



The Cultural and Religious Background of Sexual Vampirism in Ancient China

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Abstract

This paper considers sexual macrobiotic techniques of ancient China in their cultural and religious milieu, focusing on the text known as *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber*, which explains how the Spirit Mother of the West, originally an ordinary human being like anyone else, devoured the life force of numerous young boys by copulating with them, and thereby transformed herself into a famed goddess. Although many previous studies of Chinese sexuality have highlighted such methods (the noted historian R.H. van Gulik was the first to refer to them as 'sexual vampirism'), it has rarely been asked why learned and intelligent people of the past took them seriously. The inquiry here, by considering some of the most common ancient criticisms of these practices, concludes that practitioners did not regard decay as an inescapable characteristic of matter; consequently it was widely believed that, if the cosmic processes were correctly understood, one could devise techniques that may forestall senectitude indefinitely.

Keywords: sexual vampirism, macrobiotics, sex practices, Chinese religion, *qi*, Daoism

Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber (*Yufang bijue* 玉房秘訣) is a macrobiotic manual, aimed at men of leisure wealthy enough to own harems, outlining a regimen of sexual exercises that is supposed to confer immortality if practiced over a sufficient period. The original work is lost, but substantial fragments of it have been preserved in *Ishimpō* 醫心方, a Japanese chrestomathy of Chinese medical texts compiled by Tamba Yasuyori 丹波康賴 (912–995) in 982. The surviving passages show that the *Secret Instructions* belong firmly in the 'techniques of the bedchamber'

(*fangzhong shu* 房中術) genre and recommend a procedure branded in modern times as 'sexual vampirism'.¹

All human beings were thought to be made up of *qi* 氣, the basic substance of the universe, which men and women discharge in a particularly concentrated form (called *jing* 精, 'quintessence' or 'refined essence') at the moment of orgasm. (For men, *jing* was conceived as semen, for women, vaginal secretions.) Proponents of the bedchamber techniques theorized that if one could suck up the genital fluids of one's partner during sexual intercourse without releasing any fluids of one's own, one would emerge from the encounter with an increased store of *qi* – at the direct expense, of course, of the partner, who would eventually waste away and die if the technique were performed on her repeatedly. (For this reason a practitioner is counseled to acquire a large gynaeceum of young virgins who, it is assumed, have not yet suffered many enervating emissions.) The purpose of the bedchamber manuals, then, is to reveal how to induce copious orgasm in one's sex-partners while preventing the leakage of one's own vital liquids.²

Inasmuch as the *Secret Instructions* cast the typical victim of this sort of depredation as an innocent and gullible girl, the intended reader is clearly male.³ At one juncture, however, the text considers the possibility that women could employ these methods just as easily as men, appending a memorable example. We read in *Ishimpō*:

It is said in the *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber*: Master Infused Harmony⁴ said: 'It is not only *yang* that can be nourished; the same is also

1. R.H. van Gulik, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period: With an Essay on Chinese Sex Life from the Han to the Ch'ing Dynasty*, B.C. 206–A.D. 1644 (typeset edn; Sinica Leidensia, 62; Leiden: Brill, 2004), I, p. 12. See the discussion in Paul R. Goldin, 'Introduction,' in R.H. van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China: A Preliminary Survey of Chinese Sex and Society from ca. 1500 B.C. till 1644 A.D.* (rev. edn; Sinica Leidensia, 57; Leiden: Brill, 2003), pp. xxi-xxii.

2. Cf. Paul Rakita Goldin, *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 6-7 and the references in p. 126 n. 20. In some contexts it is unclear whether the manuals call for *coitus reservatus* or *coitus thesauratus* (sometimes called *coitus saxonicus* or 'retrograde ejaculation'), that is, whether the male is required to suppress his ejaculation entirely, or ejaculate backwards into his body. When the texts speak of 'circulating the essence and fortifying the brain' (*huanjing bunao* 還精補腦; see below), it is clear that *coitus thesauratus* is intended.

3. Cf. Charlotte Furth, 'Rethinking Van Gulik: Sexuality and Reproduction in Traditional Chinese Medicine,' in C.K. Gilmartin, G. Hershatter, L. Rofel and T. White (eds.), *Engendering China: Women, Culture, and the State* (Harvard Contemporary China Series, 10; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1994), pp. 125-46 (135).

4. Unidentified, but the name is an allusion to *Laozi* 42; text in Zhu Qianzhi, *Laozi jiaoshi*, Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1984), 42.175. Emil C.H. Hsia, *Ilza*

properly true of *yin*. The Spirit Mother of the West is one who attained the Way by nourishing *yin*. As soon as she copulated with a male, the male would immediately suffer illness, whereas her visage would become radiant and lush—even without make-up. She often ate curds and plucked her five-stringed lute. By this means, she harmonized her heart and stabilized her intentions, so that she had no other desire.' It is also said: The Spirit Mother has no husband; she enjoys copulating with young boys. For this reason, [her methods] must not be taught to the world. For why would only the Spirit Mother act like this?⁵

The Spirit Mother of the West is Xi wangmu, the goddess of immortality herself, whose title is more commonly (but wrongly) translated in Western writings as 'Queen Mother of the West'.⁶ The logic of this passage is not hard to follow: if men can attain immortality by consuming the *qi* of their sex partners while conserving their own *yang* essences, women should be able to attain the same results by consuming the *qi* of male sex partners while conserving their own *yin* essences. The section ends on a note of warning: Be careful not to make these arcane techniques known to the world, gentlemen, lest women of the rank and file emulate their patroness and tap their husbands' *qi* reservoirs for an endless life of yoghurt, lute music, and orgies with sustentative boys.⁷

Veith, and Robert H. Geertsma, *The Essentials of Medicine in Ancient China and Japan: Yasuyori Tamba's Ishimpō* (Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1986), II, p. 151 n.1, observe this, but refer to the wrong section of *Laozi*.

5. All translations of primary sources are my own. I follow the text as presented in the appendix to Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao* (rev. edn; Beijing: Dongfang, 2000), p. 515 (§§ 5 and 6). Good editions of *Ishimpō* are not easy to come by. Zhai Shuangqing (main ed.), *Yixinfang* (Beijing: Huaxia, 1993), provides a punctuated text and basic text-critical annotations, but is marred by typographical errors. Compare the translations of this passage in Livia Kohn, *The Taoist Experience: An Anthology* (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture; Albany: SUNY Press, 1993), p. 156; Douglas Wile, *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1992), p. 102; Howard S. Levy and Akira Ishihara, *The Tao of Sex: The Essence of Medical Prescriptions (Ishimpō)* (Lower Lake, CA: Integral, 3rd edn, 1989), p. 27; Hsia et al., *The Essentials of Medicine*, p. 160; Van Gulik, *Sexual Life in Ancient China*, p. 158; *idem*, *Erotic Colour Prints of the Ming Period*, I, pp. 69-70. It is noteworthy that this passage from *Yufang bijue*, a text likely to be unfamiliar to most historians of China, has been translated into English no fewer than six times. The best of the above is Wile.

6. I defend the translation 'Spirit Mother of the West' in *After Confucius: Studies in Early Chinese Philosophy* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 11-13.

7. Cf. Siegfried Englert, *Materialien zur Stellung der Frau und zur Sexualität im vormodernen und modernen China, Heidelberger Schriften zur Ostasienkunde 1* (Frankfurt: Haag + Herchen, 1980), pp. 58-59. Max Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan (Biographies légendaires des Immortels taoïstes de l'antiquité)* (corrected edn; Paris: Collège de France,

This representation of the Spirit Mother of the West contrasts starkly with her conventional image. It is telling that only one modern study of the goddess, as far as I know, even mentions this tale;⁸ instead, most tend to focus on her Western abode, her role in millenarian movements, and the possible astronomical underpinnings of her myth.⁹ (Part of the reason for this silence may be that the *Secret Instructions* are still relatively obscure, but mostly it is just a reflection of how reluctant Sinologists have been to deal with texts that refer explicitly to sex.) Similarly, there are many primary sources containing hagiographical material about the Spirit Mother, but *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber* is the only one to allege that her immortality was earned on the jade couch. For example, the most commonly cited account, by Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), asserts that she was engendered by the *dao* itself and soared up to the heavens at the moment of birth. Du acknowledges her femininity – he places her biography in a collection that includes only female immortals – stating more than once that she governs *yin* essence; not surprisingly, however, he declines to associate this concept with bedchamber techniques. Instead, he places the Spirit Mother within the bureaucratized other-world characteristic of orthodox Daoism.¹⁰

Why do the *Secret Instructions* fail to refer to these other conceptions of the Spirit Mother's divinity? There are a few interrelated answers. First,

Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1987), p. 182 n. 3, observes that a similar apotheosis is attributed to a woman named Nüji 女几 (sometimes written Nüwan 女丸); see Zhang Jinling, *Xinyi Liexian zhuan, Guji jinzhū xinyi congshu* (Taipei: Sanmin, 1997), § 66.

