

Wu-Style

Bone-Setting and Massage

Clinical Experience

by

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with

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Preface



On April 24, 2019, Dr. Wu Baolin began teaching a small group of students the foundational principles of massage and bone-setting. These sessions marked the beginning of what would become his Neijing Yijing Academy. The lectures compiled in this volume span from April 24, 2019, to July 20, 2020, during which we met twice a week at Dr. Wu's clinic.

Each meeting ranged from two to several hours, during which Dr. Wu delivered in-depth discussions on medical theory, clinical experience, and Daoist concepts. He regularly demonstrated techniques on us so that we could directly feel and understand the correct execution. Alongside the lectures, we practiced on each other and ourselves under his close supervision. Dr. Wu would carefully observe our technique, often allowing us to practice on him to ensure that we grasped the subtlety and precision required.

This is the first book to be published based solely on the teachings from these classes. While Dr. Wu is already widely known for his published works on Fengshui and Qigong, this is the first volume dedicated entirely to his medical teachings. Dr. Wu has practiced Chinese medicine in the United States for over forty years, though his experience in the field extends over sixty years, having begun in his youth while being raised at a Daoist monastery in China.

Dr. Wu's family descends from a distinguished medical lineage spanning seven generations of imperial physicians. His grandfather was one of the imperial physicians to the last emperor of China, and his family line traces its inheritance to renowned figures such as Wu Qian and Wu Jutong. The Wu family, still to this day, has preserved the authentic recipe of Calm the Palace Bovine Bezoar

Pill (*Angong niubuang wan* 安宮牛黃丸) through generations. The combination of Dr. Wu's family style of medical practice and Daoist knowledge is brought together in clinic and shared openly for the first time through the material in this book.

This book is the result of interpreting, compiling, and arranging the oral teachings and lectures of Dr. Wu Baolin. Every effort has been made to faithfully preserve the spirit and substance of Dr. Wu's words, while at times reorganizing the material for clarity and flow. At times, supplemental research and contextual information have been added to support and enrich the original content.

All teachings, concepts, and materials contained in this book are the intellectual property of Dr. Wu Baolin and are protected under copyright law. No part of this work may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form without the express written permission of Dr. Wu Baolin.

Although we have taken great care to present Dr. Wu's teachings as accurately as possible, we remain solely responsible for any errors in interpretation or presentation that may appear in this work. If there is any fault or omission, it is ours alone.

It is our sincere hope that this volume will serve as a useful and accurate representation of Dr. Wu's teachings, and that it may contribute meaningfully to the continued understanding and practice of Chinese medicine and Daoism.

Disclaimer

The information presented in this book is intended for educational and reference purposes only. It is not meant to substitute for professional medical advice, diagnosis, or treatment. Readers should consult a qualified healthcare practitioner before attempting any of the techniques or applications discussed herein. Neither the authors nor the publisher assume any responsibility for the use or misuse of the information contained in this work.

Chapter 1

General Overview

Daoist Medicine and Chinese Medicine:

In the earliest phases of human history, people cared for their health without the guidance of formal medical institutions, having nature alone as their guide. They experimented with natural materials, observed their effects, and transmitted practical, experience-based knowledge down through generations, forming enduring lineages of healing. At the same time, some individuals with innate talent, generated new methods or drew on these traditions, broadening the scope of early medical practice.

These early doctors did more than simply address physical ailments: their understanding encompassed the spiritual realm and the natural world. In China this would encompass principles found in the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes), weaving together medicine, cosmology, spirituality, and moral philosophy into a unified healing tradition. Even so, while the *Yijing* and other philosophical currents informed early Chinese medical thought, their integration into everyday healing practices remained a gradual, regionally diverse, and frequently debated process.

