Introduction

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Think less, want less, say less, and do less. Leave things alone. Such is the wisdom of ancient Daoism, as most famously represented by the *Laozi* 老子 and *Zhuangzi* 莊子. Through a nonmeddling "less is more" approach, things can unfold naturally in the best way. Such an approach has *sometimes* been applied to Daoist meditation. In Daoist "passive meditation,"[1] one simply keeps the mind clear and calm, focusing inwardly to witness the psychic, sensory, and physiological phenomena that occur spontaneously. My previous book, *Daoism, Meditation, and the Wonders of Serenity: From the Latter Han Dynasty (25–220) to the Tang Dynasty (618–907),* examined what various texts had to say about keeping the mind clear and calm and the wondrous effects this could bring about. This study continues this inquiry through an examination of personalities and texts of the tenth through eighteenth centuries.

Daoists have often pursued meditation methods that are better described as "proactive" because they entail techniques that purposely manipulate the mind and body.[2] These include visualization, mentally guiding inner vital forces, holding the breath, swallowing the breath, swallowing the saliva, knocking the teeth, incantations, talisman drawing, self-massages, movements and stretches, and such. In medieval Daoism such proactive meditation methods were probably more common and held a higher place of prestige. Notably, the meditation techniques endorsed in the Shangqing 上清 scriptures of the fourth century were decidedly of the proactive sort, and it was for these scriptures that the first and most prestigious section of the medieval *Daoist canon* was reserved.[3]

However, my previous book highlighted Daoist texts that endorsed passive approaches to meditation and described various effects expected to result naturally from serenity. These effects included general peace of mind, physical health, and intuitive practical wisdom. However, they also included more wondrous or strange phenomena, such as visions, unusual physical sensations, or transformations in the body and its natural functions—for instance, overcoming hunger. The explanations given for such wondrous sensory and physical effects pertained frequently to the workings of the eternal, universal, creative, life-sustaining qi of the Dao (*daoqi* 道氣, also variously known as primal qi [*yuanqi* 元氣] or genuine qi [*zhenqi* 真氣[4]]) that infuses the serene person from without or becomes activated from within the body—typically from within the lower Elixir Field (Dantian 丹田) located in the belly.

Another issue addressed in that book was Buddhism's impact on Daoist methods of passive meditation and on theories pertaining to its beneficial effects and soteriological outcomes. Medieval texts of the fifth century or later frequently incorporate Buddhist doctrines such as karma, saṃsāra, nirvāṇa, Dharma Body, and Emptiness—albeit typically without acknowledging their Buddhist provenance. Such doctrines provided Daoists with guiding insights for fostering serenity and enhanced the compassionate dimension of their ideals and aspirations. However, they also seem to have brought on a tendency to focus lopsidedly on the mental aspect of self-cultivation and to stop aspiring to physical longevity, transformation, and immortality. Certain texts of the mid- to late Tang period openly lamented this tendency and called on Daoist adepts to persevere in attaining the level where the Dao could transform their entire mental and physical being.

Daoists of subsequent periods were left with the task of properly understanding and explaining the intricacies of mind and body while integrating that understanding with practical approaches simple and passive enough not to undermine the salubrious natural processes of the mind and body. This study examines how this task was variously undertaken. It highlights both the continuity and change in how Daoists cultivated serenity, how they understood and explained its effects, and what wonders they hoped to gain from it.

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As we shall see, much of the change would be related to the rise to prominence of internal alchemy (*neidan* 內丹) and the notion of the fundamental unity of the Three Teachings (Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism). Passive meditation rose to a higher level of prestige vis-à-vis proactive meditation, owing to the distinct preference given to it by many of the most respected and influential internal alchemists. These internal alchemists found much inspiration and support for their views in Buddhist and Confucian texts, which they cited and admired openly. Interestingly, the notion put forth that Śākyamuni Buddha was himself an internal alchemist inspired professed Buddhists' efforts to "revive" the authentic Buddhist internal alchemy.

While the wonders of serenity described by Daoists after the Tang period often matched or resembled those described by their predecessors, some of the wonders had previously received little mention or emphasis. Among such newly emphasized wonders would be quasi-death (suspension of breathing and pulse), astral projection (sending out the yang spirit [*yangshen* 陽神]), and the shutdown of sexual function. A discourse also emerged on how the serenity fostered through internal alchemy could bestow one with ritual power—the power to command powerful deities and employ the Five Thunders.

