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Taoism in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Earthsea Cycle

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Prohlášení

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Abstract

The bachelor's thesis aims to demonstrate the relationship of the American writer Ursula K. Le Guin to philosophy of Taoism as reflected in the author's Earthsea fantasy book cycle.

The thesis firsts deals with Le Guin's attitude towards the ancient religion, and finds out that she was merely a thinker influenced by the philosophy of *Tao Te Ching*.

Subsequently, the work analyses Le Guin's books based on the reading of texts from *Tao Te Ching* and it searches for expressions of Taoist tenets. *Tao* and its *Te* find their reflections in pseudomythological Segoy and his magical language. The relationship of Yin and Yang is used partly purely symbolically, partly as a narrative pattern. Ethical rule of *nonaction* and the effort to maintain *equilibrium* can be found in the creed of the good wizards.

Keywords

Ursula K. Le Guin, Earthsea, fantasy, Taoism, religion, philosophy

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Abbreviations

TTC – Tao Te Ching

Wind – The Other Wind

Wizard – The Wizard of Earthsea

Tombs – Tombs of Atuan

Shore – The Farthest Shore

Introduction

Fantasy literature is often considered to be a lowbrow genre for teenagers with relatively predictable worldbuilding and storyline. And it is no wonder, for many fantasy writers choose to walk the easy path of recycling well-established patterns of Tolkien, Robert E. Howard, and others without adding anything fresh and original. This was not the path Ursula K. Le Guin chose to walk. Even though her Earthsea Cycle shares many common features with the high fantasy subgenre, it surpasses it on many levels. The authoress made use of ideas and principles from classical mythology, Jungian psychology, existentialism, and also Taoism. The last mentioned influence is the subject of interest of this work.

The thesis has got two aims. The first one is to discover and describe Ursula K. Le Guin's relationship to Taoism; to find out how the authoress understood it and how it manifested in her life and work. In order to do so, the thesis will first define the terms Taoism and Taoist and then match them with the known data about Le Guin's life and with her own statements on the matter. The second aim is to analyse Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle which is considered by the general public as explicitly Taoist and to find in it the presence of basic Taoist tenets. The thesis will first explain these tenets based on extracts from *Tao Te Ching* and subsequently compare them with the themes and ideas contained in the books.

Three additional notes must be made. First, due to the fact that the topic is the Chinese religious system, several Chinese words appear throughout the work. However, romanization of Chinese characters has no straightforward solution for there is more than one way to do it. The author of the thesis decided to use Wade-Giles system because it is very close to Czech transcription and knowingly adjusts some of the quoted excerpts. Second, since many of the books often referred to have long titles, the author decided to use abbreviations instead. Third, even though the thesis quotes quite extensively, the excerpts from *Tao Te Ching* are abbreviated. The author wants to offer a chance to peek into the full text so that the reader may get a better illustration, deeper understanding, and possibly pleasure from the beauty hidden within.

1. Ursula K. Le Guin and The Earthsea Cycle

The analysis of a work of art should never start without previous knowledge of the author's life, his or her opinions and beliefs, as well as a basic overview of his or her other works. On that account we begin with the description of Le Guin's life background. The chapter afterwards presents a basic overview of The Earthsea Cycle, so that the reader can get a general idea about the works the thesis is about to analyse later on.

1.1 Ursula K. Le Guin's Life and Work

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin was born 21 October 1929 in Berkeley, California, as the youngest of four children of Theodora and Alfred Kroeber. Both her parents were famous world-class anthropologists and Kroeber family was fairly well-off. During the year, the Kroebers lived in Berkeley, over the summer they moved to a family ranch in the Napa Valley. When Le Guin was 9, Germany invaded Poland. All three of her brothers went into the military. Since then, Le Guin feared and hated war¹ and that is why violence and war are never a solution in her books and if so, then as a horror.

When her father retired from University of California at Berkeley in 1946, he taught as a visiting professor at Ivy League Universities. Le Guin followed him to the East Coast,² where she studied as an undergraduate at Radcliffe College for women – an intellectual heaven, but narrow in its social conceits. Much later on, the experience led Le Guin to the notion that social class is a matter of exploitation.³ During her undergraduate studies, she got pregnant, but in order not to sacrifice her training, her talent, and the children she wanted to have, instead of the one nobody wanted, the elder Kroebers arranged for an abortion – a crime at the time.⁴

After Radcliffe, she went to Columbia where she majored in French and Italian Renaissance literature. In 1953, she won a Fulbright fellowship and left for France to work there on her Ph.D. The voyage to Europe was fated, for on the ship Queen Mary she met another Fulbright scholar – historian Charles A. Le Guin,

¹ Ibid., p. 24–25.

² ERLICH, p. 31.

³ CARPENTER, p. 24.

⁴ LE GUIN, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 75–79.

whom she married in Paris the very same year. Le Guin dropped her plans for Ph.D. and followed her husband to Macon, Atlanta, Moscow, and finally in 1959 to Portland in Oregon, where Charles got a job at Portland State University. Le Guins settled there and never moved again. Together they raised three children – Elizabeth, Caroline, and Theodore.⁵

All her life, Le Guin was a passionate feminist, and she cared for gender equality. In fact, she was an activist for many causes, though a quiet one. She was against nuclear testing and war as such, against capitalism and the face of publishing industry, she fought for civil rights and defended people of colour.⁶ These and many other issues consequently find their reflections in her work.

Most of Le Guin’s fiction is fantastic literature set in one of the five great settings or worlds: Orsinia (an *invented though nonfantastic Central European country*⁷ close to Poland or Czechoslovakia), American West Coast (21st century northern West Coast reshaped by natural and human disasters), the Hainish Universe (human space from our near future to some five thousand years from now), Earthsea (fantasy world set on an archipelago), and the Western Shore (diverse fantasy world similar to the Middle Ages).

Her most famous works came out at the end of 1960s and in 1970s. Among these we count the initial Earthsea trilogy (discussed in *On The Earthsea Cycle in General*), a gender-issue-focused novel *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), an anti-war-ecological novella *The Word for World is Forest* (1972), a short story pondering on happiness of many in face of exploitation of an individual – “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas” (1974), and an anarchist utopian novel *The Dispossessed* (1974).

Le Guin, however, was not just a science-fiction writer; she would have rather been called an American novelist and poet,⁸ for the genre was a mere means for the things she wanted to say. And there were other means in her career as well. She wrote children’s picture books, historical fiction, poetry, and top class literary criticism on fantasy, science-fiction, children’s stories, and imagination as such.

In total, she wrote 23 novels, 12 volumes of short stories and novellas, 11 volumes of poetry, 13 children’s books, 8 collections of essays, and 4 volumes of

⁵ ERLICH, p. 32.

⁶ CARPENTER, p. 23–25.

⁷ Ibid., p. 18.

⁸ Ibid., p. 24.

translation. Her most significant titles have been translated into 42 languages. Among other appreciations of her work, we can find 9 Hugo Awards and 6 Nebula Awards. She was named a Living Legend by the Library of Congress in 2000, and in 2016 she joined the short list of authors to be published in their lifetimes by the Library of America. Three of Le Guin's books have been finalists for the American Book Award and the Pulitzer Prize.⁹

Ursula Kroeber Le Guin died after several months of poor health conditions on 22 January 2018 at her home in Portland, survived by her husband Charles. She was 88 years old.¹⁰

1.2 On The Earthsea Cycle in General

The Earthsea was introduced to the world through two short stories Le Guin published in 1964: *The Rule of Names* and *The Word of Unbinding*. Unlike the short stories that came later on, these two are truly important, for they create the setting. *The Rule of Names* takes place in an archipelagic world of Earthsea inhabited by intelligent dragons where the system of magic is based on the knowledge of true names. *The Word of Unbinding* then introduced the Dry Land, the land of the dead, far to the west in Earthsea.

A few years later, Le Guin was commissioned to write a young adult fantasy novel.¹¹ For this job she picked up her previously invented ideas and wrote a Bildungsroman about Ged, a gifted boy who must learn to know his power – *A Wizard of Earthsea* (1968). The book was a hit, so naturally a sequel followed. However, the main protagonist got older and Le Guin needed another teenager. *The Tombs of Atuan* (1971) tells a story from the perspective of a girl Tenar, who is given a different type of power, but this time, she is not taught rightly how to handle it. Ged appears in the book, but Tenar is the main protagonist. Shortly after that, Le Guin started planning the third sequel that would follow Ged again and then the final one that would follow Tenar. Since Atheneum Books wanted another young adult novel, *The Farthest Shore* (1972) follows the path of yet another young character – Lebannen, the future king of Earthsea, who journeys to the Dry Land with archmage Ged by his side. Le Guin then started working on the fourth book. She wrote

⁹ About Ursula K. Le Guin. [online].

¹⁰ JONAS, [online].