By applying yin-yang theory and other proto-Daoist concepts in tangible, beneficial ways, people helped shape the earliest foundations of medicine and facilitated a development that was profoundly intertwined with evolving religious and philosophical traditions.¹ During the Shang dynasty (1600-1046 BCE), archaic medical knowledge centered on exorcising spirits and responding to oracular pronouncements, embedded within a religious worldview. By the Zhou era (1046-256 BCE), naturalistic conceptions began supplanting theistic ones, people developed models grounded in systematic correspondences between the human body and the larger cosmos. Core concepts like yin-yang, the five phases (*wuxing* 五行), and *qi* 氣 provided an explanatory framework that catalyzed the emergence of medicine as a theoretically systematic field.

The seminal medical classic *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic) compiled around the 2nd century BCE first synthesized these

¹ Kohn 2016, 189; 2017, 195; Michael 2015a, 109-32; 2015b; Lai 2010; Ryan 2011, 183-84; Hausen 2022; 2024.

metaphysical concepts into medical theory. It organized knowledge of diet, acupuncture, pharmacology, and physiology around yin-yang and five phases doctrine, laying foundational guidelines for clinical practice. The *Huangdi neijing* describes the body as an integrated network of meridians and collaterals through which *qi* circulates, nourishes the organs, and attunes the person to seasonal cycles and environmental forces. Illness arises when internal disharmony or external pathogens disturb the equilibrium of *qi*. Therapy aims to restore balance through modalities like acupuncture, herbs, diet and Qigong exercises.

This conceptual scheme cohered during the Han dynasty (202 BCE-220 CE) through systematic correspondence with Daoist cosmological principles. The *Huangdi neijing* adapts Daoist yin-yang thought into a medical framework describing complementary oppositional forces within the body. The five phases of water, fire, wood, metal and earth similarly organize the organs and their associated functions. This structural mapping of the human microcosm onto the universal macrocosm situates medicine within an understanding of the Dao as the fundamental principle regulating natural processes and human health.

At the same time, the early diffusion of medical knowledge remained intertwined with multiple religious traditions. Daoist groups like the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道, 2nd c.) utilized healing techniques such as talismans, petitions, exorcisms, and fasting as spiritually oriented responses to sociopolitical crisis during the late Han dynasty. However, their medical philosophy defied neat classification, exhibiting significant diversity and divergence from *Huangdi neijing* theory. Debates centered on integrating new healing modalities into established medical canons, with attitudes varying widely across schools.

During the Six Dynasties (220-589), Daoists and medical practitioners engaged in debate around topics like nurturing life (*yangsheng* 養生), meditation, guided breathing, sexual cultivation, and alchemical elixirs. The would-be alchemist Ge Hong 葛洪 (283-343) extensively incorporated medical knowledge into his work while critiquing contemporaries who emphasized material cures devoid of Daoist understanding. He stressed that the earliest Daoist practitioners were also adept in medical arts, underscoring a longstanding tradition of integrating medicine and Daoism. As he writes in the *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (The Inner Chapters of the Master who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185, 15.8b-9a), he writes “As for the earliest practitioners of the Dao in ancient times, none did not also study medical arts, so that they could aid in times of disaster” (Stanley-Baker 2020, 43).²

Other Daoists expanded upon this integration of medical tradition and Daoism (Stanley-Baker 2013, 154-56; Peng 2023, 4-5). “One of the most important figures in the development of drug therapy literature in Chinese medicine was Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536)” (Goldschmidt 2020, 136). In addition to his contributions to Chinese pharmacology, he was the first patriarch of Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清) Daoism, transmitting scriptures and registers of this

² Stanley-Baker 2019, 35-36; 2020; Engelhardt 2000, 78; Hu 2013, 190.

school. The fluid integration of Daoism and medicine throughout Chinese history challenges any rigid boundary set to delineate the two fields wholly separate from the other. Yet, as Michael Stanley-Baker cautions, viewing “Daoist medicine” as a single, uniform label oversimplifies the diversity of perspectives and practices that different Daoists embrace (2020).

