

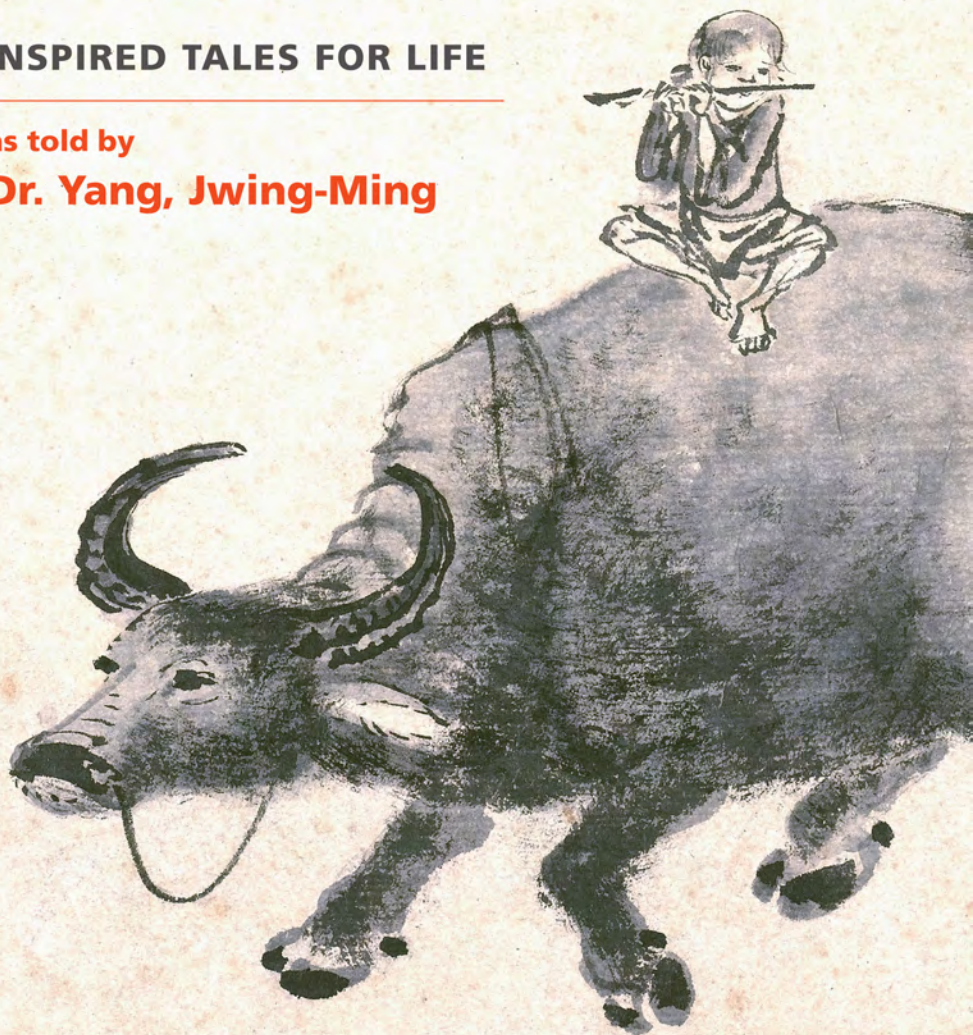
# The Dao in Action

INSPIRED TALES FOR LIFE

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as told by

**Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming**



## Bringing the Dao to life for readers of all generations

Fables entertain us, enlighten us, and guide us. We recognize ourselves in the characters, be they emperors, village children, or singing frogs. They help us see our own weaknesses, strengths, and possibilities. Their lessons transcend time and culture, touching what it really means to be alive.

In this collection of fables, Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming shares the stories that have influenced him most as a martial artist and lifelong student of the Dao. They bring the Dao to life for readers of all generations.

Whoever we are, wherever we're going, these short tales help us along the path—the Way. Some offer the traveler a moral compass. Some illustrate the dangers in human folly. Others just make us laugh.

