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The Journal of Taoist Philosophy and Practice

Summer 2015

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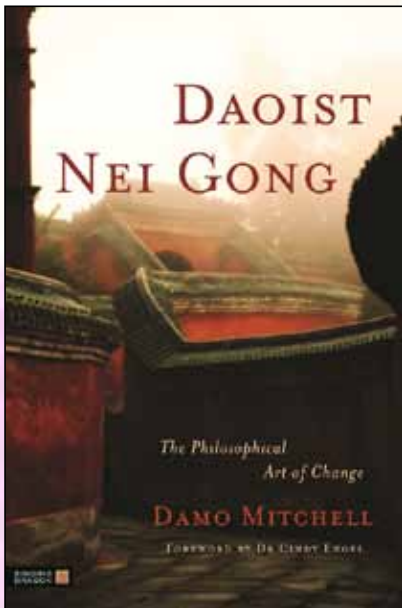
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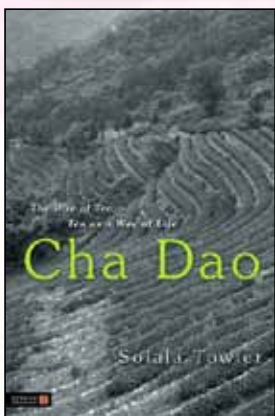
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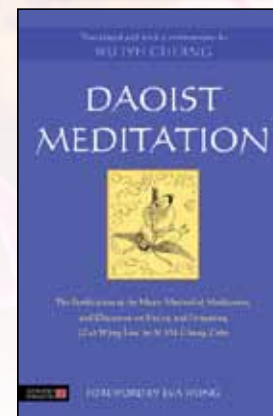
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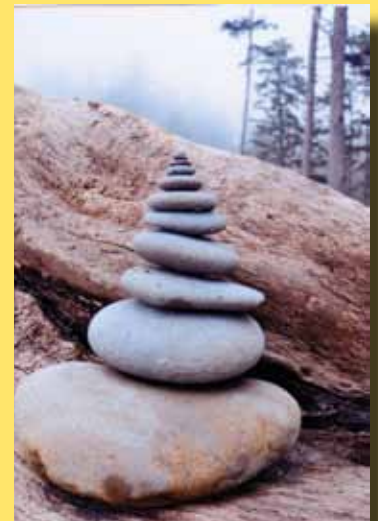
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Our Cover

"Balance" by Donald Rubbo

A deeply spiritual man, Donald Rubbo is a long-time practitioner and teacher of Chinese martial arts and qigong. From an early age, Donald and his wife Cheryl Lynne have sought unity with the One, "in all we see, in all we do, in all we say." Donald's images are the expression of that Oneness. As his artist father, Don Rubbo, was in the vanguard of the Pop Art movement, Donald has also been in the forefront of establishing the firm root of Chinese internal arts and healing arts in America. RubboArt Photo-Paintings are available at www.etsy.com/shop/RubboArt.

What is Taoism (Daoism)?

"The Tao (Dao) that can be described is not the eternal Tao." So begins the *Tao Te Ching* (*Daodejing*) of Lao Tzu (Laozi) written some 2,500 years ago. How then, to describe the indescribable? How to fit into words that which is beyond words? The Tao can only be pointed to, or referred to, say the ancient sages. It cannot be held, only experienced. It cannot be touched, only felt. It cannot be seen, only glimpsed with the inner eye.

Tao, then, is the Way, as in direction, as in manner, source, destination, purpose and process. In discovering and exploring Tao the process and the destination are one and the same. Lao Tzu describes a Daoist as the one who sees simplicity in the complicated and achieves greatness in little things. He or she is dedicated to discovering the dance of the cosmos in the passing of each season as well as the passing of each precious moment in our lives.

Taoism was already long established when Lao Tzu wrote the *Tao Te Ching*. It originated in the ancient shamanic roots of Chinese civilization. Many of the practices and attitudes toward life were already established before Lao Tzu's time. For many centuries Taoism was an informal way of life, a way followed by peasant, farmer, gentleman philosopher and artist. It was a way of deep reflection and of learning from Nature, considered the highest teacher. Followers of the Way studied the stars in the heavens and the energy that lies deep within the earth. They meditated upon the energy flow within their own bodies and mapped out the roads and paths it traveled upon.

It is a belief in life, a belief in the glorious procession of each unfolding moment. It is a deeply spiritual life, involving introspection, balance, emotional and spiritual independence and responsibility and a deep awareness and connection to the earth and all other life forms. It requires an understanding of how energy works in the body and how to treat illness in a safe, non-invasive way while teaching practical ways of maintaining health and avoiding disease and discomfort. Taoist meditation techniques help the practitioner enter deeper or more expansive levels of wakefulness and inner strength. But most of all, it is a simple, natural, practical way of being in our bodies and our psyches and sharing that way of being with all other life forms we come into contact with.

Today in China and in the West, Taoism is often divided into two forms, *tao jio* and *tao jia*. Or religious Taoism and philosophical Daoism. Many scholars argue that there are not two distinct forms of Taoism and in many ways they are right. There is really a great intermingling of the religious form of Taoism and its various sects and the philosophical Taoism of Lao Tzui and Chuang Tzu (Zhuangzi). But many people who follow the Tao do not consider themselves religious people and do not go to temples and are not ordained as priests. Rather these two forms exist both side by side and within each other.

It is up to each of us to find the way to the Way in our own way. What we try to do with *The Empty Vessel* is offer articles and information to help you, our dear readers, to do that.



The Empty Vessel

The Journal of Daoist Philosophy and Practice

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Statement of Purpose

The Empty Vessel is dedicated to the exploration and dissemination of Daoist philosophy and practice. It is open to sharing the various traditional and contemporary teachings in a nondiscriminatory manner. We at The Empty Vessel believe that it is in using these practices and attitudes of the ancient achieved ones in a timely and contemporary manner that we can best benefit from them and in doing so, be able to effect change in the world around us.

To our readers:

We are currently looking for a benefactor (s) in order to continue bringing you The Empty Vessel magazine. Our needs are approximately \$3,000 per issue (printing and postage).

Up until now we have relied on advertisements to cover this expense but these days everyone's purse is light and it is getting more and more difficult to raise enough money in this way to pay for printing and mailing each issue (not to mention our plans for expanding our distribution.)

I do not pay myself a salary but have worked for 22 years to bring you the informative and inspirational articles and stories about the wonderful world of Taoist thought and practice as a labor of love.

So we are looking for someone or some ones who can afford to help us to continue to bring you the same high quality journal that we always have. If you are someone who are interested in assisting us in this way and can afford to do so we invite you to join us in this exciting project of publishing the only Taoist magazine in the country! Please call me at 541.345.8854 or write to solala@abodetao.com if you are in a position to help keep this magazine going and growing!

Another way you can help is to buy a subscription for yourself or for someone else you know would be interested in learning more about Taoist thought and practice. The distributors take a big chunk out of the cover price (55%) so we make very little profit once printing and shipping costs are met. A one-year subscription to The Empty Vessel print version is still \$24, the same price we have had for a number of years now. Our online version (a pdf file emailed to you) is only \$20. Please take this time to subscribe for yourself or for a friend, family member, clinic or school.

We are now also available on Nook and Kindle platforms as well. We invite you to join us in "cyber-Tao" where you can download expanded issues of The Empty Vessel. (Go to <https://www.amazon.com/dp/B008E88PRK> to find us on Kindle.)

I have met so many wonderful and fascinating readers, teachers and authors over these last 22 years. It has been a humbling and exciting journey and one that I look forward to continuing.

You can also order or download many of the back issues from our website at www.abodetao.com, either digital or hard copy. We are also running a special right now for all the remaining back issues we have. (See page 27.)

We look forward to connecting with more of our readers at the various conferences and workshops that I offer around the country. (If you are interested in sponsoring a workshop in your area please let me know. You can reach me at 541.345.8854 or write to solala@abodetao.com. It's a great way to expand your knowledge of qigong and Taoist thought as well as share it with your community.)

I am excited about our October trip to China to where we will be spending time in the Wudang mountains studying with a great master there. I hope some of you will join us!

Solala Towler

Along the Way

This summer here at the Abode we have not been cutting down all the weeds but letting them grow, as long as they don't encroach *too* much on the garden and flower beds. We figure they have as much right to grow as the roses do.

As a result, we have many more wildflowers this year. Many of the plants that I usually think of as "weeds" are turning out to have lovely, though small, flowers.

So too, in our own lives here on Mother Earth, our own qualities that we often think of as "weeds" and useless can often turn out to be extremely *useful* to our cultivation practice.

It is a good thing to sometimes take stock of how we are growing in Tao, in what areas are we thriving in and where are we overgrown with useless information or emotional patterns.

Speaking of gardens, here's a fun description of how a Taoist garden differs from a Zen one, from *The Crocodile and the Crane* by Arthur Rosenfeld.

Among Asian gardeners, the Japanese are the most famous. Perhaps it is because they feel that as their territory is tiny, they must control it utterly, even banish from it nature's tendency toward maximum entropy. The Japanese prune and fuss, and arrange every stock, leaf and stem, thereby creating a refuge where the unpredictability of life can be mitigated, the ravages of time erased, and man's impotence in the face of inevitable death temporarily ignored.

The Chinese Taoist garden, by contrast, shows as little of the gardener's hand as possible. The Taoist's goal is benign neglect. He shuns interference with nature, and strives to be sensitive to the subtle doings of the Tao, thereby to represent the universe fractally. As a result, Taoist gardens always look unkempt; vines run amok, walkways sink, and hardy invasive plants thrive to the detriment of delicate flowers as if in evidence of horticultural lassitude. In the Taoist garden, man's efforts and nature's will exist in realistic balance.

May all our gardens, both inner and outer, grow in abundance and glory!

Solala Towler, editor



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2015 Empty Vessel China Tour

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October 9-25, 2015



Join us in October when we travel to the sacred Wudang Mountains – home of Taoist tai chi, qigong and martial arts. While we are there we will be studying a unique form of Wudang Tai Chi as well as Wudang Qigong with Master Zhou Ju Bu. This will be a ten-day immersion into the sacred arts of Wudang! Master Zhou has been studying Daoist gongfu since he was 10 years old, and has students all over the world. We will also spend time hiking and visiting some of the many Taoist temples there, drinking tea in the temple teahouse and visiting our friend Jiaye, who has lived in a cave above the Purple Heaven Temple for over 20 years!

We will also be spending time in Hangzhou, one of the most beautiful cities in China. Hangzhou, circling around West Lake, has long been revered for its beauty and culture. While there we visit a tea plantation where the famous Dragon Well tea is grown, as well as the museum of Chinese Medicine and take in an awe-inspiring lake show by Zhang Yimou, the well-known Chinese film director, called West Lake Impressions (check it out on youtube).

The last few days will be spent in Beijing, where we will visit the White Cloud Temple, the Great Wall and the fabulous tea market as well as attend some amazing acrobat shows. All along the way we will "talk Tao," eat incredible food, meet qigong masters, artists, musicians, tea masters, and one cave dwelling hermit.

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"Master Zhou Ju Bu is a humble, serious, funny, graceful, patient, great teacher and Qi Master! I learned so much from him and give him a 5 star recommendation. Every single person in our group of 34 was impressed and touched by him."



*The Five-Fold
Essence of Tea*

Wu De

(Text and Drawings)



The true meaning of this Way of Tea is only hinted at by words, as much adumbrated by them, and we can but hope to catch a dappled glimpse of it through the leaves we write and say. If there is a Way, a Path of Tea to be walked and lived it is surely in the growing, processing, preparing and drinking. These are the juicy buds of Cha Dao that we must steep our lives in. After that come the secondary leaves—the ones we usually leave for next season—the history, lore and discussion of tea. As a tradition of tea lore, passed on from teacher to student, there is much to say about what tea is to us, yet we mustn't forget that the understanding we share isn't as valuable as the living energy we become when we align ourselves with the harmony in a life of tea. We can't pass on that life lived, merely point out the road and leave behind as many signposts as possible so that future travelers will have an easier trip. This list is one such sign, tacked on a worn old tree you'll find just past the ancient brook...

People often ask what tea 'means', as though it were a symbol scribed on an old temple wall that needs translating. In our tradition we also speak of the essence and meaning of tea as defined in five principles, but these five aspects shouldn't be regarded as something apart from tea to which it occasionally alludes. These principles, rather, are the very essence of tea as it is cultivated and expressed in our tradition. We adopt these five primary forms of tea not as the symbolic ends to which our tea practice points, but the very quintessence of our tea life. They are the tea we drink and share—leaves and liquor alike. This steaming bowl is these five functions; and if it isn't serving one or more of them then it isn't tea. We define our tea in the gathering, processing and preparing; and more importantly the energy with which we do these things, which should always be in accordance with one or more of these five tenets.

If we view these five values as something to strive for—the culmination of Cha Dao, for example—we will in fact fall short of their attainment. These five essentials are tea. They are inherent within it: as a plant, a beverage, a culture and a Dao. As we mentioned above, these five essences are what tea is to us, not what it symbolizes. We must therefore demonstrate them in our tea, rather than seeking them beyond it in esotericism. Consequently, the oft-asked question 'What does tea mean?' is not answered by these five principles. However, the question 'What is tea?' most definitely is satisfied by the list below, at least as far as we are concerned.

Though it is important for us to be able to expound what tea is to us as a tradition, and create a valuable lore that we can hand on to future students, there is also a need for caution since ideas are often opinionated, and can be agreed or disagreed with. This list isn't meant to be an argument for what tea should be to everyone; it is instead what we define as our own cultivation and expression of a tea life in this tradition. Our tea must therefore manifest these values; it must be steeped in their water to the extent that the liquor, the aroma and even the very steam that rises from our tea are all imbibed with them. This is our definition of tea:

Tea is Nature
Tea is Medicine
Tea is Heart and Spirit
Tea is Friendship
Tea is an Act of Kindness

Tea is Nature

These leaves are earth, soil and rock, wind and water. Through them we drink in the weather. And they are also an expression of what is beyond our planet, absorbing sun, moon and starlight in photosynthesis. Plants don't have a feeling of separation or disconnection from their environment: they breathe in and out, take in the rain and sun, minerals and energy. It all flows through them, open in the receiving and the giving alike. Plants are a part of their environment, connecting completely to the Life that surrounds them. Tea offers us this connection, for we too are a part of this Earth and grew out of it just as it has. As we drink in this herb, the boundaries between outside and in grow fuzzy: at first the tea isn't us, then it is...

We drink tea to revive the connections we have with the Earth and Sky. Tea speaks to us of our own origins in the water and rock, minerals and plants. Without the trees, we would have no food to eat or air to breathe. They are as necessary to our existence as any other aspect of our bodies. And we are related to them in the most intimate ways, as we breathe their air, eat their sustenance and absorb them into our bodies, minds and souls. We must learn to once again feel our dependency on Nature, as our ancestors did. Many people nowadays rarely feel, in their everyday consciousness, just how dependent we are on plants.

Tea is one of the plant kingdom's teachers: a connector to the source that was grown out of the Earth as a guide for us. It speaks a language from a deeper and far older world than the human one we inhabit now.

Tea is Nature in the simplest sense, as it comes from the mountains—away from the city and its noise. There is an old Chinese saying, "Tea brings Nature to society." It is all too easy to disconnect tea from Nature, drinking it in some fine tea house in the middle of the city. But what would Tea tell you if you connect to Nature through it and the leaves themselves were produced in a way that harms the Earth? Would it cry for help?

