, but a force for change or criticism of it, due to their global connections (Roberston 1992: 68; Haugerud 2003: 66-67). Religious groups are one kind of organization that takes part in the formation of identities. Transnational or global religious groups act as a form of communication between people and spaces, and although one may be present in a locality it can still differ from and have an influence on the same organization in other areas. Religious groups may be present in one locality and different from the same religious organization elsewhere, but they still are part of a trans-societal network of communication (Beyer 1994: 28). Therefore, Brazilian Daoism is not only limited to influencing ideas of Daoism in Brazil, but also can do so in other areas.

The reasons for becoming a Daoist in Brazil can be connected to both localized and global trends in religiosity. In terms of global trends, interviewees cited a shift to religiosity based on a this-worldly spirituality and focused on individual choice. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart (2004) and Bronislaw Szerszynski (2005) have noted the appearance of this phenomenon across contemporary developed societies. In terms of the emphasis on tradition, Roland Robertson (1992) and Charles Taylor (1991) have argued that in the modern globalized world there is a focus on seeking on what is ‘authentic.’ This kind of authenticity for a religious group can be
found by connection to tradition, lineage, and ritual. Therefore becoming a Daoist in Brazil can accommodate to both a focus on individual choice and a search for authenticity.

However, the form of Zhengyi Daoism in Brazil is quite different from China or Taiwan and is not practiced by ethnic Han Chinese. Although Daoism is often connected to Chinese culture and ethnicity, the Daoist Society of Brazil challenges this notion and tries to separate Daoism from these. Instead, it emphasizes the universality of their teachings. This certainly displays the transnational identities that can develop in a globalized world (Beyer 1994: 28) by connecting to Daoist tradition and emphasizing authenticity, while also maintaining Brazilian characteristics.

The first section of the paper gives an overview of the Zhengyi Daoist tradition in relation to ethnicity and changes it has undergone in the twentieth century. The globalization of Daoist practices, (looking specifically at how they reached Brazil), the existing religious practices of Brazil, and recent developments in Brazilian religiosity all help to explain why Zhengyi Daoism has become an appealing choice for people. The next section describes the formation of the Daoist society of Brazil; how members of society understand their first experiences with Daoist practice and how they joined the Society; how members understand Daoism and Daoist ritual; how they see Daoism in relation to Brazil, China, and also as a universal teaching; and changes that have been made to Daoist practice in Brazil. To end, I will analyse the data from interviews with the members of the Daoist Society in Brazil first in relation to Brazilian religious practice and how Daoist practices spread to Brazil, and then impact of globalization on the transmission of cultural traditions.
Zhengyi Daoism, Globalization, and Brazil

2.1 Universality, Ethnicity, and Location in Zhengyi Daoism

Zhengyi Daoism or Orthodox Unity Daoism traces its formation back to Zhang Ling 張陵, later known as Zhang Daoling 張道陵, who is said to be the first Celestial Master (tianshi 天師) and founder of the religion in 142 CE (Miller 2003: 8). It was also known as the Way of Five Pecks of Rice (Wu dou mi dao 五斗米道) or the Way of Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道), the first referring to the earliest periods of the movement and the latter to the Six Dynasty Tang period; Orthodox Unity is used for any period after that. The Celestial Master is seen as the religious leader, and this office is believed to have been passed on hereditarily through subsequent generations (Chen 2007).

Although Zhengyi Daoist practice is often thought of in connection to Han Chinese and China’s geographic borders, Terry Kleeman (1998, 2002) has argued that the early Zhengyi Daoists communities were multi-ethnic and the tradition was thought of as a universal teaching, additionally Eli Alberts (2006) has found that Daoist practice has influenced the history and culture of the Yao 瑶 ethnic group who live in China, Thailand, Laos, and Vietnam. From its formation and throughout history Zhengyi Daoism has not been an exclusively Han Chinese religion, however, it has generally stayed within the borders of China or nearby regions until recently.

After the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911 and the formation of the People’s Republic of China in 1949, large groups emigrated from China to other parts of the world, bringing their cultural and religious practices with them. Zhang Enpu 張恩溥, the 63rd Celestial Master, was part of one of these emigrations, moving from Longhu Shan 龍虎山 in Jiangxi 江西 Province, which had traditionally been where the Celestial Master held residence, to Taiwan in 1949.
Although he remained in a country that was predominantly Han Chinese, the relation to China’s geographic borders had changed due to the distance from Longhu Shan and political relations between Taiwan and China. The recent scholarship of Kleeman and Alberts has shown that Zhengyi Daoist practice is not bound to ethnicity and increased emigration from China throughout the twentieth century has transported Zhengyi Daoist practice across the world. Taking this into account, it becomes more understandable how Daoist practices have not only spread outside of China, but also outside of Han Chinese communities, both of which are the case for the Daoist Society of Brazil.

2.1.1 Early Zhengyi Daoism and Ethnicity

The origins of Zhengyi Daoism are thought to begin in 142CE, when it is believed that Taishang Laojun 太上老君, the deified Laozi and personified Dao, contacted Zhang Daoling during the summer solstice on Heming Shan 鶴鳴山, a mountain north-west of modern day Chengdu in Sichuan province. Lao instructed Zhang to prepare people for the coming end of the world by instructing them to repent and become morally pure. He then appointed Zhang as his earthly representative with the title of Celestial Master and the Covenant with the Powers of Orthodox Unity (zhengyi mengwei 正一盟威; Kohn 2004 [2001]: 69-70; Chen 2007; Kleeman 2007).

Terry Kleeman has argued that the early Celestial Master tradition was multiethnic with a significant number of non-Han Chinese. Kleeman writes specifically about the Ba 巴 ethnicity in its early period and in the continued practice by the Yao 瑶 ethnicity today (2002: 24-29). Furthermore, Kristofer Schipper argues that initially Daoism was seen as a universal teaching, and it did not view foreign traditions as against its message until later developments (1994: 63).

Zhang Daoling is thought to have emigrated from Jiangsu to Sichuan and this is where the early developments of the Celestial Masters occurred. In this period, Han Chinese in Sichuan
lived intermixed with various other ethnicities and the groups would intermarry with each other. The *Ba* ethnic group participated in the early Celestial Masters and it is likely that non-Han Chinese took up a significant percent of the group. *Ba* leaders would convert to the Celestial Masters with their entire community and Kleeman argues that their own religious beliefs would have likely influenced the tradition (Kleeman 2002: 23-28; Alberts 2006: 118).

This openness to non-Han Chinese continued up to at least the mid third century C.E. and the early Daoist communities of this time did not see their religion as exclusive to the Chinese people. Kleeman writes that “in describing the entire corpus of sacred scriptures revealed from the beginning of time up until its end, the *Zhengyi fawen jingtu kejie pin* [正一法文經圖科戒品] (Chapters on Codes and Precepts of Scriptures and Diagrams from the Zhengyi Canon), quoted in the *Daojiao yishu* [道教義樞] (Nexus of Meaning for the Teachings of the Dao, HY 1121; ca. 700 C.E.), lists 123,000 chapters of scriptures revealed to the Chinese and 84,000 chapters revealed to the barbarians of each of the four directions (2.11b)” (Kleeman, 2002: 30-31). However, Kleeman is careful to not present the early communities as utopias free of racial and class based prejudices as there are other texts that see non-Chinese as inferior and see them as born into a position that does not know of rites or morality and also that it was through some good actions that they came to live amongst a Chinese community. The early Celestial Master Daoist tradition was open to all, regardless of ethnicity; however, there were elements of Chinese culture that non-Chinese were expected to learn, such as using a Chinese name and writing proper ritual petitions (Kleeman, 2002: 31-32). People adopted Daoist practices and, in a way, became Chinese by doing so (Alberts 2006: 76)
Taking into account Kleeman’s research it becomes more understandable how the Zhengyi lineage can spread outside of ethnic Chinese groups, such as the Daoist Society of Brazil. Zhengyi Daoism during its inception would have been a movement that went against some of the beliefs of popular local religious culture, but may have worked to bring together people from a variety of ethnic groups and religious belief into what they saw as an orthodox, universal, and superior religious practice.

2.1.2 Zhengyi Daoism, Migration, and Local Traditions

The issue of ethnicity and the question of the universal application of Daoism have become particularly relevant over the past century, with the fall of the Chinese empire in 1911, and the formation of, first, the Republic of China, and then, the People’s Republic of China. This past century has been a time of rapid social and economic modernization in China and Taiwan, and of increasing global contact and communication, both of which impacted the spread of Daoist practices through emigration and foreign relations. At the end of the Second World War, the Guomindang 國民黨 took control of Taiwan from the Japanese, and then in 1949, during the Chinese civil war with the Chinese Communist Party, the Guomindang government fled from the mainland to establish its government on Taiwan, losing control of the mainland. This was also the time that a number of Zhengyi Daoists, including Zhang Enpu, the 63rd Celestial Master of the tradition, immigrated to the island.

In order to understand how Daoism came to be transmitted to Brazil, it is first necessary to understand the historical and political context in which Zhengyi Daoism was practiced in Taiwan. There, Zhengyi Daoists were simultaneously dealing with the impact of political and social modernization in China and Taiwan and trying to establish an institutional religious force on the island. Taiwan lacked a history of institutionalized religion, and the Daoists who were on
the island prior to the Guomindang’s arrival had been initiated through a hereditary or master-disciple relationship without any official ordination at Longhu Shan (Lee 2003: 125-130).

The Celestial Master and other Daoist representatives began to adapt by distinguishing clearly what can and what cannot be changed in the tradition. It was decided that the doctrines, myths, and rituals formed the stable core that had to be maintained (Lee 2003: 125-130). What remained important is what the priests do; but what exactly the lay people do, the relation between priest and laity, the method to educate laity were not mentioned as practices that needed to maintain a standardized practice and the practices would evolve differently while still being considered orthodox. Zhengyi Daoist priests still maintained secrecy surrounding their texts and ritual techniques (Weller 2007 [1999]: 345) and this allowed the priests to avoid changes in what they had decided was important and reinforce the importance of priests in local rituals, while the varying local practices gave lay people ample room for participation (Lu, Johnson, and Stark 2008: 143-144).