8. Catherine Despeux and Livia Kohn, *Women in Daoism* (Cambridge, MA: Three Pines, 2003), pp. 38–40.

9. The best known studies are Manfred Frühauf, *Die königliche Mutter des Westens: Xiwangmu in alten Dokumenten Chinas* (Edition Cathay, 46; Bochum: Projekt, 1999); Suzanne Cahill, *Transcendence and Divine Passion: The Queen Mother of the West in Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993); Michael Loewe, *Ways to Paradise: The Chinese Quest for Immortality* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), pp. 86–126; and the review of the last work by Anna Seidel, 'Tokens of Immortality in Han Graves,' *Numen* 29.1 (1982), esp. pp. 99–106. For more references, see Goldin, *After Confucius*, p. 159 n. 51, to which another recent publication can be added: Sheri A. Lullo, 'Female Divinities in Han Dynasty Representation,' in Katheryn M. Linduff and Yan Sun (eds.), *Gender and Chinese Archaeology* (Gender and Archaeology Series, 8; Walnut Creek, CA: Rowman & Littlefield, Altamira, 2004), pp. 259–87.

10. 'Jinmu yuanjun,' *Yongcheng jixian lu*, in *Daozang* (HY 782), 1.9a–20b. The entire biography has been translated by Suzanne Cahill, 'The Daoist Goddess, Queen Mother of the West,' in Robin R. Wang (ed.), *Images of Women in Chinese Thought and Culture: Writings from the Pre-Qin Period through the Song Dynasty* (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2003), pp. 346–65. On Du Guangting generally, see Franciscus Verellen, *Du Guangting (850–933): Taoïste de cour à la fin de la Chine médiévale* (Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 30; Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1989).

though the precise date of the *Secret Instructions* is not clear, it probably lies sometime during the Han dynasty (206 BC–AD 220), long before standardized biographies of the Spirit Mother like that of Du Guangting existed. But however old the *Secret Instructions* might be, the text still cannot match the antiquity of the *Biography of Mu, Son of Heaven* (*Mu tianzi zhuan* 穆天子傳), where she is already depicted as a goddess dwelling in the remote West, charming but chaste, entertaining King Mu with feasts and songs.¹¹ One detects, therefore, a note of irreverence in the *Secret Instructions*. The reader is expected to know the more strait-laced traditions concerning the Spirit Mother, and to be startled by this alternative account of her as a vampire.

But it would be a mistake to dismiss this passage as a scurrilous joke. The tone of the *Secret Instructions* is not jocular; on the contrary, the text relates the benefits and dangers of sucking other peoples' *qi* with pure sobriety. Moreover, its remarks on the Spirit Mother engage some of the most basic themes in early Chinese religion. Specifically, this account of the Spirit Mother's apotheosis is radically (1) amoral, (2) non-Daoist, and (3) this-worldly.¹²

(1) It is amoral because there is no suggestion that the Spirit Mother attained her divinity on account of moral excellence or virtuous conduct. Rather, every indication is that the Spirit Mother was originally an ordinary girl just like anyone else, but was able to harness the extraordinary power afforded by the bedchamber techniques. As the admonitory coda emphasizes, it is the techniques that are extraordinary, not the Spirit Mother, for any other woman privy to the same knowledge could be expected to employ it to the same effect. Practicing the bedchamber techniques is like quaffing the right elixir: as long as the medicine is

11. *Mu tianzi zhuan* (*Sibu beiyao*), 3.1a-2a. This romance was found in AD 281 in a tomb sealed at least five centuries earlier. What would seem to be a firm *terminus ante quem* is complicated by the fact that the text may have suffered interpolations after its rediscovery, but *juan* 3 is probably genuine. See Rémi Mathieu, *Le Mu tianzi zhuan: Traduction annotée, étude critique* (Mémoires de l'Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 9; Paris: Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1978), pp. 101-24; and Mathieu's briefer treatment, 'Mu t'ien-tzu chuan,' in Michael Loewe (ed.), *Early Chinese Texts: A Bibliographical Guide* (Early China Special Monograph Series, 2; Berkeley: Society for the Study of Early China, 1993), pp. 342-46.

12. The designation 'this-worldly' is borrowed from Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1954–), V.2, pp. 71-127 (an improvement over his earlier discussion in II, pp. 139-61). My major area of disagreement with Needham has to do with his understanding of this-worldly immortality as 'distinctively under the aegis of religious Taoism' (V.2, p. 83).

genuine (not a trivial proviso in that world of mountebankery),¹³ it will work on even the most sinful imbibers. This moral indifference is noteworthy in the context of Han speculations about immortality.¹⁴ Compare the comments on apotheosis in *Scripture of Great Peace* (*Taiping jing* 太平經):¹⁵

There have always been genuine cases of people who ascended to Heaven in broad daylight. Their natures were good and their minds naturally possessed brightness. If they wavered, they admonished themselves so as not to incline toward evil. They disregarded anything pertaining to lucre and profit; their clothes were coarse, scarcely sufficient to cover their bodies. This was the conduct of people who ascended to Heaven in broad daylight. Heaven reckoned their goodness good, and ordered good spirits to accompany and protect them lest they come upon evil. The heavenly spirits cherished them and completed their works. For it was their own conduct that brought this about; such people never hankered after the vulgar custom of profit-seeking.¹⁶

Elsewhere in the *Scripture of Great Peace*, the figure of the Celestial Master (*tianshi* 天師) agrees with an unnamed disciple (called *zhenren* 真人, 'True Man')¹⁷ that certain drugs may confer immortality, but this

13. Consider the well-known story of a huckster who claims to bring an herb of immortality to a certain king's court. When a palace functionary hears about this, he snatches the medicine and swallows it. This occasions a serious dilemma for the sovereign: if he should overlook the crime, he would be condoning theft, but if he should execute the underling, he would simultaneously prove that the herb was a fraud and that his court has been infiltrated by quacksalvers. Text in *Zhanguo ce* (Shanghai: Guji, 1978), 17.564-55. Similarly, Han Fei 韓非 (d. 233 BC) relates the story of a charlatan who claimed to know the secret of immortality, but died before he could teach it to his student; text in Chen Qiyou, *Han Feizi xin jiaozhu* (Shanghai: Guji, 2000), 11.32.676 ('Wai chushuo zuo shang').

14. On the transition from amorality to moralism in Han religion, see the brief remarks in Mu-chou Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare: A View of Ancient Chinese Religion* (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture; Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), p. 207.

15. For a summary of the complex textual history of the *Taiping jing*, see Barbara Hendrichke (misspelled as 'Hendrichke'), 'Early Daoist Movements,' in Livia Kohn (ed.), *Daoism Handbook* (Handbuch der Orientalistik, IV.14; Leiden: Brill, 2000), pp. 143-45; as well as the earlier study by Barbara Kandel, *Taiping jing: The Origin and Transmission of the 'Scripture on General Welfare' – The History of an Unofficial Text* (Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens: Mitteilungen, 75; Hamburg: Gesellschaft für Natur- und Völkerkunde Ostasiens, 1979).

16. Wang Ming, *Taiping jing hejiao, Daojiao dianji xuankan* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1960), 114.596. Compare the translation in Ying-shih Yü, 'Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 25 (1964-65), pp. 30-122 (112).

17. On the *tianshi* and *zhenren* in the *Taiping jing*, see Barbara Hendrichke, 'The Dialogues between Master and Disciples in the *Scripture on Great Peace* (*Taiping jing*),'

apparent concession to the notion of amoral immortality serves only to refute it: immediately afterwards, the Celestial Master declares that Heaven stores these elixirs and distributes them to the worthy just as a terrestrial lord stores grain for the benefit of his populace.

