

Symbolism of Water in Daoism: A Sufi Point of View

Esmail Radpour*

Abstract

On the symbolism of water, two esoteric doctrines of the Far-Eastern and Islamic traditions, namely, Daoism and Sufism, have many comparable teachings. Although different points of view would take different aspects of the symbol into account, the teachings in question come to significant analogous points around the life-giving aspect of the symbol. Above all, water represents *fons vitæ* equally and simultaneously containing all the possibilities of manifestation and seeds of life. In this meaning, water is a symbol of the great element of the throne of Life for Ibn 'Arabī, equivalent to the state of the Water-veiled Immersion (*Hunlun*) or Water as the first epiphany of the Great One (*Taiyi*) in Daoism. This pre-eternal water of the unmanifested state is also manifested with the same quality in the heirarchical levels of existence. This paper first takes a short survey of different symbolical aspects of water in Sufism, and after explaining the place of the idea of life in Daoism, it presents major connotations of the symbol in Daoism from a Sufi point of view.

Keywords: Water, Symbolism, Sufism, Daoism, Life.

* Postdoctoral fellow. Iranian Institute of Philosophy. E-mail: radpour@gmail.com

And Thou shalt make them drink of the river of Thy pleasures. For
with Thee [is] the fountain of life: in Thy light shall we see light.

Psalms 36:8-9

The symbolism of water can provide us an occasion for endless discussions on the correspondences of two esoteric doctrines of the two great different traditions: Daoism and Sufism respectively belonging to the Far-Eastern and Islamic traditions. These two intellectual and spiritual teachings, other than the metaphysical principles, shared by all the Eastern doctrines, have many similarities in common even pertaining to the realm of forms, which explains why they have been subject of many comparative studies of great metaphysicians of our century.¹ The symbol of water has various aspects, which make different dimensions for its symbolical meanings according to the point of view one takes up. In Quranic teachings, at least for Islamic esoterism, water represents different aspects of epiphany of the divine qualities (*al-asmā waṣ-ṣifāt*) in successive states of existence. Above all, water represents 'existence', 'knowledge', and more commonly 'life'. These three can be envisaged as three viewpoints each one of which can solely be applied in every symbolical uses of water, or an emphasis on one of them can make it predominant on others. In Sufism, particularly in *waḥdat al-wujūd* school of Ibn 'Arabī, water of oceans and seas is envisaged as representing Existence. In this symbolism, sea foams, spumes, and waves represent different determinations of existence, however indefinitely abundant they are, the water is one,² and the determinations are all identified as water.

Ocean is ocean as it was in pre-eternity, and all the
accidental things of the world is its waves and currents;
beware not to be veiled by the forms which form them
from what is hidden behind these forms.³

Waves, gem, and the ocean are all one, though each form
has made an apparent difference.⁴

This relation of water and existence, in Sufi perspective, is derived from

relation of water and the divine Mercy, on the one hand, and relation of the divine Mercy and Existence, on the other. Shaikh ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī says, “The name *ar-Raḥmān* (the Merciful) is the unfolding of His absolute Being on the possibilities which are manifested by its epiphany. In reality, mercy is Existence itself and *ar-Raḥmān* (the Merciful) is God as *al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth) the Being of which is an expanded Existence on whatever is manifested from Him. Also, *ar-Raḥmān* (the Merciful) is God as *al-Ḥaqq* (the Truth) which in respect to its Existence has a perfect passivity on any command at any time in any level; thus, He as *ar-Raḥmān* governs all the possibilities.”⁵ This aspect of the symbol of water is most commonly considered when the Quran says, “He is the One who created the heavens and the earth in six days and His throne was upon water.”⁶

According to some commentators of Quran, water is also a symbol of knowledge: “He (Allah) sends down water from Heaven, making the valleys to overflow as much as they contain”;⁷ water is here interpreted as knowledge and the valleys as the hearts.⁸ However, water finds its richest symbolism around the conception of ‘life’ that is also naturally the most direct one attached to the symbol. Sustainability of plant, animal, and human lives depends on water. Most of the Quranic references to water envisages this aspect of the symbol: “From water, we gave life to everything;”⁹ “And He is the One Who sends down water from Heaven. Then by means of water, We bring forth vegetation of everything.”¹ This symbolism is also confirmed in the story of Moses and al-Khiḍr (the Green Immortal). As the story goes, Moses wishing to meet the Immortal al-Khiḍr, starts a journey towards the “meeting place of two seas” (*majma’ al-baḥrain*) where a dried fish comes to life “whether because of the extreme nearness of the Waters of Life, or because a drop of these waters actually falls on the fish.”¹ Ibn ‘Arabī also takes this point of view as for the symbol of water where he acknowledges it as the ‘great element’:

