Yoga and Daoyin: History, Worldview, and Techniques*

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Yoga, the eight-limb system associated with Patañjali's *Yogasūtras*, and Daoyin, the Daoist practice of guiding (*dao* 導) the *qi* and stretching (*yin* 引) the body, at first glance have a lot in common. They both focus on the body as the main vehicle of attainment; they both see health and spiritual transformation as one continuum leading to perfection or self-realization; and they both work intensely and consciously with the breath. In both Yoga and Daoyin, moreover—unlike in Taiji quan and the majority of Qigong forms—physical stretches and movements are executed in all the different positions of the body, while standing, moving, sitting, and lying down. Postures are often sequenced into integrated flows and named either descriptively or after various animals.

In both systems, too, practitioners follow certain basic ethical rules and guidelines for daily living, geared to create an environment best suited to personal transformation. They learn the exact way to execute postures and movements, they gain awareness and control of their respiration, and they work to adjust the breath in accordance with the body postures. Adepts moreover use the strengthening of the muscles, loosening of the joints, and awareness of internal energies to enter into states of absorption and deeper meditation, relating actively to spiritual powers and seeking higher levels of self-realization.

Does that mean, then, that Yoga and Daoyin represent essentially the same system, just expressed in Indian and Chinese forms? Do they pursue the same goal, use the same methods, and reach similar stages, just formulated in different languages and terminologies? Is there, maybe, even an historical overlap, a mutual influence between the two systems that might explain their closeness? Or are the similarities coincidental—predicated upon the fact that all bodies move and stretch and breathe and that certain exercises are essentially good for us—and mask a deeper layer of complex and sophisticated differences in worldview, history, social role, and practice?

To answer these questions, I will look at the philosophical foundations of both practices, at historical origins and sociological settings, at their developments over time, and at the way they relate healing to spiritual realizations. I conclude with a look at their concrete practices and a general evaluation of their similarities and differences.

Philosophical Foundations

The body in Yoga forms an integral part of a body-mind continuum that cannot be separated and is seen as one. This continuum is one aspect of the material world ground, known as *prakṛti*.

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Prakṛti is real and eternal, dynamic and creative, inert and primordial (Eliade 1969, 31). It is the underlying substance of all that exists, the ”noumenal matrix of creation,””the realm of the multitudinous phenomena of contingent existence”(Feuerstein 1980, 29). It lies deep underneath the surface of natural everyday reality, representing its ultimate ground and creative potential, yet it is also the concrete, material world as it exists with all its different forms, modes, and transformations. *Prakṛti* at the root of all being is not accessible by ordinary sensory means but can be reached through yogic introspection after long periods of training and meditative immersion.

So far, *prakṛti* sounds amazingly like Dao. Literally ”the way,” the term indicates how things develop naturally, nature moves along in its regular patterns, and living beings continuously grow and decline. Dao is the one power underlying all. The fundamental ground of being, it makes things what they are and causes the world to develop. Mysterious and ineffable, it cannot be known but only intuited in tranquil introspection. As the *Daode jing* says:

> Look at it and do not see it: we call it invisible.
> Listen to it and do not hear it: we call it inaudible.
> Touch it and do not feel it: we call it subtle. . . .
> Infinite and boundless, it cannot be named; . . .
> Vague and obscure,
> Meet it, yet you cannot see its head,
> Follow it, yet you cannot see its back.
> (ch. 14)

Beyond this, like *prakṛti*, Dao also manifests actively in the material, natural world and is clearly visible in rhythmic changes and patterned processes. On this, the phenomenal level, it is predictable in its developments and can be characterized as the give and take of various pairs of complementary opposites, as the natural ebb and flow of things as they rise and fall, come and go, grow and decline, emerge and die (Kohn 2005, 10). Like practitioners of Yoga, Daoists and Daoyin practitioners locate the human body-mind in the underlying cosmic continuum, as it is both the root of creation and manifest in the phenomenal world. Practitioners of either system strive to increase awareness of the fundamental structure and organization of reality, deepening their understanding of the fluid nature of the phenomenal world and encouraging the development of intuitive faculties that allow a greater appreciation of the underlying ground.

There is, therefore, a basic commonality in the elementary worldview underlying Yoga and Daoyin. However, there are also major differences. Unlike in Daoism, the Yogic ground of *prakṛti* is equipped with particular characteristics, qualities, or aspects known as guṇas, which are the ultimate building blocks of all material and mental phenomena. These are *sattva*, intelligence or luminosity that can reveal the ultimate but may also lead to attachment to knowledge and happiness; *rajas*, motor energy, passion, and activity which bind people to wealth and pleasures; and *tamas*, static inertia or ignorance that creates sloth, laziness, and delusion (Eliade 1969, 31; Feuerstein 1980, 33; Worthington 1982, 51).
These three condition psychological and physical life, and each manifest in five further aspects of reality. That is to say, *sattva*, the intelligent quality of *prakṛti*, appears in the five senses of perception, i.e., hearing, seeing, touching, smelling, and tasting. The motor energy or *rajas* of the primordial ground is activated in the five organs of action, i.e., hands, feet, speech, excretion, and reproduction. And the inert quality of *tamas* appears in the five *tanmātras* or birth states of the five elements – ether, gas, light, liquids, and solids—which join together to create the material world (Mishra 1987, xxv; Feuerstein 1980, 30).

