

# QIANFENG DAOISM: and the Buddhist Connection

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The diverse philosophy of the Dao (道) is premised upon the teachings of Laozi (老子) [c. 6<sup>th</sup>–5<sup>th</sup> centuries BCE], and Zhuangzi (莊子) [369-286 BCE], and their various spiritual descendants. Another important example of Daoist thinking was that of the Huang-Lao (黃老) tradition which developed during the Han Dynasty (206 BCE-220 CE), and integrated the work of the Yellow Emperor (黃帝—Huang Di), with that of Laozi. The Huang-Lao tradition blended Daoist developmental philosophy, with that of the rigid political thinking associated with Legalism.

Although the texts associated with this school eventually became lost, they were re-discovered in the Mawangdui Tomb (from the Han Dynasty) which was unearthed in modern China in 1973. It was during the Han Dynasty that the two major strands of Daoism emerged—the Dao Jia (道家), or 'Dao Family'—and the Dao Jiao (道教), or 'Dao Religion'. The Dao Jia lineage focuses upon the philosophy found within the ancient books entitled the *Dao De Jing* (道德經), and the *Zhuangzi* (莊子). The Dao Jia practice seeks to unite the mind with the Dao in all situations, through the exclusive use of meditational development of the mind, and is not interested in the pursuit of



Master Zhao Bichen & Grand Master Liao Kong

immortality (仙—Xian). The Dao Jiao lineage, on the other hand, uses a broad array of methods including meditation, neidan (內丹)—or inner developmental techniques—physical exercises, breathing exercises, and sexual practices, in a bid to secure immortality. The Quanzhen Dao (全真道), or 'Complete Reality' tradition is one of two schools representing Dao Jiao thought (the other being the 'Principal Unity Way' 正一道—Zhengyi Dao)—that developed during the Song Dynasty. In the book written by Wang Chongyang (1113–1170) [王重陽] during the Song Dynasty, although it uses

familiar Daoist techniques, concepts, and terms, it is also clearly indebted to both Confucian and Buddhist philosophy. In his text entitled the *'Treatise of the Foundation of the Way for the Realization of Truth'*—Wang Chongyang utilizes the 'emptiness' (sunyata) theory associated with the 'Prajna Paramita Sutra' of Mahayana Buddhism, as a philosophical foundation for his Quanzhen philosophy. In this text, Wang defines his Quanzhen Dao School as having fifteen distinct aspects, or defining characteristics:

- 1) Harmonize qi (energy) and shen (spirit) by living in a remote hermitage.
- 2) Persistently follow the 'Way of the Clouds'

- (i.e. Daoist cultivation techniques).
- 3) Study books intensely, so that their meaning penetrates deep into the mind. In this way, spontaneous insights emerge as the 'wisdom mind' manifests.
  - 4) Learn how to integrate the developmental techniques in mind and body.
  - 5) Learn how to construct a hermitage.
  - 6) Learn how to earn good friends in the Dao.
  - 7) Learn correct seated meditation.
  - 8) Cultivate a 'still' mind to keep the spirit under control.
  - 9) Keep the essential nature in perfect balance.
  - 10) Integrate the five phases of qi manifestation.
  - 11) Manifest the essential nature in everyday existence.
  - 12) Understand that which is sacred.
  - 13) Transcend the three worlds of a) desire b) form [i.e. 'appearances'] c) beyond form.
  - 14) Continuously cultivate qi to nourish the essential spirit.
  - 15) Transcend (and leave) the world.

Through the use of intense and extended meditation practice—similar to that found within Ch'an Buddhism—the Quanzhen practitioner aims (through self-effort) to transcend the world of physical form through experiencing the Dao. Meditation that concentrates and focuses the mind of the practitioner, is the primary method for attaining immortality. Overtime, the Quanzhen Dao tradition developed both a 'Northern' and a 'Southern' branch—with the Southern School eventually dying-out. The Northern School, however, survived into the modern era through its lineage known as the 'Dragon Gate System' (龍門派—Long Men Pai). It is exactly this 'Longmen' lineage which Zhao Bichen (1860-1942) [趙避塵] inherited, becoming its 11<sup>th</sup> generation descendant. When young, however, he also practiced (and perfected) a number of Daoist martial arts, and received instruction in the Wu Liu School (伍柳派)—founded in 1644 by a former Ch'an Buddhist monk—Liu Hua-yang—and the Daoist practitioner known as Wu Chung-xu. Wu Chung-xu was also a practitioner of Longmen cultivation, and initiated Liu into its practices. It is from Liu Hua-yang that we learn that the state of 'emptiness' derived from effective Ch'an practice, is compatible with, and directly related to, the realization of the essence of the

Dao. These are some examples of the many and varied influences that led to Zhao Bichen developing his own distinct path of Daoist self-cultivation.

