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DAOIST MEDITATION

Louis Komjathy

Introduction

Along with ritual, meditation has been and remains the primary form of religious praxis in the Daoist tradition. Within the various communities, lineages and movements that comprise the Daoist tradition, adherents have engaged in diverse forms of meditation. These include apophatic meditation, ingestion, visualisation, inner observation and internal alchemy. Such Daoist practices are as diverse, complex and systematised as, say, Buddhist and Christian contemplative practice, but they are largely unknown outside of Daoist communities and academic specialists. One of the challenges here involves the accompanying diversity of views and goals. In the present chapter, I begin with some brief reflections on ‘meditation’ and ‘yoga’ as comparative categories, with attentiveness to indigenous Chinese and Daoist terminology. This is followed by a short historical overview of the Daoist tradition and types of meditation. As I have already written various overviews of Daoist meditation (see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a, forthcoming), I focus the majority of this presentation on technical details in a representative sampling of specific practices and techniques, especially Daoist apophatic meditation, visualisation and internal alchemy. The chapter concludes with some information on contemporary Daoist meditation.

On meditation and so-called ‘Taoist yoga’

When approaching ‘non-western’ traditions like Daoism (Taoism) and Daoist meditation by extension, it is important to recognise that one is engaging with different cultures that use different languages, including ‘non-alphabetic’ ones. In the case of Chinese traditions, including Ruism (‘Confucianism’), 1 Daoism and Sinified or Chinese Buddhism, the primary language is classical/literary Chinese. The latter is a character-based language, with many characters being pictograms and ideographs. On the most basic level, there is no direct equivalent to ‘meditation’, or ‘Daoism’ for that matter. It is thus important to investigate indigenous Chinese and Daoist terms approximated by or related to English ones. This may inhibit certain appropriative and domesticating tendencies rooted in colonialist, missionary and orientalist legacies (see Komjathy 2013b, 2015, 2018).

The English term ‘meditation’, which derives from the Latin meditatio (‘to think over’/‘to consider’), is generally used as a comparative category to designate seated techniques that facilitate transformations of consciousness. 2 In Chinese, these types of practices most often have been designated with the term/graph zuo (‘sitting’). However, more often than not, one finds tradition-specific technical terms, rather than generalised categories. In the case of Daoism, one of the most influential and common is shouyi (‘guarding the One’). As explored below, this
phrase originally designated classical Daoist apophatic (emptiness-/stillness-based) meditation aimed at mystical union with the Dao. *Shouyi* eventually became used to designate Daoist meditation more generally. In the medieval period, we find the individual terms *cun* (‘maintain’), *guan* (‘observe’), *si* (‘consider’) and the composite phrases *zhengzuo* (lit. ‘upright sitting’) and *jingzuo* (lit. ‘quiet sitting’). As in the case of *shouyi*, these terms sometimes designate specific methods. In a contemporary context, *dazuo* (lit. ‘undertake sitting’) is the most common general term and may be used for any type of meditation, whether tradition-specific or particular methods. Less commonly, *moxiang* (lit. ‘deep thought’), as a reverse translation of ‘meditation’, is used. In my own work and as a viable approach, I accept the use of ‘meditation’ as a comparative category.

This stands in contrast to ‘yoga’ (*yoga*), derived from the Sanskrit √yuj, meaning ‘to yoke’ and, by extension, ‘to unite’ (see Harimoto Chapter 6 in this volume). There is no such indigenous term as ‘yoga’ in Chinese culture. While there is the Chinese transliteration of *yujia* 瑜伽, that term primarily was used to refer to the Indic notion of *samādhi* and in some later cases to Tantric Buddhism. There is thus no such thing as so-called ‘Taoist Yoga’. ‘Taoist Yoga’ (a.k.a. Tao Yoga) is a misnomer, a mistaken category with no correlation to Daoist technical terms. ‘Taoist Yoga’ represents a modern appropriation and hybridisation of Indian and Chinese cultural traditions.

Although more research is required, the earliest usage of the western construct of so-called ‘Taoist Yoga’ appears to be Lu K’uan Yü’s (Charles Luk; 1898–1978) *Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality* (1973), which is a translation of the *Xingming fajue mingzhi* (Illuminating Pointers to the Methods and Instructions of Innate Nature and Life–Destiny; ZW 872) by Zhao Bichen (1860–1942). The latter is a late imperial manual of internal alchemy. The term eventually became part of popular western discourse, wherein it was adopted in the 1980s by early Healing Tao (a.k.a. Universal Tao), Mantak Chia’s (Xie Mingde; b. 1940) syncretic and popularised Qigong system, which incorporated some elements of Daoist internal alchemy. In its earliest western usage, ‘Taoist Yoga’ referred to: (1) Daoist internal alchemy (*neidan*); (2) partnered sexual practices or ‘bedchamber arts’ (*fangzhong shu*), often misidentified as ‘Daoist’; and (3) stretching exercises. In terms of content and practice, there are some parallels between Daoist internal alchemy and Kundalini Yoga and Indian tantra on one hand, and between Daoyin (Guided Stretching) and Hatha Yoga on the other. As I will discuss Daoist internal alchemy below, here I will simply note that Daoyin, often located within larger health and longevity systems (*yangsheng*), usually involves stretching and breathwork that may lend themselves to cross-cultural comparison.

In contemporary popular western discourse, the term ‘Taoist Yoga’ continues to be used in its three earlier senses. However, it has also been systematised as a specific form of ‘yoga’ (stretching routines), complete with teacher certification programmes. In that context, it sometimes goes by the names ‘Flow Yoga’ and ‘Yin Yoga’. The latter is said to be softer than ‘Yang Yoga’ (read: all other forms of yoga) and to focus on the connective tissue, both of which its adherents identify as ‘yin’. So-called ‘Yin Yoga’, like ‘Taoist Yoga’, is a contemporary form of hybrid spirituality. Yin and yang are indigenous Chinese terms related to traditional Chinese cosmology. They refer to the primary, complementary and dynamic interactive principles or forces of the universe. Yin Yoga adherents not only misidentify yin-yang cosmology as ‘Daoist’, but also misconstrue the defining characteristics of Daoism (see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a).

At the present time, it is unclear if any of the content of so-called ‘Taoist Yoga’ derives from Daoist Daoyin practices. Preliminary research suggests that some so-called ‘Taoist Yoga’ is a modification of Indian practices, while other versions derive from Chinese Wushu and Gongfu (Kung-fu) training exercises. As such, ‘Taoist Yoga’ is part of what may be referred to as Popular Western Taoism (PWT), a form of New Age hybrid spirituality that appropriates some aspects of the religious tradition which is Daoism in order to increase cultural capital and marketability (see Komjathy 2014a).
The Daoist tradition and types of Daoist meditation

The Daoist tradition may be understood through what I refer to as the ‘seven periods’ and ‘four divisions’ (Komjathy 2013b; 2014a). The seven periods are as follows: (1) classical Daoism; (2) early Daoism; (3) early medieval Daoism; (4) late medieval Daoism; (5) late imperial Daoism; (6) early modern Daoism; and (7) late modern Daoism. There were diverse forms of community and social organisation in these various periods and the associated movements, including eremitic, householder, monastic and so forth. The seven periods roughly correspond to major watersheds for Daoism in Chinese dynastic and post-dynastic history:

1. Warring States (480–222 BCE), Qin (221–206 BCE) and Early Han (202 BCE–9 CE)
2. Later Han (25–220 CE)
3. Period of Disunion (220–589) and Sui (581–618)
4. Tang (618–907), Song (Northern: 960–1127; Southern: 1127–1279), and Yuan (1260–1368)
5. Ming (1368–1644) and Qing (1644–1911)

I in turn divide the modern period into ‘early modern Daoism’ (1912–1978) and ‘late modern Daoism’ (1978–present), with the latter including contemporary expressions and developments. These correspond to the sixth and seventh periods, respectively.

