

Article

The Westward Spread of Eastern Learning: Jung's Integration and Adaptation of Religious Daoism

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Abstract: The impact and influence that a religious tradition can have amongst culturally out-group populations can be quite unexpected and can even “boomerang” back home in equally unpredictable ways. This article explores one example of a Chinese religion’s unexpected cultural influence within the Western psychiatric community using religious Daoism and its appropriation by analytical psychologist Carl Jung. Although elements of religious Daoism, such as Daoist Internal Alchemy or the *Yijing*, integrated into a system of psychiatric practices, its influence was not straightforward. It will be argued that Jungian ideas such as active imagination, individuation, and synchronicity were directly influenced or inspired by Jung’s exposure to religious Daoism through Richard Wilhelm, Daoist texts, and his own adoption of Daoist Internal Alchemy techniques, an influence which would reverberate through both Western and Chinese popular culture.

Keywords: religious Daoism; analytical psychology; internal alchemy; Carl Jung; The Secret of the Golden Flower

1. Introduction

Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961), a Swiss psychologist, psychiatrist, and founder of analytical psychology, is often regarded as a maverick Freudian. Freud’s work on psychoanalysis was indeed a major source of inspiration during Jung’s early years, and their professional and personal relationship would also have an impact on Jung’s work throughout his life. Jungian analytical psychology, however, would develop from cultural influences quite distinct from those that had contributed to Freud’s psychoanalysis. This article argues that, amongst its many influences, the construction of Jung’s analytical psychology was profoundly shaped by inspiration from Chinese religious and philosophical thought, particularly from Daoism and Daoist internal alchemy or *Neidan* 内丹. Jung’s appropriation and psychological interpretation of Daoism furthermore contributed to the dissemination of Daoism from China to the rest of the world, even “boomeranging” back to China to some degree within Daoist studies and popular culture.

The academic literature analyzing the rich relationship between Jung’s analytical psychology and religious Daoism remains quite sparse. The English-language literature that does address this topic, such as David Rosen’s *The Tao of Jung: The Way of Integrity* (Rosen 1996) and Thomas Kirsch’s *The Jungians; A Comparative and Historical Perspective* (Kirsch 2000), tends to emphasize the biographical details of this connection, leaving many of the ideas specifically related to Daoism undeveloped. This article hopes to contribute analysis on the intellectual connections between Jung’s ideas and religious Daoism by addressing four key concepts, *Dao*, the Self, active imagination, and synchronicity, that are either directly related to, or were heavily influenced by, religious Daoism. However, it must also be recognized that, as his intellectual and personal relationship with Daoism was intertwined



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with his analytical psychology, biographical details cannot be overlooked, and prior to a conceptual analysis, sections two and three will address his personal and professional relationship with Daoism. Indeed, the intellectual relationship between psychoanalysis and religious Daoism (resulting in Jung's analytical psychology) is interconnected with his professional, personal, and spiritual development, with its origins found in Jung's early career in Freudian psychoanalysis.

2. Jung's Early Exposure to Freud and Daoism

Psychoanalysis served as the substratum for Jung's psychological worldview, which his later experiences with Daoism would push, deepen, and shape, leading to analytical psychology. In his early years, Jung followed the renowned psychologist Sigmund Freud (1856–1939), holding him in the highest regard. In his autobiography, Jung wrote about his impression of Freud:

Freud was the first man of real importance I had encountered; in my experience up to that time, no one else could compare with him. There was nothing the least trivial in his attitude. I found him extremely intelligent, shrewd, and altogether remarkable. And yet my first impressions of him remained somewhat tangled; I could not make him out. (Jung et al. 1989, p. 149)

At this point, Jung publicly defended Freud's psychological theories and supported Freud's theory of repression. As their interactions deepened, their relationship became increasingly close, to the extent that Freud had the intention to publicly declare Jung as his academic successor. However, Jung had begun to develop opposing views to those of Freud and was thus unwilling to accept this title. Academic differences began to emerge, especially after their trip to America, during which Jung and Freud developed significant disagreements on certain issues, ultimately leading to their intellectual decoupling and academic separation. As Jung recalls, "in 1912 my book *Wandlungen und Symbole der Libido* was published, and my friendship with Freud came to an end. From then on, I had to make my way alone." (Jung et al. 1989, p. 206). In 1913, Jung resigned from his professorship at the University of Zurich, completely severing ties with Freud.

Jung inherited Freud's psychoanalysis while also developing and expanding his theories. Jung's concept of the collective unconscious, for example, is undoubtedly an effective development and broadening of Freud's theory of the individual unconscious, and later theories on archetypes, synchronicity, the self, individuation, and the system of introverted and extraverted psychological types are significant contributions to psychology and the exploration of the unknown human psyche. While Freud's psychological theories were adopted and advanced by Jung, the latter's unique developments from this Freudian foundation can, to a certain degree, be credited to his relationship with Daoist thought.

Jung was exposed to Daoist thought early on, having read Herbert Silberer's works on Daoist alchemy before meeting Freud. At that time, Jung did not realize the significance of internal alchemy, only considering alchemy "as something off the beaten track and rather silly." (Jung et al. 1989, p. 204). In the days following his departure from the University of Zurich, Jung entered a period of turmoil, about which he wrote, "After the parting of the ways with Freud, a period of inner uncertainty began for me. It would be no exaggeration to call it a state of disorientation. I felt totally suspended in mid-air, for I had not yet found my own footing." (Jung et al. 1989, p. 170). It was not until later, after meeting Richard Wilhelm, that he found the courage to restart his academic research. Wilhelm re-introduced Jung to Daoist thought, which brought illumination and inspiration to what would become the construction of Jungian analytical psychology.

