

CHAPTER FOUR

LAO ZI, ZHUANG ZI, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF NATURE AND MEDICINE

4.1 INTRODUCTION

From what has been discussed in chapter 3, we can well conclude that during the *Chunqiu* and *Zhanguo* periods, the universe began to be thought of as a natural order structured according to objective laws and formed by impersonal forces. It must be borne in mind that this vicissitude was stimulated greatly by the influence of *Daode Jing*.

Lao Zi took *Dao* to be the order or the way the universe works. According to him, the Nature is self-sufficient, spontaneous and independent. Thus, from this is derived the concept which is second in importance after the notion of *Dao*, *wu wei*. *Daode Jing* emphasizes that Nature is the model from which man should learn and which man should follow.¹ Hence, for one to abide by *Dao* and *wu wei*, one has to follow the Order of Nature. This, nevertheless, requires a knowledge of the Order of Nature. As a result, since the late *Zhanguo* period, there was

¹ See *Daode Jing*, chap. 25.

tremendous energy invested in the study of Nature, as evidenced by the great advancements in science and technology.

From the interest of studying Nature, an awareness of a framework underlying the universe came into views. It was this study of Nature which led to the development of causal correlative cosmologies which was described by Benjamin Schwartz as "a kind of anthropocosmology in which entities, processes and classes of phenomena found in nature correspond to or 'go together' with various entities, processes and classes of phenomena in the human world."²

The Chinese believed that the body of man corresponds to the universe as a whole or of the society in a state.³ All through the history of Chinese thought this doctrine of macrocosm and microcosm goes on. One also finds that it runs through all the Chinese alchemical and medical ideas.

It should be pointed out that the transition to causal correlative cosmology is borne out by the cosmological account presented in the *Huainan Zi*, which had been cited in chapter 3 (pg.66-67). We have also mentioned in that chapter that the cosmological account of *Huainan Zi* was strongly influenced by Lao Zi's cosmology.

As we know, the Chinese maintained that the natural phenomena of different kinds in the universe being linked within a correlative structure on the basis of universal medium of *qi*. They then advanced this correlative theory into the human realm. In *Huainan Zi*, chapter 7, we read,

“ Heaven has the four seasons, Five Elements, nine divisions, and three hundred and sixty days. Man

² Schwartz, B., *The World of Thought in Ancient China*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1985:351.

³ A good discussion of the universe-analogy and state-analogy in Chinese thought is given by Joseph Needham. See *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2, p.294-303.

likewise has four limbs, five viscera, nine orifices, and three hundred and sixty joints. Heaven has wind, rain, cold and heat, and man likewise has (the qualities of) accepting and giving, joy and anger. Therefore, the gall corresponds to clouds, the lungs to vapour, the spleen to wind, the kidneys to rain, and the liver to thunder. Thus, man forms a trinity with Heaven and Earth, and his mind is the master. Therefore, the ears and eyes are as the sun and moon, and the humors of the blood as wind and rain.”⁴

The Taoists maintained that all things under heaven embody the same cosmological forces, namely *qi*. This conception has echoes everywhere in Taoist writings, especially in *Zhuang Zi*.⁵ Thereby, the foundation for the correspondences between the individual and the macrocosm is that “Heaven possesses *yin* and *yang* and man also possesses *yin* and *yang*. When the *yin*(*qi*) of the universe arises, man’s *yin*(*qi*) also rises in response [and vice versa] ... their course is one.”⁶ Hence, the body of man, in a sense, becomes a physical microcosm of the macrocosm of Nature.

The same conception of the human body is also depicted in traditional Chinese medicine as documented especially in the *Neijing* (*Inner Classics of the Yellow Emperor*), which is the oldest as well as the greatest Chinese medical classic.⁷ It maintains that man’s body and all his activities are closely aligned with the course of Nature. Thus, human body is supposed to function harmoniously in accordance with nature in order to attain good health.

⁴ *Hucian Zi*, chapter 7, Bodde, D. trans., see Feng, Y.L., *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952:399.

⁵ Chap. 22 says : The world is permeated by a single vital fluid (*qi*).

⁶ Feng, Y.L., *op. cit.* 1952: 399.

⁷ *Neijing* is the earliest complete book on traditional Chinese medicine. It is probably a summation of medical knowledge up to the Han dynasty. This book is composed of two main parts, the ‘*suwen*’ (‘Questions and Answers About Living Matter’, ‘素问’) and the ‘*lingshu*’ (‘Spiritual Nucleus’, ‘灵枢’). The ‘*suwen*’ forms the basis and the core of the book, embracing the entire realm of medical knowledge and the ‘*lingshu*’ is concerned with practical medicine, acupuncture and moxibustion in particular. In the two millenia that followed, theories in Chinese medicine had never exceeded the confines detailed in this text.

Alchemy rests heavily on the philosophical foundation of *yin-yang* and five phases, causal correlative cosmology, micro-macro paradigms and the doctrine of mutual response. As Nathan Sivin pointed out, “what distinguishes alchemy is the systematic attempt by its practitioners to apply a philosophical framework to chemical operations.”⁸

There is a statement of the religious Taoists, where we find repeated again and again: “The length of one’s life-span is not in the hands of heaven, it is in one’s own.” The religious Taoist held that if one could control the natural processes one could overcome death. This implies that his fate is within him, not with Heaven.

Peerenboom, in his article, stated that “alchemy assumes the possibility of controlling and overcoming the natural processes.” He continued to point out, “If man can manipulate natural substances and the processes of nature to produce gold, a substance, which does not deteriorate, then by consuming it man himself can become immortal as he will have internalized the natural forces of the gold.”⁹

The philosophical Taoists maintained that man’s body is a miniature version of Nature. They believed there is an interrelationship between man and nature via the medium of *qi*. It is, indeed, a vital step on the immortalist’s path to attaining control over the natural processes.

Therefore, one may be able to influence the macrocosmic natural processes mechanistically via the medium of *qi*, by manipulating the cosmological forces through his body and action, to control the natural processes that cause death.

⁸ Sivin, N., *Chinese Alchemy: Preliminary Studies*, Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1968:22

⁹ Peerenboom, R.P., ‘Naturalism and Immortality in the Han: The Antecedents of Religious Taoism’, *Chinese Culture*, vol. XXIX, no.3, 1988:31-53. He provided a good discussion concerning about the relationship between philosophical Taoism and immortality-oriented religious Taoism.

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As a result, arises the great concern over nurturing, preserving and strengthening the internal vital spirits (*qi*) within the body. This idea stimulated the development of the respiratory techniques and gymnastic techniques.

As a whole, the classical statement of the organismic idea by *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* had set the tone for later formulations expressly avoiding the idea of any anthropomorphic heaven. This was exactly the path Chinese science, especially Chinese life science had taken.

From the Taoist literature, we noticed that the Taoists were particularly impressed by the world of living creatures. They gave special attention to biological changes in the living body of man. As we shall see, their thought provided a splendid theoretical basis for Chinese life science, such as medicine, *yangsheng* (nurturing life, 养生) and alchemy (especially inner alchemy).

4.2 CHINESE MEDICINE

Chinese traditional medicine was closely connected with the beliefs of the philosophers who may broadly be termed Taoist. The Taoists ardently love their life. They devoted themselves to the study of Nature and finally they realized that man's life should be lived in conformity with her (or *Dao*). This philosophical movement exerted a strong influence on medical thought. The best sentence to

illustrate this is probably from *Neijing* that reads "If the people carefully follow *Dao* as though it were a law, theirs will be a long life."¹⁰

4.2.1 *DAO, YIN AND YANG*

During the Zhou Dynasty, there evolved one of the most influential of all concepts, that is the oneness of all life - the *Dao*. The ancient Taoists spent long hours contemplating the movement of Nature. They postulated that the patterns of the changes in Nature are contained within something called the *Dao*. Upon further study, we found that much of the thought in the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* has something to do with the contemplation of Nature of the opposite pulls of energy in the universe, namely *yin* and *yang*. *Yin* and *yang* are the primordial elements from which the universe evolved and also the fundamental polarity in life, while the *Dao* is the harmony.¹¹ The *Dao* and *yin-yang* play an important part in early Chinese medical thought.

There are numerous references to *Dao* and *yin-yang* throughout the *Huangdi Neijing*. As we shall see, all these conceptions, in Chinese medical thought, provided a splendid foundation for regarding illness and good health as a phenomenon affecting all people indiscriminately.

