

Imbibing the Universe: Methods of Ingesting the Five Sprouts¹

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Abstract

This paper explores the practice of ingesting the ‘Five Sprouts’ (*wuya* 五牙 / 芽), one of the most important meditative techniques practised by Daoists in medieval China. The five sprouts were defined as very essences of the five directions of space. The method of the Five Sprouts was a technique of meditative breathing and ingestion of saliva by which these pure essences were ingested and circulated in the body. This paper explores several variants of this method revealing the diversity of Daoist practices in medieval China, as well as examining Daoist ideas of the body, health and illness, and the diverse attitudes to medicine we find in Daoist texts.

Keywords

Daoism, Five Sprouts, meditation, breathing techniques, medieval China

All masters of techniques and physicians 道士醫師 know how to prepare medicines to heal the body, but they do not know that the crouching corpses within the body are stronger than any medicines prepared by men. They cause all medicine to be ineffective. . . . But those who prepare and ingest *zhanglu* 章陸 powder will have the three corpses expelled of their own. . . .

Those who are able to ingest *qi* do not employ these methods. The perfect *qi* are the five directional essences of the green sprouts [method]. Daoist masters ingest them for 21 days and the three worms are expelled.²

This paper explores the practice of ingesting the ‘Five Sprouts’ (*wuya* 五牙 / 芽), perceived as the purest *qi*, the very essences of the five directions of space. The method of the Five Sprouts was a technique of meditative breathing and ingestion of saliva by which these pure essences were ingested and circulated in the

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² *Taishang lingbao wufuxu* 太上靈寶五符序 DZ 388: 2.23b6–24b8. Texts in the Daoist Canon are labelled DZ and numbered following Schipper and Verellen (eds) 2004. References to specific articles in these volumes are preceded by TC.

body. Our examination of this method will allow us to investigate Daoist ideas of the body, health and illness, and the diverse attitudes to medicine we find in Daoist texts. As can already be seen in the passage above, from the *Array of the Five Numinous Treasure Talismans* (*Lingbao wufuxu* 靈寶五符序), a late third-century Daoist text, our exploration will also allow us to glimpse competition among various Daoist lineages, and to gain a clearer understanding of the development of Daoism in medieval China.

I Daoist ideas of health and illness

Daoist notions about health and healing are diverse and complex. Daoist lineages express different attitudes towards the use of traditional medicine or ritual healing, such as the use of talismans and confession. These varying attitudes are closely related to different aetiologies of disease, which in turn depend on complex ideological structures.³ Reports about the earliest Daoist movements, which appeared in the late second century CE, refer to the interest and success in healing. The two best known movements were the Way of Great Peace (*Taiping dao* 太平道) and the Way of the Five Bushels of Rice (*Wudoumi dao* 五斗米道), later known as the Way of the Celestial Master (*Tianshi dao* 天師道), which was to remain at the core of the Daoist tradition to the present:

In the Way of Great Peace, the master wielded a staff of nine-nodes and made talismans and incantations, instructing the sick to knock their heads to the ground and contemplate their offences. He then had them drink talismanic water. If the illness diminished and was finally cured, he said the person has faith in the Dao 信道; if the person was not healed, then the person was considered to have no faith in the Dao.⁴

The report continues by saying that the Way of the Five Bushels of Rice had similar practices, but added the use of ‘Chambers of Tranquility (*jingshe* 靜室) where the ill were sent to contemplate their offences’. The community was led by priests, known as libationers (*jijiu* 祭酒), who were in charge of having communal recitation of Laozi’s *Five-thousand Graphs* (*wuqian wen* 五千文), that is the *Daode jing*. The priests were also to make supplication on behalf of the sick 為病者請禱 by: ‘inscribing the name and surname of the sick and announcing their intent to accept their guilt’. The priest produced three copies

³ The literature on this topic is vast. Among the most important studies are Needham 1954, and numerous publications by Nathan Sivin. More recent studies include Strickmann 2002; Lin Fushi 1999; Lin Fushi 2000; Lin Fushi 2008; Xie Zonghui 2002; Gai Jianmin 2001.

⁴ *Sanguozhi* 三國志 8.264, citing Yu Huan’s 魚豢 *Dianlue* 典略, a third-century text.

of these documents, entitled Writs of the Three Bureaus (三官手書) and presented them to heaven, earth and water.⁵

Healing was thus central to the practices of these early Daoist movements, but what caught the interest of the secular historians was the replacement of mundane medicine with ritual healing. While the historians claim that the Daoist leaders duped and misled their adherents,⁶ it seems that the healing practices were in fact efficacious and were precisely the cause for the success of these movements in recruiting converts. The healing practices mentioned here are in fact of two types. First, perhaps best seen as magical healing, using various devices, such as the staff of nine nodes, talismans and incantations. Secondly, religious healing, which included confession of sins and a bureaucratic procedure of petitioning the bureaux of heaven, earth and water on behalf of the ill.

The importance of healing, while replacing traditional medical practices, such as acupuncture and the ingestion of medicines, with ritual healing remained at the core of Daoist practice in later centuries. Perhaps the most succinct statement in this regard is found in Lu Xiujing's 陸修靜 (406–477) *Abridged Codes of the Daoist Community*, composed ca. 430:

If the ill could not be cured with decoctions, drugs, needles, or moxa, then they were only to ingest talismans and drink water [into which were put ashes of talismans], and confess their sins from their first year of life. Even those with capital offences were all pardoned and those with chronic and sustained illnesses were all healed. Hence, those of superior virtue attained transcendence, those of middling virtue doubled their longevity, and those of lower virtue extended their years. But, those revering the Dao today are all topsy-turvy and turn all matters upside down. I sincerely request to express these illnesses as follows.⁷

若疾病之人不勝湯藥針灸，惟服符飲水，及首生年以來所犯罪過。罪應死者，皆為原赦，積疾困病，莫不生全。故上德神仙，中德倍壽，下德延年。而今之奉道，是事顛倒，無事不反。余謹請為出其疾病如左

The main purpose of Lu Xiujing's *Abridged Codes* was to reform the corrupt state of the contemporary Celestial Master community. In Lu's idealised vision, illness was not to be cured by mundane medical means, but by religious practice, namely the ingestion of talismanic water and confession of sins. It was by these means that adherents of the early church had obtained longevity and

⁵ Ibid. For more details on the early Celestial Master community, see Kleeman 2007; Kleeman 2010.

⁶ The report claims that Zhang Lu, the leader of this group 'in fact he did not cure illness but established illicit absurdities 淫妄, but the stupid and ignorant competed to practice these.' *Sanguozhi* 三國志 8.264.

⁷ *Lu xiansheng daomen kelue* 陸先生道門科略 DZ 1127.1b–2a. My translation differs from Nickerson 1996, p. 352.

even transcendence. We should also note that the ‘illnesses’ Lu Xiuqing describes in the following passages are the corrupt practices of contemporary Celestial Masters, such as not attending the three annual assemblies, not registering their families, and incorrect behaviour in the oratory (*jingshe* 靜舍), the site of ritual practice at each Celestial Master household. In the final passage of the text, Lu Xiuqing criticises the improper ritual practice of contemporary libationers who enter the oratory without proper knowledge of the required petitions:

Such people will not be obeyed by the officers and troops and the emanations of the Dao will not descend to them. Inquisitorial arrests increase daily and the severity of illnesses will increase.

如此之徒, 吏兵不為使, 道氣所不將, 考逮日更, 急病者轉。

This passage reminds us that one of the main concerns of the Way of the Celestial Master was healing. The aetiology of illness in Daoist understanding, however, differed radically from that in traditional medicine. Celestial Master Daoists, in particular, saw illness as proof of offences against the codes of the community. Another aetiological theory identified the source of illness as ‘infusion of *qi*’ (*zhuqi* 注氣) from the nether regions. This noxious *qi*, often labelled ‘deviant’ (*xie* 邪), entered the body and caused illness. The source for the infusion may be demonic, ghostly, or a result of netherworld litigation causing illness among the living.⁸ The latter ‘sepulchral complaints’ (*zhongsong* 塚訟) were a particularly frightening cause of illness, as such aetiology entailed both acknowledgement of past crimes of the deceased as well as exposing complex anxieties and tensions among the living, and between the living and the dead. As shown by Stephen Bokenkamp, this anxiety about the ancestors should alert us to reconsider the cult of ancestors in Chinese religious culture.⁹ Such moral and juridical aetiology of illness could not be dealt with by mundane medical means, but by ritual petitioning, which was modelled on the legal and bureaucratic communications at the mundane courts.¹⁰

A central aspect of petitioning rites was the summoning of the celestial officials and soldiers who would attack and destroy the cause of the illness. This ritual summoning was simultaneously an activation of the priest’s own bodily gods, who served as officials in the various organs. Importantly, this passage reminds us that the unseen officials and officers were in fact emanations of *qi* 道氣, and that efficacy of the ritual depended on the ability of the libationer to circulate the primordial *qi* of the Dao in his own body.

⁸ Strickmann 2002, pp. 23–4 *et passim*; Lai Chi-tim 2010.

⁹ Bokenkamp 2007.

¹⁰ Nickerson 1997; Verellen 2004; Cedzich 1987.

According to Lu Xiuqing, the lack of preparation and improper performance by corrupt libationers leads to increasing illness and death among the adherents. The ‘inquisitorial arrests’ mentioned here refer to the interrogation of offences at the infernal courts following one’s death. The avoidance of such inquisition was at the heart of Celestial Master liturgy. Lu Xiuqing’s idealised vision of the early Celestial Master community harks back to the earliest reports regarding the Daoist communities in relation to the Way of Great Peace and the early Celestial Master community.

Celestial Master sources, however, reveal that the process was more nuanced. According to the mid-century *Commands and Admonitions of the Families of the Great Dao*, libationers were to attempt regular medicine at the onset of illness. If the cure was effective, there was nothing further to do. However, if the illness returned then the person was determined to be spiritually ill, and beyond mundane cures:

When libationers cure the ill, they do so at the onset of the illness so they return to health. But, once the illness is cured, if it returns again, that person is considered evil. They do not again treat or cure them.¹¹

祭酒治病, 病來復差, 既差復病, 此為惡人. 勿復醫治之.

