

The Stigmatization of Taoism and Its Destigmatizing Process in Modern China

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Abstract: Taoism has generally been discriminated by intellectuals and considered to be the root of many negative factors in Chinese society in the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, especially during the New Culture Movement (around the time of the May 4th movement in 1919). This discrimination encompasses both the conservation of the traditional scholar-officials' conception and the launch of the Chinese Renaissance by the intellectuals of the New Culture. However, there is now a trend toward Taoism being the seed of native science in China since the 1930s. This trend has started to destigmatize Taoism. In fact, the image of Taoism, either negative or positive, is shaped by science. The case study presented here helps us to better understand the religious views in the ideology of modern China and remind us that the image of Taoism from the perspective of science history is not its true color. What is more, two levels of "science view" have been formed in modern China: at the level of ideological structure, the traditional principle of "craft at climax can be closer to the Tao" and at the level of concrete connotation, the real meaning of either Tao or craft has undergone a rudimental change.

Keywords: Taoism, religion, science, craft at climax can be closer to the Tao

In 1942, Joseph Needham visited the Sanqing Temple in Kunming in the company of Li Shuhua, a physicist, and several other scientists. Joseph Needham "asked them about the significance and history of the Sanqing Temple". Surprisingly, he could only find that "these scholars had no

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interest in Taoism at all and thus knew very little about it, though they had no hostile attitude against Taoism.” Later, when he learned from Feng Youlan that the “Taoist school is an extremely mystical ideological system, but it is not against science”, Joseph Needham was immediately inspired. Years later, he recalled the past and said that he had been “showing the moral qualities of Taoist schools who are not against science”(Jin, 2001, p. 108). His friend, Eric Hobsbawm, a British historian, also confirmed that Joseph Needham “considered Taoism as a democratic religion and the origin of Chinese science and technology” (Hobsbawm, 2014, pp. 178-179). However, apart from Joseph Needham, I paid more attention to the several Chinese scholars who once accompanied him: while Taoism is considered to be the only native religion in China (there are different opinions regarding whether Confucianism is a religion or not), Chinese people turned out to be so indifferent to it. How can this be justified?

Nevertheless, just when Joseph Needham was surprised at the indifference of Li Shuhua and other accompanying scholars to Taoism, there were some new signs in the Chinese intellectual community. In fact, overall, the image of Taoism among modern intellectuals has undergone a process from being increasingly stigmatized to gradually and partially purified. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, especially during the New Culture Movement, Taoism was often seen to be related to superstition, ignorance and autocracy, and was regarded as the manifestation and root of the China’s social and cultural backwardness. But since the early 1930s, some experts had tried to assess the historical role of Taoism from a more positive perspective. Although their efforts did not immediately eliminate the prejudice of the entire academic community, they have laid an important foundation for directing the Taoist study since then on, and almost helped to form a paradigm for the study today. This paper is going to discuss about this transitional process. Different from the existing achievements, the idea of which is to explore the reasons for Taoism’s rise and fall in modern China, mostly from the aspects of Taoist thoughts, behavioural characteristics and external social needs (Wang, 2002, pp. 146-162), I will focus on people’s cognition of Taoism, especially the two-sided role of “science” in this process. Science and its relevant concepts of logic, experimentation and analysis enjoy the supreme status in modern Chinese thought. Once they are mentioned, nothing is competitive. Chinese scholars usually assume that science and religion are two opposing forces. I, however, will demonstrate that the image of Taoism in modern times, either negative or positive, is highly dependent on science to evaluate and define it, i.e., Taoism’s success and failure is in the hand of science; in turn, this situation also reflects the change of intellectuals’ cognition toward science itself because religion and science can be mutually defined and shaped.

It should be noted that even in the period when Taoism was stigmatized, there were still some scholars who had a good impression on Taoism or on some of the Taoist elements. In this sense, this paper mainly discusses those intellectuals who had grasped the power of discourse. Generally, they were among the school of the “New Culture”. Even if there were opponents against the “New Culture Movement”, like Qian Mu, they still stood in line with the scholars advocating the New Culture in this regard. However, I note that the Taoist scholars (headed by Chen Yingning) responded to this trend of

thought in order to show the panorama of the issue.^① At the same time, I have no intention to imply that the entire intellectual community's attitude towards Taoism was completely changed after this. The historic inertia still continued, and the only difference was that the attitude had become diversified. Therefore, in the paragraphs describing the Taoism stigma, resources of the 1930s and 1940s will still be referred to.

1

The decline of Taoism was a long-term tendency. Specifically, it included three different levels of phenomena: one is the decline in the level of Taoist theory and practice, the second is the reduction of the influence of Taoism, and the third is the corruption of its social image. These three levels are related to each other while each has its own inclination. This paper focuses more on the third level (and may occasionally touch on the other two levels), and is interested in discussing the modern intellectuals' perception, understanding and assessment of Taoism.

Since the Tang and Song Dynasties, especially in the Ming and Qing Dynasties, it seemed that Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism started to communicate with each other. This was more popular among the populace, including some lower-class Confucian scholars. Those who regarded themselves as orthodox scholars had no positive impressions of Buddhists and Taoists. On the contrary, it was one of their duties to repel and attack Buddhism and Taoism to clarify their identity as Confucian since the Song and Yuan Dynasties. The struggles between the different genres within them would stigmatize the Buddhists or Taoists in other genres as a weapon. One example was that, the sinologists in the Qing Dynasty, who learned the tactics from the scholars of the Song Dynasty, attacked the Song Confucian scholars represented by the Cheng brothers, Zhu Xi, Lu Jiuyuan and Wang Yangming, for their acceptance of the influence of Buddhism and Taoism. Beat someone at their own game and was forceful enough for the aggressive party.

However, although Buddhism and Taoism were both equalized as heresy, they were not seen as the same. The Confucian of the Song Dynasty attacked Buddhism more heavily and frequently. Only by judging from this point can it be seen that Buddhism had been regarded stronger than Taoism by the Confucians. At the beginning of the Qing Dynasty, some scholars noticed the imbalance between Buddhism and Taoism. Yan Yuan said, "Among the social forces, Buddhism takes up 30 percent, the heroes hold 30 percent, the Song Confucian represented by the Cheng brothers and Zhu Xi hold another 30 percent, and Taoism takes up the last 10 percent" (Li, 2012, p. 764). Li Yu, seeing that there were many Buddhist temples but few Taoist temples, wrote a couplet to cry for more Taoist temples.

^① In fact, there were few Chinese scholars studying Taoism before the 1980s. Only two key journals on Taoism were available in the first half of the 20th century (and they were actually one journal published one after another): Yang Shan Semimonthly initiated on July 1, 1933 and ceased on August 1, 1937; and Xian Dao Monthly initiated on January 1, 1939 and ceased on August 1, 1941, hardly comparable to the flourishing publications of Buddhism. In terms of published works, there were 1,108 works on Buddhism, 134 works on Islam, 2,891 works on Christianity, and only 73 works on Taoism, which are collected in General List of Books Published in the Period of Republic of China: Sub-list on Religion. Although this general list does not include every book published in the said period, the difference in number between Taoism works and other religions is still remarkable.

He wrote, “While most of the famous mountains are occupied by Buddhist monks, we should leave a few special peaks for our fellow Taoists. All good words seem to be said by the Buddha, but who knows that *Tao Te Ching* was created by the Taoist master?” (Ni, 2015, p. 162) These words imply the difference of influence between Buddhism and Taoism. Ye Xie commented, “When it comes to the order, Taoism is never mentioned before Buddhism” (Ye, 2014, p. 481). The order of ranking indicates the social status. Zhang Chao said in his *Dream Shadows* (or *You Meng Ying*), “There have been many monks who are also poets. If a Taoist practitioner can make a poem, isn’t it like hearing the impossible sound of steps in an empty valley? How come?” Gu Cai gave his comments, “That Taoism ranks third among the three religions should well indicate that the practitioners of Taoism are of the least intelligence. How can they be expected to make poems?” (Zhang, 2011, p. 408) A kind of disdain overflows in Gu’s comment, and it seems to him that the intelligence of Taoist also ranks the lowest.

This situation remained unchanged during the Qing Dynasty. When visiting China in the 1860s, a Westerner found that “there are miserably less Taoist temples than Buddhist ones,” and that “worshippers are very few and donations are insignificant.” He believed that this was “because the teaching of Taoism had never dealt with the topics of original sin and life beyond, but only concerned how to prolong life rather than the expectations and plans for the next life” (Nevius, 2011, p. 93). This explanation is clearly Christian. However, Tao Chengzhang of the late Qing Dynasty also believed that the Taoist groups “have been made up by those unaccepted by Buddhism” and their influence is far less than that of Buddhism and that “there are a lot of followers worshiping toward the Buddhist mountains, but few worshiping the Taoist temples.” He thought that this showed the direction of the “national psychology” (Tao, 1986, p. 414). In fact, at the beginning of the 21st century, a field survey conducted by anthropologists in Hebei also revealed that some practitioners of folk beliefs had joined Buddhist or Taoist groups to obtain legitimate social status. However, people joining the Taoist association were far fewer than those “converting” to Buddhism (Yue, 2010, p. 187).

Even as “religion” hit the late Qing Dynasty, Taoism was not in the position to take advantage of this trend and regain its prestige. In 1905, some scholars commented on the difference between science and religion, saying that the former could only deal with the things that “already happened and should happen,” and that “when asked for a reason, the Confucians would owe it to the mandate of Heaven, Buddhists to Buddha, and Christians to God” (Zhi, 2008, p. 12704). Later, Lv Simian listed three examples, “Confucius being repelled by the influential officials; Jesus being killed on a cross; and Muhammad escaping from the secular world” (Lv, 2011, p. 236), who represented those upright and honourable men who were not welcomed by the secular world. These examples covered Confucianism, Buddhism, Christianity and Islam, but excluded Taoism. In fact, at the beginning of the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity were often mentioned together, and it seemed that they would become the “three new religions”. Although this term was referred to nobody, as a widely used model for thinking, it revealed a reform of cognition at the unconscious level among scholars. Gu Jiegang once recalled that when he was in primary school, he read a geography textbook saying that “the religious leaders are all from peninsulas” and

that “examples are Confucius, Sakyamuni and Jesus”, but “I was very confused when I heard this. I thought that the Taoist master Zhang Daoling was clearly not from the peninsula, and that it was just an accidental coincidence that Confucius, Sakyamuni and Jesus were from peninsulas” (Gu, 1936, p. 13). These were situations at the end of the Qing Dynasty when the “three traditional religions” were still dominant in people’s minds, but in new intellectuals’ minds the “three new religions” had already formed. As late as 1978, Qian Mu still wrote articles to discuss “the world’s three major religions - Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity” (Qian, 2009, pp. 262-273)^①. Therefore, the fact that Confucianism, Buddhism and Christianity were juxtaposed was actually similar to Liang Shuming’s division of culture as Chinese, Indian and Western. The “world” mentioned here was just the “world” based on the special historical experiences of Chinese. However, the point here is that the “three new religions” did not leave a position for Taoism.^②

On the government side, the names of “Celestial Master Zhang (*Zhang Tianshi*)” and “Zhengyi Taoist Sage (*Zhengyi Zhenren*)” were explicitly cancelled in the first year of the Republic of China. In 1914, Zhang Xun, on behalf of the Taoists, requested Yuan Shikai to return the seal of “Celestial Master Zhang”, but he was rejected. In 1925 and 1935, Zhang’s descendants submitted two articles, claiming to inherit the title of “Zhengyi Taoist Sage” and demanded that the title be archived. They were later rejected by the ministries of Internal Affairs of the Beijing Administration and the Nanking Administration.^③ In fact, the Kuomintang (Nationalist Party) had long listed Taoism as a target for “revolution”. In 1926, the Northern Expeditionary Army destroyed all the cultural and ritual systems of the Dragon and Tiger Mountain and abolished the local Tongshan society (a cult in the Qing Dynasty) all over the country. Some scholars regarded this as the “end” of Taoism (Yang, 1935, p. 65). Inaccurate though it is, it was indeed a catastrophe for Taoism.

Although the forces of Buddhism had also been hit, they still maintained an advantage over Taoism. Chen Yingning, who enthusiastically promoted Taoism, complained in the 1930s, “There are about seven or eight hundred thousand monks and nuns, and about three or four million Buddhists throughout China, but there are no more than twenty Taoists practicing external alchemy, and no more than one thousand Taoists practicing internal alchemy, far fewer than the number of Buddhists” (Chen Yingning, 1989, p. 227). Zhang Huasheng of Wuchang Academy of Buddhism showed a favorable impression of Taoism. As a spectator, Zhang felt sorry about this, “In recent years, academia has been really dazzling and proud. While science is emerging and popular throughout the world, Confucianism develops in depth and outgrows the Han and Song Dynasties. Also, Buddhism grows by leaps and

① Qian Mu here used “religion” in the traditional sense of the word in China, which is broader than what most people call “religion”. There is a question about how to judge “religion”, but it is not the subject of this paper, so it will not be discussed here.

② But Taoism has not been completely ignored. In the Republic of China, Confucianism, Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity and Islam were referred to as the “Five Religions” (Please refer to Peng Guoxiang. (2014). *Feng Bingnan’s “Five Religions” Concept and Practice*. *Chinese Culture*, spring volume, pp. 84-97; Peng Guoxiang (2016). Further Discussion on the “Five Religions” Concept and Practice in the Republic of China. *Religion and Philosophy*, pp. 386-401. Beijing: Social Sciences Academic Press.) Today’s “Five Major Religions” in China refer to Catholicism, Christianity (Protestantism), Islam, Buddhism and Taoism. The two theories are based on the so-called “Three Major Religions” in the world and blend the traditional “Three Religions” theory in China.