It is no longer possible for us to ignore provenance as an aspect of our collective value system. The way something is produced and where it comes from are now just as important in evaluating it as how much pleasure it brings. A high-quality tea must therefore be produced sustainably and organically; it isn't enough that it taste nice. We drink tea as a part of the Natural cycle from weather to rock, seed to sapling, sky to leaves. We enter into that Nature-process and find ourselves. For that reason, it's important that tea be respected as more than leaves. It is a tree, and each tree has a soul—a unique beingness we should converse with rather than trying to domineer to suit our taste.

Tea is also Nature in the greater, transcendent sense: The doorway to existence itself. Tea is Nature, as all of Nature went into its creation—without the sun, sky, earth or stars there wouldn't be any tea to speak of. It touches the Dao, and drinking it is often a returning. Our words, however, cannot intrude upon such a sense of completion.

Tea is Medicine

Learning to revere tea as medicine is important to us. Tea is a great healer, of body, mind and spirit. The earliest encyclopedia of Chinese herbs to mention tea stated that it "brightens the eyes." This is a powerful expression of why Shen Nong, the father of all Chinese medicine



called it the “King of All Medicinal Herbs.” The eyes are brightened when the soul is in harmony with the body.

Tea is ‘medicine’ in the Native American sense of the word: that which aligns and connects us with the world and all life. Medicine empowers us in our connection to the Earth and all life on it. Health of body, mind and spirit succor such harmony and arise from it. Health is very much akin to harmony. When the body functions in harmony, internally and externally, it is healthy. The same could be said for the mind and spirit as well. In other words, if you have problems drink tea; if you don’t... drink tea!

There is a dimension of experience where people can indeed communicate with plants—one that was utilized by our ancestors for millions of years. The knowledge learned from the plants helps align us with the Sacredness of this Earth and our own place in it. Such wisdom heals more than the individual; it also can help us restructure our societies in a sustainable, healthy way instead of endangering all life on this planet as we are doing now through our discordance.

Tea is adaptogenic, helping alleviate any and all ailments. Living teas have a way of finding and treating any of our ailments, whether they are physical or spiritual. Furthermore, most herbs are useful to treat a particular disease and unhealthy if you don’t have that illness, whereas tea can be used every day. It isn’t just adaptogenic in our bodies either; it suits the spirit of any occasion. There is an old saying that it is “curious that a teapot can suggest both great and comfortable solitariness as well as friendship and society.” Tea has a way of suiting the energy of any gathering, from deep stillness to great celebration.

In this tradition, we cultivate a respect for tea as a healer. The specifics aren’t important. While scientists are finding that tea prevents cancer and helps regulate blood pressure, etc., this isn’t what we are referring to when we call tea medicine. Tea is more than just a supplement taken for health benefits. Tea heals. While tea might aid your blood pressure, that isn’t the end—or even the essence—of its healing powers. It heals more fundamentally—cosmically, you might say. It can realign us with our source. You drink a few bowls and as the great tea poet Lu Tong says, “The last needn’t be drunk, for I am swept up to the land of immortals.” Even amidst the bustle of the city, tea can transport us to a healing space.

Tea is Heart and Spirit

Tea is a spiritual path, a Dao. In living a life of tea we realize that in all we do, we are preparing tea. What we eat affects our tea, as does the way we treat people. One of our masters always says, “If you want to learn to make tea, you must first learn to be a person.” That’s easier said than done.

Rikyu left us four virtues of tea: Reverence, Purity, Tranquility and Harmony. They form the basis of any tea practice. We must cultivate a reverence for tea, for our guests and ourselves, our teaware and tea space. We consummate this respect by purifying ourselves, our instruments and our space—for they are truly sacred. A purified space leads to tranquility, within and without. And when we are tranquil, we find a sense of completion, presence. Nothing is missing from this moment. In this way, these four virtues steep seamlessly into one liquor. A single draught of such an elixir can be transformative.

Tea is a reverence for the ordinary moment: the grains in wood or stone, the sunlight illuminating a stream of incense, or the steam from a bowl... It is about finding the sacred in

everything, every moment of our lives. As we brew tea with reverence, we are purified; and the more purified we become the more we can brew tea with reverence. Tranquility and harmony are also cultivated within and without. First, we practice outer quietude in order to meet the more powerful inner stillness. When we rest in stillness, it no longer matters that there is turbulence around us. We could then brew tea downtown and still experience and share peace with others.

They say that the Way of Tea is 80% cleaning—inner and outer. We work on purifying our hearts in order to make purer tea, the kind that transports people, heals them and connects them to Nature. This requires humility, purity, a mindful, meditative mind and other wholesome qualities. The student asked his master how to brush the perfect scroll of calligraphy and the master responded, “Perfect yourself and paint naturally!” In that way, we live our Zen-mind in our tea. We perfect ourselves and brew naturally. Our wisdom is then communicated to the world through our tea, which speaks louder than any words ever could, and much more directly as well.

The most important element in fine tea isn’t the teaware, water or charcoal; it isn’t even the leaves. It is, rather, the mind of the one brewing. Some of our best, most transformative tea sessions were held in simple surroundings and the tea was nothing to speak of—simple green tea brewed in a cracked, old bowl. Other times you find very expensive teas in elegant surroundings ruined by a lot of ego trumpeting, while the tea is unfortunately neglected. When tea is offered and received pure-heartedly, magic happens.

Living tea is a leaf grown sustainably and ecologically, full of the Qi of the Earth. It is also what we do with that energy once it has been consumed. After conversing with our master, the Leaf, what we have learned and how we apply that wisdom are important determiners of progress. If we do not heed Her wisdom, She may turn her back on us. We must learn to follow her lifeways, living and beaming the spirit of tea. This is to say that the reverence, purity, tranquility and harmony didn’t come from Rikyu—he just named them. They are inherent qualities of Tea itself. Rikyu learned them from Tea, just as we must. In fulfilling such qualities in our lives, we live the energy of Tea itself—we become an expression of tea spirit.

Tea is Friendship

Tea has always been the emblem of civilization and peace. “Through tea make friends” is an old proverb expressing the sentiments we share with tea. Tea isn’t always deep and transcendent; it is sometimes a time/space of calm joy, where we can celebrate old friends and make new ones. Tea relaxes us and frees us of the egoic discourse we usually have. Calm and joyful, we can leave our egos at the door with our shoes. In the first ever book on tea, the tea sage Lu Yu wrote that having tea each morning was the only time of day that he could be certain the emperor himself was doing the same thing. In Japan, the tea room was the only place people of different classes and stations could meet and interact free from all social constrictions. And having set down all our masks, through tea, people reveal themselves—open up and make lifelong connections.

In the tea space, we are all ordained. There is no class, title or rank. We are all pure and free, which allows us to talk amicably. Tea has connected people, cultures and countries for centuries. Lu Yu also said that the true man of tea never turns down an in-

vation to tea. Even if our enemy invites us to tea, we go knowing that this might just be the perfect opportunity to make peace.

In this day and age, we often forget the importance of the simpler gifts: a bowl of tea, a deep listening to our fellow human or perhaps even a real look into each other's eyes. No gadget can ever take the place of real human connection. Sharing time over tea is a tremendous opportunity to connect to those we love. Tea is a peaceful state where friendships blossom or are deepened, and preparing tea is itself an expression of friendship.

Tea is an Act of Kindness

There is no mastery in self-service. In this tradition we don't learn to *make tea* but to *serve tea*. True mastery must be in the service of mankind. As we progress, we come to understand that we serve the evolution of consciousness itself, and that the growth and awakening is an impersonal process—the natural movement of the light into life. In offering tea, we offer our spirit in true kinship. All movement into the sacred realm is an effort to bring back boons that will support our community.

When you serve tea to another with a pure heart, there is an opportunity to give a time and space of healing. In such an opening, people are often transformed. Nothing could be more important. In a troubled time, and facing an uncertain future, it is only the evolution of human consciousness that will save our species. This Earth doesn't have environmental problems, nor does it have climate problems; it has human problems. And the human problems are not solvable politically or economically, for they are problems of the heart. If there is to be a medicine, it must also be for the heart.

Tea connects very different people. We set up roadside tea blankets and serve tea to passersby, offering them some presence and loving-kindness in a bowl. It is surprising how dramatic an effect kicking off their shoes and sitting on the ground for a bowl or two can have on someone's day. To truly understand something you must get involved—comprehension comes through participation. To understand tea, set up at the park or market, road or temple and serve tea as an act of kindness. In such a moment, guest and host vanish and we find the oneness that we're all grounded in: the light that shines from within.

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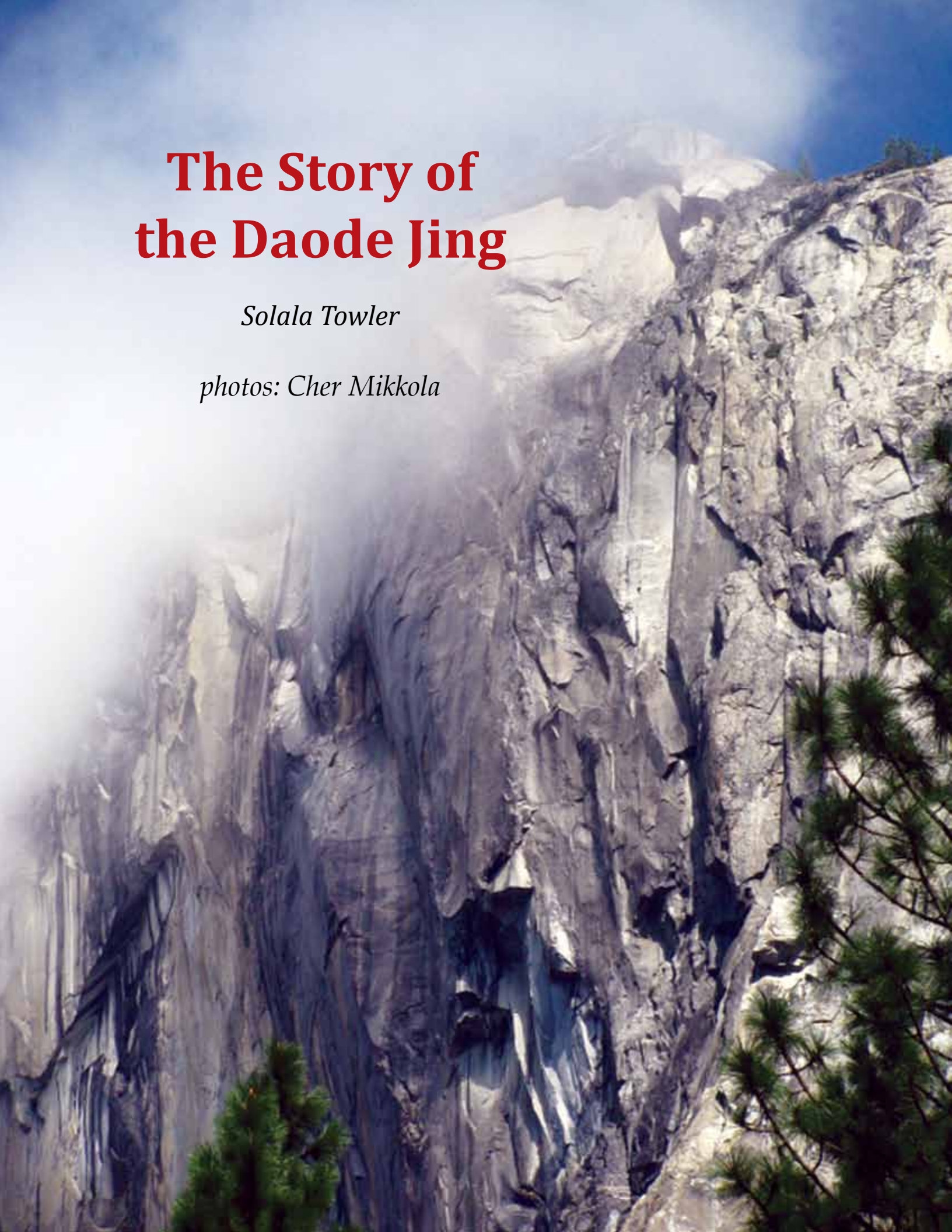
For the last decade, Wu De has been teaching the ancient practice of serving tea from a Zen and tea center in Taiwan, known as *Tea Sage Hut* (www.teasagehut.org). In the last three years, his monthly magazine and organic tea mailing, *Global Tea Hut* (www.globalteahut.org), has swelled to connect hundreds of tea lovers and spiritual seekers in over 30 countries. Meanwhile, *Tea Sage Hut* now houses five long-term students and hosts over 200 guests per year, sharing *The Way of Tea* and a more connected way of living and being with each person who joins a tea session there.



The Story of the Daode Jing

Solala Towler

photos: Cher Mikkola



The cold wind blowing off the western desert ruffled the beard of the old man riding slowly in his cart, pulled by his favorite water buffalo. It whipped 'round his traveling cloak and made him shiver deep within his robes. He tried wrapping the cloak a little tighter around his shoulders but it did him little good. It was a bad time of the year for traveling, but that could not be helped. The stolid beast plodded on slowly toward the frontier. A horse would have been faster, but this beast was steadier, more sure-footed in the mountains and ate very little. He supposed it was a bit of reverse vanity that prompted him to travel with so humble a beast, the last vestige of the once proud Royal Archivist.

This man, called Lao Tan, was leaving his post and his life in court behind him and heading toward the western frontier. Life in the capital had been going from bad to worse. In fact, as far as he was concerned, society as a whole was falling apart. The court intrigue nauseated him, the constant political maneuvering gave him a headache, and it seemed as though cynicism was trickling down even into the lower classes. The tradesmen and shopkeepers were far more interested in making money than in being of good service. Even the farmers, the bedrock of civilization, were showing signs of dissatisfaction and doubt about their own lives.

Everywhere he looked Lao Tan saw signs that society was askew. It seemed to him that the Way had truly been lost and that things were only going to get worse. Even his students had become cynical, more interested in acquiring mystical powers than simply learning how to live in accord with the eternal Way, as if there were anything more powerful than that.

Armies were massing all along the borders of the various kingdoms, ready to go at each other's throats at a moment's notice. And no longer were there chivalrous knights errant as in days past, seeking to redress the wrongs suffered by the weak at the hands of the rapacious strong. The ancient rules of combat in which battles were fought by favorites, thus avoiding needless bloodshed, were being ignored. Now, armies went at each other in wholesale slaughter, while the poor peasants whose lands they ravaged in battle suffered the loss of their crops, their sons and even their daughters to the bloodthirsty soldiers.

All in all, it had seemed like a good time to leave the festering swamp that society had become and head into the wilderness to pass his days in contemplation of the Way. So he had said good-bye to his students and his position, and, since his wife had left this world of dust years before, he mounted his oxcart, and along with one of his most trusted and promising students carrying his *qin*, slowly plodded toward the setting sun.

As he traveled further and further from the capital it seemed to Lao Tan that he was able to breathe easier and his mind, so long cluttered with the endless minutiae of imperial service, became clear. He had wielded great power and greater responsibility as Keeper of the Archives in the Capital. The people of his country had long venerated the sacred power of the written word and, as Lao Tan was in charge of the Imperial Library, his was a most glorious post. Or so it had seemed in the beginning.

But after years of watching the supposedly learned men of the kingdom calcify their minds with mindless repetition of the writings of those who had come before them, never venturing an original idea or thought, lest it get them in trouble with the intelligencia of the court, he had begun to sicken of the life at

the Imperial Court. He longed to breathe the air of mountains, to feel himself imbued with the *de* or sublime energy of those lofty places. He longed to sit with men and women who were not afraid to speak their mind, not afraid to dig deep into themselves for truth, knowledge, and experience of the ineffable and absolute Way.