The Celestial Master texts we have are prescriptive, and it is therefore difficult to garner actual social reality from them. We have, however, more detailed, albeit somewhat obscure, evidence of healing practices in *Declarations of the Perfected* (*Zhen’gao* 真誥), a collection of letters, notes and other records by the medium Yang Xi 楊羲 and his patrons Xu Mi 許謐 and Xu Hui 許翽, that form the background to the Shangqing 上清 revelations (dating to 364–370).¹² Several of these records discuss illnesses among the Xu family members. One case that has received considerable attention is the illness inflicted on Xu Mi’s grandchild due to a sepulchral plaint brought against Tao Kedou, Xu Mi’s deceased wife. The *Declarations* preserve several relevant records that reveal complex familial negotiations regarding the diagnosis and treatment of this ill child. These records indicate that the treatment in this case involved ritual means, but the details are not clear.¹³ A second case involved Xu Mi’s

¹¹ *Dadao jia lingjie* 大道家令戒 in *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 DZ 789.18b; Bokenkamp 1997, p. 181.

¹² *Zhengao* 真誥 DZ 1016 compiled by Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536). For details and bibliography, see Robinet in TC, pp. 198–200. Yoshikawa and Mugitani (eds) 2000 is an annotated Japanese translation.

¹³ Bokenkamp 2007, pp. 130–57.

own illness, perhaps a partial paralysis due to stroke. In this case, the treatment combined acupuncture and moxibustion with rituals.¹⁴

The perception of health and illness among Daoists, whether in the prescriptive texts of Celestial Master Daoists, such as *Admonitions* and *Abridged Codes*, or the more descriptive *Declarations of the Perfected* of the Shangqing revelations, was therefore more complex than simple rejection of medical treatment. These sources show that Daoist masters were to heal the sick, using medicines, moxibustion and acupuncture. These medical procedures were to be augmented by ritual techniques, usually petitioning but also incantations, as in the case of Xu Mi's stroke. But, if illness persisted, or returned, it was proof that the specific illness was caused by the patient's own offences or infusions of miasmatic *qi*.

Most importantly, however, we should note that curing illness was merely returning the body to its proper condition, so one could begin working towards salvation. A healthy body was a precondition for religious endeavor. Daoists viewed mundane medical techniques as treating merely external symptoms. True health that could lead to longevity, and eventually transcendence, entailed direct communication with the Dao by cultivating and refining one's own bodily *qi* 氣. *Qi* is the most subtle, ethereal and elemental aspect of the physical world, and it may be understood as the manifested aspect of the formless Dao. Difficult to translate or explain in Western terms, a useful way to think about *qi* is by the visual metaphor of the graph 氣 which indicates the energetic vapour (气) rising from cooking rice (米). This indeed is the etymological explanation for the graph provided in the first-century dictionary *Shuowen jiezi* 說文解字 by Xu Shen 許慎.¹⁵ An early graphic variant, found on the twelve-sided jade piece, engraved with a verse describing the inhalation of 'moving *qi*' has the radical fire 火 instead of rice below the vapour.¹⁶

Daoists thus focused on various techniques for cultivating *qi*, by which the bodily microcosm could be harmonised with the macrocosm thereby leading to transcendence. Such techniques included various dietary regimens of minerals and herbs, sexual practices and alchemy. These practices are not in themselves Daoist. These traditions of practice appeared earlier than the Daoist lineages with which we are concerned here, and they share in the general cosmological ideas of traditional China, such as *qi*, yin yang, five phases, patterned transformations, micro- and macro-cosmic homologies.

¹⁴ Kleeman 2009.

¹⁵ Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815), *Shuowen jiezi zhu* 說文解字注 (Taipei: Tiangong, 1998), 7.333A.

¹⁶ Roth 1997; Allan 1997, pp. 87–92; Harper 1998, p. 77; Li Ling 2000, pp. 342–6.

Daoism can be distinguished from these traditions by at least four criteria. First, Daoists seek transcendence, defined as merging with the Dao, which entails complete psycho-physical transformation, hence the focus on bodily practices. A second key feature is salvific eschatology—that is, a perception that the current cosmic order is at imminent end, and only those within the Daoist fold will be saved. There are several variants combining these two themes. A third feature is the social and communal aspect: Daoists were organised in lineages which defined themselves through proper initiation and ordination ranks, entailing proper rituals of transmission for texts and teachings. A fourth feature, and from the Daoists' own perspective perhaps the most important of all, is the rejection of the sacrificial religion of traditional China. As we saw above, the Daoist view of divinity was radically different than that of the imperial and local traditions. True deities were pure emanations of Dao, subtle forms of *qi*, that did not require flesh and blood sustenance as did the gods of the people and the empire. Daoists sought to integrate their bodies with the refined potencies that emanated from the Dao. The sacrificial religion was replaced by a cosmic bureaucratic paradigm, and Daoists saw themselves as active members of this cosmic bureaucracy.

The most basic forms of Daoist cultivation were methods of ingesting *qi* by which the practitioner could inhale the pure vapour (*qi*) circulating in the universe. More than simple breathing exercises, the ingestion of cosmic emanations was perceived as integrating the vital emanations of the macrocosmic celestial matrix, with its regular patterns of transformation, into the microcosm of the human body. On the one hand, these practices are based on the correlative cosmology of early China, which viewed the human body and the cosmos as homologous. On the other hand, these practices exemplify more esoteric notions developed in medieval Daoism. Among the most popular of these practices is the method for ingesting the 'five sprouts', the celestial effluvia of the five directions in the most potent moment of emergence. Correlated with the temporal, spatial and mythical scheme of the five phases, the ingestion of the 'sprouts' would literally lead the adept to embody the primordial essences of the cosmos. The practitioner would thus refine his body, quit regular foods, and gain access to powers and abilities of the spirits. Several variants of this method are preserved in medieval Daoist texts, so I can only provide a few brief examples here. I begin by providing a rather standard Daoist explanation for the necessity and efficacy of the method of the Five Sprouts, found in a Tang compendium of Daoist practices. I then discuss a few early variants of the practice.

We must remember, however, that Daoism was never a unitary religion. Rather, we should consider this tradition as a confluence of different textual

and ritual lineages that emerged through complex interactions between diverse traditions, including local cults, shamanism (wu 巫), technical traditions, such a divination, hygiene, medicine, and Han imperial ideology and ritual. The various Daoist lineages all claimed to possess the correct understanding of the patterns of the cosmos, and to advocate the most efficacious practices for attaining the Dao and restoring harmony. Daoist lineages distinguished themselves from other contemporary traditions of practice and from each other by asserting the superiority of their preferred set of practices, which they selected from a wide repertoire of shared practices. Our examination of the variant methods of the Five Sprouts will show the same practice embedded in different ritual schemes, allowing us to examine changes, developments and competition among Daoist groups.

It is due to this complex process of emergence that medieval Daoist texts are often difficult to comprehend. Rather than straightforward narratives, instructions for practices, or liturgical manuals, these texts should be understood as debates about practice and efficacy, and they need to be placed in the context of these debates. Some texts include explicit criticism of rival practices, as seen in the passage cited at the opening of this paper, but most often the criticism is implicit, and can only be seen in the context of other texts. Daoist texts are heavily intertextual, and incorporate several textual layers of texts in complex relationships. Thus, a single Daoist text may include several variants of the same practice, different versions of the same narrative, and passages that seem to contradict each other. It is crucial that we carefully attend to the rhetorical strategies with which the authors and compilers of these texts may have signalled their preferred practices or narratives.

As we explore different variants and usages of the Five Sprouts, it will be useful to consider the notion of modularity, which I borrow from Lothar Ledderose, who suggests that ‘devising of module systems seems to conform to a distinctly Chinese pattern of thought’.¹⁷ I use the term modularity to refer to the composition of complex ritual programmes from discrete ‘symbolic modules’ that reappear in different ritual contexts with different ‘meaning’. By ‘symbolic module’ I refer to the cluster of meanings and practices associated with a specific term, such as Five Talismans or the Five Sprouts, although these meanings and practices are almost never specifically spelled out. On their own, the specific terms may have no more meaning than their linguistic content, but they take on symbolic meaning in the context of specific narratives and rituals as they are placed in combination with each other. It is within

¹⁷ Ledderose 2000, p. 2.

these contexts that we need to be especially aware of shifts in meaning.¹⁸ In the case here, we will consider the changes in meaning of the practice of the Five Sprouts as it is found in different contexts. What may this tell us about the practice itself? And what do these changes reveal about the development of Daoism?

A second useful analytical notion I will use is the idea of ‘set and setting’, which was introduced and popularised by Timothy Leary and his collaborators in the Harvard research project on psychedelics. This hypothesis has been accepted in the study of hallucinogens, and elaborated to encompass all altered states of consciousness, produced in a variety of cultural and ritual settings.¹⁹ According to this hypothesis the experience of an altered state of consciousness is determined by an internal set of cognitive aspects (intention, expectation, motivation) and an external setting, or the context of the experience. This notion is particularly significant when considering the ingestion of psychoactive materials, but as I argue below, it is also useful in analysing all ritual uses of herbs, minerals and their derivatives. Indeed, I would argue that this notion is very useful in understanding meditative and visualisation techniques, which in Daoism came to replace herbal-based methods.

A particularly interesting example of the ‘set and setting’ model is Wade Davis’ study of Haitian voodoo, in which he explains the effects of poisoning which lead to the social creation of zombies and the death experience of the victims. In this context, ‘set’ refers to the individual’s expectations of what a drug or other preparation will do for him, while ‘setting’ refers to the physical and social environment in which the drug or preparation is taken. What is at the base of the effect on the individual is the world view in which he is immersed.²⁰ I will argue below that the psychophysical effects of Daoist practices, such as the ingestion of herbs and cultivation of *qi*, need first to be understood within a specific ‘set and setting’, in order to determine the understanding of the practice. Thus, as the same practice and its effects are reformulated within different cosmological schemes and ritual programmes we will see changes in the meanings associated with the same effects. The notions of modularity and ‘set and setting’ can thus be seen as complementary analytical tools.