*The Dao in Action* will inspire young readers to refine their character. Older readers will smile and recognize moments of truth. This collection is for anyone who would like to explore the enduring lessons of martial wisdom.

These lean, concise fables illustrate balance, the duality of yin and yang, always shifting, always in correction. They help us laugh at our human predicaments—and maybe even at ourselves.



Yang, Jwing-Ming, PhD, is a world-renowned author, scholar, and teacher. He has been involved in Chinese martial arts since 1961. Dr. Yang's writing and teaching include the subjects of kung fu, tai chi chuan, and meditation, and he is a leading authority on qigong. Dr. Yang is the author of over 35 books and 80 videos.

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## Foreword by Leslie Takao

I love these stories. Some are inspirational, some are funny, and some are thought provoking. Many of you will recognize the themes of these fables. You may have heard them with other names and places. The themes, noble and ignoble, transcend culture and time. The Dao is the Dao, and fables are the *de* (the manifestations) of the Dao.

In the last hours of the last days of many of Master Yang's seminars, when we were physically drained from training and mentally void from trying to remember new forms and new skills, Master Yang would sit down, answer questions, and tell stories. Sometimes, during regular classes, he would tell one of these stories to make a point. These were my favorite times; time to get to know our teacher and to absorb an important spiritual and inspirational part of the training. I find myself often retelling many of these stories to my students.

I would like to add my own story. Once upon a time, in real life, my mother was a civilian worker at the US naval base in Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, during World War II. It was not a top-secret area; we are Japanese. There was a prisoner of war, a Japanese national, who was allowed to clean the offices where she worked. She would sometimes offer this man a stick of gum or share some of the Japanese food she

had brought for lunch, little kindnesses to which she gave no second thought. She never even mentioned them to us.

If the story ended here, it would just be a story about a kind lady. But the story does not end here.

It ends about forty years later when the Japanese embassy contacted my mother. That prisoner of war had gone on to become a successful CEO of a large sake company, and he had been looking for my mother for several years. He wanted to thank her. To him, her gestures were not just small kindnesses; they made him feel like a human being again and reinstilled in him the will to live. He sent her two first-class tickets to Japan and treated her and my father like royalty.

The consequence of her small actions was the profound change in the course of another human life. That consequence honors her otherwise ordinary human gestures. That is the ethos of a fable.

These fables of human integrity, kindness, perseverance, wonder, and honor are the revelations of the Dao. Read them in order or randomly. Most of all, enjoy.

## Foreword by David Silver

Throughout his many years of teaching in his Boston YMAA headquarters school, in classes around the world, and more recently at the YMAA Retreat Center, Dr. Yang has always incorporated fables and proverbs. While we were building the retreat center, and during his years teaching there, Dr. Yang scheduled a “story time” at the end of each day so he could tell us these old tales and then discuss their deeper meaning.

I have heard a number of these fables over the years and fondly recall Dr. Yang’s zeal in sharing and discussing them. He always had a sparkle in his eye as he reminisced about these life lessons handed down from his mother and teachers. That same passion to help others find deeper meaning shines through in this book. What astounds me is how many of these tales I have never heard over the past decades and how many more Dr. Yang has known but has not shared until now!

A fun aspect of this book is that within its pages are several stories Dr. Yang has written himself based on his personal experiences. This collection offers a rare insight into another side of Dr. Yang’s personality and teaching that gives readers everywhere a chance to get to know him (and themselves) a little better.



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## The Taller the Bamboo Grows, the Lower It Bows

This is a story my White Crane master told me when I was seventeen.

Once there was a bamboo shoot that had just popped up out of the ground. It looked at the sky and smiled. It said to itself, “Someone told me that the sky is so high that it cannot be reached. I don’t believe that’s true.”

The sprout was young and felt strong. It believed if it kept growing, one day it could reach the sky. So it kept growing and growing. Ten years passed. Twenty years passed. Again it looked at the sky. The sky was still very high, and it was still far beyond the bamboo’s reach. Finally, it realized something and started to bow. The more it grew the lower it bowed.