'Supposing there really are in Heaven and on Earth methods of becoming an immortal and recipes that reverse the aging process – can these indeed be obtained?'

'That is a good question, True Man. Yes, they can be obtained. Heaven has stored as much of the drug of immortality as there is corn stored in the imperial granaries, as much of the immortals' clothing as there is cloth in the imperial offices, and as many of the host of immortals' residences as there are dormitories in the district offices. If one constantly lives in accordance with the Great Way, one will be permitted to enter Heaven. One of the Great Way is permitted to dwell in the residences of the spirits, just as men of ethics dwell in the residences of the district offices. Heaven does not begrudge the immortals' clothing and recipes of immortality, but rarely grants them to human beings. If people do not have any great merit with regard to Heaven and Earth, if they cannot cure the great diseases in Heaven and on Earth, nor harmonize the *yin* and *yang qi*, if they are of no benefit to the Three Brilliances, the Four Seasons, the Five Phases, Heaven, Earth, or the spirits, then Heaven does not grant them its recipes of immortality and immortals' clothing. These are for people of outstanding merit.'¹⁸

In the cosmos of the *Scripture of Great Peace*, one may become an immortal only if Heaven approves of one's conduct; there is no way for people of deficient virtue to appropriate the instruments of athanasia and ascend to Heaven without Heaven's consent.¹⁹ Bedchamber techniques must be useless.

in Li Zhuoran and Chen Wancheng (eds.), *A Daoist Florilegium [=Daoyuan binfen lu]*, (Hong Kong: Shangwu, 2002), pp. 185-234 (186-90); Ōfuchi Ninji, *Dōkyō shi no kenkyū*. I. *Shoki no dōkyō*, *Tōyōgaku sōsho* (Tokyo: Sōbunsha, 1991), pp. 105-108; and Hachiya Kunio, 'Taiheikyō ni okeru genji bunsho – Kyō, shū, tsū no shisō,' *Tōyō Bunka Kenkyūjo kiyō* 92 (1983), pp. 35-81 (esp. 38-43).

18. *Taiping jing hejiao* 47.138. Compare the translation in Yü, 'Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China,' p. 114; cf. also Ying-shih Yü, "'O Soul, Come Back!" A Study in the Changing Conceptions of the Soul and Afterlife in Pre-Buddhist China,' *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 47.2 (1987), pp. 363-95 (388). The 'Three Brilliances' (*sanguang* 三光) are the sun, the moon and the stars.

19. Cf. Robert Ford Campany, 'Living off the Books: Fifty Ways to Dodge Ming in Early Medieval China,' in Christopher Lupke (ed.), *The Magnitude of Ming: Command, Allotment, and Fate in Chinese Culture* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2005), pp. 129-50 (139-40); Li Gang, *Handai daojiang zhexue* (Chengdu: Ba-Shu, 1995), pp. 143-59; Ōfuchi, *Dōkyō shi no kenkyū*, pp. 119-33; and Max Kaltenmark, 'The Ideology of the T'ai-p'ing ching,' in Holmes Welch and Anna Seidel (eds.), *Facets of Taoism: Essays in Chinese Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979), pp. 19-52 (41). On the

(2) In the same vein, the *Xiang'er Commentary to the Laozi* (*Laozi Xiang'er zhu* 老子想爾注), which probably imparts the ideology of Celestial Master Daoism in its earliest phases,²⁰ sharply criticizes the methods of manuals like *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber*.

The Way teaches human beings to congeal their essence and make spirits. In the present generation there are those who practice counterfeit arts and slyly call them the Way, teaching by means of the texts of the Yellow Emperor, the Dark Maiden, Master Gong, and Rongcheng. When engaged with a woman, they do not ejaculate, but think they can circulate their essence [through their bodies] and cause it to fortify their brains. But because their mind and spirit are not at one [with the Way], they lose what they try to preserve; though they store up their pleasure, they cannot treasure it for long.²¹

Having treated the bedchamber manuals for so long as manifestations of 'early Daoism,'²² some scholars may be surprised to read that the

importance of the confession of sins in the *Taiping jing*, see Tsuchiya Masaaki, 'Confession of Sins and Awareness of Self in the *Taiping jing*,' in Livia Kohn and Harold D. Roth (eds.), *Daoist Identity: History, Lineage, and Ritual* (Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 2002), pp. 39-57. See also Isabelle Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme* (Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 137; Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient, 1984), I, pp. 68-70. For some (unsympathetic) outsiders' observations concerning Daoist healing in the early centuries AD, see *Sanguo zhi* (Beijing: Zhonghua, 1959), Wei 8.263-66 (i.e. the biography of Zhang Lu 張魯); and Yu Jiayi (1883-1955), *Shishuo xinyu jianshu* (ed. Zhou Zumo et al.; rev. edn; Shanghai: Guji, 1993), 1.40 (§ 39) and 20.708 (§ 10).

20. Cf. Stephen R. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures* (Taoist Classics, 1; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), pp. 58-62, with references to 'dissenting voices' on p. 75 n. 88. Despite this generally recognized pedigree, the *Xiang'er* commentary was curiously excluded from the Daoist Canon, and is known today only from a manuscript discovered at Dunhuang (S 6825). The title *Xiang'er* probably means It Thinks of You (referring, of course, to the Dao): see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 61-62; Ōfuchi, *Dōkyō shi no kenkyū*, p. 298; and Rao Zongyi, 'Laozi Xiang'er zhu xulun,' in *Fukui hakushi shōju ki'nen tōyō bunka ronshū* (Tokyo: Waseda Daigaku, 1969), p. 1169.

21. Rao Zongyi, *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian* (Hong Kong: Tong Nam, 1956), p. 12. Compare the translation in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 87 (the major difference being that he interprets *chuai* 揣 as 'control' where I have 'store up'). See also the discussion in Li Gang, *Handai daojiao zhexue*, p. 234. Compare also *Laozi Xiang'er zhu jiaojian*, p. 10: '[The Way] does not teach us to labor assiduously [at sex]. The tactic of laboring assiduously comes from the minds of fools. How can you blame the Way for it?' (cf. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 84).

22. For a recent example of this confusion by two excellent scholars, see Li Ling and Keith McMahon, 'The Contents and Terminology of the Mawangdui Texts on the Arts of the Bedchamber,' *Early China* 17 (1992), pp. 145-85 (183) (= Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, pp. 431-32). In the West, the conflation of macrobiotic hygiene with

early Daoists uncompromisingly rejected them! But the understanding of the rise of religious Daoism has progressed²³ to the point that most researchers consider it a movement fundamentally distinct from the ancient macrobiotic traditions, and my point that the conception of immortality in *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber* is non-Daoist should rank today as something of a straw-man argument.

Still, the issue is worth belaboring because it is not simply one of terminology. The genius of religious Daoism was to propose a grand otherworldly bureaucracy staffed by spirits, which was modeled on the mundane bureaucracy of the Han empire but, as a supernatural administration, was taken to be more potent and more just. Disease was rationalized as the product of demons (*zhugui* 注鬼, 'ghosts of infestation') dispatched by spirit clerks in order to punish evil-doers (or their relatives). The only way to avoid such misery was to work within the bureaucratic structure: to be recognized by the cerulean government as extraordinarily virtuous, and hence worthy of an appointment; or, if one's good deeds had somehow gone unnoticed, to petition the bureaucracy and plead that one's suffering was undeserved. What made Daoism a social phenomenon, and not a just an elaborate figment, was the conviction that these petitions to the otherworld would be summarily discarded if presented by someone without proper standing. This condition allowed ordained Daoist priests to earn their bread by serving as authorized

religious Daoism goes back to Herrlee G. Creel's seminal but invalid rubric of 'Hsien Taoism,' which he proposed in *What Is Taoism? and Other Studies in Chinese Cultural History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1970), esp. pp. 7-12. (All of Creel's work on Daoism is vitiated by his failure to cite a single text from the Daoist Canon, even though the now-standard edition had already been available for decades; compare Henri Maspero's studies, posthumously collected in *Le Taoïsme et les religions chinoises, Bibliothèque des histoires* [Paris: Gallimard, 1971], which contained profuse references to the Daoist Canon as early as 1937.) In China the matter is complicated by the fact that even in ancient times non-believers commonly referred to macrobiotic hygiene and religious Daoism indiscriminately as 'Daoist techniques' 道術, 'Daoism' 道家, and so on. See, generally, Nathan Sivin, 'Taoism and Science,' Chapter VII of his *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections* (Variorum Collected Studies Series, CS 512; Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995), esp. pp. 2-10; as well as his famous 'On the Word "Taoist" as a Source of Perplexity: With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,' now reprinted as Chapter VI of the same volume. For a recent criticism of Creel, see Russell Kirkland, *Taoism: The Enduring Tradition* (New York: Routledge, 2004), pp. 182-83.

