

Daoist Meditation: Theory, Method, Application

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The current study is the transcription of a lecture given to the [Contemplative Studies Initiative](#) at Brown University (Providence, Rhode Island) in 2011. The transcript was prepared and edited by [Aranyelixír Kiadó](#) (Budapest, Hungary), revised, supplemented and approved by [Louis Komjathy](#) in September 2014.



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Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Salutation..... | 3 |
| Introduction | 4 |
| Approaches to the Study of Contemplative Practice | 4 |
| A Religious Studies Approach..... | 6 |
| Dimensions of Contemplative Practice..... | 7 |
| Understanding Daoism (Taoism)..... | 8 |
| Major Types of Daoist Meditation | 9 |
| Historical Periods and Sources of Daoist Meditation..... | 9 |
| Apophatic Meditation | 11 |
| Visualization | 15 |
| Ingestion..... | 19 |
| Inner Observation | 21 |
| Internal Alchemy | 22 |
| Conclusions | 26 |
| Questions and Answers | 27 |

Salutation

It gives me great pleasure tonight to introduce our speaker. Some of you are familiar with some of the great products which came out of the Seattle area during the 90's like Soundgarden and Nirvana, you know, Kurt Cobain and so on. Well, one of the products that you're not aware of is Dr Louis Komjathy. Dr Komjathy and I met when he arrived at Boston University in the late 90's to become a graduate student of the famous Daoism scholar Livia Kohn. Louis ended up doing a wonderful doctoral dissertation, which became his first book on Complete Perfection School of Daoism, which began in the 12th century and it's kind of a combination of classical Daoism and some Buddhist influences and it's really the major lineage of Daoism that survived into the present.

Very unusual in the field of religious studies, but something that we're hoping that there will be more of is contemplative religious studies professors and scholars and researchers, who have deep contemplative training in the contemplative tradition, as well as the ability to do first grade scholarship.

Dr. Komjathy is ordained as a Daoist priest at Huashan Temple that's part of the Quanzhen lineage. And he's now a professor at the University of San Diego. He also started the Daoist Studies Group within the American Academy of Religion and he is also the founder and organizer of the Contemplative Studies Group in the American Academy of Religion. He's got one book published, and a whole bunch of other books, either completed or on the join boards. So it's with great pleasure that I would like to ask you to welcome Dr Louis Komjathy.

Introduction

Thank you for coming. I would like to thank Professor Harold Roth and the faculty members of the Departments of Religious Studies and East Asian Studies as well as the Contemplative Studies Initiative for the opportunity to speak to you here today. If you have not done so already, please silence your cell phones.

So the title of my talk is “Daoist Meditation”.

A young Daoist aspirant heard that there was a Daoist meditation master living in a secluded mountain hermitage. One day he resolved to visit the master and request to become his disciple. After the young Daoist arrived at the rough-hewn door of the master’s hut, he knocked, but there was no answer. Thinking that the master was out, perhaps collecting firewood or pine nuts, the aspirant waited outside the door, sitting on the porch.

An hour passed, then two. Dusk arrived, and the young Daoist began to worry about the incoming darkness. He decided to go into the hermitage. When he entered, he saw the old master and one of his Companions of the Dao sitting in deep meditation. They were unmoving, resembling withered wood and dead ashes. The adept waited for them to finish, believing that they would quickly suspend their meditation practice when they became aware of his presence. However, another hour passed without the masters completing their meditation session. The aspirant then took his seat next to them and continued his apprenticeship in meditation.

This well-known story from the Daoist oral tradition draws our attention to the importance of intensive and prolonged meditative practice, of guidance under a teacher and community in the Daoist tradition. Meditation is an essential Daoist religious practice, but Daoist meditation refers to many different techniques with distinct and forming worldviews and projected goals. In addition, it most often occurs within a larger training regimen.

During our time together, I will first provide some theoretical reflections on the academic study of contemplative practice. This will be followed by the topic proper, namely the types and styles of Daoist meditation, with particular attention to the historical and practical dimensions. I will conclude my talk with some thoughts on a larger application of the study of Daoist meditation for the emerging field of Contemplative Studies.

Approaches to the Study of Contemplative Practice

Contemplative practice is a more encompassing comparative category, with some rough equivalence to “meditation”. However, unlike meditation, which sometimes implies seated postures, and which is often reduced to Buddhist meditation, “contemplative practice” functions as a larger umbrella category. In terms of religious traditions, it encompasses meditation and contemplative prayer. As such, it challenges us to investigate religious practice from a nuanced and comprehensive perspective. It also requires reflection on a heuristic (interpretive) value and the relationship among “meditation,” “prayer,” and “ritual,” among other comparative categories. One possible connective strand among various types and

styles of contemplative practice involves the development of attentiveness, awareness, internal silence, and a sense of deepened meaning and purpose.

As is the case in the academic study of mysticism, there are a variety of viable interpretive approaches to the study of contemplative practice and contemplative experience. These include, but are not limited to (1) theoretical, (2) contextualist, (3) textual, (4) experiential, (5) psychological and neuroscientific, (6) comparative, as well as (7) interdisciplinary and multiperspectival approaches.

A theoretical approach emphasizes philosophical questions, such as the conception and relative importance of the body in contemplative practice. Such an approach requires familiarity with specific examples, so that theory both informs the interpretation of the practice and is informed by careful studying of particular phenomena, whether texts or living communities.

A contextualist approach emphasizes locating specific practices and experiences in an associated cultural and social context. It is often historical, but the contextualist approach may also focus on living communities and traditions. As I will discuss momentarily, from my perspective a thorough contextualist approach would locate religiously-committed contemplative practice in its larger communal, soteriological and theological context.

A textual approach focuses on texts, but here one needs to consider the spectrum of textual expression, from autobiography and hagiography to meditation manuals, poetry and so forth. That is, attention to genre, writing style and audience is important.

In the case of Religious Studies, the inherent limitations of textual study has been noted, so many scholars have turned their attention to ethnography, including participant-observation and personal autobiography, that is, first-person discourse. Such an approach might be labeled participatory and experiential. Here one might approach the study of contemplative practice from a more “objective” or “neutral” perspective, such as through the use of participant-observation ethnography. This might involve interviewing adherents, site visits and/or community-based experiences. On the other end of the spectrum, one might actually participate in and document living contemplative communities through direct personal experience among them. Although a source of anxiety for many scholars of religion, an inclusive participatory approach would include scholar-practitioners and adherents, that is, this approach makes space for “critical first-person discourse” and subjective experience.

There are a variety of psychological approaches to the study of contemplative practice, but for present purposes four stand out: (1) developmental, (2) humanistic, (3) transpersonal, and (4) contemplative. The connective strand here involves a view of meditation as contributing to human fulfillment and actualization, whether conceived existentially or theologically.

I have connected this approach to a neuroscientific one because some psychological accounts tend to emphasize physiology. More properly speaking, a neuroscientific approach to contemplative practice tends to focus on brain anatomy and function as well as associated mental capacities and conscious states. In the case of Contemplative Studies one interesting development is neuro-phenomenology, a methodology associated with Francisco Varela and his colleagues, in which one compares neuroimages with subjective accounts of contemplative

experience. Interestingly preliminary research indicates that advanced meditators provide accounts of transformations of consciousness that are confirmed by neuroimaging technology in terms of specific brain states and associated functions.

On the most basic level, a comparative approach compares forms of contemplative practice, noting similarities and differences within and across forms and traditions. It might be moderately comparative (drawing insights from a study of a different tradition) or strongly comparative (actually giving attention to two or more examples). A comparative approach also tends to engage in categorization and typologization (cartographies).

