



## A Daoist way of being: clarity and stillness as embodied practice\*

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### ABSTRACT

Daoism, especially classical Daoism, is often constructed as a ‘philosophy,’ ‘set of ideas,’ or ‘system of thought.’ This is particularly the case in studies of Chinese philosophy and comparative philosophy. The present article draws attention to the central importance of clarity and stillness (*qingjing* 清靜) as a Daoist form of meditative practice, contemplative experience, and way of being. Examining historical precedents in classical Daoism, the article gives particular attention to the Tang dynasty (618–907) ‘Clarity-and-Stillness Literature,’ specifically the eighth-century *Qingjing jing* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620). In the process, one finds that *qingjing* is one of the major connective strands throughout the Daoist tradition, a connective strand that reveals the central importance of embodied, experiential, and applied dimensions of human being from a Daoist perspective.

### KEYWORDS

Apophatic meditation; clarity and stillness; Clarity-and-Stillness Literature; contemplative psychology; Daoism (Taoism; embodiment; mystical experience; *\_qingjing\_*; *\_Qingjing jing\_*; *\_Shengxuan huming jing\_*

Anyone familiar with Daoist views of the body will immediately recognize the polysemic character of the above epigraph and similar Daoist statements. There is a hermeneutical openness in Daoist sacred texts. This is especially the case when we investigate the ways in which Daoist texts have been read, interpreted, and applied *by Daoists* and *within Daoist communities and contexts*. In the phase just quoted from the *Daode jing* 道德經 (*Tao-te ching*; Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power), *tianxia* 天下, literally, ‘under the sky/heavens/cosmos,’ is usually taken to mean ‘the world,’ the actual world as inhabited, terrestrial landscape and perhaps even as humanly governed society. Such is probably the contextual meaning (‘original meaning’) of the passage. In the context of the inner cultivation lineages of the classical Daoism (so-called ‘philosophical Daoism’), adepts practiced apophatic or quietistic meditation<sup>1</sup> aimed at mystical union with the Dao. One tangible result of such meditative praxis was harmonization of self, community, society and world. That is, one’s own cultivation of clarity and stillness has the potential to positively influence concentric circles of embeddedness. Here one finds the familiar spiritual utopianism of the Primitivist school of classical Daoism, a viewpoint challenged,

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The Way of Clarity and Stillness (*Qingjing dao* 清靜道), a way of being wherein consistent and prolonged apophatic meditation is foundational.清靜為天下正。

Clarity and stillness are the alignments of the world.

*Daode jing*, ch. 45

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however, by Zhuang Zhou (Chuang Chou) 莊周 and the Zhuangist school, among others.<sup>2</sup> At the same time, Daoists have often interpreted *tianxia* as referring to the human body, with *tian* designating the head. For example, in his influential commentary on the *Daode jing*, Heshang gong 河上公 (2<sup>nd</sup> c. CE?), the elusive Han dynasty recluse ‘dwelling-by-the-river,’ interprets the sentence as related to Yangsheng 養生 (‘nourishing life’) practice, that is, health and longevity techniques. Read on a macrocosmic level, 清靜為天下正 might suggest that when the heavens are clear and the earth is still, the world as inhabited space is aligned and harmonious. Read on a microcosmic level, the phrase might be taken as a Daoist principle of spiritual self-cultivation. When one’s heart-mind (heaven) is clear and one’s qi becomes still (stored) within the navel region (earth), the corporeal world as internal landscape and administration becomes harmonized and peaceful. The heart-mind becomes the ‘ruler’ of one’s life, the director of fate whose guidance aligns with the Dao in its various manifestations. Such is the heart-mind as storehouse of spirit (*shen* 神), as the celestial pivot in the human body. From a Daoist perspective, this is the heart-mind within the ordinary heart-mind; its original and pure state is characterized by clarity and stillness. Thus, there is a sophisticated contemplative psychology and theory of consciousness within apparent Daoist philosophical views.

In the present article, I focus on the centrally important Daoist notion of ‘clarity and stillness’ (*qingjing* 清靜), which has also been rendered as ‘purity and tranquility.’ Special emphasis is placed on what I refer to as the ‘Clarity-and-Stillness Literature’ of the Tang dynasty (618–907), specifically texts such as the *Qingjing jing* 清靜經 (*Ch’ing-ching ching*; Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620; ZH 350).<sup>3</sup> Tang-dynasty Clarity-and-Stillness literature provides a bridge from classical Daoism and early organized Daoism to later organized Daoism.<sup>4</sup> It incorporates and develops classical, and thus foundational, Daoist concerns, and combines these with Mahāyāna Buddhist views of consciousness, especially as expressed in the *Prajñā-pāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) family of texts. From its composition in the eighth century CE onward, the *Qingjing jing* became foundational in Daoist internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) lineages in general and Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism in particular. The principle of clarity and stillness is thus one of the connective strands throughout the Daoist tradition, especially among Daoist adherents and communities emphasizing self-cultivation as well as meditative praxis and application.