Upon re-encountering Daoist thought, Jung realized the significance of the ancient wisdom of the Daoist tradition and became deeply attracted to and fascinated by it. In

1916, to commemorate his departure from Freud and the rebirth of the “new” Jung, he wrote the mystical essay heavily influenced by Daoism, “Seven Sermons to the Dead”. Afterwards, he completed significant foundational works of his psychology, *Two Essays on Analytical Psychology* (Jung 1966a) and *Psychological Types* (Jung 1971). As David Rosen notes, “*Psychological Types* contains numerous references to Taoism; it is here that Jung first formally introduces the central Taoist concept that the union of opposites leads to harmony, a concept that became the primary maxim of Jung’s own psychology.” (Rosen 1996, p. 5). This orientation in research had a profound influence on him, evident in his approach to the concepts on *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 in Daoist religious belief, about which he wrote the following:

[the spirit] is a direction, or principle, of life that strives towards shining, supra-human heights. In opposition to it stands the dark, the feminine, the earth-bound principle (yin), with its emotionality and instinctiveness that reach far back into the depths of time, and into the roots of physiological continuity. Without a doubt, these concepts are purely intuitive insights, but one cannot very well dispense with them if one is trying to understand the nature of the human soul. (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 85)

While his knowledge of Daoism and internal alchemy was limited in his early years, through the influence of Richard Wilhelm, it would grow and fundamentally alter his approach to analytical psychology.

3. Richard Wilhelm and The Secret of the Golden Flower

3.1. A Psychological Interpretation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*

The interpretation of religious Daoism through the lens of 19th century psychology predates Jung, with Richard Wilhelm already having laid the foundation. Richard Wilhelm (1873–1930), a German missionary, took the name Wei Lixian 衛禮賢 after coming to China, styling himself as a native of Shandong, China. Wilhelm earned numerous accolades in the history of Sino-Western cultural exchange, such as “the Marco Polo of the inner world of China” and “spiritual intermediary between China and Europe”. He translated dozens of classical masterpieces, including the *Dao De Jing*, *Zhuangzi*, *Liezi*, *Yijing*, and *Lüshi Chunqiu*, also authoring works such as *The Soul of China* (Wilhelm 1928) and *Lao Tse and Taoism* (*Lao-Tse und Der Taoismus*) (Wilhelm 1987). However, it was his translation of the Daoist classic *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (*taiyi Jinhua zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨), one of the important texts in the practice of Daoist internal alchemy, into German for which he became most famous within fields related to Daoism.

In 1920, Wilhelm happened across a copy of the text, authored by Lü Yan 呂岩 (Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓). He keenly observed that “Lü Yan’s movement represented a reform. The alchemistic signs became symbols of psychological processes. In this respect there was a close approach to the original ideas of Lao-tse.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 6). Upon comparing it with Christian thought, Wilhelm concluded that the difference lay in the psychological content of this sect, or, as he wrote,

Perhaps it will strike many a European reader as remarkable that there appear in the text sayings familiar to him from Christian teaching, while, on the other hand, these same well known things which in Europe are very often taken only as ecclesiastical phrasing are here given quite a different perspective, because of the psychological connections in which they are used. (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 8)

Thus, Wilhelm straightforwardly connected the practice of Daoist internal alchemy with psychology, embracing it as not only a spiritual, but also a psychological, method. For example, he wrote that this text represents “an esoteric movement which has devoted itself

with energy to the psychological method, that is meditation, yoga practice.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, pp. 3–4). To validate his findings, in 1928, after completing his translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, Wilhelm sent the translated work to Jung.

Jung received the manuscript of Wilhelm’s translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* and a letter asking him to write a commentary for the book. He recalled that after having read it, “the text gave me undreamed-of confirmation of my ideas about the mandala and the circumambulation of the center. That was the first event which broke through my isolation. I became aware of an affinity; I could establish ties with something and someone.” (Jung et al. 1989, p. 197). Wilhelm’s unique insights into Daoist internal alchemy had a significant impact on Jung, providing him with both a deeper appreciation for Daoist thought and the intellectual foundation to bolster his theoretical constructs in analytical psychology, such as the unconscious, the self, and synchronicity.

Jung would reflect on these events in his essay “In Memory of Richard Wilhelm”, crediting Wilhelm with “transplanting in the soil of the West a tender seedling, the Golden Flower, giving us a new intuition of life and meaning.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 147). Wilhelm’s psychological interpretation of the hidden aspects behind Daoist internal alchemy and his translations of the *Yijing* and *The Secret of the Golden Flower* spread throughout the Western world, influencing the Western perception of Daoism and laying the foundation for the spread and integration of Daoism into Western psychology. Regarding the importance of Wilhelm in Jung’s intellectual, spiritual, and personal development, Jung further wrote the following:

Wilhelm’s life-work is of such great value to me because it explained and confirmed so much of what I had been seeking, striving for, thinking and doing, in order to meet the psychic suffering of Europe... In fact, I feel myself so very much enriched by him that it seems to me as if I had received more from him than from any other man. (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 149)

The impact of Wilhelm on Jung has been a subject of interest and research in both Chinese and Western academic circles. Some scholars point out that “in Jung’s mind, the significance of Wilhelm surpassed that of Eugen Bleuler, Freud, and Pierre Janet.” (Shen and Gao 2019, p. 67).

