

Panel 15: Cultivating Perfection and Longevity

Panel Organisers: Dr Vivienne Lo and Prof Geoffrey Samuel

This panel will contain multi-media presentations and academic papers on the (proper) aims and practices of self-cultivation and longevity in Asia, past and present. There are no temporal limitations and the geographic range of 'Asia' will include Asian healing traditions in Europe and America. But rather than assume the lens of a modern practice in search of authenticity the speakers will be concerned with the particularities of practice. Each paper will explore the definitions of a self to be cultivated, concepts, ideas and practices surrounding longevity, and set the methods and targets, as far as possible, against their particular social, cultural or institutional backgrounds. While some of the presentations will be traditional text-based studies, others will make their point with film and ethnography

Panel Participants and abstracts

15.01 Ingestion of the Five Sprouts

Professor Gil Raz (Dartmouth College)

The Daoist lineages that appeared in early medieval China tended to eschew traditional medical practices such as acupuncture and the ingestion of medicines. Daoists viewed these techniques as merely treating external symptoms. True health that would lead to longevity and even transcendence entailed direct interaction with the subtle and refined potencies that emanated from the Dao. Daoists thus focused on various techniques for cultivating *qi* (pneuma), the most ethereal and elemental material aspect of the world, by which the bodily microcosm could be harmonized with the macrocosm. More than simple breathing exercises, the ingestion of cosmic pneuma was perceived as circulating the vital pneuma of the macrocosmic celestial matrix, with its regular patterns of transformation, through the microcosm of the human body. These practices exemplify the correlative cosmology of early China, as well as the more esoteric notions developed in medieval Daoism. Among the most popular of these practices are methods for ingesting the "five sprouts" (*wuya* 五牙/芽). Correlated with the temporal, spatial and mythical scheme of the five phases, the sprouts are the celestial effluvia of the five directions in their most potent moments of emergence. Ingesting the sprouts would refine the practitioner's body allowing him to quit regular foods and to access the powers and abilities of the spirits. In this paper I examine several variants of this method, including individual practice, paired sexual practice, and its incorporation in complex ritual programs.

15.02 Confucian or Daoist Yangsheng

Michael Stanley-Baker (PhD Candidate, UCL)

The surviving records of yangsheng practice between the Han and the Sui dynasty offer little information as to their origins or social context. Their appearance in the Daoist canon, and their emphasis on body cultivation in harmony with natural cycles, has led some writers to imagine these are Daoist practices. Yet close examination of fragments from Zhang Zhan's 5th century *Yangsheng yaoji*, a primary source of yangsheng material for later compilers, reveals little soteriology, demonology or transmission along lineage lines descended from Zhang Daoling. Rather, the conservative social mores and natural claims about life-expectancy found in these passages point towards low-level officials with an orientation towards philosophical Daoism. This paper demonstrates the construction of a philosophical lineage in the later *Yangxing yanming lu*, which align with Zhang Zhan's world-affirming Confucian intellectual sympathies, and show little of the esotericism or world-transcending aims of its purported author, Tao Hongjing.

This raises further questions about the locating of the *yangsheng* genre within social contexts. I will demonstrate conflicting usages of the terms *yangsheng* and *yangxing* in various well-known bodily and self-cultivation texts between the late Warring States and the early Tang, calling for a more sophisticated attention to *whose yangsheng* at what period in history.

15.03 Yangsheng Self Cultivation: self help and self image

David Dear, Wellcome Trust Centre for the History of Medicine

Abstract: In this paper I will look at various forms of Yangsheng, the popular medico-religious tradition of China, and show how adepts seek to use their practice in an exploration of their own culture and identity.

The practices are largely though not exclusively built around callisthenic exercises, but also include dietetic and other lifestyle proscriptions, as well as meditation. The nature and interpretation of the practitioners aims and priorities have varied extensively through the lengthy history of Yansheng – we have images of practitioners in dating from the second century BC – but they are unified and given coherence though time by the crucial, and largely undefinable, concept of Qi.

The motives for commencing practice, the sources from which they derive their information and the cultural backdrop within which this is sited will all come under consideration. In particular I will look at what the practices mean within the wider and ever present discourse of “Traditional Chinese Culture” and hegemonic dogma attached to this.