③ Reply to Zhang Enpu’s Request for Archiving and Entitling Seal for Celestial Master Zhang to Maintain Taoism System, October 4, 1935, p. 241; Reply to Zhang Enpu’s Request for Investigation-based Archiving and Entitling Seal for the 63th Generation of Taoist Successor, January 11, 1936, p. 206.

bounds. Only the Taoist school encounters a cold period. I feel so sorry for the Yellow Emperor and Lao Zi (Lao Zi) and would like to cry with them for this if their spirit can come back.” Zhang also gave an example, “A librarian was compiling a book about the Taoist school. He tried to collect all over, ancient and present, Chinese and Western, but could only find that there were merely a couple of works on it. In terms of quantity, they totaled twenty to thirty pages; and in terms of quality, they were not really serious articles.” (Zhang, 1934, p. 106)

Liang Qichao noticed in the early 1920s, “Learning Buddhism has become a fashion, some learners tend to play up to the high-ranking people. There are also some Buddhist learners who once had guilty conducts or are still enthusiastic about competing for benefits.”(Liang, p. 73) Some of those Buddhism learners were converted from Taoism. In the 1930s, a Taoist accused some Taoist practitioners who “just follow the waves and trend”, “long for shifting to the flourishing and highly reputed Buddhism or follow the trend, saying Taoism is inferior to Buddhism. They intend to clasp Buddha's feet while still peeking at Taoism. They would like to attach to the stronger and speak for it”(Xu, 1936, p. 339). This Taoist's comment echoes Liang Qichao's observation attained a decade earlier.

It is true that the popularity of Buddhism made the Taoist increasingly envious. Some people advised “revitalizing Taoism”. They say that “Buddhism has been in existence for more than a thousand years since the Six Dynasties, with generations of senior practitioners and sages as well as continuous innovations” and that “Buddhism spreads from China to the western countries, undoubtedly laying a foundation for possible assimilation in the future.” Only “Confucianism and Taoism originated in China are slack and hard to be accepted broadly”, making people heart-breaking. While it is understandable that “Confucianism faded away along with monarchy”, “Taoism could have prospered as it seeks escape from the secular world.” However, since the Qin and Han dynasties, Taoism “has been lingering between existence and disappearance all along, during which there have been the occasional appearances of immortal sages, yet they could not spread the teachings and save the sentient beings as extensively as Buddhism did. Why?” It was all because Taoism is too esoteric to be understood by those who have a rooted thinking of pursuing gains. He advised “opening a Taoist temple, copying the meditation of Buddhism, and selecting some Taoist fellows who are determined to firmly and diligently study and exchange ideas on Taoism. If they understand completely the original righteousness of Lao Zi, then it will be mature for them to establish their institution as a unique religion. Like buddhists, taoists can also take tin cane and lotus platform as the facilities to spread the teachings among all creatures.”(Taoist Zhuqian, 1935, p. 369) Following and copying the practice of Buddhism was in fact another form of wrongly “clasping Buddha's feet”.

Chen Yingning believed that Taoism could not be “beaten down by any other religion”. However, “because there are few talents in Taoism, it is difficult to maintain before it slowly disappears and fades away naturally.” Talents here mainly referred to academic Taoists. “Without academic strength as the backbone and an outstanding Taoist genius to carry on the Taoist teachings, how could it work only by erecting up a few altars there to fabricate superstitions, or by building a few temples and having some fellows to chant scriptures there?” In the depths of his heart, he could not help but sigh, “Now there is

only one person throughout China who holds the banner high and cries for Taoism in his true heart. It is me.”(Chen, 1989, p. 277)

In fact, Chen Yingning believed that the Zhengyi Sect and Quanzhen Sects were not “the authentic Taoist school”, and once proposed to “make Immortal Study completely independent”. Here, he seemed to mean to be “independent” from Confucianism, Buddhism and Taoism. In fact, he mainly meant to be independent from Taoism because “Immortal Study” is a part of Taoism anyway. Nevertheless, Chen still kept his affection for the “authentic” Taoism, so he had to compromise by “integrating Immortal Study into Taoism for the sake of convenience.” In the 1940s, he suggested cooperation between Immortal Study and Taoism and drafted *Outline on Revitalizing Taoism* based on the reason that “Immortal Study and Taoism have had a close relationship since the Han Dynasty, and there were quite a few Taoists who finally ascended to immortals,” which has been regarded by scholars as a sign of “returning to Taoism” (Guo, 2015). Instead of first reasoning the “return”, Chen’s student, Hu Haiya, focused on the Taoism’s motivation to “leave”, “My teacher Yingning felt that Taoism appeared weak at the time, and was often smashed by Buddhists and Confucians, leaving Taoism as a failure religion without its own doctrine, so he proposed to develop Taoism as an independent religion from the three Taoist sects according to his academic studies on traditional Taoism in the past years.”(Hu & Pu, 2003) This was to distinguish Taoism from other forms of religion. However, after boasting himself as the “only person throughout China who holds the banner high and cries for Taoism in his true heart”, Chen hit reversely. This would only contaminate the image of Taoism even if he took it as a temporary strategic consideration.

Although Chen Yingning was a self-acknowledged Taoist, he was unconsciously influenced by the anti-Taoist side. This can be known from his perspective in defense of Taoism (detailed below), which also reveals the less desirable side of Taoism. As for the depreciation of Taoism by the Westerners visiting China, it was also related to the attitude of Chinese scholar-officials. French scholar Anna Seidel once said, “Taoism, which is a basic part of Chinese traditional culture, was discovered and studied the latest in the West.” This was because Westerners’ perception of China in the 17th and 19th centuries mainly came from the descriptions of the missionaries who were “influenced by their Confucian teachers” and naturally leaned to Confucianism. In addition, “the missionaries had no ability to distinguish between Taoism and folk superstition. They regarded the religious phenomena which were obviously beyond Buddhism as vulgar, and they once depreciated the pure philosophical Taoist teachings of Lao Zi (Lao Zi) and Zhuang Zi (Zhuang Zi) as dregs.” (Seidel, 2000, p. 1)

The derogatory cognition of Taoism by both western missionaries and local Taoists was influenced by Chinese scholars. Therefore, these remarks more or less encompassed the values of the Chinese scholars.

2

The Chinese intellectuals’ discrimination against Taoism in the 20th century, however, should

not be attributed completely to the succession of traditions since the Ming and Qing Dynasties. In fact, criticizing Taoism was a part of the social and cultural conduct of the new culture intellectuals within a broader stratum. For this sake, they made all kinds of connections between Taoism and other “backward” social and cultural phenomena, leaving them stigmatized by each other; they also banded together as they were closely related in the eyes of the intellectuals.

Regarding the relationship between Taoism and Chinese society, the best-known assertion may be made by Lu Xun, a Chinese writer and critic, who said, “China is rooted in Taoism” (Lu, 1918, p. 616)^①. In fact, there were many such remarks then. For example, Gu Jiegang said in one of his essays in 1922, “Chinese society has an environment of Taoism” (Gu, 1990, pp. 469-470). Hu Zhefu also pointed out that “Chinese society and Taoist thoughts” have “circularity of mutual causality”, and “the formation of Chinese society is driven mostly by Taoism” (Hu, 1933, pp. 54-55). When considered in the context of their original works, these “seemingly objective” are actually critical. In fact, in the eyes of the new culture intellectuals, Taoism had become the general representative of the “backward” factors in Chinese society. Therefore, in the mid-1930s, some people said that Taoism seemed to be “fading away without being noticed”, but “when looking into details of Chinese society, it still dominates all walks of life,” so “it is still necessary to discuss and criticize it” (Yang, 1935).

Since the late Qing Dynasty that the unpleasant elements of Chinese society have been blamed on the influence of the Taoist school or Taoism. Tan Sitong believed that Chinese culture advocates “tender”, “quiet” and “economic”, all of which were the thoughts of Lao Zi; yet Christianity, Confucianism and Buddhism all advocate “perseverance”, “braveness”, “fearlessness” and even “luxury”. Tan also stressed that “the critics have been always confined to comparisons of Buddhism and Taoism, only leaving them confused”, but this is actually a big mistake (Tan, 1998, p. 321). At the end of the 1920s, Jin Yuelin also said to Wu Mi that “Chinese people are all affected by Taoism, so many of them seem to be silently aggressive and are of oriental fatalism” (Wu, 1998, p. 226). Here, “silently aggressive” and “oriental fatalism” are another explanation of “tender and quiet”. Tan and Jin shared this similar view in fact.

The accusations of Taoism were not limited to these critics in the period of the New Culture Movement but were even more comprehensive and extensive. In 1918, the regular readers of *LA JEUNESSE*, a monthly magazine founded by Chen Duxiu, launched a large round of criticism against Shanghai’s *Lingxue Magazine* (*Lingxue Zazhi*) on the subject about the existence of ghosts and spirits. As the topics continued to extend, Taoism was also involved. For example, when Qian Xuantong slammed one of the articles on *fujī* (planchette writing), a kind of divination popular among the folks, he said that “The so-called Taoism since the Han and Jin dynasties is actually a set of thoughts about the genital worship originating in the ancient barbaric era. The continuous downturn of the wisdom and moral of the people for two thousand years is mostly because their thinking has been confined to

^① Lu, 1918, p. 616. The academic community has all along regarded Lu Xun's remarks as sarcastic, but in recent years Professor Qing Xitai has taken them as serious argument and turned them into positive ones (*Review of Mr Lu Xun's Scientific Assertion that China is Rooted Entirely in Taoism*, Social Science Research, Vol. 1, 2002). This paper does not take the peculiar argument.

Taoism, although a main reason is that the traitors made use of Confucianism to fool the people. Taoism worships genitals, so it is a heresy, and those who regard themselves as human should not believe in Taoism anymore” (Qian, 1918). In fact, the criticized article had nothing to do with “genital worship”. Qian’s comment can only be understood as his ulterior intention. Soon, Kang Baiqing, a student of Peking University, also wrote an article to argue that the essence of the Tai Chi diagram is “genital worship”. The Tai Chi diagram is not exclusive in Taoism. On the contrary, it had been referred to more by Confucians (at least no less than Taoism). However, the quotes of Kang Baiqing were mainly from *Can Tong Qi*, *Zhi Xuan Pian*, *Long Hu Pian*, and *Collected Works of Lv Chunyang*, and took “talisman (*fulu*) practitioners and alchemists of the Taoist School” as the target of criticism (Kang, 1919, pp. 675-681). By contrast, he rarely mentioned Confucianism, clearly showing his critical target (Zhou, 1996, pp. 70-91)^①. As for the term “Taoist Sexology” which originally exists in Taoism, as easy as it can be understood, it is something that people liked to mention at that time when talking about Taoism. No matter which terminology was used, the authors’ intention was nothing but to make Taoism indecent.

Taoism is obsessed with physical satisfaction and secular happiness, indeed making it difficult to get a favorable impression from modern intellectuals. Japanese scholar Sakai Tadao said, “The true personal desires in faith are spiritual. The rewards of the universal religion represented by Buddhism and Christianity, for example, are spiritual, But Taoism is not so. It expects more from the materialism of society rather than spiritualism” and “no great characters have ever appeared to cultivate it with a lofty spirit, so it cannot eventually become a universal religion” and cannot compete with Buddhism and Christianity (Sakai Tadao, 1942, pp. 77-78). Some people may think that these words were only said by a Japanese scholar, but Qian Mu, who was deeply in love with the Chinese tradition, also said that “Taoism has no serious mentality of misanthropy, so it is not a true religion” (Qian, 1998, p. 141). Here, the key point does not set on “misanthropy” but on “seriousness”. Yu Henian, a historian, commented that the influence of Taoism on the Chinese people is “mostly self-interested” and lacks the positive “mentality” of “being fair, just and peaceful” (Gu, 1924, p. 919).

Some criticism has been stretched to the politics. Wang Boxiang said to Gu Jiegang that “all Taoist practitioners emulate the imperial court system,” and that if they are not eliminated, “it is easy to cause imperialism.” Gu agreed and responded, “Celestial Master Zhang is the emperor of the ghosts and deities.” However, “now the present world has become the Republic of China, but the nether world is still imperial. It is quite risky with such a huge inconsistency” (Gu, 1924, pp. 489-490). In fact, if “the Taoists emulate the imperial court”, then the root cause of the problem lies in the “court” rather than the “Taoists”. However, Wang and Gu were obviously thinking from the perspective of social psychology, and they worried that the “nether world” would be powerful even among the ordinary people. Xie Xingyao also said, “The sages, immortals and Buddha in Chinese society are all intertwined with the autocratic monarchy” (Xie, 1936). Although what he said was not limited to Taoism, he was still more

^① Later, Zhou Yutong wrote an article, *Filial Piety and Genital Worship*, which targeted at Confucianism. They both only adopted the term’s backward and primary meaning.

interested in how Taoism collaborated with the monarchy.

The same way of discussion is also applied to discussing the relationship between Taoism and Chinese characters. In 1918, Qian Xuantong, who was keen to promote “abortion of Chinese characters”, said that “The overwhelming number of Chinese characters were marks recording Confucius and the Taoist demons,” so it “cannot be applied to the new era of the 20th century anymore.” He hailed, “To maintain China as a state and the Chinese nation as a nation of civilization in the 20th century, the fundamental solution is to abolish Confucianism and Taoism, and to abolish the Chinese characters which record the demons of them is the crucial step” (Qian, 1918, p. 354). Confucianism, Taoism and Chinese characters, a triangular relationship in Qian’s mind, were all opposed by Qian Xuantong. In 1941, Xu Dishan was still discussing how “Chinese characters” were out-of-date. One of his reasons was that Chinese people regarded calligraphy as “art” and neglected its practical functions. And this kind of reason was also related to Taoists. “Calligraphy was developed by Taoists to write talismans. The famous calligraphers since ancient times were related to Taoism more or less. For example, Wang Youjun’s family were considered as masters of calligraphy, and this family deeply believed in Taoism. The Taoists in the Six Dynasties (generally from the Three Kingdoms period to the Sui Dynasty), such as Tao Hongjing, Yang Yi, and Fu Xiao were all calligraphers. In the Tang Dynasty, Yan Zhenqing and Gu Kuang were also Taoists” (Xu, 1946, p. 172).

