

Cultivating the Wisdom of Wuxing Cosmology and Daoist Philosophy for Authentic States of Wellness and Resilience Through the Lens of a Student-Teacher Diary

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This article focuses on an elective university course in which the wisdom of ancient Chinese Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy became the potential foundation for the cultivation of more authentic states of wellness and resilience. It firstly observes the cycles of Wuxing (in terms of its generative and restraining phases of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water) and the flow of the Dao (in terms of its harmonizing principles of De, Yin-Yang, Qi, Ziran, Wuwei, and Pu). It then contemplates their contemporary pedagogical implications through the lens of a student-teacher diary, which integrates meditation, patterns of conceptual alignment with the Wordsmith Tools program, consultations with the Classic of Changes, and the wisdom of the Daoist classics of the Laozi, the Zhuangzi, and the Liezi. In doing so, it suggests that insights derived through the lens of a student-teacher diary inspired by Wuxing and Daoism can be effective in cultivating states of authentic wellness and resilience within contemporary academic settings.

Introduction

Ancient Chinese philosophy shares a gentle yet firm awareness of the transformational needs of today's students and teachers through a subtle emphasis on its core values of simplicity, transience, interdependence, and spontaneity. The enduring wisdom of Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy is a potential remedy for the unfavorable scenario of students and teachers losing touch with the unblemished purity of their true selves, which lies beyond the entanglements of socially conditioned egoic identities. This suggests that Wuxing and Daoist-inspired pedagogies potentially inspire the true selves of students and teachers to blossom into the educational environment as expressions of the unblemished purity of their real self-so-ness,¹ and that doing so also nurtures more authentic states of wellness and resilience in the classroom environment. It is upon the foundation of this realization that the following perspectives in this article about a student-teacher diary are built.

¹ Self-so-ness that which is no other than what it is, has been, and will always be – without comparison, force, and pretense.

This article, therefore, suggests that integrating Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy into a reflective student-teacher diary nurtures authentic wellness and resilience by supporting a return to the innate and unconditioned core being. In support of this suggestion, it examines the following three interrelated aspects of this process: (1) the integration of Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy within a pedagogical framework, (2) the use of diary writing as a path of self-cultivation, and (3) the application of Wuxing and Daoism in a student-teacher diary undertaken with the intention to cultivate authentic states of wellness and resilience.

All references to the classical Daoist texts in this article are drawn from the following: *Laozi* (Lau, 2009), *Zhuangzi* (Watson, 2013), and *Liezi* (Wong, 1995).

Wuxing for Students and Teachers

Wuxing emerged along the Yellow River in Neolithic times (c. 8500–2070 B.C.), when early observers recognized that seasonal cycles, lunar phases, tidal rhythms, and the rise and fall of all living things were not isolated phenomena but interwoven expressions of a single, and dynamic process (Fitzgerald, 1985; Fung, 1948; Littlejohn, 2009, 2016, 2020; Major & Cook, 2017). Meaning ‘five movements’ (五行), Wuxing describes how the manifestations of *Qi* cosmic energy are shaped by the synergistic interplay of *Yin-Yang*, and how the phases of Wood (*Mu* 木), Fire (*Huo* 火), Earth (*Tu* 土), Metal (*Jin* 金), and Water (*Shui* 水), have generative (*Sheng* 生) and restraining (*Ke* 剋) influences upon each other.

Unlike ancient Greek philosophy, which conceptualized the cosmos as composed of four distinct and measurable elements (Earth, Water, Fire, and Air), Wuxing emphasizes immeasurable transformations and interdependencies. While Western traditions often view them as static building blocks of material, Wuxing regards them as dynamic phases of change, constantly shifting in response to the interplay of *Yin-Yang* complementary duality and the flow of *Qi* cosmic energy. Therefore, contemporary sinologists prefer the term ‘phases’ over ‘elements’ when describing Wuxing. They regard the five Wuxing phases as a cosmic dance in which the ever-evolving interplay of *Qi* cosmic energy nourishes and restrains each of the five phases in infinite cycles. This understanding provides a powerful model for conceptualizing change, not as a series of Newtonian-inspired cause-and-effect interactions between fixed elements and an endeavor to define their outcomes, but as ongoing and interconnected generative and restraining cycles of *Qi* cosmic energy and in coming to terms with the seeming impossibility to pin down the infinite multiplicity of its manifestations (see Clarke, 2000; Kirkland, 2004; Kohn, 2009; Littlejohn, 2009, 2016, 2020; Major & Cook, 2017; Robinet, 1997).

In their generative cycle, Wood nourishes Fire by feeding its flames, Fire begets Earth by turning into ash, Earth creates Metal by forming minerals, Metal gathers Water by collecting dew, and Water sustains Wood by helping plants grow. In their restraining cycle, Wood separates Earth by breaking soil with its roots, Earth restricts Water by soaking or blocking it, Water douses Fire by putting it out, Fire melts Metal by heating it until it flows, and Metal cuts Wood by chopping it with blades.

These reciprocal generative and restraining dynamics occur simultaneously, ensuring that neither phase is excessively generated nor restrained by another phase, and as such, the manifestation of each phase is continually balanced by its partners in self-regulated and dynamic flows of *Qi* cosmic energy. From a seasonal perspective, Wood embodies spring’s curiosity and growth, Fire reflects summer’s passion and expansion, Earth marks late summer’s integration and consolidation, Metal symbolizes autumn’s harvest and refinement, and Water evokes winter’s tranquil wisdom and nourishing stillness. Water’s ‘mother-son’ relationship with Wood ensures its rebirth every spring, and the cycles continue without distinct beginnings or endings.

Beyond its wider applications in Traditional Chinese Medicine² and Feng Shui³ geomancy, Wuxing has also been applied to psychology (Chia, 2002), managerial practices (Bao et al., 2019; Law & Kesti, 2014), traditions of internal cultivation (Kohn, 2008, 2009), and education, including the work of Hongyu Wang (2021) and others such as Bulei Zuo (2013, 2014) who applied Wuxing to the Teaching of English as a Second Language. However, despite its potential to offer contemporary education a wider cosmological framework for a holistic pedagogy that might harmoniously align each of its phases with the interdependency of students and teachers, the applications of Wuxing to the field of education have been considerably less than those inspired by Daoism, despite the endeavors of a small handful of scholars.

Daoism for Pedagogical Considerations

Daoism is a living philosophical and religious tradition with ancient roots that honors the naturalness of the Way and inspires us to become attuned to its harmonious wonders. The Chinese word *Dao* (道), from which Daoism is derived, means The Way. Classical Daoism was born during China's Spring and Autumn (c. 770–476 BC) and Warring States (c. 476–221 BC) periods. Centuries later, in the Eastern Han dynasty (25–220 AD), scholars formally recognized it as both a philosophy and a religion. Its development, however, drew from much earlier roots. Daoism was influenced by early shamanic practices that trace back to Neolithic times (c. 8500–2070 BC). This was the era when Stone Age hunter-gatherers transitioned to an agrarian lifestyle. They began forming settlements along the fertile banks of the Yellow River, where these foundational spiritual traditions first took shape (Copper, 2010; Eliade, 1964; Fitzgerald, 1985; Fung, 1948; Harner, 1990; Kalweit, 1988; Littlejohn, 2009, 2016, 2020; Major & Cook, 2017). Today, Daoism is an intimately interwoven part of the cultural fabric of China and is one of the Three Teachings (the Sanjiao 三教), where it exists in a harmonious relationship alongside Confucianism and Buddhism. They have a shared harmony rooted in their ancient histories, their influences upon each other, and their mostly complementary points of view.

