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The Way to the Way: Classical Daoist Apophatic Meditation as Effortless Practice

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ABSTRACT The present article explores Daoist effortless meditation with particular attention to its association with the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism (ca. 350–ca. 90 BCE). In addition to discussing the technical specifics of the practice, including its intimate connection to *wúwéi* 無為 (lit., 'without acting/doing'; non-action/effortlessness), consideration is given to related contemplative states and traits. The article also encourages readers and researchers to examine contemplative practice in general and meditation in particular beyond mere technique. Here one engages the associated aesthetics, material culture, place, spatiality, and so forth. The piece concludes with some reflections from a lived/living Daoist perspective.

KEYWORDS Classical Daoism (Taoism), contemplative experience, contemplative practice, contemplative psychology, Daoist meditation, effortlessness, inner cultivation lineages, meditation, Pure Consciousness Events (PCEs), states and traits, wúwéi 無為

夫道、窅然難言哉！將為汝言其崖略。

Now then, the Way is cavernous and difficult to explain! I will try to give you a peninsular outline. (Zhuāngzǐ 莊子 [Book of Master Zhuang], ch. 22)

Introduction

In the emerging literature on effortlessness and 'effortless meditation,' there is a conspicuous absence of engagement with Daoism (Taoism), specifically effortlessness as a Daoist contemplative practice, principle, and mode. This is all the more surprising given the fact that classical Daoism appears to be the earliest religious community to explicitly emphasize apophatic and quietistic (emptiness-/stillness-based) meditation, specifically as centered on *wúwéi* 無為 (lit., 'without acting/doing'), to the point of quasi-orthopraxy and as self-sufficient practice. As explored below, this involved a single-practice inner cultivation approach and accompanying training regimen in which said practice was both necessary and sufficient for realizing the Dao 道, the sacred and ultimate concern of Daoists (see, e.g., Komjathy 2013, 2022d, 2023a). In [1]

the present article, I first discuss the anthropological reality of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism, specifically as the earliest self-conscious Daoist *religious* community with an emerging sense of 'tradition.' I then turn towards the technical specifics of classical Daoist effortless meditation as such, with particular attention to the key Daoist concern of *wúwéi* 無為 ('non-action/effortlessness'). This is followed by a brief exploration of associated aesthetics, material culture, place, and spatiality. Here I emphasize the importance of not reducing contemplative practice in general and meditation in particular to mere technique. I conclude with some reflections on Daoist effortless meditation from a lived/living Daoist perspective.

The Inner Cultivation Lineages of Classical Daoism

In what I have advanced in my revisionist scholarship on the Daoist tradition centering on a 'lineal' and 'continuity of tradition' view (see Komjathy 2013, 2023a), now increasingly framed as the "Center for Daoist Studies (CDS) Approach" (see Komjathy 2023b), Daoism began as a *religious* community in the middle of the Warring States period (480–222 BCE) to the Early Hàn dynasty (206 BCE–9 CE), or from around 350 BCE to around 90 BCE. Developing the scholarship of Harold Roth (see, e.g., 1996, 1999, 2015, 2021) of Brown University, I refer to these earliest, loosely-affiliated Daoist master-disciple communities as the "inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism."[1] Contra conventional (outdated and inaccurate) academic and popular accounts, the associated teachers and communities were *anthropologically real*. They were *not* a retrospective social construct and/or set of disembodied ideas. Rather, this earliest form of Daoism consisted of Daoist adherents and affiliates within a self-conscious religious community with an emerging sense of 'tradition.' When I describe them as 'religious' (rather than 'philosophical'), this is intentional and critically informed, especially by the scholarly discipline of Religious Studies.[2] This may be understood as a decolonial and de-Orientalist move (see, e.g., King 1999; Smith 2012; also Young and Goulet 1994). From my perspective, 'religious' and 'religion' are closer approximations to the actual concerns, practices, and lifeways advanced by members of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. These individuals and their associated communities had a unique cosmological and theological concept: They identified their sacred and ultimate concern as 道, pronounced something like *kə.lˤuʔ (Karlgren: **d'ôg*) in Archaic/Old Chinese. As discussed momentarily, classical Daoists established foundational views concerning the Dao as an impersonal, unified field and process ('reality'), and they encouraged other aspiring adepts and disciples to orient their lives towards the Dao. Moreover, to apply Ninian Smart's (1999) "seven dimensions of religion" (community, doctrine, ethics, experience, materiality, narrative, and practice), classical Daoism was a distinct religious community that emphasized specific beliefs, stories, practices, and experiences. They also produced their own material expressions, like the texts of classical Daoism to be discussed momentarily. The inner cultivation lineages were indeed a *community*, and an enduring community at that. They inaugurated a lineal dimension of [2]

1 'Classical Daoism' replaces the outdated and inaccurate so-called 'philosophical Daoism,' with the latter rooted in colonialist, missionary, and Orientalist legacies. For a more systematic account, see Komjathy (2013). The most complete discussion appears in Komjathy (2023a).

2 Readers should note that so-called 'Chinese philosophy' and now even so-called 'Daoist philosophy' have become cottage academic industries, especially via academic careerism and insular academic discourse. While one can identify 'philosophical dimensions' of classical Daoism, 'view' is a more accurate categorization. As will be explored momentarily, I also am open to reframing 'philosophy,' via Hadot (1922–2010) and the later Foucault, as 'praxis,' but this would be the end of conventional philosophy and especially departments of (Western) Philosophy. For an explicit critique, see Komjathy (2013), Komjathy (2023a).

Daoist identity and tradition that not only maintained itself, but also established precedents and models for the later Daoist tradition. My view of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism as a religious community, with an emerging sense of tradition, is supported, first and foremost, by the materials, including the foundational Daoist practices and experiences, that will be discussed herein.

To begin, there is a key classical Daoist category that points towards both an emerging sense of tradition and the central importance of Daoist effortless meditation. This is *dàoshù* 道術, which I prefer to translate as 'techniques of the Dao,' but which also may be understood as 'arts of the Way'. As mentioned, 'Dao' (Tao/Way) is the sacred and ultimate concern of Daoists, with the associated cosmology (view of the universe), soteriology (ultimate purpose), and theology (view of the sacred) explored more fully in the next section. Briefly, from a classical and foundational Daoist perspective, the Dao consists of four primary defining characteristics: [3]

1. Source of everything (*yuán* 元/原) [4]
2. Unnamable mystery (*xuán* 玄)
3. All-pervading sacred presence (*líng* 靈; also *qì* 氣)
4. Universe as transformative process (Nature) (*huà* 化; also *zìrán* 自然)

On the most fundamental level, Daoists live in an amoral, impersonal universe characterized by endless change. The primary informing theology is, in turn, apophatic (beyond names, concepts, etc.), monistic (one impersonal reality ['Reality']), panentheistic (sacred in and beyond the world), and panenhenic (Nature as sacred) (see Komjathy 2013, 2022d).[3] As for *shù* 術, etymologically speaking and as received, the Chinese character consists of *xíng* 行 ('walk'; more technically 'practice') and *shú* 术 ('millet/sorghum'), with the latter usually read as a phonetic. The character *xíng*-walk originally depicted an intersection or crossroads, but it was eventually divided into *chì* 彳 ('[left] step') and *chù* 亍 ('[right] step') (see Komjathy 2022b). It thus suggests movement and travel. Here it is noteworthy that the character *dào* 道 also contains *chuò* 辶/辵 ('move/walk'), while a variant character 衜 includes the same *xíng*-walk component. The character *shù*-technique in turn suggests some type of *embodied activity in the world*. Also meaning 'art,' 'craft,' 'method,' 'skill,' and so forth, this concern relates to the classical Daoist emphasis on 'aptitude' (*shàn* 善) and 'inner power/virtue' (*dé* 德).[4] It further connects to other related terms, including *fǎ* 法 ('method'), *fāng* 方 ('formula'), and, later, *gōng* 功 ('exercise').

The term *dàoshù* 道術 appears in two chapters in the *Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子 (*Chuāng-tzǔ*; Book of Master Zhuang; DZ 670; ZH 616; abbrev. ZZ).[5] This is an anonymous/pseudonymous classical [6]

3 In previous publications (2015; 2018a), I have expressed special interest in and appreciation for 'religiously-committed' and 'tradition-based' contemplative practice. More recently (2020a, 2023a), I have added 'theologically-infused,' which involves recognition of and orientation towards the more than merely human ('sacred'). Daoist effortless meditation is a form of theologically-infused contemplative practice.

4 Here careful and informed readers will note my Daoist technical translation of *shàn* 善 as "adept/aptitude," rather than the conventional "good/goodness." In the context of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism, it specifically relates to excellence and even mastery, including through application (*yòng* 用). One of the clearest articulations appears in DDJ 8 (see Komjathy 2023a, Forthcoming). This might be profitably compared to Hadot's (1995) revisionist scholarship on ancient Hellenistic philosophy, specifically as spiritual exercises aimed at character cultivation and transformation.

5 ZZ 12 also mentions the "Arts of Mister Chaos" (*Húndùn shì zhī shù* 渾沌氏之術), while ZZ 13 utilizes *xīnshù* 心術 ("techniques of the heart-mind"; also "arts of the heart"). Numbers for Daoist textual collections follow Komjathy (2002, 2014). DZ refers to the Míng-dynasty *Dàozàng* 道藏 (Daoist Canon), while ZH refers to the *Zhōnghuá dàozàng* 中華道藏 (Chinese Daoist Canon), a modern, punctuated edition of the former. Other abbreviations used herein include the following: LZ (*Lǎozǐ* 老子), NY (*Nèiyè* 內業), and ZZ (*Zhuāngzǐ* 莊子).

