

## MEDITATION AND "SPIRITUAL HYGIENE" IN LATE CLASSICAL TEXTS

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In Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu there are a few scattered passages that can be construed as referring to meditative practices, or to practices aiming at purification and regulation of internal spiritual forces.<sup>1</sup> But it is not until late classical times that definite evidence of such practices can clearly be found. At that point we find such evidence in a number of sources, such as the Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu, the Chieh Lao chapter of the Han Fei, and the Nei yeh and Hsin shu sections of the Kuan-tzu.

In order to understand such references properly, one must ask after the motivation of spiritual-hygienic practices: what led individuals to undertake such practices, and what meaning was felt to lie in them?

It could be argued that the ultimate source of spiritual hygiene was the high value placed on inwardness in the Taoist classics, especially the Tao te ching: though the Tao is universal, in its essential state it is to be found deep within all things, at their root or core. But in ancient Chinese (and to some extent in almost all languages), it was difficult to express inwardness except by using terms that carried physical overtones. Often Lao-tzu adopted physical terms (such as fu, "belly") as metaphors for spiritual realities.<sup>2</sup> Those who are aware of such usage have no trouble comprehending the metaphors. But others, who think in more typical material terms, can be misled into interpreting the text in overly physical terms. This phenomenon, while doubtless not the whole cause of spiritual-hygienic practices, may well have played some role in promoting them.

For instance, in one passage of the Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu we read, "The foundation of all things is that one must first put one's self (shen) into order."<sup>3</sup> Putting one's self into order is a perfectly good Confucian sentiment, and since the preceding discussion centers on how to rule the empire, one might view this line as either Taoist or Confucian in import. But the following lines make clear than shen is not here interpreted as "self" in a moral sense, but as "self" in a much more material sense.

Safeguard its great treasure. Use its new [forces] and dispel its old, then the pores will be unobstructed. Daily renew the essential forces (ching-ch'i) and get rid of pernicious forces completely, and you will return to [the course leading to fulfillment of] your natural lifespan. [One who does] this is called a True Person.<sup>4</sup>

The terms ching and shen are both used in the Tao te ching, but never together, and never clearly referring to spiritual forces or processes within a person.<sup>5</sup> In Chuang-tzu, ching is predicated of the Tao, of Heaven and Earth, and of the "six forces" (liu ch'i), as well as of humans. Shen is used there much as in the Tao te ching, except that people are also said to have shen in their nature.<sup>6</sup>

The author of the Chieh Lao makes even more use of the terms ching and shen. For instance, he says, "Therefore the Sage saves his essence and spirit, and esteems resting in quietness," and, "If the Sage treasures his spirit, then his essence will flourish."<sup>7</sup> Elsewhere he says, "He who is moderate (se) saves his essence and spirit, and safeguards (se) his wisdom and knowledge. Hence it is said (in the Tao te ching, ch. 59), 'In ruling the people and serving Heaven, there is nothing like moderation.'"<sup>8</sup> There is no clear indication that any of those passages refer to meditation or to hygienic practices. But there is another passage in the Chieh Lao that does seem to present such ideas:

Who knows how to obey Heaven keeps his sense-organs empty. If one thinks and worries in repose, one's old Power (te) will not leave. If one keeps one's sense-organs empty, a harmonious force (ho-ch'i) will come in every day...Indeed, one who can make the old Power not leave and [simultaneously make] the harmonious force come in every day is a person who returns early. Hence the saying (in the Tao te ching, ch. 59), "to return early may be called 'accumulating abundant Power'."<sup>9</sup>

Although this passage is far from clear, it is certainly possible to interpret it -- and the passage from the Lü-shih ch'un-chiu quoted earlier -- as advocating conscious regulation of internal spiritual forces, possibly (though not certainly) by means of, or in association with, control of the breath. Because of the ambiguous nature of the terms employed (such as ch'i) it is difficult to determine to what extent such practices may have been intended as physical, hygienic practices.

I therefore propose to refer to them as a type of "spiritual hygiene." But even if these texts should be read in this manner, it should be noted that here, as in Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu, all such practices are subordinated to much broader philosophical concerns.

We are fortunate to have other texts of approximately the same period in which similar ideas and practices can be studied. I refer to the Nei yeh and Hsin shu chapters of the Kuan-tzu.<sup>10</sup> The Nei yeh is a text of some 1600-odd characters written in rhymed prose, closest stylistically to the Tao te ching. In content it sometimes parallels that classic, and sometimes echoes Chuang-tzu, but it usually displays a philosophy quite distinct from either of those works.<sup>11</sup> Tao and te are important in the work, but not quite so important as ch'i, ching, and shen,<sup>12</sup> all of which (as usual) are interrelated. One passage reads:

By essence (ching) is meant the essence of the breath of life (ch'i).