23. See the conspectus by Franciscus Verellen, 'Taoism,' *Journal of Asian Studies* 54.2 (1995), pp. 322-46, which is intended as an update to Anna Seidel's extensive 'Chronicle of Taoist Studies in the West 1950-1990,' *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989-90), pp. 223-347.

intermediaries between the celestial and terrestrial realms. Daoist dogma prevented it from being anything other than an organized religion.²⁴

It should be obvious that none of this approximates the worldview of *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber*. For the bedchamber techniques are neither Daoist nor proto-Daoist.²⁵ The Spirit Mother does not require the services of a priest to do her magic, whereas the most famous Daoist sexual rite, 'conjoining qi' (*heqi* 合氣), can be carried out *only* in the presence of an ordained master.²⁶ Nor is there any mention of a celestial mandarin aiding or impeding the Spirit Mother's efforts; the whole idea would be rhetorically inconvenient, anyway, because then the text would have to explain why its own exercises are not in themselves sufficient to secure immortal bliss. The metaphysical gulf between Daoism and the *Secret Instructions* is underscored by the one exceptional method of attaining immortality within the religious Daoist context: 'deliverance by means of a corpse' (*shijie* 尸解/屍解), in which a swindler places someone else's corpse (or sometimes an inanimate object standing in for

24. A fine overview of the rise of Daoist institutions, with sustained reference to the conception of disease, is Michel Strickmann, *Chinese Magical Medicine* (ed. Bernard Faure; Asian Religions and Cultures; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), pp. 1-57. *Chinese Magical Medicine* was published posthumously; this section appears to be based on Strickmann's earlier essay, 'Therapeutische Rituale und das Problem des Bösen im frühen Taoismus,' in Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans-Hermann Schmidt (eds.), *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien: Festschrift für Hans Steininger* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 1985), pp. 185-200. See also the discussion of 'sepulchral plaints' (*zhongsong* 冢訟) by Peter Nickerson in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 230-60; and Chi-tim Lai, 'The Opposition of Celestial-Master Taoism to Popular Cults during the Six Dynasties,' *Asia Major* (3rd series) 11.1 (1998), esp. pp. 15-19.

25. 'Proto-Daoism,' a teleological construct much abused in the secondary literature, might plausibly refer to the bureaucratic religion that Anna Seidel has brilliantly reconstructed from tomb texts in 'Traces of Han Religion in Funeral Texts Found in Tombs,' in Akizuki Kan'ei (ed.), *Dōkyō to shūkyō bunka* (Tokyo: Hirakawa, 1987), pp. 21-57; and 'Geleitbrief an die Unterwelt: Jenseitsvorstellungen in den Grabkunden der späteren Han Zeit,' in Naundorf *et al.*, *Religion und Philosophie*, pp. 161-83. See also Donald Harper, 'Contracts with the Spirit World in Han Common Religion: The Xuning Prayer and Sacrifice Documents of A.D. 79,' *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 14 (2004), pp. 227-67; *idem*, 'Resurrection in Warring States Popular Religion,' *Taoist Resources* 5.2 (1994), pp. 13-28; and Zhang Xunliao, 'Dong-Han muzang chutu de jiezhu qi cailliao he Tianshi dao de qiyuan,' *Daojia wenhua yanjiu* 9 (1996), pp. 253-66. No other referent strikes me as very useful.

26. The best account is Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body* (trans. Karen C. Duval; Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), pp. 150-51. Ōfuchi, *Dōkyō shi no kenkyū*, p. 334, interprets the harsh objections to the bedchamber techniques in the *Xiang'er* commentary as evidence that the early Celestial Masters did not teach *heqi* after all; I believe this reflects a misunderstanding of the differences between the two practices.

a corpse) in a tomb, along with a memorial to the otherworldly bureaucrat falsely announcing that this is the cozener's own body. In this way his name is transferred from the registers of the living to the registers of the dead, and the duped thanatic demons leave him alone.²⁷

(3) Whereas Daoists must believe that the cosmic order is decreed by Heaven and maintained by its daemonic functionaries, the universe of *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber* presupposes no Prime Mover and no otherworldly superintendents to grease the cosmic wheels. It is a universe in which all that exists is *qi* in various degrees of concentration, and while most conglomerations of *qi* naturally dissipate or decompose, under special circumstances a body of *qi* might perdure indefinitely. Decay, in other words, is not an essential attribute of existence.

In comparison with other religious traditions, this is the most peculiar and important aspect of our text. This-worldly immortality is so commonplace in ancient China that specialist readers take examples like the *Secret Instructions* in stride, but it may be productive to pause and consider the notion in world-historical perspective. In ancient Greece, for example, this-worldly immortality not only is unattested, but verges on antilogy.²⁸ All immortals are gods; all gods are immortals;²⁹ and if previously mortal beings ever do become immortal, then it is always the case that they either have a divine parent (as in the case of Herakles) or are rendered immortal by the preternatural abilities of the gods (Arakhne

27. The most thorough study of *shijie* (in any language) is now Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, 'Corpse Deliverance, Substitute Bodies, Name Change, and Feigned Death: Aspects of Metamorphosis and Immortality in Early Medieval China,' *Journal of Chinese Religions* 29 (2001), pp. 1-68. Cf. also Campany, 'Living off the Books,' esp. pp. 129-38; *idem*, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth: A Translation and Study of Ge Hong's Traditions of Divine Transcendents* (Daoist Classics, 2; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002), pp. 52-60; and Yoshikawa Tadao, 'Nitchū mu ei—Shikaisen kō,' in Yoshikawa Tadao (ed.), *Chūgoku ko Dōkyōshi kenkyū* (Kyōto Daigaku Jimbun Kagaku Kenkyūjo Hōkoku; Kyoto: Dōhōsha, 1992), pp. 175-216.

28. Despite the welter of recent comparative work on ancient China and Greece (especially in the areas of science and medicine), I am not aware that this crucial difference between the two cultures has been observed anywhere in print. The nearest discussion I can find is Michael J. Puett, *To Become a God: Cosmology, Sacrifice, and Self-Divinization in Early China* (Harvard-Yenching Institute Monographs Series, 57; Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), pp. 80-121, but Puett (who selects Empedocles as his prime Greek comparandum) does not refer to physical immortality. Cf. also Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, II, pp. 72-76.

29. Cf. Mark P.O. Morford and Robert J. Lenardon, *Classical Mythology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 7th edn, 2003), p. 128; and the classic study by Martin P. Nilsson (1874-1967), *A History of Greek Religion* (trans. F.J. Fielden; Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2nd edn, 1952), p. 157.

or Pterelaus). It is inconceivable in Greece for a normal human being to attain godhead by natural means — yet this is precisely what happens to the Spirit Mother of the West. Her techniques may be uncommonly potent, but they are as natural as any other form of calisthenics, and could be practiced by any mortal fortunate enough to learn them.

There are, no doubt, many reasons why this-worldly immortality was allowed in ancient China — at least in certain circles — but the most promising line of analysis has to do with the denial that decay is inevitable. For this is exactly the premise that coevals of the *Secret Instructions* attacked when they wished to discredit the idea.³⁰ Some of the most admired criticisms come from Wang Chong 王充 (AD 27–c. 100), an intellectual maverick acclaimed long after his death as China's clarion voice of common sense. At the end of a harangue entitled 'Misconceptions about the Way' ('*Daoxu*' 道虛), Wang writes:

Some masters of the Way suppose they can ingest medicinal substances to quicken their bodies and augment their *qi*, extending their years and transcending this world. This is also a misconception.