Jung proactively integrated the elements of Daoist thought that he felt were consistent into his analytical psychology framework. Jungian psychology’s many parallels with Daoist thought are clearly reflected in *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. Despite the differences between Jung’s interpretation and those of native Chinese tradition(s), a worthwhile topic of investigation in its own right, it provided significant inspiration and a turning point in Jung’s career.

The collaboration between Jung and Wilhelm on *The Secret of the Golden Flower* initiated alchemical studies within the framework of analytical psychology. Consequently, Jung concluded his writing of *The Red Book* and ventured into the worlds of alchemy and Daoist internal alchemy. During this process, core concepts of analytical psychology, such as archetypes and archetypal images, the self and the individuation process, and related archetypal imagery and active imagination, were nourished, enriched, and developed. (Shen and Gao 2019, pp. 198–99)

Jung and Wilhelm were connected through Chinese culture and thought, and together, they served as pillars supporting the bridge of Sino-Western cultural exchange. These two individuals from different worlds co-wrote a brilliant chapter in the history of Sino-Western cultural exchange, forever intertwining Eastern Daoism and Western psychology.

3.2. The Influence of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* on Analytical Psychology

Jung was captivated by the contents of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, writing, “a thorough westerner in feeling, I am necessarily deeply impressed by the strangeness of this Chinese text.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 81). Jung delved deeper into the knowledge embedded in Daoist internal alchemy, all of which he regarded as either bearing resemblance to his already developed work or influencing his future contributions to analytical psychology. For example, he wrote, “the book on types yielded the insight that every judgment made by an individual is conditioned by his personality type and that every point of view is necessarily relative. This raised the question of the unity which must compensate this diversity, and it led me directly to the Chinese concept of Tao.” (Jung et al. 1989, p. 208). After more than a decade of research, Jung was delighted to find that,

I had very soon seen that analytical psychology coincided in a most curious way with alchemy. The experiences of the alchemists were, in a sense, my experiences, and their world was my world. This was, of course, a momentous discovery: I had stumbled upon the historical counterpart of my psychology of the unconscious. The possibility of a comparison with alchemy, and the uninterrupted intellectual chain back to Gnosticism, gave substance to my psychology. (Jung et al. 1989, p. 205)

The revelations found in both Western and Daoist alchemical works provided ample evidence and strong resources for the content on unconsciousness that Jung pursued in the latter half of his life.

With this union of Daoist internal alchemy and analytical psychology in mind, Jung’s extensive commentary for *The Secret of the Golden Flower* suggests that modern psychology provides room not only for communication between Eastern and Western cultures but also for religious insights. This represented a momentous point of departure in both Jung’s personal and professional life, which he described as follows:

When I began my life-work in the practice of psychiatry and psychotherapy, I was completely ignorant of Chinese philosophy, and only later did my professional experience show me that in my technique I had been unconsciously led along that secret way which has been the preoccupation of the best minds of the East for centuries. This could be taken for a subjective fancy... but Richard Wilhelm, that great interpreter of the soul of China, fully confirmed the parallel for me. Thus he gave me the courage to write about a Chinese text which belongs entirely to the mysterious shadows of the Eastern mind. (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 85)

Clearly, Daoist internal alchemy not only provided Jung with inspiration but also provided him with a new framework for analytical psychology. According to Daoist internal alchemy-inspired analytical psychology, the relationship between spirit and the self transforms and develops what is to become the content of the unconscious. This realization was crucial for Jung, who explicitly recognized the influence of Daoist thought and practices: “Only after I had familiarized myself with alchemy did I realize that the unconscious is a process, and that the psyche is transformed or developed by the relationship of the ego to the contents of the unconscious.” (Jung et al. 1989, p. 209).

It was Jung’s in-depth study of Daoist internal alchemy that led him to integrate its insights into his analytical psychology, or perhaps it was his study of internal alchemy that led to his analytical psychology itself. To say this is no exaggeration, for as Jung himself wrote, “Through the study of these collective transformation processes and through understanding of alchemical symbolism I arrived at the central concept of my psychology: the process of individuation”. (Jung et al. 1989, p. 209). Daoist internal alchemy provided Jung

with significant cultural resources and crucial inspiration to confidently create analytical psychology, leading to one of its key characteristics—alchemical psychology.

3.3. *Analytical Psychology's Absorption of Daoism and Daoist Internal Alchemy and Its Cross-Cultural Considerations*

Jung greatly appreciated the intuitive psychological grasp represented by Daoism. He believed that this cognitive approach, which emphasizes the balance and pursuit of inner peace and tranquility, would not resort to the promotion of power and the extremes of excessive rationality. The balance represented by this method, he believed, was more conducive to psychological and spiritual health, or, as he wrote, “as the history of Chinese philosophy shows, it has never gone so far from central psychic facts as to lose itself in a one-sided over-development and over-valuation of a single psychic function. Therefore, the Chinese have never failed to recognize the paradoxes and the polarity inherent in what is alive. The opposites always balanced one another—a sign of high culture.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 85). The pursuit of harmony that characterizes Daoist internal alchemy became a pursuit for Jung in his formulation of analytical psychology.