In Daoism, on the contrary, Dao manifests in the two complementary forces yin and yang 陰陽which originally described geographical features and were first used to indicate the shady and sunny sides of a hill. From there they acquired a series of associations: dark and bright, heavy and light, weak and strong, below and above, earth and heaven, minister and ruler, female and male, and so on. In concrete application, moreover, they came to indicate different kinds of action:

yang	active	birth	impulse	move	change	expand
yin	structive	completion	response	rest	nurture	contract

In addition, the ongoing flux and interchange of yin and yang was understood to occur in a series of five phases, which were symbolized by five materials or concrete entities:

minor yang	major yang	yin–yang	minor yin	major yin
wood	fire	earth	metal	water

These five energetic phases and their material symbols were then associated with a variety of entities in the concrete world, creating a complex system of correspondences. They were linked with colors, directions, seasons, musical tones, and with various functions in the human body, such as energy-storing (yin) organs, digestive (yang) organs, senses, emotions, and flavors. The basic chart at the root of Chinese and Daoist cosmology is as follows:

yin/yang	phase	direction	color	season	organ1	organ2	emotion	sense
lesser yang	wood	east	green	spring	liver	gall	anger	eyes
greater yang	fire	south	red	summer	heart	sm. int.	exc. joy	tongue
yin–yang	earth	center	yellow		spleen	stomach	worry	lips
lesser yin	metal	west	white	fall	lungs	lg.int.	sadness	nose
greater yin	water	north	black	winter	kidneys	bladder	fear	ears

Daoyin practice, as much as other forms of Daoist body cultivation, accordingly aims to create perfect harmony among these various forces and patterns, which guarantees health and long life. Going beyond this harmony, adepts also hope to enter a deeper awareness of and oneness with the Dao at the center of creation, finding perfection through resting in and flowing along with the root of all being.

Yogic practice, in a quite different mode, does not work toward harmony with the *guṇas* and their various aspects, but sees them as obstacles that have to be overcome in order to reach the highest goal. The highest goal, moreover, is not the attainment of *prakṛti* in its aspect as the creative root of the world, but to go beyond *prakṛti* altogether to a level that is unique to the Indian system and has no matching counterpart in China. This level is described variously as *puruṣa*, *ātman*, *brahman*, and *īśvara*.

Puruṣa is best known from *Ṛgveda* hymns as the cosmic giant whose body is dismembered to create the world, a story that appears in Chinese folklore as the myth of *Pangu* 盤古 but which has little impact on Daoist practice (see Lincoln 1975; Mair 2004, 91).[1] *Puruṣa* is the original man, the cosmic creator, the cause of all material being and existence of the universe, the source of the source, the power behind even the underlying ground (Feuerstein 1980, 16). A representation of the

[1]The *Ṛgveda* is the oldest and most important of the Four Vedas, which go back to about 3000-2000 B.C.E., and served as the key sacrificial hymnbooks of Indo-Aryan culture, a parallel culture to the ancient Indus Valley civilization. Without spelling out philosophical doctrines, the texts imply notions of self-effacement and purity. See Kinsley 1989; Feuerstein 1998a.

sheer awareness that transcends even pure consciousness, *puruṣa* is the authentic, ultimate being of humanity, the far-off and detached seer of all ongoing psychic and physical processes, the perfect knowledge of all, the ultimate mirror of reality that is utterly apart, completely other, unmoving, unthinking, unfeeling, and unintending (Feuerstein 1980, 19-20).
In this latter sense, the notion of *puruṣa* in the *Ṛgveda* is very similar to the concept of *ātman* in the *Upanishads*, a collection of over a hundred philosophical writings based on the hermit tradition that dates from around 600 B.C.E. and are considered among the most sacred scriptures of Hinduism (see Kinsley 1989). Their key concept of *ātman*, which is used interchangeably with *puruṣa* in yogic texts, indicates the soul or true self, a transcendent autonomous principle that is unique, universal, fundamentally real, solidly substantial, and eternally free. Originally referring to the extended self, i.e., the social and individual personality, *ātman* first included the physical body as much as social status, family, and self-image. In the *Upanishads*, however, it came to be seen on a more sophisticated meditative level as the core of the individual's inner being, the divine moment within. Ultimately indestructible, *ātman* exists from the beginning of time and to the end of all eons. However often reincarnated and immersed in *prakṛti*, it remains forever free from evil, grief, hunger, thirst, old age, and death.

Ātman is so far beyond the senses and the intellect that it cannot be described, but one can pursue a state of consciousness that allows a glimpse. The *Mandukya Upanishad* distinguishes four kinds of consciousness—waking, dreaming, deep sleep, and meditative trance – noting that only the latter is a state that is awake yet completely free from bodily concerns (Worthington 1982, 25). Like the wind, the clouds, lightning, and thunder, this state is present but does not rely on a tangible body that is subject to the limitations of the *guṇas*. Only in meditative trance can one experience the deepest inner nucleus of one's being, the ultimate true self or *ātman*. Deeply serene, one can allow the true self to shine forth in bright radiance (see Cope 2000). As the *Brihadaranyaka Upanishad* says:

> The true nature of the ultimate self is to be free from fear, free from desire and evil. As lovers in deep embrace forget everything, and only feel peace all around, so man where he embraces his true self feels peace all around. In that state there is neither father nor mother, there are no gods, no worlds, no good, and no evil. He neither sees, hears, tastes, smells, knows, nor touches. Yet he can see, for sight and he are one; he can hear, for sound and he are one. . . .
> (Worthington 1982, 16)

Ātman, moreover, is to be realized as ultimately one with *brahman*, the universal cosmic energy that is at the root beyond creation, is completely separate and different from all that exists materially, and is perceptible with the senses. *Brahman* is described as being in the world like salt is in water or like clay is in statues (Worthington 1982, 18), but in its original form it is utterly beyond description. It is

> not coarse, not fine, not short, not long, not glowing like fire, not adhesive like water, not bright, not dark, not airy, not spacious, not sticky, not tangible. It cannot be seen, nor heard, not smelled nor tasted. It is without voice and wind, without energy and breath, without measure, without number, without inside, without outside.
> (Worthington 1982, 25)

Brahman is the cosmic counterpart, the larger version of *ātman*, and a key doctrine of the ancient Indian thought that both are originally one. The goal of Yoga, then, as much as of other Indian

ascetic practices and philosophies, is to fully realize that one's innermost, original, and perfect self is the same as the innermost, original, and perfect power of the universe. This is classically expressed in the phrase "Tat twam asi!"(Thou art that!).
The practice of Yoga accordingly is to move through different layers of the apparent self as created by and perceptible through *prakṛti* to come to the ultimate true self which is *puruṣa*, the original man, *ātman*, the innermost soul, and *brahman*, the underlying power of the universe. The key layers of the apparent self are the five so-called sheaths (*kosa*). They are: the physical body that is nourished by food; the etheric body that exists through vital energy or *prāṇa*; the astral body made up from thoughts and intentions; the causal body consisting of pure intellect and knowledge; and the ultimate bliss body, true self, or *ātman* (Cope 2000, 68; Worthington 1982, 23; Mishra 1987, 49).

