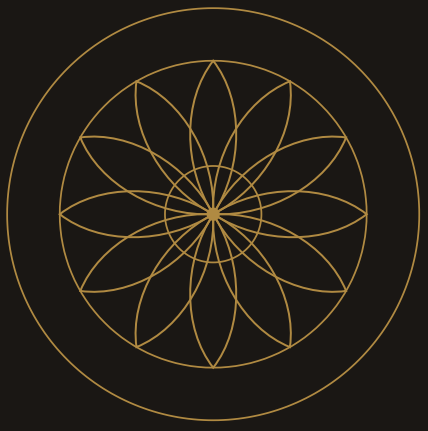


THE SACRED DIVIDE

THE FULL RECORD

Taoism / Daoism

East Asian family

HONOR THE FAITH · NAME THE MACHINERY

TEXT CHECKED 2026-10-03

Before you begin

This is the record of Taoism / Daoism in *The Sacred Divide*. It has 27 sections, the same 27 used for every tradition, so that any section can be set beside the same section for another. Every fact is sourced.

Before each section, a short note says what the section is built to show, so you know what you are looking at before you read the detail.

After each section, a note headed *Why this matters to you* points at the part of the section most likely to touch an ordinary reader: a member, a donor, a parent, a voter, someone thinking about leaving, or someone outside forming an opinion. It usually ends with a question. The questions are not traps. They are the ones a careful reader would ask anyway.

The hard questions in section 23 are set out one at a time: the question, why it is asked, and an example already documented in this record.

Where a note states a fact, the fact comes from this record's own tables and cited sources or, in a few places, from a well-known research finding named in the text. Corrections are logged, with their dates, in the last section, *What changed on this page*.

Contents

01 At a glance 10

Disclosure scorecard

02 A day inside 12

03 The forefront 14

The unanswered question · The widest gap between word and record · One cost of leaving, beside its denial · The strongest objection, answered

04 What healthy looks like here 17

05 History 19

Timeline · Moments in the room

06 Branches & variants 24

07 Structure 25

Size and shape · Authority · The top of the chain · Who holds what

08 Law & state here 30

Who can compel an answer

09 Money 32

Where it comes from · Follow the money · Pipelines this tradition shares · Money in numbers

10 Genealogy 37

11 Reach 40
Information · Children · Bodies

12 The 30 techniques 44
All thirty at a glance · Stage 1 · Idealize · Stage 2 · Hook · Stage 3 · Devalue · Stage 4 · Confuse · Stage 5 · Isolate · Stage 6 · Extract · Stage 7 · Discard · Stage 8 · Replace

13 The loops 85

14 Say versus do 97
What they say, what the record shows · Accountability or theatre? · Words used here

15 Cost & cover 100
What leaving costs · The ledger of exit · How the cost is denied

16 The ledger 102
Who benefits · Money out, leverage back · Who pays

17 Who gets hurt most 105
Where the weight lands

18 The middle tiers 106

19 Documented cases 108
The state takes temples out of business (China, 2017) · The statue under a yellow cloth (China, 2018) · A village statue demolished (China, 2018)

20 Precedent 110
It has been broken before · What would change this page

21 Voices from inside 112

22 Regional variants 114
China · United Kingdom and the West

23 The questions 116
In closing

24 Leaving safely here 120

25 Where to get help 121

26 Sources 124
Further sources

27 What changed on this page 127

How to read this

Every religion in The Sacred Divide is laid out the same way, in the same 27 sections, so that any section can be compared across religions. This file examines institutions, offices, money and power. It does not judge anyone's faith or the truth of any belief.

EVIDENCE GRADES

Each of the 30 techniques carries a grade for how it is established in this tradition.

- **CODIFIED** Written policy, published rule, contractual requirement, or a procedure the institution has confirmed in its own documents. The strongest grade and the hardest to deny.
- **DOCUMENTED** Established by court judgment, government inquiry, regulatory action, or financial filing. Not the institution's own words, but a body with subpoena power.
- **TAUGHT** Repeated leadership instruction from platform, publication, or curriculum, without a formal rule. Deniable as emphasis rather than policy.
- **CULTURAL** Community enforcement the institution neither mandates nor prevents. Real in effect, unattributable by design — the highest-deniability grade. A volume graded mostly Cultural has not been cleared of anything: it means the page names no document that makes the institution responsible. Cultural does not mean minor, and it is not a finding of absence.

- CONTESTED Occurs in some parts of the tradition and is actively opposed in others. Generalizing this grade across a whole tradition is a misuse of it.
- REFORMED Documented historically and materially changed since — policy withdrawn, practice ended, or independent oversight accepted. Recorded because omitting it would be dishonest.
- UNGRADED Present in the source material without a grade assigned yet. Read as an unverified pattern claim, not as a finding.

RECEIPTS

Bracketed labels such as [OFFICIAL POLICY] name the kind of source a claim rests on.

- **Official policy.** The institution's own written rule: handbook, canon, policy letter, catechism, trust deed, temple recommend question. The strongest evidence available, because it cannot be attributed to a rogue individual.
- **Court record.** Judgments, convictions, filings, and testimony given under oath. Adversarially tested, which is more than most religious claims about themselves have been.
- **Government inquiry.** Royal commissions, grand juries, parliamentary and state investigations with subpoena power. Where these exist they are usually the best record of what an institution did rather than said.
- **Regulatory action.** Findings and penalties from bodies like the SEC or consumer-protection regulators. Narrow in scope, unusually precise in what they establish.
- **Financial record.** Filings, audited statements, tax returns, disclosed compensation, property transactions. Frequently the only place an institution tells the truth about its priorities.

- **Leadership statement.** Recorded sermons, conference addresses, published letters. The institution in its own voice, to its own people, on the record.
- **Independent investigation.** Reports commissioned by the institution but conducted externally. Weaker than a court and far stronger than a press release — and notable when the institution publishes them in full.
- **Academic source.** Peer-reviewed history, sociology, and demography. Best for context, structure, and scale; weaker for specific institutional conduct.
- **Former member testimony.** Firsthand accounts from people who were inside. Indispensable and interested at once — graded as testimony, never presented as documentary proof.
- **Pattern observed.** A recurring configuration with no single document behind it. Labeled as an observation rather than a finding, and the weakest claim type in this codex.

METHOD

- Separation of targets. This codex analyzes institutional control patterns, never the worth of believers or the truth of beliefs. Theology is out of scope; behavior, money, and power are in scope.
- Pattern over anecdote. A tactic is attributed to a tradition's high-control expressions only where the mechanism recurs — one bad congregation proves nothing; the same architecture in a hundred proves the architecture.
- Evidence weighting. Every factual claim carries a bracketed source-type label and should carry a grade (A–D). Claims marked SOURCE NEEDED or PATTERN OBSERVED are analysis, not established fact, and must not be published as fact.
- Steelman rule. Every tactic section presents the institution's strongest defense before countering it. If the defense cannot be stated in a form its adherents would recognize, the counter is not yet earned.

- Asymmetry honesty. Similar tactic does not mean identical severity. A shunning policy that costs your entire family is not the same as a community that cools toward doubters, and the codex must never flatten that difference.
- The mirror rule. Any framework this powerful can itself be misused — to smear traditions, flatter one's own, or manufacture grievance. The self-audit and language guardrails apply to this project as much as to any institution it examines.

CITATIONS

A small raised number in the text links to the matching item in this religion's Sources, near the end. Every source was checked, and the date of the last check is shown at the top.

01 At a glance

BEFORE YOU READ

The whole page on one screen: how big Taoism / Daoism is, who sits at the top, how that person is chosen and whether anyone can remove them, where the money comes from, and what leaving costs. The disclosure scorecard underneath asks six yes-or-no questions any charity or public company would be expected to answer. Every later section expands one of these rows.

SIZE	Extremely difficult to count: fewer than 0.5% of Chinese adults identify as Taoist, yet 18% say they believe in immortals and 47% in fengshui, so belief and practice run far beyond formal identification [5]. ACADEMIC SOURCE
WHO'S IN CHARGE	The Chinese Taoist Association is the state-supervised body through which clergy registration and temple licensing run in the People's Republic of China (PRC). Its president is Li Guangfu, re-elected in December 2025.
CHOSEN BY	Elected at the Association's national congress, under state supervision [4].
REMOVABLE BY	Not recorded on this page.
MONEY IN ONE LINE	The money comes from temple fees, ritual services (funerals, exorcisms, blessings), fortune-telling, feng shui (the practice of siting buildings and graves by supposed energy flows) and the global market in qigong (breathing and movement exercises) and wellness courses.

LEAVING IN ONE LINE	Formal exit costs are low. The risk is master-student capture in small schools, where 'transmission' (the handing down of a teacher's teachings and authority along a lineage, a chain of teachers and students) is used to justify control and fees.
THE UNANSWERED QUESTION	If the transmission is real, why can no lineage be verified before the money changes hands?
EVIDENCE	None of the 30 techniques is sourced to a named document. All 30 are graded Cultural; none is graded Codified.
FAMILY	East Asian — taoism, confucianism, shinto
LAST CHECKED	2026-10-03

Disclosure scorecard

ACCOUNTS	PAY	SAFEGUARDING	EXTERNAL FIRST	REMOVAL	REPLY
NO	NO	NO	NO	NO	NO

Y Yes — established from a public source · **P** Partial — true of some parts of the tradition, or true in some jurisdictions · **N** No — not established from any public source · **?** Not assessable — no institutional apex exists to assess

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The glance table's answer to who chooses the top office is "Elected at the Association's national congress, under state supervision", and to who can remove its holder, "Not recorded on this page". Read that as though it described the board of a pension fund holding your savings. Would you accept the arrangement there? The scorecard finds no public evidence of accounts, leaders' pay, a public safeguarding policy, allegations going to police first, a written removal procedure or on-the-record replies. Each "No" is something the institution could publish tomorrow. Ask yourself why it hasn't.

02 A day inside

BEFORE YOU READ

One ordinary day, told from inside. The person is a composite built from documented patterns, not a real individual. The point is to make the structure visible at human scale: phrases like "removal mechanism" or "giving record" are easy to read past, but a Tuesday organized around them is not.

Ellen · A Tuesday in the second module · Sedona, and a Zoom link

Standing practice at dawn on the deck, forty minutes, and afterwards her hands feel warm and heavy in a way she cannot explain and has stopped trying to. Something happens in her body when she does this. She is not making it up.

She is sixty-one and retired and has spent, at last count, $18,400 across three years — the foundations course, the intensive, the certification track, two private diagnostics.

At eleven, the Zoom with Master Wen. Twelve of them in little squares. He looks at her for a moment and says her liver qi (in Chinese medicine and Daoist practice, the body's vital energy) is stagnant and that this is why the shoulder has not resolved. She writes it down. She has written down four different explanations for the shoulder across three years and each one has been superseded by the next, and each supersession has cost between four hundred and twelve hundred dollars.

She asks — and she has been building up to this for two weeks — where the lineage comes from. There is a small pause. He smiles and says that the transmission cannot be put into words, and that her need for a document is the Western mind, and that this is itself something to work on. Three people in the squares nod. Ellen says thank you.

At lunch she looks up the temple he named. She finds a photograph and a paragraph and nothing that mentions him. She closes the laptop and goes for a walk and tells herself she doesn't need the paperwork, which is a sentence she has said before.

In the evening her daughter calls from Denver and asks, carefully, how much level three is. Ellen says she hasn't decided. It is $4,800. Her daughter says *mom* and Ellen says *the practice works, Katie* — and it does, that is the thing, the hands go warm and the sleep is better and she is not imagining it. She just cannot explain why the practice working means the man must be paid again.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Did any moment in that day feel familiar: a cost nobody questions, a door nobody can see how to open? The section of this page that explains that moment is the one to read first. If nothing felt familiar, ask whether that's because it isn't your life, or because the patterns have become normal to you.

03 The forefront

BEFORE YOU READ

The page's thesis in one place. First, the single question the documented record could not answer. Then the widest gap between what the institution says and what the record shows, one cost of leaving set beside how it is officially denied, and the strongest objection to this whole page, answered rather than dismissed.

> You may have come to this through breath, movement, or a book that told you to stop striving — and found something true. But this is also the tradition where almost nothing about the teacher-student relationship is written down, no one can be verified, and 'you are resisting the flow' can be said to you by a man charging four thousand eight hundred dollars for the next level. Softness is not the same as safety.

THE UNANSWERED QUESTION

If the transmission is real, why can no lineage be verified before the money changes hands?

—

The widest gap between word and record

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
The Dao (the Way, the tradition's name for the underlying order of things) cannot be captured in words.	Said by some of the people selling words, in graded and priced levels.	PATTERN OBSERVED

One cost of leaving, beside its denial

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE OFFICIAL DENIAL
Formal penalty	Very low	There is no membership, no excommunication and no shunning apparatus.	Accurately: institutional Daoism has among the lowest exit costs here.

The strongest objection, answered

The objection. You are applying rigid Western analysis to a tradition about flow and non-forcing.

What is true in it. The philosophical texts are genuinely the least authoritarian documents in this codex, and the 20th-century destruction of lineages was catastrophic and real.