Daode Jing (see chapter 2,40) and *Zhuang Zi* maintain that the movements and operations of the *Dao* are continuous interplay between opposites.

The *Zhuang Zi* says,

"The 'this' is also 'that'. The 'that' is also 'this' ... That the 'that' and the 'this' cease to be opposites is the very essence of *Dao*. Only this essence, an axis as it were, is

¹⁰ *Neijing*, suwen, Veith, I. trans., *The Yellow Emperor's Classic of Internal Medicine*, Pelanduk Publications, 1992:109.

¹¹ see *Daode Jing*, chap. 42.

the centre of the circle responding to the endless changes."¹²

The philosophical Taoists saw all changes in Nature as manifestations of the dynamic interplay between the polar opposites *yin* and *yang*. These dialectical elements were the result of the Taoists' direct observation of the natural phenomena. This thought of polar relationship of all opposites, which lies at the very basis of Taoist thought, occupies an extremely important position not only in the history of Chinese philosophy but also in Chinese medicine.

The *yin-yang* theory is a simple dualistic mode of describing matter and its activity in one of two states or properties. In other words, *yin* and *yang* can be considered as categories, corresponding to male and female, weak and strong, dark and light. In the *Neijing*, we noticed that the basic concepts of anatomy, normal physiology, etiology and pathology, principles of diagnosis and therapy are expounded in the light of '*yin-yang*'.

On the human body, the skin or surface is *yang*, the interior is *yin*; the back is *yang*, the abdomen is *yin*; the empty organs are *yang*, the solid organs are *yin*. As for disease, a disease is *yang* while it is due to external cause and *yin* when it is from internal causes. Even drugs or medicines have this distinction. Stimulants, resolvents, expectorants, pungent substances and hot decoctions are classified as *yang* drugs. On the other hand, astringents, purgatives, haematics, bitter substances and cold infusions are *yin* drugs.¹³

¹² Zhuang Zi, chap. 2, Fung, Y.L. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 50.

¹³ Wong, K.C. & Wu, L.T., *History of Chinese Medicine*, Tientsin: The Tientsin Press, 1932?: 9-12.

All of these distinctions form an important basis for the Chinese physicians to diagnose and treat diseases and prescribe herbal medicines as well. For example, *yang* herbs such as *renshen* (人參), which are tonics or hypertensives, are used for persons suffering from *yin* conditions such as low blood pressure or general debility. *Yin* herbs such as *dahuang* (大黃, a laxative and hypotensive) are used for persons suffering from *yang* conditions such as high blood pressure or chronic constipation.¹⁴ The following sentence from the *Neijing* may serve to illustrate the preceding point: "A cold disease should be treated by hot herbs, and a hot disease should be treated by cold herbs."¹⁵

4.2.2 CONFORMITY TO *DAO*

Yin and *yang* are not only categories but also forces. In Chinese medicine, man is regarded as a microcosm of the universe (macrocosm), both of which are the creations of the dualistic 'forces' of the *yin* and *yang* principles, which, in turn, are supposed to function in accordance with the harmonious principle of the *Dao*. *Dao* connotes an all-pervading harmony in the universe and throughout time.

Since the Chinese conceive of man as composed of the same elements as the universe and as functioning along the same principles as the universe, man owed his health and hence his life to the harmony of natural forces. Thus, in Chinese medicine, therefore, good health may be interpreted, to paraphrase Jerome D. Frank's

¹⁴ Richard, H., *Chinese Herbal Medicine: Ancient Art and Modern Science*, New York: Schocken Books, 1978: 31-32.

¹⁵ *Neijing*, quoted from Lu, Henry C. trans., *Legendary Chinese Healing Herbs*, Selangor: Pelanduk Publications, 1994: 13.

article on faith healing, as the “harmonious integration of the person within himself and with his society, nature and the cosmos. Illness and suffering are indications that this harmony has been disrupted, a disruption for which the patient himself is considered partly responsible - that is, he has fallen ill because he has in some way transgressed the laws of nature, society ... and therefore he must actively participate in the healing process. The task of the healer is to rest on the disrupted harmony by activities which involve participation of persons close to the patient as well as spiritual exercises.”¹⁶

Chinese medicine emphasizes the harmony of body function with the environment. It strives to treat the whole person rather than his isolated parts, and to think of him in relations to his emotional sphere and physical environment. Its approach is one in which the ‘view is harmony with nature rather than of conflict or conquest; the concept of man/not man ... is above all one of mutuality - man is in nature and one cannot speak of man and nature.’¹⁷ Perhaps, it must suffice to say that it is the merits of Chinese medicine, which are the deficits of Western medicine, come out of the concept of wholeness.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that all these conceptions can be traced back to the thought of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi. One remembers *Zhuang Zi* that read

¹⁶ Frank, J.D., ‘The Faith That Heals’, *The Johns Hopkins Medical Journal*, vol. 137, no 3, 1975: 128

¹⁷ Redfield, R., *The Primitive World and Its Transformation*, Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1953: 107.

“The universe came into being with us together; with us, all things are one,”¹⁸ and this has become, throughout history, the watchword of Taoists. In order to become one with universe or Nature, man should follow or be in harmony with Nature. One is irresistibly reminded of the twenty-fifth chapter of *Daode Jing* that reads ‘the *Dao* follows the way of nature,’¹⁹ which was part of a prevailing Chinese trend. The Taoists concluded that man cannot be separated from Nature; he forms an organic part of it and is closely linked to the universe. Hence, man, as a microcosm, should follow the Order of Nature, as a macrocosm. Based upon this philosophical premise of nature, which has been considerably influenced by Taoism, the Chinese have gradually developed this system of medicine.

The *Neijing* is the first medical book that explains to man what he can expect by living according to the *Dao* or Nature, and how he can learn to adapt his life to this system,

“... the interaction of the four seasons and the interaction of *yin* and *yang* [the two principles in nature] is the foundation of everything in creation. Hence the sages conceived and developed their *yang* in spring and summer, and conceived and developed their *yin* in fall and winter in order to follow the rule of rules; and thus [the sages], together with everything in creation, maintained themselves at the gate of life and development.

Those who rebel against the basic rules of the universe sever their own roots and ruin their true selves. *Yin* and *yang*, the two principles in nature, and the four seasons are the beginning and the end of everything and they are also the cause of life and death. Those who disobey the laws of the universe will give rise to calamities and visitations, while those who follow the laws of the universe remain free from dangerous illness, for they are the ones who have obtained *Dao*, the Right Way.”²⁰

¹⁸ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 2, Fung, Y.L. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 56.

¹⁹ *Daode Jing*, chap. 25, Hsiung, Y.T. trans., ‘Lao Tzu Tao Te Ching’, *Chinese Culture*, vol. XVIII, no 2, 1977: 32.

²⁰ *Neijing*, ‘suwen’, Veith, I. trans., *op. cit.*, 1949: 104-105.

Chinese medicine was extremely conscious of the relation of diseases to geography, to the prevailing climate and to the seasonal changes of the year. Therefore, when a season changes, it is necessary to change certain ways of daily life and self-medicate with tonics in anticipation of the outbreak of disease prevalent in that season. According to *Neijing*, spring is the season of beginning and the development of life. During this period the liver can suffer harm if man does not adjust himself to the natural order of things. Summer is the period of luxurious growth. Particularly characteristic of this season are the outbreak of cardiac disease and 'the intermittent fever' (malaria). In autumn the forces between heaven and earth balance out, and this season can be harmful for the lungs. Finally, winter is the period of closing and storing. It is now that kidney diseases frequently occur. The *Neijing* also points out that windy weather in spring causes diarrhea and summer heat brings about feverish illnesses; the autumnal dampness coincides with "coughing" and the winter cold with feverish ailments which breaks out in spring.²¹ If diseases do occur in spite of, or for the lack of, these preventive measures, it is important to diagnose which of these external factors are causing the diseases so that medication can follow accordingly.²²

From the preceding points we see that the Chinese medical thought emphasizes the consequences of disobedience towards the *Dao*. According to the *Neijing*,

"Dao was practiced by the sages and admired by the ignorant people. Obedience to the laws of *yin* and *yang* means life; disobedience means death. The obedient ones will rule while the rebels will be in disorder and

²¹ *ibid.*, p.102-109.