¹¹ LE GUIN, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 110.

a chapter and stopped because she did not understand what happened to Tenar after she had given up her magic and become a farmwife with a couple of kids. It took Le Guin 17 years to find out.¹²

Because of this time lag, many interpreters thought of the Earthsea books as of a trilogy. Ageing character of Ged who appears in every volume arouses the idea. Moreover, each book describes a journey to self-knowledge of the main protagonist using cultural anthropology, symbols and archetypes drawn from Jungian psychology, and focus on a narrative quest as circular journey. There are also congruent patterns of narrative including movement from disorder to order on the social level; from transcendence to immanence on the religious level; from imbalance to balance in the natural, moral, and metaphysical level.¹³

However, the authoress intended more. In 1990, *Tehanu: The Last Book of Earthsea* saw the light of day and it was different. Not only were the main characters already middle-aged – except for the supporting character of adolescent Tehanu –, but since they lost their magic the story took a turn to everyday life fantasy-realism. There is no adventure, men – Ged in particular – became more domestic, whereas Le Guin's language became more colloquial, openly and sometimes angrily feminist.¹⁴ The book should have been the last one,¹⁵ but instead, the newly introduces character of a dragon girl Tehanu brought new questions which had to be answered.

In 1998, came the postscript short story to Tehanu called *Dragonfly*, a year later a romantic short story *Darkrose and Diamond*. Both of them were published in 2001 together with 3 other stories¹⁶ in the collection of short stories called *Tales from Earthsea*. Le Guin stated that in these various stories she could finally establish a coherent history as she perceived it not only from the top, but from below, through the eyes of powerless, women and children, ordinary people.¹⁷ The stories circle around known characters and places, but they do not add much to the main storyline. They are rather bits and pieces from the times before and in between the major works. Realism and feminism play dominant roles again.

¹² Ibid., p. 114–115.

¹³ SPIVACK, p. 26–27.

¹⁴ ERLICH, p. 626.

¹⁵ According to some, it apparently was the last one, because even today there are editions of the first four books called *The Earthsea Quartet*, that exclude the later additions to the cycle.

¹⁶ These are *The Finder*, *The Bones of the Earth*, and *On the High Marsh*.

¹⁷ LE GUIN, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 117.

The very same year came the last novel of the cycle *The Other Wind* which tied all the loose ends, especially the questions concerning the relationship of people and dragons, and the nature of death. Again, the main protagonist is someone else, but this time, the reader gets a glimpse of the old acquaintances.

At the dusk of her life, Le Guin published yet another novella *The Daughter of Odren* (2014). It is a story about a long planned revenge, which does not go as planned. The authoress here borrows the setting for telling a story about different points of view on the same event. Posthumously, in 2018, *Paris Review* printed the very last short story called *Firelight* where old Ged reminisces about his life and deeds.

2. Tao and Le Guin

Chinese philosophical and religious system of Taoism had a major impact on Le Guin's writing. It can be seen not only in *The Earthsea Cycle* but in all her work as such – sometimes evidently, sometimes latently. Let us now peek into and familiarize ourselves with the teachings of Taoism, so we can understand better the mind of the authoress. Afterwards, we will try to clarify Le Guin's relationship with the above-mentioned tradition in order to demonstrate the influence.

2.1 Taoism

2.1.1. What is Taoism and Who is a Taoist?

Taoism or Daoism is alongside Confucianism one of the great philosophical/religious systems of China. It has a long history which can be traced back to mythological Chinese ruler Ta Yü (3rd millennium BC)¹⁸. However, its true beginnings are connected with similarly uncertain character of Lao-tzu (6th century BC) who wrote the first and the best known treatise on *Tao* called *Tao Te Ching*¹⁹ (henceforth *TTC*); and *Tao* (i.e. the way) is the religious concept which gave the religion its name, let it be Western *Taoism* or Chinese *Tao chiao* (道教) and *Tao chia* (道家)²⁰.

The religion is not easy to understand due to its complexity. It is not as organized as Abrahamic religious traditions. There are no dogmas, no professions of faith, and no strict rules for laymen. The large number of traditions which permeate and differ at the same time due to a long history of the religion and a vast literature comprising more than a thousand works, covering all aspects of the tradition, made it almost impossible to get a clear picture. Yet, this is a problem only a Westerner would see. For the Chinese, religious activity is a part of their culture.²¹ Until recently, the religion had no special tag, and no ordinary Chinese would call himself a Taoist – the term used to be reserved for the masters, the local sages. Taoism, then, could be characterized as a religion which considers itself to be the true bond among

¹⁸ WONG, p. 11–12.

¹⁹ Also romanised as *Daodejing* or *Dao de Jing*.

²⁰ Also romanised as *Daojia* and *Daojiao*.

²¹ KOHN, 218.

all beings.²² There is no real opposition to a different belief as long as it has the capacity to coincide with the elementary Taoist tenets.

However, even Taoism has its schools or sects which put emphasis on different aspects of the tradition; these belong to the religious Taoism. The division we are making here is rather Westerner-made, for the Chinese themselves do not emphasize categorization and, as we will show further, it is hard to find evidence for such a division. Nonetheless, encyclopaedias printed in the West often separate the followers into “Lao-Chuang Philosophy” or *Tao chia*, and “Huang-Lao” religious strain also known as *Tao chiao*.²³

The first mentioned term – *Tao chia* (translates as “Lineage(s) of the Way”) refers to a so-called philosophical strain of Taoism which omits all of the religious practices and concentrates more on the individual rational and mystical approach. According to many modern interpreters, *Tao chia* began with Lao-tzu, Chuang-tzu, and Lieh-tzu. Their treatises on Tao, bearing names after the authors,²⁴ are considered classics not only by *Tao chia*, but by the followers of *Tao chiao* as well. In fact, Lao-tzu’s *TTC* is considered the cornerstone for all of Taoism. The three above mentioned thinkers never set up a school, nor did they know each other; yet their in many ways common way of speculation laid foundation for the *Tao chia*. Common traits of their teachings include finding the order of the *Tao* and following its path, and return to the original state of things – understanding indeterminate totality and receptive unity on one side, and existence as organic diversity (*yin-yang*) on the other.²⁵

The second strain of Taoism is *Tao chiao* (translates as “Teaching(s) of the Way”). The term itself has a rather complex history, but since 2nd century AD when Chang Tao-ling built upon the ideas of the above mentioned thinkers his sect *T’ien Shih Tao* – The Way of the Heavenly Masters, it has begun to be connected with all the schools which combined Taoist thoughts with various religious practices and beliefs. Truth is that worshippers of *Tai chiao* do not see the division between philosophy and religion as Westerners do; everything from Lao-tzu onwards is but one tradition. *Tao chia* and *Tao chiao* – even though the terms find support in the Chinese history – are but labels of the Westerners who want to manipulate them to

²² SCHIPPER, p. 2–3.

²³ ZALTA, outset, [online].

²⁴ Though Lao-tzu’s treatise is usually called by its proper name *Tao Te Ching*.

²⁵ PREGADIO, vol. I, p. 5–7.

suit their own agendas.²⁶ Philosophical Taoism is therefore just an approach to the same goal others seek through religious practices. Nonetheless, one must keep in mind that the *Tao chiao* schools or sects vary in what they find important and what they find superfluous. What binds them together are some basic tenets.

2.1.2. Basic Tenets of Taoism

Since the boundaries between Taoism and the rest of the cultural aspects of Chinese culture are blurred, it is sometimes hard to tell what trait is specifically Taoist and what is just shared cultural background. Though they originated differently, Taoism and Confucianism often worked closely during the long history. Taoism extolled Confucian virtues and integrated its ethical principles. The same holds for Buddhism, some Taoist schools accepted the concept of karma, reincarnation, and got inspired by the meditative way of the Buddhist monks. Taoism also integrated many popular cults of deities and forms of their worship. It makes use of the classical Chinese cosmology, the traditional calendar, magic, forms of divination (ancient book of divination *I Ching*, astrology, physiognomy), and various ways of manipulating the life force called *ch'i*²⁷ called internal alchemy (Chinese medicine, *Tai Chi* bodily exercise, or Chinese geomancy *Feng Shui*).²⁸

However, there are some Taoist tenets that are significantly more important than others. Livia Kohn – the leading specialist on Chinese religion – states that there are three unique and delimiting aspects of religious Taoism – *Tao chiao* – vis-à-vis other religions and the various aspects of Chinese culture. These are:

- The concept of *Tao* as the underlying power that creates and supports everything in the best possible way and to which one can relate through intuition and by cultivating non-action (discussed in chapter 3).
- The understanding of multiple layers of Heaven, occupied by pure, cosmic deities and transcendent bureaucrats, in their turn aided by human priests who become their equals through ritual transformation. This is a popular cults borrowing which has been integrated into the tradition many centuries ago. It emphasizes people's worship of various deities and complex ceremonies practiced by several Taoist schools, most commonly Celestial Masters - *T'ien*

²⁶ PREGADIO, vol. I, p. 8–10.

