

## **Transcript of the Wudang Lecture by Professor Yang Lizhi**

Welcome, friends, to Wudang Mountain. The topic, which is the title of today's lecture, is:

The core values of the Wudang teachings and their modern significance.

Wudang Mountain has many honorary titles. In ancient Chinese classics, it was called one of the Seventy-Two Blessed Lands, specifically the Ninth Blessed Land.

In the Yuan Dynasty, Wudang Mountain was designated by the emperor as the Blessed Land of Wudang, which meant it was officially recognized and honored by the imperial court.

In the Ming Dynasty, the emperor granted Wudang Mountain the honorary title Great Mountain of Taihe (Dayue Taihe Shan). Later, under the Ming emperor, it was also called Mysterious Mountain of Taihe (Xuanyue Taihe Shan).

After 1961, Wudang Mountain's main architectural complexes were included on the list of nationally protected cultural relics.

This is a symbol of Wudang Mountain as the number one famous mountain in China.

Everyone, take a look — do you recognize the animal carved up there? How would you say this in Europe? For example, the crane.

For us Chinese people, this is the most auspicious bird, symbolizing longevity and regarded as the best blessing for a person.

Wudang was marked as a world heritage place.

This is the symbol of a nationally protected cultural heritage site.

In 1982, Wudang Mountain was designated as a nationally protected site for cultural and historical significance.

In 1994, the ancient architectural complex of Wudang Mountain was listed as a World Heritage Site by UNESCO.

In 2006, the whole Wudang Mountain complex was officially designated as a National Key Cultural Heritage Site.

Wudang Mountain is one of China's ten most beautiful religious mountains and is also the scenic and cultural area most loved by Europeans.

This is the national and historic cultural site emblem.

This the World Heritage site emblem.

We should ask: What is the core value of Wudang Daoism?

Because Wudang Mountain's architecture, teachings, literature, and even martial arts all bear the imprint and influence of Daoist thought.

What is the core value of Wudang Daoism?

For example, we believe in Christianity, Western culture places more emphasis on freedom, equality, and love.

Chinese people have another way of expressing it, but the goal is the same.

What is the modern significance of the core values of Chinese people?

So, when we study the ideas of Wudang culture, we need to answer this question by addressing three points: What is the idea? How is this idea expressed? And what is the modern significance of this idea?

What is a core value? As we just mentioned, it is what regulates people's behaviour, this correct guideline.

When we get on a public bus, after elderly people have boarded, we should give up our seat for them. This is truly a tradition among the Chinese people.

Because of this principle, we have corresponding behaviours.

For example, as we have established certain standards in our discussions, we are able to achieve more.

The core lies in simple language, not too much. So just a few sentences, a few words can express it. So we once discussed the core values of Wudang in a book. This Wudang culture is deeply shaped by Daoist spirit, a culture molded by it. For example, the material culture.

A friend from Europe, a Belgian doctor, once asked me, "You Chinese are too focused on self-interest and don't speak about salvation." Thinking Taoism is only about carefreeness, not about saving others. But I think this is wrong.

Fifty years ago, in the Wudang Mountain area, there were fugitives, perhaps because their families were poor or they encountered a famine.

But when they passed by houses along the roadside, people would always give them something to eat, not letting them starve to death.

So we cannot say that Westerners talk about salvation, but Chinese people do not talk about salvation.

We believe that some Daoist teachings express the very essence of Daoism — its purity, its harmony with Heaven, and the sincerity people show toward the sacred mountains.

Honesty and kindness, the idea of kindness, is the basic spirit of Daoist culture.

Some friends say this is too complicated, so how can Wudang culture be summed up in simple words? In fact, it comes down to just two characters: it speaks of harmony and peace.

This refers to the emperor from 600 years ago, who emphasized that Wudang Mountain should represent Great Harmony.

This is Dayue Taihe Mountain, the way the two characters Taihe are written, written in Chinese.

So the emperor issued an imperial decree, saying that after the repairs of Wudang Mountain were completed, it should be given the name Dayue Taihe Mountain.

This is the inscription on the stone tablet. And it also mentions Taihe, Dayue Taihe Mountain.

We all see this stele surface, it is even more special to have seen it (in person).

This is a picture of the (Chinese) characters.

In China, the concept of Taihe has a history of over 3000 years.

This is the inscription of the two characters 'Taihe' written on Wudang Mountain.

It is over 100 years old.

From ancient emperors to Daoist priests, all believed that we should maintain a kind of harmony.

This is the shape of Wudang Mountain as we see it, like flames. Then there is water pressing down on the fire, which is very harmonious. The Chinese believe that water restrains fire, water overcomes fire, and this kind of situation is the best.

Here is a picture of Wudang Mountain. This shows the highest peak of Wudang Mountain as seen from the east side.

It resembles a turtle. The turtle naturally represents water.

In ancient China, more than two thousand years ago, it was believed that water could overcome fire, and that water restraining fire was a very auspicious thing.

This is the Chinese image of a hexagram. Water is above, fire is below.

This is the Southern Cliff Peak of Wudang Mountain.