Although Wuxing predated classical Daoism and has been more associated with Confucianism, Traditional Chinese Medicine, and military strategy, Daoism has been deeply influenced by Wuxing. This is especially true for Daoism's cyclic and transformative view of events. This perspective is rooted in an awareness of universal flux, which is dynamic, interconnected, and self-regulating. On the surface, this flux may appear chaotic. Yet deeper contemplation suggests an ineffable order within it. This inherent order exists beyond full human comprehension and lies outside all forms of artificial control and manipulation.

In the opening lines of the seminal Daoist text called the *Laozi* (meaning Old Master), the Way is alluded to as follows:

The Way that can be spoken of
Is not the constant way;
The name that can be named
Is not the constant name.
The nameless was the beginning of Heaven and Earth;
The named was the Mother of the myriad creatures.
Hence always rid yourself of desires in order to observe its secrets;

² Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) is a comprehensive system of healthcare that diagnoses, treats, and prevents illness through a holistic framework balancing the body's *Qi*, with practices such as herbal therapy, acupuncture, and dietary regulation at its core (See Maciocia, 2007).

³ Feng Shui is the ancient Chinese art of arranging physical spaces to harmonize with the flow of environmental energy (*Qi*) to support well-being, fortune, and balance (see Wong, 1996).

But always allow yourself to have desires in order to observe its manifestations.
 These two are the same
 But diverge in name as they issue forth.
 Being the same they are called mysteries,
 Mystery upon mystery – the gateway of the manifold secrets. (Chapter 1)

While the Dao's manifestations are readily observable, definable, and explainable, its underlying essence can only be hinted at, given its ineffable essence that lies beyond ordinary perception. Yet aligning with the Dao's essence need not be a daunting exercise. It merely entails a shift in perception which gives us insights into our true selves as being of the same oneness as the Dao itself, and an appreciation that our true selves exist beyond the egoic identities of our names, titles, roles, and personalities, among many other aspects of social conditioning (see Anatole, 2005; Bai, 1999; Capra, 1975; Fung, 1948; Gregory, 2018; Huang, 2010; Kohn, 2008, 2009; Komjathy, 2013; Lee & Jamnik, 2019; Littlejohn, 2009, 2016, 2020; Miller, 2003; Needham, 1991; Towler, 1998; Watts, 1997; Watts & Huang, 1975; Wong, 2011).

Insights based on the above, and their infusion within contemporary education settings is becoming an increasing source of inspiration among the works of a growing cohort of scholars and teachers, including Bai (2001a, 2001b, 2006, 2009), Castillo (2016), Cohen & Bai (2007, 2012, 2019), Culham & Lin (2020), Doerger (2004), Hessler, (2016), Hung and Yeh, (2013), Lewerenz, (2018), Li (2002), MacKinnon (1996), Nagel (1994), San (2006), Serran-Pagan Fuentes (2017), Smith (2008), Tan (2021), Wang (2016, 2019, 2021, 2022), Yang (2019), Yang and Lin (2016), and Yang, Lin and Culham (2019). Collectively, their work nurtures the Three treasures of Daoism (the *Sanbao* 三寶) - compassion, moderation, and humility - through Daoist-inspired pedagogies. These approaches draw on core Daoist principles, including... *De* (德), *Yin–Yang* (陰陽), *Qi* (氣), *Ziran* (自然), *Wuwei* (無為), and *Pu* (樸). A more detailed explanation of these principles, along with how I have been inspired by these scholars and teachers to cultivate them within them pedagogically, follows below.

***De* (德)**

De is a principle common to many Chinese philosophies, but from a Daoist perspective is regarded as a state of unintentional integrity. As such, it is uncontrived because it is in perfect alignment with the ineffable spontaneity and undifferentiated oneness of the Dao's essence. *De* is thus an inspiration to lead by example rather than by force. An example of this would be a teacher whose influence flows from an authentic disposition of being, rather than as an imposed authority. Such a teacher would be an effortless and uncontrived expression of his or her inherent nature, which is free from ego-driven intentions. The classroom is not merely managed but is subtly harmonized through encouraging a receptive, kind, and calm atmosphere. Here, the most profound teaching often occurs without explicit instruction because presence is embodied in stillness and attentiveness. The students intuitively mirror this state, whereby curiosity arises naturally rather than being imposed or demanded.

***Yin–Yang* (陰陽)**

Yin–Yang is the complementary duality that binds polarities together in a dynamic harmony. Also common to many Chinese philosophies, in Daoism, it is more closely associated with nature's natural rhythms. When the *Yin* and *Yang* of teaching are in balance, the digestion of knowledge and the appreciation of its interconnections coalesce into a functional wholeness of scholarly talent. This is because while *Yang*-oriented intellectual approaches tend to focus outwardly on the acquisition of external knowledge, *Yin*-oriented intuitive approaches are inwardly orientated toward the true self. Both are cultivated as complementary aspects of a Daoist-inspired pedagogy because they harmonize teachers, students, and the learning process with the ebbs and flows of the Dao. When *Yin* and *Yang* harmonize,

they inspire an extraordinary creativity that unifies both logic and intuition. Within the recognition that excessive *Yang* is rigid and brittle, while excessive *Yin* is formless and weak, lies the realization that the optimal place of focus is the tranquil interface between them. In a Daoist-inspired pedagogy, this still point between extremes represents the balanced interchange between the entanglements of excessive rigor and the ineptitude of unwarranted passivity. It is on this tranquil interface that logical thought and intuitive insight have greater potential to blend harmoniously and dance together as one. In these ways, the fluid interplay of *Yin-Yang* inspires a harmonious classroom atmosphere in which effortful tasks and recuperative activities, as well as group activities and solitary reflections, exist in a dynamic and self-adjusting harmony.

Qi (氣)

Qi is the cosmic energy that arises from the synergistic interplay of *Yin-Yang*, and it is the dynamic medium through which all phenomena come to manifestation. As with *De* and *Yin-Yang*, *Qi* is also common to most of Chinese philosophy. Being attuned to *Qi* can help classroom engagements become more energized in ways that are self-generating and self-regulating, which in turn would bring harmony and reduce anxiety. Through the nurturing of this cosmic vitality, the classroom becomes transformed into a self-sustaining energy field that is characterized by synergistic reciprocity and inter-reliance, and which stems from a profound inner and outer alignment. In this *Qi*-infused pedagogical space, actions tend to arise with a spontaneous yet gentle quality, naturally affirming the values of compassion, moderation, and humility. Along with this, the classroom atmosphere has more propensity to become lighter and more joyful and which in turn elevates the positivity of the collective mood. When this positive energy of *Qi* is cultivated and circulates freely through mindful transitions between activities, closer attention becomes more focused on a grounded and responsive presence. Here, individual well-being and communal harmony are less fragmented, and this encourages both students and teachers to feel more centered, focused, and emotionally settled.

Ziran (自然)

Ziran is more specific to Daoism and is the self-so-ness of nature and, as such, is an authenticity entirely so-of-itself. It tends to bring with it respect to each student's innate pace and nature, so that the quiet students are valued as much as the expressive ones. *Ziran* inspires balancing teaching and learning with a trust in the innate processing capacity of students. In doing so, the classroom can become similar to a delicate ecosystem, something akin to a gardener's greenhouse. A *Ziran*-inspired gardener would be unlikely to force plants to grow but would instead cultivate an environment in which they can flourish naturally. Similarly, a *Ziran*-inspired teacher would be unlikely to compel students to learn but would instead create warm and supportive conditions of pedagogical sunshine that would encourage the seeds of the students' intuition and self-discernment to sprout from within. This approach, which appreciates that true learning blossoms not from demand but from a readiness that arises from within the authentic selves of students, untangles outmoded 'one-size-fits-all' mentalities and brings a calming and non-judgmental atmosphere to the classroom. Along with this, it tends to cultivate a receptiveness to the diverse pedagogical needs of students and encourages them to share the best of their innate talents without fear of ridicule. The resulting pedagogical atmosphere tends to be equally reverent toward the tangible systematics of intelligence, rigor, and logic, and the intangible realms of wisdom, intuition, and mystery.

