Chinese astrology is not only a system that delineates interesting personality traits based on an individual’s birth year. Although this is the mainstream modern viewpoint, the tradition has roots that date back to the Warring states period (475-222 BCE), if not earlier. Like many cultures throughout the world, astrology and astronomy once went hand in hand, and after the advancement of technology, astrology no longer served pragmatic purposes. For example, the Chinese word for astronomy is *tianwen* (lit, “celestial patterns”), but it actually originally meant “portent astrology.”

Despite this shift, it is important to examine the tradition of astrology when it was most alive and vital in China: the Warring States to Han dynasty, with sporadic traces leading up to the seventeenth century. This will be done primarily through summarizing the content of three important early Chinese texts with information about Chinese astrology: the *Wuxing zhan* (Five Phase Divination) from the Mawangdi texts, two works associated with Sima Qian, and the *Huainanzi* (Book of the Huainan Masters).

As a general overview, China’s original astrological practice in the Warring States and Early Han period was exclusively used for national security prognostication for the purposes of maintaining a prosperous state, specifically military strategy and omenology. This practice became centralized in the bureaucratic court system during the Han dynasty. During this period, egalism was the main movement, so astrology, like other practices, was kept strictly under

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control. This meant that only the government had access to any texts discussing methods of astrological practice and prognostication. Official astrology was called *tianmen* (lit., “celestial portals”), and it largely focused on making predictions for the state. Individualized horoscopic astrology was not prominent in China at the time. There was a specific position designated to the Office of the Grand Astrologer (*taishi ling*) during the Han and Tang dynasty. The Grand Astrologer was prominent in Chinese bureaucracy during the Han and Tang dynasty, and practiced calendrics (*lidao*) and/or observational astrology (*tianwen dao*). These practices were based on twenty-eight lodges, discussed below, and were closely tied to mathematical astronomy. The dynasty ruler, however, was also believed to be able to correctly interpret motions of the stars, as that was his “mandate of heaven” (*tianming*), considering that the role of emperor was often seen as divine.

For the early Chinese, predictions were deemed as powerful information that provided key insights. To be more familiar with astral processes meant having more “knowledge of the natural world,” which would “...translate into political power.” Specifically, the Han dynasty military had yin-yang specialists who would comply with the seasons and would follow the Big Dipper for approximate calculations (*xingde*) concerning when to strike. In the Zhou dynasty, there existed “three Heavenly Pattern men” within the military, whose duties included observing the heavens, observing wind and astronomic phenomena (omenology), and making prognostications based on seasons and natural disasters. Most of these duties were for the purpose of “...understanding the

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4 Ibid., 444.
7 Greenbaum and Campion, *Astrology in Time and Place*, 35.
8 Ibid., 34.
mechanisms that move people’s minds.”10 Military theorists had doctrines with esoteric wisdom that expressed the divine patterns of the cosmos.11 Jupiter was of specific importance for military cosmologists. To have Jupiter’s presence in a state’s astrological space entailed a military advantage.12

The earliest surviving Chinese document that describes the motions of the five planets and their significance is called the *Wuxing zhan*, or “Prognostics of the Five Stars [Planets],” and it dates to around 168 BCE.13 This text was recovered from Han Tomb number 3 at Mawangdui, Changsha, and it holds information about prognostications based on observations of Jupiter, Saturn, and Venus dating from 246 BCE to 177 BCE.14 It is one of many excavated manuscripts from Mawangdui. The text consists of two main components: prognostications and tabulations. The first part of the text discusses the motion, positioning, and physical descriptions of the five visible planets. Each planet is associated with its cosmological counterparts, a key component of Chinese thought based on yin-yang cosmology. For example, the text describes Jupiter as associated with the East, and thus, Wood.15 The tabulations then provide details about the length of the main five planet cycles and the patterns of motions of the planets. Such descriptions included tracking Jupiter and noting its orbit from its position at the first morning rising back to that exact position as a twelve-year cycle. Saturn was a thirty-year cycle. The accuracy was impressive, as modern data demonstrates that each yields an 11.86 year and 29.45 cycle, respectively.16 However, this was done through predictions not observations. These precise trackings were very useful for

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12 Ibid., 267.
14 Cullen, “Prediction and Divination,” abstract.
15 Ibid., 222.
16 Ibid., 223.
prognostications, especially those concerning military and political events, as well as calendrical predictions for agriculture or the general disposition of a Chinese region.\textsuperscript{17}

