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**Leslie de Vries**

University of Westminster, EASTmedicine, Room N3.110, Copland Building 115, New Cavendish Street,  
UK-W1W 6UW London  
l.devries@westminster.ac.uk

**The Authentic Person as Ideal for the Late  
Ming Dynasty Physician**

**Daoist Inner Alchemy in Zhang Jiebin's Commentary on the  
*Huangdi neijing*<sup>1</sup>**

**Abstract**

*At the end of the Ming dynasty (1368–1644), Daoist inner alchemy had a significant influence on the medical theories of some of the most prominent scholar physicians in Jiangnan China. In this article, I zoom in on Zhang Jiebin's (1563–1640) commentary on the Huangdi neijing (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor), the foundational text of Chinese medicine. In the first chapter of this text, four exemplary types of human beings are described. I analyse how Zhang Jiebin elaborates on one of them, the Authentic Person (zhenren). Abundantly referring to inner alchemical sources, his focus is on the essential constituents of the body: essence (jing), qi, and spirit (shen). I further show how Zhang emphasizes strong connections between medicine and inner alchemy in a discussion on concrete practices, which could not only dispel disorders but also lead to the Daoist ideal of becoming a zhenren.*

**Keywords**

Zhang Jiebin, Chinese medicine, Ming dynasty, inner alchemy, qi, soteriology

**Introduction**

Joseph Needham, the great historian of Chinese science, considered Daoism to be the main catalyst for the development of science in China. He stated that Daoists (*daojia*), “whose speculations about, and insight into, Nature, fully equaled pre-Aristotelian Greek thought, [lie] at the basis of all Chinese science.”<sup>2</sup> Nathan Sivin strongly disagrees with this point of view, and argues that Needham had misinterpreted the term “Daoist.” According to Sivin, there is no evidence that the majority of important figures in the history of science, including physicians, were connected to Daoism.<sup>3</sup>

1

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2

Joseph Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. 2 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1956), 1.

3

Nathan Sivin, “On the Word ‘Taoist’ as a Source of Perplexity: With Special Reference to the Relations of Science and Religion in Traditional China,” *History of Religions* 17, no. 3–4 (1978); and Nathan Sivin, “Taoism and Science,” in *Medicine, Philosophy and Religion in Ancient China: Researches and Reflections* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 1995).

As this may be, Daoism undeniably influenced Chinese science. In the medical tradition for instance, this influence is apparent in the first two chapters of the *Suwen* (Plain Questions, hereafter SW) part of the *Huangdi neijing* (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor), the most important text of Chinese medicine.<sup>4</sup> The explanations on lifestyle and disease prevention in these chapters show remarkable parallels with ideas on longevity found in early Daoist texts.<sup>5</sup> Yet, the *Inner Classic* is not shaped by Daoist thought only. According to Paul Unschuld, most parts of the text should rather be understood in the eclectic Confucian-Legalist context of the Han dynasty, the time in which the majority of the text layers of the *Inner Classic* were written.<sup>6</sup>

How did Daoism in later times influence Chinese medicine? Are important stages in the development of Daoism represented in medicine? In his preliminary study on the links between Daoism and medicine in the late Ming (1368–1644) – early Qing (1644–1911) period, Peter Engelfriet argues that where there might have been tangible links between the two in earlier times, this was much less true in the late imperial period. In his opinion, certainly the links between Daoism and elite medicine are disputable. Engelfriet even assumes that the gradual disappearance of acupuncture – the main therapeutic device referred to in the *Inner Classic* – in elite medicine during the Ming dynasty was due to the fact that needling was at that time mainly practiced by Daoist physicians, who “were considered vulgar by learned doctors.”<sup>7</sup> The Daoist connections of medicine were forgotten by these elite physicians, or “they had been subsumed under learned traditions in such a manner that they were identified more with the Confucian tradition than with the Taoist tradition.”<sup>8</sup> About longevity techniques, traditionally closely related to Daoist practices, Engelfriet remarks:

“What had developed into a heterogeneous collection of spiritual and bodily exercises, tended to be no longer associated with Taoism in the first place. They were rather viewed in an eclectic way and catered to the wide spread passion to synthesize the Three Teachings.”<sup>9</sup>

Elite physicians of the late Ming – early Qing period are supposed to have been first of all syncretic Neo-Confucians.<sup>10</sup> Zhang Jiebin (1563–1640), undoubtedly one of the most influential physicians of his times, was responsible for “the most comprehensive attempt to conform medicine to the whole system of Neo-Confucian cosmology.”<sup>11</sup> One of the Neo-Confucian concepts he and other late Ming physicians referred to in order to understand the functioning of the human body was the Supreme Ultimate (*taiji*). Although the Supreme Ultimate originated from Daoism, it had become the cornerstone of Neo-Confucian cosmology.<sup>12</sup> Engelfriet says about syncretic attempts made by physicians such as Zhang Jiebin that:

“Where syncretic attempts were made, even though many were conscious of the fact that such concepts also appeared in Taoism, it were Neo-Confucian standards which formed the point of departure. Thus, in the same way Neo-Confucianism incorporated many Taoist and Buddhist elements, medicine rendered Neo-Confucian what originally might have had strong Taoist roots.”<sup>13</sup>

Likewise, the human body in the texts of these late Ming – early Qing scholarly physicians should be regarded as “a Neo-Confucian body rather than a Taoist one.”<sup>14</sup>

Chinese scholars generally express another opinion. Gai Jianmin, for example, points out the strong interaction between medicine and Daoism from the earliest till modern times.<sup>15</sup> Also some Western scholars acknowledge influences of Daoist inner alchemy (*neidan*) on medical doctrine in the Song dynasty

and later. Charlotte Furth, for instance, refers extensively to inner alchemical influences on Ming medicine, and on the works of the syncretic physician Yuan Huang (1533–1606) in particular, in her impressive study on gender in Chinese medical history.<sup>16</sup> But, did Daoist inner alchemy also have an influence on the medical writings of the great late Ming Neo-Confucian physician Zhang Jiebin? And, if so, how did he render it Neo-Confucian?

One of Zhang Jiebin's celebrated texts is the *Leijing* (Classic in Categories, 1624<sup>17</sup>). In this work, Zhang systematically rearranged the contents of the entire *Inner Classic* into twelve categories.<sup>18</sup> Zhang's rearrangement still ex-

4

The *textus receptus* of the *Inner Classic* consists of two parts: *Suwen* and *Lingshu* (Spiritual Pivot, hereafter LS), each containing 81 chapters. The standard edition of the *Suwen* used today dates from the 11<sup>th</sup> century. For a study of the history of the *Suwen* and its contents, see Paul U. Unschuld, *Huang Di nei jing su wen: Nature, Knowledge, Imagery in an Ancient Chinese Medical Text* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2003); for a translation, see Paul U. Unschuld and Herman Tessenow, in collaboration with Zheng Jinsheng, *Huang Di nei jing su wen: An Annotated Translation of Huang Di's Inner Classic – Basic Questions*. 2 vols (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 2011).

5

Paul U. Unschuld, *Medicine in China: A History of Ideas* (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1985), 106–108.

6

Ibid.

7

Peter Engelfriet, "Linked Faiths, Divergent Paths? Some Remarks on Taoism and Medicine in Late Ming and Early Qing China," in *Linked Faiths: Essays on Chinese Religions and Traditional Culture in Honour of Kristofer Schipper*, ed. Jan A.M. De Meyer and Peter M. Engelfriet (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2000), 262–265.

8

Ibid., 265.

9

Ibid., 259.

10

For critical reflections on the use of the word "syncretic" in the context of Late Ming dynasty Three Teachings Unity, see Timothy Brook, "Rethinking Syncretism: The Unity of the Three Teachings and their Joint Worship in Late-Imperial China," *Journal of Chinese Religions* no. 21 (1993), 3–44.

11

Ibid., 261–262.

12

On the Daoist origins of *taiji*, see Isabelle Robinet, "The Place and Meaning of the Notion of Taiji in Taoist Sources Prior to the Ming Dynasty," *History of Religions* 29, no. 4 (1990).

13

Engelfriet, 262.

14

Ibid., 260. On Zhu Zhenheng (1282–1358), the Yuan dynasty physician who introduced Zhou Dunyi's Neo-Confucian *taiji* philosophy into medical discourse, see Charlotte Furth, "The Physician as Philosopher of the Way: Zhu Zhenheng (1258–1358)," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 66, no. 2 (2006).

15

Gai Jianmin, *Daojiao yixue* (Daoist Medicine) (Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2001). Chinese scholars are either unaware of Sivin's standards or do not tend to follow them in applying the term "Daoist physician" (*daoyi*). (Personal communication with Kong Linghong, November 2007) Some even directly relate Zhang Jiebin to the Daoist tradition. See, for example, Zhu Deming, *Zhejiang yiyao shi* (History of Medicine and Pharmaceuticals in Zhejiang Province) (Beijing: Renmin junyi chubanshe, 1999), 319.

16

Charlotte Furth, *A Flourishing Yin: Gender in China's Medical History, 960–1665*. (Berkeley, Los Angeles and London: University of California Press, 1999), 187–206.