While the kind of transmission of teachings in Taiwan and variation in local practice was nothing new (Dean 2000: 661), what had changed was the orientation of the Celestial Master who was now distanced by political borders and geographic space from Longhu Shan. However, other communities of Daoists were also outside of China’s borders, and the variety of Zhengyi practices within different communities outside of China would become more apparent as Zhang Enpu traveled to Malaysia and Singapore to visit Chinese diaspora groups practicing Zhengyi Daoism. Then in 1995, the People’s Republic of China began conferring ordination registers (lu 錄) at Longhu Shan through the (mainland) Chinese Daoist Association (Zhongguo daojiao xiehui 中國道教協會) for 200 daoshi without the direct involvement of the Celestial Master (Lai 2003: 114-116; Boltz 2007; Dean 2009: 193). Although Zhengyi Daoists have kept close ties to local traditions and often the tradition was passed down through master-disciple relations, which created variations in practices (Dean, 2009: 179; Dean, 2000: 661), the migration of the Celestial
Master changed the connection to Longhu Shan and caused the Zhengyi officials to reevaluate their tradition; the decisions of these migrants emphasized particular practices of the religion, but not the location of them and allowed for the continuation of local variation. The reevaluation of Zhengyi Daoism’s connection to local tradition and the connections to Daoist practice outside of China would make Daoists in Brazil a more easily accepted and understood practice for Daoist officials in Taiwan.

However, unlike the Daoist Society of Brazil, all these varieties within the Zhengyi tradition in Taiwan, Malaysia, and Singapore were based within Chinese communities, and linked to Han Chinese ethnicity or to Chinese culture. While Zhengyi Daoism remained within Chinese communities, rooted in a tightly controlled lineage of ordination, other forms of Daoist culture, notably textual sources and physical practices were more easily portable. It was this portable tradition that made way for the eventual transmission of Orthodox Unity to Brazil.

2.2 Globalization of Daoist Texts and Practices

In his study of Western understandings of Daoism, J. J. Clarke writes that “more than any other Eastern religion Daoism has impinged on Western consciousness as a mainly textual object rather than a living tradition” (2000: 50). While this observation certainly holds true for the earliest phase of Daoist cultural transmission outside of China, more recently the spread of texts has been accompanied by the transmission of a broad array of body practices. Accompanying this textual transmission has been the proliferation of what Elijah Siegler calls “American Daoism,” an individual’s practice that can be based on the reading of Chinese classics, body practices, and techniques of health and medicine that are linked to forms of Traditional Chinese Medicine, movement exercises, direct transmission of healing energy, or a combination of these (Siegler 2006: 271-276).
In Brazil, the spread of Daoism mirrored the forms it took in North America and Europe in many ways, but with less influence from local academics in the transmission of Daoist texts. As Steve Moore notes “there is no Brazilian equivalent of the UK’s Royal Asiatic Society or the USA’s American Oriental Society, and this lack of academic interest in the orient is apparently reflected across the entire South American continent” (1999a: 57). The spread of Daoism to Brazil has taken place, therefore, independently of the professional academic interest in East Asian studies that produced the great Sinologists of Europe in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. On the other hand, Brazil's colonial connections to Europe enabled the spread of Chinese texts translated into European languages, and its broad cultural diversity enabled the reception of Chinese body cultivation traditions. Based on interviews with self-identified Daoist practitioners, the most important elements in the transmission of Daoism to Brazil have been the translation of the *Yijing* and *Daode jing* into Portuguese, and the spread of *taijiquan* practice under the influence of Chinese immigration to Brazil.

### 2.2.1 Translation of Chinese Texts

The *Yijing*, also known as the Book of Changes, is a classical Chinese text that contains systems of cosmology that have been used by various groups throughout Chinese history primarily for the purpose of divination. It is important to note, however, that the *Yijing* has no formal connection to Daoism. Indeed it is usually regarded as a Confucian text. In non-Chinese cultures, however, the text has become associated with Daoism, and forms one of the important bridges through which Daoism has been constructed in the Western imagination (Siegler 2006: 273).

Before the development of Western Daoist practice, however, the initial reaction of Western scholars to the *Yijing* was to dismiss it as nonsensical and backwards: in 1901 Herbert Allen Giles claimed nobody in China really knew what it meant and in 1948 Joseph Needham saw it as causing delays of modern scientific development in China (Rutt 1996: 48). However,
this changed in the 1960s when the text was marketed towards the New Age movement. A similar
growth of New Age material occurred in Brazil in the 1960s, though it gained strength
particularly in the 1980s and 1990s (Moore 1999a: 49). Brazilian artists, poets, writers,
philosophers, and intellectuals were attracted to European Orientalist ideas of exotic and wise
Eastern traditions, and after the 1950s knowledge of East Asian traditions was seen as a way to
show one’s role as an interpreter or translator of what were seen as progressive European

Versions of the *Yijing* began to appear in Portuguese language in the 1960s, which Steve
Moore describes as a translation that was “rewritten for the ‘hippy’ market” (Moore 1999a: 49).
Since then a number of other translations have appeared, some of the translators have gone on to
give courses on the *Yijing*, and at least one, Ely Britto, is a practicing diviner and instructor in
Mantak Chia’s Healing Dao group. Reference to the *Yijing* has appeared in numerous forms of
popular culture including a percussion album based on patterns of trigrams and hexagrams, short
stories inspired by a particular hexagram, soap opera characters consulting the text, and
documentary and news features about divination or the *Yijing* specifically (Moore 1999a: 49-56;
Moore 1999b: 47-51). While most of those who use the *Yijing* do not consider themselves Daoist,
some are members of different Buddhist groups and the text has also been used by Candomblé
priests for divination; a number of interviewees saw it as their first encounter with Daoism, which
is not surprising taken its widespread appearance in Brazilian popular culture.

The *Daode jing* has received less attention in Brazil. It was translated into Portuguese by
Wu Jyh Cherng (Cherng 1996), the founder of the Daoist Society of Brazil and by Mario Bruno
Sprovieri (2002), a professor at the University of São Paulo. Although earlier translations in
Spanish, French, and English would have also been available, it does not appear to be as
prominent in popular culture as the *Yijing*. 
2.2.2 Transmission of Taijiquan to Brazil

The spread of *taijiquan* to Brazil occurred in the 1970s and, like many other Western countries, was the result of teachers emigrating from China. In the United States changing immigration laws in 1965 brought more Chinese into North America, and the few who were experienced in Chinese body technologies began to teach Americans, this was also a time when many young Americans were increasingly interested in spirituality outside of the confines of traditional organized religion, creating an atmosphere in which these practices could spread more easily (Siegler 2006: 266). Immigration also increased to Brazil, particularly São Paulo, after the 1950s, and there was a large influx of Japanese migrants (Rocha 2000: 32), and also smaller numbers from China and Taiwan. Prior to the mid-twentieth century there were only close to 10,000 Chinese migrates in Brazil, it was after 1949 and the foundation of the People’s Republic of China that the first larger wave of migrants began (Benavides 2002: 156-157). Since the 1964 military coup there was economic growth and rising income levels for upper and middle classes in Brazil (Smith 2002: 207-227), and although the country was still under an authoritarian military based government, it had become a more ideal destination for immigrants. However, the number of ethnic Chinese migrants in Brazil remains fairly low, statistics collected by Taiwan’s Overseas Compatriot Affairs Commission in 2005 show a population of 151,649 ethnic Chinese in Brazil. Still, a number of migrates from China and Taiwan were knowledgeable in Chinese body technologies and began to teach in the 1970s and 1980s.

The origins of *taijiquan* are often traced back to a legendary Daoist in the Song Dynasty, Zhang Sanfeng 張三丰, though the historical connection between *taijiquan* and Daoism is debatable. However, the origins of physical practices that relate to *taijiquan* are much older, and while most people who practice *taijiquan* or *qigong* do not self-identify as Daoists, the practices have been associated with the religion to varying degrees (Clarke 2000: 137-138). There were a
number of Chinese immigrants teaching or practicing *taijiquan* in Brazil during the 1970s, but Liu Bailing 劉百齡 (1907-2000)\(^1\) gained more attention and success than most, and his centres continue today under the leadership of Jerusha Chang (Chang Yunyun 張芸芸). The practices of *taijiquan* fit well with a growing interest in health and well being in Brazil since Liu began teaching (Neto 2006: 87-105). A former student of Liu told us that the other masters “didn't understand the problem of Western body.” By this he means that they would assume people understood what they meant when they talked about “feeling the qi,” while Liu started by introducing techniques that were more commonly taught to children than adults in China, so people could develop an understanding of their bodies and qi.

Liu also played a role in connecting *taijiquan* and Daoism for people in Brazil. As his number of students grew, he decided to start another level of training, which involved teaching the *Dao de jing* and *Yijing*. He wanted to connect the physical practices with these texts, and continued to teach his upper level students in both the practices of *taijiquan*, *qigong*, and meditation, and in the more theoretical side using textual study. Although Liu was interested in combining these two sides of practice, he also was involved in what his student describes as spreading “simple practice for simple people,” by which he means that Liu thought it was important to teach the basics of *taijiquan* to Brazilians because the concepts were so unknown and he thought the basics are important for the people’s health.

Since Liu Bailing and other *taijiquan* and *qigong* teachers began to spread their practices to Brazil, the number of practitioners has grown immensely. China’s state media outlet, Xinhua News, reports that the celebrations of the 2010 World Tai Chi and Qigong day in Brasilia expected to have one thousand participants for their activities that day compared to only thirty people during the first celebration (Costa 2010). Over the past thirty or forty years *taijiquan* has become a much more common activity for people in Brazil, and although not always associated

\(^1\) In this paper I am using the standard pinyin Romanization of Liu’s Chinese name; however, his name is generally Romanized as “Liu Pai Lin.”
with Daoism, it often is and this has helped shape the conception of Daoism in Brazil.

2.2.3 Religious Practice of Taiwanese and Chinese Immigrants

While Chinese immigration produced a spread of Chinese textual and health practices to the wider Brazilian population, Chinese communities also maintained their popular religious practices. There is a traditional Chinese temple in the outskirts of São Paulo, which accommodates a popular amalgamation of Daoist, Buddhist and popular religious practices. The building has three floors and the main floor being a large hall for religious practice. The temple also serves meals on Sundays prepared by a group of Taiwanese women who volunteer (Benavides 2002: 358-359). However, the temple’s attendants are from the local Chinese and Taiwanese communities, rather than Brazilians. Wagner Canalonga, the head priest of the Daoist Society’s São Paulo temple, said that the temple is both Buddhist and Daoist, with a Daoist shrine in the front and a Buddhist shrine to Guan Yin in the back. According to Canalonga, Buddhist monastics used to work there, but have since moved to purely Buddhist temples. The religious practice of Chinese and Taiwanese immigrants may involve some aspects of Daoist beliefs, but it seems to be fairly detached from other developments of Daoism in Brazil. The high priest in São Paulo did say that he had once performed a ritual there for a Brazilian martial arts (wushu 武術) teacher, but it was only that one time and it was a number of years before our visit.

The spread of Daoism to Brazil, therefore, did not occur originally as a religious practice. Traditional Chinese temples are largely associated with kinship religiosity and are not easily portable to outsiders. Although Daoism has traditionally been construed at least theoretically as a universal religion, the spread of Zhengyi Daoism occurred after a more general diffusion of Chinese cultural texts and practices. But the spread of Daoist religion to Brazil was not made possible solely by the diffusion of these Chinese practices. It was also facilitated by transformations in Brazilian society that enabled the acceptance of a wide array of religious
diversity. Brazilian society provided a fertile soil in which Daoist religion could take root, and it is necessary, therefore, to understand the context of religious diversity in which Daoism came to flourish in Brazil.