Yogic practice aims to reach oneness with *brahman*, to return to the purity of the original soul, and to recover the true self. Firm, fixed, permanent, and eternal, this true self is thus the person's ultimate identity. Originally one with the deepest transcendent ground of all, human beings have forgotten this identity through their karmic involvement with the world and the sensory experience of *prakṛti*. Through Yoga they can recover the innate stability, wholeness, and permanence of the cosmos within and return to the essential substance of their being.

To do so, in additional to regular practice, they also have to have strong devotion to *īśvara*, the lord, a personalized form of *brahman* who can extend grace and support to the practitioner. Omnipresent and omnitemporal, he remains pure, distant, and incomprehensible, yet in the yogic system „the grace of the deity is a necessary precondition for the recompense of ascetic exertion„(Feuerstein 1980, 4). *Īśvara* is innate cosmic enlightenment, coessential with the innermost self, the personified power that creates, upholds, and withdraws. Yoga is, therefore, essentially theistic (Eliade 1969, 16). Grace and devotion are key factors for success, and *īśvara praṇidhāna*, „refuge in the lord," is one of the five *niyamas*, the mental attitudes to be cultivated as the very foundation of the practice, which also include purity, contentment, austerity, and self-study.

With this strong otherworldly and theistic orientation, Yoga in its philosophical foundations is clearly different from the underlying vision of Daoyin. The Daoist universe is complex in its own way, similarly presupposes several layers of existence, and acknowledges the pervasive presence of an underlying ground; but it does not propose the substantial, eternal presence of something totally other. Daoist practice, as a result, remains within the realm of energetic refinement and transformation. Practitioners transmutate into pure spirit, a subtle form of energy that flows at high velocity and allows easy transformations, celestial consciousness, and supernatural powers, but that is not utterly different from the world or a permanent, firm, unchanging entity of a transcendent nature.

The emphasis on the stability and permanence of the true self and the ultimate state in Yoga thus stand in radical contrast to the refinement into subtler and faster energetic flows in Daoyin. This difference, moreover, is also expressed in the execution of postures—a strong focus on stability and holding in Yoga as opposed to a sense of flow and easy movement in Daoyin – and in the role of the mind, which is the key subject of transformation in Yoga and an adjunct to transformation in Daoyin. Beyond that, the difference also manifests in the historical and social development of the two traditions.

History and Society

The historical origins of the two systems could not be more different. Yoga comes from the ancient Indian hermit tradition which "rejected the world as it is and devalued life as ephemeral, anguished, and ultimately illusory"(Eliade 1969, 18). Daoyin, on the other hand, arose as part of Han-dynasty medicine which encouraged people to relish the world in all its aspects, to find greater health, and to enjoy their physical and social pleasures. Both traditions have, in the course of their history, moved into the other realm – Yoga becoming a vehicle for health and Daoyin being integrated into the quest for immortality – but their origins and social bases remain far apart.

The earliest document on Yoga is the *Yogasūtras* of Patañjali, who may or may not be identical with a well-known Sanskrit grammarian who lived around 300 B.C.E. The date of both author and text is unclear, and some scholars have placed them as late as the third century C.E., but all agree that the text is later than the *Upanishads* and early Buddhism and probably came after the *Bhagavad Gita* (Worthington 1982, 55). The text divides into four main sections on Yogic Ecstasy, Discipline, Miraculous Powers, and Isolation (Eliade 1969, 12), and consists of 196 *sūtras* or short half-sentences that are more mnemonic aids than clarifying explanations (Taimni 1975, viii). It is largely philosophical in nature and inherits key doctrines from the *Vedas* and *Upanishads*.

For example, an important *sūtra* that is often cited among yogis today appears right in the beginning: "Yoga is the cessation of the modifications of the mind"or the "abolition of all states of consciousness"(I.2). I. K. Taimni writes a four-page explanation on this short phrase, dwelling on every word and reaching the conclusion that its intended meaning refers to the overcoming, through yogic practice, of the various states and delusions of the mind that are conditioned by the *guṇas* and thus opening the way to the appreciation and realization of *ātman* (1975, 6-10). Mircea Eliade sees the phrase as describing the gradual overcoming and elimination of all errors, delusions, and dreams, then of all normal psychological experiences, and finally even of all parapsychological powers to the point of complete cessation (1969, 51). Confirming this, the text moves on to explain the various trance states in the depth of meditative absorption and the need to overcome the *guṇas* and identify fully with *puruṣa*. As this example shows, the text is brief in phrasing and often obscure. Thus Georg Feuerstein says: "Their extreme brevity and conciseness renders the *sūtras* almost unintelligible to the uninitiated"while at the same time guaranteeing "the great degree of flexibility witnessed in the diverse traditions"of Yoga (1979, 21).

In contrast to this rather obscure and philosophical writing, the earliest works on Daoyin are immensely practical in nature and can be precisely dated. Found among manuscripts unearthed from southern China, they include the silk manuscript *Daoyin tu* 導引圖 (Exercise Chart) and the bamboo tablets of the *Yinshu* 引書 (Stretch Book).

Fig. 1: The Mawangdui "Exercise Chart."

There is some variety among them. Two figures are in a forward bend, one with head lowered, the other with head raised. Another is bending slightly forward with a rounded back and hands hanging down toward the knees. Yet another has one arm on the ground and the other extended upward in a windmill-like pose (Harper 1998, 132). The captions are often illegible, but among them are the well-known ”bear amble”and ”bird stretch,”showing a figure walking in a stately fashion with arms swinging and one bending forward with hands on the floor and head raised, respectively.

The lack of written explanations is somewhat alleviated by the *Yinshu*, which consists entirely of text. It was found in a manuscript at Zhangjiashan 張家山, also in Hunan, in a tomb that was closed in 186 B.C.E. The text divides into three parts: a general introduction on seasonal health regimens; a series of about a hundred exercises, divided into three sections; and a conclusion on the etiology of disease and ways of prevention (see Fig. 2).