In addition to the \textit{Wuxing zhan}, other important early evidence delineating the practice of astrology in early China is derived from the works of Sima Qian, who was a major Han historiographer and the son of Sima Tan, the Grand Astrologer of the Han Court from 165-110 BCE.\textsuperscript{18} One key work is the “Treatise on the Celestial Offices,” which discusses the astronomical and astrological knowledge of ancient China.\textsuperscript{19} This text discusses information from both the Warring States and Han period. The “Treatise on the Celestial Offices” discusses formal bureaucracy as well as detailed descriptions of the main planets. Quite literally, the imperial government was seen as a microcosm of the macrocosm (universe), and they were even referred to as the “heavenly offices.”\textsuperscript{20} The layout of the sky was mapped to mirror the political layout of the Chinese provinces, meaning that an asterism (star/planet) and its characteristics would reflect qualities of its respective Chinese province.\textsuperscript{21} In this text, the political conflict between the Chen and Chu (5th to late 3rd century BCE) areas in the Warring States period are explained through elemental cosmology used to describe political realities.\textsuperscript{22} The conflict is explained with the Five Phases, stating that their respective watery and fiery asterisms (stars) would appear in certain quadrants of the sky, resulting in the “conflagration in Chen” because of the spring appearance of the Fire Star Antares in the corresponding Chen quadrant of the sky.\textsuperscript{23} This political conflict

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{enumerate}
\item \textsuperscript{17} Cullen, “Prediction and Divination,” 223.
\item \textsuperscript{18} Louis Komjathy, \textit{Readings in Daoist Literature} (2017), “Affiliation,” introduction to 1.3.
\item \textsuperscript{19} Greenbaum and Campion, \textit{Astrology in Time and Place}, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{20} Ibid., 38.
\item \textsuperscript{21} Ibid.
\item \textsuperscript{22} Ibid., 11.
\item \textsuperscript{23} Ibid.
\end{enumerate}
\end{footnotesize}
ultimately resulted in a Chu victory, which was a prediction based on Jupiter’s return after a twelve year cycle.\textsuperscript{24}

Another important document associated with Sima Qian is called the \textit{Shiji} (Records of the Historian). This text is one of the most important ancient Chinese historiographies and includes detailed information about astrology in ancient China.\textsuperscript{25} One of the most important astrological derivations from \textit{Shiji} was the observation that when the grouping of the dominant five planets occurred, it was “heaven’s mandate” for the beginning of a new dynasty.\textsuperscript{26} This was reinforced when this event occurred at the beginning of the Han dynasty. This astronomical event included all of the planets following Jupiter, one of the most important planets that pertains to military security. The excitement was expressed in the \textit{Shiji}: “When the king of Han [Gaozu] entered Qing, the five planets gathered together signifying that [he] ought to gain all of the sub-celestial realms through righteousness.”\textsuperscript{27} The \textit{Shiji} also describes the other widely used theoretical orientations of astrological prognostication, including the astral fields and twenty-eight lodges. The astral fields depict the sky as an analogy between the Milky Way and the Yellow River of China, with the rest of the sky being analogous to the ancient Chinese provinces (see figure 1). These areas were called astral-terrestrial correspondences, and there were twelve. Aside from these, another key component of ancient Chinese astrology included the twenty-eight lodges of the sky, which divided the sky using the four cardinal directions.\textsuperscript{28} The twenty-eight lodges divide up the heavens as a reference system for planetary phenomena. Specifically, each “lodge” would include a certain

\textsuperscript{24} Pankenier, “Applied Field-Allocation Astrology,” 274.
\textsuperscript{25} Komjathy, \textit{Readings in Daoist Literature}, “Affiliation,” introduction to 1.3 and 1.4.
\textsuperscript{26} Greenbaum and Campion, \textit{Astrology in Time and Place}, 12.
\textsuperscript{27} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{28} Ibid.
number of \( du \), or width measure. The number of \( du \) depended on the number of days that the sun would spend in that lodge, where each main event is associated with a specific lodge.\(^{29}\)

**Figure 1: Astral Fields**

Although contested, the relevance of these types of astrology seems to have continued past the Han dynasty, being heavily debated in the Tang dynasty (618-907).\(^{30}\) For example, field allocation schemes were still identified up until the eighteenth century, as seen in the Qing dynasty (1644-1912) encyclopedia of 1725 in the *Complete Collection of Illustrations and Writings from Ancient Times to the Present*.\(^{31}\) Aside from astral-terrestrial correspondences, the twenty-eight lodges were

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\(^{29}\) Cullen, “Prediction and Divination,” 235.