Wuwei (無為)

Wuwei is another principle more specific to Daoism and is a non-assertive action, which is free of excessively deliberate effort and the struggle that often accompanies it. As such, it encourages a relaxed and non-coercive classroom atmosphere which allows the students to take initiatives, lessens micromanagement, and reassures mutual trust and gentle guidance. In a Daoist-inspired pedagogy, *Wuwei* encourages the absence of forceful interventions that seek to mold situations to fit preconceived expectations. Instead, it inspires the natural manifestation of the classroom's inherent self-so-ness that facilitates spontaneous actions that flow without resistance to the pedagogical process. If one were to imagine a classroom as a sailing ship and the teacher as its skipper, *Wuwei* would be the skill of navigating between the windless doldrums of laxity and the stormy gales of assertiveness, and in doing so, avoiding the rocks of despair. Therefore, teachers inspired by *Wuwei* intuitively appreciate that learning seldom unfolds according to a rigid plan. By skillfully balancing lesson objectives with the reality of the moment, they allow naturalness, contentedness, and harmony to arise naturally. This often entails doing less rather than more, in the recognition that overly deliberate and effortful interventions to force compliance are like cutting against the grain or rowing upstream. They are avoided by the *Wuwei*-inspired teacher, given their propensity to exacerbate discontent, stifle scholarly endeavor, and foster rebellion. By appreciating the wisdom that more can be gained by doing less, the unforced spontaneity of *Wuwei* has a propensity to diffuse authoritarianism and inspire students to engage with learning in more enjoyable, meaningful, and self-directed ways.

Pu (樸)

Pu is also specific to Daoism, and is a principle metaphorically associated with the unblemished purity of raw wood because it exemplifies our true selves in terms of our uncarved original and eternal nature. As such, *Pu* can be considered the true essence of the unconditioned and potential-laden state that exists before the superimposition of ego-driven distinctions and social artifice, and which embodies direct and unlimited intuitive wisdom. A Daoist-inspired pedagogy tends to cultivate the return to the unblemished purity of students and teachers within the recognition of the interrelatedness between our authentic nature and the outside world. It therefore tends to value the clarity of simplicity over the ambiguity of complexity and the keeping of instructions and explanations clear and uncluttered so that expectations can be more realistic. It suggests that self-awareness can be cultivated through harnessing the capacity for self-discernment as the foundation for the manifestation of unique talents and innate wisdom. This approach does not imply a lack of rigor, but rather a focus on foundational understanding and authentic engagement. It supports the sharing of core concepts in their most accessible linguistic form, the use of plain language, and the assessment of what truly matters rather than the layering on unnecessary tasks. In so doing, it tends to preserve natural curiosity, confidence, and the joy of learning without the imposition of artificial or excessive criteria. The path of inner discovery, inspired by *Pu*, is among the highest forms of spiritual cultivation and is one of the highest ideals in Daoist-inspired pedagogy.

Diary Writing as a Path of Self-Cultivation

Numerous styles of self-cultivation are associated with Chinese culture. Among them are meditation,⁴ the inner alchemical practice of Neidan,⁵ and the mind-body practices of Qigong⁶ and Taijiquan.⁷ In addition, there are activities like painting, gardening, living in accord with nature, and writing diaries.⁸

From a Wuxing and Daoist perspective, the classroom environment exists within dynamic, interflowing patterns of transformation that reflect the interdependence of Heaven and Earth and their inseparable connection to the inner landscape of the authentic self. Likewise, the classroom is seen as an intricately interwoven network of consciousness that spans and unites Heaven and Earth, and this suggests that the classroom environment is a microcosmic manifestation of the macrocosmic organic order of the universe. Therefore, when writing diaries is paired with Wuxing and Daoism, the natural ebbs and flows of classroom experiences, in terms of their joyfully expansive moments of delight and their stressfully contractive moments of challenge, tend to become more intertwined and complementary towards each other. When these flow together as complementary currents, students and teachers have greater potential to emulate the dynamic balance of universal flux along with its self-balancing phases of generative and restraining *Qi* cosmic energy.

With this, classroom atmospheres appear to enhance the potential for mutual interdependency between students and teachers to arise while diffusing the polarizations of conceptualized opposites. Within the harmonious wake of these interdependent pedagogical circumstances, neither logic nor intuition tend to stand far apart from each other, because it is through perceptions of their underlying interdependency that they inspire students and teachers to transcend the superficiality of their conventional obligations toward each other and enter into a shared and more embrative pedagogy. Here, more authentic states of wellness and resilience would appear to arise more spontaneously and in closer alignment with the natural rhythms of the Wuxing five phases and the ineffable essence of the Dao.⁹ As

⁴ Meditation is a practice of inner stillness which calms the mind and opens pathways of awareness and intuitive perception. In the Daoist meditative discourse *Sitting in Forgetfulness* (Zuowang Lun 坐忘論) attributed to Sima Chengzhen (647 – 735 AD), a seven-step meditative process is outlined for attuning to the essence of the Dao. It is based on the Zuowang form of Daoist meditation which was first mentioned in the Zhuangzi Daoist classic of the Warring States Period (c. 476 - 221 BC). Livia Kohn (2010) translates the word Zuowang as ‘sitting in oblivion’ and describes it as “a state of deep meditative absorption and mystical oneness, during which all sensory and conscious faculties are overcome, and which is the base point of attaining Dao” (p. 1). It has been my preferred style of meditation for the past two decades.

⁵ Neidan is the internal refinement of mental and physical energies into spiritual immortality, using the body as the alchemical locus (See Wang, 2011).

⁶ Qigong is the mindful practice of aligning breath, movement, and awareness to cultivate and balance the body’s vital energy (See Cohen, 1999).

⁷ Taijiquan is the Chinese internal martial art and moving meditation that cultivates health, balance, and self-defense through slow, fluid, and mindful movement (See Yang, 1996).

⁸ Although historically attested Chinese diary practices were largely Confucian in orientation and focused on moral rectification and social consideration, Daoist diary traditions were more episodic and oriented toward inner transformation. Cynthia Brokaw (1991) elucidated on the late imperial *Ledgers of Merit and Demerit* (*Gongguo Ge* 功過格), which formalized Confucian modes of daily moral accounting aimed at social rectification. By contrast, as Pei-Yi Wu (1990) surveyed autobiographical writing, and noted the Daoist and syncretic traditions favored dream records (*mèngjì* 夢記), alchemical notes, and spiritual travelogues. However, the diary proposed in this article on authentic wellness and resilience should be considered as being inspired by Wuxing manifestations of cosmic energy and Daoist philosophy in broad terms rather than as a revival of a discrete classical diary genre.

⁹ This view of the classroom as a spontaneously harmonious field resonates with cosmological principles found in Wuxing and Daoism such as the *Yin-Yang* unity of opposites and the cultivation of *Ziran* natural unfoldment

such, diaries inspired by Wuxing and Daoism would seem to offer a journey beyond the narrow lens of the finite mind, towards the reality of becoming an infinite being with all of happenstance and in ways that enhance the potential for authenticity of wellness and resilience.