The throne of Life is the throne of the Will, the point of establishment of the Essence (*al-Dhāt*), and the same as the throne of Identity. In the *Quran*, Allah says, “From water, we gave life to everything;” (21:30) about this water He also says, “His throne was upon water” (11:7),

that is, He made life manifested in you, “in order to test you.” (11:7) In another occasion He says, “He has made death and life in order to test you” (67:2) where has places “in order to test you” closer to life [than death], since one who is died has no consciousness [to be tested], and it is the same word of him: “His throne was upon water in order to test you.” (11:7) and compare it also with “From water, we gave life to everything.” (21:30) This water is the great element, namely, the throne of Life, and it is the name of names and the first of names upon which all of them exist.¹

The great element is created from manifestation of God from Himself on Himself by means of quiddative lights (*an vār as-subuḥāt*): “this creation was forthwith with no casual succession and there is no way to understand it.”¹

One of the ideas generally taken up in the Daoist tradition as the central point of view is that of ‘life’,¹ defined as “the splendor of the *De*”.¹ Dao (道, the Truth) is the principle of life; “beings obtaining Dao live, losing it die.”¹ In Sima Chengzhen’s words, “What men hold dear is life; what life holds dear is Dao. To possess Dao for men is to possess water for fishes.”¹ Therefore, “the true life is to embrace Dao.”¹ All lives are from Dao alone in all the metaphysical and physical domains:

There is the Bestower of life which is not bestowed a life itself [but possesses life *ziran* or *bidh-dhāt*]. There is the Manifester which is not manifested itself. That which is not bestowed a life can give life to all lives. That which is not manifested can manifest all manifestation.¹

Heshang Gong, who composed the first complete commentary of the *Daodejing*, interprets the Laozi’s “Eternal Dao” (*changdao* 常道) as “the self-subsisting permanent Life.”¹ The notion of “the self-subsisting permanent

Life” (*ziran changsheng* 自然長生), appearing also in many other Daoist writings, calls to mind two names of Allah that are constantly repeated in Quran together: *al-Ḥayy* (the Alive) and *al-Qayyūm* (the Self-Subsisting). Although *ziran*, here translated as ‘self-subsisting’, has its own special meaning in technical terminology of Daoism (oversimplified as ‘naturalness’), it is not far from the Islamic philosophical conception of *al-Qā'im bidh-Dhāt* (sustained *per se*) when used for the Principle itself. According to the *Laozi*, “Man imitates Earth; Earth imitates Heaven; Heaven imitates Dao; Dao imitates being self-subsisting.” Heshang Gong commenting on the last portion says, “the nature ʻof Dao (*daoxing* 道性) is self-subsisting (or ‘from the self’, as the most literal translation of *ziran*) without imitating from anything else.” “It is also said that although Dao cannot be defined whatsoever, can roughly be approached through a combination of the conceptions of “Heaven, Life, God-Spirit, and Mystery”²

In the formal states, this Life includes not only animal and human beings but also all the plant and inanimate beings, due to their possession of the ‘nature of Dao’ (*daoxing* 道性).² The nature of Dao is “the true ultimate of intrinsic order and sustenance, and its core meaning refers to circular inherent flow which returns to the sole source of the Dark and Silent and it includes all the ten thousand beings. Even deviated and confused beings are covered by it; even temporal and inanimate beings follow it; it is through it that all of them ascends to the state of sanctity.”²

The mystery of life is called the ‘breath of the One’ (*yiqi* 一氣), that is, an exhalation of Dao as the Non-Being or, if preferred, Beyond-Being which brings forth the Cosmos through the Being. This exhalation which produce “pre-eternal Heaven and Earth integrated within Dao” (*daozaì tiandìzhì xiān* 道在天地之先, the Cosmos in its archetypical form) is ingested by the Cosmos; it is only after this ingestion that the ten thousand beings come to life.² Contrasted with the exhalation of Dao, its inhalation implies the return of everything to the state of Non-Being after their reuniting with the