Each of these periods saw the emergence of specific communities and movements. Briefly stated, classical Daoism encompasses the diverse communities and ‘schools’ of the inner cultivation lineages as well as Huang-Lao Dao (Way of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi). Major movements associated with early Daoism include Taiping (Great Peace) and Tianshi (Celestial Masters). Early medieval Daoism consisted of such important movements as Taiqing (Great Clarity), Sanhuang (Three Sovereigns), Shangqing (Highest Clarity) and Lingbao (Numinous Treasure). Late medieval Daoism included a variety of internal alchemy movements, including Quanzhen (Ch’üan-chen; Complete Perfection) and so-called Nanzong (Southern School), as well as new deity cults and ritual movements. Late imperial and modern Daoism was dominated by Zhengyi (Cheng-i; Orthodox Unity; a.k.a. Celestial Masters) and Complete Perfection, though it also saw the emergence of major lineages of the latter as well as new lineages of internal alchemy.

The constituents of global Daoism are a highly complex topic. Briefly stated, from a tradition-based and institutional perspective, global Daoism remains primarily an Orthodox Unity–Complete Perfection tradition. Orthodox Unity Daoism is largely a householder community consisting of married priests (male and female) and family lineages and primarily located in south and southeast China as well as Taiwan. Complete Perfection, including its Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage, is primarily a monastic community consisting of celibate clergy and monastics (male and female) living in temples and monasteries throughout mainland China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. There are also dynamic (and problematic) recent developments, including mediumistic cult influences, obscure family lineages and diverse organisations.

For simplicity’s sake, we might further speak of four basic divisions of Daoism: (1) classical Daoism; (2) early organised Daoism; (3) later organised Daoism; and (4) modern Daoism. The rationale for this grouping is to distinguish historical developments, types of community and distinctive models of practice. It draws our attention to the ways in which the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism differ from the householder, ascetic and eremitic communities of early organised Daoism, as the Later Han dynasty witnessed the emergence of Daoism as an organised religious tradition with enduring institutions. Early organised Daoism may be distinguished from later organised Daoism based on the ascendance of a monastic model in the latter and the emergence of new models of practice, especially internal alchemy. As discussed in
more detail below, internal alchemy usually involves complex, stage-based physiological (energetic) practices aimed at complete psychosomatic transformation, or ‘immortality’ in Daoist terms. Modern Daoism corresponds to the end of dynastic rule in China and the increasing influence of western values and political ideologies. In its more contemporary form, it directs our attention towards Daoism as a global religious tradition with worldwide distribution and international adherence.

Here it should be mentioned that Daoism is the object of various western fabrications, fictions and fantasies, which are rooted in colonialist, missionary and orientalist legacies. The most epidemic of these is the inaccurate and outdated distinction between so-called ‘philosophical Daoism’ and so-called ‘religious Daoism’, the usage of which should be taken ipso facto as misunderstanding concerning Daoism. As herein employed, ‘classical Daoism’ replaces so-called ‘philosophical Daoism’, while ‘organised Daoism’ replaced so-called ‘religious Daoism’. This revisionist framework allows individuals to engage the tradition in a more neutral and receptive, a more integrated and sophisticated manner. For present purposes, meditation has been a major form of Daoist religious practice from the beginning of the tradition and throughout its history. By way of background, there are at least five major types of Daoist meditation.

1. Apophatic or quietistic meditation. Designated by various Chinese Daoist technical terms such as ‘fasting the heart-mind’ (xinzhai), ‘guarding the One’ (shouyi), ‘sitting-in-forgetfulness’ (zuowang) and later ‘quiet sitting’ (jingzuo)
2. Ingestion (fuqi; lit. ‘ingesting subtle breath’)  
3. Visualisation (cunxiang; lit. ‘maintaining the image’)
4. Inner observation (neiguan)
5. Internal alchemy (neidan). Also ‘female alchemy’ (nüdan)

Briefly stated, apophatic meditation emphasises emptying and stilling the heart-mind (xin), the seat of emotional and intellectual activity from a traditional Chinese perspective, until one becomes empty and still. It is primarily contentless, non-conceptual and non-dualistic (see Roth 1999a, 2015). Ingestion 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 vapours. Visualisation involves visualising (possibly ‘imagining’ or ‘actualising’) specific deities, constellations, colours and so forth. There is some overlap between visualisation and ingestion (see Kohn 1989a; Robinet 1989a, 1993). If one were more radical, one might categorise ingestion as a form of Daoist dietetics as well as of meditation. It is also a major Daoist health and longevity technique (see Komjathy 2013b). Adapted from Buddhist vipassanā practice, Daoist inner observation generally involves maintaining non-discriminating awareness of all phenomena and/or exploring the body as an internal landscape (see Kohn 1987, 1989c). Finally, internal alchemy utilises complex, stage-based practices aimed at psychosomatic, including physiological and energetic, transformation. It often corporates and systematises the four other types (see Needham et al. 1983; Pregadio and Skar 2000; Komjathy 2007, 2013a, 2013b). Later, methods specifically for women, called ‘female alchemy’, developed.

These types of Daoist meditation in turn emerged during specific periods and are associated with specific Daoist movements or sub-traditions.

1. Classical Daoism: Warring States (480-222 BCE) to Early Han (206 BCE-9 CE). Texts: Laozi, Zhuangzi and sections of the Guanzi, Huainanzi, Liushi chunqiu, etc. Associated movement: Classical inner cultivation lineages
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2. Early and early medieval Daoism: Later Han (25–220 CE) to Period of Disunion (220–581). Texts: Laozi zhongjing, Huangting jing, Dadong zhenjing, etc. Associated movements: Taiping, Taiqing and Shangqing

3. In the early and early medieval period as (2), although many of the influential texts date from the next period of Daoist history. Texts: Taiqing fuqi koujue, Fuqi jingyi lun, etc.

4. Late medieval Daoism: Tang (618–907). Texts: Neiguan jing, Dingguan jing and sections of other Tang-dynasty meditation manuals. Associated movement: Late medieval Daoism (monastic system), specifically later Shangqing

5. Late medieval and late imperial Daoism: Tang to Qing (1644–1911). Texts: Chuandao ji, Wuzhen pian, Dadan zhizhi, etc. Associated movements: Zhong-Lü, Nanzong, Quanzhen, etc.

Apophatic or quietistic meditation is the earliest form of Daoist contemplative practice and is associated with the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. Ingestion and visualisation are particularly connected to the early Shangqing (Highest Clarity) movement of early medieval Daoism, although there are earlier precedents. Inner observation emerged in the context of the fully integrated Tang-dynasty monastic system, although there are earlier precedents in the classical Daoist textual corpus. Finally, internal alchemy, as a developmental stage-based approach, was first articulated in the late Tang and early Song dynasty, with the Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) and so-called Nanzong (Southern School) movements being especially influential. Each of these five types of meditation still exist in contemporary Daoist practice, but apophatic meditation and internal alchemy are most widely practised.

