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Chapter One

Mystics in Training: Living the Daoist Body[1]

> Lord Lao said: A long human life lasts for a hundred years, but with proper moderation and preservation, one can extend that to a thousand. It is like the wax of a candle: use it sparingly and it will last long.
>
> The multitude are full of great words—I speak only little. They have many vexations—I hardly remember anything. They are aggressive and violent—I never get angry.
>
> I don't let my mind get entangled in human affairs; I don't pursue the work of service or employment. Serene and at peace, I rest in nonaction, my spirit and *qi* spontaneously satisfied. This truly is the medicine of no-death. (*Yangxing yanming lu* 1.7b)

The Daoist body has been studied widely and from many perspectives ever since Kristofer Schipper's seminal article of the same title (1978). Scholars have examined it as a microcosm of the greater universe and a replica of social and administrative systems (Kohn 1991b), inquired into its cosmic inner landscape and presentation in charts and diagrams (Despeux 1994; Komjathy 2008), described the gods that inhabit it in various forms and shapes (Homann 1971; Robinet 1993; Saso 1995; Kroll 1996; Bumbacher 2001), and placed it into the active co of Daoist organization and ritual (Schipper 1994; Andersen 1994; Saso 1997). In a less cosmological or social dimension, they have also paid increasingly close attention to its transformation through Daoist self-cultivation, most importantly with the help of diets and fasting (Levi 1983; Arthur 2006), sexual hygiene and internal alchemy (Wile 1992; Winn 2006), breath control and the absorption of *qi* (Engelhardt 1989; Despeux 2006; Jackowicz 2006), physical stretches and other exercises (Kohn 2008a), as well as various modern Daoist-inspired

[1] This paper was presented at the Conference on Daoist Studies, held in October 2008 at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, Canada.

practices such as qigong and taiji quan (Kohn 2005; Bidlack 2006; Komjathy 2006).

All these various studies have in common that they focus largely on the Daoist body as a unique, cosmic, and powerful entity that relates the person directly to Dao. It stands aside from other body visions and modes of relating to physical reality, be they Western, indigenous, or even classically Chinese. The impression is thus created that the body in Daoism is only relevant for highly specialized practitioners and is first and foremost a way of transforming the self toward oneness with Dao. While this is certainly the case, it only reflects one part of the larger picture, which also includes the Daoist body as a living, breathing, and interactive entity within the larger context of Chinese (and increasingly modern Western) society.

In other words, there is a dimension to the Daoist body that underlies the more advanced visions and practices associated with it: the body that Daoists live in their day-to-day life—Daoists here being not only the reclusive specialists of the monasteries and the would-be immortals of the deep wilderness but also lay followers and general practitioners. This body, too, has to be treated as a holy vessel and with great care, and texts provide ample advice on how to relate to it psychologically, how to use it ethically among other beings, and how to treat it with care, dignity, and moderation in various lifestyle modes. These texts, it turns out, although contained in the Daoist canon, are not of the highly esoteric and mysterious quality often associated with medieval Daoist documents. Rather, they also appear in medical classics and actively participate in the tradition of Chinese longevity or nourishing life (*yangsheng* 養生), which began as the preventative branch of Chinese medicine in the Han dynasty and only gradually merged with hermit practices to form part of the Daoist tradition.

A major compendium of relevant passages is the *Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命錄 (On Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life, DZ 838; *Yunji qiqian* 32.1a-24b), a summary of nourishing life practices in six sections that is linked with various masters in the bibliographies but is most likely a work of Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581-682) or his disciples.[2] Many passages in the text also appear in Sun's *Qianjin fang* 千金方 (Priceless Prescriptions) and other medical works of the

[2] A complete Japanese translation with ample annotation appears in Mugitani 1987. Sections 2 and 3 on diet and taboos are translated in Switkin 1987. Sections 4 and 5 on *qi*-absorption and daoyin are rendered in Jackowicz 2003. For a brief discussion, see Schipper and Verellen 2004, 345-47.

