

Yale professor explains Taoist mysticism

By SUSAN OUDERKIRK
Of the Emerald

Chinese religion celebrates life

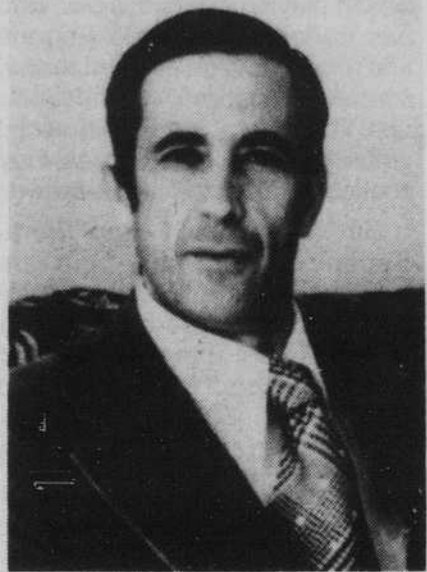
Cultural relativity is the key to understanding the differences between religions of the world, according to Michael Saso, a visiting professor from Yale University who gave a series of lectures at the University this week.

Saso, a Roman Catholic as well as an initiated Taoist, finds no incompatibility between the two religions. The mystical experience with the Ultimate Being, whether it be called God, Brahma or Tao, is the same no matter what the religion, the well-known scholar of Asian mysticism explained.

Mysticism is the thing all religions have in common, Saso said adding, culture makes them different.

Saso's Wednesday lecture, the second of three, was on the Taoist tradition in China. Taoism is Saso's field of expertise.

Mysticism, as defined by Saso, is the act of the Ultimate Being filling a person spiritually. A mystical experience cannot be deliberately directed by a human being — the human can only prepare him or herself for the experience, Saso said. Practicing Taoism is one culture's way to prepare for



Michael Saso

this immediate awareness of relation with God, he said.

Taoism in China is one of three teachings of Chinese religion, the other two being Confucianism and Buddhism. Saso began his Wednesday lecture explaining that Chinese religion does not mean what Westerners call religion.

To the Chinese, religion means the celebration of men's and

women's passage through life — birth, growing up, marriage, burial. "This is Chinese religion," Saso said.

Therefore, when missionaries come from the West to China and talk about religion, the Chinese cannot understand why they're so uptight about faith and belief and dogma, he said.

"There is no dogma in the Chinese religion; religion means life, living and celebration," Saso said.

A Taoist is a man or woman who serves the people of China. Saso explained the functions: The Taoist is called upon to help when a baby is born, when a child is sick, when there is a marriage or when a new home is being built. The Taoist gives blessings and performs the rite of renewal during village festivals and exercises. He helps bury the dead and goes down into hell to pay off all the evil demons — the Chinese concept of politicians who run hell and this world in a corrupt manner. He frees persons of those demons so they can go to heaven.

To become a Taoist, as Saso

has done, one must totally empty oneself spiritually, he said. This training, Saso said, takes 20 years of preparation. The object is to attain mystical union with the Ultimate Being.

"Only when you've totally given and are emptied can the Tao dwell inside of you," Saso said.

Saso, originally from Portland, lived in Taiwan and learned Taoism there from a black-headed Tao. After 14 years of study, he reached level six out of nine (level one is the highest level). He said the training takes so much time because it is necessary to learn how to sing, to play all Chinese musical instruments and to dance.

Furthermore, one has to memorize several thousand

spirits' names, where they reside in the body, how to draw them perfectly and then to envision them, thus putting them outside the body, Saso said.

The basis of the mysticism in Taoism is easily understood by the analogy Saso told his audience: "Because we have seven apertures (eyes, ears, nostrils and mouth), you look outside of you and you want things; you grab things and bring them into yourself and you die. If only you didn't do that, if you only closed all these apertures and didn't have all those spirits, you could live eternally. You would have inside of you Tao and only Tao would be important."

Saso has recently published a book entitled "The Teachings of Taoist Master Chuang," Yale University Press. It will be available soon.

World at a glance

From Associated Press reports

Carter wins round one

WASHINGTON — A Senate committee Thursday turned down a resolution aimed at blocking Pres. Carter's Mideast jet fighter sales, giving Carter a victory in the first round of his battle to keep Congress from scuttling the deal.

On an 8-8 vote, the Senate Foreign Relations Committee refused to block the \$4.8 billion arms sales package, in which the United States would sell jet fighters to Israel and two of its Arab neighbors, Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Under parliamentary procedure, Congress may reject an administration's planned arms sale within 30 days of its formal submission to Capitol Hill.

'Kneecappers' notch another

ROME — Terrorists struck at an American multinational target Thursday, wounding the Italian manager of the Chemical Bank of New York in a street ambush in Milan.

In the sixth "kneecapping" attack in six days, a man and a woman fired three bullets into the legs and one into the groin of Marzio Astarita, 37, manager of the Milan and Rome offices of the bank.

Rabbi pleads guilty to bribe

NEW YORK — A Brooklyn rabbi pleaded guilty Thursday to paying \$5,000 in bribes to Rep. Daniel Flood for help in obtaining federal money for a multimillion-dollar poverty agency and aid for a proposed school in Israel.

"I made payments to Congressman Flood to use his influence in his official capacity as a Congressman," Rabbi Leib Pinter said in the Manhattan federal court where he pleaded guilty to a bribery charge.

Conference focuses on legal issues

For those interested in becoming involved with student legal services, there is a "Western States Conference on Student Legal Issues and Advocacy Systems" planned for today and Saturday.

Registration will be this morning from 9 to noon in the EMU, room to be posted. Speeches will be given also in the EMU, mostly by local attorneys, and workshops will be conducted Saturday.

For more information, call the Office of Student Advocacy, 686-3710.

Nursing center sets open house

The Emerald Nursing Center will hold an open house in conjunction with National Nursing Home Week Monday through Friday from 1 to 4 p.m. at 2360 Chambers St.

Tours of the facility will be given by staff members who will also answer questions.

For more information, call 687-1310.




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