2.3 Religion in Brazil

While religion in Brazil has a long history of Catholic dominance, it is now a pluralistic religious environment, and particularly in major cities there is a wide variety of religious choice. One interviewee said that when he was younger he would try every kind of religious practice available in Brazil, adding that every religious practice available in Brazil means every religion anywhere. The developments of Afro-Brazilian religious groups and traditional and new religious practices of Asian immigrants groups have not been constrained by ethnicity, and many Brazilians may practice one or more religions while continuing to identify as Catholic.

2.3.1 The World’s Largest Catholic Nation

The Geographic and Statistical Institute of Brazil (IBGE) 2000 census on religion in Brazil indicates that 74% of the population is Roman Catholic, but only 20% of those who identify as Catholic attend Mass on a weekly basis. This is because the majority answers Catholic on surveys because they were baptized into the Catholic religion (Rocha 2006: 109); this does not mean that they actively or exclusively practice Catholicism. While the survey results show that Catholicism is still by far the largest religious group in the country, its membership has continually decreased since the 1980s, and dropped ten percent between 1990 and 2000 (Rocha 2006: 94).

Data on the beliefs of Brazilians from the World Values Survey in 1991 and 1997 found that despite a declining church attendance, almost the entire population continues to believe in God (98.5% in 1991, 99.1% in 1997), although only 56.2% in 1991 believed in a personal God. Fewer people believed in Heaven than God (76% in 1991, 82.4% in 1997), and under half the
population believed in Hell (39.1% in 1991, 49.1% in 1997). Over 70% believe in life after death (70.7% in 1997, 73.6% in 1991), and 56.7% (1991) believe in reincarnation. Over 80% believe in a soul (83.8% in 1991, 82.1% in 1997) and in the concept of sin (82% in 1991, 89% in 1997), but fewer believe in the devil’s existence (43.5% in 1991, 56.9% in 1997). Between 40% and 50% of people believed that churches could provide answers to important problems in life (In 1991, 51.3% for family life problems, 43.8% for moral problems, 41.6% for social problems, and 46% for clear guidelines on good and evil; and in 1997, 49.2% for clear guidelines on good and evil). This survey of individual beliefs shows a continued influence of Christianity through belief in God, Heaven, a soul, and sin, but also points to the development of individualized belief seen in the disparity in ideas about life after death and the role of the church to answer important problems.

While Christianity and Catholicism in particular remains the most prevalent religious force within Brazil, the role of the laity has changed. Individual choices about how to be religious have emerged. With increasing pluralism in the religions of Brazil, there is indeed increased diversity in individual belief. However, the majority of people continue to claim membership with the traditional religious institutions, but this does not necessarily mean they take part in the practice of only one tradition. Brazilian religious practice involves many hybridizations, overlapping, and fusions of belief (Rocha 2006: 92).

2.3.2 Spirits, Possession, and Health Care

In Brazil and other Latin American countries change in religiosity has seen “the diffusion of evangelical Pentecostalism along with the retreat of Catholicism,” producing new forms of religious participation (Cruz 2009: 5). The census data from Brazil also indicates that belief is changing and diverging from traditional Catholicism (World Values Survey 1991, 1997). Additionally, studies of participants in Afro-Brazilian religions have shown that many people
participate in practices from Umbanda, Candomblé, or other Afro-Brazilian religions while identifying primarily as Catholic. People see these different practices as complementary to each other (Clarke 1998: 24; Brown 1986: 133-135).

Participation in religion in Brazil varies within different sections of society. There is an increase in individualized religiosity that is more characteristic of post-industrial societies (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 53, 64-65, 70-71, 229-230), but also, among the poor and at risk groups in society, a continuation to look for religion that provides safety and security, rather than answers to questions of existential meaning. However, despite the class-based differences, there are two larger themes in Brazilian religious practice: conversion to a religion for practices related to health and a belief in spirits and practices of possession. Although participation in the Daoist Society of Brazil is the first experience with Zhengyi Daoism for its members, these two themes of Brazilian religiosity have added to religious knowledge and experience of individuals and make Zhengyi Daoism a more legitimate choice. The practices and cosmological views of religions like Candomblé and the spread of Asian religions from immigrant groups to the wider public that made Daoist practice appear more familiar and understandable.

Practitioners of Candomblé, like those of Daoism, believe in a world of spirits that can be communicated with, and also uses similar materials such as talismans (Clarke 2006). The prominence of belief in spirits and practice of possession is so widespread in Brazil that the Brazilian Anthropologist, José Jorge de Carvalho argues that religion in Brazil can be thought of as a “dispute of spirits” (Rocha 2006: 93) and Bernice Martin writes that Latin America in general remains “inspirited” or “enchanted” in comparison to other developed countries (1998: 109). This makes available the idea of a world full of spirits, spirits that are close to humans, more easily accepted or at least understandable. Although the cosmological details and even the relationships between the deities and medium are different, as the Daoist priest is seen as being in control over the deity while in Candomblé the deity would take full control over the medium,
there is a more general connection. Both practices try to connect with the energies of deities that are perceived as being immanent within the world. While this may sound like a very small connection, a predominately Protestant community would be more likely to see such practices as magic or superstition. This connection then is not in the complexities of either religions practice, but in the acceptance of the lived experience of an immanent polytheistic sacred.

Membership in religions outside one's cultural heritage is also a feature of Brazilian society. Although African slaves in Brazil initially developed Candomblé and Umbanda, for instance, people of European descent now also participate in the practices (Brown 1986: 133-135). Conversion and participation to religion not tied to one’s heritage is seen in various other religions, such as Buddhism and Japanese New Religious Movements. The statistics show 214,873 adherents of Buddhism and 151,080 adherents of “other oriental religious groups” (IBGE 2000). In a study of Buddhism in Brazil, Frank Usarski notes that other sources as reported as many as one million Buddhists in the country, but he sides with the an estimate closer to that of the IBGE (Usarski 2002: 163). However, since the late 1990s, despite the low numbers of official members, Buddhism has entered into the wider cultural consciousness through its presentation in mainstream magazines, newspapers, and TV soap operas, often spread through local celebrities who identify as Buddhist (Rocha 2006: 1). This prevalence in popular culture acknowledges that Brazilians practice Buddhism and brings Buddhist concepts to a larger audience, even if they are at times misconstrued.

While Japanese NRMs have not received the same media attention as Buddhism, they do connect to the increased interest in religion for health. James V. Spickard found that the middle-class in Brazil are attracted to the group Sekai Kyusei-kyo 世界救世教, for its physical healing practices, as scientific medicine may not be affordable (Spickard 2004: 56). On a visit to a Kofuku-no-Kagaku 幸福の科学 temple, a different Japanese NRM, in São Paulo, we observed Brazilians taking part in physical healing practices. Brazilians who were not of Japanese descent
also staffed the temple. Immigration to Brazil has caused the population to become aware of diversity of culture and religious experiences. The conversion to Japanese NRM or Pentecostalism for physical health (Spickard 2004: 56; Chesnut 1997: 197-170; Burdock 1993: 15, 137) has not gone unnoticed by the Catholic Church, and since 1991 they have tried to focus more on mysticism and healing (Rocha 2006: 105). While Catholicism remains the dominant faith in Brazil, and the second largest group in IBGE statistics (2000) is Pentecostalism, people take part in a variety of different religious practices, whether or not they regard that group as their official religion.

Two major focuses in contemporary religious practice can be seen in relation to Daoism: a belief in a world of spirits and an interest in religious practices that relate to the body. Additionally, it has become increasingly common to take part in a religion regardless of one’s ethnic or geographic origins. Furthermore, since the 1980s, texts and physical practices that are seen as related to Daoism have spread throughout Brazil, namely the *Yijing* and practice of *taijiquan*. This is the context into which Zhengyi Daoism entered Brazil. Although it was a new tradition for Brazilian people, not all the ideas or practices within the religion were completely foreign to the area.
Zhengyi Daoism in Brazil

Wu Jyh Cherng, a Taiwanese immigrant, began the transmission of Zhengyi Daoist practice to Brazil, but today none of the members of the Daoist Society of Brazil have an ancestral relation to China or Daoist practice. Most frequently the study of taijiquan or qigong, or the study of Chinese texts in translation brought them to the temple. Although these are common ways that Westerners come to know of Daoism, for the interviewees, Daoism has become a larger part of their lives than that, and it is now seen as their religion or life philosophy.

Daoism is seen by many of the interviewees as a religion that offers a balance in life and people emphasized its this-worldly focus. While it was often difficult for people to articulate how it does this, some of the priests talked about the power of the ritual to transform energy and improve people's lives, using the same kind of terminology about balance and harmony as the lay people.

The benefits of Daoism were thought of as universal teachings; however, there were a number of ideas about why Daoism applies specifically to Brazil and how Daoism connects to Chinese culture. Although many members see it as important to understand at least some aspects of Chinese culture, it has also been the intent of the Daoist Society to separate the two things and create a more Brazilian Daoism. These changes apply to both how people find out about the temple and how the services at the temple operate, and relate to both how Daoism spread to Brazil previously and to contemporary Brazilian religiosity.

3.1 The Daoist Society of Brazil

The Daoist Society of Brazil (Sociedade Taoista do Brasil) was founded on January 15, 1991 as part of the Orthodox Unity (Zhengyi 正一) tradition. Its founder, Wu Jyh Cherng\(^2\) (Wu Zhicheng\(^2\))

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\(^2\) Although Wu Jyh Cherng’s family name is Wu 武, he went by Cherng 成 (written as Cheng in the standard pinyin Romanization) to differentiate himself from his father, and so in this paper I
武志成 (1958-2004) moved to Brazil from Taiwan with his parents in 1973, returning to Taiwan for a number of years to train as a Daoist priest. After Cherng’s death in 2004, Hamilton Fonseca Filho became the head priest of the temple in Rio de Janeiro, and Wagner Canalonga continued as the head priest in the smaller São Paulo temple. The two had initially trained under Cherng, but following his death traveled to Taiwan to receive further training from the Daoist Association of Taiwan. All of the priests and lay people at the temple are Brazilians and none are of Chinese descent.

3.1.1 Wu Jyh Cherng and the Formation of the Daoist Society of Brazil

Hamilton Fonseca Filho’s understanding of how Cherng became a Daoist priest is that the process began after Cherng’s family moved from Taiwan to Brazil. Cherng developed arthritis and almost died from his condition. However, his father decided to treat him with acupuncture, which improved his health. While recovering from this he stayed in bed and his mother told him traditional Chinese stories, some of which were related to Daoism or featured Daoist figures. Soon his father began teaching him *taijiquan*, although at first he could not stand up, so he only was able to use his arms. His father had trained in Chinese medicine in Taipei and was a master of *taijiquan* in the Chinese Society of Tai Chi, so such practices were not new in Cherng’s life. His father had taught him both *taijiquan* and meditation techniques earlier in life.