²⁷ Also romanised as *qi*.

²⁸ KOHN, p. 218.

Shih Tao. The concept of *Tao* serves Ceremonial Taoism only as the basis upon which the cosmos stands; the importance *Tao* enjoys in *TTC* is rather diminished.

- The firm conviction that the *ch'i*-based human body/mind can be transmuted into an immortal spirit entity through the systematic and persistent application of longevity techniques and advanced meditations. This is a strain of the Internal-Alchemical Taoism, which uses philosophical basis and connects it with praxis of proper way of thinking, meditation, conduct, diet, and bodily exercise.²⁹

2.2 (Non)religious Le Guin and Taoist Religion

Was Ursula K. Le Guin a religious person? What was her relationship with Taoism? It is not easy to answer these difficult questions for one's own belief is always a private matter. We, therefore, base our assumption on scarce references scattered across her work and try to create an approximate picture.

Ursula K. Le Guin surely was not a fan of organized religions, Christianity in particular. She blamed it for the insufficiency of information during (what she calls) the *Dark Ages* which was directly responsible for her getting pregnant and for the obstruction of making the choice whether one wants to have baby or not.³⁰ It is no wonder that she became a pro-choice activist and a supporter of NARAL Pro-Choice America when it came into existence. Moreover, Christianity – especially Catholicism – maintained the status quo of patriarchy, or machoism as Le Guin often calls it, which again opposed her feminist attitude.³¹ Finally, according to her, some branches of Christianity oppose reason;³² others accept superstitious practices like exorcism.³³ On the other hand, she never ridiculed the faith in God;³⁴ she just seemed to be against the reactionary machinery of churches and notion of one true God. Le

²⁹ KOHN, p. 218. Cf. also WONG, p. 145–189.

³⁰ LE GUIN, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 75–79.

³¹ This situation mirrors in the short story from the Earthsea Cycle called “Finder” where the magical school of Roke is founded by women but later on women are excluded and only men can study there, for the women's magic is weak and wicked. In: LE GUIN, *Tales from Earthsea*, p. 1–131.

³² In her essay called *Belief in Belief* she deals with a pew survey held in the US that questioned people whether they believe in evolution or not. In: LE GUIN, *No Time to Spare*, p. 131–135.

³³ See the Essay called *Exorcism*. In: LE GUIN, *No Time to Spare*, p. 105–106.

³⁴ *I see no opposition between accepting the theory of evolution and believing in God*. In: LE GUIN, *No Time to Spare*, p. 133.

Guin's perception of sacredness, or what is holy, nonetheless, differed extensively from the one proposed by churches.

From a very young age she observed her father often reading and making notes in Lao-tzu's *TTC*. No wonder *the book bound in yellow cloth stamped with blue and red Chinese designs and characters soon became a venerable object of mystery* to her.³⁵ Le Guin soon investigated it, and found more fascinating inside than the outside of it.³⁶ Later on she commented: *Of all the deep springs, this is the purest water. To me, it is also the deepest spring.*³⁷

The major role in her understanding of Taoism was played by Holmes H. Welch's book *Taoism: The Parting of the Way* which Le Guin recommends as the clearest introduction and guide.³⁸ It needs to be said that the work was published in 1957 and even though Welch was a respected scholar of his time, his book is in some respect outdated. The book first concentrates on four ideas of *TTC*: inaction (or non-action), original nature of man (return to desireless nature), character of Tao, and practice of *Te* (the Virtue – *Tao* in one's actions); the rest of the book tries to prove that Taoism which came later has nothing to do with *TTC*. Welch here tears *TTC* out of the stream of Chinese tradition and makes it something unique and wholly original which was later corrupted and made into a religion, starting with Chuang-tzu and Lieh-tzu who added non-philosophical ideas. Welch's true Taoism is based on one book and it is anti-ritual, anti-priestly, anti-church, anti-morality, and anti-government.³⁹ This attitude towards Taoism is the heritage of post-Reformation Europe. *TTC* meets the same fate as the Bible – it is interpreted without historical-critical method and without tradition that came afterwards. Moreover, it is read with a Romanticized Enlightenment individualistic approach which abhors realities of religion. *Tao* is understood as the ultimate truth – a category typical to Judeo-Christian thought; however, distant to the Chinese one. Lao-tzu is then envisioned as a saintly individualist of antiquity who taught values that we find attractive,

³⁵ LAO TZU, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 101.

³⁶ In her later years, Le Guin decided to make *TTC* more approachable to the modern reader by creating her own 'translation' of it. She knew no Chinese, so she herself called it a rendition. With help of Paul Carus' 1898 version including the Chinese text with each character followed by a transliteration and translation, she compared various English versions of the time, compiled her own, and enriched it with her commentary. LAO TZU, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 101.

³⁷ LAO TZU, *Tao Te Ching*, p. 10.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

³⁹ WELCH, *Taoism: The Parting of the Way*, p. 87.

specifically, an individualistic pursuit of an abstract self-perfection, with no priests, rituals, or temples.⁴⁰

TTC seen through this prism presents the world from the naturalist perspective – the supernatural is built from the observation of nature. It concentrates predominantly on wisdom that can be extracted from the book of creation, and it adds a pinch of transcendence which a sensitive soul cannot omit when thinking about the world. Nevertheless, the form of statements about things beyond is apophatic, or from a certain point of view even agnostic. There is no personal superpower – earthly or heavenly – demanding obedience. Nowhere does it put a burdening list of ethical obligations on the reader; there is no true moral authority outside of the reader's mind. Truth is whatever the reader says it is. *TTC*, when properly misunderstood, gives the reader justification for her or his secular humanistic individualism, while ennobling it with references to an undemanding, non-judgmental higher reality, and suffusing it with the fragrant perfume of the exotic East.⁴¹

No wonder Le Guin accepted *TTC*. It conformed with her understanding of natural order – equality of all people, complementarity of men and women, sacred character of nature. It also gave justification to her free, reason-based spirit which she understood as the ultimate judge. There were no authorities, nor churches, and yet this philosophical understanding of the world included a degree of transcendence as a bonus.⁴² The mysticism of the book is according to Le Guin practical and not theistic, it stands before and beyond God. She deems it humorous and easy-going, as opposed to burdening demands of monotheistic religions. There is a fair share of pacifism in it – to be precise, pacifist anarchism that suited the development of social thought in the second half of the 20th century (Hippie movement) as well as Le Guin who lived during the period.⁴³ Additionally, *TTC* is, unlike *Chuang-tzu* and *Lieh-tzu*,⁴⁴ free of all the cultural background, therefore more universal and fitting her interests.

⁴⁰ KIRKLAND, *The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China*, p. 8.

⁴¹ KIRKLAND, *The Taoism of the Western Imagination and the Taoism of China*, p. 11.

⁴² An interesting interview which gives insight into Le Guin's understanding of Taoism was made by Brenda Peterson. In PETERSON, *The Feminine and the Tao*, [online].

⁴³ Le Guin talks about it when asked what book shaped her character. In: KRASNY, *The Good Life*. [online].

⁴⁴ We did not find whether Le Guin read *Lieh-tzu*, but she definitely knew *Chuang-tzu*, because she quotes it in an essay called *Non-Euclidean View of California as a Cold Place to Be*. In: LE GUIN, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 98.

One might almost think that Le Guin was miles apart from any sort of irrational belief; however, there is a passage in one of her essays where she says:

(...) *I obeyed, letting my understanding rest in what it could not understand, and went to the I Ching. I asked that book please to describe a yin utopia for me. It replied with Hexagram 30, the doubled trigram Fire, with a single changing line in the first place taking me to Hexagram 56, the Wanderer.*⁴⁵

Le Guin uses *I Ching* here – the Taoist divination book. That would not be so strange, for she surely was not the only writer of the West Coast who made use of it;⁴⁶ interesting is the way she uses it – she politely asks the book as the book had a will of its own. A superstitious stain on an otherwise rational mind? We may never know for sure.

In conclusion, we might say that Ursula K. Le Guin was not a fan of organized religions which demanded attendance on gatherings, obedience to higher powers, and imposed obligatory moral rules. On the other hand, she felt necessity of guidance, umbrella teachings which would help her to understand the world, and she found it in *TTC*. Was she a Taoist then? She understood herself as such, even though she claimed to be *inconsistent Taoist*.⁴⁷ But she also realized that there is something like Chinese Taoism in its entirety – a religion she *knew next to nothing about* and differentiated it from the philosophy of Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu.⁴⁸ Was she a mere follower of the philosophy, then? After all, at one point of her life she considered herself to be an *honest and intelligent atheist*.⁴⁹ The answer is more complex, for Le Guin was anti-god (*a-theos*), but not anti-holy⁵⁰ as we demonstrated before. Also, *TTC* is not just a philosophical treatise, but rather a religious tract, and thus it does not offer purely rational answers. The incomprehensible *Tao* did become Le Guin's ultimate truth. It is not a religious truth we in the West are used to, but it is a religious truth with all its properties nonetheless, and this believe of Le Guin's

⁴⁵ LE GUIN, *Dancing at the Edge of the World*, p. 98.