Finally, I will ask whether we can move beyond the emic explanations of the practice. Can we in fact account for the efficacy of this practice, and others like it, in modern bio-medical terms, or perhaps in terms of cognitive science?

¹⁸ I discuss modularity in more detail in Raz 2009.

¹⁹ Metzner 1998; Metzner 1989; Barbosa *et al.* 2005; Armstrong 1998.

²⁰ Davis 1988, pp. 181–2. For the Voodoo world view in which both the sorcerer and victim operate, see pp. 184–91); for psychosomatic effects of an individual’s mental state *vis-à-vis* witchcraft, see pp. 197–207. See, also, Davis 1983.

II Qi cultivation

In the preface to his *Treatise on the Essential Meaning of Ingestion of Qi* (*Fuqi jingyi lun* 服氣精義論), Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735), eminent Daoist of the Tang dynasty, explained the importance of ingesting *qi*.²¹

Qi is the germinating subtlety 幾微 the Dao. Germinating, hence it put the Dao into motion; as subtlety, it led the Dao to function. Thus, the Dao generated One. Hence, primordial chaos was completed in Great Transformation (*taiji* 太易). One is the movement and congealing 沖凝 of the Dao. As movement, it causes transformation; as congealing it causes it to create. Hence, two was generated. Thus, heaven and earth were distinguished in Great Culmen (*taiji* 太極). It was by this that form and body appeared, and the myriad things all received them from the same source; essence and spirit formed, and the myriad things received them in proportional measure.²²

夫氣者，道之幾微也。幾而動之，微而用之，乃生一焉。故混元全乎太易。夫一者，道之沖凝也。沖而化之，凝而造之，乃生二焉。故天地分乎太極。是以形體立焉！萬物與之同稟；精神著焉。萬物與之齊受。

This explanation is an interesting hermeneutic on the well-known, but obscure, line in the *Daodejing*: ‘Dao generated One, One generated Two, Two generated Three, Three generated the myriad things.’ This cosmogonic process is here explained through the efficacy of *qi* which is here defined as the primordial dynamic substance that is the manifested aspect of the Dao. Simultaneously pervasive and dynamic, *qi* is the cause of the transformation of the Dao from its ineffable uniqueness into the things of the world. These ideas are neither new nor unique, and hark back to Warring States and Han cosmological speculations. The significance of this cosmogonic account is that it provides a cosmological explanation for the various methods of ingesting and manipulating *qi*, which Sima Chengzhen discusses in the following nine sections of the text.²³

²¹ There are two extant versions of the *Fuqi jingyi lun* in the *Daozang*: (1) Two independent and arbitrarily divided texts: 服氣精義論 DZ 830 and 修真精義雜論 DZ 277; (2) chapter 57 of *Yunji qiqian* 雲笈七籤 DZ 1032, which includes nine sections, two more than DZ 830 and DZ 277. The passages in *YJQQ* are more complete. For studies of this text, see Engelhart 1987; Engelhart 1989.

²² *YJQQ* DZ 1032 57.1a; Engelhart 1989, p. 293, provides a partial and somewhat loose translation.

²³ The text includes a Preface; (1) Discourse on the Five Sprouts 五芽論; (2) Discourse on Ingestion of Qi *Fuqi lun* 服氣論; (3) Discourse on Guiding and Stretching 導引論; (4) Discourse on Talismanic water 符水論; (5) Discourse on Ingestion of Drugs 服藥論; (6) Discourse on Observing Taboos 慎忌論; (7) Discourse on Five viscera 五臟論; (8) Discourse on Treatment of Disease by *qi* ingestion 服氣療病論; (9) Discourse on Disease symptoms 病疾論.

The first section in the treatise is ‘Discourse on the Five Sprouts’ 五芽論. Introducing the Five Sprouts, Sima Chengzhen writes:

That by which the form is complete originates in the viscera and organs. That by which the spirits are secured is based in essence and *qi*. Although the body receives its form from the five spirits and fully incorporates their image, yet it weakens and the *qi* is exhausted until one is decrepit and feeble. Hence it is necessary to inhale the cloud-sprouts and channel their liquids [to the respective organs] and to inhale the auroral radiances in order to produce numinous spirits 孕靈 [within the body]. . . . He who reveres cultivation and study, should begin with careful study of this method.²⁴

夫形之所全者，本於臟腑也。神之所安者，質於精氣也。雖稟形於五神，已具其象，而體衰氣耗，乃致凋敗。故須納雲牙而溉液，吸霞景以孕靈... 修學所遵，自宜詳覈。

Sima claims that the most basic of all methods of ingesting *qi* is the method of the Five Sprouts. He continues by providing two variants of the practice, beginning with the instructions for ingesting the Five Sprouts given in the *Array of the Five Talismans*.²⁵ He then cites a variant of this practice, entitled the method of the Four Cloud Sprouts, found in the *Superior Method of the Transcendents for Ingesting the Cloudy Sprouts of the Four Culmens*,²⁶ a text associated with the Shangqing revelations.²⁷

III Early Daoist methods

The earliest and most detailed instructions for the method of the Five Sprouts are in the *Array of the Five Talismans*. The *Array* is a complicated text, and is one of the best examples of the diversity of ideas and practices from which Daoism emerged. Probably compiled at the end of the third century, the text consists of three chapters that include material from various sources, the oldest of which date to the Han dynasty. The second chapter of the *Array*, which includes the passage discussed below, consists of several dozen medicinal recipes. The first and third chapters are focused on the transmission of the five ‘numinous treasure’ talismans (*lingbao fu* 靈寶符). The text incorporates the transmission rite into a ritual programme entitled *jiao* 醮, which was to

²⁴ YJQQ DZ 1032: 57.2b4–7; DZ 830.2b1–4.

²⁵ DZ 388: 3.21a5–22a1.

²⁶ *Taiji zhenren fu siji yunya shenxian shangfang* 太極真人服四極雲牙神仙上方. See below for details.

²⁷ The Shangqing revelations appeared between 364–370. For an introduction, see Bokenkamp 1997, p. 6 *et passim*; Robinet 1997.

become the most basic ritual module in medieval Daoism.²⁸ Alongside the ritual instructions, the text includes several passages, which are evidently earlier and from distinct traditions, that served as the basis for the ritual synthesis. The text also includes several mythical narratives that tell of the appearance and transmission of the talismans into the human realm. Intriguingly, these narratives clearly emerged from distinct communities of practice, and advocate distinct ritual programmes. I discuss one of these narratives in detail below.

A particularly important reference to the Five Sprouts is in the passage cited at the opening of this chapter. Culled from a recipe in the second chapter of the *Array*, the passage refers to the Five Sprouts in an appended note that criticises the method advocated in the main body of the recipe. This recipe is worth quoting in full as it introduces several key Daoist ideas of the body and its esoteric anatomy, such as the Three Worms 三蟲, also known as the Crouching Corpses 伏尸, terrifying denizens of our body.

*Method of the Transcendents for Expelling the Three Worms
and the Crouching Corpses*
仙人下三蟲伏尸方

Use ten *jin* of *fuling* 茯苓,²⁹ five *jin* of the inner white substance of *zhanglu* roots with the outer skin removed, clear liquor, wheat flour and yeast, five *dou* each. Cook them together to brew the compound. Place the decoction in a clay vessel and seal for twenty days. When the medicine is ready, complete the preparation: take a measure the size of a large bean and cook it until it is like caramel. Knead it into a pill shaped like a large arrow head. Ingest three pills daily. In ten days your excretions will be like egg-yolk. The superior corpse will be excreted in a hundred days, the middle corpse in sixty days, and the lower corpse in thirty days. The superior corpse is shaped like a hand, the middle corpse is shaped like a foot, and the lower corpse is shaped like an egg. The superior corpse is black, the middle corpse is green, and the lower corpse is white. These three corpses are born together with you, yet constantly wish to cause your death. On the first and last days of the months they rise to heaven to report on your offences and misdeeds. On these days you should hold on to your *hun*-soul 魂 and control your *po*-soul 魄. You should keep them in check during the night of *gengshen* 庚申 (57) day. Then the three corpses will be unable to move. If on that evening you dream that you are fighting with another person, it is your *hun*-soul struggling with the corpses. As the *hun*-soul wishes to pacify the body it does not wish for the presence the crouching corpses. The *po*-soul always wishes to pacify the spirits, hence it wishes for confusion. The three corpses always wish for your death, hence they wish to attack and fight. This is the explanation.

²⁸ For an analysis of this ritual programme, see Raz 2007.

²⁹ *Scelarium Poria cocos*, a fungus that colonises pine trees.

All masters of Dao and physicians know how to prepare medicines to heal the body but do not know that the crouching corpses are within the body. The medicines prepared by men are proved ineffective because of the three worms. The superior corpse enjoys treasures and valuables in the billions, the middle corpse enjoys the five tastes, and the lower corpse enjoys the five colours. If you do not expel them you are merely cheating yourself. If you expel them, you will no longer feel hunger, your heart will be tranquil and without thoughts, and you will be able to attain extended life. The Perfected value this method, Daoist masters revere this medicine and the worthy are joyful at its application. The stupid and vulgar laugh at this practice. It is therefore said: upon death a person's skeleton is the residence of the three worms. But those who prepare and ingest *zhanglu* powder will have the three corpses expelled of their own. There is no need to ferment this medicine before imbibing it. The seeds of the pagoda-tree are also fine.

Those who are able to ingest *qi* do not employ these methods. The perfect *qi* are the five directional essences of the green sprouts [method]. Daoist masters ingest them for twenty-one days and the three worms are expelled.³⁰

This passage hints at the complex competition of traditions in medieval China. The main body of the passage is an extended criticism of mundane medical knowledge and practice. First, we should note that *daoshi* 道士 in this passage is a general category of practitioners who possess specific methods or techniques. We should be careful understanding or translating this term simply as 'Daoist', that is an initiate into the ritual and textual lineages that emerged in medieval China. These practitioners and physicians are simply unaware of the true inner composition of the body. Most importantly, they do not know about the three worms, also known as corpses, which dwell in the body, yet seek its death. Ideas regarding the presence of the three worms were already known in the Han,³¹ but beliefs and practices related to the function of these worms in the moral ecology of the body were fully developed in the Daoist lineages of medieval China. Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–344) refers to three worms and corpses several times in his *Inner Chapters Master Embracing the Unhewn* [*Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇] and *Traditions of Divine Transcendents* [*Shenxian zhuan* 神仙傳].³² Among the clearest statements regarding the three corpses is a passage that discusses their role as overseers who leave the person's body and ascend to heaven on the fifty-seventh day (*gengshen* 庚申) to report on the person's offences:

³⁰ DZ 338: 2.23b6–24b8.

