



The Tao of Yao: Insights from Basketball's Brightest Big Man

Oliver Chin

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In this clever twist on the traditional sports biography, Chin focuses on the 7'5" Yao Ming, the Chinese-born basketball star whose skills during his first year playing with the NBA's Houston Rockets were nothing short of remarkable. Chin (author of the graphic novel *Nine of One*) deftly weaves Yao's biography and the events of his first season as Houston's number-one draft pick with an explanation of Lao Tzu's Tao Te Ching-along with numerous quotes from this venerable Chinese philosophical classic-as a way of explaining the phenomenon of a player who is "redefining how Asians could view themselves, as well as the image of the athlete in modern society." Chin is a skilled writer with an obvious love of basketball who provides compelling insights into Yao's skills, such as how his role as the linchpin for both the Rockets' offense and defense makes him, in a Taoist sense, the "anti-center": "Embodying the qualities of water, he is fluid as much as fixed." But Chin sometimes overreaches, such as in his view that "[b]y understanding the basic Taoist relationship between difficult and easy, Yao was able to draw upon Lao's timeless wisdom for comfort in the here and now." A player like Yao who signs a \$200,000 endorsement deal with Nike can be seen as far more Western than Eastern, a point which Chin himself makes in other good observations about Houston's expanding Asian-American community and the remarkable media savvy that Yao has shown when dealing with NBA superstars like Shaquille O'Neal and Charles Barkley.

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