early Tang. Its overall outlook and dominant tendencies, moreover, match Sun's other writings on life extension, such as the *Baosheng ming* 保生銘 (On Preserving Life, DZ 835), a concise treatise extolling moderation, a regular lifestyle, and virtuous attitudes; the *Fushou lun* 福壽論 (On Happiness and Long Life, DZ 1426), a presentation of the workings of fate and various ways to enhance it; [3] the *Sheyang lun* 攝養論 (On Preserving and Nourishing [Life], DZ 841), an account of dietary and other health methods for each of the twelve months of the year; and the *Zhenzhong ji* 枕中記 (Pillowbook Record, DZ 837, *Yunji qiqian* 33.1a-12a; see Engelhardt 1989), a collection of longevity techniques in five sections that also emphasizes ethical and lifestyle aspects.

In addition, the *Yangxing yanming lu* contains numerous passages that also appear in the chapter on longevity in the Japanese medical collection *Ishinpō* 醫心方 (Essential Medical Methods; trl. Hsia et al. 1986) of the year 984, thus replicating a classic pattern of medieval materials, notably surviving from fourth-century south China. Among them the most important is the *Yangsheng yaoji* 養生要集 (Long Life Compendium) by the aristocrat and official Zhang Zhan 張湛, better known as the first and most important commentator to the *Liezi* 列子 (Book of Master Lie; trl. Graham 1960), which supports a similar view of the body.[4]

Beyond this, there are also several treatises in the Daoist canon, such as two lifestyle advisories based on Ge Hong's 葛洪 (283-343) *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185; trl. Ware 1966). They are the *Pengzu shesheng yangxing lun* 彭祖攝生養性論 (Preserving Life and Nourishing Inner Nature As Practiced by Pengzu, DZ 840; abbr. *Pengzu lun*) and the *Baopuzi yangsheng lun* 抱朴子養生論 (Nourishing Life According to the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 842; abbr. *Yangsheng lun*). Although in title and edition linked with esoteric Daoist and hermit traditions and probably compiled on the basis of eremitic documents (see Schipper and Verellen 2004, 362, 357), they closely match Zhang Zhan's attitude and

[3] This is probably the same as the *Fulu lun* 福錄論 (On Happiness and Prosperity), ascribed to Sun in the early bibliographies (Sivin 1968, 132). On these two texts, see Schipper and Verellen 2004, 535, 743.

[4] The *Yangsheng yaoji* survives only in fragments, many found in the *Ishinpō*. The fragments are collected, translated, and analyzed in Stein 1999. For more on the text, see also Sakade 1986.

recommendations. Like other longevity texts, they do not speak of mountain isolation, alchemical elixirs, ecstatic visions, or radical transformation, but rather emphasize the need for moderation, ethical behavior, and personal care in daily life, thus helping to create a comprehensive vision of how best to live the Daoist body. Another, slightly more technical text that yet includes much of the same information is the *Shenxian shiqi jin'gui miaolu* 神仙食氣金櫃妙錄 (Wondrous Record of the Golden Casket on the Spirit Immortals' Practice of Eating *Qi*, DZ 836, 16a; abbr. *Jin'gui lu*), which may go back to the fourth century.[5]

Fundamental Attitudes

The most important attitude to develop in living the Daoist body is a sense of destiny and one's place in the large scheme of things. Thus Sun Simiao notes in his *Fushou lun* that health and long life are functions of good fortune. As such they relate directly to one's karma and inherited patterns and also depend on the good and bad deeds one performs in life (1b). The key to goodness, aside from accumulating "hidden virtues" by doing good deeds that may not even be recognized, is to appreciate one's standing within the greater scheme of things or to remain within one's allotment (fen 分)—an important concept in the *Zhuangzi* interpretation of Guo Xiang (d. 312) who defines it as the "share" one has in Dao which manifests in one's inner nature (*xing* 性) and combines it with "principle" (*li* 理), the determining factor of one's social setting and outward circumstances, described in terms of destiny (*ming* 命).[6] For Sun Simiao, the "share" or "lot" means one's entire position in the greater universe, including things such as rank and status, carriages and horses, wives and concubines, servants and slaves, houses and residences, silks and brocades, clothes and garments, food and drink, as well as profit in business (2a-3b).

