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Introduction

Many religious traditions encourage the practice of cultivation. They support their members in developing qualities that are seen as ideal, perfect, or desirable within the context of their beliefs, qualities that make their followers more like the deity or cosmic principle at their core. Thus, for example, Christians encourage the development of neighborly love, unselfishness, and social services. Buddhists like to see their followers be morally upright, calmly self-possessed, and full of wisdom. In each case, the object of cultivation is closely correlated to the sacred, the central concern, and most divine aspect of the religion, while human life on its ordinary, mundane level is seen as separate and different from this vision. We are by our nature of being human not ideal or perfect. We lack inner peace, mutual love, and divinity. We are not like the deity or the cosmic principle—but we have the spark, the seed, the trace of the divine within us.

Cultivation thus presupposes two basic assumptions. One, that human life and the human condition are divergent from the divine, the ultimate, the perfection. And two, that there is the potential for attaining the perfect state within every human being. The practice of cultivation, then, just like its agricultural counterpart in the mundane world, means to plant the seed, support and nurture it, keep predators and weeds away, allow it to grow, and gradually raise it to full bloom. Eventually the seed will be a completely grown plant, and cultivation will no longer be a separate practice but will become one with life itself. In the religious context, this means that to understand cultivation one should first examine the ideals and goals of the religion in question, then find the nature of the seed and look for the different methods of care and cultivation.

Consistent with the growth metaphor, cultivation means action and forward motion, progress and enhancement. Once begun, it is a continuous process, an ongoing movement of transformation. It requires that one challenges basic assumptions about self and world, becomes a new person with every phase, and is never quite satisfied, done, or finished. There is always the divine ideal looming above. There is always yet another step to take, another area to support, another as-

pect to work on. The process itself, the journey to the goal, becomes the way of cultivation, and for the dedicated practitioner that is his life.

Just as in planting a field one can rely entirely on oneself or get help from manuals, advisers, and assistants, so cultivation can be undertaken either under one's own steam or with the help of others. The Japanese tradition distinguishes this most clearly in its contrast between Zen and Pure Land, described as *jiriki* 自力or "self-power" and *tariki* 他力or "other power," respectively. In other words, to cultivate the religious ideal one can follow a path of self-transformation through virtue, meditation, and self-control or one can deliver oneself into the hands of a deity or divine agent, a bodhisattva-type savior who will give support and guidance and even take matters into his or her powerful hands. Another image sometimes used in the Buddhist context is that of the bicycle versus the bus. Both will take you to the desired destination, but on the bicycle you have to propel yourself forward by your own strength, whereas on the bus you can leave the driving and decision-making to someone else.

It may seem at first glance that biking is a great deal harder than sitting on a bus, but the fact is that human beings have a very difficult time delivering themselves unquestioningly into the hands of another, however much revered, beloved, and trusted. Giving oneself in devotion is just as hard, and for some people may be even harder, than pursuing the mystical path of meditation and self-control.

You may note at this point that we speak of "trusting" and "self-control," both essentially mental actions and psychological attitudes. And indeed, in most traditions the path of cultivation, whichever form it may take, is one of mental transformation. More than anything, it requires a change in attitude and awareness, a development of qualities such as compassion, neighborly love, calmness, and detachment—all essentially unphysical, not of the body. Bodies tend to be on the sidelines of cultivation, at best left to their own devices, at worst maligned and mistreated. All too often the basic human nature of greediness and egotism is understood to be rooted in the fact that we have bodies and that these bodies have needs that have to be satisfied. As Bertold Brecht, the famous German dramatist, says in his *Three Penny Opera*: "Erst kommt das Fressen, dann kommt die Moral!" or "Food first, ethics later." Yes, it is very hard to be good if you are poor, hungry, dirty, and disheveled. And all too often the resi-

dents of monasteries, the cultivation sites *par excellence*, are well fed, well clothed, well kept, and in general freed from bodily worries.