The answer. The entire project of Zhuangzi, the ancient Daoist philosopher, was deflating people claiming spiritual authority. Asking a teacher for a verifiable lineage and a written price list is not Western rigidity — it is the source texts' own attitude, applied to the people currently invoking them.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Try answering the unanswered question yourself: *If the transmission is real, why can no lineage be verified before the money changes hands?* If you can't, who could, and would asking them be welcome? How an institution reacts to a fair question often tells you more than the answer does.

04 What healthy looks like here

BEFORE YOU READ

What genuinely works in Taoism / Daoism, stated first and separately from any critique. That is a standing rule of this book: no tradition is reduced to its worst documented moments. Anything criticized later is measured against the best of what is described here.

WHAT HEALTHY LOOKS LIKE HERE

> Taoism is a Chinese religious-philosophical tradition of alignment with the Dao. It ranges from philosophical texts (the Daodejing, attributed to the sage Laozi, and the Zhuangzi) to organized religious lineages, temple networks, ritual masters, and internal-alchemy (meditative practice aimed at refining the body's energies) schools.

- Healthy practice here includes the philosophical stream's own skepticism of authority and artifice, in which Zhuangzi is a standing rebuke to religious pomposity, and teachers who make transparent lineage claims and post their prices.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

A bias check before the critique. People tend to read criticism of their own group as an attack and criticism of other groups as simply true. Social psychologists call this in-group bias; it shows up even when the groups are assigned at random (Tajfel's "minimal group" experiments, 1971). If you belong here, did this section feel fair? If you don't, did anything in it surprise you? The surprise is a rough measure of what you had assumed.

05 History

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated timeline and a few moments where the direction changed. Dates matter because they show that most rules had a beginning. A rule that began in a particular year, for a particular reason, is a rule that can be examined, and sometimes retired.

The tradition began with classical texts (~4th c. BCE) and took organized religious form with the Celestial Masters (2nd c. CE). It passed through cycles of imperial patronage and, in the PRC, suppression and state management, and it spread globally through qigong, tai chi, and wellness culture.

Timeline

HISTORY AT A GLANCE



Numbered markers match the timeline below; spacing is proportional to the years.

1

C. 4TH–3RD C. BCE

Daodejing and Zhuangzi circulate

A philosophy explicitly skeptical of rulers, hierarchy, and moral posturing.

2

142 CE

Celestial Masters movement (led by a hereditary line of leaders descended from Zhang Daoling) founded; organized religious Daoism with clergy and dues

Philosophy acquires an institution, a priesthood, and a tax — within about five centuries of the texts.

3

300–900 CE

Canon formation; Shangqing and Lingbao (two scriptural traditions of early Daoism) traditions; imperial patronage cycles

Court favor determines which lineages flourish.

4

1100–1400

Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) monasticism; Mongol-era patronage

Monastic Daoism institutionalizes; internal alchemy traditions formalize.

5

1400–1900

Temple networks, ritual specialists, folk-religion integration

Daoist ritual becomes the practical religion of village life across China.

6

1911–1949

Republican-era suppression as 'superstition'; temple confiscations

Modernizing states treat the tradition as backwardness.

7 1949–1976

PRC suppression; Cultural Revolution destroys temples and lineages

Massive rupture of transmission — a real persecution that must be stated alongside any critique.

8 1957 / 1980S

China Taoist Association established; post-Mao revival under state licensing

Clergy and temples operate by government permission. OFFICIAL POLICY

9 1980S–2000S

Qigong boom; Falun Gong (a qigong-based spiritual movement) emerges and is banned in 1999

Mass practice movements and their suppression — state control of the spiritual field. GOVERNMENT REPORT

10 1990S–PRESENT

Global wellness market absorbs qigong, tai chi, feng shui; temple tourism monetized

Western lineage entrepreneurship with no verifiable accountability.

PATTERN OBSERVED

Moments in the room

1281 — THE BOOKS ARE BURNED

Under Kublai Khan, after court debates between Buddhists and Taoists, an edict ordered the Daoist canon and its printing blocks burned; one account says the Daodejing alone was spared [16]. A large part of the written tradition was lost.

Why it matters. Lineage in this tradition is thin partly because a state destroyed the records. That history is why 'we cannot verify the lineage' deserves sympathy — and why it cannot function as a permanent answer to a paying student.

1957 — THE ASSOCIATION IS FOUNDED

The Chinese Taoist Association was established under the new state's religious-affairs framework; clergy registration and temple licensing have run through it since.

Why it matters. The apex here is a state office, and it has been one since the Association was founded. That sentence is the tradition's structure in mainland China, stated plainly.

1990S–PRESENT — THE WESTERN LINEAGE MARKET

As qigong and internal-arts teaching commercialised in the West, competing Celestial Master claims and unverifiable transmission lines entered a marketplace with no register, no governing body, and no complaints procedure.

Why it matters. On this page, the meaningful accountability body in the West is a small-claims court. Ask for one checkable fact before paying — the response is the entire due diligence.

Sources for this section: 7 9 16

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Pick one rule that shapes your week and look for it on the timeline. If it has a start date, it was decided by people at a particular moment, for reasons of that moment. Were you taught it as timeless? What would it mean for you if it turned out to be younger than your grandparents' grandparents?

06 Branches & variants

BEFORE YOU READ

Taoism / Daoism is not one bloc. This section maps the main branches and variants, so that nothing documented about one community is read as true of all of them.

The principal ordination lineages are Quanzhen and Zhengyi (Orthodox Unity). Beside them are countless local temple traditions and a distinct Western philosophical and wellness stream, largely detached from either.

BRANCH	WHERE	WHAT DIFFERS ON THIS PAGE'S QUESTIONS
Quanzhen	Monastic; mainland China	Its clergy are celibate and live in temples [7].
Zhengyi (Celestial Masters)	Married priests; mainland China and Taiwan	It follows a hereditary Celestial Master line, and rival claimants have contested the 65th generation since 2008 [7] [8].
Local temple traditions	China, Taiwan, Southeast Asia	These traditions blend with folk religion; few people identify as Daoist, but 18% of Chinese adults say they believe in immortals [5].
Western philosophical and wellness streams	Europe, North America	These are tai chi and qigong societies, often charities with no clergy [12].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you know one community of Taoism / Daoism, you know one community. Most bad generalizations about a religion, and most unfair defenses of it, come from treating one branch as the whole. Which branch is the one you picture when you hear the name? Is that picture yours, or one you were given by news coverage or by the community itself?

07 Structure

BEFORE YOU READ

The organizational chart: how many people and institutions there are, where authority sits, who holds the top office, and who holds what beneath it. The question to keep in mind is simple: if the person at the top got something badly wrong, what written procedure exists to correct or remove them?

Size and shape

Adherents	Extremely difficult to count: fewer than 0.5% of Chinese adults identify as Taoist, yet 18% say they believe in immortals and 47% in fengshui, so belief and practice run far beyond formal identification [5]. ACADEMIC SOURCE
Regions	The tradition is found in mainland China, Taiwan (where temple Daoism is vigorous and unregulated by Beijing), Hong Kong, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam and the global diaspora.
Trend	The revival in the PRC is state-managed, the tradition is strong in Taiwan, and the global wellness stream is growing fastest and least accountably.
Participation	The gap between practice and identity is the largest of any tradition here — a person may use feng shui, consult a temple, and practice qigong while reporting no religion at all.

Authority

- Authority rests on lineage transmission and ritual-master ordination. In the PRC, the state-run Taoist Association licenses clergy and temples, which places religion under bureaucratic management. OFFICIAL POLICY
- In the diffuse Western market, authority rests with self-authorized masters who have invented or embellished lineages. PATTERN OBSERVED

The top of the chain

> Two apexes exist, and neither can be appealed by a student: a state license, or a lineage claim that cannot be checked.

OFFICE	WHO SITS IN IT NOW	CHOSEN BY	REMOVABLE BY
Chinese Taoist Association	It is the state-supervised body through which clergy registration and temple licensing run in the PRC. Its president is Li Guangfu, re-elected in December 2025.	The president is elected at the Association's national congress, under state supervision [4].	This page does not record who can remove the holder.
The Celestial Master line	The succession most cited in the West is itself disputed among claimants — the lineage cannot agree on who holds it	The holder is chosen by contested inheritance.	Nobody can remove the holder.
The Western teaching market	No register, no governing body, no complaint procedure. The teacher is the apex of a lineage you cannot verify before payment	Teachers designate themselves.	Removal is by refund policy, if there is one.

THE TELL

Before the first fee changes hands, ask for one thing that can be independently checked. The reaction to that request is the entire due diligence.

Who holds what

ENTITY	TYPE	HOLDER	HOLDS	WHY IT MATTERS TO YOU	RECEIPT
China Taoist Association	State-licensed body	It is state-supervised [4]; this page does not record how its leadership is approved.	It holds the registration of clergy and temples in the PRC.	It determines whether your priest is permitted to exist.	OFFICIAL POLICY
Temple tourism management companies	Commercial	Management companies and local officials hold it.	It holds ticketed access to sacred sites; Freedom House found average admission of 6 yuan outside scenic parks and 59 yuan inside them [6].	It decides admission to a mountain your ancestors walked up for free.	INVESTIGATIVE REPORT / OFFICIAL POLICY · 2017 directive of twelve central agencies barring investors from running temples
Ritual service providers	Fee-for-outcome practice	Ritual masters and geomancers (practitioners of feng shui) hold it.	It holds funerals, exorcisms and site blessings, priced during crisis.	It sets what your grief and your illness cost.	PATTERN OBSERVED

Western lineage entrepreneurs	Unverifiable credential	Self-certified masters hold it.	It holds escalating course fees and secret transmissions with no external validator.	It means years of payments for access to your own breath.	PATTERN OBSERVED
Global qigong and wellness certification chains	Commercial pyramid	Original certifiers hold it.	It holds downstream fee shares from everyone they credential.	It sets what being allowed to teach costs, forever.	PATTERN OBSERVED

Sources for this section: 3 4 5 8

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

There are two very different structures here. In China, clergy and temples must register through the state-supervised China Taoist Association, and the glance table says its president is elected at a national congress under state supervision. In the West there is often no structure at all: a self-described master with a website, a lineage you can't verify, and nobody to complain to. Which one are you in? And if something went wrong, who would you tell?

08 Law & state here

BEFORE YOU READ

What states actually do. That includes how they fund, protect, regulate or enforce the tradition, and which outside body, if any, can compel an answer from it. For most readers, this is where the institution meets their own passport.

COUNTRY	WHAT THE LAW DOES	THE ACCOUNTABILITY QUESTION
China — registration	The Regulations on Religious Affairs (in force February 2018) require clergy and venues to register [3]; the China Taoist Association is the state-supervised body (president re-elected December 2025) [4]	On 2014 data, at least 120,000 Buddhist and Taoist clergy work within this system [6]
China — commerce	Twelve central departments barred companies from investing in, leasing or running Buddhist and Taoist venues in 2017, after a 2012 notice failed [1] [2]	Temple tourism is regulated by the same state whose local officials have sought a share of its revenue [1] [6]
China — buildings	Religious statues need approval from religious-affairs authorities [10] [11]	Authorities ordered a Laozi statue demolished and another covered in 2018 [10] [11]
China — qigong	Falun Gong, a qigong movement, was banned in July 1999 [9]	The state banned the movement outright [9].

United Kingdom	Charity law applies to registered tai chi societies [12].	One registered charity, the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Great Britain, files public accounts [12].

Who can compel an answer

In the West: consumer-protection law and the small-claims court — the teacher with an unverifiable lineage has no regulator, but the invoice creates one. In the PRC: the regulator is the Party, which is the finding, not the remedy.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

China regulates this tradition closely. In 2017 twelve central government departments barred companies from investing in or running Taoist and Buddhist temples. In 2018 officials covered a 38-meter Laozi statue in yellow cloth, and ordered a village's 18-meter statue demolished as "illegal construction." In the UK, by contrast, a registered tai chi charity files public accounts. If you take classes, is your school registered anywhere? If not, you have no regulator at all.

09 Money

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the money comes from, how each flow is justified, how it can be used to control, and who benefits. Read it the way you would read any organization you give to: what is disclosed, what is not, and who decides.

