
December 2019

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Magic, Alchemy, and the Spiritual but Not Religious

By John C. Marshall, Jr.

Abstract: In this paper, I identify a problem within the growing phenomenon of the "spiritual but not religious" community based on the particular experiences of German pilgrims attending a retreat at a Chinese Daoist monastery. Despite interests and affirmations in Daoism, the German pilgrims reacted negatively to Daoist supernatural attitudes and practices. Their SBNR beliefs clashed with Daoist orthodoxy. My research is largely based on a historical examination that contextualizes the problems the German pilgrims experienced and offers a possible remedy to their trans-cultural spiritual dilemma in alchemy and Jungian psychology.

In an article written for the *New York Times Review of Books*, posted on the web site China File, Ian Johnson chronicles his experiences as an interpreter for a group of German pilgrims on a retreat at a Daoist nunnery in China. In the course of events, which included more than a few misunderstandings between devout Daoist nuns and their post-modernist European guests, Johnson describes the often unhappy and jarring social junction of two cultures. Conflicts not defined by issues of table etiquette and monastic protocol, but by the commonly held locus of their beliefs (Johnson 2018).

The Germans, who had set out in good fashion to experience genuine Daoism, were surprised when their hosts gave them instruction in the Daoist pantheon and the rigorous chanting of sacred texts. European practice of Daoism was defined by a refined cosmopolitan vision of the *Dao de Jing*, a respect for nature, and *qigong* exercises. The sudden exposure to a world of supernatural beings, divination, and uniform habits left the Germans disoriented and a little distraught. Their expectations were grounded in the deliberately ambiguous dogma of the non-theistic and anti-institutionalized, but personally fulfilling, “spiritual but not religious” faith, where syncretic engagement means tailoring everything to meet your personal needs, not embracing the metanarratives of religious doctrine. They had read into the Daoist tradition their own hopes that a primitive culture could save them from modernity and were left rattled when the mirror broke (Johnson 2018).

This paper examines the plight of the “spiritual but not religious” (SBNR) and its closely aligned fellow travelers in spirituality “none of the above” (Nones). The incident of the German pilgrims will be viewed as a microcosm of larger concerns, especially with regard to the growing phenomenon of Daoism in western culture. This paper will examine the historical events that promoted contemporary prejudices toward religion and supernaturalism in postmodernist culture and that created trans-cultural issues for the German pilgrims. This paper will address in a positive light the needs of the SBNR community and suggest a solution to their spiritual needs in the embrace of Jungian psychology.

Those who choose to be a part of “the spiritual but not religious” or “none of the above” categories, when asked their religious affiliation, have both their supporters and defilers, but there is little doubt that the membership is growing. Religious scholar, Linda Mercadante, lists four characteristics that define the membership of the “Nones” and SBNR movement. In her study of American religious culture, Mercadante characterizes the “spiritual but not religious” as individualistic: the SBNR are not inclined to community, “non-traditioning,” preferring their own judgment on spiritual matters, health-oriented, promoting well-being over metaphysical concerns, and possessing a spirit of “pick and

choose” dogmatics that draws upon ancient traditions without necessarily affirming any of the “total package” belonging to proscribed teaching (Mercandante 2014a). The SBNR are inclined to embrace Buddha and Christ not as saviors, but as archetypes to fashion their own identity. They largely disassociate from supernaturalism and superstition, which they see as the hallmarks of western religious traditions. Eastern religions, and especially Daoism, have become their venue of choice to rid themselves of what they see as unessential religious baggage. David Palmer and Elijah Siegler, in their book *Dream Trippers*, state that Daoism “is perfectly suited for this cultural smorgasbord because it offers a complete system of meditation, philosophy, and physical practices for health, healing, and martial arts, enhancing the meaning and pleasure of sex and placing the body in a cosmos, these ideas and skills can be learned in discrete packages; a person can take one part and leave the rest” (qtd. in Johnson 2018). While Daoism of this type may be satisfying to westerners keen to have spirituality without religion, it suffers from the reality that Daoism *is* a religion. The SBNR’s highly personalized, counter-culturally driven philosophy inevitably runs into trans-cultural issues when confronting any form of orthodox belief not given to “discrete packaging.”