Cherng found both the stories that his mother told him and the practices his father taught him very interesting and wanted to learn more. In the early 1980s Cherng had recovered from his arthritis and was able to walk. He asked his father for the names of Daoist masters in Taiwan and China, so he could return there for further study.

In China, while waiting in a line-up to see one master, he began talking with a woman and showed her the list of Daoist masters that his father gave him. She began to cross off names...
from his list and said “this one is dead, this one no longer teaches” and so forth. She then told him that if he is seeking alchemy he should visit her master. He visited this master and a number of others who taught alchemy in the Western School and learnt both neidan 内丹 and waidan 外丹 practices, before arriving at the Zhengyi tradition. Cherng did not think that the practices he was taught from the Daoist alchemists included everything that he was looking for, and continued to seek out masters until finding the Zhengyi Daoists in Taiwan, and became initiated as a daoshi, before returning to Rio de Janeiro.

In Rio, he started to teach courses on taijiquan and the Yijing, and as he realized that people were interested in the philosophical side of practice he taught, he decided to translate the Daode Jing into Portuguese under the title Tao Te Ching — O Livro do Caminho e da Virtude in 1996. As interest in his courses grew, Cherng decided to return to Taiwan for further training in 1987, an “upgrade” as Hamilton Fonseca Filho calls it. During this time he began to collect the images and statues for the first temple in Brazil. Cherng continued this trips back to Taiwan for further training and once brought twelve Brazilians with him for ordination in the lineage. In 1994, he was given permission to initiate people into the lineage in Brazil and started a seminary to train priests.

3.1.2 The Two Temples

The Daoist Society of Brazil formed with the foundation of the temple in Rio, The Temple of Sublime Transparency (Templo da Transparência Sublime), in 1991. Previously courses had been taught in a gym, but the group had no permanent space of its own. Cherng’s father bought the property, which once belonged to a local artist, and Cherng lived in the back section of the building, while the front section was used by the society. It includes a school for Daoist arts on the lower floor and the temple on the second floor. The society remains the only Daoist group in South America that has a connection to the Daoist Society of China or the Zhengyi Lineage.
Cherng also visited São Paulo to teach courses on the *Yijing* at a *taijiquan* school. Wagner Canalonga, the São Paulo temple’s high priest, explained that Cherng thought the *Yijing* would appeal to people as a gateway to Daoism because “the *Yijing* is very charming because it is very rational, but it has a mystery to it.” As the classes grew in São Paulo, Cherng wanted to install an altar in the *taijiquan* School. However, the school was actually run by a Catholic woman who did not want an altar in the centre and Cherng’s group decided to find their own space. They then moved into two different spaces for periods of six months before finding a more permanent location in 2002 and founded The Temple of the Treasure of the Spirit, *Templo do Tesouro do Espírito*. The temple later moved again to their current location in Liberdade, the Japanese district of São Paulo.

Soon after the founding of the second temple, Cherng went on a one and a half year retreat in China. In 2004, after returning to Brazil, he died of arthritis. Wagner Canalonga could see this as part of destiny saying that “he was a very healthy person, he had very healthy habits … he was a very high level meditation master, but all of us have our destiny.” However, having the founder and head priest of the society die at the age of 46 was still quite shocking for the members, and caused many changes for the group, particularly in Rio where Cherng had lived.

### 3.1.3 Cherng’s Death and the Continuation of the Daoist Society of Brazil

In São Paulo, the death of Master Cherng had less impact than in Rio. Cherng had left for China a week after the temple opened, and the lay people had already accepted Wagner Canalonga as the head of the temple. Canalonga explained this by saying that when Cherng “passed away, they had another connection to me. I lost my master, but people didn't lose the connection with me.” Even though Canalonga had not been initiated as a *daoshi* when the temple was founded, he was the person who had always been there, and while the people were shocked and saddened by Cherng’s
death, Canalonga does not think it affected the attendance or organization of the temple in any major way.

At this time the temple in Rio already had a number of priests, who up until Cherng’s death had generally thought of each other as equals. However, according to Hamilton Fonseca Filho, Cherng chose Fonseca Filho as his successor before his death. Fonseca Filho says the choice was based on his knowledge of fa and level of meditation, but some other priests at the time found the change of leadership difficult to accept or were disillusioned after their master’s death. Many of the priests did not want to accept Fonseca Filho as their new leader, their new master, and all but one left the temple after having some disagreements. Since then, Fonseca Filho has continued to run the temple and a number of new daoshi have been initiated in Rio.

Currently the Society is still made up of the two temples, but in the same year that Cherng died, they were donated 6000 square meters of land in the town of Embu, outside of the city of São Paulo, to build a meditation centre. Previously Cherng had lived in the back of the property in Rio, however, after his death the land was transferred over to the Society. With this new space Fonseca Filho plans to expand what the temple can offer and intends to build a meditation centre and lake for fengshui on the property.

Cherng first encountered Daoism because of family connection, his father had trained in taijiquan and Chinese medicine, and his mother was familiar with a number of Daoist stories. He returned to Taiwan, his country of birth, to study Daoism, and being able to speak both Chinese and Portuguese he was able to transmit these teachings back to Brazil. However the current members of the society did not grow up with the same kind of connections to Daoist practices, and in the next section I will look at how lay people and priests explained what they saw as their first experiences with Daoist practices and how they became involved in the temples.


3.2 Becoming a Daoist in Brazil

Interviewees were asked how they first came to participate with the Daoist Society of Brazil. The intent was to understand how Brazilians, without the kind of connections that the Daoist Society’s founder Wu Jyh Cherng had, first became interested in Daoist practice. Their responses can be grouped into three main categories: they became interested through the practice of taijiquan, through the study of texts related to Daoism, or through a process of practicing a number of religions and trying to find the one that they thought was right for them. None of these are different from what has been found in research on Daoist practice by North American or Europeans who identify as Daoist (Siegler 2006; Clarke 2000). The first two categories are also the major forms of earlier Daoist transmission to Brazil in the forms of texts and physical practices, so it is not surprising people would consider these their first encounters with Daoism or the cause for them going to the temple.

The Daoist Society of Brazil was then able to use what was more familiar to Brazilian people in order to attract them to the temple. Darren E. Skerkat has argued that choosing a religion is not only based on one’s belief, but like other choices depends on one’s previous knowledge and experience of religions (Skerkat 1997: 68-72). Daoist practice then can become more accessible to Brazilians by joining through the practices that had disseminated to Brazil earlier than the founding of the Daoist Society.

After their first experiences with the Daoist Society of Brazil, which mirror many other Western Daoist practices, the interviewees became more involved with the society through taking part in other courses and the ritual services to develop an understanding and practice of Daoism that is not typical for Westerners.
3.2.1 Finding Daoism through Taijiquan

Many interviewees understood their first experience with Daoism through physical practices like *taijiquan*. However, at that time, most of them did not see this as part of a religious journey; rather it was out of an interest in the health aspects of the practices. Even Master Cherng’s interest in Daoism developed as a result of his father teaching him *taijiquan* in order to improve his health. Such practice is widespread in Brazil, as in many other Western countries, and members of the Daoist Society did not necessarily begin to practice *taijiquan* with the Daoist Society, but they still see it as the beginning of their path of becoming a self-identified Daoist.

One priest, when asked about how he came to study Daoism brought up his first encounter with *taiji*, saying, “When I was twelve… I started to practice *taiji*, but at that time, *taijiquan*, it changed my life, I was very young, but it really changed my life, my opinions about life, about who I am.” He began to practice after walking by a *taijiquan* centre, seeing a sign and becoming curious of what exactly it was. After practicing *taijiquan* he decided to leave the Catholic church he was attending and to continue his religious path alone, although he did not connect *taijiquan* to religion at the time, he does see it as having a direct influence on him leaving the church. This was not a *taijiquan* class at the temple, but he places it as the start in his path of becoming a Daoist priest. However, he stopped practicing *taijiquan* after initiation as a *daoshi*, saying that at that point he found his religious way, which he sees as conducting rites and reading classical texts.

A lay person, who had been involved in the temple for a number of years said that she began to practice *taijiquan* when her physical and emotional health were not well, and through this practice she began to get better and develop an understanding of the connections between body, mind, and spirit. She sees *taijiquan* as transforming her consciousness of the world and continues to practice. Another priest, who had only been initiated as a *daoshi* approximately two months prior to the interviews, said that she initially came to the temple to study *taijiquan*. After
this she came across an article by Master Cherng in a journal at the temple, and from this she became more interested in Daoism. She thought the article was brilliant, and started to attend weekly classes about the *Daode Jing* at the temple. Unlike the first priest, she did not begin to practice *taijiquan* only out of curiosity, but to have a better understanding of her body and its energy.

The initial interest in *taijiquan* was not described as an interest in religion, but, like many other people who practice *taijiquan* outside of the Daoist Society, it was due to an interest in health, physical exercise, or understanding one’s body. While many people around the world practice *taijiquan* without any connection to religion, the interviewees were either brought into direct contact with Daoism by practicing at the temple and finding more information there or thought that *taijiquan* helped to change their way of thinking to a form more compatible with Daoist practice. Others came to Daoism through individual textual study, however, similar results of changing how this either brought them directly to the temple or changed their overall worldview were discussed.

### 3.2.2 Textual Study of the Yijing and Dao De Jing

The individual study of texts related to Daoism was another major category that interviewees described when asked about their first experience with Daoism. Although they began this study as an individual, they were attracted to the temple when they saw courses offered on the *Yijing* or *Daode Jing* and began to attend these group study sessions. Like the practice of *taijiquan* the study of these texts is described by other self-identified Daoists in Western countries as a gateway to identifying as Daoist and people outside of the Daoist Society in Brazil also study these texts without any connection to a religion.

One layperson and temple volunteer, after leaving the Baptist Church that he was raised in began to study what he described as “esoteric arts.” He said, “I kept studying in my own way and
then... I got interested in the *Yijing*, and then that same week there was an *Yijing* course here. I came and never stopped.” Wagner Canalonga also considers the *Yijing* as his first encounter with Daoism. In 1991 he bought a copy and began to study it himself, and later, in 1993, began to study it with a teacher and started to practice *taijiquan* with a Buddhist group known as the Brazilian Taijiquan Society. Hamilton Fonseca Filho bought a copy of the *Yijing* after a former girlfriend of his began to use a copy and he became curious about it. However, he was not involved in anything related to Daoism again until 1993 when he mis-dialed a phone number and reached the Daoist Society of Brazil by mistake. He first hung up the phone, but then, seeing a connection between the *Yijing* and Daoism, decided to redial the temple.