Master Zhao Bichen was the founder of the Qianfeng—or 'Thousand Peaks'—School of Daoist self-cultivation, more properly known as the Qianfeng Earlier Divine Sky School (千峰先天派—Qian Feng Xian Tian Pai). Unlike its Quanzhen predecessor, however, the Qianfeng School is considered to lie within the Dao Jia tradition. In his text entitled '*The Secrets of Cultivation of Essential Nature and Eternal Life*' (性命法訣明旨—Xing Ming Fa Jue Ming Zhi), he explains the highest attainable state which was transmitted to him through the teachings of his principal teachers—Liao Ran (了然) and Liao Kong (了空). Zhao Bichen states:

*My late master Liao K'ung said: The return to nothingness is achieved in the final stage of training in which the practitioner, while maintaining serenity of heart, lets the all-embracing positive spirit leave his bodily form to appear in the world and to perform its work of salvation such as alleviating human sufferings, curing the sick, etc., and then re-enter its original cavity (tsu ch'lao, between and behind the eyes) in order to be preserved in the ocean of (essential) nature. It should not be allowed again to leave the body, which now should be closed and further sublimated in order to enter the spiritual body which comprises (essential) nature and (eternal) life in their prenatal condition. The physical body is then further sublimated so that it is neither existing nor non-existing, neither form nor void, neither within nor without, neither coming nor going, and neither beginning nor ending. This is done with the same care that a dragon nurtures its pearl while remaining hidden and motionless, and because of which a sitting hen refuses to leave her eggs; this condition of quiet and stillness should be held until it reaches its highest degree.*

*All previous achievements such as appearing in countless transformation bodies riding on dragons and storks, walking on the sun and playing with the moon, as well as thousands of transmutations should now be gathered in the original cavity of spirit (between and behind the eyes) in order to be reduced to the state of complete stillness and extinction. This is called the condition of a hibernating dragon. It leads to the complete extinction (of all phenomena) which should carefully maintained in order to prevent positive spirit from going out*

*(leaving the body), so that it can be further sublimated to reach its highest degree. This continual sublimation will result in deeper concealment of the spiritual fire in the light of vitality so that the positive spirit will be kept in its original cavity (tsu ch'iao). As time passes while dwelling in utter serenity, the true fire of positive spirit will develop fully and radiate inside and outside its cavity to become all-embracing, shining on heaven, earth and myriad things which will appear within its light.*

—(Taoist Yoga: By Charles Luk  
—Pages 175-176)

Grand Master Liao Kong was both an eminent Ch'an Buddhist monk, and an accomplished 'Complete Reality' (Quanzhen) Daoist practitioner, and it is clear from Chinese texts (and the photograph at the top of this article), that Zhao Bichen considered Liao Kong his 'main', or 'root' lineage master, which is understandable as he received lineage transmission in 1920 from him in Beijing. At this time, Liao Kong issued official certification of 'Tian Ming' (天命), or permission to teach by 'Order of the Divine Sky' to Zhao Bichen—but this was not the first time the two masters had met. History records that Zhao Bichen first met Liao Kong 25 years earlier (in 1895) at the 'Golden Mountain Temple' (金山寺), which is situated in the Zhenjiang area of southwest Jiangsu province. This temple is situated on the top of 'Gold Mountain' and legend states that when a monk was searching for an area to establish a temple (around 1600 years ago during the Eastern Jin Dynasty), he discovered rich veins of gold running through the mountain. The imperial authorities of the time took this as an auspicious sign, and an indicator of divine support, and gave their agreement to the building project. However, this temple also carries the name of 'Jiang Tian Ch'an Si' (江天禪寺), which translates as 'Yangze River Divine Sky Ch'an Temple'. This probably derives from the fact that originally Gold Mountain is said to have been an island set in the middle of the Yangze River—which is routinely referred to as the 'Long River' (長江—Chang Jiang) in China. The Jin Shan Temple has had a long history of being considered an elite centre for the study of Ch'an Buddhism. As Liao Kong is known to have studied there, this fact maybe taken as an indicator of the quality of