My teacher said, “Remember, the taller the bamboo grows, the lower it bows.” The Chinese people also have a saying: “Satisfaction loses and humility gains.” The Daoists say, “In order to fill up the room, first you must empty your mind.”





## Carry a Heavy Bucket

One day, my White Crane master said to us, “There are ten buckets of water. Some are empty, some are half full, and some are completely full.” He asked, “If you have a choice to carry one bucket to my rice field, which one do you prefer?”

Some of my classmates said, “I will carry an empty one.”

Another felt somewhat bad if he said he would carry an empty one, so he said, “I will choose the half-full one.”

Only a couple of students said, “I will carry the full bucket.”

My master smiled and said, “Those who carry the full bucket will have a chance to condition their body, and those who choose easy ones will miss the opportunity.” The Chinese have a saying: “When carrying a load, choose a heavy load. When climbing the mountain, choose a high mountain to climb.” (挑擔要找重擔挑，爬山要找高山爬。)

## The Engineer Serves Coffee

There was a Chinese man who earned a PhD in engineering. With his advanced degree he quickly found an engineering job, and he was very happy. On the first day at work, he discovered his boss did not like “the short Chinese young guy.” His boss had graduated with a BS degree and had been working for this company for more than thirty years. The Chinese engineer had graduated with a PhD from a well-known university. When this Chinese engineer reported to work in his boss’s office, the boss said, “Now you report to me, so you

have to listen to me. I want you to bring me a cup of black coffee every morning before you begin your other work. Understand?”

“Yes, sir,” he said. “I will bring you a cup of black coffee every morning.” Though he knew bringing coffee for his boss was not his duty, he did not argue with his boss. He was new and wanted to avoid creating a poor relationship.

So, he brought coffee to his boss every morning and worked very hard at his engineering job. After one year, he had established a good relationship with all the employees and earned the company’s trust. Now, his boss began to feel guilty about abusing him.

One day, the boss told him, “OK. From tomorrow morning, you don’t have to bring me coffee anymore.”

The Chinese guy replied with a smile, “OK. From tomorrow morning, no more spit.”

## One Plus One Does Not Equal Two

This conversation opened my mind. Now, I believe the arts are creative and not dead.

After I trained White Crane for nearly one year, I discovered that, for the same movement, two of my older classmates applied it differently. I was confused and believed one movement should have only one application. I wanted to understand, so I went to ask my master.

Instead of answering my questions, he asked, “Little Yang, how much is one plus one?”

“Two, master.” I said. I wondered why he asked this simple question.

“No, it is not two, little Yang.”

“Master, one plus one is two. I know I am right.” I was very confused.

“You see, little Yang, your father is one and your mother is one. After they got married, they had five children. Now, you see, one plus one is seven instead of two. If you treat an art like it’s dead, it is two. But if you think the art is alive, it can be many. The arts are creative and, therefore, they can be many from derivation. Applications are derived from movement, so there are many.”

## Revenge on a Classmate

When I was learning gongfu from Master Cheng in 1963, one of my senior classmates was never fond of me. I don’t know why. Maybe it was because I was new and the last student (the nineteenth) accepted by my master. Whatever the reason, this classmate did not like me. When I began my training and for the following two years, he always gave me trouble. He would kick me during training and a few times he even injured me intentionally. I had a feeling he wanted to force me out of the class. However, no matter what, I kept hanging in there.

Later I left my hometown, Xinzhu (新竹), to move to Taipei (台北) for my college studies at Tamkang University (淡江大學). I had the opportunity to learn Long Fist (長拳) gongfu from Master Li, Mao-Ching (李茂清). From Master Li, my skills advanced rapidly, especially long-range fighting.

A few days before my departure to the US for my PhD studies at Purdue University, I had a chance to visit my old classmate’s school. He had been teaching for several years, and out of curiosity I went to visit his school.