## Classical precedents and Buddhist influence

Before examining the Tang-dynasty Clarity-and-Stillness Literature, some background information on classical precedents and on Buddhist influence is necessary. The Daoist concern for and emphasis on clarity and stillness goes back to the earliest Daoist communities of the Warring States period (480–222 BCE) and Early Han dynasty (202 BCE–9 CE), the ‘inner cultivation lineages’ of classical Daoism as Harold Roth of Brown University has labelled them. These were master-disciple communities with diverse views on and approaches to Daoist religious practice, but ones that tended to emphasize a shared repertoire of apophatic meditation. Following my seminal, revisionist framework (2013b, 2014a), here I will refer to these adepts and communities as ‘classical Daoism,’ a moment in Daoist religious history mischaracterized as so-called ‘philosophical Daoism’ in inaccurate and outdated scholarship on Daoism.<sup>5</sup> While I accept that there

were Daoists and Daoist communities in the Warring States period, I believe that their primary concerns were religious. Specifically, as expressed in texts such as the *Laozi* 老子 (*Lao-tzu*; Book of Venerable Masters; a.k.a. *Daode jing*), *Zhuangzi* 莊子 (*Chuang-tzu*; Book of Master Zhuang), and other less well-known texts, members of the classical inner cultivation lineages emphasized apophatic meditation aimed at mystical union with the Dao. This is a type of Daoist meditation that is primarily contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. The classical inner cultivation lineages were religious communities because they emphasized cosmology, psychology, theology, lineage, religious praxis, training and transmission, as well as mystical experience. From a Religious Studies perspective, they exhibit the ‘seven dimensions’ of religion as outlined by Ninian Smart in his phenomenological approach.<sup>6</sup> Here I would simply draw attention to the lived social context that led to the composition, preservation, and transmission of the texts themselves (See also LaFargue 1992).

These details are important for understanding clarity and stillness in classical Daoism, as *qingjing* was not simply a philosophical view or philosophy of life. Rather, *qingjing* was an informing worldview utilized in classical Daoist religious praxis, specifically within the context of self-cultivation, solitary meditation, and spiritual direction. It was informed by and expressed through Daoist practice. It is based in classical Chinese and Daoist cosmological and theological views, that is, views focusing on the Dao as sacred and the cosmos (‘Nature’) as one manifestation of the Dao. From this perspective, clarity and stillness relate to heaven/yang and earth/yin, respectively. For example, according to chapter three of the received *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Huainan Masters; DZ 1184; ZH 978), which is titled *Tianwen* 天文 (Celestial Patterns),

When the heavens and earth were not yet formed, everything was ascending and flying, diving and delving. We refer to this as the Great Inception. The Dao originally birthed the nebulous void; the nebulous void birthed the cosmos; and the cosmos birthed qi. This qi divided like a shoreline: the clear and light rose and became the heavens; the heavy and turbid sank and became the earth. It is easy for the clear and wondrous to converge, but difficult for the heavy and turbid to congeal. Thus the heavens were completed first, while the earth was established after. The conjoined essences of the heavens and earth became yin and yang, and the disseminated essence of yin and yang became the four seasons. The scattered essences of the four seasons became the myriad beings. (cf. Major, 1993, p. 62; see also Major, Queen, Meyer, & Roth, 2010)<sup>7</sup>

The technical vocabulary appearing in this passage and other contemporaneous cosmological texts is central to both Daoist cosmology and cultivational concerns. As we will see, the *Qingjing jing* makes a distinction between the following paired terms: turbidity (*zhuo* 濁)/stillness (*jing* 靜) and agitation (*dong* 動)/clarity (*qing* 清). In the present passage, the heavy and turbid correspond to earth, while the clear and light correspond to heaven. These terms also have value-neutral correspondences to yin and yang, respectively. They are aspects of yin-yang interaction and relational patterns. As expressed in the *Yijing* 易經 (*I-ching*; Classic of Changes), this cosmogonic moment relates to the trigrams and hexagrams Qian-heaven (hexagram 1) and Kun-earth (hexagram 2), or pure yang and pure yin, respectively. If we map this out following later internal alchemy traditions, for which the *Qingjing jing* became a foundational influence, Li-fire and Kan-water become Qian-heaven and Kun-earth, respectively. That is, the heavy and turbid aspect of the heart (Li-fire) sinks down to become energetic stillness

(Kun-earth), while the clear and light aspect of the navel region (Kan-water) ascends to become spiritual clarity (Qian-heaven). The external cosmos is also an internal landscape governed by the same cosmological principles and patterns of interaction.

Before examining *qingjing* in terms of classical Daoist meditation practice, it is also important to understand the underlying contemplative psychology and theory of consciousness.<sup>8</sup> The cultivation of clarity and stillness centers on the heart-mind (*xin* 心). Although often translated as ‘mind,’ an appropriate rendering for the character in Buddhism, from a classical and foundational Daoist perspective *xin* is both the actual, physical heart as well as mind or consciousness in a more abstract or subtle sense. At the same time, within the organ-meridian system, the heart-mind is the ‘ruler’ of the body and associated with the Fire phase. It is psychosomatic, simultaneously physical, psychological, and spiritual. It is ultimately multi-local, meaning that it is not simply in the head or the chest. Daoist apophatic meditation is ultimately connected to consciousness and spirit (*shen* 神), with particular emphasis placed on the ability of the heart-mind either to attain numinous pervasion (*lingtong* 靈通) or to separate the adept from the Dao as Source. Here the heart-mind is understood both as a physical location in the chest (the heart as ‘organ’ [*zang* 臟]) and as relating to thoughts (*nian* 念) and emotions (*qing* 情) (the heart as ‘consciousness’ [*shi* 識]). Intellectual and emotional activity is a possible source of dissipation and disruption. However, when stilled (*jing* 靜) and stabilized (*ding* 定), the heart-mind is associated with innate nature (*xing* 性), the givenness (*ziran* 自然) and the actualization (*xiu* 修) of one’s innate endowment from and connection with the Dao. This return to one’s original nature (*benxing* 本性) is the attainment of mystical unification (*dedao* 得道).