One.² The Being is the Principle, the Destination, and the Immanent: as the Principle it is called the One; as the Destination it is called the Whirlpool (*chong* 冲),² and as the Immanent and universal presence in all the states of existence and in all the beings both in macrocosm and microcosm it is called the 'Great Intrinsic Flow' (*datong* 大通) and the 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣).² In addition, it is in this view that ultimate state of spiritual realization is described as achieving 'immortality' (*xianren* 仙人), comparable to the Sufi notion of *baqā* (permanency) which is similarly the highest of *maqāmāt* (spiritual stations). Though, the symbolical usage of 'immortality' has been commonly neglected particularly in modern times. Laozi says,

The ten thousand beings grow together; I, however, observe them as returning. These beings spread like weeds; all return to their Origin. Returning to the Origin is called stillness. Stillness is called returning to life. Returning to life is called permanency [i.e., immortality]. Knowledge of permanency is called light (of knowledge).³

Heshang Gong comments:

Here, 'grow' means to receive life ... men must give importance to returning to their Root ... The ten thousand beings [as weeds] all dry up and drop down [that is, they leave worldly life] with no exception. Therefore, they all return to their Origin and find even more life ... Returning to the Origin ... is not turning to death ... Stillness is returning to the source of life and becoming deathless ... thereupon being moved by eternal movement of Dao ... One who is moved by the eternal movement of Dao becomes enlightened [or participated in sapiential light of Dao].³

What Sayyid Haidar Āmulī says on the spiritual realization of the name

al-Ḥayy (the Alive), can return us to the symbolism of water:

The Fountain of Life is the concealed aspect of the Name *al-Ḥayy*. Whoever realizes this Name, actually has drunk from the water of that Fountain and eternally never dies, for he lives the life of Allah. All the lives of the universe live the life of this man, for his life is life of Allah ... Also, al-Khidhr (the Green immortal) is related to this Fountain, since he drunk a drop of it.³

This kind of symbolism of water finds its application in spiritual realization. In the Chapter 4 of the *Laozi Daodejing*, Dao is variously signified with three different qualities in three stages of realization: Whirlpool, Abyss, and Still, the Chinese characters of which all are interestingly comprised of the semantic particle 氵 (abbreviated form of 水) meaning water. First, Dao is called the Whirlpool (*chong* 冲) which “does not become full, how much it works”. To use a geometrical symbolism, this stage is a horizontal movement towards the center of the human state, realizing the humanity in its fullness, becoming true man (*jenren* 真人), and “turning back being an infant”. Dao is the Whirlpool or centripetal pivot of this concentration. Second, Dao is called the Abyss (*yuan* 淵) which “seems like the ancestor of the ten thousand beings”. This stage is an upward return to the center of all centers in all the states of existence, going beyond humanity, becoming transcendent man (*shenren* 神人), “turning back to being the Ultimate Nothingness”. Third, Dao is Still (*zhan* 湛) “as existing forever”. This third stage is a downward return to the human state bringing along divine qualities, re-manifestation of the transcendent man in the human world clothing the appearance of true man, and “turning back to being an uncarved block”.

With respect to the pivotal place of the conception of life in Daoism, sages has given a special attention to the symbol of water according to its creative or life-giving aspect, too. As we know, from the far antiquity, intensely symbolical mind of the Chinese had taken symbolical aspects to writing, or

if one prefers, depicting of characters. The old form of the Chinese character for water, called *shui* 水 (𠄎) depicts the trigram Kan (坎; 三) of the *Yijing* (易經), but in a vertical shape and additional vision of waveform. The trigrams, above all, represent the archetypes (*xiang* 象) governing possibilities of manifestation in the pre-eternal Heaven (*xiantian* 先天) with the Principle itself.³ Next to this, they are symbols of the archetypes in manifested states governing exteriorized objects in the posterior Heaven (*houtian* 後天). The trigram water naturally includes both the mentioned states. It is firstly a symbol of the passive aspect for the emanation of the Great One (*Taiyi* 太一) or the first product of it, since it is the treasury of possibilities of manifestation as well as the destination to which all things shall return. Among the texts recently discovered in a tomb in Guodian, there is a Daoist texts, generally called *Taiyi Sheng Shui* (太一生水) which describes water as the first product of the Great One above Heaven:

The Great One gives birth to Water. Water returns and assists the Great One to complete production of Heaven. Heaven returns and assists the Great One to complete production of Earth ... Therefore, the Great One conceals in Water and moves in Time ... Because of its circulation, it becomes the mother of the ten thousand beings.³