The question about whether Chinese characters are “backward”, and the relationship between calligraphy and Taoists, in fact, is actually irrelevant. Xu’s inserted argument in his work was quite incomplete, but it suggested his subconscious dislikes about these two things. As for the argument made by Qian Xuantong, it is even more ridiculous. According to him, while the Chinese characters record “the demon” and thus should be abolished, he himself wrote down his arguments about “civilization in the 20th century” in Chinese characters. Logically, Taoism has no connection with imperialism and Chinese characters. However, the intellectuals of the New Culture arbitrarily judged that they were all decaying things, and they were trying to beat them all with a strong voice. In this process, it seemed that they didn’t find it necessary to convincingly reason their argumentation.

In the eyes of many intellectuals, Taoism was the root cause of all kinds of malpractices in Chinese society and culture. In 1921, Gu Jiegang pointed out that although there was a saying that China had three religions, Confucianism and Buddhism had been ideologically “Taoism-ized”, they had rendered into one religion. This is because Taoism “is the condensed spirit of the inherent Chinese spirit (Gu, 1921, p. 235-237). Later, Xie Xingyao also said, China was “a superstitious society. To put it simply, it is a society dominated by Taoist thoughts. For example, the monarchy in the past followed ‘nihilism’ which pursued governance by doing nothing that goes against nature; the middle-class scholar-officials followed passivism featuring enduring humiliation in order to realize important missions and stepping backward instead of forward; and the low-class society followed the funeral rituals, seasonal superstitions (such as the practices of choosing a ‘good’ day for traveling, wedding and funeral ceremonies), Taoist sexology, *Sutra of Native Woman (Su Nv Jing)*, etc. These are all the inheritance of

Taoist ideology. Hence, I think that Chinese society is always dominated by Taoism” (Xie, 1936).

Although all classes were influenced by Taoism, intellectuals were more concerned with its connections to the lower class. In the late Qing Dynasty, Deng Shi believed that China’s “upper class” was “a society where men and women tend to satisfy their carnal demands without souls” while its “lower class” was “a nether world in which people were superstitious about destiny, *fengshui* (geomancy), ghosts and deities” (Deng, 1976, p. 178). By saying “men and women tend to satisfy their carnal demand without souls,” Deng meant that they led a mediocre life without aspirations; by saying “people were superstitious about destiny, *fengshui*, ghosts and deities,” he meant that these things were mostly in the business of Taoists. When discussing about the origin of Taoism, Lv Simian emphasized that Taoism was the product of “all kinds of superstitions” held by “the lower-class society” (Lv, 1996, p.375). Fu Sinian, agreeing with Gu Jiegang, believed that Taoism had infiltrated into all of China’s religions, and he particularly pointed out that even if foreign Buddhism was in the “middle and lower class society, it had been entangling with Taoism in terms of its doctrines—their smells were blended (Fu, 1918, p. 334). Hu Zhefu asserted that the “intention” of Taoism was leaning toward “the lower-class civilians” and catering to the weakness of Chinese people, so “the ideas it adopted were mostly below the average level” (Hu, 1933, p. 55). Although these scholars were dissatisfied with both the upper and lower classes, they distinguished their respective weakness—Taoism was mainly connected to the lower class. Gu Jiegang’s so-called present world and nether world had different state systems, which had such backgrounds: “the nether world is still an Empire” means the civilian society was still ruled by imperial thoughts, which was very dangerous for a person who believed strongly in the Republic of China.

In 1920, Zhou Zuoren announced in his article *Countryside and Taoist Thoughts*, “The greatest resistance to improving the countryside is the old thoughts in the villagers’ mind, and the old thoughts are mainly of Taoism.” Although there are three religions, “the principles of Confucianism have long been broken, and Buddhism has only a few points of teachings such as reincarnation and causality remaining and prevailing among civilians, which have been assimilated by Taoism. It is now the power of Taoism that rules the national ideology.” Those malicious activities and events, such as teaching programs, the fake emperor, the burning of the schools run by foreigners, the anti-vaccination and statistical survey, the armed and disarmed fights, the alchemy practicing, the cultivation of venomous insect, the sickness treatments with amulets and spells were all “the evil influence of Taoist thoughts”. As for the concept of “destiny” or “fate” , “any feudal emperors who adopted conservatism did not succeed in making people believe in them, but Taoist thoughts did.” In 1926, Zhou bitterly felt that “everything in China is changing fast, yet its national Taoist thought is an exception.” He added some new paragraphs into his article and got it republished. He quoted the British anthropologist James George Frazer’s point of view and concluded, “It is not easy to save those people who believe in superstitious.” Fortunately, however, “human politics always belong to the aristocrats at all times and everywhere.” At any time, “the stupid majority” must “follow the smart minority” to make “historical progress” and it is the only hope. And this minority is composed of “those thinkers developing

knowledge” instead of those of the political power class (Zhou, 1999, pp. 198-203).

In fact, in the process of development and dissemination, Taoism and the various folk beliefs intermingled with each other. Although this process broadens Taoism’s influence, it inevitably must be a scapegoat. Hu Zhefu said, “Since the Ming and Qing dynasties, all secret associations which take advantage of the power of religious superstitions, fool the peoples and produce social chaos are almost all related to Taoism. These associations include the Bailian Sect, Tianli Sect, Hongyang Sect, Baiyang Sect, Qinglian Sect, Bagua Sect, and Wuwei Sect, most of which are branch forces and remained descendants of Taoism. Those volunteer participants of *Yihetuan* (the Boxer), are members of Bagua Sect” (Hu, 1933, p. 54). Yang Yusheng said, “China’s social thoughts and Taoism have an interactive relationship...Originating in the dissemination and evolution of Taoism, these social mess makers have been in fact related to Taoism from the beginning to the end.” He also took sects such as the Bailian, the Boxer and Hongqiang Sect as examples (Yang, 1935, p. 67).

Among these several sects or groups, the one that shocked the modern intellectuals most was Boxer. James L. Hevia believes that the Boxer was based on the idea of “Buddhism” (Hevia, 2007, p. 217), but most Chinese scholars attributed it to the influence of Taoism. In fact, the Boxer made extensive use of the belief resources that are popular among the lower class. Not all these belief resources were from Taoism, but Taoism had long been accused of being a representative of “backwardness” and could not keep itself away from the Boxer. Soon after the Boxer Rebellion, the “boxer bandits” were described as an image of Taoists who “have messy hair, walk slowly and always murmur, with a sword on their back” in Liang Qichao’s article (Liang, 1936, p. 47-48). At the same time, Xia Zengyou also put forward that “the sin of the alchemist lies in their absurd sayings about ghosts and deities, which have gradually spread into the Chinese society, and become rooted. The folk customs of China are nothing but habits passed down by the alchemists. From the end of the Han Dynasty, the outbreak of the Yellow Turban Rebellion, and then the Boxer Rebellion were both connected to Taoism”(Xia, 2011, p. 962). While Liang Qichao and Xia Zengyou were both influenced by the Confucian classics in present characters, Zhang Taiyan, who advocated the Confucian classics in ancient characters in the late Qing Dynasty, also blamed Dong Zhongshu and Sui Meng, who were scholars of Confucian classics in present characters in the Han Dynasty, and thought that their study was learned from “those weird and pedantic scholars from the states of Yan and Qi”, and that their interpretation of the classics were “at the same level as the Bailian Sect and Boxer” (Zhang, 2003, p. 602). It seems that they reached a consensus when commenting on the Boxer.

During the period of the New Culture Movement, Qian Xuantong, a disciple of Zhang Taiyan, had already run counter to his teacher in his thoughts, but he had the same comments as his teacher regarding the Boxer. He attributed the tragedy committed by the “boxing bandits” to the product of the “Taoism” (Qian, 1918, p. 464). Yang Yinhang, who had studied in America, tried to distinguish between the Taoist school in the pre-Qin period and the so-called Taoism of the later periods, thinking that “taking Tianshi and Wudoumi Taoism as the authentic Taoism will lead to the decline of Taoism”. Yang also quoted Sun En’s words, “I have requested the ghost army of the Great Taoism to help me,” to

conclude that “This is similar to the Boxer” (Yang, 1921)^①. The decline of Taoism in Yang’s conclusion was due to those sects represented by the Boxer.

With this awareness of social stratification as the background, we can once again return to the previous question: How on earth can we assess the impact of Taoism on Chinese society? Sakai Tadao said, “According to China’s statistics on religions, when comparing Taoism and Buddhism, it seems that Buddhism outgrows Taoism even today. No matter in terms of the number of Buddhist monasteries and Taoist temples or the number of Taoists and monks, Buddhism outnumbers Taoism.” “However,” he added, “we can’t conclude that Taoism is not as important as Buddhism, because this result only reflects the contrast between Buddhism and Taoism in terms of the number of their officially-established institutions which is based on the ‘registration roll of monasteries and temples’ kept by the Ministry of Internal Affairs of the 25th year of the Republic of China (January 1936).” Besides, the “folk Taoist groups that are really living among the populace” were not included in this statistic. With perspective changed, it is found that the so-called decline of Taoism was only about institutional Taoism while folk Taoism was still active (Sakai Tadao, p. 73).

The term “folk Taoism”^② is very instructive. In addition to its meaning mentioned by Sakai himself, we should at least consider the following two meanings: first, Taoism was originally a mixture of many people’s beliefs, and has been in the exchange of many folk beliefs. This experience has shaped its basic appearance. Even if it was “institutional Taoism”, it is often hard to draw a clear line between folk beliefs; second, the believers and spheres of Taoism were basically among the lower class. Of course, this does not mean that it had no influence on the upper and middle classes of the society. On the contrary, its believers were commonly seen among scholar-officials and literati and were still prevalent in some eras and regions. Emperor Wenchang, a deity who oversaw recruiting scholar candidates based on their levels of article writing, was enshrined at a remarkable position in any Taoist temple. Undoubtedly, the behaviours such as planchette-writing cannot be done by those who are illiterate. In addition, many commentators also noticed that the secret of longevity and alchemy in Taoism were attractive to the emperors. Gu Jiegang said, “Incense burning practiced by the civilians is not different from the inauguration ceremony of the emperors.” It is thus “really unfair to blame only Zhang Jiao and Zhang Daoling” (Gu, 2011, p. 67). While claiming that Taoism “catered to the low level of interest of the lower class”, Hu Zhefu also held that “emperors were the most powerful supporter of Taoism in Chinese society” (Hu, 1933, p. 53). It was only since the Qing Dynasty that the image and voice of Taoism started weakening and modern intellectuals started to try to keep away from it. When the Republic of China was newly founded, the imperial system was broken, and the belief foundation

① Yang was not opposed to religion. He once criticized: “people begin to criticize religion as superstition after they have learned a little about the sciences. This is a common problem in China today. I think that no matter how civilized the world is and no matter how advanced science is, no religion should be abolished because of this, instead, religion should make progress hand in hand with science.” In his opinion, at a time when Chinese morality is in its difficult period, “rather than talking about metaphysics and doing nothing practical, it is better to talk about religion, which can be known by the ignorant people. I think that Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity, if they choose one to believe in, are enough to restrain their behaviors and mind so that they can benefit society” (*On Religion*, Shen Bao, June 7, 1920, 1st edition). Here Confucianism, Buddhism, and Christianity are still juxtaposed, and Taoism is ignored.

② The term “folk Taoism” was put forward by Yoshioka Yoshitoyo.

of Taoism was further shrinking toward the lower class. However, what is more important than these “facts” was the cognition of intellectuals: they were more inclined to emphasize the connection between Taoism and the lower class.

Xie Xingyao also proposed, in the same sense as Sakai, that the power of Buddhism was less than that of Taoism. He argued that “in Buddhism, the deities of the social superstition are only the Buddha, Avalokitesvara, the Eighteen Arhats, etc., but these images do not have any connection with the present world or the nether world. Taoism is quite different.” Whether it is before or after death, the “view of life in Chinese society” is governed by those Taoist deities. For example, the affairs for a living person, including becoming an official are in the charge of Emperor Wenchang, longevity is in the charge of the South Pole Star of Longevity, fortune is in the charge of the God of Wealth, domestic affairs is in the charge of the God of the Kitchen, and business and social connections are in the charge of Emperor Guansheng. These issues are all governed by deities. The affairs after death are also governed by the gods of Chenghuang, Fengdu, Kailu, Door Guarding, Dongyue, etc. “It is obvious that the present world and the nether world are both occupied by the power of Taoism and that it is closely connected with the society” (Xie, 1936, p. 449).

Although Xie Xingyao’s argument is reasonable, it is hard to say that Taoism was far more influential than Buddhism. The answer to this question depends on the observer’s perspective. The remarks on respecting Buddha and distaining Taoism cited above were all spoken by scholars. As Sakai Tadao said, some seemingly “objective” descriptions were only concerned with “institutional Taoism”. However, no matter how the intellectuals of the New Culture Movement would evaluate the social influence of Buddhism and Taoism in their values, Taoism was undoubtedly on the negative side.

3

Whether the dismissiveness or the overestimation of Taoism as a social destructive power is the subjective judgment of the intellectuals. Their perspectives of Taoism can be seen in their binding of Taoism to the lower-class society. In fact, although the the new culture intellectuals were holding an “anti-aristocracy” banner, they had not eliminated their elite consciousness, so they had an attitude of keeping their distance from and a contempt for the lower class (Ge, 1998, p. 8). As mentioned above, in Zhou Zuoren’s argument, this kind of consciousness had been formed based on the intellectuals’ knowledge and thoughts, which enabled them to distinguish themselves from both politicians and the “ignorant populace”. Therefore, although there might have been multiple topics in their criticisms of Taoism, a main undercurrent was still running, which was their support for “science”.

