

On the Intellectual Origins of Tang Dynasty Taoism Philosophy

Xiangyi Qian

SOAS University of London, London WC1H 0XG, United Kingdom

Abstract. The Tang Dynasty was a period of cultural flourishing in ancient China and an important stage in developing Taoism philosophy. This paper aims to explore the intellectual origins of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy, analyse its formation and development background, and examine its influence on contemporary thought. Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy drew from the essence of various schools of thought in pre-Qin China, integrating Laozi's Taoism ideas, Zhuangzi's concept of nature, and the Taoism notions of self-cultivation. Influenced by the social context of the Tang Dynasty, Taoism philosophy flourished. The changing social and political environment, cultural exchanges, intellectual integration, and the relationship between Tang Dynasty literati and Taoism philosophy profoundly impacted the formation and development of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy. Emphasising the harmony between the universe and humanity, Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy focused on moral cultivation, the pursuit of personal enlightenment, and social care and governance. It exerted a far-reaching influence on later generations and continues to hold significant value in contemporary thought. In-depth research into the intellectual origins and connotations of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy is of great significance for enriching and expanding the development of Chinese philosophy and providing wisdom and guidance for contemporary society.

Keywords: Tang Dynasty, Taoism philosophy, intellectual origins, formation and development, influence, contemporary thought, Laozi.

1. Introduction

The Tang Dynasty was a golden age of cultural prosperity in ancient China and a crucial period for developing Taoism philosophy. However, there has been relatively limited in-depth research on Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy's intellectual origins and connotations. Therefore, this paper aims to systematically analyse the intellectual origins of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy by examining Taoism classics, historical literature, and scholarly research. The objective is to enrich further and expand our understanding of the development of Chinese philosophy. This study adopts a comprehensive research approach that combines textual analysis and scholarly interpretations to provide a comprehensive and in-depth analysis of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy. By exploring the intellectual origins of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy, investigating the influence of the social context of the Tang Dynasty, analysing its core ideas, and examining its impact on later generations and contemporary evaluations, we hope to gain a comprehensive understanding of the formation and development of Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy. This will unveil its intellectual origins and explore its significant influence on the development of Chinese philosophy and contemporary thought. Such insights will provide us with a deeper understanding of ancient Chinese philosophy and offer wisdom and inspiration for the development of contemporary society.

2. Intellectual Origins of Tang Dynasty Taoism Philosophy

2.1 The Rise and Development of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty was an important period for the development of Taoism, during which it gained widespread recognition and flourished. The relatively relaxed political environment and cultural prosperity of the Tang Dynasty provided favourable conditions for the flourishing of Taoism. The fortuitous opportunities and alignment with social demands made Taoism one of that time's prominent religious and philosophical systems. In the Tang Dynasty, Taoism played a significant role in various domains, including politics, culture, and society, influencing people's thinking, moral concepts, and lifestyles. In the early period of the Tang Dynasty, the government adopted a relatively tolerant

attitude toward religious activities, respecting the freedom of belief. This enabled Taoism to receive certain support and recognition in the political sphere. Some emperors held a supportive attitude toward Taoism and regarded it as one of the national faiths. For example, Emperor Taizong bestowed the "Orthodox Unity Teaching" title upon Taoism, and Emperor Xuanzong personally participated in Taoism rituals. The cultural prosperity of the Tang Dynasty also contributed to the flourishing of Taoism.