⁴⁶ P. K. Dick, Le Guin's penfriend, wrote novel *The Man in the High Castle* using *I Ching* to make decisions crucial to the plot.

⁴⁷ LE GUIN, *Ketterer on "The Left Hand of Darkness"*, p. 139.

⁴⁸ *Chronicles of Earthsea* [online].

⁴⁹ The statement can be found in 1976 introduction to the re-issued *The Left Hand of Darkness*. Cited from ERLICH, p. 58.

⁵⁰ Term *holy* is here understood in accord with the idea of holy as proposed by Rudolf Otto, i.e. transcendent wholly other causing fear and fascination at the same time.

permeates all her work, the Earthsea Cycle in the first place. We may conclude that from the Chinese vantage point the authoress was a mere follower of *Tao chia* (if there really is such a thing). However, her understanding of the teachings never exceeded the popular Western perception.

2.3 Presence of Taoist Thought in Le Guin's Work

Apart from the Earthsea Cycle that will be discussed later, Taoist thought also appears in various other works by the authoress. After all, it was sort of her creed. A full overview would, nonetheless, exceed the scope of the thesis and so we must settle for a simple enumeration of the fiction that is explicitly Taoist, among which we count the novels *City of Illusions* (1967), *The Left Hand of Darkness* (1969), *The Lathe of Heaven* (1971), and *The Dispossessed* (1974).⁵¹

⁵¹ Enumeration is based upon ERLICH, p. 55–110 and BLOOM, p. 211–224.

3. Tao and Earthsea

Where to look for the principles of Taoism in the Earthsea Cycle? The answer cannot be straightforward, for Le Guin's worldview clashes here and mingles with the ideas of Taoism and sometimes it is hard to tell what served the authoress as the original source. On that account, the thesis author chose but three crucial Taoist tenets in order to narrow the work. However, there are lots of other ideas, references, or mere allusions to Taoism in the cycle. A list of such themes can be found in **Appendix I: Reference Table – Le Guin and Tao Te Ching**.

The main points we are about to deal with are true names and their relation to Tao, *yin-yang* bipolarity of the world, and the quest for equilibrium of the main protagonists through cultivation of non-action. Each section starts with a brief explanation of the main Taoist tenet as described in *TTC*, and then shifts to the analysis of the Earthsea Cycle. It needs to be said that formerly published stories are more important, for the later ones tend to recycle the ideas. That is why the thesis revolves predominantly around the so called trilogy.

3.1 Tao, Te, and True Names

3.1.1 The Concepts of Tao and Te

According to Taoism, *Tao* (道) is the underlying pattern of cosmos. The notion of *Tao* existed before Lao-tzu, it translates as *the way* and *to say* hence *the way one should walk and that is taught*, a *guideline* or *method*; however, the Taoist forefather gave it its present-day meaning.⁵² The best explanation of what *Tao* actually is can be found in *TTC* 1. The text gives an apophatic definition – *Tao* is not a name of the described reality, because it is ever-changing, and no name can describe it permanently. It is primal because nothing was before it and it is the originator of all that exists. It is the deepest mystery – the ultimate truth a man should seek, but it can be found only when the seeker becomes one with the Tao; when he strips off all his desires and learns to hear the voiceless song of natural order, the order which can be spotted when one passionately regards life in all its forms and struggles. *Tao* has no personal qualities, it is no god, it is but *the way* of all things;

⁵² PREGADIO, vol. I, p. 6.

the way all things are in their true nature, the way all things must walk, the way all things are born and perish.

The concept of *Te* (德) – translated as *virtue* or *power* – is central to the early Chinese religious conception of relationship or unity between human beings and Heaven (or nature). The term refers to a characteristic of the sage that both results in good actions and confers authority. The relationship between *Te* and *Tao* changes over the course of history; nowadays *Te* is almost overshadowed by *Tao* itself. However, for *TTC* the concept is important and we can find there three similar relationships of *Te* and *Tao* that are pivotal for our thesis:

- *Te* as a projection of formless *Tao*;
- *Te* as the individual characteristics of objects that formed from *Tao*;
- *Te* as the manifestation of the *Tao* in the material world.⁵³

3.1.2 True Names

True names, also known as the Tongue of Making, or the Old Speech, are a core element of the Earthsea stories. In *Wizard*, Master Namer explains Ged true names as follows:

*That is the language dragons speak, and the language Segoy spoke who made the islands of the world, and the language of our lays and songs, spells, enchantments, and invocations. Its words lie hidden and changed among our Hardic words.(...) Any witch knows a few of these words in the Old Speech, and a mage knows many. But there are many more, and some have been lost over the ages, and some have been hidden, and some are known only to dragons and to the Old Powers of Earth, and some are known to no living creature; and no man could learn them all. For there is no end to that language.*⁵⁴

It is the language through which wizards can perform their magic. Knowing true name gives a wizard power to control a thing or a living creature. That is why people in the archipelago hide their true names they acquire through a semi-religious ritual

⁵³ PREGADIO, vol. I, p. 353–354.

⁵⁴ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 50–51.

when the true name reveals itself to a wizard or a witch, and use secular names. Revealing one's true name is understood as demonstration of trust among the closest friends.⁵⁵ True names therefore visualize and materialize the abstract nature which is hidden; it enables wizards to grasp the essence of one's existence.⁵⁶

As we have shown in the previous subsection, *Tao* is the nameless reality transcending and pervading our world. It cannot be named because there are no names encompassing the essence of existence – neither in the absolute sense (the sum of all things), nor in the individual (a thing or a living being). There is no absolute or *true name*, as Le Guin translates it in her translation of the first chapter of *TTC*.⁵⁷ However, there are some in the world of Earthsea.

3.1.3 Segoy's Word

Throughout the Cycle, Le Guin uses poetic, mythological language which is very similar to the one used in *TTC*. It helps to carry a meaning without being responsible for illogical syllogism. One of such never explained nor inspected syllogisms appear repeatedly across the whole cycle: it is said that in the time before myth, Segoy spoke the first word and raised the islands of Earthsea from the deeps of the Open Sea.⁵⁸ We are never told where Segoy came from, how he learnt the words of creation, and how it is possible that there is a sea.⁵⁹ The important thing is that there is Segoy and the world was created and shaped through language.⁶⁰

According to *TTC*, in the very beginning, *before the Heaven and Earth existed, there was something nebulous (TTC 25)* a formless and nameless potentiality from which the world came into existence. Its essence could not be captured, therefore in its own essence it was *nameless origin of Heaven and Earth*. Once the potentiality acquired a name – accidental, not essential⁶¹ – *the Named* became *Mother of All Things (TTC 1)*. What name is it? According to some texts it is *Tao*, according to the others it is *Te*. Reading *TTC* contextually, we know that they are but

⁵⁵ Cf. LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 24, 70.

⁵⁶ Y. N., HUANG a DAI H. B., p. 42.

⁵⁷ LAO TZU, p. 13.

⁵⁸ Cf. LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 50, 73, 109.

⁵⁹ Western mind searches for something like *creatio ex nihilo*; however, we must not forget that even the Bible knows such inconsistencies like the one shown by Le Guin. First chapter of The Book of Genesis states that *the earth was formless and empty, darkness was over the surface of the deep, and the Spirit of God was hovering over the waters.* (Genesis 1:2)

⁶⁰ Again, a parallel can be found in the Bible (Genesis 1-2; John 1).

⁶¹ We are using the terms here in accordance with Aristotelian metaphysics.

different sides of one coin. *Te* is *Tao* made visible and acting in the world. *Tao* through *Te* becomes constantly and dynamically changing, and it becomes the origin of all existence by reflecting the essential attribution of everything. Every name has its origin in *Tao* through *Te*. Man mirrors the naming process, after all he is modelled after *Tao* (*TTC* 25). Through naming of things, through language he reaches out for the universe and comprehends the great mystery of being.⁶²

We can see an interesting parallel in the creation of Earthsea. In the beginning, there is *something nebulous* – a disordered, chaotic element of sea – in which all things originate. Then comes the naming process. Pseudo-mythological Segoy speaks the word and the world appears. Segoy's character is rather problematic for he somewhat stands in the place of *Tao*, but he also draws the archipelago from the sea. Almost at the end of the Earthsea Cycle we learn that Segoy is the oldest living dragon Kalessin⁶³ who is apparently *standing alone, changing not, eternally revolving* (*TTC* 25) like mythological Ouroboros.⁶⁴ He is not impersonal like *Tao*, he acts and speaks in the books, though he does not interfere much in the world of men. Nonetheless, Segoy is the namegiver just like *Tao*, he speaks the word – just one word – and the world comes into being (and once this word will also unmake all things⁶⁵). What word is it then? We are never told, but we know that through this word all acquires its existence as well as essence. We are dealing here with a word containing all Tongue of Making, word tantamount to *Te* which fosters, grows, develops, feeds and shelters everything *Tao* gives birth to (*TTC* 51). Segoy is the namegiver (*Tao*), the word is his power (*Te*), and true names are but myriads of different manifestations of one and the same life giving force.⁶⁶ Thus, true names are not a mere static language, but very dynamic power holding the key to the mystery of creation.