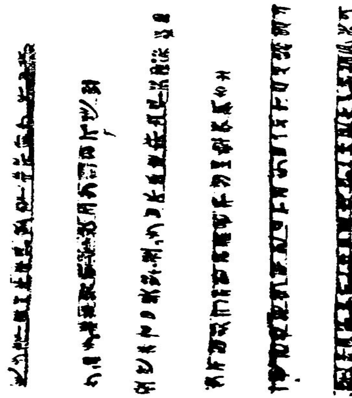

Fig.2: The „Stretch Book“.

The first part on seasonal health regimens discusses hygiene, diet, sleep, and movement as well as adequate times for sexual intercourse. It is ascribed to Pengzu 彭祖, a famous immortal of antiquity, said to have lived over 800 years. It says, for instance:

> Spring days. After rising in the morning, pass water, wash and rinse, clean and click the teeth. Loosen the hair, stroll to the lower end of the hall to meet the purest of dew and receive the essence of Heaven, and drink one cup of water. These are the means to increase accord. Enter the chamber [for sex] between evening until greater midnight [1 a.m.]. More would harm the *qi*.
> (Harper 1998, 110-11; Engelhardt 2001, 215)

This places the practice firmly in the home of a wealthy aristocrat with leisure to pursue long life and well-being and the inclination to perform proper hygiene and develop bodily awareness. It also assumes that the practitioner lives in society and has a wife or concubine for bedroom activities. The scene could not be farther removed from the kind of hermit setting that lies at the foundation of Yoga.

Following a general outline of daily routines, the middle part of the *Yinshu* provides concrete practice instructions, describing and naming specific moves. For example:

> ”Bend and Gaze”is: interlace the fingers at the back and bend forward, then turn the head to look at your heels (#12).

> ”Dragon Flourish”is: step one leg forward with bent knee while stretching the other leg back, then interlace the fingers, place them on the knee, and look up (#19).
>
> ”Pointing Backward”is: interlace the fingers, raise them overhead and bend back as far as possible (#29).[2]

Following forty exercises of this type, the text focuses on the medical use of the practices. It often repeats instructions outlined earlier and in some cases prescribes a combination of them. For example, a variation of lunges such as ”Dragon Flourish”is the following, which can be described as a walking lunge:

> To relieve tense muscles: Stand with legs hip-width apart and hold both thighs. Then bend the left leg while stretching the right thigh back, reaching the knee to the floor. Once done, [change legs and] bend the right leg while stretching the left leg back and reaching that knee to the floor. Repeat three times (#46).

Another variant of the lunges is recommended to relieve *qi*-disruptions in the muscles and intestines. Lunging with the left foot forward and the right leg back, one goes into a twist by bending the right arm at the elbow and looking back over the left shoulder. After three repetitions on both sides, one is to maintain the lunge position while raising one arm at a time and then both arms up as far as one can (each three times), bending the back and opening the torso (#68). The idea seems to be that by stretching arms and legs one can open blockages in the extremities while the twisting of the abdominal area aids the intestines.

Exercises like these in the medical section of the text also include breathing techniques, notably exhalations with *chui*, *xu*, and *hu* (three forms of the six breaths) to strengthen the body and to harmonize *qi*-flow, as well as exercises in other than standing positions, such as seated, kneeling, or lying down. For example, to alleviate lower back pain, one should lie on one’s back and rock the painful area back and forth 300 times—if possible with knees bent into the chest. After this, one should lift the legs up straight to ninety degrees, point the toes, and—with hands holding on to the mat—vigorously lift and lower the buttocks three times (#55).

An example of a kneeling practice is the following:

> To relieve thigh pain. Kneel upright, stretch the left leg forward while rotating the right shoulder down to bring them together with some vigor. Then stretch the right leg forward while rotating the left shoulder down to bring them together. Repeat ten times. (#50)

Following this detailed outline of concrete exercises, the *Yinshu* concludes its third part with a list of twenty-four brief mnemonic statements. After this, it places the practice into a larger social and cultural context. It notes that the most important factors in causing diseases are climatic excesses:

> People get sick because of heat, dampness, wind, cold, rain, or dew as well as because of [a dysfunction] in opening and closing the pores, a disharmony in eating and drinking, and the inability to adapt their rising and resting to the changes in cold and heat. (Engelhardt 2001, 216)

This harks back to the seasonal regimen in the beginning of the text, restating the importance of climatic and temporal awareness in the way one treats the body. The proper way of treating the

[2] These translations are based on the original text. It is published with modern characters and some punctuation in Wenwu 1990; Ikai 2004.

body, however, as the text points out next, is accessible mainly to ”noble people”of the upper classes, who fall ill because of uncontrolled emotions such as anger and joy (which overload yin and yang *qi*). ”Base people,”whose conditions tend to be caused by excessive labor, hunger, and thirst, on the contrary, have no opportunity to learn the necessary breathing exercises and therefore contract numerous diseases and die early.

This, as much as the fact that the manuscripts were found in tombs of local rulers, makes it clear that Daoyin practice in Han China was very much the domain of the aristocracy and upper classes and aimed predominantly at alleviating diseases and physical discomforts, providing greater enjoyment of daily luxuries and faster recorvery after raucous parties (Engelhardt 2000, 88; 2001, 217; also Harper 1995, 381). Also, the very existence of the texts with their detailed instructions shows that the practices were public knowledge and accessible to anyone with enough interest and financial means to obtain them.

Historical records show that medical and philosophical materials were often collected by aristocrats. Some searched out already written works and had them transcribed; others invited knowledgeable people to their estate and had them dictate their philosophical sayings and medical recipes to an experienced scribe. While knowledge was transmitted orally in a three-year apprenticeship from father to son in professional medical families or from master to disciple among itinerant practitioners and within philosophical schools, the dominant tendency was to offer this knowledge to society at large, and there was little concern for the establishment of close-knit hierarchies or esoteric lineages (Harper 1998, 61).