If you have time, you can have a look.

The Wudang Daoist concept of Taihe (Grand Harmony) can be explained on four levels.

The first is from the perspective of our own person: the body and mind should be in harmony.

The second is between people, in society, between nations, and between ethnic groups — there should be harmony.

The third is between man and nature. Humans should not, because of their great power, destroy nature.

The fourth level emphasizes that Heaven and Earth should be in harmony. The natural wind and rain must be peaceful, not violent, and must not destroy human life.

Of course this is our beautiful wish.

This is the sacred pathway leading up Wudang Mountain, with over 300 steps.

What I want to highlight is not the number of steps, but rather that the railing patterns on the steps have special meaning.

This is the pattern on the railing at the South Terrace. At the bottom is a treasure vase, and on top is a lotus leaf, representing peace in Chinese culture.

These patterns also represent peace, this is part of China's traditional architecture and design.

From the top of the Wudang Golden Peak, you can see this classical pattern.

So when we practice Daoism and wear Daoist robes, we need to maintain inner calm. We should follow the Daoist mind and not be disturbed by human desires.

We Chinese believe this is not just about dissecting a small jade, but about a living human body.

The back is called the Du meridian, the front is called the Ren meridian. When the Ren and Du meridians are open, the person's body will be healthy.

This is Taoism's understanding of the human body: at certain stages, a person can feel the qi in the abdomen, in the chest, in the head, and transform it into inner refinement.

The Chinese believe that in practicing Taoism, the body should become more connected, freer, and unrestrained, without illness.

We have a Western psychologist who translated a book called *The Secret of Essence*. He did the translation based on such diagrams.

In France, we have six scholars. Two of them studied the *Essence* and the cultivation diagrams, and translated them into English.

Therefore, Daoism emphasizes unblocking the human meridians and keeping the body upright and balanced. This is the root of Taiji culture and a typical expression of Taiji culture in health preservation and martial arts.

This is what ancient Taoist priests achieved through persistent cultivation of the mind and progress in their practice, bringing about a profound and subtle state of realization.

This place is where a very famous Taoist priest in China practiced cultivation about 900 years ago.

This is the site where he studied the I Ching, known as the Songjin Terrace.

This is from this side.

This place is very quiet, and the air is very good.

This is a Daoist practitioner's insights gained through cultivation, expressed in poems he composed. This happened about 700 years ago.

So when we practice Kungfu and martial arts, the most important thing is to focus and cultivate oneself. So we say that the foundation of the entire Taiji culture is the cultivation of Daoism, the theory of cultivation.

So Daoist practitioners must maintain an upright body; the spine must be straight. Taiji also particularly emphasizes this. This is a fundamental aspect of cultivation. It is not simply a matter of martial arts.

So Wudang Mountain Taiji is the true transmission. This is not said by the people of Wudang Mountain, but by experts in Shanghai.

The second point emphasizes that people should live in harmony with each other and not fight.

So between people, one should be honest and upright, truthful and trustworthy.

So in some Daoist temples, there can be Buddhist statues, for worship and prayer, emphasizing that the three teachings are not separate. In this place, they were originally one family.

So in Chinese history, basically there were no religious wars, but because of religious beliefs, conflicts sometimes occurred.

For people to live together in harmony, they naturally need to cultivate kindness and virtue. Only with virtue can peaceful relations between people be maintained.

It is very similar to Christianity and other religions.

This place, because it sold fake goods, later suffered natural disasters and a fire—such is the story.

This is a story from 900 years ago.

The third point is that we emphasize harmony between humans and nature.

First, cultivation should never involve harming or damaging the body, that is, one must live in harmony with nature and things.

When we are on a very steep mountain and want to build a wall, but the mountain itself cannot be altered, then how can we build the wall well?

This is the wall, a wall on the mountain, which was built well here.

Of course, this wall must be cut into a trapezoidal shape, bigger at the bottom and smaller at the top, to find stability and balance.

This illustrates the relationship between humans and nature—the wall seems to emerge naturally from the mountainside.

This is a very good example, a picture on the wall; we can see that the wall is completely in harmony with nature.

These natural stones are still very well preserved; with debris regularly cleared to maintain their condition.

This wall rises and falls, built following the contours of the mountain.

This is the highest point we reached on Wudang Mountain; this is the destination at the top.

This is the largest road on Wudang Mountain, but the wall on the left side of it is curved. Why is this? It is to protect the mountain.

This kind of construction already had this meaning 600 years ago.

This is a painting from 600 years ago. This wall is curved, in order to protect the mountain peak.

We won't go into detail here. The unique animals and plants of Wudang Mountain may be less familiar to you, so I won't spend much time on them.

This is the Jade Void Palace, a deity platform of the largest Daoist palace on Wudang Mountain, a platform in front of the main hall. What is this platform used for? Please tell me everyone.

Everyone can try guessing a bit, what is it used for?

I at first also thought it was for performing rituals, but it is very strange — there are no steps to go up. Since normally there would be steps around, it cannot be used for performing rituals.