But there is another alternative to taking the body out of the cultivation equation. That is, one can make the body the basis, the root, the foundation of the cultivation process, anchor oneself in physicality and transform the very nature of bodily existence as part of the divine undertaking. This is the route the Daoist tradition has chosen—a unique route that has yet to find its match among other religions and that has, with physicality becoming more relevant these days, a great appeal to modern Western seekers. Would not it be nice, really, to enjoy the body and be a good person, both at the same time? Would it not be nice to be able to enjoy all sorts of treats and pleasures while also moving forward on the path to divine existence?

There is great appeal in this vision, and the Chinese tradition, life-affirming and world-loving from the beginning, has explored it extensively. Their solution to the problem of having a body and wanting to be divine is something called *qi* 氣.

Qi and the Five Phases

Qi is the foundational energy of the universe, the basic stuff of the Dao, the life force in the human body, and the basis of all physical vitality. Tangible in the sensations and pulses, visible as vapor and breath, audible in sighs and sounds, it is what we are as physical, embodied beings. Yet it is also the material energy of Dao, the underlying force of the greater universe, the power that makes things happen in the cosmos. There is only one *qi*, just as there is only one Dao, and through it people and the cosmos are one. We are by way of being bodies already part of the divine, the ultimate, the creation. All we have to do is realize this fact and behave accordingly.

That is to say, not all is well by just being *qi*. *Qi* appears on different levels and in different modes. At our core, in our deepest being, there are the cosmic forms of primordial and prenatal *qi*, i.e., *qi* that is part of the creative substratum of the universe and the true, perfect *qi* we receive from our parents. At the periphery, in our lives and day-to-day expression, there is postnatal or earthly *qi*. All three have to work together smoothly and with ease for health and harmony to be achieved.

Health, then, is not just the absence of symptoms and ailments. It is the presence of a strong vital energy and a smooth, harmonious, and active flow of *qi*. This is known as the state of *zhengqi* 正氣 or "proper *qi*," also translated as "upright *qi*." The ideal is to have *qi* flow freely, creating harmony in the body and a balanced state of being in the person. This personal health is further matched by health in nature, defined as regular weather patterns and the absence of disasters. It is also present as health in society in the peaceful coexistence among families, clans, villages, and states. This harmony on all levels, the cosmic presence of a steady and pleasant flow of *qi*, is what the Chinese call the state of Great Peace (*taiping* 太平), a state venerated by all different religious, philosophical, and political schools in traditional China.

The opposite of health, what other traditions would describe as turning away from the divine and giving in to bodily urges, in China is *xieqi* 邪氣or "wayward *qi*," also called deviant *qi,* pathogenic *qi*, heteropathic *qi*, or evil *qi*. This indicates *qi* that humans have lost their harmonious relation to the cosmos, the *qi* field has fallen out of balance, and their *qi* no longer supports the dynamic forces of change. Whereas proper *qi* moves in a smooth, steady rhythm and effects daily renewal, helping health and long life, wayward *qi* is disorderly and dysfunctional and creates change that violates the normal order. When it becomes dominant, the *qi*-flow can turn upon itself and deplete the body's resources. The individual loses his or her connection to the universe, no longer operates as part of a greater system, and is increasingly out of tune with the basic life force.

This in due course results in irritation: mental irritation that appears as negative emotions and physical irritation that shows up as bodily discomforts and eventually leads to disease. People have the ability to feel the quality of their *qi* within their bodies. They also have the power to regulate its flow, and they have the strength to control its intake and output. The same applies to the levels of nature and society. In nature, wayward *qi* means the occurrence of unpredictable weather patterns, such as floods, droughts, locust plagues, earthquakes, and the like. In society, it means upheaval in rebellions, revolutions, or acts of terrorism. As in the body, these signs of uneven *qi*-flow can be predicted, controlled, and remedied—provided one understands the subtle dynamic of life on all its levels.

This fundamental understanding of the body and the divine is common to all of Chinese culture and finds its best-known expression in

Chinese medicine as well as, to a less well-known degree, in Chinese political theory. The Daoist tradition, as the indigenous higher religion of China, has developed it further by linking the body with the natural world and with the country's administration, by populating it with stellar deities, and by defining subtler distinctions and types of energy. On this basis, it has created an intricate, complex system of spiritual cultivation, through which the body is transformed energetically into the subtlest possible potency. Its ultimate goal is to become one with the Dao, to reach a state of mystical union and release of personal ego-identity on this earth and to ascend to the heavens of the gods and immortals after death.