By providing therapeutic spaces for self-reflections through enabling the capacity to pause, breathe, and reconnect with the true self, diaries based on Wuxing and Daoism offer a consistent and embodied practice that helps students and teachers unload sensations of being overwhelmed. They also contribute to the clarification of thoughts, and in building a more lasting metacognition with a greater depth of analysis alongside a more sustained self-awareness.¹⁰ In short, reflective writing of any form, whether that be in the form of a diary or a journal, would seem to create a structured yet adaptable routine for developing self-awareness, emotional regulation, and critical reflection, and which, in a pedagogical sense, has the propensity to contribute toward a more harmonious and engaged classroom environment.¹¹

Our Student-Teacher Diary Based on Wuxing and Daoism

In the Fall of 2024, I hosted an elective course focused on the cultivation of authentic states of wellness and resilience through the lens of a student–teacher diary at the Sichuan University–Pittsburgh Institute in Chengdu, China. Eighteen Chinese undergraduates volunteered and enrolled. They had a basic understanding of Wuxing and Daoism, given that they had encountered them as historical and literary concepts in high school.¹²

The course was recommended by me to the university administration, who approved of it. The students were then invited to enroll via the administration’s digital booking system. Interestingly, all the students who enrolled were the same ones that I had taught an academic English writing course to during the previous semester. In that course, I used Wuxing and Daoist concepts to explain aspects of academic English writing in ways that they could more easily internalize from a cultural point of view. Doing so was helpful to them in transcending their perception of academic English writing as being an alien, rigid, and perplexing step-by-step process. Through experiencing academic English writing as a system of balance and flow that did not replace the linearity of Western logic, but instead incorporated relational and process-oriented forms, and students found it appealing because it resonated with their Chinese

among others (See Wong, 2011; Wang, 2012). My pedagogical dynamics described here tends to mirror these (See Nagel, 1994; Wang, 2019, 2021, 2022; Yang & Lin, 2016).

¹⁰ It should also be mentioned at this juncture that, although like diaries, reflective journals are less structured and tend to be guided more by thematic inquiry and retrospective analysis. In my own experience, I tend to combine journaling and diary writing, in the sense that I carry a notebook as a journal to handwrite short notes that I later type into my diary, which is in digital format.

¹¹ Although it appears that diaries by teachers and students based on Daoism and Wuxing are unique undertakings and extremely rare, the general practice of writing diaries and journals along with articulations of their benefits is much more widespread in the academic and scholarly community. Research in applied linguistics and education documents how regular reflective writing, whether it be in the form of a diary or a journal, reduces stress, anxiety, and depression, while strengthening problem-solving abilities and cognitive flexibility (See Watts, 1974; Howell-Richardson & Parkinson, 1988; Hundleby & Breet, 1988; Bailey, 1990; Nunan, 1992; Jarvis, 1992; Bell, 1993; Richards & Lockhart, 1996; Henderson, Morris, & Fitz-Gibbon, 1987; Reichmann, 2001; Yi, 2008; O’Connell, O’Shea & Gallagher, 2017 and McDonough, 1994).

¹² It is important to note that our diary did not presuppose a lack of prior knowledge about the role of wellness and resilience in academia. Its purpose was to facilitate an embodied application and personalized integration of authentic wellness and resilience into our immediate academic and personal landscapes. The elective was also not primarily focused on factual learning about Wuxing and Daoism, but on their personal and pedagogical applications with a view toward the enhancement of authentic wellness and resilience.

cognitive and cultural patterns.¹³ Having acquired academic writing skills through Wuxing and Daoist structures enabled them to harmonize their creativity with both discipline and refinement, and they were able to confidently compose academic English articles in their authentic scholarly voices. This was an essential component in their requirement of acquiring a high proficiency in academic English writing, given their aspirations to study at leading Western universities.

Writing a diary inspired by Wuxing and Daoism for authentic wellness and resilience, offered another culturally familiar framework through which we could continue what we had become familiar with together. With nearly four decades of contemplations inspired by Wuxing and Daoism – which included the publication of journal articles based on solo written diaries (Jeffrey, 2015, 2019a, 2019b, 2020), as well as a recently published book based on their wider pedagogical applications (Jeffrey, 2024), hosting this course was a special opportunity to write a diary together with my students for the first time.

Methodology

The methodology was qualitatively and reflectively based on cultivating the wisdom of Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy for authentic states of wellness and resilience through the lens of our student-teacher diary. Wuxing cosmology provided situationally attuned processes, whereas Daoist philosophy offered a complementary and praxiological stance that valued receptivity, authenticity, and harmony. Together, they supported an epistemological balance between written reflective articulation and conceptual interpretation, as well as between tacit knowledge and trans-conceptual insight. In addition, there was no requirement to reference Wuxing and Daoism explicitly.

Wuxing cosmology, with its integrated cycles of generative and restraining interactions between the five phases of Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, and Water, provided a culturally resonant and metacognitive framework comprised of organically balanced checks and balances for our diarized reflections on cultivating authentic states of wellness and resilience. Each phase corresponded with a correlated diary lens and its associated reflective prompts. The correlations were Wood related to vision and growth, Fire related to expression and connection, Earth related to reflection and nourishment, Metal related to contraction and discernment, and Water related to introspection and rest. This structure would allow us to undertake our diary writings with an awareness that wellness and resilience are not static and monolithic concepts but are instead interdependent expressions of perpetual transformation. This was aimed at nurturing our self-awareness and our cognizance of the interrelationship between our personal rhythms and the wider environment, as well as our innate capacity to overcome challenges through harnessing the aspects of generation and restraint within every phase. Prompts based on Wuxing were associated with: Growth and curiosity (for Wood), passion and dynamism (for Fire), centeredness and stability (for Earth), clarity and integrity (for Metal), as well as depth and insight (for Water).

Daoist philosophy, with its associated principles of *De* (unintentional integrity), *Yin-Yang* (complementary duality), *Qi* (cosmic energy), *Ziran* (self-so-ness), *Wuwei* (non-assertive action), and *Pu* (unblemished purity), was to shape the diary, not as a willful exercise of forcing insights for the attainment of authentic wellness and resilience, but to cultivate a creative space in which these would arise more naturally. Through prompts grounded in an awareness of these principles, they carried the intention of writing the diary entries in ways that transcended reaction with receptivity, light with shadow, rejection with embracement, rigidity with fluidity, and impulsiveness with spontaneity. Ultimately, the diary was to serve as a means for the return to the essential and unadorned self, which is the innate and core of our being. Prompts based on Daoism were associated with: Kindness and patience (*De*), balance and harmony (*Yin-Yang*), energy and abundance (*Qi*), authenticity and naturalness (*Ziran*), effortlessness

¹³ I am currently writing an academic article based on this experience. It shows how equipping students with metacognitive strategies which are guided by culturally sustaining principles that sustain cultural backgrounds can be instrumental in preparing them to succeed within existing academic structures without compromising their unique identities and voices.

and alignment (*Wuwei*), as well as simplicity and originality (*Pu*). Also, to help align the Wuxing and Daoist prompts, consideration was given to which Wuxing phases one's current state was most active and most dormant, and then to contemplate which Daoist principles might be applied to further nurture its transformation toward a deeper harmony.