³¹ Wang Chong 王充 (27–ca.100 CE) in his *Lunheng* 論衡 refers to 'three worms in man's abdomen... which devour his intestines' in chapter 49 'On Worms' (Shangchong 商虫). Wang Chong does not, however, refer to the moral qualities of these worms or their role as inspectors of behaviour; *Lunheng jiaoshi* 論衡校釋 vol. 3, p. 718; Forke 1962, vol. 2, p. 366.

³² Campamy 2002, pp. 47–52 *et passim*.

It is also said that in our bodies are three corpses. These three corpses are real although they have no physical form. They are of the same category as cloud-souls, numina, ghosts, and spirits. They wish people to die early, in which case they can act as ghosts, roaming about at will and enjoying people's sacrifices and libations. Therefore, on each *gengshen* day, they ascend to heaven to report to the Director of Destinies 司命 telling him of people's transgressions.³³

Beliefs and practices related to the three worms continued to flourish in medieval China, and were transmitted to Japan.³⁴ While Ge Hong, and later Daoist authors, offer several recipes for the expulsion of the worms, we should note that already in the passage cited above we find that these entities are perceived as similar to spirits, rather than physical creatures.

Importantly, the final line of the passage, probably a note appended by the compilers of the text, presents a secondary stage of criticism here. While the *zhanglu* preparation, celebrated in the main body of the passage, is useful in destroying the three corpses, the note asserts that ingestion of the Five Sprouts is far more efficacious.

Before continuing our examination of the Five Sprouts, we should examine the recipe itself, for it reveals important divergences between Daoist and medical understandings. The herb *zhanglu* 章陸, or *shanglu* 商陸, identified in modern terms as *Phytolacca acinosa*,³⁵ was very important among early Daoists and their herbalist predecessors. The *Array of the Five Talismans* provides the following description:

The root of *zhanglu* is sour and poisonous. It cures evil *qi* in the heart, relieves swelling, and kills evil spirits. It refines the five viscera by scattering water *qi*. The root has a spirit with a human-like form. It grows in fields and at old burial grounds. This herb is a divine herb.³⁶

The efficacy of *zhanglu* is further expressed in the next passage as providing direct access to the spirits, and indeed 'communication with spirits' 通神: 'Daoist masters always plant this medicinal herb in the garden of a Silent Chamber. It leads one to communicate with the spirits.'³⁷

³³ For a full translation and discussion of this passage, see Campamy 2002, p. 49.

³⁴ Strickmann 2002, pp. 36–9; Kohn 1993–5; Kubo Noritada 1960.

³⁵ Cai Yongmin (ed.) 1996, p. 323; Duke and Ayensu 1985, p. 477; Smith and Stuart 2003, p. 319. For a colour photo, see Xu Guojun (ed.) 1990, pp. 184–5.

³⁶ DZ 388:2.10b4; cited in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032: 82.7 as 'Method of Yu of Xia bestowed on the Perfected'. The passage also includes several alternative names for the herb, some of which indicate the appearance, characteristics or effects of the herb: *yehu* 夜呼 (night crier), *danggen* 蕩根 (shaking root), *danglu* 當陸, *xianlu* 莧陸, *zhanggen* 長根, *shanglu cao* 商陸草, *shenlu* 神陸, *baihua* 百華 (white floreate), *zhuxie* 逐邪 (expelling deviance), *zhu yinzhijing* 逐陰之精 (expelling Yin essence).

³⁷ DZ 388:2.10b10.

The qualities of *zhanglu* are described in different terms in contemporary medical texts and pharmacopeias. *Zhanglu* (here named *shanglu*) is listed among the third rank of medicinals in the early medieval *Shennong bencaojing* 神農本草經, which describes it as: ‘acid, balanced. It controls water distention, mounting conglomerations and impediments, smoothes and removes abscesses and swellings, kills ghosts and demons.’³⁸ Similar effects are also described in the Song-era *Zhenglei bencao* 證類本草:

[Shanglu’s] flowers control men’s minds causing confusion and blockage, leading to forgetfulness and delight in folly. Pick the flowers, dry in shade for a hundred days and then pound to a fine powder. Ingest one spatula with water at sunset, lie down and think upon your desires. They will spontaneously appear in your eyes.³⁹

As I have shown elsewhere, the ability to communicate with spirits refers to the hallucinogenic quality of *zhanglu*, which were recognised by both Daoists and medical practitioners. While this psychoactive quality was probably among the intended effects of using *zhanglu* in the recipes in the *Array*, it is far clearer in a ritual found in an early Lingbao text, the *Five Ascendant Talismans*.⁴⁰ In this ritual, *zhanglu* was central in the summoning of the Eight Archivists (*bashi* 八史). The herb is used in several stages in this complex ritual. In the early part of the rite, the root of *zhanglu* is carved into the forms of the 12 spirits of the chronograms (辰), the markers of the 12 double-hours, while the adept visualises their true shape. This causes the spirits to appear. Later in the ritual procedure, the leaves of the *zhanglu* were used in infusions, as the adept summoned the Eight Archivists.

However, the use of *zhanglu* in the recipe for the expulsion of the three worms probably stems from another of its side-effects, reported in Ming-era pharmacopeia *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目, which describes it as poisonous and its improper use leads to bloody stools as well as hallucinations.⁴¹ I suggest that in this case, the purgative effects of *zhanglu*, and particularly the bloody stool, was perceived by practitioners as evidence that the ‘crouching corpses’ were indeed eradicated and removed. While contemporary medical practitioners, and modern readers especially, may view the psychoactive and purgative

³⁸ *Shennong bencaojing* 3: 14b. Yang Shouzhong 1998, p. 82.

³⁹ *Zhenglei bencao* 11.

⁴⁰ *Taishang wuji dadao ziran zhenyi wuchengfu shangjing* 太上無極 大道自然真一五稱符上經 DZ 671. Dunhuang manuscript P.2440 *Lingbao zhenyi wuchengjing* 靈寶真一五稱經 is an early version of the text and includes several important variants; published in Ōfuchi Ninji 1978, pp. 10–22. For a colour illustration, see Little with Eichman (eds) 2000, pp. 201–3; Ishii Masako 1983, pp. 164–7. For a comparison of the two versions, see Raz 1996. For a study of the ritual, see Raz 2005.

⁴¹ Li Shizhen 李時珍, *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (comp. 1552–1578), 14.17.7–8.

effects of ingesting *zhanglu* as dangerous, for practitioners these effects were in fact proof of the efficacy of the practice. On the one hand, the divergent understandings of the psychophysical effects of ingesting *zhanglu* we find in Daoist texts and in medical texts exemplify the notion of ‘set and setting’. The ‘set’ of hallucinatory and purgative effects are interpreted by practitioners through their interpretive lens, or ‘setting’, which assumed the existence of a complex realm of spirits which extended from the celestial to the bodily microcosm. It is within this assumed cosmos that the practitioner sought to communicate with spirits and expel demonic parasites from the body.

On the other hand, we should remember that the Daoist ‘setting’ was not stable and clearly defined. Rather, as we saw above, there were differences in aetiologies of illness, definitions of health, and understandings of the body among Daoist practitioners. Thus, while the hallucinatory and purgative effects of ingesting *zhanglu* were indeed sought after by early Daoist practitioners, the use of psychoactive herbs was soon replaced by guided meditation and visualisation, based on complex breathing techniques, such as the method of the Five Sprouts. The significance of the note appended to the recipe in the *Array* is precise in revealing a moment of such shift in Daoist practice.

The use of psychoactive herbs was, perhaps, discontinued because the correct dosage was so difficult to obtain and control. Different body types would of course need slight adjustments in preparation, which may also cause unwanted and untoward effects. Most importantly, the techniques of breathing and visualisation could produce similar effects, without dangerous side-effects. In the case here, I argue that the altered states of consciousness, ‘communication with spirits’, induced by ingesting *zhanglu*, was replaced by the meditative technique of the Five Sprouts. The final comment on this passage is thus indicative of a larger trend in the Daoist tradition, as it shifted away from older traditions of ‘external’ practices such as ingesting herbs, minerals, alchemy and sexual practices and replacing them with ‘internal’ practices. Indeed, the internalisation and sublimation of practice is one of the major motifs in the development of Daoism.

IV Variant methods of the Five Sprouts

IV.1 Array of the Five Talismans *and* Scripture of the Perfected One

The brief editorial note discussed in the previous section alerted us to the importance of the Five Sprouts in the *Array of the Five Talismans*. In fact, we find that the Five Sprouts are embedded in two distinct, and competing, ritual

schemes in the text. In the main body of the text, the practice is embedded in a ritual programme for an Offering rite *jiao* 醮 that remains one of the basic modules in Daoist ritual to the present. We should also stress that while in the note the purpose of imbibing the Five Sprouts is the expulsion of the three worms, without further purpose or outcome, in the two rituals discussed below, the method of the Five Sprouts is subordinated to larger ritual and cosmological schemes.

The most basic form of the practice is preserved in the *Scripture of the Perfected One* (*Zhenyi jing* 真一經). This text forms the final section of the *Array*, but was in fact composed by a distinct and rival lineage. Intriguingly, a variant of the *Zhenyi jing* is also preserved as chapter 18 ‘Terrestrial Perfection’ 地真 of Ge Hong’s *Inner Chapters*.⁴² While the two texts contain much of the same material, the sequence of passages in the two texts differs, and there are major differences indicating that the texts were formulated in distinct traditions of practice. One major difference between the two texts concerns the passage from the *Scripture of the Perfected One* translated below, which presents precise instructions for ingesting the Five Sprouts. These instructions are preceded by a narrative that suborns the method of the Five Sprouts to a cosmological scheme of the Three Ones, as well as providing a complex and detailed homology between the individual body and the state. The section on the Three Ones and the homology between the body and the state is also found in Ge Hong’s chapter, but in this version there is no mention of the Five Sprouts.