17

The dating of Song-Ming texts in this article follows Liu Shijue, ed., *Song Yuan Ming Qing yiji nianbiao* (Time Chart of Song, Yuan, Ming, Qing Medical Texts) (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 2005).

18

These twelve categories are: "Preserving Life" (*shesheng*), "Yinyang", "Organ Clusters" (*zangxiang*), "Pulsations and Complexion" (*maise*), "Channels and Links" (*jingluo*), "Ramifications and Roots" (*biaoben*), "Qi and Flavor" (*qiwei*), "Discussing Treatment" (*lunzhi*), "Illnesses" (*jibing*), "Piercing with Needles" (*zhenci*), "[Five] Circulatory Phases and [Six] Seasonal Influences" (*yunqi*), and



erts a very strong influence on the way in which contemporary textbooks of Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) describing the *Inner Classic* are structured, as Elisabeth Hsu has shown.<sup>19</sup> His comments on the ideas on “nurturing life” in the *Inner Classic* are found in the first category: “Preserving Life” (*Shesheng*).<sup>20</sup> Herein, almost the entire content of SW 1 and SW 2 is given.

Particularly, Zhang Jiebin’s comments on the concluding section of SW 1 are useful to examine his appreciation of Daoist ideas. At the end of SW 1, the Yellow Emperor states that there were four exemplary types of human beings in former times: the Authentic Person (*zhenren*), the Arriving Person (*zhiren*), the Sagely Person (*shengren*), and the Virtuous Person (*xianren*).<sup>21</sup> The Authentic Person and the Arriving Person clearly belong to the realm of early Daoist thought. They embody the highest soteriological ideals in early Daoist texts, such as the *Zhuangzi* and the *Huainanzi*.<sup>22</sup> Unlike the Sagely Person and the Virtuous Person, which are also ideal types of human beings in non-Daoist texts, the Authentic Person and the Arriving Person are restricted to the Daoist tradition only. Although a clear distinction is made between the four types in the *Inner Classic*, the boundaries between these and other ideal types of persons are not very apparent in Daoist texts.<sup>23</sup> SW 1 associates the Authentic Person with High Antiquity (*shanggu*), the earliest phase of cosmogony. The Arriving Person, associated with Middle Antiquity (*zhonggu*), is able to “return” (*gui*) to the state of the Authentic Person.<sup>24</sup> The Sagely Person and the Virtuous Person, living in later times, embody ideals of life cultivation that are regarded inferior to that of the Authentic Person and the Arriving Person. Since the highest ideal of cultivation in SW 1 is related to the Authentic Person, it is no coincidence that the first chapter of the *Inner Classic* is titled: “Essay on Heavenly Authenticity in High Antiquity” (*Shanggu tianzhen lun*).

In later Daoism, and especially in inner alchemy (*neidan*), becoming an Authentic Person remains the highest soteriological aspiration for the adept. According to Fabrizio Pregadio and Lowell Skar “*xiuzhen* ‘cultivating perfection’ [is] a common synonym for *neidan* practices in imperial times.”<sup>25</sup> They further state:

“The term *neidan* and its synonym *jindan* refer to three things: 1. a coherent body of oral and written teachings; 2. regimens of practices related to these teachings; and 3. an inner state realized through these practices. Reaching this state derives from generating and nourishing the perfected or realized one’s (*zhenren*) ‘holy embryo’ (*shengtai*).”<sup>26</sup>

Also in the Ming dynasty, reaching the state of the Authentic Person was the highest achievable goal for the practitioner of inner alchemy. But, what interests me in this article is how Zhang Jiebin comments on the description of the Authentic Person in the *Inner Classic*. Did this description have implications for his understanding of medicine or did he consider it merely to be a Daoist embellishment in the text? Did Zhang try to neglect the Daoist connotations and adapt the contents of SW 1 to a Neo-Confucian discourse or did he, on the contrary, acknowledge the strong connections between Daoism and medicine, and was his reading of this section informed by the inner alchemical lore disseminated among the literati class of the Jiangnan region, the region where he was born and where he was active?<sup>27</sup> Before answering these questions, I will first have a closer look at the importance of the last section of SW 1 itself and at the description of the Authentic Person in the history of Chinese medicine until Zhang Jiebin’s times.

## 1. The four exemplary types of human beings in Chinese medical history

Paul Unschuld has summarized the essential ideas on lifestyle and prevention in the first two chapters of the *Inner Classic* as follows:

“People in the distant past had been able to live through the entire life span allotted to them by heaven and earth. The reasons given make as much sense today as they did then, if one disregards quite a few additional risk factors that have come to threaten human life in the meantime.

“Congruences” (*huitong*). Compare with Elisabeth Hsu, “Zangxiang in the *Canon of Categories* and Tendencies towards a Body-Centered Traditional Chinese Medicine,” *Ziran kexueshi yanjiue* 19, no. 2 (2000), 169.

19

Elisabeth Hsu, *The Transmission of Chinese Medicine* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 189–206; and Elisabeth Hsu, “Zangxiang in the *Canon of Categories*,” 168–72.

20

This first chapter is moved to the very end of the 1980ies TCM textbooks examined by Elisabeth Hsu. She concludes that major differences between late Ming and present-day readings of the *Inner Classic* are due to a paradigmatic shift. Cosmological thinking of the early seventeenth century has made place for a materialistic (body-centered) intellectual framework. This might, in her opinion, also explain the diminished attention on health cultivation in contemporary TCM textbooks and classroom teaching. Although Hsu’s observations seem to be valid for early twenty-first century TCM as well, not all textbooks put the contents on health cultivation in the very last chapter. Compare for example with Wang Qingqi, ed., *Neijing xuandu* (Selected Readings from the Inner Classic) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyi chubanshe, 2003), 27–37.

21

The section to which I refer here and below is found in *Huangdi neijing suwen* (Basic Questions of the Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor) (Beijing: Zhongyi guji chubanshe, 1997), 2. There is no standard translation for these four types of human beings into English. Alternative translations are for example True Man/Person, Genuine Person, Real Person, Perfected for *zhenren*; Utmost Person, Arrived Person for *zhiren*; Sage, Saint for *shengren*; and Worthy for *xianren*.

22

On early Daoist soteriology, see Thomas Michael, *The Pristine Dao: Metaphysics in Early Daoist Discourse* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005), 95–141.

23

Besides the four types mentioned in SW 1, many more types of humans feature in *Zhuangzi* (*shenren*, *tianren*, *daoren*, *daren*,

etc.). The only Daoist text which has a listing of types of humans that bears some resemblance with SW 1 is *Wenzi*, in the Tang dynasty canonized as *Tongxuan zhenjing*. Compare with *Wenzi*, *Tongxuan zhenjing* (Authentic Classic of Connecting with Mystery) (DZ 746), 7:14a-b. For a very different list of exemplary beings related to stages of cultivation, see *Dongxuan lingbao dingguan jing zhu* (Book of Intent Contemplation of the Dongxuan Lingbao Canon, with a Commentary) (DZ 400), 7a-b and *Sheyang zhenzhong fang* (Methods of the Pillow Book on Conserving and Nourishing Life), attributed to Sun Simiao, in *Yunji qiqian* (Cloudy Bookcase with Seven Labels) (DZ 1032), 33:13b-14b. On stages in Daoist cultivation, see also Yang Yuhui, *Daojiao renxue yanjiu* (Research on the Study of the Human in Daoism) (Beijing: Renmin chubanshe, 2004), 142–145. Here and below, I use the abbreviation DZ referring to works in the *Zhengtong Daozang* (Daoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign). Text number is after K. M. Schipper, *Concordance du Tao Tsang*, Paris: École Française d’Extrême-Orient, 1975.

24

In his study on early Daoist metaphysics, Thomas Michael explains *zhi* (to arrive, utmost) as a quasi-synonym of *zhen* (which he translates as “genuine”): “‘Genuine’ describes the body in which those components called ‘Heaven’ have transformed in union with the Dao. Another term that is used in a virtually identical sense is *zhi*, literally ‘to arrive’ or ‘arrival’, and it signifies the arrival or attainment of bodily genuineness as something achieved by the cultivation of the body.” Michael, 126.

25

Fabrizio Pregadio and Lowell Skar, “Inner Alchemy (*neidan*),” in *Daoism Handbook*, ed. Livia Kohn (Leiden, Boston, and Köln: Brill, 2000), 478.

26

*Ibid.*, 481.

27

Zhang Jiebin was born in Shanyin (present-day Shaoxing). On the spread of *neidan* among literati in the Yuan and Ming period in the Jiangnan region, see Pregadio and Skar, 472. For an account on the influences of inner alchemy on Ming literati, see Liu Ts’un-yan,



Basically, readers were advised that a lifestyle in accordance with the rhythm of the seasons, as well as moderation in action, thought, and feeling, including eating, drinking, and sexuality, guaranteed strength until an inevitable end. The text does not explicitly state, however, whether a person can or occasionally is bound to fall ill despite perfecting his or her lifestyle.<sup>28</sup>

These ideas on lifestyle and prevention are in a most apparent way connected to early Daoism in the last section of SW 1. The Yellow Emperor concludes SW 1 with a description of how four types of human beings interact with the spatial and temporal environment (Heaven-and-Earth, *yinyang*, the four seasons, the eight winds, etc.); how they function in the social world; and how they nurture the main internal constituents of the body: essence (*jing*), *qi*, spirit (*shen*), and the outer, physical form.