The Tang Dynasty was also a golden age of Chinese ancient culture, with numerous literati and flourishing cultural exchanges. In such a context, the fusion of Taoism and culture was inevitable. The creation and dissemination of Taoism classics and the integration of Taoism ideas with literature and art further expanded the influence of Taoism. Many literati and poets were inspired by Taoism philosophy and incorporated it into their poetry and literary works, further promoting the development of Taoism in the cultural domain. The Tang Dynasty poet Li Bai is an example of a poet who was inspired by Taoist philosophy and incorporated it into his poetic works. Li Bai's poems often reflect a pursuit of nature, freedom, and transcending worldly concerns, echoing the ideas of Taoist philosophy, which advocates embracing nature and governing through non-action. His literary creations express the praise of the natural world and profound thoughts on the search for life. At the same time, Li Bai vividly depicted natural scenes with a Taoist atmosphere, presenting a transcendent worldly realm. Among them, "Rhapsody On The Great Roc" can be regarded as his outstanding work:

The Old Transcendent of the South,
He expounded Heaven-born wisdom in the lacquer gardens.
His high unrivalled discourse poured out of him,
Issuing forth wide-ranging and wondrous doctrine.
From Humorous Tales of Qi he quoted a story of a marvel,
Telling of a great fish in the dark Northern Ocean.
I don't know how many thousand leagues long it is...
Its name is Kun, the Smout.

The poem was inspired by Li Bai's encounter with Sima Chengzhen at Jiangling. Li Bai was honoured by Sima Chengzhen's recognition of Li Bai as a man who could travel with him nationwide, so he wrote the "Rhapsody On The Great Roc" to express his feelings. Sima Chengzhen was a highly respected Taoist scholar at the time and was called to court by the Tang emperor on several occasions and was rewarded for his work, showing Sima Chengzhen's outstanding position in the field of Taoism. In this excerpt, Li Bai introduces Taoist lore concisely, and "the old transcendent of the south" mentioned in the first sentence is Zhuangzi, a representative of Taoist thought. The poem profoundly reflects the influence of Taoist thought on Li Bai's poetry and fits in with the Taoist metaphysics concept. The skilful integration of these elements in Li Bai's poetry further promoted the spread and development of Taoist thought in the cultural field.

The social demand for Taoism was also an important factor in its flourishing in the Tang Dynasty. During this period, social changes and economic development brought about a demand for spiritual sustenance and religious beliefs. Taoism emphasises individual cultivation and care for a life aligned with these social demands, providing people with a path to seek inner peace and spiritual fulfilment. Additionally, Taoism also emphasised caring for and assisting socially disadvantaged groups, positively impacting the society of that time.

In conclusion, the Tang Dynasty was an essential period for the rise and development of Taoism. The lenient political environment and cultural prosperity of the Tang Dynasty provided favourable conditions for the flourishing of Taoism. The alignment of Taoism with the social demands of that time made it one of the most prominent religious and philosophical systems. The development of Taoism in the domains of politics, culture, and society influenced people's ways of thinking, moral concepts, and lifestyles. In-depth research on the rise and development of Taoism during the Tang Dynasty helps us better understand the development process of ancient Chinese religion and philosophy, shedding light on its impact on the society and culture of that time [1].

2.2 The Importance of Taoism Classics in the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty stands as a pivotal period for creating and compiling Taoism classics. Numerous Taoism texts emerged during this time, including works such as "Tao Te Ching", "Zhuangzi", and "Nanhua Jing". These classics played a significant role in the formation and development of Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty. They not only encapsulated the essence of Taoism thought but also provided a solid foundation for future research and transmission. The significance of these classics extended beyond their widespread dissemination and study during the Tang Dynasty; their profound impact resonated throughout subsequent periods, significantly shaping the trajectory of Taoist philosophy.

Firstly, the emergence of these classics enriched the philosophical system of Taoism. "Tao Te Ching" is one of the essential Taoism classics, considered the core work of the Taoism school of thought. It succinctly expounds on key Taoism concepts such as the 'Tao', 'non-action' (wuwei), and 'naturalness'. Another influential Taoism classic, "Zhuangzi", explores the relationship between humans, nature, and humans and society through various fables and stories. It presents the concept of governing through non-action and conforming to nature. The "Nanhua Jing" records Zhuangzi's words, deeds, and thoughts, which are crucial in developing and transmitting Taoism. The advent of these classics enriched the philosophical landscape of Taoism and laid a robust foundation for the doctrines of the Taoist tradition.