When I arrived, he was teaching a bare-hand matching sequence. I proposed that it would be clearer if both of us could demonstrate how the sequence could be done. He agreed. When we demonstrated,

I began to speed up. My reactions were so quick that he was unable to block my strikes. I embarrassed him in front of his students. His face turned flushed, and I could tell he felt uneasy. I said my good-byes, and I left.

When I stepped outside his school, I felt great. In my early years of training this man was my senior classmate, and he had often intentionally injured me. For ten years I had carried my resentment, and I finally had the chance to release it. However, after I calmed down and thought it over, I began to feel ashamed. I felt I was small and had showed little magnanimity. I regretted what I had done and swore I would never do it again.

I remembered Master Cheng said, “When a dog bites you, you don’t bite it back. Otherwise, what is the difference between you and the dog?” He also said, “You should train your temper and tolerance in such a way that even if someone spits in your face, you don’t even bother to wipe it off but let it dry by itself.” It is not easy to reach this level of tolerance.

## Pick Up a Paper Napkin from the Floor

When I was in Boston, I taught a series of seminars twice per year. Often, I had more than fifty participants for each of my seminars. One winter I had a very good turnout for one of my seminars, nearly seventy participants.

On the first day of the seminar, early that morning, I went to Dunkin’ Donuts to buy some donuts for the participants. After I purchased six dozen doughnuts, I also grabbed a pile of paper napkins. With my two hands full with donuts, one paper napkin dropped out

of my hand onto the floor before I stepped out of the door. When I realized it, I thought, "It is inside of the donut shop; they will clean it up later." So, I continued to walk toward the door.

Before I reached the door, a portly lady stood right in front of me. She looked at me and said, "Pick it up!" She was serious.

"It is inside of the shop, and I believe they will clean it up soon." I looked at her with a smile.

"I don't care. Just pick it up," she insisted.

About twelve people in the shop noticed what was happening and looked at us, waiting to see what would happen next. I began to get upset and thought that my accidentally dropping the napkin was none of her business. Why was she so concerned about it? However, after a few seconds, I placed the donuts on the counter and picked up the paper napkin on the floor. After I threw it into the trash can, I faced her directly, looked at her eyes, and gave her a ninety-degree bow. I said, "Thank you very much, madam."

What I did shocked everyone in the shop since they were expecting a fight. I simply picked up the donuts and paper napkins and stepped out of the door.

After I stepped out the door, I smiled inside my heart. I said to myself, "This time, I conquered myself."

## The Attitude of Learning Gongfu

During the 1960s, we began to see plastic objects, such as flowers or fruits, for the first time. One day, my White Crane master got us together. From his pocket, he took out an orange. He asked, "Do you know what this is?"

"It is an orange, master!" we all replied.

He laughed and said, “No! Actually, it is not. It is a piece of plastic.” He handed the fake orange to us so we could see the truth.

Then, from his other pocket, he took out another orange. We all paid close attention to the orange this time and hoped not to be fooled again. He said, “Now, this is the real orange. Tell me, do you know what is this orange?”

“We know, master. We know it is an orange.”

“OK. Then tell me if this orange is sweet or sour,” he said.

“No, master! We don’t know.”

“Now you realize that seeing can, again, fool you,” he said. Next, he peeled the orange and gave us one piece each. We all tasted it. He said again, “Now do you know the orange?”

“Master, we know now.”

“No! You don’t. If you really know the orange, please tell me how it grows. What kind of soil, sunshine, water, and fertilizer are required for growing an orange?”

Now we were all quiet since we did not know anything about growing oranges. Then he said, “You see! Learning gongfu is the same. Looking is not as real as feeling. And feeling is still not good enough to become an expert. To be an expert, you must know how to create instead of just learning and selling. The art is alive and created from deep feeling. If the feeling of creation is shallow, the art created will also be shallow.”

Indeed, this short lesson has since influenced my attitude about learning.

## The Mind of Wonders

After I had practiced White Crane gongfu for one year, I was saddened to find that, even though I tried so hard, I failed to make as much progress as my classmates. This sadness often influenced my practice.