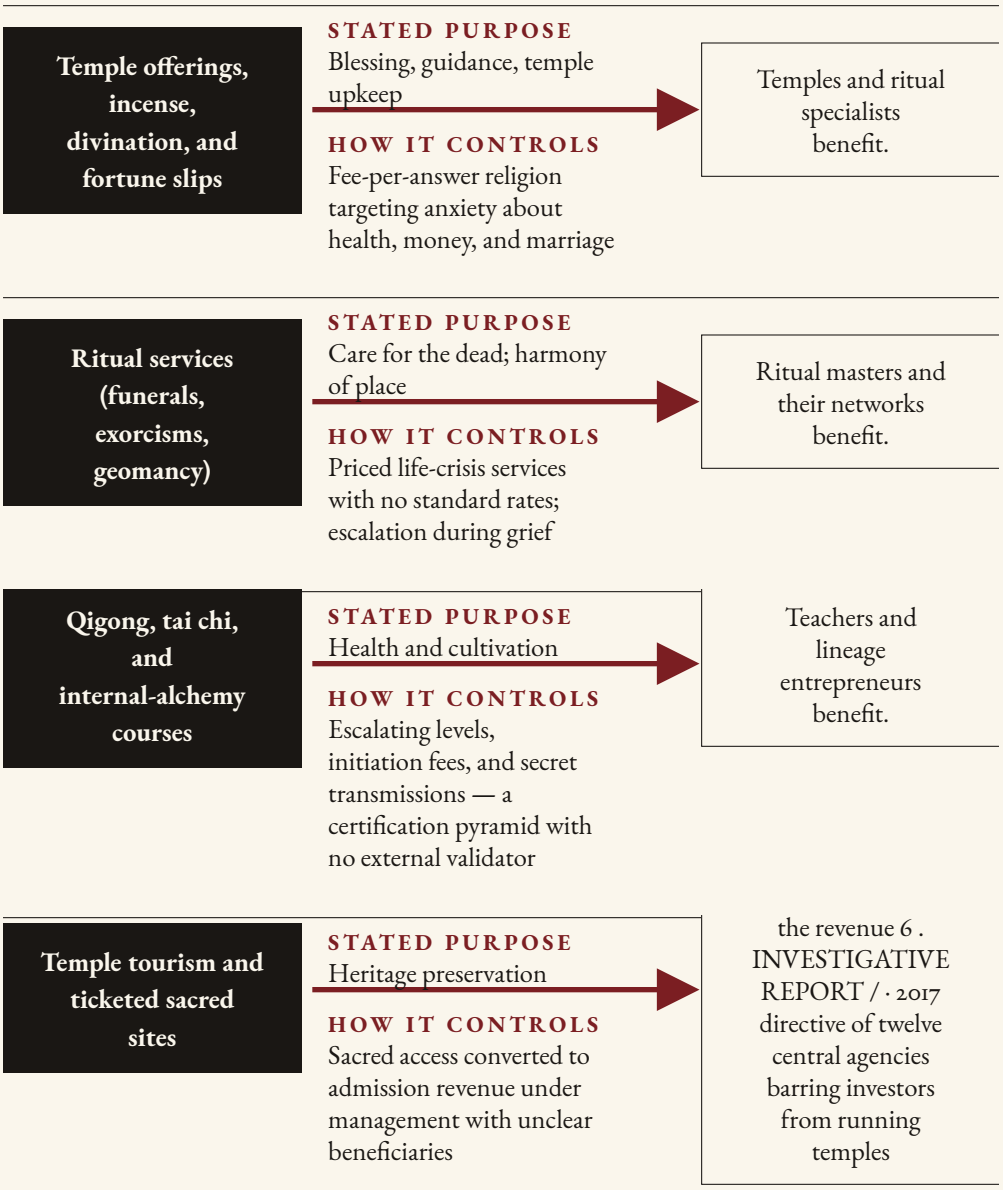
Where it comes from

- The money comes from temple fees, ritual services (funerals, exorcisms, blessings), fortune-telling and feng shui economies, and the global qigong and wellness course market.
- In the PRC, temple tourism is monetized: sacred sites are ticketed, with average admission of 6 yuan outside scenic parks and 59 yuan inside them, and local officials and developers have sought a share of the revenue [6]. This page does not record where the ticket revenue finally goes. INVESTIGATIVE REPORT A 2017 directive barred outside investors from running temples [12]. OFFICIAL POLICY

Follow the money

FLOW	STATED PURPOSE	HOW IT CONTROLS	WHO BENEFITS
Temple offerings, incense, divination, and fortune slips	Blessing, guidance, temple upkeep	Fee-per-answer religion targeting anxiety about health, money, and marriage	Temples and ritual specialists benefit.
Ritual services (funerals, exorcisms, geomancy)	Care for the dead; harmony of place	Priced life-crisis services with no standard rates; escalation during grief	Ritual masters and their networks benefit.
Qigong, tai chi, and internal-alchemy courses	Health and cultivation	Escalating levels, initiation fees, and secret transmissions — a certification pyramid with no external validator	Teachers and lineage entrepreneurs benefit.
Temple tourism and ticketed sacred sites	Heritage preservation	Sacred access converted to admission revenue under management with unclear beneficiaries	Local officials and developers have sought a share of the revenue [6]. INVESTIGATIVE REPORT / OFFICIAL POLICY · 2017 directive of twelve central agencies barring investors from running temples

WHERE THE MONEY GOES, AND WHAT IT HOLDS



Not to scale. The table gives one figure, the German church tax of €6.75bn in 2025; the other flows are shown without amounts.

Pipelines this tradition shares

GRADED SPIRITUAL SERVICES

Source. Students pay for each course, initiation or certification level (section 2).

Path. Student → Teacher → In certification chains, the original certifier

Disclosed. Not recorded on this page; no published rate list is recorded.

Hidden. Where the fees go beyond the teacher stays hidden.

TEMPLE ADMISSION

Source. The money comes from visitors paying admission to sacred sites.

Path. Visitor → Ticketed site → Management companies and local officials

Disclosed. Admission prices are charged openly; Freedom House found average admission of 6 yuan outside scenic parks and 59 yuan inside them [6].

Hidden. Who finally receives the ticket revenue stays unclear.

CERTIFICATION PYRAMID

Source. The money comes from practitioners paying to become certifiers.

Path. Trainer → Original certifier → Perpetual downstream fee share

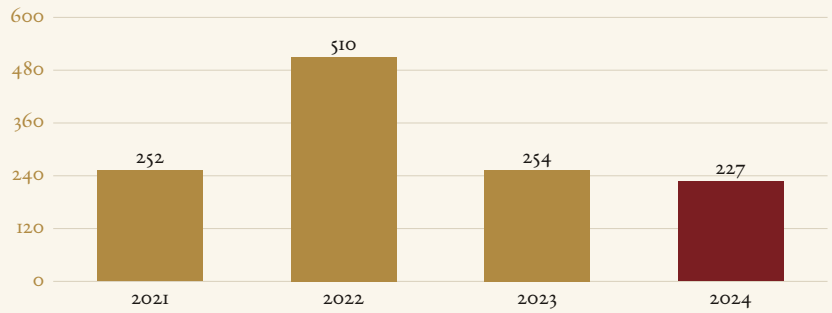
Disclosed. Not recorded on this page; no published rate list is recorded for Western teaching.

Hidden. Failure rates and income distribution stay hidden.

Sources for this section: [1] [2] [6]

Money in numbers

TAOIST TAI CHI SOCIETY OF GREAT BRITAIN: INCOME



£ thousand, years to 31 December — A UK charity teaching Taoist tai chi; public because it is registered. Income swings sharply between years. Accounts for 2025 are not shown because they could not be confirmed. [12]

- **Laojun Mountain:** The 38-metre bronze Laozi statue cost nearly ¥350 million (about $52 million), and the site is a state 5A tourist attraction (the highest grade in China's national rating of scenic areas) [10].
- **China, 2017:** Companies were barred from investing in, leasing or running Buddhist and Taoist venues [12].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The money comes from funerals, exorcisms, blessings, fortune-telling, feng shui and a global market in qigong and wellness courses. The money section describes "priced life-crisis services with no standard rates; escalation during grief." If you are grieving or ill and someone offers a ritual for a price, it is fair to ask for the full price in writing before you agree. What would you think of a teacher who refused?

10 Genealogy

BEFORE YOU READ

Rules with a history. Each card asks the same three questions: what was this rule originally for, has that reason expired, and who benefits from the rule continuing anyway?

UNVERIFIABLE LINEAGE TRANSMISSION

Origin. The practice originated in oral and initiatory transmission in Chinese religious Daoism, with secrecy protecting genuinely difficult and sometimes dangerous practices.

ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. In a lineage community, everyone knew who trained whom. Secrecy from outsiders coexisted with total transparency inside.

Why that reason expired. In the global market there is no inside. A Western teacher can claim any lineage and no one can check, because checking is framed as disrespect and the records were destroyed in the 20th century anyway.

Who benefits now. Anyone willing to claim credentials they do not have benefits. This is the structural vulnerability that defines the modern tradition.

'YOU ARE RESISTING' — FLOW LANGUAGE AS COMPLIANCE TOOL

Origin. The origin is classical wu wei (effortless action, non-forcing, alignment with the Dao). It was philosophically serious and originally anti-authoritarian. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. Zhuangzi used these ideas to mock rulers, moralists, and religious pomposity. The concept was a weapon against control.

Why that reason expired. Inverted entirely. A command phrased as 'stop resisting the flow' is still a command, and it now arrives from the person selling the flow. The most anti-authoritarian vocabulary in Chinese thought became a script for teacher authority.

Who benefits now. Teachers benefit when their instructions cannot be refused without the refusal itself becoming evidence of the student's blockage.

ENERGY DIAGNOSIS AS SOLE INTERPRETIVE AUTHORITY

Origin. The origin is the traditional Chinese medical and internal-alchemy frameworks that describe qi. ACADEMIC SOURCE

What it was for. A working physiology in a pre-modern medical system, applied by practitioners embedded in accountable communities.

Why that reason expired. When only the master can read your qi, only the master can say whether you are improving, and only the master can say what the next payment buys. Your own body is no longer evidence you can access.

Who benefits now. The diagnosing teacher benefits. He occupies the position of both physician and salesman with no licensing body in between.

STATE LICENSING OF CLERGY AND TEMPLES (PRC)

Origin. The origin is the China Taoist Association (1957) and the post-1980s revival under government registration. OFFICIAL POLICY

What it was for. It was framed as restoring a tradition the state itself had devastated.

Why that reason expired. Restoration under permission is management. Clergy are licensed, content is restricted, and sacred sites are ticketed heritage attractions, with local officials and developers seeking a share of the revenue [6].

Who benefits now. The state benefits, because it converts a suppressed religion into managed heritage and tourism income.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The expired-reason test works on any rule. Take one you follow or enforce, name what it was originally for, and ask whether that reason still exists. If it doesn't, and the rule survives anyway, the section's last question is the one that matters to you: who benefits from it continuing?

11 Reach

BEFORE YOU READ

How far the institution's authority extends into three private areas: what members may read and hear, how children are raised and schooled, and decisions about their own bodies.

Information

- In the PRC, clergy registration, temple licensing, and content restrictions place religious information under state administration. OFFICIAL POLICY
- Lineage secrecy and 'the transmission cannot be explained' claims make credentials unverifiable — the central vulnerability in the Western market. PATTERN OBSERVED
- Energy-diagnosis framing ('your qi is blocked because you resist') makes the teacher the sole interpreter of the student's own body. PATTERN OBSERVED

Children

- Children receive little formal initiation in most traditions; they participate in family temple observance and ancestor rites rather than being enrolled.
- Martial-arts and temple training schools for children can be intense, and abuse in commercial schools is a risk; this page cites no report of a case. PATTERN OBSERVED
- Fortune-telling and horoscope framing applied to children can shape marriage, career, and naming decisions before consent. PATTERN OBSERVED

Bodies

- Female priests and Daoist nuns have a genuine historical presence — comparatively strong among traditions in this codex. ACADEMIC SOURCE
- Internal-alchemy literature contains gender-differentiated practice, sometimes framing female bodies as requiring correction.
- The high-risk zone is the modern teacher–student market: sexual-energy and 'dual cultivation' (practices involving sexual union, presented as spiritual or energetic cultivation) framings can be used to pressure students into sex; this page cites no report of a case. PATTERN OBSERVED

Sources for this section: 3 7

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a parent, this is the section about your children: what they may read, what they are taught about their bodies, and who else has a say in their schooling. Ask what your child would need to do at sixteen to hear the strongest case against what they were taught. Would they be allowed? Would they know it existed?



12

The 30 techniques

How the thirty techniques are established here

30
CULTURAL

STAGE 1 Idealize	1 Love Bombing CULTURAL	2 Weaponized Generosity CULTURAL		
STAGE 2 Hook	3 Future Faking CULTURAL	4 Hoovering CULTURAL		
STAGE 3 Devalue	5 Devaluation CULTURAL	6 Gaslighting CULTURAL	7 Double Bind CULTURAL	
STAGE 4 Confuse	8 Intermittent Reinforcement CULTURAL	9 Moving the Goalposts CULTURAL	10 Strategic Ambiguity CULTURAL	11 Projection CULTURAL
	12 DARVO CULTURAL	13 Normalization / Desensitization CULTURAL		
STAGE 5 Isolate	14 Isolation CULTURAL	15 Triangulation CULTURAL		

STAGE 6 Extract	16 Flying Monkeys CULTURAL	17 Smear Campaign CULTURAL	18 Silent Treatment / Stonewalling CULTURAL	19 Manufactured Consent CULTURAL
	20 Trauma Bonding CULTURAL	21 Learned Helplessness CULTURAL	22 Benevolent Control CULTURAL	23 Infantilization CULTURAL
	24 Identity Erosion CULTURAL	25 Spiritual Bypassing CULTURAL	26 Financial Control CULTURAL	
STAGE 7 Discard	27 Manufactured Crisis CULTURAL	28 Discard CULTURAL		
STAGE 8 Replace	29 Replacement CULTURAL	30 Plausible Deniability CULTURAL		

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle.