The Authentic Person holds the whole cosmos in his hands and equals Heaven-and-Earth, while the Arriving Person, the Sagely Person, and the Virtuous Person are rather in harmony with, in tune with, or follow the principles of time and space (i.e. the macro-cosmos) in which they live. The Authentic Person and the Arriving Person are not acting in the social world of ordinary humans, in which the Sagely Person and the Virtuous Person are still active. It should be noted, however, that the Sagely Person, who is mostly referred to as the role model in other parts of the *Inner Classic*,<sup>29</sup> is not affected by the harmful influences of the human world.

About the main constituents within the body, SW 1 says that the Authentic Person breathes essence and *qi*, and preserves his spirit. Externally, which results in a body that appears to be one. Also for the Arriving Person and the Sagely Person essence, *qi*, and spirit are essential. The Arriving Person gathers essence and completes his spirit. The Sagely Person does not exhaust his body and mind by dispersing essence and spirit. Nothing is said in this context about the Virtuous Person, who, however, has the ambition to follow the ways of High Antiquity and who tries to observe the laws of the cosmos.

The behavior of the four types (interaction with the macro-cosmos without the body and nurturing of the essential ingredients of the micro-cosmos within) further has an effect on the length of lifespan. The life of the Authentic Person falls together with Heaven-and-Earth, and is endless. He completely lives a life of the Way (*dao sheng*). The actions undertaken to return to the state of the Authentic Person by the Arriving Person result in superhuman abilities (wandering freely through the world, seeing and hearing beyond the eight far-ends) and a substantial increase in lifespan. About the Sagely Person is said that he can reach an age of one hundred years, which is considered as the ideal length of a human life. Although the Virtuous Person also increases his lifespan by following the example of High Antiquity of uniting with the Way, he only gains a limited increase.

The ideals of life cultivation, as embodied by these four types of human beings, could be regarded as an essential feature of Chinese medicine, since they are found in the two opening chapters of the *Inner Classic*. However, these first two chapters were not always occupying this most prominent position in the text. According to the annotations of the eleventh century editors of the SW, Wang Bing (8<sup>th</sup> C.) shifted them to the front of the text.<sup>30</sup>

Moreover, the section on the four types of human beings in SW 1 seems to have had no tangible influence on other transmitted texts dating before the Song dynasty. Although some medieval texts quote from the contents now found in SW 1 and SW 2, none of these texts mentions the four. The Daoist physician Sun Simiao (581–682), for instance, quotes larger parts of SW 1 and SW 2 in the chapter on “Nourishing Human Nature” (*Yangxing*) of his

famous *Beiji qianjin yaofang* (Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces in Cases of Urgency),<sup>31</sup> but any reference to the last section of SW 1 is lacking.<sup>32</sup> Since the classification in four types of human beings in SW 1 is not attested in other early and medieval medical and religious/philosophical writings, this section might even not be included in editions of the *Inner Classic* dating before the Tang dynasty. It is possible that some parts of the *Inner Classic* were only inserted in the text long after the Tang.<sup>33</sup> Yet, Wang Bing's direct references to the *Kangcangzi* (Master Kangcang), an important Daoist philosophical text of the Tang dynasty, in his comments suggest that the section on the four types of human beings was part of the Tang dynasty edition of the SW.<sup>34</sup>

The first physician who clearly referred to the section on the four types of human beings was Liu Wansu (ca. 1120–1200) in the Jin dynasty. In his *Suwen bingji qiyi baoming ji* (Collection on Protecting Life according to Disease Mechanisms and Qi Appropriateness in the *Plain Questions*, 1186), he de-

“Taoist Self-Cultivation in Ming Thought,” in *Self and Society in Ming Thought*, ed. Wm. Theodore de Bary (New York and London: Columbia University Press, 1970).

28

Unschuld, *Huang Di nei jing su wen*, 198–199.

29

Apart from SW 1, the Authentic Person is only mentioned in two other chapters of the *Inner Classic*: SW 13 and SW 68. The Sagely Person, in contrast, features in twenty chapters of the *Inner Classic*. In three of them, the Sagely Person is even associated with High Antiquity (i.e. *shanggu shengren*): SW 1 (earlier section), SW 5, and SW 14.

30

Lin Yi et al., ed., *Chongguang bu zhu Huang-di neijing suwen* (Plain Questions of the Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor, Broadly Supplemented and Annotated) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2004), 1. Before the edition attributed to Wang Bing, the first chapters were on prognostication about the outcome of a disease. In Paul Unschuld's opinion, the rising of status of the physician in Tang society triggered the replacement of these chapters on prognostication to a less important place in the text. Furthermore, Wang Bing's inclinations to Daoist thought might have motivated him to promote ideas on self-cultivation to the most prominent position. Unschuld, *Huang Di nei jing su wen*, 45–46, 48.

31

Sun Simiao, *Beiji qianjin yaofang* (Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces in Cases of Urgency), in *Yaowang qianjin fang* (Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand Gold Pieces of the King of Medicine) (Beijing: Huaxia chubanshe, 2004), 463–464. Although Sun Simiao does not refer to the description of the Authentic Person in SW 1, he relates the Authentic Person to Daoist practices on other places of his chapter on nour-

ishing human nature. *Ibid.*, 466, 470. On the relation between the Daoist practice of breath retention and becoming an Authentic Person, see also *infra*. Sun Simiao himself is known by the honorific name Authentic Person Sun (Sun Zhenren).

32

Other medieval texts that quote SW 1 and SW 2, but not the section on the four humans, are the Daoist *Yangxing yanming lu* (DZ 838), attributed to Sun Simiao or Tao Hongjing, and Huangfu Mi's *Jiayi jing* (A B Classic). Searches in the digital text collection of medical texts *Zhonghua yidian* (Encyclopaedia of Traditional Chinese Medicine). (Changsha: Hunan dianzi yinxiang chubanshe, 2006) and the electronic version of the *Wenyuange Sikuan* (Imperial Library, Wenyuan Pavilion Edition). (Taipei: Shangwu yinshuguan, 1983–1986, hereafter WYG SKQS) did not reveal any other results.

33

Catherine Despeux, “The System of the Five Circulatory Phases and the Six Seasonal Influences (*wuyun liuqi*): A Source of Innovation in Medicine under the Song (960–1279),” in *Innovation in Chinese Medicine*, ed. Elisabeth Hsu (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), 129.

34

Although later commentators of the SW included parts of Wang Bing's commentary, they did not mention the *Kangcangzi*. *Kangcangzi* was canonized as *Dongling zhenjing* (Authentic Classic of Penetrating the Numinous) (DZ 669). For more information on *Kangcangzi* and its relevance in Tang Daoism, see Ursula-Angelika Cedzich, “Dongling zhenjing,” in *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 2004), 302–303.



scribes the ideal of the Authentic Person in almost an identical way as is done in SW 1. The elaboration on cultivation practices, which follows this description of the Authentic Person, bears strong resemblances with Song-Jin inner alchemical lore.<sup>35</sup> Except for an official textbook of the Southern Song, no other reference to the Authentic Person in SW 1 is found in any other important transmitted medical text dating before the Ming dynasty.<sup>36</sup>

After the commentated SW edition attributed to Wang Bing, most other important commentaries that have been transmitted till our times only date from the end of the sixteenth century. The late Ming commentaries on the SW that are mostly referred to in textbooks of TCM (Traditional Chinese Medicine) and studies on Chinese medical literature are these of Ma Shi (15<sup>th</sup>–16<sup>th</sup> C.), Wu Kun (1552–1618), Zhang Jiebin, and Li Zhongzi (1588–1655).<sup>37</sup> In their comments, these physicians again explain the section describing the four types of human beings in SW 1. This section is given a lot of attention to in the works of Zhang Jiebin and Li Zhongzi in particular. In the remaining parts of this article, I will focus on Zhang Jiebin's explanation of the Authentic Person in "Absorption of Life," the first category in *Leijing*.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. Zhang Jiebin and the Authentic Person

### 2.1. Structure and contents of Zhang's comments on the Authentic Person in SW 1

The third subchapter of "Absorption of Life" is titled: "In antiquity there were the Authentic Person, the Arriving Person, the Sagely Person, and the Virtuous Person. (Gu you zhenren, zhiren, shengren, xianren)" Herein, Zhang Jiebin gives comments on the entire text of the last section of SW 1. The style of these comments is analogue to all his other comments in *Leijing*. Zhang's comments are mostly shorter in comparison to those attributed to Wang Bing of the Tang dynasty. On the other hand, the difficulty of the language of the *Inner Classic* was a hard burden to overcome for the Ming dynasty reader. This undoubtedly motivated Zhang in providing many more explanations on meaning and pronunciation of individual words than Wang did. Zhang also took previous commentaries, including that of Wang, into account, something he has in common with other Ming dynasty commentators, such as Ma Shi and Wu Kun. Most characterizing for Zhang's comments, however, are his use of cross references to other parts of *Leijing* and his rather long essayistic elaborations on main ideas in the *Inner Classic*, attached to some of the comments.