Taoism leaves us with the impression of a mixture of alchemies and deity worship, and that it is extremely weak at developing its system of doctrines and teachings. Compared with the “higher” and “evolved” religions such as Buddhism and Christianity, the gap is even more obvious. Put in old words, Taoism was supported by “technology” rather than by “science”, that is why craft cannot culminate in the Tao. Gu Jiegang pointed out in an article published in 1924, “Taoism is a religion mixed with all

kinds of deity worship. It embraces everything. If Christianity was introduced to China earlier, I dare say that the status of Christianity in Taoism could be as equal to Confucius.” This character of mixing in Taoism made Gu reach his conclusion that “Taoism is really a religion with only worship but no thought” (Gu, 2011, pp. 482-483). Wang Zhixin, who believed in Christianity and studied the history of Chinese thought, said, “Among the Taoism classics, most are shallow in doctrines and teachings except for *Tao Te Ching* and *Zhuang Zi*; and its contribution in academic thoughts, thus it cannot be compared with Buddhism” (Wang, 1947). Yang Yusheng said, “Taoism has no core theory, so there is no permanent value in it, and it is impossible to draw essence from it.” He commented that a scholar might feel hard to start if he wanted to study it (Yang, 1935, p. 63). Fu Qinjia also complained, “There are some common grounds in all religions as there are also specific aspects in them. Taoism is no exception. The only difference is that other religions have their own history that established them in the world, but Taoism doesn’t. There have been many versions of books called *Taoist Canon (Dao Zang)*, but there are no valuable contents in them, rendering them unworthy of selection” (Fu, 1984, p. 9). This comment is almost like saying that Taoism’s own arguments are of no value and must be expressed by non-Taoists.

Most scholars believed that Taoism has always followed and imitated Buddhism without creativity. Li Yangzheng said, “When I read works about the history of Taoism some years ago, I found that whenever scholars dwelled on the birth of Taoism, they agreed that Taoism started on the background of Buddhism’s introduction into China, which stimulated and inspired the appearance of Taoism” (Li, 1995, p. 376). Gu Jiegang’s argument was more moderate in this regard. He held that “the formation of Taoism relied on *Chen Wei* (folk deity worship) and Buddhism”. While he did not attribute the formation of Taoism entirely to the influence of Buddhism, Gu also pointed out, “If Buddhism had not been introduced to China, Taoism would not have been as completely established as it is now” (Gu, p. 66). The “influence” does not only fall on the doctrines and teachings, but also takes on a trail of “copying practices of Buddhism” from time to time in the deity worship system and technology. This is not only the view of Chinese scholars, but also a shared understanding of the international academia. Yoshioka Yoshitoyo said, “The formation of Taoism was facilitated by the influence of Buddhism after being introduced into China.” In its early stage, Taoism “only imitated and followed Buddhism”, and “it didn’t build up its consciousness until the end of the Tang Dynasty” (Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, 1948, p. 6). According to Anna Seidel, “Before Henri Maspero, European scholars had wrongly thought Taoism as a fake product of Buddhism that was suitable to China’s conditions” (Yoshioka Yoshitoyo, 1948, p. 6). From this comment, it was clear that Taoism did not imitate, but plagiarize.

Hu Zhefu believed that the decline of Taoism was because its contents were “mostly taken from Buddhism” and that it lacked an independent foundation and “could not get established in the ideological world”. Although the Taoist temple architecture was “extremely magnificent”, the believers were mostly those ignorant peoples, plus a few of emperors, generals and ministers who feared death and longed for longevity. Hence, when Taoism was loved by a certain emperor, it would turn powerful and arrogant; when suppressed, it would decline. Differently, Buddhism has both “theories in depth”

and a strict set of “ritual system”, which make it independent. When an emperor supports it, it may certainly extend its enlightenment; when an emperor suppresses it, it would still hold its teachings and doctrines. In contrast, it can be seen that “although Taoism extends widely, its value cannot compete with that of Buddhism” (Hu, 1933, p. 53; Yang, p. 64).

In the late Qing Dynasty, the missionary Joseph Edkins also believed that Taoism was more dependent on external forces. He commented that, in the Tang and Song dynasties, “the classics written by the Taoists were extensively copying Buddhism sutras. They wrote their teachings for the purpose of application, i.e., for blessings, praying for longevity, disintegrating the opponent force and disasters, releasing souls and praying for rainfall. The Taoists who chanted scriptures and practiced confessions did not marry either, just like Buddhist monks with choice to keep their hair.” They “followed the leftover practices of Buddhism so closely that they forgot that Lao Zi was their religious master”. Joseph Edkins thus asserted that “Taoism, if we call it as a religion, is in fact inconsistent with its own system. Its establishment is dependent on the support from other religions” (Edkins, 1879, p. 100). Nevertheless, Edkins did not entirely despise Taoism. He thought that Taoism had lost its original “purpose” of stoicism and non-action held by the master Lao Zi, and its decline was all because of imitating Buddhism (Edkins, 1879, p 86).

No matter that Edkins thought this from his true heart, or he took “his influence as a Christian missionary” into account, his assertion was different from the views of most Chinese intellectuals in modern times. In the mind of Chinese intellectuals, the situation happened to be reversed: Buddhism was pulled down by Taoism. A case in point is that, Zhou Zuoren regarded Buddhism’s teaching of incarnation as a belief assimilated by Taoism. Gu Jiegang also talked about this issue from time to time in his reading notes. One of the notes goes, “A wizard and a monk look differently but they think the same.” If there is no Buddhism, “then the wizard would be the authenticity of the superstition world, and it could still be maintaining its status. Since Buddhism was introduced, Taoism first followed it and then formed as a religion. Then Buddhism started to degenerate as it collaborated with Taoism, causing the fame and form of the wizard to change in people’s minds. However, a wizard was expected to pray, offer sacrifices for the deity, invite souls and offer sacrifices for a person because people thought that a wizard has a permanent soul.” Another note was Gu’s after-thinking when he followed his grandmother’s will and recited *Jing Tu Chan* (pure land confession) after her death. It goes, “I think this practice of confession in Buddhism derived from Taoism. Once Buddhism started to practice confession, the status of monks were consolidated. Nowadays, how can we expect monks to study Buddhist sutras? Even if they do, they may only have read two sutras, *The Heart Sutra*, and *The Diamond Sutra* (*Vajracchedika Prajna Paramita*). Their only connection with Buddhism is that they provide the service of confession. Speaking of confession, however, it is completely self-created by Chinese people with some integration of Taoism, the inherent religion rooted from Chinese nation. Taoism thus has only a negative influence on Buddhism, as it has long been deceiving itself as well as others (Gu, 2011, pp. 480, 544).

It is a different question as to which influenced the other between Buddhism and Taoism on the

matter of practicing confession. Joseph Edkins and Gu Jiegang had different opinions. According to the understanding of the present academia, it seems that Gu's opinion is closer to the fact.^① But it is a pity that he did not prove it, or because Gu expressed these opinions in the form of reading notes, which were not the formal style for argument. Nevertheless, it is more likely that Gu had already determined that Taoism was inferior to Buddhism, so it could only be the former polluting the latter, and in this sense, it was unnecessary for him to elaborate his argument. Naturally there is no need to elaborate.

In the minds of the scholar-officials, Buddhism was superior to Taoism. The ideological changes in the modern times also lifted the scholars' impressions on Buddhism. The revival of Buddhism since the late Qing Dynasty entitled Buddhism quite a few positive significances, of which its logic meaning has been mostly hailed. Zhang Taiyan once said that the "philosophical insights" of Buddhism required the wise people to agree with them (Zhang, 2015, pp. 5-6). He also quoted Gui Bohua's words, arguing that in an era when "scientific theory is becoming more and more prosperous", it was necessary to "guide" the humans with Dharma-laksana. The commonality of Sinology, science, philosophy and Buddhism lies the belief that "the writing must be truthful, and the saying must be reasonable" (Zhang, 1978, p. 256). Zhang Ertian later said to Xia Chengtao that "Buddhist sutras are difficult to read not for their language characters but for their terminology. Each term has its definition. To understand the definition, it is necessary to be versed in Hetuvidya (or Buddhist logic)" (Xia, 1997, pp. 235-236). Xiong Shili also said that Buddhism "pays attention to logical thinking, which has been lacking in China and thus China may especially need it" (Xiong, 1985, p. 3). Here, the terms, "scientific theory", "Hetuvidya" and "logic" refer to the same thing.

Based on the same reason, Liang Qichao believed that "belief in Buddhism is a wise belief rather than a blind belief" and thus "is a realm of academic research" (Liang, p. 46). On the other side, many Buddhists also vigorously promoted the characteristic of "wise belief", based on which they even thought that Buddhism was superior to philosophy and science. In the mind of Ouyang Jingwu, "the paltry religion" surely cannot compete with the "Dharma", and "philosophy" is merely the understanding of the world limited to a finite time and space (Ouyang, 2015, pp. 575, 583). Taihsu said that Buddhism is a "complete consciousness of the thoroughness of the universe". Although it is "communicative with religion, philosophy and science", it leaves three far behind (Taihsu, 2007, p. 1092).

Zhang Taiyan divided religions into three levels; polytheism, monotheism and atheism. He further believed that there was an order of evolution between the three levels, i.e., polytheism must experience the order of monotheism before entering the stage of atheism. If the middle stage is skipped, "atheism must take on all kinds of polytheistic impurities." Taoism is of polytheism while Buddhism is of atheism, which is the most advanced in religions. As China has not experienced the stage of monotheism, "Buddha is seen as a deity in the eyes of the laymen. It seems that Buddhism blends with

^① In accordance with the Buddhist outlook on practicing confession, Buddhism learned a lot from Taoism on the confession rituals. When Vajrayana (Tantric Buddhism) was introduced, Buddhism and Taoism influenced each other. Thanks to Professor Duan Yuming and my fellow researcher Wei Bing that I have this point of view.

all the deities in Taoism.” This made the indoctrination of Buddhism lose its effectiveness. However, with the introduction of Christianity which “worships one God”, it is possible to make use of its power to break the Taoism as polytheism. “Then Buddhism can be promoted as expected” (Zhang, 2015, pp. 6-7).

When it comes to logic, Taoism falls far from Buddhism. And it is positioned as “polytheism” because of its hybridity. The hybridity allows Taoism to become an exceptionally tolerant and attachable religion. This feature has been especially obvious in the latest period. Yan Huiqing recalled a society called “Savior New Religion Society” existing in the mid-1920s. “The basic idea of the society was to blend the five major religions of the world — Buddhism, Taoism, Christianity, Islam and Confucianism, with an aim to save the world together.” In the worship hall of the society, “the deity positions of the five major religions were equal in worship. In fact, the society took on the thickest atmosphere of Taoism as there set a sand platform for planchette-writing” (Yan, 2003, p. 168). This was not surprising — it is the feature of polytheism that the deities and gods are all together. Similarly, in the eyes of Gu Jiegang, “the United Association of World Religions”, which was also characterized by “conciliating” the major religions in the world, was “accepting” the “orthodox thought of Taoism” (Gu, 2011, p. 482).

However, although the hybridity contributed to the expansion of Taoism in the lower class, it also made Taoism undesirable among scholars. Ma Duanlin stated, “The Taoist school absorbs multi-sources and thus appears variant” in his *General Study of the Literary Remains (Wenxian Tongkao)*; Taoism is also mentioned as “picking from other classics extensively in order to make itself complete” in the *Complete Library in the Four Branches of Literature (Siku Quanshu Zongmu Tiyao)* (Chen, 1989, p.3). Modern scholars had more doubts about this. Hu Zhefu, for example, has repeatedly satirized about aspects of Taoism. Once he said, “Taoism is the most common but also the most mysterious thing in Chinese society. The reason is that, on the one hand, Taoist theory tends to be irrelevant but just for advertising itself; on the other hand, it collects all the inferior thoughts and information from the folklore and processes them together.” He said on another occasion, “If I have to say something good about it, I would say that Taoism is all-encompassing; and unfavorably, I would say that it is a trash container. It rejects nothing from any schools. When there comes Buddhism, it touched on some superficial knowledge of it; when there comes Islam and Christianity, it absorbed some teachings from them. In the modern era, as Taoism claims itself to be inclusive of all the religions, it can be concluded that this is exactly what Taoism has been looking like.” But what Taoism has absorbed shares a similarity, which is demons and black magic. “All the heterodox schools, as long as they can fool and confuse the peoples, are embraced by Taoism” (Hu, 1933, pp. 49, 50, 55; Yang, 1935, p. 63).

Modern science emphasizes analysis and promotes clear distinctions. In the late Qing Dynasty, Zhang Taiyan criticized Chinese science for being “wide-ranging”, and advocated the spirit of “not overlapping with each other” (Zhang, p. 48). Later, Fu Sinian also criticized that Chinese scholarship saying it was “wide-ranging, incomplete and confusingly blending”, and all in all, “lack of logic” (Fu, 2003, pp. 24-25). That Taoism “melts all the religions in a furnace” happened to violates logic, making

it impossible for intellectuals to appreciate it.

More importantly, Taoism was centered on seeking immortality. Liu Guojun said that the “purpose” of Taoism throughout the two thousand years had been “stipulated” by “immortals”(Liu, 1931, p. 12), which was the consensus among Chinese scholars. Taoism’s nature of “polytheism” could only mean that Taoism gathered “superstitions”. This single item had madethe focus of new intellectuals.