Secondly, these classics played a significant role in promoting and developing Taoism in the Tang Dynasty. The Tang Dynasty was a period of cultural prosperity, with numerous literati and scholars who contributed to studying and disseminating Taoism classics. Many Taoism scholars and literati conducted in-depth research and interpretations of these classics, incorporating their ideas into their writings and cultural creations. They spread Taoist thoughts to a wider audience through lectures, commentaries, and publications. These efforts further expanded the influence of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty, permeating various aspects of politics, culture, and society.

Lastly, these classics had a profound impact on later Taoism philosophy. The Taoism classics from the Tang Dynasty became essential references for subsequent Taoism scholars, providing a vital basis for studying and transmitting Taoism philosophy. The ideas and theories presented in these classics became important sources of thought for later Taoist schools, pervasively impacting Taoism's ongoing development and evolution. This influence extended not only within the confines of China but also resonated globally, shaping the study and comprehension of Taoism on an international scale.

In summary, the emergence and development of Taoism classics in the Tang Dynasty played a significant role in the formation, promotion, and subsequent transmission of Taoism philosophy. These classics enriched the philosophical system of Taoism and promoted its flourishing and dissemination in the Tang Dynasty, leaving an enduring imprint on later Taoist thought. They provided invaluable research materials and references for future scholars, ensuring the inheritance and progression of Taoism thought. Moreover, the ideas and theories presented in these classics also influenced other schools of thought and philosophical traditions, imprinting a broad and profound impact on the history of ancient Chinese philosophy.

2.3 The Main Philosophical Schools of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty

During the Tang Dynasty, Taoism philosophy developed into several major schools of thought, with the Taoism school emphasising the concept of the 'Tao', receiving widespread attention and following. Taoism thought emphasises the idea of the 'Tao', considering it as the origin and essence of the universe, the governing principle, and the moral standard of all things. In the Tang Dynasty, Taoism thought had in-depth exchanges and integration with other philosophical schools, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, forming a distinctive philosophical system of Taoism. Self-cultivation and nurturing one's nature are crucial aspects of the philosophical schools of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty. It emphasises achieving unity with the 'Tao' and inner tranquillity by cultivating virtues and inner character. This concept broadly impacted Tang Dynasty society, promoting the dissemination and practice of Taoism thought. Furthermore, Taoism scholars in the Tang Dynasty

also focused on exploring the concept of nature, emphasising harmony and coexistence with nature. Through studying natural phenomena and observing natural laws, they proposed numerous theories and perspectives on nature to achieve balance and harmony between body and mind.

Within the philosophical schools of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty, there were also specific sects and thinkers, such as the Quanzhen and the Zhengyi. The Quanzhen School, grounded in a metaphysical framework, emphasised the importance of inner cultivation and moral refinement as a means to attain longevity and transcendence from the ordinary world. Through their teachings, practitioners of the Quanzhen School sought to harmonise their inner energies and align themselves with the fundamental principles of the universe. By purifying their thoughts and emotions, they aimed to cultivate a state of spiritual enlightenment and oneness with the cosmic forces. On the other hand, the Zhengyi School, also rooted in a metaphysical standpoint, focused on the practice of the immortal way and alchemy. This school believed in the existence of an elixir of immortality. It sought to attain longevity and transcendence through the refinement of the physical body and the cultivation of vital energy. The Zhengyi School emphasised the study and application of alchemical practices, which involved transforming and purifying substances to achieve spiritual and physical transformation.

From a metaphysical perspective, the Quanzhen and Zhengyi Schools offered different paths to spiritual transcendence and attaining higher states of existence. While the Quanzhen School emphasised inner cultivation, moral refinement, and alignment with universal principles, the Zhengyi School focused on the practice of alchemy and the pursuit of immortality. However, it is important to note that both schools shared the underlying goal of transcending the mundane world's limitations and achieving spiritual transcendence.