Daoist text consisting of historical and textual material dating from the fourth to second century BCE (see, e.g., Graham 1981; Liú Xiàogǎn 1994). It contains teachings and practices associated with various named, pseudonymous, and anonymous elders of the inner cultivation lineages. The two passages are as follows:[6]

> 魚相造乎水，人相造乎道。相造乎水者，穿池而養給；相造乎道者，無事而生定。故曰：魚相忘乎江湖，人相忘乎道術。 [7]
>
> Fish thrive in water; humans thrive in the Dao. For those who thrive in water, dig a pond and they will find nourishment enough. For those who thrive in the Dao, don't bother about them and their lives will be secure. So it is said, fish forget each other in rivers and lakes; humans forget each other through the techniques of the Dao. (ZZ 6) [8]

> 以本為精，以物為粗，以有積為不足，澹然獨與神明居，古之道術有在於是者。關尹、老聃聞其風而悅之。建之以常無有，主之以太一，以濡弱謙下為表，以空虛不毀萬物為實。 [9]
>
> To regard the root as pure and things as coarse, to look upon accumulation as insufficiency; dwelling alone (*dú* 獨), peaceful and tranquil, in spiritual illumination (*shénmíng* 神明), there were those in ancient times who believed that the techniques of the Dao lay in these things. Guardian Yǐn 尹 [Yǐn Xǐ 尹喜] and Lǎo Dān 老聃 (Elder Dan) heard of their views and delighted in them. They expounded them in terms of constant Nonbeing and Being, and headed them with Great Unity (*tàiyī* 太一). Gentle weakness and humble self-effacement are its outer marks; emptiness (*kōngxū* 空虛) and non-injury of the ten thousand beings are its substance. (ZZ 33) [10]

In chapter thirty-three, such practitioners of the Way are contrasted with individuals who practice deficient and inferior 'techniques of one-corner' (*fāngshù* 方術). As explored more fully below, the 'techniques of the Dao' primarily refer to apophatic and quietistic meditation aimed at mystical union with the Dao. Along with an orientation towards the Dao as sacred, the practice of such methods is a signature, a defining identity feature and shared commitment, of members of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism.[7] *Dàoshù* in turn parallels the use of *xīnshù* 心術 (lit., 'techniques of the heart-mind'), also translated as 'arts of the heart,' in the associated chapters of the *Guǎnzǐ* 管子 (*Kuǎn-tzǔ*; Book of Master Guan) (see Komjathy [2003] 2023, I.1). Significantly, the *Xīnshù shàng* 心術上 (Heart-mind Techniques I), which is preserved as chapter thirty-six of the received *Guǎnzǐ*, provides the following definition: "The techniques of the heart-mind involve non-action (*wúwéi* 無為) and regulating the apertures [11]

Here I focus on the latter three texts. However, readers should note that, from a revisionist perspective, the 'classical Daoist textual corpus' includes a much wider group of works. For guidance, see Roth (1996), Roth (1999), Roth (2015), Roth (2021), Komjathy (2013), Komjathy ([2003] 2023), Komjathy (2023a). Researchers also may benefit from consulting my Alternate Homepage (www.louiskomjathy.com), which includes my more recent "Supplements to *Title Index to Daoist Collections*" (STIDC).

6 Unless otherwise indicated, all translations are my own. Translations from ZZ have benefitted from Watson (1968), which is the standard literary translation used in Daoist Studies. See also Graham (1981) and Mair ([1994] 1998).

7 Here it is important to recognize, contra modern popularizers of meditation and spirituality connoisseurs, religious practice cannot be reduced to technique. It is possible to practice Daoist techniques, or any method for that matter, without an informing Daoist orientation and accompanying Daoist view. As I have consistently suggested (see 2015; 2018a, 2023a), there is a complex interrelationship between views, practices, experiences, and goals. Such is 'praxis' understood in a more comprehensive, holistic, integrated, and sophisticated manner. See also https://louiskomjathy.com/kontemplacja/.

[senses] (*zhìqiào* 制竅).” Under this reading, such techniques are a means to cultivate the heart-mind, specifically by purifying it of emotional and intellectual activity in order to return to one’s innate nature (*xìng* 性) and original connection to the Dao. By extension, and recalling the contemporaneous use of *shì* 士 (‘adept/practitioner’) and *zǐ* (‘adept/master’), *dàoshù zhě* 道術者 (‘technicians of the Dao’) and *xīnshù zhě* 心術者 (‘technicians of the heart-mind’), or more simply *dàoshì* 道士 (‘adepts/practitioners of the Dao’), may be seen as approximations for intra-religious identification.

In addition, chapter fifteen of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, which significantly is titled “Kèyì 刻意” (Ingrained Opinions), distinguishes Daoist practice from five lower forms of self-cultivation. In contrast to these, Daoist practitioners (*shì* 士) are committed to apophatic meditation with the goal of mystical union with the Dao (see also LZ 8 and 15). Significantly, the chapter includes the following description of the distinctive and shared Daoist practice: [12]

> 故曰：「夫恬惔寂寞，虛無無為，此天地之平而道德之質也。」故曰：「聖人休，休焉則平易矣；平易則恬惔矣。」平易恬惔，則憂患不能入，邪氣不能襲，故其德全而神不虧。 [13]
>
> So it is said, “Tranquil serenity (*tiándàn* 恬惔), silent aloneness (*jìmò* 寂寞), empty absence (*xūwú* 虛無), and non-action (*wúwéi* 無為)—these are the level of the heavens and earth, the substance of the Dao and inner power.” So it is said, “The sage relaxes (*xiū* 休); with relaxation comes peaceful ease (*píngyì* 平易); with peaceful ease comes tranquil serenity.” When there is peaceful ease and tranquil serenity, care and worry (*yōuhuàn* 憂患) cannot enter, and aberrant *qi* (*xiéqì* 邪氣) cannot seep in (*xí* 襲). Thus, one’s inner power is complete and spirit unimpaired. (ZZ 15)[8] [14]

So, by at least the beginning of the Early Hàn dynasty, individuals who may be reasonably labelled ‘Daoists’ began to integrate previously diffused lineages, sources, and teachings into a more cohesive system with a specific training regimen, or at least a shared soteriological practice.[9] Simply stated and explored below, this is a form of ‘theologically-infused meditation,’ one in which practitioners re-member their (our?) original and inherent connection to a sacred reality simultaneously within and beyond oneself. These various details once again point towards a self-conscious early Daoist religious community that can be reasonably labeled the ‘inner cultivation lineages.’ Such is the beginning of the Daoist tradition, and such is one of the key source-points for the later movements of organized Daoism (see Komjathy 2013, 2023a). [15]

Along similar, but perhaps more integrated lines, in chapter twenty-three of the same classical Daoist text, we encounter an exchange between the mythological Lǎozǐ 老子 (‘Master Lao’; traditionally dated sixth century BCE) and Nánróng Zhū 南榮趎 (Nánróng Chú; Southern Flourishing Appearance), who is a disciple of Gēngsāng Chǔ 庚桑楚 (Western Mulberry Cane) [16]

8 *Xiū* 休, here translated as ‘relax,’ also can mean ‘cease,’ ‘rest,’ and ‘retire,’ while *píng* 平, here translated as ‘peaceful,’ also can mean ‘level’ and ‘stable,’ and may thus refer to an aligned posture. Thus, an alternative technical and more liberal contemplative translation would be as follows: “The sage withdraws, and in seclusion practices balanced relaxation. Through this balanced relaxation, she enters tranquil serenity.” The passage also connects to other Daoist views of inner power, which appear quasi-magical. Through apophatic meditation, one becomes aligned with the Dao, and harmful energetic influences (‘aberrant *qi*’), possibly including malevolent forces, do not or cannot affect the advanced Daoist adept. Alternatively, perhaps they cannot find one or do not exist in the Daoist ‘alternate universe’ (Reality). See Komjathy (2013), Komjathy (2023a).

9 It is beyond the current article to fully articulate this position. Interested readers may consult Komjathy (2023a), Komjathy (Forthcoming).

and thus a 'grand-disciple' of Lǎozǐ himself. After their initial interaction, and Nánróng Zhū's subsequent ten days of meditative seclusion and purification, he asks about the 'principle of preserving life' (*wèishēng zhī jīng* 衛生之經). To this Lǎozǐ responds,

> 能抱一乎？能勿失乎？能無卜筮而知吉凶乎？能止乎？能已乎？能舍諸人而求諸己乎？能翛然乎？能侗然乎？能兒子乎？兒子終日嗥而嗌不嗄，和之至也；終日握而手不拘，共其德也；終日視而目不瞬，偏不在外也。行不知所之，居不知所為，與物委蛇，而同其波。是衛生之經已。 [17]
>
> Can you embrace the One? Can you keep from losing it? Can you, without resorting to divining by tortoise or milfoil, recognize the auspicious and the inauspicious? Can you stop? Can you cease? Can you not seek it in others, but rather realize it in yourself? Can you be swift? Can you be plain? Can you become a newborn child? Infants howl all day, but their throat never gets hoarse—this is the height of harmony. Infants make fists all day, but their hands never get cramped—they maintain inner power. Infants stare all day without blinking their eyes—their concern does not reside in the external. To move without knowing where you are going, to reside without knowing what you are doing, shifting and trailing about with things, riding along with the waves—this is the principle of preserving life, and that is all. (ZZ 23) [18]

After inquiring and receiving insights about the inner power of the utmost sage, Nánróng Zhū asks if this is the highest stage. Lǎozǐ in turn provides additional guidance. [19]

> 未也。吾固告汝曰：「能兒子乎？」兒子動不知所為，行不知所之，身若槁木之枝而心若死灰。若是者，禍亦不至，福亦不來。禍福無有，惡有人災也？ [20]
>
> Not yet! Just a moment ago I said to you, 'Can you become a newborn child?' Infants act without knowing what they are doing, move without knowing where they are going. Their body is like the limb of a withered tree and their heart-mind like dead ashes. Because of this, bad fortune will not occur and good fortune will not arrive. If one is free from good and bad fortune, then what human calamities can occur? (ibid.) [21]