Simultaneously, *qingjing* was one dimension of the actual practice of classical Daoist quietistic or apophatic meditation, a form of meditation that incorporated the previously mentioned cosmological and psychological associations of *qingjing*. This is so much the case that I am inclined to refer to it as the ‘Way of Clarity-and-Stillness’ (*qingjing dao* 清靜道). The phrase appears throughout the texts of classical Daoism.<sup>9</sup> Here two examples will have to suffice.

Apply emptiness completely;  
Guard stillness steadfastly.  
The ten thousand beings arise together;  
I simply observe their return.  
All beings flourish and multiply;  
Each again returns to the Source.  
Returning to the Source is called stillness;  
This means returning to life-destiny.  
Returning to life-destiny is called constancy;  
Knowing constancy is called illumination.  
(DDJ, ch. 16)

And<sup>10</sup>

Most people are busy as though attending the Tailao sacrifice,  
As though ascending a tower in spring;  
I alone am unmoving, showing no sign.  
I resemble an infant who has not yet become a child;  
Lazy and idle, as though there is no place to return.

Everyone has more than enough;  
 I alone appear as though abandoned.  
 I have the heart-mind of a fool—  
 Chaotic and unpredictable.  
 Ordinary people are bright and clear;  
 I alone appear dim and indistinct.  
 Ordinary people are inquiring and discerning;  
 I alone appear hidden and obscure.  
 Like an ocean in its tranquility;  
 Like a high wind in its endless movement.  
 Each person has his reasons;  
 I alone am insolent as though unconcerned.  
 I alone am different from other people;  
 I revere being fed by the mother.  
 (DDJ, ch. 20)

From my perspective, these passages document the actual practice and experience of Daoist apophatic meditation. At the same time, they provide guidance and instruction to aspiring adepts in the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. One is directed to enter a state of stillness and emptiness. Provisionally speaking, this involves disengaging sense perception and emptying the heart-mind of emotional and intellectual activity until one enters a state of clarity and stillness. Other texts map this out in a more technical and sophisticated, rather than a vague and assumed, way. For example, paralleling various passages in the *Guanzi*, chapter one of the *Huainanzi* explains the patterns of psychological agitation, habitual reactivity, and spiritual disruption: one's perceptual system encounters phenomenal appearances ('things'); this creates feelings of attraction and aversion as well as intellectual confusion; through such patterns of habituation and reactivity, one loses one's innate connection to the Dao (see Lau & Ames, 1998, p. 73). Thus, the aspiring Daoist adept lessens sensory engagement and emotional and intellectual activity. One practices inner cultivation, which leads to cosmic integration and mystical union. From a classical and foundational Daoist perspective, such a state is one's innate nature, or the Dao as the ground of being. The passages just quoted refer to this as 'returning to the Source' (*guigen* 歸根) and 'being fed by the mother' (*shimu* 食母), both of which may refer to meditative praxis, mystical union with the Dao, and a corresponding transformed existential and ontological condition.

A contextual reading of classical Daoist texts, by which I mean one attentive to both textual landscape, inter-textuality, and religio-cultural location, reveals the central importance of contentless, non-conceptual meditation. I would suggest that it is, in fact, an assumed, shared commitment outside of which so-called Daoist thought is mere intellectual rumination, the very distraction and disorientation that classical Daoism aims to overcome. Although beyond the confines of the present analysis, this is discoverable through analysis of various technical terms related to meditative praxis: 'embracing' (*bao* 抱), 'guarding' (*shou* 守), and 'protecting' (*bao* 保). In the *Daode jing*, these appear as 'guarding the Center' (*shouzhong* 守中; ch. 5), 'embracing the One' (*baoyi* 抱一; ch. 10), 'guarding stillness' (*shoujing* 守靜; ch. 16), 'guarding the feminine' (*shouci* 守雌; ch. 28), and so forth. In the *Zhuangzi*, we find a parallel practice, most well-known in the passages on 'fasting of the heart-mind' (*xinzhai* 心齋; ch. 4) and 'sitting-in-forgetfulness' (*zuowang* 坐忘; ch. 6), but also referred to as 'guarding the One' (*shouyi* 守一; ch. 11) and

'guarding the root' (*shouben* 守本; ch. 13). A similar emphasis on the attainment of clarity and stillness also appears in the so-called 'Xinshu' 心術 (Techniques of the Heart-mind) chapters (chs. 36–38 & 49) of the *Guanzi*; specifically, the 'Neiye' 內業 (Inward Training; ch. 49) chapter refers to the practice as 'guarding the One' (ch. 24; also ch. 9)

As a final point before discussing the Tang-dynasty Clarity-and-Stillness Literature, it is important to note that texts such as the *Qingjing jing* combine classical Daoist concerns with Mahāyāna views of consciousness, especially as expressed in the *Prajñā-pāramitā* (Perfection of Wisdom) texts (see Conze, 1973, 1975). The title of this textual family refers to the 'perfections' (Skt.: *pāramitā*), which usually consist of the following six in Mahāyāna Buddhism: generosity/charity (Skt.: *dāna*), virtue (Skt.: *śīla*), forbearance/patience under insult (Skt.: *ṣānti*), effort/perseverance (Skt.: *vīrya*), concentration (Skt.: *dhyāna*), and wisdom/insight (Skt.: *prajñā*). The *Prajñā-pāramitā* texts thus focus on developing wisdom or insight, specifically with respect to gaining 'right understanding' of the nature of existence (from a Mahāyāna perspective, of course). These texts were among the first Buddhist sutras translated into Chinese, and they became highly influential in the emergence of distinctively Chinese schools of Mahāyāna Buddhism (see, e.g., Ch'en, 1972 [1964]; Conze, 1973, 1975). For our purposes, the *Xinjing* 心經 (Heart Sutra; T. 250–57) is especially important. This text is a concise encapsulation of the Perfection of Wisdom sutras. It was most likely composed in China in the sixth century CE (Nattier, 1992), and thus represents an 'apocryphal text,' meaning that it is a Chinese Buddhist text not translated from a Sanskrit original. In any case, the text places primary emphasis on 'emptiness' (Skt.: *śūnyatā*; Chn.: *kong* 空). As expressed in its most famous lines,