[5] The *Jin'gui lu* is ascribed to Master Jingli 京里 or Jinghei 京黑 who supposedly lived in the fourth century. The text may be a Tang compilation but in contents predates the Sui. See Loon 1984, 130; Schipper and Verellen 2004, 355. A modern Chinese presentation is found in Ma 1999.

[6] On Guo Xiang and his understanding of share and destiny, see Robinet 1983; Knaul 1985a; 1985b; Kohn 1992a.

Continuing his essay, Sun emphasizes that it is most important to gain a basic understanding of how Dao works in the world, so that one can discern when to move forward and when to retreat, when to accumulate more and when to leave well alone. He then distinguishes nine different kinds of people:

> Sages who embody Dao in nonaction;
> worthies who know some misfortunes but do not cheat to avoid them;
> accomplished ones who obey destiny and do go beyond their level;
> faithful people who guard their faith and rest in calm tranquility;
> benevolent folk who are modest and diligent, caring and circumspect;
> knights dedicated in service who always maintain respect;
> ordinary people who observe the principles but are careless in implementation;
> ignorant ones who are obstinate and egotistic and pay no attention to Dao;
> small men who actively go against Dao, busy without thinking in larger terms (1a).

Sun then notes that one should examine oneself to see which category fits, then cultivate the attitude of the next higher level, so that one ends up with clear perception and a dedication to service, benevolence, and destiny. Whatever good fortune, moreover, one may find, one should keep a sense of detachment: "Reside in wealth and not love it, reside in nobility and not cherish it" (4b).

As regards the body, Sun Simiao in his *Zhenzhong ji* further specifies that one should nurture one's spirit by maintaining an attitude of awe and care. Awe and care, as the *Jin'gui lu* already says, "are the gateway of life and death, the key to rites and good teaching, the cause of existing and perishing, the root of good and bad fortune, as well as the prime source of all auspicious and inauspicious conditions" (14b). If lost, moreover, "the mind will be confused and not cultivated, the body will be hectic and not at peace, the spirit will be scattered, the *qi* will go beyond all bounds, and will and intention will be deluded" (14b). This condition, which we would describe as stress today, is accordingly the ultimate antithesis to long life and the preservation of health. Sun continues along these lines and defines the first principle of "prudence" in terms of awe and care, which he defines further as

the basis of all moral actions and virtuous thoughts. This quality creates great benefit. As the *Zhenzhong ji* has:

> One who is able to understand these things is safe from harm by dragons when traveling on water, and cannot be hurt by tigers or rhinoceroses when traveling on land. Weapons cannot wound him, nor can contagious diseases infect him. Slander cannot destroy his good name, nor the poisonous stings of insects do him harm. (Sivin 1968, 118; Engelhardt 1989, 281)[7]

To maintain prudence, moreover, the other great principle Sun expounds is moderation: one should avoid overindulgence in food and drink as well as other sensual and sexual pleasures, observing instead guidelines for healthy living. The principle of moderation goes back far in the literature and is the key topic of most longevity texts, from Ge Hong's work all through the middle ages.[8] A major way in which the texts express it is in the format of twelve things to do only in "little" increments. They are:

Think little, reflect little, laugh little, speak little, enjoy little, anger little, delight little, mourn little, like little, dislike little, engage little, deal little.