\(^{31}\) Greenbaum and Campion, *Astrology in Time and Place*, 16.
used for stock-raising and agriculture in the Yuan dynasty (1279-1368), as evidenced by Wang Zhen’s (1290-1333) *Treatise on Agriculture.*

Another important text that provides information on ancient Chinese astrology is the *Huainanzi* (Book of the Huainan Masters), which was presented to the Han throne in 139 BCE. Chapters three and five are most relevant to astrology. According to Livia Kohn, Chinese cosmology of the Han as understood through the *Huainanzi* is a reduction of Daoist cosmic speculation. This is evidenced by the information in chapter three, “Patterns of Heaven,” which specifically discusses the origins of the cosmos, the division of the sky, planetary movements, seasonal changes, and details about the twelve-year Jupiter cycle. The cosmological belief behind Chinese astrology, at the root, was a belief that qi, life-force or energy, underlies the fabric of space-time, where everything is interrelated. Because of this, any phenomena, interpreted as omens, were interpreted analogically to events on earth. Omenology consisted of using devices like the mantic astrolabe (see figure 2) and hemerological predictions as opposed to strict sky observation. The mantic astrolabe was one of the first examples of an astrological calendar, with the Big Dipper lying in the center of the “heaven plate,” which delineated days of the month. In this way, one could predict how “x” day would be based on the order of the stars around that date. Predictions were particularly important whenever an irregular event appeared in the sky, such as a rainbow, comet, or meteor shower. Aside from this, the chapter also describes the mathematical theories that create the paradigm for planetary predictions. In chapter five of the *Huainanzi*, titled

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32 Ibid., 15.
33 Cullen, “Prediction and Divination,” abstract.
35 Ibid., 328.
36 Ibid., 321.
38 Ibid., 21.
“Seasonal Rules,” the pattern of the twelve months is delineated. The specific positioning of the solar and lunar lodges are described with their respective deities, creatures, musical notes, numbers, tastes, and smells. Many divisions are also delineated in this text including the five palaces, nine fields, eight wind-directions, ten stems, twelve branches, and twenty-eight lodges.

Figure 2: Mantic Astrolabe

Ultimately, astrology was indeed a prominent practice in ancient China, used primarily for agriculture, military strategy, and governmental national security. The use of the twenty-eight lodge divisions of the sky was surely Sinocentric, but became reinforced through specific instances such as the five planet clustering at beginning of the Han dynasty as well as the conflagration of the Chen province with the “fiery star” appearing in its respective quadrant. Modern Chinese

astrology has taken some of these qualities, such as planning weddings, trips, and other events around certain numerological days or zodiacal years, but traditional astrology did not carry on because of the archaic nature of the texts as well as the lack of pragmatism associated with prognostication with the advancement of technology. It is nonetheless important to speculate on the existential and cosmological significance of the ancient Chinese reliance on the planets and stars as guides for daily life. One might, in turn, understand it as a broader pattern of entire human community.

Work Cited


CHINESE MEDICINE AND MENTAL ILLNESS:
THE IMPACT OF CHINESE COSMOLOGY AND PSYCHOSOMATIC VIEWS

“When the four limbs become aligned
The blood and qi become still.
Unify your awareness and concentrate the heart-mind.
Then the ears and eyes will not overflow.
Even the far-off will seem quite near.”
-“Inward Training,” Book of Master Guan

The concept of mind/body awareness is present in not only the Daoist tradition, but also in other Chinese religions such as Sinified Buddhism. It is part of “traditional Chinese culture.” Traditional Chinese culture refers to the foundational worldviews found commonly in China that date back to pre-modern culture, and it includes various elements such as a Fengshui, martial arts practices, yin-yang cosmology, and Chinese health practices that are based in their cosmological viewpoints (Komjathy 322). A common theme that relates to traditional cosmology is the holistic view of body/mind. It is common in Chinese culture to associate disease with disharmony of self, with personhood seen as somatic and spiritual (Tan 59). For this reason, many practitioners of Chinese medicine see mental illness through the lens of mind/body unity, and there is thus much overlap between physical health practices and psychological therapy (Tan 59). This paper will describe how Chinese cosmology impacts traditional Chinese views of self, which then impacts perceptions of mental illness and corresponding therapy practices.

To understand how Chinese medicine functions, it is first important to understand the underlying cosmological view that directly impacts medicinal practices. The traditional Chinese worldview centers on yin-yang, the Five Phases, and qi (Komjathy 105). Yin and yang are
complementary forces that represent the different aspects of the same subject (Komjathy 106). Yin encompasses cold, darkness, wet, heavy, rest, and inwardness, while yang encompasses heat, light, dry, light, activity, and outwardness (Komjathy 106). Both yin and yang are integral to any situation, and they are necessary elements of the human body (Tan 61). Since the body is directly connected to the mind and spirit, yin and yang are also correlated to feelings, emotions, and mental states. In order to have good health, one must maintain yin-yang balance. The imbalance or disharmony of yin-yang results in disordered qi, which thus results in disease of the mind or the body (Tan 61). Yin-yang balance in the body closely relates to the Five Phases (wuxing), and together they create the “system of correspondences” of the body and mind (Komjathy 107). These Five Phases relate to each other in cycles (see figure 1).