This refined web of misunderstanding is not without its precedents. The great Victorian translator James Legge was quick to divorce the literary sophistication of the *Dao de Jing* and the *Zhuangzi* from its “superstitious” contexts (Johnson 2018). The *daojiao* (道教) tradition (Daoist religion, as opposed to the *daojia* tradition (道家), or philosophical Daoism) was immured with divination, spirit possession, and magic, and suffered not only from its own cultural prejudice (the Confucians disdained them) but from western aspersions that saw little good in shaman-based beliefs expressed through spells, incantations, and spirit writing. Daoist sages fell under the category of the Jungian “trickster,” a magician inclined to inauthenticity and mischief. The prevailing science of the day, based on a theory of Darwinian social evolution, imbued the magical aspects of religion with all the significance of passing adolescence, an immature expression of primitive psychology that would support later developments in wish-fulfilling faith but fall short of robust scientific certainty (Girardot 2002, pp. 292 and 442ff).

Under the pen of James George Frazer, the prejudice toward magic would acquire a taxonomy that removed magical content from contemporary concerns. Frazer’s *The Golden Bough* defined human religious development in a three-fold arc of ascending depletions: Magic replaced by religion, religion replaced by science. Though magic and science were kindred souls in this schema, magic paled in its relationship to science, as the primitive mind that practiced it could not perceive the increased odds of success in repetitive ritual acts. In Frazer’s

view, magic's potency was simply aligned with a gambler's probability, and the success of the magician's gambit was subject to the forces of nature that would support it. Magic's essential character was that of a pseudoscience. For example, making smoke was similar to cloud formation, and clouds could produce rain. If your community suffered from drought, sooner or later, rain would ease your pain, but the magician's craft, the mimetic blowing of smoke, could, in a sense, bring rain to dry fields. Ritual performance could be credited with this natural cycle.

Frazer also defined a second form of magic based on cause and effect. In this practice, an object was ritually connected in some way with a person of interest—either friend or foe. The object was sympathetically attuned to the person upon whom the magician wished bane or blessing. A ritual performance would be produced on a lock of hair or an effigy to initiate the curse and bring about the desired effect of illness or good health. In a sense, the natural teleology of the object was arrested, with the magician's will subverting natural design (De Vries 1962, pp. 215).

Sigmund Freud, having read Frazer and the evolution, denuded magic of any positive legitimacy, which continued into his psychology of neurosis. Freud, as his many writings on religion attest, was never a supporter of religion, even categorizing the high-water mark of religious faith, the mystical experience, as a recollection of a pre-ego encounter drawn from breastfeeding. The mystic's inability to discern nourishment from nourisher in infancy was the mental residue that vouchsafed oceanic feeling in adulthood. Freud also related magical thinking to early childhood, as a projection of emotional content necessary to form a bond with the outside world. The psychoanalytic method (perhaps tactic) of sequestering religion to the id outside of ego and superego structures moved magic in western social science to the secretive domain of fetishism and dark illicit desire. In concert with this thinking, Emile Durkheim famously distinguished between the ethos of churches and magicians, declaring the magician to be a loner devoid of moral authority and in many ways anti-religious, preferring a world apart from normative alliances and often twisting sacred objects to irreligious needs (Durkheim 1995, pp. 39-42).