The Great One above Water strictly evokes the throne of *ar-Rahmān* upon Water mentioned above. In the *Laozi* too, it is the One who is cause of existence, permanence, clarity and stillness of Heaven and Earth (and all beings):

Heaven gained the One and became purified; Earth gained the One and became still. Spiritual beings gained the One and became subtle ... The ten thousand beings gained the One and came to life.³

Although there is no mention of water in this passage, yet water's being "close to Dao" can be understood in this sense:

The transcendental Excellence is similar to water. Water is excellent and benefits the ten thousand beings with no contend. It resides where most people avoids. Thus, it is close to Dao.³

Water as a symbol of the All-possible aspect of the Great One, equivalent to the great element of the throne of Life for Ibn 'Arabī, denotes the state of the Water-veiled Immersion (*Hunlun* 混淪), the word consisting of two characters which both contains the particle 水 (water).³ These pre-eternal waters, however, are manifested in the non-formal domain of existence with the corresponding quality as containing possibilities of manifestation or, in accordance with our preceding expressions, as immersing indefinite lives of beings pertaining to the successive states of existence. Curiously, the word for the celestial mountainous paradise of Xiwangmu (西王母, the immortal Empress of the West), i.e. *Kunlun* (崑崙) is both vocally and visually has a great similarity to *Hunlun* (混淪, the water-veiled immersion). The only difference is that the semantic particle 水 (water) in *Hunlun* is replaced by 山 (mountain) denoting that the possibilities of manifestation of *Kunlun*, which clearly belongs to the subtle manifestation, are contained in the unmanifested state of the *Hunlun*. Here, mountain is a symbol of determination on the one hand, and the mediator of the downward movement of mountainous streams, or possibilities of the gross state, on the other. Also, the famous diagram of the 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣), in the form of a mountain upon the sea of the trigram *kan* (坎; 三) with vast rivers flowing downward to the sea, must be linked to this subject.³

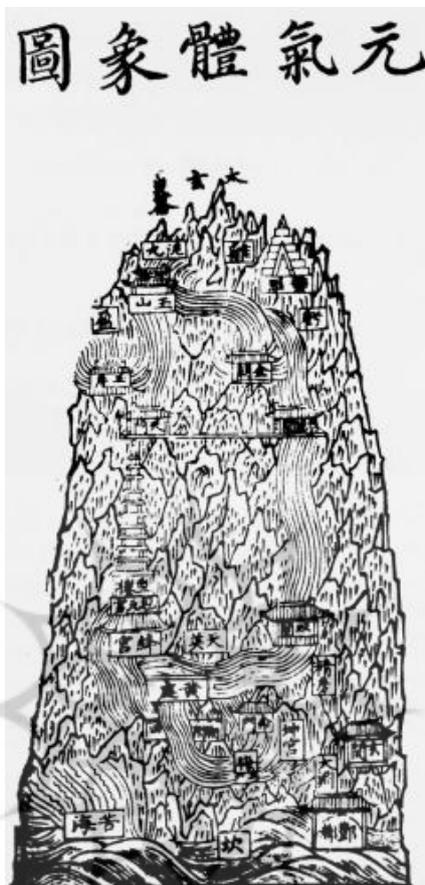


Diagram of Symbolical Impression of the Primordial Breath

A mythological expression of this water is stated by Yuanduzi (緣督子 aka. Zhao Youqin 趙有欽):

Heaven is similar to a ball of yarn half-filled with water. On the water afloat a wooden plate which represents the great Earth. All beings, all the races of men, and all the ten thousand kinds of entities are all positioned on the plate. This ball is constantly rotating, a rotation without being felt or known by the beings on the plate. Heaven is daily and nightly rotating and Earth is inside it, but men and beings residing on the Earth are still with no movement.³

This image accords with the theory of the spherical Cosmos (*huntian lun* 渾天論) which envisage Heaven as shaped like an egg inside which Earth is its yolk.⁴ It is here that Water, substituted for Man of the Great Triad (*sancai* 三才, Heaven, Earth, and Man), becomes a term of the Three Realms (*sanjie* 三界, Heaven, Earth, Water).⁴ Among the three, the Water realm is the middle one between non-formal and formal states, just as it is so in the pre-eternal state, between the Principle and manifestation. This intermediate position of this realm, which connects it somehow to the subtle manifestation, is confirmed by the fluid quality of water and its alchemical substitute, Mercury,⁴ as well as the rain coming down from heaven to the earth. Let us once again remember the Quranic verse, “And He is the One Who sends down water from Heaven. Then by means of water, We bring forth vegetation of everything,” (*Quran*, 6:99) that is, seeds of life of everything, comparable to the Daoist concept of the ‘essence-spirit’ (*jing* 精) which is always associated with water.⁴ Here, due to its downward quality, water bestows the life of celestial consciousness to the terrestrial insentient matter.