Finally an interdisciplinary approach would be multi perspectival, combining these and other approaches in order to provide a comprehensive and integrated account of contemplative practice and experience. In addition, in the emerging interdisciplinary field of Contemplative Studies, it would make space for the investigation and practice of dance, painting, photography, sculpture, music, and so forth as contemplative practice.

A Religious Studies Approach

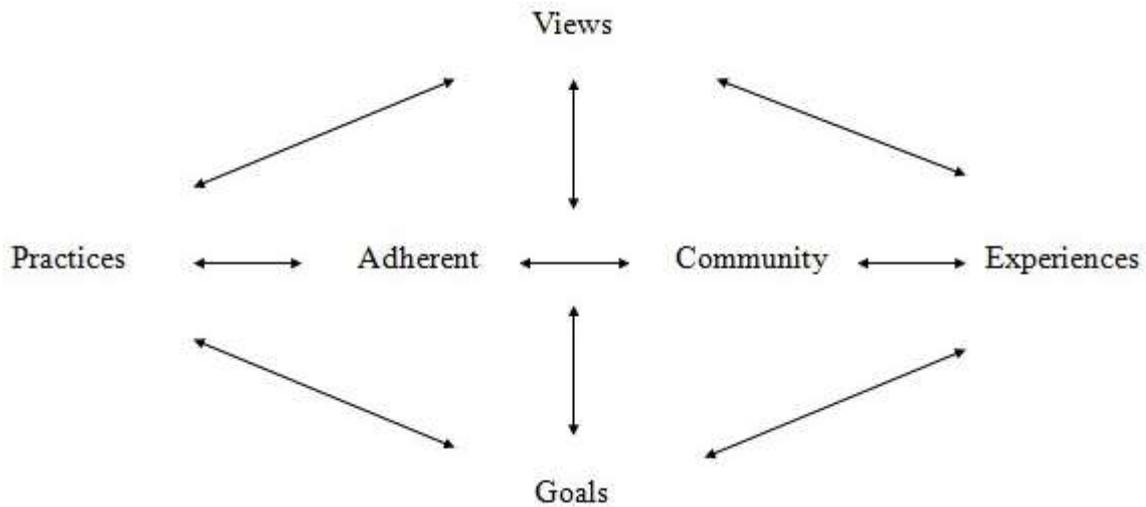
Moving into Religious Studies proper, which is my field and primary interest, I would advocate an integrated approach to the study of “religiously-committed contemplative practice.” This approach is comparative, cross-cultural and interdisciplinary. It is also inclusive and pluralistic, by this I mean that it does not privilege one tradition or one type of meditation as normative. An inclusive and pluralistic approach helps to overcome a frequently unrecognized bias in the academic study of meditation, for example, an undue attention to Buddhist meditation, the use of Buddhist distinctions such as *samatha* (calming) and *vipassanā* (insight or mindfulness), and/or equating the comparative category of “meditation” with non-theistic, emptiness-based forms of meditation.

In place of this, I would suggest that we utilize “contemplative practice,” in a fashion parallel to “mystical experience,” in an inclusive way. Specifically, we would include various forms of prayer, including theistic and devotional practices such as Catholic Dominican prayer and visualization practices like Pure Land visualization. That is, we would begin with hermeneutical openness. Such an interpretive endeavor emphasizes a dialogical inquiry, with theory informing interpretation, and careful and detailed study informing theory.

My proposed religious studies approach also emphasizes the importance of contextualization, both historical and practical. Practical contextualization gives attention to the community-based and tradition-specific elements of religiously-committed contemplative practice. This involves not extracting meditation from its larger religious tradition, and not reducing meditation to technique. An integrated and comprehensive understanding of contemplative practice would have to consider other dimensions such as dietetics, ethics, ritual, scriptures study and so forth. Where does “contemplative practice” end and begin? Thus, in order to fully understand contemplative practice, one must consider the larger soteriological system and informing theology. I use soteriology and theology as comparative categories. Here “soteriology” refers to actualization, liberation, perfection, salvation, or however an individual or community defines the ultimate goal of religious practice. “Theology” refers to

discourse on or theories about the sacred, with the “sacred” differing depending on the tradition under consideration.

In theorizing religious praxis, and contemplative practice in particular, I would thus suggest that we give the attention to the complex interplay and interrelationship among informing worldviews, specific practices, related experiences, and projected goals.



Theorizing Religious Praxis

We may think of these in terms of individual adherence and/or religious communities. When I say that these are interrelated, I mean that each one informs and expresses the other. Worldviews inform practices, experiences and goals but these are embodiments, literally and symbolically, of those worldviews. Specific practices and experiences only make sense within a larger framework of doctrine and imagined accomplishment and outcome.

Dimensions of Contemplative Practice

As a final theoretical and interpretive point, one which comes from careful study of contemplative practice in general and Daoist meditation in particular, I would emphasize the multidimensional nature of contemplative practice. We should not reduce contemplative practice to method or technique. Instead, we should be attentive to at least the following dimensions: (1) posture, (2) breathing (for example, regulated or unregulated), (3) technique, (4) style (for example, individual or communal, lay or monastic), (5) location (for example, the relative importance of place and contemplative spaces), (6) aesthetics and material culture, including art, clothing and paraphernalia, and (7) the larger religious system within which religiously-committed contemplative practice occurs. As mentioned, the latter would include dietetics, ethics, ritual, scripture study and so forth.

In the present talk I will give particular attention to the technical specifics of Daoist meditation methods.

Understanding Daoism (Taoism)

First, it is important to have at least a rudimentary and foundational understanding in Daoism, especially since misconceptions concerning Daoism are so widespread. Daoism, the tradition of the Dao, is an indigenous Chinese religion deeply rooted in traditional Chinese culture. At the same time, it has now become a global religious and cultural phenomenon characterized by ethnic and cultural diversity. Here we should note the widespread misinterpretation of Daoism as divided into so-called ~~philosophical Daoism~~ and so-called ~~religious Daoism~~. These modern concepts are rooted in colonial, missionary and Orientalist legacies. As careful historical and textual study of classical Daoism, such as that conducted by Professor Roth, indicates, classical Daoism was a religious community composed of master-disciple lineages. In addition, there are actually major similarities and continuities, including shared values, commitments, and practices, among the early inner cultivation lineages and the organized tradition.

The primary emphasis throughout Daoist history has been on the Dao 道, which is a Daoist cosmological and theological concept. (This slide is an attempt to represent the unrepresentable. How do we do that? Do we do it through blackness; do we do it through silence? How do we represent the unrepresentable?, which is what the Dao is.) From a Daoist perspective, the Dao is a Chinese character designating the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists. As a Daoist theological and cosmological concept the Dao has four primary characteristics: (1) Source of everything, (2) unnameable mystery, (3) All-pervading sacred presence, connected to a worldview based on *qi* 氣, which is translated anachronistically as “energy,” and (4) Universe as cosmological process, or Nature considered as a whole.

That is, the primary Daoist theology is apophatic, monistic, panentheistic, and panenhenic. The secondary Daoist theology is animistic and polytheistic. Generally speaking, Daoists believe that the world itself, including sentient beings, is a manifestation of the Dao. The universe is the Dao on some level. This world-affirming and body-affirming view extends to human beings, whose innate nature (*xing* 性) is the Dao.

Daoism is a religious tradition characterized by diversity and inclusivity. There is no founder or central scripture, though the pseudo-historical Laozi or Zhang Daoling have been nominated as the former, while the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power) has been nominated for the latter. In fact, different Daoist texts received a place of veneration in different Daoist movements. Generally speaking, Daoists place a strong emphasis on community, cultivation, embodiment, lineage, ordination, and place. There are various Daoist communities, including eremitic, householder and monastic. Daoism is generally divided into movements, schools and lineages. So, considered from an integrated and comprehensive perspective, Daoist training includes aesthetics, dietetics, ethics, health and longevity practice, meditation, ritual, scripture study and so forth. Thus, there are many viable paths to the Dao, including diverse forms of contemplative practice.