²² see *Neijing*, 'suwen', chap.53; *Qianjin Yaofang* (千金要方), in *Zhentong Daozang*, Shi B.E. ed., Taipei: Tiwen Press, vol.43, 1977: 34681-34687.

confusion. Anything contrary to harmony (with nature) is disobedience and means rebellion to nature.”²³

In short, the thought of Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi’s ‘compliance with *Dao*’ was closely interwoven with medical knowledge and practices and provided a theoretical basis for the traditional art of healing.

4.3 NURTURING LIFE (*YANGSHENG*, 养生)

The Chinese stress much on preventive medicine. In fact, it is characteristic of Chinese medicine. The so-called ‘prevention is better than cure’ appears to be apprehended by the ancients before the first Chinese medical book *Neijing* was written. Perhaps, Lao Zi may be the first scholar who mentioned about it. In chapter 64, we find,

“It is easy to maintain a situation, while it is still secure; It is easy to deal with a situation before symptoms develop; It is easy to break a thing when it is yet brittle; It is easy to dissolve a thing when it is yet minute. Deal with a thing while it is still nothing; keep a thing in order before disorder sets in.”²⁴

A little later, we find a statement in *Huainan Zi*, which reads, “A skilful doctor cures illness when there is no sign of disease never comes.”²⁵ During the same period, the great medical classic *Neijing* points out in its introductory chapter,

“... the sages did not treat those who were already ill; they instructed those who were not yet ill. They did not want to rule those who were already rebellious; they guided those who were not yet rebellious. This is the meaning of the entire preceding discussion. To

²³ *Neijing*, ‘suwen’, Veith, I., trans., *op. cit.*, 1949: 105.

²⁴ *Daode Jing*, chap. 64, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 125.

²⁵ *Huainan Zi*, chap. 16, quoted from Needham, J. trans., *Clerks And Craftsmen In China And The West*, Cambridge: At the University Press, 1970: 344.

administer medicines to diseases which have already developed and to suppress revolts which have already developed is comparable to the behavior of those persons who begin to dig a well after they have become thirsty, and of those who begin to cast weapons after they have already engaged in battle. Would these actions not be too late?²⁶

Here we find that the philosophers and the medical writers shared the same the concepts of prevention. Here we also see that these conceptions are linked with the Taoist practice of *yangsheng* (tending life).

Daode Jing does not agree with people purposely pursuing a long and interminable life. Chapter 7 reads,

“Heaven is eternal, the Earth everlasting. How come they to be so? It is because they do not foster their own lives; that is why they live so long. Therefore the sage puts his own person last, and yet it is found in the foremost place; he treats his person as if it were foreign to him, and yet that person is preserved.”²⁷

Daode Jing maintains that when one does not live for self, one preserves oneself. In other words, death is often courted by those who value their lives too much. *Daode Jing* does not hesitate to say,

“To try to add to one’s vitality is called ill-omened. For the mind to egg on the breath is called violent. A creature in its prime doing harm to the old. It’s known as going against the way. That which goes against the way will come to an early end.”²⁸

To take care of one’s life, *Zhuang Zi* also deems it necessary that one should not become overanxious about one’s welfare, but leave it to the course of nature. As chapter 5 points out,

²⁶ *Neijing*, ‘suwen’, chap. 2, Veith, I., trans., *op. cit.*, 1992: 105.

²⁷ *Daode Jing*, chap. 7, Waley, A. trans., *op. cit.*, 1956: 150. Also see Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 52.

²⁸ *Daode Jing*, chap. 55, Lau, D.C., trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 116.

“He does not inflict any internal injury upon himself with desires and aversions. He is always in accordance with nature, and does nothing to increase artificially what is already in his life.”²⁹

Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi criticized people generally wishing to have a better life, so much so that they intensely seek fame and wealth which are harmful to them. As *Daode Jing*, chapter 50 says,

“... there are those who value life and as a result move into the realm of death. ... Why is this so? It is because men feed life to grossly.”³⁰

And *Zhuang Zi* also says,

“... those who have a proper respect for life, if rich and powerful, do not let that which should nourish injure the body. If poor and lowly, they do not allow gain to involve them in physical wear and tear.”³¹

According to them, man who is good at preserving his health has few desires. *Daode Jing* is very insistent that we avoid excess, extravagance and arrogance (chapter 29) and do away with desires (chapter 3,19,37,64). Excessive lust is harmful to the health. As *Daode Jing*, chapter 12 says,

“The five colours make man’s eyes blind; The five notes make his ears deaf; The five tastes injure his palate; Riding and hunting. Make his mind go wild with excitement; Goods hard to come by serve to hinder his progress.”³²

Or, in the words of *Zhuang Zi*,

“The causes of his loss are five in number; viz. - The five colours confuse the eye, and the eye fail to see clearly. The five sounds confuse the ear, and the ear fails to hear accurately. The five scents confuse the

²⁹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 5, Fung, Y.L. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 107.

³⁰ *Daode Jing*, chap. 50, Waley, A. trans., *op. cit.*, 1956: 203. See also Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 111.

³¹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 28, Giles, H.A. trans., *op. cit.*, 1969: 372.

³² *Daode Jing*, chap. 12, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 68.

nose, and obstruct the sense of smell. The five tastes cloy the palate, and vitiate the sense of taste. Finally, likes and dislikes cloud the understanding, and cause dispersion of the original nature. These five are the banes of life."³³

Consequently, the most effective way to prolong and conserve life, according to the *Daode Jing*, is to "exhibit the unadorned and embrace the uncarved block, have little thought of self and as few desires as possible."³⁴ And also chapter 44:

"Or fame or life,
which do you hold more dear?
Or life or wealth,
To which would you adhere?
keep life and lose those other things;
keep them and lose your life: - which brings sorrow and
pain more near?
Thus we may see,
who cleaves to fame
Rejects what is more great;
who loves large stores.
Gives up the richer state
who is content
Needs fear no shame.
Who knows to stop
Incurs no blame
From danger free
Long live shall he."³⁵

In order to have one's life preserved, one should be "transformed with the (changing) character of the time, and is not willing to addict himself to any one thing."³⁶ In chapter 7, we read,

"Do not be the owner of fame. Do not be full of plans.
Do not be busy with work. Do not be the master of
knowledge. Identify yourself with the infinite. Make
excursion into the void. Exercise fully what you have

³³ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 12, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 155.

³⁴ *Daode Jing*, chap. 19, Lau, D.C., trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 75.

³⁵ *Daode Jing*, chap. 44, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 88.

³⁶ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 20, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 28.

received from nature, but gain nothing besides. In one word, be empty. The mind of the perfect man is like a mirror. It does not move with things, nor it does not retain them. Therefore, he is able to deal successfully with things, but he is not affected by them."³⁷

In short, the way to preserve one's body, according to the philosophical Taoist, is to lead a simple and desireless life. All in all, he is "quiet at the proper occasion and prepare to follow the course of nature"³⁸ The Taoists grieved for those who live to live, without knowing why and how they live, as the chapter 2 of *Zhuang Zi* says,

"When once we have received the bodily form complete, its parts do not fail to perform their functions till the end comes. In conflict with things or in harmony with them, they pursue their course with the speed of a galloping horse which cannot be stopped; is it not deplorable? To be constantly toiling all the time of one's life, without seeing the fruit of one's labor; to be weary and worn out without knowing where one is going to; is it not lamentable? Man may say: there is immortality. But what is the use of this saying? When the body is decomposed, so with it is the spirit. Can it not be called very deplorable?"³⁹

The virtue of having no desires, which is a current theme in the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi*, had been assimilated in Chinese medicine to develop a complete doctrine of nourishing of life (*yangsheng xue*, 养生学). The *Neijing* says,

"They [the sages] were tranquilly content in nothing and the true vital force accompanied them always; their vital (original) spirit was preserved within; thus, how could illness come to them? They exercised restraint of their wills and reduced their desires; their hearts were at peace and without any fear; their bodies toiled and yet did not become weary. ... No kind of desires can tempt the eyes of those pure people and their mind cannot be misled by excessiveness and evil."⁴⁰

³⁷ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 7, Fung, Y.L. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 141.

³⁸ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 4, *ibid.*, 1964: 70.

³⁹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 2, *ibid.*, 1964: 47.

⁴⁰ *Neijing*, 'suwen', chap. 1, Veith, I. trans., *op. cit.*, 1949: 98.

