

道法自然
為虛空

a RAINBOW of
TAO

Jane English

co-creator of best-selling editions of
Tao Te Ching and *Chuang Tsu*

Foreword by Chungliang Al Huang



Through images, together with her uniquely personal understanding and perceptions, Jane English helps us enter into the heart and soul of the living philosophy of *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tzu*, two of the most important Tao classics.



What treasures does this Tao from the Orient bring to our Western culture?

In this beautiful and accessible book the author replies by telling her experience with Tao through her words and her color photographs of nature, accompanied by selections from *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tsu*.

Readers can notice what is awakened in themselves by these words and images. Each of us must find Tao in our own unique way.

In the early 1970's Jane English and her husband Gia-fu Feng illustrated their best-selling editions of these classics with his Chinese calligraphy and her black-and-white photographs of nature.

In this new book Jane has ventured into another dimension of expression, the full color spectrum. This is just as nature intended for our eyes to see; it allows our spirits to soar.

—Chungliang Al Huang

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Who is Tao?

Here in the West we live in a world shaped by the structure of our language into objects and actions. There are nouns and there are verbs, and among the nouns there is a division between the “whats” and the “whos,” between inanimate things and living beings.

In translation from Chinese, Tao is usually treated as a noun, however, Tao cannot be neatly categorized. It is both noun and verb, and neither noun nor verb. Likewise it is not easily classified either as a “who” or as a “what.”

A defining statement of our Western culture is found in the *Gospel of John*, “In the beginning was the Word . . .”

Yet *Tao Te Ching* begins with a starkly contrasting line that roughly translates as, “The Tao that can be put into words is not the real Tao.”

Mindful of the paradox of using words, and images, to approach Tao, I invite you to enter into this book with a spirit of adventure. Explore with me this Tao that has over the past few decades come from the Orient into our Western world.

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A Rainbow of Tao

Looking at most of the books on Tao, one might easily come to think that Tao existed only in ancient China and that it can be shown only in black and white, preferably through Chinese calligraphy and landscape painting on rice paper. Various shades of tan and brown are also allowed, as is an occasional spot of red. I followed this way with the black & white photography for the *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tsu* books I did with Gia-fu Feng in 1972 and 1974.

But the ancient Taoists saw in full color just as we do. It is simply that their technology for expressing themselves was ink on paper. Now we have film, computers, and color printing.

In *a Rainbow of Tao* I am using color photographs, some that are contemporary with the black and white photographs in *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tsu*.

Black and white is yin-yang. Adding color changes this to yin-yang and the ten thousand things – mother, father and the full spectrum of their children.



*Yin, Yang
and the
Ten-Thousand Things*

*Tao begot one
One begot two
Two begot three
And three begot the ten-thousand things.*

*The ten-thousand things carry yin
and embrace yang
They achieve harmony by combining
these forces*

– Tao Te Ching, Chapter 42



The image of *Yin, Yang and the Ten Thousand Things* came to me in meditation about 1988. It shows yin-yang opening up and bringing forth their rainbow children, all of creation, the “ten-thousand things.”

Rather than seeing yin and yang as opposites, we need a co-creative balance of masculine yang and feminine yin in our lives, so that their children, our creativity, the ten-thousand things, can be born.

Tao may be found not only in the undivided ground of being, nor just in the polarity of yin and yang, dark and light, dynamic and receptive, but also everywhere in the full rainbow spectrum of the ten-thousand things, all the myriad ways the un-nameable whole is divided into discrete beings.



*A Dance
of
Words and Images*

This book is like a sandwich.

The twenty pages you have just read are one slice of bread.

The other slice is the final twenty pages.

Both of these can be read in a linear fashion from start to end.

The dance you are about to enter is the filling,
and like the filling of a sandwich it is to be savored.

Wander around in it, even going backward and forward, lingering occasionally,
delighting in the mystery of Tao.

Do I know anything about Tao?

How would I know if I know anything about Tao?

I laugh!

What impossible questions.





*The wise student hears of the Tao and practices it diligently.
The average student hears of the Tao and gives it thought now and again.
The foolish student hears of the Tao and laughs aloud.
If there were no laughter, the Tao would not be what it is.*

– Tao Te Ching, Chapter 41

Someone emailed me a question about this line in *Tao Te Ching*:

Using the outer light, return to insight.

– *Tao Te Ching, Chapter 52*

I wondered, “Is this what I do with photography?”

I think so.

While we are in physical human form, it is physical tools such as images that can help us stay in touch with the larger non-physical world from which we come and to which we will return.





Promise me that from time to time as you read this book you will set it down and welcome the living Tao as it moves through your whole being. Remember that these are words and images, still artifacts of Tao as it has moved in my living.

I should be most disappointed if they did not come back to life in your own living Tao.



*Be truly whole,
And all things will come to you.*

– Tao Te Ching, Chapter 22

Such wonderful trust in the integrity of all that is!



*Returning is the motion of the Tao.
Yielding is the way of the Tao.
The ten thousand things arise from being.
Being arises from not being.*

– Tao Te Ching, Chapter 40

Does fear of this state of not being separate us from our creativity? I think so. Not being is a state of “no I” from which “I” is created anew. And of course the phrase “not being” is inaccurate as it is words, words attempting to point beyond words to a state of oneness that is prior to all distinctions.

So many have written about this place where words slide up to the edge and almost fall over into what is beyond words.

(this is the last page of the section on the story
of our editions of *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tsu*)

Through all these years of work with our best-selling editions of *Tao Te Ching* and *Chuang Tsu* I had been noticing how patriarchal the text was. When I asked Chungliang about this, he assured me that the ancient Chinese was much more gender neutral and supported my bringing more balance to the English translation. Toinette Lippe, my long-time editor at Random House, came out of retirement to help with this project, which resulted in new editions of both books—*Tao Te Ching* in 2011 and *Chuang Tsu* in 2014.

I recently became aware that through all these years of work on the Tao books and calendars I have carried a nagging uncertainty as to the appropriateness of my doing this work, being a woman, having European ancestors, and knowing no Chinese at all, yet I did do the work.

Reviews of our *Tao Te Ching* when it was first published in 1972 included comments that this ancient text had been “gussied up” and “decorated” with photographs. Yet there was also a review that suggested that while the real Tao cannot be told, perhaps it could be photographed.

It is only through my association with indigenous people, Native American, Basque and Inuit, that I have come to understand that through my many years of spending time in the natural world and through my photographing I had become “fluent” in the even more ancient language of Nature—trees, clouds, sun, moon, plants, water, and mountains. Taoist wisdom is itself an indigenous tradition, so its combination in our books with photographs of nature is fitting.

The integration, within my own being, of European, Native and Taoist and Natural wisdom was reflected to me recently in a dream. I was with a red man and a yellow man, Inuit and Asian. Together we were making stained glass of red and yellow tulips, which are European Nature.

a Rainbow of Tao includes everyone, everywhere.