Frazer, Freud, and Durkheim's critiques reflect the general trend of European religious history in depriving magic of its potency. In the early centuries of the Common Era, magic driven pagan cults, replete with witches, diviners, and sorcerers, were the indigenous competitors to the advancing Christian missionaries marching through the Roman Empire. Christianity's demonizing of the native tradition was essential to promoting its own remedy to the social structures magicians and witches had created. The Kingdom of God, or at least the Church, was in no need of magic, or, as R. I. Moore illustrates in *The*

Formation of a Persecuting Society, had little need for challenges to clerical authority (Moore 1987, pp. 141ff.). A well-grounded prejudice toward magic, especially promoted among the peasant classes where the heresy thrived, would foster a common intellectual milieu that was opposed to polytheism and the illicit bending of nature in secret rites and rituals. The Church successfully disenfranchised magic and witchery and promoted their own faith-based miracles to meet the spiritual and social needs of the general population. The template for magic as a practice devoid of genuine spiritual power was established long before the nineteenth-century social scientists theorized about it. In contemporary parlance, the magician is only a stage performer, who, through illusion and slights-of-hand, creates the appearance of power, though a potency designed largely to entertain. This prejudice in the current western imagination colors any historical narrative that would perceive magical performance as anything more than a trickery of inauthentic gains.

When confronting the supernatural, the SBNR community, whether aware of it or not, demurs to the sanitizing effect of reason created by nineteenth-century social science. Not unlike the medieval cleric's attitude toward magic, they have displaced religion with a personally conceived post-modern rationality that sees little need in what preceded it. In a sense, they have followed Frazer's taxonomy of ascending depletions, which' interpreted religion as little more than a passing corruption. However, the SBNR have not achieved Frazer's desire for scientific rigor. The SBNR's desire for personally-fulfilling, authenticating experiences motivates their countercultural agenda and places the spiritual search more within the domain of Freudian wish fulfillment, a desire to fulfill the id's need for holism and emotional fulfillment in a hostile environment. The German pilgrims sought salvation in a primitive, foreign world, in the ancient devices of Daoism, perhaps reflecting the id's subconscious drive for like things (a synchronic meeting of Chinese mythic past with mind's deepest desires), but when their counterculture ideology met with Daoist praxis, they felt betrayed (Johnson 2018). Frazer's view of magic as a pseudoscience would seem to fit the needs of the SBNR (its primitivism appealing to their sense of spiritual search), but with the post-modernist prejudice toward supernaturalism and magic firmly embedded in their psyche, the Germans failed to cotton to genuine Daoism. The supernatural beliefs of the Daoist nuns reflected a world of superstition that would in-authenticate them (Johnson 2018).

This leads the contemporary person to consider the nature of magic in the Daoist tradition. Chinese religious traditions do not harbor any of the prejudice we associate with magic; there does not appear to be a "Chinese Frazer" promoting a stepped process of social development. The Confucians who frowned upon Daoist irrationality and clamoring spiritualism sought a mollifying

engagement with the customs of magicians, soothsayers, and healers. Unlike its western counterpart, Christianity, which engaged with the magical forces of indigenous paganism in a syncretic manner and then sought to kill off the host to ensure spiritual hegemony, the Confucian elite parlayed with Daoist supernaturalism in a dialectic of complementing forces. This dialogue was designed to promote balance and safeguard political structures, which, somewhat to the dismay of Confucian intellectuals, relied on magic to legitimate any claim to the Mandate of Heaven (Freiburg 1977, pp. 177). Max Weber noted that “Confucianism was helpless when confronted with the magic image of the world, however much it disdained Daoism. This helplessness prevented the Confucians from being internally capable of eradicating the fundamental, purely magical conceptions of the Daoists. To tackle magic always appeared dangerous for the Confucian’s own power” (Weber 1964, pp. 200).²¹ Consequently, in its engagement with Confucian orthodoxy, Daoist magic never traveled “underground” into the subconscious world of repression and projection.

Magic in the Daoist tradition is too important to ignore in cross-cultural engagement. Those who belong to the SBNR movement and are seeking spiritual direction in a foreign world need to be sensitive to cross-cultural conflicts created by centuries of intellectual development. Western inclinations to negate supernatural efficacy will not find a comfortable repose in a Chinese world that incorporated magic into every aspect of society—including the sciences. This freedom to evolve and maintain magic within scientific activity opens a rubric for an east-west parlay of magic and supernaturalism, surety and rationalism.