The emphases on quasi-death and astral projection may have come about in part through the influence of Buddhist theories on meditative trance stages, the mind-made body (Skt. *mano-maya-kāya,*[5] Ch. *yisheng shen* 意生身), and the intermediate state (Skt. *antarā-bhava,* Ch. *zhongyou* 中有 or *zhongyin* 中陰) between death and rebirth. The notion of the shutting down of sexual function finds precedent in late medieval Daoist theories on Embryonic Breathing (Taixi 胎息). However, in the seventeenth century certain influential internal alchemists would resort to creative reinterpretations of Buddhist scripture and terminology to laud penile shrinkage and the loss of sexual function as hallmarks of high attainment.

Neidan 內丹, meaning "internal alchemy" or "inner elixir," became a standard term for referring to most of the Daoist meditation methods that emerged from the Song period (960–1279) onward. These methods, to greater or lesser degrees, took recourse to the terminology and metaphysics of laboratory alchemy—particularly that of the sort expounded in the abstruse

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classic *Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易參同契 (The Seal of the Unity of the Three, in Accordance with the *Changes of the Zhou,* ca. 400–700).[6] The inner elixir denoted by the term *neidan* is an immortal spirit body—a yang spirit (*yangshen* 陽神)—fashioned within one's own person by refining and combining the "ingredients" (e.g., blood, semen, saliva, and breath or more subtle modes of essence, qi, or spirit) furnished by the mind and body. In this internal alchemy, the practitioner's own mind and body also furnish the "crucible," "cauldron," and "fire." Of course, the term *neidan* can occasionally be found in Daoist meditation texts dating to the mid- or late Tang, and alchemical terminology and metaphors can be found in some Daoist meditation texts (including some Shangqing scriptures) dating back to the early centuries of the Common Era. However, it is from the Song period onward that the term *neidan* and the alchemical metaphor become so pervasive.[7]

While internal alchemical texts share in the alchemical metaphor, the actual methods they endorse vary greatly. Some are passive or passive-reactive (the meaning of this shall be explained shortly). Others are certainly proactive. Of course, determining the exact nature of the internal alchemical method being endorsed can be frustrating due to the notoriously abstruse expositions (often in metaphor-laden poetry) of so many texts. Most interestingly, certain highly influential internal alchemists proclaimed that the best practice is no practice at all and that internal alchemy in its highest form is serenity that prevails naturally and effortlessly in mundane life. This, in fact, is why I have chosen to leave the word "meditation" out of the title of this book.

In proactive internal alchemy, visualization plays a major role, though these visualizations are not usually of inner bodily deities (as was primarily the case in medieval Daoist meditation) but rather of suggestive imagery (e.g., dragon, tiger, infant, maiden, fire, water, clouds, chariots, towers, and such) meant to embody and incite the desired psychic or physiological phenomena. Also figuring prominently are techniques such as the mental guiding of inner vital forces, holding of breath, swallowing of breath, swallowing of saliva, knocking of teeth, self-massages, movements, and stretches.[8] In some cases, sexual intercourse figures as an essential procedure for acquiring necessary "ingredients" from a body of the opposite sex.[9]

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Passive or passive-reactive internal alchemy methods greatly resemble medieval Daoist passive meditation methods. They are grounded in the reasoning that a clear and calm mind is the primary requirement for harnessing and maintaining the eternal vital qi of the Dao. Internal alchemists also frequently echo the claim that this wondrous qi spontaneously arises from the depths of calm out of the lower Elixir Field (Dantian 丹田) in the belly and can become the agent that brings about wondrous transformations possibly leading to eternal life.

My previous book examined some texts from the Tang period that described this activation of inner vital qi as a process of Embryonic Breathing (Taixi 胎息) in which spirit and qi converge in the lower Elixir Field to form a "fetus" that begins to live and breathe on its own. Notably, one late Tang text—the commentary portion of the *Taixi jing zhu* 胎息經註 (The Scripture of Embryonic Breathing, with Commentary)—describes this process and then states that this method constitutes "Internal Alchemy (*neidan*), the Way of Immortality" 內丹不死之道. The same text further states that one should always decrease one's food intake and one's desires and "make the primal qi circulate internally" (*shi yuanqi neiyun* 使元炁內運) to eliminate yin qi 陰炁 from the body and make the yang 陽 flourish, bringing an end to all diseases. Other texts (such as the "Neizhen miaoyong jue" 內真妙用訣 in the *Taixi jingwei lun* 胎息精微論) explain that once the "fetus" has been conceived and has come to life, one should proceed to mentally guide it on a circuit through the body that above encompasses the Muddy Pellet (Niwan 泥丸;[10] in the head, the upper Elixir Field) and below reaches down to the Gate of Life (Mingmen 命門; between the kidneys, the lower Elixir Field) or, according to one text, the tip of the penis. As one does so, one naturally ceases to exhale (and inhale, depending on the specific text) air through the nose. Circulating the "fetus" up and down the body purifies, heals, and nourishes the body. Furthermore, it ensures that a man will "not gather essence in his stalk" 莖中無聚精, and a woman will "not form an infant inside her navel" 臍中不結嬰—meaning perhaps that one gains the ability to completely control or eradicate one's sexual desires, impulses, and functions.[11]