The *Neijing* condemns those people who do not content with contentment, thus “they reach only one half of the hundred years and then they degenerate”. The *Neijing* continues to say,

“They use wine as beverage and they adopt recklessness as usual behaviour. They enter the chamber (of love) in an intoxicated condition; their passions exhaust their vital force; they cravings dissipate their true(essence); they do not know how to find contentment within themselves; they are not skilled in the control of their spirits. They devoted all their attention to the amusement of their minds, thus cutting themselves off from the joys of long (life).”⁴¹

The author of the *Neijing* advised that people could escape old age and keep their body in perfect condition, if “they were able to adjust their desires to worldly affairs, and within their hearts there was neither hatred nor anger. They did not wish to separate their activities from the world; they could be indifferent to custom. They did not over-exert their bodies at physical labour and they did not over-exert their minds by strenuous meditation. They were not concerned about anything, they regarded inner happiness and peace as fundamental, and contentment as highest achievement. Their bodies could never be harmed and their mental faculties never be dissipated.”⁴²

Sun Simiao (孙思邈), a famous doctor (581-682 AD) at the beginning of the Tang period, also pointed out in his *Thousand Golden Remedies* (*Qianjing Yaofang*, 千金要方) that one must avoid excess in everything such as desires, talking,

⁴¹ *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁴² *ibid.*, p. 101.

thinking, anxiety, happiness, anger and so on, in the hope that one's life will be prolonged.⁴³

One further aspect of ancient Chinese medicine demands allusion here, namely, the ideas of "saving one's energy (精) and preserving one's spirit (神) completely." (积精全神) The *Daode Jing* has shown that man's desires disturbed the mental faculty and impeded the residence of the vital force (精) in the body. It goes on to point out that the crux of nurturing life is preserving the vital force. In chapter 55, we read,

"The impunity of things fraught with the 'power'
May be likened to that of an infant.
...
Not yet to have known the union of male and female,
but to be completely formed,
means that the vital force (精) is at its height;
to be able to scream all day without getting hoarse
means that harmony is at its perfection."⁴⁴

And, chapter 10 says,

"Can you keep the unquiet physical-soul from straying,
hold fast to the Unity, and never quit it?"⁴⁵

According to many commentators, "hold fast to the Unity" means "concentrating on the unity of the *qi* (vital force)." *Zhuang Zi*, chapter 23 notes that "the art of preserving life consists in being able to keep all in One."⁴⁶ Thus, it is clear that *Daode Jing* pays great attention to preserving the vital force (*jingqi*, 精气).

In chapter 59, *Daode Jing* teaches one the way for ruling a country and also for personal cultivation of individual how he can last long by practising the

⁴³ *Qianjing Yaofang*, 'yangxing' ('Nourishing the Nature', '养性'), in *Zhentong Daozang (Taoist Canon)*, *op. cit.*, vol.44, 1977: 35475-35509.

⁴⁴ *Daode Jing*, chap. 55, Waley, A. trans., *op. cit.*, 1956: 209.

⁴⁵ *Daode Jing*, chap. 10, *ibid.*, p. 153.

⁴⁶ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 23, Giles, H.A., *op. cit.*, 1926: 300.

principle of frugality (嗇). We read, "To govern people and to serve Heaven, there is nothing like frugality."⁴⁷

According to Chen Guying (陈鼓应), *se*⁴⁸ (嗇) means the reinforcement and conservation of one's stock of vital-energy or like-force.⁴⁹ He Shang Gong (河上公) interpreted this quotation in the following way,

"He who practises the techniques must cherish the semen and the breath (精气); he must not let them escape."⁵⁰

Thus, to attain a long life, for *Daode Jing*, one must therefore value and preserve the vital force (精气) and use it sparingly. It is *jing* (精) that gives life to things. As *Guan Zi* points out, "*Jing*, essence, is the essence of *qi* ... When *jing* exists, naturally there is life."⁵¹ The *Neijing* also says the same words, "Essence (精) is the foundation of the body."⁵²

In order to conserve one's vital force, one should not wantonly wallow in excessive desires. The *Neijing* warns those who give way to their carnal desires, "their passions will exhaust their vital forces, their craving dissipate their true (essence)."⁵³ Therefore, people could enjoy a long life if they saved their energies, and preserved their spirits. As *Neijing* points out, "... their vital (original) spirit was

⁴⁷ *Daode Jing*, chap. 59, Hsiung, Y.T. trans., *op. cit.*, part II, 1977: 33.

⁴⁸ Tao Hongjing (陶宏景), in his *Yangxing Yanming Lu* (*On Delaying Destiny By Nourishing The Natural Forces*, 养性延命录), adopted this conception to point out excessive desires will dissipate one's spirit, thus cutting oneself off from the joys of long life (嗇神).

⁴⁹ Chen, G.Y., *op. cit.*, 1993: 297.

⁵⁰ quoted from Needham, J. trans., *op. cit.*, vol. 5, 1983: 135.

⁵¹ *Guan Zi*, 'neiye', chap. 49, part 2, Rickett, A.W. trans. and ed., *Kuan Tzu*, Hong Kong: University of Hong Kong Press, 1965: 160-163.

⁵² *Neijing*, 'suwen', Veith, I. trans., *op. cit.*, 1949: 98.

⁵³ *Neijing*, 'suwen', *ibid.*, p. 98.

preserved within; thus, how could illness come to them"⁵⁴ and "... those who have attained spirit and energy are flourishing and prosperous, while those perish who lose their spirit and energy."⁵⁵

In short, *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* maintain that excessive desire is harmful to the health. As we see, these conceptions were closely interwoven with medical knowledge and traditions and provided a theoretical basis for Chinese hygiene and preventive medicine.

4.4 ARE THERE ANY ELEMENTS OF IMMORTALITY IN *DAODE JING* (*LAO ZI*) AND *ZHUANG ZI*?

The matter of life and death is one of the important topics in Taoist philosophy. *Zhuang Zi* can be regarded as one of the best examples of the view of death and life among the Chinese philosophers. Chapter 5 says,

"Death and life, existence and peril, ill and good fortune, wealth and poverty, worth and worthlessness, praise and blame, hunger and thirst, cold and hot - these are changes of events and the operation of destiny. They succeed one another like the alternation of day and night."⁵⁶

It is evident that man's life and death, for *Zhuang Zi*, are but part of the inevitable process of changes in Nature. *Zhuang Zi* also points out that life and death succeed each other in the never-ceasing cycle of Nature. In chapter 27, we read,

"All things are divided into their several classes, and succeed one another in the same way, though of different bodily forms. They begin and end as in an unbroken ring, though how it is they do so be not apprehended."⁵⁷

⁵⁴ *Neijing*, 'suwen', *ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵⁵ *Neijing*, 'suwen', *ibid.*, p. 151.

⁵⁶ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.5, Fung, Y.L. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 104.

⁵⁷ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.27, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 144.

As Zhuang Zi, Lao Zi also pointed out that life being a cyclical movement is both birth and death. Death is the natural movement of things in their return to *Dao*. Chapter 16 says,

“All things alike go through their processes of activity, and (then) we see them return (to their original state). When things (in the vegetable world) have displayed their luxuriant growth, we see each of them return to its root.”⁵⁸

The idea that man's birth and death represent different forms of *qi* with birth being the coming together of *qi* and death being its dispersal is illustrated very strikingly in chapter 22 of *Zhuang Zi*:

“Life is the follower of death, and death is the predecessor of life; but who knows the Arranger(*Dao*) (of this connexion between them?) The life is due to the collecting of the breath (*qi*). When that is collected, there is life, when it is dispersed, there is death. Since death and life thus attend on each other, why should I account (either of) them an evil? Therefore all things go through one and the same experience. (Life) is accounted beautiful because it is spirit-like and wonderful, and death is accounted ugly because of its foetid and putridity. But the foetid and putrid is transformed again into the spirit-like and wonderful, and the spirit-like and wonderful is transformed again into the foetid and putrid. Hence it is said, ‘All under the sky there is one breath of life, and therefore the sages prized that unity.’”⁵⁹

We may in fact say that *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* maintain man's life and death to be a kind of natural phenomenon. They teach people to become reconciled to death as a part of nature's cycle of change. Thus, it is hard to believe that the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* teach the art of physical immortality.

⁵⁸ *Daode Jing*, chap.16, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 144.

⁵⁹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.22, Legge, J. trans. *op. cit.*, 1962: 59-60.

Nevertheless, a few chapters in *Daode Jing* seem to suggest that some form of immortality is attainable by the Taoist. They seem to assure an everlasting life on earth. As chapter 6 says, "The spirit of the valley never dies."⁶⁰ *Daode Jing* also talks about one "who dies and yet does not perish, has longevity"⁶¹ and about "the secret of long life and eternal vision."⁶² Judging from these passages, together with the above-mentioned passage, it seems that they are contradictory.