> If you think much, the spirit will disperse.
> If you reflect much, the heart will be labored.
> If you laugh much, the organs and viscera will soar up.
> If you speak much, the Ocean of Qi will be empty and vacant.
> If you enjoy much, the gall bladder and bladder will take in outside wind.
> If you get angry much, the fascia will push the blood around.
> If you delight much, the spirit and heart will be deviant and unsettled.
> If you mourn much, the hair and whiskers will dry and wither.
> If you like much, the will and qi will be one-sided and overloaded.
> If you dislike much, the essence and power will race off and soar away.
> If you engage yourself much, the muscles and meridians will be tense and nervous.
> If you deal much, wisdom and worry will all be confused.

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[7] See also *Yangxing yanming lu* 1.2b.

[8] It plays also a key role in Xi Kang's 稀康 *Yangsheng lun* 養生論 (On Nourishing Life). See Henricks 1983.

> All these attack people's lives worse than axes and spears; they diminish people's destiny worse that wolves and wolverines. [9]

In other words, harmony with Dao manifests itself in mental stability and physical wellness, and any form of agitation or sickness indicates a decline in one's alignment with the forces of nature. The various mental activities and strong emotions will harm key psychological forces and thus bring about a diminishing of *qi*, which takes one further away from Dao and reduces life. As the *Yangsheng yaoji* says: "Dao is *qi*. By preserving *qi* you can attain Dao, and through attaining Dao you can live long. Spirit is essence. By preserving essence you can reach spirit brightness, and once you have spirit brightness, you can live long" (23.17ab; Stein 1999, 172). [10]

Citing the ancient immortal Pengzu, the *Yangsheng yaoji* further details its instructions on moderation by pointing out that heavy clothing and thick comforters, spicy foods and heavy meats, sexual attraction and beautiful women, melodious voices and enticing sounds, wild hunting and exciting outings, as well as all strife for success and ambition will inevitably lead to a weakening of the body and thus a reduction in life expectancy (Stein 1999,178; also in *Yangxing yanming lu* 1.10b-11a). Along the same lines, the *Yangsheng lun* has a set of six exhortations to release mental strain and sensory involvement. It says:

> 1. Let go of fame and profit.
> 2. Limit sights and sounds.
> 3. Moderate material goods and wealth.
> 4. Lessen smells and tastes.
> 5. Eliminate lies and falsehood.
> 6. Avoid jealousy and envy. (1b)

In other words, to successfully live the Daoist body, one must place oneself firmly in the larger context of universal transformation and individual destiny, understand self and body as manifestations of Dao

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[9] The version translated here appears in *Yangsheng yaoji* as cited in *Ishinpō* 29 (Stein 1999, 170-71). It is also found in *Yangsheng lun* 1b-2a and *Jin'gui lu* 16a. In the enviroment of Sun Simiao, it is cited as from the *Xiaoyou jing* in *Yangxing yanming lu* 1.5b.

[10] The *Yangxing yanming lu* similarly notes: "Life is the foundation of spirit; the body is its tool. If you use spirit a lot, it will be exhausted; if you exert the body a lot, it will perish" (pref.1a).

and *qi*, and maintain an attitude of fundamental goodness and moderation in all things—both physical and psychological. As the *Zhuangzi* says: "Focus on the essence of life and do not trouble yourself with what life cannot do" (ch. 19; Watson 1968, 197).

Ethical Behavior

The clearest discussion of ethical guidelines in relation to bodily well-being appears in Sun Simiao's *Zhenzhong ji*, in the second section after "Prudence" under the heading "Prohibitions." Here Sun encourages closer alignment with Dao by observing moral precepts, temporal taboos, and dietetic regulations. Presenting a set of ten precepts, he says that one should stringently avoid:

> 1. licentiousness
> 2. stealing and doing evil
> 3. intoxication
> 4. uncleanliness
> 5. eating the meat of the zodiac animal corresponding to the year of one's father's birth
> 6. eating the meat of the zodiac animal corresponding to the year of one's own birth
> 7. eating any meat at all
> 8. eating raw food or the five strong vegetables[11]
> 9. killing a sentient being, including even insects and worms
> 10. urinating while facing north (Yunji qiqian 33.6a; Engelhardt 1989, 284)