When the breath of life permeates, then there is life.<sup>13</sup>

Elsewhere, it suggests that when the essence is peaceful, it acts as the wellspring for ch'i, thus ensuring physical health.<sup>14</sup> But to assure a peaceful essence, it is necessary to purify the heart (hsin). The heart is the most important factor in the Nei Yeh.<sup>15</sup> In order to purify the heart, one must make it quiescent (ching) and, interestingly enough, correct (cheng):

Able to be correct and quiescent,

He is thus able to remain stable.

A stable heart lying within, his ears and eyes are sharp and clear,

His four limbs strong and firm.

And (his heart) thereby becomes the dwelling place of the essence.<sup>16</sup>

The heart being quiescent, the breath of life is regular,

And thus the Way may be made to stay.<sup>17</sup>

From these passages it becomes evident that ching, shen, tao, and te are *spiritual realities which are not always located within, but which must be obtained*. Several passages of the work spell out how the spiritual force is to be obtained:

Cultivate the heart and quiet the intellect (ssu).

Thus the Way may be obtained.<sup>18</sup>

If the form (hsing) is not correct, the Power (te) will not come.  
If the self within is not quiescent, the heart will not be well-regulated.  
When the form is correct and the Power acquired,  
The humaneness (jen) of Heaven and righteousness (i) of earth  
Will bounteously arrive of their own accord.<sup>19</sup>

You may rely and count upon the Way coming of itself.  
If quiescent, you will then obtain it.  
If hasty, you will then lose it.  
In the heart the subtle breath of life sometimes comes and sometimes  
disappears.<sup>20</sup>

When the Spirit (shen) comes of itself to reside within the body,  
It sometimes goes and sometimes comes,  
But no one is able to design this....  
Respectfully keep clean its abode,  
And (this embodiment of) the essence will then come of itself.<sup>21</sup>

Moreover, we read elsewhere that te ("Power") is to be daily used and renewed.<sup>22</sup>

It would be difficult to find a single coherent system of spiritual hygiene in all these passages. But two facts should be noted. The first is that there are two passages in the Kuan-tzu -- one of a few words, one of over a hundred -- that link spiritual hygiene to moderation in eating.<sup>23</sup> These passages, like a few of those seen earlier, emphasize the more physical aspects of such practices. Another passage, however, provides a different perspective:

For this reason, this breath of life (ch'i)  
Is never to be restrained through physical force,  
But may be brought to rest by the Power (te).  
It is never to be summoned by one's call,  
But may be made welcome by the intellect (i).<sup>24</sup>

It is thus clear that ch'i (and most likely all the other related terms) does not refer here to a force that is purely physical. But in weighing such considerations we must not forget that the Chinese whose thought we read in these texts did not share our implicit dichotomy between soul and body, between spiritual and physical. The foregoing passages demonstrate that those who engendered these texts deemed their entire personal system ("body" and "spirit") to be a single integrated system ruled by the "heart" or "mind" (hsin). Proper conduct of that entire system was considered essential to their physical and spiritual well-being.

#### NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Several Western scholars have claimed to find yoga and sexual hygiene in the Tao te ching. See Arthur Waley, The Way and Its Power (New York, 1958 c1934), especially pp. 116-120; J. J. L. Duyvendak, Tao Te Ching (London, 1954), p. 11; Holmes Welch, Taoism: The Parting of the Way, 2nd ed. (Boston, 1966), pp. 70ff.; and Chang Chung-yuan, Tao: A New Way of Thinking (New York, 1975), pp. 33f. Those views do not hold up under serious scrutiny, and are to be viewed as unwarranted eisegesis. The only lines in the Tao te ching which might actually imply the practice of internal spiritual regulation come in ch. 10 [in which concentration of the vital force (ch'i) is advocated] and ch. 55 [which contains a warning against freely plying the vital force].

<sup>2</sup> Tao te ching, chs. 3 and 12.

<sup>3</sup> Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu 13, in Yin Chung-jung, Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu chiao-shih (Hong Kong, 1935), p. 186, translation mine. Cf. Richard Wilhelm, trans., Das Frühling und Herbst des Lu Bu We (Jena, 1928), p. 32.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, translation mine. Cf. Wilhelm, *ibid.*; Waley, 118; and Welch, 101.

<sup>5</sup> The term ching is used in Tao te ching ch. 21. Shen is used in ch. 39 to refer to spiritual beings; in ch. 29 as a modifier of t'ien-hsia ("the world"); and in chs. 6 and 60 -- where it is usually understood as referring to spiritual beings, but might conceivably refer to spiritual forces within a person.