Additionally, in the world of Earthsea, it is impossible to lie when using true names, only dragons can do that but even they cannot unbind the truth residing in the words and must *catch the hearer in maze of mirrorwords*.⁶⁷ The Old Speech carries

⁶² Y. N., HUANG a DAI H. B., p. 43.

⁶³ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (Tehanu), p. 688.

⁶⁴ Le Guin's inspiration by myths probably stands here above her intention to create a coherent non-religious cosmos.

⁶⁵ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Farthest Shore), p. 366.

⁶⁶ Here the thesis author disapproves of an otherwise well-accepted proposition made by HUANG and DAI who leave out both Segoy and *Te* out of the equation. They merely compare true name (Segoy's word) to *Tao*. However, such simplification matches neither Earthsea cosmos, nor *TTC*.

⁶⁷ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 87–88.

not only the life force, but also original unchangeable order and reflects the ultimate truth of Earthsea just like *Te* carries ceaselessly *Tao* inside the name of every created thing *from the days of old till now (TTC 21)*.

As noted before, the magic of Earthsea comes from the knowledge of true names, i.e. the knowledge of *Tao*. True name is one with the essence of its bearer, so to control one's true name means to control his or her existence. But the idea of magic according to Le Guin is rather more sophisticated than that. To obtain the true name of a thing requires a thorough interpretation of its real nature,⁶⁸ while to call a thing by its true name is to act in accordance with its real nature – both activities lay foundation for a proper use of magic in Earthsea. In our world, when a person learns to act in accordance with nature instead of his or her individual interests, the person has little chance to acquire magic, nonetheless, such actions will undoubtedly bring him or her something as powerful as magic – the understanding of works of *Tao* and its *Te* in the world and in oneself. The very same idea – the pursuit of true names as a way of exploring both external existence and inner self – appear on multiple occasions throughout the cycle as well, and the thesis will deal with some of them later on.

One last remark must be made. We must not forget the discrepancy between the pursuit of true names and the pursuit of *Tao*. In Earthsea, it is vital for a wizard to know true names. They are hard to learn, sometimes hidden, yet still reachable. In Taoism, *the Names that can be given are not Absolute Names (TTC 1)* – the attempts to obtain names, to try to make nameable things that cannot be names, and to explain things with languages actually act as a hindrance prohibiting people from understanding the essence of things,⁶⁹ from finding *Tao* which remains nameless.

3.2 Yin-Yang Bipolarity and Wholeness of Being

3.2.1 Principles of Yin and Yang

Acts of *Tao* cannot be understood properly without the knowledge of two contrary and yet inseparable forces of *yin* (陰) and *yang* (陽). Use of the dualist concept yet again exceeds the boundaries of Taoism; nonetheless, for the religion it

⁶⁸ In *The Farthest Shore*, for example, prince Arren never reveals his true name to Ged, and yet Ged knows it because he 'studies' Arren for a long time. In: LE GUIN, *Earthsea (The Farthest Shore)*, p. 410.

⁶⁹ Y. N., HUANG a DAI H. B., p. 53.

is indispensable. *TTC* is permeated by the idea and *yin* and *yang* can be seen in various forms almost everywhere; however, the only place where the book names them explicitly is chapter 42:

Out of Tao, One is born;

Out of One, Two;

Out of Two, Three;

Out of Three, the created universe.

The created universe carries the yin at its back and the yang in front;

*Through the union of pervading principles it reaches harmony.*⁷⁰

The beginning of the extract is quite obscure and the interpreters do not speak unanimously.⁷¹ Nevertheless, the important part is that *Tao* gives birth to *yin* (Brightness) and *yang* (Obscurity) whose unity – oneness – brings harmony to the universe. The continued hierogamy of *yin* and *yang* engenders everything within space and time, giving rise to the material and spiritual manifestation. The cosmos thus is not static but in constant change. Many complementary entities and phenomena of this world are manifestations of the two: female-male, dark-light, night-day, low-high, earth-heaven, passive-active, death-life, etc.⁷² Besides, all things carry in themselves both *yin* and *yang*, so the principles do not carry ethical charge of good and bad. They are but potentially ethical, in the relation of one to the other. In our world, *Tao* establishes perfection through complementarity or wholeness. Imperfection rises from deficiency of the other element. To understand this, to find balance or equilibrium of the two, means to be on *the way*.

⁷⁰ LAO TSE, p. 214.

⁷¹ French sinologist Maspero understands *Two* as *yin* and *yang*, *Three* then as heaven, earth, and man. Chinese thinker Yen Fu explains as follows: ‘*Tao* is the absolute primariness. In its descent it produces *One*. Through creation of *One* *Tao* enters into relation, thus creating *Two*. Their difference gives birth to *Three*.’ Another interpretation sees the *Three* as *yin*, *yang*, and *ch’i* life-force. In: LAO-C’, p. 126–127.

⁷² PREGADIO, vol. II, p. 1164.

3.2.2 Yin-Yang Symbolism in the Main Storyline

The *yin-yang* is truly a unifying symbol in the Earthsea Cycle, be it visible at first sight or elaborately concealed in the narrative. We meet it first at the gateway to both *Wizard* and *Tehanu*⁷³ in the fragment of *The Creation of Éa*:

*Only in silence the word,
only in dark the light,
only in dying life:
bright the hawk's flight
on the empty sky.*⁷⁴

The meaning of the words is more poetic than straightforward, but the presence of contrary principles is unquestionable. The poem marks the journey of the main protagonist Ged otherwise called Sparrowhawk (*hawk's flight*). However, the lines serve well most of the Earthsea Cycle books, for they share a similar narrative pattern. Let us now illustrate how Le Guin uses *yin-yang* symbolism in the main storyline.

Wizard is a story of young dark-skinned⁷⁵ boy Ged who must learn to cope with his powers as well as with his own temperament. In the magical school at Roke island, he is challenged by his adversary to summon the spirit of a dead woman. He does so, but together with the spirit he unleashes a shadow which hunts him throughout the book. In this first encounter, the shadow marks Ged's dark-skinned face with a white scar. The sign foreshadows the end of the book where at the edge of the world Ged eventually understands that the shadow cannot be run from, nor defeated, because it is the shadow of his own death – *only in dying he finds life*. He encounters the shadow, calls it with his own true name, embraces it, and thus makes himself whole carrying *the yin at its back and the yang in front*⁷⁶ (TTC 42).

The symbolism of light and dark play a major role in *Tombs* as well. The main protagonist – a Kargish white-skinned girl Tenar – is forced to serve as

⁷³ Presence of the epigraph in *Tehanu* returns readers to the very beginning; it builds an arch with *The Wizard* and thus binds all the four books together. After all, Le Guin planned *Tehanu* to be the last book in the cycle.

⁷⁴ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 12.

⁷⁵ The idea serves many purposes. Le Guin for example wanted children of different skin colour to feel included. In: LE GUIN, *Cheek by Jowl*, p. 4–5.

⁷⁶ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 164–166.

a priestess to the Nameless Ones in an unlit undertomb. The service to the Nameless Ones requires of her to be deprived of her own true name. Thus Tenar walks in darkness. The state of her mind finds its external manifestation in the undertomb where she must serve the force of the old. But there she also finds Ged who carries light – literally as well as metaphorically. Ged helps her to find the truth she was looking for⁷⁷ and returns her the lost name. At the climax of the book, Ged's dark face plays its role again. White-skinned Tenar overcomes fear of her dark past and bonds with the dark-skinned man and his vision of brighter future.⁷⁸

A Variation on the very same theme can be seen in *Tehanu* where Ged – stripped of his powers – finally yields to his fate and accepts a simple life. He asks Tenar for a job on her farm and she resolves the sleeping arrangements by asking Ged if he wants her in his bed. He does and when they couple his dark skin is balanced against her white skin.⁷⁹ In this case, the embrace of the colours emphasizes the desirable unity of man and woman – a topic very much present in the novel. Ged once again accepts something he was missing and was running from – sexual completeness – which finally makes him whole human.⁸⁰

3.2.3 Integration as a Way to Harmony

Le Guin's idea of harmony has its origin in Taoist integration, in finding wholeness, and the pattern of movement from decay to integration, from imbalance to balance, from chaos to harmony finds many expressions in the cycle, be it on individual, political or cosmic level. It is not uninteresting that political and cosmic level integration often starts with the integration of individuals.