The same problems are also found in *Zhuang Zi*. One of the often-cited chapters in support of the immortality seekers' claim that the *Zhuang Zi* advocates one to become a *xian* (immortal, 仙 = 仙) in heaven is chapter 12, where we read,

"Yao was looking about him at Hua, the border-warden of which said, 'Ha! the sage! Let me ask blessings on the sage! May he live long!' Yao said, 'Hush!' but the other went on, 'May the sage become rich!' Yao (again) said, 'Hush!' but (the warden) continued, 'May the sage have many sons!' When Yao repeated his 'Hush,' the warden said, 'Long life, riches, and many sons are what men wish for; - how is it that you alone do not wish for them?' Yao replied, 'Many sons bring many fears; riches bring many troubles; and long life gives rise to many obloquies. These three things do not help to nourish virtue; and therefore I wish to decline them. The warden rejoined, 'At first I considered you to be a sage; now I see in you only a Superior man. Heaven, in producing the myriad of the people, is sure to have appointed for them their several offices. If you had many sons, and gave them (all their) offices, what would you have to fear? If you had riches, and made other men share them with you, what trouble would you have? The sage finds his dwelling like the quail (without any choice of its own), and is fed like the fledgling; he is like the bird which passes on (through the air), and leaves no trace (of its flight). When good order prevails in the world, he shares in the general prosperity. When there is no such order, he cultivates his virtue, and seeks to be unoccupied. After a thousand

⁶⁰ *Daode Jing*, chap.6, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 62.

⁶¹ *Daode Jing*, chap. 33, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 75.

⁶² *Daode Jing*, chap.59, Hsiung, Y.T. trans., *op. cit.*, part 2, 1977: 34.

years, tired of the world, he leaves it, and ascends among the immortals (仟). He mounts on the white clouds, and arrives at the place of God. The three forms of evil do not reach him, his person is always free from misfortune; - what obloquy has he to incur?"⁶³

And also in chapter one, through the mouth of Jian Wu,

"Far away on the hill of Gu She there dwelt a spirit-like man whose flesh and skin were (smooth) as ice and (white) as snow; that his manner was elegant and delicate as that of a virgin; that he did not eat any of the five grains⁶⁴, but inhaled the wind and drank the dew; that he mounted on the clouds, drove along the flying dragons, rambling and enjoying himself beyond the four seas; that by the concentration of his spirit-like powers he could save men from disease and pestilence, and secure every year a plentiful harvest."⁶⁵

The above-mentioned passages seem to tell us that the philosophical Taoist sees the highest happiness in attaining longevity or immortality in this world. They are played as a trump card by all those who would find the immortality cult in the *Zhuang Zi*.

It is indisputable that the philosophical Taoist maintained that life is valuable. As *Daode Jing* says, "High rank is, like one's body, a source of great trouble."⁶⁶ And also in chapter 43, "Fame and your body, which is dearer? Your body and your wealth, which is more precious?"⁶⁷ Although the body subjects man to sufferings and death⁶⁸, the Taoist does not blame the body. On the contrary, he accepts the body and its accompanying misfortunes.

⁶³ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.12, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 313-314.

⁶⁴ The immortality seekers believed that life will be prolonged by abstaining from eating five grains.

⁶⁵ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.1, Legge, J., trans., *op. cit.*, p.170-171.

⁶⁶ *Daode Jing*, chap.13, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 69.

⁶⁷ *Daode Jing*, chap.43, Hsiung, Y.T. trans., *op. cit.*, part I, 1977: 17.

⁶⁸ See *Daode Jing*, chap. 13.

The Taoist holds that "the universe carries me in my body, toils me through my life, gives me repose with old age, and rests me in death."⁶⁹ In that connexion, he comes to a conclusion that "the universe came into being with us together; with us, all things are one."⁷⁰ It is clear that in accepting the body, the philosophical Taoist expands his individual life and takes the whole universe as his own life. As *Daode Jing*, chapter 13 says,

'One, who values the world as himself,
can be entrusted with the world.
One, who loves the world as himself,
can be entrusted to care for the world.'⁷¹

This implies that the whole universe has become his body. Thus, he will live as long as heaven and earth because he no longer lives for self.⁷² In support of this view, I would quote the following passage from *Daode Jing*,

"Heaven and earth are enduring. The reason why heaven and earth can be enduring is that they do not give themselves life. Hence they are able to be long-lived."⁷³

We must admit that the physical body, in the Taoist's point of view, is perishable. However, the Taoist is immortal not by preserving his physical body, but by expanding his physical body so that eventually it becomes the universal *Dao* itself.⁷⁴ The philosophical Taoist maintains that living in harmony with Nature (*Dao*) ensures one's immortality in oneness with Nature. One who stays with the place of

⁶⁹ Zhuang Zi, chap.6, Fung, Y.T. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 122.

⁷⁰ Zhuang Zi, chap. 2, *ibid.*, p.56.

⁷¹ *Daode Jing*, chap.13, Hsiung, Y.T. trans., *op. cit.*, 1964: 122.

⁷² Chen, E.M., 'Is There A Doctrine Of Physical Immortality In The Tao Te Ching', *History of Religions*, vol.12, no.3, 1972/73: 231-249.

⁷³ *Daode Jing*, chap. 7, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 63.

⁷⁴ Chen, E.M., *op. cit.*, 1972/73: 239.

Dao will endure as *Dao*. Thus, the true longevity should consist in the realization that “when one dies one is not lost”⁷⁵ from the universe.

Lao Zi told us that death is often courted by those who value their lives too much (see chapter 44). He taught us to value our own lives, not to value materials and fame, and we should know when to stop and to be contented. He also taught us always to maintain a mental attitude of ‘emptiness and quietude’ so that we were not influenced by desires.

In fact, it cannot be denied that there is some element of immortality in the both Taoism (philosophical Taoism and religious Taoism). Blofeld’s comments on this is meaningful, which merits citation:

“What unifies all the various traditions referred to as Taoist is the quest for immortality, although the goal is understood on different levels. Adepts with a superficial understanding sought an elixir of physical immortality, while those with a more sophisticated and genuine understanding undertake a path of self-transformation, cultivation of the Way.”⁷⁶

4.5 ALCHEMY

As we know the Taoist religion was captivated by the idea that it was possible to achieve a material immortality. Since its goals are to cultivate long life and non-death as well as to make the flesh immortal, the Taoist religion stressed on the nurturing of life and the cultivation of the physical body.

⁷⁵ *Daode Jing*, chap. 33, Waley, A. trans., *op. cit.*, 1956: 184.

⁷⁶ Kornfeld R., ‘Review on *Taoism: The Road To Immortality*’, by John Blofeld, (Boulder:Shambala Publications, 1978), *Journal of Chinese Philosophy*, 11(1984): 110. Blofeld maintained that the ultimate attainment of *neidan* is identical with the realization of *Dao* as understood by Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi.

In order to attain immortality, the body must be transformed by means of complicated physical and mental practices. The religious Taoists attempt to make various chemical extracts, distilled 'pharmaceutical poison', and a number of compounds and mixtures in hoping to find the 'elixir of eternal life.' The focus on chemical products made pragmatic alchemy, as it developed, into a branch of medicine. Many alchemists were also doctors such as Ge Hong(葛洪), Tao Hongjing(陶弘景), Sun Simiao(孙思邈), and this left its mark on the Chinese pharmacopoeia.

There was also another type of alchemy, to the same end: the 'internal alchemy'(neidan,内丹)⁷⁷ which is a proto-science with more emphasis on hygiene. Breathing exercises, dietary techniques, bathing of all sorts, gymnastics and sexual techniques were all used, in this sort of alchemy, to fortify and dam up man's vitality so that it cannot escape. Alchemy, medicine, hygiene, the pill for immortality and so forth, were definitely pseudoscientific adventures. Thus, China's scientific technology, especially the development of medicine, chemistry, biochemistry and pharmacology became inextricably connected to the Taoist religion.

The quest of immortality in religious Taoism has its root in ancient Chinese magical practices and immortality cults. It should be pointed out that these cults and the Taoist philosophy, which also arose at the same time, are different and

⁷⁷ see Needham, J., *op. cit.*, vol.5, 1974: xviii,xxxij.