The Wuxing and Daoist frameworks were used in an interpretive and heuristic fashion rather than as a diagnostic system. Therefore, the diary study did not aim to measure wellness and resilience as fixed entities or to rigidly evaluate the students in terms of predefined outcomes. Instead, the students were evaluated on how they noticed, reflected on, and aligned their sense of balance over time through reflective diary writing, and with particular attention to the relationship between analytical reasoning and intuitive awareness. The students retained full autonomy over the content, frequency, and depth of their entries. Special care was taken to ensure that wellness and resilience were treated as phenomena that varied according to circumstances, and not as potential shortfalls that required remediation. Accordingly, the assessment was designed to balance institutional requirements for outcome-based grading with respect for personal insight and reflective autonomy. Therefore, grading was based mostly on engagement with the reflective process and contemplative sincerity. In this way, diary writing was positioned such that its analytical and intuitive modes were held in a balanced relationship with each other. This allowed authentic wellness and resilience to emerge mostly through reflective awareness and contemplative introspection rather than through forced compliance with prescriptive standards of measurement.

The course spanned 17 weeks, and we met once a week for a three-hour class. In the first hour, we discussed aspects of Wuxing and Daoism¹⁴; in the second hour, we wrote our diary entries, and in the third hour we held workshops in which we shared our diary entries and wrote further diary summaries that integrated our insights. No minimum word count or fixed writing schedule was imposed. Writing was encouraged episodically, particularly when we noticed shifts in energy, motivation, clarity, stress, or balance. Periods of non-writing were treated as equally meaningful, given that insights do not always manifest through continuous written engagement. At the beginning of every hour, we meditated for 10 minutes. In this way, meditation became an integrated part of our diarized reflections. It was a simple form of meditation, whereby we sat at our desks and let our minds become still, letting our thoughts just come and go without trying to stop them. We meditated not with the intention of it being a beneficial means to an end, but rather in terms of it being a process that had no specific objective other than being pleasant and calming.¹⁵

Midway through the semester, we noticed that meditation had the effect of calming our minds and opening intuitive pathways that were less cluttered with compartmentalized viewpoints and rigid categorizations. With this came three shared insights: The first was that the reality of all experience happens within the ever-unfolding present moment, the second was that our thoughts become pacified when we let them come and go on their own, and the third was that our true selves lie in an intangible, unnamable, and undefinable realm beyond our egoic identities. With this approach, the classroom became more tranquil and reflected a sense of harmony aligned with Daoist principles. This was most noticeable in our diarized reflections. At the beginning of the semester, many entries expressed stress and anxiety, mental fatigue, and uncertainty about the future. However, as the semester progressed, our reflections turned more toward opportunities, gratitude, and an appreciation for how they were helping us to become more optimistic and enthusiastic about the academic environment and about life in general.

¹⁴ In the inaugural session of the class, we discussed the cyclical phases of Wuxing (Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal, Water) and the core Daoist principles of *De*, *Yin-Yang*, *Qi*, *Wuwei*, *Ziran*, and *Pu*, explicitly linking them to the reflective practices that would structure the diary component of the course. I would often read a Chapter from the Laozi, and short stories from the Zhuangzi and the Liezi to the students to facilitate the discussions.

¹⁵ The reason for doing so was that it aligned with contemporary understandings of creativity in cognitive science, whereby the 'default network' of the brain is most active during restful and non-goal-oriented states, and which facilitates creative insights (See Buckner, Andrews-Hanna and Schacter, 2008).

Many students pointed out that they had initially been skeptical as to whether diary writing would be useful to them, but that they had later come to realize its benefits.

The Blackboard Learn educational management platform (Blackboard Inc., n.d.) served as our main interface for our diarized reflections during the workshop sessions. We uploaded what we considered to be the most insightful of them in terms of newly discovered perspectives that enhanced our awareness of authentic wellness and resilience to the shared discussions section of Blackboard Learn. We then discussed our uploaded reflections and wrote further summaries of them, which further infused their intuitive essence. A significant aspect of this refinement process was the re-reading of entries to discover deeper insights. So, during these workshops, we used the freeware version of the Microsoft Windows WordSmith Tools program (Scott, 1997) to find deeper thought patterns within our written reflections.¹⁶ Its integration into the analysis of our diary entries provided a useful methodological bridge between the qualitative depth of our reflective practice and the objective textual patterning of our entries. By applying corpus linguistics to our entries grounded in Wuxing and Daoism, the software revealed latent linguistic shifts. Among these were our increasing use of the words ‘harmony’ and ‘flow,’ which confirmed our internalization of these philosophical concepts. This allowed our diary to transcend being merely a subjective interpretation of criteria and provided us with tangible evidence as to how principles such as *Wuwei* and *Ziran* were becoming manifested within our awareness. In doing so, WordSmith Tools not only analyzed our texts, but it also revealed hidden patterns of Wuxing and Daoist-inspired insights related to authentic states of wellness and resilience that might otherwise have remained beneath the surface of our reflective writing.

Finding further inspiration for our written reflections was also an essential part of the workshops. For this, we regularly consulted the *Yijing* (易经), a Confucian classic with origins in the Zhou dynasty, and which is also popular in the West, where it is known as the *Classic of Changes* (also known as the *Book of Changes*). It is a contemplative platform for insights based on 64 Hexagrams, which, in turn, are archetypal representatives of the entire realm of happenstance. Though it served as a divinatory guide in ancient times, it is currently regarded as a wise book for insights that are appropriate to fluctuating circumstances. It does so by opening pathways of inward contemplation concerning outward circumstances, which tap into the vast reservoirs of intuition that lie beyond the ego and within the depths of the true self. Tapping into these reservoirs of wisdom within the *Classic of Changes* encourages intuitive responses to challenging situations (Deng, 2013; Liu, 1997; Redmond & Hon, 2014; Ritsema & Sabbadini, 2005; Shaughnessy, 1996; Smith, 2008, 2012; Wen, 2023; Wilhelm, 1950).

Using the *Classic of Changes* provided us with further contemplative insights into our reflections and influenced our perspectives and actions in ways that aligned with the Dao. First, after soliciting the students’ points of view, I would write down a question such as:

Despite our well-intentioned desire to add as many extra dimensions of learning and knowledge to equip ourselves with all that we feel we need to succeed as scholars, we consistently find ourselves becoming entangled in complexities. The more we try to untangle these complexities, the more we become entrapped within them. And the more we become entrapped within them, the more anxious and stressed we become. This takes us further away from the states of wellness and resilience we would like to be a part of. Should we consider another approach to successful scholarliness, and if so, what might that be?

Then, in states of meditative contemplation, we would toss three coins six times to build up a hexagram from the bottom upwards. For the question above, the Hexagram that came up was number 41, titled ‘Diminishing’ - and comprised of the trigram ‘lake’ (comprised of a *Yin* line over two *Yang* lines) below

¹⁶ WordSmith Tools is a corpus linguistics software that analyzes language patterns by examining word frequency, thematic significance, and contextual concordances within digital texts.

and the trigram ‘mountain’ (comprised of a *Yang* line over two *Yin* lines) above it. Then we read the oracle about this hexagram in the text of the *Classic of Changes*. It was summarized as follows:

The situation described by this hexagram is characterized by decrease, reducing one’s involvement, withdrawing energy from the matter at hand. (Ritsema & Sabbadini, 2005, p. 753)

And so, my diary excerpt following our reflections based on the oracle reading was:

This helps us realize that moderation is the key to successful scholarship, and that ‘less is more’ - given that adding as many extra dimensions of learning and knowledge as possible merely exacerbates confusion and frustration. In being aware of this, we can reduce the *Yang*-ness of excessive confusion with the *Yin*-ness of moderation. We now recognize the functionality of blending *Yang*-directness and *Yin*-indirectness (which harmonizes the explicitness of logic together with the implicitness of intuition). In addition, we choose authenticity over authoritarianism, prefer selflessness, recognize the fullness of emptiness, appreciate the value of compassion, frugality, and humility, accept that the highest teaching is that which leads by example, are less attached to excessive desires, and trust in the wisdom of keeping things simple.