In *Wizard*, we find a land tormented by raids of warriors from the Kargad Lands, piracy, and slavery. The Rune of Peace is lost, the land has no king, and it has a desperate need for a hero. At the end of *Wizard*, Ged achieves wholeness – oneness which allows him to become a hero in *Tombs*. There, in Kargad Lands – where Ged searches for the second half of the Ring of Erreth-Akbe – he bonds with Tenar, helps her to find wholeness through freedom and truth, and together they reunite the ring, i.e. the lost Rune of Peace. The only thing missing now is a king. That is the story of

⁷⁷ The truth about the nature of her service, about the nature of the Nameless Ones, and about Kargish religions.

⁷⁸ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (Tombs of Atuan), p. 294–300.

⁷⁹ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (Tehanu), p. 656–658.

⁸⁰ Wizards are to be celibates, otherwise they might lose their powers. In: LINDOW, p. 10–11.

Shore where Ged helps a young boy Arren to become king Lebannen; it is a story of integration through accepting one's fear of fate. The outlined political integration stands on a pattern known from TTC 42: *Out of Tao, One is born* (Ged); *Out of One, Two* (Tenar); *Out of Two, Three* (Lebannen); *Out of Three, the created universe* (harmony of the kingdom).⁸¹

Integration on cosmic level – which happens twice in the cycle – has something to do with imbalance of the equilibrium (See subsection 3.3.2 Equilibrium in the Hands of). In the *Shore*, we find the very same problem Ged faces in *Wizard* – the fear of death – but this time the whole society suffers, including Arren-Lebannen. General malaise manifests itself in that people lose their sense of purpose, craftsmanship suffers, trade declines, lawlessness spreads, slavery increases; deluded by illusory hope, people take drugs and search the misty reaches of reality, looking for occult secret to save them from death.⁸² All that thanks to the wizard Cob who opened the door to the Dry Land (land of the dead), refused to die, and tempted others to do the same. In order to give courage to young Arren, Ged tells him the truth about death:

*There are two, Arren, two that make one: the world and the shadow, the light and the dark. The two poles of the Balance. Life rises out of death, death rises out of life; in being opposite they yearn to each other, they give birth to each other and are forever reborn.*⁸³

Not only understanding, but accepting death helps Arren to become Lebannen, a courageous hero who can rejoice in life and weigh it justly in order to be a good king, and who is made whole so that he could help Ged on his quest to defeat Cob. They succeed, the breach is closed, and life in Earthsea returns to normal, cosmos is saved.

Ged's homily on complementarity of *yin* and *yang* in *Shore*, however, explains the question of life and death through reincarnation. There should not be an afterlife of the Christian design, yet the Dry Land contains spirits of the dead. Le Guin saw the discrepancy and made it an issue of *Wind* years later. The Dry Land is

⁸¹ ERLICH, *Coyote's Song*, p. 99–100.

⁸² OLANDER, GREENBERG, *Ursula K. Le Guin*, p. 207.

⁸³ LE GUIN, *The Farthest Shore*, p. 174. The novel was revised in 1990 and this very passage disappeared from some of the newly published versions.

explained as a work of men longing for eternity; men who stole the land once belonging to the dragons, who violated the natural order, and who distorted the fate of all people.⁸⁴ Once the truth is unmasked, Dry Land must be destroyed so that life can return to its natural cycle. *What was built is broken. What was broken is made whole*⁸⁵, says master Pattern at the end. The correction of cosmos this time does not stand on the integration of an individual, but on the integration of many. By learning the truth wizards decide to rectify errors of the ancestors and they return to the original, natural state of things – yet another Taoist theme.

3.3 The Art of Non-action and the Quest for Equilibrium

3.3.1 Non-action and Taoist Ethics

How does a man find *Tao* – the perfect stillness – in a world full of change? Through cultivation of *wuwei* (無為) or non-action, i.e. by doing things in a natural way; by not interfering with patterns, rhythms, and structures of nature, without imposing one's own intentions upon the organization of the world.⁸⁶

The term is explained in *TTC 2* which speaks of interdependence of relative opposites like being and non-being, or difficult and easy. The opposites complete one another and from this state arises the equilibrium. Men often meddle with this order and strengthening one at the expense of the other creates imbalance. The only way how to maintain the equilibrium is *wuwei*. Taoist sage therefore:

Manages affairs without action;
Preaches the doctrine without words;
All things take their rise, but he does not turn away from them;
He gives them life, but does not take possession of them;
He acts, but does not appropriate;
*Accomplishes, but claims no credit.*⁸⁷

Similarly speaks *TTC 3* which discusses government run by the sage. It proposes to keep his subjects deprived of knowledge, lust, and desires; otherwise he

⁸⁴ LE GUIN, *The Other Wind*, p. 192.

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

⁸⁶ PREGADIO, vol. II, p. 1067.

⁸⁷ LAO TSE, p. 47.

should not interfere in their businesses and so *by action without deeds (wuwei) may all live in peace.*⁸⁸

Wuwei is often misinterpreted as a practice of doing absolutely nothing, yet such an idea is far from the truth. *Wuwei* is more about stillness and cautiousness, about observation and taking the right decision at the right time. The sage, therefore, does a great deal: he must void himself of his desires in order to get ready for the acceptance of *Tao* and its *Te* in the right time. People are the ones who do harm to each other as well as to nature; they are the ones who throw forces of *yin* and *yang* into imbalance. *Tao*, on the other hand, is believed to govern the world in the best way possible though it is perfectly still (*TTC* 37). To be one with *Tao* means to abstain from actions stemming from one's own will be it good or bad, and to accept only the necessary action leading to the preservation of equilibrium. Thus one becomes a good ruler – of oneself and potentially of the society.

3.3.2 Equilibrium in the Hands of Magicworkers

As we have already proven, the fabric of the Earthsea world is interwoven with the truth and firm order of things very similar to the one *Tao* maintains. And just as *Tao*, this order hidden in true names governs the world infallibly in balance – in *Equilibrium*⁸⁹. The *Equilibrium* rules all of nature; but man, to the extent that he is conscious and intelligent, is outside of nature. Lawlessness is a possibility for men as a part of freedom. Being lawless is to derail *Equilibrium*, to elevate one and diminish other, to bring imbalance. Learning to know how to keep balance is to accept responsibility for the freedom men have been given.⁹⁰

In Earthsea, magicworkers can operate natural forces by naming them, but there are some limitations. Only a few sources in the Earthsea are inexhaustible: *such energies as light, and heat, and the force that draws the magnet, and those forces men perceive as weight, form, color, sound.*⁹¹ All the other wizardly spells make use of the nature of things – power of true names – and to tamper with them without further knowledge always carries a prize of bringing imbalance: *Rain on Roke may*

⁸⁸ LAO TSE, p. 56.

⁸⁹ Capital letter and italic differentiates Taoist equilibrium from the Equilibrium present in the Earthsea Cycle.

⁹⁰ OLANDER, GREENBERG, *Ursula K. Le Guin*, p. 209.

⁹¹ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 57.

*be drought in Osskil and a calm in the East Reach may be storm and ruin in the West.*⁹²

The best sermon on the matter is delivered by Ged in *Shore* and it holds a great deal of ecological responsibility:

*(...) an act is not, as young men think, like a rock that one picks up and throws, and it hits or misses, and that's the end of it. When that rock is lifted, the earth is lighter; the hand that bears it heavier. When it is thrown, the circuits of the stars respond, and where it strikes or falls the universe is changed. On every act the balance of the whole depends. The winds and seas, the powers of water and earth and light, all that these do, and all that the beasts and green things do, is well done, and rightly done. All these act within the Equilibrium. From the hurricane and the great whale's sounding to the fall of a dry leaf and the gnat's flight, all they do is done within the balance of the whole. But we, insofar as we have power over the world and over one another, we must learn to do what the leaf and the whale and the wind do of their own nature. We must learn to keep the balance.*⁹³

3.3.3 Wizard – Sage of Tao

In the Earthsea, responsible for the *Equilibrium* are the ones who know the true names and can use them – the only ones who can meddle with the natural order. First and foremost the wizards, who are taught thoroughly at school on Roke Island, and then the rest of the magic-using crowd including village witches, weatherworkers, and spell-weavers whose powers and understanding are, however, scant.

Nonetheless, the knowledge is but one thing. The knowledge did not stop wizard Cob from interfering with the *Equilibrium* in *Shore*. He opened the rift between Earthsea and Dry Land on purpose. He pursued his desire for eternal life leaving knowledge out of the equation; he decided that he knows better. His eventual shadow existence is surely not the one he wanted in the first place. After all, men in Earthsea are still part of the world, they do not stand above it like dragons do.⁹⁴

⁹² LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 57.

⁹³ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Farthest Shore), p. 361.

⁹⁴ Dragons can fly outside of time. LE GUIN, *The Other Wind*, p. 192.