The text of SW 1 describing the Authentic Person is broken up in three passages, almost in the same way as Wang Bing did.<sup>39</sup> The first passage reads as follows:

"The Yellow Emperor said: 'I heard that there was the Authentic Person in High Antiquity. He held Heaven-and-Earth in his hands, and grasped *yinyang*.'"<sup>40</sup>

Zhang's comment is rather short. Like Wu Kun, Zhang states that "authenticity" refers to "heavenly authenticity", and that the Authentic Person "does not have to depend on cultivation practices".<sup>41</sup> This is followed by an own accent, inspired by Neo-Confucian metaphysics:

"His heart is identical to the Supreme Ultimate (*xin tong taiji*). His power is in agreement with the two symbols (*de qi liangyi*). Hence, he can make the creations and transformations spin around, and harmonize *yinyang*. This is what is meant by 'heaving in his hands' (*ti qie*) and 'grasping' (*ba wo*)."<sup>42</sup>

The second phrase of the description of the Authentic Person in SW 1 reads:

“He breathes [*huxi*: ex- and inhaling] essence and *qi*. Standing on his own, he safeguards his spirit. His muscles and flesh [the outer body] are like one.”<sup>43</sup>

Hereafter, Zhang’s comment diverts from all previous commentators:

“By exhaling, he makes contact with Heaven. Therefore, he connects with *qi*. By inhaling, he makes contact with Earth. Therefore, he connects with essence.<sup>44</sup> Possessing the Way, he is preserved by himself. Hence, he is able to stand on his own. His spirit does not drift outside. Hence, ‘he safeguards his spirit.’ When the spirit is safeguarded internally and the form is completed externally, body (*shen*) and mind (*xin*) are both united with the Way. Hence, ‘his muscles and

35

Liu Wansu, *Suwen bingji qiyi baoming ji* (Collection on Protecting Life according to Disease Mechanisms and Qi Appropriateness in the *Plain Questions*) (Beijing: Renmin weisheng chubanshe, 2005), 3–4. See Gai Jianmin, 164–166. For more information on Liu Wansu, see Jutta Rall, *Die vier grossen Medizinschulen der Mongolenzeit: Stand und Entwicklung der Chinesischen Medizin in der Chin- und Yuan-Zeit* (Wiesbaden: Steiner Verlag, 1970), 38–52. On Liu Wansu as founder of post-Song medical lineages, see Wu Yiyi, “A Medical Line of Many Masters: A Prosopographical Study of Liu Wansu and His Disciples from the Jin to the Early Ming,” *Chinese Science* 11 (1993–94). On the alchemical connections between Liu Wansu’s ideas on medicine and alchemy, see Angela Ki-che Leung, “Medical Learning from the Song to the Ming,” in *The Song-Yuan-Ming Transition in Chinese History*, ed. Paul Jakob Smith and Richard von Glahn (Cambridge: Harvard University Asia Center, 2003), 463, n. 26.

36

For the Authentic Person of SW 1 in the Southern Song textbook, see *Taiyi ju zhuke chengwen ge* (Composition Models for the Various Departments of the Imperial Bureau of Medicine), in WYG SKQS, 2:12a. Searches *Zhonghua yidian* and the electronic version of WYG SKQS yielded no results on the Authentic Man as described in SW 1 in other pre-Ming texts.

37

For textbooks, see for example Yan Lilan and Gu Zhishan, eds., *Zhongyi wenxian xue* (The Study of Chinese Medical Texts) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyiyao chubanshe, 2002), 19 and Wang Qingqi, 222; for studies, see for example Unschuld, *Huang Di nei jing su wen*, 66–69. Unschuld does not refer to Li Zhongzi. For modern editions of these commentaries see: Ma Shi, *Huangdi neijing suwen zhuzheng fawei* (Plain Questions of the Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor, commented, validated, and its subtleties elucidated) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2003); Wu Kun, *Huangdi neijing suwen Wu zhu* (Wu’s Commentary on the

Basic Questions of the Inner Classic of Yellow Emperor) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2001); Zhang Jiebin, *Leijing* (Classic in Categories) (Beijing: Xueyuan chubanshe, 2005); and Li Zhongzi, *Neijing zhiyao* (Knowing the Essentials of the Inner Classic), in *Li Zhongzi yixue quanshu* (The Complete Medical Works of Li Zhongzi) (Beijing: Zhongguo zhongyiyao chubanshe, 1998).

38

I will focus on Li Zhongzi is much detail in a forthcoming publication.

39

Compare with Lin Yi, *Chongguang buzhu Huangdi neijing suwen*, 8–9.

40

As quoted in Zhang Jiebin, 20. Compare my translation of the passages in SW 1 describing the Authentic Person with Unschuld, *Medicine in China*, 279–280.

41

*Ibid.* Compare with Wu Kun, 4.

42

Zhang Jiebin, 5.

43

*Ibid.*, 6.

44

This phrase is almost identically found after a quote of Ye Wenshu in *Leijing fuyi* (Appendix to the Classic in Categories). See Zhang Jiebin, 2052. The quote of Ye Wenshu is in fact taken from his comment on Zhang Boduan’s (984–1082) *Wuzhen pian* (Pieces on Understanding Authenticity), included in *Xiuzhen shishu* (Ten Books on Restoring Authenticity) (DZ 263), 26:23a. The phrase on breathing in connection with the roots of Heaven and Earth is, however, not included in Ye’s comment on *Wuzhen pian*. Because the above phrase is included in Ye’s quote in the modern edition of *Leijing* that I used, its punctuation is mistaken. Moreover, both quote and phrase are found in Chen Zhixu (1289–?)’s *Shangyangzi jindan dayao* (Master Shangyang’s Great Essentials of the Golden Cinnabar) (DZ 1067), 3:5a-b. Zhang probably used *Shangyangzi jindan dayao* as his main source. See *infra*.

flesh are like one.’ This is precisely what is meant with ‘form and spirit are completed’ in the first subchapter.<sup>45</sup>

Zhang continues by referring to the Daoist tradition:

“What this section emphasizes are three words: essence, *qi*, and spirit. Only Daoists (*daojia*) explain them in detail.”<sup>46</sup>

Here, Zhang goes beyond a mere Neo-Confucian understanding of the text. He highlights that the main constituents of the body in the most thorough way are discussed by Daoists.

Zhang further elaborates on this point in a long *ex cursus* attached to his comment. Herein, he includes an extensive list of quotations to illustrate the importance of essence, *qi*, and spirit in relation to cultivation practices.<sup>47</sup> The quotes chosen, except those from the *Huainanzi*, Fang Yang, and Li Gao’s medical text, are all closely related to inner alchemy. Zhang Jiebin seems to have been especially inspired by the *Taixi jing* (Classic on Embryonic Breathing),<sup>48</sup> Zhang Boduan’s *Yuqing jinsi qinghua biwen jinbao neilian danjue* (Alchemical Formulae for the Inner Purification of the Gold Treasure from the Secret Documents in the Golden Box of the Jade Purity of Qinghua),<sup>49</sup> and Chen Zhixu’s *Shangyangzi jindan dayao*.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, three of the other quotes in Zhang Jiebin’s list also feature in *Jindan dayao*, which suggests that *Jindan dayao* was the source text from which Zhang Jiebin took these three quotes.<sup>51</sup> After the list with quotes, Zhang points out the importance of *qi*, related to both Pre-Heaven (*xiantian*) and Post-Heaven (*houtian*), again illustrated by referring to various texts.

**Table 1.** Sources of Zhang Jiebin’s consideration of the importance of essence, *qi*, and spirit in relation to cultivation practices

Source (author and/or text)	Explanation
– Bai Juyi (772–846) [in <i>Huainanzi</i> ] <sup>52</sup> – Fang Yang <sup>53</sup>	The nourishing of <i>qi</i> should follow in- and exhaling. ( <i>yang qi dang cong hu xi</i> )
– Cao Wenyi, <i>Lingyuan dadao ge</i> . [in <i>Jindan dayao</i> ] – Zhang Xujing, <i>Sanshi dai Tianshi Xujing zhenren yulu</i> [in <i>Jindan dayao</i> ]	Safeguard the spirit to nourish <i>qi</i> . ( <i>shou shen yi yang qi</i> )
– <i>Huainanzi</i>	Tranquility can nourish the spirit. ( <i>jing ke yang shen</i> )
– Chen Zhixu, <i>Jindan dayao</i>	Essence and <i>qi</i> are rooted in each other. ( <i>jing qi zhi hu gen</i> )
– <i>Qi mitu</i> [in <i>Jindan dayao</i> ]	The sexual intercourse of <i>kan</i> and <i>li</i> . ( <i>kan li zhi jiao gou</i> )
– Lü Yan, <i>jujue</i> (poem in truncated verse) <sup>54</sup>	The way of restoring authenticity is found in essence, <i>qi</i> and spirit. ( <i>xiu zhen zhi dao zai yu jing qi shen</i> )
– <i>Taixi jing</i> and appended <i>Taixi ming</i>	The way of nourishing life is found in preserving the spirit and nourishing <i>qi</i> . ( <i>yang sheng zhi dao zai hu cun shen yang qi</i> )
– Zhang Boduan, <i>Yuqing jinsi qinghua miwen jinbao neilian danjue</i>	The preservation of spirit depends on the heart, and making the heart tranquil depends on the eyes. ( <i>cun shen zai xin, jing xin zai mu</i> )
– Ibid.	For primordial essence, primordial <i>qi</i> , and primordial spirit look for essence, <i>qi</i> , and spirit at the beginnings of the transformation of life. ( <i>yuanjing yuanqi yuan-shen zhe qiu jing qi shen yu hua sheng zhi chu</i> )
– Li Gao, <i>Piwei lun</i> (Essays on the Spleen-Stomach)	The way of nourishing the body takes the nourishing of <i>qi</i> as its root. ( <i>yang shen zhi dao yi yang qi wei ben</i> )

The last passage on the Authentic Person in SW 1 relates what was said in the previous two passages to his lifespan.