With this understanding of the psychological significance embedded in Daoism, Jung criticized many Europeans' dismissive attitude toward Chinese culture. He reflected on the dominant perception of Chinese religious and philosophical thought in Europe at that time, pointing out how these views were fundamentally misguided:

The East has taught us another, wider, more profound, and higher understanding, that is, understanding through life. We know this way only vaguely, as a mere shadowy sentiment culled from religious terminology, and therefore we gladly dispose of Eastern ‘wisdom’ in quotation marks, and relegate it to the obscure territory of faith and superstition. But in this way we wholly misunderstand the ‘realism’ of the East. This text, for instance, does not consist of exaggerated sentiment or overwrought mystical intuitions bordering on the pathological and emanating from ascetic cranks and recluses. It is based on the practical insights of highly evolved Chinese minds, which we have not the slightest justification for undervaluing. (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 82)

He furthermore criticized those Westerners who appreciated Chinese culture as merely an exotic curiosity for their superficiality, writing, “Western imitation of the East is doubly tragic in that it comes from an unpsychological misunderstanding as sterile as are the modern escapades in Taos, the blissful South Sea Islands, and Central Africa, where ‘primitivity’ is earnestly being played at.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 83). Jung wrote this in the early 20th century, and it is a striking, albeit unfortunate, testament to the resilience of the image of the Other in our collective imaginations that, one hundred years later, both the dismissive attitudes toward Chinese thought and its exoticization remain all too common.

Of course, Jung's unique understanding of Daoism lies in his belief that the essence of Daoist culture holds psychological significance. Using a psychological perspective, he revealed Daoism's valuable contribution in that it promoted the development and cultivation of consciousness and personality. As Jung commented, “if we take the Tao to be the method or conscious way by which to unite what is separated, we have probably come close to the psychological content of the concept.” (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 98). Jung and Wilhelm's critical appropriation of Daoist thought is further reflected in his understanding of Daoist internal alchemy as an art of psychological cultivation, interpreting Daoism through his vocabulary of analytical psychology. Shen Heyong 申荷永 likewise notes the following:

Through his interpretation of Daoist internal alchemy techniques, he expressed the idea that Daoist non-intentional action (wuwei 無為) is the key to self-liberation.

Jung said that the art of allowing things to manifest spontaneously as taught by Daoism... became the key to unlocking the door of the unconscious. This later evolved into Jung's concept of the active imagination. (Shen 2005, p. 225)

Indeed, many elements of Jung's work display the seamless integration of analytical psychology into Daoist internal alchemy, making it difficult to differentiate what is the product of Daoism's influence on Jung and what is Jung's interpretation of Daoism through already-formed psychological ideas. Considering that influences can only ever occur through particular interpretations, however, distinguishing these two might be simply splitting hairs. The following section will engage with some of the concepts and themes central to Jung's work that display the most evident influences from Daoist internal alchemy, exploring how Daoist thought inspired, developed, and embodied many of the contributions made in the field of analytical psychology.

4. Conceptual Intersections Between Jung's Analytical Psychology and Daoism

4.1. Jung and Dao

Dao can be seen as the highest category in Chinese philosophy, used to refer to ultimate existence not only in Daoism and Daoist religion but also in Confucianism. For instance, the Confucian text the *Analects* records, "If in the morning I hear *Dao*, I can die in the evening!" (*The Analects*, Li Ren). Another passage states, "The gentleman seeks *Dao*, not food; he worries about *Dao*, not poverty." (*The Analects*, Wei Ling Gong). The importance of *Dao* in Chinese philosophy is evident; as Jin Yuelin once commented, "the most sublime concept in Chinese thought seems to be *Dao*. The pursuit of *Dao*, the cultivation of *Dao*, and the attainment of *Dao* are all aimed at *Dao* as the ultimate goal. The fundamental driving force of both thought and emotion also appears to be *Dao*." (Jin 1985, p. 15). Clearly, *Dao* is a concept with distinctive Chinese characteristics, making it difficult to find an exact equivalent in Western thought. In order to appreciate Jung's unique appropriation of Daoist thought, questions surrounding how he understood *Dao*, to what degree it reflected its meaning in the Chinese context, and how he reinterpreted it must be addressed.

Originally, *Dao* was not a philosophical concept. The *Shuowen Jiezi* 说文解字 explains *Dao* as a great road. During the Spring and Autumn period, the orbits of celestial bodies were called the "Heavenly *Dao*" (*tiandao* 天道) and the rules governing human affairs were called the "Human *Dao*" (*rendao* 人道). Thus, *Dao* extended from "road" to mean "orbit" and "rules/principles", involving the relationship between things and their rules or principles of change, thereby acquiring philosophical significance. Jung may not have specifically studied the semantic evolution of the term *Dao*, as his understanding of Chinese characters was admittedly limited. He did, however, have a sufficient understanding of the uniqueness of *Dao* in Chinese culture. In an example of both his cultural awareness of the centrality of *Dao* in Chinese thought and a self-awareness of his own European projections onto the concept due to being an outsider looking in, Jung wrote that his understanding of the concept "represents a European reaction to the wisdom of China... I have tried my hand at interpreting Tao." (Jung 1992, p. 67). Clearly, Jung understood that he could keenly perceive its wisdom, but he also knew that without a thorough interpretation being accessible to Europeans, they would not comprehend the concept.