The body in Daoism as a system of *qi* is part and parcel of the natural world.[1] Its every part matches one or the other aspect of nature, so that already the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Writings of the Prince of Huainan) of the second century B.C.E. says that "the roundness of the head is an image of Heaven, the squareness of the feet follows the pattern of Earth." Just as the natural world functions according to the four seasons, five phases, nine directions, and 360 days, "human beings have four limbs, five inner organs, nine orifices, and 360 joints." Similarly, the various forces of nature, such as wind, rain, cold, and heat are matched in people's "actions of giving, taking, joy, and anger." Each organ, moreover, has a part to play in the natural inner world: "The gall bladder corresponds to the clouds, the lungs to the breath, the liver to the wind, the kidneys to the rain, and the spleen to the thunder" (ch. 7; see Major 1978).

Fig. 1: Pangu, the Creator

A more radical vision of the same idea appears in the Daoist adaptation of the Indian myth of Puruşa, where the physical body of the dei-

1 The following discussion of the body in Daoism is based on Kohn 1991. Other presentations are found in Homann 1971; Schipper 1978; 1994; Ishida 1989; Andersen 1994; Kroll 1996; Saso 1997; Bumbacher 2001; Despeux 2005.

ty is transformed into the world (see Lincoln 1975). In China this story is first told about the creator figure Pangu 盤古, it also appears with the defied Laozi as key protagonist (see Fig. 1). The story goes:

> Laozi changed his body. His left eye became the sun and his right eye the moon. His head was Mount Kunlun, his hair the stars. His bones turned into dragons, his flesh into wild beasts, his intestines into snakes. His breast was the ocean, his fingers, the five sacred mountains. The hair on his body was transformed into grass and trees, his heart into the constellation Cassiopeia. Finally, his testicles joined in embrace as the true parents of the universe. (*Xiaodao lun*; Kohn 1995, 55)

Here every obvious part of the body—eyes, ears, hair, bones, limbs, intestines—is transformed into an aspect of nature, creating a complete and systematic match of the human body and the larger universe.

Under the Han dynasty (206 B.C.E.-220 C.E.), Chinese cosmologists created an even more sophisticated matching of body parts and aspects of the natural world by classifying the entire universe as well as the body's parts and activities according to yin 陰 and yang 陽 and further subdividing this into the so-called five phases (*wuxing* 五行). That is to say, they took the two forces yin and yang and not only linked them with any number of complementary opposites in the human, natural, and cosmic levels (e.g., low and high, cold and warm, female and male, earth and heaven), but also interpreted them as continuously evolving from one into the other. As yin rises and grows, it reaches its zenith and gives way to yang, which in its turn rises and grows until it reaches its zenith, and so on. They duly identified five phases of yin and yang and associated them with five material objects as their appropriate symbols. The five phases and their symbols are:

minor yang	major yang	yin-yang	minor yin	major yin
wood	fire	earth	metal	water

In the human body, these five phases are present as the five inner organs (*wuzang* 五臟; liver, heart, spleen, lungs, kidneys), which also work together in a constant flow of movement and exchange. They may have names like the organs we know from Western medicine, but they are more than mere organs. They serve as the receptacles and

centers of an entire network of *qi*, and any reference made to any of them connotes the entire fabric of functional manifestations related to them. Consequently "liver" is not just the organ as we know it, but includes the working of muscles and sinews and also corresponds to the sense of vision and the eyes (Porkert 1974, 117-23). Beyond the five phases, the five inner organs are further associated with planets, geographical directions, colors, seasons, digestive organs, emotions, senses, and spiritual forces. This set of correspondences provides an intricate system that thoroughly mixes the cosmic with the physical and directly reflects the fundamental worldview of the body and universe being one through *qi*. Its main components are:

> *liver*: wood, east, green, spring, gallbladder, anger, eyes, spirit soul
> *heart*: fire, south, red, summer, small intestine, agitation, tongue, spirit
> *spleen*: earth, center, yellow, late summer, stomach, worry, lips, will
> *lungs*: metal, west, white, fall, large int., sadness, nose, material soul
> *kidneys*: water, north, black, winter, bladder, fear, ears, essence

As centers of a network of *qi* both on the physical and cosmic levels, the five organs are also the focal points of the so-called meridians or conduits of *qi* that run along the arms and legs to and from the extremities and connect the center of the body to its periphery. They are analogous to the earth arteries in the natural world, described and analyzed by Fengshui specialists and responsible for the auspicious or unlucky placement of houses and graves. In either case, *qi* needs to flow freely—a process helped by the correct construction of manmade structures as much as by physical cultivation methods.