‘Guarding the One’

Shouyi, or ‘guarding the One’, is a key Daoist technical term for apophatic meditation, that is, emptiness- and stillness-based meditation. This is the earliest form of Daoist meditation. It was the central practice of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. Shou (‘guard’) suggests protecting a precious substance or condition within oneself, while yi, literally the number ‘one’ and ‘oneness/unity/unification’ by extension, is an alternative classical Daoist name for the Dao (Tao), the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists. While the Dao and the One may be used for a technical cosmogonic distinction, the One refers to the Dao as primordial non-differentiation and cosmogonic unity. Yi may thus refer to the process of mystical unification and/or the state of oneness/unity. As explored below, ‘guarding the One’ thus refers to returning to the original and inherent stillness of innate nature (xing), which is associated with the Dao-as-Stillness and/or preserving and maintaining it within oneself. Shouyi in turn relates to various other classical Daoist technical terms, with xinzhai (lit. ‘heart fast’) and zuowang (lit. ‘sit and forget’) being most influential. These terms appear in chapters four and six of the fourth to second century BCE Zhuangzi (Chuang-tzu; Book of Master Zhuang), respectively. Xinzhai, which may be rendered technically as ‘fasting of the heart-mind’, directs one’s attention to emptying and stilling the heart-mind of excessive intellectual and emotional activity and content. ‘Fasting’ suggests refraining from unnecessary or harmful consumption patterns (e.g. rumination), while the ‘heart-mind’ refers to both the actual, physical heart and mind in a more abstract sense. This is a key dimension of ‘Daoist anthropology’ and ‘Daoist contemplative psychology’. Zuowang, which may be rendered technically as ‘sitting-in-forgetfulness’, designates both a physical posture (‘sitting’), a meditative method (‘forgetting’) and a contemplative state (‘forgetfulness’). As a method, one forgets everything until one has even forgotten forgetting. Like stillness, forgetfulness may be understood as a state of meditative absorption and mystical union.
The two earliest references to ‘guarding the One’ appear in the Neiye (Inward Training) and aforementioned Book of Master Zhuang. The former is a mid-fourth-century classical Daoist text preserved as chapter 49 in the received Guanzi (Book of Master Guan) and often identified as one of the so-called ‘Xinshu’ (Techniques of the Heart-mind) chapters, while the Zhuangzi is a multi-vocal anthology that contains historical and textual material from at least the fourth to second century BCE and associated with various lineages of classical Daoism.12 The shouyi reference in the Zhuangzi occurs in chapter 11, which is associated with the Primitivists.13 Both texts provide technical specifics on classical Daoist apophatic meditation.

Expand your heart-mind and release it.
Relax your qi and allow it to extend.
When your body is calm and unmoving,
Guard the One and discard myriad disturbances.
You will see profit and not be enticed by it.
You will see harm and not be frightened by it.
Relaxed and unwound, and yet free from selfishness,
In solitude you will find joy in your own being.
This is what we call ‘circulating qi’ (yunqi).
Your awareness and practice appear celestial.

(Neiye, ch. 24)

Come, I will tell you about the perfect Dao. The essence of the perfect Dao is dark and mysterious; the ridgepole of the perfect Dao is obscure and silent. Without looking or listening, embrace spirit (baoshen) through stillness. The body will align naturally. You inevitably become still and clear. By not laboring your body or agitating your vital essence, you can live a long life. When the eyes do not see, the ears do not hear, and the heart-mind does not know, then your spirit will guard the body, and the body will attain long life. Be attentive to the internal and seal off the external, because much knowing leads to dissipation. Then I will lead you beyond the great brightness, to the source of utmost yang; I will guide you through the dark and mysterious gate, to the source of the utmost yin. The heavens and earth have regulators; yin and yang have storehouses. You only have only to take care and guard your own body; these other things will be stable on their own. As for myself, I guard this oneness (shou qi yi) and abide in this harmony.

(Zhuangzi, ch. 11; adapted from Watson 1968: 119–20)14

As in other descriptions of classical Daoist apophatic meditation, such as in chapters 10, 16, 20, 28 and 37 of the Laozi (Book of Venerable Masters),15 these passages encourage aspiring Daoist adepts to disengage sensory perception and decrease psychological activity. As habituated cognitive patterns decrease, one gradually enters a state of deep stillness. One simply sits in silence, which is the ground of one’s being. From a Daoist perspective, this is one’s innate connection with and manifestation of the Dao. Thus, Daoist apophatic meditation is primarily contentless, non-conceptual and non-dualistic.

In terms of the technical specifics, it is noteworthy that both passages mention the body, which again reveals the psychosomatic characteristics of Daoist practice. This includes the importance of postural alignment and structural integrity in meditation. The Inward Training in particular emphasises a four-fold process of alignment: (1) Aligning the body (zhengxing); (2) Aligning the four limbs (zheng sizhi); (3) Aligning qi (zhengqi); and (4) Aligning the heart-ind...
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(zhengxin) (Roth 1999a, 109). Attentive readers will also note a Daoist critique of ‘knowing’, in the sense of ingrained opinions, limited perceptions and habituated consciousness states. Daoist meditation results in various ‘beyond/non-states’, including ‘non-knowing’ (wuzhi). This is a state of open receptivity, especially with respect to the mysterious and numinous nature of existence. There are thus uniquely Daoist views of consciousness and associated contemplative states and traits (see Roth 1991, 1997, 1999a, 2015). In addition, the texts mention what later became known as the internal Three Treasures (sanbao), namely, vital essence (jing), subtle breath or energy (qi) and spirit (shen). These generally refer to foundational vitality, energy and consciousness, including ‘divine’ capacities. In terms of the present volume and the comparative study of meditation, it is especially noteworthy that Daoist anthropology, psychology and theology include an energetic view. From a Daoist perspective, reality is energetic in nature, and the efficacy of meditation manifests in energetic transformation and attunement. There is an energetic signature related to different types of practices, and Daoist meditation results in energetic sensitivity and support.

While retaining its classical technical meaning of apophatic meditation, especially in the sense of ‘quiet sitting’ (jingzuo), shouyi eventually became a general term for Daoist meditation. In the early and late medieval period, one finds references to ‘guarding the One’ in concert with diverse types of meditation (see Kohn 1989b). For example, in the Taiqing (Great Clarity) movement, shouyi appears in discussions of visualisation practice.16 In such discussions, the earlier technical term of shouyi now becomes incorporated into an early medieval Daoist system of meditation, which includes visualisation and what might be labelled proto-neidan. The latter focuses on the so-called three elixir fields (dantian), with dan technically designating cinnabar (mercuric sulfide; HgS), a key ingredient in earlier external alchemy formulas. The elixir fields are subtle corporeal locations associated with the Three Treasures. Expressing Daoist microcosmic views and symbolic corporeality, the ‘elixir fields’ suggest that the body contains ‘fields’ wherein certain things are cultivated. Framing practice with an agricultural metaphor, one plants, tends, harvests and stores in these interior places. This is the body as landscape and farm. Incorporating an alchemical model, one undertakes a process of alchemical transformation and transmutation. One gathers, coalesces, combines and refines various vital substances in order to concoct ‘elixirs’ within the body. This is the body as crucible and laboratory (see Komjathy 2008b, 2009, 2011).