The formation of various major philosophical schools in Taoism during the Tang Dynasty, with a predominant influence of Taoism thought, garnered widespread attention and following. The concepts of self-cultivation, nurturing one's nature, and understanding nature were integral components of Taoism's thought in the Tang Dynasty. Different schools and thinkers played significant roles in shaping Taoist philosophy during this period. By delving into the intellectual origins of Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty, a more nuanced understanding of its formation and development is achieved, illuminating its interrelation with other philosophical schools and enriching our comprehension of philosophical thought within the Tang Dynasty.

3. The Influence of Tang Dynasty Social Background on Taoist Philosophy

3.1 Changes in the Socio-Political Environment of the Tang Dynasty

The Tang Dynasty, characterised by frequent political fluctuations, wielded a profound influence on Tang society, particularly impacting the standing of Taoism. Different political periods and rulers had varying attitudes and policies towards Taoism, directly or indirectly shaping its position and influence in society. In the early Tang period, Taoism received relatively tolerant treatment, marked by the restoration and reconstruction of temples and support from the imperial court and nobility. However, as the Tang Dynasty developed, the political environment changed, and attitudes towards Taoism also shifted. During the reign of Emperor Xuanzong, Taoism faced exclusion and suppression, but Emperor Xuanzong himself maintained a certain level of tolerance. After the An Lushan Rebellion, the Tang Dynasty entered a period of decline, and the status and influence of Taoism declined. The political changes in the Tang Dynasty also facilitated the exchange and integration of Taoism philosophy with Buddhism and Confucianism. Zen Buddhist thought and Taoism introspective cultivation influenced each other, giving rise to the concept of the unity of 'Zen' and 'Tao'. Confucian thought emphasised moral standards, which blended with Taoism's concept of self-cultivation and nurturing one's nature, forming a comprehensive idea of moral cultivation. Overall, the political changes of the Tang Dynasty had a significant impact on the development of Taoism philosophy, shaping its position and influence in society and promoting the exchange and integration of Taoism with other schools of thought.

3.2 Cultural Exchange and Intellectual Integration

The Tang Dynasty marked an era of cultural exchange and prosperity, attracting talents from various regions and promoting trade and cultural interactions along the Silk Road. This provided valuable opportunities for developing Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty. The exchange and integration between Taoism and other schools of thought, such as Buddhism and Confucianism, allowed Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty to absorb the essence of other doctrines, forming a unique and rich ideological system. Furthermore, the influence of foreign cultures also drove the openness and diversity of Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty, providing fertile ground for further innovation and development. Buddhism spread widely and influenced the Tang Dynasty, and its exchange and integration with Taoism were particularly notable. Zen Buddhist thought and Taoism introspective cultivation influenced each other, in particular, resulting in the conception of the unity of 'Zen' and 'Tao', profoundly enriching the philosophical significance of Taoism. Confucian thought also played an important role in the Tang Dynasty and had exchanges and integration with Taoism. Confucianism emphasised social ethics and moral standards, which blended with Taoism's concept of self-cultivation and nurturing one's nature, forming a comprehensive idea of moral cultivation. Some Taoism scholars combined Taoism cultivation concepts with Confucian ethical ideas, advocating the notions of self-cultivation, harmonious families, good governance, and peace under heaven, attempting to provide society with more comprehensive values and moral guidelines [2].

Other cultures also influenced Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty. The opening of the Silk Road facilitated the exchange of Central Plains culture with the cultures of the Western Regions, bringing in religious and philosophical ideas from Persia, India, and other places. The mystical thoughts of Persia and the yoga philosophy of India influenced the Taoism concepts of cultivation, enriching the philosophical significance of Taoism. At the same time, the eastward spread of Central Plains culture brought Japanese religious and philosophical ideas into contact with and influenced by Taoism in the Tang Dynasty, playing a role in its development. Cultural exchange and intellectual integration enriched the philosophical significance of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty while providing a foundation for its openness and diversity. Taoism in the Tang Dynasty absorbed the essence of other doctrines while maintaining its characteristics and independence, forming a unique and rich system of Taoism philosophy [3].