These ten precepts include first of all the classic five precepts against killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and intoxication, central in both Daoist and Buddhist ethics as well as in moral systems all over

[11] The five strong vegetables (*wuxin* 五辛) are onions, leeks, scallions, chives, and garlic, all plants in the genus *Allium* (Anderson and Anderson 1977, 328). Yang-enhancing and warming foods, they serve as important herbal remedies in the Chinese pharmacopoeia (see Stuart 1976) and were originally part of the diet of Daoist hermits and immortals, who used them to replace grains and ordinary nourishment. They were prohibited in Daoist communities because their consumption was seen as leading to diminished purity of the organs and could result in socially obnoxious phenomena, such as bad breath and flatulence, which in turn might have a negative impact on discipline and community cohesion (Kohn 2003, 127).

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the world, thus often called the great universal rules (see, e.g., Gert 1970). In Daoism, they feature most prominently in the *Laojun jiejing* 老君戒經 (Precepts of Lord Lao, DZ 784) of the late fifth century. Here each precept has a distinct impact on a certain aspect of the body, as punishment for every breach is meted out through its corresponding organ as defined in the system of the five phases:

> The precept to abstain from killing belongs to the east. It embodies the *qi* of Germinating Life and honors natural growth. People who harm and kill living beings will receive corresponding harm in their livers.
>
> The precept to abstain from stealing belongs to the north. It embodies the essence of Great Yin and presides over the resting and storing of nature. People who steal will receive corresponding calamities in their kidneys.
>
> The precept to abstain from sexual misconduct belongs to the west. It embodies the material power of Lesser Yin and preserves the purity and strength of men and women. People who delight in licentiousness will receive corresponding foulness in their lungs.
>
> The precept to abstain from intoxication belongs to the south and the phase fire. It embodies the *qi* of Great Yang and supports all beings in their full growth. People who indulge in drink will receive corresponding poison in their hearts.
>
> The precept to abstain from lying belongs to the center and the phase earth; its virtue is honesty. People who lie will receive corresponding shame in their spleens. (14a-15a; Kohn 1994; 2004, 32, 150)

The way this works, as outlined in the *Zhengyi wujie pin* 正一五戒品 (Five Precepts of Orthodox Unity; in *Wushang biyao* [DZ 1138], 45.16b), is through the senses and psychological agents associated with the five organs:

liver	eyes	spirit souls
kidneys	ears	essence
lungs	nose	material souls
heart	mouth	spirit
spleen	body	intention

As people indulge in activities involving the five senses, they engage and labor the five psychological agents. For example, “the eyes desire

to see the five colors; overwhelmed by color, the spirit souls are labored" (16b). As a result, the five organs do not function properly and induce the person to engage in further sensory excesses which lead to violations of the precepts. Vice versa, as people violate the precepts, the five psychological agents are more exhausted and cannot maintain a proper spirit presence in the organs which duly fall ill, leading to the karmic consequences of sickness, misfortune, and eventually death.

The *Yangxing yanming lu* expresses a similar concept when it says:

> The reason why diseases arise is because of the five exertions. Once these are present, they will affect the two organs of the heart and kidneys which will in turn be subject to wayward *qi*. Then organs and viscera will equally become diseased. [3b] The five exertions are [creating exertion through] (1) the will, (2) thinking, (3) the mind, (4) worry, and (5) fatigue. They create six forms of extreme pressure [stress] in the body, in (1) *qi*, (2) blood, (3) tendons, (4) bones, (5) essence, and (6) marrow. These six in turn cause the seven injuries which transform into the seven pains. The seven pains create disease. (2.3b)

Remedies not only involve sensory moderation along the lines of "awe and care," but also include the five Confucian virtues that, too, are linked with the body through the five phases: benevolence to counteract aggression and the urge to kill (liver), wisdom to help with the push to steal and take what is not freely given (kidneys), righteousness and social responsibility to ward off the tendency toward sexual misconduct (lungs), propriety to release the desire for intoxication and other forms of uncontrolled behavior (heart), and honesty to prevent lying and cheating in every form (spleen).[12] Ideally all virtues should be practiced equally to prevent the negative impact of ethical violations on health and long life, but it is perfectly acceptable to work mainly on a central one—often described as honesty (spleen)—and thereby set a positive cycle of cosmic awareness into motion.