And so, saying a few last goodbyes to his students and friends, he had set out on this slow and ponderous way, feeling freer than he had for many years.

Of course, as he traveled he came to towns where he was known, and men there—ostentatious, wealthy, and shallow men—tripped each other up to be able to feast and fete him, believing that he still had power and connections in the capital. Often he let them alone in their fantasies, especially when he and his student were half starved and freezing from their journey, and let his officious hosts wine and dine them. He was careful to promise them nothing but he could see the greed in their eyes as they sat with him, asking for his teaching while ignoring his very words of truth. "Empty your minds and fill your bellies" he had told them. And they, misunderstanding his words said, "Yes, yes, take more of our humble and miserable food. Fill your belly with our unworthy dishes," while serving him on gold platters.

But now, at last, he was past all the towns and cities of the kingdom, out on the edge of the wilderness, where he planned to live out his last days in peace, stillness, and quiet communion with Dao. He had one last barrier to pass, one last test of his resolve.

At the end of the day he reached the outermost gate of the kingdom. He slowly and stiffly dismounted and turned to the gatekeeper who had come out of his tiny hut to greet him. Yin Xi was a long-time friend and student and was about as old as Lao Tan himself.

"Master Lao," he said, coming forward, his wrinkled face breaking into a broad smile. "It's so good of you to visit. Are you on a vacation from the capital?"

"No," answered Lao Tan, "I'm afraid I'm done with all that. I am on my way out there." He pointed to the vast desert on the other side of the pass.

Yin Xi frowned. "But that way is very hard, and may even mean your death."

"No matter," said Lao Tan. "It is time for me to leave my old life behind and see what Dao has in store for me."

Later, after a simple but delicious meal, Lao Tan and his friend sat by the fire and listened to the night sounds around them.

"Master Lao," began Yin Xi, "if you are really going, never to return, I beg you to please write something for your students so they may have some of your wisdom to refer to in the troubled times ahead."

"I am afraid that if they did not hear me when I was speaking to them, they surely will not listen to mere words on paper," answered Lao Tan.

Lao Tan's student sat in the shadows and did not say anything. He had already exhausted all his words in begging his master for written instructions. That is why he had elected to accompany him out to the wilderness, away from his easy life in the court and out to who knows where, as long as he could stay by his teacher's side.



“But,” entreated Yin Xi, “if things are really getting as bad as you say, then we will surely be in need of whatever wisdom you can leave us.”

“I dislike writing things down,” answered Lao Tan, getting up and stretching. “I feel there is really no way to convey the immensity of the Way in simple words, no matter how clever or polished. Now I must go to bed, old friend. I will be leaving at first light.”

Before going to bed, Lao Tan sat awhile, thinking over what Yin Xi had said. He did feel a little guilty about leaving his students and friends back at the capital. Perhaps writing a few lines would not be such a bad thing after all. It might even help him formulate his thoughts a little better in his own mind. He got out his writing implements and began mixing his ink. Then, with his brush poised over a long strip of bamboo, he stopped.

How could he possibly put into words the immensity and depth of the Way? How could he, in a few lines, bring forth all that he had experienced and learned in a lifetime of seeking the great and sublime Dao? For a moment the thought overwhelmed him. But even though he was quitting this sad and misguided world, he felt responsible to the people who were struggling under the weight of fear and ignorance. If it was possible to leave behind a small token of his concern for them, he felt he had a duty to do what he could.

And so, after taking one deep breath “from the bottom of his heels,” he put his brush to the bamboo and began to write.

“Dao that can be spoken
is not the true and eternal Dao.
Names that can be named
are not the true and eternal names.”

Before he knew it, the sun had risen and he had filled a large pile of bamboo slips. He gathered them together and left them on the low table for his friend Yin Xi to find. He was not sure if anything he had written there would be of use to others. He hoped it would. He knew that to try and fit all that was Dao into mere words was probably a waste of time at best, yet he *did* feel a sense of responsibility to those who came after him to try and leave some sort of impression of what he saw as the grand design, what for want of a better term he called Dao.

He had spent many long hours in meditation and contemplation and had studied what texts he could glean from the vast imperial library. He had sought out teachers as well, mostly wild *wu* shamans and shamanesses from the hills, those who had spent many years deep in the mountains and forests and who had lived closely with animals and nature and life and death. They had ideas, principles and practices to share with



anyone humble and patient enough to spend time with them.

From them he had learned not to trust words, not to invest himself in book knowledge but to fill his lower brain, his belly, with good knowledge, the kind that would sustain him in troubled times as well as good times. These people, with their wild hair and oftentimes frightful countenances had so much real wisdom to share.

Of course these people were frowned upon by the elite of the court. Even the so-called scholars looked down their noses at them. But Lao Tan had brought them food and wine and sat with them night after night, as they described the world as they saw it. They told him about the many nature spirits that surrounded their forest home and how they spoke to these spirits and danced and drummed with them and were taught many things.

He had sat with the farmers who toiled on the land and knew how to read the signs that nature gave them on when to plant and when to harvest. Lao Tan, who had grown up as a scholar from an early age, felt he had learned more from these humble people than many of the musty texts he had studied all his life.

And slowly he had begun to understand a small part of what the world was made of. He sat by rivers and streams and watched how the water flowed downhill and conformed itself to the shape of the banks and how it patiently slid over rocks and under tree limbs, never wavering, never complaining. He explored deeply the streams and rivers of life energy, which he

called *qi*, as it flowed within his own body. He watched how the plants grew green and flexible in the spring and how they dried up and became brittle and easily broken in the fall. He knew that nature was the best teacher he could have, better than any of the expensive tutors his father had paid for in his youth.

He meditated so deeply that he was able to travel anywhere he wanted without leaving his own home. But when he tried to tell others about his new and wonderful experiences he found it very difficult to put it into words. Besides, what he was offering was so simple compared to what the intelligentsia of the court were interested in that he often ended up feeling tongue-tied and stupid when he tried.

And so, seeing the way things were going in his beloved land of Zhou, he had left, turned his gaze from his ancestral home and heading out into the wilderness. It seemed the only choice left him. He had planned on just disappearing but here was one who had asked, even begged for him to leave some of his hard-won wisdom behind.

Now he put on his thick traveling robes and, climbing back into the heavy oxcart he headed out to the western reaches of the world, never to be heard from again.

Solala Towler's book on using the Lao Tzu's work as a manual for self-cultivation, *Practicing the Tao Te Ching, 81 Steps On the Way*, will be published by Sounds True in Spring 2016

The Empty Vessel Interview

with Master Yang Hai

James Coons



James Coons: Hello master Yang, could you please introduce yourself to us?

Yang Hai: My name is Yang Hai, I grew up in Tianjin China and moved to Canada in 2000. I currently live in Montreal and run a martial arts school where I teach Taijiquan, Baguazhang, Xingyiquan, and Qi Gong.

JC: You also do some other types of work, could you tell us a bit about that?

YH: I also teach some business management courses at Lasalle College in

Montreal, and I am currently involved in two projects to promote Chinese culture, medicine, martial arts, and Daoism.

JC: Could you please tell us a little about your history of studying Daoism?

YH: Sure, when I was a child, my grandfather began to systematically teach me martial arts. I remember at that time I was made to study Xingyiquan very seriously. My uncle was a Taiji teacher who studied with Chen Zhaokui, and I also learned from him but that was much later. Throughout

my teens I kept learning with various teachers about the three Daoist, or internal martial arts.

At that time Qi gong was becoming very popular, and the government had begun to open up about religious freedoms, having realized that many mistakes were made during the cultural revolution.

Because during the cultural revolution it was taboo to talk about spiritual things, I was very interested to study when the materials became more available and books began to be published on the subject.

I originally read Zhu Xi's commen-

tary on the Yijing when I was in junior-high school, and then a friend of mine took me to the White Cloud Temple in Beijing to study when I was in senior-high school. At that time we could not get an introduction to the head master in the beginning, but there were many documents available on the subject of Daoism, and we could study directly from the large stones in the yard with ancient engravings on them and so on. Somewhat later, a family friend was able to get an introduction to the top master of the temple, and we began studying with him together. His name was Cao Zhenyang, who was also called "Zhen Yangzi," which is an honorific term to denote him as a Daoist teacher.

Originally when we studied with him, he gave me a copy of the Daode Jing to read, and because I had already read the Yijing and other Daoist documents, I was able to understand it fairly quickly. After that I would go there every week from Tianjin to learn from him when my school schedule allowed me to go there. Basically, I would read classics and he would help to correct my understanding. After a while he gave me a copy of Xing Ming Guizhi, a manual on meditation. After I read this, I began to really understand what authentic Daoist practice is.

Cao always said that the best thing would be to continue reading and practice when I had time.

Since then I have read every meditation document in Dao Zang (the Daoist canon), and most of the philosophical documents as well.

These days I prefer to read research papers that come out about Daoist practice, and don't only focus so much on the old documents.

JC: But Cao Zhenyang wasn't the only person from whom you learned Daoism, could you please tell us about some of your other teachers?

YH: I found out at that time that there was also a popular Daoist school in Tianjin called Sanfeng Pai, and I learned many things from them while also doing my own research. It also became clear that many people in the gongfu community had a very deep understanding of Daoism. My Bagua

teacher, Fu Shoubu was extremely knowledgeable about Daoist meditation concepts and philosophy.

I also had a distant family member who had his own family practice passed down through many generations. I later found out that it was a type of eight brocade Qigong based on the Daoist system, but that he also had a very deep understanding of Daoist concepts and practice too.

I also went to many different Daoist heritage spots all over China, and met many people within Quanzheng Daoism, Buddhism, Qi Gong, and other fields to research the topic of meditation.

JC: This brings us around to an interesting point of contention in Daoist study. Do you think that Daoism can be practiced as a secular art, or is it merely confined to temples and religion?

YH: Of course Daoism can be treated as a secular practice!

Religious Daoism is only part of the big picture of Daoist arts and culture. Even Zhang Baoduan said at the beginning of the book *Understanding Reality* that one should not abandon their family in order to practice. This has been a recurring theme throughout Chinese history and many ordinary people have practiced Daoist cultivation with good results.

JC: So do you think the phrase "xiaoyin yin yu lin, dayin yin yu shi" (the small hermit lives in the forest, the great hermit lives in the town) is a true statement then?

YH: I think it is better to say that both religious Daoism and non religious practice have their place in Chinese culture. I respect religious Daoism very much, and some of the priests know Daoism very well indeed!

There are also many non religious people in China who understand Daoism very deeply from their own research. The effect of Daoist ideas on Chinese culture means that Daoism permeates all the way to the root of the culture, and so many Chinese arts have elements of Daoist philosophy at their very roots.

JC: So how do you feel about ceremony, chanting, burning incense, and ritual?

YH: Those practices were part of the popular contents before the better-development of Neidan (meditation) as a central practice of the Quanzhen school. For example, Zhang Baoduan even said that some of these practices are not correct, and it is better to focus on cultivating the great Dao.

JC: You have a very special understanding of the effects of chanting, could you please share a little with our readers on this subject?

YH: In certain schools or at some stages of practice in Daoism, chanting can be used to create spiritual and physiological responses which can allow one to enter the meditation state. It really makes no difference whether one chants in a devotional way, or just to create the correct atmosphere in which to enter the meditative state. The words used in this type of devotion are entirely religious, but even just making the sounds can have a positive effect. Later, some Qigong practices are based on this principle and use chanting to stimulate energy as an effective practice too.

JC: So do you think it is important to separate Neidan from devotional practice?

YH: Yes, of course! Religious Daoists believe in many gods, for example, there is a god for the toilet, a god for the tree, a god for the street and so on. Some people say that Daoist followers are very busy to show respect to all the gods and not break any rules. Even most Daoist priests won't have time to meditate deeply, since they are too busy making their gods happy.

In my opinion, if someone thinks that the Daoism is a purely religious practice, I would say that this type of misconception is the by-product of academic laziness. They should realize that, actually, most of the traditional and contemporary Daoist practices are not religious related activities.



JC: What do you mean by academic laziness?

YH: Many western scholars in Daoism are worthy of respect and have spent much of their time to make a study of Chinese documents. I don't want to say and I have never said that it is not possible to study Neidan for non-Chinese language speaking people, but certainly it is very difficult to get the genuine feeling of Daoist meditation practice. This is even difficult for most Chinese people to understand and practice the core of the Daoist arts, which is meditation. The problem is that people often read devotional documents and interact with priests, so their interpretation of Daoism is strongly based on the religious side of things. Reading a religious document is much easier than reading one about Neidan since Neidan is a systematically developed huge system. Imagine how complicated Neidan

theory is! It is all written in code. Many people who translate meditation texts haven't been taught how to read the code, and their translation of documents simply comes out as gibberish. On the other hand, it is much easier to translate historical documents and writings about ceremony and religion. There are only about 500 meditation documents in the Daoist Canon, and the vast majority of the rest are either philosophical or religious. Sometimes people become confused by this and attempt to view the entire practice as religious, but this is a negative path to practice. Pleasing the gods will not help meditation practice.

JC: In what way?

YH: People who are involved in Daoist religion who don't understand the value of meditation and often interpret good events as being signs of the

gods shining on humanity, and view bad events as not being controllable, simply reverting to Laozi's concept of Wuwei and just allowing bad things to happen to them. This is not correct.

JC: Tell me about your grandfather and what he thought of your Daoist studies?

YH: My grandfather wasn't willing to share spiritual practice with me, I think he was afraid by the events that happened during the cultural revolution. When China opened up again, he was very cautious because he worried there might be another similar political event again and so he cautioned me not to get overly involved, and not be "led away by demons," he said I should be practical and never superstitious.

At the start of my practice it was very hard to get the Daoist principle and only after I graduated from university and went on to learn Chinese medicine was I able to start putting together how Chinese culture works as one process which is joined by the same concept.

JC: So in effect, Chinese traditional concept accords to the concept of Dao?

YH: Yes, but there are many different levels of understanding this subject. It all depends on individual's experience in life, study, practice, and personal achievement in different cultural aspects.

JC: If people want to study Daoism, can you give them any advice.

YH: This topic is profoundly difficult to study deeply, and to really get the principle of it may not be possible for most people. I think just to be interested in it and treat it as a hobby may be better for most.

JC: What if people work very hard to learn Chinese language and persevere in study?

YH: I don't know, to be honest it will not be easy. People can learn modern language but it is very hard to study the old language since languages evolve with society, technology, thoughts and



other related elements together.

JC: Yes, for me it took more than one year to read through the Dao De Jing once, and then I have been reading the Chan Wei for almost two years and have only completed one and a half chapters.

YH: I'm not sure this is practical, that book has eighty one chapters, how many years will it take to complete it? If people want to study Daoism successfully, they will have to put their entire effort into this field.

Learning a bit of Daoism, a bit about Chinese opera, a bit about Calligraphy, Art and so on will scatter your efforts too much. I think it is very hard for people to get the big concept of Daoism without a very serious effort.

If we talk about western people who studied Daoism in China so far, I don't want to say they are completely wrong, but from what I have read, mostly their research is not complete.

I don't care if someone lived in Sichuan in a temple for a decade studying from the priests there, that does not

mean they understand many things outside of worship. I know many Daoist priests in person. Most Daoist priests are too busy making their gods happy to be able to have time to seriously cultivate themselves.

In the future I hope that I can do serious work to remedy the understanding of Daoism in the western world.