In 1944, when discussing the scholarship of the Chen Brothers, Miao Yue especially noticed that the Chen Brothers did not like Taoism. Miao said, “The evolution of human culture has moved from ignorance to enlightening, and from confusion to pursuit of truth.” “Chinese people” started this evolution quite early”. Confucianism in the pre-Qin period did not speak of weird power and cluttered deities any more. “The superstitious thoughts and the concept of divination were hidden in the School of *Yin-Yang*. In the Western Han Dynasty, the School of *Yin-Yang*’s thoughts blended into Confucianism and became a part of Confucian classics in present characters”, rendering “the Chinese national thoughts to go backwards”. Later, as Confucian classics in ancient characters and metaphysics were emerging, these thoughts were excluded from Confucianism, but they later got attached to the Taoist school’s theories, making them the so-called Taoism which is still popular in Chinese society and affecting the superstitious thoughts of the general people, and this situation remains unchanged today” (Miao, 2006, p. 418). Till then, Confucianism and Taoism were two opposite ends, one was “enlightened” and valued “truth”, and the other was “ignorant” and embraced “demons and black magic”. As for the Confucian sect that took on the features of the most “confusing and black magical”, “Confucian classics in present characters”, it has been classified as the pernicious influence imposed by the School of *Yin-Yang*.

As implied by Miao’s comments, quite a few intellectuals have criticized Taoism for the sake of excusing Confucianism more or less. These intellectuals included both those scholars who were close to “cultural conservatism” and those who were fiercely against traditions. As mentioned above, when Qian Xuanton spoke of Confucianism, he said it was purposely made use of by the “traitors”, and when he spoke of Taoism, he said frankly that Taoism was “a heresy”. Miao and Qian viewed and commented differently. Chen Duxiu frankly said, “I am dissatisfied with Confucianism because it respects men and despises women too much, which is not in line with the modern society. However, its theories are plain and reasonable at least.” Chen Duxiu added that the most harmful force in the ancient sayings was not Confucianism but the School of *Yin-Yang* (there was a Confucian sect called Gong Yang, which was also a variant of the School of *Yin-Yang*). People from the School of *Yin-Yang* first acted as alchemists and then turned into Taoists in the Eastern Han and the Northern Wei dynasties. All kinds of activities aimed at avoiding evil things, such as geomancy, fortune telling, divination, planchette-writing, alchemy, praying for rainfall and sunshine, welcoming deities and talking to the ghosts prevailed China, while the real learning was not pursued and the people’s wisdom was blocked. These were all the harms produced by the sect’s thoughts. The theory of driving evils and correcting people’s minds started from here” (Chen, 1918, pp. 76-77). Chen was not abhorrent to Confucianism; what’s more, his last comments in the above even taked on a sense of Taoism.

Both Chen and Miao had noticed the original relationship between the Confucian classics in present characters and the School of *Yin-Yang*. Gu Jiegang's masterpiece, *Alchemists and Confucians in the Qin and Han Dynasties*, discusses in detail the process of how the School of *Yin-Yang* members and alchemists entered the Confucian system, and how immortals and alchemists became linked to the power of the royal family. Zhou Yutong also stated clearly, "Confucius was imaged as a one-hundred-percent Taoist by the classic scholars and religious scholars in the Han Dynasty, and let *The Spring and Autumn Annals (Chunqiu)* and *The Classic of Filial Piety (Xiao Jing)* become his magic weapons. These two weapons seemed to stick to this Taoist and in fact were just the advance team of the "rogue emperor" Liu Bang. Who on earth disgraced Confucius, the great philosopher? The answer is the self-called Confucius-respecting classic scholars in the Han Dynasty (Zhou, 1983, pp. 481-485). These signs indicate that when the intellectuals of the New Culture launched a campaign of "beating down Confucian institutions", it in fact helped purify the Confucian school. In this campaign, they were keeping a close eye on Taoism, implying that they at least had a subconscious motive to free Confucianism from various "blames".

The other one who got liberated was the Taoist school in the pre-Qin period. It has long been recognized since ancient times that Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi's thoughts were different from Taoism. Both Xu Dishan and Xie Xingyao have cited the argument about dividing Taoist schools into three levels in *An Essay on Eliminating Nuisance* by Liu Xie, a writer in the Southern and Northern Dynasties. In this regard, Xu commented that Liu grasped the true difference between the Taoist school and Taoism, while Xie regarded Liu as the first person to distinguish and criticize the Taoist school and Taoism clearly (Xu, 1999, p. 2; Xie, 1936, p. 448). In the later literature, the opinion that the Taoist school and immortals were inherently different was discussed in details in both the *General Study of the Literary Remains* and the *Complete library in the Four Branches of Literature*. As to pursuing longevity, immortality, eating elixirs, practicing physical and breathing exercise, sexology, alchemy, Talisman, *zhaizhan* (a rite of blessing), incantations, etc., were practices to be attached to Taoism later. "Those narrations made by the later generations were mostly from the attached text and do not represent the real original meaning" (Ma, 2006, p. 1802). These opinions laid a basic tone for the later discussions on the same topic. In addition, the relevant remarks of Shi Dao'an and Zhu Xi were also widely quoted (Jiang, 1933, p. 8; Yang, 1935, p. 58). Although those quotations were not necessarily in compliance with the authors' true meaning, it made us see that the differences between the Taoist school in the pre-Qin period and Taoism referred to in the later periods have been perceived by people in all periods.

Since the late Qing Dynasty, these critics have been particularly popular. Xia Zengyou said, "The Taoist schools today are all immortal schools", yet "without the heritage of the essence of the Taoist school in the pre-Qin period" (Xia, 2011, p. 839). Qian Xuantong said, "The only way to eradicate the barbaric thoughts of demons and ghosts as well as the practices of alchemy, drawing magic characters and chanting incantations lies in wiping out Taoism — that is the Tao Taoists have been taking rather than the Tao taken by Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi" (Chen, 1996, p. 740). Hu Zhefu said,

“Taoism was originally never equal to the thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi as there has been a major watershed between them: the latter advocated ‘compliance with nature’, and the former advocated ‘the immortality of life and ascending to the heaven in the day’, which is in fact ‘violation of nature’”. However, Taoism “has been trying to presumptuously attach to the thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. For thousands of years, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi tend to receive the scholars’ blame for the misconducts done by Taoism. On the other side, the scholars who study on the philosophical thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi have always attached what they study to the Taoism teachings, keeping Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi’s philosophy in the shade.” This is really a grievance in the Chinese academic history (Hu, 1933, p. 55; Yang, 1935, pp. 67-68).

These arguments have one thing in common. They emphasize the differences and even contradictions between the two. Fu Qinjia said that the teachings and philosophy of Taoism “originated from the Taoist school”, that the belief of Taoism came from “the wizard prayers”, and that they two have blended into each other” (Fu, 2011, p. 43). Therefore, it is impossible to separate the Taoist school and Taoism, at least for the latter. Xu Dishan also admitted that “as the thoughts of the Tao (the Path) cast shadows on everything,” it was “really hard” to distinguish them from each other. Xu’s *History of Taoism* takes up more than a half of the volume to dwell on the Taoist school, indicating the dilemma mentioned above. However, Xu still tried to separate the two “in terms of their forms”, and for the sake of this, he also cited many ancient arguments and conclusions. However, when looking carefully at what he cited, one may find that the ancient commentators all confusingly used “Tao”. For example, Liu Xie divided “Taoist schools” into three levels from top down, namely Lao Zi, Immortals and Zhang Ling, who were all given the name of “Taoist schools”. Xu Dishan, however, called the top-level the Taoist school, and the second and third levels Taoism. At last, Xu summarized that “the Taoist school in the origin period put emphasis on teachings and philosophy while Taoism in the later periods started to spread superstition” (Xu, 2010, pp. 2, 4, 8). This was in fact a completely new interpretation.

Indeed, scholars of the present day see the Taoist school and Taoism differently. Although they usually refer to the final conclusions made by the ancient commentators, they use the concepts that are sufficient to enable them to interpret the topics far beyond their ancient counterparts’ horizon. Among them, the term “religion” and “philosophy” have been widely used since the late Qing Dynasty. Wang Zhixin declared that Lao Zi was a “philosopher”, not a “religionist” (Wang, 2015, p. 33). Jiang Weiqiao believed that Lao Zi’s thoughts had been completely altered from the originals after the “immortalization” and “religionization” in the Han Dynasty. “Lao Zi originally meant to overthrow the ancient philosophers representing God. Out of his expectation, he was immortalized and religionized in the later periods and, incredibly, became a deity himself whose image was adapted to that of God”(Jiang, pp. 8-9). Hu Zhefu even interpreted the philosophical thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi and Taoism as the differences between “science” and “techniques”. The Taoist school’s science was diminished day by day while the “techniques” of Taoism gaining power” (Hu, 1933, p. 50).

After reaching this level of separative understanding, the Taoist school was purified from Taoism

and restored to its “original appearance” as philosophy and are assumed the task of saving face for Chinese culture as well. Yang Yusheng had a comment that clearly stated this process. He said, “The dialectic thinking of the new materialism is emerging in the century which Lao Zi started in his time thousands of years ago. However, China is far behind the progress made by the Western world today. It is really a shame for Chinese academia. If Lao Zi’s philosophical thoughts had not been misused by Taoism and had the chance to be developed properly, China today would have not been surpassed by the Western countries.” The “root cause for the Western world being advanced in civilization” lies in that “it inherits the ‘Heraclitus logos’ in the attitude of life. And ‘logos’ is equal to the ‘Tao’ (the Path) of China”. However, China’s “backwardness” was not because the concept of “Tao” had been wrong, but that people had wrongly used the concept of the “Tao”. “With Lao Zi’s ‘Tao’ being minimized, Chinese attitudes of life became the opposite of that of the Westerners and has been stuck in a non-evolutionary and decadent state. In this sense, apart from the impact of Confucianism and Buddhism, the ideology of Taoism should bear the major responsibility for China’s non-evolution. This responsibility is by no means on Lao Zi” (Yang, p. 68).

Laying emphasis on rationality, logic and philosophy, as well as the goodwill of Buddhism and the Taoist school reflect the intellectuals’ perspective behind their critical theories on Taoism in modern times as well as the intentional and unintentional concept of social stratification. On this basis, traditional culture has also been released to a considerable degree. During the War of Resistance against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), Feng Youlan made a comment which systematically demonstrated the connection of these several levels: although Taoism “holds the banner of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi, it does not accept their philosophy at all”, so the “philosophical composition in Taoism is far less than Buddhism.” Therefore, it has been “only popular in the under-educated society of the lower class”. However, “most of China’s educated people do not believe in any religion, because they can get ‘very highly intellectual and moderately practiced’ life” from the philosophy. They “need neither a God nor a heavenly kingdom.” Feng concluded proudly, “this is an achievement of Chinese philosophy” (Feng, 1996, pp. 796-797).

4

In view of the hard whiplash of intellectuals against Taoism, there were also a small number of Taoism believers who actively responded. The most famous one of them was Chen Yingning. These responses were generally oriented in two directions, one was to highlight the aboriginality of Taoism and the other was to enhance its academic status.

In the history of the contentious relationship between Buddhism and Taoism, Taoism has distinguished itself by using the relationship between the Cathay civilization and the beyond-Cathay barbarianism as an important argument from the beginning. Although its effectiveness is limited, it can still be justified itself. Since the late Qing Dynasty, China has been trapped in the hard times of being colonized. The national consciousness of the Chinese people had risen and the Taoists had

repeatedly tried to engaged in this aspect with the implication that Taoism is the salvation of China. Chen Yingning said, “When talking about Taoism today, we must look back to the theories of Yellow Emperor and Lao Zi and refer to various schools of thinkers at the same time, to confirm that Taoism is the cherished place for the spirit of the Chinese nation. We must not blame ourselves and ruin the jade in our hands while admiring others’ rubble. We must understand that believing in Taoism is to guard the individual body, and promoting Taoism means saving the country.” He stressed that, compared with the more intuitive “military aggression”, the “cultural and religious aggression occupying people’s minds and souls” is actually more worrying; and that “only by using the inherent culture and religion can we fight against the outer force.” Undoubtedly, his “inherent religion” referred to Taoism (Chen, 1989, p. 7).

In 1936, Chen Yingning once again stressed that Taoism could shape the national spirit and appeal to the people to change their prejudice. He said, “Please don’t rush to scorn superstitions, and be aware that it was those ancient sages who pioneered the resistance against the aggression of the religions from foreign lands. Do not sheer at it and take it as nonsense. Instead, we should rely on it as a tool to unite the national spirit today.” Taking this as a yardstick, Chen commented on the shortcomings and merits of all religions in his discussion. His result was that no religion was as good as Taoism, and that although Confucianism is regarded as the main force of “national culture to save the country”, it is actually an inherited school of Taoism. He said, “The Confucian school originated from Taoist schools, and Taoist schools formed Taoism.” Regarding the “national culture”, he mentioned that there is a difference between “getting a part” and “getting the full power”, and between “being good at maintaining the achievements of one’s predecessors” and “being good at adjusting to changing circumstances”. Both Buddhism and Christianity are foreign religions and they are unable to revive the national feeling. He said, “Foreign religions teach people to loath the present world and wrongly hope for the blessings of the after world. That is why the country’s cause is rendered pessimistic. Taoism advocates the theory of living and puts physical health in the first position. It comforts the real life very well. On the contrary, foreign religions unrealistically advocate union, but if the weak country and the powerful country take the same religion, the consequence is unimaginable. Taoism was derived from the Chinese nation. As long as the nation would like to work hard and build their life, the heaven is just there in front of them.” Obviously, the former “foreign religion” means Buddhism and the latter refers to Christianity in Chen’s comment (Chen, 1936, p. 290).

Chen Yingning also had this response to the New Culture trend, “Among various religions in the world, solemn rituals and systems are regulated and theories are well developed, but few of them provide the equal opportunity for both men and women. The immortals, however, are different. It is often mentioned that female Taoist practitioners spend less time than man do to acquire achievements. It may take a man three years to finish practicing, while a woman can finish within only one year owing to her physiological specialty. As to the practitioner’s position after achieving success, it depends on his or her efforts rather on the gender. This is the immortals’ vision that is quite different from other religions.” That women are considered to be faster practitioners, plus equality between men and

women, made it “keep pace with the time”. Chen’s saying, on the one hand, worked to attract more female believers to enlarge the Taoist group; on the other hand, it aimed to improve the image of Taoism (Immortal Study). Regarding this, Chen said, “You’ll know that the school of immortals enjoys high-level freedom beyond the scope of religion. It is purely academic. My readers should not criticize it from a religious perspective”(Chen, 1989, p. 152).