Daoists integrated incantations, guiding qi, healing exercises (daoyin 導引), and visualizations of inner spirits into their health regimens. Even as some of these practices became increasingly specialized within Daoist contexts, the broader medical profession remained porous, facilitating continual exchange and adaptation. Figures like Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581-682) exemplified this fusion, producing influential medical treatises while systematizing Daoist inner cultivation practices. Given their shared conceptual foundations and extensive intermingling, any attempt to neatly categorize these two traditions proves inherently difficult (Stanley-Baker 2013; 2020; Peng 2023, 4-5).

Multiple lineages claimed even the revered Yellow Emperor, each invoking his legacy to legitimize their own systems of knowledge. Rather than existing as strictly separate domains, Chinese medicine evolved through ongoing negotiation, adaptation, and hybridization of Daoist methods. Much like the *Yijing*'s emphasis on constant change, Daoist healing practices never followed a linear path; instead, it has continually reinvented itself. This adaptability allows Daoist healing practices to respond directly to sociocultural contingencies.

Over the centuries, many pivotal figures, such as Zhang Zhongjing 張仲景 (150-219), Sun Simiao, and numerous Ming-dynasty physicians, identified with or drew inspiration from Daoism. During the early Republican period, when efforts were undertaken to reinstitutionalize it, many practitioners privately adhered to Daoist beliefs. Determining the exact extent of Daoist influence among Chinese physicians throughout history is challenging, as their commitments varied widely. Some immersed themselves deeply in Daoist practices, while others focused primarily on traditional medicine. This diversity led to multiple trajectories in the development of both. Regardless of their primary focus, the underlying thread of a systemized understanding of nature based on Daoist principles is present throughout.

Dr. Wu often cites a famous example of how Daoist-influenced knowledge continues to shape modern medicine. His colleague from mainland China, Tu Youyou, earned a Nobel Prize for her discovery of the antimalarial drug artemisinin (*qinghaosu* 青蒿素). This achievement addressed the resurgence of malaria, a life-threatening disease that had plagued humanity for thousands of years. It had recently escalated in spreading due to a resistance it had generated to all existing antimalarial drugs (Tu 2011; Hsu 2009, 204). Tu's breakthrough in finding a remedy drew on the herbal preparation methods documented by the two Daoists, Ge Hong and Tao Hongjing, whose centuries-old writings guided her toward the optimal way to extract the medicine's active components. He says,

Seeking an explanation, we carried out an intensive review of the literature. The only reference relevant to use of *qinghao* (the Chinese name of *Artemisia annua* L.) for alleviating malaria symptoms appeared in Ge Hong's *A Handbook of Prescriptions for Emergencies*: "A handful of *qinghao* immersed with 2 liters of water, wring out the juice and drink it all." This sentence gave me the idea that the heating involved in the conventional extraction step we had used might have destroyed the active components, and that extraction at a lower temperature might be necessary to preserve antimalarial activity. Indeed, we obtained much better activity after switching to a lower-temperature procedure. (Tu 2011, 1217)

Through his writings, Tao Hongjing emphasized careful preparation and deep understanding of natural pharmaceuticals in his pursuit of the elusive elixir of immortality (Zhu 2024; Hsu 2009, 204). In their quest for longevity and the development of external alchemy (*waidan* 外丹), many Daoist alchemists performed enumerable experiments making discoveries that inadvertently advanced Chinese medical science.³ These practical healing implications would further bridge together the worlds of Daoist cultivation and clinical treatment. "Alchemists such as Ge Hong, Tao Hongjing, and Sun Simiao were also well versed in medicine and wrote influential medical texts. Admittedly, their medical writings focus on curing illness and sustaining health rather than seeking transcendence. Nevertheless, certain knowledge was relevant for both types of pursuit" (Liu 2021, 167).