![The Five Phase Cycle, with Associated Organs and Emotions](image)

**Figure 1: The Five Phase Cycle, with Associated Organs and Emotions**  
Source: Tan, “Chinese Medicine for Mental Disorders”

This figure depicts the way each cosmological phase impacts and relates to the other, and it also shows the correlative yin-organ (zang) and negative emotion. The outer cycle represents the
production cycle, while the inside cycle is the control cycle (Komjathy 108). In the Wood phase, the yin-organ is the liver. This corresponds to lesser yang and anger, which means anger is most prevalent in spring (Tan 62). In the Fire phase, summer, the yin-organ is the heart, which corresponds to greater yang and excessive joy. Earth relates to the spleen and worry. Metal’s yin-organ is the lungs, and is lesser yin, which relates to grief. Water’s yin-organ is the kidneys, which relates to greater yin and fear. Each phase and cycle directly affects the flow of qi. Qi is the subtle, vital breath that circulates through the body as well as the entire universe (Komjathy 109). Qi moves through the Five Phase cycle as shown above, and it moves most freely when yin and yang are in balance (Tan 61). Qi flows through the universe and all forms of life, and it is the vital essence of people. An adept person who practices health and longevity practices would ideally be able to nourish themselves solely with qi, in place of physical food. However, many factors, emotional or physical, can cause imbalance in the system and stifle the flow of qi. This is where traditional Chinese medicinal factors come into play. Chinese medicine recognizes the importance of qi flow and the interconnectedness of a person’s mind and body, and it uses the cosmological foundation to treat and prevent illnesses.

Due to the cosmological nature of Chinese medicine, the ultimate goal of treatment is usually to restore balance to the system. In the case of mental illnesses, this can be achieved through body techniques and cognitive reframing. Common body techniques include breathing, meditation, acupuncture, Taiji quan (Yin-yang Boxing), and Qigong (Energy Exercises). Cognitive reframing is usually paired with one of these physical exercises, and it involves the acceptance of self and personal emotional validation (Leung 304). The most important aspect of cognitive reframing from a Chinese medicinal perspective is the practice of appreciating change (ibid.). According to Leung, change is “a process of moving towards new balance,” and improvement only happens when “one
recognizes that something has disrupted the dynamic balance within the self and between self and the world” (ibid.). This remains consistent with the cosmological underpinnings and interconnected view of the person. If an emotion is too strong, this disrupts the flow of qi in the Five Phase cycle, causes an imbalance of yin and yang, and results in illness (Tan 61). A clear example of this is seasonal affective disorder. Individuals with this disorder become depressed during winter months, sleeping more, feeling listless and uninterested in things. When spring arrives though, this depression is lifted, and cognition and resilience improve (ibid.). According to Chinese cosmology, this makes perfect sense. Autumn and winter occur during the Metal and Water Phases, and emotions of grief and fear are more prevalent during these phases. To restore balance to the system, one should tend to the lungs and kidneys by engage in activities such as walking and exposure to light (ibid., 62). There are many other health practices that are used to treat mental illness as well. Below are some common practices used to treat mental illnesses.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Domains</th>
<th>Physical</th>
<th>Mental/emotional</th>
<th>Spiritual/existential</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Components</td>
<td>Breathing</td>
<td>Normalization</td>
<td>Reconstructing meaning of suffering</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Breathing meditation</td>
<td>Acceptance</td>
<td>Focusing on transformation in pain</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Therapeutic massage</td>
<td>Emotional validation</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Taiji/qigong exercises</td>
<td>Cognitive reframing</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Movement</td>
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**Figure 2: Intervention Components of the “Integrative Mind-Body-Spirit” Approach**
Source: Leung, “Towards Body-Mind-Spirit Integration”

Breathing exercises draw a person’s attention to the lungs and lead to conscious regulation of the breath. When a person experiences extreme sadness or grief, breathing becomes shallow and quick. Focusing on taking deep breaths when feeling grief leads to the replenishing of the lungs (Leung 306). Leung’s article describes a case in which a depressed patient was taught to use “ha” breathing techniques. This technique involves smiling while taking in deep breaths and repeating “ha” with each exhale (ibid., 307). The technique is based on the principle of restoring
qi flow to the affected organ, the lungs, to help balance the system and ease some of the sadness and grief that was felt. In addition to addressing the lungs, the “ha” breathing technique altered the patient’s heart pattern, which brought an increase of joy (ibid.). Consciously regulating breathing restores qi flow and balances yin-yang, leading to relief and an improved mental state.

Breathing meditation differs from breathing exercises because it also involves visualization of qi (Leung 307). During breathing meditation exercises, patients are asked to visualize vital energy of the universe entering the body when they breathe in, and visualize negative energy leaving their body when they breathe out. They are also sometimes asked to visualize breathing out positive, loving energy for other people. After a depressed patient with insomnia practiced several sessions of breathing meditation, she reported feeling calm, revitalized, and relieved (ibid.). Similar to breathing exercises, breathing meditation is meant to improve qi flow through the Five Phases of the body and bring a balanced yin-yang state.