As mentioned Taoism’s lack of learning had been the reason for people’s criticisms. Obviously, Chen Yingning intended to fill the gap. In fact, this intention indeed worked better than manifesting the “indigenous” status of Taoism. In the first half of the 20th century, although nationalism was motivating, the patriots might not be willing to recognize the indigenous culture. Instead, they were often identifiable for being against tradition. If they could not prove themselves to have academic qualities, even if those who were from the Chinese orthodox, like Confucians, they had no way to escape their destiny of being whipped. The climate for Taoism was of course even more unfavorable as it was a time when intellectuals of the New Culture stood out to replace “superstition” with “science”, and “religion” with “philosophy”. No matter which pair Taoism was in, it was always on the negative side with an overall image of being barbaric and ignorant. Only by changing such an image, can Taoism escape the dilemma.

The strategies adopted by the side defending Taoism were both negative and positive. It was negative because it tried to remove the title of “superstition” and made it an “evolutionary religion”. And it was positive because it made itself into a kind of “philosophy” and “science”, like Buddhism, and even more advanced than “science”. This thinking surely followed the rules set by the intellectuals of the New Culture. It not only limited the space for Taoism to defend for itself, but also created the possibility to reinterpret and even “invent” the new teachings.

In the eyes of the people at that time, a “religion” still had certain ideological and social significances while “superstition” was however, totally unworthy of mentioning. As Qian Xuantong said, “In this 20th century when science is prospering, people are even not expected to have blind faith in the most evolutionary religions like Buddhism and Christianity, let alone the most barbarian Taoism” (Qian, 1918, p. 464). From Qian’s comment, it can be seen that religion is also either “evolutionary” or “barbarian”. If Taoism wanted to obtain a basic space for existence, in addition to making it a “religion”, it must also draw a line with “superstition”. In June 1934, the Nancheng Society of Taoism in Jiangxi province applied to the government for administrative registration. Xiong Shihui, Chairman of the provincial government, held, “The members of the Society are Taoists. In fact, they are a gang of wizards and witches who disseminate superstition to collect money in the name of deity. They are on the list of organizations to be abolished according to the relevant regulations issued by the Ministry of Internal Affairs. Of course, they have no permit to be registered as a legal organization.” However, the nature of Taoism was vague, making the government officials confused. “Since the Taoists have no standardized activities as a profession, and they also have no fixed residence, it is hard to conclude whether there are differences between those Taoists who have a license and those who live in the temple, or whether their registration should be restricted or permitted.” The provincial governor

reported to the Ministry of Internal Affairs for instructions. The Ministry of Internal Affairs further reported the issue to the Central Civil Movement Steering Committee of the Kuomintang (KMT) for instructions. The Committee responded, “The Society of Taoism is supposed to be a religious group, and it is permitted to be organized according to law.” Yet it additionally emphasized, “But those who claim that Taoists are like wizards and witches, and who want to organize illegal business, are not allowed to promote superstition in the name of society. This shall be stated clearly in its charter. If there is an activity to promote superstition, it will be strictly banned according to law.”^①

Interestingly, this instructive document was reprinted by *Yang Shan Semimonthly* (*Yang Shan Ban Yue Kan*) in a title with a clear distinction -*Societies of Taoism Must Not Promote Superstition*.^② In 1936, when publishing *The Origin of All China Societies of Taoism* authored by Chen Yingning, the editor of the same journal also added a short postscript, re-emphasizing that the purpose of publishing this article was to “inform the public of the importance of Taoism in China so that Taoism will not be misunderstood as other cults that specialize in propaganda superstition” (Postscript of *The Origin of All China Societies of Taoism*, 1936, p. 289).

In 1928, Taoists from the Quanzhen Sect and Zhengyi Sect in Shanghai jointly established China Society of Taoism. By the mid-1930s, after being rectified and reorganized, the Society clearly had stipulated that it was not allowed to “wrongly advocate superstition and conduct to confuse people in the name of Taoism” (Draft Charter of China Society of Taoism, 1935, p. 152). In July 1936, Xie Qiangong stated at the inaugural meeting of the Supervisory Committee of China Society of Taoism, “Taoism is so vast that it excludes nothing. *Zhaizhan* (a rite of blessing) is merely one of the specific rituals in the religion. People may think that Taoism is only about *zhaizhan* under inadequate investigation. For this reason, they tend to have a prejudice against Taoism. They even ignore the other aspects about Taoism just because of one single ritual and disgrace and smash it. In order to prevent it from being suspected, strict measures should be taken to ban the misconducts of the Taoists in the future and eradicate the confusion formed in the minds of those unconscious people.”^③

However, for Chen Yingning, it was far from enough to draw a line from “superstition”. The fundamental solution was to make Taoism “academic” and keep away from being a “religion” (Liu, 2009). In the mid-1930s, when he advocated the independence of “Immortality Study”, Chen also tried to distinguish the Taoist schools Taoism. He said, “China had been united in one Taoist school during many historical periods from the Yellow Emperor to Lao Zi of the Zhou Dynasty. The teachings of the school have been systematic.” It could not only be used to “rule the country and unite the family,” but also to “cultivate a man’s merit”. This is called “Taoism as a study” .“As for the practices of Talisman represented by Kou Qianzhi, the Five Thunders Magic (*wuleifa*, a magic summoning wind and rain)

① The Ministry of Internal Affairs, Reply to the Request on Whether the Society of Taoism of Nancheng County is Allowed to Register—For Reference of Provincial and Municipal Governments. November 10, 1934, pp. 2409-2410.

② Societies of Taoism Must Not Promote Superstition, 1935, p. 205.

③ Inaugural Meeting of the Supervisory Committee of China Society of Taoism, 1936, p. 422. Judging from the wording, Xie Qiangong’s statement might have been influenced by Chen Yingning.

represented by Celestial Master Zhang of the Zhengyi Sect, the *zhaizhan* blessing represented by Qiu Changchun of the Quanzhen Sect, etc., they should be called “Taoism as a religion”. They are completely different in terms of “aims and roles” and must be “identified differently”. He deliberately used the term “Taoism as a study” to distinguish from “Taoism as a religion”, describing the former as a set of “systematic doctrines”, and the practices such as Talisman, the Five Thunders Magic and the *zhaizhan* blessing are classified into “Taoism as a religion”. This was quite in line with the insights of anti-Taoism intellectuals. However, he also emphasized that “Immortal Study” and the “Taoist schools” were different, too. In *The Book of Han (Han Shu)*, the latter was classified in the realm of “the nine schools of thought” which are mostly about “controlling skills” and the former was seen as “alchemy” which is “pro-regimen”, “Taoism as a study” covers both theory and practices, thus making a difference between “study on the Tao” and “study on immortality”. “Studying on the Tao doesn’t necessarily mean pursuing eternal life but pursuing hearing the Tao, to be enlightened and to demonstrate the Tao. Death is seen as normal.” Studying immortality pursues “eternal life”. That is why people who study immortality have all kinds of the strange and vulgar skills, which may not even be heard about by those who study the Tao”(Chen, 1989, pp. 282-285).

Following this method of classification, “Immortal Study” is a part of the traditions of “Taoism as a study”, making it different from any common Taoist school. The reason is that it pursues hearing the Tao, to be enlightened and to demonstrate the Tao. Further, Immortal Study takes regimen skills into consideration. Therefore, “Immortal Study” and “Taoism as a study” seemed to be under the same banner, though their purposes were different as to being negative or positive. “Taoist schools viewed life as natural, so the purpose was to free the life as much as possible and seek purity, tranquility and non-action, even to a degree that the schools in the last ranking seemed to be dispirited. Immortal schools viewed life as imperfect, so their purpose was to change the present, overthrow the scientific law, go beyond the context and fight against and win over nature” (Chen, 1989, p. 248). Although “Taoism as a religion” also put emphasis on skills, such “superstitious” rituals as Talisman had no academic support.

In this way, “Immortal Study” was classified in the “academic” category. However, different from the “religion”, “Today I am writing a book as a study on the theory, thinking that like-minded people in the future can test it and use it to solve their life problems. My intention is different from those who wish to promote the religion. Therefore, my study has nothing to do with those idols including Celestial Venerable of the Primordial Beginning (*Yuanshi Tianzun*), the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord (*Taishang Laojun*) and the Great Emperor of Jade (*Yu Huang Dadi*)” (Chen, 1989, p. 152). Now that Immortal Study has nothing to do with “religious belief”, followers of any religions or any unbelievers can study on immortality. “Because immortality itself was sourced from academic experiments, unlike religion which depends on followers’ beliefs. For example, if a person gets an electric shock, the body immediately feels it no matter he or she believes it or not. But when it comes to the nature of a religion, it is quite different. If one believes in it, it may produce a little effectiveness; and if one does not believe, it does not work at all. We have to be clear about this difference between Immortal Study and religion” (Chen, 1989, p. 240).

The positioning of Immortal Study as “academic” also gave Chen Yingning the confidence to compete with the so-called “science”. He said, “Scientists of extreme materialism believe a human is just ‘the body’, and they do not think that there is life beyond the body. Those who study immortality will definitely challenge their thinking. To make it, only by trying to reach the point where our body and spirit work well with each other can we convince scientists.” He added with confidence, “We should be clear that immortals’ competitors are scientists, and the enemy of religions is also scientists. But in the future, only immortals may be hopeful enough to be against scientists.” (Chen, 1989, p. 233) The “competitor” means “matched each other in strength” while “enemy” means “hostile”. In addition, by the wording “scientists of extreme materialism”, Chen meant more in-depth, implying that there might be “scientists” of other schools, and perhaps “immortals” are one of them.

Just as Immortal Study originated from and then transcended the philosophical “Taoist schools”, its “confrontation” with science was also performed by transcending science. Chen Yingning did not oppose science, or at least he did not oppose the spirit and method of science. In his *A Colloquial Annotation of Ling Yuan Da Dao Ge* published in 1938, Chen made it clear, “Elixir classics and Taoist books that appeared in the past have one thing in common, namely they are too general and unclear in reasoning. But this book, *Ling Yuan Da Dao Ge*, is devoted to analysis and intends to put the scientific spirit into Immortal Study” (Chen, 1989, pp. 178, 179, 196). In one of his previous articles, Chen commented that the “study of the immortals is experimental, not empty talk”. Chen’s “experiment” was different from the scientists’ “experiment”. Chen’s “experiment” means to verify via practice. For this purpose, he once again emphasized the difference between “the theory of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi” and immortals: the latter was about “facts” rather than “empty teachings”, which must be “experimented” for understanding. However, his so-called “experiment” and “science” were correlated — “You can get the same effect by adopting his method.” He even stated, “The immortal alchemy prioritizes longevity and only talks about the reality, standing quite close to science. And it can be very easy for people with scientific thinking and knowledge to get started in studying immortality” (Chen, 1989, pp. 265, 270, 271).

Hong Tai’an, a disciple of Chen Yingning, prefaced the book and tried to demonstrate this point of view. Similar with his teacher, Hong also thought that the power of “electricity” far exceeded “stream”. He said, “Electricity is the primordial substance between the heaven and the land, and humans are the primordial spirit between them. Why can’t immortality practitioners unite the primordial spirit and substance if scientists can catch the electricity and control it? Why can’t daylight, for example, be made in an immortal’s elixir field instead of a scientist’s lab?” He also referred to the term “micro-bacteria” used by medical scientists in his time to interpret “three corpses and five worms (San Shi Wu Chong)” in Taoism. He concluded, “Although the medical scientists have good evidence, the medicine can only cure the diseases, but cannot lead to longevity. Though Taoist practitioners’ sayings cannot be proved by the microscope, it is about working on both the body and spirit, mobilizing the primordial substance, softening the veins and reshaping the muscles and bones. It seeks the path toward true immortality” (Chen, 1989, pp. 178, 179, 196). According to this conclusion, “Immortal Study” is seen as similar

to science in terms of principle. They only differ from each other as to whether it works on exterior material or on human bodies and spirits. Because of this, the effect of “Immortal Study” is superior to science.

After “returning to Taoism”, Chen Yingning no longer emphasized the differences among the Taoist schools, Immortal Study and Taoism. On the contrary, in a work completed in the early 1960s, Chen emphasized that the “Taoist schools and Taoism are inseparable” and that “the Path of Lao Zi is their shared faith.” Since the Three Kingdoms period, “the entire ‘Taoism’ has been completely shrouded in the mist of the Taoist school’s philosophical spirit.” For example, Wei Boyang, Ge Xuan, Ge Hong, etc., were all in the “system of Lao Zi”, making pro-theory ‘Taoist schools’ and pro-religion ‘Taoism’ so intermingled that they actually became inseparable from each other.” He criticized that the “previous scholars did not understand such a correlation between the ‘Taoist schools’ and ‘Taoism’, and attempted to separate them in vain and render the Grand Supreme Elderly Lord to sit uneasily on the throne of the Three Purities. In fact, their attempt was completely ineffective.” By saying this, Chen was also somewhat self-criticizing. However, now that what he called “Taoism” was based on the “philosophical spirit of the “Taoism schools”, it was not oriented to Talisman and confession. Compared to the period of “Immortal Study”, Chen stressed more on exchanges between theory study and practicing, and on combining the philosophical spirit of getting involved in the material world adopted by the “Taoist schools” with the alchemy skills of “Taoism” which tried not to get involved in the material world. He thought of this interrelation as “a good tradition inherited by Taoism” (Chen, 1989, pp. 81-89). This shows that Chen’s point of view remained unchanged while he still put emphasis on the dimension of “being academic”.