Visualising the dipper

The early medieval period witnessed the emergence and development of Daoist ingestion and visualisation methods, especially in the context of the Shangqing (Highest Clarity) movement of early organised Daoism. In its formative moments, Highest Clarity began in present-day Jiangsu province and largely consisted of disenchanted aristocrats interested in divine communication, ecstatic journeys and self-divinisation (see Robinet 1989a, 1993; Miller 2008). Here visualisation became incorporated into a larger soteriological system aimed at rarefication and self-divinisation. Such Daoist methods are diverse and complex, often involving what might be understood as the ‘cosmicisation’ of the human body. They thus employ Daoist microcosmic/macrocosmic views of personhood. Some Daoist visualisation techniques parallel ingestion practices by focusing on various Five Phase constituents (e.g. Five Marchmounts, Five Thearchs) as well as the sun, moon and stars. The Five Phases, often referred to as traditional Chinese ‘correlative cosmology’ or the ‘system of correspondences’, refer to Wood, Fire, Earth, Metal and Water. These have various associations utilised in Daoist practice, including Wood/spring/east/liver/green, Fire/summer/south/heart/red, Earth/centre/spleen/yellow, Metal/autumn/
Other forms of visualisation centre on esoteric Daoist pantheons, including inner body-gods associated with various corporeal locations. The latter are frequently described as a somatic landscape, which consists of mountains (spine and head), rivers (meridians), water (qi and body fluids), forests (liver) and so forth (see Needham et al. 1983; Schipper 1993; Komjathy 2008b, 2009, 2011).

A representative Daoist visualisation method focuses on the constellations, including the associated ‘gods’ (divine presences) and astral effulgences. In the Jinque dijun sanyuan zhenyi jing (Scripture on the Perfect Ones of the Three Primes by Lord Golden Tower; DZ 253; cf. DZ 1314; see Andersen 1980), part of the original fourth-century Highest Clarity revelations, aspiring adepts are instructed to visualise the Northern Dipper (Big Dipper; Ursa Major) according to the method of ‘guarding the One’, also referred to as ‘guarding the Three Ones’ (shou sanyi):

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

Then visualise 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. Visualise 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 Mysterious Darkness, from where they move east. When they reach 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 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 visualise 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.

(Sanyuan zhenyi jing, DZ 253, 6a–7a)
This method begins with a posture of cosmological attunement. *Lichun* (Spring Begins; approximately 5 February) refers to the first of the six energetic nodes of spring. The energetic nodes are twenty-four seasonal and cosmological moments associated with the solar and agricultural cycles; they are divided into four sets of six based on the four seasons. This cosmological dimension is strengthened by facing east, associated with the Wood phase and spring. The more standard temporal correspondence is 3–5am, which corresponds to the terrestrial branch *yin*.¹⁹ The twelve terrestrial branches (*dizhi*) are an ordering system based on observation of the orbit of Jupiter.

This includes the twelve Chinese zoomorphic zodiac signs and twelve ‘double-hours’ of traditional Chinese time measurement. The time (midnight) utilised in the Dipper visualisation method is the double-hour *zi* (11pm–1am), which technically corresponds to the Water phase and winter/north/kidneys by extension. However, in Daoist meditation, the double-hour *zi* often is central, as it represents the apex of *yin* and the emergence of *yang*. Associated with winter solstice, it is thus a time of deep stillness in which spiritual insight and illumination may easily emerge. Another interesting dimension of the initial framing involves exhaling nine times. This probably involves exhaling through the mouth in order to enter a deeper state of relaxation and to expel impurities. The number nine is extremely important in Daoist numerology because it represents ‘redoubled’ or ‘two-fold yang’, with three being a ‘pure yang’ number. Finally, ‘swallowing saliva’ is a major dimension of Daoist practice more generally. Saliva, and fluids in general, are often associated with the vital essence and the kidneys by extension.²⁰ That is, one conserves major vital substances, harmonises the entire corporeal system and sets the foundation for deeper meditative practice.

In the main part of the practice, the Daoist adept visualises the Northern Dipper, associated with ‘fate’ (*ming*) in the Daoist tradition, above his or her head (see Figure 14.1). The seven visible stars are identified as follows (from bowl to handle): (1) Yangming (Yang Brightness); (2) Yinjing (Yin Essence); (3) Zhenren (Perfect One); (4) Xuanming (Mysterious Darkness); (5) Danyuan (Cinnabar Prime); (6) Beiji (North Culmen); (7) Tianguan (Celestial Pass).

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 seventh star, called Celestial Pass, rests in front of the mouth. One in turn visualises the Three Ones, also known as the Three Primes (*sanyuan*) or Three Purities (*sanqing*), in the dipper bowl. These are the three highest ‘gods’ (divine/celestial presences) of the standard Daoist pantheon and correspond to three primordial energies of the cosmos. In this visualisation practice, they ascend together to the fourth star, Mysterious Darkness, move to the seventh star, Celestial Pass, and wait there facing towards the adept’s mouth. The practitioner then visualises each one in sequence (upper, middle, lower) entering their respective corporeal locations (Niwan [centre of head], Scarlet Palace [heart], Cinnabar Field [navel region]).²¹
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 adept to follow the same instructions for the commencements of the other seasons: Lixia (Summer Begins; approx. 5 May) facing south; liqiu (Autumn Begins; approx. 8 August) facing west; and lidong (Winter Begins; approx. 11 November) facing north. The corresponding time seems to be the same, namely, 11 pm to 1 am. There are thus seasonal, cosmological and theological dimensions to the practice.

In this Dipper method of early Highest Clarity, one notes various features common to Daoist visualisation more generally. These include cosmological, astronomical and energetic dimensions. Numerologically speaking, three and nine are central, and there are various ternary associations. Primary triads include the Three Purities, Three Heavens, Three Fields, Three Treasures and so forth. In the standardised system, they are organized hierarchically, with the highest appearing first (see Table 14.2).

Another distinctive characteristic involves Daoist ‘body-gods’, including what might be labelled the Daoist ‘inner pantheon’. This dimension of the Daoist tradition is complex, as it involves uniquely Daoist cosmological and theological views (see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a). As mentioned, reference to ‘gods’ and ‘deities’ may create confusion because, while some Daoists have viewed and do understand these as personal gods, they often correspond to more impersonal cosmic forces and divine presences. Here it is important to note that the indigenous Chinese term is shen, also translated as ‘spirit’, consists of shi (‘omen’) and shen (‘extend’). It may thus suggest some type of connection to hidden or subtle forces. In the case of the Three Purities, what is one to make of the claim that they exist in both the Three Heavens of the cosmos and the Three Fields of the human body? Thinking through such Daoist views, one discovers the universe in oneself and oneself as the universe. To venerate the Three Purities involves conserving the Three Treasures in the Three Fields, which are, in turn, manifestations
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or concentrations of the associated three primordial energies. On a deeper level, one may realise that ‘divinity’ and ‘heaven’ are within oneself. This may be actualised and/or encountered through Daoist visualisation practice.