BEFORE YOU READ

A fixed checklist of thirty influence and control patterns from research on coercive control and social psychology, applied here to institutions rather than to individual people. Every entry carries an evidence grade. The grade matters more than the name of the technique: Codified or Documented means there is a paper trail; Contested means the claim is disputed.

Thirty named techniques from domestic-abuse and social-psychology research, applied to institutions, in the eight stages of the cycle. Each carries an evidence grade for this tradition.

Stage 1 · Idealize

You arrive with a need and are met with more warmth than you have had in years.

Gentleness, nature, balance, and a master who accepts you exactly as you are — plus the suggestion that your problems are blockages he can read.

What it asks of you: Acceptance offered alongside a diagnosis is a sales structure, however softly it is delivered.

1 · Love Bombing

Overwhelming affection on arrival to create emotional dependency before terms are revealed.

How it shows here

- Seekers are attracted by effortless wisdom, nature, balance, qi, inner alchemy, temples, martial arts, healing practices, and the promise of harmony.
- Teachers may offer gentle acceptance: “Stop striving,” “Flow with the Dao,” “You are blocked because you are resisting.”
- The hook becomes visible when access to harmony is routed through masters, secret techniques, paid teachings, lineage claims, energy diagnoses, or vague promises of longevity and spiritual power.

The strongest defense. Daoism is anti-control by nature. It teaches flow, not domination.

The counter. That is exactly why control hides well inside it. A command sounds softer when phrased as “flow.” A hierarchy sounds gentler when called “lineage.” A demand sounds mystical when called “alignment.” Soft language can still steer the body.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The warm acceptance and the energetic diagnosis the entry describes are given in private between teacher and student. They are not regulated, and nobody can check them afterward.

2 · Weaponized Generosity

Giving help that installs unspoken obligation.

How it shows here

- Daoist teachers or communities may offer healing rituals, qi practices, martial arts, meditation, talismans (written charms believed to carry protective power), temple ceremonies, lineage teachings, or promises of balance and vitality.
- A seeker may receive personal attention: energy diagnosis, herbal advice, spiritual protection, or "alignment" with the Dao.
- The obligation may appear through payment for teachings, loyalty to a master, purchase of rituals, secrecy, repeated initiations, or dependence on the teacher's interpretation of one's energy.
- "Naturalness" and "flow" can be used to make authority feel gentle: the student is not ordered to obey; they are told to stop resisting.

The strongest defense. Daoism teaches harmony, not domination.

The counter. Domination can speak softly. A command wrapped in the language of harmony is still a command. If healing and wisdom are offered in ways that make the seeker dependent on the master, the lineage, or the next paid technique, then the river has a toll booth.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The help, the diagnosis and the alignment the entry describes are given in private and are not regulated. The obligation they create is unwritten, and nobody can check it.

Stage 2 · Hook

You are given a future that cannot be verified, and a rope for whenever you drift toward the door.

Longevity, immortality, alignment, mastery of your own energy — always at the next level, always with the next transmission. Retrieval is framed as diagnosis: your leaving was itself the blockage, and the level you never reached is still available.

What it asks of you: A goal only your teacher can measure is a goal only your teacher can tell you you have not reached.

3 · Future Faking

Promising a future that keeps you invested but never has to arrive.

How it shows here

- Daoist and Daoist-adjacent systems can future-fake through harmony, longevity, immortality, spiritual power, energetic refinement, union with the Dao, internal alchemy, and secret practices.

- The seeker is promised that balance will arrive after alignment: fix your qi, regulate your body, follow the master, learn the forms, receive the talismans, practice the alchemy, harmonize with nature.
- "Naturalness" becomes a future ideal always slightly out of reach. If you are anxious, you are resisting. If sick, blocked. If confused, unaligned. If skeptical, too mental.
- Some teachers sell hidden levels of practice: beginner forms, advanced forms, inner-door teachings, lineage secrets, energetic transmissions, immortality methods.
- The result is always hard to verify. If it works, the teaching is validated. If it fails, the student lacked discipline, purity, patience, or proper transmission.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice is about harmony with reality, not chasing false promises.

The counter. Harmony becomes future faking when the teacher controls the definition of alignment. If every disappointment means the student is blocked and every next payment promises deeper access, then the Dao has been turned into a subscription model.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The future the entry describes is promised to each student individually. No curriculum is published, so nobody can check whether any level was ever reached.

4 · Hoovering

Pulling someone back after they've started to leave, through guilt, love, or fear.

How it shows here

- A student leaving a Daoist teacher, temple, martial lineage, qi practice, or healing circle may be told they are falling out of harmony, resisting the Dao, blocking their energy, or abandoning inner cultivation.
- The teacher may pull them back with soft authority: "You are at a difficult stage," "Your qi is disturbed," "Leaving now would interrupt the process."
- Paid healing or spiritual systems may say that symptoms returning prove the need to continue.
- Lineage language can be used as leverage: "You were accepted into this transmission," "Do not disrespect the masters," "You are not ready to walk alone."
- The hoover is rarely loud. It is atmospheric: calm concern, mystical diagnosis, and the suggestion that leaving proves imbalance.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice encourages patience and continuity, not impulsive quitting.

The counter. Patience becomes manipulation when the teacher defines every exit as imbalance. If the person can never leave without being told they are blocked, unaligned, or spiritually immature, then "flow" has become a velvet rope.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The pull-back the entry describes comes in private conversation, as concern and diagnosis. No written policy or record of it exists.

Stage 3 · Devalue

You are taught that you are broken, that your perception is unreliable, and that both exits from the trap lead back inside.

Your qi is blocked, your practice impure, your mind too Western. The problem is always located in you and it is always chargeable.

What it asks of you: Notice that the diagnosis and the invoice come from the same mouth.

5 · Devaluation

Reducing your sense of worth so you become dependent on the institution for identity.

How it shows here

- Daoist or Daoist-adjacent systems can devalue through claims that the person is blocked, unbalanced, disharmonious, energetically polluted, too mental, too forceful, or out of alignment with the Dao.
- A teacher may diagnose the student's life as evidence of poor flow: illness, anxiety, conflict, doubt, or fatigue become signs of energetic failure.
- The student is told to soften, yield, stop resisting, trust the master, follow the lineage, or continue practice.
- Because "alignment" is vague, the teacher can always claim the student has not reached it.
- The person's own interpretation of their body and life is replaced by the master's energetic diagnosis.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice encourages harmony and humility, not self-hatred.

The counter. Harmony becomes devaluation when every disagreement is called resistance. If the teacher can name your boundary as blockage and your skepticism as imbalance, then "flow" has become a gentle word for submission.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The labels the entry describes (blocked, unbalanced, out of alignment) are the teacher's own vocabulary, applied without any published standard.

6 · Gaslighting

Making you doubt your own experience so you trust the institution's interpretation instead.

How it shows here

- A student says a teacher is controlling, and the answer is, "You are resisting the flow."
- Illness, anxiety, doubt, or conflict may be diagnosed as blocked qi or disharmony.
- A person questions paid teachings or lineage secrecy and is told they are too intellectual or not ready.
- Boundaries are reframed as rigidity.
- Submission is reframed as softness.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice teaches flexibility, patience, and harmony.

The counter. Flexibility that only bends toward the teacher is not harmony. If every no is called resistance and every yes is called alignment, then the Dao has been turned into a vocabulary of compliance.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The replies the entry describes, such as 'you are resisting the flow', are spoken and not written. They rest on the teacher's own vocabulary, with no published standard.

7 · Double Bind

A trap where both options lead to compliance. No exit serves you.

How it shows here

- The student is told to flow like water and stop forcing — but leaving the teacher is 'forcing,' and staying uncomfortable is 'flow.' The current only ever runs toward the master.
- Questions are 'too mental'; silence is 'not yet receptive.' The mind is wrong when it speaks and wrong when it waits.
- Esoteric transmission requires trust before understanding — pay, practice, and obey now; comprehension is always one initiation away.

The strongest defense. The Dao genuinely cannot be captured in words; wordless transmission is the tradition.

The counter. That the Dao exceeds language is philosophy. That your objections specifically are the part language cannot handle is convenience. Notice which silences the teacher enforces and which he exempts himself from.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The double bind the entry describes is built from the teacher's own vocabulary of flow, forcing and readiness. It is spoken, not written.

Stage 4 · Confuse

The rewards become unpredictable, the standard keeps moving, the answers stop meaning anything, and the accusation gets turned around.

Ask a direct question and you are too rigid, too rational, not ready. Sexual-energy and dual-cultivation framings can be used to pressure students into sex, with refusal recast as blockage; this page cites no report of a case.

What it asks of you: Anything that makes your 'no' into a symptom is not a spiritual teaching.

8 · Intermittent Reinforcement

Unpredictable reward that creates addictive emotional dependency.

How it shows here

- Energy practices pay out intermittently — some sessions produce warmth, tingling, calm; most produce nothing — and teachers annex the schedule: sensations confirm the transmission, numbness reveals your blockage.
- A master alternates between treating a student as nearly ready for inner-door teachings (teachings reserved for a teacher's inner circle of students) and as fundamentally obstructed; the oscillation, never explained, is the curriculum.
- Divination and feng-shui services pay clients irregularly by nature — remembered hits, forgotten misses — and each hit is compounding testimony for the practitioner's fee schedule.

The strongest defense. Qi cultivation genuinely varies by day, constitution, and season; honest teachers say so.

The counter. Honest variability belongs to the body. It stops being honest when the teacher owns all hits and the student owns all misses — the teacher keeps the ledger and the student cannot audit it.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The pattern the entry describes is the unpredictable payout of sensations and the teacher's reading of them. It happens in practice sessions and leaves no record.

9 · Moving the Goalposts

The standard of success keeps shifting so you can never arrive.

How it shows here

- A student begins with meditation, qi practice, or martial training. Then they need more forms, more alignment, more lineage access, more correction, more energetic clearing.
- If they question the teacher, the goalpost moves from technique to temperament: they are too rigid, too intellectual, too yang (in Chinese cosmology, the active, assertive principle), too blocked, not flowing.
- Paid "inner door" teachings can keep moving: the real method is always later, after loyalty, payment, secrecy, or readiness.

The strongest defense. Daoist arts require patience, refinement, and subtle correction.

The counter. Refinement becomes goalpost-moving when the teacher can always declare the student energetically unready. A path with no measurable arrival can become obedience disguised as flow.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The shifting standard the entry describes is set by the teacher in conversation. No published curriculum or measure of arrival exists.

10 · Strategic Ambiguity

Language that sounds profound but means nothing specific — functioning as a shutdown to real questions.

How it shows here

- "Flow" can mean wise nonforce, but also passivity, obedience, tolerance of intrusion, or surrender to a teacher.
- "Energy blockage" is vague enough to explain illness, doubt, refusal, anger, trauma, or skepticism.
- Lineage secrecy is called sacred when questioned and marketed when sold.

The strongest defense. Daoist language is poetic because reality is subtle.

The counter. Poetry becomes strategic ambiguity when the metaphor always benefits the master. If your no is blockage and their demand is flow, the Dao has been turned into a fog bank around authority.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The vague terms the entry names ('flow', 'energy blockage') are used in spoken instruction and leave no record. That they are used to shut down questions is a pattern observed, and this page cites no document for it.

11 · Projection

Accusing the outside world of the exact thing the institution practices.

How it shows here

- A teacher may accuse a student of being blocked, rigid, or out of flow when the student resists control.
- A lineage may accuse critics of being too intellectual while hiding behind vague mystical claims that cannot be questioned.
- Paid masters may accuse seekers of impatience while creating dependency through secret techniques, endless levels, or energy diagnoses.
- A student's boundary is called disharmony while the teacher's intrusion is called guidance.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice values harmony, patience, and receptivity.

The counter. Harmony becomes projection when only the student must yield. If the teacher's control is called flow and the student's no is called blockage, balance has been weaponized to preserve imbalance.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The accusation the entry describes is made in conversation, in the teacher's own vocabulary, and leaves no record.

12 · DARVO

Deny the wrongdoing. Attack the person who raised it. Reverse victim and offender.

How it shows here

- A student says a Daoist teacher, healer, martial master, or lineage authority is controlling or exploitative. The response may deny control and call the student blocked, rigid, unbalanced, or resistant to flow.
- Paid teachings, secret techniques, or energetic diagnoses may be defended as ancient lineage, while critics are accused of being too intellectual or spiritually immature.
- The teacher becomes the misunderstood sage; the student becomes the disharmonious disruptor.
- Boundaries are portrayed as aggression, while intrusion is portrayed as guidance.
- The master's imbalance is projected onto the student's energy.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice requires receptivity, patience, and trust in the teacher.

The counter. Trust does not mean the teacher gets to define every no as blockage. If the student's refusal becomes the problem and the teacher's control becomes wisdom, then harmony has been turned into reversal.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The reversal the entry describes happens in conversation. No complaint procedure exists to record it.

13 · Normalization / Desensitization

Practices that would seem extreme to an outsider feel normal to insiders because they were installed before critical evaluation developed.