One way of envisioning the correct management of the body's organs and inner resources is through the metaphor of an administrative system. This vision appears first in the medical classics, such as the *Huangdi neijing suwen* 黃帝內經素問 (The Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic, Simple Questions). It says:

> The heart is the residence of the ruler: spirit and clarity originate here. The lungs are the residence of the high ministers of state: order and division originate here. The liver is the residence of the strategists: planning and organization originate here. The gall is residence of the judges: judgments and decisions originate here.
>
> The center of the breast is the residence of a special taskforce: joy and pleasure originate here. The stomach is the residence of the granary administration: the various kinds

> of taste originate here. The large intestine is the residence of the teachers of the Dao: development and transformations originate here. . . . The kidneys are the residence of the business men: activity and care originate here (3.1ab).

Understanding the body in this way, one can give special attention to parts that are underdeveloped with the ultimate goal of having all the different aspects work in complete harmony and with maximum efficiency of *qi*-flow. This state, then, is not only essential for physical health but also provides mental ease and allows a subtler sense of going along with the larger patterns of the world. The alchemist Ge Hong葛洪accordingly says in his *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ1185;[2] trl. Ware 1966) of the early fourth century:

> The body of an individual can be pictured as a state. The diaphragm may be compared with the palace; the arms and legs, with the suburbs and frontiers. The bones and joints are like the officials; the inner gods are like the sovereign; the blood is like the ministers of state; the *qi* is like the population.
>
> Therefore, anyone able to regulate his own body can regulate a state. To take good care of the population is the best way to make your state secure; by the same token, to nurture the *qi* is the way to keep the body whole, for when the population scatters, a state goes to ruin; when the *qi* is exhausted, the body dies. (18.4b)

Just as a good ruler and administrator has to make sure the people are secure and can do their work without impediment, a practitioner of Daoist cultivation needs to tend most urgently to his or her *qi*, ensuring that it is present in adequate quantities, flows smoothly and harmoniously, and does not enter or leave the body improperly. The idea that *qi* is like the population of a state goes well with the concept that the inner organs are its ministries while the joints are its officials. They all have an important part to play, but the central focus of cultivation practice is *qi*, and all other parts are nurtured only through the *qi* and for the *qi*.

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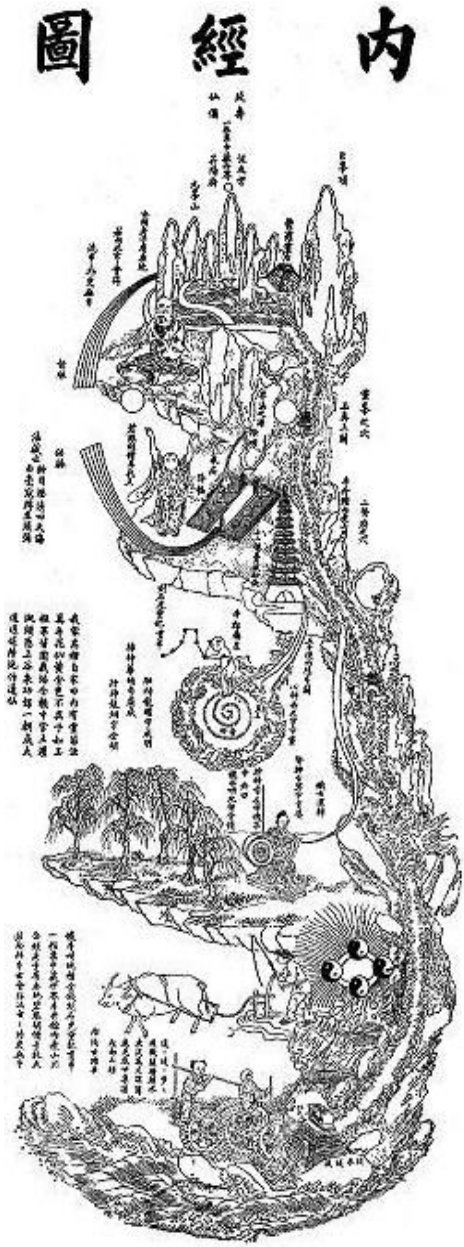
2 Texts in the Daoist canon and its supplements, throughout this volume, are numbered according to Komjathy 2002; Schipper and Verellen 2004.