his training, understanding, and development through self-cultivation. It is also interesting to acknowledge that Zhao Bichen—an eminent Daoist practitioner—would apprentice himself to a Ch'an Buddhist master, and frequent the Golden Mountain Ch'an Temple. Between their first meeting in 1895 and their subsequent meeting in 1920, Zhao Bichen had 25 years to practice and perfect the specific internal, development, medicalized exercises (known as 'Nei Dan'), which were transmitted to him by Liao Kong.

Although around 35 years of age in 1895 (during his first pivotal encounter with Liao Kong), this was not the first time that Zhao Bichen had encountered Quanzhen Daoist self-cultivation techniques. At the age of 15 years old (in 1875), Zhao Bichen was taken by his mother to see the well-known Quanzhen Daoist master who lived in the Changping District area of northwest Beijing. His mother took this action because Zhao Bichen was often ill as a child, and Daoist masters were often renowned for their healing abilities—often performing the function of village doctor. This master was known as Liu Ming Rui (刘名瑞) [1839-1933], and he practiced the Quanzhen monastic tradition (which accepted both men and women as disciples), before eventually earning the prestigious title of the 20<sup>th</sup> generation lineage master of the Namo School (南无派—Na Mo Pai), or branch of that tradition. He cured Zhao Bichen of his illnesses and formally accepted him as his disciple. This is how Zhao Bichen initially gained entry into the Quanzhen tradition of Daoist self-cultivation, and access (and guidance) into its complex and profound teachings. Liu Ming Rui is described as a celibate Quanzhen monastic, and he spent much of his life living in the hills surrounding Beijing, and frequenting numerous hermitages. As a consequence, Liu Ming Rui was very demanding of his students, and he often tested their characters before accepting them into his lineage. He demanded a strict adherence to spiritual developmental routines outside the rigors and demands of the ordinary daily life of the householder. However, in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, a Quanzhen lineage began to emerge that saw devout ordinary male and female members of the laity enter into the Quanzhen tradition through 'spirit writing' (扶鸞—Fu Luan) ordina-

tion. This process saw a psychic medium supposedly communicate with the spiritual essence of the famous Daoist Immortal Lu Dong Bin (吕洞宾) [born. 796], who would issue an ordination name (through the medium) for the individual concerned. Although the Quanzhen tradition (within its over 30 branches) favoured its adherents living in remote areas and practicing various neidan techniques, an effective lay practice did develop which saw dedicated men and women applying the monastic Quanzhen teachings in the various (and diverse) settings associated with everyday life, such as having a family, running a business, or working for a living, etc. Zhao Bichen did not formerly inherit the Namo Pai transmission from Liu Ming Rui, but he did him honour by naming his new style of Daoism after Liu's temple, which was built on Qian Feng Mountain (千峰山—Qian Feng Shan), which is situated in the Changping District of Beijing. Liu Ming Rui's temple on Qian Feng Mountain was named Tao Yuan Guan (桃园观), or 'Peach Garden Temple', and this where Zhao met Liu as a teenager. Zhao Bichen was taken with the remote beauty of this place and used its name to convey the essence of his Daoist teaching.

Liao Kong, on the other hand, despite being an ordained Ch'an Buddhist monk, insisted that it was the filial duty of Zhao Bichen to get married and live in society whilst practicing neidan self-cultivation. This attitude of concentrated lay Daoist practice has served as the basis for the Qian Feng School ever since. In other words, Liao Kong asserted that being a lay-person is no excuse for not realizing full and complete enlightenment and immortality. This is one of the reasons that the Qianfeng lineage has been popular amongst both men and women—as both are encouraged to take-up the quest for self-perfection here and now, and not be hindered by worldly circumstances. As the Qianfeng teachings advocate and emphasize the act of disciplined, but otherwise natural meditation practice, it does require a monastery or a purpose built hermitage to practice, and unlike its Quanzhen ancestor, it does not insist upon a life of strict celibacy. Each practitioner is free to practice as she or he sees fit. This openness, coupled with the abandonment of exclusivity, has led to the Qianfeng lineage being very popular within society, as whilst utilizing Dao-

ist neidan techniques, it is obvious that they are being used to penetrate the empty essence of the mind—which is synonymous with the realization of the profound 'Dao'.