Several other sections of the *Array of the Five Talismans* are closely aligned with the *Scripture of the Perfected One*, and are distinct from the main body of the *Array*.⁴³ These sections, however, are closely affiliated with yet another early text, the *Central Scripture of Laozi* (*Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經). This intriguing text shares several notions with the *Scripture of the Perfected One*, including the cosmology of the Three Ones and a variant of the method of the Five Sprouts. I discuss this text in more detail in the next section, but will refer to it in passing below.

The narrative context for the transmission of the instructions for the method of the Five Sprouts is a quest by the Yellow Thearch to obtain long life (願得

⁴² For details, see Raz 2004. For a translation of the latter, see Raz (forthcoming).

⁴³ (1) ‘The Way of Imbibing Lunar and Solar Essences’ 食日月精之道 (Array 1.18b8–26a8). This section includes two sections: (a) A contemplative method of imbibing solar and lunar qi; (b) A method of imbibing the qi of the Three-Ones, predicated on the homology of the human body and the cosmos. (2) ‘Names of All Heavens from the Luminary’s Scripture of the Perfected One by the Most High’ 皇人太上真一經諸天名 (Array 3.14a10). This section is in celestial script.

長生).⁴⁴ After travelling around the realm, the emperor finally encounters the Luminary Person (Huangren 皇人) in a cave within Mt. E'mei. The Luminary agrees to teach the Yellow Thearch, and begins by explaining that only after 'attaining the two celestial writs, the *Genuine One* and *Consuming the Five Sprouts* can one dispatch the Lord of the South Dipper and have one's registers matched against the lock and keys 鍵籥 of the Great Thearch'.⁴⁵ The Yellow Thearch begs for instruction of the *Scripture of the Five Sprouts*, and the Luminary begins:

According to what you had said earlier what you do not understand of the words of the Perfected Scriptures is that the celestial *qi* are gathered in one's body. If the body is clearly understood then one can obtain longevity. Note that among living creatures humans are the most numinous.⁴⁶ But, people do not know themselves, and cannot maintain their [bodily] spirits to resist the various evils. If you know this, you would not seek aid from the celestial spirits; it suffices to stop at the body. Therefore it is said the human body is the image of the state.⁴⁷ The status of the chest and belly are like the palace halls and the arrangement of arms and legs is like the suburbs. The divisions of the joints and bones is as that of the hundred officials. The spirit is like the lord, the blood like ministers, and the *qi* is like people. Therefore, knowing how to administer the body, you will know how to administer a kingdom. [Just as] one cherishes the people so as to bring peace to the kingdom, one [must] cherish his *qi* so as to keep his body whole. If the people are scattered, the country will collapse, if *qi* is exhausted, the body dies. What has collapsed cannot be preserved, and what has died cannot live. Therefore, the person of ultimate attainment resolves disaster before it occurs, and heals disease prior to infection. He cures it before it becomes a problem, and does not chase it after it has gone. People are hard to nurture but easy to contaminate. Therefore, you should carefully wield authority and virtue in order to protect the principles;⁴⁸ cut off desires in order to consolidate blood and *qi*. Then, the Perfected One will thereby be preserved, [3.20b8] the Three-Ones will thereby be maintained,⁴⁹ the body will thereby be strengthened, and your life span will thereby be extended.⁵⁰ The *niwan* 泥丸, Scarlet Palace, and cinnabar field are the perfected of the Three Ones. If you maintain them, then the myriad poisons and thousand demons will

⁴⁴ This narrative is also found in Ge Hong's chapter; see note 42.

⁴⁵ DZ 388: 3.19b3. The Lord of the South Dipper was in charge of the registers of life in the bureaucratic cosmology of medieval Daoism. For example, *Nüqing guilü* 女青鬼律 DZ 790: 1.9a; *Master Redpine's Almanac of Petitions Chisongzi zhangli* 赤松子章歷 DZ 615: 4.6a, and Lu Xiuqing's *Taishang dongxuan lingbao fazhu jing* 太上洞玄靈寶法燭經 DZ 349.8a.

⁴⁶ The section beginning with this sentence [3:20a8] and on to 20b9 is cited in *Wushang biyao* DZ 1138: 5.6b5–7a7, under the title *Scripture of the Luminary (Huangren jing 皇人經)*.

⁴⁷ Parallels *Baopuzi neipian* 18.326.10–15, this text does not refer to the Five Sprouts.

⁴⁸ *Baopuzi neipian* 18.326.14 has 'carefully wield authority and virtue in order to protect the state' 審威德所以保社稷.

⁴⁹ *Baopuzi neipian* 18.326.15 has 'three and seven will thereby be maintained'. Three and seven probably refer to the three cloud-souls and seven white-souls (*sanhun qipo* 三魂七魄).

⁵⁰ The section in *Baopuzi* ends with the lines: 'the hundred harms will thereby be expelled, and your life's allotment will be extended'. *Baopuzi neipian* 18.326.15.

not dare harm you. People who ceaselessly imbibe the liquids of the Floreate pool and ingest the Five Sprouts will become transcendents.⁵¹

Following the complex analogies between the body and the state, this passage introduces a complex inner anatomy which, based on a tripartite division of the body, has three loci defined as the dwellings of the Three Ones: the upper locus, within the skull, is named *niwan*, literally ‘muddy pellet’, which was originally a transcription of nirvana. The middle centre, the Scarlet Palace, is the heart. The lower centre is the cinnabar field, generally defined as a locus within the abdomen, two inches below the navel.

The importance of Cinnabar Field in traditions of self-cultivation is already attested in the Han era.⁵² The three centres first appear in Daoist texts of the medieval era, the *Zhenyi jing* among the earliest of them, and eventually accepted by most Daoist lineages. Interestingly, the passage uses the rhetoric of medical practice to claim that healing and curing should preempt illness. This claim of course undercuts mundane medical practice.

For an explanation of the Three-Ones we may turn to the opening passage of Ge Hong’s chapter. This passage is also included in the *Scripture of the Perfected One*, but it lacks the line regarding the Three-Ones. Importantly, this passage is heavily indebted to the *Daode jing*.⁵³

If you comprehend unity, then all matters will be complete.⁵⁴ If you know the One then nothing will be unknown. If you do not know the One, then nothing may be known. The Dao arises in the One; its value is unique. All things harbour the One, and by it emulate heaven, earth and humanity, hence it is called Three Ones. Heaven by attaining the One gains clarity. The spirits by attaining the One gain efficacy. Earth by attaining the One gains tranquility. Humanity by attaining the One gains life ...⁵⁵

We should note that while this passage cites *Daode jing* 39 in which One is evidently an aspect of Dao that grants all things of the world their essential characteristic, it also assumes that there are three special aspects of the manifested world that exemplify their close alignment with the One: heaven, earth

⁵¹ DZ 388: 3.20a6–21b1.

⁵² For example, on the imperial inscription to Laozi 老子銘 and on the stele inscription to Wangzi qiao 王子橋碑. For details, see Raz 2012, p. 83.

⁵³ *Baopuzi neipian* 18.323.

⁵⁴ DZ 388: 3.22a10 says: ‘If you know the cinnabar [method] of the perfected One, then the myriad affairs will be extended.’

⁵⁵ *Daode jing* 39: ‘Those who attained the One anciently: Heaven attained the One and thereby became clear, Earth attained the One and thereby became tranquil, the spirits attained the One and thereby became numinous, the valley attained the One and thereby became abundant, the myriad creatures attained the One and thereby gained life.’ The sequence here switches the positions of Earth and Spirits, ignores the valley, and replaces *wanwu* with humanity.

and humanity. While this passage refers to the Dao, it is also clear that this is no longer the ineffable Dao of the *Daode jing*, but a divine entity which can be visualised within the body:

The One has a surname and name, clothes of specific colour. It is nine inches in height in men, six in women. It is located either in the Lower Cinnabar Field, two and a half inches below the navel, or in the Golden Porte of the Crimson Palace below the heart, the Middle Cinnabar Field. Sometimes it is between a person's eye brows. As you progress within, at one inch is the Bright Hall 明堂, two inches within is the Cavern Chamber 洞房 and three inches within is the Upper Cinnabar Field.⁵⁶

While this passage provides us with the same locations of the Three Ones we saw in the *Scripture of the Perfected One*, it is not included in this text. The assertion that One, or Dao, can be named, described and localised within the body was not accepted by most Daoist lineages. The fact that the *Scripture of the Perfected One* elides this passage is further indication of the distinct cosmologies and practices advocated by the authors of these various texts.⁵⁷

The text continues by providing detailed instructions of the method of the Five Sprouts. The practitioner is to face the directional heavens in turn, and incant the appropriate formula. The incantations for the cardinal directions are all structured similarly, while the formula for centre differs slightly, indicating its importance. Each incantation begins by announcing the direction and the name of the respective directional effluvia. Then the adept announces the ingestion (*fushi* 服食) of that effluvium, and the imbibing (*yin* 飲) of the associated liquid. Each incantation is followed by precise instructions for complex manipulations of the teeth, tongue and lips, thereby producing saliva, which is then swallowed. It is important to note that the physical exercise is composed of two parts: the inhalation of the directional *qi* followed by the swallowing of saliva, which is understood to be the liquid form of the directional essence. The full instructions are as follows:⁵⁸

Facing the dawn, secretly incant: 'Green sprout of the east; I ingest the green sprout, and imbibe the dawn blossoms.' Following the incantation, put your tongue to the surface of your upper teeth, and lick your lips to inundate your mouth 漱口. When your mouth is full swallow three times.

Next, incant: 'Cinnabar elixir of the south; I ingest cinnabar elixir, and imbibe the cinnabar pool.' Following the incantation, put your tongue on the surface of your lower teeth, and lick your lips to inundate your mouth. When your mouth is full swallow three times.