There surely is evidence that one might ingest medicinal substances to quicken one's body and augment one's *qi*. But there is no effective means in the world to extend one's years and transcend the world. The many medicines cure disease; when the disease is cured, the *qi* is restored, and the body is quickened. The body is naturally quick and the *qi* naturally hardy by virtue of the endowment of all human beings. When we are struck by wind and moisture, the many diseases harm us, and thus our bodies become languid and our *qi* feeble. If we ingest medicine, our body and *qi* return to their former state. For it is not that our *qi* is originally feeble and our bodies originally languid; we just obtain our medicine to make our *qi* hardy and our bodies quick. When we receive [our body and *qi*], they already have [these qualities]. How, therefore, could one extend one's years by ingesting medicinal substances, which dispel the many diseases by making the body quick and the *qi* hardy, returning them to their original nature?

As for transcending the world — among the creatures with blood vessels, there is not one that does not live; and there is nothing that lives that does not die. One knows that it will die from the fact that it is alive. Heaven and Earth are not alive; thus they will not die. *Yin* and *yang* [the two complementary aspects of *qi*] are not alive; thus they will not die. Death is the consequence of life; life is the evidence of death. Whatever has a beginning must have an end; whatever has an end must have a beginning. Only something with no beginning or end can live eternally without death.

The life of human beings is like water. Water congeals to form ice as *qi* is accumulated to form a human being. Ice lasts at most a single winter, and

30. Cf. Benjamin Penny, 'Immortality and Transcendence,' in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, p. 112; and Yü, 'Life and Immortality in the Mind of Han China,' pp. 109-11.

then it melts; human beings reach their limit within a hundred years, and then they die. Can human beings be made not to die as if ice could be made not to melt? All those who study the techniques of immortality and recipes to forestall death must fall short, just as one cannot prevent ice from melting in the end.³¹

Here Wang Chong adopts two argumentative strategies that were widely imitated.³² First, he concedes that medicines *do* have an effect, but grants this point only in order to defuse the more extravagant pretensions of immortalism: what medicines accomplish, in his view, is no more than the restoration of one's damaged physical substance to its original healthy state; they cannot augment the physical substance beyond its original endowment. Then Wang Chong proceeds to his second proposition, which is akin to our law of the conservation of matter: *qi* itself is indestructible (a massive assertion conveyed in the simple statement that *yin* and *yang* are not alive and do not die – which also implies that *qi* is volitionless), but living things, as transitory combinations of *qi*, must eventually decompose.³³ Inanimate substances like Heaven and Earth might last forever, but no living being, human or divine, can copulate with boys in perpetuity.³⁴

31. Huang Hui, *Lunheng jiaoshi (fu Liu Pansui jijie)* (Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1990), 7.24.338. Compare the translations in Nicolas Zufferey, *Wang Chong: Discussions Critiques* (Connaissance de l'Orient; Paris: Gallimard, 1997), pp. 98-99. (§§24, 29-31); and Alfred Forke (1867-1944), *Lun-hêng* (repr., New York: Paragon, 1962 [1907-11]), I, pp. 349-50.

32. For example, Xun Yue 荀悅 (AD 148-209) expresses essentially the same views in his *Extended Reflections* (*Shenjian* 申鑒). Some people may enjoy unusually long life-spans, but no one can endure beyond the term allotted by fate; medicines, similarly, can restore health, but cannot bring about immortality. Text in 'Suxian,' *Shenjian*, ed. Qian Peiming (*Guoxue jiben congshu*), 3.18-19. Cf. Chi-yun Chen, *Hsün Yüeh (AD 148-209): The Life and Reflections of an Early Medieval Confucian* (Cambridge Studies in Chinese History, Literature and Institutions; Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), pp. 144-45.

33. Cf. Nicolas Zufferey, *Wang Chong (27-97?): Connaissance, politique et vérité en Chine ancienne* (Schweizer Asiatische Studien: Monographien 19; Berne: Peter Lang, 1995), pp. 262-66.

34. At one point Wang Chong mentions the bedchamber techniques specifically, and says: 'The method of [copulating with] five women at a time, which the Unadorned Girl expounded before the Yellow Emperor, not only injures the bodies of the father and mother, but also despoils the endowment of males and females' ('Mingyi,' *Lunheng jiaoshi* 2.6.55). Cf. Liu Dalin, *Zhongguo gudai xing wenhua* (rev. edn; Yinchuan: Ningxia renmin, 2003), pp. 348-51 (optimistically labeled 'collectors' edition' 珍藏本). Forke, *Lun-hêng*, I, p. 141, appears to be unaware that 'the Unadorned Girl' refers to a tradition represented by the now-lost *Sunü jing* 素女經 and *Sunü fang* 素女方, two other bedchamber manuals with fragments preserved in *Ishimpō*. I cannot

Though Wang Chong is celebrated today and ubiquitously quoted, his arguments are anticipated in the surviving fragments of Huan Tan 桓譚 (43 BC–AD 28), a writer and statesman about two generations older.

I once visited the former Magistrate of Chen District, Du Fang of my own commandery, and saw him reading the works of Laozi. He said: 'Laozi employed "serenity"³⁵ and cultivated his endowment in order to bring about longevity of several hundred years. Suppose I practice his Way – could I not extend my years and escape senectitude?'

I replied: 'Although [people] have the same body and name, in the quality of their endowment, talents and capabilities, all are of different degrees. There are strong and weak, firm and fragile physiques. By cherishing [the body] and cultivating it as one uses it, one may slightly improve it. Compare this to clothing, shoes, or utensils, which will stay intact if one cherishes them.' I saw that there was a rush candle by his side, from which about a foot of ash was hanging down, so I took advantage of this as an analogy, saying: 'The spirit dwells in the body as the flame burns down the candle. If one is good at maintaining [the candle] and adjusting it to follow the flame, one can keep [the flame] from burning out until it uses up the whole candle. If there is no longer any flame in the candle, it certainly cannot become active independently in the air, nor can one burn its ashes afterwards. The ashes are like senectitude in human beings: the teeth fall out; the hair turns white; the muscles and flesh wither and the spirit cannot lubricate them. If [the body] is like this inside, outside, and all over, then the *qi* is depleted and we die, just as the flame and candle expire together. If people encounter some pathogen, injury, or illness and do not meet with a nurse or fine doctor, sometimes they are forced to die. When they die [in this way], their muscles, flesh, sinews, and bones are like a flame that has inclined toward a piercing wind and is not rescued or protected; they are extinguished even though there is flesh to spare and the torch is still long.'

...

Later one evening I was with Boshi,³⁶ we lit a flame in some tallow and sat down to talk. When the tallow in the brazier was used up, the wick, scorched bare, was about to go out. I used this to explain [my opinion] to

find in these texts any passage documenting specifically 'the method of copulating with five women at a time,' but such statements as 'The essence of the method lies in frequently mounting young girls but not often leaking semen' (Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, p. 510) are typical. The *Secret Instructions* echo this idea: 'The Daoist Master of the Green Ox said: "If you often change women, the benefits will be even greater; changing off among ten or more women in one night is especially fine. If you constantly mount the same woman, her refined *qi* will turn weak; she will not be of much benefit to anyone, and moreover it will emaciate her and give her aches"' (Li Ling, *Zhongguo fangshu kao*, p. 514).

35. An allusion to Laozi 31; see Laozi *jiaoshi* 31.126.

36. Boshi is unidentified, but see Timoteus Pokora, *Hsin-lun (New Treatise) and Other Writings by Huan T'an (43 BC–28 AD)* (Michigan Papers in Chinese Studies, 20; Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 1975), p. 87 n. 34.

Boshi, saying: 'People decay and age just like the scorched [wick of] that lamp,' and I spoke again of the rush candle from before.

Boshi said: 'When a brazier or candle is going to expire, one can put in more tallow or change the candle. When people age and decay, they can either let themselves succumb or carry on.'

I replied: 'People are endowed with bodies and live just like that brazier or a single candle: when it comes to its end, how can it replenish or exchange itself? The replenishing and exchanging occur through the agency of a human being. It might be through the agency of Heaven that people succumb; or perhaps Heaven can effect something unusual.³⁷ If one's muscles, bones, blood, and *qi* are full and strong, one's body and spirit will be supported and will subsist for a long time; and if they are bad, they will be broken and injured—just as a flame will [burn out] quickly or slowly depending on the quantity of the tallow and the length of the candle. If you want the brazier and candle to replenish or exchange themselves, they cannot, but if you collect the tallow on the sides so that it soaks the tip [of the wick], and turn and adjust the rush or the candle so that the flame rests safely, then it will always become bright again. But when the foundation is used up, there is no longer any way to light it. Now as for those who cultivate their endowment—some may be able to make their lost teeth grow again, or their white hair turn black, or their cheeks radiate, just as one can collect the tallow and adjust the wick. But when they come to the end of their longevity, they can only die.'³⁸

Cao Zhi 曹植 (192–232) recorded a related episode:

There was one Huan Junshan [i.e. Huan Tan], whose writings contain many good points. Liu Zijun [i.e. Liu Xin 劉歆, d. A.D. 23] once asked someone: 'Can one really avoid decay and degeneration by repressing lustful desires and shutting one's ears and eyes?'