4. The Core Ideas of Taoism Philosophy in the Tang Dynasty

4.1 Ontology and Cosmology of Taoism

In the Taoism philosophy of the Tang Dynasty, the ontology and cosmology of Taoism are considered to be one of its core ideas. Taoism believes that the universe is generated and transformed from Wuji (the ultimate emptiness) to Taiji (the supreme polarity) and then to all things. This concept originates from the scriptures of the "Tao Te Ching", emphasising the origin and evolutionary process of the universe. Taoism emphasises the essence of the 'Tao', viewing it as the source and essence of the universe, surpassing all finite existence. The 'Tao' is perceived as an unseen and omnipotent force permeating all elements of the universe, omnipresent and foundational to its sustenance. Taoists believe that humans should seek unity with the 'Tao', reaching a realm beyond the limitations of the self through cultivation and understanding of the truths of the 'Tao'. Furthermore, Taoism cosmology in the Tang Dynasty emphasised the harmony and unity between nature and human beings, highlighting the interconnectedness and symbiosis between humans and the universe. Taoism regards the universe as an organic whole, with humans closely connected and interdependent with the natural environment. Humans should conform to nature, harmoniously coexist with it, and follow the 'Tao'. Taoism observes natural phenomena, seeking to reveal the mysteries of the universe and the truths of the 'Tao' through observing the changes and laws of nature. In the Tang Dynasty, the ontology and cosmology of Taoism were also influenced by and had exchanges with other schools of thought.

Corresponding to the concept of emptiness in Buddhism, Taoism's ontology also emphasises the illusory nature and selflessness of the world. Integrating the Confucian concept of human relationships, Taoism cosmology also emphasises the harmonious coexistence between humans and nature. The exchange and integration of these ideas enriched the ontology and cosmology of Taoism, making it more comprehensive and diverse [4].

4.2 Moral Cultivation and the Realm of Human Existence

In the Taoism philosophy of the Tang Dynasty, moral cultivation and the elevation of the realm of human existence were important topics. Taoism emphasises achieving unity with the 'Tao' through cultivation and practice, attaining harmony and perfection of the body, mind, and spirit. Moral cultivation was regarded as an essential aspect of Taoism in the Tang Dynasty, encompassing ethical behaviour, compassion, kindness, and a desire for restraint. The Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy also stressed the importance of introspection and meditation. Through meditation and introspection, individuals can transcend the distractions of the mundane world, enter the depths of their inner selves, and seek inner tranquillity and peace of mind. Introspection is a method of self-reflection, allowing individuals to observe their inner thoughts and desires, gain insight into their desires and attachments, and transcend the limitations of the individual to achieve inner calm and transcendence. During the Tang Dynasty, the discourse on moral cultivation and the elevation of the human realm within Taoism engaged in exchange and integration with other schools of thought. Corresponding to the precepts and compassion in Buddhism, Taoism's moral cultivation also emphasises the cultivation of compassion and kindness. Integrating the Confucian concepts of benevolence and ritual, Taoism's moral cultivation also emphasises respect and care for others. This cross-fertilisation of ideas enriched the theoretical framework of moral cultivation in Taoism, rendering it more comprehensive and diverse.