The problem is that most teachers in China don't speak English, so how can the students study and really learn deeply?

This will take well over a decade for native Chinese speakers to learn, so can you imagine how many decades it will take for someone who has to learn Chinese language as they read the documents?

I think gradually, as the relationship between China and the West is more formalized, maybe we can start to see a better standard, but for the time being, studying this topic is still very difficult.

JC: In the book *Xian Xue*, Chen Yingqing said not to teach foreigners. Do you have any opinion about that?

YH: We should not judge his attitude toward foreigner based on his one or two sentences. When he wrote that book, China was undergoing a very special time, and had been destroyed by foreign powers. If he were alive today, he would not hold that opinion. Daoism is the cultural treasure of China, of course we should share it openly with the rest of the world.

JC: So in terms of past teachers, can you discuss the relationship between Daoism and religion, and how to make everything fit together?

YH: We can say it like this, Laozi was not religious, there is not a place in the Dao De Jing where Laozi suggests any kind of religious ideas. That document is about meditation, not religion. Religion in China was not formalized at that time. Daoism was created based on non-religious concepts and environment, how come people in the West so closely bind Daoism and religion together? There is much much more in Daoism than just the religious

approach.

JC: So you don't think that Laozi has any relationship with Chinese religion?

YH: That relationship was the result of Zhang Daoling, back to that time there were only folk religions. Zhang Daoling was a typical folk religious leader.

If we talk about five pecks of rice (the movement that spurred religious Daoism) that is simply a movement to build power by stockpiling food. Any person who joined them could give five grains of rice and in return they would be protected. Zhang Daoling chose Laozi as his god simply because Laozi was a good name to choose at that time, philosophically and intellectually, he had a great impact on Chinese thought. In the beginning of religious Daoism, they even could not fix the numbers of their gods.

JC: So you don't think that Daoist priests had a great impact on Daoist history?

This is an ongoing argument in Western Daoist academia. In one regard, we have groups pointing to things like the mystery study school (Neo Daoists) who wrote many books

explaining Laozi as philosophy, and on the other hand, we have allusions to Daoism springing from Zhang Daoling as being the true interpretation of Daoism. How can we be clear about this?

YH: I do not see many of the greatest teachers in Daoism practice were religious.

Laozi and Zhaungzi were not, neither were Han Zhongli, Lu Dongbin, Zhang Baoduan, Huang Yuanji, certainly Chen Yingqing was nothing close to a priest.

Maybe if we say Qiu Chuji was religious, but many scholars explain that because he needed to preach peace to Ghengis Khan, so he had to adopt religious ideas in order to convince him. Also, they argue that most of the Qiu Chuji's religious teaching was imported from the Confucian system. It becomes very academic now so it is better to leave this topic at this level.

Also, please do not forget that Daoist practice (Neidan) does not require religious belief.

Lets stop here for now, I will cook some food for you, have a look at this book (passes LeYutang/Sichuan chronicles to us...)

Yang Hai, born in Tianjin China and having grown up in the family of martial arts grandmaster Yang Qinglin (grandfather), he began studying the internal martial arts of Xingyiquan and Baguazhang at the age of eight. By the time he was in his early twenties, he was already accomplished in all three major internal styles of martial arts including the Chen style Taijiquan of Chen Fa'ke, as passed down by Grand Master Ma Hong.

Having received an introduction to various Daoist masters, including Headmaster Cao Zhenyang at White Cloud Temple, and to the Tianjin Sanfeng Pai school, master Yang began to deeply study the essence of Daoist meditation. Having read all of the meditation classics in the Daoist Canon, Master Yang has become a very accomplished teacher in his own right.

Currently, he teaches in Montreal where he also works as a professor in a local college, teaching an MBA prep course.

Master Yang is dedicated to learning and sharing, as well as helping his students realize the essence of the practice of the internal styles of self cultivation, originating from Daoism.

His website is www.internalstyle.com



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The Functions of Essence, Breath, and Spirit

Fabrizio Pregadio



In the whole tradition of *Awakening to Reality*, the material foundation of the Internal Elixir is the Medicine (*yao*). The formation of the Medicine involves Essence, Breath, and Spirit, which the alchemical texts call the Three Treasures. This term refers to the three major components of human life.

Taoist Internal Alchemy subdivides the refinement of the Three Treasures into several stages. In the first stage, Essence is transmuted into Breath, and Essence and Breath are refined into Spirit; this is the process of “the Three returning to the Two, and

the Two returning to the One.” Finally, when the Three Treasures have returned to the One Spirit (*yishen*), Spirit is refined in order to return to Emptiness. The foundation of Taoist inner refining lies, therefore, in the Three Treasures. At the stage of “laying the foundations,” the Three Treasures are first replenished; then they become abundant and flourishing; and finally they form the source for the return to a youthful state—the Inner Elixir.

Spirit (shen 神)

The alchemical texts attach most importance to the refining of Spirit: from “laying the foundations” to “returning to Emptiness,” the whole process is ruled by Spirit. A postface to *Awakening to Reality* says: “If you want to embody the supreme Dao, nothing is more important than understanding the Heart. The Heart is the axis of the Dao.”⁴⁹

According to Zhang Boduan, Heart and Spirit are related as follows: the Heart is the ultimate foundation, and Spirit is born from the Heart; the foundation of the Heart consists in non-doing and non-movement; as it moves, it is called Spirit. Therefore Zhang Boduan says in his *Secret Text of Green Florescence*:

心者，神之舍也。

The Heart is the residence of Spirit.⁵⁰

He adds:

蓋心者，君之位也。以無為臨之，則其所以動者，元神之性耳。以有為臨之，則其所以動者，欲念之性耳。

Essentially, the Heart takes the position of the lord. With regard to “non-doing,” that through which it moves is the nature of the Original Spirit. With regard to “doing,” that through which it moves is thoughts and desires.⁵¹

These sentences state that Spirit is stored within the Heart. As it moves, it becomes Spirit. Its movement in “non-doing” is called Original Spirit (*yuanshen*), its movement in “doing” is called “cognitive spirit” (*shishen*).

Therefore Zhang Boduan also says:

心靜則神全，神全則性現。

When one’s Heart is quiescent, one’s Spirit is whole. When one’s Spirit is whole, one’s Nature manifests itself.⁵²

Although the concepts behind their names are similar, Heart and Spirit differ in rank and priority. According to Zhang Boduan, the Heart is “silent and unmoving,” and the Spirit moves in response to impulses. What Taoism calls “refining Nature” (*lianxing*) is the cultivation of the Heart; what it calls “refining Life” (*lianming*) is the joint cultivation of Essence, Breath, and Spirit. As shown by Chen Tuan’s (ca. 920–89) *Wuji tu* (Chart of the Ultimateless), the Ultimateless (*wuji*) is the Heart; the movement of Yang and the quiescence of Yin are the Spirit; and what gathers the five agents together is the Intention (*yi*). Therefore Chen Tuan also upholds the view that “Spirit is the ruler.”

According to the alchemical methods of Zhang Boduan, “refining Ming (Life)” comes first, and “refining Xing (Nature)” comes later. At the initial stage of “laying the foundations,” however, Xing and Ming are cultivated together: since the practice at this stage consists in replenishing one’s Ming and in cultivating the ultimate foundation, both Xing and Ming should be attended to simultaneously. Therefore the initial stage involves collecting the mind (*shouxin*), guarding Unity (*shouyi*), ceasing thoughts (*zhinian*), and entering the state of quiescence (*rujing*). These four

expressions show that, at this stage, one should perform practices to eliminate the impure thoughts (*zhanian*). The *Secret Text of Green Florescence* says in this concern:

但於一念妄生之際，思平日心不得靜者，此為梗耳。急捨之，久久純熟。夫妄念莫大於喜怒，怒喜回思則不怒，喜中知抑則不喜，種種皆然，久而自靜。

When even one thought arisen due to delusion is sufficient to cause continuous mental activity, so that the Heart cannot be quiescent, this is a cause of hindrances. Rapidly dismiss that thought; in due course you will become skilled in doing this. Now, among deluded thoughts none is of greater import than joy or anger. If, when you experience anger, you are able to recollect, then you will not experience anger. If, when you experience joy, you know how to restrain it, then you will not experience joy. If you do this every time, eventually you will attain quiescence.⁵³

This passage refers to ending the flow of thoughts. Therefore collecting the mind is the first requirement to enter the state of quiescence and to control the inner Heart, keeping it silent and unmoving. Although impure thoughts may arise, they are at once restrained. This is the first practice. “Embracing Unity” means concentrating the mind on one point in order to remove the impure thoughts. Here the word “unity” is meant in a broad sense, i.e., collecting the Heart and the Spirit in one point. Guarding the Cinnabar Field and guarding the “ancestral opening” (*zuqiao*)⁵⁴ can attain the goal of collecting the mind and ceasing thoughts.⁵⁵

Inner observation (*neishi*) is also a method of collecting the mind. The *Secret Text of Green Florescence* says:

心之所以不能靜者，不可純謂之心。蓋神亦役心，心亦役神，二者交相役，而欲念生焉。心求靜，必先制眼。眼者神遊之宅也，神遊於眼而役於心。故抑之於眼而使之歸於心。

When the Heart cannot be quiescent, this is not simply due to the Heart itself. Essentially, Spirit makes use of the Heart, and the Heart makes use of Spirit. They make use of one another, and because of this, thoughts and desires are born. If the Heart seeks quiescence, it is first of all necessary to control the eyes. The eyes are the residences for the roaming of Spirit: Spirit roams through the eyes, and makes use of the Heart. Therefore restrain Spirit through the eyes and cause it to return to the Heart.⁵⁶

According to the principles of Taoist alchemy, Spirit is stored in the Heart and is issued from the eyes. In the practice of inner observation, the emphasis is on “observation”: when the eyes are used to observe inwardly, one’s thinking becomes focused, and the Original Breath surges; one internally illuminates oneself, all concerns become empty, delusive thoughts vanish, and one’s Heart is calm and untroubled. This is the third step for entering the state of quiescence. An anonymous master said:

天之神發於日，人之神發於目，目之所至，心亦至焉。

The Spirit of Heaven is issued from the Sun, the Spirit of Man is issued from the eyes. Wherever the eyes go, the Heart also goes.

Therefore when the alchemical masters sit to practice, they coagulate Spirit and stabilize breathing, press the tongue lightly against the upper palate, concentrate the Heart and the eyes inwardly, look down at their Cinnabar Field, and can rapidly enter the state

of quiescence.

Intention. The *Secret Text of Green Florescence* also says: “Intention is the go between.”⁵⁷ The Intention (*yi*) is the operation of Spirit; the so-called True Intention (*zhenyi*) means that the thought activity issues from the Spirit. If we identify the mind with the brain, then the function of the brain is the Spirit, and its thinking faculty is the Intention. If one controls the joining of the Three Treasures by means of the Intention, then one can activate its intermediary function among the Three Treasures.

For this reason, the Intention is also called “go-between” and Intention-Soil (*yitu*). The meaning of “go-between” is that it introduces Yin and Yang to one another for their conjunction. Therefore the alchemical texts also call it Yellow Dame (*huangpo*): “yellow” indicates that it pertains to the central agent Soil, and “dame” means that it is the “matchmaker” (*meipo*), a metaphor for the intermediary that allows the joining of Yin and Yang.

Awakening to Reality attributes a great importance to the Intention-Soil, considering that the True Intention operates throughout the entire alchemical process: Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire achieve completion by means of the True Intention (*zhenyi*). One of its poems says: “The four images and the five agents all avail themselves of Soil.”⁵⁸ Liu Yiming explains that the “four images” are the Breaths of Metal, Wood, Water, and Fire; with Soil, these are the five agents (*wuxing*). Soil, which stands for the Intention (*yi*), harmonizes the four Breaths; it forms one “family” by itself, and is the Golden Elixir.

According to the principles of alchemy, Fire in the first place is a code name of the Spirit; since Wood generates Fire, Wood stands for the Original Spirit, and Fire stands for the postcelestial Spirit. Analogously, Water is a code name of the Essence; since Metal generates Water, Metal stands for the Original Essence, and Water stands for the postcelestial Essence. Metal and Water form one family; Wood and Fire form one family; and Soil on its own forms one family. *Awakening to Reality* says:

三五—都三箇字，古今明者實然稀，東三南二同成五，北一西方四共之。戊己身居生數五，三家相見結嬰兒，嬰兒是一含真氣，十月胎圓入聖基。

Three, Five, One —
all is in these three words;
but truly rare are those who understand them
in past and present times.
East is 3, South is 2,
together they make 5;
North is 1, West is 4,
they are the same.
Wu (戊) and Ji (己) dwell on their own,
their birth number is 5;
when the three families see one another,
the Infant coalesces.
The Infant is the One
holding True Breath;
in ten months the embryo is complete —
this is the foundation for entering sainthood.⁵⁹

“Three, Five, One” means that the three “fives” return to the One. At the stage of “laying the foundations,” guarding the Cinnabar

Field is called “guarding the Intention”: one’s True Intention (*zhenyi*) is placed within the Cinnabar Field. When clearing the Function and Control vessels, guarding the Cinnabar Field is called “being guided by the Intention”: Intention (*yi*) guides the Breath, and the Breath journeys through the Function and Control vessels. When one enters the state of quiescence, it is said that “the Intention follows the turning of Breath”: here it is important that one “neither forgets nor assists,” and is “neither tense nor inert.” All this pertains to the operation of the True Intention (*zhenyi*).

The True Intention (*zhenyi*) has different functions at each of the three stages of the alchemical practice. The present section has been concerned with its operation and meaning at the stage of “laying the foundations.” The more advanced meanings will be examined in the following chapters.

Breath (qi 氣)

In the alchemical practice, Breath has a wide meaning: it involves both the breath of respiration and the precelestial Breath, or internal Breath (*neiqi*). Refining Breath is an important component of the stage of “laying the foundations.”

At the beginning of the practices of collecting the mind and ceasing thoughts, one performs the ordinary breathing: exhaling, the belly contracts; inhaling, it expands. This is called “harmonizing the breathing” (*tiaoxi*). Although there are many methods of “harmonizing the breathing,” their common goal is leading one to enter the state of quiescence. Before clearing the Function and Control vessels, one should progressively shift to “inverted breathing”: exhaling, the belly expands; inhaling, it contracts. The technical term for this is “practice of the bellows” (*tuoyue gongfu*).

When, in the next stage of the practice, the inhaled breath rises along the Control vessel and the exhaled breath descends along the Function vessel, inhaling and exhaling must join one another. Unless one is already accustomed to inverted breathing, one cannot practice the circulation of the River Chariot. In the alchemical texts, this is called “harmonizing the true breathing” (*tiao zhenxi*).

An even more advanced stage, one does not rely on inhaling and exhaling. At that stage, the spontaneous circulation of the internal Breath (*neiqi*) is called “circulation of the hidden Breath” (*qianqi yunxing*). It should be noted that, in present-day Qigong, the “circulation of the hidden Breath” is called Lesser Celestial Circuit, but the alchemical texts use the latter term with a different meaning.⁶⁰

When the preliminary practices of “laying the foundations” have reached the stage of replenishing the Essence, the gradual coagulation of Spirit, Breath, and Essence occurs. Later, after the Medicine is generated, it is refined together with Spirit. To refer to Breath at this stage of the practice, the Longmen masters use the character 「炁」 (pronounced *qi*) instead of the standard character 「氣」 (also pronounced *qi*). This character is used as a code name for the joining of Essence and Breath.