Daoist sensibilities are acute to natural observation and the blending of elemental forces and mirror western attitudes that often view the sciences as the epitome of rational investigation. Within this common territory, it appears that science offers a venue for cross-cultural engagement. Frazer’s depiction of magic as a pseudoscience would be germane to both Daoism’s ancient corporate religious identity and western social and intellectual evolution dynamics. However, unlike the western magical tradition, which suffered an almost irretrievable blow during the Enlightenment, Daoism never lost its capacity for growth as a sort of science. Daoism was a pseudoscience with a potential for growth and shares a sympathy with western Renaissance philosophy. The overlap between science and spirituality is the hallmark of alchemy, an ancient spiritual discipline common to both cultures. Alchemy could provide a spiritual discipline for the SBNR as a category to study traditional Daoist practices and do so without the lingering prejudices normally associated with magic.

²¹ Quote modified from Wade-Giles.

In an effort to mollify the SBNR prejudice toward supernaturalism, the difference between the east and west needs to be examined. Western magic works within a teleological framework that sees a purposeful and rational design to humankind and created things in the universe. The magician seeks to subvert this process by arresting a thing's natural end to serve her own purposes. It is a fundamentally hostile relationship to nature, which seeks a knowledge of control and dominance. Teleology is a firmly embedded belief in the consciousness of the western mind and forms the crux of theistic belief; westerners naturally intuit purposive and ordered design with ascribed ends to their environment (Barrett and Burdett 2018, pp. 1-2). Western teleology consists of Aristotelian substances operating within prescribed limits requiring transcendental motion from a prime mover for completion. An ontology of Being is the fundamental anchor to a subject's identity and creativity. Magic runs counterintuitive to western social and natural expectations (Barrett and Burdett 2018, pp. 1-2).

Daoist magic is firmly imbedded within Daoist philosophy and offers a different understanding of the teleological participation of its magicians. Daoist teleology seeks a harmony attuned to the transformative processes of the world; it is a philosophical outlook geared to evolution and change and does not seek an epistemology of dominance and control but alignment with forces beyond human volition. In many ways, Daoist magic is an effort to restore the natural order, not subvert it. It is a fundamentally immanent view that sees the human body as a microcosm that mirrors and participates in a macrocosm. The use of objects in Daoist magic is not to subvert their teleology but to reveal creative processes reflected in objects that are usually made by the magician, albeit as an intermediary for supernatural forces, grounded in Non-Being or Emptiness as a precursor for utility (Legeza 1975, pp. 30). Daoist philosopher, Liu I-ming (刘一明), writing in the eighteenth century, characterized the mind's relationship with effigies as a pivot that could lead to life or death depending on the holder's attitude toward the effigy's artificiality. Daoist philosophy seeks life beyond symbolic constructions and denies a positive power to representations *per se*. Daoists do not overburden the symbol as a causal source for instrumental change. To focus on representations leads to death, falsity, and a mind unspontaneous to the Dao's inner and hidden promptings. That which is magical is inherent in the representation as a primordial force but not bound to it inimically in a need to coerce an effect. Though the exterior effects of the symbol's locus are clearly desired by those who solicit them, breaking the tandem between unseen and seen forces would be heterodoxy. The effigy or symbol's life-giving power is found in devaluing its physical manifestation and attuning the mind to cosmic sources (Liu I-ming 1988, pp. 32). Such apophatic attitudes toward symbols find support in Daoist theories concerning language, where words are abandoned in the process

of abstracting meaning.²² In this way, Daoist thought structures magical practice, and magic's ultimate goal is a positive regress to the life source from a fitting representation (Liu I-ming 1988, pp. 32).