One afternoon, after school, I went to my master's home and was happy to see he was available. Since I'd begun practicing gongfu, whenever I felt confused about my life or uncertain about decisions I had to make, I would go to see him for advice. I told my master that, compared to my classmates, I felt so stupid and slow in my practice.

He looked at me and said, "Little Yang! Why do you look around when you are learning or working? If you see you are ahead of others, you will be satisfied, and this will weaken your will for progressing. If you see you are behind, you will be discouraged and feel sorrow for yourself. The way to achieve success in your practice is just like plowing a field. Bow your head low and keep digging. Look only ahead of you, not sideways or even behind you. Simply keep digging and digging. Someday, only someday, after a long period of time, when you take a break and look around, you will suddenly realize there is nobody around you or near you simply because all of them have been left far behind you. A good harvest comes from hard work, not from comparison."

Since then, I have kept practicing, studying, and pondering ceaselessly, without ever worrying about the progress of other people. I did not comprehend the true results of this effort until I came to the United States and quit my engineering job, relying solely on gongfu for my living.

## Happiness Recovered

When I was in France to teach seminars, there was a young man who had taken several of my previous seminars. One time his natural smile and happy face were covered by a dismal shadow. During a break in the seminar, I found a chance to talk to him. I asked him, “Is there something bothering you? Your face looks so sad and grey.”

“No! Nothing is bothering me,” he replied.

However, at the end of the seminar, he came to talk to me. He said, “I have not talked to my mom for six months.” I asked him why. He said, “I had an argument with her over my girlfriend six months ago, and since then I have not talked to her.”

“Why don’t you call her and untie this knot?” I asked.

“I can’t. I cannot surrender to her.”

“Why not? Your mom would sacrifice anything for your happiness. She has taken care of you her whole life. Why can’t you call her?”

He was silent and then left.

The next week at my final seminar, the young man returned. His facial expression was so different, bright and cheerful. I asked him, “Did you call your mom?”

“We will have dinner together tomorrow night.”



## Two Monks and a Lady (和尚淑女)

One day many, many years ago in ancient China, there were two Buddhist monks walking on a country path. The day started out with the sun shining and the temperature mild, a nice day for walking, but early in the afternoon the clouds gathered and darkened, and in a flash, rain began to pour heavily from the skies.

The two monks sought shelter under the leaves of a big tree. When the rain stopped, they continued their journey on what was now a muddy path.

Soon, they came to a place where the road was flooded. It was impossible to walk through without getting their feet and clothes wet and muddy. There they saw a beautifully dressed lady on the other side of the puddle. She was crying. They asked the lady what was troubling her and she sobbed.

“I am on my way to see my mother. It is her birthday and these are my best clothes,” she said, “but I cannot cross over to the other side without ruining my clothes.”

One of the monks volunteered to help. He waded through the water, picked up the lady, and carried her to the other side. The lady thanked him profusely and continued her journey. The monks continued on theirs.

After a few miles, the monk who did not carry the lady spoke out in anger.

“Why did you do that?” he asked. “We are monks, and we are not supposed to touch women—especially such a young and beautiful lady. It is wrong for you to have carried her.”

To this the other monk replied, “My brother, you are correct, but I dropped the woman off miles ago. Why are you still carrying her?”



## About the Author

Dr. Yang, Jwing-Ming was born on August 11, 1946, in Xinzhu Xian (新竹縣), Taiwan (台灣), Republic of China (中華民國). He started his wushu (武術) (gongfu or kung fu, 功夫) training at the age of fifteen under Shaolin White Crane (Shaolin Bai He, 少林白鶴) Master Cheng, Gin-Gsao (曾金灶). Master Cheng originally learned taizuquan (太祖拳) from his grandfather when he was a child. When Master Cheng was fifteen years old, he started learning White Crane from Master Jin, Shao-Feng (金紹峰) and followed him for twenty-three years until Master Jin's death.