Major Types of Daoist Meditation

Although research on the entire spectrum of Daoist contemplative practice is just beginning, we may identify five major types:

1. apophatic meditation, for which there are various technical terms, such as “quiet sitting” (*jingzuo* 靜坐), “fasting the heart-mind” (*xinzhai* 心齋), “sitting-in-forgetfulness” (*zuowang* 坐忘), or “guarding the One” (*shouyi* 守一)
2. visualization (*cunxiang* 存想)
3. ingestion (*fuqi* 服氣)
4. inner observation (*neiguan* 內觀)
5. internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), which includes “female alchemy” (*nüdan* 女丹), or specific methods for women’s practice in particular.

Briefly stated, apophatic meditation emphasizes emptying and stilling the heart-mind, the seat of emotional and intellectual activity from a traditional Chinese prospective, until it becomes empty and still.

Visualization, which literally means something like “maintaining thought,” involves visualizing and possibly imagining and/or actualizing (this is one of the interpretive questions, is it imagination or actualization?) of specific deities, constellations, colors and so forth.

Ingestion, which literally means “eating *qi*,” involves taking the energies of the cosmos into one’s body and incorporating them into one’s being. Typical examples include ingesting solar, lunar and astral effulgences and cosmic ethers or vapors. There is some overlap between visualization and ingestion. If one were more radical, one might categorize ingestion as a form of Daoist dietetics as well as meditation.

Adapted from Buddhist *vipassanā* (Sanskrit: *vipaśyanā*), inner observation involves exploring the body as an internal landscape.

Finally, internal alchemy involves complex stage-based practices aimed at psychosomatic, including physiological and energetic, transformation. Later, methods specifically practiced by women, called female alchemy, developed. I will provide specific examples of these associated methods in a moment.

Historical Periods and Sources of Daoist Meditation

Although each major type of Daoist meditation survives into the modern world, especially in integrated training regimens, each has a corresponding historical source-point and associated seminal texts. Considered chronologically, here are the periods corresponding to the five types:

First, apophatic meditation is the earliest type of Daoist meditation. It was practiced by members of the early inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism¹ from the 4th to the 2nd

¹ From the Warring States (480–222 BCE) period to Early Han (206 BCE–9 CE).

century BCE. Associated texts include the *Laozi* 老子 (which I translate as the “Book of Venerable Masters” and not “Book of Master Lao”), the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuang), and selections from the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan), *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Huainan Masters), and *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü). The inner cultivation lineages were a diverse group of master-disciple lineages. They placed primary emphasis on attaining mystical union with the Dao. Professor Roth is one of the foremost authorities on this period of Daoist history.

Second, visualization is first documented in early and early medieval Daoism² from the 2nd to the 6th century CE. Key early and seminal texts include the 2nd century *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Scripture of Laozi; DZ 1168), the 3rd century *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Scripture on the Yellow Court; DZ 331; DZ 332) and the 4th century *Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經 (Perfect Scripture of Great Profundity; DZ 6). Visualization was first practiced by members of the Taiping 太平 (Great Peace), Taiqing 太清 (Great Clarity), and Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity) movements, although it was fully systematized by Shangqing. Shangqing was a mediumistic Daoist movement; it focused on a series of revelations given to the spirit-medium Yang Xi (330–386). Shangqing adherents emphasize cosmic integration and self-divinization, that is, making oneself into a god. This is so much the case that some Shangqing texts verge on being proto-*neidan* 內丹 or internal alchemy. The research of the late Isabelle Robinet is especially important here.

Third, ingestion is also first documented in early and early medieval Daoism.³ Representative texts include *Taiqing fuqi koujue* 太清服氣口訣 (Oral Instructions on Ingesting Qi from Taiqing; DZ 822) and the *Fuqi jingyi lun* 服氣精義論 (Discourse on Essentials of Ingesting Qi; DZ 830). Ingestion was also a central practice in the early Shangqing system.

Fourth, inner observation appears during the beginning of late medieval Daoism⁴ specifically during the Tang dynasty, which lasted from 618 to 907. It developed under the influence of Buddhist vipassanā, mindfulness or insight meditation. Key early texts include the *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641) and *Dingguan jing* 定觀經 (Scripture on Concentration and Observation; DZ 400). Inner observation was especially prominent in late medieval Daoist monasticism. Late medieval Daoist monasticism was a fully integrated system in which Shangqing was the highest ordination rank. The research of Livia Kohn is especially important on this particular topic.

Finally, internal alchemy was first systematized in the context of late medieval Daoism, specifically during the later Tang and the early Song-Jin periods, the 10th to 12th centuries.⁵ Key early representative and seminal texts include the 10th century *Chuandao ji* 傳道集

² From the Later Han (25–220 CE) period to the Period of Disunion (220–581).

³ Same time period as visualization, although many of the influential texts date from the next period of Daoist history.

⁴ Late medieval Daoism begins with the Tang dynasty (618–907).

⁵ Late medieval and late imperial Daoism: from the Tang to the Qing (1644–1911) dynasties.

(Anthology on Transmitting the Dao; DZ 263, j. 14-16; DZ 1309), the 11th century *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Chapters on Awakening to Perfection; DZ 263, j. 26-30), and the 13th century *Dadan zhizhi* 大丹直指 (Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir; DZ 244). Early internal alchemy was practiced by members of the Zhong-Lü 鐘呂, the Nanzong 南宗 (Southern School) and the Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) movements. Internal alchemy incorporates earlier practices into integrated systems. It uses Chinese medical views, *Yijing* 易經 hexagram and trigram symbology, earlier external alchemy terminology, and so forth. In concert with ritual, internal alchemy became the primary form of Daoist religious practice from the late medieval to the contemporary period. Its study is only beginning, but some important information appears in the works of Joseph Needham, Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, Catherine Despeux, and Fabrizio Pregadio. I have also published a recent study of the Quanzhen system.

That gives you a little bit of background on the types and the history, so now I will go through the methods and the techniques in detail.

Apophatic Meditation

So, the first is apophatic meditation. Daoist apophatic meditation, also referred to as quietistic meditation, is the earliest form of Daoist contemplative practice. In terms of historical origins, it is associated with the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. Apophatic meditation focuses on emptiness and stillness. It is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. One simply empties the heart-mind of all emotional and intellectual content. Disengaged from conventional perceptual and cognitive processes, the “culmination” of apophatic meditation resembles the state that Robert K.C. Forman of the Forge Institute and his colleagues have described as the Pure Consciousness Events (PCE).

Although textual descriptions date back to the Warring States period (480–222 BCE), such practice, specifically in the form of “quiet sitting” (*jingzuo* 靜坐), remains central in contemporary Daoism. So, contemporary Daoists still practice a form of this. The classical locations for instructional approximations of apophatic meditation are contained in the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, although recent work by Professor Roth has brought attention another texts, specifically the so called *Xinshu* 心術, the Techniques of the Heart-mind, chapters of the *Guanzi*. According to the *Neiye* 內業 (Inward Training), the aspiring Daoist adept engages in the contemplative process involving fourfold alignment:

1. Aligning the body (*zhengxing* 正形)
2. Aligning the four limbs (*zheng siti* 正四體): “Four limbs firm and fixed”
3. Aligning the *qi* (*zhengqi* 正氣)
4. Aligning the heart-mind (*zhengxin* 正心)⁶

Although the *Neiye* emphasizes aligning the body and the four limbs, it does not indicate whether this is a seated posture. It is possible that the corresponding posture involved lying

⁶ Roth, *Original Tao*, 109.

down, as was the case in some slightly later forms of Daoist meditation. However, supplementing the technical instructions from the *Neiyue* with other classical Daoist texts, one finds that sitting, or *zuo*, is emphasized. We do not know the specific body configuration, but my preliminary research suggests they probably involved sitting on the heels in the fashion that parallels the Japanese *seiza* 正坐 position. Consulting other materials, such as murals and statuary, we find such a posture was fairly standard.