Daoist magic possesses an inherently aesthetic ontology. Its association with writing is its primary characteristic. In this way, Daoist magic underwrites a variety of concerns in the social structure: Scripted talismans are an important part of medicine, cryptic characters in need of interpretation form a part of divination, and written revelation supports the beliefs of sects and cults. Laszlo Legeza writes that Daoist calligraphy "has been of the first importance in China since earliest times, both as an artistic carrier of spiritual truths, and as the one means of communication with the spirits" (Legeza 1975, pp. 7). Daoist magic, acting in concert with an ontology that imagined the world in a complementing relationship between Being and Non-Being saw the use of line (Being) and empty space (Non-Being) as a reflection of Dao's ability to manifest itself. Writing was not a mean chore, but a deeper ontological engagement in which a spirit-being acted through the priest or magician writing the character in an ecstatic bond. The common utensil for writing was a wooden planchette, brush, or a legged stool banged on an indelible surface. In the process of writing, "all [the spirit's] spiritual power was immediately *transferred* to the talisman. It was then used by the individual as a kind of ritual object to retain his direct contact with the spirit" (Legeza 1975, pp. 9).

Writing and magic have a serious relationship in the Daoist worldview, which pivots between the mundane and the sacred. The native term for this writing craft is "*Fu Wen*" (符文) and the sigils created for it is "*fu*" (符) (Wen 2016, pp. 53). Talismans could protect against calamity, bless marriages, and cure sickness. In medical practice, they are often burned, mixed with water, and ingested as medicine. The functionality of the sigil was determined by the ubiquitous energy of "*Qi*" (气), a term now common in the American lexicon. *Qi* is an all-encompassing, life-giving force and its impression on the *fu* through the writing process is essential for the sigil's efficacy. This "spirit writing" is also manifest in divination and present in the codified text *Yijing* (易经), or *Book of Changes*, where coins or sticks are tossed in an effort to create a mimetic connection to hexagrams found in the text. This book is commonly consulted for prognostication and philosophical edification. Spirit-beings also work through writing intermediaries to reveal spiritual wisdom, and many Chinese religious texts are an impress from a celestial realm providing not only religious wisdom, but also objects with exorcistic and apotropaic powers (Bumbacher 1990).

²² See, for example, the following from the *Zhuangzi*: "A snare is there for rabbits. When you have got a hold of the rabbit, you forget the snare. Words are for the intent. When you have got a hold of the intent, you forget the words" (*Zhuangzi* 2009, pp. 114).

Something that becomes clear in the Chinese religious milieu is the significant role of the priest/magician. Believers desiring fu, prognostication, or teachings on immortality were keen to avoid charlatans and human conduits with dubious spiritual connections. The seventeenth-century novel *Han Xiangzi quanzhuan* (韩湘子全转) relates in compelling detail the magical world of Daoism and the wary search for celestial life and godly help (Yang 2007). Finding genuine aid in spiritual life was often determined by the quality of the human conduit, not the objective energy of metaphysical reality. Deceptions and misunderstandings characterize the oracular as much as accuracy and veracity. The magician will now become the focus of this paper.

The shaman of early Chinese history is the forerunner of the Daoist magician. The older tradition's focus on spirit possession is the hallmark of genuine status in the ranking of magicians in Daoism today, which is usually reflected in the formula, "deity and human become one" (神人合一) (Clart 2003, pp. 166). However, the magician's identity is never the focus of the magician's work, and any egoistic interference in his mind--anything other than the possessing spirit's habitation--immediately renders his revelations suspect or, at worst, invalid (Clart 2003, pp. 167). Philip Clart, in an excellent study of Chinese mediumship, surveys the tradition of possession. One of its principal characteristics is the lack of personal ego in the relationship with the possessing spirit. The medium does not seek the spirit; rather, the spirit chooses him. In most cases, the medium may make more than modest efforts to deny the spirit's takeover of his body. Such denials authenticate the medium's value as a conduit for celestial contact (Clark 2003, pp. 165). However, the humbling medium is still subject to scrutiny: there is a strong ethical dimension to mediumship that is directly related to his personal authenticity. Loud and disorderly behavior suggests the possession of a low-grade spirit, while behavior in accord with Confucian virtues suggests possession by a spirit of nobler rank. The ethical and moral fiber of the medium is of great significance in the "spirit writing" tradition. Higher ranking spirits find an abode in purer minds, and developing a relationship with the spirit world becomes part of the medium's cultivation (Clart 2003, pp. 174ff.).