The theme of integration returns. One must find wisdom through wholeness with oneself, with the community, and with the world; in terms of Taoism, one must find *Tao* and let it guide his or her actions. Without it, a man is but dragged by his own desires and finds no peace. The Earthsea trilogy shows us transitions from imprudence to wisdom with all the major characters. Arrogant Ged of *Wizard* becomes a humble teacher in *Tombs and Shore*; confused Tenar of *Tombs* becomes a wise woman in *Tehanu*; fearful and reckless Arren of *Shore* becomes a great king in *Wind*. They all find internal integrity and that makes them wise and cautious about actions against Equilibrium.

What does the one with the *Equilibrium* do, then? The question is nicely answered in one of the maieutic conversations between Arren and Ged in *Shore*: *Surely a man must act, even not knowing all the consequences of his act, if anything is to be done at all*, utters confused Arren, and Ged replies that it is *much easier for men to act, than to refrain from acting, nonetheless, we will continue to do evil*.⁹⁵ According to Ged, there is no absolute oneness with *Equilibrium*. People will fail and harm and destroy. However, such actions can be suppressed by refraining from action or acting on what one knows, which means acting locally, on the smallest scale possible, and preferably spontaneously, depending upon one's intuition,⁹⁶ i.e. by practicing *wuwei*. Ged then finishes his preaching with a counsel to the future king echoing *TTC* 3:

*My lord, do nothing because it is righteous or praiseworthy or noble to do so; do nothing because it seems good to do so; do only that which you must do and which you cannot do in any other way.*⁹⁷

Wuwei in Ged's words is explained as acting out of complete necessity – an action otherwise inevitable. The one with the *Equilibrium* does no longer impose his will to his actions, it is the *Equilibrium* itself that flows through man like a stream and acts with him. It is the way Ged himself acts in later books (even though he must learn it once again in *Tehanu*) because he becomes the true sage of the *Equilibrium* and thus fulfils the poetic advice of his own former teacher Ogion:

⁹⁵ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Farthest Shore), p. 361.

⁹⁶ ERLICH, *Coyote's Song*, p. 101–102.

⁹⁷ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Farthest Shore), p. 362.

*A man would know the end he goes to, but he cannot know it if he does not turn, and return to his beginning, and hold that beginning in his being. If he would not be a stick whirled and whelmed in the stream, he must be the stream itself, all of it, from its spring to its sinking in the sea.*⁹⁸

Ultimately, only mystic union with the *Equilibrium – Tao* – allows full being and right action; ultimately, even a hero can be a sage.

⁹⁸ LE GUIN, *Earthsea* (The Wizard of Earthsea), p. 120.

Conclusion

The thesis sought answers to two questions: What is Ursula K. Le Guin's relationship to Taoism? How does Taoism manifest in Le Guin's Earthsea Cycle?

We learned that Le Guin was an upper class liberal mind who tried to bend the rules of her time. She was a pacifist, feminist, pro-choice, gender, and racial equality activist. All that made her question faith in God and the morality of macho-led churches, which led her to atheism. However, by discovering *Tao Te Ching* at a very young age she was introduced to the ideas of Taoism which then inspired her work. Nonetheless, her understanding of the book was more or less atheistic, philosophical. The thesis clarified that being a Taoist does not necessarily mean to be a follower of *Tao Te Ching*'s philosophy, but rather of a wide stream of Chinese religious beliefs and practices which include the book and make it a religious book. Le Guin's understanding of the book was subject to the Western vantage point of its time. The authoress would not be recognized as a Taoist by Chinese people.

The Earthsea Cycle manifests Taoist ideas found in *Tao Te Ching*, but it does not step further beyond the book. The thesis concentrates on three areas that are distinctively Taoist and are recognisable as such: *Tao* and *Te*, *yin-yang* bipolarity and wholeness of being, and non-action as a means of maintaining equilibrium.

The idea of metaphysical *Tao* finds its reflection in the creator of Earthsea, mythological Segoy, and *Te* – power of *Tao* – is tantamount to true names, the language, through which the world of Earthsea came into being, which holds the truth in the world, and which is the source of all magic.

Yin and *yang* – two bipolar, yet permeating principles of the world – are visible in the cycle on two different levels. The first one is more referential – Le Guin makes use of light and dark to highlight various important moments of the main storyline. The second one is based on the relationship of the principles and what emerges out of it. There is a repeating traceable pattern in the Cycle, a movement from disintegration to integration, from fragmentation to wholeness, from chaos to harmony be it on individual, political, or cosmic level.

Non-action – the basic ethical standpoint of Taoism – can be found in the creed of good wizards. Young inexperienced characters seek magic as a solution to a situation they find themselves in. However, magic – even though it is possible –

creates imbalance and disturbs the Equilibrium of the world of Earthsea. A good wizard knows it and often chooses not to act at all, leaving the fate of things in the hands of the Equilibrium. Wizards of Earthsea thus resemble sages of Taoism.

The research on the topic was not an easy one, for there are no relevant resources in Czech libraries. The studies analysing Le Guin's relation to Taoism are scarce and scattered across different anthologies and monographs. However, because of their time of publication, not a single one of them takes into account *The Other Wind*, nor the short stories in *Tales from Earthsea* or even the later ones.

The thesis partially remedies above mentioned deficiency, includes the last works, and ponders upon their merit to the topic of Taoism in the Earthsea. Another contribution made by the thesis is an attempt to connect religious studies with an analysis of Le Guin's life and work. As far as the thesis author knows, no one has attempted that with the rare exception of Yini Huang and Hongbin Dai. Nonetheless, the effort would surely deserve deepening on either the religious studies or literary criticism side. The thesis author leaves that to Le Guin's enthusiasts who will follow in his footsteps.

Appendices

Appendix I: Reference Table – Le Guin and Tao Te Ching

(ERLICH, *Coyote's Song*, p. 72–73.)

Themes / Chapter Numbers in *Tao te Ching*

abyss: 4-
acting (on a world too big to handle: a bad idea): 29
actionless activity (*wu wei*) / wordless teaching: 2, 3, 29, 30, 37, 43, 48,
57, 58, 63, 64, 67 (81). [Also *Chuang Tzu* 23.6]
anarchism (recommended) / leaving off (withdrawal) / 'Let be': 3, 9,
17, 29, 30, 32, 57, 58, 75
balance / harmony: 32, 42
beginning: 52
Being / Non-being: 1, 2, 6, 14, 40, 43
below: 61, 66, 68
benevolence / holiness, morality, humane behavior, duty / good & evil
/ justice, rights / ruthlessness: 5, 8, 18, 19, 20, 38, 79 [Also *Chuang
Tzu* 22.1]
bent, twisted (a good thing): 22
chance / luck: 50
change / changelessness: 25
child, infant / uncarved block: 10, (19), 20, 28, 55
communism / no property / being 'dispossessed': 3, 7, 9, 19, 22, 44, 46,
64, 77, 81
Dao (Way): 1, 4, 16, 25, 32, 34, 37, 40, 41, 46, 51, 53, 62, 73
dark(ness) / chaos (positive as aspects of Dao): 14, 21, 41, 42
desire / desirelessness: 19, 37, 46, 55, 57, 64
doorway / gateway: 6
duration, eternity, lastingness (of Heaven and Earth) / deathlessness:
7, 16, 25, 37, 52, 59
ego(izing), boasting: 24
emptiness / nothingness (positive, useful): 4, 5, 11, 16
environment (shaping humans): 51
evil / good: 13
far (away): 25
fate: 16
female / Mysterious Female / male: 6, 28, 61
flow / flux: 4, (16), 45
flowing abundance (wealth): 45
foreknowledge (= folly): 38
forgiveness: 62, 63
form / formless(ness): 14
freedom: 17
gender (male/femaleness): 28
glory: 26, 56
God, gods (Dao preceding): 4, 39
greatness (including human): 25
home (as Dao): 62
ignorance / learning, knowledge, cleverness (a bad idea): 18, 19, 20, 48,
64, 65, 71, 81

joy (gladness): 23
judging: 54
king (ruler): 16, 25
knowledge / wisdom (positive): 47, 52, (71)
left / right: 31, 34
life / death: 23, 38, 41, 50
light: 42, 52, 56
limits: 59
living well: 54, 56, 57, 59, 64, 66, 67, 68, 71, 77, 79
love: 8, 38, 56, 67
low(liness), baseness / humility: 39, 56, 66, 68
loyalty / promise-keeping, faithfulness: 38, 49
Mother (cosmic): 20, 25, 52, 59
Name(s) / nameless (Self-so) / true name: 1, 25, 32
nature: (Used by Merel and others for 'heaven and earth,' 'the world,'
 Dao,' and other words and formulations.)
nothing: 11
One, oneness / undifferentiated unity: 10, 19, 22, 39, (60),
origins / continuity: 14
pain, suffering: 13, (16), 71
peace: (16), 31, 66, 68, 81
progress, advance: 41
return (circle, cycle): 16, 22, 25, 40, 52
rock: 43, 78
root: 6, 16, 26, 39
sea / brooks, streams, rivers (like Dao): 32, 66
Self (vs. «ego»): 7, 13, 24
shame / purity: 41
simplicity: 19, 28, 32, 37, 57
soft(ness) / hard (soft better): 10, 43, 76, 78
Source (Dao as [older than God]): 4
**stillness / quiet, silence (vs. busy-ness, claiming to know, leading the
 world:** 15, 16, 23, 26, 49, 53, 56, 57, 61, 67
strength (true strength): 55
things (hoarding them): 9, 44
thread: 14
traces (tracks): 27
use, usefulness / purpose: 11, 20, 40, 67
utopia (primitive, and small): 80
valley, gorge / Valley Spirit (valley stream): 6 32, 28, 41
violence, conquest (advised against) / nonviolence: 29, 30, 31, (67), 68,
 69
water / dryness: 6, 8, 43, 74, 78
weakness (advised): 28, 36, 40, 76, 78
wholeness: 22
words: 70

Appendix II: Full Text of Quoted Chapters from Tao Te Ching

(We are using Lin Yutang's classical translation, for Ursula K. Le Guin's translation is somewhat ponderous and, in our opinion, sometimes clouds the meaning.)