The alchemical texts usually make a distinction between “respiration” (*huxi*, lit., “exhaling and inhaling”) and “harmonizing the breathing” (*tiaoxi*). In the latter term, the primary meaning of the word *xi* 息 is “exhaling and inhaling.” However, when the alchemical texts use this word, they intend to point out the difference between two kinds of breathing. The *Zhuangzi* says:



真人之息以踵，眾人之息以喉。

The True Man breathes through the heels, the common man breathes through the throat.⁶¹

A gloss on this passage says: “‘Heels’ means that inhalation and exhalation reach the Bubbling Spring” (*yongquan*).⁶² The *Zhuangzi* editor, Guo Qingfan (1844–96), notes: “‘Breathing through the heels’ means that the breathing is extremely deep. This shows that the True Man is in a state of deep quiescence.” The *Xingming guizhi* provides further explanations:

一切常人呼吸皆隨咽喉而下，至中脘而回，不能與祖氣相連，如魚飲水而口進腮出，即莊子所謂「眾人之息以喉」是也。如是至人呼吸則直貫明堂，而上至夾脊，而流入命門，得與祖氣相連，如磁吸鐵，而同類相親，即莊子所謂「真人之息以踵」是也。踵者，真息深深之意。

The common people’s breathing always begins from the throat and then

descends, reaches the stomach and then turns around. Thus their breath cannot join the Ancestral Breath; it is like a fish drinking water, which enters from the mouth and exists from the cheeks. This is what Zhuangzi meant when he said, “The common man breathes through the throat.” The breathing of the man of attainment, instead, passes through the Hall of Lights (*mingtang*), rises to the Spinal Handle, and flows into the Gate of Life. There it can join with the Ancestral Breath. It is like magnetite attracting iron, or like things of the same kind that join with one another. This is what Zhuangzi meant when he said, “The True Man breathes through the heels.” “Heels” means that his breathing is extremely deep.⁶³

According to the *Zhuangzi*, therefore, the True Man’s “breathing through the heels” refers to the precelestial Breath, i.e., the “circulation of the hidden Breath” that we have mentioned above. The common people, instead, breath through the throat, and this is the respiration based on the postcelestial breath. If one focuses on the precelestial Breath, allowing it to rise from the Bubbling Spring, ascend through the Spinal Handle, surge to the Muddy Pellet, descend to the lower Cinnabar Field, and join with the



postcelestial breath, then the two breaths join as one, and inhalation and exhalation become extremely deep. This is what Cui Xifan meant when he wrote in his *Ruyao jing*:

先天炁，後天氣，得之者，常似醉。

Breath prior to Heaven,
breath posterior to Heaven —
those who obtain them
always seem drunk.⁶⁴

This “Breath prior to Heaven” (*xiantian qi*) is the Breath that pervades the Eight Vessels.

“Embryonic breathing.” Although the *Zhuangzi* distinguishes “breathing through the throat,” or *houxi*, from “breathing through the heels,” or *zhongxi*, in both cases the word *xi* 息 means “inhalation and exhalation.”

When the later alchemical texts use this word, instead, they often mean the internal breathing, i.e., the “circulation of the hid-

den Breath.” For example, the term “embryonic breathing” (*taixi*) means that Breath has reached a stage in which the breathing through the nostrils is extremely subtle and almost imperceptible, as if the external inhaling and exhaling had come to a halt. The Eight Vessels are cleared, and the whole body feels comfortable; just like an embryo in the womb, there is no external inhaling and exhaling, but only the “circulation of the hidden Breath.”

This state, nevertheless, pertains to the initial stage of the practice, when the harmonization of breathing serves to pacify the Heart. When the practice progresses, and Heart and Spirit become one, then Heart and breathing rely on one another, and one reaches the state in which one forgets one’s self. Then, by means of the practice of quiescence, the External Medicine is spontaneously produced, and the stage of “laying the foundations” is concluded.

Awakening to Reality says:

護守藥爐看火候，但安神息任天然。

Desist from guarding the furnace of the Medicine
and from watching over the fire times:
just settle the breathing of the Spirit
and rely on the celestial spontaneity.⁶⁵

This means that one can refine the Medicine only after the “breathing of the Spirit” has settled. This state, however, can only be sought by means of such practices as the “breathing through the heels” and the “embryonic breathing.”

The *Taixi ming* (Inscription on Embryonic Breathing), which is appended to one of the editions of the *Taixi jing* (Scripture of Embryonic Breathing) in the Taoist Canon, says:

三十六咽，一咽為先，吐唯細細，納唯綿綿。坐臥亦爾，行立坦然... 假名胎息，實曰內丹，非只治病，決定延年。

As regards the thirty-six breathings, for each of them the most important thing is that exhalation should be very slight, and inhalation should be very long drawn. Whether sitting or lying, this rule should be observed; whether walking or lying, the breathing should be smooth. . . This is metaphorically called “embryonic breathing”; in fact, it is the Internal Elixir. Not only will it cure diseases: it will also grant a long life.⁶⁶

The *Taixi jing* itself says:

心不動念，無來無去，不出不入，自然常住。

If the Heart does not stir thoughts, neither coming nor going, neither exiting nor entering, it will constantly dwell of its own accord.⁶⁷

These passages refer to the actual practice of “embryonic breathing.”

Essence (jing 精)

In the alchemical texts, Essence, Breath, and Spirit are specialized terms, used in substantially different ways compared to the medical texts. These differences are often indicated by the use of such expressions as Original Essence (*yuanjing*), precelestial Essence (*xiantian jing*), or True Essence (*zhenjing*), on the one hand; and postcelestial essence (*houtian jing*) or “essence of the intercourse” (*jiaogan jing*, i.e., semen), on the other hand. Bai Yuchan explicates this point saying:

其精不是交感精，乃是玉皇口中涎。

This essence is not the essence of the intercourse: it is the saliva in the mouth of the Jade Sovereign.⁶⁸

The Jade Sovereign (Yuhuang) represents the Origin, and the “saliva in his mouth” represents the precelestial state. This passage shows that the terms used in the alchemical texts should not be confused with those used in the medical texts. Min Yide’s (1748–1836) commentary on this passage states: “This is what we call Original Essence.”

When the alchemical texts use the word “original” (*yuan*), they refer to the Origin (*yuanshi*), i.e., to a primordial substance that is not born in the postcelestial state. Therefore the *Shihan ji* (Records from a Stone Casket), attributed to Xu Jingyang (also known as Xu Xun, trad. 239–374), says:

元陽即元精，發生於玄玄之際。元精無形，寓於元炁之中。若受外感而動，與元炁分判，則成凡精。

Original Yang is the same as Original Essence, sent forth from the bourns of the Mystery beyond the Mystery. Original Essence has no form, and resides within Original Breath. If it receives an external stimulus, then it moves: it separates from Original Breath, and becomes the common essence.⁶⁹

During the Ming dynasty, Wan Shangfu wrote:

精在先天時，藏於五臟六腑，氤氳而未成形，後天之念一動，則成為後天之精。

When the Essence is in the precelestial state, it is stored in the five viscera and the six receptacles, misty and murky and still formless. As soon as a single thought moves in the postcelestial state, it becomes the essence of the postcelestial state.⁷⁰

This shows that, in the alchemical texts, the word “essence” denotes the life functions and the very foundation of life, in a way comparable to the internal secretions and the hormones.

Taoism deems Essence to be the “mother of the Elixir” (*danmu*) and regards it as life’s basic element. When the Essence is damaged, it causes weakening and aging; when it is reborn, it can lead to a long life. A flourishing energy is the foundation of youthful vigor. When this basic element coagulates with Breath, the Elixir is achieved. If the code name “essence” found in the alchemical texts is confused with the physiological essence discussed in the medical texts, misunderstandings can easily occur.

Essence as “prima materia.” Wu Shouyang (1574–1644) says in his *Xian Fo hezhong yulu* (Recorded Sayings on the Common Origin of the Immortals and the Buddhas):

元精何故號先天，非象非形未判乾。太極靜純如有動，仙機靈竅在無前。

Why is the Original Essence called “precelestial”?

The undivided Qian ☰ is devoid of image and form.

In the Great Ultimate, quiescent and pure, there is something like a movement:

The Numinous Opening, mainspring of immortality, lies in what has nothing prior to Itself.⁷¹

This poem requires an explanation.⁷² Qian ☰ stands for Heaven. “Undivided Qian” means the time when Heaven and Earth have not yet separated from one another and are in an inchoate state; they are devoid of form and image, and there is only the Breath of Emptiness and Non-Being. These sentences describe Original Essence as the earliest stage in the origin of the cosmos. This Essence blooms into the misty and murky Great Breath, and lodges within the five viscera: it is not the physiological essence of the medical texts.

The Great Ultimate is Emptiness and Non-Being; it is “ultimate emptiness” and “utmost quiescence.”⁷³ Within the precelestial Original Essence, after “guarding Unity” and “harmonizing the breathing,” quiescence reaches a state of ultimate purity. Then there is the subtle awareness of a movement: the Medicine is going to be generated. The word “like” in the sentence “there is something like

a movement” means that it seems to be a movement, but actually is not a movement. This Essence is entirely devoid of the qualities of the postcelestial essence, and thus can be used as *prima materia* (*yuanliao*) to compound the Numinous Medicine (*lingyao*).

“The Numinous Opening, mainspring of immortality” is that in which “there is something like a movement.” In the expression “lies in what has nothing prior to Itself,” “nothing” (*wu*) means that there is not yet matter: as it “lies in what has nothing prior to Itself,” it is devoid of form and matter. Breath is exceedingly abundant and Essence is exceedingly pure: this is the nature of the precelestial Essence, or Original Essence.

Although Wu Shouyang was a master of the Northern Lineage, he lived at the end of the Ming period and thus he could also receive the transmission of the Southern Lineage. The understanding of the Original Essence after the unification of the two lineages is the same.

The nature of Original Essence. The Essence, Breath, and Spirit that are used for compounding the Elixir are, in the first place, a single entity, and cannot be sharply distinguished from one another. However, the stage of “laying the foundations” consists of practices of replenishment. Since Essence is the foundation of the Elixir, Spirit is the ruler, and Breath is the moving force, what needs to be replenished at this stage is most often the Original Essence. Therefore protecting, replenishing, and harmonizing the Essence have the purpose of improving the foundation. Essence, Breath, and Spirit then harmonize, transform, and coagulate with one another. When Essence is abundant, Breath is full, and Spirit is flourishing, one can begin the practice of “refining Essence to transmute it into Breath.”

In his *Secret Text of Green Florescence*, Zhang Boduan states that Essence comes from Breath. He says:

神有元神，氣有元氣，精得無元精乎？…元神見而元氣生，元氣生則元精產。

As regards Spirit, there is an Original Spirit, and as regards Breath, there is an Original Breath. Therefore as regards Essence, how could there not be an Original Essence? . . . When the Original Spirit appears, the Original Breath is generated, and when the Original Breath is generated, the Original Essence is born.⁷⁴

This is in agreement with Wu Shouyang’s discourse quoted above: “The undivided Qian ☰ is devoid of image and form” means that, in the realm of Original Spirit, “there is something like a movement” within the pure and quiescent Great Ultimate, and the Original Breath is generated. “The Numinous Opening, mainspring of immortality, lies in what has nothing prior to Itself” means the time when the Original Essence is born. In the same text, however, Zhang Boduan also says:

藥不離精、氣、神，藥材又精氣神之也。…三者孰為重？曰：神為重。金丹之道，始然以神而用精、氣也。〔神氣精常相戀，而〕神者性之別名也，至靜之餘，元氣方產之際，神亦欲出，急庸定以待之，不然，是散而無用之體也。

The Great Medicine cannot separate itself from Essence, Breath, and Spirit; and the ingredients of the Medicine are also born from Essence, Breath, and Spirit. . . . Which of these three is most important? Spirit is

most important. The Way of the Golden Elixir begins with Spirit, but also uses Essence and Breath. [Spirit, Breath, and Essence always long for one another, but] Spirit is another name for one’s Nature. In the state of absolute quiescence, when the Original Breath is on the point of being produced, Spirit is also ready to emerge. You should rapidly attend to them, otherwise Spirit would disperse itself and would become a useless thing.⁷⁵

This means that the Medicine is formed by the union of “these three.” If any of them is not sufficient, then the stage of “laying the foundation” has not yet been completed: they cannot be used to make the Numinous Medicine (*lingyao*), and without ingredients one cannot “refine Essence and transmute it into Breath.”

Therefore one of Zhang Boduan’s poems says:

咽津納氣是人行，有藥方能造化生，鼎內若無真種子，猶將水火煮空鑊。

Swallowing saliva and ingesting breath are human actions; only when you have the Medicine can you form and transform. If in the tripod there is no True Seed, it is like using water and fire to boil an empty pot.⁷⁶

The dregs of the postcelestial state cannot generate the perfectly numinous, precelestial Elixir. This is why Zhang Boduan uses the expression “true seed” (*zhen zhongzi*): he emphasizes that he means something different from a material entity, so that no one would misunderstand his words.

Awakening to Reality also says:

見之不可用，用之不可見。

What you see cannot be used, what you use cannot be seen.⁷⁷

These words clarify that Original Essence is devoid of form and matter. As soon as matter is generated, it cannot be used as “mother of the Elixir.” Lü Dongbin says:

息精息氣養精神，精養丹田氣養身，有人學得這般術，便是長生不死人。

Increase your Essence, increase your Breath, and nourish Essence and Breath:

when your Essence nourishes the Cinnabar Field, your Breath nourishes you.

Anyone who is capable of studying this Art will live a long life without death.⁷⁸

These words clarify, in turn, that Essence, Breath, and Spirit must be refined together.

In the *Huangdi neijing* (Inner Canon of the Yellow Emperor) we read:

知之則強，不知則老，故同出而名異耳。智者察同，愚者察異，愚者不足，智者有餘。有餘而耳目聰明，身體輕強，老者復壯，壯者益治。是以聖人為無為之事，樂恬淡之能。

One who knows them becomes strong, one who does not know them becomes old. “They come forth together, but have different names.”⁷⁹ The wise observes their sameness, the foolish observes their differences. The foolish does not have enough, the wise has more than enough. Since he has more than enough, his ears and eyes are sharp and bright, and his body is light and strong; when he becomes old he can revert to his prime,

and when he is in his prime he can benefit the government. Therefore the sage does the deed of non-doing and rejoices in the capacity of being calm and tranquil.⁸⁰

“The wise observes their sameness” means that Essence, Breath, and Spirit are a single entity, and operate with one another. The transformation of the three is achieved by means of the transformation of Breath in the human body. Therefore Zhang Boduan states in his *Secret Text of Green Florescence* that “Essence comes from Breath.” He states, in other words, that at the stage of “laying the foundations” one should refine the Three Treasures together; only then can the Medicine be obtained, and only then can one possess the proper foundation to enter the stage of the Barrier of the Hundred Days.

Notes

49 *Wuzhen pian*, in *Xiuzhen shishu*, chapter 30, postface. — Here and elsewhere, the word *xin* is translated as “heart,” except when it is juxtaposed to *shen* in the pair “mind and body,” or when it refers specifically to the mind as the organ of thought. In all other cases, “mind” would not convey all the nuances and implications of the Chinese term *xin*; in particular, it would obscure the fact that *xin* also means “center—just like “heart” does in English—and refers in the first place to the center of the human being.

50 *Qinghua biwen*, “Xin wei jun lun.”

51 *Qinghua biwen*, “Shen wei zhu lun.”

52 *Qinghua biwen*, “Xin wei jun lun.”

53 *Qinghua biwen*, “Xin wei jun lun.”