The initial interest in the *Yijing* was not an interest in organized religion, nor was it necessarily connected to Daoism at the time. However, like the practice of *taijiquan*, the Daoist Society was able to attract people to the temple based on an already existing interest in something related to Daoism by offering courses on the subject. Many people only later became interested in Daoism as a religion.

What initially brought people to the temple, or what they see as their first experience with Daoism, is similar to what is practiced in North American and European Daoist groups; they pay for a class about a type of physical practice or textual study. Both the practice of *taijiquan* and study of texts like the *Yijing* or *Daode Jing* are quite widespread in Brazil. However, the *Daode Jing* did not receive a Portuguese translation until Cherng’s work in 1996. This does not mean that copies were not available in other languages before hand; just that study of it was not as widespread as the *Yijing* or the practice of *taijiquan*. Still, the members of the Daoist Society of Brazil are doing more than just *taijiquan* practice and textual study. There are also cosmological views, worship of deities, and rituals practiced in the Zhengyi lineage. Looking for these elements of a religion is something else that brought people to the temples. People who could be called religious seekers, and had previously been involved in a number of religious groups, have since
decided to join the Daoist Society.

3.2.3 Religious Seekers

The third category of how people initially came to practice Daoism is that the interviewees were searching for a religion. Although this was not as frequent a response as the two above categories, it is worth noting. Looking at only the practice of taijiquan or study of the Yijing as reasons for coming to the Daoist Society of Brazil would make it appear that none of the members had previous interest in religion, which is not the case at all. Rather the above sections indicate that they did not connect those practices to religion or to Daoism when they first became interested, not that they had no interest in religious practices.

Practicing other religions such as Buddhism, Catholicism, and Candomblé were mentioned by a few of the lay interviewees. However, the search for a religion or feeling of a kind of destined religious role in life was much more prominent within the priests interviewed. Although some interviewees have practiced a number of different religions in this past this does not mean that they were not serious about their previous or current religious commitments, but that after practicing they found aspects within the traditions that were not compatible with their lives.

As mentioned above, Wagner Canalonga practiced taijiquan with a Tibetan Buddhist group in São Paulo. A year or two after this he met Master Cherng and began to attend his Yijing, Daode Jing, taijiquan, qigong, and astrology classes. While he had an immediate connection to Cherng, he did not convert to Daoism so quickly. Canalonga said that he resisted considering himself a Daoist at first, and did not actually stop his Buddhist practices until the taijiquan teacher and Tibetan Lama in the group had a disagreement that caused the Lama to leave. He said that at that point there was no need to find another Buddhist master, because he had already found a new master, Master Cherng.
Another priest was also interested in Tibetan Buddhism before his involvement in the Daoist Society. He went through the initiation ritual with a Buddhist group about a year before he began to practice Daoism. He decided to leave because he thought that if he was part of a religion he wanted to become a religious official, not just a layperson, but did not want to abandon his family and become a monk. While he found some aspects of Buddhism interesting, he did not think it was able to fill the religious role in his life as Daoism has.

Hamilton Fonseca Filho also had a long desire to become a religious worker; he said that “since I was a little kid, I wanted to be a priest, I just didn’t know what kind of priest,” later adding with a laugh that he also wanted to be an immortal since he saw the movie *Highlander* as a child. However, aside from the practice of Catholicism as a child, Fonseca Filho did not discuss previous religious membership. Rather, it was Master Cherng who asked him to study the different religions in Brazil before he made the decision to become a Daoist priest in order to make sure it was the right choice for him.

That a number of interviewees, primarily those who are now priests, previously sought out religious practice shows that their interest in religiosity, lineage, and ritual did not develop after joining the Daoist Society of Brazil. Rather, that they had been looking for a religious affiliation or, in the case of Fonseca Filho, looking to become a priest, prior to having knowledge of the Daoist Society or of Daoism at all. While they had this long-lasting desire, it was not something satisfied by previous religious commitments, and they did not immediately accept Daoism without first trying to understand the religion. Their search then was not just for something that seemed exotic, nor did members describe what might be considered rushing into things. Rather, it was a slower process that often coincided with the first two categories of taking different courses at the temple, and becoming more interested in and identifying more with Daoism over time.
The different ways that people began to practice Daoism at the Daoist Society of Brazil did not involve a direct conversion. Rather, they were part of a process that may have started with practices of taijiquan, individual or group study of different texts, or participation in other Asian or non-mainstream religious groups. This kind of process was seen in the group interview with lay people at the Rio Temple, one woman said that “I believe that people, the culture here, does not accept Daoism as a religion...for us, we have accepted Daoism as our religion, we don’t have another one.” She then said, “like her,” and motioned to another woman in the group who had said that she was a Catholic, but also likes to come to the Daoist rituals and does not identify herself as a Daoist. As Daoism is small and new religion in Brazil, people appear to approach it with caution, and take time to adjust and identify as a Daoist. This slow process allows people to take courses they may be interested in without feeling forced to become “religious” or pressured to commit. Laurence R. Iannaccone has argued this sort of religious organization does not produce commitment in the laity and that strict religions are more successful (1992; 1994; 1997: 35-36). However, Kent D. Miller argues “reducing the demands placed upon potential customers [religious adherents] eases them into a religious organization,” (2002: 445) and Nancy T. Ammerman sees adherence to low-commitment groups as an effort in raising children, as an expression of trying to be a good and moral person, and to affirm a vague conception of something transcending human life (1997: 126). Looking at the Daoist Society of Brazil it appears that having a low required commitment level can still produce increasing commitment among members, particularly for religions that are not well understood by the public and are very different from the traditional mainstream beliefs.

After these Brazilians started to think of themselves as Daoists, however, what did that mean for them? Here I have covered the explanations given for beginning affiliation with Daoism. In the following section I will discuss how interviewees understood Daoism, why it is relevant to their lives, why someone in Brazil would practice it, and what, if anything, it has to
offer Brazil specifically.

3.3 Being a Daoist in Brazil

In order to understand what members of the society thought was important about being a Daoist and how they would define their religion, interviewees were asked how they would describe Daoism to a friend or how they would explain what they do in the temple. Many interviewees described Daoism as being about balance or harmony with the natural world, and emphasized its this-worldly focus that appealed to them. Some contrasted Daoist practice with other religions to show Daoism’s focus on this life and how it gives one control over life. Most did not try to explain Daoism or the temple services in terms of the rituals performed there, however, the priests emphasized the rituals as the most important part of Daoism. These views emphasize both changes in contemporary religiosity that focus on individual choice and this-world (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Szerszynski 2005) and a desire for authenticity in the organizations and practices one uses to construct an identity in a globalized world (Roland 1992; Taylor 1991).

The definitions of what is important about Daoism may appear to show the divergent understandings of Daoism in the laity and priests, but the words the priests used to describe the results of the rituals included the same emphasis on balancing energy and bringing harmony that the laity brought up. It is not that ritual is unimportant for the laity, but that it is not what they would use to describe Daoism. In fact, when asked if they would describe the kinds of rituals at the temple, a number of interviewees said that it would seem strange or exotic to people, that people do not understand it. While describing the kinds of courses available or how Daoist thought applies to life were seen as aspects of Daoist practice that could be more easily accepted by society, people thought that Brazilians, particularly Christians, would view the ritual practices much more negatively.
3.3.1 Daoism, Harmony, and Loving Life

Descriptions of finding a balance in life or a natural way came up repeatedly when interviewees were asked how they would explain Daoism to a friend. These ideas were seen as connected to Daoism’s focus on this world and how to live right now, this was sometimes contrasted with other religions that were seen as having less life affirming beliefs. However, a number of interviewees also maintained that there is nothing wrong with other religions and that while Daoism has much to offer them, it is a personal choice and that one should be accepting of other believes. Acceptance was also connected to what Daoism is. The focus on this world and individual choice or control over one’s life are common shifts found in other developed countries (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Szerszynski 2005), and the ties to lineage and tradition can work to establish a sense of ‘authenticity’ also common to the contemporary or globalized world (Robertson 1992; Taylor 1991).

One layperson described the principles of Daoism as, “to know the world, because this conception of harmony and balance, and [because of the] internal transformation of consciousness,” while another said Daoism “concerns being human.” When asked about his thoughts on immortality, one priest responded that “Daoism is about joy, about happiness. Life is happiness.” What was important for many of the people about Daoism was that they did not find it to be caught up in rewards in another world; rather it was seen as a practical way to help live in this life.

This focus on life, and particularly on the enjoyment of life, was contrasted with other religious beliefs or how people think about religion in general. Hamilton Fonseca Filho said that some people find Daoism hard to understand because it is not what they expect of a religion, because it says to “go enjoy life, be free,” rather than to constrain one’s life. Often Catholicism was used as the example of this sort of religion; it was described as causing suffering for people who do not believe in it and being based on dogma. Daoism was seen as lacking these traits, after
two interviewees talked about the Catholic Church, one woman added that what she liked about the temple was that it does not “try to sell you fantasies.” Daoism, unlike Catholicism, was seen as offering something one can use in this life, rather than something used to control people.

Candomblé was also compared to Daoism in relation to spirits and possession. One priest, whose mother was a Candomblé medium, thought that being a medium in Candomblé could be dangerous for people. He said that, in the past, his mother could not control when the spirits would enter her, and that this was a problem for many mediums. However, after she started to practice Daoism, she had control over the spirits and they would only enter her when she wanted. While the way Daoism was talked about in relation to Candomblé is quite different from how it was talked about in relation to Catholicism, there is a theme within both that focus on gaining control over your life. With Catholicism the Church was seen as controlling people through their dogmas and in Candomblé the spirits control mediums through possession. Daoism was seen as giving people control in both their everyday relations and control in the spiritual realm.