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However, Chen Yingning’s efforts could only convince those few people who were willing to be persuaded. And it was not an easy thing to make the minds trained by modern science to accept immortality and ascendance to heaven.^① Plus, he stood on his own to use the term “Immortal Study”, which could only trigger the adverse feelings of intellectuals of the New Culture. It seemed to be much more straightforward to recognize the term “Taoism” as a religion. The real change in the image of Taoism would ultimately depend on the external forces, otherwise it would only be self-murmuring. The person who locked the door has the key to open it. Now that the stigma of Taoism grew because of intellectuals, it must be restored through the participation of intellectuals.

As mentioned earlier, Joseph Needham’s cognition of the relationship between Taoism (the Taoist school) and science was first confirmed from Feng Youlan. In his speech addressed in 1951, Joseph Needham quoted the words of Feng Youlan, a famous Chinese philosopher, “The Taoist school is the

① In 1947, Li Yuancheng pointed out in his *Ge Hong Discusses Lao Zi and Immortals*, “Regimen proposed by the Taoist school is meant to conserve the spirit to keep harmonious with nature so that one dies after a natural span of live rather than dying untimely. That’s all and is surely different from immortalization.”

only ideology in the world that is mystical and does not contain profound anti-scientific factors.” He then added, “In China, it is true that the development of all sciences and technologies is inseparable from the Taoist school — the Taoist schools sought elixir, so alchemy was produced. China started alchemy earlier than any other area in the world. Later, botany and pharmacology were invented. Ironworkers and miners first invented horse harness sets and deep drilling techniques, and these inventors all believed in the guardian lords that belong to Taoism (Needham, 1987, p. 106). The opinion quoted by Joseph Needham was probably from an essay written by Feng Youlan in 1927. Feng’s original words went like this, “The Taoist philosophy of scholars like Guo Xiang (a philosopher of Metaphysical School in the Western Jin Dynasty) is of mysticism, but it does not conflict with science” (Feng, 2001, p. 106). Nevertheless, Feng’s expression was negative while Joseph Needham’s tone was much more positive. And Feng used the term “Taoist school” rather than “Taoism”. Feng insisted on the distinction between them until his twilight years.

However, in his *Xin Yuan Ren* published in 1942, Feng also had a similar expression. This time he used the term “Taoism” indeed. He said, “unlike most religions believing that the soul is immortal, Taoism is almost naturalistic. Thus, it is almost closer to so-called science rather than so-called religion. While believing that physical death is followed by spiritual disappearance, which is a natural process of change, people of Taoism can use an ‘anti-nature’ approach which can maintain the spirit when the physical body is dead.” In this regard, Taoism “has a spirit of ‘victory over nature’”. In 1947, when he lectured on history of Chinese philosophy in America, Feng was more certain, “Taoism has the scientific spirit of conquering nature, and those who are interested in the history of Chinese science and technology can find a lot of information from the writings of Taoists.” When discussing the School of *Yin-Yang*, Feng stressed, “Alchemy itself is based on superstition, but it is often the origin of science. Alchemy and science share one common desire: to explain nature in a positive attitude and to serve humanity by serving nature. When alchemy gives up the belief in supernatural powers and tries to explain the universe only with natural forces, it becomes science” (Feng, 2001, pp. 690, 692). By comparing *A History of Chinese Philosophy* written in his early years, one can know that Feng developed this insight only when he was in his later years.

Feng Youlan’s views were consistent with Joseph Needham’s argument in his speech delivered in Chongqing in 1944. He said, “Alchemy, as the origin of modern chemistry, first appeared in China. It was achievement made by ‘the Taoists who wanted to live as immortals’” (he referred to Taoism obviously). “Although their idea of using elixir and gold to reach immortality seems to be wrong today, they have developed chemical techniques and matter processing methods. Thus, these Taoists can be called the fathers of modern chemistry”(Needham, 1999, p. 268). However, neither Joseph Needham nor Feng Youlan was the first to associate Taoism with science. Joseph Edkins had already mentioned that the cinnabar used in the so-called elixir could be used to extract mercury, which had a “magic medical effect”. Taoists “had no chance to know about the secret of chemistry”, thus suspecting that there was a “secret of immortality”. In this sense, the invention of alchemy “can be understood as pseudo-chemistry”. Alchemy appeared in Europe later than in China. It was thought to be introduced

from China to Europe in the Tang Dynasty by Uyghurs(Edkins, 1879, p. 87).

However, although all of them have noticed the fact that chemistry originated from alchemy, the key was how to describe the relationship, i.e., to emphasize on the connections or the differences between the two. This depended on the describer's attitude towards Taoism. In the prevailing atmosphere of discrimination against Taoism, the popular opinion was that alchemy made no "evolution". Cai Yuanpei pointed out in the early 20th century, "The progress of European philosophy owes much to science." China, however, has been ruled by the all-encompassing theory of "five elements" which cover extensively, e.g., astronomy, disasters, pathology, medicine, political system and morality, "so it doesn't need something new." That's why alchemy in Europe could evolve into chemistry while Chinese alchemy "had no chance to evolve into chemistry" (Cai, 1984, p. 394). Qian Mu also said in the 1940s, "Taoist thoughts are often prone to the alchemy", so "it seems quite possible that Taoist thoughts could get close to the natural science of the West". But since they were unable to be purely objective, "they would never give birth to science as alchemy did in the West, although there are many elements which are similar to those in the Western natural sciences" (Qian, 1998, pp. 141-142). At about the same time, Chen Pan wrote an article discussing the alchemists of the Qin and Han dynasties in the Warring States period. In his article, there was one paragraph saying, "all of their so-called experiments were explained in weird and unrealistic ways." This saying, on the one hand, confessed that "there is surely some valuable natural knowledge contained in the alchemy skills", some of them are even quite effective, and that "they cannot be denied even in this modern time when science has been well developed." On the other hand, the saying lays its focus on that "alchemy classics and theories mainly contain weird and unrealistic descriptions other than experimental data"(Chen, 2010, pp. 234, 237, 238).

However, since the late 1920s and early 1930s, the influence of radical anti-traditional thoughts has been declining, and the academic community has gradually been able to review Chinese culture with peace of mind, and the understanding of Taoism also changed.

Jiang Weiqiao pointed out that Taoism had two positive significances: one is to turn its attention to life and the other is to treat the disease without praying. "It extremely advocated treating the disease with medicinal stones, and it asserted that taking the elixir would make people immortal." This worked to break the "superstition" and "take the lead in chemistry". The science of chemistry in the West was thus developed from the idea of "transforming stones into gold". "Imagine if the immortals' method of alchemy in China was not held as a secret, but was open to those who wanted to have a try," perhaps today's China will have remarkable achievements in chemistry, probably more advanced than the achievements realized in the West. Jiang attributed the problem to the esoteric spread of knowledge instead of the nature of Taoism itself. He thought so differently from Cai Yuanpei and Qian Mu. In Jiang's opinion, Taoist thought has two "elements", one is "religious", that is, "the idea of immortality", and the other is "scientific", that is, "the thought of medicinal stones' versatility". As "science" has never been separated from the "religion", the scientific element gradually turned mysterious until it disappeared (Jiang, 1934, pp. 25-26). Instead of taking a blaming attitude, Jiang actually felt pitiful.

Jiang Weiqiao once wrote a book called *Yin Shizi's Meditation (Yin Shi Zi Jing Zuo Fa)*. Therefore,

he tended to “feel pitiful based on a better understanding of Taoism”. More importantly, he emphasized that science and religion have a dialectical connection. “The more mysterious a thought is, the more it tends to show an open and scientific idea directly by itself, or by its influence (or response) indirectly.” Christianity, for example, “did not show any scientific spirit; instead, it was anti-scientific. But it was responded to with the creation of science in the West. If there hadn’t been any religion at the time binding people’s mind, science would not have developed so fast even if it might have been developed.” Therefore, “only with extreme mysterious thought can there be an extreme scientific spirit!” Compared with the firmness and briefness of the intellectuals of the New Culture when evaluating the relationship between Taoism and science, Jiang’s observation was undoubtedly more sophisticated.

In 1931, after Qu Jigao, who then worked in the library of Qingdao University, accompanied Gu Jiegang to the Taiqing Palace located on the Laoshan Mountain to review *Taoist Canon*, he felt that the attitude of Chinese scholars, which gave high value to Buddhism but ignored Taoism, was not correct. “Although *Buddhist Canon (Fo Zang)* is subtle and profound in its teachings”, most of them are “theorized”. Although “*Taoist Canon* started as a minor and was represented by alchemists and looked absurd and unscrupulous at the first sight”, half of it is “pragmatic”. “Burning lead, merging mercury, medicine and martial arts, all can be called science. Even those tricks played by the alchemists before, can be gradually positively proved by science.” Qu believed that “it is more important to study *Taoist Canon* than to study *Buddhist Canon* in this period of promoting science for the purpose of saving the country”(Qu, 1989, pp. 275-276). The examples he listed such as burning lead, merging mercury were all criticized as superstitions by the intellectuals of the New Culture Movement. Yet they were renewed in Qu’s writing, and the relationship between Taoism and Buddhism was just reversed. The scholars mentioned in previous sections focused on thoughts, teachings and principles, thus they thought Buddhism was science. Qu Jigao turned his attention to the technical level and reversely thought that Taoism was closer to science.

Philip A. Kuhn once discovered that the social images of monks and Taoists in China in the 18th century were completely different. While Taoists were often suspected of carrying black magic with them, monks were attacked for their moral defects (Kuhn, 1999, p. 154). Although Buddhism tapped on China by appealing to Chinese people with spells at the beginning, it quickly turned to building its teachings and principles. Taoism, however, has never gotten rid of the connection with spells. Modern intellectuals have clearly inherited this impression. However, that Taoism has partially shaken off the stigma is also based on the same foundation.

After the 1930s and 1940s, the scholars who held a positive attitude (no matter to what degree) toward Taoism based their support for their argument from a technical perspective. One example in point was Fu Qinjia, who summed up the three things that could be learned from Taoism. The first thing was that “it pursues pure heart and less desire, which are beneficial for self-cultivating”; the second was “it longs for longevity and physical ascending to the celestial world”, showing the spirit of “trying to fight against nature”; the third was alchemy. “Alchemy of burning stones and converting it into gold or silver was initiated by Taoists.” Although it was not successful in “elixir producing”, it later

started the “science of chemistry”. “The progress has been great so far. Chemistry elaborates that if the way of circulatory changes between electronic atoms is clearly known, converting stone into gold will be successful, and this is not empty talk. If the studies on physics, physiology and the science of medicines are well developed, the ways to realize longevity and be disease-free are also expectable. Thus, although most of the teachings of Taoism sound virtual and weird, the thoughts of Taoism are not absolutely useless. It is a pity that Taoism knew nothing about science before and wasted its effort on useless fields. It is just like throwing gold into the idle valley”(Fu, 2011, pp. 241-242).

Chemistry and medicine are two basic points when modern intellectuals speak positively. It is no coincidence that Chen Guofu, born in a Taoist family, specialized in the chemical industry, and became one of the pioneers of modern Taoist studies. Xu Dishan, who studied the history of religion, also discussed the relationship between Taoism and medicine in one of his essays (Xu, 1946, pp. 23-31). In 1948, Wang Ming proposed, “In ancient times, witchcraft and medical treatment were usually done by one person”, which contained the “non-spontaneously acquired natural concept and original knowledge of the ancestors”. It was in later periods that the professions of witch and doctor were divided. Because medicine showed accurate and progressive artificial skills, it “consciously discovered the necessity to develop independently into science”. But after the religious thought “became spontaneous”, again, “it blended medicine and immortal witchcraft as the practice of regimen and life extension.” Of course, Wang still stood on the side of “science”, and he couldn’t help but regret, “The ancient Taoist school had the original worship of nature, yet Taoism thinks about extending life span via human skills. Thus, Taoism is close to the scientific spirit. However, as naive as it is, this scientific spirit still cannot avoid being hybrid with witchcraft”(Wang, 1948, pp. 539, 540, 558).

If one says that the position of Buddhism and Taoism has been reversed in Qu Jigao’s eyes, then Wang Ming suggested another inversion: The Taoist school respects nature while Taoism thinks about controlling nature by human skills, i.e., Taoism rather than the Taoist school is closer to the “scientific spirit”. The anti-Taoism intellectuals thought that it had a sense of rationality when the Taoist school freed people’s thinking from the “ghosts and deity” and made it return to being natural, and that it was ridiculous that Taoism worships ghosts and deities. Wang Ming also believed that Taoist thought had a tendency to admire nature, but his perspective of observation and judging criteria had changed: “being compliant with nature” was no longer worthy of appreciation, and the thought of alchemy was turned from nature-violating “barbaric thought” into nature-conquering “scientific spirit”. In the minds of modern intellectuals, there were two different standards for “being scientific”: one set on whether the thought recognizes the existence of ghosts and deities; and the other set on whether the thought has the attitude of challenging “nature”. In the course, alchemy was also repositioned.

Feng Youlan pointed out in 1921 that the occurrence of Chinese philosophy wasn’t later than in ancient Greece, but Chinese philosophy did not produce science. As for what he meant by “science”, it is necessary to find out from his narrative: Mo Zi (Mo Tzu) had a “scientific spirit” because “he did not think like a Taoist did. He did not think that people are the happiest in the natural state and did not

think that what people need to do and should do is to return to nature. On the contrary, he thought that people need to get rid of nature.” Xun Zi (Hsun Tsu) also had the attitude of “conquering nature instead of praising it”. Both Mo Zi and Xun Zi inclined to the route of “human taking the initiative”. The only pity was that this route was beaten by its opponents, making China’s “technological development” head towards “knowing and controlling the mind” while “European technological development” was the opposite, focusing on “knowing and controlling matter”. Feng Youlan quoted Henri Bergson’s remarks, “Europe discovered scientific methods because modern European science started from matter.” It was also because of this that science “developed a habit of being precise and rigorous, trying its best to prove, distinguishing between what is possible and what is indeed in existence.” Feng’s evaluation of the Chinese traditional thinking route which starting from “mind” and “nature” was not that critical. He thought that this gives Chinese people “reasonable happiness” and leads to the same goal as science does (Feng, 1984, pp. 32, 42, 50-52). However, it is obvious that the route of “human taking the initiative” and the stance of “starting from matter” was right and the basis for Feng’s later conception that Taoism was “similar to” science.