'Embracing the One' (*bàoyī* 抱一) in the first selection refers to Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation (see below). The phrase appears in chapters ten and twenty-two of the anonymous fourth-second century BCE *Lǎozǐ* 老子 (*Lǎo-tzǔ*; Book of Venerable Masters; aka *Dàodé jīng* 道德經 [Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power]; DZ 690; ZH 560; abbrev. LZ), with the former containing one of the most technical discussions of classical Daoist practice. Interestingly, the next set of lines parallels chapter nineteen of the anonymous mid-fourth century BCE *Nèiyè* 內業 (Inward Training) (see Komjathy [2003] 2023, I.1; also Roth 1999), which is another source from the 'old masters' and is preserved as chapter forty-nine in the received *Guǎnzǐ*. This may indicate a shared oral tradition, increasingly affiliated lineages, or even intertextuality. It is noteworthy that the practice is referred to as 'concentrating *qi*' (*tuánqì* 摶氣) in chapter nineteen of the *Nèiyè*, which again echoes chapter ten of the received *Lǎozǐ* as well as other sections of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. The latter include the upcoming passage on the 'fasting of the heart-mind,' wherein one is told to 'listen to/with *qi*' (*tīngqì* 聽氣). The above passages also apparently draw on other teachings associated with and collected in the received *Lǎozǐ*. Some key themes include childhood (chs. 10, 20, 28, 55), inner power (*passim*), non-action [22]

(*passim*), sages (*passim*), and the avoidance of calamities (ch. 13; also chs. 16, 32, 44, 46, 50, 52, 58, 63, and 69). It in turn links the state of childhood with that of withered wood and dead ashes (see also ZZ 2 and 24). That is, from this classical Daoist perspective, such technical terms point towards specific psychospiritual conditions and meditative experiences associated with apophatic practices, specifically as informed by and informing effortlessness.

Classical Daoist Effortless Meditation

[23] Members of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism emphasized the practice of various techniques of the Dao. These were self-cultivational methods and training regimens aimed at mystical union with and participation in the Dao. Such *dàoshù* 道術 consisted of informing views, associated practices, and resultant experiences, including states (temporary psychological shifts) and traits (lasting character changes and reconfigurations).[10] The primary advocated method involved apophatic and quietistic meditation, which centered on emptiness (*xū* 虛) and stillness (*jìng* 靜). This practice was primarily contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. Emphasizing deconditioning, and as explored momentarily, this form of Daoist contemplative practice is informed by and informs *wúwéi* 無為 (lit., 'without acting/doing'), which is translated more technically as 'non-action' and 'effortlessness'.

[24] Members of the inner cultivation lineages utilized a contemplative lexicon that included 'techniques of the Dao' and 'techniques of the heart-mind' as a soteriological (Dao-centered/centering) framework. Such techniques included a variety of specific technical terms that designate what is herein presented as 'apophatic meditation,' 'quietistic meditation,' and now 'effortless meditation' (see also Roth 1999, 2021; Komjathy 2020b, 2020c, 2021, 2023a). 'Apophatic,' which derives from the Greek *apophasis* (lit., 'away from speaking'; and denial or negation by extension) suggests beyond, while 'quietistic' suggests quietude, acceptance, and open receptivity. This connects to the larger, cross-cultural phenomenon of quietism and the specific movement known as Quietism (see, e.g., Komjathy 2015; Komjathy 2018a). One defining feature of the latter involves dissolution of separate (egoic) identity and submersion or fusion of individual will with divine will, or the Dao as transformative process in Daoist terms. From a Daoist perspective, there is an apparent paradox in this: One's personal aspirations (*zhì* 志) and fate (*mìng* 命) may only be realized through acceptance of and participation in the Dao as such (*zìrán* 自然). That is, there is a non-dualistic mode in which such distinctions disappear. In the words of a Daoist oral teaching, "There comes a point when you can only make one choice and remain free." In any case, unlike other forms of Daoist meditation Kohn (1989), classical Daoist 'effortless meditation' corresponds to various indigenous, classical Chinese Daoist terms (see fig. 1).

[25] These terms are instructive for a preliminary understanding of the Daoist practice. There are a variety of verbs describing the process: *bào*-embrace, *guī*-return (also *fǎn* 反; *fù* 復; *huán* 還), and *shǒu*-guard, with the latter functioning like 'meditation:'[11] *Bào* contains the *shǒu* 手/ ('hand') radical, while *shǒu* includes *cùn* 寸 (originally the radial artery pulse at the wrist).

10 Here I utilize my larger theory of praxis as consisting of the interrelationship among views, practices, experiences, and goals. See Komjathy (2015), Komjathy (2018a). My understanding of the distinction between states and traits has been clarified by Cahn and Polich (2006). For an explicit discussion in classical Daoism see Roth (2015); Komjathy (2023a); also below.

11 *Shǒu* also may mean 'keep,' 'keep watch,' 'maintain,' and 'preserve.' However, in Daoist Studies, the standard rendering is 'guard/guarding,' which also is helpful for distinguishing it from other 'protection' terms (e.g., *bǎo* 保).

bàoyī 抱一 (‘embracing the One’) (LZ 10 & 22; ZZ 23; also NY 9)	shǒuyī 守一 (‘guarding the One’) (NY 24; ZZ 11; also ZZ 23)
guīgēn 歸根 (‘returning to the Root’) (LZ 16; also ZZ 11 & 17)	shǒuzhōng 守中 (‘guarding the Center’) (LZ 5; NY 12)
shǒucí 守雌 (‘guarding the feminine’) (LZ 28 & ZZ 33)	xīnzhāi 心齋 (‘fasting of the heart-mind’) (ZZ 4; also ZZ 11 & 22)
shǒujìng 守靜 (‘guarding stillness’) (LZ 16; also NY 22)	zuòwàng 坐忘 (‘sitting-in-forgetfulness’) (ZZ 6; also ZZ 11 & 23)

Figure 1 Some Classical Chinese Daoist Terms Related to ‘Effortless Meditation.’

Both suggest holding onto something and further connect to classical Daoist references to ‘treasure’ (see, e.g., LZ 9, 26, 67, 69, and 70). That is, one’s original and inherent connection to the Dao is something precious that must be stored and protected, perhaps even hidden. Interestingly, there is a later Daoist esoteric reading of *shǒu*-guard, in which *mián* 宀 (‘roof’) is understood as the human head and *cùn* 寸 (here ‘inch’) is read as the heart region. Meditative ‘guarding’ involves maintaining emptiness and stillness in the heart-field, which is viewed as the psychospiritual center of human personhood (see below). The accompanying phrases point towards both the Dao and associated contemplative states, specifically realized Daoist ones. These include *yī* 一 as invoking the Dao-as-One (LZ 42), including meditation as a process of uniting and the means of (not) attaining oneness/union with the Dao. Similarly, *gēn* 根 refers to the Dao-as-Root, but also the ground of one’s being. This is defined as ‘stillness’ (*jìng* 靜) and further as the method to ‘return to life-destiny’ (*fùmìng* 復命) in LZ 16. Thus, innate nature (*xìng* 性) is understood as stillness, which connects to and manifests the Dao-as-Stillness. *Cí* 雌 (‘female/feminine’) is complex. Although sometimes read through a quasi-feminist lens, this and related characters do not designate female human beings. Rather the Chinese character includes *zhuī* 隹 (‘small-tailed bird/sparrow’). Read contextually, it corresponds to the cosmological principle of *yin* (in the sense of *yin-yang*) and suggests open receptivity (see Komjathy 2022d, 2023a).[12] *Zhōng* 中 (‘center’) refers to the Dao-as-Center (LZ 21), but also the heart and/or navel region (see below). Aspiring Daoists are further advised to ‘fast’ (*zhāi* 齋), with the Chinese character also meaning ‘retreat:’ Thus, as explored more fully momentarily, *xīnzhāi* may be glossed as both ‘heart-fasting’ and ‘mind-retreat.’ One withholds ordinary nourishment in the form of sense perception and habituated thoughts and emotions so that clarity of consciousness emerges. One retreats from the ordinary human world to decrease distractions and dissipation. As indicated by the phrase *zuòwàng*, one sits (*zuò* 坐) and forgets (*wàng* 忘). Under my translation-interpretation, the latter indicates the Daoist contemplative state of ‘forgetful**ness**’, and thus parallels ‘empti**ness**’ (*xū* 虛) and ‘still**ness**’ (*jìng* 靜), to which we will return below.[13]

12 The same is true of *pìn* 牝 (LZ 6, 55, and 61), which includes *niú* 牛/牜 (‘ox’).

13 *Zuòwàng* has been problematically translated as ‘sitting in oblivion’ by Livia Kohn (1987, 2010), which also has influenced popular (mis)understanding. *Wàng* 忘 is principally a verb and more conventionally means ‘forget’ (try turning ‘oblivion’ into a verb), so *zuòwàng* more literally means ‘sit and forget.’ The character consists *wáng* 亡 (‘lose/perish’) and *xīn* 心 (‘heart-mind’), with the former usually read as a phonetic. ‘Oblivion’ has the connotation of annihilation and even obliviousness, neither of which is the context-specific meaning. Specifically, there is an emphasis on energetic presence: Emptiness of the heart-center results in energetic integrity and sensitivity, including a deeper form of awareness and perception (‘listening’ [*tīng* 聽]). This may be further clarified by NY 14: “Within the heart-mind, there is yet another

Turning to the technical specifics of the practice of classical Daoist effortless meditation, the two passages with the most details again appear in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. These occur in chapters four and six, which are titled "Rénjiān shì 人間世" (In the Human World) and "Dà zōngshī 大宗師" (Great Ancestral Teacher), respectively. The passages in question focus on an imaginary/mythological exchange between Kǒngzǐ 孔子 (Master Kong; 'Confucius'; ca. 551–ca. 479 BCE), the retrospective founder of Ruism ('Confucianism'), and his senior (and impoverished) disciple Yán Huí 顏回 (Zǐyuān 子淵 [Adept Profundity]; ca. 521–481 BCE).[14] [26]