“Therefore, it is possible for his lifespan to exhaust Heaven-and-Earth, and to be without a time of ending. This is what is meant by living by the Way.”

Zhang comments:

“‘Exhausting’ (*bi*) means ‘ending’ (*jin*). The body of the Authentic Person is united with the Way. Therefore, he is born because he comes after Heaven-and-Earth, but finds his origins at the beginning of Heaven-and-Earth. He transforms because of what is before Heaven-and-Earth, but seeks to end with Heaven-and-Earth. The form leaves, but the heart (*xin*) remains. *Qi* disperses, but the spirit is preserved. Hence, his lifespan can exhaust Heaven-and-Earth. This is completely living by the Way.”<sup>55</sup>

45

Zhang Jiebin, 5. The phrase of the first subchapter refers to the result of living a lifestyle associated with the people of High Antiquity. In the first subchapter, these persons are not called Authentic Persons, but just “people in High Antiquity” (*shanggu zhi ren*). See Zhang Jiebin, 4.

46

*Ibid.*, 6.

47

First, he refers to a source, (“... says:”, ... *yue*). This is followed by the actual quote, and concluded by a short explanation (“this explains ...”, *ci yan ... ye*). In Table 1, references to the quotes Zhang used and his own concluding explanations can be found.

48

The *Taixi jing* is a very short text on respiratory techniques, probably dating from the Tang dynasty. As a separate text, it can be found as *Gaoshang Yuhuang taixi jing* (Classic on Embryonic Breathing of the Jade Emperor on High) (DZ 14). Together with a commentary and the appended *Taixi ming* (Inscription on Embryonic Breathing), it can be found as *Taixi jing zhu* (Classic on Embryonic Breathing, with a Commentary) (DZ 130). The *Taixi jing* is also included in *Yunji qiqian*, 60:26a–28b. See also Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, “*Taixi jing zhu*,” in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 366–367. The *Taixi ming*, which is also appended to the *Taixi jing* in Zhang Jiebin’s list, equates embryonic breathing (*taixi*) with inner alchemy (*neidan*). *Taixi jing zhu*, 2a.

49

DZ 240.

50

In the remaining parts of the text and annotations, I use its short title: *Jindan dayao*.

51

The first two quotes come from two different poems that have the same title: *Dadao ge* (Song of the Great Dao). The first of

these quotes is from the Northern Song female Daoist Cao Wenyi’s *Lingyuan dadao ge* (Song of the Great Dao of the Numinous Source) (ZW 160), 1b; the second is found in 30<sup>th</sup> generation Heavenly Masters Zhang Xujing’s (1092–1126), *Sanshi dai Tianshi Xujing zhenren yulu* (Recorded Sayings of the Thirtieth Heavenly Master Authentic Lord Xujing) (DZ 1249), 3:1a. Both quotes also feature in the same passage of *Jindan dayao*, 4:7a. The quote from *Qi mitu* (Secret Diagrams of the Token) is found in *Jindan dayao*, 5:4a. *Qi mitu* probably refers to *Da huandan qi mitu* (Secret Diagrams on the Token for the Great Reverting to Cinnabar), a text included in *Yunji qiqian*, 72:1a–32b. However, the contents of the quote of *Qi mitu* used by Zhang Jiebin do not feature in the text included in *Yunji qiqian*, and are to my knowledge only found in *Jindan dayao*.

52

*Huainanzi* (Master of Huainan), in Guoxue zhenglishe, comp., *Zhuzi jicheng* (Grand Compendium of Various Philosophical Masters), 8 vols. (Shanghai: Zhonghua shuju, 1954), 7:353–354.

53

I was unable to identify Fang Yang and the quoted passage.

54

Also known as Lü Dongbin, and acknowledged as patriarch by both Southern and Northern lineage of inner alchemy. Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, “Lü Dongbin,” in *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, ed. Fabrizio Pregadio (London and New York: Routledge, 2008), 712–714. See also, Paul R. Katz, *Images of the Immortal: The Cult of Lü Dongbin at the Palace of Eternal Joy* (Honolulu: University of Hawai’i Press, 1999), 52–93. For the poem, see *Quan Tang shi* (Complete Poems of the Tang), comp. Peng Dingqiu et al. (Taipei: Hongye shudian, 1977), 2426.

55

Zhang Jiebin, 8.

Zhang Jiebin’s comments on the description of the Arriving Person, the Sage-ly Person, and the Virtuous Person are short, and can be compared in style with those on the first and third passages describing the Authentic Person. To sum up, most of Zhang Jiebin’s attention goes to the Daoist explanations of the essential ingredients of the body (essence, *qi*, and spirit) referred to in the second passage describing the Authentic Person.

## 2.2. Pre-Heavenly *qi*

Although essence, *qi*, and spirit are all important, *qi* is the point of departure. The last quote in Table 1 is not taken from a Daoist source, but is from the Jin dynasty physician Li Gao (1180–1251). In “Admonishment on Saving Words” (*Shengyan zhen*) at the end of his famous *Piwei lun* (Essay on the Spleen-Stomach, 1249), Li stresses that *qi* is the root of cultivating the body.

“*Qi* is the ancestor of spirit. Essence is the child of *qi*. *Qi* is the root and stem of essence and spirit. How great indeed! Gather *qi* to accomplish essence. Gather essence to complete spirit. It should be clear and tranquil. Control it by the Way (*yu zhi yi dao*), and you will become a Heavenly Person (*tianren*). Someone who possesses the Way can do this. What kind of man am I? It is only appropriate to save my words. That is all!”<sup>56</sup>

In Zhang Jiebin’s medical doctrine, however, there is an important difference with Li Gao’s explanation of *qi*. Zhang distinguishes two modes of *qi*, something he has in common with other late Ming physicians such as Sun Yikui (1522–1619), Zhao Xianke (16th–17th C.), and Li Zhongzi. For Zhang, there is fundamental difference between Pre-Heavenly *qi* (*xiantian qi*) and Post-Heavenly *qi* (*houtian qi*).<sup>57</sup> According to Zhang, the difference between these two states of *qi* can be explained as follows:

“*Xiantian* is the *qi* of the Authentic One (*zhenyi zhi qi*). It is *qi* transformed out of emptiness. Thus, *qi* transforms into form. This *qi* comes from empty nothingness (*ci qi zi xuwu zhong lai*). *Houtian* is the *qi* of Blood and *qi* (*xueqi zhi qi*). It is *qi* transformed out of grains. Thus, form transforms into *qi*. This *qi* comes from adjusting and absorbing (*ci qi zi tiaoshe zhong lai*).”<sup>58</sup>

A subtle interplay thus exists between *qi* and form (*xing*). In Zhang’s opinion, form is exactly the same as essence (*jing*). It is “what is produced by the Heavenly One” (*tianyi suo sheng*), and as such “the ancestor of what has form” (*you xing zhi zu*).<sup>59</sup> Hence, essence is not only the product of *xiantian qi*, it is also the starting point of everything that exists in the (*houtian*) cosmos. This is further illustrated by references to the *Longhu jing* (Classic of the Dragon and Tiger)<sup>60</sup> and two chapters of the *Inner Classic*.<sup>61</sup> Finally, Zhang summarizes his ideas on the relation between essence and *qi* in the *xiantian* and *houtian* state respectively as follows:

“*Qi* of *xiantian* is *qi* transforming into essence. *Qi* of *houtian* is essence transforming into *qi*. Essence and *qi* originate from mutual production. When essence and *qi* are abundant, spirit flourishes spontaneously (*shen zi wang*).”<sup>62</sup>

**Table 2.** Relation of essence and *qi* in different states of *qi* according to Zhang Jiebin

state of <i>qi</i>	origin of <i>qi</i>	relation essence- <i>qi</i>
<i>xiantian</i>	emptiness	<i>qi</i> → essence
<i>houtian</i>	grains	essence → <i>qi</i>

The introduction of *xiantian* into mainstream philosophical thinking is attributed to Shao Yong (1012–1077) in the Song dynasty. According to tradition,

the learning of Pre-Heaven (*xiantian xue*) was transmitted to Shao Yong by the semi-legendary Daoist master Chen Tuan.<sup>63</sup> *Xiantian*, which refers to the formless state before the cosmos itself existed, is like *taiji* one of those Neo-Confucian concepts that originated in the Daoist tradition.<sup>64</sup> In Shao Yong's writings *xiantian* is associated with the "method of the heart" (*xinfa*)<sup>65</sup> and with diagrammatic charts:

"The study of *xiantian* is the method of the heart. Hence, the diagrams (*tu*) arise from its center. The myriad transformations and myriad things are born from the heart."<sup>66</sup>

Although *xiantian*, especially in relation to diagrammatic charts, would play an important role in the Neo-Confucian orthodoxy systematized by Zhu Xi (1130–1200), Alain Arrault has shown that the specific diagrammatic ordering associated with *xiantian* cannot be attested in Shao Yong's writings.<sup>67</sup> Neither should the importance of the concept *xiantian* be overestimated in Shao Yong's philosophy.