4.3 Social Concern and Governance Thought in Taoism

In the Taoism philosophy of the Tang Dynasty, Taoism demonstrated concern for society and contemplation on governance. Taoism thought emphasises the governance of the 'Tao' and the concept of governing by non-action, focusing on ruling the country with virtue and nurturing the people with the 'Tao'. Taoism believes that a harmonious and stable social order can be established through moral guidance and the popularisation of Taoism philosophy. Additionally, Taoism emphasises the values of benevolence, compassion, and social welfare, focusing on the well-being of vulnerable groups in society and encouraging individuals to contribute to social welfare and social justice. By studying the core ideas of Taoism philosophy in the Tang Dynasty, we can gain a deeper understanding of the connotations and characteristics of the Taoism philosophical system of the Tang Dynasty, revealing its influence on Tang society, people's ways of thinking, moral concepts, and lifestyles. This contributes to a better appreciation and understanding of the profoundness of ancient Chinese philosophy, drawing wisdom and insights from it and applying them to the development and progress of contemporary society. Furthermore, a nuanced exploration of the core tenets of Taoism philosophy during the Tang Dynasty affords a comprehensive understanding and interpretation of the diversity and uniqueness inherent in ancient Chinese culture and intellectual traditions. [5].

5. The Influence and Transmission of Taoist Philosophy in the Tang Dynasty

5.1 The Influence of Tang Dynasty Taoist Philosophy on Later Generations

Taoist philosophy during the Tang Dynasty had a profound influence on later generations. In the Tang Dynasty, Taoist philosophy was widely disseminated and popularised, exerting significant influence on the societal mindset, values, and cultural forms of the time. The core ideas of Tang Dynasty Taoism, such as the ontology of the 'Tao', moral cultivation, and social concern, laid a solid foundation for later Taoist philosophy and practice. Many Taoist classics and ideas from the Tang Dynasty were inherited and developed in subsequent eras, playing an important guiding role in

ancient and contemporary Chinese Taoist beliefs and practices. Central to the philosophy of Tang Dynasty Taoism was the ontology of the 'Tao.' This posited the existence of an intangible 'Tao' in the universe, serving as the source and essence of all things, transcending metaphysical existence. Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy delved deeply into the nature and characteristics of the 'Tao', proposing corresponding practices such as introspection and meditation to attain unity with the 'Tao'. This ontological view of the 'Tao' exerted a lasting influence on later Taoist thought, becoming a foundational cornerstone for the beliefs and moral practices of Taoists in subsequent eras. Furthermore, Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy underscored moral cultivation and personal self-improvement. Emphasising inner cultivation and nurturing moral concepts, this philosophical contemplation profoundly impacted later Taoism's ethical views and moral norms. The concept of moral cultivation, focusing on individual self-improvement and harmonious coexistence with others, was crucial in shaping later Taoists' behavioural guidelines and moral bottom line. Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy also prioritised social concern and returning to nature. Taoist thought emphasised the harmony and balance between humans and nature, advocating a lifestyle integrated with the natural order. This philosophy positively influenced social concern and environmental protection during the Tang Dynasty. Many Taoist scholars, inspired by these ideas, revered nature and actively engaged in social welfare activities, contributing to societal prosperity and the well-being of the people. This ethos of social concern and ecological consciousness continued to be cultivated and developed in the later practice of Taoism [6].

5.2 Evaluation and Study of Tang Dynasty Taoist Philosophy in the Contemporary Era

Contemporary scholars have conducted extensive evaluation and research on Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy. Through studying and interpreting Tang Dynasty Taoist classical literature, they have delved into its core ideas and philosophical systems and analysed and evaluated them from multiple perspectives, such as history, culture, and religion. At the same time, contemporary researchers have also focused on exploring and unearthing the influence of Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy on literature, art, and social life, recognising its unique position and role in Tang Dynasty culture. In evaluating Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy, some scholars believe it holds an important position in the history of Chinese philosophy and is one of the treasures of ancient Chinese philosophy. They believe that Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy has made unique contributions to Chinese traditional culture and philosophical thought through its distinctive ideas of ontology, self-cultivation, and social concern. The ontological view of the 'Tao' in Tang Dynasty Taoism recognises the universe's intangible nature and the Tao's existence. Additionally, the ideas of harmonious coexistence between humans and nature, advocated by Tang Dynasty Taoism, have significantly influenced social ethical views and fostered social harmony, thus contributing considerably to societal well-being [7].