54 On the “ancestral opening” see above, p. 20.

55 Author’s note: In its discussion of “guarding the Center” and “embracing Unity,” the *Xingming guizhi* considers that there are a center with a fixed position as well as a center without a fixed position. The center with a fixed position is the Cavity of the Yellow Court (*huangting xue*). The center without a fixed position is the noumenal Center in which Heaven and Earth dwell together, i.e., the Center of the Heart. Embracing Unity means guarding that one place. The *Xingming guizhi* says: “Embracing Unity is the same as guarding the Center of that Unity.” In other words, this means guarding in quiescence any of the Openings.

56 *Qinghua biwen*, “Xin wei jun lun.”

57 *Qinghua biwen*, “Yi wei mei shuo.”

58 *Wuzhen pian*, “Lüshi,” poem 11.

59 *Wuzhen pian*, “Lüshi,” poem 14.

60 In *Neidan*, the Lesser Celestial Circuit is the route of the River Chariot

61 *Zhuangzi*, chapter 6 (“Da zongshi”).

62 The Bubbling Spring (*yongquan*) is located on the soles of the feet.

63 *Xingming guizhi*, “Heng ji,” section 1.

64 *Ruyao jing*, in *Xiuzhen shishu*, chapter 13. (heche); see pp. 71 ff.

65 *Wuzhen pian*, “Lüshi,” poem 13.

66 *Taixi jing zhu*, “Taixi ming.”

67 *Taixi jing zhu*.

68 *Shangqing ji*, in *Xiuzhen shishu*, j. 39.

69 *Shihan ji*, chapter 1 (the quotation is not literal).

70 *Wan Shangfu*, *Tingxin zhai kewen*.

71 *Xian Fo hezong yulu*, “Ji Wang Zhu Taihe shijiu wen,” no. 3.

72 The explanation given by Wang Mu is based on the comments made by Wu Shouyang on his own poem quoted above.

73 These expressions are drawn from *Daode jing*, 16: “Attain ultimate emptiness, guard utmost quiescence.”

74 *Qinghua biwen*, “Jing cong qi shuo.”

75 *Qinghua biwen*, “Zonglun jindan zhi yao.”

76 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” poem 5.

77 *Wuzhen pian*, “Wuyan lüshi.”

78 *Quan Tang shi*, chapter 888.

79 This sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 1.

80 *Huangdi neijing suwen*, “Jingui zhenyan lun.” For the last sentence, see *Daodejing*, 2: “The saint dwells in the deed of non-doing,” and *Daode jing*, 31: “Calm and substance of the Way and its Virtue.” — The reference to “being of benefit to the government” is owed to the fact that, according to tradition, the *Huangdi neijing* was taught to the Yellow Emperor, the first mythical ruler of Chinese history. tranquility are the best.” See also *Zhuangzi*, chapter 15: “Calm and tranquility, silence, emptiness, non-doing: these are the level of Heaven and Earth, the substance of the Way and its Virtue.”

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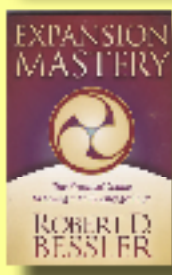
Fabrizio Pregadio has taught at different universities in Italy, Germany, the United States, and Canada. He is currently professor of Daoist Anthropology at the University of Erlangen-Nuremberg. He is the author of “Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China” (Stanford University Press, 2006) and the editor of “The Encyclopedia of Taoism” (Routledge, 2008). In addition to his scholarly activities, he publishes translations of original texts on Taoism and Taoist Internal Alchemy (*Neidan*) addressed to wider audiences. These translations, published by Golden Elixir Press, include the “*Cantong qi*” (Seal of the Unity of the Three); the “*Wuzhen pian*” (Awakening to Reality); the “*Ruyao jing*” (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine); the “*Yinfu jing*” (Scripture of the Hidden Accordance); and “*Cultivating the Tao*”, a work by the great Taoist master, Liu Yiming.



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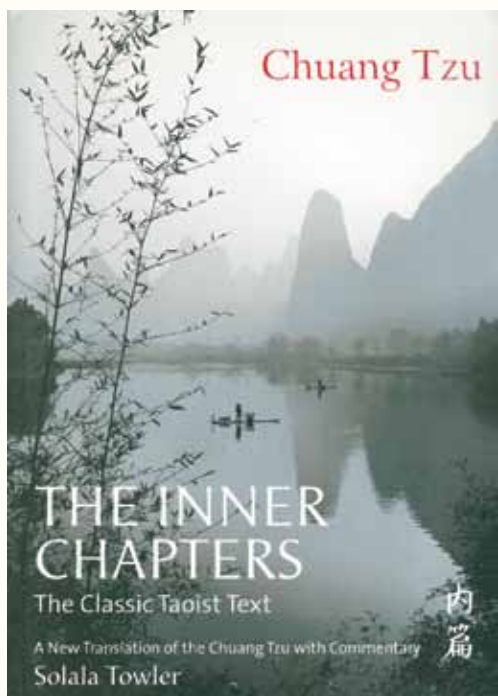
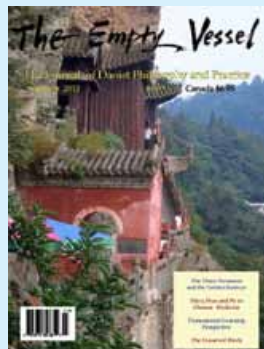
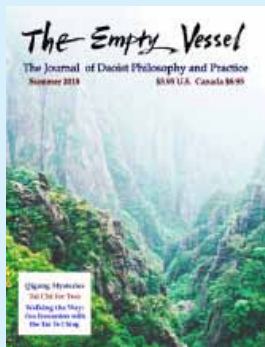
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Yangsheng 養生 and the Yin Style Baguazhang of Wang Fu and Wang Shangzhi

Robert Santee, PhD

Xiu Zhang, Ed.D.



Wang Shangzhi in the basic on guard or sitting tiger position.

Yangsheng (養生) translates as Nourishing Life. It is a general concept and practice which represents a holistic approach to positive health and well-being (physically, psychologically, and interpersonally). The practice of Yangsheng is focused on embracing and living a full and long life in the present, the here and now, as it integrates mind, body, spirit and environment. It addresses and incorporates meditation, physical exercise, stretching, breath-

ing practices, gathering, refining and circulating qi (氣), guiding qi by leading and pulling (daoyin 導引), visualization, diet, sleep, interpersonal relationships, sexual relations, and the practice of moderation (Robinet 1997; Despeux 1989, 2008; Wilms, 2010; Kohn 2008, 2012; Komjathy 2013; Chen 2015, 2015a; Neijing 2015).

Although not believed to be created by Daoists, Yangsheng is, nonetheless, looked upon as being the foundation of all Daoism and Traditional/Classical Chinese Medicine (Robinet 1997, 91; Despeux 2008, 1148; Bisio 2013, 214). Of particular interest is that Yangsheng incorporates nourishing essence (yangjing 養精), nourishing qi (yangqi 養氣) and nourishing spirit (yangshen 養神). These are all fundamental aspects of the Daoist practice of neidan (內丹) or internal alchemy (Robinet 1997; Lu 2009; Komjathy 2014). In addition, practices such as nourishing your nature (yangxing 養性) nourishing yourself (yangji 養己), nourishing your will (yangzhi 養志), and nourishing your fire (yang huo 養火) are subsumed by the concept of Yangsheng.

The following definitions regarding aspects of Yangsheng are from a Daoist dictionary website (Daojiao 2015) and a text on Daoist neidan (Zhang 2003). A fundamental characteristic of Yangsheng that appears to cut across these definitions is silencing, stilling and emptying the mind/heart (xin 心) in the present.

Nourishing Your Fire (yanghuo 養火)

It is a term for internal refinement (neilian 內煉). It is just like nourishing the mind/heart (yangxin 養心). Keeping fit by nourishing essence (jing 精) and spirit (shen 神). Keeping the mind/heart still, silent and not moving is called nourishing fire. Daojiao 2015

Nourishing Your Self (yangji 養己)

It is a term for internal refinement. It is also a name for refining yourself (lianji 煉己). It is cultivating the body and nourishing your nature (yangxing 養性), storing essence (jing 精) and regulating qi (氣). The *Zhouyi Cantong Qi* says: "In order to nourish the self (yangji 養己), you need to be quiet, still and empty so the original concealed brightness will internally illuminate the form of the body." A commentary says, "Nourishing self (yangji 養己) is to cultivate the body and refine the self." Daojiao 2015

Indicates cultivating the body (xiushen 修身) and refining the self (lianji 煉己). The self is separate from the person's original spirit (yuanqi 元神). By cultivating and refining you will succeed in recognizing spirit (shen 神). Being still, quiet and empty is the manner in which you internally nourish the self. Thus you return to the original spirit (yuanqi 元神).

Zhang 2003, 416

Nourishing Your Will (yangzhi 養志)

Restrain lofty ambitions, aspirations, interests, thoughts and sentiments. In the Yielding the Throne (rangwang 讓王) chapter (28) of the *Zhuangzi* it states: Thus to nourish the will (yangzhi 養志) is to forget the body (wangxing 忘形). To nourish the body is to forget gain, profit and self-interest (wangli 忘利). Those who concentrate on Dao, forget the mind/heart (wangxin 忘心)!

Daojiao 2015

Nourishing Your Nature (yangxing 養性)

Is called refining your mind/heart/spirit (xin 心, shen 神).Practicing meditation (rujing 入靜), being tranquil, detached,

and not interfering (wuwei 無為), the person's original nature (benxing 本性) is spontaneously (ziran 自然) nourished (yang 養) within, resulting in the person not being chronically stressed out (depressed, anxious or angry).

Daojiao 2015

Nourishing Your Spirit (yangshen 養神)

A term for internal refinement indicating illuminating and nourishing spiritual clarity by regulating your cognitive processes (attention, concentration, thoughts, thinking, consciousness) and your body (physical exercise). Thus not allowing yourself to be externally distracted. All people wish to nourish their essence (yangjing 養精), but first you must nourish your spirit (yangshen 養神).

Daojiao 2015

Nourishing Your Qi (yangqi 養氣)

A term for refining and nourishing. It indicates keeping fit by authentically nourishing your body internally with qi.

Daojiao 2015

Indicates refining and nourishing qi and spirit. It is the key to forgetting words and protecting what is real (shouzhen 守真). Ancestor Lu's *100 Character Tablet* says: "Nourish Qi, forget words, protect. Tame the mind, act by not acting."

Zhang 2003, 416

The Zhuangzi and Yangsheng

Research indicates that the earliest written document containing the phrase Yangsheng is in the Taoist text, from the 4th-3rd century BCE, known as the *Zhuangzi* (Despeux 2008a, 1152). It is in the third chapter, aptly titled Yangsheng zhu (養生主) or the Fundamentals of Nourishing Life. Guo Xiang's (252-312) commentary to the title of the chapter notes:

Life is that which you preserve and nourish. This is the ultimate principle (li zhi ji 理之極) for those who nourish life (Yangsheng 養生). What does it mean to exceed this ultimate principle? If your nourishing harms, damages or threatens life, this is not the process of nourishing life (Yangsheng 養生).

Guo 1974, 65

Lu Deming's (556-627) Explanation of Characters (Shiwen 釋文) in regard to the title states, "To nourish life is to make it your primary concern" (Guo 1974, 65). Thus both Guo and Lu view Yangsheng as being fundamental to one's existence.

The phrase Yangsheng first occurs in the story of Cook Ding. This story is one of the more well-known and analyzed sections in the *Zhuangzi* (Kohn 2014, 211).

Cook Ding was cutting apart an ox for Duke Wen Hui. A touch of his hand, a lean of his shoulder, a step of his foot, a bend of his knee, Hua, Xiang, the rhythmic slicing of the blade. There was no sound that was not ok, suitable for the Mulberry Grove Dance as well as fit for dealing with leaders.



Master Wang observing/correcting co-author Zhang Xiu

Duke Wen Hui said, “Oh my! Quite good! How did you reach this level of skill? Cook Ding released his knife, faced Lord Wen Hui, and said, “That which I (your subject) am fond of is Dao. It is beyond skill! When I first began cutting apart oxen, I only saw the whole ox. After three years, I did not see the whole ox. Now, in the present, I engage it with Shen (spirit 神) and do not use my eyes to look. My eyes know where to stop and Shen (spirit 神) desires to travel on. In accordance with natural processes and patterns (Tianli 天理), slapping the large gaps, guiding through the large openings, there is no doubt in continuing in this manner. The skill is in not touching the channels where muscle and bone meet, even more so, large bones. A good cook replaces his knife once a year, for he cuts. The clan cook replaces his knife once a month, for he hacks. Now my knife of 19 years has separated 1000 oxen, yet its edge is as if it was newly produced from the whetstone.

Each joint has a gap between it, and the edge of the knife

is without thickness. Using that without thickness to enter that which has a gap, there is vastness indeed for it to travel through. The blade must have room. This knife has been used for 19 years yet its blade is as if it was newly produced from the whetstone.

Nonetheless, every time I reach a knot and see that it is difficult to manage, I am cautious, forbidding my attention from stopping. Moving slowly, with a slight motion of the knife, dismembered, already separate, like dirt discarded on the ground. Raising up my knife and standing, looking in the four directions, pausing, the task complete. The knife is cleaned and is put away.”

Duke Wen Hui said, “Quite good! I have heard the words of Cook Ding, nourishing life (Yangsheng 養生) has been grasped!”

Guo 1974, 66-69



From left, Robert Santee, Master Wang, Zhang Xiu

It is clear from this story that Yangsheng requires a still and empty mind/heart in order to nourish one's life and accomplish a successful and stress free interaction with challenges from the environment. Cook Ding's abilities are beyond mere technique and expertise as he negotiates the emptiness of his mind/heart through the emptiness of the oxen by being in accordance with natural patterns and processes (Kohn 2014, 211-213; Wang 2014, 54-55). He is in harmony with his environment, focused and not distracted. When a new more difficult challenge presents itself, he does not interfere with himself. He is not impulsive. He does not become distracted, agitated, or judgmental. He is patient. He is careful. His mind/heart remains still and empty as he simply and naturally refines his focus, slows down and adapts. He continues to be in harmony with his environment.

For the author of the *Zhuangzi*, the practice of Yangsheng seems very much involved with the natural challenges and physical interactions found in one's environment. In Chapter 19 there are numerous similar tales of Yangsheng, such as the hunchback

catching cicadas, the raising of a fighting rooster, Carpenter Qing, the old man swimming in the water, and craftsman Chui. All are in harmony and integrated with their environment. All demonstrate physical interaction linked to stilling and emptying the mind/heart in order to resolve a challenge in the environment.

What is of fundamental importance for the *Zhuangzi* regarding Yangsheng is having a quiet, still and empty mind/heart in the present. This mind/heart which is not agitated, that is in fact still and empty, is a recurrent theme throughout the *Zhuangzi*. The practice of sitting in forgetfulness/oblivion or zuowang (坐忘) found in Chapter 6 and mind/heart fasting or xinzhai (心齋) found in Chapter 4 are primary examples of this quiet, still and empty mind/heart. In fact, in the presentation of the mirror mind/heart (xin ruo jing 心若鏡) in Chapter 7, the author succinctly sums it all up by simply stating, "Just be empty, that is it!"