To sum up, we will mention that study of living symbols, not vague mythical elements, through correspondences of traditional doctrines, provides us new horizons leading to a rich amount of results in mutual understanding them. Here, we briefly examined the symbolism of water in two esoteric teachings of Daoism and Sufism. We saw that in spite of numerous symbolical aspects of water, Sufism and Daoism have many analogous visions in common, especially from the point of view that takes the concept of life as the core of the symbolism.

Endnotes

1 Ivan Aguéli (for the first time in 1911), René Guénon and Toshihiko Izutsu have presented some essential correspondences between these two traditions. See René Guénon, *Insights into Islamic Esoterism and Taoism* (NY, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis,

2004); Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (California: UC Press, 1984).

2‘The One’ or Unicity (*al-Wāḥid*) is one of the names (*al-asmā*) of Allah that is itself the first determination of Him as ‘the One without a second’ or ‘Unity’ (*al-Aḥad*). *Al-Wāḥid* is the ultimate source of everything, while it has its principle in *al-Aḥad*. On this question, one may readily recall the *Laozi’s* formula: “Dao gives life to the One.” (ch. 42) 道生一。

3This poem, composed by Shaikh Mu‘ayid ad-Din Jundī, is quoted in Shaikh ‘Abd ar-Raḥmān Jāmī in his *Explanations on Ibn ‘Arabī’s Nuṣūṣ (Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ)* in a chapter which is devoted to the symbolism of ocean and its waves (Jāmī, Abd ar-Raḥmān, *Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ*, ed. ‘Aṣim Ibrāhīm al-Kayyālī [Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-Ilmiyah, 2005], pp. 60-61).

البحر بحر على ما كان في قدم / ان الحوادث امواج وانهار / لا يحجبنيك اشكال تشاكلها / عمن تشكّل فيها فهي استار.

4 ‘Irāqī, Fakhr ad-Dīn, *Collection (Kulliyāt)*, ed. Sa‘īd Nafīsī (Tehran: Ketābkhāneh Sanāyī, 1984) p. 92.

جملة يك چیز است موج و گوهر و دریا ولیک / صورت هر يك خلافي در میان انداخته.

5 Jāmī, *Naqd an-Nuṣūṣ*, p. 92.

و تسميته الرحمن عبارة عن انبساط وجوده المطلق على شؤونه ظاهرة بظهوره؛ فأَنَّ الرحمة نفس الوجود، والرحمن الحق من كونه وجوداً منسبطاً على كل ما ظهر به، ومن حيث كونه أيضاً باعتبار وجوده له كمال القبول لكل حكم في كل وقت بحسب كل مرتبة و حاكم على كل حال.

6 Quran, 11:7.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي خَلَقَ السَّمَاوَاتِ وَالْأَرْضَ فِي سِتَّةِ أَيَّامٍ وَكَانَ عَرْشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ.

7 Quran, 13:17

أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَسَالَتْ أَوْدِيَةٌ بِقَدَرِهَا.

8 C.f. *Mishkāt al-Anvār* quoted from Lings, Martin, “The Quranic Symbolism of Water”, in *Studies in Comparative Religion*, Vol. 2, No. 3. (Summer, 1968). It must be noted that the heart (*al-Qalb*) in Islamic tradition is, before everything else, the faculty of knowledge: “There may be hearts for them to think.” (*Quran*, 22:46) In this respect, *al-Qalb* can be compared with some specific uses of *xin* (心) in the Far-Eastern tradition, considering that both possess a vertical hierarchy from ‘Human heart’ (*renxin* 人心) to ‘Dao heart’ (*daoxin* 道心).

9 Quran, 21:30.

وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيًّا.

10 Quran, 6:99.

وَهُوَ الَّذِي أَنْزَلَ مِنَ السَّمَاءِ مَاءً فَأَخْرَجْنَا بِهِ نَبَاتَ كُلِّ شَيْءٍ.