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What is thus described in these sorts of Tang Embryonic Breathing texts indeed in several ways constitutes precedents of features that we will encounter in the passive-reactive meditation methods of the Song and onward. "Passive-reactive" means that the meditation regimen primarily entails passive inner observation but also requires the practitioner to, at certain moments and junctures, react appropriately and effectively to inner phenomena that have spontaneously arisen. The appropriate reaction entails some act of mental volition, such as guiding the freshly emerged vital force (variously described as primal essence, primal qi, inner elixir, minor medicine, great medicine) along a circuit (the cosmic orbit) leading from the lower Elixir Field into the tailbone; up the spine; into the brain; down into the mouth, the throat, and the front of the torso; and back into the lower Elixir Field. This mirrors the sort of circuit referred to in the Tang Embryonic Breathing texts. The claim that the inner circulation can result in subduing or shutting down sexual impulses also gets mirrored (and proclaimed much more forcefully) in certain texts, as does the claim that respiration is naturally brought to suspension. Another act of mental volition that might be prescribed—albeit at only the right moment and in reaction to specific spontaneous phenomena—is to visualize oneself gushing out from the top of one's own head. This sends the yang spirit out of the body.

In my previous book, the chapters were arranged in chronological order, with each chapter divided into sections discussing specific texts of a particular historical phase. In this study the chapters are arranged thematically, although within each chapter the discussion proceeds largely in chronological sequence. It is hoped that this will clearly and efficiently highlight the most important issues and observations. Certain key figures are mentioned or quoted repeatedly across chapters. Foremost among the "recurring characters" are Wang Zhe 王嚞 (1113–1170), Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1143–1227), Yin Zhiping 尹志平 (1169–1251), Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (ca. 984–1082), Chen Nan 陳楠 (d. 1213), Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–1229), Li Daochun 李道純 (fl. 1288–1292), Yu Yan 俞琰 (ca. 1253–1314), Wu Shouyang 伍守陽 (1574–after 1641), Wu Shouxu 伍守虛 (fl. 17th c.), and Liu Huayang 柳華陽 (fl. 1794).

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Wang Zhe, Qiu Chuji, and Yin Zhiping were leaders of the Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Genuineness[12]) movement in northern China when it was under the control of non-Chinese regimes—first the Jurchen 女真 Jin 金 dynasty (1115–1234) and then the Mongol Empire. In the thirteenth century, the Quanzhen movement blossomed to become the predominant school of monastic Daoism. Wang Zhe was the movement's eccentric and charismatic founder. He acquired a significant following that included both lay devotees and full-time ascetics. The latter included the famous Seven Genuine Ones (Qizhen 七真): Ma Yu 馬鈺 (1123–1184), Sun Bu'er 孫不二 (1119–1183; once the wife of Ma Yu), Tan Chuduan 譚處端 (1123–1185), Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄 (1147–1203), Wang Chuyi 王處一 (1142–1217), Hao Datong 郝大通 (1140–1212), and Qiu Chuji. Qiu Chuji is most famous for his heroic journey (1220–1223) to the Hindu Kush mountains (Afghanistan) to meet Genghis Khan. Under Qiu Chuji's leadership, the Quanzhen movement developed into a nationwide organization of monastic clergy and temples. Yin Zhiping, who had been a disciple of both Liu Chuxuan and Qiu Chuji and had accompanied the latter on his famous journey, assumed leadership of the Quanzhen school after the death of Qiu Chuji, at its most glorious period.[13] Although the Quanzhen school underwent a period of eclipse under the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), it was revived and reorganized by Wang Changyue 王常月 (d. 1680), who championed the Quanzhen school Longmen (Dragon Gate) Branch 龍門派, which claims Qiu Chuji as its founder. The Quanzhen school Longmen Branch dominates monastic Daoism to this day.[14]

Zhang Boduan, Chen Nan, and Bai Yuchan are regarded by posterity as, respectively, the first, fourth, and fifth patriarchs (*zu* 祖) of the Nanzong 南宗 or Southern Lineage of internal alchemy. Shi Tai 石泰 (d. 1158) and Xue Daoguang 薛道光 (1078?–1191) are considered the second and third patriarchs. However, unlike the Quanzhen school in the north, the Nanzong largely lacked any institutional presence, such as a clerical organization or temple network. The personal relationships between its patriarchs seem tenuous—except for the last two patriarchs. The notion that a particular internal alchemy method was transmitted through these five patriarchs was probably conceived by fifth patriarch Bai Yuchan himself—hence Judith