At the time, there was an old elm tree in the courtyard. Junshan pointed to it and said: 'This tree has no emotions to be curbed, nor ears or eyes to be shut, but it will still wither and rot. When Zijun says that one can avoid decay and degeneration, he is speaking nonsense.'³⁹

There is one important difference between Huan Tan's position and Wang Chong's: Huan seems to allow for the possibility that Heaven

37. This line is opaque and could be punctuated in several different ways.

38. Seng You 僧祐 (445–518), *Hongming ji* (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* LII.2102), 5.29a-c. Compare the fine translation of Pokora, § 84.

39. Daoxuan 道宣 (596–667), *Guang Hongming ji* (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* LII.2103), 5.118c-119a. Compare the translation in Donald Holzman, 'Ts'ao Chih and the Immortals,' *Asia Major* (third series) 1.1 (1988), p. 17, with unpersuasive interpretation. In Holzman's analysis, everyone is either a 'Confucian' or a 'Taoist,' and Cao's complex and conflicting utterances regarding immortality are defused by supposing that he simply 'mellowed' (25 and 27) over time. Finally, Holzman's principal criteria for determining the authenticity of a disputed text are its literary merit and acceptance by esteemed gentlemen (e.g., 56); these are old-fashioned Sinological fallacies.

might be disposed to increase our store of life, just as a human being can add more tallow to a brazier or replace a dying candle with a new one. But he does not go into any detail as to how or why Heaven might bless us in this manner, and the second quote brusquely rules out the familiar hope that immortality might be our celestial reward for righteous conduct. Wang Chong, for his part, denies that Heaven is even alive, and hence repudiates the venerable anthropopathic notion that Heaven enforces its will in the human arena. But otherwise Huan and Wang share the same general attitude,⁴⁰ and, for all their vivid imagery, there is every reason to assume that they were only expressing what most Chinese people had always believed: immortality cannot be attained without some kind of supramundane intervention. (The tendency to categorize such views as 'Confucian'⁴¹ is therefore misguided; after all, Wang Chong is renowned for being one of the few thinkers in pre-modern China to criticize Confucius directly.)⁴² If such skeptical voices became more audible in the first centuries AD, it was precisely because the conventional outlook was being questioned, even among the solemn literati, as never before.⁴³

Why would anyone have begun to doubt that decay is an intrinsic attribute of life and thereby earn the ire of Huan Tan and Wang Chong in the first place? Some of the best source-material for this question comes from the Inner Chapters 内篇 of the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, which argue that our ingrained understanding of the world has been distorted by socialization.⁴⁴ If we were to cast off this stultifying cross, we would be

40. Huan and Wang are compared in Zhong Zhaopeng, 'Huan Tan pingzhuan,' in Zhong Zhaopeng and Zhou Guidian, *Huan Tan, Wang Chong pingzhuan* (Zhongguo sixiangjia pingzhuan congshu, 24; Nanjing: Nanjing Daxue, 1993), pp. 59-71.

41. As in Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, II, pp. 111-12.

42. See Nicolas Zufferey, 'Pourquoi Wang Chong critique-t-il Confucius?' *Études Chinoises* 14.1 (1995), pp. 25-54.

43. Etienne Balazs, *Chinese Civilization and Bureaucracy: Variations on a Theme* (ed. Arthur F. Wright; trans. H.M. Wright; New Haven: Yale University Press, 1964), pp. 187-254, is still one of the best surveys of the intellectual history of this period. See also Poo, *In Search of Personal Welfare*, pp. 160-63.; Chen Qiyun, *Han Jin Liuchao wenhua, shehui, zhidu - Zhonghua zhongguo qianqi shi yanjiu* (Taipei: Xinwen, 1996), pp. 176-78; *idem*, 'Confucian, Legalist, and Taoist Thought in Later Han,' in Denis Twitchett and Michael Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China. I. The Ch'in and Han Empires, 221 BC-AD 220* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), pp. 767-807; and Paul Demiéville (1894-1979), 'Philosophy and Religion from Han to Sui' (trans. Francesca Bray), in Twitchett and Loewe (eds.), *The Cambridge History of China*, pp. 808-72.

44. See Judith Berling, 'Self and Whole in Chuang Tzu,' in Donald J. Munro (ed.), *Individualism and Holism: Studies in Confucian and Taoist Values* (Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, 52; Ann Arbor, MI: Michigan University Press, 1985), pp. 101-20.

cognizant of all kinds of natural phenomena that appear as nothing short of miraculous to the unenlightened.

Jianwu inquired of Lianshu,⁴⁵ saying: 'I heard Jieyu say something great but irrational; it wandered off and never came back. I was alarmed and frightened by his words, which were boundless like the Milky Way. They were too far-flung; there was nothing near to the experience of human beings in them.'

Lianshu said: 'What was he talking about?'

'He said: "There is a Spirit Man who dwells on the remote mountain of Guye. His flesh and skin are like ice or snow, and he is as graceful as a maiden. He does not eat of the Five Cereals; he breathes in the wind and drinks dew. He uses cloudy *qi* as his chariot, drives a flying dragon, and wanders beyond the Four Seas. With his spirit concentrated, he causes creatures to be without defect or disease, and the grain to ripen." I thought this was mad and did not believe him.'

Lianshu said: 'It is so. The blind have nothing with which to share in the vision of patterns and ornaments, nor the deaf in the sound of bells and drums. Is it only in the body that there is blindness and deafness? They exist in knowledge too. This statement refers to you!⁴⁶ Such a man, with such inner power, fuses with the Myriad Things and becomes one with them. Society begs for organization.⁴⁷ Why would he toil at this and make the world his affair? There is nothing that harms such a man. If there were a great flood reaching Heaven, he would not drown, nor would he be burned by a drought so great that it would melt metal or stone and scorch the mountains of Earth. One could cast a [Sage King like] Yao or Shun even from his dust and chaff. Why would he be willing to make [worldly] things his affair?'⁴⁸

45. Both unidentified; Jianwu is glossed by Sima Biao 司馬彪 (died c. AD 306) as the name of an immortal mountain spirit. See Wang Shumin, *Zhuangzi jiaoquan* (Zhongyang Yanjiuyuan Lishi Yuyan Yanjiusuo zhuankan, 88; Taipei, 1988), 1.24 n. 1. Jieyu is known from *Analec*s 18.5.

46. Following the commentary of Jiao Hong 焦贛 (1541-1620), *Zhuangzi jiaoquan*, 1.28 n. 3.

47. *Shi* 世, literally 'generation,' refers to the civilized, as opposed to the natural, world. *Luan* 亂, usually understood as 'disorder,' is used in the *Shangshu* to denote the social order wrought by a sage. See the commentary of Li Zhen 李楨 (1200-58), *Zhuangzi jishi* 1A.1.32 n.3. (The basic meaning of *luan* is 'to ravel a skein'.)

48. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (1844-96), *Zhuangzi jishi* (ed. Wang Xiaoyu; Xinbian Zhuzi jicheng; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1961), 1A.1.26-31 ('Xiaoyao you'). The last two sentences are omitted here; they are taken in this edition to be part of Lianshu's speech, but I believe they constitute an entirely separate section. Compare the translations in Victor H. Mair, *Wandering on the Way: Early Taoist Tales and Parables of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Bantam, 1994; repr., Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press, 1998), pp. 6-7; A.C. Graham, *Chuang-tzu: The Inner Chapters* (London: Allen & Unwin, 1981; repr., Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001), p. 46; and Burton Watson, *The Complete Works*

We are not told precisely how Jieyu's Spirit Man attained his exalted state, but the text offers some important hints. The first is that 'he does not eat of the Five Cereals.'⁴⁹ In later hagiographical literature, this attribute is meant literally: abstaining from grain becomes a hallmark of the insouciant immortal. In the *Zhuangzi*, however, it is best understood as a symbol of the Spirit Man's unwillingness to profit from domestication; for by taking this easier path, he would only domesticate *himself*. Instead, he seeks purer nourishment in wild and untamed nature. In ancient China – the epitome of agrarian society – refusing to eat cereals would be tantamount to rejecting the entire human economy.⁵⁰ To the mind of a peasant, this would be mad self-destruction, but the Spirit Man, far from being handicapped by forgoing the fruits of civilization, is rendered immune to the corrupting forces of civil society. Whereas men like Jianwu, with their narrow horizons, are as good as blind and deaf, the awesome denizen of Mount Guye owns no worldly things, but travels to heights and distances that the masses cannot imagine.⁵¹

The detail that extreme temperatures and environments cannot harm the Spirit Man is repeated in similar descriptions.