11 See Lings, Martin, “The Quranic Symbolism of Water”.

12 Ibn ‘Arabī, “The Bolt for the Restless” (*Uqlat al-Mustawfiz*) in *Ibn ‘Arabī’s ‘Arabī’s*

Treatises (Rasā'il Ibn 'Arabī), ed. Sa'īd Abd al-Fattāh (Beirut: 2002), vol. 2, p. 85.

فعرش الحيات هو عرش المشينة وهو مستوى الذات و هوش العرش الهوية. قال الله تعالى: "وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيًّا" و قال فيه " كَانَتْ عَرَشُهُ عَلَى الْمَاءِ " أى اظهر حياة فيكم "لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" وكذلك قال تعالى فى موضع آخر "الَّذِي خَلَقَ الْمَوْتَ وَالْحَيَاةَ لِيَبْلُوكُمْ". فجعل "لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" إلى جانب الحياة، فإن الميت لا يُنخبر وهو قوله: "عَلَى الْمَاءِ لِيَبْلُوكُمْ" وهو قوله تعالى: "وَجَعَلْنَا مِنَ الْمَاءِ كُلَّ شَيْءٍ حَيًّا" فهو العنصر الاعظم، اعنى فلك الحياة، وهو اسم الأسماء و مقدمها و به كانت.

Ibid, p. 79.

The idea of 'life' seems undeductible to 'knowledge' in Daoism, although it is so in other traditions.

Zhuangzi, Ch. 23 ("The True Scripture of the Southern Flowers" [*nanhua zhenjing* 南華真經] in *The Cannon of Dao* [*zhonghua daoang* 中華道藏] [Beijing: Huaxia Pub., 2003], vol. 13, p. 50). 生者，德之光也。The Daoist usage of the *De* (德; lit. uprightness) denotes mainly the axis leading to Dao, and secondly the center of a specific state intercepted by the axis. The *De* is the compass showing the Way; comparable to the Sufi concept of *vajh al-Haqq* (face of the Truth) as "what by means of which everything is the Truth, for nothing has reality unless by the Truth." (Jorjānī, Ali bin Muhammad, *The Definitions [at-Ta'rifāt]* [Tehran: Nasir Khusrou Pub., 1991], p. 110)

وجه الحق: هو ما به الشيء حقا اذ لا حقيقة لشيء إلا به تعالى.

1 . Li Jiamou 李嘉謀, "Commentary on Pre-Eternal Scripture of Dao and the De Spoken by Yuanshi" (*yuanshi shuoxiantian daode jing zhujie* 元始說先天道德經註解) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 11, pp. 160-161. 物得道生，道失物死，得失相生，道同出入。

1 . Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎, "Discussions on Sitting and Forgetting" (*zuowang lun* 坐忘論) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 26, pp. 28. 人之所貴者生，生之所貴者道。

1 . Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄, "Ultimate True Conversations of the True Man of Non-Action and Longevity" (*wuwei qingjing changsheng zhenren zhiren yulu* 無為清靜長生真人至真語錄) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 26, pp. 548. 生者，抱道則真生也。

1. Liezi 列子, "Central Emptiness and Ultimate Uprightness" (*chongxu zhide zhenjing* 沖虛至德真經) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 15, p. 1. 有生不生，有化不化。不生者能生生，不化者能化化。

2 . Heshang Gong 河上公, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De" (*daode zhenjing zhu* 道德真經註) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 9, pp. 134-135. Those who

peremptorily views Heshang Gong's commentary only as a handbook of meditative practices, will object that *ziran changsheng dao* must solely be read as the way of practicing naturalness and longevity. We simply refer them to the forgotten commented text, to the explicit distinction between *dao ke dao* (the *dao* which is a way) and *changdao* (the Eternal Dao, which is not a way like that of practicing naturalness, but the Absolute Way).

2 . The Chinese character *xing* (性, 'nature') which denotes primal nature when used for human being, taken as an equivalent of *ar-ruh* (the spirit) by Hui Chinese Sufis, is comprised of the particle 生 meaning 'life'. Importance of this notice is all the more justified with the Daoist idea of 'nature' which is closely related to that of 'life'. As Zhuangzi says, "Nature is the substance of life." (*Zhuangzi*, Ch. 23) 性者，生之質也。

2 . Heshang Gong, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", p. 140. 人法地，地法天，天法道，道法自然。【道性自然，無所法也。】

23See Guanyinzi 關尹子, "True Scripture of Archetypal Beginning" (*wenshi zhenjing* 文始真經) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 8, p. 7. 故曰天，曰命，曰神，曰玄，合曰道。

24*Daoxing* is commonly rendered as the Dao-nature to suggest as being borrowed from the Mahāyāna idea of the *buddhadhātu* or Buddha-nature, a load that can be but an orientalist presupposition.