> 顏回曰：「敢問其方。」 [27]

> 仲尼曰：「齋，吾將語若！有而為之，其易邪？易之者，皞天不宜…若一志，無聽之以耳而聽之以心，無聽之以心而聽之以氣。聽止於耳，心止於符。氣也者，虛而待物者也。唯道集虛。虛者，心齋也。」 [28]

> Yán Huí said, "May I dare to ask about this method (*fāng* 方)?" [29]

> Zhòngní 仲尼 [Kǒngzǐ] responded, "You must fast! I will tell you what that means. Do you think that it is easy to do anything while you have a heart-mind? If you do, the luminous heavens will not support you […]. Unify your aspirations (*yīzhì* 一志)! Don't listen with your ears; listen with your heart-mind (*xīn* 心). No, don't listen with your heart-mind; listen with *qi* 氣. Listening stops with the ears, the heart-mind stops with joining (*fú* 符), but *qi* is empty and waits on all things. The Dao gathers in emptiness alone. Emptiness (*xū* 虛) is the fasting of the heart-mind (*xīnzhāi* 心齋)." (ZZ 4; see also ZZ 22)[15] [30]

Aspiring Daoist adepts, represented by Yán Huí, are instructed to begin meditation, here referred to as *xīnzhāi* 心齋 ('fasting of the heart-mind'), by unifying their aspirations. This is single-pointed commitment to realizing the Dao (*dédào* 得道). For this, one must disengage ordinary sense perception, especially ordinary, externally-directed listening, and move into the deeper psychospiritual level of one's being, namely, the heart-region. However, as the ordinary heart-mind is characterized by emotional and intellectual agitation and conditioned modes, specifically concerns for society, family, and individual personhood, one must decrease such patterns of distraction and dissipation. As we will discover, this is (not) accomplished by simply "letting go, leaving alone, and letting be" (see ZZ 11). One then moves into an even deeper layer of being. This is *qi*, which I prefer to leave untranslated, but which is variously rendered as 'vital breath,' 'energy,' and 'pneuma.' *Qi* is a key dimension of traditional Chinese and thus Daoist cosmology. It is a subtle current and presence that infuses everything that exists. From a Daoist perspective, it circulates through universe, world, and self. Through the practice of [31]

heart-mind. That inner heart-mind is an awareness that precedes language." *Zuòwàng* is, in turn, connected to *xīnzhāi*, which is defined as 'emptiness' (*xū* 虛). See below.

14 While these exchanges are framed as 'fictional' in conventional scholarship, there is an alternative Daoist 'mythological' reading. As Kǒngzǐ was said to have studied with Lǎo Dān/Lǎozǐ (see, e.g., ZZ 14), the present account suggests an 'alternate Daoist life' of the former, beyond the shackles of Ruism (see, e.g., ZZ 17). For a fuller account of these various details related to the 'legend of Lǎo Dān,' see Komjathy (2020d), Komjathy (2023a).

15 Note that Watson (1925–2017), in his generally excellent translation, mistranslates *qi* as 'spirit.' This has led to misunderstanding and mischaracterization on the part of Western popularizers without knowledge of the Chinese original. Other translators/interpreters (e.g., Harold Roth) also present this as some form of 'breathing meditation' (pers. comm.; author's field observations), which is a misinterpretation and recurring deficiency in Roth's oeuvre. For context-specific and technical guidance, see Komjathy (2023a).

heart-fasting and mind-retreat, one becomes more energetically attuned and sensitive. One "listens with *qi*," which is an energetic mode of being, perceiving, and participating. It may be thought of as a mystical (non) mode, referred to, for instance, as 'mysterious perception' (*xuánlǎn* 玄覽) in chapter ten of the *Lǎozǐ*. Here it is noteworthy that there are a number of variant characters for *lǎn*, which as received contains *jiàn* 見 ('see'), that have the *mǐn* 皿 ('vessel') or *jīn* 金 ('metal') radical. This suggests a 'mirror' reading, and further connects to chapters five, six, seven, thirteen, twenty, and thirty-three of the *Zhuāngzǐ*. As explored more fully below, although the 'mind-mirror/mirror-mind' analogy is often assumed to be a Chán/Zen Buddhist concept and framework, the earliest indigenous Chinese precedent actually originates with classical Daoism and includes a contemplative dimension.[16] In any case, the passage significantly concludes by defining the Dao, *qi*, and the associated meditation method as characterized by emptiness. That is, one realizes the ground of one's (non) being as infused with and interconnecting to reality as such.

The dialogue and instruction continue in the second passage. [32]

> 顏回曰：「回益矣… 回坐忘矣…墮肢體，黜聰明，離形去知，同於大通，此謂坐忘。」 [33]
>
> 仲尼曰：「同則無好也，化則無常也。而果其賢乎！丘也請從而後也。」 [34]
>
> Yán Huí said, "I'm improving […]. I can sit and forget […]. I smash up my limbs and body, drive out perception and intellect, cast off form, do away with understanding, and make myself identical (*tóng* 同) with Great Pervasion (*dàtōng* 大通). This is what I mean by sitting-in-forgetfulness (*zuòwàng* 坐忘)." [35]
>
> Zhòngní said, "If you're identical with it, you must have no more preferences! If you've been transformed, you must have no more constancy! So you really are a worthy person after all! With your permission, I'd like to become your follower." (ZZ 6; see also ZZ 11) [36]

Significantly, in the parallel passage in chapter twenty-two of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, it is Lǎo Dān who instructs Kǒngzǐ on the practice of heart-fasting. One moves through progressive states of relaxation to the point of (not) attaining emptiness and numinous pervasion. This involves abstaining from concerns that disturb the heart-mind and forgetting distractions. One sits and forgets, until even forgetting is forgotten. This is the state of *forgetfulness*, which is largely parallel to emptiness and stillness. Interestingly, the first passage involves Kǒngzǐ instructing Yán Huí, while the second involves Yán Huí instructing Kǒngzǐ. That is, it is *dialogic and inter-relational*. Through intensive, dedicated, and prolonged meditation practice, the disciple becomes the master. The *Zhuāngzǐ* in turn speaks of clearing out the "underbrush of the head" and "brambles of the heart-mind" (*péng zhī xīn* 蓬之心; ZZ 1) as well as making the body like "withered wood" (*gǎomù* 槁木) and heart-mind like "dead ashes" (*sǐhuī* 死灰) (ZZ 2, 22, 23, and 24).[17] One "dwells corpse-like" (*shījū* 尸居) (ZZ 11, 14, and 23). I take the latter phrases to refer [37]

16 The standard (Buddhist) *locus classicus* is the *Liùzǔ tánjīng* 六祖壇經 (Platform Sutra of the Six Patriarch). See, e.g., Yampolsky (1967). Anyone familiar with the larger Sinological literature knows that this text tends to be identified as the primary source-point for the 'mind-mirror/mirror-mind' analogy.

17 Significantly, especially in terms of skeptical dismissal of textual reconstructions as irrelevant to understanding 'experience,' the associated passage in ZZ 2 involves an attendant observing the advanced Daoist practitioner in meditative absorption. The former then inquires about the latter's apparent absorption, to which he provides said description. That is, it is simultaneously subjective and intersubjective, with an accompanying subjective account. Deeper reading of the *Zhuāngzǐ* results in many more examples.

to a deep state of meditative absorption, a trophotropic condition characterized by extremely low levels of physiological activity (see Fischer 1971, 1980; Forman 1990; Komjathy 2015; Komjathy 2018a). This is so much the case that it appears that the practitioner has ceased breathing; respiration has so slowed, deepened, and lengthened to become imperceptible.

Here a few additional points may be helpful. First, just as the first passage defines the fasting of the heart-mind in terms of emptiness, the second passage defines sitting-in-forgetfulness as becoming identical or uniting with Great Pervasion. The latter refers to both the Dao, especially as numinous presence, and a deep state of meditative absorption. To these, we may add the above-mentioned definition of 'returning to the root' as stillness and the 'techniques of the heart-mind' as based on non-action and sensory disengagement. The contemplative formula and recurring, shared approach are clear: One moves from sensory disengagement through physiological serenity and psychological stability to spiritual realization, especially as understood in terms of energetic connection and mystical abiding. This relates to the above-mentioned position of apophatic and quietistic meditation as quasi-orthopraxy among members of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. Under my interpretation, it is akin to a Pure Consciousness Event (PCE) explored by Robert K.C. Forman and his colleagues (1990), albeit with a different informing view (see below). Second and along these lines, the invocation of *tóng* 同, which may mean 'identical,' 'same,' and 'unite,' is significant because it connects with both chapter one of the *Lǎozǐ* and further with chapter forty-eight of that same text. In the former, *tóng* is understood as centering on the Dao-as-Mystery (*xuán* 玄). There we are told, [38]

> 玄之又玄，
> 衆妙之門。 [39]
>
> Mysterious and again more mysterious,
> The gateway to all that is wondrous. [40]
> (LZ 1)

The only other place in the entire text where this grammatical construction (__ 之又 __) appears is the following: [41]

> 為學日益；
> 為道日損。
> 損之又損，以至於無為。無為而無不為。 [42]
>
> In the pursuit of learning, one increases each day.
> In the practice of the Dao, one decreases each day.
> Decreasing and again decreasing, one arrives at non-action (*wúwéi* 無為). Through non-action, nothing is left undone. [43]
> (LZ 48)

That is, the practice of twofold decreasing (*chóngsǔn* 重損) leads to realizing the twofold mystery (*chóngxuán* 重玄) of the Dao. This, in turn, connects to the classical Daoist emphasis on 'pausing' and 'stopping' (*zhǐ* 止; more technically, 'cessation'), with the Chinese character later used to translate the Buddhist *samatha/śamatha* (calming/serenity meditation). Third, under a 'Daoist contemplative reading,' one may contextualize the two above dialogic exchanges on the technical specifics of classical Daoist effortless meditation within the larger text of the [44]