How it shows here

- Taoism / Daoism is an ancient Chinese religious-philosophical tradition, often described around the Dao / Tao, commonly translated as "way," "road," "path," or "technique". In controlling environments, that vagueness can be used to normalize whatever the teacher wants: obedience becomes "flow," doubt becomes "resistance," and boundaries become "disharmony."
- Taoism is often associated with flowing with life, and that language can be used beautifully. But in manipulative settings, "flow" can become a soft command: stop resisting the master, stop asking questions, stop imposing Western logic, stop blocking the process.
- Because Taoism includes both philosophical and religious forms, a teacher or group can slide between philosophy, mysticism, healing, lineage, ritual, martial practice, and energy work depending on what gives them authority.
- Students may become normalized into vague energetic diagnoses: blocked qi, imbalance, excessive force, lack of receptivity, disharmony, resistance, or being "too mental."
- A teacher's authority may slowly expand from instruction to life advice, healing claims, sexual boundaries, money, secrecy, spiritual interpretation, and loyalty.
- Paid "inner-door" teachings can normalize dependence: the real teaching is always later, deeper, subtler, more secret, or reserved for those who prove trust.

The strongest defense. Taoist training requires patience, subtle correction, trust, and learning to move with the Dao rather than forcing life.

The counter. Subtlety becomes normalization when the student is trained to stop recognizing intrusion as intrusion. If every no is called rigidity and every yes is called harmony, the system has trained compliance into the body.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The normalization the entry describes builds up over months of practice and conversation, and it leaves no written trace.

Stage 5 · Isolate

Your world narrows until every voice you hear is inside the system, and everything you came for now runs through a middleman.

Only he can assess your progress. The transmission cannot be explained, written, or checked. Each level requires the previous one, and him.

What it asks of you: If you cannot evaluate your own progress, you cannot ever decide you are finished.

14 · Isolation

Shrinking your world until the only voices you hear are inside the system.

How it shows here

- Daoist or Daoist-adjacent groups can isolate through master-disciple hierarchy, secret teachings, lineage loyalty, qi diagnosis, retreat practice, martial arts schools, and suspicion of people who "do not understand energy."
- A student may be told that outsiders are too intellectual, too blocked, too Western, too skeptical, or too untrained to understand the practice.
- Paid inner-door teachings can create layered isolation: those inside the lineage are spiritually progressing; outsiders are surface-level.
- If the student questions the teacher, senior students may say they are resisting flow, disturbing harmony, or disrespecting the masters.
- The language of subtle energy can separate the student from ordinary reality checks: friends and therapists see manipulation, but the teacher calls it energetic correction.

The strongest defense. Traditional arts often require trust, lineage, and gradual transmission.

The counter. Gradual transmission becomes isolation when access to truth depends on obedience to one teacher. If outsiders are dismissed as too ignorant to evaluate harm, then secrecy has become insulation.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The isolation the entry describes rests on lineage secrecy and unverifiable credentials, which are market conditions rather than doctrine.

15 · Triangulation

Inserting intermediaries between you and the thing you came for, so the institution is always in the middle.

How it shows here

- Daoist triangulation can work through master, lineage, qi diagnosis, ancestors, secret teachings, senior students, martial hierarchy, healing authority, and "the Dao" itself.
- A student who questions a teacher may be told by senior students, "You are not ready," "The master sees your blockage," "You are resisting flow."
- The teacher triangulates through invisible energy: your doubt is not a reasoned concern but a sign of blocked qi, imbalance, excessive yang, fear, or disharmony.
- Lineage is used to create pressure: "This teaching has been passed down for generations," "Do not disrespect the masters."
- Paid levels and inner-door teachings create comparison: others are progressing because they trust; you are stuck because you resist.
- The student is pressured by a triangle of master, lineage, and mystical diagnosis.

The strongest defense. Daoist arts often require trust, patience, and correction from experienced teachers.

The counter. Correction becomes triangulation when the teacher invokes invisible forces to outrank the student's perception. If your no is diagnosed as imbalance by the same person who benefits from your yes, the Dao has been drafted into manipulation.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The mediation the entry describes, by senior students, lineage claims and the teacher's diagnosis, is informal. No rule governs it (PRC clergy registration covers licensed clergy, not students within a lineage) and no body records it.

Stage 6 · Extract

Now the harvest: your labor, your money, your identity, your silence, your capacity to trust yourself.

Escalating course and initiation fees with nothing transferable. Ritual services priced during illness and bereavement. Certification pyramids where the upstream seller takes a margin on every practitioner. And in the PRC, licensed clergy and ticketed sacred sites where local officials and developers seek a share of the revenue.

What it asks of you: You paid repeatedly for access to your own breath, from a man whose credentials cannot be checked by anyone.

16 · Flying Monkeys

The community enforces the institution's norms without being asked — mobilized by culture, not memos.

How it shows here

- A student questioning a Daoist teacher may be approached by senior students who say: “You are not ready,” “The master sees your blockage,” “You are disturbing the harmony.”
- The teacher triangulates through invisible diagnosis: blocked qi, imbalance, excessive force, lack of receptivity, or resistance to the Dao.
- Lineage loyalists may pressure the person not to disrespect the masters or reveal inner-door teachings.
- The person’s boundary is not treated as a boundary; it is treated as energetic immaturity.

The strongest defense. Daoist arts require correction, patience, and respect for lineage.

The counter. Correction becomes FLYING MONKEY behavior when senior students enforce the master’s authority with mystical diagnosis. If the person’s refusal is always called blockage by people loyal to the teacher, the Dao has been turned into a chain of command.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The enforcement by senior students that the entry describes is informal. No rule requires it and no body records it.

17 · Smear Campaign

Rewriting your character after departure to protect the institution from the implications of your leaving.

How it shows here

- A student who leaves a teacher may be smeared as blocked, unbalanced, too intellectual, disrespectful, rigid, energetically unstable, or not ready.
- Critics of paid teachings or lineage secrecy may be described as outsiders who cannot understand subtle practice.
- A person setting boundaries may be accused of disturbing harmony.
- Senior students may spread the idea that the dissenter failed because they resisted the Dao.

The strongest defense. Daoist training requires subtlety, patience, and trust.

The counter. Subtlety becomes smear when it is used to portray the critic as spiritually defective. If the teacher never has to answer the accusation because the student is "blocked," the diagnosis is doing reputational damage.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The reputational damage the entry describes is spread informally among students. No body records it and there is no recourse.

18 · Silent Treatment / Stonewalling

Refusing to engage with legitimate questions in order to maintain control.

How it shows here

- A student questions a teacher's money, secrecy, sexual boundaries, or control and receives vague replies about timing, readiness, harmony, qi, or flow.
- Senior students say the master does not need to explain because the teaching is subtle.
- The person is told to stop forcing, stop thinking too much, stop resisting, and let the process unfold.
- Concerns disappear into poetic language instead of being answered plainly.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice uses subtle, non-linear teaching that cannot always be explained directly.

The counter. Mystery becomes stonewalling when it protects the teacher from ordinary accountability. If the master can take money, obedience, intimacy, or labor clearly, then he can answer clearly when challenged.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The silence the entry describes is a refusal to answer in conversation. Nothing obliges a teacher to answer, and no body exists to which a student could appeal.

19 · Manufactured Consent

Creating the appearance of choice when the conditions of choice were shaped before you could evaluate them.

How it shows here

- A student "chooses" to trust a master after being told the teaching is subtle, secret, and impossible for outsiders to judge.
- Payment for inner-door teachings appears voluntary, but access, belonging, and spiritual progress are tied to continued compliance.
- A boundary becomes "resistance to flow," so agreement is generated by fear of being disharmonious.
- The student consents to authority because qi, lineage, and readiness are defined by the teacher.

The strongest defense. Daoist training requires gradual trust and transmission.

The counter. Trust is not consent when the teacher controls the language of readiness and imbalance. If every refusal is diagnosed as blockage, the student's yes has been manufactured through mystical framing.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The consent the entry describes is shaped in private by the teacher's own definitions of readiness and resistance. No outside body reviews it.

20 · Trauma Bonding

The wound and the bandage come from the same hand.

How it shows here

- A teacher diagnoses a student as blocked, unbalanced, rigid, too mental, or out of harmony, then offers correction, qi work, lineage access, or secret practice as relief.
- The student feels defective when they resist, then peaceful when they yield.
- The master creates uncertainty through vague energy language, then becomes the only person who can interpret the uncertainty.
- Paid teachings and inner-door access create intermittent reward: sometimes the student is praised as ready, sometimes shamed as blocked.

The strongest defense. Daoist training requires subtle correction and learning to harmonize with the Dao.

The counter. Harmony becomes TRAUMA BONDING when the teacher first destabilizes the student with mystical diagnosis and then offers himself as the path back to balance. If peace only returns when the student stops resisting the master, flow has become control.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The cycle of diagnosis and relief the entry describes is private between teacher and student. No outside party records or reviews it.

21 · Learned Helplessness

Teaching you that your own judgment is unreliable until you stop trusting it entirely.

How it shows here

- A student asks for clarity and receives poetry, paradox, energy diagnosis, or claims they are not ready.
- Boundaries are repeatedly called rigidity; questions are called overthinking; refusal is called disharmony.
- The teacher controls the meaning of progress, blockage, readiness, and flow.
- Eventually the student stops asserting themselves because assertion itself has been defined as imbalance.

The strongest defense. Daoist teaching is subtle and cannot always be forced into direct explanation.

The counter. Subtlety becomes LEARNED HELPLESSNESS when it makes clear action impossible. If the student can never know whether they are resisting control or resisting the Dao, the ambiguity has disabled agency.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The loss of judgment the entry describes builds up in private between teacher and student. Nothing in writing and nobody outside the relationship records it.

22 · Benevolent Control

Control wrapped in the language of care, so that resisting the control feels like rejecting the love.

How it shows here

- A teacher controls students through language of harmony, flow, qi, balance, and alignment.
- Boundaries are called rigidity. Doubt is called blockage. Submission is called receptivity.
- Paid inner-door teachings are framed as careful protection of powerful knowledge.
- The teacher's authority expands because he is supposedly helping the student stop resisting the Dao.

The strongest defense. Daoist training requires subtle guidance and trust in the master's correction.

The counter. Harmony becomes BENEVOLENT CONTROL when the master defines every no as imbalance. If the teacher benefits from your surrender and calls it flow, the Dao has been used to launder control.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The control the entry describes is exercised through the teacher's language of harmony and flow. No written rule stands behind it and no outside body checks it.

23 · Infantilization

Positioning the adult believer as permanently childlike and dependent on institutional authority.

How it shows here

- A teacher may describe students as not ready, too intellectual, blocked, rigid, or energetically immature.
- Inner-door teachings create a hierarchy where adults must wait for the master's approval.
- Boundaries are treated as lack of flow.
- Students are taught to distrust ordinary reasoning because the master sees subtle reality.

The strongest defense. Daoist arts require gradual training and readiness.

The counter. Readiness becomes INFANTILIZATION when the teacher controls the timeline forever. If adulthood is suspended until the master says you are ready, the path has become dependency disguised as subtlety.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The treatment of students as unready that the entry describes is the teacher's own judgment, applied without any published standard of readiness.

24 · Identity Erosion

Gradually replacing your identity with a role the institution provides, until you can't separate who you are from where you belong.

How it shows here

- The student's identity may be redefined through flow, qi, harmony, lineage, master approval, inner-door status, and energetic diagnosis.
- Personal resistance becomes "blockage." Boundaries become rigidity. Doubt becomes imbalance.
- The teacher's interpretation replaces the student's self-knowledge.
- The person may begin to feel real only when aligned with the master's idea of the Dao.
- Ordinary language for harm disappears into mystical diagnosis.

The strongest defense. Daoist practice helps people loosen rigid ego and harmonize with reality.

The counter. Harmony becomes IDENTITY EROSION when the teacher defines what harmony means. If your own no is renamed blockage and your surrender is renamed flow, the self has been dissolved into someone else's vocabulary.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The redefinition of identity the entry describes happens through the teacher's own vocabulary, in private. No outside body records it.

25 · Spiritual Bypassing

Using spiritual language to avoid engaging with real pain, real questions, and real accountability.

How it shows here

- Conflict is bypassed with "flow," "harmony," "non-resistance," or "don't force."
- Boundaries are bypassed as rigidity.
- Questions are bypassed as overthinking.
- Teacher control is bypassed as energetic correction.
- Harm disappears into poetic language about balance.

The strongest defense. Daoist wisdom helps people stop forcing and live harmoniously.

The counter. Harmony becomes SPIRITUAL BYPASSING when it avoids accountability. If "flow" always means yielding to the teacher, the Dao has been used to bypass consent.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The bypassing the entry describes is done in the teacher's spoken vocabulary of flow and harmony, so no written rule exists to cite.

26 · Financial Control

Extracting money through spiritual obligation while offering no transparency about where it goes.

How it shows here

- Daoist or Daoist-adjacent teachers may charge for healing rituals, talismans, qigong, martial instruction, initiations, retreats, herbal advice, or inner-door teachings.
- The student may be told that deeper access requires readiness, loyalty, secrecy, and payment.
- Repeated energy diagnoses can create recurring financial dependence: another clearing, another correction, another ritual.
- Lineage claims may justify high fees or obedience to a master.

The strongest defense. Traditional teachers deserve support, and advanced practices require gradual transmission.