The paper will use video recordings of the practices themselves and interview clips with a number of practitioners explaining their ideas about what these activities mean to them and how they benefit from them.

I hope also to be able to present a brief case study on the “rolling out” of a newly created taiji form for the 21st century, “TAIJI ZHANG”, which has been devised within a professional academic setting at Qing Hua and is being officially supported by national institutions and the ministry of sport.

I will seek to show that within China such practices are located in a very specific historic cultural context that is per se not readily transferable to other locations, and that when such transference does occur it can only do so by the adoption of what French anthropologist Pierre Bourdieu would call a new “habitus” of self image.

15.04 Tibetan Longevity Practices: The Body in Buddhist Tantric ritual

Geoffrey Samuel (Cardiff University)

Tibetan longevity attainment techniques (ts'edrub) are an important sub-set of Tibetan Tantric practices, aimed at the attainment of a healthy and long life. They form part of a wider repertoire of Tibetan longevity practices, including medical preparations, the ritual empowerment of pills made from herbal and mineral substances and their ingestion under controlled circumstances as well as the creation and conveyance of ritual power to oneself and others. At the core of longevity practice, however, particularly as performed for oneself, is the constructed relationship between one's own bodymind complex and the wider environment, mediated by the image of the Tantric deity. The Tantric body in these practices is experienced as a site open to flows of various kinds of life-essence, which may be both lost to external forces and recovered and brought back into the body. This can be seen as a sophisticated reworking of the common shamanic idiom of soul loss and recovery.

Thus the body posited by and experienced within Tibetan longevity attainment techniques lies in some respects at the opposite pole to the body of biomedicine. While the processes of biomedicine operate in terms of a materialist reduction within which the body is a closed entity and mind and consciousness have a minor and epiphenomenal role, these Tibetan practices stress the linkage between body and consciousness and experience the vitality of the bodymind as critically affected by ongoing transactions with the wider environment. This paper explores these understandings of the body in the context of a research project I am undertaking with Cathy Cantwell, Rob Mayer and the lama Ogyan P. Tanzin Rinpoche on a set of longevity practices associated with the late Dudjom Rinpoche (1904-1987).

15.05 Chulen - Reinventing the idea of a 'tonic'

Barbara Gerke (International Institute for Traditional Medicine, Kalimpong, India)

Chulen (*bcud len*), essence extraction practices, have been described in classical Tibetan medical texts as a part of rejuvenation therapies. They are accompanied by specific preparations of *chulen*-pills (*bcud len ril bu*), on which the practitioner lives for a certain period of time while practicing meditation and fasting.

This paper will discuss how ideas of *chulen* are being re-interpreted by Men-Tsee-Khang trained Tibetan doctors in India as 'health tonics.' What underlies these changing ideas of a 'tonic' in relation to Tibetan rejuvenation therapies and contemporary pharmacological practices within the wider context of biomedical influences on Tibetan medical practice? Ethnographic examples presented are based on doctoral fieldwork in the Kalimpong-Darjeeling Hills (2004-2006).

15.06 Satisfaction, Pleasure and Euphoria in Medieval Chinese Daoist Yangsheng Texts

By Rudolf Pfister

While harbouring on the one side a sceptical attitude towards outward expression of emotion, and advising against the "twelve too muchs" like laughing, brooding, thinking, etc. medieval Daoist yangsheng ("nurturing life") texts also describe preferred states and out-comes of certain self-healing body techniques and meditation which describe, and prescribe, a rich inner life.

The paper will analyse satisfaction, pleasure and euphoria as presented in selected medieval Chinese texts from the 4th to about the 12th c. CE. It discusses the role and language of such promised rewards within the training regime of individual male adepts, and attempts to interpret these states from a comparative, psychological viewpoint. Whenever possible, historical developments are considered in order to sharpen our understanding of medico-psychological thinking throughout medieval imperial China.

15.07 The Principle of Yang Sheng in Education

By Felicity Moir and Cinzia Scorzon

This year the Acupuncture course in the School of Integrated Health at the University of Westminster, London, has been reviewed (revalidated). This means that we can make major changes to the syllabus content and institutionalise it for the next six years. The main goal of the course is to train students to become accomplished and professional practitioners of acupuncture and the three-year training is focused on patient care and treatment within the framework of Chinese medicine.