Zhuāngzǐ. As we have seen, the first occurs in chapter four, while the second occurs in chapter six. From a contemplative perspective, Yán Huí is presumably practicing the entire time that one is reading. In the meantime, like contemplatives deepening practice, conversing with other contemplatives, and having other contemplative experiences, we meet other Daoist teachers and practitioners. Some of these include the following in sequential order: Qú Bóyù 蘧伯玉, Carpenter Shí 石, Nánbó Zǐqí 南伯子綦, Crippled Shū 疏, Jiē Yú 接輿, Wáng Tái 王駘, Bóhūn Wúrén 伯昏無人, Shēntú Jiā 申徒嘉, Toeless Shūshān 叔山, Fleshless Zhīlí 支離, Zhuāngzǐ 莊子, Nǚyǔ 女偶, Mèngsūn Cái 孟孫才, and Xǔ Yóu 許由. How does one's practice-realization become clarified by other approaches, encounters, and teachings? Finally, given the current special issue of *Entangled Religions*, we should inquire about the relationship between classical Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation framed as 'heart-fasting/mind-retreat' and 'forgetful sitting/seated forgetting.' While these may be understood as roughly equivalent, they also may point towards a deepening understanding and application. One begins with a framework of 'fasting' centering on the heart, in which one believes and perhaps is required to actively 'withhold.' However, one then simply 'sits and forgets.' While 'forgetting' may seem active, to engage in the practice in this manner actually involves remembering. One provisionally reminds oneself to 'forget,' and so one is *not* forgetting. In place of this approach, one *sits-in-forgetfulness*. One enters the associated contemplative state in/as/through practice, which involves not-doing to the point of beyond/non. This may be thought of as 'redoubled' or 'twofold forgetting' (*chóngwàng* 重忘), in which one sits and forgets until even forgetting is forgotten. *Forgetfulness*. Thus, in the later Daoist tradition, meditation is sometimes referred to as *rùjìng* 入靜 ('entering stillness'). Each of these points also may inspire greater attentiveness to indigenous terms related to 'effortless meditation,' which again would express stronger commitment to decolonialism ('deOrientalism').

Before turning to the informing worldview, including a more robust discussion of *wúwéi* understood contemplatively, let us explore a few more technical details related to classical Daoist effortless meditation. As mentioned, this type of meditation was the center of a shared spiritual repertoire and training regimen. As expressed in the *Nèiyè*, which is one of the four "Techniques of the Heart-mind" chapters in the received *Guǎnzǐ* (see above), [45]

> 能正能靜、 [46]
> 然後能定。
> 定心在中，
> 耳目聰明，
> 四肢堅固：
> 可以為精舍。
>
> If you can be aligned and still, [47]
> Only then can you become stable.
> With a stabilized heart-mind at the center,
> With the ears and eyes acute and bright,
> And with the four limbs firm and solid,
> You can make a lodging-place for vital essence.
> (NY 8; see also NY 5)

We find a parallel sentiment in the *Zhuāngzǐ*: [48]

> 正則靜， [49]
> 靜則明，
> 明則虛，
> 虛則無為
> 而無不為。
>
> Alignment results in stillness; [50]
> Stillness results in illumination;
> Illumination results in emptiness;
> Emptiness results in non-action.
> Then nothing is left undone.
> (ZZ 23)

These passages may be further connected to what I refer to as the "Seven Core Contemplative Chapters" of the *Lǎozǐ*, namely, 10, 16, 20, 28, 37, 48, and 52 (see Komjathy [2003] 2023, I.2; 2023a; 2024; cf. LaFargue 1992). For present purposes, I would like to add the end of chapter fifty-seven. [51]

> 我無為而民自化； [52]
> 我好靜而民自正；
> 我無事而民自富；
> 我無欲而民自樸。
>
> I practice non-action, and the people naturally transform. [53]
> I enjoy stillness, and the people naturally align.
> I abide in non-involvement, and the people naturally prosper.
> I live in desirelessness, and the people naturally simplify.
> (LZ 57)

To begin, the *Nèiyè* emphasizes the central importance of alignment (*zhèng* 正) as the prerequisite for stillness (*jìng* 靜) and stability (*dìng* 定), or stabilized stillness. The latter also is translated as 'concentration' and more technically as 'absorption,' and again it is noteworthy that it was later used to translate the Indian and Buddhist Sanskrit *samādhi*. Alignment points towards a Daoist psychosomatic view and approach to meditation, in which somatic attentiveness is required and results in concentrated *qi* and increased vitality. This is discussed as *jīng* 精 ('vital essence'), a technical usage that is somewhat idiosyncratic in the larger Daoist tradition and beyond. Harold Roth has, in turn, discussed the *Nèiyè* as centering on the 'fourfold aligning' (*sìzhèng* 四正) (Roth 1999, 109–12, 134–36), also translated as 'four alignments' (Komjathy [2003] 2023, I.1). They are as follows: [54]

1. Aligning the body (*zhèngxíng* 正形) [55]
2. Aligning the four limbs (*zhèng sìtǐ* 正四體/*zhèng sìzhī* 正四肢)
3. Aligning *qi* (*zhèngqì* 正氣)
4. Aligning the heart-mind (*zhèngxīn* 正心)

Recalling the above-mentioned passage on heart-fasting, there appears to have been a contem- [56]

poraneous intra-Daoist debate concerning the deepest layer of human being and contemplative practice. Not surprisingly, the *Nèiyè* centers on the heart-mind, while the *Lǎozǐ* and *Zhuāngzǐ* emphasize *qi*. One explanation is that the *Nèiyè* identifies an 'inner heart-mind,' which is an empty field and pure consciousness that enables mystical perception, which includes the role of *qi* and energetic sensitivity in a manner paralleling the other texts. In any case, postural alignment is a necessary precondition for deeper contemplative practice, with so-called 'body' and so-called 'mind' being interdependent and mutually influencing. In fact, as we have seen, these are actually just different manifestations of *qi* from a classical and foundational Daoist perspective. As one goes deeper into the practice, stillness deepens to the point that one enters meditative absorption. This is a contemplative state/stage that is absent of and free from desire, effort, and involvement. Here it is important to note that Daoist contemplative readings of the *Lǎozǐ* identify the 'country/state' (*guó* 國) as 'body/person/self' (*shēn* 身) and thus the 'people' (*mín* 民) as somatic inhabitants and constituents. Thus, as I have suggested (2023a), it is possible to take *guó* as referring to psychospiritual states and dispositions. In any case, classical Daoist effortless meditation is a process of deconditioning. In the language of the tradition, it involves 'return,' including disappearance and transpersonal (non) abiding. It is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. That is, at some point one enters and experiences complete emptiness, absent of any and all content. One no longer uses concepts, language, reason, and so forth to analyze one's experience. This includes the previously discussed conceptual frameworks, that is, 'fasting,' 'forgetting,' 'guarding,' 'uniting,' and so forth. Just as the sacred is beyond 'Dao', so too spiritual realization is beyond 'meditation'. This points towards both the possibility of techniqueless meditation as well as contemplative being (see Komjathy 2015; Komjathy 2018a). One also transcends subject-object modes. In the language of the larger Daoist tradition, one disappears into the Void and then reemerges as a new being beyond ordinary cognitive patterning and ontological modes.

Classical Daoist effortless meditation in turn utilizes what I refer to, drawing upon Han de Wit (1991), as 'Daoist contemplative psychology' (see Komjathy 2023a).[18] This is psychology (views of *psychē*) informed by and informing contemplative practice and contemplative experience (see Komjathy 2015; Komjathy 2018a). We have already encountered some of the informing worldview, specifically as centering on the Dao as sacred, the heart-mind as psychospiritual center of human personhood, and *qi* as the underlying subtle current and presence infusing and circulating through cosmos, world, and self. The view of the heart-mind (*xīn* 心) is psychosomatic, referring to both the physical organ ('heart') and the seat of consciousness ('mind'), remembering the informing energetic anthropology, cosmology, and theology. Part of the associated belief system is that the ordinary and habituated heart-mind is characterized by agitation and turbidity, while the original and realized heart-mind is characterized by stillness and clarity. Through Daoist apophatic and quietistic (emptiness/stillness-based) meditation, one cultivates the original and realized heart-mind. [57]

虛其心，
實其腹， [58]

18 This framework was introduced by me into Harold Roth's contribution to my edited volume *Contemplative Literature* (2015). It was unacknowledged due to our contemporaneous collaboration. The same is true with(out) respect to his more recent *The Contemplative Foundations of Classical Daoism* (2021). See, e.g., Roth (2021), xii, 447, n. 1; cf. Komjathy (2023a), xvi. Specifically, and perhaps somewhat (un)surprisingly with respect to academic integrity, Roth fails to acknowledge my critical reading, editorial involvement, and afterword proposal.

