



In the Shadows of the Dao: Laozi, the Sage, and the Daodejing (SUNY series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture)

Thomas Michael

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Challenges standard views of the origins of the Daodejing, revealing the work's roots in a tradition of physical cultivation.

Thomas Michael's study of the early history of the *Daodejing* reveals that the work is grounded in a unique tradition of early Daoism, one unrelated to other early Chinese schools of thought and practice. The text is associated with a tradition of hermits committed to *yangsheng*, a particular practice of physical cultivation involving techniques of breath circulation in combination with specific bodily movements leading to a physical union with the Dao. Michael explores the ways in which the text systematically anchored these techniques to a Dao-centered worldview. Including a new translation of the *Daodejing*, *In the Shadows of the Dao* opens new approaches to understanding the early history of one of the world's great religious texts and great religious traditions.

“Michael’s work provides a fresh and innovative methodological approach to a well-known and much studied text. Unlike the vast majority of previous studies, which situate the *Daodejing* in an ahistorical philosophical realm divorced from ritual and practice, Michael’s analysis takes seriously the possibility that the text both contains and advocates for self-transformative practices. In addition, his translation, while not intended to be a stand-alone work, significantly contributes another important perspective. This excellent, groundbreaking book lays the foundation for a new round of vigorous debate and scholarly attention.” — Jeffrey Dippmann, coeditor of *Riding the Wind with Liezi: New Perspectives on the Daoist Classic*

Thomas Michael specializes in early Chinese religion, philosophy, and shamanism, and is the author of *The Pristine Dao: Metaphysics in Early Daoist Discourse*, also published by SUNY Press.



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