In thirteen years of study (1961–1974) under Master Cheng, Dr. Yang became an expert in the White Crane style of Chinese martial arts, which includes both the use of bare hands and various weapons, such as saber, staff, spear, trident, two short rods, and many others. With the same master, he also studied White Crane qigong (白鶴氣功), qin na or chin na (擒拿), tui na (推拿), and dian xue masage (點穴按摩) and herbal treatment.

At sixteen, Dr. Yang began the study of Yang-style taijiquan (楊氏太極拳) under Master Kao Tao (高濤). He later continued his study

of taijiquan under Master Li, Mao-Ching (李茂清). Master Li learned his taijiquan from the well-known Master Han, Ching-Tang (韓慶堂). From this further practice, Dr. Yang was able to master the taiji bare-hand sequence, pushing hands, the two-man fighting sequence, taiji sword, taiji saber, and taiji qigong.

When Dr. Yang was eighteen years old, he entered Tamkang College (淡江學院) in Taipei Xian to study physics. In college, he began the study of traditional Shaolin Long Fist (Changquan or Chang Chuan, 長拳) with Master Li, Mao-Ching at the Tamkang College Guoshu Club (淡江國術社), 1964–1968, and eventually became an assistant instructor under Master Li. In 1971, he completed his MS degree in physics at the National Taiwan University (台灣大學) and then served in the Chinese Air Force from 1971 to 1972. During his military service, Dr. Yang taught physics at the Junior Academy of the Chinese Air Force (空軍幼校) while also teaching wushu. After being honorably discharged in 1972, he returned to Tamkang College to teach physics and resumed study under Master Li, Mao-Ching. From Master Li, Dr. Yang learned Northern-style wushu, which includes bare-hand and kicking techniques as well as numerous weapons.

In 1974, Dr. Yang came to the United States to study mechanical engineering at Purdue University. At the request of a few students, Dr. Yang began to teach gongfu, which resulted in the establishment of the Purdue University Chinese Kung Fu Research Club in the spring of 1975. While at Purdue, Dr. Yang also taught college-credit courses in taijiquan. In May 1978, he was awarded a PhD in mechanical engineering by Purdue.

In 1980, Dr. Yang moved to Houston to work for Texas Instruments. While in Houston, he founded Yang's Shaolin Kung Fu Academy, which was eventually taken over by his disciple, Mr. Jeffery Bolt, after Dr. Yang moved to Boston in 1982. Dr. Yang founded Yang's Martial Arts Academy in Boston on October 1, 1982.

In January 1984, he gave up his engineering career to devote more time to research, writing, and teaching. In March 1986, he purchased property in the Jamaica Plain area of Boston to be used as the headquarters of the new organization, Yang's Martial Arts Association (YMAA). The organization expanded to become a division of Yang's Oriental Arts Association, Inc. (YOAA).

In 2008, Dr. Yang began the nonprofit YMAA California Retreat Center. This training facility in rural California is where selected students enroll in a five-year to ten-year residency to learn Chinese martial arts.

Dr. Yang has been involved in traditional Chinese wushu since 1961, studying Shaolin White Crane (Bai He), Shaolin Long Fist (Changquan), and taijiquan under several different masters. He has taught for more than forty-six years, seven years in Taiwan, five years at Purdue University, two years in Houston, twenty-six years in Boston, and, since 2008 in California at the YMAA California Retreat Center. He has taught seminars all over the world, sharing his knowledge of Chinese martial arts and qigong in Argentina, Austria, Barbados, Botswana, Belgium, Bermuda, Brazil, Canada, China, Chile, England, Egypt, France, Germany, Hungary, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Mexico, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Spain, Switzerland, and Venezuela.

Since 1986, YMAA has become an international organization, which currently includes more than fifty schools located in Argentina, Belgium, Canada, Chile, France, Hungary, Iran, Ireland, Italy, New Zealand, Poland, Portugal, South Africa, Sweden, the United Kingdom, the United States, and Venezuela.

Many of Dr. Yang's books and videos have been translated into other languages, such as French, Italian, Spanish, Polish, Czech, Bulgarian, Russian, German, and Hungarian.



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