Another psychosomatic technique to deal with mental illness is therapeutic self-massage. For this, patients are asked to quickly rub their palms together for ten seconds, and then place their hands on the part of the body that requires attention (Leung 308). A manic patient would be asked to place her hand on the heart, focusing on restoring the balance of qi there. Someone with a phobia would be asked to place his hand on the kidneys. With this therapeutic massage, therapists also ask the patient to acknowledge how hard her body is working and feel gratefulness for it, thinking about the love they have for themselves. With this message patients learn to recognize that feelings are held in the body, and that one should care for the body and work to create space for qi to flow instead of letting it remain blocked (ibid.). This practice promotes harmony within the body and leads to a greater sense of well-being.
Similar to the way that therapeutic massage is used to treat mental imbalance, acupuncture is the most common Chinese medicinal treatment for mental disorders (Tan 67). Acupuncture involves using a needle to trigger specific areas in the body, according to the Five Phase cycle and internal body maps, to restore qi flow to the correct areas. A clinical trial using around 2,000 patients showed the positive effects of acupuncture on patients with Major Depressive Disorder, as well as patients working on stroke rehabilitation and various neurological disorders (Tan 67). Acupuncture is based on the cosmological foundation of restorative qi flow, and as the most common medicinal practice it helps promote yin-yang balance and harmony for many.

Another medicinal practice for mental illness is guided movement and breathing practices. The two most common types of this are Qigong and Taiji quan, and the goal is to restore a balance between yin and yang through conscious breathing and deliberate movement (Qian 55). These practices allow for qi to flow more smoothly throughout the body and harmony to be restored. According to Qian, Qigong and Taiji quan are used to treat anxiety, depression, and insomnia, and they are also prescribed as preventative exercises (Qian 56). Taiji quan is sometimes referred to as a martial art, and it is a form of traditional Chinese shadowboxing. Taiji quan involves slow, rhythmic and sequential postures that discipline the body and lead to mental clarity through coordinated movements and regulated breathing. Somewhat similarly, Qigong is used to control the mind and breathing to promote the flow of qi (Tan 67). Qigong can involve sound breaths and the Standing Eight Brocades (Komjathy 202). Both Qigong and Taiji quan demonstrate that cosmological thought can be transformed into physical and mental health practices.

Physical practices are most common in Chinese medicinal psychological therapy, and sometimes they are paired with herbal supplements or medication to treat the affected part of the system. Tan’s article in the *Alternative Therapies Journal* discusses a host of herbal remedies for
specific ailments. Herbs should be taken in addition to qi stimulating health practices. When anger impairs the liver qi, a host of symptoms such as headache, dizziness, red eyes, and insomnia may occur (Tan 64). For this, practitioners prescribe herbs such as *citrus aurantium* and *P lactiflora* as well as breathing meditation. Because anger is the liver’s emotion of wood, these herbs also help overcome anger by producing stimulating the lungs so that the metal phase of grief overcomes the anger (ibid.). When worry impairs the spleen, a person may feel amnesia, dreaminess, and a weak pulse. Herbs like *Conodonopsis* and *attractylodes macrocephala* are commonly used with movement exercises to ignite anger, which overcomes the anxiety and displaces blocked qi in the abdomen. When fright impairs the kidneys, a person may experience listlessness, weakness of joints, and urinary problems. For this, on is prescribed *P ginseng* and *P coco* as well as meditation to replenish kidney qi (ibid., 65). The restoration of qi through the Five Phase cycle and in the body rebalances yin and yang, and therefore leads to mind/body harmony. Here we once again find the psychosomatic approach so characteristic of traditional Chinese culture.

Although most of the practices described have been in the context of treatment, they are all prescribed for the prevention of illness as well. Balancing qi and keeping a harmonious system keeps one from contracting a mental or a physical illness (Qian 54). Balancing yin-yang and accumulating qi also requires keeping the system in check throughout the Five Phase cycle. During the spring and the summer, one should nourish yang (activity); during the fall and the winter, one should nourish yin (rest). For this, one should wake up early in the spring, adapt agreeably to cold or hot weather, and keep moods in control during each season (Tan 67). One is always encouraged to strive for a state of peace and to accumulate qi, not just to prevent illness but to live an overall healthier and longer life. Ultimately, if someone has accumulated enough qi and has proper flow, he or she should be able to nourish on qi alone while maintaining a yin-yang balance.
The foundational cosmological views of Chinese medicinal approaches emphasize the interconnectedness of the individual, since the self is a microcosm of the universe. This leads to the application of yin-yang and the Five Phases to the self-system, and it emphasizes the accumulation and flow of qi. These principles underlie a psychosomatic view of the self, which leads to many therapeutic techniques that involve physical practices focused on restoring inner harmony to treat mental illness. Breathing, meditation, massage, acupuncture, Qigong, Taiji quan, and herbal remedies all apply yin-yang and qi principles to healing techniques for mental illnesses.