Thereafter, following further discussion in a workshop, we wrote personalized reflections which were integrated into a collective and cohesive whole representing Wood’s growth and curiosity, Fire’s passion and dynamism, Earth’s centeredness and stability, Metal’s clarity and integrity, and Water’s depth and insight. We used Wordsmith Tools and consulted the Ritsema and Sabbadini (2005) translation of the *Classic of Changes* many times during the workshops, and the perspectives that we derived from them were woven together with Wuxing cosmology and Daoist principles in further diary entries for deeper insights. The following is an overview of some of the reflections that emerged from this process.

Reflections Based on Wood’s Growth and Curiosity

In Wuxing, Wood is a minor *Yang* (少陽) phase which corresponds to the spring season, and which symbolizes planting, flowering, and the fresh vitality of new beginnings. It embodies growth, curiosity, and idealism. On the *Yin* side, Wood is compassionate, empathetic, and creatively inspired; on the *Yang* side, it is ambitious, charismatic, and adventurous. Wood governs the liver, is associated with the color green, the planet Jupiter, and the easterly direction. Wood’s greatest strength is its optimistic drive toward possibility; its greatest vulnerability is anger, especially when lofty expectations give way to disillusionment.

While Wuxing assigns Wood a specific place within a cycle, Daoism relates its essence metaphorically through observations of its natural characteristics, which, among others, emulate its deep-rooted yet flexible persistence along with the potential of its unrushed unfoldment of soft and supple growth. As such, Wood is the epitome of the core Daoist values of humility and non-contention, and its reverence for authenticity over sophistication and wholeness over refinement. It reminds us that flexibility is strength, as well as to forgo the outward struggle for utility and to return inwardly to the naturalness of our true selves, from where the spirit of all genuine curiosity arises.

At the beginning of our class, with the theme of writing reflections based on Wood’s association with growth and curiosity, we read the story from Chapter 4 of the *Zhuangzi* about a useless tree that, despite its great age and magnificent size, had become so old, gnarled, and twisted that its wood was no longer considered useful for making utensils. In being considered a useless tree from the carpenter’s point of view, it was spared from the axe. Then the students and I reflected on the growth and curiosity of Wood and the wisdom of the useless tree. Based on our reflections, I wrote the following entry:

We often feel overwhelmed, anxious, and useless when facing the many challenges of academic life. Reflecting on the story of the useless tree deepens our realization that the uncarved cores of our true selves lie at much deeper levels than our egoic identities, beyond our fears of rejection and our struggle to be considered useful and liked by others to gain their approval. It is preferable to be considered useless while being aligned with our innermost selves, from where our joyful curiosity for learning sprouts and grows. Such bears the hallmark of authentic wellness and resilience, because it is aligned with our unique inclinations, aptitudes, and skills.

While being true to oneself like the useless tree may be considered nonsensical by “the modern education industry [which] focuses much on the massive production of college degree holders” (Yang, 2019, p. 118) and its excessive emphasis on logical-mathematical forms of intelligence while downplaying other forms of intelligence which include verbal-linguistic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalistic, among others (Gardner, 1999), the diary emphasized that all students and teachers are unique and worthy, and that their contributions should be treasured by all who appreciate the harmonizing cosmic manifestations of Wuxing and the compassionate, moderate, and humble features of Daoism. In these ways, Wood-inspired reflections of the paradoxical interplay of uselessness and usefulness encouraged considerations of how our personal growth and curiosities might foster authentic states of wellness and resilience.

Reflections Based on Fire's Passion and Dynamism

In Wuxing, the major *Yang* (太陽) phase of Fire is aligned with the summer season, which transforms spring's budding curiosity into a blazing quest for depth, burning away superficial disillusionment to reveal inner essence. On its *Yin* side, Fire shares Wood's compassion, empathy, and creative warmth; on its *Yang* side, it amplifies ambition, charisma, and courage into dynamic leadership and bold expression. Yet when over-stoked, Fire's assertiveness can become reckless, and its resolute drive can harden into impatience. Fire governs the heart, is linked to the color red, the planet Mars, and the southerly direction. Its greatest gift is joyful engagement, the exhilaration of purposeful action, while its chief pitfall is euphoric overextension. When that persists for too long, it collapses into panic and self-consuming burnout.

In Daoism, Fire and its association with passion and dynamism are metaphorically expressed as a natural process of transformation from knowing the hotness of its brazen ambition towards aligning with the subtle warmth of its radiant illumination. It therefore requires a delicate balance between its potential to be a destructive inferno of all-consuming chaos when it imposes its agitated will and its capacity to be a nurturing spark of creative awareness when it neither grasps nor clings but gently harmonizes the rhythms of the Dao towards stillness, humility, and non-interference. Yet when Fire aligns with the natural rhythms of the Dao, it cultivates the authentic vitality of Shen (生) which is like the gentle light emitted by the flame of cosmic *Qi* energy – and which enables the accomplishment of “things beyond the range of normal human capacities” (Ivanhoe & Van Norden, 2001, p. 359), and as demonstrated by the exemplary skills of artisans, butchers, fishermen, among others, in the Zhuangzi and the Liezi.

At the beginning of our class, with the theme being to write reflections based on Fire's association with passion and dynamism, we read the story in Chapter 20 of the Liezi about a man who could walk through fire. In this story, a man walked barefoot through burning grass by being in full attunement with the Dao through alignment with the moment and being free of illusions that bring fear. The story exemplifies how a sage would navigate the challenges of life not by forceful ambition, but by being in deep alignment with its rhythms. In the same way that an unattended fire would eventually extinguish itself, unrestrained passion and dynamism would weaken the essence of their persistence. Therefore, the Daoist approach to Fire avoids extremes and lets situations unfold naturally. Moved by this story and the passion and dynamism of Fire, and based on our discussions thereof, I wrote:

Despite our great enthusiasm to do impressive work, often things don't go as planned. While we inevitably lose our thoughts and stumble over our words on occasion, it's not desirable to feel scorched by shameful feelings based on perceived failures. Fire can easily exceed its initial passion to motivate us, and when this happens, the warmth of ambition can turn into an inferno of agitation in an instant. We should appreciate that Fire also brings light, and that burning like a candle gently radiates the warmth of our presence.

In our diary, Fire-inspired reflections invited considerations of passion and dynamism in ways that enhanced the authenticity of wellness and resilience through exploring our contemplative insights as to how the intense energy of Fire could distill our scholarly experiences into their purest forms, and in ways that are not destructive. We came to appreciate that the authentic vitality derived from a balanced appreciation of passion and dynamism exemplifies that the true source of great strength lies not in emotional excess but in harmoniously following the natural order, like a gently kindled fire that emits warmth. Such are reminders that beneath the turmoil of passionate and dynamic infernos driven by bold and powerful fixations lies the more playful and tempering essence of the Dao – and that tapping into its rhythms by allowing it to flow through situations opens the space for inner-clarity, receptivity and tranquility to exist, and out of which authentic wellness and resilience effortlessly arise from the tranquility of their self-so-ness.

