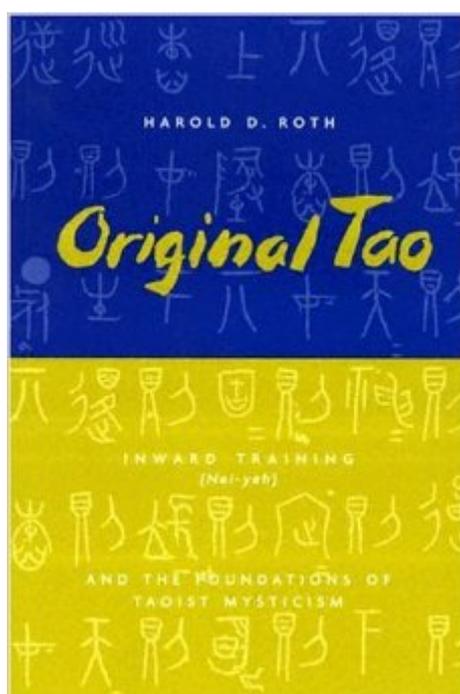


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# Original Tao: Inward Training (Nei-yeh) And The Foundations Of Taoist Mysticism (Translations From The Asian Classics)



## Synopsis

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

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

The centre of this 200-pages book is the critical edition of the Chinese text and the scholar translation of the Nei Ye (55 pages). Before and after this part, an introduction and 4 other chapters trace the history of the text, its contents and structure, its position in the context of the early Taoist mysticism and its position in the context of the early Taoism in general. The Nei Ye is not a recent discovery; it was known since millennia but, buried in a supposed Confucian miscellany, its actual contents and significance have been since long overlooked. This book attempts, with success, to re-assess them, placing this work at the origins of Taoist mysticism, as the earliest extant text of the tradition which will later express more widely known works like Laozi and Zhuangzi. "Original Tao" is a scholar book, it is not an 'easy' reading and the reader without any familiarity with ancient China's history and philosophy will be easily overwhelmed by the amount of names, data, quotations and so on. On the other hand, its language is not too technical, and basic concepts are never taken for granted but appropriately introduced. And, above all, the new lights it casts on (and the grounds it provides for) the development of the early Taoist mysticism are for sure of great interest even to the layman who knows Taoism only through (more or less sound translations of) the Laozi and the Zhuangzi. While not really new (it has now about 10 years), this book is definitely to recommend to anybody with a non-casual interest on Taoism. The only (small) criticism I can make is the use of an old Chinese transliteration system instead of the now more widely used pinyin system.

Original Tao is a wonderful translation of an often over-looked text. The verses contained within this short work rival and often surpass those found in the more well known Taoist classic, Lau-tzu. In addition to the translation, Professor Roth's commentary on Chinese mysticism is phenomenal and provides an interesting back-drop to the history of Taoist thought. I highly recommend this book to both newcomers and veterans of Taoism

Roth has done a tremendous service to humanity in this work. Through his diligent scholarship he has brought to life an obscure text that should have its place among the celebrated Taoist texts. Roth begins with a deep digging into the history of this text. Though it doesn't have the heart of

the text itself, it is definitely worth a read to find out the critical background of the text. Next Roth offers his translation, which I found on point and beautiful. The final chapters offers his thematic review, which works also as sort of a commentary to the text. I would highly recommend every practicing western Taoist to take a look. Though much of what is understood of the Tao has been written in the Lao Tzu and Hua Hu Ching, this text gets to the heart of practice, and that is the development of inward training, and the supremacy of breathing meditation to align oneself with the "vital essence", as Roth put it.

This monograph argues for several very interesting positions regarding early Daoism and in particular the significance of the text Nei-Yeh (Inner Training) in the early Daoist tradition. It argues Nei-Yeh is in fact the oldest extant Daoist text; that it represents an early example of a literary genre that assembles rhymed verse (originally orally transmitted) into a sort of intellectual collage (Lao Tzu being the most famous example of this genre); that this text - along with other more famous Daoist texts - shows evidence that mystical practice of breathing meditation was central to the early Daoist tradition; that this early Daoist tradition was not quite a school of philosophical thought, but was a kind of loosely affiliated grouping of intellectual master-student lineages. The methodological aspects of this work are at least as interesting as the object of its argument; in arguing his position about the dating, significance, and nature of Nei-Yeh, and the structure of early Daoist traditions, Roth draws on many fascinating methods of textual archeology, scholarly concepts and definitions of mysticism and of a 'school' of thought, the Laozi parallels discovered in recent decades, and much more. As a scholar interested in both science and mysticism, I have a deep respect for how this work does justice to both these scholarly traditions (an accomplishment that seems rare in modern intellectual life). Mindheartedly recommended to any student of Daoism, but also any student of mysticism in general and history of intellectual groups.

I have been a student of Taoism for over 40 years and try to accumulate as much literature on the subject as I can. This particular book is a very good find. I have been (and still am) enjoying it immensely. And .com helped me in finding this book at a great value.

I have studied every book in English on the subject of Tao for the last forty plus years. If it was left to me to select a single book to represent the essence of Taoist thought it would be this book. The sincerity, simplicity and direct pointing of the text is beyond compelling. For anyone who has even the slightest natural curiosity about the essential nature of existence, you will experience a great

remembering, a great opening within your being as you make your way across the pages.

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