Divine Dimensions

An expanded vision of the body as the natural world appears in the medieval Daoist school of Highest Clarity (Shangqing上清). According to this, the human body is not only a combination of natural patterns and energies but also an inner sphere containing supernatural landscapes and divine beings. The body is a complete world with mountains and rivers, a divine and cosmic realm, a paradise and residence of the gods.

This understanding appears first in the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Yellow Court Scripture), a visualization manual from the fourth century C.E. In a more recent visual depiction, it is found in the *Neijing tu* 內經圖 (Chart of Interior Passages). Here the celestial headquarters within are located in the head and match the immortals' paradise of Mount Kunlun. It is depicted as a large, luscious mountain surrounded by a wide lake and covered with splendid palaces and wondrous orchards (see Fig. 2: *Neijing tu*).

Between the eyes, which are the sun and the moon, one can move inside to the Hall of Light, one of nine palaces in the head. Best reached by passing through the deep, dark valley of the nose, it is guarded by the two high towers of the ears. To attain entry one has to perform the physical/ritual exercise of "beating the heavenly drum":



with both palms covering the ears, snap the index and middle fingers to drum against the back of the skull.

Underneath the valley of the nose is a small lake, i.e., the mouth. This regulates the water level of the upper lake in the head and raises or lowers it as necessary. Crossing the mouth-lake over its bridge (tongue) and moving further down, one reaches the twelve-storied tower of the throat, then comes to the Scarlet Palace (heart), the Yellow Court (spleen), the Imperial Granary (stomach), the Purple Chamber (gall), and various other starry palaces transposed into the body's depth. Going ever deeper, another cosmic region is reached, with another sun and moon (kidneys). Beneath them, the Ocean of *Qi* extends with another Mount Kunlun in its midst. Various divine beings, moreover, reside in the body, creating vitality and providing spiritual resources.

The Daoist vision of the body as a network of celestial passageways and starry palaces closely overlaps with the medical understanding of the body as consisting of various aspects of *qi* and the phase-energetics of the five organs and six viscera. Many acupuncture points have Daoist connotations, and Chinese healing practices and physical longevity exercises are at the root of Daoist practice. Without losing any aspect of the medical dynamics, the Daoist vision provides a more cosmic and spiritual dimension of the same basic understanding, allowing adepts to move beyond mundane existence toward a greater, more spiritual realm, reaching out for the gods in the stars and thereby for the Dao at the center.

While physical practices prepare the body for the higher stages, to reach the ultimate goal adepts engage in more advanced techniques of meditation and visualization. One rather well known method is the interior fixation of the three major Daoist gods in charge of the human body: the Female One, the Male One, and the Great One. They reside in the upper, middle, and lower energy centers of the body, commonly known as the cinnabar or elixir fields (*dantian* 丹田) located in the center of the head, solar plexus, and lower abdomen. The gods are essentially astral divinities, born directly from the primordial energy of the universe in the Northern Dipper, the central constellation of the sky (see Robinet 1993).

Adepts visualize the Three Ones as manifestations of three kinds of cosmic primordial *qi* in the three elixir fields. They in turn govern the twenty-four fundamental powers of the human body which corre-

spond to the twenty-four energies of the year and the twenty-four constellations in the sky. The exact procedure of the meditation varies according to season, but if at all possible should be performed at the solstices and the equinoxes.