The counter. Transmission becomes FINANCIAL CONTROL when the next level is always paywalled and the teacher defines your blockage. If the person selling the cure also diagnoses the defect, the Dao has become a toll road.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The escalating course and initiation pricing the entry describes is set privately by each teacher, with no licensing body and no published rates. This page cites no price document.

Stage 7 · Discard

You become expensive — too many questions, too much independence — and the urgency ramps up until you are removed.

Access simply ends — no expulsion, no announcement, and no refund. Years of fees leave nothing transferable.

What it asks of you: There is no institution to appeal to, which was the selling point and is now the problem.

27 · Manufactured Crisis

Creating urgency to suppress critical thinking and generate loyalty.

How it shows here

- Daoist or Daoist-adjacent teachers may manufacture crisis through warnings about blocked qi, energetic imbalance, disrupted flow, lineage violation, spiritual attack, or failed initiation.
- A student questioning the teacher is told leaving now could damage their energy, interrupt the process, or close the path.

- Paid rituals or teachings may be framed as urgently necessary to correct imbalance.
- The teacher defines the crisis and sells the correction.

The strongest defense. Energy practices may require careful timing, correction, and continuity.

The counter. Correction becomes MANUFACTURED CRISIS when the teacher profits from declaring urgency. If every discomfort means you need another ritual, payment, or transmission, the crisis is being used to monetize dependence.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The crisis the entry describes is declared by the teacher in conversation. No written rule, record or institution exists to check it against.

28 · Discard

Removing members who become too costly — too many questions, too much independence, too visible a contradiction.

How it shows here

- A student who leaves a master may be labeled blocked, disharmonious, unready, disrespectful, or energetically unstable.
- Inner-door community may withdraw access, teachings, friendships, or status.
- Criticism of fees, secrecy, or boundaries is treated as proof the student never understood the Dao.

- The master's diagnosis outlives the relationship: the discarded student becomes a cautionary example of resistance.

The strongest defense. Traditional training requires respect, patience, and readiness.

The counter. Readiness becomes DISCARD when it is revoked after dissent. If the master praises a student's receptivity while the student obeys and calls the same person blocked when they refuse, the diagnosis is just control changing masks.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The ending of access the entry describes happens without expulsion, announcement or refund, and with no institution to appeal to.

Stage 8 · Replace

Your seat is filled before the door shuts, and nobody is responsible for any of it because the authority is attributed to the Dao or to a lineage.

Access simply ends — no expulsion, no announcement, no refund, and no institution to appeal to. And the authority is the Dao itself, or the lineage, neither of which can be produced.

What it asks of you: There is nowhere to complain. That absence was sold to you as freedom from hierarchy.

29 · Replacement

Your seat is filled before the door closes behind you.

How it shows here

- A student who questions the master is replaced by one eager for inner-door access.
- A critic is labeled blocked while a compliant student is praised as receptive.
- Paid teachings continue with new seekers.
- The master's authority is refreshed by beginners who do not know the prior harm.
- The lineage moves on by selecting more agreeable vessels.

The strongest defense. Teachers continue teaching students who are ready.

The counter. Readiness becomes REPLACEMENT when it means obedience. If the master discards questioners as blocked and replaces them with compliant seekers, the lineage is not transmitting wisdom. It is selecting submission.

> EVIDENCE GRADE
>
> CULTURAL The replacement the entry describes happens inside private teacher-student arrangements. No register of students or teachers exists to show who was removed.

30 · Plausible Deniability

The institution is never responsible, because the authority is attributed to the Dao or to a lineage, neither of which is available for cross-examination.

How it shows here

- A master may say students are free to leave, while framing departure as blockage, imbalance, disrespect, or lack of readiness.
- Fees for inner-door teachings are "optional," but access, status, and progress depend on payment.
- Harmful control is denied as "subtle correction," "energy work," or "alignment."
- Senior students pressure dissenters while the teacher remains serene and uninvolved.
- The Dao is invoked vaguely enough to guide obedience but evade accountability.

The strongest defense. Daoist teaching is subtle and cannot always be explained directly. Transmission requires trust. Students choose their teacher.

The counter. Subtlety becomes PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY when plain questions never receive plain answers. Trust is not consent if the teacher defines every refusal as energetic immaturity. Choice is compromised when the teacher controls the meaning of readiness, progress, and disharmony.

EVIDENCE GRADE

CULTURAL The deniability the entry describes rests on the Dao or an unproduceable lineage being named as the source of authority, so nobody can be held to account for it.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Count grades, not names. A long list of Contested entries says something very different from a short list of Codified ones. A bias to watch for in yourself: people rate the same pressure as "normal" when their own group applies it and as "manipulation" when another group does. Before you judge an entry, try imagining it applied by a group you distrust. Does it look different?

13

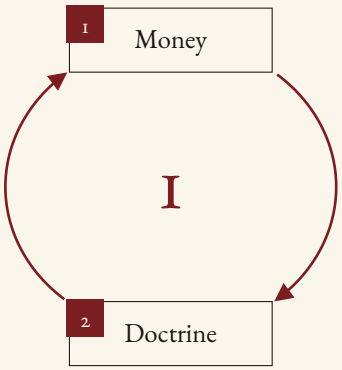
The loops

BEFORE YOU READ

How the techniques connect into cycles. A single practice can look harmless on its own. The loops show how one step feeds the next, so that, for example, a newcomer's welcome turns into an obligation.

> The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first. The loops are analysis built from findings recorded elsewhere on this page PATTERN OBSERVED; each step names the section or technique where its fact is recorded.

1 · Money to Doctrine to Money



Escalating fees fund the teacher who defines the levels and assesses your progress toward them.

How it runs.

1. A student pays for a graded sequence of courses, intensives and certification tracks, each priced separately (section 2; technique 26).
2. The teacher alone defines the levels, and the next level and the next transmission are always ahead (techniques 3 and 9).
3. The teacher also assesses the student's progress, so the same person measures the goal and sells the way to it (section 14).

4. The fees go to the teacher and, in certification chains, upstream to the original certifier (sections 7 and 9).

5. The income keeps the school open to sell the same levels to the next student (technique 29).

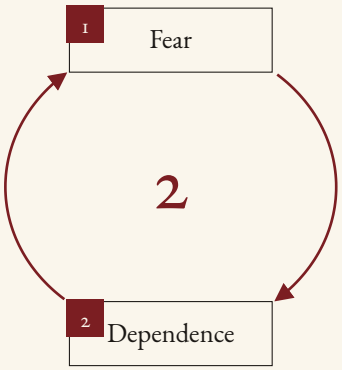
Techniques that feed it. 3 · Future Faking, 9 · Moving the Goalposts, 26 · Financial Control.

Why it closes. The person who prices the levels also defines them and judges progress. The page records no register, no governing body and no published rates in the Western teaching market (section 7), so a student has nothing outside the teacher to measure either the progress or the price against.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens wherever the price and the level become checkable before payment. A student can ask for a price list for every level, in writing and in advance (section 23, question 2). In the United Kingdom, a registered tai chi charity, the Taoist Tai Chi Society of Great Britain, files public accounts (sections 8 and 9), and consumer law and the small-claims court apply to an invoice (section 8). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Ellen has spent $18,400 across three years on a foundations course, an intensive, a certification track and two private diagnostics, and level three costs a further $4,800 (section 2).

2 · Fear to Dependence to Fear



Blockage and imbalance supply the diagnosis, only the diagnoser can assess relief, and the relief requires payment.

How it runs.

1. The teacher names the student's condition as blocked qi, imbalance or resistance (stage 3; technique 5).
2. Only the teacher can read the student's qi, so only the teacher can say whether the student is improving (sections 2 and 14).
3. Doubt or a refusal is diagnosed as a further blockage (techniques 6 and 12).
4. Relief is offered as correction, qi work or secret practice, and each costs money (techniques 20 and 26).
5. A student who thinks of leaving is told that leaving interrupts the process, so the fear of the condition returns (techniques 4 and 27).

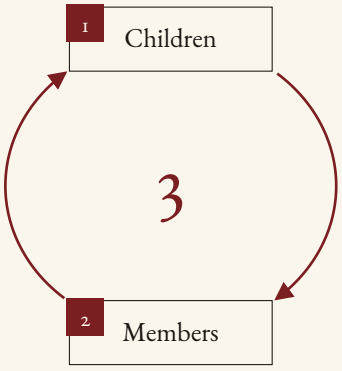
Techniques that feed it. 4 · Hoovering, 5 · Devaluation, 6 · Gaslighting, 20 · Trauma Bonding, 27 · Manufactured Crisis.

Why it closes. The person who names the condition is the only one allowed to judge the relief. A student who disputes the diagnosis has, on the teacher's terms, confirmed it. The page finds no outside party to whom the diagnosis can be taken (sections 14 and 15).

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where the student can ask what evidence would ever show the teacher was wrong (section 23, question 3), and where health claims are weighed against medical treatment, since no practice replaces it (section 24). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Master Wen tells Ellen her liver qi is stagnant. She has written down four different explanations for her shoulder across three years, each superseded by the next, and each supersession has cost between four hundred and twelve hundred dollars (section 2).

3 · Children to Members to Children



The tradition has little institutional childhood capture; the risk is master-student capture in adulthood.

How it runs.

1. Children take part in family temple observance and ancestor rites rather than being enrolled (section 11).
2. There is no membership to leave later, and the formal penalty for leaving is very low (sections 3 and 15).
3. Fortune-telling and horoscope framing applied to children can shape marriage, career and naming decisions before consent (section 11).
4. The capture the page records happens later, in adulthood, in small schools with a master-student relationship (section 15).
5. Abuse in commercial martial-arts boarding schools for children is named as a risk, with no case cited, where parents paid for the discipline (section 17).

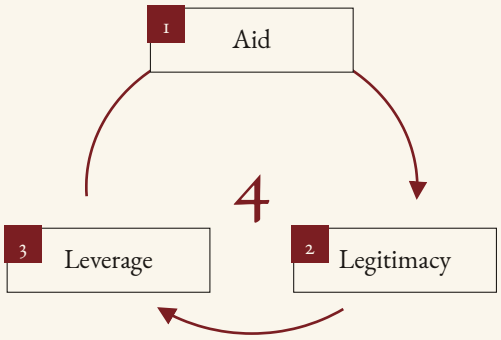
Techniques that feed it. 13 · Normalization / Desensitization, 23 · Infantilization.

Why it closes. This loop closes only weakly. The page records no cycle in which children raised in the tradition are enrolled and in turn enroll their own. What it records is a family practice that leaves little formal hold, and a separate risk that begins when an adult enters a master-student relationship.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. The childhood stage has little institutional hold to break. Parents can ask a school for one independently checkable fact before paying, as section 7 advises. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Children in commercial martial-arts boarding schools are listed in section 17 as a group on whom the weight falls, with abuse named as a risk and no case cited.

4 · Aid to Legitimacy to Leverage to Aid



In the PRC, licensing trades religious existence for state management of heritage and tourism revenue.

How it runs.

1. The Cultural Revolution destroyed temples and lineages, and the post-Mao revival came under state licensing (section 5).
2. The China Taoist Association, founded in 1957, registers clergy and temples (sections 5 and 8).
3. Clergy and temples operate by government permission (sections 5 and 7).
4. Sacred sites become ticketed attractions, and local officials and developers seek a share of the revenue (section 9).
5. The same state orders statues covered or demolished when they lack religious-affairs approval (section 19).

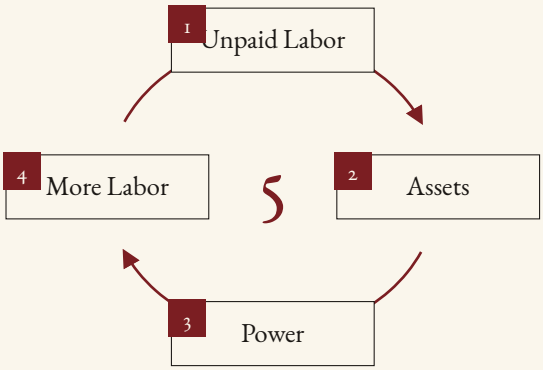
Techniques that feed it. 22 · Benevolent Control, 26 · Financial Control.

Why it closes. The body that licenses the clergy and the regulator are the party-state, and local officials are reported to seek a share of the temple revenue. Section 22 puts it this way: the regulator is the source of the pressure, not the remedy.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. The page shows the state limiting commercialization from within: in 2017 twelve central departments barred companies from investing in, leasing or running temples (sections 8 and 19). It records no outside body that can compel an answer from the state, and registered clergy could refuse very little safely (section 18). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. The 38-metre Laozi statue at Laojun Mountain cost nearly ¥350 million and the site is a state 5A tourist attraction (section 9). In 2018 officials called the statue an illegal construction and covered it in yellow cloth (section 19).

5 · Unpaid Labor to Assets to Power to More Labor



The page records senior students and downstream instructors working for a master or certifier. Unpaid labor at schools or temples is not recorded on this page.

How it runs.

1. The harvest at stage 6 includes the student's labor, as well as money and silence (section 12, stage 6).
2. Senior students and assistant instructors gatekeep access and defend the master's reputation (section 18; technique 16).
3. Certified instructors downstream teach and pay upstream, and are asked to recruit (section 18).