"L'expression *xiantian* n'apparaît que dans les ultimes chapitres du *Jirang ji*, autrement dit dans les dernières années de Shao. Par ailleurs, ses relations les plus proches ne l'évoquent qu'incidemment."<sup>68</sup>

While Neo-Confucians mainly referred to *xiantian* in the context of a diagrammatic ordering of tri- and hexagram, *xiantian* became even more commonly used in later inner alchemical texts, which of course also made use

56

As quoted in *Ibid.*, 7. Compare with Li Gao, *Piwei lun* (Treatise on the Spleen-Stomach) (Beijing weisheng chubanshe, 2005), 96. Li Gao does not refer not to the Authentic Person, but to the Heavenly Person (*tianren*).

57

This distinction between *xiantian* and *houtian* is not found in pre-Ming medical texts. *Xiantian* does feature in SW 69, SW 70, and SW 71, as a term used in the context of climatic conditions. See Xie Guan, ed., *Zhongyi dacidian* (Great Dictionary of Chinese Medicine) (1921; repr., Beijing: Shangwu yinshuaguan, 2004), 969.

58

Zhang Jiebin, 7–8.

59

Zhang Jiebin, 8.

60

An important alchemical classic, DZ 996.

61

SW 5 and LS 10.

62

Zhang Jiebin, 8. On the mutual interdependence of *jing* and *qi*, see also the quote from *Jindan dayao* in Table 1. I will refer to essence and *qi* in relation to spirit in the next section.

63

On Chen Tuan, see Livia Knaul, *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan* (Berne: Peter Lang, 1981).

64

Robinet, "The Place and Meaning of the Notion of Taiji in Taoist Sources Prior to the Ming Dynasty," 385; François Louis, "The Genesis of an Icon: The *Taiji* Diagram's Early History," *Harvard Journal of Asiatic Studies* 63, no. 1 (2003): 162.

65

Alain Arrault, "Les diagrammes de Shao Yong (1012–1077): Qui les a vus ?" *Études chinoises* 19, no. 1–2 (2000): 77–78. See also Don J. Wyatt "Shao Yung and the Number," in *Sung Dynasty Uses of the I Ching*, ed. Kidder Smith et al. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 127.

66

Shao Yong, *Huangji jingshi shu* (Book of the Passing of Ages of the August Ultimate), in WYG SKQS, 13:34b. See also Don J. Wyatt who explains: "For Shao, *xiantian* learning, if not the diagram itself, appears to have had its locus in the human mind, which itself was believed to exist even before Heaven's formation." Don J. Wyatt, *The Recluse of Loyang: Shao Yung and the Moral Evolution of Early Sung thought* (Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1996), 205.

67

Only the position of *qian* in the South, *kun* in the North, *li* in the East, and *kan* in the West is referred to by Shao Yong. Arrault, "Les diagrammes de Shao Yong (1012–1077)," 79.

68

*Ibid.*, 77.

of these diagrams.<sup>69</sup> For inner alchemists, such as Chen Zhixu of the Yuan dynasty, the distinction between two modes of *qi* is fundamental. In Chen’s opinion, inner alchemy is not about esoteric language, but about “the ineffable, all-embracing, immanent, and transcendental *qi* of ‘Former Heaven,’” as highlighted in his preface to *Jindan dayao*.<sup>70</sup> The resemblance between Chen Zhixu’s explanations on *xiantian qi* and *houtian qi* and those of Zhang Jiebin are striking. Compare, for instance, the following phrases of *Jindan dayao*, with the above quotes taken from Zhang Jiebin’s comments:

“Now, I will explain *qi* that comes after Heaven-and-Earth (*hou tiandi zhi qi*). This *qi* is produced by grains. Therefore, it [the composition of the character for *qi*] comes from ‘vapor’ and ‘rice.’<sup>71</sup> The stomach receives the grains, and produces *qi*.<sup>72</sup>

...

Only, the *qi* of the Pre-Heavenly Authentic One can be refined to let it revert into cinnabar. This is coming from empty nothingness.”<sup>73</sup>

**Table 3.** Comparison of explanations of different states of *qi* in Chen Zhixu’s *Shangyangzi jindan dayao* and Zhang Jiebin’s *Leijing*

state of <i>qi</i>	<i>Jindan dayao</i>	<i>Leijing</i>
<i>xiantian</i>	<i>qi</i> of the Pre-Heavenly Authentic One can be refined to let it revert into cinnabar. It comes from empty nothingness.	<i>qi</i> of the Authentic One. It is <i>qi</i> transformed out of emptiness.
<i>houtian</i>	<i>qi</i> that comes after Heaven-and-Earth. This <i>qi</i> is produced by grains.	<i>qi</i> of Blood and <i>qi</i> . It is <i>qi</i> transformed out of grains.

In *Jindan dayao* also the relation between *qi* and essence/form is explained. The production of essence out of *qi* is an essential part of the ontogeny of the human being, and is compared with the famous cosmogony in the forty-second chapter of the *Daode jing*:

“What is continuation (*shun*)? One produces two. Two produces three. Three produces the Myriad Things.<sup>74</sup> Thus, emptiness (*xu*) transforms into spirit. Spirit transforms into *qi*. *Qi* transforms into essence. Essence transforms into form. And, form completes the human being.”<sup>75</sup>

In alchemical practices the return to the primordial state of the cosmos (*xiantian*) is essential. Therefore, the alchemist inverses (*ni*) the normal order (*shun*) of cosmogony:

“What is inversion? The Myriad Things contain the three. The three return to the two. The two return to the one. Those who know this Way concord the spirit (*yi shen*) and safeguard the form (*shou xing*). They nourish the form and refine essence. They accumulate essence and transform it into *qi*. They refine *qi* and unite it with spirit. They refine spirit and make it return to emptiness. When golden cinnabar (*jindan*) is then completed, it depends only on that one thing of before Heaven-and-Earth (*xian tiandi zhi yi wu*)!”<sup>76</sup>

Even if we still might argue that Zhang Jiebin should be placed in the context of Neo-Confucianism, after comparing Zhang Jiebin’s ideas on *xiantian-houtian qi* and those of Chen Zhixu in *Jindan dayao*, it is very apparent that Zhang owes a lot to the inner alchemical explanations of Chen. Such detailed explanations on the differences between *xiantian* and *houtian qi*, as found in the medical and the inner alchemical text, are absent in orthodox Neo-Confucian writings.<sup>77</sup> The circle is full now. According to tradition, Chen Tuan transmitted *xiantian xue* to Shao Yong. Although Zhu Xi considered Shao Yong’s ideas to be too Daoist to include him into the orthodox transmission

of the Way, at the end of the Ming dynasty, physicians such as Zhang Jiebin were reaching back to alchemical texts for explaining the essence of *qi* and the difference between its *xiantian* and *houtian* state.

### 3. Cultivation practices

In the last part of this article, I will have a closer look at Zhang Jiebin's explanations of cultivation practices themselves, and whereto these practices might lead. As can be seen in Table 1, Zhang makes a distinction between the practice of restoring authenticity (*xiuzhen zhi dao*) and the practice of nourishing life (*yangsheng zhi fa*). In the Ming dynasty, restoring authenticity should be placed in the context of Daoist inner alchemy. This is illustrated by the inclusion of some verses taken from a poem attributed to Lü Yan, patriarch of both Southern and Northern lineages of inner alchemy. On the other hand, in explaining the practice of nourishing life, which is more neutral and not necessarily related to inner alchemy, Zhang also quotes a basic text of inner alchemy: the entire *Taixi jing* with the appended *Taixi ming*. Thus, in his explanation of the importance of essence, *qi*, and spirit in relation to both *xiuzhen* and *yangsheng*, the connections with inner alchemy are highlighted.<sup>78</sup>

However, practices related to essence, *qi*, and spirit are certainly not exclusively found in inner alchemy. They originated in early China and pre-date inner alchemy as such.<sup>79</sup> For example, the content of the text of Bai Juyi (772–846) to which Zhang refers explaining the breathing techniques practiced by two legendary immortals, Wang Qiao and Red Pine (Chi Song), can already be found in the *Huainanzi*. Also the quote which explains that “the method to

69

Ibid., 77–79, 82–83 and Alain Arrault, *Shao Yong (1012–1077), poète et cosmologue* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut de Hautes Études Chinoises, 2002), 282–286. On *xiantian* and *houtian* in the inner alchemical context, see also Isabelle Robinet, “Original Contributions of *Neidan* to Taoism and Chinese Thought,” in *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*, ed. Livia Kohn (Ann Arbor: The Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1989), 323–324; and Pregadio and Skar, 484–485.