While Daoism was seen as offering more than other religious groups, interviewees did not want to dismiss other belief systems. Religion was seen as an individual choice and acceptance was seen as part of Daoism. One interviewee thought that all religions can offer something, saying that “even with all the rites and rituals and dogmas [they can help people and are better than having no spiritual side in life].” Another said that “anyone can choose what they like to think and live, I choose Daoism...it’s very particular [to the individual].” Becoming Daoist, or a member of any other religion, was not seen as something that can be pushed upon people; rather people had to come to it on their own terms, based on their own experience. As seen earlier in the paper, people saw coming to Daoism as a natural process, and this is how they wanted others to come to the temple or any other religious practice.
This type of religiosity, one that is focused on this world and is based on a personal journey of what is right for the individual, is found in other societies today. Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart see a shift from religiosity based on security in agrarian societies to one based on concerns about existential meaning in post-industrial societies. People, who have become less interested in traditional (Christian) religious practice, have not given up on individual religiosity (Norris and Inglehart 2004: 74-75). Bronislaw Szerszynski has discussed the transformation of religiosity to a more individual form, and sees these post-industrial societies as developing a “postmodern sacred.” This kind of religiosity or sacrality is based on many different cosmologies and world-views that develop from subjective experiences. It is now up to the individual to work out their own religious meanings inside or outside of religious institutions (Szerszynski 2005: 10-23). While the themes that appear in these contemporary forms of religiosity are not so different from what was discussed by the Zhengyi Daoists in Brazil, the Brazilian Daoist practice is rooted in lineage and tradition, it is not completely about individuality. Although it is described as an individual choice, the group and collective practice remains important. While Norris and Inglehart’s theory points to the development of an individual religiosity, individual choice is not the only important factor here, so is a sense of authenticity. Roland Robertson writes that in the contemporary world the representation of ‘authenticity’ becomes an important source of empowerment for people (Robertson 1992: 166). Charles Taylor also writes on the importance of authenticity for people today and links it to the desire to make individual choice; it is the idea that nobody can live one’s life, but oneself. However, while Taylor sees it up to the individual choose how to live and how to be ‘authentic,’ receiving recognition from others is still very important (Taylor, 1991: 45-61). Although people may make religious choices more individually, they still look for what they consider to be ‘authentic.’ In Daoism the sense of lineage and practice of rituals help to establish commitment and an identity as a Daoist (Kohn and Roth 2002: 7-11), and
in Brazil the connection to lineage affiliation and ritual can also help to provide this sense of ‘authenticity’ in the religious practice.

Although rituals are practiced at the temple, can help produce a sense of tradition or authenticity, and all of the interviewees attend the rituals services, but discussing the rituals in order to explain Daoism was not common. Some said they would usually explain it as more of a philosophy than a religion, and others said that talking about the ritual might give people the wrong impression. Rituals might make them think Daoism is too strange or exotic. However, the important role of ritual within the tradition did come up. It was discussed in more detail by the priests, but the lay people also said it was important or that it was one of the “deeper” aspects of the religion. The ritual is also what sets the Daoist Society of Brazil apart of other Brazilian groups that consider themselves Daoist in one way or another, and is a major part of what connects them to the tradition of Zhengyi Daoism.

3.3.2 Daoism and Ritual

Ritual services are held once a month at the Daoist Society of Brazil and are open to the public. The priests can also be hired to perform rituals for specific individuals. Hamilton Fonseca Filho and Wagner Canalonga, the two High Priests who perform the rituals were asked about how they understand the importance of rituals and what they think the rituals actually do. As ritual practice is an important part of the Zhengyi Daoist practice, we asked this in order to understand why ritual is thought of as important for them, not just for maintaining tradition, but also for the results that the rituals are believed to bring.

For both of them the rituals work to change energy. The goal of this is to help improve one’s prosperity, harmony, and health. Although the priests do talk about the purpose of rituals with the lay people, describing ritual was not a frequent occurrence in how the laity would explain Daoism to others. However, the descriptions of what Daoism is about often included the
same concepts of finding balance or harmony that were used to explain the purpose of rituals. Some interviewees said they would not discuss the rituals when explaining Daoism to someone else because it might be too confusing, exotic, or just strange for other people. In Brazil, ritual practice is not limited to Daoism, it also continues in other religions such as Catholicism, Afro-Brazilian religions, and Zen Buddhism. While interviewees thought that explaining ritual to people might seem strange to others, it has been argued that the historic connection to Catholicism may make it more accessible to Brazilians (Rocha 2006: 187).

Hamilton Fonseca Filho, the head priest in Rio, discussing the most important aspect of the Zhengyi tradition as the rituals, said that they will help you first gain material stability and then you can improve your belief. While lay people may not have explicitly discussed ritual, they agreed on the importance of this-worldly focus and improving one’s life now. Fonseca Filho went on to explain that the fa first stabilizes financial prosperity, then to harmonize families, and then once there is stability in these areas one can improve one’s faith. Wagner Canalonga explained that having an altar and a temple are important in order for the rituals to be successful, as these help to “create roots” that make the space more favourable for one’s development in one’s understanding of Daoism. The impact of the rituals, then, is greater inside the temple, but they both saw them as having an influence on increasing prosperity outside of it as well.

Fonseca Filho explained the rituals saying that you use mantras and recitations to evoke the gods in order move energy, and each god is a certain type of energy. The priest has to determine what kind of energy is around a person and then they can use the fa to balance the energy and balance the emotions. This was contrasted with neidan techniques that were seen as depending on an individual, on one’s destiny or effort, while fa uses external energy to change an individual’s destiny by burning a talisman. Another priest, when discussing how most people in the west practice Daoism, said that most Western Daoists lose and important part of the tradition because they are not interested in ritual.
While both temples do explain the purposes of the ritual and how they work, there were not frequently discussed by the laity. However, our questions for the lay people did not directly ask them to explain what the rituals did. They were asked how they would describe the service, which the ritual was a part of, to friends, and in this case they would often avoid emphasis on the rituals. One said that she does not like to get into the “deeper or complex” aspects of things when explaining Daoism to others. Another said that because the rituals happened infrequently he would usually just explain to people about the study groups or meditation classes. One lay person in Rio did try to explain the service in terms of explaining ritual saying that it was a ritual “for one’s health and uses energies that are not from one’s destiny, and you get rid of your bad energy.” This sort of discussion of removing bad energies did come up in others descriptions of what Daoism is, particularly in regard to Daoism helping you become more balanced, but people did not give any details of how this happens. The purpose of the rituals is still understood by the laity, albeit without the amount of detail that the high priests might use. The rituals are seen as changing the energies of people and enhancing one’s life, the same kinds of qualities that were used in explaining what Daoism is. However, the lay people tend to be hesitant to talk about the rituals when explaining Daoism or the activities at the temple to others. This could relate to what one lay person said about people in Brazil not accepting Daoism as a real religion, so it is easier to try to explain to people about Daoism as “philosophy” or as classes on qigong or meditation, rather than a religion with ritual services.

Although lay people thought others who are involved in the temple would find the rituals strange, rituals are practiced by other traditions in Brazil. In her study of Zen in Brazil, Cristina Rocha discusses Coen de Souza, a non-Japanese Brazilian Zen nun, who was able to gain acceptance in the Japanese community by maintaining the traditional rituals from Japan (Rocha 2006: 23). Afro-Brazilian religions also continue to practice complex rituals (Pierucci and Prandi 2000: 634). Rocha argues that the history of devotion to saints in Catholicism has made
performing Buddhist devotional rituals much easier for Brazilians, than for Protestant countries that tried to remove such practices (Rocha 2006: 187). The Daoist Society of Brazil certainly seems to make this theory more plausible, but further study on Daoist or Zen groups in other historically Catholic and Protestant nations is still needed in order to see if this is a purely Catholic influence or if it has to do with other factors in Brazil. Additionally, even within Brazil, maintaining traditional Asian religious ritual outside of Asian communities does not appear to be common, and many people of non-Asian descent practice in much the same way as American Daoists or Buddhists would in fee-for-service classes and workshops (Usarski 1999, 2002; Neto 2006).

What ritual certainly does do for Zhengyi Daoist practice is connect it to the tradition and historic practices of Daoism. The style of chanting, material culture of the altar, mudras, and construction of talisman link the Brazilian Daoists to Chinese tradition. Although this connection to traditional Chinese practice is seen as important to members and works to develop the sense of ‘authenticity’ discussed above, people also see Daoism as a universal teaching. The idea of Daoism as universal did not first emerge in the modern west (Kleeman 1998; 2002), but is common among Western Daoists (Siegler 2006). In this next section I will look at the relationship between culture and Daoism as Chinese, Brazilian, and universal.

3.4 Chinese Culture and Brazilian Daoism

Interviewees were asked both how they think Daoism can apply particularly to Brazil and if practicing Daoism has made them more interested in Chinese culture. Both of these received mixed responses. While some found that Daoism could offer something to Brazil or they could think of particular reasons that it would be practiced in Brazil, others said there was nothing particular about the place, and all agreed that Daoism was a universal teaching. Regardless of this view of the universality of Daoism, many of the interviewees said that Daoism had made them
more interested in Chinese culture in a variety of ways. For some people, Daoist practice has connected to cultural flows from Chinese traditions to Brazil that may have little to nothing to do with Daoism at all. Taking part in a religious tradition that has long been tied to a specific location or ethnic group, at least for the Daoist Society of Brazil, then can promote understanding of that culture outside of the religion.

3.4.1 Daoism and Brazil

Many people thought that Daoism was suitable for Brazil because of its focus on life. Some thought that in Brazil there is closeness to the natural world and an enjoyment of life that makes Daoism very fitting for people there. It was also seen as a positive alternative to the dominant religious beliefs that do not fit with such a mindset. However, regardless of this, people saw Daoist teachings as something that could apply universally and some saw nothing specific about life in Brazil that would make Daoism more applicable there.

One layperson said that, “Daoism celebrates life, and here in Brazil people like to live life with joy,” adding that the abundance of nature in Brazil makes this easier for people to do. Another said that in Brazil there is an “excess of joy,” but Daoism can help people because it “brings us more, it speaks about the internal joy ... it brings us more common sense,” another lay person responded to this saying that it brings a “more real joy.” Others repeated similar sentiments about people in Brazil being closely connected to nature and enjoying life. One interviewee who had recently been ordained elaborated on this connection between people and nature, he said that this connection was important to help with problems in society such as pollution and violence, and this is what Daoist practice could help in society. How Daoism was thought to relate specifically to Brazil was in appealing to people’s love of life and of the natural world.
This balance between humans and nature was contrasted Catholicism, and how Catholicism was too focused on the other world in its beliefs and also tied to colonialism in its history. One layperson said that “Catholic religion teaches us to worry about our sins … all the time, and only after our death we will have some sort of redemption. And in Daoism it's different. We learn a different [way]. We make the difference right now, living.” Others thought that Christianity had made people in Brazil more closed to other belief systems and focused too much on dogmas. One lay person in Rio brought up the history of colonialism in Brazil, and how Catholicism was connected to killing the native peoples. Daoism was important for people in Brazil to help to create an identity that was not so closely connected such events in Brazilian history, and is something that is freely chosen rather than imposed from above.

The importance of Daoism for Brazil was to offer a religion focused on this world, an interest that has also grown in other developed countries (Norris and Inglehart 2004; Szerszynski 2005), and because it is a religion that is based on individual choice, an interest that is also common in the contemporary world (Taylor 1991). The particulars given for why Daoism might apply specifically Brazil can then be connected to larger global trends in religiosity and identity. Some, however, saw little or nothing in particular about Brazilian society that Daoism could help, for them Daoism can be applied anywhere regardless of nationality. While the focus on this life is seen as something that is appealing to people of Brazil, it was also something see as applicable elsewhere. Even those who could think of specific reasons why Daoism might develop in Brazil thought of the religion as a universal teaching.