<sup>6</sup> For the use of ching in Chuang-tzu, see Giancarlo Finazzo, The Notion of Tao in Lao Tzu and Chuang Tzu (Taipei, 1968), pp. 124-25, 196, 17, 19, and 110. For the use of shen, see pp. 61, 66, 71, 97, 41-2, 88, and 126. Finazzo discusses the use of shen in Lao-tzu and Chuang-tzu more fully in pp. 210-12. <sup>7</sup> See Wang Huan-piao, ed., Han-Fei-tzu hsüan (Beijing, 1965), pp. 251, 252; translation mine. Cf. Wen-kuei Liao, Complete Works of Han Fei Tzu (London, 1939), I, 196, 199-200.

<sup>8</sup> Wang, 240; translation mine; cf. Liao, 180-81. There is one brief passage in the Yu Lao chapter in which the phrase ching-shen is used as in this text (see Wang, 264). A similar line also appears in the Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu. See Yin Chung-jung, p. 187; Wilhelm, p. 35.

<sup>9</sup> Wang, 241; translation based upon Liao, 181.

<sup>10</sup> According to W. Allyn Rickett, the Nei yeh (Kuan-tzu 49) dates from the early third or even the late fourth century; the Hsin shu, shang (Kuan-tzu 36) dates from the middle of the third century (the explanatory section being from the Han); and the Hsin shu, hsia (Kuan-tzu 37) is the product of an official named Jao living during the reign of Han Wu-ti (140-87 B.C.E.). See W.A. Rickett, Kuan-tzu: A Repository of Early Chinese Thought (Hong Kong, 1965), 155ff. Since, in my opinion, the Hsin shu, hsia is essentially a summary of the Nei yeh, I shall not treat it separately. The shorter Hsin shu, shang contains much similar material, but also contains a stronger admixture (ca. 30%) of Confucianism, Legalism, and Nominalism. With due respect for Prof. Rickett's neat Jao-hypothesis, I believe that the last lines of the text (urging quiescence and apparent lack of knowledge to avoid crimes and transgressions) might indicate a dating before the fall of the Ch'in. The only new element in the text relating to spiritual hygiene is the mention in the opening passage of the "nine apertures," which should be controlled by maintaining the heart (hsin) in the Tao.

<sup>11</sup> For instance, Nei yeh 1b (end)-2a (beg.) are reminiscent of Tao te ching 14, 21, 25; 2b (beg.) is similar to TTC 39; 4a (beg.) resembles TTC 32; and 5a (beg.) closely parallels TTC 16 and Chuang-tzu 8 (cf. Rickett, 165 n. 55). There are other echoes of TTC in shorter passages. Passages closer to Chuang-tzu are found in 2b and 3a. For the text, see Kuan-tzu, Nei yeh, in Chung-kuo li-tai che-hsüeh wen-hsüan (Beijing, 1963), I, 143; cf. Rickett, 160-61. Distinct Confucian sentiments can also be discerned in the text, e.g. Nei yeh 5b-6a (Rickett, 166).

<sup>12</sup> Tao appears in the text some 20 times; te 6 times. Ch'i appears 17 times, ching 12 times, and shen 7 times.

<sup>13</sup> Rickett, 160, Chinese inserted. For the text, see Chung-kuo li-tai che-hsüeh wen-hsüan (hereafter, "Text"), p. 143, line 7. For other uses of ching and ch'i together in the Kuan-tzu, see Yasui Sokken, Kuan-tzu tsuan ku (Taipei, 1976): ch. 35, p. 35; ch. 39, p. 3; and ch. 41, p. 17.

<sup>14</sup> See Rickett, 163, sec. H; cf. 162, sec. F. Cf. also Waley, 47-48.

<sup>15</sup> Hsin appears some 25 times in the text.

<sup>16</sup> Rickett, 160; for text, see p. 143, lines 6-7.

<sup>17</sup> Rickett, 159; text: 142, line 10. Cf. Rickett, 168.

<sup>18</sup> Rickett, 160, Chinese added; text: 143, line 2.

<sup>19</sup> Rickett, 161, Chinese added; text: 143, line 11.

<sup>20</sup> Rickett, 168, Chinese added; text: 146, lines 2-3.

<sup>21</sup> Rickett, 161-62, Chinese added; text: 143, line 13.

<sup>22</sup> Text: p. 142, line 7; p. 144, line 8. Cf. Waley, 49.

<sup>23</sup> Rickett, 166, 5b, line 2, and 166-67 (section N); text: 145, lines 4 and 11-15.

<sup>24</sup> Rickett, 158, all Chinese except Te added; text: 142, line 3f.