The legacy of Daoist thought endures in Chinese medicine in the names of well-known herbal formulas like Major Blue-Green Dragon Decoction (*Da Qinglong Tang* 大青龍湯), Minor Blue-Green Dragon Decoction (*Xiao Qinglong Tang* 小青龍湯), and White Tiger Decoction (*Baihu Tang* 白虎湯). These prescriptions not only echo Daoist cosmological principles and correspondences in their names and functions but have also served as foundational models from which numerous variants have evolved. Zhang Zhongjing's inclusion of these formulas in the *Shanghan lun* 傷寒論 (Treatise on Cold Damage), accompanied by his acknowledged study of the *Yijing*, confirms the deep-rooted dialogue between Daoism and Chinese medicine from its foundation.

Types of Physicians

There are two main types of traditional bodywork in China: massage and bone-setting. While unique, these disciplines often intersect during treatment, fostering a symbiotic relationship in healing. For example, a massage therapist may integrate bone-setting techniques to realign skeletal problems as the culminating final phase to their treatment. Likewise, a bone-setter might use massage methods

³ Wang et al. 2019; Sellman 2020, 654-6; Liu 2021; Ho 2007.

initially to relax the muscles and tissues, facilitating the bone realignment they perform afterwards.

In modern times, hospitals make clear divisions between massage and bone-setting by separating them into different departments. In terms of numbers, massage therapy is more widely practiced than bone-setting. While the U.S. has chiropractors specializing in the spine and nervous system, currently China does not formally recognize chiropractic as a profession. Instead, traditional Chinese bone-setters address conditions like spinal misalignments, limb issues, dislocations, and trauma injuries. These practices, deeply rooted in millennia-old traditions, are distinct from Western chiropractic techniques. With over 5,000 years of history, China has generated numerous schools of thought around bodywork. Currently, there are over a hundred distinct massage traditions and numerous different bone-setting lineages.

Broadly, three primary categories of traditional bodyworkers have come to exist in China. Although variations occur, they typically align with the core principles of one of these groups, diverging slightly based on specific differences. The three main categories are imperial doctors (*taiyi* 太醫), martial doctors (*wuyi* 武醫), and peasant doctors (*nongyi* 農醫).

Imperial Doctors

Imperial doctors served as elite practitioners of traditional Chinese medicine, tending to the emperor, the imperial family, and high officials within court-sponsored medical offices and scholarly institutions. They were recognized authorities who compiled and interpreted medical texts, refined treatment methods, and covered the entire scope of accepted medicine of their times. One of their many specialties was in the art of bone-setting and massage.

Before Western medicine began influencing China's medical landscape around two centuries ago, many practitioners sought official appointments through the imperial court's examination systems or training institutions. Although these structures differed from modern concepts of formal medical degrees, they still conferred a measure of official recognition, prestige, and specialized instruction. While fields like bone-setting eventually found their place within the imperial medical academies, surgery itself did not become a formalized department. Even so, certain surgical techniques practiced by Hua Tuo 華佗 (145-208) were extraordinarily advanced, predating the widespread use of similar methods elsewhere by more than a millennium. He stands out in official records as the earliest clearly documented surgeon.

Hua Tuo, the Chinese surgical pioneer and herbal expert, excelled as a physician, making significant strides in anesthesia, surgery, and acupuncture. He is accredited for spearheading the practice of laparotomies and organ transplants, using anesthetics, and he was the first Chinese surgeon to operate on the abdomen including performing splenectomy and colostomy. Neurologically, Hua

Tuo is said to have performed procedures to treat headache, paralysis, and suspected a brain tumor in one patient. (Tubbs et al. 2011)

During the turbulent Three Kingdoms era, Hua Tuo performed an astonishing feat of bone surgery on the renowned general Guan Yu 關羽 (162-220). In the midst of fierce combat, a poison-tipped arrow struck the general's arm, inflicting a wound of grave consequence. With meticulous care, Hua Tuo extracted the barbed arrow, delicately maneuvering it out so as not to damage the surrounding muscles, tendons, nerves and blood vessels. Upon closer inspection, he observed that the poison had alarmingly reached as far as the bone itself. He knew the only recourse was to scrape away the poison off the bone's periosteum, though the intense pain that will be experienced in performing such an operation would be too much for anyone to bare.