As with many cross-cultural encounters, the first difficulty with the term arose in the work of translation. Wilhelm translated *Dao* as "meaning" (*Sinn* in German). While this translation was unable to convey the full connotations of "*Dao*", it was a clever handling. Translation is merely a linguistic conversion without the further work of interpretation, and it would be challenging to reveal the essence of this "core concept of Chinese philosophy" without thorough interpretation. Thus, in *Psychological Types*, Jung offered an expla-

nation of *Dao* as (1) the way; (2) the method; (3) the principle; (4) natural force or vitality; (5) the process of natural regulation; (6) cosmology; (7) the primary cause of all phenomena; (8) justice; (9) goodness; and (10) the eternal moral law. From this list of possible meanings, it is evident that Jung's understanding of *Dao* was relatively comprehensive, yet its meaning would take on a more specific sense when combined with his analytical psychology and would furthermore be infused with his analytical psychology on other concepts, such as the "Self", which will be discussed in more detail in the next section.

In the intellectual system of Daoism, *Dao* encompasses *yin* and embraces *yang*, representing the highest conceptual category. Similarly, Jung described the "Self" in analytical psychology as embodying the form of "a complexio oppositorum, a union of opposites, it can also appear as a united duality, in the form, for instance, of tao as the interplay of yang and yin... the self appears as a play of light and shadow, although conceived as a totality and unity in which the opposites are united." (Jung 1971, p. 214). When describing the deepest layers of the unconscious, Jung noted that this aligns with the Daoist state of the "*Dao*". He stated the following:

This is the primordial condition of things, and at the same time a most ideal achievement, because it is the union of elements eternally opposed. Conflict has come to rest, and everything is still or once again in the original state of indistinguishable harmony. You find the same idea in ancient Chinese philosophy. The ideal condition is named Tao, and it consists of the complete harmony between heaven and earth. (Jung 2024, p. 119)

As seen here, the parallels between Jung's analytical psychology and Daoism are perhaps nowhere more evident than in his descriptions of *Dao*. These parallels would be reflected throughout his work, representing an intertwining of analytical psychology with Daoism. The notion of *Dao* within Jung's analytical psychology was inextricably interrelated with the concept of the Self, which likewise reveals both Daoism's impact on Jungian psychology and his unique psychological interpretation of Daoism.

4.2. The Self and Individuation

Perhaps Jung's greatest contribution to psychoanalysis was his theory of the "collective unconscious", within which there exist several "archetypes" or "primordial images". Just as "complexes" exist in clusters within the personal unconscious, archetypes exist in the depths of the collective unconscious. According to Jung, the archetype "preforms the crystalline structure in the mother liquid, although it has no material existence of its own." (Jung 1981, p. 79). In Jungian psychology, the theory of archetypes is a foundational concept. Researchers have commented that "the archetype is thus Jung's basic concept, in that its significance for analytical psychology is comparable to that of gravity for Newtonian physics, relativity for Einsteinian physics, or natural selection for Darwinian biology." (Stevens 2012, p. 75). Jung proposed that archetypes influence individuals' lives by controlling the "life cycle", with some important archetypes being the persona, shadow, anima, and animus. However, Jung also believed that deep within the collective unconscious lay the most important archetype, which was both the center and the entirety of the psyche, this is, "the Self". Jung's description of the Self is relatively ambiguous, making it difficult to confine it to a specific definition. Moreover, Jung's understanding of the Self seemed to have undergone a developmental process, with different insights in different periods, many of which were heavily enhanced by influences from Eastern thought (Daoism, Buddhism, and Hinduism).

Up until 1928, Jung had only focused on the issue of the Self in his essay "Relations Between the Ego and the Unconscious" (Jung 1966b, pp. 123–25); however, by the 1940s, Jung had explicitly referred to the Self as an archetype, viewing it as both the center and the

entirety of the psyche. This change in terminology reflects the evolution of Jung's thought, occurring during the period from 1916 to 1928, during which he had frequent contact with Richard Wilhelm and actively absorbed Eastern thought. Many who are familiar with Daoist thought might recognize Jung's method of "self-realization", a form of mystic epistemology, as being similar to the "mysterious reflection" (xuan lan 玄覽) described in the *Dao De Jing*. The character lan 覽 carries the meaning of both "inspect" and "mirror", similar to the double meaning of the word "reflect" in the senses of both contemplation and an image being cast back. In the language of Jungian psychology, self-realization is also a process of transformation: the ego is the center of consciousness, while the Self is the center of both consciousness and the unconscious. The process of realization involves an individual's mystical experiences, allowing the Self to emerge and the ego to recede. This has certain similarities with "cultivating inner nature" (*xinggong* 性功) in internal alchemy.