Needham pointed out that there are two parallel traditions in Chinese alchemy, namely inorganic laboratory alchemy (*waidan*, 外丹) which concerned with the manipulating substances to obtain the elixir; and physiological alchemy(*neidan*, 内丹) which concerned rather with operations within the adept's own body. He continued to state, "Lastly we pass from the 'outer elixir'(waidan) to the 'inner elixir'(neidan), from proto-chemistry to proto-biochemistry, from reliance on mineral and inorganic remedies to a faith in the possibility of making a macrobiogen from the juices and substances of the living body."

contradictory. Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi had nothing to do with later religious Taoism, and their writings did not touch upon religious thought.

Nevertheless, Creel, after his serious observation and examination, pointed out that "the cult and the philosophy seem to have been almost entirely distinct until perhaps as late as the middle of Former Han times. ...(However), the Taoist philosophy, which rejected both the possibility and the desirability of (physical) immortality, had become linked with the immortality cult."⁷⁸ This seems most improbable. How could it have come about that the high philosophy of the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* - even with its strange marriage to the primarily practical magic of the immortality seekers- transformed itself into a supernaturalist religion, with a heavy stress on the search for physical immortality?⁷⁹

According to the *Historical Records (Shiji)*, in Qin times (221-207 BC), there were numerous shamans (*wu*, 巫) and magicians (*fangshi*, 方士) living in the states of Qi (齐) and Yan (燕), who were deeply engrossed in the cult of immortality. They developed some techniques for attaining immortality, although their techniques lacked a strong theoretical basis. Thus they tried to draw up some ideas stemming from early philosophic school at that time, especially from the Five Elements school and the *Yin-yang* school, in developing theoretical foundation of their arts.

The teaching of the school of immortals had become quite popular in Qin times. and even in the Western Han (202BC-9AD). The teachers of this school

⁷⁸ Creel, H.G., *What is Taoism? And Other Studies In Chinese Cultural History*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970: 11, 20.

⁷⁹ Needham, J., *op. cit.*, vol.2, 1969: 154.

attributed their ideas to the Yellow Emperor⁸⁰ and especially to Lao Zi. From that time, they became integrated with philosophical Taoism. A few reasons for this curious phenomenon stand out clearly.

As stated earlier, Lao Zi is a legendary or at least, semi-legendary figure. He has left no trace of his life. No one knows how or where he spent his last years, still less when he died. However, he enjoys high prestige and commands universal respect among the ancient Chinese, as chapter 33 of *Zhuang Zi* describes Lao Zi as “as among the greatest man of antiquity; True man indeed!”⁸¹ Therefore, he has become a favourite subject for all kinds of legends. None of such legends has any degree of credibility. But one thing seems certain that he was a cultivator of long life.

The *Shiji*, chapter 63 reads:

“...129 years after the death of Confucius, the historiographers record that Dan (僖), Grand Historiographer of Zhou (周), visited Duke Xian of Qin (秦献公) and said: ‘At first Qin was joined with Zhou, having been joined 500 years they parted, after being parted 70 years a hegemony and king will arise here.’ Some say Dan was Lao Zi, some say not. No one in our time knows whether or not it is so.”⁸²

In the same passage, *Shiji* continues to state,

“It seems that Lao Zi lived at least 160 years, some say at least 200 years, as a result of cultivating the Way (*Dao*) and nurturing longevity.”⁸³

Hence, Lao Zi was very suitably deified and idolized as an immortal (*xian*, 仙).

⁸⁰ ‘The Book of Enfranchisement’ (‘Feng Chan Shu’, ‘封禅书’), *Shiji*, records the notion that the Yellow Emperor attained immortality and escaped from death when he performed the ceremony of enfranchisement.

⁸¹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap. 33, Legge, J. trans., *op. cit.*, 1962: 227.

⁸² *Shiji*, chap. 63, quoted from Graham, A.C. trans., ‘The Origins of the legend of Lao Tan’, *Studies in Chinese Philosophy and Philosophical Literature*, State University of New York Press, 1990: 119.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p.120.

As a matter of fact, practitioners of the immortality cult used to be looked down at that time.⁸⁴ Such practices to achieve immortality, as for example, the use of sexual techniques, called forth social condemnation. Thus, this immortality cult needed the protection of a highly respected philosophy. Since Lao Zi commanded deep love and reverence among the people, especially at the beginning of Han times, the immortality seekers made an idol of Lao Zi and took full advantage of his teachings.

As early as the end of the Western Han Dynasty, there were already such things as 'Huang-lao Dao' (Taoist religion of the Huang and Lao teachings, 黄老道) and 'Fang-xian Dao' (Taoism of the magicians and immortality, 方仙道), which were actually a fraction of the 'school of immortal'. They absorbed a great deal of intellectual material from the Lao Zi's ideas of "purity, chastity, non-action, modesty and restraint of desire" that is in line with their goals of immortality.

Hu Shi (胡适), in his book *Outline of the History of Chinese Philosophy*, called Lao Zi a rebel.⁸⁵ Lao Zi can be regarded as the first critic of culture and civilization in China's history.⁸⁶ It is a fact that throughout Chinese history, Taoism has always been the philosophy of the minority and the suppressed, and that secret societies, in their revolt against oppressive rulers, have often raised the banner of Taoism. As Needham pointed out the Taoists were always associated with that succession of subversive secret societies that played prominent parts at the changes of

⁸⁴ CreeI, H.G., *op. cit.*, 1970: 20.

⁸⁵ Hu, S., *op. cit.*, vol. 1, 1919: 50-57.

⁸⁶ Wei, Z.T., *op. cit.*, 1994: 137-138.

dynasties.⁸⁷ For example, in 184 AD, the Taoist sect of the Yellow Turbans (a class of men who commanded troops and at the same time taught religion) rose in rebellion in central and eastern China. It is thought that another Taoist sect of the 'five-bush rice *Dao*' ('Wudoumi *Dao*', 五斗米道)⁸⁸ was closely connected with this terrible revolution of the Yellow Turbans.⁸⁹ These two Taoist sects exhorted people to honor Lao Zi, and taught novices of his cult to read the *Daode Jing* because its spirit of revolt gave the rebels a strong support.

It is worth remarking that four sects which were mentioned above, have something in common, that is, they emphasized 'long life and immortality, or escape from death.' Of prime importance to this is they honour Lao Zi as True man and drew their inspiration in achieving immortality from *Daode Jing*.

The introduction of Buddhism into China had greatly stimulated the establishment and emergence of the Taoist religion in the end of Eastern Han (22-220AD). We should acknowledge that the religious Taoism is marked by one constant aim: the achievement of immortality, and it has its root in ancient Chinese magical practices and ancient immortality cult. The Taoist priests claimed that these teachings were transmitted by immortals and in most cases ascribing the words to *Laojun* (Lao Zi, or 'Lao the Lord').

A religion in the full sense must also possess a 'scripture' that explains and develops its religious doctrines and rituals, so that there may be a literary foundation for the faith of its adherents. The *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* may be

⁸⁷ Needham, J., *op. cit.*, vol.2, 1969: 138.

⁸⁸ During the second century AD, a man named Zhang Daoling started a health cult. He cured people of various kinds of diseases, who thereafter, either as payment for their cure or as a membership fee to his cult, paid him five bushels of rice. Thus, this earned his cult the name of 'five-bushel rice *Dao*'.

⁸⁹ Needham, J., *op. cit.*, vol.2, 1969: 138.

regarded as the earliest surviving Chinese book to present a philosophy for private life and personal cultivation (especially the *Zhuang Zi*). The religious Taoists' goals in pursuit of nurturing life and hoping to attain immortality were also matters of personal cultivation. Thus, the adherents of the Taoist religion, in order to find a basis for their beliefs in history and in theory, exalted books such as these as their 'canon'. They, then, had become inextricable from many ideas of the philosophical Taoism. In other words, the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* have a direct influence on the conceptualization and practice of religious Taoist.

We must admit that many of the sayings in the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* are very difficult to understand and ambiguous. "Confusing paradoxes, dazzling figures of speech, talk of soaring through the heavens beyond the ends of the earth (in these two works), if taken literally, are much like the mystifying patter of the magician."⁹⁰ One would not wish to deny that ancient Taoist thought had strong elements of mysticism. The immortality seekers seized on the mystical elements in Taoist philosophy and gave undue weight to isolated passages and terms in order to alter them to suit their own ends. That is what has made these two works so attractive to those who have wished to read their own ideas into it. Of prime importance is the sayings of *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi*, which if taken literally, can serve a theoretical basis for practices of immortality seekers.