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Boltz's apt description "Ex Post Facto Nan-tsung (Nanzong)."[15] The ex post facto lineage came to be referred to as Nanzong even later—perhaps not until the fourteenth century.[16]

None of the first three "Nanzong patriarchs" seem to have been Daoist clerics or to have been associated with organized Daoist religion, although Xue Daoguang was a *Buddhist* monk at one time. Zhang Boduan 張伯端 lived during the Northern Song 北宋 period (960–1127), about a century before the Quanzhen movement began. A learned man of varied interests, he served a few different government officials as an adviser. His collection of internal alchemical poetry, the *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Chapters on Understanding Reality), is a widely read classic—and probably the most oft quoted internal alchemy text of all time. Owing to its abstruse, metaphor-laden style, it was interpreted by many people in different ways, and numerous commentaries to it can be found. Among the appreciative readers of the *Wuzhen pian,* as we shall see, was Quanzhen Master Yin Zhiping (and/or perhaps Qiu Chuji), who voiced unique insights on it (though he wrote no commentary).

Chen Nan and Bai Yuchan, who lived under the Southern Song 南宋 dynasty (1127–1279), were contemporaries of the early Quanzhen masters. Neither was a monastic Daoist cleric, but both were Daoist ritual masters with expertise in the Thunder Rites (Leifa 雷法). Chen Nan, alongside his pursuits as ritual master and internal alchemist, was also a cooper (a maker and repairer of barrels). Bai Yuchan was the most prolific and important internal alchemy writer of his era, if not of all time. His enormous literary output belies his brief lifespan of thirty-five years. His works include poetry, treatises, records of sayings (*yulu* 語錄), commentaries, and other genres and amply reflect his expertise in both internal alchemy and Daoist ritual. His close relationship with Chen Nan is well reflected in his reminiscences and in the two works "Luofu Cuixu yin" 羅浮翠虛吟 (Azure Emptiness Song on Mount Luofu[17]) and *Xiuxian bianhuo lun* 修仙辯惑論 (Discourse on the Cultivation of Immortal-Hood for Dispelling Confusion).[18] Both works record teachings uttered (allegedly) by Chen Nan in conversation with a youthful Bai Yuchan. Bai Yuchan himself would gather a circle of disciples, whom he guided in both internal alchemy and ritual methods.

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The most articulate proponents of internal alchemy under the Mongol Yuan 元 dynasty (1279–1368) were probably Li Daochun and Yu Yan. Li Daochun, who is said to have been a second-generation disciple of Bai Yuchan, went to greater depths than anyone else to incorporate Confucian insights (both ancient and Neo-Confucian) into his internal alchemy expositions. Although Zhang Boduan and Bai Yuchan seem to have been his strongest influences, he identified his school of teaching as "Quanzhen." This is perhaps more than anything else a reflection of the prestige that the Quanzhen school enjoyed under the Yuan. Li Daochun had a devoted circle of disciples that included Miao Shanshi 苗善時 (fl. 1324), the ardent internal alchemical proponent, polemicist, and compiler of legends about the famous Immortal Lü Yan 呂嵒 (best known as Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓).[19]

Yu Yan was a private scholar and lay Daoist, whose expertise lay in the *Book of Changes* (*Yi jing* 易經), internal alchemy, and the medieval alchemical classic *Zhouyi cantong qi.* Most notably, he authored *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui* 周易參同契發揮 (Exposition on the *Zhouyi cantong qi*), which is perhaps the most interesting and illuminating commentary on the *Zhouyi cantong qi* for anybody interested in concrete descriptions of internal alchemy and its wondrous effects. Widely read and informed by the internal alchemy teachings of the masters of both the north and south, he does not seem to have been beholden to any specific lineage or school.

Near the very end of the Ming 明 dynasty (1368–1644) appeared the cousins Wu Shouyang and Wu Shouxu, who professed to being eighth-generation disciples in the Quanzhen school Longmen Branch. They were also contemporaries of Wang Changyue, the great champion of Quanzhen Longmen monasticism. However, the two Wus had nothing to do with any monastery. They both had wives and lived amid secular society. Nonetheless, their internal alchemical theories emphasized celibacy and the eradication of sexual function to an unprecedented degree. Their written works cite the insights of not only the Quanzhen masters but also figures such as Zhang Boduan, Chen Nan, and Bai Yuchan, as well as Buddhist scriptures. Owing mostly to their concrete, accessible manner of exposition, their works became very popular and are widely regarded as orthodox presentations of Quanzhen

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