The situation in Indian Yoga is much different. As the *Yogasūtras* reflect, the masters' knowledge, however practical, was closely guarded and formulated in obscure philosophical phrases. Disciples had to commit fully to their teacher, and together with faith in the grace of *Īśvara* had to have total trust in and obedience to the guru who, as representative of the ultimate, possessed powers far beyond ordinary knowledge (see Arya 1981; Hewitt 1977). Also, since the goal of Yoga was the attainment of complete cessation of mentation and the realization of the transcendent true self, it could not be undertaken within society—let alone be used for the enhancement of ordinary pleasures. The only way to freedom and beatitude in Yoga, as Mircea Eliade points out, was to withdraw from the world, detach from wealth and ambition, and live in radical self-isolation (1969, 21).

Socially, therefore, Yoga took place in a completely different context than Daoyin. Yogic practitioners were not aristocrats trying to stay healthy and have more fun, but radical ascetics who denied themselves even the most basic human comforts. The ascetic hermit (*sadhu*) would give up all products of culture and live in the wilderness, not even ”stepping on ploughed land,”the symbol of human domination over nature (Olivelle 1990, 133). He – very few if any female ascetics are mentioned from the early stages (Ghurye 1964, 40) – would eat only uncultivated foods, such as fruits, berries, roots, and herbs; wear bark, leaves, and animal skins; leave his hair unkempt and his nails growing; and imitate animals in his behavior – notably deer, cows, pigeons, fish, snakes, and dogs. Returning to a state of primal origin, before the plow and social hierarchies, he would find paradise for himself in utter independence from society (Olivelle 1990, 134-35). Thus he could attain the freedom of mind and body necessary for ultimate release.

Typically such ascetics undertook a variety of practices, which are still familiar among the yogis of today.

> There are those who squatted on their heels, others who lay on beds of thorns, ashes or

> grass, others who rested on a pestle. . . . One was avowedly following the vow of exposing himself to the elements, especially to the sun and the rain. Another with the help of a long staff was carrying out the austerity of standing on one leg.
> (Ghurye 1964, 39-40)

This contrasts vividly with the description of the ideals of Daoyin from a fourth-century text, which through its very warning of the enticements of sensuality and beauty shows just how much its practitioners were exposed to them. It says,

> The method of nourishing longevity consists mainly in not doing harm to oneself. Keep warm in winter and cool in summer, and never lose your harmony with the four seasons—that is how you can align yourself with the body. Do not allow sensuous beauty, provocative postures, easy leisure, and enticing entertainments to incite yearnings and desires—that is how you come to pervade the spirit.
> (Stein 1999, 169)

Rather than subject themselves to extremes, practitioners of Daoyin matched the changes of nature, creating harmony in the body and in society instead of leaving the family and restructuring the body to the point of complete cessation. The physical and breathing exercises of the two systems, however apparently similar, in their original setting thus served completely different purposes, were executed in completely different social milieus, and found expression in completely different kinds of documents.

Healing and Transcendence

As history moved along, this original contrast between the two traditions began to dissolve to a certain degree. Daoyin became part of the Daoist enterprise of the attainment of immortality and Yoga, as we know all too well from its popularity today, turned into a major method for health and well-being. How and when did this change occur?

In the case of Daoyin, it had to do with the arising of various organized Daoist groups that adopted some self-cultivation methods practiced by Chinese hermits (see Kohn 2001). Most prominent among them was the school of Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清), which arose in the 360s, when two brothers of the aristocratic Xu family hired the medium Yang Xi楊 羲 (330–386) to establish contact with Xu Mi's 許謐 wife who had died in 362 to find out about her fate in the otherworld. She appeared to tell them about her status and explained the overall organization of the heavens. She also introduced the medium to various other spirit figures who revealed methods of personal transformation, meditations, visualizations, and alchemical concoctions; gave thorough instructions on how to transmit the texts and their methods; and provided prophecies about the golden age to come (see Strickmann 1981).

The Xu brothers wrote down everything Yang Xi transmitted, however disparate it may have seemed, and created a basic collection of sacred texts. They shared their new revelations with their immediate neighbors and relatives, thus establishing the first generation of Highest Clarity followers (Robinet 1984, 1:108). They developed a spiritual practice that also included a daily routine of stretches, breathing, and self-massages in combination with the use of talismans and incantations – all to purify their bodies and to enhance their vigor for the great endeavor of becoming immortal.

How Daoyin functioned in the daily practice of these would-be immortals is described in the *Baoshen jing* 寶神經 (Scripture on Treasuring the Spirit, DZ 1319; see Robinet 1984, 2:359-62). The text says:

> When you get up in the morning, always calm your breath and sit up straight, then interlace the fingers and massage the nape of your neck. Next, lift the face and look up, press the hands against the neck while moving the head back. Do this three or four times, then stop.[3]
> This causes essence to be in harmony and the blood to flow well. It prevents wind or wayward *qi* from entering the body. Over a long time it will keep you free from disease and death.
> Next, bend and stretch; extend the hands to the four extremes [up, down, right, left]; bend backward and stretch out the sides; and shake out the hundred joints. Do each of these three times. (6a)

These and similar morning practices were further accompanied by incantations that implored the deities and perfected to support the practitioner and enhanced their visions of divine ascension. An example is:

> My spirit and material souls receiving purity, My five spirits [of the inner organs] are restful and at peace. I return in a flying carriage to visit [the heaven of] Jade Clarity, Ascend to Great Nonbeing and journey with the sun. Becoming a perfected, I merge in mystery with emperors and lords. (2b)

The practice also involved the use of talismans, written in red ink on yellow paper in imitation of the sacred writings of the otherworld. Adepts used them either by placing them on themselves or by burning them and drinking the ashes (*Baoshen jing* 16b) (see Fig. 3).

Fig. 3: A talisman used in Highest Clarity practice.

The morning practices of Daoyin in Highest Clarity served several goals: dispersal of obstructive and demonic forces, self-purification in the face of the divine, clarity of vision and keenness of hearing to open otherworldly perception, extension of life expectancy to have more practice time, and preparation for ascension through visualizations of gods and heavens (see Robinet 1993).