As we know the goal of religious Taoism is to become an immortal. In *Daode Jing* many passages seem to assure an everlasting life on earth, for example, "The spirit of the valley never dies" (chapter 6), "Heaven and earth are enduring. The reason why heaven and earth can be enduring is that they do not give themselves life.

⁹⁰ Creel, H.G., *op. cit.*, 1970: 20.

Hence, they are able to be long-lived." (chapter 7), "He who lives out his days has had a long life" (chapter 33), "... Because for him there is no realm of death" (chapter 50), "... the secret of long life and eternal vision" (chapter 59) and so on. Thus, there is no insuperable barrier to believing that these ambiguous expressions, if taken too literally, provide a basis of theoretical support for the cult of immortality that it is entirely possible to live long and no death.

Zhuang Zi in various places gives descriptions of the Master Taoist, *zhenren* (the True man, 真人), *shenren* (the 'Spiritual man, 神人) and *zhiren* (the Perfect man, 至人). In chapter 6 of *Zhuang Zi*, we find:

"What is a true man? The true man of old did not oppose even the minority. He did not seek for heroic accomplishment. He laid no plans. Therefore, he had neither regret in failure, nor self-complacency in success. Thus, he could scale heights without fear, enter water without being wet, and fire without feeling hot. Such is he whose knowledge has ascended to *Dao*.

The true man of old slept without dreaming and woke without anxiety. He ate without discrimination, breathing deep breaths. The breaths of the true man come from his heels, while men generally breathe from their throats. Out of the men who are defeated, words are retched up like vomit. If a man's lust and desires are deep, his spring of nature is shallow.

The true man of old knew neither to love life, nor to hate death. Living, he felt no elation; dying, he offered no resistance. Unconsciously he went; unconsciously he came; that was all."⁹¹

And chapter 2,

"The Perfect man is mysterious... were the great lakes burned up, he would not feel hot were the great rivers frozen hard, he would not feel cold. Were the mountains to be riven with thunder, or the seas thrown into waves by a storm, he would not be frightened. Being such, he would mount upon the clouds of heaven, would ride on

⁹¹ *Zhuang Zi*, chap.6, Fung, Y.L.trans.,*op. cit.*,1964: 112.

the sun and moon and would thus ramble at ease beyond
the seas."⁹²

Similarly, in another passage, *Zhuang Zi* tells us that in the mountain of Gu She (姑射), there lived a Spiritual man whose skin was white, who did not eat the five grains (rice, millet, wheat, barley and beans), but inhaled the wind and drank the dew. He could ride on clouds driven along by the flying dragons; he was immune to flood and fire.⁹³

From the above mentioned passages, *Zhuang Zi* seems to attribute the magic powers to his idealized individual (*zhenren*, *zhiren* and *shenren*). Chapter 55 of *Daode Jing* also shows the same tendency:

“One who possesses virtue in abundance is comparable to new born baby; Poisonous insects will not sting it; Ferocious animals will not pounce on it; Predatory birds will not swoop down on it.”⁹⁴

And chapter 50 also depicts that “one who excels in safeguarding his own life does not meet with rhinoceros or tiger when traveling on land nor is he touched by weapons when charging into an army. There is nowhere for the rhinoceros to pitch its horn; there is nowhere for the tiger to place its claws; there is nowhere for the weapon to lodge its blade.”⁹⁵ By now, we may say that the ideal individual of philosophical Taoist is a mystic.

⁹² *Ibid.* p. 60.

⁹³ *Ibid.* p. 36-37.

⁹⁴ *Daode Jing*, chap.55, Lau, D.C. trans., *op. cit.*, 1976: 116.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.* p.111.

As we know, although the word *xian*, or immortal, was used by Zhuang Zi, and though Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi attributed their idealized individual the magic powers, nonetheless the *xian* ideal was something they did not believe in. From what we had just discussed in this chapter, it does seem reasonable to believe that *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi* does accept the ideal of 'long life', however, they do not agree with the ideal of 'no death.' The idealized man lives long because he models himself on Nature and cultivates the *Dao*, and because he models himself on Nature, he has to die. In fact, Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi taught people to become reconciled to death as part of Nature's cycle of change.

Nevertheless their descriptions of idealized man were so mystical, if taken literally, can be served as a model of *xian* (immortal) that could be copied by the Taoist religion. As we shall see the delineation of immortal in the later Taoism (religious Taoist) is seemed to be the same as philosophical Taoist's ideal individual.

For example, the *Shiji* records the sayings of a magician named Master Lu who states,

"The *zhenren* enters water without getting wet and fire without getting burned. He rides the clouds and mists. He is as eternal as heaven and Earth."⁹⁶

Wei Boyang (魏伯阳), in his book *Zhouyi Cantongqi (The Accordance (of the Book of Changes) with the Phenomena of Composite Things, 周易参同契)* which is the oldest surviving text on alchemy, mentioned an elixir which, when swallowed, 'spreads foggily like wind-driven rain. Vaporizing and permeating, it reaches the four limbs. Thereupon the complexion becomes rejuvenated, hoary hair regains its

⁹⁶ *Shiji*, chap.6, see *Shiji Quanben Xinzhuzhu* (The New Annotation of Historical Records, 史记全本新注), Zhang, D.K. ed., Xi An: Sanqin Publications, 1990: 125.

remember a brilliant thought of biological change from *Zhuang Zi* that had been quoted in chapter 2 (pg. 53-54). Here, we may say that because of the philosophical Taoists deeply engrossed in observation of Nature, they have a great knowledge and understanding of the problem of change.

The religious Taoist adopted and carried forward Lao-Zhuang's thought of change. As we shall see the idea of *bianhua* (change and transformation, 变化) is the heart of their immortal thought. They maintained that man could etherealize his body to become an immortal, if only he could go about it in the proper way. The great Taoist alchemist, Ge Hong, in order to support his belief in the possibility of prolonging man's natural span of life, opposed any fixity of species and emphasized the numerous semi-legendary zoological transformation. Ge Hong, in his *Baopuzi* (*Book of the Preservation-of-Solidarity Master*, 抱朴子), stated,

"If you claim that all breathing things follow one fixed norm, your thesis cannot be sustained, for the pheasant turns into a *shen* (蜃) bivalve, the sparrow becomes a clam, earth bugs assume wings, river frogs come to fly, oysters are changed into frogs, *xingqin* (荇芩) plants become maggots, field mice become quail, rotting grass turns into lightning bugs, alligators become tigers, and snakes become dragon."⁹⁸

Several times in *Baopuzi* 'neipian', Ge Hong referred to spontaneous transformation. He stated, such as, the following:

"What is it that the arts of transformation cannot do? May I remind my readers that human body, which is normally visible, can be made to disappear. Ghosts and gods are normally invisible, but there are ways and means to make them visible. Those capable of operating these methods and prescriptions will be found to abound wherever you go. Water and fire are present in the sky,

⁹⁸ Ge Hong, *Baopuzi*, 'neipian', chap.2, Ware, J.R. trans., *Alchemy, Medicine, Religion In the China of A.D. 320: The Nei P'ien of Ko Hung*, The M.I.T. Press, 1966: 37.

but they may be brought down with specula and burning-mirrors; lead is naturally white, but it can be reddened and mistaken for cinnabar. Cinnabar is naturally red, but it can be whitened to look like lead. Clouds, rains, frost, and snow are all breaths belonging to heaven and earth, but those produced by art differ in no way from the natural phenomena. Flying things and those that creep and crawl have been created in specific shapes, but it would be impossible ever to finish listing the thousands upon thousands of sudden metamorphoses which they can undergo.

Man himself is the most highly honoured member of creation and the most highly endowed, yet there are just as many instances of men and women changing into cranes, stones, tigers, monkeys, sand, or lizards. The cases of high mountains becoming deep abysses and of profound valleys changing into peaks are metamorphoses on an immense scale. It is clear, therefore, that transformation is something spontaneous in nature. Why should we doubt the possibility of making gold and silver from something different? Compare, if you will, the fire obtained with a burning-mirror and the water which condenses at night on the surface of a metal speculum. Do they differ from ordinary water and fire?

