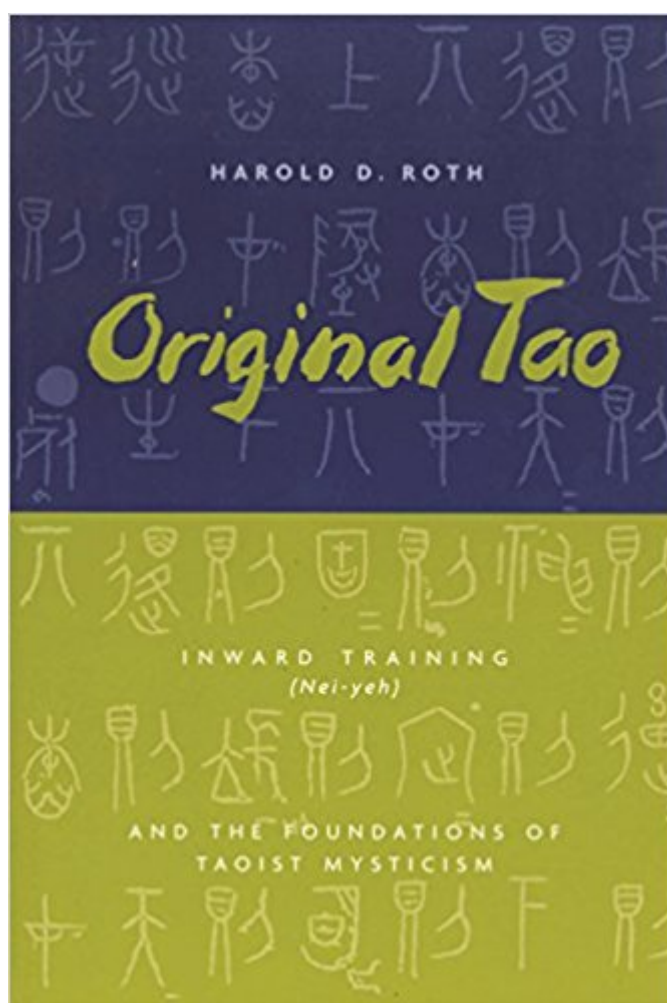


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# Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) And The Foundations Of Taoist Mysticism (Translations From The Asian Classics)



## Synopsis

Revolutionizing received opinion of Taoism's origins in light of historic new discoveries, Harold D. Roth has uncovered China's oldest mystical text—the original expression of Taoist philosophy—and presents it here with a complete translation and commentary. Over the past twenty-five years, documents recovered from the tombs of China's ancient elite have sparked a revolution in scholarship about early Chinese thought, in particular the origins of Taoist philosophy and religion. In *Original Tao*, Harold D. Roth exhumes the seminal text of Taoism—*Inward Training* (Nei-yeh)—not from a tomb but from the pages of the *Kuan Tzu*, a voluminous text on politics and economics in which this mystical tract had been "buried" for centuries. *Inward Training* is composed of short poetic verses devoted to the practice of breath meditation, and to the insights about the nature of human beings and the form of the cosmos derived from this practice. In its poetic form and tone, the work closely resembles the *Tao-te Ching*; moreover, it clearly evokes Taoism's affinities to other mystical traditions, notably aspects of Hinduism and Buddhism. Roth argues that *Inward Training* is the foundational text of early Taoism and traces the book to the mid-fourth century B.C. (the late Warring States period in China). These verses contain the oldest surviving expressions of a method for mystical "inner cultivation," which Roth identifies as the basis for all early Taoist texts, including the *Chuang Tzu* and the world-renowned *Tao-te Ching*. With these historic discoveries, he reveals the possibility of a much deeper continuity between early "philosophical" Taoism and the later Taoist religion than scholars had previously suspected. *Original Tao* contains an elegant and luminous complete translation of the original text. Roth's comprehensive analysis explains what *Inward Training* meant to the people who wrote it, how this work came to be "entombed" within the *Kuan Tzu*, and why the text was largely overlooked after the early Han period.

## Book Information

Series: Translations from the Asian Classics

Paperback: 272 pages

Publisher: Columbia University Press; Bilingual edition (November 24, 2004)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0231115652

ISBN-13: 978-0231115650

Product Dimensions: 6.2 x 0.6 x 9.2 inches

Shipping Weight: 12.6 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.6 out of 5 stars 14 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #78,540 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #48 in Books > Religion & Spirituality > Other Eastern Religions & Sacred Texts > Taoism #64 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > Eastern > Taoism #529 in Books > Textbooks > Humanities > Religious Studies

## Customer Reviews

In his rigorous scholarship of textual archaeology and mystical hermeneutics, Harold Roth has given us invaluable insights, the analytical tools and a perspective to examine the religious traditions of not only China, but of the rest of the world as well. (Franklin J. Woo China Review International) Searching for the origins of things remains a perennial favorite of Western scholars. For millennia, this quest has been at the core of innumerable scholarly projects.... Harold Roth's *Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* continues this time-honored investigation, applying it to Taoist mystical writings, in a search for what Roth calls 'the original tao.' (John A. Tucker *Philosophy East & West*) Here is a work that does justice to the beauty of this long poem, for so long neglected to the virtually exclusive benefit of Zhuangzi and Laozi.... The reader will find in the quality of the textual edition, in the numerous translation discoveries, and in the willingness to provide maximum coherence to this text, a profound and original effort. (Romain Graziani *T'oung Pao*) An estimable achievement by one of the foremost scholars of early Taoism in North America... powerful and original. (Paul Rakita Goldin *Sino-Platonic Papers*)

Revolutionizing received opinion of Taoism's origins in light of historic new discoveries, Harold D. Roth has uncovered China's oldest mystical text—the original expression of Taoist philosophy—and presents it here with a complete translation and commentary.