Works Cited


THE SOTERIOLOGY OF QUANZHEN DAOISM:
TOWARDS A PERFECTED SELF

If one thing is certain about the Daoist tradition, it is that attunement and union with the Dao are the central and utmost concern of its adherents, no matter the movement. However, each historical movement of the tradition has a unique view of the individual and the means of attaining this highest goal, each providing a differing soteriology that defines the ultimate purpose of human existence. For the movement of classical Daoism, this may be a quietistic approach focused on returning to innate nature; within Taiqing (Great Clarity) Daoism, adherents seek transformation of the self through external alchemy (waidan), specifically the creation of an external elixir for immortality (Daoist Tradition, 21, 25). This paper will examine the unique soteriology of Quanzhen (Complete Perfection) Daoism, which essentially consists of two categories for total realization of the individual: self-cultivation and alchemical transformation utilizing internal alchemy (neidan). It is through a disciplined incorporation of these practices that the adherent can attain the utmost goal of Quanzhen: to transcend the ordinary human state and actualize the non-dissipating condition of “complete perfection,” thus attaining immortality as a pure yang being (Cultivating Perfection, 4).

It is worthwhile to first understand the historical context into which the Quanzhen movement of Daoism was born before exploring its prescribed practices for attaining purity and perfection. Though currently the primary Daoist monastic order in China, the movement finds its origins in the late medieval period of Daoism, around the late 12\textsuperscript{th} or early 13\textsuperscript{th} century CE (Teachings and Practices, 1). While many of the models of attainment in Quanzhen were already
practiced by earlier Daoist adherents (for example, internal alchemy had been fully systematized by the 10th century), it was through the life and teachings of Wang Zhe (Chongyang [Redoubled Yang]; 1113-1170) in the mid to late twelfth century that the movement’s soteriology came to fruition (Daoist Tradition, 132).

Writings on this teacher’s life describe him as having slipped into a pattern of drunkenness and neglect of his familial responsibilities, when a mystical experience with the immortals Zhongli Quan (2nd c. CE?) and Lü Dongbin (b. 798?) gave him the revelations that would become the foundation of the Quanzhen movement. Considered the origins of his spiritual lineage, these two immortals were masters of internal alchemy (neidan), which came to largely inform the path to immortality in Quanzhen (Teachings and Practices, 3-4). Additionally, several writings record Wang Zhe as a self-identified student of the teachings of Ren Fashi, a Buddhist teacher who imparted to him the so-called eighteen precepts; he was additionally well read on Mahayana Buddhist texts such as the Diamond Sutra and the Heart Sutra (Teachings and Practices, 4). It was these teachers and revelations surrounding Wang Zhe that informed the practices he utilized in his lifetime to attain immortality, being the model upon which Quanzhen practice was then built.

With this background in mind, we can better understand the soteriology of Quanzhen Daoism, the path to complete perfection and resulting immortality. The specific practices, which will be discussed in more detail momentarily, vary in their specific purpose towards this goal, and many Daoist teachers have condemned excessive focus on the practices because this can result in mistaking them for the Dao itself, and distorting the underlying soteriology of Quanzhen. Ma Yu (Danyang [Elixir Yang]; 1123-1183), one of the so-called Seven Perfected, exemplifies this fact succinctly: “The alchemical scriptures and the books of various philosophers, the thousand classics and 10,000 treatises can all be covered up with one phrase—‘clean and pure’” (Teachings and
The ultimate goal of all the alchemical, ascetic, mystical, and meditative disciplines that make up this movement center on one thing: becoming a transformed being of absolute purity, a being who no longer clings to desires and is free from energetic dissipation. Buddhism informs this soteriology, as dystrophy of desires is paramount, with an emphasis on ascetic and ethical self-cultivation practice. Simultaneously, the internal alchemy and apophatic meditation approaches are derived from Daoism and are equally vital to cultivating perfection.

It is also important to note that attaining this perfected state involves the creation of an immortal spirit, but this is not the sole goal of the practice. In fact, as Wang Zhe states in one of his poems, “Quit wishing for divine immortality, quit speaking of it! Let yourself sit alone on the white lotus flower.” (Teachings and Practices, 23). He thus advocates for inner peace and purity as a major concern beyond immortality. With this knowledge, we can understand that it is really xiuzhen, or “cultivating perfection,” that is the purpose of the individual in Quanzhen, with immortality as the mark of having achieved the highest state (Encyclopedia of Taoism, 1118). The actions are not a simply recipe for immortality; one who undergoes the motions of cultivation with fervor but forgets to do so with an understanding of the Dao will not become an immortal (Daoist Literature, 104). There are many practices that play into cultivation (apophatic meditation, mystical attunement, etc.), but for our purposes, we will explore the path to perfection through self-cultivation and internal alchemy, as they are consistently upheld as the most central pillars of Quanzhen.