Chapter 1

*The Tao that can be told of
Is not the Absolute Tao;
The Names that can be given
Are not Absolute Names.*

*The Nameless is the origin of Heaven and Earth;
The Named is the Mother of All Things.*

*Therefore:
Oftentimes, one strips oneself of passion
In order to see the Secret of Life;
Oftentimes, one regards life with passion,
In order to see its manifest forms.*

*These two (the Secret of manifestations)
Are (in their nature) the same;
They are given different names
When they become manifest.*

*They may both be called the Cosmic Mystery:
Reaching from the Mystery into the Deeper Mystery
Is the Gate to the Secret of All Life.*

Chapter 2

*When the people of the Earth all know beauty as beauty,
There arises (the recognition of) ugliness.*

*When the people of the Earth all know the good as good,
There arises (the recognition of) evil.*

Therefore:

*Being and non-being interdependent in growth;
Difficult and easy interdependent in completion;
Long and short interdependent in contrast;
High and low interdependent in position;
Tones and voices interdependent in harmony;
Front and behind interdependent in company.*

Therefore the sage:

*Manages affairs without action;
Preaches the doctrine without words;
All things take their rise, but he does not turn away from them;
He gives them life, but does not take possession of them;
He acts, but does not appropriate;
Accomplishes, but claims no credit.
It is because he lays claim to no credit
That the credit cannot be taken away from him.*

Chapter 3

*Exalt not the wise,
So that people shall not scheme and contend;
Prize not rare objects,
So that the people shall not steal;
Shut out from sight the things of desire,
So that the people's hearts shall not be disturbed.*

*Therefore in the government of the Sage:
He keeps empty their hearts
Makes full their bellies,
Discourages their ambitions,
Strengthens their frames;
So that the people may be innocent of knowledge and desires.
And the cunning ones shall not presume to interfere.
By action without deeds
May all live in peace.*

Chapter 21

*The marks of the great Character⁹⁹
Follow alone from the Tao.*

*The thing that is called Tao
Is elusive, evasive.
Evasive, elusive,
Yet latent in it are forms.
Elusive, evasive,
Yet latent in it are objects.
Dark and dim,
Yet latent in it is the life-force.
The life-force being very true,
Latent in it are evidences.*

*From the days of old till now
Its Named (manifested forms) have never ceased,
By which we may view the Father of All Things.
How do I know the shape of Father of All Things?
Through these!*

⁹⁹ Meaning *Te*.

Chapter 25

*Before the Heaven and Earth existed
There was something nebulous:
Silent, isolated,
Standing alone, changing not,
Eternally revolving without fail,
Worthy to be the Mother of All Things.
I do not know its name
And address it as Tao.
If forced to give it a name, I shall call it "Great."
Being great implies reaching out in space,
Reaching out in space implies far-reaching,
Far-reaching implies reversion to the original point.*

*Therefore:
Tao is Great,
Heaven is great,
The Earth is great,
The King is also great.
These are the Great Four in the universe,
And the King is one of them.*

*Man models himself after the Earth;
The Earth models itself after Heaven;
The Heaven models itself after Tao;
Tao models itself after [its own] Nature.*

Chapter 37

*The Tao never does,
Yet through it everything is done,
If princes and dukes can keep the Tao,
The world will of its own accord be reformed.
When reformed and rising to action,
Let it be restrained by the Nameless pristine simplicity.
The Nameless pristine simplicity
Is stripped of desire (for contention).
By stripping of desire quiescence is achieved,
And the world arrives at peace of its own accord.*

Chapter 42

Out of Tao, One is born;

Out of One, Two;

Out of Two, Three;

Out of Three, the created universe.

The created universe carries the yin at its back and the yang in front;

Through the union of the pervading principles it reaches harmony.

To be “orphaned,” “lonely” and “unworthy” is what men hate most.

Yet the princes and dukes call themselves by such names.

For sometimes things are benefited by being taken away from,

And suffer by being added to.

Others have taught this maxim,

Which I shall teach also:

“The violent man shall die a violent death.”

This I shall regard as my spiritual teacher.

Chapter 51

*Tao gives them birth,
Te¹⁰⁰ (character) fosters them.
The material world gives them form.
The circumstances of the moment complete them.
Therefore all things of the universe worship Tao and exalt Te.
Tao is worshipped and Te is exalted
Without anyone's order but is so of its own accord.*

*Therefore Tao gives them birth,
Te fosters them,
Makes them grow, develops them,
Gives them a harbor, a place to dwell in peace,
Feeds them and shelters them.
It gives them birth and does not own them,
Acts (helps) and does not appropriate them,
Is superior, and does not control them.
– This is the Mystic Virtue.*

¹⁰⁰ Transcription changed. Originally as *Teh*.

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Resumé

Bakalářská práce si klade za cíl ukázat vztah americké spisovatelky Ursuly K. Le Guinové a Taoismu, jak se zračí v autorčině cyklu fantasy knih ze světa Zeměmoří.

Práce se nejprve zabývá vztahem Le Guinové k tomuto náboženství a zjišťuje, že Le Guinovou nelze považovat za taoistku, ale pouze za myslitelku ovlivněnou filosofií knihy *Tao te t'ing*.

Práce dále analyzuje knihy cyklu Zeměmoří na základě četby textů knihy *Tao te t'ing* a hledá v nich vyjádření principů taoismu. *Tao* a jeho *Te* nachází odraz v pseudomytologickém Segoyovi a jeho magickém jazyku. Vztah *jinu* a *jangu* je užit jednak čistě symbolicky, jednak jako vypravěčské schéma. Etické východisko *nekonání* a snahu zachování *equilibria* lze konečně nalézt v učení dobrých čarodějů.

Annotation

Jméno a příjmení:	Petr Toman
Katedra:	Ústav cizích jazyků
Vedoucí práce:	Mgr. Petr Anténe, M.A., Ph.D.
Rok obhajoby:	2021
Název práce:	Taoismus v cyklu Zeměmoří Ursuly K. Le Guin
Název práce v angličtině:	Taoism in Ursula K. Le Guin's The Earthsea Cycle
Anotace práce:	Bakalářská práce si klade za cíl ukázat vztah americké spisovatelky Ursuly K. Le Guinové a Taoismu, jak se zračí v autorčině cyklu fantasy knih ze světa Zeměmoří. Po úvodním seznámení se spisovatelčím životem a dílem pojednává práce o vztahu Le Guinové k tomuto náboženství. Následně analyzuje knihy cyklu Zeměmoří na základě četby textů knihy <i>Tao te ťing</i> a hledá v nich vyjádření principů klasického taoismu, jako Tao, bipolarita jinu a jangu, teorie nekonání a zachování rovnovážného stavu.
Klíčová slova:	Ursula K. Le Guinová, Zeměmoří, fantasy, taoismus, náboženství, filosofie
Anotace v angličtině:	The bachelor's thesis aims to demonstrate the relationship of the American writer Ursula K. Le Guin to philosophy of Taoism as reflected in the author's Earthsea fantasy book cycle. After the initial introduction to the writer's life and work, the thesis deals with Le Guin's attitude towards the ancient religion. Subsequently, it analyses the books of the Earthsea Cycle based on the reading of texts from <i>Tao Te Ching</i> and it searches for expressions of classic Taoist tenets like Tao, yin-yang bipolarity, theory of non-action, and preservation of equilibrium.
Klíčová slova v angličtině	Ursula K. Le Guin, Earthsea, fantasy, Taoism, religion, philosophy
Rozsah práce:	36 stran (64 810 znaků)
Přílohy:	Referenční tabulka kapitol <i>Tao te ťing</i> , z nichž Le Guinová čerpá ve svých knihách. (anglický jazyk) Plný text citovaných kapitol z <i>Tao te ťing</i> . (anglický jazyk)