Students, as part of their learning, will be trained from the first year onwards to develop clinical skills and awareness by working on themselves initially by using the principles of yang sheng (self-cultivation). In other words, students will learn how to change their lifestyle to improve and maintain their health and wellbeing. The focus will be on diet, exercises, strategies and techniques to manage stress and prevent illness and exhaustion, increase their level of fitness and improve their concentration and strength. They will also be encouraged to develop their wider understanding of the context in which they will be working in terms of the philosophy and history of Chinese medicine and their own ethnic background.

The students will undertake a self-assessment of their own health and lifestyle, and work out a simple, practical and realistic self-development plan and the strategies for change. They will reflect on the whole process and progress through it, in order to become well aware of their own needs, and the challenges and difficulties that such change might involve.

They are supposed to go through a “growing” process inspired by the application of the ancient principles of improving and maintaining good health and increasing the quality of their own life. These issues have been discussed over thousands of years by a wide variety of Chinese philosophical and medical texts, which examine in practical details diets, exercises, breathing technique, sexual practices, etc.

Students will explore how self-cultivating can be done in the world we live in, how to negotiate between the requirements for looking after their health and well being and the demands of modern life; they will experience in first person the difficulties and problems while doing it, but also the benefits and gains after a certain period of time.

Thus, the students’ personal experiences and reflections will become part of their education in a very concrete manner. Working on their own self-cultivation should help them to understand the possibilities for transformation of patients, the aspects that can be easy and those that can be difficult. This approach will enable students to critically evaluate a wide variety of texts, integrate their reading to their “growing” process, examine introspectively their on-going development, reflect on this process and present it in a unique and creative manner to their tutors and fellow students, thus their experience will be not just assessed, but most importantly, shared.

In brief, the acupuncture course at the University of Westminster will have a very practical and clinical emphasis, based not only on the academic curriculum, but also on the students’ own experience of yang-sheng: learn how to become and keep healthy and hopefully develop a positive attitude to life which will not just benefit them but also their patients.

By the time of the IASTAM conference we will have one year of the results of this approach as demonstrated by the student output and the teachers reflections on the process.

15.08 Writing the body techniques for prolonging life in 16th-17th century China: why and how?

Hsiu-fen Chen, Assistant Professor, National Chengchi University, Taipei, Taiwan

The body techniques of *yangsheng* (regimen aimed at health preservation and prolonging life) had played a key role in the traditions of classic Chinese medicine and religions. In early and mediaeval China, most of the *yangsheng* works were written by physicians, recluses and Daoists. In the late imperial period, however, some of the neo-Confucian scholars seem to have paid no less attention to *yangsheng* than their counterparts did. It is particularly true in the 16th-17th century since numerous scholars’ literary collections, jotting works and family encyclopaedias for daily use have recorded and transcribed discourses on *yangsheng*. To them, *yangsheng* is not only involved in theory but practice, i.e. regulating the body in living, sleeping, exercising, washing, eating, drinking, and sex in their daily life.

It is thus my attempt to answer the questions as follow: why did these scholarly gentlemen show more interest in *yangsheng* than their predecessors in the previous ages? How did they write/compile/edit the *yangsheng* works? Not least, how did these works look different from that of before?

This paper will be divided into three parts. Firstly, I will explain the reasons why the scholars wrote/compiled/edited the *yangsheng* works in the 16th-17th century. In addition to practical purposes, such as healing and preventing their own diseases, the commercial value of *yangsheng* is evidently an important consideration in their publication. Then my focus will shift to the publishing industry and book marketing that has made the *yangsheng* works widely accessible. In the third part of this paper, I will argue how the ideals of longevity and the techniques for preserving life were secularised largely owing to the commodity economy in the 16th-17th century.

15.09 Female Alchemy in China: From Religious Practice to Health Regimen

Elena Valussi (University of Venice)

In this paper I wish to look at *nudan*, a tradition of meditation techniques for women, from a historical to a contemporary perspective. I will look at the historical primary sources to give a background to contemporary practice in China and in the West. I will discuss the process that led these practices, originating from a religious milieu directed to Daoist believers, to become seen and practised as purely health techniques, devoid of spiritual undertones

I will accompany the presentation with videos of contemporary practitioners.