Form does not differ from emptiness; emptiness does not differ from form. Form itself is emptiness; emptiness itself is form. So, too, are feeling, cognition, formation, and consciousness.<sup>11</sup>

That is, the phenomenal world of individual appearances and separate identities is an illusion, not in the sense that it does not exist, but in the sense that it is characterized by impermanence (Skt.: *anitya*; Pali: *anicca*; Chn.: *wuchang* 無常) and absence of own-being (Skt.: *anatman*; Pali: *anattā*; Chn.: *kong* 空). From the perspective of wisdom and spiritual clarity, one realizes that the construct of a separate, abiding self is the source of suffering and that one is, in fact, connected to all beings. In terms of consciousness and meditative praxis, one investigates the (Buddhist) truth of impermanence and absence of own-being in one's 'own' experience, especially through the lens of the Five Aggregates (Skt.: *skandha*). Through this, one may attain a psychological, existential, and perhaps soteriological state of freedom from suffering caused by desire. The *Qingjing jing* follows the Perfection of Wisdom understanding of consciousness by adding elements of a Buddhist worldview to classical Daoist concerns, specifically the mapping of defilements and vexations that obscure consciousness, obscurations which must be purified in order for the Daoist adept to unite with the Dao.<sup>12</sup>

## Tang-dynasty clarity-and-stillness literature

During the Tang dynasty, Daoists began composing a series of texts that I would refer to as 'Clarity-and Stillness Literature.'<sup>13</sup> Generally speaking, these are anonymous texts of

unclear provenance that are presented as revelations from Taishang Laojun 太上老君, the Great High Lord Lao, who is the deified Laozi, high god of early Daoism, and personification of the Dao (see Kohn, 1998; Seidel, 1969). Aside from Daoist accounts of revelation, there are various socio-historical factors that would have influenced such composition, but this is not my concern here. We may, however, note a historical development in this textual corpus. The earliest texts, namely, the anonymous seventh-century *Shengxuan huming jing* 昇玄護命經 (Scripture on Protecting Life-Destiny and Ascending to the Mysterious; DZ 19; ZH 368)<sup>14</sup> and anonymous eighth-century *Qingjing xinjing* 清靜心經 (Heart Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 1169; ZH 358), were Daoist adaptations of the *Heart Sutra*, complete with parallel formatting and much overlap in content. For example, while the *Heart Sutra* begins with Avalokiteśvara (Chn.: Guanyin 觀音; Bodhisattva of Compassion) surveying the phenomenal world, the *Shengxuan huming jing* replaces him (no he has not yet gone through his Chinese gender transition to become female) with Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning), the highest of the Sanqing 三清 (Three Purities) of the Daoist pantheon. I would suggest that the eighth-century *Qingjing jing* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) corresponds to the second phase of development and represents not so much a ‘Daoist adaptation’ but a ‘Daoist reconceptualization’ or ‘integration,’ which combines classical and foundational Daoist concerns with Mahāyāna Buddhist views. It may be considered the culmination of the Clarity-and-Stillness family of texts, and it became the most influential *qingjing* text in later organized Daoism. The *Qingjing jing* prepares the way for a new approach to Daoist cultivation, which remains fully rooted in the Daoist tradition, but incorporates insights and principles from Buddhism, especially concerning psychospiritual defilements and the path to purified consciousness.

The *Qingjing jing* begins with a cosmological description that parallels the classical precedents mentioned above.<sup>15</sup> Theologically speaking, it emphasizes the formlessness, emotionlessness, and namelessness of the Dao (1a). This section culminates with its highly influential reconceptualization of chapter 25 of the *Daode jing*: ‘I do not know its name. Forced to name it, I call it “Dao”.’ Following the classical Daoist tradition of negative theology and apophatic mysticism (see, e.g., Komjathy, 2017), a ‘philosophical approach’ that deemphasizes rationality and intellect, the text suggests that the Dao’s suchness or being-so-of-itself (*ziran* 自然) is beyond linguistic expression and beyond knowing. This is so much the case that the Daoist name for the sacred, *dao*, is only a provisional name, a ‘style-name’ (*zi* 字) in the language of the *Daode jing*. As the *Zhuangzi* admonishes, ‘Names are the guest of reality’ (*mingzhe shi zhi bin ye* 名者實之賓也); the Chinese character and name *dao* should not be misidentified as that which it designates. However, to study Daoist views on the Dao, especially views derived from Daoist practice and experience, is to study the self. As we will see, to cultivate oneself and return to the Source involve attaining a state of clarity and stillness, a state which parallels the Dao’s suchness. For the accomplished Daoist adept, this is a transformed ontological condition characterized by formlessness, emotionlessness (in a conventional human sense), and namelessness.