In his key study manual entitled the 'The Secrets of Cultivation of Essential Nature and Eternal Life', Zhao Bichen sets-out 16 distinct stages (in two sections) of self-developmental attainment—leading from delusion to enlightenment. Each chapter of explanation is accompanied by a drawing of a roundel (comprising of various modes of 'shading'), and/or a picture-gram of a human body depicting the correct direction of qi (i.e. energy flow), as well as correct posture, attitude, and appropriate visualization, etc. Although each chapter is presented as a distinct 'step' leading up a developmental ladder, (and can be concentrated upon as a 'stand-alone' teaching), it is also true that Zhao Bichen's text replicates the structure of the received *Zhouyi* (周易), [or the 'Book of Change', - 'Yijing (易经)], in as much as each of the 16 chapters also contain the essence of the other 15—meaning that it is possible to follow Zhao's path in a 'gradual' or 'instantaneous' fashion—depending upon character, understanding, and natural inclination of the aspirant. This is not surprising as much of the concepts and processes associated with Daoist self-cultivation are drawn directly from the Yijing, and the sincere seeker of the Dao is advised to study this Chinese classic thoroughly before embarking upon Qianfeng training. This developmental capacity is reminiscent of the apparent dichotomy (between 'gradual' and 'instantaneous' attainment) that is believed to have historically existed within the Chinese Ch'an Buddhism School. Zhao relates—within each chapter—the instructions that he received from masters Liao Jan and Liao Kong in cultivating the Dao throughout his life, and then answers his disciple's questions regarding the in-depth meaning of each teaching. Charles Luk—working in the late 1960's—had to create a 'new' lexicon of English terms to describe the unfamiliar Daoist terms to a Western audience. The English terms, although accurate and clear, nevertheless, in and of themselves, have no direct historical link to Chinese culture in general, or to the specific developmental imagery associated with its Daoist manifestation. Even Zhao's original manual (written in the Chinese language), is considered

difficult to understand at times even by Chinese practitioners who have been raised within the milieu of Chinese culture, and who are otherwise familiar with Daoist concepts. This is not a fault in the text, or in Zhao Bichen's understanding or teaching abilities, but is rather the consequence of the text being designed to convey a tremendous amount of information whilst using the minimum amount of words. Charles Luk shortened the title from the original '*The Secrets of Cultivation of Essential Nature and Eternal Life*', to the more succinct, and possibly more familiar '*Taoist Yoga*', combining Chinese and Indian concepts for the convenience of an English reading, Western audience. This audience had gained familiarity (in a general sense) with these two terms through the Theosophy movement, and its various off-shoots. Charles Luk had the ominous task of explaining the thoroughly distinct and unique terms of religious Daoism in a manner that distinguished those terms from those found within Buddhist philosophy, whilst simultaneously admitting that the Qianfeng School owed much of its philosophical structure to Ch'an Buddhism. This is not an unusual situation in China, when it is taken into account that even the Qianfeng's ancestral school—the Quanzhen—was directly influenced by the 'sunyata' (emptiness) philosophy of the Prajna literature of Buddhism. What follows is a brief explanation of each of the 16 chapters of Zhao's treatise, which draws attention to the distinctly 'Buddhist' aspects,

whilst explaining the general Daoist framework this Buddhist influence is presented within. Zhao's text—in either its Chinese or English version—can be effectively deciphered if the mind is calmed and a logical approach to the content is applied. Daoist wisdom is not given out easily, and Zhao's text ensures that a student or disciple must make the right kind of effort if progress is to be made. Charles Luk's translation is correct, but Western students must first take a step back from over-intellectualization. Interpreting the text is part of the 'yoga' process that is implied in the title, and students are advised that the wisdom it contains is the product of self-realization experienced through years of effective self-cultivation. ■

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