弱其志，
強其骨。

Empty the heart-mind; [59]
Fill the belly;
Weaken the will;
Strengthen the bones.
(LZ 3)

While open to various contextual interpretations, Daoists tend to read these classical aphorisms [60]
as contemplative principles and 'meditation cyphers.' One releases the weight of thoughts and emotions from head and heart, and this settles down to (re)coalesce as *qi* in the 'belly' (*fù* 腹; Jpn. *hara*), with the latter Chinese character also designating 'lower abdomen' and 'navel.' Interestingly, the character consists of *ròu* 肉/月 ('flesh') and *fù* 复 ('return'), with the latter usually read as a phonetic. However, from an applied and lived Daoist perspective, the character encourages practitioners to return to the body, and specifically to the navel region as the primary storehouse of *qi* in the body. Along these lines, the fundamental and underlying contemplative view is that one's innate nature (*xìng* 性) is stillness (*jìng* 靜), and a manifestation of the Dao-as-Stillness (see also LaFargue 1992).[19] Again, this is a non-dualistic view of human being. *Xìng*, which consists of *xīn* 心/忄 ('heart-mind') and *shēng* 生 ('inborn'), is one's original and inherent connection with the Dao. The heart-mind that one was born with. In this way, it may be further connected to *pǔ* 樸 ('unhewn simplicity'; also translated as 'uncarved block'). As expressed in chapter nine of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, "Merging (*tóng* 同) through non-knowing (*wúzhī* 無知), one's inner power (*dé* 德) is not separated (*bùlí* 不離). Merging through desirelessness (*wúyù* 無欲) is called pure simplicity (*sùpǔ* 素樸). In pure simplicity, people realize innate nature (*xìng* 性)."[20] Traditionally speaking, Daoists generally understand this to be the ground of all being, including every being and beyond the merely human (see Komjathy 2017, 2022c). Especially for humans, it further relates to *dé* 德 ('inner power/virtue'), or the way in which the Dao becomes embodied as human activity in the world, which is characterized by beneficial and transformative influence. *Jìng*-stillness is, in turn, generally understood as the absence of agitation, and basically synonymous with emptiness and forgetfulness. It is what we fundamentally are. Again, from the perspective of 'Daoist etymology' (see Komjathy 2022b), the character suggests the purification (*qīng* 青) of contention (*zhēng* ,爭), and thus suggests the state of 'non-agitation' (*wúzhēng* 無爭), which is the culmination of the *Lǎozǐ* (9x9＝81) and discussed in terms of the Way of the Sages (*shèngrén zhī dào* 聖人之道). Thus, the practice of Daoist effortless meditation involves 'returning to the real' (*fǎnzhēn* 反眞; ZZ 17), the real as embodied and lived. As expressed in the key contemplative formula of the *Nèiyè*,

內靜外敬，
能反其性。

Inwardly still and outwardly reverent, [62]

19 For some classical Daoist discussions of innate nature, see NY 3, 16, 17, and 22 as well as ZZ 8, 9, 11, 12, 16, 17, 22, 23, and 25. The term does not appear in the *Lǎozǐ*, but I take *mìng* 命 ('fate/life-destiny') to be basically synonymous therein. See Komjathy (2023a).

20 Significantly, the emphasis on 'non-separation' (*wúlí* 無離) also appears in LZ 10, which is one of the core contemplative chapters.

> You can return to innate nature.
> (NY 22)

That is, there is an inner (*nèi* 內) and outer (*wài* 外) dimension and expression of Daoist practice and being, with recognizable patterns and imprints (see also LZ 8 and 15). It is not simply that one has inward stillness; one also has outward reverence, specifically for the Dao manifesting in/as/through the world and all beings. As we encountered in the above-cited passage from chapter thirty-three of the *Zhuāngzǐ*, again the culmination of the text (3/3): "Gentle weakness and humble self-effacement are its outer marks; emptiness and non-injury of the ten thousand beings are its substance." And, as expressed in the famous line of chapter fifty-one of the *Lǎozǐ*, "Venerate the Dao and honor inner power" (*zūndào guìdé* 尊道貴德; see also LZ 70). [63]

For present purposes, the most significant dimension of the informing view centers on *wúwéi* 無為, which is one of the most commonly invoked and misrepresented Daoist 'concepts' in academic and popular engagements with Daoism.[21] *Wúwéi* is best understood as a classical and foundational Daoist commitment, practice, principle, state, and value. Additionally, and as we will explore momentarily, it is rooted in Daoist contemplative practice and contemplative experience, and it is further connected to a wide variety of other Daoist states and traits. To begin, grammatically speaking *wú* 無 is a negation character that means 'without.' A variant character 橆 consists of *rén* 𠂉 (人; 'person'), *xì* 卅 ('forty'), and *lín* 林 ('forest'): Forty people in a forest. Again, under a Daoist etymological reading, it suggests the infinitesimal of the human within the boundlessness of reality. Along these lines and in terms of cosmology, it often refers to 'Nonbeing' or 'Nothingness,' with some overlap with the above-mentioned *xū* 虛 ('emptiness'). As a Daoist contemplative term, it indicates 'absent of' and 'free from,' and more radically 'beyond/non' (see below). *Wéi* 為/爲 literally means 'act,' 'do,' 'make,' and so forth. The Chinese character originally consisted of *yòu* 又 ('[right] hand') and *xiàng* 象 ('elephant'): A human hand holding an elephant. If one were to explore this in terms of Animal Studies (see Komjathy 2017, 2022c), it thus suggests animal husbandry with accompanying captivity and domestication, human activities that are often critiqued in classical Daoism (see, e.g., ZZ 17). In fact, at least some members of the inner cultivation lineages envisioned a world free of cages, corrals, hooks, lures, nets, pens, snares, and traps (see ZZ 1, 3, 10, 18, 20, and 23). *Wéi* in turn suggests calculating, contrived, controlling, and habituated behavior patterns and relational modes. Thus, on the most basic level, *wúwéi* literally means 'without acting/doing,' but is translated more technically as 'non-action' and 'effortlessness.' From a Daoist perspective, and this is essential, *from a Daoist perspective*, *wúwéi* refers to effortless activity. It involves non-interference and non-intervention. It involves only doing what is necessary to do something well. Soteriologically and theologically speaking, one discontinues everything that prevents one from being what one is. Nothing extra. As we have seen, this is a means to return to one's innate nature, the ground of one's (non) being, as stillness. From an applied and lived Daoist perspective, *wúwéi*, especially in concert with *zìrán* 自然 (*tzù-ján*; lit., 'self-so'; 'suchness'), may be compared to a forestry (non) method in which all beings have the freedom, space, and self-determination to flourish within the all-encompassing forest. Intact wildness. It also may be understood (engaged and applied) as a form of psychosomatic minimalism and energetic conservationism. [64]

21 In fact, *wúwéi* has become domesticated and misinterpreted as an intellectual concept/construct in a number of more recent academic publications, complete with accompanying academic careerism and 'philosophical' rumination. See, e.g., E. Slingerland (2003); Slingerland (2014); Puett and Gross-Loh (2016); cf. Komjathy (2023a). Here one might simply pause and reflect on the intimate connection of *wúwéi* with *wúmíng* 無名 ('namelessness'), *wúyù* 無欲 ('desirelessness'), *wúzhī* 無知 ('non-knowing'), and the like. See below.

There are a wide variety of passages that clarify the contextual *Daoist* meaning of *wúwéi*. As previously discussed, LZ 48 defines *wúwéi* as a process of 'redoubled' or 'twofold decreasing' (*chóngsǔn* 重損); LZ 57 presents it as an approach that allows and facilitates 'natural' or 'spontaneous transformation' (*zìhuà* 自化); and ZZ 23 frames it as a sequential process moving from alignment through stillness and illumination to emptiness, which culminates in *wúwéi*. In addition, and as mentioned, *wúwéi* is further connected to inner power and unhewn simplicity. The germinal and near-canonical discussion appears in the *Lǎozǐ*: [65]

> 上德不德，
> 是以有德；
> 下德不失德，
> 是以無德。
> 上德無為而無以為。 [66]

> Highest virtue is not virtuous;
> Therefore, it has virtue.
> Lowest virtue never loses virtue;
> Therefore, it lacks virtue.
> Highest virtue is non-action and free of effortful activity.
> (LZ 38) [67]

Here *dé* 德 ('inner power/virtue') refers to the way in which the Dao manifests through human beings as embodied activity in the world.[22] From a classical and foundational Daoist perspective, Daoist *dé* is 'not virtuous' because it is an energetic connection and expression, beyond conventional morality. In fact, the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism sometimes suggested that it was 'unrecognizable' (by non-Daoists) (see, e.g., LZ 8 and 15), and even points towards a mystical mode. This *dé* is equated with *wúwéi* as beyond contrivance and conditioned modes. It is even beyond '*dé*' as construct and filter. That is, authentic *dé* is a spontaneous expression of one's sacred connection without residual traces of ordinary personality. In addition, other chapters in the *Lǎozǐ* emphasize that "through non-action, nothing is left undone" (LZ 37 and 48; see also above). There are a number of ways to understand this, but one significant interpretation centers on accepting what is. Because one has abandoned and transcended the limitations of ego as well as ordinary perceptual and cognitive modes, one is able to allow reality to unfold as it is. This is *wúwéi* as a (non) method of deconditioning and return, and even of radical undoing. Such a Daoist perspective may be compared to and explicated with humanistic psychological frameworks centering on a 'being mode' in contrast to a 'having mode' (see, e.g., Deikman 1982; also Forman 1990; Komjathy 2018a). The former is characterized by open receptivity and acceptance, including ease and contentment in one's daily life. In this sense, *wúwéi* may be connected to other, parallel 'concepts' in the *Zhuāngzǐ*, including 'being carefree/carefree ease' (*xiāoyáo* 逍遙; ch. 1), 'equalizing things' (*qíwù* 齊物; ch. 2), 'adaptive presence' (*yīnshì* 因是; also 'flowing cognition'; ch. 2), and 'abiding acceptance' (*zàiyòu* 在宥; also 'letting be, leaving alone'; ch. 11).[23] *Wúwéi* is, in turn, a mode of being and experiencing in which one *embodies the Dao* as a space and presence that nourishes all beings without distinction. Again, this may [68]

22 'Virtue' in the classical Hellenistic sense (via Latin *virtus*) of moral excellence related to one's entire character and conduct. This stands in contrast to the conventional sense of moralism as social conformity.

23 Interestingly, there is an allegorical exchange between Tàiqīng 泰清 (Great Clarity) and Wúqióng 無窮 (Inexhaustibility), Wúwéi 無為 (Non-Action), and Wúshǐ 無始 (Beginninglessness) in ZZ 22.

be understood as a form of 'Daoist Quietism' because it is characterized by 'trusting the Dao' (*xìndào* 信道), and, for realized Daoists, by 'tracing the threads of the Dao' manifesting in/as/through one's (apparently) individual life.