The *Qingjing jing* in turn emphasizes that the universe as cosmological process is the Dao; all changes and differentiation within the manifest world participate in the Dao’s all-encompassing Oneness. Cosmologically speaking, this includes various yin-yang



associations: earth/feminine/turbidity/stillness and heaven/masculine/movement/clarity (1a). The text then moves from the value-neutral connotations of the cosmological terms to their application in Daoist meditative praxis:

Human spirit is fond of clarity,  
 But the heart-mind disturbs it.  
 The human heart-mind is fond of stillness,  
 But desires meddle with it.  
 If you can constantly banish desires,  
 Then the heart-mind will become still naturally.  
 If you can constantly settle the heart-mind,  
 Then spirit will become clear naturally.  
 (1b)

And

Perfect stillness resonates with things.  
 Perfect constancy realizes innate nature.  
 Constantly resonating, constantly still,  
 There is constant clarity, constant stillness.  
 When clarity and stillness are like this,  
 You gradually enter the perfect Dao.  
 When you enter the perfect Dao,  
 This is called "realizing the Dao."  
 Although we call this "realizing the Dao,"  
 In truth there is nothing to attain.  
 Having the ability to transform all life,  
 This is called "realizing the Dao."  
 Considering those who awaken to this,  
 They are able to transmit the sacred Dao.  
 (1b-2a)

In the next section, the text reverses the discussion to explain the ways in which desire, vexations, deviance, and defilements are produced through sensory engagement and psychological reactivity. The cultivation and attainment of clarity and stillness thus require a turn inward, a contemplative orientation within which one decreases desires and stills excess emotional and intellectual activity. Placed in its larger religious context, this involves specific meditation methods, such as those found in the eighth-century *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641; ZH 359) and eighth-century *Zuowang lun* 坐忘論 (Discourse on Sitting-in-Forgetfulness; DZ 1036; ZH 992; see Kohn, 1987, 1989). It involves emptiness-based meditation practice during which psychosomatic agitation and turbidity (yin conditions, in the negative sense) become clarity and stillness (their yang counterparts). Alternatively conceived, one merges with the heavens and earth as pure yang and pure yin (in the positive sense), here corresponding to clarity and stillness. This is accomplished through dedicated, consistent, and prolonged meditation practice, through the purification of the heart-mind. As expressed in the seventh-century *Cunshen lianqi ming* 存神鍊氣銘 (Inscription on Preserving Spirit and Refining Qi; DZ 834; DZ 1032, 33.12a-14b) and eighth-century *Dingguan jing* 定觀經 (Scripture on Concentration and Observation; DZ 400; DZ 1032, 17.6b-13a; DZ 1036, 15b-18a), there are stages involved (see Kohn, 1987, pp. 64, 78). For those who begin Daoist contemplative practice in a state of habituation and spiritual disorientation, those



disrupted by social conditioning, familial obligations, and personal habituation, there are five meditative stages or ‘moments’ (*wushi* 五時; DZ 1032, 33.13ab): major agitation/turbidity, minor agitation/turbidity, equilibrium of agitation/turbidity and clarity/stillness, minor clarity/stillness, major clarity/stillness (DZ 834, 1b-2a; also DZ 1036, 17b). One moves towards a condition of pure consciousness and spiritual integration. The final stage of complete stillness is mystical union with the Dao.

## A Daoist way of being

*Qingjing* is thus a Daoist way of being, a form of embodied practice. The concern for cultivating clarity and stillness originated in the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism and eventually became systematized in the Clarity-and-Stillness Literature of the Tang dynasty. This literature, in turn, exerted a profound influence on internal alchemy lineages in general and Quanzhen in particular, even into contemporary Daoist circles. I would thus suggest that *qingjing* is one of the connective strands throughout the diverse communities and movements which constitute the religious tradition which is Daoism.

The Daoist emphasis on clarity and stillness is simultaneously view, practice, experience, and existential mode. First, one recognizes that innate nature, one’s original ontological condition and manifestation of the Dao, is characterized by clarity and stillness. These characteristics are also discoverable by observing the heavens and earth, respectively. Such a view then informs the practice of Daoist apophatic meditation, a form of contemplative practice that is primarily contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. Here one cultivates clarity and stillness; one purifies consciousness of agitation, turbidity, and defilements. Through this practice, one returns to the silence and emptiness at the ground of one’s being. As stillness deepens, spiritual discernment and realization increase. By emptying and stilling the heart-mind of emotional and intellectual, one enters a state of *qingjing*. This experience involves absorption into the mystery, numinosity and unity of the Dao. Such experience confirms the informing worldview and the efficacy of the practice. One then returns to daily life with a different orientation. This involves the application of *qingjing* to each and every activity and situation. Clarity-and-stillness becomes a Daoist way of thinking, way of perceiving, and way of being.

## Notes

1. Apophatic meditation, which emphasizes emptiness and stillness, is the earliest form of Daoist meditation, which subsequently became foundational for the larger Daoist tradition. See Komjathy (2013b; 2014a). The designation “apophatic” or “quietistic meditation” approximates a variety of Chinese Daoist technical terms, including *baoyi* 抱一 (“embracing the one”), *shouyi* 守一 (“guarding the One”), *xinzhai* 心齋 (“fasting of the heart-mind”), and *zuowang* 坐忘 (“sitting-in-forgetfulness”), among others. This form of Daoist meditation is primarily contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. Interested readers may consult the various publications of Harold Roth (Brown University), especially his *Original Tao* (1999).
2. Revisionist scholarship by A.C. Graham, Liu Xiaogan, Victor Mair, and Harold Roth suggests that the received *Zhuangzi* (*Chuang-tzu*; Book of Master Zhuang), the third-century CE redaction of Guo Xiang 郭象 (Kuo Hsiang, pp. 252–312), is a multi-vocal anthology with a variety of historical and textual layers. Specifically, it contains the teachings of various lineages or “schools” of classical Daoism. In addition to the so-called Inner Chapters (1–7)