Of particular importance, noted in Chapter 6, is that the role model for the *Zhuangzi*, the authentic person or zhenren (真人)

with a still and empty mind/heart, is a healthy, stress free individual who breathes deeply, gets a sound and restful sleep, eats well, physically interacts with the world in a positive manner, and lives out his natural lifespan. This concern for health, freedom from stress, restful sleep, healthy diet, physical and interpersonal interaction in the world, and having a full and natural lifespan, is a prime example suggesting the holistic approach of Yangsheng. In all interactions, physically, psychologically and interpersonally, nourishing life is the primary concern.

Yangsheng and the Huangdi Neijing

While the *Zhuangzi* examines Yangsheng within the context of a person with a quiet, still and empty mind/heart interacting with a challenge in the environment, the *Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine* (Huangdi Neijing 黃帝內經), traditionally dated to the 2nd century BCE, examines Yangsheng from a more expansive, holistic, and proactive approach (physical and psychological) to health, well-being and longevity. The text not only addresses challenges in the environment with a quiet, still and empty mind/heart, it expands Yangsheng to include being in harmony with the changes of yin and yang, diet, sleep, exercise, enjoying life, the practice of moderation in all aspects of life, and adjusting your behavior relative to/being in harmony with the seasonal changes. In Chapter Two of the Simple Questions (Suwen 素問) section it addresses behavior within each of the four seasons. Regarding the Spring it states:

The three months of Spring are called issue forth and display. The sky and the earth produce life together. All things are thriving. At night lie down and go to sleep. Rise up early in the morning, stretch out and take a brisk walk in the courtyard. By issuing energy the body recuperates. This is applying your will (zhi 志) to live and grow. Living and growing you will not weaken. Enjoying life and not punishing yourself. This is responding to the qi (氣) of spring. This is the Tao of nourishing life (Yangsheng 養生).

Neijing 2015

In the First chapter of the Suwen the specifics of nourishing life are presented. The text refers back to the behavior (cognitive, emotional, behavioral, and physical) of those who understood Dao during the ancient times. They are used as the role models for the practice of Yangsheng.

Qibo [the Yellow Emperor's advisor] responding to the Yellow Emperor said, "Amongst the people of ancient times there were those who understood the Tao. They were guided by the continual changes and transformations of yin and yang while being harmonized by the art of calculation (術數). Eating and drinking with moderation. Their daily life was consistent and regular. They did not labor excessively. Thus they were able to integrate their spirit (shen 神) and body (xing 形). Exhausting their natural years reaching 100 years and beyond.

The teachings of the ancient sages that were passed down all said: Be empty of the winds of negativity and deceit. At all times avoid them. Be tranquil and cheerful in emptiness (xu 虛). The authentic qi (zhenqi 真氣) flows freely. Jing and shen (精神) are protected internally. How could illness come through them?

Neijing 2015

Regarding the practice of Yangsheng, what is apparent

in these selections is the necessity of simplifying life, reducing desires, stilling and emptying the mind/heart, practicing moderation in all aspects of life, and being in harmony with the world around you (Santee 2013). In addition, the integration of the three Daoist treasures of jing, qi and shen is quite apparent.

Yangxing Yanming Lu

The *Yangxing yanming lu* (養性延命) or *Records of Nourishing Your Nature and Extending Your Life* is probably the most important compendium of selections on Yangsheng and longevity practices (Kohn 2012, 160). It appears to have been actually constructed during the mid to late Tang dynasty (618-907) with its authorship being unclear. Both Tao Hongming (456-536 CE) and Sun Simiao (581-682) have been associated with it (Despeux 2008b, 1152; Kohn 2012, 160).

The *Yangxing yanming lu* integrates sleep, exercise, daoyin (導引), eating, drinking, meditation, sexual techniques, gathering, refining and circulation of qi, massage, healing, prevention, and developing and maintaining a still and empty mind in one's quest to nourish life and to live a long, healthy, physically and psychologically, existence. It noticeably focuses on the importance of moderation in all aspects of life. Its preface, attributed to Sun Simiao, provides a succinct summary of the practice of nourishing life (Yangsheng 養生).

Human beings receive qi (氣) and contain an internal spiritual force (ling 靈). Only humans are so honored. That which humans honor the most is life (sheng 生). Life is the root of spirit (shen 神). The body is the tool of spirit. If the spirit is greatly used it becomes exhausted. If the body is greatly labored and over worked it dies.

If you are able to let the mind/heart (xin 心) flow in emptiness and stillness, stop worrying and thinking excessively, not interfere (wuwei 無為) with yourself and others, ingest original qi (yuan qi 元氣) after the hour of the rat (子 earthly branch 11 pm- am), regularly practice qi circulation, breathing exercises, and physical exercises of daoyin (導引 (guiding, stretching and leading) in a stress free environment, conserve and nourish your health consistently, eat good food and herbs, then an energetic life of 100 years is most likely. Because of this I am able to still my mind/heart and nonjudgmentally observe my environment.

The valuable collections on Yangsheng (養生) or nourishing life of Zhang Zhan (yangsheng yaoji), the followers of Dao Lin, Zhai Ping and the generations of Huang Shan I have examined. All of these outstanding and marvelous works clearly focus on treasuring the importance of learning and putting what you learn into practice. In addition I have studied the patterns and rules of longevity of the authentic person (zhen ren 真人), and obtained the techniques and arts of Pengzu and Laojun extending back to the time of Nong (the Divine Farmer), and Huangdi (the Yellow Emperor) as well as the time of the Wei and Jin (265-420) dynasties. They are beneficial and advantageous for nourishing life (Yangsheng 養生) as well as avoiding future troubles and worries [physical and psychological problems].

CTCW 2015

Baguazhang

According to a significant amount of research, there is a high degree of probability that Dong Haichuan (c. 1813-1882) created the martial art Baguazhang by integrating Daoist circle walking, Daoist theory, theory and concepts from the Book of Changes (Yijing 易經) such as the understanding that change is fundamental, yin and yang (陰陽) and the eight trigrams (bagua 八卦) with his own training in martial arts (Yin, 1932/2002; Miller, 1992, 14-20; Miller 1993a, 14-20, 1993b, 27-29; Kang 1995, 74; Wang, 1995, 5-11). It is important to note that Baguazhang was not only created as a self-defense, but also simultaneously created as a way of improving and maintaining positive (physically and psychologically) health and well-being. They are both equally important.

The unique, observable aspect of the martial art of Baguazhang (八卦掌) or Eight Trigram Palms is circle walking. While walking the circle the practitioner engages in the unceasing process of change while applying self-defense techniques. While the earliest beginnings of circle walking can be traced back to the shamans where it was used to become in harmony with the universe, contact the spirits, and rise up into the celestial realms (Santee 2009), its linkage to Daoism appears to be with the traditional founder of the Dragon Gate (Longmen 龍門) branch of Complete Reality (Quanzhen 全真) Daoism, Qiu Changchun (1148-1227). According to Miller (1993b, 27-28), Kang Gewu discovered that Qiu Changchun developed a way of meditating by walking in a circle. This circle walking practice has been absorbed into Daoist ritual with the practice of zhuantianzun (轉天尊) or rotating in a circle while respecting *Tian* (Santee 2009, 12-15). This phrase is found in the *Xuanmen Risong Zaowan Gongkejing* (玄門日誦早晚功課經) or The Daoist Morning and Evening Format of the Gongkejing (Xuanmen 2009). The text is used by practitioners of Quanzhen Daoism, and this phrase clearly establishes the link between Baguazhang circle walking, Quanzhen Daoism, zhuantianzun, health, and spirituality (Miller 1993b, 27-28). The *Xuanmen Risong Zaowan Gongkejing* states, regarding the morning services,

Peoples' mind and heart being very scattered and confused,
Focus on the present and all will be pure

Seeking the ultimateless *Dao*,

Everybody should rotate in a circle while respecting *Tian*
(*zhuantianzun*)

Xuanmen 2009

Once again we see the importance of a still and empty mind focused on the present while engaging in physical exercise. Clearly the links between Daoism, Yangsheng, and Baguazhang are becoming quite apparent.

Dong Haichuan and the CircleWalk

The fundamental basis of all of Baguazhang is the circle walk. Dong Haichuan said, "Practicing 100 techniques is not equal to walking the circle. Walking the circle is the ancestor of 100 techniques" (Wang 2001; Wang 1995, 11). Given the importance of circle walking there are many stories about how Dong Haichuan learned how to circle walk.

In one such story (Wang 2001) while Dong is hungry, thirsty, and lost on a mountain in bad weather, he stumbles upon two Dao-

ist priests (daoshi 道士) walking in circles. One Daoist priest was walking around a tree. The other Daoist priest was walking on snow and not leaving any footprints. They put on such a display of martial skills that he could literally feel their spiritual presence. Dong was astounded!

When Dong asked what they were practicing he was told that circle walking was the heart of martial arts. Not understanding he nonetheless asked to be taught. He followed the Daoist priests up to the top of the mountain where he was, based on his sincerity, accepted as a student. After many years of just performing manual labor he was quite discouraged. His patience had worn thin and he was ready to simply leave. But for whatever reason, he persevered, let go of the demons and continued to perform the manual labor. His mind was still and empty! He was in the here and now. At this point the Daoist priests began to teach Dong how to circle walk.

After many years of simply just walking the circle, Dong sensed great strength in his legs. He felt rooted and centered. He was not distracted. He was simply focused on the present. At this point the Daoist priests began to gradually teach him hand techniques, weapon techniques, how to lead his qi (dao qi 導氣), and how to refine his spirit (lian shen 煉神).

Of particular importance in this story is ascertaining the level of commitment of Dong Haichuan, testing his patience, anxiety and perseverance, and not teaching him until his mind calmed, stilled and emptied out. All of these characteristics are fundamental for the practice of Yangsheng.

Dong Haichuan and Yin Fu

While Dong Haichuan had a number of students, his two most famous are Yin Fu 尹福 (1840-1909), essentially his first student and the student who, according Miller (1993c, 5) was with him 8-10 years longer (mid-1860s to mid-1870s) than any other student, and his fourth student Cheng Tinghua 程廷華 (1848-1900). The two major styles of Baguazhang Yin style and Cheng style are named after these two students. Also, unlike any other martial art, Dong, according to tradition, required potential students to be proficient in another martial art before he would teach them Baguazhang. He would then customize his teaching contingent upon the martial arts background of the student.

The Yin style of Baguazhang reflects Yin Fu's background in the Shaolin/Luohan (少林/羅漢) tradition. The hand position, where the fingers are touching and held straight out with the thumb curled in front of the palm, is the *niushe zhang* (牛舌掌) or ox tongue palm for fast, quick, and firm striking and penetration. The footwork is more natural, heel to toe, with little attention to excessive koubu or hooking in and baibu or hooking out (Wang 2001). In addition, also reflecting Yin's background in the Shaolin/Luohan tradition, there are linear forms in the Yin style of Baguazhang.

Yangsheng, Yin Baguazhang and Wang Fu

Wang Fu (1919-2002), 3rd generation of Yin style Baguazhang

began studying Baguazhang under Yin Yuzhang (1890-1950) 2nd generation Yin style, the fourth son of Yin Fu, at the age of six. Wang's classmate and martial art brother was He Zhongqi (1907-1989), the grandson of Yin Fu. He Zhongqi's parents, both 2nd generation experts in Yin style Baguazhang, were Yin Fu's daughter Yin Jinyu (1867-1956) and her husband He Jinkui (1869-1933).

According to Wang family history, Wang Fu was a descendant of a Chinese noble family as his maternal grandfather Luo Xingyuan was a royal medical officer in the Forbidden City. Wang Fu was not only a famous martial artist in Beijing, he also was trained in Chinese medicine and was an orthopedic expert. In 1950, after he graduated from college in 1945, he established the first private but free Peking opera school in Beijing with his own money. He was the founder and the first president of the Beijing Longevity Club. He also was the author of *Longevity Methods and Exercise* (Changshou Gong 寿功) and *Yin Style Bagua Palm* (Yin Shi Baguazhang 尹式八卦掌).

In the Yin style of Baguazhang there is a circle walk exercise where the student puts the upper body and arms in a specific position, maintains this position and then walks the circle in counterclockwise direction. After a specified number of revolutions, the student turns around to walk in a clockwise direction, for the same number of revolutions, with the body and hands changing accordingly to reflect a mirror image of the previous upper body position. This process is repeated seven more times with different body and hand positions. There are a total of eight basic body and hand positions, taken by the student during the circle walk, with each one stimulating various meridians allowing the qi to flow in an unobstructed manner. During the entire process the eyes focus on and then beyond the hand positions. The mind/heart must remain still and empty during the entire circle walk. This exercise is called Yangsheng or Nourishing Life (养生). In the Yin Shi Baguazhang Yangsheng Zhuanzhang Ba Shi (尹式八卦掌养生 掌八式) or "Nourishing Life Through the Eight Changing Palm Forms of Yin Style Baguazhang" section of his book, Wang (2001) describes the benefits of this Yangsheng.

Practicing Baguazhang is not only intended for physical exercise, developing and enhancing martial skills, both attacking and defending, but also for effectively improving one's health and invigorating one's body. Master Dong Haichuan said, "Practicing 100 techniques is not equal to walking the circle. Walking the circle is the ancestor of practicing 100 techniques."

The eight forms of Baguazhang's Yangsheng Changing Palms are suitable to engage in exercise for a person of any age, gender, occupation, body structure and temperament. It adopts methods of changing palms while walking in a circle. While engaged in the physical exercise of moving in a circle, the four limbs and joints are adjusted, blood circulation is increased, metabolism is promoted, and immunity is enhanced. By means of breathing it brings about the adjustment of the yin and yang motion of qi, thus causing the qi channels (jingmai 经脉) or meridians to clear.

As well as attaining a spiritual glow, preventing and curing disease, resisting weakness, slowing aging, **Yangsheng** is an effective method for improving one's health and invigorating the body.

Wang (2001) provides further linkage between Baguazhang, Yangsheng, circle walking, and Daoism in the "Circle Walking Strengthens and Enhances the Body, the Joints, and Vitality" (zou

zhang zengqiang renti guanjie huoli 走掌增强人体关活力) section of his book. The references to linking up the renmai (任脉) or the conception meridian and dumai (督脉) or the governing meridian and thus establishing the microcosmic orbit (xiao zhoutian 小周天), and the nourishing of jing, qi, and shen are fundamental aspects for the internal alchemy practices of Quanzhen (全真) or Complete Reality Daoism (Komjathy 2013, 218-219).

Place your tongue on your upper palate, breathe through your nose, pull up your anus and tuck your buttocks. This will allow your renmai (任脉) and dumai (督脉) to connect, and regulate the qi all over your body. Adopting the practice of the Baguazhang circle walking will adjust and develop your entire body's skeleton, your joints, your muscles, your nerves, and your blood vessels. It is very good in enhancing the function of all of these areas. In the course of practicing Baguazhang your meridians (jingmai 精脉) will be clear and unobstructed and your qi and blood will both flourish and be vigorous, by which you will nourish your jing (养精), qi (养气) and shen (养神).

As has been noted throughout this article, having a mind/heart which is still and empty is essential to the practice of Yangsheng and Daoism. Throughout his text, Wang (2001) notes that it is critical to have a mind/heart that is still and empty. Otherwise you simply cannot learn Baguazhang or receive all of its martial, health, well-being and longevity benefits. In the Talking About "Demons" section of his book he provides a list of the "demons" or self-generated negative thoughts, emotions and behaviors that clutter, fill, and agitate your mind/heart.

If you are able to grasp the essence of Baguazhang and truly master it, when you apply it the transformations and changes are endless, inexhaustible and ceaseless. However if..... your mind/heart is not empty it cannot be done.

Yangsheng, Yin Baguazhang and Wang Shangzhi.