15.10 The Toxic Effects of Insects, Women, Witchcraft, and Southerners: Classifications and Etiologies of Gu 蠱 (which panel?)

By TJ Hinrichs

This paper examines diverse descriptions of gu-poisoning. It compares and traces the transfer of medical discourses to and from cosmological, historical, Daoist, Buddhist, legal, and popular categorizations of gu, and accounts of its production, illness, and treatment. Gu, one of the hexagrams, finds associations as early as the Warring States with insects (chong), feminine seduction or bewitchment, bewilderment, and abdominal disorders. While early historical accounts describe it as a witchcraft deployed for political ends by palace women, later popular accounts tend to elaborate on inter-sexual and inter-ethnic elements in its production and use. In later legal codes, it appears as one of the “Ten Evils,” the highest crimes of the empire. In Daoist and many medical texts, it is treated as a demonic illness, often a type of “infestious” (zhu) disorder. In Chao Yuanfang’s oft-quoted description (Zhubing yuanhou lun [Comprehensive Treatise on the Origins and Symptoms of Diseases], 610), “Gu-poison has several types, and all are qi that confuses [people]. There are people who purposely make it. Many take things like insects and snakes, fill a vessel with them, and leave them to eat each other. When only one of them is left, it is called Gu.” Medical and ritual responses included medication and exorcism. Imperial states prosecuted perpetrators, and in some cases disseminated medical treatments. This paper will explore the ways in which different disciplinary fields and historical contexts shape narratives of gu as a social and physiological phenomenon.

15.11 QIN MUSIC AND NURTURING LIFE

Mingmei Yip, Ph.D., New York City

For many centuries, Chinese have held in high regard practice of the four literati arts of music, chess, calligraphy and painting as beneficial to health.

Music refers specifically to the qin, the oldest string instrument and the most esteemed. Qin music, painting and calligraphy are all based on lines through which the balance or imbalance of the performer’s qi, or inner energy, is manifested. Thus performance of these arts, and music particularly, has important effects on health. Lines in music, painting and calligraphy, depending on whether they are dry or wet, strong or weak. The best are lines saturated with qi. Therefore, its practice helps scholar-artists to regulate their qi.

Unlike Western music which is polyphonic or harmonic, and uses multiple melodic lines, qin music is manifested with single melodic lines without harmony or polyphony. These lines can be of considerable length; filling the entire line with qi fosters longevity.

This paper will discuss health benefits believed to result from playing the qin:

Regulation and prolongation of breath, Better posture for calmness and better health, Effects of different forms of qin music on health and longevity

Historical anecdotes of cure of disease by qin playing, A brief selection of qin music will be played to illustrate these points. Chinese ideas about music and health will be compared to modern concepts of stress management.

15. 12 Grasping at the wind: in search of the vayus.

By Lucy Powell

This paper will explore the textual lineage and formation of a modern day praxis of the vayus, or bodily winds, of ancient yoga practise. First mentioned in the Taittiriya Upanishad (I.1.1), the vayus are described as a vital, living link between the 'pranic' or energy body, and the physical body of the yogi, reappearing in the yoga sutras of Patanjali. The ten vayus, five outer, five inner, are again stressed in the 17th century hatha yoga manual, the Gheranda Samhita, as a seminal aspect of yogic knowledge and practise.

The Gheranda Samhita describes the vayus according to their placement in either the physical or the energy body, and by their physiological functioning.

"the vayus are ten, namely: prana, apana, samana, udana and vyana.

Naga, kurma, krikara, devadatta and dhananjaya.[...] Prana moves in the heart. [...] krikara does sneezing."

But while stressing their importance to the regular functioning of the body, to harmonising and uniting the pranic and physical body, to deepening meditation, and to aligning and purifying the nadi and the body in asana, no traditional yoga text explains how the contemporary yogi might discover and employ them.

This paper uses the fifteen year inquiry into the vayus of the yoga teacher Orit Sengupta to unearth information both on the neglected lineage of the vayus, and on the formation of a contemporary yoga practise around them. It asks whether an etiolated practise can be revived through dedicated personal experimentation, using obtuse texts and even tales as guidelines. And it ponders: might the vayus prove the missing link to a transformative contemporary yoga practise?