Great book. Essential text on your Taoist bookshelf

It gives a better understanding on the essence of Tao

Excellent!

also, informative.

Roth's *Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism* is a seminal work. Simply put, *Inward Training* is the oldest known and most essential of the Taoist texts, preceding the *Tao Te Ching* and the *Chuang Tzu*, and setting the precedent for our understanding of the Tao and of original Taoist meditation practices. In this book, Roth makes a convincing scholarly case for the precedence (in time, anyway) of *Inward Training*, and puts it into the context of a genre of texts, originally oral, that were rendered in writing in approx. the 4th c. BC. In regard to literary form, it is of the same genre as the *Tao Te Ching*, but Roth demonstrates, through an incisive sketch of the genealogy of its ideas, that *Inward Training* came first. It is not a reconstructed text (though one short section out of its 26 verses is clearly a Confucian interpolation), but was always known, having been included in the *Kuan Tzu* anthology. Until Roth's book, however, its importance as an ur-Taoist text went essentially unnoticed. In terms of its content, it paints a very concise picture of the meaning of the Tao (though, like most Taoist writings, through circumlocutions, since the "real Tao defies language"), one that is more concrete, more physical even, than that of the *Lao Tzu* (*Tao Te Ching*). *Inward Training* sees *ch'i* as the physical expression of the Tao, something that can be fostered within the body & mind through particular techniques. It is devoid of the (now ancient) Chinese political concerns of the *Lao Tzu*, and thus, for me anyway, more pertinent to a contemporary mystical practice. It is also worthwhile for its more direct treatment of meditation practice, without all the intricate metaphors of alchemy that later took over Taoist thought. The method is simple, a shutting off of the conscious mind in meditation, and thereby allowing the Tao, which is latent, to come of its own accord. The metaphor of *Inward Training* is simply to "clean out the lodging place of the Tao" i.e. to clear the mind, to be still and calm, and to let the Tao manifest itself. There's nothing here about lead and mercury; it's not necessary. Roth makes it clear that *Lao Tzu* is a fictional creation, that these early texts were collectively composed over time, and sees it as part of a continuum of early Taoist thought. The reasons for its eclipse by the now more well-known texts are political and historical, but Roth does a great service in bringing *Inward Training* back to its rightful position as an important part of the development of Taoism. For me, it's in fact probably more important than any other. Why it hasn't been universally embraced I'm not sure.

vested interests, I suspect. But if you're serious about understanding Taoism and its meditation techniques, no one can ignore *Inner Training* or Roth's important book. First there was *Inner Training* only then, as Roth demonstrates, could the *Tao Te Ching* even come about, as an elaboration on the former. *Inner Training* is indeed the "original Tao."

This is a must for anyone who practices traditional Daoist meditation and who wishes to better understand the roots of that tradition. The translation of the Inner Training chapter of the *Kuanzi* alone is worth the price of the book. The depth of Roth's scholarship is clear, and all in all I think he makes a good case for the provenance of Inner Training as representative of the earliest advocacy for "Daoist" meditative practice. I do, however, think he gets carried away in his desire to sum up all of Daoism under the rubric of those who practiced breathing mediation rather than as defined by their philosophies. This stands if all who were of Daoist temperament made strong advocacy for this practice. Sometimes he must make a very long stretch in his attempts to demonstrate that they do. Sometimes his own advocacy seems to exceed his scholarship. My real concern is that I understand Zhuangzi as making a radically different statement than that enunciated in Inner Training. The latter declares its belief in a metaphysical Dao that is real enough to "unite" with, and a *chi* that one can "accumulate." All this leads to "understanding" the nature of Reality. Its Daoism is a very serious project of spiritual attainment. It is steeped in belief. Zhuangzi would have had none of it. His entire philosophy turns on believing in no such things. His call for radical non-dependence includes both the eschewal of all metaphysics and any dogmatic advocacy for a technique. Yes, Zhuangzi speaks of meditation and *chi*. He also makes use of Confucius without being a Confucian, of Mozi without being a Mohist, and of Logicians without being a Logician. When it comes to understanding Zhuangzi, it's best to first get a sense of his spirit of intellectual anarchy lest one become entrapped by literalism. Perhaps Zhuangzi cannot be taken as a proper "Daoist." It doesn't matter. In any case, I offer an alternative take on Zhuangzi in my blog [...].

I have studied every book in English on the subject of Tao for the last forty plus years. If it was left to me to select a single book to represent the essence of Taoist thought it would be this book. The

sincerity, simplicity and direct pointing of the text is beyond compelling. For anyone who has even the slightest natural curiosity about the essential nature of existence, you will experience a great remembering, a great opening within your being as you make your way across the pages.

Roth has done a tremendous service to humanity in this work. Through his diligent scholarship he has brought to life an obscure text that should have its place among the celebrated Taoist texts. Roth begins with a deep digging into the history of this text. Though it doesn't have the heart of the text itself, it is definitely worth a read to find out the critical background of the text. Next Roth offers his translation, which I found on point and beautiful. The final chapters offers his thematic review, which works also as sort of a commentary to the text. I would highly recommend every practicing western Taoist to take a look. Though much of what is understood of the Tao has been written in the Lao Tzu and Hua Hu Ching, this text gets to the heart of practice, and that is the development of inward training, and the supremacy of breathing meditation to align oneself with the "vital essence", as Roth put it.

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