What seems to emerge in the tradition is a reciprocal relationship with the spirit world, though the medium is still a passive and receptive vessel. The medium's cultivation is structured by the Daoist alchemical tradition. Though the action of the medium is exterior to himself, the essential spirituality of the medium is interior.

The training of a medium is formally called *xiabi* or *xiaji* (also pronounced *yabi* 'and *yaji*, respectively); informally it is referred to

asxunlian [training]. The term *xia* is difficult to translate. Its root meaning is ‘hot’ or ‘to heat’, ‘to bum.’ In the composite *xialian* [to heat and refine], it refers to the Daoist alchemical practice; the term *xialian* is sometimes used to refer to the training of a planchette medium. ‘Heating the brush’ or ‘heating the planchette’ thus may indicate that the training of a new medium involves a quasi-alchemical process of gradual refinement and purification of the candidate (Clart 2003, pp. 171).

In this framework, the possessing god becomes more like an instructor than an inhabiting spirit, providing the medium with a teacher-student relationship for automatic writing. The characteristics of alchemy, spiritual instruction, and moral cultivation transform the priest/magician’s vocation into a genuine form of spirituality with its own unique set of goals and patterns of development.

The aforementioned “heating and purification” process is only a small part of the Chinese alchemical tradition. Firing processes (time managed practices aligned with cosmological change), yin and yang dynamics (recognition of male and female forces), Five Elements theory (earth, water, fire, wood, and metal), and the circulation of creative light all contribute to the alchemical pursuit of aligning the self with nature. Chinese alchemy does not demarcate strong boundaries between inner-outer or seen-unseen relations. Anthropology and cosmology are categories intrinsic to each other. Gods in the cosmos find a place in the body, as well as celestial bodies like sun and moon. The “magic” of the magician is to engage in practices that transform the self, and, according to Clart, make him receptive to spirit possession, either as a conduit for revelation or as a student for spiritual development.

In the west, alchemy has often been labeled a pseudoscience or as part of a historical narrative about the development of chemistry. In many ways, it has been burdened by the same prejudice applied to magic, to which it is often related, and so suffers a guilt-by-association. However, there have been serious efforts to revise the characterization of alchemy simply as the primitive efforts to master nature. Noted historian of science, Lawrence M. Principe, writes that claiming alchemy to be magic is “essentially deceptive,” and that the notions that distinguished it from chemistry and promoted fraudulent claims of transmutations in soul and matter emerged during the eighteenth century or after and so reflect the robust rationalism of the Enlightenment-era scientific thought. Principe asserts that while claims of fraud and unscientific methods “may have a limited validity within a narrow context, none of them [are] accurate depiction[s] of alchemy in general” (Principe 2012, pp. 83)

The eighteenth-century reaction toward alchemy was linked to the beliefs and practices in the preceding Renaissance era. The intellectual life of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries was based on an aesthetic milieu that gave humanity pride of place in a neo-platonic universe ordered by a hierophany of angelic beings, revealed wisdom, and a reciprocating methodology of drawing “inner and outer” worlds into a subjective experience that bestowed credibility to chrysopoeia (Principe 2012, pp. 84, 143ff.). Though alchemy during the Renaissance was concerned with the scientific method, it was framed with a simple and uncritical phenomenology that could be easily tainted by uncritical beliefs. The significance of the subject’s imagination as a guide to truth, belief in animating souls in objects, and efforts to see the world in the holistic terms common to alchemical thinking became muddled during the Renaissance. This occurred when the collective ego-consciousness of the Continent became mired in images and imaginative speculation without the intellectual strength to underwrite its *paideia* with a “critical reflection on fantasy” (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 4-5). Alchemy suffered not so much from its own philosophical perspective, but from the naivete of a surrounding culture that replaced its internal logic with wishful thinking.

