

9-1-2021

## Book Review: The Divine Feminine Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary, by Rosemarie Anderson

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### Recommended Citation

Kling, S. D. (2021). Book review: The divine feminine Tao Te Ching: A new translation and commentary, by Rosemarie Anderson. *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies*, 40 (1). <https://doi.org/0.24972/ijts.2021.40.1.136>



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## BOOK REVIEW

### *The Divine Feminine Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary*

by Rosemarie Anderson

(2021; Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions)

Reviewed by

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*The Divine Feminine Tao Te Ching: A New Translation and Commentary* is an aesthetically alluring text that invites the reader to journey deeply into a matrix of relational, embodied, and non-coercive presence. The author, Rosemarie Anderson, draws from her personal journey, including time spent living in China and an exploration into Chinese calligraphy, as well as her facility with the Chinese language and knowledge of the origins and manuscripts of Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*. This is a book for all individuals interested in a fresh take on ancient wisdom.

The work joins a decades-long stream of appreciation in the transpersonal psychology community for Taoism (also Daoism) as a framework for the psycho-spiritual development of elevated mental and spiritual states that may also positively impact physical wellbeing. (Cott & Rock, 2009, p. 119) While Western psychology has focused on individual need fulfillment and goal achievement, Taoism "looks for more fundamental changes in attitudes," seeing human beings as inseparable from a world where everything is related and with which humans must be in harmony to flourish. (Perryman & Moss, 2012, p. 1) Though a generally lesser-known religious and philosophical tradition in the West, Taoism may be finding new application due to its integrative capacities within a cosmos marked by change and the interplay of polarities. (Woodward et al., 2020, p. 1)

Beginning with a telling of her time spent in China forty years earlier, Anderson relates her own immersion into the mindset of *wei wu wei*, or

"acting without acting," that is at the core of the *Tao Te Ching*'s wisdom. The experience profoundly changed her as a human being. Now, four decades later, she was surprised to find in her revisitation of the text that the *Tao* is "profoundly *feminine*," with consistent references of "mother," "virgin," and "womb of creation."

The book's introductory material continues with notes on the author's approach to translation and guidance on how one might read—and even sing, given the text's history as an oral tradition—the *Tao Te Ching*. Anderson helps readers understand her emphasis on the more mystical and poetic aspects of the text, along with introductions to *wei wu wei* and the Divine Feminine. These first two sections, as well as her concluding notes on the translation, calligraphy, and poems, provide rich material for deeper comprehension of metaphors that may be unfamiliar to Western readers. As well, the text's cover art and internal calligraphic reproductions add much beauty to the text.

While the explanatory material is excellent, the true artistry of this volume lies in the translations of the poems of the *Tao Te Ching*. While brief, each is a treasure trove of deep wisdom for living harmoniously within the flow of life. Giving pause to theologians everywhere, the first poem begins with probably the most familiar of the text's lines:

*The Tao that can be told  
Is not the everlasting Tao  
The name that can be named  
Is not the everlasting name*

Many alluring metaphors await the reader, including “unbroken gossamer,” “bright darkness,” “dark virtue,” and the “dark beyond dark.” Great themes of the one and the many, the non-coercive nature of authentic power in leadership, the ability to drop into the embodied present through the belly, and the constant flow of change emerge through the verses in simple, yet expansive language. We learn that the Tao flows everywhere and gives life to all, allowing those who align with it to reach a state of balance and harmony. Ultimately, this book, like Richard Powers’ novel *The Overstory*, invites us into profound stillness, offering its grace as a way to bring new growth to our devastated inner forests by doing “nothing – nothing at all, and do it for less time than you might think” (Powers, 2019, p. 460).

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### About the Author

**Rosemarie Anderson, Ph.D.**, is professor emerita of psychology at Sofia University, an author, and an Episcopal priest. In 2017 she received the Abraham Maslow Heritage Award from the Society of Humanistic Psychology of the American Psychological Association. She is the author of several books, including *Celtic Healing Oracle: 64 Cards & Guidebook* and *Transforming Self and Others through Research*. She lives in rural Oregon surrounded by wilderness and wildlife.

### The Reviewer

**Sheri D. Kling, PhD**, is the author of *A Process Spirituality: Christian and Transreligious Resources for Transformation* and earned her doctorate in religion: process studies from the Claremont School of Theology where she serves as the director of Process and Faith (Center for Process Studies). She is a constructive theologian who integrates the process-relational philosophy of Alfred North Whitehead and the analytical psychology of C. G. Jung for psycho-spiritual wholeness and is a faculty member of the Haden Institute. She lives in Bradenton, Florida.

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The *International Journal of Transpersonal Studies* is a Scopus listed peer-reviewed academic journal, and the largest and most accessible scholarly periodical in the transpersonal field. IJTS has been in print since 1981, is published by Floragrades Foundation, sponsored in part by Attention Strategies, and serves as the official publication of the International Transpersonal Association. The journal is available online at [www.transpersonalstudies.org](http://www.transpersonalstudies.org), and in print through [www.lulu.com](http://www.lulu.com) (search for IJTS).