To prepare for the practice, adepts have to purify themselves by bathing and fasting. They enter the meditation chamber at midnight, the hour of rising yang. Then they light incense, and click their teeth thirty times. Facing east, they close their eyes and visualize the Northern Dipper slowly descending toward them until it rests right above their heads with the handle pointing straight east. This preliminary measure serves to protect adepts from evil influences during the practice.

Then they start with the Upper One. They visualize a ball of red energy in the Niwan Palace, the upper elixir field in the center of the head. Within this ball of energy, a red sun about nine inches in radius will appear. Its brilliance envelops practitioners to such a degree that they enter a state of utter oblivion. As soon as they have reached this state, the god Red Child becomes visible. The ruler of the Niwan Palace, he holds a talisman of the white tiger, the sacred animal of the west. He is accompanied by an attendant, the god of the subtle essences of the teeth, the tongue, and the skull, who holds a sacred scripture in his hands.

The Middle and Lower Ones are similarly imagined as residing in the other elixir fields, the Scarlet Palace of the heart and the Ocean of *Qi* in the abdomen and are accompanied by assistants who govern the five inner organs as well as the extremities, senses, and fluids of the body. Through visualization, adepts keep them securely in the body and over time learn to communicate with them, resulting in the attainment of yet higher stages in which adepts transpose the visualized gods back to their true realm in the stars and paradises and themselves take flight to visit those extraterrestrial realms—dimensions that will be their true home once their limited existence on this earth has come to an end (see Robinet 1993).

Reorienting the body to be the container of heavenly palaces and deities, to be in fact a cosmos in itself, adepts attain oneness in body and spirit with the cosmic dimensions of the universe. As all parts of the body are transformed into divine entities and firmly guarded by their responsible gods, the very physicality of the adept turns into a cosmic network and becomes the celestial realm in which the gods reside.

Visualizing and feeling the gods within the bodily self, the Daoist becomes a more cosmic being, transforming but not relinquishing his physical, embodied nature.

Levels of Qi

This physical nature, however, at the higher stages of oneness with gods and cosmic powers, is not the same gross material we experience in ordinary life. Before Daoists can reach out for the stars, their bodies have to undergo massive transformations and become subtle energy networks. For this, they distinguish different kinds and levels of *qi* in the body.

The most immediately tangible and strongest among them is *jing* 精, often translated "essence." As Manfred Porkert defines it (1974), *jing* is the indeterminate aspect of *qi* or *qi* in transition from one determinate form to another. A classic example is man's semen that carries life from the father to the child; another is the essence that the body takes from food during its assimilation. Neither yin nor yang, *jing* marks *qi* in transit, the raw fuel that drives the pulsating rhythm of the body's cellular reproduction. Governed by the kidneys and the phase water, it is also connected to the primordial *qi* that resides there and to the psychological power of will or determination. It is among the main sources of a person's charisma, sexual attraction, and sense of wholeness.

In its dominant form *jing* is sexual potency, that is, semen in men and menstrual blood in women. Both develop from pure *qi* that sinks down from its center—the Ocean of *Qi* in the abdomen in men and the Cavern of *Qi* in the breast area in women—and becomes tangible in sexual sensations and fluids. Emitting *jing* from the body through untimely ejaculation and excessive menstruation is seen as a major source of *qi*-loss which can cause physical weakness, lead to diseases, and precipitate early death. But even without massive loss of *jing*, vital essence diminishes over a lifetime. Its rise and decline are understood as occurring in an eight-year cycle in males and a seven-year cycle in females, reaching its height as people are in their twenties and thirties and continuously declining until their reproductive functions cease and the body decays in their later years.

The basic concern for all longevity seekers and Daoist practitioners is to regulate and slow down this process of decline, to keep *jing* in the body, and to reverse the downward movement of *qi*. By reverting essence back to *qi* through various physical disciplines and meditation practices, they renew life and enhance vigor, laying the foundation for ultimate energetic refinement.

The *qi* that is at the root of essence and to which it returns in the body is the inner, personal aspect of universal energy. Classified as yang in relation to blood (*xue* 血) as its yin counterpart, this *qi* is made up of both prenatal and postnatal aspects; serves as the foundation of our health and sickness; and determines how we move, eat, sleep, and function in the world. Flowing through the meridians just as blood flows through veins and arteries, it is the source of movement in and out of the body, present in continuous circulation.