Enlightenment thinking was dismissive of a subjectivity based on mythologies and unrefined classicalism, and promoted in its place a scientific world that saw “objectivity” as its foremost concern (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 3). With Descartes’ separation of mind and body into two different entities and the atomization of nature into smaller and smaller units of study, the continuing development of the European mind promoted this trend toward objectivity. (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 4). With the advent of the Enlightenment, rationality and scientific method displaced the literary and artistic tropes of the Renaissance, and the belief in “mystery” changed from embracing an “other dimension” of existence to a simple category of unknown things requiring examination (Schwarz-Salant 1995, pp. 5). The so-called primitive logic of alchemy saw mystery as a dynamic dialogue of dark knowledge and light-filled revelation. Mystery was a more dialectical paradox than an intellectual category of unknown things. Renaissance thinking possessed an endlessly open horizon that enveloped *a priori* structures of the mind with a cosmological ontology that required the alchemist to be both a scientist and theologian searching for a reality that gave human life value and man interaction with the Divine. In his interesting study, *The Senses of Mystery*, Bernard J. Verkamp’s thoughts on mystery can be easily translated to a definition for alchemy: "make man a 'spirit,' a being whose very nature it is to question, to live within the realm of mystery, to seek individuality, uniqueness, privacy, and transcendence of his selfhood beyond the objectivity of the empirical ego" (Verkamp 2005, pp. 135). Unlike modern chemistry, which

focused on the limited mechanics of an object and its reactions, alchemical processes were meaningless without some kind of transformation of the subject (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 6).

It was famed Swiss psychologist Carl Jung who recognized alchemy as more than a quirky, antiquated practice. However, his conversion was slow in coming. Jung's initial encounter with the material in 1913 resulted in an unsympathetic conclusion, regarding alchemy "as off the beaten track and rather silly" (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 22). Alchemy's symbols and cryptic allusions left him baffled. In 1928 noted sinologist Richard Wilhelm sent Jung his newly translated and published Chinese alchemical text known in the west as *The Secret of the Golden Flower* (太乙金華宗旨), which induced an epiphany in Jung's understanding. The next ten years were spent researching alchemical texts with different eyes, and Jung concludes that analytical psychology coincides with alchemy in its efforts to heal and transform the mind (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 22). Science and religion find a home in the blossoming science of psychology. Alchemy showed Jung through its rich symbols, which in his renewed thinking provided nodal points between the conscious and unconscious mind, that the unconscious was a *process*, which would become known as "the process of individuation," the integration of the archetypes self, shadow, anima, animus, and the persona (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 23). Jung's understanding of the relationship between magic and psychology becomes very close and critical: "We are very much afraid of the word magic, it has a bad name, for its meaning has degenerated and it has a purely superstitious sound in our ears. But magical was originally simply psychical, the ancients did not know of the existence of the psyche, so not being able to call anything psychic they used the word magic."²³ Jung's alchemical investigations reached their apotheosis in 1955 with his magnum opus, *Mysterium coniunctionis* (Schwartz-Salant 1995, pp. 23). However, it is not the purpose of this paper to delve into the rich complexities of Jungian psychology but to illustrate the cooperative venues of science and religion in the development of Chinese magic, alchemy, and analytic psychology.