- associated with Zhuang Zhou, they include the following: (1) Primitivists (Chapters 8–10; parts of 11, 12, and 14); (2) Individualists (Chapters 28–31); (3) Syncretists (Chapters 12–16, 33); (4) Zhuangists (Chapters 17–22); and (5) Anthologists (Chapters 23–27, 32) (Mair, 2000, p. 37). For a summary and revisionist engagement see Komjathy (2013b, 2014a).
3. Text numbers for the received *Daozang* 道藏 (*Tao-tsang*; Daoist Canon; abbrev. DZ; dat. 1445/1607; 1,487 texts) follow Komjathy (2002), with numbers paralleling the standard system established by Kristofer Schipper and his colleagues (CT). Numbers for the *Zhonghua daozaang* 中華道藏 (Chinese Daoist Canon; abbrev. ZH; dat. 2003; 1,524 texts) follow the recently established system of Komjathy (2014b).
  4. For example, ‘practicing clarity and stillness’ appears as one of the Nine Practices (*jiuxing* 九行) of early Tianshi 天師 (Celestial Masters) Daoism. These principles or precepts are derived from the *Daode jing*. See Bokenkamp (1997); Komjathy (2008 [2003]). Thus, in place of the supposedly unbridgeable gap between so-called ‘philosophical Daoism’ and so-called ‘religious Daoism,’ one, in fact, finds a bridge, and that bridge is based on shared principles and practices. See Komjathy (2013b, 2014a).
  5. I do not deny that there are dimensions of the Daoist tradition that may reasonably be discussed as ‘philosophy,’ but not in the sense of disembodied ‘ideas’ and ‘thought.’ Although beyond the present article, I would, for example, suggest that so-called ‘Daoist philosophy’ might be reimagined through Pierre Hadot’s (1995) revisionist account of Western philosophy in terms of ‘spiritual exercises.’ That is, Daoist philosophical views are rooted in and informed by contemplative practice and contemplative, even mystical experience.
  6. The seven dimensions are as follows: doctrines, ethics, narratives, practices, experiences, organization, and material culture.
  7. Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own.
  8. Following Han de Wit (1991), ‘contemplative psychology’ refers to the specific psychological views that are informed by and expressed in contemplative practices. Readers interested in these matters may consult Komjathy (2015); Komjathy (2018).
  9. Following Harold Roth, I would include at least the following texts in the classical Daoist textual corpus: *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi*, the standard sources, as well as sections of the *Guanzi* 管子 (Book of Master Guan), *Lüshi chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü), and *Huainanzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Huainan Masters). I leave open the relationship of the *Heguanzi* 鶡冠子 (Book of the Pheasant-Cap Master) and recent archaeological manuscripts to classical Daoism. Roth has done important and profound work on classical Daoism, including its psychological, meditative, and mystical dimensions. See, for example, Roth (1999). As text-critical work on the *Zhuangzi* indicates, we should also recognize that classical Daoism was characterized by as much diversity as say, for example, early medieval Daoism (See also Kirkland 2004).
  10. The Tailao 太牢 (Great Sacrifice) ritual was one of the most elaborate ancient sacrifices, wherein three kinds of animals were killed as ritual offerings. The animals included an ox, sheep, and pig.
  11. One finds a parallel line in the section 1b of the *Qingjing jing*.
  12. For example, the so-called Three Poisons (*sandu* 三毒) of greed, hatred, and ignorance/delusion.
  13. For some insights on the associated texts see Appendix 2 herein. See also Kohn (1998, pp. 65–68); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, pp. 362–63); Schipper and Verellen (2004, pp. 316, 554, 562); Kohn 2000a; Pregadio 2008.
  14. For a translation of see Appendix 1 herein. For an alternative translation see Assandri (2009, pp. 216–18). See also Kohn (2010, p. 118).
  15. The complete title is *Taishang Laojun shuo chang qingjing miaojing* 太上老君說常清靜妙經 (Wondrous Scripture on Constant Clarity and Stillness, Revealed by the Great High Lord Lao). The *Qingjing jing* has been translated a variety of times. See Appendix 2. A translation with late medieval Quanzhen commentary appears in Komjathy (2013a). For a discussion of the central importance of the text in early Quanzhen Daoism see Komjathy (2007, 2013a).