Forming the elixir

In later organised Daoism and in the late medieval period, Daoists began combining the various forms of Daoist meditation into a more comprehensive and integrated system. Although drawing upon methods from earlier Daoist movements like Great Clarity and Highest Clarity, internal alchemy (neidan), as a fully developed stage-based process aimed at complete psychosomatic transformation, only emerged at the end of the Tang and beginning of the Song dynasty (see above). Internal alchemy integrated diverse sources, including classical Daoist texts, correlative cosmology, Yijing (Book of Changes) symbology, meditational and physical disciplines of Yangsheng, cosmological dimensions and technical terminology of waidan (external alchemy), Chinese medical theory and even Buddhist soteriology and Confucian moral philosophy.

Before investigating a specific neidan system, let us begin with a brief consideration of what I refer to as the ‘Daoist alchemical body’ (see Komjathy 2007, 2008b, 2009, 2011). Viewed as a whole, Daoist internal alchemy engages and activates a subtle body, an energetic body within the apparently physical or material body. The constituents of the ‘standardised Daoist body’ include the following:

- Sun (left eye) and moon (right eye)
- Descending Bridge (tongue), Crimson Dragon (tongue), Twelve Storied Tower (trachea), Sweet Dew (saliva), etc.
- Five yin-organs (wuzang)
  - Liver (east/green/dragon), heart (south/red/bird), spleen (centre/yellow/—), lungs (west/white/tiger), kidneys (north/black [purple]/snake-turtle)
- Three elixir fields (dantian)
  - Ocean of Qi (lower; navel), Scarlet Palace (middle; heart), Niwan (upper; head)
- Three Treasures (sanbao)
  - Vital essence (jing), subtle breath (qi), spirit (shen)
- Meridians (jing/luo/mai)
  - 12/8: Governing, Conception, Belt, Thrusting
- Three Passes (sanguan)
  - Tailbone Gate (lower; coccyx), Paired Passes (middle; mid-spine), Jade Pillow (upper; occiput)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Heaven</th>
<th>Deity</th>
<th>Field</th>
<th>Treasure</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Jade Clarity</td>
<td>Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning</td>
<td>Upper elixir field (centre of head)</td>
<td>Spirit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Highest Clarity</td>
<td>Celestial Worthy of Numinous Treasure</td>
<td>Middle elixir field (heart or lower abdomen)</td>
<td>Qi</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great Clarity</td>
<td>Celestial Worthy of Dao and Inner Power</td>
<td>Lower elixir field (lower abdomen or perineum)</td>
<td>Vital essence</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 14.2 Triads common to Daoist visualisation techniques
Most of these are straightforward, but the more esoteric ones require some explanation. As mentioned, Daoist numerology tends to privilege triads. From a Daoist perspective, three is a pure yang number, and multiples of threes, particularly nine (3x3), are prevalent. The latter is often referred to as ‘redoubled yang’ (chongyang) and represents complete alchemical transformation. In the above list, we find the ‘three elixir fields’ and ‘three treasures’. As we saw in the previous sections, ‘elixir field’ is a Daoist name for subtle body locations. Interestingly, recalling the various influences on internal alchemy, dan, more literally ‘pill’, derives from an ingredient utilised in external alchemy formulas. Specifically, dan, designating a colour and being an abbreviation of dansha, refers to ‘cinnabar’, or mercuric sulphide (HgS). As the name indicates, internal alchemy seeks to create an ‘inner elixir’ through the transmutation of various substances within the body. In any case, the standardised Daoist body consists of three elixir fields associated with the internal three treasures. The former may refer to the perineum/navel/head or navel/heart/head. The associations in the former are clearer: perineum/vital essence, navel/qi and head/spirit. Also associated with bodily fluids (e.g. saliva, sweat), vital essence is considered the most substantial and corresponds to foundational vitality. The character contains the mi (‘rice’) radical, thus suggesting a more substantial substance. Vital essence is housed in the kidneys and relates to one’s constitution, partially indebted to ancestry (‘genes’). It is associated with semen in men and menstrual blood in women. While also designating physical respiration, qi is a more subtle breath or ‘energy’ stored in and circulating through the body. The standard character consists of qi (‘steam’) over mi (‘rice’), thus suggesting a more subtle presence. Qi also circulates through the world, universe and all things, and there are many types. For Daoists, the most important is the ‘qi of the Dao’ (daodi), which designates a sacred, numinous presence and sometimes corresponds to ‘original qi’ (yuanqi). Finally, spirit is the most subtle or rarefied; it is housed in the heart and corresponds to consciousness and divine capacities more generally. The character consists of shi (‘omen’) and shen (‘extend’). While the latter is usually taken as a phonetic, under one reading spirit suggests the ability to connect to invisible or barely noticeable presences. Simplified and standardised internal alchemy systems tend to frame alchemical transformation in terms of a three-stage process: (1) Transforming vital essence to qi; (2) Transforming qi to spirit; and (3) Transforming spirit to return to the Void. That is, a process of rarefaction, transmutation and even divinisation is at work, which culminates in ‘immortality’ in Daoist terms. The three elixir fields and internal Three Treasures in turn relate to other triads, including the Three Purities, Three Heavens and external Three Treasures. The meridians, also referred to as ‘channels’ or ‘vessels’, are the energy conduits and networks in the body. They are utilised in both Chinese medicine and Daoism, which partially explains the conflation of these traditions in the popular imagination. The standard system consists of the twelve primary organ-meridians and the ‘eight extraordinary vessels’. The latter tend to be more central in Daoist training regimens. These meridians are as follows: (1) Governing Channel, which moves up the middle of the spine; (2) Conception Channel, which moves up the centre of the front torso; (3) Thrusting Channel, which moves through the centre of the torso; and (4) Belt Channel, which moves around the waist and is the only horizontal meridian. In Daoist practice, the other four tend to be understood as two moving down the outside and up the inside of the arms, and two following a similar path through the legs. Finally, the Three Passes are the three places along the spine through which it is difficult for qi to circulate. Interestingly, as explored below, they are often imagined as mountain passes and relate to a practice known as the Microcosmic Orbit.

We may now turn to a representative example of a late medieval neidan system. One of the most important and influential Daoist movements associated with internal alchemy is Quanzhen (Complete Perfection). In its formative period, Complete Perfection began in present-day Shaanxi and then Shandong province and primarily was a small ascetic and eremitic community
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centring on alchemical transformation and mystical experience. Among the first-generation adherents, the preferred genres of literary expression were poetry and discourse records (yulu). This makes the reconstruction of early Complete Perfection neidan practice comparatively challenging. However, there are also two extant technical manuals (see Komjathy 2007, 2013a). Among them, the most systematic discussion appears in the Dadan zhizhi (Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir; DZ 244). This manual is attributed to Qiu Chuji (Changchun [Perpetual Spring]; 1148–1227), the youngest first-generation representative, third Patriarch, and eventual leader of the movement. Although this authorial attribution is complex, it appears that the text seems to be a mid-to late-thirteenth-century work, post-dating the death of Qiu Changchun and most of his direct disciples.

In terms of alchemical practice and transformation, the Dadan zhizhi is organised as a series of instructions and illustrations with corresponding explanations. On the most fundamental level, neidan praxis is presented as a sequence of nine stages.