Approximation of the Classical Daoist Meditation Posture

Source: Eastern Han Murals and Artifacts.

This research is, however, preliminary and problematic. (I’m talking about myself.) The materials come from the Eastern or Later Han dynasty (25–220 CE), about 300 years after the classical Daoist texts. Unfortunately, I have not been able to locate any Warring States or Early Han materials.

The two images at the top are related to *Liubo* 六博, literally the “six sticks,” which was an ancient Chinese board game. The three images below are related to the Han cult of immortality. As you can see, regardless of the other things that are going on in these representations, all the figures are sitting on their heels. And this is especially illuminating with respect to *Liubo*, as it would have been an activity somewhat similar to meditation in terms of style and duration.

After the introduction of Buddhism during the 1st and 2nd century CE, and after Buddhism became increasingly influential during the 4th century, Daoists began adopting its meditative postures. So, in the organized Daoist tradition, the full-lotus and so-called modified Burmese posture became standard. That is, Daoists were not sitting on their heels for the most part.

Within classical Daoist texts the practice of apophatic meditation is referred to as *shouyi* 守一 (“guarding the One”), *baoyi* 保一 (“protecting the One”), *baopu* 抱朴 (“embracing simplicity”), *xinzhai* 心齋 (“fasting the heart-mind”), *zuowang* 坐忘 (“sitting in

forgetfulness”), and so forth. In the later Daoist tradition *shouyi*, or “guarding the One,” becomes both a general name for Daoist meditation as well as a reference to specific non-apophatic types of Daoist meditation. So when looking at indigenous technical terms, we have to be thinking about the context and the context-specific meaning of the terminology.

Daoist apophatic meditation involves emptying and stilling the heart-mind, the seat of emotional and intellectual activity from a traditional Chinese perspective. The heart-mind (*xin* 心) is both the physical heart and mind in a more abstract sense. This is a psychosomatic view of personhood. In addition, in certain early Daoist systems, paralleling classical Chinese medicine, the heart is the storehouse of *shen* 神 or spirit, associated with consciousness and various numinous abilities, which some people talk about as divine capacities.

There are, in turn, a variety of passages in the *Daode jing* that describe apophatic meditation, though they tend to be de-emphasized in conventional and popular readings of the text that ignore its religious dimensions. Some of the chapters are technical descriptions (chapters 10 and 16), while others require more attentive reading. According to chapter 20, for example,

Renounce learning and be free from sorrow.
Positive and negative, what’s the difference?
Beneficial and harmful, where’s the distinction?
What humans fear cannot but be feared.
Because they are uncultivated, fear has not yet ended.
Most people are busy as though attending the Tailao 太牢 feast,⁷
As though ascending a tower in spring;
I alone am unmoving, showing no sign.
I resemble an infant who has not yet become a child;
Lazy and idle, as though there is no place to return.
Everyone has more than enough;
I alone appear as though abandoned.
I have the heart-mind of a fool—
Chaotic and unpredictable.
Ordinary people are bright and clear;
I alone appear dim and indistinct.
Ordinary people are inquiring and discerning;
I alone appear hidden and obscure.
Like an ocean in its tranquility;
Like a high wind in its endless movement.

⁷ The Tailao ritual was one of the most elaborate ancient sacrifices, wherein three kinds of animals were killed as ritual offerings. The animals included an ox, sheep, and pig.

Each person has his reasons;
I alone am insolent, as though unconcerned.
I alone am different from other people;
I revere being fed by the mother.

While the *Daode jing* is a multi-vocal and polysemic anthology, and while different Daoists have read it differently throughout Chinese history, I would suggest that chapter 20 is pivotal for understanding apophatic meditation. It depicts the Daoist adept in meditative seclusion. As the repetition of the phrase “alone” or “in isolation” (*du* 獨) indicates, such practitioners remove themselves from ordinary human concerns, both psychically and psychologically. Supplementing the description with other sources, the adept sits in silence. Here she disengages the senses and allows the “turbidity to become clear,” which is a reference to chapter 15 (“the dust to settle”). By applying *wuwei* 無為, non-action, effortless activity and non-interference as a contemplative principle, the adept’s heart-mind returns to its original state of open presence. This is a state of emptiness and stillness in which one is aligned with the numinous presence of the Dao. The ultimate goal of mystical union with the Dao is emphasized in phrases like “dimmed and indistinct” and “hidden and obscure,” both descriptions of the Dao in classical Daoism.

In addition, the final line, “being fed by the Mother,” also refers to mystical union. Throughout the texts of classical Daoism the Dao is described as “mother,” “origin,” “source,” “root,” “ancestor,” and so forth. “Being fed by the mother” is thus a technical and esoteric reference to meditative praxis, cosmological attunement, and mystical union.

More explicit descriptions of Daoist apophatic meditation appear in the 4th century BCE Inner Chapters of the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang), where it is presented as “fasting of the heart-mind” (*xinzhai* 心齋) and “sitting-in-forgetfulness” (*zuowang* 坐忘). The relevant passages appear in chapters 4 and 6, respectively:

“You must fast! I will tell you what that means. Do you think that it is easy to do anything while you have a heart-mind? If you do, the luminous cosmos will not support you...Make your aspirations one! Don’t listen with your ears; listen with your heart-mind. No, don’t listen with your heart-mind; listen with *qi*.⁸ Listening stops with the ears, the heart-mind stops with joining, but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. The Dao gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness is the fasting of the heart-mind.”

And the second important passage:

“I’m improving...I can sit and forget...I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical with Great Pervasion. This is what I mean by sitting-in-forgetfulness.”

⁸ Note that Burton Watson, in his highly influential and generally reliable rendering of the text, has mistranslated *qi* as “spirit.” In the texts of classical Daoism, it is clear that *qi* is central, although the contextual meaning of the term, whether subtle breath or physical respiration, is open to interpretation. Following Watson, most non-specialists misinterpret the passage.

As is the case with other related passages in the *Zhuangzi*, for example Woman Crookback's instructions on Daoist practice in chapter 6, here we seem to have a stage-based process of meditative discipline.

First, one withdraws from sensory engagement with the phenomenal world. Then one empties the heart-mind of intellectual and emotional content. Finally, one enters the state of cosmological integration, wherein *qi*, subtle breath or one's vital force, is the primary layer of being that one listens to. This condition is described as "unity" (*yi* 一), "emptiness" (*kong* 空 or *xu* 虚), and "identification" (*tong* 同/通). As the Dao is Stillness from the Daoist perspective, by entering one's own interior silence one returns to one's innate nature, which is the Dao.

Interestingly these passages remain central in contemporary Daoist meditation practice, specifically in certain instructions on "quiet sitting" (*jingzuo* 靜坐). As I will discuss tomorrow, a number of Daoists describe the foundational practice by citing and commenting on the *xinzhai* and *zuowang* passages.

According to this approach one begins by listening to the center of the head, so one brings one's listening into the center of the head. Then one rests one's gaze on the tip of the nose. The gaze, one's awareness and intent, sinks down the front center-line of the body to rest in the lower elixir field, the *dantian* 丹田, which is the lower abdominal region. This is the primarily storehouse of *qi* in the body.⁹ One practices forgetting until even forgetting is forgotten.

Visualization

Visualization is the next major form in Daoist meditation. In terms of historical origins, it was first systematized in the early Shangqing or Highest Clarity movement of early medieval Daoism. Visualization involves visualizing or imagining the inner regions of the body (the microcosm) and other realms of the universe (the macrocosm). Vision and imagination are the primary faculties utilized here. While there are many complex Daoist visualization practices, two representative examples will suffice.