[69] The crux of the interpretive exercise, especially with respect to understanding the contextual Daoist meaning of *wúwéi*, is its root in formal contemplative practice, seated meditation in particular. This essential dimension of *wúwéi* has been largely unrecognized, overlooked, and/or ignored in conventional accounts. *Wúwéi* is informed by and informs classical Daoist effortless meditation. As explored above, Daoist effortless meditation, first and foremost, simply involves centering and settling down. It involves sitting in emptiness, forgetfulness, and stillness. Practically speaking, one simply allows thoughts and emotions to dissipate naturally. One eventually enters deeper states of stillness, culminating in meditative absorption. This is *wúwéi* as a contemplative (non) method. Agitation naturally settles down through disengagement and non-reaction. In traditional Daoist terms, one moves from turbidity (*zhuó* 濁) and agitation (*dòng* 動) to clarity (*qīng* 清) and stillness (*jìng* 靜). One eventually enters a state of pure consciousness, which is contentless. This reveals consciousness as an open field; ordinary thoughts and emotions as ephemeral and contingent; and perceived separate identity as illusory in some sense. Here we must add that the latter insight, like the Daoist emphasis on desirelessness (see below), contrasts with standard Buddhist discussions of the Three (Buddhist) Characteristics of existence, namely, *aniccā* ('impermanence'), *dukkha* ('suffering/unsatisfactoriness'), and *anattā* (Skt. *anātman*; 'no-self/no-soul'). In a Daoist frame, the dissolution of ordinary, limited self is a merging into the Dao as beginningless, boundless, measureless, and so forth. This energetic merging alters embodied cognition in such a way that one intuits and senses the Dao's all-pervading sacred presence, which opens the body as a vessel of energetic exchange with world and cosmos. Soteriologically speaking, this is a 'way in', rather than a 'way out'. It enables one to be fully present to the grace of being. One's connection with the Dao is, in turn, transpersonal, with the practice culminating in mystical (non) union with the Dao. In addition, as applied in daily life, one has developed an (dis)engaged facility with non-reactivity. That is, the contemplative mode, rooted in *wúwéi*-based meditation, becomes an all-pervading existential approach and enduring ontological condition.

[70] Along these lines, it is important to note that much of classical Daoist literature involves what I refer to as 'mystical' and 'soteriological linguistics' (see Komjathy 2018b, 2023a), which in conventional scholarship is discussed as 'relativism,' 'skepticism,' 'paradox,' and the like.[24] From this Daoist perspective, much of what appears to be subversive and paradoxical actually expresses a contemplative and mystical view of reality. Additionally, for the present special issue of *Entangled Religions* focusing on 'effortless meditation' in comparative and cross-cultural perspective, the intimate connection between Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation and *wúwéi* is germinal and perhaps normative: The indigenous Daoist commitment to and emphasis on effortlessness *is* contemplative, and specifically the foundation of this type of Daoist meditation. It thus provides a benchmark for effortless meditation as such. It is a unique contemplative approach and form of meditation with specific defining characteristics.

[71] Finally, it is important to note that *wúwéi* is not a stand-alone Daoist concern, even if it is often extracted from the larger classical Daoist training regimen and soteriological systems as such. *Wúwéi* relates to a whole 'contemplative lexicon' of what I refer to as 'beyond' and 'non-

24 Rather than engage yet more deficient scholarship, individuals may consult the various critical materials on my Alternate Homepage (<www.louiskomjathy.com>).

Figure 2 Daoist Beyond/Non-States.

states' (see fig. 2). As the name suggests, these are phrases that include *wú* 無 (lit., "without") (see above).

They are as follows (moving from left-to-right): *wúmíng* 無名 (lit., 'without name'; nameless- [72]
ness), *wúqíng* 無情 (lit., 'without emotion/feeling'; emotionlessness), *wúshì* 無事 (lit., 'without affairs'; non-involvement/unconcernedness), *wúsī* 無私 (lit., 'without personal concerns'; self-lessness), *wúwéi* 無為 (lit., 'without acting/doing'; non-action/effortlessness), *wúwù* 無物 (lit., 'without thinghood'; no-thingness), *wúxíng* 無形 (lit., 'without form'; formlessness), *wúyòng* 無用 (lit., 'without use'; uselessness), *wúyǒu* 無有 (lit., 'without having'; non-being), *wúyù* 無欲 (lit., 'without desire'; desirelessness), *wúzhēng* 無爭 (lit., 'without contention'; non-contention), and *wúzhī* 無知 (lit., 'without knowledge'; non-knowing).[25] As a necessary corrective to standard misrepresentations, simply consider the following:

> 見素抱樸，
> 少私寡欲。 [73]
>
> Appear plain and embrace simplicity;
> Lessen selfishness and decrease desire. [74]

These are still more 'contemplative aphorisms' related to effortless meditation as 'returning to [75]
the root.' Recall also the connection between innate nature, inner power, and unhewn simplicity. Here we should further note that the various beyond/non-states are Daoist contemplative states (temporary psychological shifts) and traits (enduring personality changes). Along these lines, we find classical Daoist discussions of various states and stages directly associated with classical Daoist effortless meditation.

For present purposes, I will just point out a few relevant details. First, both associated [76]
passages (see fig. 3) are dialogic and involve these senior Daoist teachers instructing their disciples on effortless meditation. Second, we may think of the first three of each set as the Three Externalizations (*sānwài* 三外) and Three Pivots (*sānjī* 三機), respectively, with *jī* literally referring to a crossbow trigger and so translated as 'mechanism.' Third, we note the culmination of the first as realizing a state beyond life and death, and the second as being not yet emerged from the ancestral. Both refer to conditions of disappearance and nondifferentiation (*wújí* 無極). However, and finally, Húzǐ suggests that there are still five more layers of the abyss, which

25 For a more complete discussion, see Komjathy (2018b), Komjathy (2023a).

Seven States/Stages of Nǚyǔ 女偊 (Woman Yu)	Nine Abyss-Levels of Húzǐ 壺子 (Gourd Master)
1. Externalizing the World (*wài tiānxià* 外天下) 2. Externalizing Things (*wàiwù* 外物) 3. Externalizing Life (*wàishēng* 外生) 4. Pervading the Brightness of Dawn (*cháochè* 朝徹) 5. Realizing Aloneness (*jiàndú* 見獨) 6. Doing Away with Past and Present (*wú gǔjīn* 無古今) 7. Entering Where There Is No Death and No Life (*rù yú bùsǐ bùshēng* 入於不死不生) (ZZ 6)	1. Terrestrial Pattern (*dìwén* 地文) and Pivot of Restrained Inner Power (*dùdé jī* 杜德機) 2. Celestial Ground (*tiānrǎng* 天壤) and Pivot of the Beneficial (*shànzhě jī* 善者機) 3. Great Vastness beyond Victory (*tàichōng mòshèng* 太沖莫勝) and Pivot of Balanced *Qi* (*héngqì jī* 衡氣機) 4. Not-Yet-Emerged-from-the-Ancestral (*wèishǐ chū wúzōng* 未始出吾宗) 5–9. Unmentioned (ZZ 7)

Figure 3 Classical Daoist Contemplative States and Stages.

may be thought of as the Nine Abysses (*jiǔyuān* 九淵). The contextual teachings suggest that these are indescribable and unspeakable absorption states, with increasing degrees of subtlety, perhaps analogous to *jhana/dhyāna* states in certain Buddhist contemplative cartographies and systems. Such details again point towards a practice dimension beyond. This is part of the reason that classical Daoist contemplative practice may be understood as 'apophatic' and 'quietistic.' It is thus no coincidence that one of the classical Daoist names for 'Daoism' is the 'Teaching beyond/without Words' (*bùyán zhī jiào* 不言之教) (LZ 2 and 43; ZZ 5 and 22; also LZ 56; ZZ 5, 13, 22, 24, and 32). "Knowing the Dao is easy; not speaking is difficult. Knowing, but not speaking is the means to become celestial" (ZZ 32). Ultimately, one relaxes into one's being, until arriving at the ground. This is the "gateway to all that is wondrous."

Teachers, Community, and Context

As I have previously and repeatedly emphasized the importance of not reducing contemplative practice to mere technique (Komjathy 2015; 2018a), let me follow my own admonition and draw attention to some under-recognized 'contemplative dimensions.' Here I would like to briefly examine the importance of aesthetics, material culture, place, and spatiality. As mentioned, we find documentation of place-specific Daoist communities engaging in teacher-student dialogic exchange and a shared practice repertoire in the classical Daoist textual corpus. This is most clearly recorded in the *Zhuāngzǐ*. [77]

> 申徒嘉，兀者也，而與鄭子產同師於伯昏無人。子產謂申徒嘉曰：「我先出，則子止；子先出，則我止。」 [78]

> 其明日，又與合堂同席而坐。子產謂申徒嘉曰：「我先出，則子止；子先出，則我止。今我將出，子可以止乎，其未邪？且子見執政而不違，子齊執政乎？」 [79]

> 申徒嘉曰：「先生之門，固有執政焉如此哉？子而說子之執政而後人者也！聞之曰：『鑑明則塵垢不止，止則不明也。久與賢人處，則無過。』今子之所取大者，先生也，而猶出言若是，不亦過乎！」 [80]

Shēntú Jiā 申徒嘉 (Extended Disciple Excelling), who had lost a foot, was studying [81]