[3]The same exercise is still part of the Daoyin repertoire today. It appears under the name "Immortal Imitating Tall Pine Standing Firmly in the Wind"in Ni Hua-ching's regimen (1989, 60). Here the posture proposed is to sit cross-legged.

Variations of the practice include:

- bends and stretches known from the medical manuscripts as well as deep breathing to release stale *qi* and absorb new energy;
- self-massages of the face, eyes, and ears;
- saliva swallowings to harmonize *qi* in the body and calm the viscera;
- visualizations of the inner organs with the body gods.

In this religious Daoist context, therefore, the practice of Daoyin was transformed into an aspect of spiritual purification, including but not limited to the maintenance of health and extension of life. Although the setting was still aristocratic and mundane, it has come much closer to Yoga, leading to extensive explorations of the unseen world and deep absorptive trance states.[4]

Yoga, on the other hand, moved in the opposite direction, leading to a greater emphasis on health benefits and a wider spread among people within society. Two movements in particular took the tradition into a more secular environment and transformed it into a popular form of self-therapy. The first is known as Laya Yoga. It arose toward the end of the first millennium C.E. as part of the tantric adoption of Yoga and focused on utilizing the energy that arises in the body after prolonged meditation.

This energy, called *kuṇḍalinī*, was thought to lie dormant at the base of the spine. If awakened properly, it would begin to move from here, rising up along the spine through three major *nāḍīs* or energy channels. Along the way it would open the seven *chakras* or energy centers until it reached the top of the head where it would unify with cosmic consciousness and exit the body (see Fig. 4). By activating *kuṇḍalinī*, the belief was, people could bring their energetic system into balance and reach greater health, endurance, and well-being (Worthington 1982, 100-02).

Fig. 4: The Seven Chakras in the body.

The seven *chakras*, moreover, were associated with various colors, geometric forms or *yantras*, deities, and personality types. They are: [5].

[4]This more spiritual form of Daoyin practice has persisted in the Daoist tradition, leading to the integration of gymnastic exercises into later forms of Daoist meditation and immortality practice, including the complex system of inner alchemy—the creation of an elixir and immortal embryo within the body—which still is the dominant form of Daoist spiritual practice today (see Berk 1986; Despeux 1988). On the other hand, it has also recovered its medical origins in the practice of Qigong, which since the 1950s has adopted Daoist techniques into a health regimen for the masses and spread successfully not only throughout China but also in East Asia and the West (see Kohn 2008, esp. 198-204, 266).

[5]See Wood 1962, 153-55; Worthington 1982, 104-06; Yasudian and Haich 1965, 93-95.

Name	Location	Color	Yantra	Personality	Deity
Root	perineum	red	square	survival	Brahma
Sacral	abdomen	orange	semi-circle	creativity	Vishnu
Central	solar plexus	yellow	triangle	ego/confidence	Rudra
Heart	chest/thyroid	pink	star	love/compassion	Isha
Throat	throat/pineal	blue	triangle	logic/thought	Shiva
Brow	third eye	north	violet	intuition	
Crown	top of head	gold	black	spirituality	

Activating the chakras through a mixture of physical practices, breathing exercises, and meditations, practitioners hoped to find perfect balance in their energetic system to create health, vigor, and long life. As history moved on, however, the practice was once more reintegrated with the higher spiritual goals of Patañjali's *Yogasūtras* and practitioners came to aspire to advanced stages of evolution, reaching out to complete transcendence and the true self. Even the awakening of the *kuṇḍalinī* eventually came to be described as a mystical, supernatural experience. As the modern mystic Krishna Gopi records:

> I experienced a rocking sensation and then felt myself slipping out of my body, entirely enveloped in a halo of light. I felt the point of consciousness that was myself growing wider, surrounded by waves of light. I was not all consciousness, without any outline, without any idea of a corporeal appendage, without any feeling or sensation coming from the senses, immersed in a sea of light. (1977, 143)

Therefore, while Laya Yoga may have begun as a secularized form of energy transformation, it eventually recovered the spiritual aspects of classical Yoga and became an important part of the tantric tradition (see Feuerstein 1998a).

This is not quite the case in the other therapy form of Yoga, known as Haṭha Yoga and named after a combination of *ha*, the sun, and *ṭha*, the moon, meant to indicate the joining and harmonizing of the two basic forms of energy in the body (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 20).

Haṭha Yoga goes back to a group known as Nāth yogis who flourished in northern India from the tenth century onward. Founded by Goruksanatha, this group placed great emphasis on physical fitness, developed various forms of martial arts, and engaged in psychic experiments. Rather than remain aloof from society, they made attempts at reform, treating women and outcasts as equals and trying to unite Hindus and Buddhists. Their efforts were not greatly appreciated by the ruling classes, and they were soon relegated to a lower caste. Still, the legendary Gurkha fighters are said to be their heirs, and their transformation of Yoga into an art of practical living has had a profound impact on the tradition (Worthington 1982, 129).

The main document of the Naṭh yogis is the *Haṭhayoga pradịpikā* (Light on *Haṭha Yoga*), which was compiled in the fifteenth century on the basis of the notes and instructions of earlier masters by Svatmarama Swami, also known as Divatma Ram. Arranged in five sections on Initial Practices, Stepping up Energy, Overcoming Limitations, Manifesting Self, and Corrective Treatments, it is written like the *Yogasūtras* in a series of short instructions that need further personal instruction (Worthington 1982, 129).

Unlike the*Yogasūtras* and more like the early Daoyin manuscripts, however, the *Haṭhayoga pradịpikā* is eminently practical and quite concrete. It warns against excesses that will hinder

the practice, including overeating, exertion, useless talk, extreme abstinence, public company, and unsteadiness of mind. Instead it encourages persistence, knowledge, courage, and determination (Worthington 1982, 130). It follows the eight limbs of the *Yogasūtras* but places a stronger emphasis on moral discipline and the physical practices than on deep absorptions and meditative trances. It supports the five *yamas* or restraints— – gainst killing, stealing, lying, sexual misconduct, and attachments – and the five *niyamas* or proper mental attitudes: purity, contentment, austerity, self-study, and refuge in the lord (Iyengar 1976, 31-40). Continuing along the eight limbs, the text then provides detailed instructions on the performance of fifteen key postures or *āsanas* and moves on to a discussion of breath control or *pranayāma* (Eliade 1969, 65).