4. The original certifier takes a downstream fee share from everyone credentialed (section 9).
5. Beginners who do not know the prior harm refresh the master's authority, and the cycle continues (technique 29).

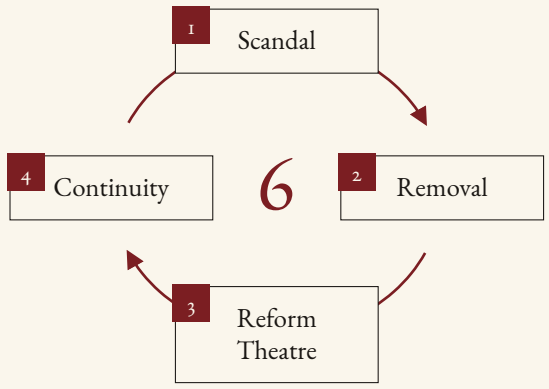
Techniques that feed it. 16 · Flying Monkeys, 26 · Financial Control, 29 · Replacement.

Why it closes. The page records the labor of senior students and downstream instructors in the service of a master or certifier, with no title or agreement recorded for them. It records no volume of unpaid labor at schools or temples beyond this, so the loop is stated at the level of the structure.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens at the point section 18 names: a certified instructor could refuse to certify anyone else, and a senior student could refuse to be the buffer between a master and a complaint. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 18 lists certified instructors downstream who teach and pay upstream, see that the pyramid's margin flows away from them, and are asked to recruit.

6 · Scandal to Removal to Reform Theatre to Continuity



Access simply ends. There is no scandal apparatus because there is no institution.

How it runs.

1. A student's complaint is answered with a diagnosis of blockage (techniques 6 and 12).
2. Access then simply ends, with no expulsion, no announcement and no refund (stage 7; technique 28).
3. There is no institution to appeal to (stage 8).
4. The page predicts that the teacher will relocate, rebrand and resume, because there is no register to be struck from (section 14).
5. New seekers replace the student and continue the paid teachings (technique 29).

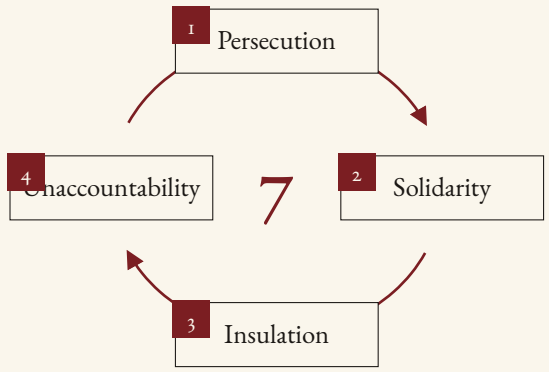
Techniques that feed it. 12 · DARVO, 28 · Discard, 29 · Replacement, 30 · Plausible Deniability.

Why it closes. No step in the sequence produces a record. The last time the chair ran, nothing was formal, because there is no body to run it through (section 14), so nothing carries from one case to the next.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. It weakens where a record exists that a teacher cannot rebrand away from. A student can ask for one checkable fact before the first fee (section 7), and consumer law and the small-claims court give a student an invoice-based route (section 8). This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Section 14 sets out the pattern: the last time the chair ran, nothing formal happened, and the teacher will relocate, rebrand and resume.

7 · Persecution to Solidarity to Insulation to Unaccountability



The genuine 20th-century destruction of lineages is cited to make credential questions look like disrespect.

How it runs.

1. Texts and lineages were destroyed: Taoist texts in 1281, temple confiscations in the Republican era, and temples and lineages in the Cultural Revolution (sections 5 and 10).
2. The page treats this as real persecution, and the loss of records as a reason for sympathy with a teacher who cannot show a lineage (section 5).
3. Questions about lineage are then framed as disrespect (section 10).
4. A teacher can claim any lineage, because nobody can check it (section 10).
5. The unverifiable claim is priced as a credential (section 14), and checking it is framed as disrespect (section 10).

Techniques that feed it. 10 · Strategic Ambiguity, 14 · Isolation, 30 · Plausible Deniability.

Why it closes. The history is real, so it cannot be dismissed, and it cannot be checked either. The request for verification is answered with the persecution, which ends the conversation without supplying a record.

Where it could be broken, and by whom. Section 5 states the limit: the history deserves sympathy and cannot function as a permanent answer to a paying student. Section 20 names the change that would break the loop, a Western lineage publishing verifiable succession records that can be checked before payment. This paragraph is analysis, not a documented finding.

An example from this page. Ellen asks where the lineage comes from. Master Wen says the transmission cannot be put into words and that her need for a document is the Western mind (section 2).

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The loops explain why good people stay in arrangements they would never sign up for from scratch. The more you have already put in, the harder it is to walk away. Researchers call this the sunk-cost effect (Arkes & Blumer, 1985), and it works on time, money and relationships alike. Ask yourself: if you were starting today, knowing what you know, would you join?

The seven loops below show how the practices connect, so that each step makes the next one easier and the last step feeds the first.

14 Say versus do

BEFORE YOU READ

Direct, checkable comparisons: a public statement on one side, the documented record on the other, and the receipt that links them. This is the most falsifiable section on the page, because each row either matches its source or it doesn't.

What they say, what the record shows

THEY SAY	THE RECORD SHOWS	RECEIPT
The Dao cannot be captured in words.	Said by some of the people selling words, in graded and priced levels.	PATTERN OBSERVED
Lineage must be protected by secrecy.	Which conveniently makes every credential in the global market unverifiable.	PATTERN OBSERVED
There is no hierarchy here, only flow.	Only the master can read your qi, assess your progress, and say what the next payment buys.	PATTERN OBSERVED

Accountability or theatre?

Last time the chair ran. Nothing formal, because there is no body to run it through.

Who holds the chair now. Individual masters, and in the PRC the licensing authority.

Prediction. The teacher will relocate, rebrand, and resume, because there is no register to be struck from.

Words used here

TERM	WHAT IT MEANS INSIDE	WHAT IT DOES	SAID PLAINLY
Lineage transmission	It is authority received through an unbroken teacher-to-student line.	In the Western market it is an unverifiable claim priced as a credential, with no register anywhere against which to check it.	'Trust the pedigree you cannot inspect.'
Wu wei	It means effortless action and non-forcing.	It is a subtle and genuine concept, and a convenient answer to any question about accounts, structure, or complaints procedure.	'Structure would be inauthentic, so there is none.'
Closed-door disciple	It is a student admitted to inner transmission.	It creates a paid tier of intimacy with the teacher and a hierarchy among students that the teacher alone administers.	'You may buy proximity, and I decide the price.'

Nothing formal, because there is no body to run it through.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Test one row yourself. Pick a "they say" line you have actually heard said in person, then read the receipt. If the record matches the statement, this page is wrong about that row, and you should tell us. If it doesn't, what does it mean that you had never seen the receipt?

15 Cost & cover

BEFORE YOU READ

What leaving actually costs here, in family, work, housing, money and legal status, and how each of those costs is officially denied. Where the cost is low, the page says so plainly.

What leaving costs

- Formal exit costs are low. The risk is master-student capture in small schools, where 'transmission' is used to justify control and fees.

The ledger of exit

COST	DOCUMENTED?	DETAIL	THE OFFICIAL DENIAL
Formal penalty	Very low	There is no membership, no excommunication and no shunning apparatus.	Accurately: institutional Daoism has among the lowest exit costs here.

Master–student capture	Yes in small schools	The student pays years of fees and shows years of deference, and leaving is framed as losing the transmission or damaging one's qi.	"The student simply stopped practicing."
Financial loss	Yes	Course and initiation payments escalate, and nothing transferable results.	"They paid for teaching they received."
Spiritual framing	Moderate	Misfortune or illness is attributed to abandoning practice or offending the master.	"That's just how energy works."

How the cost is denied

CHANNEL	LEVEL	NOTE
Explicit policy	High deniability	Almost nothing is written down — no membership rules, no published requirements, no receipts.
Informal enforcement	High	Master's approval and lineage standing are the only currency, and both are undocumented.
Leadership distance	Very high	No central body of any kind outside state associations.
Doctrinal ambiguity	Very high	'Flow,' 'balance,' and 'non-action' can rationalize any instruction or any harm.
Cultural outsourcing	High	Problems are attributed to Chinese cultural context or to the student's Western misunderstanding.
Volunteer enforcement	Medium	Senior students protect the master's reputation and gatekeep access.
Sacred secrecy	High	Unverifiable secret transmission is the core structural weakness.

Exit cost denial	Medium	The denial is institutionally accurate and individually false inside a capture relationship.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Leaving costs little formally. The risk the page describes is being captured by a master in a small school, where "transmission" is used to justify control and fees. If you have been told your doubts are a sign of rigidity, the forefront section's answer is worth reading: Zhuangzi's whole project was deflating people who claimed spiritual authority.

16 The ledger

BEFORE YOU READ

The balance sheet. It shows who benefits, who pays, and what leverage flows back to the institution in return for what it gives.

Who benefits

- The beneficiaries are the Chinese state, which manages religion as heritage tourism and social control; ritual-service providers; and Western lineage entrepreneurs, who monetize exotic authority.

Money out, leverage back

- The Chinese state manages Daoism as licensed heritage: clergy registered, temples ticketed, and sacred sites operated as tourism assets, with local officials and developers seeking a share of the revenue. OFFICIAL POLICY / INVESTIGATIVE REPORT
- The global wellness market monetizes qigong, tai chi, and feng shui through certification pyramids in which the upstream certifier profits from every practitioner they license. PATTERN OBSERVED
- Ritual services priced during illness and bereavement extract most from people least able to evaluate the claim. PATTERN OBSERVED

Who pays

- Students of self-certified Western masters pay, and they are exposed to financial and sexual exploitation.
- Grieving and ill people pay for outcome-promising rituals.
- Falun Gong practitioners and other unregistered groups bear the cost, under documented state persecution. GOVERNMENT REPORT
- Children in commercial martial-arts boarding schools are at risk; this page cites no report of a case.
- Chinese Daoist clergy bear the cost, because their religious life requires state permission.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Find yourself in this table. Are you among those who benefit, those who pay, or both? Most readers are both. The question is whether the exchange was ever explained to you in these terms, and whether you would agree to it if it had been.

17 Who gets hurt most

BEFORE YOU READ

Where the weight lands hardest, and what it compounds with: poverty, childhood, gender, a lack of civil alternatives. This is the human stakes stated plainly.

Where the weight lands

The costs set out in sections 11, 15 and 16 do not fall evenly. The table names who carries the most, how, and what makes it worse.

WHO	HOW	WHAT IT COMPOUNDS WITH
Students of self-certified masters	They face financial exploitation and the risk of sexual exploitation, with no body to report to.	It compounds where 'dual cultivation' framing can make refusal a spiritual defect.
The bereaved and the ill	They are sold outcome-promising ritual priced at the worst moment of their lives.	It compounds with the absence of standard rates and of recourse.
Unregistered practitioners in the PRC	They face documented state persecution.	It compounds with the absence of any legal protection.

Children in commercial martial-arts boarding schools	Abuse is a risk; this page cites no report of a case.	It compounds where parents paid for the discipline.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The table's first row is students of self-certified masters: financial exploitation and the risk of sexual exploitation, with no body to report to, where "dual cultivation" framing can make refusal a spiritual defect.

Then the bereaved and the ill, sold outcome-promising rituals at the worst moments of their lives. If someone you love is paying for a cure, how would you ask them about it gently?

18 The middle tiers

BEFORE YOU READ

The people in the middle: local clergy, teachers, officials and volunteers who apply rules they did not write. The section exists so that an institution is not collapsed into a monolith, and so that people in the middle can see their own position in it.

The table names the people who sit between the apex and the student, what each does and sees, what each is asked to do, and what each could refuse.

ROLE	DOES	SEES	IS ASKED TO	COULD REFUSE
Senior students and assistant instructors	They gatekeep access and defend the master's reputation.	They see which students are under financial or sexual pressure.	They are asked to manage it internally.	They could refuse to be the buffer between a master and a complaint.
Registered clergy in the PRC	They serve under state licence.	They see which content is permitted.	They are asked to operate within approval.	They could refuse very little safely, and this codex should say so.
Ritual practitioners	They serve the bereaved and the ill.	They see how pricing escalates during crisis.	They are asked nothing formally.	They could refuse to quote a price to a family during a death.
Certified instructors downstream	They teach and pay upstream.	They see that the pyramid's margin flows away from them.	They are asked to recruit.	They could refuse to certify anyone else.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

If you are a local leader, a teacher or a volunteer, this section is about you. It is not an accusation: most of the people who carry out a rule did not write it. But the middle tier is also where a rule is most often quietly softened, or quietly enforced. Which do you do, and what would happen to you if you chose differently?

19 Documented cases

BEFORE YOU READ

Named, dated, sourced incidents: court records, government inquiries, regulators' findings and on-the-record reporting. Read the outcome lines in particular. They show what actually changed, if anything.

The state takes temples out of business (China, 2017)

WHEN: 2017

WHAT: Twelve central government departments barred companies from investing in, contracting or running Buddhist and Taoist temples, after a 2012 ten-department notice had failed to stop commercialization [1][2].