Reflections Based on Earth's Centeredness and Stability

In Wuxing, the *Yin-Yang* (陰陽) balanced phase of Earth arrives after Wood's spring growth and Fire's summer blaze, and marks late summer's contractive pause. It draws in Wood's curiosity and Fire's passionate intensity, transforming them into nourishing integrity. On its *Yin* side, Earth shares Wood's compassion, empathy, and creativity; on its *Yang* side, it echoes Wood's ambition and Fire's drive—but grounds these qualities in steadfast reliability and ethical commitment. Earth governs the spleen, is linked to the color yellow, the planet Saturn, and occupies the center of the four cardinal directions. Its greatest strength lies in balancing Wood's idealism and Fire's exuberance—absorbing their excess into a stable core of being. Yet Earth's gift of care can become excessive worry, as it frets over outcomes and, like Fire, risks undermining itself through excessive rumination.

In Daoism, Earth's association with centeredness and stability is expressed in its reverence for its deep, grounded rootedness in non-judgmental receptivity, humility, stillness, patience, sincerity, and in the way it nurtures all the 'ten thousand things' - the Daoist expression for the myriad creatures, sentient and non-sentient, as well as all the non-living things of the world. In letting them arise from and return to their source, Earth is a foundation of the dynamic transformational dance of the Dao, whereby all things emerge and return through infinite cycles of decay and renewal. It does not discern between one thing and another but welcomes all without judgment. In being so, it teaches us that we are not separate from it, but rather an integral part of it, and that we as humans are merely one of the ten thousand things, and that we are not their masters nor their conquerors. Given this, a Daoist sage is someone whose true self has returned to its source and is free from the imposition of societal roles and personal worries. Such a person embodies the notion of Xiaoyaoyou (逍遙遊), meaning 'free and easy wandering,' and is a "supremely self-realized individual who wanders free from the conventions of culture and society" (Miller, 2003, p. 6).

I've always enjoyed walking in nature, and Sichuan University's Jiang'an campus in the bustling city of Chengdu has within it a large part devoted to nature called the Mingyuan Lake. It is an impressive expanse of water teeming with fish, frogs, and birds, while on its banks a wide variety of magnificent trees flourish. It is a welcome sight for all the students and teachers who traverse its wonders along the Long Bridge, and it is the most direct and convenient route between the dormitories and faculty accommodation. Yet there is an alternative route which circumvents the Long Bridge, but which offers

a leisurely stroll along the banks of the lake. It is this route that I usually take to and from classes, and on this occasion, I sat down close to the water's edge and wrote the following poem:

There's no path ahead, and no path behind,
And the mountain only moves within my mind.
A fish leaps free, and a bird takes flight,
While the Dao unfolds with an effortless might.

Then, when I entered the classroom, I was startled by the students' apprehensive faces. I asked them why they were so tense, and they told me that they were going to take an important examination that evening. Given this situation, I decided that, because the weather looked perfect for the next hour or so despite the earlier than expected onset of wintry conditions, going for a leisurely walk together along the banks of the Mingyuan Lake before coming back and resuming the lesson might be a good remedy. So, I read my poem to them, and then we went on our walk. After our walk, we discussed the aspects of it that resonated with us. Based on these resonations, I wrote the following reflection:

With the arrival of the Earth phase midway through the semester, going for a walk together around the lake was a wonderful experience. The best part was when we all noticed all the little white specks approaching us from afar, and how we realized that they were ducks paddling towards us. How nice it was that when they reached us, we all showered them with whatever we had to feed them. It's a testimony that we are more fully appreciating the wider dimensions of our scholarly endeavors. In transcending, without neglecting, our immediate fixations on calculation and scientific proof, we are finding a wider focus that grounds, centers, and stabilizes us.

We wandered around the lake without direction or purpose, merely observing what unfolded before our eyes without reacting to it, but spontaneously responding to whatever happened to be. In our reflections, Earth-inspired centeredness and stability guided us to a quiet contentment whereby we came to appreciate how grounded awareness rooted in gratitude can transform negative emotions into deeper appreciations that lie much deeper than the hectic glare of artificial striving. Doing so contributed to and strengthened our awareness of the true meaning of authentic wellness and resilience.

Reflections Based on Metal's Clarity and Integrity

In Wuxing, the minor *Yin* (少陰) phase of Metal arrives in autumn and embodies the tools and processes for the harvesting of the fruits derived from the lessons learned from the growth and curiosity of spring's Wood, the passion and dynamism of summer's Fire, and the centeredness and stability of late-summer's Earth for storage and future adaptations. Reflective and contractive by nature, Metal personalities are introspective, refined, and detail-oriented (pertaining towards *Yin*) and aspirational, ambitious, and determined (pertaining towards *Yang*). Metal governs the lungs, is linked with the color white, the planet Venus, and the westerly direction. Metal's strength lies in its clarity, integrity, and hopeful striving. Its vulnerability lies in the propensity for sadness and depression given its tendency towards feelings of grief when the results of diligent efforts yield lesser rewards than expected—a desolate sentiment akin to the dread of witnessing once-fertile fields being left to lie fallow, but without the realization that such is a prerequisite for the restoration of their future vitality.

In Daoism, Metal is metaphorically associated with the notion of the high point of cultivation, whereby its maturation becomes a part of the cycle of birth, growth, fullness, decay, and return, and which also returns us to our primordial source. In other words, it facilitates our yearning to return into being in alignment with the unblemished purity of our true selves. It does so by no longer chipping away at the unhewn purity of our true selves. Instead, it chips away at the egoic layers that social conditioning

had once rendered possible and solidified. In so doing, our true selves that had once been smothered by many layers of artificiality can once again shine through. Within this unforced authenticity, which appreciates cosmic cycles, we can be like the flowers that bloom in alignment with the rhythms of the Dao. Here, the fruits of past lessons tend to ripen spontaneously because their seeds were not planted with anxious intentions, nor harvested prematurely. Instead, they are products of an unconditional acceptance of the way things are, and so their harvesting is undertaken without boastfulness. And after contemplating the clarity and integrity of Metal, I wrote:

Many of us are doing last-minute revisions of the final assignments. Cutting unnecessary sections and words from the text feels hard to do, but once done, it also feels liberating. Doing so makes sense when we appreciate that Metal teaches us to let go of all forms of excessiveness by cutting away all that is unclear and unnecessary, while keeping only that with which we resonate. It's a process like the cutting and polishing of jade, where true refinement is a combination of technical skill and aesthetic appreciation.

In our diary, Metal-inspired reflections based on clarity and integrity helped us to realize that our sense of being separate entities from ourselves and the wider environment was illusory. Such notions of separation tended to dissolve and become reunified into the spiritual wholeness of a more contented existence, which inspired balance and harmony. Within this, more authentic states of wellness and resilience arise because it guides us toward our centers where our spirits settle naturally.

Reflections Based on Water's Depth and Insight

In Wuxing, the major *Yin* (太陰) phase of Water, embodying winter, distills the lessons of the preceding phases—spring's curiosity (Wood), summer's passion (Fire), late-summer integrity (Earth), and autumn's harvest (Metal)—into deep wisdom. In its *Yin* aspect, Water is introspective, reserved, and hidden; in its *Yang* aspect, it is dynamic, resilient, and adaptable. Water governs the kidneys, is associated with the color black, the planet Mercury, and the northerly direction. Water's greatest strength is its deep wisdom—its ability to critically examine the lessons of experience and to flow around obstacles. Its vulnerability is grief, which can arise when the weight of accumulated curiosity, passion, integrity, and harvest becomes overwhelming.