70

Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, “Shangyang zi jindan dayao,” in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon*, 1180.

71

This is an etymological explanation of the character *qi* (氣). The character depicts what is said in the previous sentence. Vapor (*qi* 气) rising up after cooking rice (*mi* 米). Or, in a more medical view: the grains enter the stomach, where they are processed. *Qi* processed of the grains rises up to the lungs, from where it diffused over the whole body.

72

*Jindan dayao*, 3:5a.

73

Ibid., 3:7b.

74

*Daode jing*, chapter 42.

75

Ibid., 4:7b.

76

*Jindan dayao*, 4:7b. On continuation and inversion, see Pregadio and Skar, 485.

77

Compare for example with the writings of Zhu Xi, who did also write a commentary on the *Zhouyi cantong qi* (Token for the Agreement of the Three According to the *Book of Changes*), a basic text of inner alchemy. This commentary, however, “offers a cosmological interpretation of the *Cantong qi* which downplays its alchemical import.” Pregadio and Skar, 474.

78

Only when Zhang explains the way of nourishing the body/self (*yang shen zhi dao*), he refers to Li Gao's medical *Piwei lun*.

79

Fabrizio Pregadio and Lowell Skar call the period before the Tang dynasty the “embryonic phase” of inner alchemy. They situate “early *neidan*” in the Tang. “Mature *neidan*” starts only in the late Tang. Pregadio and Skar, 465.



cultivate the spirit is tranquility” is taken from the *Huainanzi*.<sup>80</sup> What is more specific for later texts of inner alchemy, and not found in early Daoist texts, is for instance the idea of the intercourse between the trigrams *kan* (water, ☵) and *li* (fire, ☲) in the explanation of the quote taken from the *Qi mitu*.<sup>81</sup>

Zhang Jiebin further distinguishes the practice of essence, *qi*, and spirit into *xing* (inner nature) and *ming* (life) training, as is done in the two main inner alchemical traditions.<sup>82</sup> Practices related to spirit are regarded as *xing* training, while those related to essence and *qi* are regarded as *ming* training. Nevertheless, essence, *qi*, and spirit (or: *ming* and *xing*) form an unbreakable bond, and can never be separated.<sup>83</sup> Zhang Jiebin explains:

“Although spirit is produced out of essence and *qi*, it is also [the thing] by which essence and spirit are controlled and driven, and is the ruler of their applications (*yunyong zhi zhu*). It is the spirit that is located in our hearts. If these three [essence, *qi*, and spirit] are united as one, it can be called the Way!”<sup>84</sup>

At the end of his comment on essence, *qi*, and spirit in relation to the Authentic Person, Zhang gives an introductory practice aid. He counters the widespread opinion that restricting (sexual) desires (*jin yu*) was sufficient to nourish life.

“They [people in his time] do not know that when there is an aberrant movement (*wang dong*) of the heart, *qi* is dispersed by following the heart. When *qi* is dispersed instead of gathered, essence is expelled and *qi* is lost.”<sup>85</sup>

Hereafter, he refers to the Buddhist *Sishi'er zhang jing* (Sūtra in Forty-two Sections):

“Cutting off sexual desires (*duan yin*) is not as good as cutting off the heart. The heart is the official that does the efforts (*gong cao*). If you are able to stop the one in charge, the followers will all cease their irregularities (*xie*). When the heart is not halted, what benefits does it have to cut off sexual desires?”<sup>86</sup>

More specific practices are found in the forty-first subchapter of the category “Circulatory Phases and Seasonal Influences” (*Yunqi*) to which Zhang gives a cross-reference. In that subchapter we find a passage of the apocryphal SW 72,<sup>87</sup> in which “breath retention” (*bi qi*)<sup>88</sup> and “swallowing the fluid of *qi*” (*yan qi jin*) are mentioned as a method that can be practiced in the case of an enduring kidney disorder.<sup>89</sup> Zhang Jiebin first points out that this is a method of “nourishing *qi* and making essence return” (*yang qi huan jing*). By swallowing saliva the roots of life can be reinforced. Or, as is stated in an old comment to which Zhang refers:

“Daoists alchemists (*xianjia*) swallow *qi*. They let the roaring in their belly arrive under the umbilicus. The *qi* of the child (*zi qi*) sees the primordial *qi* of the mother (*mu yuanqi*). Hence, this is called ‘turning back to the root and reverting to the origin’ (*fanben huanyuan*).”<sup>90</sup>

In addition, Zhang attaches a long explanation, titled “Method of Guiding and Pulling” (*Daoyin fa*).<sup>91</sup> Again, he highlights the importance of essence and *qi* as the root of life (*ming*) and spirit as the controller of life (*xing*). He also provides three breathing exercises that can serve as introductory methods.<sup>92</sup> Zhang further explains how and when these exercises can be practiced, and what results can be expected:

“When the whole body is completely [like] the Way (*yi shen jie dao*), what obstruction (*zhi*) will there still be? After it has become most subtle by practicing for a long time, then it honestly does not stop by dispelling diseases!”<sup>93</sup>

More details on the results are given in a quote of the “Method of Breath Retention” (*Biqi fa*) attributed to the legendary figure Pengzu, who supposedly

lived eight hundred years and is associated with longevity techniques. Results of practicing this technique are described as follows:

“When a goose feather is put on the nose, it does not move anymore during three hundred breathings. The ears have nothing they hear, the eyes have nothing they see, and the mind has nothing it thinks of. Cold and heat cannot enter. Wasps and scorpions cannot sting their poison. One lives one hundred sixty years, and is nearing the state of the Authentic Person (*lin yu zhenren*).”<sup>94</sup>

80

*Huainanzi*, in *Guoxue zhenglishi*, *Zhuzi jicheng*, 7:23.

81

On the use of these trigrams in inner alchemy, see Robinet, “Original Contributions of *Neidan* to Taoism and Chinese Thought,” 312–314. Robinet has characterized texts of inner alchemy as follows: “1. a concern for training the mind as much as the body, with the mental aspect usually predominant; 2. a tendency to synthesize various Taoist currents, certain Buddhist speculations, and specific Confucian lines of thought; 3. references to the *Yijing*; and 4. references to chemical practices.” *Ibid.*, 300. The use of tri- and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* in inner alchemy goes back to *Zhouyi cantong qi*, attributed to Wei Boyang of the Han dynasty. However, the received version of the *Zhouyi cantong qi* dates from the Tang dynasty and marks the shift from external alchemy (*waidan*) to inner alchemy. Fabrizio Pregadio, “The Early History of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*,” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 30 (2003).

82

*Xing* and *ming* are used in Quanzhen and Nanzong, but not in the Zhong-Lü tradition, the oldest tradition of inner alchemy. Robinet, “Original Contributions of *Neidan* to Taoism and Chinese Thought,” 306.

83

Dual cultivation of inner nature and life (*xing-ming shuangxiu*) was important in both the Southern lineage of Zhang Boduan and the Yuan dynasty form of inner alchemy of Chen Zhixu. On dual cultivation of *xing-ming* in the Southern lineage of inner alchemy, see Dan K.J. Vercammen, “Bedenkingen bij de *xing-ming* formule van de Zuidelijke Innerlijke Alchemie (Thoughts on the *xing-ming* Formula of Southern Inner Alchemy),” in *Food for Thought: de essentie van de Chinese cultuur*, ed. Dan K.J. Vercammen (Antwerpen: Belgische Taoïstische Associatie, 2001). Dual cultivation of *xing-ming*, as explained by Chen Zhixu, also influenced Ming dynasty inner alchemists, such as Lu Xixing. See Pierre-Henry de Bruyn, “Daoism in the Ming (1368–1644),” in Kohn, *Daoism Handbook*, 608.

84

Zhang Jiebin, 8. Compare also with *Ibid.*, 1141.

85

*Ibid.*, 8. These sentences can almost verbatim be found in *Jindan dayao*, 3:6a, which again proves the close affinity between Zhang Jiebin’s ideas on essence, *qi*, and spirit and those expressed in *Jindan dayao*.

86

Quoted as in Zhang Jiebin, 8. Compare with *Taishō shinshū daizōkyō* 784, 723b:28–29. On *Sishi’er zhang jing*, see Erik Zürcher, *The Buddhist Conquest of China: The Spread and Adaptation of Buddhism in Early Medieval China*, 3rd ed. (Leiden: Brill, 2007), 29–30.

87

The contents of SW 72 and 73 are attributed to Liu Wenshu (11<sup>th</sup> C.). Despeux, “The System of the Five Circulatory Phases and the Six Seasonal Influences,” 133.

88

See Catherine Despeux, “Breath Retention,” in Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 234–235. On techniques of breath retention as mentioned in the *Baopuzi* and Sun Simiao’s *Beiji qianjin yaofang*, see *supra*.