In May 2011, China's internal martial art of Baguazhang was designated as a National Intangible Cultural Heritage (Chinese Cultural News 2011). In June 2012, Wang Shangzhi (1947-), Wang Fu's son and 4th generation Yin style Baguazhang master, was designated by the government to be a representative for Yin style Baguazhang (YFB 2015). Wang Shangzhi is essentially a living treasure in China.

Wang Shangzhi learned Baguazhang from his father, Wang Fu, from the time he was very young. Wang also learned Baguazhang from He Zhongqi, the grandson of Yin Fu. He Zhongqi transmitted all aspects of Baguazhang to Wang Shangzhi such as circle walking, palm changes, open hand techniques, kicking techniques, weapons, and Yangsheng. Wang Shangzhi mastered all the aspects of Yin style Baguazhang. His lineage for Baguazhang is clearly linked all the way back to Yin Fu and Dong Haichuan.

Wang Shangzhi is a retired engineer. He is the executive vice-president of the Beijing Longevity Club, and Vice President/Committee Member of the Beijing Baguazhang Research Association. He has been consulted many times as a representative of Yin style Bagua for the creation of Wushu educational films as well as Wushu books. He wrote the 72 *Baguazhang Chi Na Methods of Dong Haichuan*.

He has also made the 10 part VCD series *Yin Style Baguazhang* published by People's Sports Audio-Visual Publishing Agency (Renmin Tiyu Yinxiang Chubanshe).

Wang Shangzhi is dedicated and committed to the transmission of the Yin style of Baguazhang. In carrying forward his cultural heritage, Wang Shangzhi is determined to pass on the treasures of Yin style Baguazhang.

The Lecture

In December 2013, in Honolulu, prior to conducting his three day workshop reviewing the fundamentals of Baguazhang, especially circling walking, and the teaching of the Yin style Seven Star Staff, Master Wang presented a public lecture. Xiu Zhang provided the translation from Chinese to English for the audience as Master Wang does not speak English. One of the questions from the audience was "Where does the power of Baguazhang come from? How is it generated?" Master Wang smiled, looked at his brother Wang Shangxin (1951-), also a Master of Yin Baguazhang, who smiled back and then said. "The power comes from walking the circle!" He also noted that Dong Haichuan had said that "Practicing 100 techniques is not equivalent to walking the circle. Circle walking is the master and ancestor of all techniques." The audience member persisted by asking, "How do you learn this? What is its source or mechanism?" Master Wang said, "It is discovered through consistently walking the circle. The essence and power of Baguazhang is naturally revealed to you over time as a result of your practice. It cannot be given or shown to you. You must discover it yourself through walking the circle. Of course, you must be properly trained in how to walk."

The Workshops

During the December 2013 workshop in Honolulu, Master Wang focused on the importance of walking the circle. While walking the circle students were told to send their yi (意) intention/focus beyond their fingertips across the Pacific Ocean. In other words while walking the circle you are 100% committed to your practice. Your mind/heart is still and empty. You are not distracted. You are focused. You are fully integrated in the here and now. As you walk the circle in this manner, you are engaged in the practice of nourishing life or Yangsheng.

From November 2014 through January 5, 2015 Master Wang was back in Honolulu conducting a series of workshops on Yin style Baguazhang. The first three day workshop focused on circle walking as expressed through the Yin Shi Baguazhang Yangsheng Zhuanzhang Ba Shi (尹式八卦掌养生掌八式) or "Nourishing Life Through the Eight Changing Palm Forms of Yin Style Baguazhang." All subsequent workshops began with the Nourishing Life (Yangsheng) circle walk for a minimal time of 30 minutes.

Conversations

Between November 2014 and January 5, 2015 a series of conversations with Master Wang occurred regarding all aspects of Baguazhang. For Xiu Zhang, who is a 5th generation disciple of

Master Wang, these conversations occurred daily. Conversations with Robert Santee were all translated by Xiu Zhang. A number of these conversations focused on Yangsheng. Regarding Baguazhang and Yangsheng, Master Wang made the following points:

Although the practice of Nourishing Life (Yangsheng) Through the Eight Changing Palm Forms of Yin Style Baguazhang is a foundational practice and specifically refers to Yangsheng, Yangsheng is not restricted only to this exercise, is applicable to the entire practice of Baguazhang.

All the twisting and turning, coiling and uncoiling of the entire body while practicing Baguazhang nourishes life (Yangsheng) and is beneficial to one's overall health and well-being both physically and psychologically.

All the joints will become flexible. It will adjust vertebrae by turning the head and waist while holding the tail bone stationary. As the muscles twist and relax the blood vessels will be massaged thus strengthening the vessels and increasing circulation. All the movements can stimulate the entire body's acupuncture points causing the body to relax while at the same time strengthening the muscles and allowing qi to circulate without obstructions. The mental focus along with deep breathing will still, empty and relax the mind while increasing lung capacity. All the turns and changes while walking in circles or in the forms will improve and maintain good balance.

While Yangsheng is clearly holistic, physically and psychologically, in nature, the most important aspect of Yangsheng is stilling and emptying your mind/heart while you are in the present.

Conclusion

Yangsheng and Daoism are clearly integrated in the art of Baguazhang. The proactive holistic emphasis on overall positive health and well-being, physically and psychologically, is fundamental for all three. The core focus of all three is on stilling and emptying the mind/heart in the present. As a still and empty mind/heart is free from chronic stress, it will be naturally nourished.

To nourish life requires a proactive attitude, commitment, motivation, appropriate guidance, and probably most important of all, consistent regular practice. It entails a lifestyle change. Baguazhang is one such lifestyle change and pathway to nourishing life.

Notes

Translations from the written Chinese are by Santee and Zhang. All oral translations from the Chinese are by Zhang.

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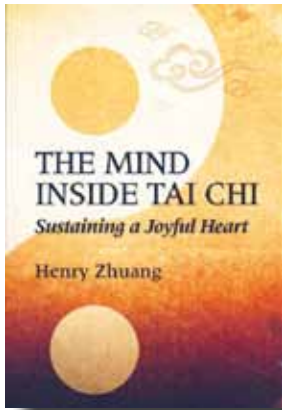
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Robert is a Professor of Psychology at Chaminade University in Honolulu, Hawaii. He is the author of *An Integrative Approach to Counseling: Bridging Chinese Thought, Evolutionary Theory, and Stress Management* (Sage 2007) and *The Tao of Stress: How to Calm, Balance, and Simplify Your Life* (New Harbinger Publications 2013). He has been a practitioner/student of Baguazhang under the guidance/instruction of Xiu Zhang for 10 years. He challenges his ability to keep his mind/heart still and empty by interacting with his grandchildren Liliana, Cameron, Kalani, Payson, Emma, Lauren, and the newly arrived Keiriko.

Xiu holds a doctorate in Instructional Leadership. She is President and Head Coach of the Hawaii Wushu Center. Born in China, she began her wushu training at age 6 and won numerous awards in many Chinese regional and national level wushu competitions. A graduate in Chinese Martial Arts from Beijing Sports University, she is a first degree wushu judge. She co-authored "Chinese Martial Arts Exercises", Beijing Physical Education University Press, China, 1997. She is a disciple of Yin family Baguazhang Master Shangzhi Wang.

Reviews



The Mind Inside Tai Chi: Sustaining a Joyful Heart

by Henry Zhuang

YMAA Publications

Softcover, 154 pages, \$16.95

I love the line on the back of the book that says: "Tai Chi's big reward is a joyful heart." For far too many people, practicing tai chi or qigong are very serious things instead of a way to connect with the deep joy of the heart. The author also says: "Get ready to make tai chi a happy lifelong experience."

Learning a movement practice from a book is always problematic but the author covers not only the fundamentals of taijiquan but also the essentials of the mind during the practice.

For beginning taijiquan enthusiasts who want to enter the real world of taijiquan, it is not merely the will to practice taijiquan just as taiji acrobatics, but to learn the subtlety of the use of internal force and power; one must learn the mind approach of the internal power, in which the inner qi is of major importance.

I tend to approach each book like this as another teacher on the Way. Whatever nuggets of wisdom or inspiration I can glean from them is another opportunity to learn something new, take another step on the road to freedom, which brings me closer to true knowledge. This is just such a book.

New Visions of the Zhuangzi

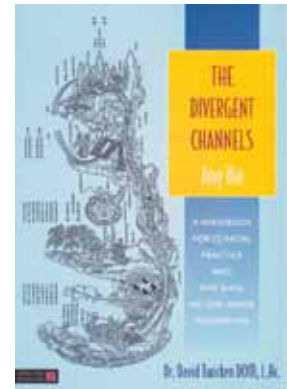
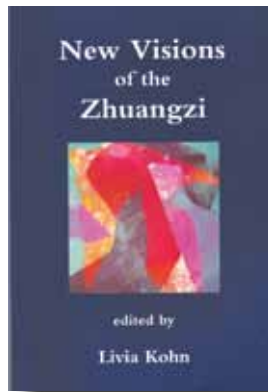
edited by Livia Kohn

Three Pines Press

Softcover, 220 pages, \$34.95

This book, a collection of essays about this important Taoist text, is for the serious student of Taoism. With titles such as Zhuangzi's Weiwuwei Epistemology, Layers of Ineffability in the Zhuangzi and Forget or not Forget? The Neurophysiology of Zuowang, this book is not for the causal reader.

But there is much to glean from the pages of this book for someone who wants to delve deeply into this text, which



after the *Tao Te Ching*, is the most important book of Taoism.

From the back cover:

A collection of thirteen essays on Zhuangzi, this presents new angles and approaches. It overcomes the traditional division of schools in favor of topics, sheds new light on key notions, examines Zhuangzi's relation to language, and explores issues of ethics, virtue and perfection. It also applies modern neuroscience to its instructions, explores its vision of the mind, and connects Zhuangzi's teachings to issues of education and community today.

For the serious reader who wishes to learn more about how modern thinkers and philosophers work with this invaluable text.

The Divergent Channels: A Handbook for Clinical Practice and Five Shen Nei Dan Inner Meditation

by David Twicken

Singing Dragon

Softcover, 224 pages, \$39.95

Another great title from Singing Dragon by an old friend and contributor to *The Empty Vessel*. I feel that it is always helpful and even important for teachers and students of qigong and Taoist Practice to have some knowledge of Chinese medicine. To find an author that writes about the Eight Extraordinary Meridians and who also understands and teaches Taoist Nei Dan practices is rare.

I especially enjoyed the last chapters of the book, which cover Nei Dan meditation practices. The author of this book joins other authors, teachers, and practitioners in making an important contribution to the growth and evolution of Taoist traditions.

As previously mentioned, a little knowledge of how Chinese medicine works and how it is connected to the inner practices of Nei Dan is of primary importance for anyone thinking of becoming an instructor of qigong and Taoist meditation. This is book is a good beginning place for that education.

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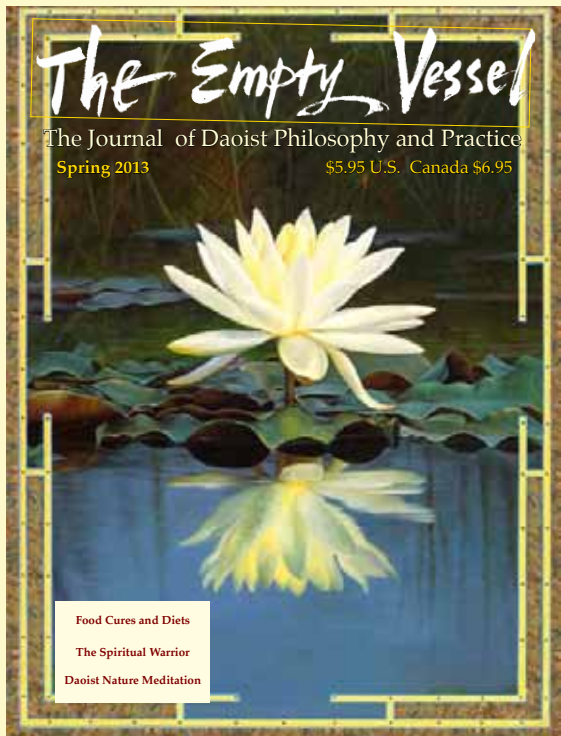
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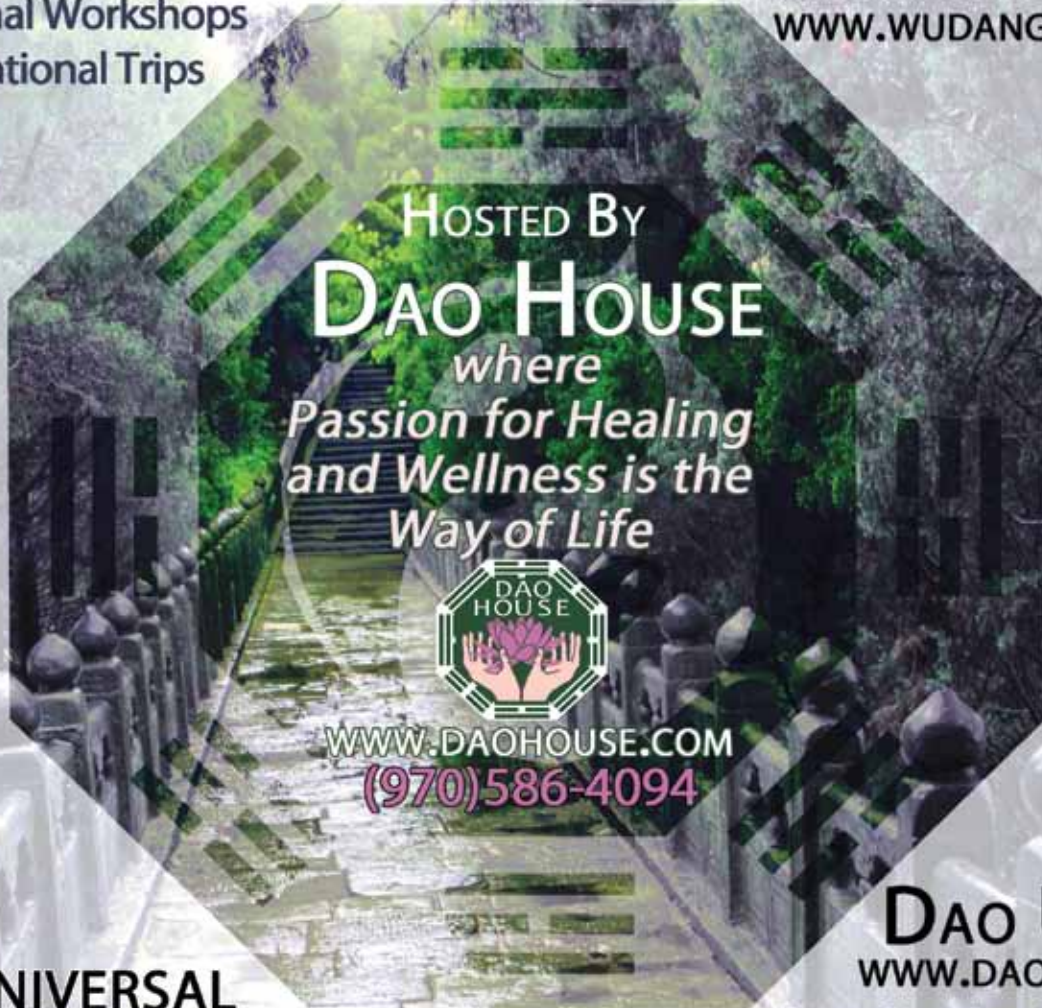
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