One of the most representative types of Daoist meditation focuses on the sun, moon and stars. In the *Jinque dijun sanyuan zhenyi jing* 金闕帝君三元真一經 (Scripture on the Perfect Ones of the Three Primes by the Lord Gold Tower; DZ 253; cf. DZ 1314), part of the original 4th century Highest Clarity revelations, aspiring adepts are instructed to visualize the Northern Dipper, that is, the Big Dipper or Ursa Major, according to the method of "guarding the One." Now we have *shouyi* being used for a completely different kind of practice. This practice is also called "guarding the Three Ones" (*shou sanyi* 守三一).

⁹ Although *dantian* is a later Daoist technical term, it is noteworthy that classical Daoist texts frequently emphasize focusing on "the belly" (*fu* 腹), which may also be understood as the lower abdomen.



Visualizing the Big Dipper

Source: *Jinque dijun wudou sanyi tujue* 金闕帝君五斗三一圖訣, DZ 765, 16b

At midnight on the *lichun* 立春 (Spring Begins) node [approx. February 2nd], practice aligned meditation (*zhengzuo* 正坐) facing east. Exhale nine times and swallow saliva thirty-five times.

Then visualize the seven stars of the Northern Dipper as they slowly descend toward you until they rest above you. The Dipper should be directly above your head, with its handle pointing forward, due east. Visualize it in such a way that the stars Yin Essence and Perfect One are just above the top of your head. The two stars Yang Brightness and Mysterious Darkness should be higher up. In addition, Yin Essence and Yang Brightness should be toward your back, while Perfect One and Mysterious Darkness are in front. Though the image may be blurred at first, concentrate firmly and focus it in position.

Then concentrate on the venerable Lords, the Three Ones. They appear suddenly in the bowl of the Dipper above your head. Before long their three ministers arrive in the same way. After a little while, observe how the six gods ascend together to Mysterious Darkness, from where they move east. When they reach the Celestial Pass, they stop.

Together they turn and face your mouth. See how the Upper Prime supports the upper minister with his hand; how the Middle Prime supports the middle minister; and how the Lower Prime supports the lower minister.

Then take a deep breath and hold it for as long as you can. The Upper Prime and his minister follow this breath and enter your mouth. Once inside they ascend and go to the Palace of Niwan 泥丸 in the head.

Take another breath as deep as you can. The Middle Prime and his minister follow this breath and enter your mouth. Once inside they descend and go to the Scarlet Palace in the heart.

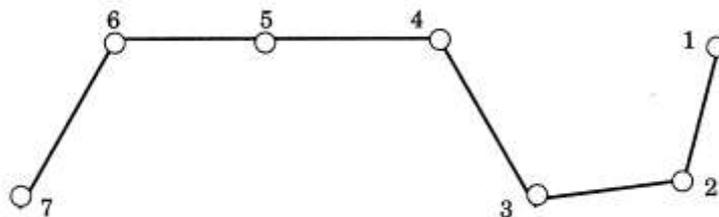
Take yet another breath as deep as you can. The Lower Prime and his minister follow this breath and enter your mouth. Once inside they descend and go to the lower Cinnabar Field in the abdomen.

Next visualize the star Celestial Pass and bring it down to about seven inches in front of your mouth. While this star stands guard before your mouth, the Three Ones firmly enter into their bodily palaces.

With this complete, concentrate again on the Perfected to make sure they are all at rest in their residences. From then on, whether sitting or lying down, always keep them firmly in your mind.

At any point during the practice, if concerns or desires arise in your mind, it will push to pursue them. Then, however much the mind strains to break free, make sure to keep it firmly concentrated on the Three Ones. See that you remain at peace and in solitude. Moreover, if your room is quiet enough, you may continue the practice well into the day. (DZ 253, 6a-7a)

That's a lot of information; I hope this will help. So these are the names of the stars of the Dipper, according to Daoism:



1. Yangming 陽明 (Yang Brightness)
2. Yinjing 陰精 (Yin Essence)
3. Zhenren 真人 (Perfect One)
4. Xuanming 玄冥 (Mysterious Darkness)
5. Danyuan 丹元 (Cinnabar Prime)
6. Beiji 北極 (North Culmen)
7. Tianguan 天關 (Celestial Pass)

The Seven Visible Stars of the Big Dipper

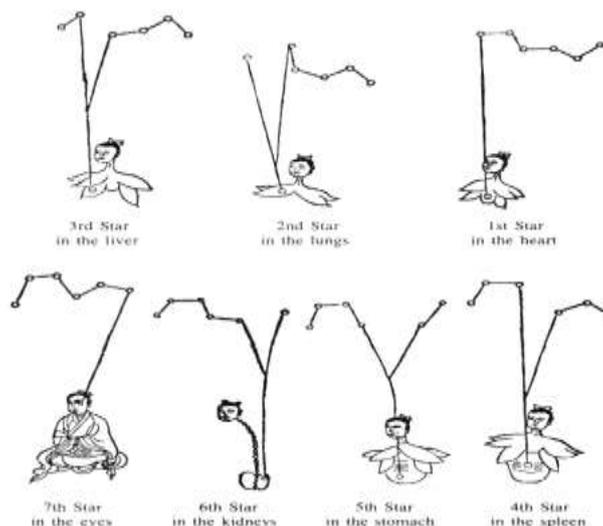
Source: *Jinque dijun wudou sanyi tujue* 金闕帝君五斗三一圖訣, DZ 765, 16b

Within this method, the Daoist adept visualizes the Big Dipper above his/her head. The two lower stars of the Dipper bowl rest in close proximity to the top of the head, while the handle extends forward so that the 7th star, called Celestial Pass, rests in front of the mouth. At the beginning of spring, one faces east, that is, one enters a posture of cosmological alignment based on the Five Phases (Wood/spring/east).

One internally visualizes the Three Ones, also known as the Three Primes and the Three Purities in the Dipper bowl. The Three Purities represent primordial ethers and cosmic *qi*, the earliest emanations of the Dao. They are the highest “deities” of the Daoist pantheon. They are usually represented in anthropomorphic form, three old Chinese men, wearing Daoist ritual investments. According to this method, the Three Purities ascend together to the 4th star, Mysterious Darkness, move to the 7th star, Celestial Pass, and wait there facing towards the adept’s mouth. The adept then visualizes each one in sequence. So the upper, middle and lower entering their respective corporeal locations, that is, *niwan* in the center of the head, the Scarlet Palace in the heart, and the cinnabar field [in the abdomen], which are called the three cinnabar or elixir fields. In this way the three heavens and their corresponding gods become located in the Daoist adherent’s very own body.

The text in turn advises the Daoist aspirant to follow the same instructions for the commencements of the other seasons: *lixia* 立夏 (summer begins; around May 5th) facing south; *liqiu* 立秋 (autumn begins; around August 8th) facing west; and *lidong* 立冬 (winter begins; around November 11th) facing north. The corresponding time seems to be the same, namely 11 pm to 1 am. There are thus seasonal, cosmological and theological dimensions of the practice.

Another distinctively Daoist visualization method centering on the Big Dipper appears in the 4th century in *Dongfang jing* 洞房經 (Scripture on the Cavern Chamber; DZ 405, 13b). The *dongfang* 洞房, or “Cavern Chamber,” of the text title refers to one of the Nine Palaces, which are the nine Daoist mystical cranial locations, that is, you have Nine Palaces in your brain that you can access through Daoist practice. According to this text, the Daoist adept visualizes and then locates each of the seven stars and its corresponding body organ. As such, this method falls somewhere between the categories of visualization and ingestion, as one seems to be taking the actual energies of the stars into the body.