In order to achieve the soteriological goal of Quanzhen, one must complete a holistic series of self-cultivation practices, one of which is asceticism. Accounts of the life of Wang Zhe include descriptions of his austere training regimen; perhaps the most famous example is his isolation in a hermitage for 100 days, which served as a model for other ascetics and later monastics. Huts like
Wang Zhe’s were eventually established around some Quanzhen monasteries for the purpose of replicating his period of isolation (Teachings and Practices, 42). Generally, the “renunciant orientation” of the movement calls for sleep deprivation, sobriety, abstinence, poverty, etc. as the means of self-cultivation. The ordinary person engages in patterns of dissipation by their indulgence in such desires. Quanzhen texts, attributed to Ma Yu and Qiu Chuji (Changchun [Perpetual Spring]; 1148-1227), advise adherents to “discard your desires. Have nothing that hangs upon or hinders your mind…contemplate on the Dao in the same way a hungry person thinks of food or a thirsty person thinks of drink” (Daoist Tradition, 32). It is important to ask, what exactly is the rationale behind these practices? How to they cultivate perfection and the formation of a transcendent spirit?

Within Quanzhen, the understanding of mental states is that they are a direct reflection of the state of one’s qi in the body. If the mind is full of impure desires, there will be disharmony between spirit and qi, which lends to dissipation. As will be discussed later, the union and harmony of the spirit and qi is perhaps the most critical component of creating an immortal spirit, so a mind which continues to cling to desire is one destined to remain in the ordinary human condition (Teachings and Practices, 33). According to Ma Yu, one who deprives oneself can fill these deficiencies with their own internal fluids and energies; in this way ascetic practice allows the adherent to have maximum control over their vital forces and decreases the need for physical sustenance and instead replaces such needs with qi – after all, the qi constituting food is what the body is truly utilizing from a Daoist perspective (Teachings and Practices, 42; Daoist Tradition, 169). Asceticism gives the practitioner control over the body and its vital substances, and thus refines the self as an act of self-cultivation and even self-divinization. A metaphor for asceticism associated with Liu Chuxuan illustrates this well: “It is like shattering a rock to take out a piece of
The body is like the rock; it is only by intense austerity and labor that the exterior impurity can be stripped away to extract the jade from within, jade being the immortal state (*Teachings and Practice*, 45).

While asceticism relates primarily to the desire-driven state of the ordinary human mind, self-cultivation practice goes beyond asceticism and into ethical cultivation and virtuous action. Wang Zhe advocated living by the Five Precepts (a code of conduct that is Buddhist in origin) as a means of fully expelling any deviant thoughts from the mind (*Daoist Literature*, 139-140). These precepts include prescriptions against killing, stealing, and sexual misconduct. In the late imperial Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage, this foundational Quanzhen ethical commitment involves adherence to the Ten Precepts of Initial Perfection (among other advanced sets of precepts) as ethical guidelines for monastics to cultivate a pure and ethical mind. From an energetic perspective, these practices function similarly in avoiding patterns of dissipation. Within Quanzhen, sex is considered to disrupt the harmony of yin-orbs (the significance of which will be clear later), wealth disrupts the clarity of the heart-mind, and anger dissipates the individual (*Cultivating Perfection*, 105). In this way, ethical restraint makes the individual more energetically conservative, but what they do with that energy is equally vital and comes through alchemical practice.

The hallmark practice of Quanzhen Daoism is *neidan*, or internal alchemy. Rather than seeking to form an external elixir of immortality to be consumed, an elixir is achieved by discipline and transformation of substances within the body (focusing on the internal Three Treasures), using the body as a crucible for such transformation (*Teachings and Practice*, 36). It can be defined as a “process of psychosomatic refinement, a shift in ontological condition from ordinary human being to a more cosmological being” (*Daoist Tradition*, 30). Categorically a form of meditation, this practice uses maps of the body as a psychosomatic and energetic space in order to transform it.
This in part requires an understanding of the five yin-orbs and six yang-orbs, each associated with intertwined physical and energetic functions. For example, the yin-orb of the spleen is associated with a yellow energy of the Earth phase, and functions in controlling blood as well as creating post-natal qi (Cultivating Perfection, 120). Each of these orbs serves a psychosomatic role, and all are interconnected through the meridian system which runs along major lines of the body. Most notably for the purpose of neidan, there is the Governing Vessel, which runs up along the back from spine to upper lip, and the Conception Vessel, which moves up the front of the torso from the perineum to the lower lip (Cultivating Perfection, 123).