Yet Guan Yu retained complete equanimity throughout the grueling procedure while engaging in a strategic board game called *weiqi*, best known today by its Japanese as Go, with a friend. Time was of the essence, if the poison seeped in any further it would lead to death, Hua Tuo went straight to work scraping off the poison with his metal instrument. The sound of the metal grating against the bone caused the onlookers in the room to shudder and recoil at the screeching abrasive sound. But General Guan remained composed, laughing and drinking while engrossed in his game.

Hua Tuo performed a bone-setting technique before the surgery, dislocating Guan's shoulder so as to subdue the pain during the surgery. He would then relocate the joint once the surgery was completed. Afterwards, he sutured the wound and had Guan rotate his arm as a type of rehabilitation exercise that would balance the nerves, tendons and muscles in his arm. Within 100 days, the general regained full function and could ride into battle anew, fully capable of shooting arrows from horseback. Due to Hua Tuo treating both the highest officials and commoners alike he fits into both the category of an imperial doctor and peasant doctor.

Hua Tuo's ability to accurately diagnose and treat with precision in an ingenious method of removing poison from the bone's periosteum demonstrated the heights of medical skill at the time. His ability to save Guan Yu's life cemented his status as China's first master surgeon. This riveting account between two incredible figures is well documented in multiple historical texts, and is celebrated as a monumental achievement in osteology. Hua Tuo is credited with being the first person on record to develop anesthesia in world history (Chu 2005, 211; Eger 2014, 4). However, in this operation with General Guan Yu, anesthesia was not used as it could have impaired his ability in continuing to fight in the war or if there was a sudden ambush he needed to stay battle ready. His herbal anesthesia formula was called Hemp-Boiled Powder (*Mafeisan* 麻沸散).

After drinking *Mafeisan*, the patients were able to undergo the operation with little pain. In one case, a patient with depilation of the beard and eyebrows was

diagnosed by Hua Tuo as having problems with his spleen. After the patient drank *Mafeisan*, he opened and explored his abdomen, eventually confirming that the spleen was unhealthy. He then removed the deteriorated part of the spleen and plastered the abdomen; the patient soon recovered afterwards. (Wai 2004, 316)

At that time, one of the few methods available to patients was to bite down on a wooden stick, preventing them from accidentally biting off their tongues during the intense pain of surgery. However, Hua Tuo introduced a groundbreaking acupuncture technique that applied stimulating specific acupoints to induce anesthetic effects. Additionally, practitioners stimulated certain acupoints at locations distal to the actual injury site. This simultaneous stimulation overshadowed the severe pain caused by surgical incisions, resulting in a significantly reduced overall sensation of discomfort.

Martial Doctors

People who fight in constant combat suffer tremendous injuries and excruciating pain. As a result, medical practitioners must remain on hand, often directly on the battlefield, to address emergency conditions. Naturally, this need has led many soldiers and martial artists to learn how to heal the body. In China, numerous martial arts systems, such as Bagua zhang 八卦掌 and Xingyi quan 形意拳, integrate healing techniques within their systems. This approach has given rise to the concept of the “martial doctor” within certain combat disciplines.

Practitioners of these martial arts often delve into therapeutic methods that seamlessly blend with their combative techniques, a practice rooted in the principle of yin and yang. This ancient philosophy describes how seemingly opposite or contrary forces may actually be complementary and interconnected. These martial artists understand this principle by first mastering the skills to break a person’s body in combat and afterwards learning how to fix that broken body. The same movements used to inflict pain can be used to heal. This dual knowledge completes their training and allows them to pursue a profession in medicine rather than bound by a career in physical combat.