His conception certainly had its basis. Francis Bacon advocated the “torture” of nature in order to force her to reveal her secrets as a principle of experimental science. This idea was accepted by Chinese intellectuals of the New Culture Movement. In 1919, Hu Shi wrote a song for the Science Society of China. The lyrics went like this, “We don’t worship nature. He is a weird one. We beat him and make him comply with our arrangement” (Hu, 1998, p. 250). In 1940, Chen Duxiu also called out a slogan, “To make efforts to compete with nature” (Chen, 2001, p. 155). Connecting Taoism and “science” like this was not only a technology-oriented way of thinking, but also a part of the modern Chinese cultural changes driven by a new set of outlooks on life^①.

With the vision changed, even the techniques that were not related to science shone with new brilliance. Lin Yutang ascertained in the mid-1930s, “Taoism is Chinese’s attempt to discover the secrets of nature.” His list of Taoism techniques included not only “herbal medicine collection and production, physiology and cosmology, martial arts and fitness skills”, but also “magic, witchcraft, aphrodisiac, spells, astrology, and deity pedigrees”, which would be definitely dubbed by Qian Xuantong and Lu Xun as “barbaric thoughts”(Lin, 1994, pp. 129, 130)^②. Some also believed that Taoism contains the germination of “materialist philosophy”, so its “freedom-pursuing method” is also “unlike any other religion, it advocates working on material entities to achieve longevity, or to deform the existing body to achieve ascending to the celestial as an immortal”. This “profound philosophical outlook on the universe” can be seen as a “material” for studying “the knowledge fragments and the philosophical thoughts of Chinese culture stored in religions” (Pan, 1936, p. p. 23-24). This article was published in a Christian journal sponsored by the Chinese Anglican Church, yet the author praised the “materialist

① In this sense, Fu Qinjia’s positive remarks on Taoism mentioned in previous paragraphs are contradictory. That “it (Taoism) pursues pure heart and less desire” conflicts against “it longs for longevity and physical ascending to the celestial world.” However, it seemed that Fu did not realize this contradiction. This ignorance is also seen in others.

② “Martial arts” actually did not escape Lu Xun’s accusation, and was linked with “Mysterious Lady of the Nine Heavens and Yellow Emperor.”

philosophy". Through this, it can be seen how much the author was influenced by the new ideological trend. He obviously believed that Taoism was not just a "religion", or a set of "alchemy", but that there was a unique "philosophy" behind it as well.

Having experienced the baptism of "materialism" and "experimental science", Taoism has gradually changed its barbaric image and taken on an appearance of the "original science". This not only gave Taoism "a value for research", but also suggested a path for studying it. Today, the relationship between Taoism and science and technology has become a fixed thinking for Taoism researchers. In the early 1980s, Pan Yuting called for the study of the *Taoist Canon*. In his research, Pan straightforwardly revealed the interactive connections of philosophy, religion and science: "Religion and natural science are seen as two ends of philosophy for Western scholars." If studying philosophy without fully understanding these two ends, "one cannot go deep into the subtleties of philosophy. If religions are simply seen as superstitions, the objective result as to how scientific theories have been grown from fantasy ideas to the facts will not be generated." In this sense, the significance of Taoism studies is self-evident: as "the native religion of our country, Taoism is especially close to the philosophical thoughts and scientific achievements in China." (Pan, 2012, pp. 400-401) Writing a history of Taoism, the writer's narration should be based on "understanding of the relationships between Taoism and the natural sciences developed indigenously in China" (Pan, 2003, p. 2).

Connecting Taoism with science has also strengthened the power of defending Taoism from the standpoint of nationalism. The question, "why didn't China have sciences" has long been sticking to the minds of modern Chinese intellectuals. Feng Youlan emphasized in his famous article published in the early 1920s that China did not produce science because "China did not need sciences". The Chinese pursue "goodness and happiness directly within their hearts" rather than the growth of material wealth. "What is the use of sciences for them?" (Feng, 1984, pp. 51, 52) However, his answer was obviously not in line with the theme of "pursuing prosperity and strength" in the present time, and it was inevitably seen as self-comforting. Now Taoism not only carries evidence for China's spontaneous "scientific spirit", but also demonstrates concrete technical practices and achievements, which is much more powerful than that answer. Compared to Chen Yingning's definition of "science" in the style of "seeking longevity", it is more possible to be accepted. Obviously, Chinese intellectuals did not exclude the interpretation of the value of Taoism from the perspective of nationalism, but the premise was that it must first become "scientific".

Of course, not all scholars could accept this new positioning of Taoism. Joseph Needham once commented that Confucianism hindered the development of science in China. Lao Gan put forward his counterview, "Among the pre-Qin scholars, those of the Taoist school were against science and technology." "Those alchemists in the Yan and Qi states during the Warring States period" praised by Joseph Needham "had nothing special to do with the Taoist school. On the contrary, some minor schools of Confucianism had something to do with alchemists in the Yan and Qi states." Lao Gan surely admitted that alchemists had started combining with the Taoist

school since the Western Han Dynasty, and Taoism was also a product of this tradition. However, Lao Gan believed that those who contributed to science after the Han Dynasty “were all people who belong to Confucianism”. As for the backwardness of science in China, it had something to do with geographical and linguistic factors, but the “greater obstacle” came from the new Zen after the Tang Dynasty. It was so influential that the practice of Taoism was also affected, which had shifted from “burning lead and mercury to metals” to “sitting in tranquility for meditation”(Lao, 2006, pp. 257, 260-264).

However, Lao Gan had something in common with Joseph Needham on cognition of science, so he partly agreed on the connection between the immortals and Taoism, as well as the connection between the tradition of alchemy and science. In fact, instead of saying that the main purpose of Lao Gan’s essay was to criticize the Taoist school or Taoism, it is better to say that he meant to defend Confucianism. He wrote, “Among the Chinese schools of thinkers, Confucianism is the plainest and honest one. It is hard to find it amazing except for hitting the point in people’s feelings. The Legalist school and Mohist school are more extreme” and the Taoist thought is the most “surreal, subtle and intriguing”, thus, “Taoist thought is the easiest one to be admired by foreign scholars.” Here lies the reason why both Bertrand Russell and Joseph Needham “favored” Taoism and criticized Confucianism. Lao Gan claimed that he did not intend to “completely pass the buck of Confucianism”, but stressed that Confucianism could not have been fully responsible for this. Lao Gan’s thinking was similar to that of Chen Duxiu.

Although Pan Yuting and Lao Gan viewed this differently, their arguments also revealed the connections between the image transformation of Taoism and science in the West. James George Frazer specifically discussed how witchcraft became akin to science in his *The Golden Bough*. He wrote, it was because they “are akin to each other in the concept of seeing the world” (Frazer, 1987, pp. 75-77). Based on this kinship, science was produced from witchcraft, and witchcraft was also able to share the brilliance of science. Russell also noted the role of religions in the origin of “philosophy” (Russel, 1997, pp. 47-48). Frazer’s ideas were introduced to China no later than the 1920s. Russell was even more famous. As for Joseph Needham, what he did and said as well as his masterpiece on China’s scientific and technological achievements had all made Chinese people proud. These examples show that the role of the Westerners cannot be ignored in the image transformation of Taoism.

Even Qian Mu, who once asserted that the “Taoist school” would never generate science, later said that the Taoist school and the School of *Yin-Yang* “always discussed much about reproduction and creatures in the universe which turned into superstitions about this world”. However, if these superstitions have a chance to be studied in detail, one may find that they are in fact related to science. In fact, the term “Taoist school” used by Joseph Needham contained the concept of Taoism, and when he used this term, he was also inclined to mean Taoism. But what Qian Mu meant was for certain the “Taoist school”. He praised that “although the Chinese people in modern times admired the West so much, they did not like the western religions, and they only admired science”, and commented that “their admiration was right to the point” (Qian, 1987, pp. 13, 24). In his mind, “religion” and “science” were

clearly against each other. This remained unchanged for Qian and was what made him different from Joseph Needham. But it is also discernible that Qian made his argument after being inspired by Joseph Needham.

6

During the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, especially during the period of the New Culture Movement, Chinese intellectuals generally discriminated against Taoism or deliberately ignored its existence. This mentality was partially a heritage from the intellectual tradition of the scholar-officials of the previous historical periods, and was also rooted in the values of the intellectuals of the New Culture. The further stigmatization of Taoism was a key step toward their program of “civilization reshaping”. The unpleasant elements in Chinese society were often attributed to Taoism or were at least seen related to it. In this way, while Taoism became a scapegoat of the traditional culture (not the only scapegoat though), some elite ideology such as Confucianism and the thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi had been at least partially relieved from political and moral criticism. After the 1930s, some intellectuals regarded Taoism as the germination of Chinese native science. Its stigma was thus gradually erased, and was even made to take on the mission of saving face for Chinese culture. Although this did not change its impression on everyone, it was completely renewed compared to its previous image.

One important thing is that the use of the term “study”, or especially “science” was inevitable whether Taoism’s image was stigmatized or purified. Taoism was discriminated against because it “had no academic support”, and was then highly recognized because of being connected with “science”. Understanding this contrary phenomenon does not only help us to re-recognize the “religious view” in modern Chinese thought, but also to imply the change of “scientific view”. During the period of the New Culture Movement, the term “science” meant more about the denial of ghosts and supernatural phenomena as the ideological content. In the 1930s and 1940s, the importance of the ways of thinking represented by the route of “humans taking the initiative” and the stance of “starting from matter” were highlighted. In the process, the ideology of “craft at climax can be closer to the Tao” held in Chinese tradition has undergone subtle changes.

It is generally believed that religions did not occupy important positions in the “grand tradition” of Chinese culture. Although the scholar-officials were reluctant to mention much about weird power and random deities, they tended to be tolerant and even praised a religion because of its educational effects. In the late Qing Dynasty and the early Republic of China, “religion” was once regarded as the key to Western prosperity, thus receiving attention. The “three religions” including Confucianism were also redefined by this concept, which aroused controversy (Chen, 2002). However, from the perspective of the experience of Taoism, it is known that Chinese modern intellectuals did not accept the image of Taoism as “weird power and random deities”, and were more interested in “study” than in “craft”, though their understanding of “religion” was undoubtedly shaped by Westerners (Huang,

2014, pp. 236-271).^① Luo Zhitian once commented, China's tradition of looking up "study" but looking down upon "crafts" made the intellectuals of the New Culture concentrate on "spirit and method" when understanding the term "science" (Luo, 2003, pp. 219-223). Ren Hongjun, an advocator of "the spirit of science", also explicitly proposed to use "Tao" (the Path) to understand the so-called "truth" used by Westerners. He interpreted "science" in the way that was understandable in the context of China (Wang, 2008). Liang Shuming also said, "Most of China's knowledge is technical rather than academic," thus it can grow to "art" but not "science" (Liang, 1999, p. 36). Although greatly in some specific views, Ren and Liang had the same standards. The intellectuals' cognition of "religion" was similarly first influenced by this thinking: if the "craft" at climax cannot be "closer to the Tao", then it will be valueless. What's more, none of Ouyang Jingwu, Taihsu (of Buddhism) and Chen Yingning (of Taoism) saw themselves as followers of "religion", indicating that it was still hard for a "religion" to stand stably in the "grand tradition" in spite of the influence from the West, and that religious influence was only temporary (Feynman, 2016, p. 263).^②

However, the new way of thinking also gave "craft" the opportunity to "be closer to the Tao". The reason why Taoism was favored in the history of science depended mainly on its alchemy rather than its principles. On the spiritual level, it was merely its orientation of "humans taking the initiative" reflected in the practices that was appreciated. However, traditional Taoism may not have deep consciousness on this spirit, and it might even be against it. The "Tao" in their own mind was still about respecting the thoughts of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi to live naturally and take no action, which was thought to be "anti-science". In other words, the so-called "Tao" in the traditional system did not mean the same as the "Tao" from the perspective of "science". The "craft" once disfavored by the intellectuals of the New Culture Movement has now been promoted to the position of "Tao" after being recognized by "science". Obviously, the meaning of "Tao" has been shifted in the course, and "Taoism" has already been reshaped by "science". Surely, "Taoism in the traditional sense" keeps changing too. It must be noticed that the image of "Taoism" established from "the historical perspective of science" is a new product since the 20th century, rather than "Taoism" itself anymore.

Investigating the concept of "science" in modern China from the same perspective, it can be found that there are two levels: on the level of ideological structure, the principle of "craft at climax closer to the Tao" has been maintained; on the level of the specific connotation, both "Tao" and "craft" have changed fundamentally in their true meanings: while "science" has achieved the status of "Tao" in traditional Chinese culture, most Chinese people's actual cognition of science is more inclined to the field of "technology". This was related to the mentality of Chinese people in modern times who were eager to pursue national prosperity and strength. Besides, that science putting emphasis on experiments as one of its own characteristics is also an evidence. And it was the second level mentioned above which allowed "craft" to be recognized by "science" as a new system. However, from the standpoint of

^① This is true of both the proponents and opponents of religion.

^② As the religion has been sitting in the central position of western culture, even Richard Phillips Feynman, who was not really embracing religion, confessed, "there are two great traditions which are the base of the western culture, one is science's spirit of adventure, and the other is Christian ethics."



Chinese traditional culture, including Taoism, this “craft at climax can be closer to the Tao” is actually “craft at climax develops into the Tao”, which is far from the original implication.

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