⁵⁶ *Baopuzi neipian* 18.323.

⁵⁷ For more details on this point, see Raz 2012, pp. 34–5.

⁵⁸ DZ 388 3: 21a–b; this is the passage cited by Sima Chengzhen in his treatise; see section II.

Table 1. The Five Sprouts in *Zhenyi jing*

Direction	East	South	Centre	West	North
Effluvia	Green Sprouts <i>qingya</i> 青芽	Ruby-Cinnabar <i>zhudan</i> 朱丹	Central <i>wuji</i> Taishan	Bright Stone <i>mingshi</i> 明石	Dark Shoots <i>xuanzi</i> 玄滋
Liquid Source	Dawn Blossoms <i>chaohua</i> 朝華	Cinnabar pool <i>danchi</i> 丹池	Liquor Font <i>Liquan</i> 醴泉	Numinous Fluid <i>lingye</i> 靈液	Jade Syrup <i>yuyi</i> 玉飴

Next incant: ‘At *wuji* in the centre, there is eminent Mt. Tai.⁵⁹ I ingest the essence and *qi*, and imbibe the liquor font.’ Following the incantation, raise your tongue [to the roof of your mouth], and mysteriously draw water of the Jade spring, lick your lips to inundate your mouth. When your mouth is full swallow three times.

Next incant: ‘Luminous Rocks of the west. I ingest the luminous rocks and imbibe the numinous liquid.’ Following the incantation, put your tongue over your teeth, lick your lips to inundate your mouth. When your mouth is full swallow three times. Then clack your teeth seven times. Stop. Then clack them five times. Continue for a total of thirty-six times.

Next incant saying: ‘Dark Fluid of the north. I ingest the dark fluid and imbibe the jade syrup.’ After saying the incantation roll your tongue,⁶⁰ lick your lips, and swallow it three times. Stop. Then fill your nose with air and slowly release it. Make this [exhalation] longer than five [breaths].

At this point, I should reiterate that the practice of the Five Sprouts in this section of the text is subordinated to the cosmological scheme of the Three Ones, which in fact rivals the scheme of the five phases that informs the practice itself. This cosmological subordination is more apparent when this scheme is contrasted with the Offering ritual described in the main body of the *Array of the Five Talismans*. In this complex ritual, the ingestion of the Five Sprouts is used to summon the celestial emperors of the five directions, who guarantee the bestowal of the five Lingbao talismans. The ritual is modelled on Han imperial ritual and ideology, and thoroughly based on five-phase cosmology.⁶¹

⁵⁹ This is an odd statement. Mt. Tai is the eastern of the five Marchmounts, and I know of no system in which it is considered the centre.

⁶⁰ Literally ‘place your tongue under your tongue’.

⁶¹ See Raz 2007.

IV.2 Central Scripture of Laozi

Another early example for the ingestion of the Five Sprouts is found in the *Central Scripture of Laozi*, which probably dates to the late second or third century.⁶² This text consists of 55 passages in two chapters that list the spirits of the cosmos, beginning with the highest manifestation of the Dao, ‘the supreme uppermost Great One, the father of the Dao’ and correlating them to the various organs of the human body. The Central Scripture is closely related to the *Scripture of the Perfected One*. The two texts share several passages, and both present a similar tripartite division of the body. The cosmology of the *Central Scripture*, however, is more complex. The main deity in the text is Great One (Taiyi 太一), the high god of the Han dynasty.⁶³ More importantly, Great One is a cosmogonic deity in the recently unearthed manuscript ‘Great One Gave Birth to Water’ (*Taiyi shengshui* 太一生水), which was discovered together with fragments of the *Daode jing* at Guodian.⁶⁴ According to this cosmogony, Great One, a unique and unchanging entity, produces all things in the world through a series of copulations. The cosmogonic process begins with Great One, on its own, producing water. Water then reverts and joins with Taiyi to produce heaven. Heaven reverts and joins with Great One to produce earth. After water, heaven and earth are complete, the process proceeds with a further series of copulations, beginning with heaven and earth, until the seasons and time itself, the year, is produced. The text then stresses the continuing centrality of Great One in the operation of the cosmos:

Therefore, Great One is treasured in water, and moves in accord to the seasons. Circulating and again [four missing graphs; probably ‘it takes itself as’] the mother of the myriad things...

The relationship between this text and the *Daode jing* is far beyond the scope of this paper.⁶⁵ Suffice it to say that in some early traditions, Great One was perceived as a cosmogonic deity, perhaps as equivalent to Dao. The *Central*

⁶² *Laozi zhongjing* is preserved in two almost identical versions in the *Daozang*: as an independent scripture, entitled *Taishang Laozi zhongjing* 太上老子中經 DZ 1168, and as *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經, alternately entitled *Jade Calendar of the Pearly Palace* (*Zhugong yuli* 珠宮玉曆), in *Yunji qiqian* DZ 1032, *juan* 18–19. Kristofer Schipper dates the text to the late Han (TC, p. 93). Maeda and Kato suggest later dates. Studies of this text include: Schipper 1979; Shi Zhouren 施舟人 (Schipper) 1994; Schipper 1997; Maeda Shigeki 1988; Kato Chie 1996; Lagerwey 2004; Liu Yongming 2006.

⁶³ Li Ling 1995–6; Bujard 2000.

⁶⁴ The literature on ‘Taiyi shengshui’ and the Guodian manuscripts more broadly is enormous. I list here only a few English language works: Henricks 2000, pp. 126–9; Puett 2002, pp. 160–4; Harper 2001.

⁶⁵ Recent studies on this issue include Allan 2003; Jia 2009.

Scripture shares in this ancient tradition. Great One appears in passage 1 as the ancestor of the Dao, but reappears in several, multiple locations in the body. We will see several examples in the following.

Beyond mapping precisely the homology between the macrocosm and the microcosm, the text also provides precise instructions for visualising and communicating with the spirits. Thus, proper use of the text would allow the practitioner to recognise and activate the body gods, match them with the macrocosmic deities, and fully integrate with the Dao. For example, passage 4 describes the cosmic and bodily domains of the ancient goddess, the Queen-Mother of the West:⁶⁶

The Queen-Mother of the West is the Primal pneuma of Grand Yin.... She is surnamed Spontaneity 自然, and named 'Lordly Meditation' 君思. Below, her domain is Mt. Kunlun, in the nine-layered gold citadel encompassed by multi-coloured clouds and myriad patterns atop cliffs 100,000 feet tall cliffs. Above, her domain is the Northern Dipper in the Floreate Canopy, below the Purple Chamber within Northern Asterism. She is also present in the human body, within the right eye. She is surnamed Grand Yin 太陰, named Dark Radiance 玄光, and her byname is Hidden Jade 偃玉. You must have the King-Father and Queen-Mother protect your two eyes.⁶⁷ Then you can proceed forth with acute sight and hearing, and distinguishing good from bad, you will flow with the various spirits. As the mother thinks of her sons, so do the sons think of the mother. If the essence and *qi* interact, you may live for a myriad generations. A human's two nipples are the ford for the essence, *qi* and yin and yang of the myriad spirits. Below the left nipple is the sun, below the right nipple is the moon. These are the residences of the King-Father and Queen-Mother. Their upper domain are the eyes, they cavort in the head. At rest, they are below the nipples, sleeping in the Purple Chamber of the Scarlet Palace. They are the *qi* of yin and yang.⁶⁸

This passage is a re-inscription of the ancient goddess, Queen-Mother of the West, into the complex cosmography of the *Central Scripture*. She is simultaneously present in the celestial realm, in the Dipper, in a terrestrial abode, mythical Mt. Kunlun, and in the human body. Moreover, within the body, she is found at two locations, in the head and in the chest. These are the two upper realms of the body. The third central locus is the Cinnabar Field, which is described in passage 17:

The Cinnabar Field is the root of a human; it is the location where essence and spirit are preserved; it is the source of the five *qi*. It is the palace of the Cinnabar Child. Here males preserve their semen (精), and females preserve their menstrual

⁶⁶ The literature on this goddess is vast. Among the major studies include: Cahill 1993; Goldin 2002; Wu 1989, pp. 106–40 *et passim*.

⁶⁷ This is also mentioned in passage 2.

⁶⁸ DZ 1032: 18.3a.

blood (月水). It is in charge of producing children, as is the gateway wherein yin and yang are harmonised. It is three inches below the navel, adjacent to the spinal column 脊脊 at the root of the two kidneys. The interior of the Cinnabar Field is red at the centre, green to the left, white to the right, white above, and black below. Its circumference is four inches. As it is three inches below the navel it is said to be a model of heaven, earth, and humanity. Heaven is one, earth is two, humanity is three, and time [lit. the seasons] is four. Hence it is said, four inches model the five phases; hence, it has the five colours. Clear water village is Aoqiu 敖丘 hamlet.⁶⁹ Cinnabar Field is named Place of Preserving Essence. Its spirit is surnamed Kong, named Qiu, and its byname is Zhongni. Those who transmit this, become a master 傳之為師. You should regularly meditate upon this at midnight: visualise the red *qi* of your heart ascending to the floreate canopy of the Crimson Palace, and each circulating to the right (clockwise). Great One will enter the Yellow Court. Your *qi* will fill the Great Granary and nourish the Cinnabar Child. It will then revert to the great abyss. Suddenly, confusedly you will not know where you are (忽忽不知所在). Once again, visualise the *qi* of Great One entering the Cinnabar Field. Stop. Regularly visualise the Great One, Mother of the Dao Mystic Radiance nourishing the Perfected Child-Cinnabar (Zidan 子丹) within the body. He is named after you. Do not forget this.⁷⁰

The Cinnabar Field is thus the centre of the body, and is itself a microcosm, as symbolised by its pentachromatic interior, wherein the *qi* of the five organs originate. Intriguingly, the resident spirit of the Cinnabar Field is Confucius. It is the locus of life, where the male and female store their most vital aspects. Circulating the *qi* of Great One so that it enters the Cinnabar nourishes the Cinnabar Child. This perfected embryo is the simulacrum of the practitioner, which when completed will become the replacement form with which the practitioner will attain transcendence. Indeed, several passages in the text are focused on the production and nourishing of the Cinnabar Child, often as a product of the hierogamy of the Mother and Father of the Dao. For example, in passage 3:

King-Father is in the left eye, the Queen-Mother is in the right eye. The Child is in the middle of the two eyes. If you wish to cultivate perfection, you must contemplate the King-Father of the East and the Queen-Mother of the West, and that precisely on your head there are three persons standing together. Then, you must merge the essential radiance of the sun and moon to descend in meditation to Great One in the purple chamber, the Yellow Court at the Vermilion Palace, and the Cinnabar Field in the Great Abyss. Cause their perfect *qi* to circulate five times, so it pervades your abdomen. Then, circulate the *qi* again twelve times, so it pervades your whole body.⁷¹

⁶⁹ The referents here are unclear.