The Ultimate Man is like a spirit! The great marshes may blaze, but they cannot burn him; the rivers may freeze, but they cannot chill him. A flash of

of *Chuang Tzu* (Records of Civilization: Sources and Studies, 80; New York: Columbia University Press, 1970), pp. 33-34.

49. See Robert Ford Campany, 'The Meanings of Cuisines of Transcendence in Late Classical and Early Medieval China,' *T'oung Pao* 91.1-3 (2005), esp. pp. 7-24; *idem*, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, pp. 22-24; and Stephen Eskildsen, *Asceticism in Early Taoist Thought* (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture; Albany: SUNY Press, 1998), pp. 43-44; and Jean Lévi, 'L'abstinence des céréales chez les taoïstes,' *Études Chinoises* 1 (1982), pp. 3-47.

50. Compare the 'Qihuan' chapter of the *Mozi*: 'The Five Cereals are what the people rely on'; text in Wu Yujiang, *Mozi jiaozhu* (ed. Sun Qizhi; Xibian Zhuzi jicheng; Beijing: Zhonghua, 1993), 1.5.36.

51. Very similar arguments, though with different metaphysical foundations, are found in *Weimojie suoshuo jing* (*Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* XIV.475, i.e. the *Vimalakīrtinirdeśā*), translated by Kumārajīva 鳩摩羅什 (344-413): armed with their comprehension of 'non-duality' (*buer* 不二), buddhas and bodhisattvas are capable of a litany of miracles, as in 'Busi yi pin,' 6.546b-47a (beginning with the ability to 'contain the height and breadth of Mount Sumeru in a mustard seed without increasing or decreasing their sizes'). The resemblances between this sort of rhetoric and that of the *Zhuangzi* surely contributed to the latter's resurgence in the post-Han era. Cf. E. Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China* (Sinica Leidensia, 11; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1972), I, p. 132. For a study of the influence of *Zhuangzi* on Kumārajīva's student Sengzhao 僧肇 (384-414), see Chen Shaoming, 'Qiwulun' jiqi yingxiang, *Xueshushi congshu* (Beijing: Beijing Daxue, 2004), pp. 122-36.

lightning may crack the mountains and blowing winds may shake the oceans, but they cannot startle him. Someone like this uses cloudy *qi* as his chariot, rides astride the sun and moon, and wanders beyond the four seas. Death and life cause no change in him, much less the cusps of profit and loss!⁵²

This passage is the culmination of a dialogue in Chapter 2 of the *Zhuangzi*, 'The Discourse on Making Things Equal' ('Qiwu lun' 齊物論), in which 'discrimination' (*bian* 辯) is singled out as a characteristic of people who are bonded to their finite perspectives and cannot view the world in its multifarious totality. Absolute standards are necessarily artificial. Whether a sensation is apperceived as 'hot' or 'cold' depends on one's frame of reference; the Spirit Man, who takes the whole universe as his frame of reference, is unencumbered by such distinctions. He retains his integrity in the face of drastic stimuli because he refuses to discriminate between phenomena that moribund society regards as polar opposites. But the magic that the Spirit Man appears to have mastered by transcending dichotomies is really as natural as any other human activity; like the Spirit Mother's sexual techniques, it is accessible to anyone who makes the effort to discover it. What is *unnatural* is our confined and rapacious way of life. One price we pay for husbandry and profiteering is losing the ability to ride on cloudy *qi* and soar unscathed over blazing marshes.

The other cost is our health. Nothing is more dangerous than to be useful, especially in a commercial sense. (As Jieyu himself is said to announce, 'Everyone knows the use of usefulness, but no one knows the use of uselessness.')⁵³ A tree with valuable timber is the first to be felled; an able-bodied subject is the first to be called upon for wearying *corvée*.⁵⁴ Only creatures that have no palpable economic value live out their natural lives. These themes are exemplified in many stories and parables. One of the most illustrative involves Carpenter Shi:

52. 'Qiwu lun,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 1B.2.96. Cf. also 'Da zongshi,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 3A.6.226: 'He ascends heights without shuddering; he enters water without getting wet; he enters fire without feeling hot.' Compare the translations in Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, p. 21; Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, p. 58; and Watson, *The Complete Works*, p. 46.

53. 'Renjian shi,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 2B.4.186.

54. 'Qinshi,' *Mozi jiaozhu* 1.1.2 (by all appearances a late chapter), appears to borrow this idea: 'If there are five awls, one will be the sharpest, and the sharpest is surely the first to be worn down. If there are five blades, one will be the keenest, and the keenest is surely the first to be blunted. In this way the sweetest well soon runs dry; the loftiest tree is soon felled; the numinous tortoise is soon broiled, the divine snake is soon destroyed.' (The 'numinous tortoise' almost certainly refers to an oracle bone; commentators opine that the 'divine snake' is also used in divination rites.)

Carpenter Shi was going to Qi when he came to Quyuan and saw a cork oak that served as a shrine to the god of soil. It was so large that it would cover several thousand oxen. Measured by tape, it was a hundred spans around. It was so high that it looked down on the mountains. Only twenty-five yards up did it have any branches, and there were more than ten of them that could have been made into boats. People gathered to gaze at it as though at a market, but the carpenter did not even turn to look; he kept walking without a halt. When his disciple had gotten tired of gazing at it, he ran up to Carpenter Shi, and said: 'For as long as I have wielded my hatchet and followed you, master, I have never seen timber this beautiful. Yet you were unwilling to look at it; you walked without halting. Why was that?'

[The carpenter] said: 'Enough! Do not speak of it! It is unsound wood. If you made a boat out of it, it would sink; if you made a coffin out of it, it would soon rot; if you made a bowl out of it, it would soon break; if you made a door out of it, it would ooze sap; if you made a pillar out of it, it would be infested with worms. This is a tree with bad timber. It has no use; that is why it has been able to live so long.'

When Carpenter Shi had arrived back home, the cork-oak shrine appeared to him in a dream, saying: 'What are you comparing me with? Would you compare me with fine-grained trees? The fructiferous kind — cherry-apple, pear, orange, pomelo — are stripped when their fruit ripens, and, stripped, they are abused. Their larger branches are broken, their smaller branches snapped off. These are trees that make their lives bitter through their own abilities; thus they do not live out their Heaven-ordained years, but always die halfway down their path. They have let themselves be assailed by the vulgar rabble. All things are like this. I, on the other hand, have been in search of uselessness for a long time; now, near death, I have attained it, and it has been of great use to me. If you made me useful, how would I get to be this big? Moreover, you and I are both things; what is the use of our treating each other as things? You, an unsound man nearing death — how can you know unsound wood?'

Carpenter Shi awoke and reported his dream. His disciple said: 'If its intention is to secure uselessness, why has it become a shrine?'

'Silence! Do not speak! It has only consigned itself there because it regards those who do not understand it as an affliction. If it did not become a shrine, it would be in jeopardy of being cut down. Moreover, the manner in which it has protected itself is out of the ordinary; if we should explain it by conventional principles, would we not be wide of the mark?'⁵⁵

The cork oak, though exceptional, is obviously not immortal because it freely admits that its own end is near. Is the Spirit Man encountered earlier likewise subject to death in the end? This is a matter of consider-

55. 'Renjian shi,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 2B.4.170-74. Compare the translations in Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, pp. 37-38; Graham, *Chuang-tzŭ*, pp. 72-73; and Watson, *The Complete Works*, pp. 63-65.

able dispute. For the most part, the *Zhuangzi* looks askance at the macrobiotic exercises of *soi-disant* masters:

They blow and breathe, inhale and exhale, expectorate the old and take in the new, do the 'bear-climb' and 'bird-stretch'; they pursue longevity and nothing more – these are the masters of gymnastics, the nurturers of the body, devotees of the longevity of Progenitor Peng.⁵⁶

Clinging to life betrays an inability to recognize that life and death are interdependent: 'We live while we die; we die while we live.'⁵⁷ Thus the *Zhuangzi* typically counsels accepting death with equanimity.⁵⁸ Only by acquiescing in death can one transcend the ignorant human dread of it.