16. The complete title is *Taishang shengxuan xiaozai huming miaojing* 太上昇玄消災護命妙經 (Great High's Wondrous Scripture on Protecting Life-destiny, Dispersing Calamities, and Ascending to the Mysterious), which sometimes is also abbreviated as *Huming jing*. Taishang 太上 (Great High) most often refers to Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao), the deified Laozi and personification of the Dao, but here designates Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning). In the later *Qingjing jing*, Lord Lao is the source of revelation.
17. Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning is a high god of medieval Daoism. Although sometimes appearing independently and apparently taking the place of the earlier Lord Lao, he eventually became one of the Sanqing 三清 (Three Purities). Residing in the Daoist heaven of Yuqing 玉清 (Jade Clarity), Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning is the highest of the Three Purities. See Komjathy (2013b, 2014a).
18. *You* 有 and *wu* 無. These terms refer to the entirety of the manifest world and the pre-manifest primordial nondifferentiation, respectively. They already appear in this technical sense in the texts of classical Daoism. The translation endeavor is complexified because the terms may also mean “to have” and “not to have.”
19. With respect to the classical Chinese, these lines are complex and open to a variety of interpretations. An alternative translation would be the following: “[They believe that] non-being is empty or being is empty;/Nonbeing is form or being is form;/Nonbeing does not exist or being does not exist; being exists or nonbeing exists.”
20. These lines recall the influential passage on cosmogonic emanation in chapter two of the *Zhuangzi*: “There was a beginning. There was not yet beginning to be a beginning. There was not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be a beginning. There was being. There was nonbeing. There was not yet beginning to be nonbeing. There was not yet beginning to be not yet beginning to be nonbeing. Suddenly there was nonbeing. But when it comes to nonbeing, I don’t know what is being and what is nonbeing.” See also chapter three of the *Huainanzi*.
21. An allusion to the famous lines from the *Heart Sutra*. The point of these lines is that discursive thought and discriminating consciousness inhibits one’s ability to attain mystical union with the Dao.
22. Like the Mysterious (*xuan* 玄), the Wondrous (*miao* 妙) is another name for the Dao (Tao; Way), the sacred or ultimate concern of Daoists. All of the terms appear in the highly influential chapter one of the *Daode jing*: “Mysterious and again more mysterious,/The gateway to all wonders.” Interestingly, chapter one of the *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Inner Chapters of Master Embracing Simplicity; DZ 1185) is titled “The Uncontainable Mystery.”
23. Here *dharma* (Chn.: *fa* 法) refers to phenomenal appearances, or the “myriad beings” and “ten thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物) in more traditional Daoist terms.
24. *Ziran* (*tzu-jan*; lit., “self-so”), variously translated as “naturalness,” “spontaneity,” “suchness,” and even “being-in-itself,” refers to Dao as itself, as both primordial nondifferentiation and transformative process, and the state in which one abides in one’s own innate nature (*xing* 性), one’s original connection with the Dao. See Komjathy (2013b, 2014a).
25. Or, “nets of doubt.”
26. The Six Roots (*liugen* 六根), also rendered as “Six Causes,” are the six sense-organs, namely, eyes/seeing, ears/hearing, nose/smelling, mouth/tasting/speaking, body/touching, and mind/thinking. They are also associated with the Six Desires (*liuyu* 六欲) and Six Thieves (*liuzei* 六賊), that is, desires generated through sensory engagement.
27. This line recalls the early medieval Daoist emphasis, via Mahāyāna Buddhist influence, on “universal salvation” (*pudu* 普度).
28. “Diamond” translates *jingang* 金剛, which has a variety of potential technical meanings.
29. Here “Dharma” refers to the teachings and truth by extension.
30. An allusion of chapter 14 of the *Daode jing*: “Looking for it, one cannot see it./We call it remote./Listening for it, one cannot hear it./We call it rare./Grasping for it, one cannot attain it./We call it subtle./These three cannot be investigated.”

31. This catalogue is organized chronologically. Although the *Nei riyong jing* and *Wai riyong jing* date from a later period of Daoist history, I have included them in order to point toward a tradition of clarity and stillness, specifically a textual corpus beyond the Tang-dynasty Clarity-and-Stillness Literature as such.

## Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the author. The disclosure statement has been inserted. Please correct if this is inaccurate.

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## Appendix 1

Translation of *Shengxuan huming jing* 昇玄護命經

(Scripture on Protecting Life-Destiny and Ascending to the Mysterious; DZ 19)<sup>16</sup>

At that time,

Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning<sup>17</sup>

Was dwelling in the Palace of Five Luminosities

In the Forest of Seven Treasures.

With all of the sages in limitless number assembled,

He released his limitless radiant luminosity,

Illuminating the limitless worlds.

He observed the limitless beings

Enduring limitless suffering and vexation.

They inhabit the [limitless] worlds,

Endlessly transmigrating through birth and death,

Drowning in the river of passion,

[1b] Flailing in the ocean of desire,

Obstructed by sound and form,

And deluded about being and nonbeing.<sup>18</sup>

[They believe that]

There is no emptiness or there is emptiness;

There is no form or there is form;

There is no nonbeing or there is nonbeing;

There is being or there is no being.<sup>19</sup>

From beginning to end, lost in darkened obscuraton,

They are unable to realize self-illumination.

In the end they remain deluded.

Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning declared:

To each of you myriad beings [I say]—

Being emerged from not-being,

Nonbeing from not-nonbeing,<sup>20</sup>

Form from not-form,

And emptiness from not-emptiness.  
 It is not the case that being is being;  
 It is not the case that nonbeing is nonbeing;  
 It is not the case that form is form;  
 It is not the case that emptiness is emptiness.  
 When emptiness is emptiness,  
 Emptiness is not established in emptiness.  
 When form is form,  
 Form is not established in form.  
 Thus form is emptiness,  
 And emptiness is form.<sup>21</sup>  
 If you are able to realize that emptiness is not emptiness  
 And that form is not form,  
 Then you may be called enlightened (*zhaoliao* 照了).  
 From the moment that you penetrate the sound of the Wondrous,<sup>22</sup>  
 You recognize that there is no emptiness and no *dharmas*.<sup>23</sup>  
 With deep observation and free from obstruction,  
 You enter the gate to all subtleties.  
 Naturally (*ziran* 自然) you become awakened.<sup>24</sup>  
 You are separated from doubt and entanglements,<sup>25</sup>  
 And no longer manifest empty perceptions.  
 Clearing and stilling the Six Roots,<sup>26</sup>  
 You sever ties to the veils of deviation.  
 [2a] I therefore reveal this wondrous scripture for you:  
 It is called 'protecting life-destiny' (*huming* 護命)  
 Because it saves the myriad beings.<sup>27</sup>  
 May it be transmitted and taught throughout the world.  
 May it be disseminated, memorized, and chanted.  
 Then the spirit kings who fly through the heavens,  
 The diamond [*vajra*-protectors] who destroy deviation,<sup>28</sup>  
 The numinous lads who protect the Dharma,<sup>29</sup>  
 The Perfected who save from suffering,  
 The fierce animals of incorruptible essence,  
 And every one of the innumerable beings  
 Assemble to serve and protect this scripture  
 In accordance with what they have to offer.  
 They support the weak,  
 Save all of the myriad sentient beings,  
 And liberate all from every defilement.  
 At that time,  
 Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning recited the following *gātha*:  
 Looking, you cannot see it;  
 Listening, you cannot hear it<sup>30</sup>;  
 Liberated from every kind of limitation,  
 This is called the wondrous Dao.