⁷⁰ DZ 1032: 18.13a.

⁷¹ DZ 1032: 18.2b.

In the meditative exercise in this passage, the practitioner is to first envision the King-Father, Queen-Mother, and the Child atop his head. He is then to visualise and merge the solar and lunar *qi* causing them to descend and circulate through the three centres of the body, the purple chamber in the head, the vermilion palace in the heart, and the Cinnabar Field.

It is only in passage 27 that we encounter the Five Sprouts. The passage states that the goal of the practice is to expel the three worms, so that one may ‘become a spirit transcendent of the Dao and not die’. The text provides the names of the five directional effluvia along with the source from which they are imbibed. These mysterious fonts we now suspect are in fact saliva glands that are activated by the complex movements of the tongue in accord with precise instructions:

If you sincerely wish to become a spirit transcendent of the Dao and not die, you must first expel the three worms and expurgate the crouching corpses. For three days, you should ingest *qi*, a hundred times sixty breaths. After ingesting thirty times, rest. After another ninety breaths, rest. On the fourth day you would attain it. Always incant the following at midnight and at cock-crow:

‘Green sprouts of the east, purple clouds and streaming auroras. I imbibe the green sprouts and ingest the dawn blossoms.’ Swallow it three times.

‘Ruby cinnabar of the south, criss-crossing blazing radiances. I ingest the ruby cinnabar and drink from the cinnabar pool.’ Swallow it three times.

‘Yellow *qi* of the centre, eminent transcendent of the yellow court. I ingest the yellow *qi* and drink from the liquor font.’ Swallow it three times.

‘Luminous rocks of the west, bright-white numina of metallic essence. I ingest the luminous rocks and drink from the metallic liquid.’ Swallow it three times.

‘Dark shoots of the north, dark pearls of moist shoots. I ingest the dark shoots and drink from the jade fluid.’ Swallow it three times.

If you practise this for thirty days the three worms will all die, the crouching corpses will be expelled, the three spirits will be rectified, and your *qi* will of itself be pacified. The crouching corpses will not dare return into your body. You will become a spirit transcendent and not die. You will be inscribed with jade characters on gold. Riding clouds, you will ascend.⁷²

While the technical names of the liquids ingested in each direction and the incantations are similar to the Five Sprouts method described in *Zhenyi jing*, the final section of the *Array*, the purpose of the practice echoes that found in the note appended to the recipe, namely the expulsion of the three worms and crouching corpses. The passage in the Central Scripture of Laozi may indeed be representative of the earlier understanding of the practice, before it was embedded and suborned in larger ritual schemes, as we find in the *Array of the Five Talismans*.

⁷² DZ 1032: 18.22a–23b.

Table 2. The Five Sprouts in the *Central Scripture of Laozi*

Direction	East	South	Centre	West	North
Sprout	Green Sprouts <i>qingya</i> 青芽	Ruby-cinnabar <i>zhudan</i> 朱丹	Central Yellow pneuma of the Yellow Court	Bright Stone <i>mingshi</i> 明石	Dark Shoots <i>xuanzi</i> 玄滋
Liquid Source	Dawn Blossoms <i>chaohua</i> 朝華	Cinnabar pool <i>danchi</i> 丹池	Liquor Font <i>Liquan</i> 醴泉	Metallic Fluid <i>Jinye</i> 金液	Jade Syrup <i>yuyi</i> 玉飴

The final attainment of this practice is the eradication of the ‘three worms’ and the ‘crouching corpses’, and the refinement of the bodily spirits. The adept will thereby ‘become a spirit transcendent and not die; [his name] will be inscribed with jade characters on gold, and riding clouds he will ascend.’⁷³

IV.3 Ingesting the Cloud Sprouts of the Four Culmens

Although named Ingestion of the Four Cloud Sprouts this method is actually another variant elaboration of the method of the Five Sprouts, and the text provides clear instructions for the inhalation of the *qi* of the five directions.⁷⁴ This method is clearly associated with the Shangqing tradition,⁷⁵ but the text was probably not part of the original Shangqing revelations. The complex cosmology presented in this text defines the *qi* of the five directions as the ‘the essential *qi* of the five ancient ones, the auroral vapors of grand culmen’ (9b8). References to the Five Ancient Ones are found already in Han texts, where the term refers to ancient sages. In the Lingbao scriptures, composed *ca.* 400, this term is adopted as a reference to the manifestations of the five directions that were emblematic of unfathomably long epochal changes. This cosmology was a reaction to Buddhist notions of space and time, especially the vast time frames of kalpa cycles. The reference in this text is based on the cosmology

⁷³ DZ 1032: 18.22a–b.

⁷⁴ *Taiji zhenren fu siji yunya shenxian shangfang* 太極真人服四極雲牙神仙上方 is currently the second part of the *Upper Clarity Scripture and Instructions of the Luminous Hall and Profound Perfection* (*Shangqing mingtang yuanzhen jingjue* 上清明堂元真經訣 DZ 424.6a–10a. The text may have originally been part of *Qingxu zhenren Wangjun neizhuan* 清虛真人王君內專, the hagiography of Wang Bao. For details, see Robinet, 1984, vol. I, pp. 52, 54, 111; vol. II, pp. 363–4, 369–73. This passage is also found in *Wozhong jue* 握中訣 DZ 140.3.9a–b (Robinet 1984, vol. II, p. 357); *Shangqing taiji zhenren shenxian jing* 上清太極真人神仙經 DZ 1404.1a–4b; and in *Wushang biyao* 無上祕要 DZ 1138: 76.8b–11a (citing the *Daoji jing*).

⁷⁵ The method was purportedly transmitted by Master Xiliang, the Perfected of the Great Culmen 西梁君太極真人 to Wang Bao 王褒清虛真人, the Perfected of the Clear Void, who in turn transmitted it to Wei Huacun.

Table 3. The Five Sprouts in the *Cloud Sprouts of the Four Culmens*

East	South	West	North	Centre (Primordial <i>wuji</i> 戊己之元)
Purple Cloud of Green Sprouts 青牙紫雲	Auroral Radiance of Ruby Cinnabar 朱丹霞曜	Flying Auroras of Clear Rocks 明石飛霞	Blessed Clouds of Dark Shoots 玄滋慶雲	Five Clouds of Yellow Simplicity 黃素五雲

developed in the Lingbao scriptures. It was probably redacted after the appearance of the Lingbao scriptures; that is, in the mid-fifth century. More pertinently for us, this method co-opts the earlier method of the Five Sprouts, associated with the Lingbao tradition, and subordinates it to the Shangqing cosmological and ritual scheme. The names of the Cloud Sprouts are based on the Five Sprouts listed in the *Array*, while the added references to clouds and auroras may be based on the incantations in the *Central Scripture*.

The attainment envisaged in this text is far beyond the expulsion of the three worms, which are not even mentioned here. The ingestion of the cloud sprouts promises total physical transformation, as the body of the practitioner will be refined into an ethereal, radiant form that will bodily ascend to the heavens and transcend. Ingesting the cloud sprouts causes the body to glow internally and be radiant externally:

The Perfected imbibe the rays of the primordial dawn of the five directions and ingest the essence of the nine auroras. Thereby their spirits are illuminated. Internally they irradiate ruby blossoms and externally, their entire body generates jade rays. Their physical form will become as limpid as *qi*. Practise this for ten years and the Elders of the Four Culmens and the Primordial Lady of the centre will descend and merge with you. Riding clouds and driving dragons you will ascend to the heavens in broad daylight. (6a4–6).

We should note, however, that though the ingestion of the Sprouts may be amazingly efficacious, this practice is subordinated to a higher ritual scheme. Upon completion of the practice, several perfected persons will descend and present the adept with further texts and devices, more subtle and efficacious. An interlinear commentary explicates the arcane terms as titles of texts or talismans (in brackets):

The Elder of the Eastern Culmen will transmit the *Azure Perfection* 青真 (title of scripture); the Elder of the Southern Culmen will transmit the *Cinnabar Radiance* 丹景 (title of scripture); the Elder of the Western Culmen will transmit the *Unadorned Numinous Awesome Spirits* 素靈威神 (name of six talismans); the Elder of the Northern Culmen will transmit the *Mystic Registers of Treasured*

Brightness 玄錄寶明 (name of text); the Primordial Lady of the Centre and Master Huanglao of Supreme Profundity will transmit the *Registers and Petitions of Yellow Pneuma Yang Essence for Secreting Heaven, Hiding the Moon and Concealing Shadows* 黃氣陽精藏天隱月遁景祿章 and *Azure Essentials Tiger Text* 青要虎書 (names of text, talismans and petitions).⁷⁶

What we find here is that the method of the Five Sprouts is embedded in a far more complex cosmology than that envisioned in the *Array* and the *Central Scripture*. While the practice seems subordinated to the larger ritual goals of attaining further teachings, we should also see that the method of ingesting the cloud-sprouts was also perceived as necessary preliminary step. We should, perhaps, interpret the procedure of receiving the higher texts and teachings as occurring within the altered state attained through the method of ingesting the cloud-sprouts.