Contemporary scholars have undertaken comprehensive investigations into Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy, approaching it from historical and cultural perspectives. Their studies delved into the development and changes of Taoism in the context of Tang Dynasty society and politics. These scholars recognise the complex relationship between Tang Dynasty Taoism and various societal facets, including politics, culture, and broader social dynamics. The flourishing and decline of Tang Dynasty Taoism were closely related to changes in political power and the social environment of the time. They also pay attention to the expression and influence of Tang Dynasty Taoism in literature, art, and social life. The poetry and paintings of Tang Dynasty Taoism, as well as the praise and expression of natural landscapes, injected a unique Taoist flavour into Tang Dynasty literature and art, becoming an important part of the culture of that time.

Contemporary researchers, such as Liu Shaoji and Russell Kirkland, also focus on the value and significance of Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy in modern society. They believe that the ideas of individual cultivation, social concern, and harmonious coexistence with nature emphasised in Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy still have enlightening effects on contemporary social development and individual spiritual pursuits. In modern society, people face various challenges and dilemmas, and the values and practices emphasised by Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy, such as inner tranquillity,

moral cultivation, and concern for others, provide positive guidance for individuals to seek balance and pursue happiness in a complex reality. The evaluation and exploration of the value and significance of Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy in the contemporary era contribute to the academic understanding of Taoism and provide insights and inspiration for individuals seeking personal growth and societal harmony.

Overall, Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy has undeniably bequeathed a lasting legacy to later generations. Its core ideas, such as the ontology of the 'Tao', moral cultivation, and social concern, have been inherited and developed in subsequent eras, shaping Taoism's beliefs, practices, and cultural expressions. Contemporary scrutiny and analysis of Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy deepen our comprehension of its enduring significance, offering valuable insights for individuals and society in the modern world. Although the Tang Dynasty Taoism philosophy undoubtedly profoundly influenced later generations, it is necessary for us to evaluate it from a critical perspective. The emphasis on individual moral cultivation and social concern in Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy may inadvertently neglect systemic issues and structural inequalities present in society. While Taoism promotes personal growth and ethical behaviour, it may not effectively address broader societal problems contributing to social injustice and inequality. A more comprehensive approach to achieving social harmony should involve addressing systemic challenges and advocating for social and structural changes. Moreover, the abstract and philosophically intriguing nature of the Tao's ontology can pose difficulties regarding practical application. The concept of the 'Tao' as an underlying principle of the universe may not offer clear guidance for specific ethical dilemmas or practical decision-making in the modern world. Striking a balance between the abstract nature of the 'Tao' and establishing concrete moral principles and ethical frameworks becomes crucial for ensuring its relevance and practicality in contemporary society.

6. Conclusion

Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy is one of the significant schools of ancient Chinese philosophy and profoundly impacted the society and culture of that time. Its core ideas encompassed the ontology and cosmology of the 'Tao', moral cultivation and spiritual development, social concern, and governance principles. These formed the philosophical system and values of Tang Dynasty Taoism. Taoism emphasises the harmony and unity between the universe and individuals, seeking a state of harmony and perfection through moral cultivation and spiritual practice. Additionally, Taoism emphasised social concern and governance, advocating governance based on virtue and nurturing the people through the Tao. It highlighted the values of benevolence, compassion, and care for the well-being of vulnerable groups in society. Future research directions could delve deeper into Taoist classical literature, compare different schools of thought, and explore the influence of Taoism on literature, art, and social life, as well as its value and significance in contemporary society. In conclusion, Tang Dynasty Taoist philosophy holds a significant position in the history of ancient Chinese thought, and the study and dissemination of its core ideas are of great importance for inheriting the excellent traditional culture of China.

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