1. Coupling the Dragon and Tiger and Inverting the Five Phases (1.6a-8b)
2. Firing Times of the Celestial Cycle and Inverting the Five Phases (1.8b-11b)
3. Reversion of the Three Fields and Flying the Gold Essence behind the Elbow (1.12a-14b)
4. Reversion of the Three Fields and the Reverted Elixir of the Gold Ye-fluids (1.14b-17b)
5. Five Qi Meeting the Origin and Refining Form into Greater Yang (1.18b-20b)
6. Union of Spirit and Qi and the Consummation of the Three Fields (1.20b-23b)
7. Five Qi Meeting the Origin and Refining Spirit to Enter the Summit (2.1a-3a)
8. Initiating the Fire through Inner Observation and Refining Spirit to Merge with the Dao (2.3a-5a)
9. Casting off the Husk to Ascend to Immortality and Transcending the Mundane to Enter the Sacred (2.8a-11b)

The Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir instructs adepts to activate and refine the energies to the five yin-organs (liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys). Specifically, one visualises each organ as an orb of light with the associated colour: liver/green, heart/red, spleen/yellow, lungs/white and kidneys/black (purple). These distinct energies are then combined or ‘inverted’ (fan; huan) to become a single, unified energy in the lower elixir field, the navel or lower abdominal region. One then circulates this energy, which has been infused with other vital substances and subtle presences, through the Waterwheel (heche) (see Figure 14.2).

Also known as the Celestial Cycle (zhoutian), or Microcosmic Orbit in more general discussions, this method involves circulating qi up the Governing Vessel, from the perineum towards the occiput and into the head. Then qi is normally directed down the Conception Vessel and stored in the lower elixir field. As refinement and transmutation advance through additional techniques, the yang-spirit (yangshen) forms. Also known as the ‘immortal embryo’ (xiantai) and ‘body-beyond-the-body’ (shenwai shen), the yang-spirit is the transcendent spirit created through internal alchemy, which confirms personal post-mortem survival. The practitioner eventually trains this spirit to exit through the crown-point. This prepares the way for ‘casting off the husk to ascend to immortality’. That is, upon death, one leaves behind mundane, physical existence and enters the Daoist sacred realms. This is ‘immortality’ or ‘transcendence’ in Daoist terms.

Beyond the simplified formula of refining vital essence and qi to eventually become spirit and merge with the Dao, internal alchemy is a complex process of self-refinement and transformation, of rarefication and self-divinisation. For example, refining vital essence, associated with the kidneys, leads to the production of blood, with the assistance of the lungs and heart, and the production of fluids, with the assistance of the spleen and stomach. These fluids in
Figure 14.2 The Waterwheel
Source: Dadan zhizhi, DZ 244, 1.11b-12a
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Turn nourish and moisten the muscles, skin, joints and orifices of the sense organs. In combination with marrow derived from vital essence, the fluids also nourish the brain and spinal cord. Simultaneously, the fluids transferred to the heart become blood, the material basis of spirit. That is, the seemingly simple formula of ‘refining vital essence to become qi’ (lianjing huaqi) initiates a complex set of physiological responses. More specifically, producing, conserving and ingesting fluids leads to both a greater resiliency to disease, through increased protective qi, and an abundance of spirit, through increased blood and marrow production. Nourishing and attending to the various organs and their related substances initiates a dynamic physiological process. This physiology provides a foundation for the activation and opening of mystical body locations, as well as for the patterning of a pathway for the spirit to transcend the mundane world and become an immortal.

Sitting in the modern Daoist tradition

The five major types of Daoist meditation, which include aphophatic meditation, ingestion, visualisation, inner observation and internal alchemy, continue to be practised in modern Daoism. Depending on the specific Daoist adherents, associated communities, lineages and movements, there are diverse informing views, goals and ideals. In contemporary Daoism, aphophatic meditation, or ‘quiet sitting’, and internal alchemy are the most prominent, with the latter often integrating the other four. Modern internal alchemy systems frequently begin and end with quiet sitting as both the foundation and culmination of Daoist practice. In terms of posture, Daoists primarily utilise seated ones, usually with the support of a meditation mat and cushion. The so-called modified ‘Burmese’ posture tends to be the preferred one, but some Daoists sit in full lotus or the earlier zhengzuo (Japanese: seiya) configuration (see Roth 1999a, 2015). In Daoist practice, which employs Daoist energetic views and emphasises the subtle body, modified ‘Burmese’ posture involves placing the legs in a position that resembles an inverted triangle, with the vectors of force moving between the sit-bones and knees. Men sit with the right foot behind the left, while women sit with the left foot behind the right. This is because the general Daoist view is that qi moves up the left and down the right in men, and up the right and down the left in women. The primary hand-configuration (Chinese: shouyin; Sanskrit: mudra) is the ziwu gesture. Also referred to as the ‘yin-yang mudra’, ziwu alludes to the above-mentioned terrestrial branches, with zi corresponding to midnight (winter solstice), the apex of yin, and wu corresponding to noon (summer solstice), the apex of yang. The human hand is, in turn, divided into twelve sections, with zi as the base of the ring-finger and wu as the tip of the middle-finger.

In the ziwu mudra, men touch all of the tips of the fingers of left-hand to the tip of the left thumb; they then insert the tip of the right thumb through the opening to touch the inside-base of left ring-finger (zi), with the tip of the right middle-finger (wu) touching the outside-base of the left ring-finger. For women, the hand-configuration is reversed, that is, left-hand encircling right-hand. The latter is the gesture utilised by all Daoists, regardless of gender, in Daoist bowing. One also touches the tip of the tongue to the upper-palate, which joins the Governing and Conception Vessels. The eyes are either completely closed or slightly open. Taken as a whole, this body-configuration facilitates and embodies complete energetic integration. On a more esoteric and ritualistic level, these points also activate specific deities, in this case the Northern Thearch and Southern Thearch, respectively (see, e.g. Saso 1972).

Here a few additional points need to be made. First, while modern Daoists primarily practice seated meditation, there also are contemplative methods that involve standing, walking, lying down and even sleeping. Among these, standing is most common, with ‘empty’ or ‘quiet standing’ (jingzhan), sometimes referred to as ‘post standing’ (zhanzhuang), being a foundational
practice in Daoist Yangsheng (Nourishing Life), or health and longevity techniques. This traditional Daoist practice has some connections to modern Qigong (Ch’i-kung; Energy Exercises), although the latter has a complex history and includes Buddhist, Daoist, medical and even martial systems (see, e.g. Komjathy 2006; Palmer 2007). Empty standing also is used in the so-called Chinese internal martial arts (neijia). These parallels help to explain the common conflation and misidentification of practices like Qigong and Taiji quan (T’ai-chi ch’üan; Great Ultimate/ Yin-Yang Boxing) with Daoism as such (see Komjathy 2013b; 2014a). In any case, Daoist quiet standing parallels the previously discussed apophatic meditation. One simply stands in stillness. However, like Daoist postures more generally, this practice also has a strong psychosomatic and cosmological dimension. Specifically, the crown-point (Baihui [Hundred Meetings]; GV-20), associated with the heavens in the human body, is the primary point through which celestial qi (tianqi) enters the body; the soles of the feet (Yongquan [Bubbling Spring]; KI-1), associated with earth in the human body, is the primary point through which terrestrial qi (diqi) enters the human body. Thus, standing with postural alignment creates the context for the commingling of these energies and their subsequent circulation through the meridians. Once again, Daoist practitioners literally activate and circulate something else.