3.4.2 Daoism as a Universal Teaching
The idea of Daoism as a universal teaching is most prevalent within Western Daoist practitioners, as this is who would be more likely to ignore the ways that Daoism is rooted in Chinese culture (Miller 2003: 29-30; Siegler 2006: 278). However, as seen earlier in this paper in the works of
Kleeman (1998; 2002) and Schipper (1993), there is historic evidence of Zhengyi Daoism having members of multiple ethnicities and Daoists seeing it as a universal tradition (Kleeman 2002: 24-29; Schipper 1994: 63). Members still saw understanding Chinese culture as an important part of Daoist practice, however, the degree to which this was important varied. Still this differs from many American Daoists, as few of them express interest in increasing knowledge of Chinese language, culture, or history as part of studying Daoism (Seigler 2006: 278).

One lay person explained Daoism’s universality by saying that Daoism “is not something Chinese by ownership, it's Chinese by origination, and I think [that] it may get some flavours locally [over time].” Another expressed similar sentiments saying that Daoism is Chinese, but that she does not associate it with China because it has become something universal, to which someone added that the energy was what was important, not the country. The universality of the energies of the deities was expressed in another interview when discussing the statues of deities, the lay person said that the faces of these deities look Chinese, but if she was to put a different face on it the energy would remain the same, and this is what is universal.

Although some interviewees see understanding Chinese culture as helping to understand Daoism or the context of Daoist practices, many said that it was not essential to understand Chinese culture to practice Daoism. One summed up his thoughts on this relation saying that learning about Chinese culture “helps, of course, it helps... [but] you can study Daoism learning nothing about Chinese culture, [these are] two things separate.” Certainly what I described at the beginning of this paper is quite different from temples in China or Taiwan, and Fonseca Filho explains that since the Daoist Society of Brazil began, they have tried to make the practices appeal more to Brazilian people, avoid making it appear overly exotic, and try to avoid confusion with religions like Candomblé.

Although much of the material culture at the temple, the chanting and rituals remain from Daoist practice in China or Taiwan, Daoism is thought of as a universal teaching. It is thought of
as universal not just as a “philosophy” for life, but also in the energy that is transformed in Daoist ritual. However, while considered universal, there is still a connection to China through the lineage and the development history of Daoist practices. In the next section, I will discuss the connections with Chinese culture and the ways that practice of Daoism has increased interest and knowledge of Chinese culture for some members.

3.4.3 Daoism and China

Though there was no consensus on whether or not one needed to understand Chinese culture to understand Daoism or what aspects of Chinese culture should be understood, a number of people did say that practicing Daoism made them more interested in Chinese culture. Though the interests ranged a great deal and included reading books on Chinese history, eating more Chinese food, visiting the acupuncturist before a western doctor, and planning to travel to China. While people had an interest in China and Chinese culture, it does mean that they thought of China as some sort of Daoist utopia. In fact a number of people expressed the opinion that people in China today do not understand Daoism or that barely anybody practices Daoism there. However, for most of the members of the Daoist Society of Brazil there was little interest in “returning Daoism to China” and only five of the twelve asked said they were interested in visiting China. Although they placed an importance on maintaining a tradition or having an authentic practice, most people did not think that travelling to China to study Daoism played an important role in this.

When a group of lay people were asked if they thought they were practicing something that was Chinese when practicing Daoism all three who responded said, to varying degrees, yes. One said that they are following a tradition, another added that it is very traditional and authentic, while the third said it is a Chinese tradition, but added that it is also universal. This was seen as a good thing that the practices had some sort of authenticity to them. While the place of origin was acknowledged, planning to go to China was not dominant among interviewees and only one
layperson had actually set plans in the future to visit China. The only members of the temple who had visited China or Taiwan were one priest was studying in Beijing at the time of our research and the two high priests who trained in Taiwan. Generally the reason given for the lack of interest was that most people in China do not practice Daoism or that it is not necessary to go to China in order to be a Daoist. One person jokingly said, “I want to go when Communism is not there,” while others made comments saying that China was currently in conflict between its past traditions and current ways or that Daoism was disappearing in China. Still some expected that many people in Brazil would see China as a place where everyone is a Daoist. They explained that the High Priests of their temples had told them that only a small amount of the population considers themselves Daoist. While many did not see going to China as important and said that few people practice Daoism in China today, some people still have an interest in visiting, though it tends to be for the historic importance of the country rather than for contemporary cultural activities.

Although plans to visit China were not dominant, a number of people, particularly those who had been members of the society for a longer period of time, said that practicing Daoism had made them more interested in Chinese culture, even if they did not think of it as the contemporary culture of China. One said studying Daoism made him begin to buy books on Chinese culture and Daoism makes him search for Chinese culture. Another had a similar sentiment that after studying Daoism a person “can’t avoid learning about their culture.” Others found an influence on how they lived their day-to-day lives, rather than just an increased interest, one said that “[in] my house all my food [is Chinese], tea, tofu, soy, it’s an influence” and another said “I always go to the acupuncturist first, never the doctor.” Out of the twelve people questioned, seven said they had read something about Confucius or Confucianism, eight said they had read something about the history of Daoism, and nine said they had read something about Chinese history. While all of these people would still see Daoism as a universal teaching, they found that it increased interest
in other parts of Chinese culture, not just to understand the history of the development of Daoism or China more generally, but also in choices they make in life for food or medicine.

To see Daoism as a universal teaching means that it does not have to be Chinese to be authentic and the Daoist Society has consciously tried to distance Daoism from Chinese culture. However, people still become more interested in Chinese culture as a result of their practice. In a globalized society, individuals can form their identities trans-societally through religion and social movements, among other forms of communication (Beyer 1994: 28). While we can form our identities based on organizations like religious groups, these groups do not only exist in the local setting, they are often globalized. For Daoism, however, it has historically and continues to be predominately practiced in China; therefore it remains tied to China in many ways. As Daoism has yet to establish firm roots in Brazil, the Brazilian practitioners have looked to China to develop their interest in Daoism and this has led to further interest in Chinese culture.

Seeing Daoism as universal does not dissolve its connection to China, and Daoism as an organized religion in Brazil has communicated not only Daoist practice to people, but indirectly communicated knowledge of and interest in wider Chinese culture that is not a part of the practices at the Daoist Society. However, the interests were in traditional Chinese culture, rather than modern developments, which combined with seeing Daoism as universal explains why fewer people were interested in traveling to China.

Although maintaining a tradition or sense of authenticity was seen as important and a number of people found themselves to be increasingly interested in other aspects of Chinese culture, the Daoist Society of Brazil has also tried to localized its practice. This was not just seen in the idea of the universality of Daoism, but was something the High Priests said was a deliberate decision made by Wu Jyh Cherng and is continued by them. In order for Zhengyi Daoism to function in Brazil, to make people interested in it, they decided to change certain practices in terms of their openness to the public and information they provide during services.
and through courses. Fonseca Filho said that “it’s not necessary to be a Chinese-Portuguese-Brazilian to be Daoist, you have to distance these two things because the culture is very different and Daoist knowledge must be settled in Brazil. People do not have to be Chinese.” Obviously, the society could not change everything, but they were encouraged by both Master Cherng and later by the Daoist Association in Taiwan to adapt their practices in Brazil.

3.5 Transforming the Zhengyi tradition

The Daoist Society of Brazil made a number of changes to how a Zhengyi Daoist Temple operates. Some of these are for more obvious economic and logistical reasons, such as the design of the building, hours of operation, and services provided. Others were made in order to make Daoism more appealing to Brazilians. The temple features instructions of how to offer incense, and sometimes will explain the rituals to the congregation in Portuguese. The chairs are lined up in straight rows, facing the main shrine, comparable to the set up of a Christian church. The members add to this Christian-like atmosphere as they sit in silence waiting for the service to begin, in stark contrast to the loud and somewhat chaotic atmosphere of Zhengyi Daoist temples in China or Taiwan.

3.5.1 Master Cherng’s Plan for Daoism in Brazil

From what we were told by the High Priests at the temples, adapting Daoism to fit with Brazilian society was a deliberate plan by Master Cherng from the start of the society. In China and Taiwan Zhengyi Daoism has close ties to popular local practices and this allows the priests to be able to connect their myths, rituals, and world-view to local communities through temples, ancestor worship, and festivals (Dean 2009: 179; Lee 2003: 125-128). The local customs of Brazil however are very different from what other Zhengyi Daoists would have encountered, and so in order to make their practices appeal to Brazilians changes would need to be made. Darren E.
Sherkat has explained how people choose religion based on constraints made based on experience; knowledge; social expectations that can differ depending on age, gender, class, and ethnicity; choices of family and friends; and belief (Sherkat 1997: 68-72). While there are individual variations, there are also commonalities within a society or culture about these, not just in terms of what people want from a religious group, but how they expect one to function. Thus, what is expected of Daoism in Chinese societies is different from Brazilian societies.

Hamilton Fonseca Filho told us that Master Cherng tried to separate Chinese culture from Daoism, and thought that this was important to do because they are two different things. He elaborated saying that this allowed people in Brazil to “use the services available from the priest without entering the culture of dragons or the supernatural culture of Chinese, [and] it respects [the] theology [of Daoism].” Much of this the change been based in further explanation about the concepts of Daoism and Daoist ritual than one would find at a Chinese or Taiwanese Daoist temple, this occurs both during the ritual services and through classes offered by the society. The classes were how Master Cherng first began to try and spread Daoist teachings to Brazil. By teaching gongfu 功夫, bagua 八卦, and taijiquan people began to come to the temple and later became curious about what actually occurred in the temple section of the building. Other classes were offered not just to attract more people, but also to increase the members’ knowledge of Daoism. These classes included a study group on the Daode Jing and an introduction to Daoism course.

Another large change was based on language, what parts of the practice were important to keep in Chinese and what could be translated to Portuguese. None of the lay people interviewed could speak Chinese and only one of the priests was currently studying it, so in order for the members to understand what was going on, speaking Portuguese would be a necessity. One priest explained that their Master in Taiwan told Wagner Canalonga and Hamilton Fonseca Filho that it was better to translate things into Portuguese so that people are able to participate in
the religion and understand the texts. Certain aspects of the services, however, remain in Chinese. All of the chanting is done in Chinese, but translations and pinyin transliterations are printed below the Chinese characters in a booklet handed out during services. Wagner Canalonga said that keeping the chanting in Chinese was to have the same vibrations during all the rituals, and also that it sounds better in Chinese, and Fonseca Filho said that it was important to keep the mantras in Chinese because people have said the same years for centuries and each of them acquired the same energy by making the same sounds, changing the language would change the energy. The translations are done to help explain what the rituals are for and for studying texts, however, the translations of the chants seem to have been more for the curiosity for the members of the society, rather than for the success of the rituals. Cherng’s efforts were to appeal to what people knew about Daoism and what they expected of a religious practice in order to make it more accessible to Brazilians.