Haṭha Yoga has become dominant in the practice of Yoga today and for many people means the creation of perfect health, defined as the state of natural equilibrium of all energies and the free flow of *prāna*, the inner life force that smoothes out irregularities and preserves health, the power of gravity, attraction, repulsion, electricity, and radioactivity (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 30, 53).

Prāna is more concrete and more tangible than *kuṇḍalinī*; present in everyone and everything, it does not need to be awakened. Very much like *qi*, it is omnipresent, flows through energy channels in the body, and is activated through conscious breathing and controlled physical movements. People tend to neglect and waste their prāna, straining it through exhausting labor, excessive sexuality, and draining mental work—items that Daoists would heartily endorse. Haṭha Yoga, like Daoyin, accordingly teaches to use and store vital energy to the maximum, thereby enhancing health and extending long life (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 36, 31).

The proper use of *prāna* ultimately leads to the complete control over the body and mind, the ability to counteract various outside influences through internal energy work and to overcome and eventually eliminate all sorts of harmful emotions, such as rage, fear, grief, sorrow, fright, jealousy, despondency, and pessimism (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 37). While this may again sound very much like the program of Daoyin or even Qigong, the ultimate goal of Haṭha Yoga is formulated once more in the classical vision as the ultimate transformation of consciousness. As B. K. S. Iyengar notes:

> Yoga is the method by which the restless mind is calmed and the energy directed into constructive channels. . . . The mind, when controlled, provides a reservoir of peace and generates abundant energy for human uplift. . . .
>
> [Eventually] the seer, the sight, and the seen have no separate existence from each other. It is like a great musician becoming one with his instrument and the music that comes from it. Then the yogi stands in his own nature and realizes his true self, the part of the Supreme Soul within himself.
> (1976, 20, 22)

Divergent Techniques

Taking all this information together, we can now begin to answer the questions posed in the beginning. Are Yoga and Daoyin essentially the same but formulated differently? Or are they two separate traditions that have very little in common? It should be clear by now that in their original social setting, cosmological speculation, and textual formulation they are very different indeed, although they share some basic notions about the nature of existence and propose similar physical practices. In the course of history, on the other hand, they have come a bit closer to each other, Daoyin being used in a more spiritual context and Yoga transforming into popular therapy. This shift has also led to a certain change in key concepts, Laya and Haṭha Yoga emphasizing

notions of internal vital energy that are very much like *qi*, and Highest Clarity and later Daoists engaging in deep trance states with the hope to reach otherworldly dimensions.

To conclude this discussion, I would now like to take a closer look at the actual practices and their commonalities and differences. First, quite obviously, both Yoga and Daoyin support a moderate and simple lifestyle, a nutritious and natural diet, freedom from strong emotions, and clarity in daily living. They have a basic moral code, formulated as the *yamas* and *niyamas* in Yoga and apparent in Daoism in various sets of precepts for lay followers, priests, and monastics (see Kohn 2004).

Both also prescribe a fairly straightforward exercise regimen that, combined with deep, abdominal and chest-expanding breathing, can be executed in all different positions of the body. Exercises include bends and stretches, most commonly forward bends, backbends, lunges, and twists, as well as some weight-bearing practices, such as pull-ups and push-ups. Many of these basic exercises are part and parcel of any workout routine and will be familiar to athletes and gym-users everywhere. They have been proven effective for health over many centuries and in all different cultures, just as a moderate life style and good moral foundation have been helpful all along.

So far, both systems do not contradict each other, nor are they different from other health enhancing methods, whether they emphasize the physical or the spiritual. Their effectiveness is not questioned, nor is their general applicability. Beyond this, however, things become more complicated. Both Yoga and Daoyin have more complex postures and sequences that are not at all alike in name or execution.[6]

Daoyin variously makes use of ropes and swings, which are not found in Yoga. Yoga, on the other hand, places a great emphasis on inversions and balancing poses which are strikingly absent in Daoyin. Also, with the exception of the meditation known as "Standing Like a Pine Tree,"Daoyin tends to encourage movement, while Yoga demands holding—sometimes for periods of ten, twenty, or thirty minutes. This, of course, goes back to the ultimate goal in Yoga of reaching a level of complete inner stability that allows the awareness of the eternal true self, contrasted with the aim of Daoists to become one with the flow and to find perfect harmony by moving along with the patterns of Dao.

A similar set of differences also applies to the breathing practices associated with the two systems, *qifa* 氣法 in Daoyin and *pranayāma* in Yoga. Both encourage holding of the breath—called *biqi* 閉氣in Daoyin and *kumbhaka* in Yoga – for the opening of energy channels. Both use a method of directed breathing to alleviate discomforts and distress, and both guide energy up the spinal column. Yet, in general Daoyin works with the systematic circulation of *qi* throughout the body, while Yoga focuses on the concentrated use of breath in the nostril, sinus, and throat areas.

For example, one form of Daoyin breathing is called "swallowing *qi*"(*yanqi* 咽氣). According to the *Huanzhen xiansheng fu neiqi juefa* 幻真先生服內氣訣法 (Master Huanzhen's Essential Method of Absorbing Internal Qi, DZ 828)[7], this involves lying flat on one's back with the head slightly raised and the hands curled into fists. In this position, adepts inhale through the nose, allow the breath to reach the mouth, mix it with saliva by moving the tongue and cheeks, and swallow it

[6]One exception is figure 44 on the *Daoyin tu*, shown with legs in lunge position and arms extended and named "Warrior Pointing,"which is strikingly similar to the Yoga pose known as "Warrior II."