In contemporary Daoist communities, Daoist meditation tends to utilise a quietistic and/or alchemical model (see Komjathy 2013a; 2014b). Technically speaking, a quietistic model centres on silence and stillness. Stillness is understood as one’s original and innate nature, one’s foundational connection to and expression of the Dao. The quietistic model thus involves ‘return’ and ‘dissolution’, especially meditative absorption and mystical union with the Dao. One simply disappears into the Dao. This is a transpersonal state that is both an existential approach and response to the inevitability of death. There is no personal death (or post-mortem survival) because separate identity is an illusion. Here we might understand meditation as dying. An alchemical model centres on transformation. Similar to the quietistic model, the alchemical model utilises a composite view of self. However, while in the former death is understood as dissolution, internal alchemists claim another possibility beyond this ‘ordinary fate’. Through stage-based practice, which culminates in complete psychosomatic transmutation, one may create a transcendent spirit (see above). This results in personal post-mortem survival and eventual entry into the Daoist sacred realms as an ‘immortal’. The alchemical model thus involves ‘progress’ and ‘transcendence’. It is more of a participatory vision. Here we might understand meditation as timelessness. These models are often reconceptualised, and complexified, through Buddhism and other traditions. As many, perhaps most, modern Daoists believe in reincarnation, meditation becomes understood as a means to purify defilements, remove obstructions, neutralise karma and make progress on the path to liberation or realisation. That is, unlike traditional Chinese and Daoist views of self, which centre on a composite view (see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a), in the Buddhist-influenced view of meditation, one has some type of enduring personhood. The point of meditation is to facilitate spiritual development.

These various models tend to share the aspiration for meditative absorption and mystical union with the Dao, including numinous pervasion or becoming infused with sacred presence. The diversity of Daoist meditative views and methods in turn lead to different perspectives on and insights into ‘union with the Dao’. There are various experiences and accompanying accounts. These include attunement, disappearance, pervasion, vitality and so forth. As chapter one of the Daode jing tells us, the Dao is the ‘gateway to myriad wonders’. Daoist meditation involves ‘entering the Dao’ (rudao). By opening the door of meditation and finding the gateway to the Dao, another hidden and mysterious landscape opens. This is the landscape explored and discovered in Daoist contemplative practice and contemplative experience. It is a landscape found in/as/through outer and inner worlds.
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Glossary

Baihui, Hundred Meetings, 百會
Baopuzi neipian, Inner Chapters of Master Embracing Simplicity, 抱朴子內篇
Baoshen, embracing spirit, 抱神
Baoyi, embracing the One, 抱一
Beiji, North Culmen, 北極
Chongyang, redoubled yang, 重陽
Chuandao ji, Record of Transmitting the Dao, 傳道集
cun, maintain, 存
cunxiang, maintaining the image; visualisation, 存想
Dadan zhizhi, Direct Pointers to the Great Elixir, 大丹直指
Dadong zhenjing, Perfect Scripture on Great Profundity, 大洞真經
dan, cinnbar/elixir, 丹
dansha, cinnabar, 丹砂/丹沙
dantian, elixir field, 丹田
Danyuan, Cinnabar Prime, 丹元
Dao; Tao, Way, 道
Daode jing, Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power, 道德經
daoqi, qi of the Dao, 道炁
Daoyin, Guided Stretching, 導引
Daozang, Daoist Canon, 道藏
dazuo, undertake sitting; meditation, 打坐
Dingguan jing, Scripture on Concentration and Observation, 定觀經
diqi, terrestrial qi, 地氣
dizhi, terrestrial branches, 地支
Duren shangjing dafa, Great Methods from the Upper Chapters on Limitless Salvation, 度人上經大法
fan, revert, 反
fangshi, formula masters, 方士
fangzhong shu, bedchamber arts, 房中術
fuqi, ingesting qi, 服氣
Fuqi jingyi lun, Discourse on the Essential Meaning of Ingesting Qi, 服氣精義論
Gongfu, Kung-Fu; martial arts, 功夫
guan, observe, 觀
Guanzi, Book of Master Guan, 管子
heche, Waterwheel, 河車
Huainanzi, Book of the Huainan Masters, 淮南子
huan, revert, 還
Huang-Lao Dao, Way of the Yellow Thearch and Laozi, 黃老道
Huangting jing, Scripture on the Yellow Court, 黃庭經
jing, essence, 精
jing, meridian, 經
jingzhan, quiet standing, 靜站
jingzuo, quiet sitting, 靜坐
Jinquet djun, Lord Golden Tower, 金闕帝君
Jinquet djun sanyuan zhenyi jing, Scripture on the Perfect Ones of the Three Primes by Lord Golden Tower, 金闕帝君三元真一經
Laozi, Book of Venerable Masters, 老子
Laozi zhongjing, Central Scripture of Master Lao, 老子中經
lianjing huaqi, refining vital essence to become qi, 煉精化氣
lichun, Spring Begins, 立春
lidong, Winter Begins, 立冬
Lingbao, Numinous Treasure, 灵寶
liqui, Autumn Begins, 立秋
lixia, Summer Begins, 立夏
Longmen, Dragon Gate, 龍門
luo, meridian, 経
Lüshì chunqiu, Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü, 吕氏春秋
mai, meridian, 脉
mi, rice, 米
ming, fate/life-destiny, 命
moxiang, deep thought; meditation, 冥想
Nanzong, Southern School, 南宗
neidan, internal alchemy, 内丹
neiguan, inner observation, 内觀
Neiguan jing, Scripture on Inner Observation, 内觀経
neijia, internal martial arts, 内家
Neiye, Inward Training, 内業
Niwan, Mudball/Nirvana, 尼丸
nūdan, female alchemy, 女丹
qi, steam, 氣
qi, subtle breath, 氣
Qigong, Energy Exercises, 氣功
Quanzhen, Complete Perfection, 全真
rūdào, entering the Dao, 入道
rujia, Ruisim; 'Confucianism', 儒家
sanbāo, Three Treasures, 三寶
sanguan, Three Passes, 三關
sanqìng, Three Purity, 三清
sanyuǎn, Three Primes, 三元
Shàngqìng, Highest Clarity, 上清
shèn, extend, 伸
shèn, spirit, 神
shènwài shèn, body-beyond-the-body, 身外身
shì, omen, 示
shòu, guard, 守
shòu qì yì, guarding this oneness, 守其一
shòu sānyì, guarding the Three Ones, 守三一
shòu wǔ, guarding the feminine, 守雌
shòu jìng, guarding stillness, 守靜
shòu yī, guarding the One, 守一
shòu yīn, hand-configuration; mudrā, 手印
shòu zōng, guarding the Ancestor, 守宗
sì, consider, 思
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siyi, meditating on the One, 思一
Taiji quan, Great Ultimate/Yin-Yang Boxing, 太極拳
Taiping, Great Peace, 太平
Taiqing, Great Clarity, 太清
Taiqing fuqi koujue, Oral Instructions on Ingesting Qi of Great Clarity, 太清服氣口訣
Tianguan, Celestial Pass, 天關
tianqi, celestial qi, 天氣
Tianshi, Celestial Masters, 天師
waidan, external alchemy, 外丹
Wisheu, martial arts, 武術
wuizang, five yin-organs, 五臟
Wuzhen pian, Chapters on Awakening to Perfection, 悟真篇
wuizhi, non-knowing, 無知
xiantai, immortal embryo, 仙胎
xin, heart-mind, 心
xing, innate nature, 性
Xingming fajue mingzhi, Illuminating Pointers to the Methods and Instructions of Innate Nature and Life-Destiny, 性命法訣明旨
‘Xinshu’， ‘Techniques of the Heart-mind’, 心術
xinzhai, fasting the heart-mind, 心齋
Xuanming, Mysterious Darkness, 玄冥
Yangming, Yang Brightness, 陽明
yangshen, yang-spirit, 陽神
yangsheng, nourishing life, 養生
Yijing, Classic of Changes, 易經
Yinjing, Yin Essence, 陰精
Yongquan, Bubbling Spring, 涌泉
yuanshi, original qi, 元氣
yujia, yoga, 瑜伽
yulu, discourse records, 語錄
yunqi, circulating qi, 運氣
zhanzhuang, post standing, 站樁
zheng sizhi, aligning the four limbs, 正四肢
zhengqi, aligning qi, 正氣
zhengxin, aligning the heart-mind, 正心
zhengxing, aligning the body, 正形
Zhengyi, Orthodox Unity, 正一
zhengzuo, upright sitting; seiza, 正坐
Zhenren, Perfect One, 真人
Zhong-Lü, 鍾呂
zhoutian, Celestial Cycle; Microcosmic Orbit, 周天
Zhuangzi, Book of Master Zhuang, 莊子
ziwu, ziwu branches, 子午
zuo, sitting, 坐
zuowang, sitting-in-forgetfulness, 坐忘
Notes