An understanding of the flow of vital substances, especially of qi movement along the meridians, is key to seeing how internal alchemy fits into the soteriology of Quanzhen: It is by a disciplined control over these energetic movements that one can transform the vital essence, qi, and spirit of the body into an immortal being. These Three Treasures dwell in the elixir fields of the “Ocean of Qi” (abdomen), the “Vermillion palace” (heart region), and the “Palace of Nirvana” (the head) (Cultivating Perfection, 140). Within these regions there is a complex network of psychological beings, ranging from wild animals to aristocrats; there is thus an immense complexity to the Quanzhen view of the body which must be harmonized and intentionally transformed through internal alchemy. This is no easy feat and takes discipline, with a full knowledge and awareness of disharmony in the orbs, meridian channels, and entities of the body to attain total psychosomatic health, becoming a pure yang being (Cultivating Perfection, 144-145).

The specifics of practice for transforming one’s subtle energies is often written about in cryptic and poetic language, but we certainly have specific examples of neidan in action. An example of this is the activation of the Waterwheel or Microcosmic Orbit, in which the practitioner
(by means of meditation and visualization) circulates qi up the Governing Vessel of the back and down the Conception Vessel of the front torso in order to form an energetic whole (Daoist Tradition, 218-219). The retention of saliva, postures and breathing patterns, visualization, and mental concentration are all capable of bringing greater control of the practitioner over their vital forces within them, and with enough discipline the “golden elixir” is created (“Death Meditations,” 374).

An immortal condition is the end-state when a Quanzhen adherent has achieved total transformation and perfection of the heart-mind, but what exactly does it mean to be an immortal? Looking to Daoist texts for this answer, it becomes clear that the immortality is a non-corporeal transcendence. A sermon delivered by Qiu Chuji regarding humans at their origin gives an interesting insight to the non-physical nature of humans. He states that when the Dao first gave way to the earth and thus to humans, “their spiritual light shined naturally, and they went about walking as though they were flying,” appearing to only gain weight and substance once their desires for the taste and smell of foods set in, and they clung to them (Teachings and Practices, 118). It would appear that a desireless, pure perfected being does not require a physical body to continue to live and have agency. Some texts refer to the transcendence of the immortal spirit as “casting off the husk” of the mortal corpse (Daoist Literature, 105). This is interesting in light of the very world-affirming classical Daoist views of self, with dissipation of both the corporeal and energetic self back into the fluctuating cosmos that is the Dao as an expected end for all beings. The Quanzhen portrait of immortals (at face value) may appear to contain quasi-docetic tendencies with the idea of an eternal soul which simply dwells within the disposable body, but when analyzing it from an energetic perspective, it becomes clear that this is not the case.
Rather than the individual having a soul that is innately immortal, the individual is an energetic collection that can be strengthened and kept from dissipating; the Daoist view of the non-corporeal self must be viewed less as a soul-entity and more as an energetic-entity. The uncultivated person can expect nothing more than dissipation at death, while the perfected being can prevent patterns of dissipation through self-transformation (Cultivating Perfection, 67). All of the previously discussed techniques and methods lend themselves to this goal, which culminates in the union of the spirit in the lower elixir field with the qi of the body. At this moment, the individual “conceives” an inner spirit embryo, which when brought to maturity is able to exit the body through the head (“Death Meditations,” 374). Ultimately, this means the formation of the yang-spirit (yangshen) and embryo of immortality (xiantai). These energetic substances which usually inhabit the body in life and are dissipated at death instead unite to form a new entity, a yang-spirit, which is able to live on. The individual is united with the Dao, but not through dissipation – rather, they are the embodiment of the Dao in their perfection of the cosmological and energetic harmony of their body.

It worth noting that the path to ultimate perfection requires the absolute commitment of the individual and total cultivation of the yang-spirit. For example, impatience and failure to fully refine the spirit may result in a lesser state of post-corporeal existence, such as a mere, weak yin-spirit (transitory ghost) which separates from the body, existing in the realm of the dead and lacking the visible form of true immortals (“Death Meditations,” 377-378). A text of the Zhong-Lü textual corpus details the possible intermediate immortal states, such as terrestrial immortals, spirit immortals, and ghosts (yin-spirits). In the case of these intermediate forms, it appears that it is those who “cultivate but do not understand the Dao” have the fate of being a lesser-immortal (Daoist Literature, 4-5). A remnant of impure desire is also cited as a potential source of imperfect
immortality (“Death Meditations,” 379). These texts make the soteriology of Quanzhen even more clear: it is not just a valiant effort in cultivating one’s yang-spirit that is the goal, but a complete and perfect transformation of the self into a fully yang being. It may seem the obvious goal given the name “Complete Perfection,” but the texts make it clear that nothing short of absolute dedication to cultivation and realization of the Dao is sufficient to become a celestial immortal.

The state of being a pure yang being is entirely distinct from the ordinary human state–this is a distant condition that requires a lifetime of cultivation to achieve. This is why a total internal transformation is necessary and is the ultimate purpose of Quanzhen adherents. By utilizing the models of attainment, not out of the desire of status as an immortal, but out of a desire for deepest understanding and attunement to the Dao, one becomes an immortal and completely perfected being. This is the path to complete perfection, the soteriology of Quanzhen.

Works Cited