## Appendix 2

Clarity-and-Stillness Literature<sup>31</sup>

***Taishang shengxuan xiaozai huming jing*** 太上昇玄消災護命經: Great High's Wondrous Scripture on Protecting Life-Destiny, Dispersing Calamities, and Ascending to the Mysterious: Abbreviated *Shengxuan huming jing*: DZ 19.



Anonymous seventh-century Daoist adaptation of the *Panruo boluomiduo xinjing* 般若波羅蜜多心經 (*Prajñāparāmītā-hridaya sūtrā* [Heart Sutra on the Perfection of Wisdom]; T.250; T.251). Earliest extant Daoist adaptation. Revealed by Yuanshi tianzun (Celestial Worthy of Original Beginning). See Fumimasa (1987); Nattier (1992); Kohn (1998, p. 66); Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 554. Translated herein. Also translated by Assandri (2009, pp. 216–18).

**Taishang Laojun qingjing xinjing** 太上老君清靜心經: Great High Lord Lao's Heart Scripture on Clarity and Stillness: Abbreviated *Qingjing xinjing*: DZ 1169.

Anonymous eighth-century Daoist adaptation of the *Heart Sutra*. Concludes with a *gātha* (sacred verse) and promises of rewards for the recitation and keeping of the scripture. Revealed by Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao), the deified Laozi 老子 ('Master Lao'), personification of the Dao, and high god of early Daoism. See Kohn (1998, pp. 65–66); Kohn and Kirkland (2000), pp. 362–63; Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 316. No translation to date.

**Taishang Laojun shuo chang qingjing miaojing** 太上老君說常清靜妙經: Wondrous Scripture on Constant Clarity and Stillness as Revealed by the Great High Lord Lao: Abbreviated *Qingjing jing*: DZ 620.

Anonymous eighth-century work. The seminal and most influential Clarity-and-Stillness text. Revealed by Lord Lao. See Kohn (1998, p. 68); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, p. 363); Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 562. Translated by James Legge (1962 [1891], vol. 2, pp. 247–54), Livia Kohn (1993, pp. 25–29), and Louis Komjathy (2008 [2003], v.4), among others.

**Laozi shuo wuchu jing** 老子說五廚經: Scripture on the Five Pantries as Revealed by Master Lao: Abbreviated *Wuchu jing*: DZ 763.

Anonymous eighth-century work. As preserved in the Daoist Canon, the text appears with commentary by Yin Yin 尹愔 (d. 741), a prominent Daoist literatus under Emperor Xuanzong (r. 712–756). Here the “five pantries” or “five feasts,” with *chu* 廚 earlier designating Daoist communal feast that was part of Daoist liturgy, become associated with the five yin-organs (*zang* 臟). Revealed by Master Lao. See Kohn (1998, p. 67); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, p. 363); Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 562. No translation to date.

**Taishang Laojun shuo liaoxin jing** 太上老君說了心經: Scripture on Realizing the Heart-Mind as Revealed by the Great High Lord Lao: Abbreviated *Liaoxin jing*: DZ 642.

Anonymous eighth-century text. Revealed by Lord Lao. See Kohn (1998, p. 68); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, p. 363); Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 745. No translation to date.

**Taishang Laojun xuwu ziran benqi jing** 太上老君虛無自然本起經: Great High Lord Lao's Scripture on the Origin and Arisal of Empty Nonbeing and Suchness: Abbreviated *Xuwu bengqi jing*: DZ 1438.

Anonymous ninth-century text. Revealed by Lord Lao. See Kohn (1998, p. 68); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, p. 363); Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 531–32. No translation to date.

**Xuanzhu xinjing** 玄珠心鏡: Mind-Mirror of the Mysterious Pearl: DZ 574; 575.

Ninth-century poems revealed by Qiao Shaoxuan 樵少玄 (d.u.), with commentaries by Hengyue zhenzi 衡嶽真子 (d.u.) and Wang Sunzhi 王損之 (d.u.). See Kohn (1998, p. 68); Kohn and Kirkland (2000, pp. 363–64); Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 300–1. Translated by Livia Kohn (1993, pp. 215–19)

**Taishang Laojun nei riyong miaojing** 太上老君內日用妙經: Great High Lord Lao's Wondrous Scripture on Daily Internal Practice: Abbreviated *Nei riyong jing*: DZ 645.

Probably a thirteenth-century *neidan* transformation of earlier Clarity-and-Stillness literature. Emphasizes meditation practice (inner cultivation). Paired with the *wai* version and revealed by Lord Lao. Possibly of Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Perfection) provenance. See Kohn (1998, pp. 82–83); Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 1187; Komjathy (2013a). Translated by Livia Kohn (2000b) and Louis Komjathy (2008 [2003], v.6).

**Taishang Laojun wai riyong jing** 太上老君外日用經: Great High Lord Lao's Scripture on Daily External Practice: Abbreviated *Wai riyong jing*: DZ 646.

Probably a thirteenth-century *neidan* transformation of earlier Clarity-and-Stillness literature. Emphasizes ethical practice (outer expression and application). Paired with the *nei* version and revealed by Lord Lao. See Kohn (1998, pp. 82–83); Schipper and Verellen 2004, pp. 1187–88. Translated by Livia Kohn (2000b).