1 Ruis, which derives from the indigenous Chinese rujia (Family of the Ru [Scholars/Literati-Officials]), is a closer approximation of the tradition’s self-conception. In contrast, ‘Confucianism’ is a colonialist and missionary construction derived from ‘Confucius’, which is the Latinised version of the honorific name of Kongzi (Master Kong). The latter was a formative influence on and key representative of Ruis.

2 For my comparative and theoretical reflections on this and related terms see Komjathy 2015; 2018. While beyond this contribution, I utilise praxis, which includes specific forms like meditation, in a technical sense that emphasises the complex interrelationship between views, methods, experiences and goals. Herein I explore the latter in terms of Daoist meditation.

3 As a comparative category, ‘soteriology’ refers to views about actualisation, liberation, perfection, realisation, salvation or however a given individual or community defines the ultimate purpose of human existence.

4 The history of Qigong, which is a modern Chinese health and fitness movement, and its relationship to Daoism is complex. See, e.g. Komjathy 2006; Palmer 2007.

5 All of this of course begs the question of the meaning of ‘philosophy’ and ‘religion’, including the former as referring to disembodied thought and intellectual reflection. For my critical reflections on Daoism as a religious tradition, see Komjathy 2013b, 2014a. For a critical, revisionist perspective on western philosophy as centering on ‘spiritual exercises’ see Hadot 1995; also Komjathy 2015, 2018.

6 Qi, which has some parallels to the Greek pneuma and Sanskrit prāna, may refer to physical respiration and/or a more subtle breath. It also has been rendered as ‘vital breath’ and ‘energy’. Like Dao and yin-yang, I prefer to leave the term untranslated.

7 For guidance on these various texts see Kohn 2000; Schipper and Verellen 2004; Pregadio 2008.

8 From a Daoist perspective, the Dao, which is impersonal and amoral, has four primary characteristics: (1) Source of everything; (2) Unnamable mystery; (3) All-pervading sacred presence; and (4) Universe as transformative process (‘Nature’). In terms of comparative theology (views of the sacred), Daoist theology is primarily monistic (one impersonal reality), panentheistic (sacred in and beyond the world), and panenhenic (Nature as sacred). See Komjathy 2013b, 2014a.

9 Other terms include baosi (‘embracing the One’), shousi (‘guarding the feminine’), shouying (‘guarding stillness’), shouzong (‘guarding the Ancestor’) and so forth.

10 I translate xin as ‘heart-mind’ in order to indicate its psychosomatic nature from a traditional Chinese perspective, in which it is considered the psycho-spiritual center of human personhood.


12 The Zhuangzi is one of the most widely translated and interpreted classical Daoist texts. For reliable translations of the Neiye see Roth 1999a; Komjathy 2008a, vol. 1. I follow Roth’s text-critical edition of the Neiye, including his chapter numbers.

13 Revisionist scholars of the Zhuangzi, including A.C. Graham, Liu Xiaogan, Victor Mair and Harold Roth, identify various lineages or ‘schools’ in the received text. For a concise summary see Komjathy 2013a.

14 These instructions are being given by the Daoist Master Guangcheng (Expansive Completion).

15 The Laozi, which is attributed to the legendary Laozi (Lao-tzu; Master Lao), is the earliest title of the text that would become known by the honorific title Daode jing (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power). Like the Zhuangzi, this work contains material from at least the fourth to second century BCE.

16 Specifically, Ge Hong (Ko Hung; Baopuzi [Master Embracing Simplicity]; 283–343), a key representative and systematiser of Great Clarity, uses the term in his highly influential Baopuzi neipian (Inner Chapters of Master Embracing Simplicity; DZ 1185). See, e.g. DZ 1185, 18.1ab.

17 Daoists generally do not visualise ‘dark energy’ because it is usually associated with illness, injury, negativity, death and the like. On an esoteric level, the black colour of the kidneys becomes purple in practice.

18 Jinque dijun (Lord Golden Tower) was a central deity in early Highest Clarity with strong messianic dimensions. Lord Golden Tower is usually identified as a manifestation of Laojun (Lord Lao), the deified Laozi and personification of the Dao.

19 This differs from the ‘organ-meridian times’ utilised in classical Chinese medicine, with the liver corresponding to 1–3am.
As discussed below, the fluid physiology utilised in Daoist practice is quite complex. It sometimes parallels and sometimes deviates from classical Chinese medical views. On the latter, see, eg, Clavey 1995.

Niwan literally means 'mud–ball'. It is generally understood as a transliteration of nirvana, but may also derive from an alchemical substance utilised in external alchemy. On a more symbolic level, it recalls the view of realised consciousness as a lotus flower.

In point of fact, it is more historically accurate to see Highest Clarity methods as setting some of the foundations for Daoist visualisation practice.

The Yi jing is an ancient Chinese text, neither Ruist ('Confucian') nor Daoist, and consists of sixty-four hexagrams (six-line diagrams), which are also analysed according to the eight trigrams (three-line diagrams). Taken collectively, these are said to describe all of the changes in the universe. Each trigram and hexagram consists of solid or broken lines, which are read from bottom to top and correspond to yang and yin, respectively. In the context of Daoist internal alchemy, these become utilised to designate specific corporeal locations, vital substances and/or psychosomatic transformations. For example, the Gen–mountain ☥ trigram consists of one yang-line above two yin-lines. Under one reading, this represents the stillness of mountains, and meditation by extension. That is, the stability of earth (yin) creates the foundation for the clarity of heaven (yang).

Under one view of classical Chinese embryogenesis, the Governing and Conception Channels are the first meridians to form. That is, in the womb and in early stages of foetal development, human beings are a single, unified energy form.

A complete annotated translation of this text, with English renderings of the illustrations, is included in Komjathy 2013a.

Here I draw upon my 20-plus years of ethnographic study and participant-observation of modern mainland Chinese Complete Perfection monasticism as well as globalised and American Daoism.

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Louis Komjathy


Daoist meditation