89

Zhang Jiebin, 1411.

90

*Ibid.*

91

*Daoyin* can be literally translated as “guiding and pulling” and usually refers to “gymnastics”. On *daoyin* as gymnastics, see Catherine Despeux, “Gymnastics: The Ancient Tradition,” in Kohn, *Taoist Meditation and Longevity Techniques*. Here, Zhang Jiebin uses *daoyin* to denote respiratory techniques.

92

These exercises are: “Mr. Jiang’s Pieces on Regulating Qi” (*Jiang-shi Tiaoqi pian*), “Mr. Su’s Formula on Nourishing Life” (*Su-shi Yangsheng jue*), and Authentic Man Li’s Formula in Thirty-six Characters on Prolonging Life (*Li Zhenren Changsheng shiliu zi jue*). Zhang Jiebin, 1411–1414.

93

*Ibid.*, 1414.

94

As in *ibid.* Compare with Sun Simiao, *Beiji qianjin yaofang*, 470, in which Pengzu’s method is also described.

For Zhang Jiebin, becoming an Authentic Person was thus a genuine ambition, and should be seen in the context of inner alchemy. Zhang points out that the obscure terminology used in inner alchemical texts basically refers to making *qi* raise up (*ti qi*), breathing (*huxi*), the fluids (*jinye*), etc.<sup>95</sup> Although there are many names and practices, according to Zhang there is one basic principle: “what goes out is less than what enters” (*chu shao ru duo*).<sup>96</sup> This principle already occurs in texts as the *Baopuzi*, and relates to embryonic breathing.<sup>97</sup> The purpose of this breathing exercise in the *Baopuzi*, which predates mature inner alchemy, was also “generating and nourishing the perfected or realized one’s (*zhenren*) ‘holy embryo’ (*shengtai*).”<sup>98</sup>

It could be argued that most of the practices to which Zhang Jiebin refers are only introductory means, and should not be regarded as inner alchemy. As this may be, it is undeniable that in Zhang’s opinion medicine and inner alchemy (referred to as *xiandao*) are closely related to each other. Or, to use his words:

“The way of medicine connects with the way of immortality (*vidao tong xiandao*). This is most important. When you hear this, you should not regard it to be a heresy, or that I tell this as a joke.”<sup>99</sup>

## Conclusion

It is impossible to prove that Zhang Jiebin himself practiced Daoist inner alchemy. He was a “(Neo-)Confucian,” or rather a “scholar”, physician (*ruyi*) in the first place. As a physician, the religious aspirations of the practitioner of inner alchemy were probably not his first preoccupation. Zhang lived in the world of ordinary human beings and practiced the virtuous profession of medicine.

Nevertheless, he acknowledged the importance of Daoism especially in his comments dealing with principles of cultivating a long and healthy life. His references to Daoism are undeniably not just some embellishments in the text. This becomes clear when analyzing his comment on the second passage describing the Authentic Person at the end of SW 1. First, Zhang Jiebin had thoroughly read main inner alchemical texts. He highlights the importance of texts such as the *Taixi jing*, *Jindan dayao*, works by Zhang Boduan, etc., to explain essence, *qi*, and spirit. Second, Zhang’s understanding of *xiantian qi* is more profound and elaborate than in “orthodox” Neo-Confucian writings, and bears strong resemblances with ideas expressed in texts such as the *Jindan dayao*. Third, Zhang Jiebin refers to specific exercises. These exercises are not just health preventive techniques. Although the techniques described in the *Leijing* are only introductory means, they do not only aim at dispelling disease but also lead to the soteriological goal of becoming an Authentic Person. For Zhang Jiebin, medicine and Daoism were no divergent paths. If a physician at the end of the Ming dynasty wanted to fully understand the main ingredients of life itself, he had, in Zhang Jiebin’s opinion at least, to take account of Daoist inner alchemical explanations and practices.

Leslie de Vries

**Autentični čovjek kao ideal za liječnika u razdoblju kasne dinastije Ming**

**Daoistička unutarnja alkemija u Zhang Jiebinovom komentaru *Huangdi neijing***

**Sažetak**

*Krajem razdoblja dinastije Ming (1368.–1644.) daoistička unutarnja alkemija imala je značajan utjecaj na medicinske teorije nekih od najistaknutijih liječnika u kineskoj pokrajini Jiangnan. Ovaj se članak fokusira na Zhang Jiebinove (1563.–1640.) komentare Huangdi neijing (Unutarnji klasik žutoga cara), temeljnog teksta kineske medicine. U prvome poglavlju navedenog teksta dan je opis četiri uzorna tipa čovjeka. Analizira se Zhang Jiebinovo razmatranje jednog od tih tipova, autentičnog čovjeka (zhenren). Obilato se oslanjajući na izvore unutarnje alkemije, Zhang se fokusira na bitne konstituente tijela: bit (jing), qi i duh (shen). Nadalje se pokazuje kako Zhang naglašava snažne veze između medicine i unutarnje alkemije u raspravi o konkretnim praksama, koje ne samo da uklanjaju poremećaje nego također vode do daoističkog ideala postajanja zhenrenom.*

**Ključne riječi**

Zhang Jiebin, kineska medicina, dinastija Ming, unutarnja alkemija, qi, soteriologija

Leslie de Vries

**Der authentische Mensch als Ideal für den Arzt der späten Ming-Dynastie**

**Daoistische innere Alchemie in Zhang Jiebins Kommentar zu *Huangdi neijing***

**Zusammenfassung**

*Gegen Ende der Ming-Dynastie (1368–1644) übte die daoistische innere Alchemie einen erheblichen Einfluss auf die medizinischen Theorien einiger der prominentesten gelehrten Ärzte im chinesischen Gebiet Jiangnan aus. In diesem Artikel richte ich meine Aufmerksamkeit auf Zhang Jiebins (1563–1640) Kommentar zu Huangdi neijing (Innerer Klassiker des Gelben Kaisers), dem grundlegenden Text der chinesischen Medizin. Im ersten Kapitel des erwähnten Textes werden vier beispielhafte Typen von Menschen geschildert. Ich analysiere Zhang Jiebins Ausführung eines von denen, des authentischen Menschen (zhenren). Sich reichlich an die inneren alchemistischen Quellen lehrend legt er seinen Schwerpunkt auf die wesentliche Bestandteile des Körpers: Essenz (jing), qi und Geist (shen). Ferner zeige ich, wie Zhang starke Verbindungen zwischen Medizin und der inneren Alchemie in einer Diskussion über konkrete Praktiken betont, die nicht nur Störungen abbauen, sondern überdies zum daoistischen Ideal des zhenren-Werdens führen könnten.*

**Schlüsselwörter**

Zhang Jiebin, chinesische Medizin, Ming-Dynastie, innere Alchemie, qi, Soteriologie

95

In addition, Zhang also refers to sexual practices (*Yunü zhi shu*). On inner alchemy and sexual practices, see Douglas Wile, *Art of the Bedchamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics Including Women's Solo Meditation Texts* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992).

96

Zhang Jiebin, 1414.

97

Baopuzi mentions this principle in reverse order (“what enters is more than what goes out” *ru duo chu shao*) in the context of embryonic breathing. *Qi* (air) is inhaled through the nose, and then closed off (*bi*). After having counted

till one hundred-twenty (at beginner level), the air is gently breathed out through the mouth. As in the citation of “Pengzu’s Method of Breath Retention” above, also a goose feather is mentioned. This goose feather makes “what goes out is less than what enters” visually clear: “It should be that a goose feather placed on top of mouth and nose does not move while breathing out (*tu qi*).” Ge Hong, *Baopuzi* (Master who Embraces Simplicity), Guoxue zhenglische, *Zhuzi jicheng*, 8:33.

98

Cf. fn. 26.

99

Zhang Jiebin, 1414.

Leslie de Vries

**L'homme authentique en tant que médecin idéal dans la période  
tardive de la dynastie Ming**

**Alchimie taoïste interne de Zhang Jiebin dans le commentaire du *Huangdi neijing***

**Résumé**

*À la fin de la dynastie Ming (1368–1644) l'alchimie interne taoïste exerçait une influence significative sur les théories médicales de médecins renommés de la province chinoise de Jiangnan. Cet article se concentre sur les commentaires du Huangdi neijing (Classique interne de l'empire Jaune) de Zhang Jiebin, texte fondateur de la médecine chinoise. Dans le premier chapitre de ce texte quatre types d'hommes exemplaires sont décrits. L'analyse porte sur l'élaboration de Zhang Jiebin de l'un des quatre types d'hommes, l'homme authentique (zhenren). Se référant de manière abondante aux sources de l'alchimie interne, Zhang se concentre sur ses constituants essentiels : l'essence (jing), le qi, et l'esprit (shen). Plus loin, l'article montre comment Zhang souligne les relations fortes entre la médecine et l'alchimie interne dans les discussions sur les pratiques concrètes, qui non seulement suppriment les désordres, mais mènent également à l'idéal taoïste du devenir zhenren.*

**Mots-clés**

Zhang Jiebin, médecine chinoise, dynastie Ming, alchimie interne, qi, sotériologie