So later I thought this place was for planting a tree, the purpose being to change the tree's orientation; the tree should not be dug out, but how to keep the tree? Just use this. By a very ingenious method, this platform is actually a platform for a tree, a platform for planting a tree.

This place is right at the foot of Wudang Mountain, the largest Daoist site. At that time, people also asked me, since you are someone who studies history, how do you think about this question, how do you consider it? This time I thought it might have been for planting a tree.

So in building palaces, one must follow the mountain and adapt to the rocks, conforming to nature. Look at the layout of the Nanyuan Palace — it especially emphasizes following the mountain and adapting to the rocks, conforming to nature. But the Zixiao Palace is simply two jade walls placed on a single central axis.

For the central axis, we see that the Zixiao Palace is like this, but the Nanyuan Palace is not like this — it follows nature.

These two jade walls are positioned one in front and one behind, one to the left and one to the right, but the distances are not the same, and in this respect they are also different. It was built entirely according to the terrain.

The architecture of Wudang Mountain appears like a painting created by nature itself.

We have many photographs, nature itself is a natural painting, so everyone should take more photos to preserve the beautiful scenery.

Another cultural peculiarity involves the crow. In Wudang, the black crow is an auspicious bird — people do not harm it, but show it respect. When I visited Las Vegas, I noticed a local place that shared a similar cultural tradition.

Tokyo in Japan is called the city of crows.

This is a Black Tiger deity, representing the idea that tigers are something humans should confront. It is a personified image.

When building something, you must think carefully before starting, and ensure that the results remain in harmony with everything around them.

This is the Grand Temple of the Sun and Moon. Netardju(?), a German traveler, took photographs of it about 120 years ago.

He even wrote a book in German language about his trip to Wudang.

Here is a picture of a Daoist practitioner at Wudang Mountain. He grafted a different kind of flower onto a tree, and it blossomed there. As a result, the tree produced a unique, mixed fruit.

One interesting thing: I have been to Germany, to Japan, to Finland, but I have not been to Norway. I have seen that in many places they protect the mountains. But more than 500 years ago, people had already paid attention to protecting the mountains.

Germany and Japan both use wire mesh supports to protect the mountain slope.”

Wudang Mountain uses stones to protect the mountain, building a large wall as a foundation to protect it.

This is a photo from when I was in good health, during my research at Wudang Mountain.

I've been there about 20 times.

These ideas are not very easy to explain, so let's just briefly talk about them. This Daoist concept of Taiji in Wudang has important meaning, a positive meaning, for solving the problems that humanity faces in our modern society.

What is the connection between traditional Chinese society and today's world? What kind of connection exists between them? It is the principle of Great Harmony that links society and its aspects together. In today's world, the pace of life is fast, and this brings many psychological issues — including depression and various other mental health challenges.

The concepts of contentment, wisdom, closeness, peace, practice, and self-cultivation in Wudang Daoism can provide valuable reference for solving the problems of disharmony in a person's body and mind.

Facing today's society's desire for material possessions, everyone hopes to obtain material satisfaction. This intensifies competition for interests, creates tense international relations, promotes managerialism, and brings many global peace-related problems.

These principles provide us with valuable experience and can help solve problems of disharmony, conflicts, and wars between people and between nations.

Because of tense international relations and the prevalence of managerialism, many global peace-related problems arise. In 2015, General Secretary Xi Jinping emphasized at a United Nations Conference, that all countries in today's world should be mutually respectful and work together.

These ideas provide us with valuable experience, which can help resolve disharmony between people and nations, as well as problems of war. When Madame Xi and the President of the United States took a beautiful photo together, they chose the Hall of Great Harmony as the setting. The choice was deliberate — to show the world something important: that we all share in the spirit of Great Harmony.

Xi Jinping used Daoist thought — going up the mountain and down to the water, harmony between heaven and earth — to explain to Obama and Trump China's concept of peace, the idea of a community of shared destiny for humankind.

So when we Chinese speak of peace, it is not only now that we speak of it, but already five hundred, a thousand years ago we were speaking of it.

So as humanity faces the taking from nature, with pollution becoming more and more serious, and ecological destruction and other problems, we must properly resolve the relationship between people and nature.

In our world, all countries are like the inhabitants of a spaceship. We have common interests, common needs, and a common future, so we must cherish the Earth.

We must face the natural disasters of our world, such as earthquakes, volcanic eruptions, and violent storms at sea. All of this is meant to emphasize that we should pray for peace between Heaven and Earth. Heaven and Earth transform and give rise to the growth of all things, bringing about good prosperity, and allowing humans, animals, and plants to grow well.

So, from ancient times until today, Chinese people have considered not only the relationships between people, but also the relationships between people and nature, and between nature and Heaven and Earth, all with the hope for peace.

So, in modern society the idea of Great Harmony (Taihe) has significance for planning, therefore we Chinese today are also reviving and carrying on the thought of Great Harmony, to make new contributions for humanity.

I also hope our noble friends have a smooth trip to Wudang. May your future life be healthy and safe. Thank you everyone.