25Meng Anpai 孟安排, "The Pivot of Daoist Terminology" (*Daojiao Yishu* 道教義樞) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 5, p. 572. 道性者理存真極，義實圓通，雖復冥寂一源，而亦備周萬物，煩惑所覆，暫滯凡因，障累若消，還登聖果，此其致也。

26See Heshang Gong's commentary on the first chapter of the *Laozi* in "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", vol. 9, p. 140, and Liu Yiming 劉一明, "Constitutional Meanings of the *Daodejing*" (*daodejing huiyi* 道德經會義), in the *Collection of the Laozi* (*laozi jicheng* 老子集成), (Beijing: Zongjia Wenhua Pub. 宗教文化出版社, 2011), vol. 10, p. 140.

27In the Daoist literature, the state of the Being is named variously as the 'Being' (you 有), the 'Great Being' (*youji* 有極), the 'Great Ultimate' (*taiji* 太極), the 'One' (yi 一), and the 'Great One' (*Taiyi* 太一). The state of the Non-Being also has various designations such as 'Non-Being' (*wu* 無), the 'Ultimate Non-Being' (*wuji* 無極; or

the Limitless), Emptiness (*xu* 虛), and so on.

²⁸This idea seminally derives from the *Laozi's* fourth chapter.

²⁹The 'Primordial Breath' (*yuanqi* 元氣) is referred to as "manifestation of the Whirlpool" (*chongyong* 沖用) which is "uniting with *yang* in Heaven and with *yin* in Earth both of which becomes one as the Great Unity". (Yin Qing 尹情, "Commentary on the Scripture of the Five Kitchens" [*wuzang jingzhu* 五廚經註], in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 23, p. 155) 沖用所謂元氣，沖用在天揚和，在地陰和，交合為泰合。 See also note 31 below.

³⁰*Laozi Daodejing*, Ch. 16. 萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，歸根曰靜，靜曰復命。復命曰常。知常曰明。

³¹Heshang Gong, "Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De", vol. 9, p. 140).
【作，生也...人當念重其本也...萬物無不枯落...各復反其根而更生也...故不復死也...安靜者是為復還性命，使不死也...乃道之所常行也...能知道之所常行，則為明。】

³²Sayyid Haidar Āmulī, *Jāme' al-asrār (Collection of Mysteries)* (Tehran: Elmi-o-Farhangi Publication, 1989), p. 381.

عين الحياة هو باطن الاسم الحى الذى من تحقّق به شرب من ماء عين الحياة الذى من شربه لا يموت أبدا لكونه يحيا بحياة الحق، وكلّ حى فى العالم يحيا بحياة هذا الإنسان لكون حياته حياة الحق... و إليها نسب الخضر(عليه السلام) لانه شرب منها قطرة.

³³*Laozi*, Ch. 21: "Dao is ... indistinct and indeterminable; integrated within it are the archetypes". 道...忽兮恍兮，其中有象。

³⁴*Taiyi Shengshui* 太一生水 in Meyer, Dirk, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China* (Leiden: Brill, 2012), pp. 353-354. 太一生水，水反輔太一，是以成天。天反輔太一，是以成地。...是故太一藏於水，行於時。...周而或...萬物母。

³⁵*Laozi*, Ch. 39. 天得一以清；地得一以寧；神得一以靈；...萬物得一以生。

³⁶*Laozi*, Ch. 8. 上善若水。水善利萬物而不爭，處衆人之所惡，故幾於道。 The Daoist idea of *tuirang* (推讓) or 'yielding in advancement' is best represented in the current of water, which cannot be stopped by obstructions though it does not struggle with them.

³⁸This diagram is found in Chen Zhixu 陳至虛, "Diagrams of the Book of the Great



dayao tu 上陽子金丹大要圖) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 27, p. 595.