But such nuances did not always matter to enthusiastic practitioners, and the received text even includes two or three passages prizing physical immortality – spurious additions, in the judgment of modern scholars.⁵⁹ When the *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* emerged as the cynosure of highbrow taste in the Latter Han and Six Dynasties, their names became synonymous with marvelous longevity, regardless of the inconvenient

56. 'Keyi,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 6A.15.535. Compare the translations in Mair, *Wandering on the Way*, p. 145; Graham, *Chuang-tzū*, p. 265; and Watson, *The Complete Works*, pp. 167-68. Watson renders *daoyin* 道引 as 'Induction,' and writes that the meanings of such exercises as *xiongjing* 熊經 (translated above as 'bear-climb') and *niaoshen* 鳥申 ('bird-stretch') 'can only be guessed at' (p. 168 n. 1). The medical texts excavated at Mawangdui 馬王堆 and Zhangjiashan 張家山 have cleared up this riddle once and for all. *Xiongjing* appears in *Daoyin tu* 導引圖, an illustrated codex of gymnastic positions from Mawangdui, as well as *Yinshu* 引書, a similar manuscript from Zhangjiashan. See *Mawangdui Hanmu boshu* (Beijing: Wenwu, 1985), IV, p. 95 (with a photograph of the damaged scroll at p. 52, where *xiongjing* appears at the bottom right); and *Zhangjiashan Hanmu zhujian* (*Ersiqi hao mu*) (Beijing: Wenwu, 2001), p. 292 (strip 50). For the various possible meanings of *xiongjing*, see Ma Jixing, *Mawangdui gu yishu kaoshi* (Changsha: Hunan kexue jishu, 1992), p. 864 n. 1. Moreover, the phrase *chuixu huxi* 吹呼吸 ('blow and breathe, inhale and exhale'), taken by most translators of *Zhuangzi* as derisive, appears in *Yinshu* as well (p. 298, strip 104); thus it must be a technical term. On *daoyin* ('guiding and pulling') generally, see Ute Engelhardt, 'Daoyin tu und Yinshu: Neue Erkenntnisse über die Übungen zur Lebenspflege in der frühen Han-Zeit,' *Monumenta Serica* 49 (2001), pp. 213-26; Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts* (Sir Henry Wellcome Asian Series, 2; London: Kegan Paul International, 1998), pp. 132-35; and Gao Dalun, *Zhangjiashan Hanmu Yinshu yanjiu* (Chengdu: Ba-Shu, 1995).

57. 'Qiwu lun,' *Zhuangzi jishi* 1B.2.66.

58. I have discussed such attitudes toward death in 'A Mind-Body Problem in the *Zhuangzi*?' in Scott Cook (ed.), *Hiding the World in the World: Uneven Discourses on the *Zhuangzi** (SUNY Series in Chinese Philosophy and Culture; Albany: SUNY Press, 2003), pp. 226-47.

59. See Graham, *Chuang-tzū*, pp. 176-77.

fact that the texts did not propound a doctrine of immortality.⁶⁰ We have already seen Huan Tan's friend Du Fang long for everlasting youth as he leafed through the *Daode jing*, even though the ultimate goal in this scripture is 'to die without being obliterated' (*si er bu wang* 死而不亡): to set aside aspirations of immortality and merge one's soul with the timeless Way.⁶¹

As stated above, sexual vampirism was never conceived as the only possible method of attaining this-worldly immortality in China; there is also a vibrant macrobiotic literature involving alchemy, dietary regimens, gymnastics, meditation – even swallowing saliva.⁶² Nevertheless, sexual intercourse (of the predatory nature related in such texts as the *Secret Instructions of the Jade Bedchamber*) constituted a prominent sub-category of such macrobiotic techniques, and it is worth emphasizing, by way of closing, two basic aspects of the Chinese conception of sexuality that made this possible. After all, the idea that one may copulate all the way to immortality will surely seem unusual, perhaps even bizarre, to readers accustomed to different sexual and theological traditions.

First, though the point is sometimes overwrought, it bears repeating that sex was not considered sinful in ancient China. To be sure, various powers, whether for moral, legal, political, or religious reasons, sought to limit the permissible partners and locations for sexual intercourse.⁶³

60. An even more bizarre transformation befell the figure of Mo Di 墨翟 (died c. 390 BC), the ancient philosopher who never discussed physical immortality (at least not in any of the extant texts attributed to him or his followers), but who is said in Six Dynasties sources to have become a master alchemist and an immortal invested with revelations from even higher beings. See Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, pp. 329-30 and 508-10; Stephen W. Durrant, 'The Taoist Apotheosis of Mo Ti,' *JAOS* 97.4 (1977), pp. 540-46; and Shao Ruipeng 邵瑞彭 (1888-1937), 'Mozi ru shenxian jia zhi zakao,' *Hu Shi wencun sanji* (ed. Zheng Dahua; Hu Shi quanji; Hefei: Anhui jiaoyu, 2003), III, pp. 683-86.

61. Ellen Marie Chen, 'Is There a Doctrine of Physical Immortality in the Tao Te Ching?' *HR* 12.3 (1973), pp. 231-49, is still unsurpassed.

62. Many of these traditions are surveyed in Livia Kohn (ed.), *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques* (Michigan Monographs in Chinese Studies, 61; Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1989). However, the essays in this volume do not consistently distinguish between true Daoist techniques (such as *neidan* 内丹, a type of meditation inspired by alchemy) and essentially non-religious techniques that some Daoist practitioners incorporated into their methods of self-cultivation (such as gymnastics, drug-taking, and so on).

63. Cf. Matthew H. Sommer, *Sex, Law, and Society in Late Imperial China* (Law, Society, and Culture in China; Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), pp. 30-65, which surveys the standard imperial vision of sexual order that obtained until the

Injunctions relating to incest and adultery are the main examples of the former; the latter include prohibitions against sex in sacred precincts; in front of one's parents; or, in certain Daoist scriptures, outdoors (where one's nakedness would offend the fastidious spirits).⁶⁴ But sexual desire and sexual activity – especially if not 'immoderate' (*yin* 淫/媵) – were never laden with anything like a Christian conception of sin. As long as the partners were not morally or legally forbidden to cohabit with each other, they were free to practice, and desire pleasure from, whatever form of sex they desired. This attitude allowed anyone with sufficient means (and, in practice, this usually meant wealthy males) to regard the consumption of legal sexual partners for nutritive purposes as no more or less objectionable than the consumption of food or medicine.

Finally, one can hardly fail to notice the thorough materialism of this worldview. People, like all other physical things, are containers of *qi*, which can naturally be manipulated and consumed for one's own benefit if one knows how to do so. Manuals like the *Secret Instructions* frequently remind the reader that an incorrect or excessive application of its techniques can result in the death, or at least decrepitude, of the victims. But the purpose of these warnings is to keep the practitioner from ruining a useful possession; they are by no means voiced out of concern for the concubines themselves, or with the presumption that the willful destruction of human life is a fundamentally immoral act. Many people in ancient China were repulsed by the view that humans are no more than aggregations of *qi*, and it is understandable that the bitterest criticisms of sexual vampirism emerged from traditions, like religious Daoism, with a conception of morality that could not be contained within a purely materialistic cosmology.

eighteenth century, and its radical reorientation in the Qing dynasty. I discuss the underpinnings of sexual regulations in early imperial times in *The Culture of Sex in Ancient China*, pp. 75-109.

64. See 'Daolü jinji,' *Nūqing guilü* (HY 789), 3.2b. Cf Nickerson in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 259 n. 43; and, more generally, Wolfram Eberhard, *The Local Cultures of South and East China* (trans. Alide Eberhard; Leiden: E.J. Brill, 1968), p. 132.

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