Also, through breath, food, drink, physical contact, sexuality, and emotions, personal *qi* is in constant exchange with the outside world. As noted earlier, it can be proper, well-aligned, harmonious, right in amount and timing and activity, or wayward, heteropathic, misaligned, off-track, and harmful. Practitioners have to make sure their *qi* is proper and flows smoothly. Only the best quality of *qi* should be allowed in the body and only stale, postnatal *qi*, not the valuable primordial part, should be permitted to leave. Adepts develop a high awareness of interaction with the environment as well as great care in the types of food they take and the breathing methods they apply. More and more they learn to focus on the inner patterns and rhythms of *qi*, refining it through continued conscious circulation to subtler and more cosmic levels.

Eventually *qi* is transformed into the finest of internal energies, which flow with the same vibrational frequency as the gods themselves. The Chinese call this *shen* 神, which means "spirit" as bodily energy but also indicates "gods" and "divine" in religious contexts. Everyone has spirit naturally from birth. Classified as yang, it is the guiding vitality behind the body's senses and the individual's psychological forces, manifesting as individual consciousness and constituting the individual's mental direction. Residing in the heart, it controls the mind and the emotions and through them is an important cause of sickness. Beyond the mind and the emotions, spirit is also the power that connects the person to Heaven and original destiny—an active, organizing configurative force and transformative influence that

one cannot perceive directly but only through its manifestations (Kaptchuk 1983, 58).

Adepts strive to transform their *qi* increasingly into spirit, becoming finer and subtler in the basic energetic configuration of their bodies, thereby being more like spirits, gods, and the immortals. Refined in their energetic bodies, they become more aware of the subtler levels of existence, more attuned to the gods, and more potent in their abilities. Advanced practitioners not only see and feel the presence of the deities around and within them but also gain various supernatural powers, called aspects of spirit pervasion (*shentong* 神通): they can be in two places at once, move quickly from one place to another, know the past and the future, divine people's thoughts, procure wondrous substances, overcome all hazards of fire and water, and have powers over life and death. Their entire being has shifted from the mundane, *qi*-based world to the realm of the spirit, the divine, the gods. They are firmly on their way of becoming gods themselves (see Despeux and Kohn 2003).

The Present Volume

This book does not concern itself much with these advanced stages. Rather, it focuses on the intermediate level, the stage of the refinement of *qi*, and the various methods by which people can make their energy softer, finer, and subtler to find greater health, higher vitality, extended life expectancy, and an improved awareness of inner energies and outside vibrational patterns. The contributions of the volume are accordingly practical and oriented toward modern application, focusing on the traditional conceptions but dominantly presenting contemporary activities and uses.

This, however, does not mean that this book is a how-to manual. For correct usage of the methods presented, readers should consult a trained professional and take the relevant courses under proper guidance and supervision. Still, they can find inspiration here and learn- which Daoist or other kinds of body cultivation might be appropriate for them to enhance life and well-being.

In the first paper, Stockbridge-based acupuncturist and well-known author Lonny Jarrett deals with the medical dimension. He shows how Chinese medicine and acupuncture, when applied with subtlety

and energetic awareness, can be powerful instruments in helping people realize their inner authenticity and fulfill their ultimate destiny on the planet. Not only managing symptoms and healing diseases, Chinese medical practice has a spiritual dimension that begins with the manipulation of bodily energies and leads to important spiritual achievements.

Following this, the book focuses on breathing practice. Catherine Despeux, senior researcher at the INALCO Institute in Paris, France, and author of numerous volumes on Chinese religion and longevity, examines the six healing breaths, ways of exhaling with a particular mouth position that will create a certain sound, like *ssss*. Each sound is associated with a particular organ and is said to help with a variety of physical conditions, thus supporting physical health and well-being while increasing the depth of the breath and the awareness of one's breathing patterns. She traces the practice through various forms and sources, finding that it goes back to the beginning of the Common Era and is still very much part of modern Daoism and popular Qigong.