Installing the Dipper in One’s Body

Source: *Yutang zhengzong gaoben neijing yushu* 玉堂正宗高奔内景玉書; DZ 221, 2.13a-17b

This method is called “returning to the origin” (*huiyuan* 迴元), and a corresponding illustration orients the Big Dipper in a reversed manner from the above-mentioned technique for guarding the Three Ones—it is upside down compared to the other one. That is, the bowl of the Big Dipper is upside-down with the handle pointing backwards.

One begins by visualizing the 1st star of the Big Dipper, Yang Brightness, descending into and connected to the heart. This is followed by locating in 2nd star, Yin Essence, in the lungs; the 3rd star, Perfect One, in the liver; the 4th star, Mysterious Darkness, in the spleen; the 5th star, Cinnabar Prime, in the stomach; and the 6th star, North Culmen, in the kidneys. The practice concludes with visualizing the 7th star, Celestial Pass, descending into and connected to the eyes. The latter is noteworthy as more standardized Daoist visualization methods associate the left and right eye with the sun and moon, respectively. The adept is also instructed to perform each of the seven visualizations while practicing “calm” or “level sitting” (*pingzuo* 平坐) at midnight on the corresponding day. So you can kind of map out all the days in our associations.

Here I should also mention that the Big Dipper is centrally important in the Daoist tradition. Generally speaking, Daoists view the Big Dipper as the center and pivot-point of the universe. The entire cosmos turns around it. It is also associated with human fate (*ming* 命), one’s endowed destiny. Many Daoist texts claim that through Daoist training and spiritual transformation one can change one’s fate. That is, the handle of the Big Dipper is within oneself. In addition to the visualization practice such as the one just described, the Big Dipper becomes a map for the body. Sometimes it extends out from the heart. More commonly, it is imposed on to the spine, with Huiyin 會陰 (the perineum) corresponding to the first star and Mingtang 明堂 (third-eye) corresponding to the seventh star.

Ingestion

The 3rd major form of Daoist meditation is ingestion, also referred to as absorption. In terms of historical origins, it was also systematized by the early Shangqing or Highest Clarity movement of early medieval Daoism. Ingestion involves the absorption of seasonal and locality influences as well as astral effulgences. That is, it involves gathering terrestrial and celestial energies and then incorporating them into one’s own body as an energetic system. Some of the most well-known methods involve ingesting the energies of the five directions and the energies of the sun, moon and stars. Like visualization, Daoist ingestion methods usually utilize traditional Chinese cosmology, specifically the various Five Phase associations. They also tend to be time-specific. So there are specific times during the day and during the seasons when you practice them.

For example, in a standard Daoist method, when ingesting the *qi* of the five directions, often referred to as the “five sprouts” (*wuya* 五芽) or the “five energies” (*wuqi* 五氣). One stands (or sits) facing east around sunrise. One brings the *qi* of the east and spring into the liver as vibrant green light. Each of these elements corresponds to the Wood phase. One then goes through this for each of the other Five Phases. The energies are in turn stored in the lower elixir field, and in later internal alchemy the methods are referred to as the “Five Qi return to

source” (*wuqi guigen* 五氣歸根). In this type of ingestion practice, one can see cosmological and seasonal dimensions, especially with respect to solar influences and cosmic energies.

Another common and popular method involves ingesting solar effulgences.



Ingesting Solar Effulgences

Source: *Yuyi jielin tu* 鬱儀結璘奔圖, DZ 435, 5ab

According to the twelfth century anthology *Yuyi jielin tu* 鬱儀結璘圖 (Diagram of the Sun and Moon; DZ 435, 5ab),¹⁰ a basic practice involves standing facing the sun in the early morning. One allows the warm solar radiance to enter and infuse one’s entire body. One “makes the light of the sun embrace one’s entire body extending as far as the edges of the stomach, and infusing one with the feeling of being completely illuminated both internally and externally.” Whoever regularly practices such exercises will acquire “radiant complexion” and one’s “whole body will become luminous.” The same text also describes a more complex method wherein the sun and moon are associated with specific deities. In all of these exercises, one exchanges qualities with the sun and moon, specifically as pure *yang* (heaven and fire) and pure *yin* (earth and water) energies of the cosmos. Thus primordial ethers and cosmic energies are taken into and circulated throughout the Daoist adept’s body. The body becomes the universe, and the universe is one’s body. From this Daoist perspective, one literally shifts ontological conditions, becomes a different kind of being in which subtle presences circulate and manifest in the body.

In the contemporary world, these types of practices tend to utilize standing postures and movement and to be categorized as Yangshang 養生 (“nourishing life”) or Qigong 氣功 (Qi

¹⁰ Yuyi and Jielin are esoteric names of the sun and moon, respectively.

Exercises). Some of them are employed in a specifically Daoist framework, while others are reconceptualized, especially as part of alternative healthcare, the American health and fitness movement, and/or spiritual capitalism. Also noteworthy is the fact that contemporary Daoists have different views on the necessity and the relative importance of ingestion, though health and longevity tend to remain a strong emphasis in the Daoist tradition.

Inner Observation

The fourth major form of Daoist meditation is inner observation. In terms of historical origins, inner observation was first expressed in late medieval Daoist monasticism, a fully integrated system in which Shangqing was the highest ordination rank. Inner observation developed during the Tang dynasty (618–907) under the influence of Buddhist insight or mindfulness meditation. On the most basic level, Daoist inner observation involves contemplating the body and purifying consciousness.

However, in contrast to its Buddhist counterpart, Daoist inner observation does not primarily involve non-discriminating awareness of phenomenon or confirmation of Buddhist doctrine through meditation practice. Rather, it focuses on the human body as a manifestation of the Dao (rather than a samsaric emanation) and on the body as microcosm. In this way, inner observation incorporates some Buddhist psychological and soteriological insights with earlier Daoist views of the body as landscape and universe.

The anonymous 8th century *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641) and *Dingguan jing* 定觀經 (Scripture on Concentration and Observation; DZ 400) both emphasize a foundational practice that parallels classical Daoist apophatic meditation, albeit with a Buddhist slant on the purification of consciousness (e.g., the removal of “defilements” and “vexations”). However a more distinctive element focuses on the body as microcosm. For example, the *Neiguan jing* begins by describing the “Daoist body” as comprised of the three *hun* 魂 (“ethereal souls”) and the seven *po* 魄 (“corporeal souls”), the spirits with the five main organs associated with the Five Phases, the six *yang* organs associated with the six nodes, and so forth. The Daoist practitioner not only understands this theoretically, as an informing worldview, but also gains experiential confirmation through inner observation, that is, through practice.



Daoist Inner Landscape Map

Source: *Nanjing zuantu jujie* 難經纂圖句解, DZ 1024

In one of the more distinctive phases of inner observation, the aspiring adept focuses on the five spiritual presences associated with the five *yin*-organs (liver, heart, spleen, lungs and kidneys). Here one notes a continuation of earlier Daoist visualization-ingestion practices. According to the *Neiguan jing*,

In the five *yin*-organs, the following spirit manifestations reside: the ethereal soul in the liver; corporeal soul in the lungs; vital essence in the kidneys; intention in the spleen; and spirit in the heart.

There appellations vary according to their respective positions. The heart belongs to the Fire phase. Fire is the essence of the south and of greater yang. Above, it is governed by the planet Mars; below, it corresponds to the heart. Its color is red and it consists of three valves that resemble a lotus flower. (DZ 641, 2ab)

The text then goes on to describe various other psychosomatic dimensions of personhood. Through inner observation practice, one transforms negative dimension of the self into their positive counterparts. One also investigates and realizes the body as the manifestation of the Dao, as a microcosm interpenetrating with the larger universe.