Researchers believe that from the time Jung established his own school of thought until his passing, individuation, another concept closely related to the Self, remained a central theme and focus. It plays such a central role in Jung's work that in some regard, it is "perhaps his major psychological idea, a sort of backbone for the rest of the corpus." (Stein 2012, p. 196). This concept may have originated in his 1915 essay "Seven Sermons to the Dead", a mystical piece with strong Daoist inspirations. Indeed, the connection between this central theme and his Daoist influences is evident in that "individuation" means "integration", that is, transforming "complex opposites" into "coincident opposites" by integrating consciousness with the unconscious, the individual with the collective, and the particular with the universal. In addition to the clear connections with Daoism in the idea of the integration of opposites, individuation also parallels the Daoist alchemical process, greatly inspired by *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. Daoist internal alchemy emphasizes "refinement", while the key to Jungian psychology's individuation lies in integration. In broad terms, integration and refinement are not very different but are simply rooted in different cultural backgrounds. Jung's "individuation" borrows from Daoism, yet it exhibits contributions from multiple other sources, as well. When discussing integration, Jung certainly borrowed heavily from Daoist classics such as the *Yijing* and *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, emphasizing that "integration" was achieved through the complementary interaction of opposites and embracing *yin* and *yang*. However, Jung did not hesitate to use Christian terminology to interpret the "self" and "individuation". For instance, he regarded the image of God as a symbol of the self. Warren Colman, for example, notes that "while Jung retained some interest in the Eastern religious tradition, from the mid-1920s onwards, it was the Christian God-image (together with alchemy) that seems to have had the major hold on his own imagination." (Colman 2012, p. 159). Evidently, Jungian psychology embodies a spirit of straddling, or perhaps more appropriately, "integrating", both Eastern and Western cultures.

4.3. Active Imagination

"Active imagination", viewed by Jung as an analytical method of psychotherapy, is discussed by Jung according to various names, such as active fantasy, the transcendent function, the picture method, and the technique of introversion. It has been described variously as "a channel for 'messages' from the unconscious by any means; for example, by media such as painting, modelling or writing" (Samuels 1985, p. 12, quoted in Chodorow 2012, p. 229) or more abstractly as "the process by which a strong but flexible ego complex allows intangible unconscious material (complexes, dreams, and images) to be expressed in a tangible product such as painting, poetry, or song" (Kast 1991, p. 16, quoted in Chodorow 2012, p. 229). One of the fundamental elements that all researchers agree on is that active imagination is a distinctive technique in Jungian psychology that aims to

reveal the deepest contents of the unconscious. Whereas Freud had employed methods such as hypnosis, dream interpretation, and free association to explore the unconscious, Jung believed that these methods were indirect methods of communicating with the unconscious, while active imagination was a proactive and direct communication method. This attempt to transition from indirect communication to direct communication represents yet another parallel with Daoist internal alchemy, which offers practitioners a set of guidelines for refining energy and nurturing the spirit, helping them to actively explore their mental world.

Jung's active imagination can be seen as a hybrid of Daoist internal alchemy and basic psychoanalytic techniques. It is akin to a meditative process or other religious practices. Jung believed that the starting point of "active imagination" was a conflicted, repressed, or chaotic psychological state, within which the patient must "take the unconscious in one of its handiest forms, say a spontaneous fantasy, a dream, an irrational mood, an affect, or something of the kind, and operate with it. Give it your special attention, concentrate on it, and observe the alterations." (Jung 1977, p. 489). Simply put, active imagination involves two stages: first, allowing the unconscious to manifest, then reconciling with the unconscious. Jung emphasized a Daoist attitude of "non-action" (*wu wei* 無為) in this reconciliation process, which differed from traditional Western thinking: the images in the unconscious must be allowed to emerge naturally and spontaneously, without the patient's subjective preferences interfering. Regarding the necessity to relinquish control, he stated, "The individual must give himself to the new way completely, for it is only by means of his integrity that he can go further, and only his integrity can guarantee that his way does not turn out to be an absurd adventure." (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 95).

Using "active imagination", Jung particularly emphasized giving form to the images in the unconscious. For example, Jung's followers developed sandplay therapy from this idea. Art and poetry were also used as tools in the technique of active imagination. Jung himself referenced a Daoist internal alchemy painting, a diagram of the physical and spiritual body through analogous scenes of a landscape known as the *Neijing Tu* 內景圖 (inner landscape diagram), and its accompanying poem written next to the painting. The poem describes scenes from the painting with rather abstract verses such as, "iron oxen plow the land planting gold coins, carving stone a child threads them together. A single grain of millet contains the world, half a liter pot cooks mountains and rivers. The white-haired old man's eyebrows droop to the ground, the blue-eyed monk's hands support the heavens. If you ask about this profound understanding, beyond this profundity, there is no other." (see Shen 2005, p. 208). The poem and diagram depict the stages and methods of refining energy and nurturing the spirit which, for Jung, "the symbols and images contained within were sufficient to inspire the practice of analytical psychology." (Shen 2005, p. 208). Jung viewed the various images mentioned in the esoteric language of Daoist internal alchemy as unconscious images. Internal alchemy schools have different methods of the "dual cultivation of nature and life". According to Jungian psychology, these methods are specific applications of active imagination in ancient Eastern practices. Similarly, Buddhist meditation and Hindu yoga are also essentially methods of accessing active imagination. Thus, Jung referred to internal alchemy as "Daoist yoga", which might seem incongruous to Chinese readers. However, according to Jung's understanding, internal alchemy, yoga, and meditation only differ in form; their fundamental spirit and ultimate aims are the same. Because of the esoteric language often utilized in internal alchemy, it is difficult to judge how closely Jung's interpretation aligns with its original intent. To better understand the relation between the practices of active imagination and Daoism, we can compare Jung's methods with classics of Daoism, for example, *Dao De Jing*.

The concept of “purifying mysterious reflection” (*dichu xuanlan* 滌除玄覽) from chapter ten of *Dao De Jing* contains a few conceptual similarities with Jung’s method of active imagination. Chapter ten of the *Dao De Jing* discusses self-cultivation with the following language:

The spirit and body are held together, can they be kept from separating? Concentrating vital breath to the utmost supple, can it become like that of a newborn child? Purifying mysterious reflection, can it have no blemish?