The same holds also true for the practice of *qi*-absorption, studied by Stephen Jackowicz, a trained acupuncturist, Chinese studies Ph. D., and teacher of Chinese medicine in Long Island, New York. As he shows, *qi*-absorption first appears in Han dynasty manuscripts as a method of ingesting *qi*, i.e., eating *qi* instead of food. This method makes the body subtler and independent of outer food but does not transform the digestive system. In contrast, *qi*-absorption involves a connection to the energies of the cosmos and effects a reorganization of the body's energetic system, creating a different physicality in the process. Both methods are used in healing today and represent valid ways of finding well-being and integration.

The same case is also made by Shawn Arthur, assistant professor of Asian Religions at Applachian State University in Boone, North Carolina. He focuses on the dietary techniques of ancient Daoism and the ways of replacing, reducing, and even stopping all food intake in favor of a higher awareness and the absorption of *qi*. He presents specific recipes of herbal concoctions and alchemical elixirs and outlines their alleged effects. He also recounts testimonies of people who are still actively practicing the ancient dietary regimens today.

Next comes the practice of physical bends and stretches, known as Daoyin and presented by Livia Kohn, professor of Religion and East

Asian Studies at Boston University and certified Yoga teacher. Although at first glance very similar to Yoga as it is practiced widely in the West today, Daoyin has its own history, underlying assumptions, and sets of practices that distinguish it thoroughly from Indian methods. Still an active part in contemporary practice, Daoyin has played a role in both the medical and religious communities and been closely connected to breathing techniques, dietary measures, and *qi*-absorption.

A more inner focus is the subject of the next contribution by Michael Winn, long-term practitioner of Daoist methods and the leader of Healing Tao, USA. He describes and analyzes the transformation of sexual energies through internal alchemy. First learning to recognize and activate the feeling of *jing* or sexual essence in the body, practitioners reverse its course and mutate it back into *qi.* They then circulate this purified energy through the body and refine it further into pure spirit (*shen*) with the help of water and fire—understood both as alchemical substances and energetic bodily forces. As adepts become more sensitized to their inner energetic structure, they can modify it through careful, gradual practice to a subtler and more spiritual level. Internal alchemy requires an active *qi*-flow, an open body, and a heightened awareness. The various other physical practices are preparatory to it and form a necessary part of its process.

The last two contributions look at Daoist body cultivation in community settings. Bede Bidlack, director of the Still Mountain Tai Chi Center and Ph. D. candidate at Boston College, examines Taiji quan both as a martial art and as a spiritual technique in Daoism. In either role, its movements are practiced in close conjunction with nature and other people. That is to say, one ideally practices outside, in a natural setting, and through the practice develops close awareness of the energetic patterns of nature. Also, one typically practices in groups and learns to maintain constant awareness of what others are doing, a training enhanced in partner practice. Through Taiji quan, therefore, practitioners take their own inner purified *qi* and relate it to the outside world—or, vice versa, they become aware of their *qi* through calm and focused interaction with nature and others, and from there develop a greater urge toward personal refinement.

The last article in the book focuses on Qigong, the modern adaptation of Daoist body cultivation with great popularity in China and increased accessibility in the West. Louis Komjathy, visiting professor at Shandong University, China, looks at its presence in America to-

day, describing its major forms, main representatives, and key characteristics. He points out the role these practices have come to play in our world and how they have been subject to political changes (Chinese communism, American immigration laws) and cultural fads (New Age movement, complementary healthcare). He also notes just to what degree their availability is subject to market factors and how much leading practitioners are ignoring or even distorting historical realities in favor of creating a marketable product.

Daoist body cultivation with its long history and proven efficaciousness can make an important contribution to our stress-ridden, technology-driven world. It can be even more potent if one makes the effort to understand the practices in context, to appreciate the culture from which they came, and to respect their integrity and the demands they may make on becoming a different person: more inward-focused, kinder and gentler, calmer and slower, less consumptive and pleasure-oriented. It may be very rewarding, healthwise and spiritually, to reach out for Daoist attainments, but one should never forget that the traditional goal of the practices is an energetic transfiguration that leads to ultimate transcendence and inner spiritization.

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