The parallels between magic and psychology are evident in Jung's reading of the *Golden Flower*. Lü Dongbin (吕洞宾) of the T'ang Dynasty (唐朝) is largely considered the preserver and promoter of the *Golden Flower* text as well as a reformer of Daoism during a period of increasing superstition. His efforts at reforming Daoism included the interpretation of alchemical symbols as psychological processes, and thus thought in harmony with Jung's appreciation of the *Golden Flower* text (*Secrets of the Golden Flower* 1962, pp. 6). Symbols and

²³ Jung, ETH Lecture XI, 3Feb1939, Page 71.

archetypes become for Jung the “thoughts of God”²⁴ and merit a transposed affinity with the Daoist pantheon. The language of alchemy and the significance of symbolic manifestation is, for Daoism and Jung, a life-giving venue between the unconscious and conscious, seen and unseen forces, anthropology and cosmology. Recalling Verkamp, it is the making of man into a “spirit.”

Liu I-ming’s sense of pivot between life and death found in representations and the essential Daoist ontology of writing are reflected in Jung’s understanding of magical words. “The magical word is one that lets ‘a primordial word resound behind it’; magical action releases primordial action.”²⁵ Cosmology and anthropology, inner and outer worlds, are not beyond Jungian symbol theory. Spirit possession and the manipulation of planchette and pen find meaningful resonance in Jungian interiority where “[m]agic is a way of living. If one has done one’s best to steer the chariot, and one then notices that a greater other is actually steering it, then magical operation takes place.”²⁶ Philip Clart’s (2003) observations concerning the development of a medium spirituality in which moral integrity becomes part of an alchemical process find a resonance in Jung’s *Red Book*: “Magic is the working of men on men, but your magic action does not affect your neighbor; it affects you first, and only if you withstand it does an invisible effect pass from you to your neighbor.”²⁷ The affinities of magic and Jungian psychology could form a template for interreligious dialogue and help frame cross-cultural engagement.

If the German pilgrims or the SBNR community were to genuinely subscribe to the sciences of the modern era in their religious search--something that would likely appeal to them-- a concord with Jungian psychology would meet their post-modernist motivations for a rational and superstition-free framework in which to develop a meaningful spirituality. Alan Watts, who’s plausibly a founding father of the spiritual-but-not-religious community, was a tremendous admirer and supporter of Jungian psychology from the earliest time of his career. He saw Jung as a “bridge-builder” and “peacemaker” of a “Middle Way” that would bring science and religion together (Watts 1992, pp. 72). Watts often derided the repressive instincts of the mind promoted by traditional Christianity and post-war society that “sport with our lives, deny our conscious desires and disturb us with moods, impulses and impressions which we fear and suppress” (Watts, 1997, pp. 75). For Watts, Jungian psychology was the remedy for a psyche in need of drawing shadow into the light of reason.

²⁴ Conversations with C.G. Jung, Page 59.

²⁵ Carl Jung, Letters Vol. 1, Pages 59-63.

²⁶ Carl Jung, The Red Book, Page 314.

²⁷ Carl Jung, The Red Book, Page 308.

The path the SBNR would pursue would not be without perils, as one of the elements of their psyche in need of integration would be the magic in alchemy repressed by their western prejudice, perhaps hidden at first but later released from the unconscious—the “realm of the Gods, or the internal counterpart of the external universe” (Watts 1997, pp. 77). The SBNR would have to lose what Mercadante characterized as their individualism, as the primitive devices of Daoism do not rely on self-sufficiency and fantasy as a part of ordinary life (Watts 1997, pp. 75-76). Authenticity would have to come from an outside source. In a sense Jung would become the archetype for their own journey, modeling his transformation of disdain for “rather silly” symbolism to a respectful “virtual point,” which Watts describes in eloquent metaphor as “a centre of balance, between Conscious and Unconscious mind which is, as it were, the child of the two—a child which can only be born when the parents know how to love and accept each other, and this child is the reborn man, the Christ-principle, the Bodhisattva, the God-man of which all religions speak” (Watts 1997, pp. 75-76).

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