Laozi believed that “a healthy life must be a unification of the form and the spirit without one-sided attachment. ‘Holding together’ means holding to *Dao*, by which one can achieve harmony between physical and spiritual life.” (Chen 2020, p. 113). The phrase “spirit and body are held together” can be understood from a Jungian psychological perspective as the initial state of active imagination in which emotions and fantasies must be “held” in the mind, not rejected: “Fantasy must be allowed the freest possible play, yet not in such a manner that it leaves the orbit of its object, namely the affect.” (Jung quoted in Chodorow 2012, p. 224). The subsequent process of image emergence and integration corresponds to “purifying mysterious reflection” to achieve “no blemish” clarity. The mirror-like “reflection” here symbolizes the mind, and “purifying mysterious reflection” means clearing away distractions and maintaining mental focus and purity, allowing images to emerge naturally. The final stage of “active imagination”, achieving reconciliation with the unconscious, aligns with the pursuit of “blemish-free” clarity.

Jung’s technique of “active imagination” inherits Freud’s “free association” but also emphasizes the natural expression of images from the unconscious. This approach is aligned with Laozi’s method of “purifying mysterious reflection”. While it cannot be definitively stated that Jung was directly inspired by this passage, it is almost certain that the technique of “active imagination” borrows from Daoist internal alchemy and early Daoist mental cultivation that was inspired by this passage.

4.4. Synchronicity

Daoist texts contain many reports of supernatural phenomena and astonishing coincidences. Although these phenomena cannot be explained by science and do not conform to the basic principles of scientific research—namely, reproducibility—they seem to be ubiquitous. We cannot simply dismiss them, labeling them as irrational superstitions. Jung paid great attention to the coincidences represented in Daoism and in the *Yijing*, proposing the concept of “synchronicity” to explain them. “Synchronicity” is one of the important concepts in Jung’s analytical psychology and was introduced under significant influence from Daoist thought, particularly from the *Yijing*, in which Jung expressed a strong interest. The *Yijing*, also known as the *Zhouyi* 周易 or *Book of Changes*, is widely regarded as one of the foundational texts of Chinese thought and religion, often referred to as “the head of the Six Classics” (*liujing zhi shou* 六經之首). Through an analysis of the sixty-four hexagrams, each composed of six lines representing either *Yin* or *Yang*, this text offers insights into the patterns of transformation between states of affairs, guiding practitioners as to when it is auspicious to act or remain still. In his memoirs, Jung detailed his experimental research using the *Yijing* in the practice of divination. He explained the use of reeds to practice the form of divination traditionally associated with the text “by referring the resultant oracles to one another in an interplay of questions and answers. All sorts of undeniably remarkable results emerged meaningful connections with my own thought processes which I could not explain to myself.” (Jung et al. 1989, p. 373). For the entire summer, Jung was consumed by questions regarding the mysteries and significance behind these connections. He further recorded, “I was preoccupied with the question: Are the I Chings answers meaningful or not? If they are, how does the connection between

the psychic and the physical sequence of events come about? Time and again I encountered amazing coincidences which seemed to suggest the idea of an acausal parallelism (a synchronicity, as I later called it)." (Jung et al. 1989, p. 374).

Jung introduced the concept of "synchronicity" in 1930, in a letter to Richard Wilhelm. "In a memorandum to Richard Wilhelm, Jung introduced the term 'synchronistic': 'The science of the I Ching is based not on the causality principle but on one which-hitherto unnamed because unfamiliar to us- I have tentatively called the synchronistic principle.'" (Jung, quoted in Lindorff 2004, p. 99). Jung attempted to provide a scientific explanation for the coincidences in the *Yijing* and sought to analyze them from a psychological perspective. Approaching the issues from the angle of how we perceive the passage of time, "Jung identified his newly formulated principle with the Taoist way of relating to time. Whereas the Western mind is attuned to the causal sequencing of events in time, the *Yijing* recognizes the meaning of a certain moment in time." (Lindorff 2004, p. 99). Jung recognized the necessity of incorporating the entire ancient philosophical concept into the psychological framework to understand the irrationality of the psyche. He defined "synchronicity" as "the simultaneous occurrence of a certain psychological state with one or more external events, which appear to be parallel and meaningful in a particular moment [mental] state—in some cases, vice versa." (Jung, quoted in Lindorff 2004, p. 99).

The issue of synchronicity troubled Jung for over twenty years, and the concept was proposed with the considerable support and approval of his patient and friend, the brilliant theoretical physicist and Nobel laureate Wolfgang E. Pauli. In a letter to Pauli, Jung wrote the following:

ever since the middle twenties, when I was investigating the phenomena of the collective unconscious and kept on coming across connections which I simply could not explain as chance groupings or "runs." What I found were "coincidences" which were connected so meaningfully that their "chance" concurrence would represent a degree of improbability that would have to be expressed by an astronomical figure. (Jung, quoted in Lindorff 2004, p. 100)

Pauli expressed great interest in Jung's concept of "synchronicity". Encouraged by Pauli, Jung provided an explanation for "synchronicity" from a psychological perspective. Jung discovered that "synchronicity's occurrence was accompanied by an emotional state fed by a deeply rooted (archetypal) energy, thereby connecting the synchronicity to the archetypal unconscious. He related the connection between psyche and matter to what he called the psychoid factor, a quasi-psychic aspect of archetype, which is energized during a synchronicity." (Lindorff 2004, p. 100). Pauli appears to have been sympathetic with this somewhat metaphysical assertion. This element of Jung's psychological theory would also be intertwined with his research in the *Yijing*, once more, as a result of the influence of Richard Wilhelm, but this time with Pauli also drawing inspiration from the ancient Daoist text.