Internal Alchemy

The final type of Daoist meditation, internal alchemy, first became systematized during the late Tang dynasty and during the Northern Song dynasty (960–1127). Taken as a whole,

internal alchemy often incorporates the other four forms of Daoist meditation, though it should not be taken as superior or primary because of that fact. Internal alchemy emphasizes complex physiological methods to transform one's psychosomatic experience. More often than not, it is a stage-based process of energetic transformation. From the Song dynasty onward, internal alchemy became the dominant form of Daoist meditation, though some Daoists also preferred other approaches.

There are diverse forms of internal alchemy, with the technical specifics differing among practitioners, movements and lineages. More often than not, internal alchemy has an esoteric dimension, tends to be lineage-specific, and requires guidance under a master.

As expressed in the early texts of the Zhong-Lü 鍾呂, the so-called Nanzong 南宗 (Southern School) and the Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) movements, the practice is extremely complex, through which the practitioner aims to unite the composite dimensions of the self into a unified being. The latter is often referred to as the “yang-spirit” (*yangshen* 陽神) or “body-beyond-the-body” (*shenwai shen* 身外身). That is, from a traditional *neidan* perspective, immortality and transcendence are created, not given. One does not have an eternal soul; rather, one is a composite self destined to disappear into the cosmos after death, unless one practices internal alchemy.

As one moves into the late imperial modern periods, Daoist internal alchemy becomes popularized and simplified in new lineages. The process of simplification and popularization was expressed in explicit descriptions and illustrated manuals. This process culminated in certain forms of contemporary Qigong. In any case, one relatively accessible late imperial expression, which remains popular in the temporary *neidan* circles, is the Wu-Liu 伍柳 system. This lineage is technically a sub-lineage of Longmen 龍門 (Dragon Gate), the most prominent lineage of Quanzhen, the contemporary monastic order. It is named after the Longmen Daoist monk Wu Shouyang 伍守陽 and the Chan Buddhist monk Liu Huayang 柳華陽.

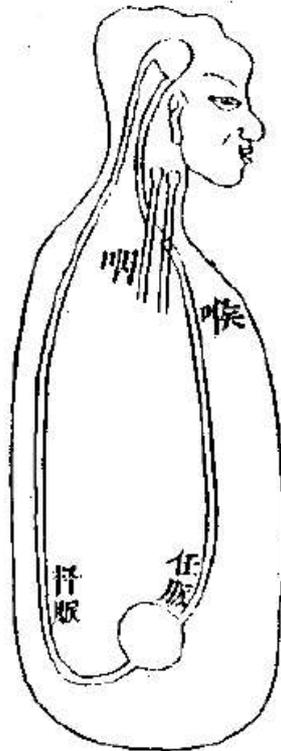
I have selected the *Huiming jing* 慧命經 (Scripture on Wisdom and Life-Destiny; ZW 131), one of Liu Huayang's most influential texts, because it is relatively accessible and representative of basic internal alchemy practice. The title of the text refers to spiritual illumination, associated with spirit, and vitality, associated with the body and physical health. The *Huiming jing* is a late 18th century text on Daoist internal alchemy combined with Chan meditation and soteriology. In terms of contemplative practice, the *Huiming jing* describes an eight-stage process of alchemical transformation according to the following diagrams and corresponding instructions:

1. Diagram of Dissipation
2. Diagram of the Six Phases
3. Diagram of the Governing and Conception Channels
4. Diagram of the Embryo of the Dao
5. Diagram of the Emergence of the Embryo
6. Diagram of the Transformation Body
7. Diagram of Wall Gazing

8. Diagram of Disappearance into the Empty Void

The text begins with the now-standardized corporeal landscape emphasizing the abdominal region as the “lower elixir field” (*xia dantian*), as the place where *qi* is stored, and the body as a system of “meridians,” or intersecting energetic pathways. Aspiring adepts are first instructed to seal themselves off from every source of dissipation, including sensory engagement, excessive emotional and intellectual activity, and sexual stimulation. This allows one to conserve and fortify *qi* and spirit.

Then one must activate the Waterwheel or Microcosmic Orbit, that is, connect the Governing Vessel along the centerline on the back with the Conception Vessel along the centerline of the torso.

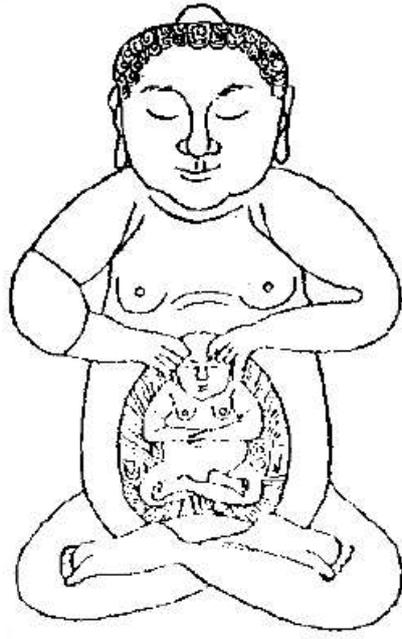


Governing and Conception Vessels

Source: *Huiming jing*, ZW 131

This is done by circulating *qi* up the back and down the front of the body, so that the body becomes an integrated whole, so that one activates the Dao a subtle body. Through this process, in concert with the cultivation of stillness, one becomes a spiritually integrated and transformed being.

Liu discusses the culmination of Wu-Liu training in both Daoist and Chan Buddhist terms. One completes the immortal embryo, attains the Buddha form, returns to the Source, and disappears into the Void. One becomes an immortal and a buddha simultaneously. From Liu Huayang’s perspective, this seems to mean the end of separate personhood and the attainment of mystical union.



Immortal Embryo

Source: *Huiming jing*, ZW 131

Conclusions

Considered from a more comprehensive historical perspective Daoist meditation consists of diverse methods and goals. As we have seen, there are five major types of Daoist meditation, namely, apophatic meditation, visualization, ingestion, inner observation, and internal alchemy.

Although I have primarily focused on specific methods, Daoist meditation cannot be removed from its larger religious and soteriological system. These systems include aesthetics, dietetics, ethics, health and longevity practice, ritual, scripture study, and so forth. In addition, Daoists tend to emphasize the importance of community and place. Utilizing comparative typologies and categories of contemplative practice, Daoist meditation includes both apophatic or unitive, and kataphatic or dualistic types. That is, there are some forms of Daoist meditation that are non-conceptual, non-dualistic, contentless and monistic, and there are other forms that are devotional and theistic. Although the primarily Daoist approach involves solitary meditation, there are communal types of Daoist meditation as well. The latter tend to be monastic and follow Chan Buddhist models. Finally, there are strong theological dimensions to Daoist contemplative practice. This includes somatic theology in which one locates or discovers gods in one's own body.

The study of Daoist meditation has larger implications for and applications to the emerging interdisciplinary field of Contemplative Studies. It reveals that there is diversity not only between, but also within religious traditions. It draws our attention to the specific types of contemplative practice and expressions of specific religious and soteriological systems. It expands our understanding of religious diversity, including the challenges of taking religious traditions seriously on their own terms.

As mentioned at the beginning of this talk, I would also emphasize the importance of adopting an inclusive and pluralistic approach, of not privileging one type of meditation as normative. The inclusion of Daoist meditation in the comparative study of contemplative practice encourages us to consider the diversity and complexity of other traditions as well. Although research on meditation has tended to privilege Buddhist meditation, especially *vipassanā*, Japanese *zazen* and now Tibetan Buddhist forms, every major religious tradition has its contemplative and mystical elements.

Finally, we may develop more sophisticated and nuance cartographies of contemplative practice. In this respect we might utilize at least the following typologies: alchemical, apophatic, attentional, communal, concentrative, devotional, dualistic, ecstatic, enstatic, ergotropic, kataphatic, kinesthetic, mantic, mantric, mediumistic, mystical, quietistic, respiratory, secular, solitary, therapeutic, trophotropic, unitive, and visualizational.

