

# China Daoist Ecology Protection Eight Year Plan (2010-2017)



"I have Three Treasures, which I hold fast and watch over closely: the first is kindness, the second is simple living and the third is not to presume oneself to be the chief of the whole world."

Daoist sage, Laozi, Chapter 67 of "Dao De Jing"

*There are more than 1,500 Daoist temples in China today, and approximately 30,000 Daoist monks and nuns. Tens of millions of people in China follow Daoist practices, and millions more engage in pilgrimages and visits to Daoist sites every year. This ancient indigenous faith still has a great deal of influence on this modern nation. As one of the five recognised religions in modern China, Daoism has recently reassessed its beliefs and values with regard to environmental issues.*

*The China Daoist Association, based in White Cloud Temple, has approved this Daoist Eight Year Plan, which now represents the long term environmental strategy of all Daoist temples in mainland China. Daoists believe that humanity should obey nature's rules, maintain the balance of our ecological systems and protect the species that live beside us.*

## **INTRODUCTION**

With the environment of our planet deteriorating, people are widely realising that the process of development must be harmonised with the needs of the environment. The vital importance of sustainable development has been recognised by people of all countries.

Recently, the Chinese government has paid great attention to environment protection, and issued a clear environment protection policy. This includes, for example, raising the awareness of environment protection in society, encouraging green purchasing and promoting the technical advances and industrial restructuring necessary for the development of a low carbon, energy saving, low pollution industrial base in China, which will also use natural resources more carefully and reduce waste.

From ancient times, Chinese Daoism has always put a great emphasis on Dao following nature. It pays a great attention to the harmony and balance of heaven, earth and humanity, and the balance between Yin and Yang. Humanity should obey nature's rules, maintain the balance of our ecological system and protect the species that live beside us. In the past, Daoist monks have left many examples of wisdom and of moving stories of their encounters and experiences with nature. And today, Daoists monks and nuns should continue to expound and propagate such ecological wisdom in order to raise the awareness of environment issues in the wider community. At the same time, the Daoist community, Daoist organisations, and Daoist temples should all carry on such great ecological traditions and should make positive contributions towards the construction of Daoist Ecology Temples, in both spiritual and practical ways.

It is for these reasons that the China Daoist Association has decided to draw up an Eight Year Plan, stretching from 2010-2017, based on our present experiences. From 2010 onwards, we call on the Daoist community and all Daoist temples in China to take actions on the areas listed below:

### **First: Providing ecological education, and raising environmental awareness**

#### **a. Education project**

Our original Daoist Ecology Education Project started from just one province – Shaanxi, in western China, but since 2006 it has already spread to many temples nationwide. In 2015, our target is for there to be ecological education projects running in half of all the Daoist temples in inland China.

In terms of facilities, we will require Daoist temples to set up specific information boards on environment protection, and to display ecological education materials and posters.

In terms of concept, we will make it a general practice that – while we are holding preaching and meditation activities – we will hold a Daoist Ecology Protection Forum on a regular basis. The intention is to raise the environment awareness of our Daoist followers, so that they will take greater responsibility for protecting the environment around them. We will also hold regular ecology protection talks in temples.

In terms of people, we will gradually develop and set up volunteer teams, which will work together with relevant communities to spread Daoist ecological thinking to the wider society.

#### b. Environment management

We will build better standards and regulations on ecology protection, so that people can understand them, and they are consistent. Currently, all Daoist temples have made environment-related regulations, but they are not yet ideal. From 2010 onwards, we will gradually make more systematic regulations and by 2017 we hope that all Daoist temples in inland China will have completed this, and that systematic ecology regulations will be in place to give Daoist followers, and other visitors to the temples, a strong awareness of ecology tourism in context.

#### c. Education style (Youth Camps)

In connection with the Daoist practices of reflection in nature, and keeping in good health through keeping in nature, we will run summer camps to attract young people and students from China and abroad, and help them to pay attention to and learn Daoist ecological wisdom.