When a snake turns into a dragon and sun dew produces fat, the transformations do not differ in any way from those which occur in nature, for the basic cause in both cases is a natural stimulus. Only a man who has thoroughly studied the underlying principle can understand the significance of such phenomena. Only one whose range of vision is universal can grasp their circumstances."⁹⁹

The idea of biological change was already raised in *Zhuang Zi*. Needham pointed out that *Zhuang Zi*'s biological conceptions, through the idea of mineral transformation that appeared very early in China¹⁰⁰, turned into the attempt to hasten these changes by active interference (alchemy).¹⁰¹ In chapter 16 of *Baopuzi*, we read:

⁹⁹ Chap. 16, *ibid.* p. 262-263.

¹⁰⁰ See *Huainan Zi*, chap. 4.

¹⁰¹ Needham, *J., op. cit.*, 1969: 80.

“...gold created by transformation, being the very essence of a variety ingredients, is superior to natural gold. The genii classics tells us that the essence of cinnabar produces gold; this is another way of saying that gold can be made from cinnabar. ... those who make gold from cinnabar and achieve geniehood by taking it are first class.”¹⁰²

The alchemists believed that artificial gold was superior to natural gold in the quest for longevity and physical immortality because the gold which is made by transformation consists of the essences of many different chemical ingredients. Thus, they were encouraged to make these metals artificially. Such beliefs must have been instrumental in kindling the fire in the stove of the Chinese alchemists and keeping it burning for more than one thousand years.

To make sure that the artificial gold is genuine, the alchemists maintained that the cinnabar had to ‘come back’ nine times by repeating separation and sublimatory recombination of mercury and sulphur, reducing cinnabar and reforming mercuric sulphide. This operation is called *huandan* (cyclically-transformed elixir, 还丹). The cinnabar which had undergone nine cyclical changes would become more efficacious and powerful with each transformation. “The span of life is up to me, not heaven. The reverted cinnabar becomes gold, and millions of years are mine”¹⁰³, this became the motto of the alchemists.

The alchemist also maintained that cinnabar could be made inside the human body, mainly by means of the distillation of sperm. Regarding this specific bedroom technique, it was a technique available to the male, that of ‘making the semen return upwards to nourish the brain’ (*huanjing bunao*, 还精补脑). “At the

¹⁰² *Baopuzi*, ‘neipian’, chap.16. Ware, J.R., trans., *op.cit.*, 1966: 268-269.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.* p.269.

moment of ejaculation, pressure was exerted on the urethra between the scrotum and the anus in order to divert the seminal secretion into the bladder which would later be voided with the excreted urine. However, the alchemists did not know about this. They thought the seminal essence could thus be made to ascend and rejuvenate or revivify the upper parts of the body."¹⁰⁴ This technique which was designed to spare the sperms and at the same time to enhance vitality was recommended. The alchemist held that he could create inside his own body the embryo of an immortal being, instead of passing on his own vital forces by propagating children. Here, it is quite clear that the technique of *huanjing bunao* is another instance of the emphasis on reversion, restoration, regeneration, counter-current motion and cyclical transformation.

The ideal of the religious Taoists is obtaining a reversion to youth, an attainment of immortality because of continued rejuvenation (*fanlao huantong*, 返老还童). They maintained that in order to obtain longevity and immortality, one should 'return to the womb' or 'return to cosmic Great-one' by practising some mystical techniques. We note that the idea of 'returning to the origin' is highly esteemed as therapy in China. However, it is worth recalling here that the pregnant phrase can be traced back to the *Daode Jing*: "Returning to the state of infancy."¹⁰⁵ It was indeed one of the most influential ancient slogans of philosophical Taoism, and later became a fundamental idea of the arts of immortality.

¹⁰⁴ Needham, J., *op. cit.*, vol 2, 1969: 149-150.

¹⁰⁵ Waley, A., *op. cit.*, 1956: 178.

The aim of 'returning to the cosmic Great-one', in Taoist immortal thought, was to recover or reproduce the primordial chaotic situation (*hundun*, 混沌) that preceded the cosmogony. *Hundun* was one of the important ideas or terms as we may remember that Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi applied to their cosmological thought. The religious Taoist emphasized on returning to the primordial situation which actually means that the return of the physical freshness and perfect vital force of infancy and even foetal life.

The alchemists maintained that *qi* (气), *jing* (精) and *shen* (神) which were received at birth, were necessary for life. As *Taiping Jing* (*Canon of Great Peace*, 太平经) says, "If a man wants to live long, he must preserve his breath (*qi*), respect his spirit (*shen*), be sparing of his essence (*jing*)."¹⁰⁶ If one completely exhausted his supplies of *qi*, *jing* and *shen*, he would die. Thus, to become immortal, one should keep them within the body in maximum as the state of a newborn baby. Here, it is worth remarking that this idea originated in *Daode Jing*:

"(The infant's) bones are soft, its sinews weak; but its grip is strong. Not yet to have know the union of male and female, but to be completely formed, means that the vital force is at its height; to be able to scream all day without getting hoarse, means that harmony is at its perfection."¹⁰⁷

Furthermore, if we read through the *Daode Jing* and *Zhuang Zi*, we realized that the baby, uncarved block, sage (in *Daode Jing*), *zhenren*, *zhiren* and *shenren* (in *Zhuang Zi*) were viewed as being identical to chaos which is a symbolism of a state that is full of potentiality of life. The religious Taoist plagiarized and applied

¹⁰⁶ *Canon of Great Peace*, in *Zhentong Daozang* (Taoist Canon), *op. cit.*, vol 40 -41, 1977:32417-32846.

¹⁰⁷ *Daode Jing*, chap 55, Waley, A., *op. cit.*, 1956: 209.

this idea to the *Dao* of regenerating the primary vitalities, a reversion of the tissues from an aging state to the state of the newborn baby.

A mystical technique, which was employed by the Taoist adept of *neidan* (inner alchemy) to acquire youth and immortality, namely respiratory therapy. Although medical works as well, including *Neijing*, devote some attention to respiratory exercises, it was Taoism that, by and large, first used this discipline as a type of therapy.

Whether *Daode Jing* alludes to breathing exercises is uncertain, but it seems to suggest some breathing exercises, such as, "empties the minds and fills the bellies" (chapter 3), "concentrates the breath to achieve gentleness" (chapter 10), "to attain the utmost emptiness and to hold firmly to quietude" (chapter 16) and so forth. On the other hand, many passages in *Zhuang Zi* which describes the practice of breath control has often been cited as showing that the *Zhuang Zi* advocates such exercise, for example, "looking up to heaven and breathed gently, seeming to be in a trance, and to have lost all consciousness of any companion" (chapter 2), "blowing and breathing with open mouth; inhaling and exhaling the breath; expelling the old breath and taking in new" (chapter 15) and so on. But if Lao Zi and Zhuang Zi did perform these exercises, they were exercises undertaken as a part of meditation leading to union with *Dao*, not as method leading to immortality. However, the religious Taoist carried out these ideas in order to help them achieve material immortality.

They maintained that the aim of respiratory therapy exercises is to produce *qi*, which is the way to preservation of life. For them, it is of the utmost importance to prevent any substance of vigour from escaping out of the body. Here, as we shall see Taoism lays considerable stress on 'embryonic breathing.' It consists in a

closed-circuit respiration, like that of a foetus, through the 'cinnabar fields' of the head, breast and abdomen, while external respiration is limited to a minimum. The adept tried to imitate the circulation of blood and breath between mother and child and vice versa. The preface to the 'Taixi Koujue' (Oral Explanation of Embryonic Respiration, 胎息口诀), states, "It is in reverting to the origin (*fanben*, 返本) and regenerating the primary vitalities (*huanyuan*, 还原) that old age can be chased away and that one can return to the state of the foetus."¹⁰⁸

By now, it should be apparent that the concepts of transformation and change (include reversion) did constitute a central issue in Chinese alchemy. Because the Taoist understood that transformation and change are the basic characteristics of the substances, they therefore attempted to accelerate enormously natural change of substances by active interference in order to obtain the material life-elixirs. The conviction of the existence of elixirs among the Taoist adepts had led to the accumulation of a great deal of knowledge about metals and salts, in pursuit of which such important discoveries as that of gunpowder were incidentally made. This nobly optimistic idea - transformation and change - was also extensively used to interpret the practices of inner alchemy. Although the *neidan* made much use of meditation techniques, most of its techniques were highly conducive to both mental and physical health.

¹⁰⁸ Zhang, J.F., 'Oral Explanation of Embryonic Respiration', *Yunji Qiqian (Seven Bamboo Tablets of the Cloudy Satchel, 云笈七签)*.