Historically, this practice was particularly valuable in military contexts. In times of war, soldiers skilled in their army’s specific martial arts became crucial assets on the battlefield. When traditional medical aid proved insufficient due to the high number of casualties, these warriors leveraged their extensive understanding of the human body, honed by martial discipline, to provide emergency care. This gave the soldiers faster and better results in recovery which insured their survival and potential for victory.

Their field experience often led to innovative, albeit sometimes harsh, methods of treatment. Unconstrained by conventional medical norms and driven by the urgency of survival, these martial medics employed a myriad of techniques. Efficiency and effectiveness were their primary concerns, even if the procedures seemed brutal compared to standard medical practices.

As time passed, certain soldiers, renowned for their life-saving skills on the battlefield, began earning recognition as genuine healers. These individuals, respected within both medical and military communities, made significant contributions to the field of trauma medicine. Their hands-on experience under extreme conditions led to practical advances in treating injuries, innovations that conventional Chinese healthcare systems later embraced.

Peasant Doctors

The third category encompasses peasant doctors, reflecting a period when China was predominantly an agricultural society. People spent considerable time outdoors, working on the land. On occasion, individuals might eat something poisonous, and in quickly scrambling to find a remedy, stumble upon a cure by consuming another substance close by to the poisonous thing they just ate. Such folk remedies were exchanged within their local communities. Although shared casually, some individuals took it upon themselves to gather as many of these remedies as possible. Given the lack of medical professionals catering to common people, self-treatment became a necessity. Some peasants, through amassed knowledge and practical experience, became adept in various remedies and treatments, evolving into what people called peasant doctors.

For instance, there is a tale of a peasant who, while out hunting attacked an animal. Despite being wounded, the animal managed to escape. Days later, the peasant spotted the animal again, noticing that it had fully recovered from its injuries, whether they were wounds or fractures. Intrigued by the animal's ability to heal, the peasant decided to observe it. Upon another encounter, he attacked the animal again but allowed it to escape, subsequently tracking it from a distance. He observed the animal consuming certain herbs from a cluster of shrubs, taking note of the specific herb ingested in relation to the type of injury that animal had just sustained. This tale closely mirrors the story of Qu Huanzhang 曲焕章 (1880-1938) and his discovery of a significant herb. Observers noted that the animal healed remarkably fast after consuming a plant containing notoginseng. This anecdote is just one among many that illuminate the origins of the renowned Chinese herbal pharmaceutical company, Yunnan Baiyao 雲南白藥.

Daoist Medicine

Apart from these three main categories, there exists a distinct group of doctors whose practice is rooted in religious traditions, particularly Daoism. Much like a university system, Daoist practitioners engage in in-depth study within highly specialized fields. For instance, one individual might devote themselves to Qigong, this practice is related to the crafting of an internal tonic known as internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), mirroring the use of herbal tonics in external alchemy aimed at achieving longevity and promoting health. Within Daoism, there are thirty-six diverse departments of study, ranging from internal medicine,

gynecology, martial arts, and the *Yijing* to climatology and even sex studies. Massage and bone-setting also constitute a dedicated department of study.

Guiding technique, massage technique, and exhaling and convincing are also widely used by Daoist doctors. Guiding technique is a form of exercise combining physical movements, mental focus, and breathing originated in ancient China. Massage method is included in Dao Hongjing's *Yangxing yanming lu*, Sun Simiao's *Qianjin fang* and other scriptures in Daoist Collection. There are more than ten kinds of works about massage in the Daoist Canon, and massage techniques and positions are also described in detail. (Zhang and Dong 2021, 401)

Historically, Daoist practitioners kept various animals for research, carefully tending to their needs and treating their injuries. They applied techniques such as acupuncture, massage, and bone-setting, and also examined how different diets influenced the animals' healing processes. Daoist practitioners often kept this wealth of knowledge within their community and rarely shared with the wider public.