> under Bóhūn Wúrén 伯昏無人 (Elder Obscurity Beyond-Humanity) along with Zǐchǎn 子產 (Adept Chan) of Zhèng 鄭. Zǐchǎn addressed Shēntú Jiā saying, "If I go out first, you wait; if you go out first, I'll wait."
>
> The next day the two of them were sitting together on the same mat (*xí* 席) in the hall (*táng* 堂). Zǐchǎn said to Shēntú Jiā, "If I go out first, you wait; if you go out first, I'll wait! Now I will go out. Are you going to wait or aren't you? When you see a prime minister, you don't even get out of the way—do you think you're equal to a prime minister?" [82]
>
> Shēntú Jiā said, "Within the gates (*mén* 門) of the master, is there any such thing as prime minister? You delight in being a prime minister and pushing people behind you. But as I've heard, 'If the mirror (*jiàn* 鑑) is bright, dust does not settle; if dust settles, it isn't bright. When you live around worthy people for a long time, you'll be free of faults.' Today you regard the master as great, and yet you talk like this—it isn't right, is it?" (ZZ 5) [83]

There are many interesting elements of this passage, especially with respect to the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. First, this is a *Daoist community*, here depicted as two students conversing about their shared teacher's oral instructions. Second, said community has infrastructure (halls) and material culture (mats). Interestingly, the passage also employs an understanding of spatial demarcation as corresponding to accompanying spiritual commitments. Perhaps anticipating the later Daoist use of 'gates' to designate religious conversion/adherence/affiliation (*rùmén* 入門 [lit., 'enter the gates']) and discipleship (*ménrén* 門人 [lit., 'gate-person']), there is, third, an inner/outer locatedness. To be a formal disciple of the Daoist elder Bóhūn Wúrén is to be 'inside the gates,' both literally and figuratively. One must, in turn, leave one's ordinary social identity and hierarchal thinking 'outside the gates.' Finally, members of this Daoist community practice meditation on the same mats and in the same hall as every person, presumably understanding and ideally realizing shared innate nature as the Dao manifesting through individual being-in-the-world. Specifically, through the practice of effortless meditation, one polishes the 'mind-mirror,' that is, one purifies ordinary consciousness and gains clarity of perception and spiritual insight (see above). One moves towards a condition of spiritual awakening and realization, referred to as 'mysterious perception' (*xuánlǎn* 玄覽 [also *xuánjiàn* 玄鑒]) in LZ 10. Thus, it is no coincidence that later Daoists, drawing upon LZ 1, refer to "Daoism" as Xuánmén 玄門 (Mysterious Gate) and Xuánfēng 玄風 (Mysterious Movement), with *fēng* literally meaning 'wind' and 'currents' by extension. Here effortless meditation becomes a somatic portal into the Dao-as-Mystery, which circulates through the Daoist contemplative and contemplative community as a mysterious current and movement. Such is Daoism as the Tradition of the Dao, and effortless meditation as the way to the Way. [84]

By Way of Conclusion: A Lived/Living Daoist Perspective

By way of/around conclusion, I would like to provide a few insights into Daoist effortless meditation from a lived/living Daoist perspective, specifically utilizing what I refer to as a Daoist 'scholar-practitioner approach' (SPA) and 'critical adherent discourse' (CAD) (see Komjathy 2011a, 2016, 2018a). I have been practicing this type of Daoist meditation for some thirty years now, and formally teaching it in the context of the global/local Daoist community [85]

of the Daoist Foundation 道教基金會 and beyond for about fifteen years. This includes through individual spiritual direction and retreats, both in-person/on-site and remote. As taught and transmitted within the modern Daoist tradition, it is generally referred to as 'Quiet Sitting' (*jìngzuò* 靜坐), with the Chinese term also translated as 'tranquil sitting.'[26] As mentioned, two of the classical Daoist terms for the practice are *shǒujìng* 守靜 ('guarding stillness') and *zuòwàng* 坐忘 ('sitting-in-forgetfulness'), so there is a historical precedent for referring to it as *jìngzuò*. Again, *jìng*-stillness invokes both innate nature and the Dao as such, so, paralleling *zuòwàng*, *jìngzuò* also might be understood as 'sitting-in-stillness.'

To begin, recall that this form of meditation, which I generally refer to in English as 'apophatic and quietistic meditation,' is informed by and informs *wúwéi*. It involves a systematic process of deconditioning. Daoist Quiet Sitting is rooted in the previously explored classical Daoist passages. As I have learned it from multiple mainland Chinese Daoist Quánzhēn 全眞 (Complete Perfection) monastics, including some associated with the Qiānfēng 千峰 (Thousand Peaks) sub-lineage (see Komjathy 2022a; Komjathy and Townsend 2022), the modern practice is, first and foremost, an oral commentary (*kǒujué* 口訣) on the *xīnzhāi* passage in ZZ 4. However, a later Daoist inner alchemical (*nèidān* 內丹) dimension is added, specifically focusing on the Daoist subtle body. Although there is a recognition of the 'belly' (*fù* 腹; Jpn. *hara*) as somatic center in classical Daoism, the Daoist view of the navel region as 'elixir field' (*dāntián* 丹田), with accompanying energy channels, is later.[27] From this Daoist perspective, the practice not only leads to mystical union with the Dao, but also activates and strengthens the Daoist subtle body. Specifically, various points and meridians become connected, and one becomes a more energetically integrated being. Thus, I frequently emphasize that here the primary model of Daoist practice-realization is quietistic, while the secondary one is alchemical. The latter is not present in the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism or the associated textual passages. Any reference to the 'elixir field' in relationship to the latter is anachronistic, even if one can find an emerging, proto-subtle somatology in classical Daoism. [86]

The accompanying instructions involve "just allowing any thoughts or emotions to dissipate naturally." And "entering stillness." As one gains facility with 'letting go' and 'leaving alone,' one enters deeper states of stillness and meditative absorption. This is *wúwéi*/effortlessness as a lived (non) experience of disengagement and non-reaction. Initially, there is some residual agitation and accompanying reactivity, but this eventually decreases to the point of absence/non-existence. In addition to recalling the ZZ description of decreased physiological activity as 'withered wood' and 'dead ashes,' the accompanying contemplative states involve dissolution and disappearance in a manner paralleling those documented in the Nǚyǔ ("beyond-life-and-death") and Húzǐ ("not-yet-emerged-from-the-ancestral") passages. In the larger Daoist tradition, this is sometimes compared to a blue sky free of residual clouds or a lotus flower emerging from a muddy pond. [87]

I have, in turn, had a variety of associated contemplative and mystical experiences, includ- [88]

26 While beyond the current article, an early Daoist reference to *jìngzuò* appears in the *Chóngyáng lìjiào shíwǔ lùn* 重陽立教十五論 (Redoubled Yang's Fifteen Discourses to Establish the Teachings; DZ 1233; ZH 1010), which is attributed to Wáng Zhé 王嚞 (Chóngyáng 重陽 [Redoubled Yang]; 1113–1170), the founder of Quánzhēn 全眞 (Complete Perfection) Daoism. See Komjathy ([2003] 2023), III.8. There also is the *Yīnshìzǐ jìngzuò fǎ* 因是子靜坐法 (Master Yinshi's Methods of Quiet Sitting; JH 22) by the lay Daoist sympathizer Jiǎng Wéiqiáo 蔣維橋 (Yīnshì 因是 [Adaptive Presence]; 1872–1954). See, e.g., Komjathy and Townsend (2022).

27 The earliest known occurrence of *dāntián* appears in the *Lǎozǐ míng* 老子銘 (Inscription on Laozi; dat. 165 CE), while the *locus classicus* is the anonymous, third-century CE *Huángtíng wàijǐng jīng* 黃庭外景經 (Scripture on the Outer View of the Yellow Court; DZ 332; ZH 897). See Komjathy (2011b), Komjathy (2020b), Komjathy (2022b).

ing embryonic respiration, energetic pervasion, meditative absorption, mystical union, pure consciousness, and self-dissolution, among others. From an applied, committed, and lived Daoist perspective, these are natural outcomes and byproducts of dedicated and prolonged Daoist meditation practice. They are not to be actively pursued and may become distractions. Practice is primary; experience is secondary. In any case and as the name suggests, 'embryonic respiration' (*tāixī* 胎息) refers to a (non) condition in which one's breathing slows down to such a degree that it appears to cease. From a Daoist esoteric perspective, it involves the (temporary) cessation of pulmonary respiration, associated with postnatal *qi* (*hòutiān qì* 後天氣), and a condition of energetic interconnection in which one becomes infused with the '*qi* of the Dao' (*dàoqì* 道炁), or Way-Energy for short. This is a more formless and nondifferentiated type of *qi* along the lines of original *qi* (*yuánqì* 元氣), beyond even prenatal *qi* (*xiāntiān qì* 先天氣). Here one issue that emerges, especially from a theoretical and interpretive perspective, centers on Pure Consciousness Events (see Forman 1990). As PCEs are *contentless*, there is a question about the relevance of them outside of a given religious community and tradition (Steven Katz, pers. comm.; cf. Evans 1989). Like other so-called altered states of consciousness (ASC), how is this relevant for the academic study of religion in general and meditation and mysticism in particular?[28] Is there 'epistemological standing' and 'soteriological import'? One response, especially from a Daoist critical adherent perspective, is that they are inherently transformative, resulting in a transformed ontological condition and a new way of being and experiencing. In my case, such experiences resulted in a radical restructuring of my life. They revealed an 'alternate reality,' energetic in nature, and a deeper sense of meaning and purpose ('vocation'). Inwardly still; outwardly reverent. Such is at least one insight into effortless meditation as a resolution of the 'great matter' of the human condition. Embracing simplicity and returning to the root, one awakens innate nature as the ground of one's being. An original and innate connection to the sacred. For this, effortlessness offers nourishment and reveals a hidden landscape, simultaneously present and absent, simultaneously within and beyond time. A deeper trust emerges. Trust in something else and some more. Infusing and enlivening. One discovers the gateway to all that is wondrous. A gateway that is simultaneously within and beyond.

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28 Here it is important not to conflate meditation and mysticism, but rather explore the relationship and potential intersection points. See, e.g., Gimello (1978); Moore (1978); Komjathy (2018a).

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