RECORD: Sixth Tone and *South China Morning Post*, November 2017 [1][2]

OUTCOME: The state reasserted control over temple money; profit-making by outside investors was banned [1][2].

TACTICS: —

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

The statue under a yellow cloth (China, 2018)

WHEN: 2018

WHAT: Officials said the 38-metre Laozi statue at Laojun Mountain in Henan was an "illegal construction" without religious-affairs approval, and threatened to close the whole scenic area; on 11 October 2018 it was covered in yellow cloth [10].

RECORD: *Bitter Winter*, a religious-liberty magazine, 30 January 2019 [10]

OUTCOME: The statue, certified by Guinness in 2014 as the world's tallest bronze Laozi, was hidden from view [10].

TACTICS: —

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

A village statue demolished (China, 2018)

WHEN: 2018

WHAT: On 1 October 2018 Xingyang's ethnic and religious affairs committee ordered Laojuntang villagers to destroy their 18-metre Laozi statue within a week; four days later more than 60 government personnel arrived to demolish it [11].

RECORD: *Bitter Winter*, 13 November 2018 [11]

OUTCOME: The statue was demolished as an "illegal construction" [11].

TACTICS: —

GRADE: DOCUMENTED

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

These are not hypotheticals. Three documented cases on this page rest on a named record. The most common reaction to documented cases is "that was them, not us." Before settling on that, read the outcome lines. Did anything change in the structure that allowed each case to happen, or did one person leave while the structure stayed?

20 Precedent

BEFORE YOU READ

What has already been broken once, somewhere, and what would count as real change here. It is a benchmark, not a prediction.

It has been broken before

WHAT	WHO	WHEN	WHAT IT COST
The Zhuangzi and Daodejing themselves — the least authoritarian texts in this codex	The tradition's founders	Ancient	It cost the founders nothing.
Teachers publishing verifiable lineage and posted prices	A minority of Western practitioners	Ongoing	They face a competitive disadvantage against mystique.
Historical female priests and Daoist nuns	The tradition, unusually	Historic	It cost the tradition nothing.

What would change this page

Any Western lineage publishing verifiable succession records, checkable before payment, would revise the unverifiability finding that structures this entire page.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Some rows here record a change that has already happened somewhere; others name what would count as change here. When you are told something "can't change", it is fair to ask: can't, or won't? And who decided?

21 Voices from inside

BEFORE YOU READ

The people this section names: villagers, a site manager, clergy and believers interviewed by Freedom House, and Falun Gong practitioners. Each appears in the record because of what the state did to them or because they were asked about it.

The people below appear in the record because of what was done to them, or because they were interviewed about it. None is quoted on this page.

- **The Laojuntang villagers** were ordered to tear down their own statue [11].
- **The manager of the Laojun Mountain site** was told to cover the statue or see the mountain sealed off [10].
- **The clergy and believers interviewed by Freedom House** described how the party-state manages Taoism [6].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

The people named here are known through what was done to them, and none is quoted. If one of them told you in their own words what happened, which part of this page would that change? If someone in your community raised one of these questions tomorrow, how would they be treated, and by you?

22 Regional variants

BEFORE YOU READ

The same tradition under different governments. What a member can say, leave, marry or inherit depends heavily on the state, and these cards show how differently it plays out.

China

APEX: The apex is the China Taoist Association, under state supervision [4].

LAW: The law is the 2018 Regulations on Religious Affairs [3] and the 2017 ban on commercialization [1].

DOCUMENTED: The documented cases are the 2018 statue orders [10][11].

EXIT: Belief is rarely formal membership; the state's controls fall on clergy and temples [35].

REGULATOR: The regulator is the party-state [36].

TELL: The regulator here is the source of the pressure, not the remedy.

United Kingdom and the West

APEX: The apex is societies and teachers, with no clergy hierarchy.

LAW: Charity and consumer law apply [12].

DOCUMENTED: The documented record is public charity accounts [12].

EXIT: Leaving is legally free.

REGULATOR: The regulator is the Charity Commission, for registered societies [12].

TELL: In the West, Taoism mostly arrives as a class, with an invoice rather than a vow.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page covers China and the United Kingdom and the West. Your country changes what this tradition can do to you, and what you can do about it. If you live somewhere not listed, ask which of these cards your country most resembles. If you are a voter, note that each of these arrangements was chosen by a government.

23 The questions

BEFORE YOU READ

The six questions the documented record could not resolve. Each is set out below: why it is being asked, and a concrete example already on this page that it points back to.

QUESTION 1 OF 6

Ask your teacher for his lineage: names, dates, and a person alive who can confirm it. Note whether you get an answer or a lesson about your need for certainty.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

A lineage is a factual claim about people and dates. The question asks for facts, and notes when the answer is a lesson instead.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The day inside shows a student who asks her teacher where the lineage comes from. After a pause, he says the transmission cannot be put into words. The glance table asks: why can no lineage be verified "before the money changes hands?"

QUESTION 2 OF 6

Ask for a price list for every level, in writing, in advance. Note what happens.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

A price list written in advance protects a student from escalation. The question tests whether one exists.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The money section records ritual services with "no standard rates," and the global qigong and wellness course market. The say-do table notes teachings "said by some of the people selling words, in graded and priced levels."

QUESTION 3 OF 6

If only he can read your qi, ask what evidence would ever tell you he was wrong.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

If only the teacher can perceive what is wrong with you, nothing you experience can prove him wrong. The question asks what evidence could.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The day inside shows a teacher telling a student over Zoom that her "liver qi is stagnant," which is why her shoulder hasn't healed. She writes it down.

QUESTION 4 OF 6

Zhuangzi mocked authority. Explain how deference to a master is Daoist.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

The tradition's own foundational texts mock claims of spiritual authority. The question asks how deference to a master fits that.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The forefront section answers the objection about "rigid Western analysis": asking for a verifiable lineage and a written price list is not Western rigidity, because Zhuangzi's entire project was deflating people who claimed spiritual authority.

QUESTION 5 OF 6

If a practice requires sexual contact with your teacher, ask him to produce the text — and then ask a scholar whether he read it correctly.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

A claim that sexual contact is a spiritual practice is a claim about a text. Texts can be checked by scholars. The question asks for the text, and a second opinion.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The who-gets-hurt table records the risk of financial and sexual exploitation of students, where 'dual cultivation' framing can make refusal a spiritual defect.

QUESTION 6 OF 6

You were taught that questioning shows rigidity. Ask who benefits from a framework where scepticism is a symptom.

WHY THIS IS ASKED

A framework in which skepticism is itself a symptom cannot be questioned from inside. The question asks who benefits from it.

EXAMPLE ALREADY ON THIS PAGE

The say-do table sets "The Dao cannot be captured in words" beside the observation that it is "said by some of the people selling words, in graded and priced levels."

In closing

Your tradition's founding texts are the least authoritarian documents in this entire codex. Zhuangzi's whole project was deflating people who claimed spiritual authority. Laozi says the sage does not accumulate. Every mechanism of teacher authority on this page is something the source texts would have laughed at.

So use them the way they were meant to be used. A tradition that says the Dao cannot be captured in words is a poor foundation for anyone claiming to own the words. Keep the practice, keep the philosophy, and stop paying men for access to your own breath.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Choose one question and ask it this month, out loud, to a real person who could answer it. Then write down what happened. Were you answered, redirected, or told that asking was the problem? Whichever it was, the response is information.

24 Leaving safely here

BEFORE YOU READ

Practical, non-theological guidance for someone who needs to step back or step away safely. It is a safety document, not an argument.

Practical guidance, not legal advice.

1. **Leaving a tai chi or qigong group is legally free;** if you paid for a course or "transmission", ordinary consumer law applies.

2. **Be wary of health claims:** no practice replaces medical treatment.
3. **Find support** if a teacher's group has taken over your life [13][14][15].

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Even if this section is not for you, it may be for someone you know. Most people who leave a high-demand community say that the first person who listened without trying to argue them back mattered more than anything else. Could that person be you?

25 Where to get help

BEFORE YOU READ

Organizations that can help, each checked directly against its own site, with the date of the check. Nothing here is endorsed beyond that check.

Checked 2026-10-03.

ORGANIZATION	FOR	WHERE	CONTACT
Faith to Faithless	People leaving high-control religion	UK	**0800 448 0748** (freephone; Monday 10:00–13:00, Wednesday 10:00–13:00, Thursday 16:00–19:00 UK time) [13]
Recovering from Religion	People questioning or leaving faith	US, Canada and online	**(844) 368-2848** (aims to offer a 24-hour service) [14]
ICSA	Former members of high-control groups; families	International	Via website [15]

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Save one contact now, before anyone needs it: **Faith to Faithless** (people leaving high-control religion; UK). People in crisis rarely have the energy to research options. Having a name ready is one of the most useful things you can do for someone else.



26

Sources

BEFORE YOU READ

Every numbered citation on this page, with a named, checkable source. Spot-check a few before trusting the rest; that is the honest way to read any page in this book, including this one.

1. Sixth Tone, "China Bans Big-Bucks Buddhism" (Nov 2017 — twelve central departments bar companies from investing in, leasing or running Buddhist and Taoist venues; a 2012 ten-department notice had failed). https://www.sixthtone.com/news/1001235/china-bans-big-bucks-buddhism
2. South China Morning Post, "Worship but don't make profits, Beijing warns Buddhists and Taoists" (Nov 2017). https://www.scmp.com/news/china/society/article/2121326/beijing-tightens-grip-religion-ban-profit-making-activities
3. PRC *Regulations on Religious Affairs* (revised 2017, in force Feb 2018) — registration of clergy and venues (China Law Translate). https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/religious-affairs-regulations-2017/
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Further sources

10. *Bitter Winter* (religious-liberty magazine), "World's Tallest Bronze Statue of Laozi Hidden by State" (30 Jan 2019). https://bitterwinter.org/tallest-bronze-statue-of-laozi-hidden/

11. *Bitter Winter*, "Lao-Tzu Statue Demolished in Henan" (13 Nov 2018). https://bitterwinter.org/lao-tzu-statue-demolished-in-henan/

12. Charity Commission for England and Wales, The Taoist Tai Chi Society of Great Britain (charity 1053425), financial history 2021–2024. https://register-of-charities.charitycommission.gov.uk/en/charity-search/-/charity-details/1053425/financial-history

13. Faith to Faithless (Humanists UK) — helpline 0800 448 0748 (freephone; Monday 10:00–13:00, Wednesday 10:00–13:00, Thursday 16:00–19:00 UK time). https://humanists.uk/faith-to-faithless/helpline/

14. Recovering from Religion — (844) 368-2848. https://www.recoveringfromreligion.org/

15. International Cultic Studies Association (ICSA). https://internationalculticstudies.org/

16. Early Tibet (blog), "Phagpa's Arrow, or Buddhists vs Daoists" (30 Sep 2008) — after the 1281 debate "the entire Daoist canon (except for the Daodejing) was burned". The post cites no source for the event; other accounts found by search describe the 1281 burning of the printed canon and its blocks but do not confirm the Daodejing exemption. https://earlytibet.com/2008/09/30/phagpas-arrow

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

Don't take this page's word for anything either. People tend to believe a claim more the more often they have heard it, whether or not it is true; this is the "illusory truth effect" (Hasher, Goldstein & Toppino, 1977). Spot-check three citations at random. If any fails, tell us, and it will be corrected and logged.

27 What changed on this page

BEFORE YOU READ

A dated log of what changed on this page: corrections, additions and new sources. Changes are logged in public rather than made quietly.

- **2026-10-03:** Corrected the technique tally: none of the 30 techniques is now counted as sourced to a named document, and the one graded as state-codified is graded as custom, because it describes what teachers and students do to each other. Removed claims of documented sexual exploitation and child abuse that had no source behind them, and said instead that this page cites no report of a case. Fixed the 'four centuries' and '$4,800' figures, the 1281 edict (the sparing of the Daodejing is now attributed to one account), and Pew's wording on belief in immortals. Replaced the unsourced adherent range with Pew's figures. Stopped saying the Party chooses and removes the Association's president, and reworded the temple-ticket revenue claims to what Freedom House reports. Rewrote two of the pipeline cards and removed a third that the page could not support; removed the 2025 charity income figure, which could not be confirmed; re-worded the case tags and the Falun Gong entry under voices; added help-line hours. Source 16 is new.
- **2026-09-27:** Added Branches, Law & state, Money in numbers, three documented cases, Voices from inside, two regional cards, Leaving safely and Where to get help.

WHY THIS MATTERS TO YOU

This page keeps a public log of its own changes, mistakes included. Does the institution you belong to, give to, or were raised in keep one like it? If not, how would you know what it got wrong, and when?

Colophon

Set in EB Garamond (SIL Open Font License), regular, italic and bold, with true small capitals and old-style figures in text and lining tabular figures in tables. Laid out with Paged.js in Chromium from the same Markdown that feeds the website. US Letter, single-sided, tagged for accessibility and checked against PDF/UA-1 with veraPDF. Built 2026-10-27. Text checked 2026-10-03.

Palette: ink, oxblood, gold, cream, rule. Seven type sizes. Rules of 0.4 pt and 2 pt only.