In addition, Sun Simiao also includes specific dietary regulations and concrete taboos in his set of ten precepts, such as against eating animals with specific cosmic connections and offending Dao by urinating while facing north. His list is typical for the intricate mixture in Dao-

[12] The *Zhengyi wujie pin* provides a slightly different version, agreeing on the connection liver—killing—benevolence and spleen—lying—honest, but then connecting lungs—stealing—righteousness, heart—sexual misconduct—propriety, and kidneys—intoxication—wisdom.

ist thinking of behavioral guidelines of different levels (personal, social, cosmic) and types (regulations, prohibitions, taboos) to enhance a cosmic awareness of human behavior.

An earlier example of similar taboos appears in the *Lingshu ziwen xianji* 靈書紫文仙忌 *(Immortals' Taboos According to the Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits*, DZ 179),[13] which similarly prohibits the consumption of the five strong vegetables, then lists several kinds of that meat practitioners should avoid:

> Do not eat the flesh of animals associated with the day of your parents' birth.
> Do not eat the flesh of animals associated with the day of your birth.
> Do not eat the flesh of the six domestic animals.
> Do not eat the meat of armored [shelled] animals like turtles or dragons on the days of Six Armored Gods [liujia 六甲].
> Do not eat pheasant on *bingwu* 丙午 days.
> Do not eat the meat of black animals on *bingzi* 丙子 days.
> Do not eat fish on the ninth day of the second month. (2ab; Bokenkamp 1997, 365)

Rules like these further appear in Sun Simiao's *Sheyang lun*, where he also lists food taboos concerned with specific days of the month. For example, he says that days including the cyclical signs *jia* and *yin* are dangerous because they mark the time when the demons fight each other and people are given to tension and nervousness.

Not just food, but also personal relations are subject to ethical guidelines. Thus Sun continues his discussion in the *Zhenzhong ji* noting that practitioners should keep themselves and their surroundings scrupulously clean and always maintain emotional harmony. They should move frequently to prevent getting involved with ordinary people and to avoid any deep relationships with the opposite sex. Female adepts should not get pregnant; male practitioners should not approach pregnant or menstruating women. Both should strive for greater self-reliance and venerate the gods and goddesses but not

[13] The text is connected to the *Lingshu ziwen*, which appeared as part of the Highest Clarity (Shangqing) revelations in the mid-fourth century and probably dates from the fifth century. See Robinet 1984, 2:412-15; Kleeman 1991, 176; Yoshioka 1961a, 66-67. Similar taboos are also found in the *Shangqing xiuxing jingjue* 上清修行經訣 (Scriptural Instructions on Highest Clarity Cultivation (DZ 427), 22b-25a; and in *Yunji qiqian* 40.11b-12a. Tao Hongjing's *Zhen'gao* 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected, DZ 1016), too, variously mentions taboos of a similar nature.

dream of engaging in sexual intercourse with them (Engelhardt 1989, 282).[14]

To sum up, a long life in a healthy body and contented environment depends to a large extent on ethical principles and proper moral conduct, observing not only the fundamental five precepts of the religion but also various contextual rules or taboos about food, behavior, and social interaction. The body is never isolated or separate but functions in constant interaction with the world and society; it is always subject to divine judgment and the laws of karma and retribution. Physical suffering and/or well-being is as much the result of how people treat their bodies as how they live in the world.

[14] Sexual relations with divine beings were a common fantasy among Tang seekers, some of whom expressed them in beautiful poetry. See Cahill 1985.