#### d. Alliance of Ecology and Healthcare

In the Qinling Declaration, published in 2006 at the first Daoist ecology and education workshop on the sacred mountain of Taibaishan in Shaanxi Province, there was a goal to construct environmentally friendly Daoist temples. The China Daoist Association will help Daoist temples to form an Alliance of Ecology Temples, and combine this with an Alliance of Daoist Healthcare to promote the new ideas of the connection between an ecologically friendly and a healthy lifestyle.

### **Second: Maximising the ecological benefit achieved from our Daoist resources**

#### a. Land and Building

Traditional Daoist temples have always paid strong attention to the harmonious relationship between buildings and their surroundings. This is to reflect the Daoist thinking about following Nature and returning to lives of simplicity and truth. In doing so, the result has been that the beautiful natural surroundings of Daoist places are protected and also that the purity and sacredness of the temples have been highlighted. This is the foundation of good *feng shui*, the traditional Chinese geomancy, which gives people a sense that Daoist temples are born from both heaven and earth.

Based on these ideas, we will restore and repair religious and environment-related facilities on land that is owned and used by Daoist temples so as not to destroy the existing surroundings. From 2010 to 2012 we will draw up an overall action plan and from 2013 to 2017 we will promote the experiences we have learned all across the country. The environmental facilities include: ritual facilities, education facilities, living facilities, recycling facilities and environment-related media facilities.

In future, any newly registered and opened Daoist temples should follow this overall environmental construction plan.

## b. Water and vegetation

Water and vegetation – trees, plants and gardens – are the basic conditions for constructing harmonised Daoist Ecology temples. We must protect the water resources around temples to the greatest extent possible, and this includes dealing with domestic sewage in scientific and sensitive ways. We will create special posters and booklets to help pilgrims, visitors and local householders reduce the pollution in the nearby water resources.

We recommend Daoist temples to plant trees and other vegetation with a specific plan to protect old and well-known trees. We also call for a better use of green places and resources around Daoist temples. In connection with specific Daoist methods and practices on how to keep in good health, we will guide tourists and visitors to better understand beautiful nature and ecology systems during their times of relaxation and entertainment – for example, in the form of meditation sites and pathways through the woodlands and forests. We have already opened up such places in a few temples. From 2012 onwards we will promote this practice in the grounds of suitable Daoist temples across the country.

## c. Pilgrimage and travel

We call for a healthier and more environmentally friendly style of pilgrimage and travel. The reforms and improvements of pilgrimage styles have already started in Daoist temples and on Daoist mountains. These mainly focus on the “three stick incense burning” – in which temples strongly promote a new tradition of burning just three sticks of incense instead of the previous many sticks in order to reduce pollution caused by burning incense, candles, papers and fireworks on Daoist premises. We also recommend that people give offerings of flowers and fruits. All religious articles must be environment friendly. From 2010 to 2012 we will carry out pilot projects (selecting one to two temples from seven of the major regions of China) and from 2013 to 2017 we will promote and pass on the experiences we learned from these projects to temples across the country.

We will call for pilgrims to walk within the land used by the temples in order that these people should have a better understanding of ecology and Daoism during their outdoor times of relaxation, entertainment and exercise (see b. above)

Temples with restaurants and lodging places should manage these places in ways that are kind to the environment, saving water and energy, and reducing the use of disposable tableware.

## d. Healthcare and Health practices

It is the tradition in Daoism to pay great attention to quality of life and the practice of how to keep in good health. We will work to rediscover some of the ancient health practices within Daoism, and set up health-maintenance places within Daoist temples to provide food therapy, medicine therapy and healthcare programmes. We will also hold talks on healthcare exercises and practices for Daoist followers and others. Currently we are experimenting to find the best way to carry out these projects. From 2010 we will promote the experiences we have already learned in some of the Daoist temples around China and from 2014 we will promote this in suitable temples across the country.