IV.4 Scripture of Initial Vitality of the Green Sprouts

A particularly intriguing variant of the practice is found in the *Scripture of Initial Vitality of the Green Sprouts of the Most High from the Cavern of Perfection*.⁷⁷ Unlike the methods we saw above which were aimed at individual practitioners, this method is to be practised by a pair of initiates between the ages of 12 and 15. Intriguingly, this practice seems to be a replacement of sexual practices—and may be an example of the attempts to reform the sexual ‘merging qi’ (*heqi* 合氣) practices of the Celestial Masters.⁷⁸

Although the text does not include instructions as to how the sprouts are to be ingested, the effects promised by the text clearly hark back to the earliest variants of the method of the Five Sprouts, as well as incorporating the greater attainments envisioned in the *Lingbao* and *Shangqing* scriptures. If practised for five years, this method would cause ‘the three corpses to be obliterated, the five spirits to secure [one’s body]. One will roam with the five celestial emperors and ramble freely at the three purities’ (1b1).

The sprouts here are named simply by their directional colours, and not by the arcane names as in the *Array*. Two key technical terms in this system imply a set of metaphors which may also inform the use of the term ‘sprouts’ in the other variants of this practice. The sprouts are defined as the ‘primordial image’ (*yuanxiang* 元象) of the phase, and the ‘Initial vitality’ (*shisheng* 始生) of their pneuma is described in terms of atmospherics. The passage on the Green Sprout of the East is typical:

⁷⁶ DZ 424.7a1–8a9.

⁷⁷ *Dongzhen taishang qingya shisheng jing* 洞真太上青牙始生經 DZ 1349.

⁷⁸ For details on Daoist debates regarding sexual practice, see Raz 2008; Raz, 2012, ch. 4.

Green Sprout of the East is the primordial image of azure heaven. In the centre it becomes the Year Star (Jupiter). It flows to become the essence of wood. Below it becomes Mt. Tai and secures (*zhen* 鎮) the liver. The Initial vitality of its *qi* is like the first buds of spring grass. Its light gleams like the rays of the blazing sun. Ingested together by a couple, they will unify with the spirits.

東方青牙元象蒼天；中為歲星流為木精。下為太山，真人肝府。其炁始生，如春曹之初萌，其光啟耀，如暉日之發芒。二人共吞與神同一。

The term ‘primordial image’ is probably an allusion to *Daode jing* which defines the Dao as the Great Image 大象, and in another passage describes the ‘indistinct Dao, within are images’. Thus, the sprouts are the primordial images of the five heavens, which precede the formation of the respective stars and phases. The sprouts therefore mediate between the heavens, which are pure potentiality but lack physicality, and the manifested things of the world. The initial vitality of the sprouts then brings about the formation of the basic elements of the world in their five-phase correlates: the stars of the heavens, the five Peaks on earth, and the viscera in the body. The use of the term ‘images’ also implies that the sprouts are functionally and structurally equivalent to the five primordial talismans, which are also defined as ‘images’.

The practice the text is alluding to is more than simply reforming the sexual practices in which various Daoist lineages were engaged. Rather, this text seems to advocate complete celibacy, which began to appear among Daoist practitioners during the fifth century.⁷⁹

Males and females below the age of twelve may know but not practise this method (知可及之未可行之). Those over twelve years in age who know and practise this will remain unsullied (不經私通), they are called ‘[disciples of] Initial Vitality’.⁸⁰ If one is over fifteen it is too late. One who learns this method late has already suffered much loss (of essence) which would therefore be difficult to replenish. Although one may have remained chaste one has been late in knowing the method of Vitality. Late Vitality, though it may be extended, cannot be called Initial Vitality. If one has engaged in illicit sexual relations before learning of vitality, one must first purify and confess in accord with the codes. If one does not know the method for confession, one may not receive the Scripture of Initial Vitality. (2a9–b4)

The text reiterates the importance of this practice for replenishing the loss of essence caused by sexual practice, ‘if you do not ingest the pneumas of the green sprouts, and do not inhale the fluids of the five colours, although you

⁷⁹ Bumbacher 2000; Wang Chengwen 2002, pp. 435–47.

⁸⁰ *Shisheng* could also be translated as ‘initiates’ but, although unwieldy, I prefer to maintain the same technical term used to describe the sprouts.

may practise many techniques, to the end you will be unable to replenish [your losses].’ (2b8)

IV.5 *The Five Sprouts in medical context*

Returning to Sima Chengzhen’s treatise we find yet another way in which the macrocosm and microcosm interrelate. Unlike the various texts discussed above, Sima discusses the circulation of *qi* Five Sprouts through the body along the system of the meridians:

Whenever ingesting the *qi* of the five sprouts one should contemplate them entering the respective organs, and cause their liquids to spread and pervade [the respective system] of which they are in charge 各依所主. Thus, they circulate through the whole body, and one can thereby heal disease. When ingesting azure *qi* one should contemplate the *qi* entering the liver, visualise the azure *qi* billowing, and visualise the azure liquid condensing. Observe this clearly for a long time, and you will then see the *qi* of the *dadun* 大敦 point on the foot.⁸¹ It will circle and be absorbed back into the vessel, and flow and disperse throughout all the vessels.⁸²

Sima thus elaborates the physical effects of the practice linking it closely to medical conceptions of the body. On the one hand, this seems to remove the practice from the cosmological speculations aligning the Five Sprouts with their full five-phase correlations, as in the *Array of the Five Talismans* or in the method of the Four Cloud Sprouts. On the other hand, by integrating the breathing practice so closely with medical practice the efficacy it claims would be far more acceptable to the audience he was addressing. We should remember that the various texts we examined above were all texts that could only be transmitted to initiates using strict ritual protocols. Sima Chengzhen’s treatise was aimed at a more general audience such as his patrons in the imperial court.

Conclusion

This brief survey of variant methods of the Five Sprouts shows that the same practice, or symbolic module, could be embedded in a variety of ritual and cosmological schemes. While these schemes make sense within the Chinese traditional correlative cosmology and notions of *qi*, they express the far more complex schemes developed by Daoist lineages in medieval China. The

⁸¹ Point LR 1 on the Liver Meridian, on the inside of the right big toe (Kaptchuk 2000, p. 128).

⁸² DZ 1032: 57.5a2–4; the version in DZ 830.4b5 is incomplete.

method of the Five Sprouts is of course part of the pervasive practice of swallowing saliva. Isabelle Robinet has long ago pointed to the importance of ingestion of saliva in Daoist meditation practices, particularly in methods of the Shangqing tradition.⁸³ Several meditation traditions include ways of swallowing saliva so it does not interfere with the practice, as well as provide nourishment during the meditation. However, the efficacy of saliva must be understood in the context of the ancient cosmological ideas which, as shown by Sarah Allan, perceived *qi* as liquid. This understanding was not mere metaphor, but impacted the experience of the world itself. In the terminology borrowed from Wade Davis, this metaphorical system formed the ‘setting’ within which practitioners understood the inhalation of ethereal *qi* and its transformation into liquid form. The method of the Five Sprouts was particularly efficacious as it brought the inhalation and ingestion of *qi* into accord with correlative system of the five phases.

The method of the Five Sprouts remained an important module within these more elaborate schemes, with their particular cosmic and ritual patterns. While it is of course important, and even necessary, to flesh out as much as possible the emic explanations for practice, I find that at some point this becomes a circular language game. More importantly, it allows us to interpret these practices intellectually, and without admitting that anything ‘real’ actually occurs. It is as if the Daoist texts were riddles that we solve, or as real as a video game!

This is clearly not the case. In almost all the cases examined, the practice is in fact subordinated into a larger ritual context. The most basic practice seems to have been a breathing technique coupled with swallowing saliva that was to rid the body of its internal demonic overseers, the three worms or crouching corpses. This method must have been efficacious, as it was incorporated into larger ritual schemes. In discussing the note appended to a herbal recipe for expelling the worms found in the *Array of the Five Talismans*, which is one of the earliest references to the method of the Five Sprouts, I suggested that the ingestion of the sprouts was meant to replace the use of the recipe, and particularly its most active ingredient, the psychoactive and purgative herb *zhanglu*. We may explain the shift in practice as a shift in the understanding of these internal overseers from physical entities to spirits. Like the various other bodily spirits they were thus perceived as localised instantiations of *qi*. Just as the cosmic pantheon described in the *Central Scripture* was apprehended and activated through complex visualisation and breathing techniques, so were the three worms to be expelled through similar *qi* practice. This explanation,

⁸³ Robinet 1993, pp. 90 ff.

however, still begs the question of the efficacy of the practice. The simplest answer is that the guided breathing, with varying speeds of inhalation and exhalation, caused changes in oxygenation levels in the brain, eventually leading to altered states of consciousness.

In the larger schemes, the method of the Five Sprouts seems to serve a basic preparatory stage that is necessary for the more esoteric elements of the complex rite to proceed. As these rites are based in complex visualisation techniques, I suggest that the method of the Five Sprouts brings about a first stage of cognitive changes that enables further more complex visualisations.

Can we, however, explain these practices in modern, scientific terms? How exactly does breathing the *qi* of the five directions actually produce the effects the texts describe? What is the significance of the emphasis on the liquids, i.e. saliva ingested in the practice?

Modern studies correlate various changes in the amount of saliva produced under stress, relaxation and in meditation; studies also show changes in the biochemical constitution, such as pH levels, of saliva under these conditions.⁸⁴ In particular, these studies show increased levels of saliva during meditation, accompanied by less stress and relaxation. Daoists certainly experienced these change during their practice. Daoists correlated the increased levels of saliva with successful meditation experience, and thus focused on inducing saliva in controlled techniques which indeed led to actual cognitive and psychophysical changes.

We can only hope that future studies of Daoist meditation techniques by teams of scholars and practitioners of Daoism with cognitive scientists will allow us to further understand the inner working of the mind and our experience of the world. Perhaps, after all, swallowing saliva really does allow us to imbibe the cosmos.

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⁸⁴ Recent studies include Delmontea 1985; Bullen *et al.* 2006; Dooley 2009.

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- DZ 789 *Dadao jia lingjie* 大道家令戒 in *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiao jieke jing* 正一法文天師教戒科經
- DZ 790 *Nuqing guilu* 女青鬼律
- DZ 830 *Fuqi jingyi lun* 服氣精義論
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