Thank you for your kind attention.

Questions and Answers

*You mentioned the importance of place in Daoism when you were talking about the constellation practice. Did that happen indoors, visualizing the constellations or did people sit outside and look at them?*¹¹

It seems that probably it was both. There were some practices that involved actually sitting inside, sometimes it's called a pure chamber, a meditation room, and then visualizing it, and there are a lot of practices where you were literally outside connecting with the particular energies of a given constellation. And that is still the case today.

Are there any issues then with light pollution and industrial pollution?

Yes, absolutely. But not just light pollution, but the quality of *qi* where you live. So the first layer is the *qi* of your surrounding environment, where you live, how nourishing that is and your spiritual wellbeing. So forget about the Big Dipper. Can you see the Big Dipper? If you can't see the Big Dipper, you have bigger issues from a Daoist perspective.

You mentioned the definition of qi. What would you suggest for translation?

I would not translate it. So in general I think *dao*, *yin-yang*, *qi* are best left untranslated and we just explain them. The etymology of *qi* is helpful if you know Chinese. Steam over rice has this idea of the transformation from something more material to something more subtle. I tend to translate it as "subtle breath," but it can also be physical respiration. So it can have many meanings, as there are so many types of *qi*, but this is one of those technical terms I prefer to be left untranslated. Other religious traditions get away with a lot in terms of untranslated terms, I think we can have four: *dao*, *yin-yang*, *qi*. But a lot of people translate it as "energy." And there is a kind of parallel conception, but there is a history behind what energy is. I think that is what I'm hinting at. How was this concept understood indigenously? Rather than in terms of contemporary astrophysics or something like that.

Would you say more on the development and content of female alchemy?

Sorry, I was thinking I was already doing so much. So one of the pivotal figures of female alchemy is Sun Buer 孫不二. Sun Buer was the only female member of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) in the 12th century. She was the only senior disciple under the founder Wang Chongyang. And we have a series of poems that are attributed to her and more than likely that she wrote. You have evidence of the beginning of a *nüdan* 女丹 (female alchemy) tradition there. But it is not until the Ming, so much later, like the 17th century, where you have fully developed female alchemy emerging, and unfortunately not a lot of research has been done on this. There are a couple of younger female scholars, as you might expect, who work on this. One thing that you find is that a lot of *nüdan* female alchemy systems tend to be exactly the same as the male versions, except women tend to focus on breast health first and also given attention to menstrual period. So there are specific practices that you do to help kind of fortify

¹¹ As some of the questions and comments could not be heard perfectly on the recording, they have been somewhat truncated and interpreted.

your foundational health. That is different from men obviously, because there is a monthly period in the case of women.

Are there any differences in concentration practices? (Still in regard to female alchemy.)

Unfortunately, we don't have maps of female alchemy at this point, the way we can map out internal alchemy, so we don't know all the different expressions of it, so I can't really answer that question. What you do tend to get though in *nüdan*, in female internal alchemy, is that there is a much stronger concentration on the heart. So in internal alchemy practice men are generally focusing on the lower elixir field, the abdominal region, and women are focusing more on the heart. There are a number of reasons from a traditional Chinese perspective: spirit is also connected to blood. It's a really fascinating question about, does spirit from a traditional Chinese perspective have a root in actual blood. So there is a kind of a material component and connection, and that is something a few people are starting to think about, but it's not very well researched.

I also wonder about the possible conjunction of science and spirituality, in India there wasn't a separation like that, the spiritual interest in prana that came from the planets fuelled these scientific investigations. Did something like that happen in China?

There is overlap, definitely. I think it depends on how you think of the development of science and what science can reasonably be said to be before the modern period. In the context of the development of something like internal alchemy and external alchemy, there is a lot of connection with the development of chemistry in China for instance. Joseph Needham has published on this is his something-like 25 volumes called *Science and Civilisation in China*, and they go through a lot of those questions. There definitely were intersection points between so-called scientific traditions and so-called religious or spiritual traditions in China.

And did they remain? (I.e., the intersection points between so-called scientific traditions and so-called religious or spiritual traditions.)

I would tend to say not so much, no; also I think that there are some strange attempts to try to conceptualize Daoism and science to get more cultural capital in modern China. So it's a kind of a political issue as well, and a lot of it. If you look at contemporary Daoism it lost lots of its cultural capital in contemporary China. So they are doing everything they can to try to convince people that Daoism really deserves to be respected. So Daoism being the most ecological tradition—there is a political dimension to that. Daoism being a really scientific tradition—there is a political dimension to that. So there are a lot of layers to these things.

What did you mean by spiritual capitalism?

What I mean by spiritual capitalism was the idea that we use these traditions to make money. That's what I mean. In my own way of thinking about contemplative practice in the contemporary world, we are developing a vocabulary, try to analyze it appropriately, and so for instance Professor Roth has put forward the idea of spiritual imperialism or cognitive imperialism. I'm trying to think through those categories as well. What is the intent behind religiously-committed contemplative practice, it's definitely not to make money. If you read the Daoist materials carefully, it's definitely not to be more unique in terms of your identity, it's not to be more famous in terms of your life. So you start filling in those details from the

contemporary American situation, and there is a lot of deviation from those values, and that is not necessarily good or bad, but I think from a Daoist perspective it's a deviation. That's what I'm trying to get to. If these practices become a means to make a lot of money and become famous, it seems to contradict the foundational worldview of what they're using. So there is a way to use the tradition to think through some of the appropriations of it.

Revision of Daoism, relation between Chinese medicine and Daoism. (Inaudible question)

This is another area that needs a lot more research. Basically Paul Unschuld is the main person who is trying to investigate this. His work is really important, especially on the level of history of Chinese medicine, but I think it's problematic in terms of understanding Daoism because he is focusing on a particular aspect of Daoism. Mainly I would say demonological and exorcistic medicine, and that's what he categorizes as Daoist. But there are a lot of other kinds of Daoist medicine. Then you have specific Daoists who are famous physicians. So we don't really know how much intersection there was. We can see parallels, but when you are looking for specific examples of the connections, especially in that earlier period like in Mawangdui in the 2nd century BCE, there is a lot of—what looks like—overlap, but then you look at something like the *Zhuangzi*, it has a strong critique of *daoyin* practice for instance (though it's a special part of the *Zhuangzi*). So something that might be more therapeutic or medical, it's a lower form of practice, and apophatic meditation is a higher form of practice. So there is some kind of debate going on obviously. It's not like they [classical Daoists] are going 'let me just make this up,' but there are a bunch of *daoyin* people making headway and they're not listening to us [classical Daoists] on the importance of apophatic meditation. So I think it's a really interesting question, but not much research has been made on it.

I'm wondering why people were swallowing saliva as part of their practice?

One key idea, one distinctive aspect of Daoist practice, is the idea that when you are doing serious Daoist practice you are generating clear fluids. Actually this [saliva] is not spit and this is a kind of common misunderstanding. It's not like ordinary spittle in your mouth. It's actually clear fluids that are generated in practice, and they're accumulating in your mouth so you swallow them. On the most basic level, it's this idea of conservation, what you have in Daoism is a consent emphasis on conservation. Conservation of *jing*, so the fluids are connected with *jing*, they're connected with your kind of foundational vitality, the conservation of *qi*, the conservation of spirit, all of these kinds of things, so you want to seal yourself in and guard all those things. When you really get into fluid physiology (which I don't know a lot about, but fortunately my wife knows a lot about, and I get to have discussions with her about internal alchemical practice from a Chinese medical perspective), there is a whole sophisticated Chinese medical understanding of how fluids are generated and what fluids do in the body, and then by swallowing that you are feeding it back into that system. And then there are other elements as well but that's...

Well, thank you very much for coming.