## e. Public welfare and charity

Daoism has a great tradition of altruism. According to their own capacity, Daoist temples should work well on public welfare and charity. At present only one or two specific temples have developed public welfare projects with the purpose of Daoist health maintenance. In future, all temples with the economic capacity and qualified staff to do so will gradually set up Daoist medical clinics, health-maintenance centres and welfare accommodation for elderly people. We will run and manage these places in environmentally friendly ways.

We prohibit the use of ingredients from endangered animal and plants in any Daoist healthcare food and medicinal remedies.

### **Third: To promote Daoist ecological traditions and wisdom**

#### a. Keeping the tradition of simple lifestyles

The great Daoist sage Laozi said: "I have Three Treasures, which I hold fast and watch over closely: the first is kindness, the second is simple living and the third is not to presume oneself to be the chief of the whole world" (chapter 67 of *Dao De Jing*).

In Daoist temples we will continue the tradition of simple and energy-saving lifestyles. We will also promote this kind of lifestyle to visitors and pilgrims, through Daoist concepts of simplicity and thrift.

#### b. Training

Our training will be mainly carried out by separate Daoist temples themselves, supported by training held by the Daoist Associations and Daoist academies. From 2012 onwards we will promote this practice across the country, and increase the relevant curricula in Daoist colleges.

#### c. Charity

We will carry forward the Daoist traditions of charity and benevolence, and we will also participate in public welfare and poverty alleviation through three means: material support, providing compassionate care, and healthcare practice. We will recommend that Daoist communities and Temples set up charity money boxes and also to set up relevant funds and foundations. We will make these into part of our structure after 2016.

#### d. Rituals, quotations and prayers

We will integrate ecological concepts into our Daoist rituals. We have already experimented with this in some of the Daoist temples - for instance, writing prayers about the environment.

#### e. Sacred land

We will actively cooperate with forest and tourist organisations to hold activities that will help protect our Daoist sacred mountains.

#### f. Stories and practice

We will collect traditional stories on environment protection to provide useful lessons for today's environmental reality. From 2010 to 2013 we will collect the stories written by the

local temples. After 2014 we will re-edit and print the collection of these stories and distribute them to temples across country.

#### **Fourth: Living daily life with environment awareness and action**

We call further for a Daoist simple life. Daoists should select their daily timetable and their food according to natural principles. Their lifestyle should be environmentally friendly. They should also practice traditional Daoist life-nourishing exercises. "Environmentally friendly" and "energy saving" should be the standards for Daoist temples' energy choices. Temples should also establish structures that will help to reprocess and recycle used items and waste. Temples capable of doing so should set up sewage cleaning systems. From 2011 onwards we will promote these experiences.

#### **Fifth: Co-operating with environment-related departments to incorporate environment protection into our Daoist network**

a. By asserting standards, rules and regulations of government, we hope to attract the attention of environmental departments of different levels of government.

b. By using the existing Daoist network, to increase media coverage of discussions of environment protection issues, such as the "spiritual Daoist temple".

c. Enhancing the connections with international environment organisations. With the help and guidance of Government religious departments, we will continue good and effective co-operation with international environment organisations such the Alliance of Religions and Conservation (ARC), EMF and UNDP. We are hoping to expand this co-operation from 2010 onwards.

#### **Sixth: Advocacy and Celebration**

##### a. Festivals and temple fairs

We will emphasise ecological concepts in traditional Daoist festivals, such as the birthday of the Supreme Lord Laozi and other religious festivals. Some provinces have already begun to preach Daoist ecological concepts during Daoist festivals. From 2010 onwards, we will require all temples to emphasise ecology protection during both Daoist festivals and temple fairs.

##### b. Art and dance

We will produce Daoist ecology songs, dances and paintings, and will use these kind of art forms through TV and radio, Internet, concert celebrations and temple fairs to help pilgrims and visitors understand the concept of Daoist Ecology. From 2012 onwards, we will promote practices across the country.

##### c. To incorporate International Environment Day activities into the Daoist religious calendar

*This plan was approved during the executive meeting of the China Daoist Association on September 9, 2009*