3.5.2 Accommodating a Catholic Culture

Offering courses and translating texts were changes made in order to increase the understanding of Daoism, but other changes were made to services to accommodate to what most Brazilians expect a religious service to be like, in other words, to be more like a Catholic Mass. During a purification ritual at the Rio temple, described at the start of this paper, a volunteer tells each row of people when to stand up from their seats to go to join the line for the ritual. The Brazilian temples’ method accommodates to a lack of space inside the temple and does not assume people know what to do or when to do it. Additionally, the similarities to communion at Church give a feeling of familiarity to those who have practiced Christianity.

Another change was to perform rituals to a congregation. The layout of the seating in the temple is quite church-like, both temples use straight rows of chairs facing the main altar to watch the priests perform the ritual with an isle down the middle. Hamilton Fonseca Filho explained
that “in China you can only watch the rituals if you get the priest to do the special ritual for you, and then you can choose a few people to participate… In Brazil, if we start doing that, the religion would not go far. People don’t like that system… [Here] the rituals are open for everyone, [and there is] no discrimination [regardless of if you are] Daoist or not Daoist.” The Brazilian Daoists perform these services on Sunday mornings at the temple, they conform to the expectation of religious rituals being open and that religions offer some sort of scheduled service for the laity. Another priest clarified that, while they adapt to Brazilian culture and customs and opened their rituals to the public and that it is a service to the public, but the performance of the ritual is between the priests and the deities, saying that “when we are doing the rituals, we are looking to the deities, not the public” and that “it’s not opera, it’s not a show.” Opening to the public, for him, should not detract from the seriousness of the rituals as the energy one connects to and the relationship between the priest and the deities remains the same for them.

Misunderstandings have also developed due to some people’s Christian background and what Christians might consider evil, demonic, or witchcraft. Some Christians in Brazil have associated the Daoist practices with demonic forces, Wagner Canalonga told us. This has been because the rituals use so much red colour (mistakenly evoking images of blood in Christian culture) and that, for a Christian, some of the deities might look frightening. However, these were not things they would change. Canalonga said the red represents fire and consciousness, and the scary looking deities are protectors, so they are depicted as strong figures with weapons. Although substantial changes have been made to accommodate to a new context, the society also retains a level of tradition and legitimacy. The chanting and instruments, statues of gods, altar design, other martial culture, lineage affiliation, and the rituals performed are all traditionally Chinese. What was adapted to Brazil developed due to a lack of knowledge and experience with Daoism, and this accommodation to previous religious knowledge and experience allowed Zhengyi Daoist practice to overcome some of the constraints that new religions in Brazil face.
Although people in Brazil have been familiar with some practices associated with Daoism, understanding the religion as practiced in China and Taiwan may be confusing or unappealing to people. Although Brazil has a variety of religious practices the cultural influence from Catholicism on what a religion should look like remains today and has shaped how the Daoist Society of Brazil has developed. This is not to say the Daoist Society of Brazil is practicing some sort of Daoist-Catholic syncretism, but that while Daoism maintains a theological power, the organization and expectations of what a religious service should be are traditionally more Catholic than Daoist in style, indicating that while there may be a decline in Catholic belief, the church has retained a cultural authority in ideas of what religion is and what it looks like.

The changes that occur when a tradition is transported from one area to another are often discussed in terms of the hybridization of cultures. Hybridization is the way in which forms are separated from existing practices and then recombine with new forms in new practices; these are the local variants on practices elsewhere. It is not to say that the early practice is somehow the original or pure version, but to look at the fluidity and change in cultural practices and how they occur (Picterse 2004: 64-70, 80). The hybridization discussed here is not the combination of Daoism and Catholicism, but of Daoism and Brazilian culture; however, Catholicism among other traditions has had a lasting influence on Brazilian culture, even in cases when people do not adhere to Christian beliefs.

From the perspective of Zhengyi Daoists, the idea of cultural hybridization should not be abhorrent. In his study of early Zhengyi communities Terry Kleeman (2002) saw that practices by other ethnicities was accepted, and Kenneth Dean (2003, 2009) and Lee Fong-Mao (2003) have both shown that Zhengyi Daoists have maintained ties to a wide range of local communities across China and Taiwan and accepted a variety of local practices. What is different with the Daoist Society of Brazil, however, is not only that it is the Zhengyi tradition moving to a different ethnic group or a different country with new local customs, but the speed that it developed as a
community with its own traditions. The hybridization was deliberate, yet some Brazilian Daoists continue to speak of the importance of understanding Chinese culture in Daoist practice. While the global spread of Daoist practice allows for the continued localization of Daoist practice in new ways, which then may have influence elsewhere, these changes are not seen as completely detached from the historical development of the tradition. The members of the Daoist Society of Brazil do speak of Daoism as a universal tradition, but that does not mean Daoism can be whatever you want, only that it should not be confined by ethnicity or geographic borders.
4.1 Zhengyi Daoism and Religion in Brazil

Harrison Moretz writes that “the Dao is the new Zen. Just as with Zen, many people think the Dao is whatever they want it to be” discussing the increase in using “Taoism” as part of a kind of anything goes spirituality in the United States, and the past use of Zen in the same way (Moretz 2009: 167). In Brazil, Daoism also followed Zen, first in the orientalist exoticism and commercial spirituality Moretz discusses, and later in both Zen and Daoism forming religious institutions with traditional lineages and the continuation of ritual practice. Although Cristina Rocha (2006) connects the continuation of ritual to Brazil’s Catholic history, there also appears to be other influences from religious practice by immigrant groups and Afro-Brazilian religious ritual.

Religion in Brazil has seen a decline in Catholicism continuously since the 1980s (Cruz 2009: 5; Rocha 2006: 94), and the majority of Brazilian Catholics are members of the religion for social identity and participate only for important annual dates or rites of passage (Pierucci and Prandi 2000: 629-630). This decline is more than merely a rise of people claiming to have no religion or religious apathy among Catholics, but, as we have seen, there have been certain developments in Brazilian religiosity that have resulted in other religions, including Daoism, becoming more appealing than traditional Catholicism. Although Daoism in Brazil has transformed Daoism in some ways, it also places importance on tradition, ritual, and lineage for globalized Daoist practice.

This globalized Daoism in the form of organized religion would have been difficult to accomplish without the earlier development of what Peter Beyer describes as social movement religion. These are the kinds of Daoist groups that exist more widely in Western countries in the form of taijiquan and qigong groups. Social movement religion is largely uncontrolled by a central authority, and participation is generally only occasional and when it is regular it still tends to be a kind of individual religiosity (Beyer 2006: 108-110). This limited commitment makes
taking a chance at something unknown less risky for people, so it can more easily develop in different cultures. While Zhengyi Daoism still had to adapt certain practices in Brazil, the earlier globalization of Daoism through social movements, rather than an organized religion, allowed other practices to appeal to people and be accepted as part of their identity. Furthermore, by maintaining the importance of ritual and lineage, they have increased a sense of legitimacy in Daoist practice outside of China, to show that these traditions are not bound by geographic location or ethnicity.

4.2 The Global Spread of Daoist Practices

Globalized Daoist practice is often associated with the detachment of Daoism from tradition and from Chinese culture (Siegler 2006). The Daoist Society of Brazil, however, tries to maintain the traditional practices, while distancing itself from Chinese culture in order to try to create an authentic yet Brazilian-style of Daoism. In the globalized world, a local organization can quickly have a wider influence on a trans-societal level (Haugerud 2003: 66-67). The Daoist Society of Brazil therefore could not only change how Daoism is practiced in Brazil, but can act to change how people elsewhere think about Daoism.

While the cultures exist within a global network, the local can remain distinct. This is partly due to the particular histories of different cultures and the different outcomes that result from interpretations based on cultural assumptions of individuals and groups when they have new encounters with other cultures. We bring our own culture into interactions that are global or transnational and these interactions then have an impact on how we make further interpretations (Hopper 2007: 42-46). This is part of the reason why the process of forming Daoism as an organized in Brazil was a rather slow process, as a Daoist community did not migrate with a large diaspora group as an organized tradition which people in Brazil would have frequent interactions with; instead the exposure was through texts or teachers of physical practices. Thus
understanding Daoism as a religion as it would be practiced in China or Taiwan remains difficult unless one travels to those places. Brazilian culture remains influenced by Catholicism and this shapes how traditions that enter Brazilian culture and shaped and conform to societal expectations.

Although the form of Daoism in Brazil is different from the historical practice of Daoism, it still conforms to the universality of Daoist teachings found in the early Zhengyi communities (Kleeman 2002) and the incorporation of local practices (Dean 2003, 2009; Lee 2003). If Wu Jyh Cherng had instead tried to spread Daoist practices to the local Chinese diaspora community first, the results would have been very different, and it may be more appropriate to explain such a spread in terms of transnationalism, of identifying as both Chinese and Brazilian, and how that had changed religious practice. However, this is not what happened; Master Cherng worked to create identities as Brazilian Daoist and at the same time tried to remove the Chinese cultural aspects.

While the Daoist Society of Brazil presents a specifically Brazilian Daoism, it is not detached from Chinese culture and the historic tradition of Daoism, nor is it detached from contemporary changes in religiosity of developed and historically Christian areas and the global spread of Daoism. All of these have contributed to Daoist practice in Brazil and the view of it as universal, Chinese, and Brazilian.
Altar in Temple of Sublime Transparency (Rio de Janiero)

b-i listed from left to right.

a. Image behind: Three Pure Ones 三清

b. Zhang Hui 張回

c. General Zao 增慍

d. Xuan Di 玄帝

e. Guan Di 關帝

f. Zhang Daoling 張道陵

g. Taishang Laojun 太上老君

h. Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓

i. Doumu 斗母
Appendix B

Photographs

Image 1 Hamilton Fonseca Filho in front of the main altar in The Temple of Sublime Transparency, Rio de Janeiro.

Image 2 The main altar in The Temple of the Treasure of the Spirit, São Paulo
Image 3 A small shrine to Guandi in the back of The Temple of Sublime Transparency, Rio de Janeiro.

Image 4 Framed instructions for how to offer a donation in The Temple of Sublime Transparency, Rio de Janeiro.
Image 5 View of the outside of The Temple of Sublime Transparency, Rio de Janeiro.

Image 6 Two daoshi walking outside of The Temple of Sublime Transparency, Rio de Janeiro.
Image 7 Book display case with a framed photo of Master Cherng on top in The Temple of the Treasure of the Spirit, São Paulo

Image 8 Bulletin board of courses offered in The Temple of the Treasure of the Spirit, São Paulo
References