30 Chen Zhixu 陳至虛, “Commentary on the Scripture of Salvation” (*duren shangpin miaojing zhu* 度人上品妙經註) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 3, p. 651. 天如繡毬, 內盛半毬水, 水上浮一板, 板比大地。板上置諸物, 比人品萬類; 毬常旋轉, 板上諸物未嘗覺知。天乃日夜旋轉, 地居其中, 人物在于地上, 安然不動。

40 This cosmological model is in contrast with that of the canopy-shaped Cosmos (*gantian lun* 蓋天論) which views Earth as a flat plane upon which Heaven is a canopy determining the extremes of the plane of Earth. Nonetheless, these models are merely symbolical images for interpreting the world, and they are not claimed as its concrete shapes.

41 Though comparable, it is obviously different from the Hindu or Buddhist *triloka*, in spite of using the same Chinese characters in Buddhist translations of the Sanskrit word.

42 The alchemical application of the symbolism demands a detailed study of its own. For a masterful study of the subject, thought mostly considering Hermetic tradition, see Guénon, René, *The Great Triad*, tr. H. D. Fohr (NY, Hillsdale: Sophia Perennis, 2001), Ch. 12. Of interest is that both in Chinese and Persian languages, terms for ‘mercury’ contains a word element denoting ‘water’. The Persian word *sīmāb* is a combination of *sīm* (silver) and *āb* (water). Similarly, the Chinese word *shuiyin* (水銀, mercury) consists of two characters of *shui* (水, water) and *yin* (銀, silver). In addition, the other Chinese word for mercury, the monosyllabic one, *gong* (汞) contains the semantic particle 水 (water) in the bottom half of the character.

43 The Chinese character *jing* (精, essence-spirit) contains the semantic particle of 米 that shows a seed of rice being green (青).

References:

Chinese:

- Chen Zhixu 陳至虛, “Diagrams of the Book of the Great Elixir of the Golden Alchemy by the Master Transcendent Yang” (*shangyangzi jindan dayao tu* 上陽子金丹大要圖) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 27, pp. 595-599.
- ———, “Commentary on the Scripture of Salvation” (*duren shangpin miaojing zhu* 度人上品妙經註) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 3, pp. 615-665.

- *Collection of the Laozi (laozi jicheng 老子集成)*, (Beijing: Zongjia Wenhua Pub. 宗教文化出版社, 2011), vol. 10.
- Guanyinzi 關尹子, “True Scripture of Archetypal Beginning” (*wenshi zhenjing 文始真經*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 8, pp. 7-21.
- Heshang Gong 河上公, “Commentary on the Scripture of Dao and De” (*daode zhenjing zhu 道德真經註*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 9, pp. 127-168.
- Li Jiamou 李嘉謀, “Commentary on Pre-Eternal Scripture of Dao and the De Spoken by Yuanshi” (*yuanshi shuo xiantian daode jing zhujie 元始說先天道德經註解*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 11, pp. 160-188.
- Liezi 列子, “Central Emptiness and Ultimate Uprightness” (*chongxu zhide zhenjing 沖虛至德真經*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 15, pp. 1-35.
- Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄, “Ultimate True Conversations of the True Man of Non-Action and Longevity” (*wuwei qingjing changsheng zhenren zhiren yulu 無為清靜長生真人至真語錄*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 26, pp. 546-558.
- Liu Yiming 劉一明, “Constitutional Meanings of the *Daodejing*” (*daodejing huiyi 道德經會義*), in the *Collection of the Laozi*, vol. 10, pp. 139-194.
- Meng Anpai 孟安排, “The Pivot of Daoist Terminology” (*Daojiao Yishu 道教義樞*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 5, pp. 541-579.
- Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎, “Discussions on Sitting and Forgetting” (*zuowang lun 坐忘論*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 26, pp. 28-34.
- Taiyi Sheng Shui 太一生水 in Meyer, Dirk, *Philosophy on Bamboo: Text and the Production of Meaning in Early China*, pp. 353-355.
- *The Cannon of Dao (zhonghua daozaog 中華道藏)* (Beijing: Huaxia Pub., 2003), vols. 5, 9, 10, 11, 13, 15, 23, 26.
- Yin Qing 尹情, “Commentary on the Scripture of the Five Kitchens” (*wuzang jingzhu 五廚經註*), in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 23, pp. 155-157.
- Zhuangzi, “The True Scripture of the Southern Flowers” (*nanhua zhenjing 南華真經*) in *The Cannon of Dao*, vol. 13, pp. 1-74.