Water was an important metaphor in most traditional Chinese philosophies, and especially in classical Daoism, where cosmic principles derived from observations of nature were associated with human behavior (Allan, 1997; Slingerland, 2000; Chen & Holt, 2002; Giblett, 2009; Lee, et. al., 2008; Lu, 2012). In Daoism, the spontaneous adaptability of Water with its environment harmonizes with the acceptance that spring brings sprouting, summer brings fullness, autumn brings harvest, and winter brings retreat. Water is “modest, flexible, clear, soft, yet powerful (or perseverant) philosophically and psychologically” (Lee, Yang, and Wang, 2009, p. 73). Given that it does not pursue the superficial heights of self-interest and prefers a place of unfathomable obscurity, it is appropriate that Water represents the winter, which brings retreat. It is for these reasons that Daoist-inspired students and teachers hold Water in high esteem and with much gratitude. As an expression of our gratitude for the depth and insight of Water, I wrote the following entry:

As our semester draws to a close, we feel the energy of Water returning as we become quieter and more intuitive. We no longer strive blindly against the challenges that confront us. We are tapping into a quiet strength beneath the surface, our inner landscapes where the Dao moves unseen and guides us intuitively to where an unpretentious abundance of authentic wellness and resilience exists.

Water-inspired reflections enhanced our appreciation that our true selves exist as an indivisible oneness with the Dao's essence - and that this can be observed in the way that Water spontaneously adapts to all configurations of the terrain, including stubborn rocks around which it flows without contention and gently dissolves. When our paths as scholars become blocked by challenges, it is like Water's paths becoming jammed with obstacles. This made us aware that we should not confront our challenges aggressively. We realized that, in a similar way in which Water does not become entangled with the rocks it encounters on its way to the ocean, we too should not become entangled with our challenges as we make our way to our true selves. Just as Water nurtures everything and sustains life, taking no credit and leaving no trace behind except for the beautifully carved mountains and winding valleys as profound reminders of its omnipresence, we too can meander asymmetrically throughout the landscape of higher education's challenges, whilst fortifying our states of wellness and resilience by emulating the Dao's effortless essence.

Concluding Reflections

Our student-teacher diary, inspired by Wuxing and Daoism, contributed towards a balanced and harmonious classroom environment and more authentic states of wellness and resilience through enhancing holistic and cyclic perspectives, deepening our self-awareness in accord with our academic environment, and by immersing ourselves in the unconditional loving-kindness of compassion, moderation, and humility.

Holistic and Cyclic Perspectives

We came to regard our learning and teaching experiences more holistically and as being indivisible parts of an integrated whole that was cyclical rather than linear in nature. This encouraged us to take more balanced approaches to the unfoldment of pedagogical activities.

While noticing which phase was dominant given a certain situation, we could decide whether it required support or restraint. We became more aware that Wood's propensity for anger and disillusionment could be tempered by Metal's clarity, integrity, and hopeful striving. Likewise, Fire's propensity for panic and burnout could be tempered by Water's deep wisdom; Earth's propensity for worry and rumination could be tempered by Wood's optimistic drive toward possibility; Metal's propensity for sadness and depression could be tempered by Fire's joy and exhilaration, and that Water's propensity for becoming overwhelmed by grief could be tempered by Earth's gift of care. Through the phases of Wuxing representing different emotional and cognitive states, we came to see our academic challenges as parts of a natural cycle of learning from experience rather than as a one-way road to failure.

In becoming more aware of these holistic, integrated, and cyclic aspects of learning and teaching, we came to appreciate that the rigorous logic of technical skills and the intuitive insights of emotional awareness are equal companions of scholarly excellence. In navigating the phases of Wuxing without clinging to nor resisting them in the Daoist spirit of flowing with challenges and accepting setbacks as part of the process of the unintentional integrity of *De*, the complementary duality of *Yin-Yang*, the vital energy *Qi*, the self-so-ness of *Ziran*, the unforceful spontaneity of *Wuwei*, and the unblemished purity of *Pu*, more genuine states of wellness and resilience emerged effortlessly and of their own accord.

Self-Awareness in Accord with our Academic Environment

The diary shifted our approaches to learning and teaching such that we became more aware of the unique individuality of our rhythms, styles, and reactions to stressful situations. It was also a shift from an excessive reliance on external validation towards an inner confidence grounded in self-awareness.

We acquired a new scholarly identity whereby I became less of a transmitter of knowledge and more of a guide, while the students became less fixated on test-taking and rote learning and more attuned to their innate rhythms and methods of learning. With this, we came to feel that we were an inseparable part of a much larger integrated system of cross-cultural openness, one which is equally supportive of the *Yang*-ness of the logical reasoning of intellectual endeavor and *Yin*-ness of spontaneous self-inquiry. As such, we no longer sought to identify ourselves with a scholarliness that was driven by a desire for perfection, but as one that nurtured genuine engagement and honesty. In doing so, we came to view the combination of Wuxing and Daoism as not only being supportive but as being indispensable to a super-creativity in terms of metacognitive skill-building and technical knowledge, and as one that does not undermine nor marginalize the inner world of emotional intelligence but values achievement and attunement in equal measure.

Such was grounded in an equal appreciation for the Wuxing and Daoist-inspired logical applications of the *Yang*-ness of intelligence and the *Yin*-ness of intuitive creativity. We came to appreciate that when these arise mutually from within the innermost core of the true self, more authentic states of wellness and resilience become naturally infused within the classroom.

The Unconditional Loving-Kindness of Compassion, Moderation, and Humility

By looking beyond the prescriptive rigidities that are common to many contemporary educational scenarios on a global scale, the harmonizing influence of Wuxing and Daoism, as we perceived them through the lens of our student-teacher diary, nurtured our appreciation for the unconditional loving-kindness of compassion, moderation, and humility. It is within their tranquil dynamics that authentic states of wellness and resilience would seem to arise both naturally and effortlessly.

Compassion would seem to nurture empathy because it is not rooted in undue expectations. Similarly, moderation would appreciate that over-striving is detrimental to health and happiness, while humility would bind compassion and frugality together and infuse them within a spirit of tolerance and patience. Together, they inspire an unconditional loving-kindness which manifests as joyful contentedness. Such seems to diffuse compulsive patterns of negative thinking while unlocking creative spaces that are free of pre-conditioned judgments. In this light, the nurturing of unconditional loving-kindness appears to inspire harmony within the pedagogical environment and a more tolerant world beyond the classroom.

In an overall sense, this diary, informed by Wuxing cosmology and Daoist philosophy, would hopefully inspire scholars to give wider consideration to China's rich cultural heritage and use it as a valuable philosophical inquiry into aspects of self-cultivation in contemporary education. Doing so, in the context of this diary, may suggest that sustained diary writing can be experienced not only as a reflective technique, but also as an ongoing ontological practice whereby students and teachers can expand their awareness of the relational and embodied aspects of educational life. Here, compassion may come to be understood as sensitivity to imbalance rather than as mere moral judgment, moderation as self-regulation rather than as mere restraint, and humility as awareness of natural limitations rather than as mere modesty. From this perspective, wellness and resilience have a greater propensity to become more authentic, given that they are no longer regarded as phenomena to merely endure but also to adaptively respond to, whilst being in harmonious alignment with the natural transformations of Wuxing phases and Daoist principles. Such would also potentially contribute toward the further widening of the space for re-imagining educational wellbeing beyond performance-oriented paradigms, while focusing on the relevance of Wuxing and Daoist-informed perspectives within the philosophy of education.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to sincerely acknowledge the students for their engaged participation during the unfolding of this elective course. As the inspirational foundation for this article, their role was that of fellow travelers on the contemplative pedagogical path rather than as research participants or as direct contributors to the content of this article.

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