Providing significant inspiration for Jung's notion of synchronicity, Wilhelm described the *Yijing*'s hexagram "Zhen" 雷 (representing "thunder", which triggers movement), as follows:

The fear and trembling engendered by shock come to an individual at first in such a way that he sees himself placed at a disadvantage as against others. But this is only transitory. When the ordeal is over, he experiences relief, and thus the very terror he had to endure at the outset brings good fortune in the long run. (Wilhelm 1977, p. 434)

This explanation significantly impacted Jung's thoughts and advanced the study of synchronicity. The associations made between synchronicity and ideas from the *Yijing*

were also extended to contributions made by Pauli, who was likewise influenced by the *Yijing*. As the foundational text for both religious and philosophical Daoism, as well as ancient Chinese thought more broadly, and given its centrality to the work of Richard Wilhelm—Jung’s mentor on Chinese thought and culture—it is fitting that the *Yijing* became a significant source of inspiration for Jung.

5. Conclusions: Psychological Daoism and Jung’s Psychological Experience of *Dao*

It is not clear whether Jung would have developed concepts such as active imagination or individuation were it not for his deep interest, indeed even lifelong dedication, to Daoist thought and practices. What is clear, however, is that if not for their Daoist influences, they would have been articulated quite differently, if at all. Jung’s approach to the integration of opposites within self-individuation, for example, draws heavily on Daoist imagery, and the process is often articulated through concepts such as the complementary nature of opposites from the *Dao De Jing* and the process of “refinement” from Daoist internal alchemy. Even in popular culture today, Jordan B. Peterson, a public intellectual and psychiatrist who was heavily influenced by Jung’s work, refers to Daoist imagery in his description of the integration and balance of opposites being “the Taoist juxtaposition of yin and yang... The Way, the Taoist path of life, is represented by (or exists on) the border between the twin serpents.” (Peterson 2018, p. 43).

Given Daoism’s history as an ancient tradition, it goes without saying that its influence on Jung’s analytical psychology far exceeds the reverse. However, the relationship between Daoism and Jungian psychology is not entirely one-sided, as Jung’s Daoism-inspired analytical psychology has, in turn, influencing modern Chinese interpretations of Daoism. Wilhelm’s German translation of *The Secret of the Golden Flower* along with Jung’s commentary has been translated into many languages, including English, French, Italian, Korean, and Japanese. In an unexpected twist, the text originally translated from Chinese into German has been translated from its foreign-language versions back into Chinese under the title *jihua de mimi* 金華的秘密, a direct translation of Wilhelm’s title. In fact, as a result of Jung’s influential commentary, it has been translated into Chinese recently multiple times, including translations by Deng Xiaosong 鄧小松 in 2011, republished in 2020 (Wilhelm and Jung 2011), and Zhang Butian 張卜天 in 2016 (Wilhelm and Jung 2016). In addition to Jung’s own works, the recognition of the connections between religious Daoism and psychology that Jung and Wilhelm first uncovered has become a burgeoning field of discourse in the Chinese-language literature. Chinese-language books such as Lü Xichen’s *The Wisdom of Daoist Health Cultivation* (Lü 2008) and Geng Daoxin’s *The Boundless Mind: Using Psychology to Unlock the Treasures of Daoism* (Geng 2023) integrate insights from Daoism and Daoist internal alchemy into Western psychology, particularly Jungian analytical psychology. The study of the Chinese-language literature deepening Daoist psychology through a Jungian perspective has only begun to gain traction in the last couple of decades and remains a promising yet underdeveloped area of research.

Daoist thought profoundly influenced Jung’s philosophy and understanding of human psychology, becoming an integral part of his personal life as he endeavored to understand and experience the existence of *Dao*. His fascination with Daoism led him to fully integrate Daoist principles into his life, and, as his longtime collaborator, Marie Louise von Franz, noted, “Jung favored Taoism, and he lived the Taoist philosophy.” (Rosen 1996, p. XXI). In his book *The Jungians; A Comparative and Historical Perspective*, Thomas Kirsch highlighted the development of analytical psychology in the contemporary world, pointing out that “Jung was deeply influenced by ancient Chinese wisdom. There has been a long-standing affinity between analytical psychology and Taoist philosophy.” (Kirsch

2000, p. 221). Toward the end of his life, at his hermitage at Bollingen, he immersed himself completely, experiencing profound psychological encounters by analyzing his dreams, embracing solitude, and engaging in active imagination through painting, writing, and carving (Rosen 1996, p. 10). Jung's relationship with Chinese culture is reflected in his wish for his work to "build a bridge of psychological understanding between East and West." (Wilhelm and Jung 2001, p. 136). Jung's openness to the influence of Daoist culture and practice, and its impact on modern psychology, can indeed be seen as constructing a cultural bridge between Eastern and Western cultures, a bridge that continues to facilitate the exchange of ideas from East to West and back again.

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