[7]The text has a preface dated to the mid-Tang period. It also appears in the *Chifeng sui* 赤鳳髓 (Marrow of the Red Phoenix) of the late Ming. It is translated Despeux 1988, 65-81 and summarized in Kohn 2012: esp. 234-250, 301.

down, guiding the *qi* mentally to reach the stomach and spread from there into the various inner organs. To help the movement, practitioners massage the passageway of the breath by rubbing the chest and belly (2b-3b).
In an extension, they also "guide the *qi*"(*xingqi* 行氣) by first taking the swallowed saliva-breath mixture into the lower elixir field, then entering it into two small caverns at the back and imagining it moving up the body in two strands to enter the Niwan Center or upper elixir field in the head. From here they allow it to stream into all parts of the body, "through hair, face, head, neck, and shoulders into the hands and fingers; from the chest and the middle elixir field at the heart into the five inner organs and down along the legs to thighs, knees, calves, heels, and soles"(3b-4a). As they do so, all congestions of blood and blockages of *qi* are successfully dissolved, paving the way for the refinement of *qi* into subtler energetic forces.

A yet different variant is called "surrendering to *qi*"(*weiqi* 委氣), which is described as flowing mentally along with the *qi* in the body wherever it may go in a state of deep absorption, "where there is no spirit, no conscious awareness; deep and serene, the mind is one with the Great Void"(5b-6a). This in turn causes the body to become independent of nostril breathing as the *qi* will begin to flow through the pores of the skin. In an extension of this heightened power of *qi*, adepts can then spread it to other people in a form of laying-on of hands to create healing and greater harmony with the Dao.

In contrast to these breathing practices, Yoga followers use the breath to heighten awareness, to calm the mind, and to cleanse the air passages (see Loehr and Migdow 1986). To give a few examples, there is a popular form known as *ujjayi* breathing, often called the "ocean-sounding breath."It involves the tightening of the muscles at the back of the throat, allowing the air to flow slowly and making a soft, rasping noise, said to stimulate the endocrine and thyroid glands and increase mental alertness (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 120). A breath that calms the mind and balances energy channels is *nadi shodana*. Also called "alternate nostril breathing,"it is done by alternately closing off one nostril with the fingers or thumb of the right hand. Encouraging long, calm inhalations and complete, deep exhalations, every soothing and aids the integration of the two brain hemispheres.

Another classic yogic breath is *bhastrikā*, which means "bellows."In this exercise, the breath is pushed in and out quickly and powerfully ten times, after which it is held in for 5-10 seconds. It is said to help with colds, destroy phlegm, relieve inflammation of the nose and throat, and over longer periods may cure asthma (Yasudian and Haich 1965, 122). The "skull-polishing"breath, finally, is called *kapalabhāti*. It cleanses and tones up the nasal passages, expels bacteria, and increases concentration. For this, practitioners breathe in deeply and then expel the breath in short bursts from the lungs through the nose while vigorously contracting the abdominal muscles and pushing the diaphragm upward. They continue for thirty to fifty repetitions, then exhale completely, hold the breath out while "securing the locks"by tightening the muscles in pelvis, belly, and throat, then inhale and hold the breath in (Yasudian 1965, 120-21).

This brief overview of the best known breathing practices in the two systems shows just how significantly different they are in both form and purpose. Daoists mix the breath with saliva and guide it internally to effect opening of *qi*-channels while Yogis work with strong, deep inhalations and exhalations to cleanse specific physical channels.

The difference is further enhanced by the vast variety in cleansing procedures in the two traditions. Daoists practice daily hygiene by washing the face, rinsing the mouth, and cleaning the teeth. They also expel stale *qi* upon waking in the morning. To do so, they close the eyes and curl their hands into

fists. Lying down flat, they bend the arms and set the fists on the chest, while placing the feet on the mat to raise the knees. From here, they lift the back and buttocks, hold the breath in, and pound on the abdomen to make the stale *qi* in the belly flow back out through the mouth (*Huanzhen juefa* 1ab).

Yogis likewise wash and rinse and clean their teeth, but in addition they also gargle, rub the base of the tongue and cleanse it with butter, and clean the hole in the skull by massaging the third-eye area. They clean the interior of the chest by inserting a plantain stalk through the mouth into the esophagus and the nasal passages, hoping thereby to remove phlegm, mucus, and bile. They may also swallow a fine cloth about three inches wide, allowing it to reach the stomach, then pull it out again, or they might guide a thread through the nostrils into the mouth to open the sinuses. For intestinal sweepings, they push water in and out of the rectum or insert a stalk of turmeric into the colon (Wood 1971, 126-28). All these are methods quite unique to the Indian tradition that have no documented counterpart in China.

Conclusion

Given the enormous differences in historical origins, fundamental worldview, and applied techniques, it is safe to conclude that Yoga and Daoyin are indeed two radically different systems of body cultivation. This is despite the fact that there are certain basic similarities in body postures and energy circulation (Mair 2004, 88; 1990, 140-48); that there was rich cultural contact between Persia, India, and China already in the first millennium B.C.E.; that evidence shows the use of various technical Sanskrit terms in Chinese (Mair 2004, 92); and that Buddhist masters undoubtedly brought physical and breathing practices to China in addition to scriptures and meditations in the first few centuries C.E. (see Despeux 1989; Eliade 1958).

In spite of all this, examining the deeper levels of the two systems, it becomes clear that Yoga and Daoyin are completely at odds in the way they deal with the body:

- They see the body differently: Yogis strive to control and overcome its characteristics, while Daoyin followers hope to align with it and perfect its functioning.
- They use the body differently: Yogis change its natural patterns and ultimately aim to keep it quiet and stable for the unfolding of mental purity and a vision of the true self, while Daoyin practitioners enhance its natural functioning with the expectation of refining its energetic structure to greater levels of subtlety and thus reaching the perfection of the Dao.
- They heal the body differently: Yogis accept health as a byproduct and necessary condition for more advanced stages and – with the exception of Haṭha practitioners – tend to scorn the pursuit of mere bodily well-being and successful functioning in society, while Daoyin masters – again with some exceptions in later Daoist circles – emphasize health, long life, and the experience of mundane pleasures and see them as a key motivation of the practice, more spiritual states being possible but not essential.

Both systems, when followed at a basic level, can help people find wellness in their bodies, peace in their minds, and balance in their lives. They both fulfill an important role in modern technological and hyperactive societies. However, when it comes to higher spiritual goals, their visions, organizational settings, and practices are vastly divergent.

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