Nourishing Life, Cultivation and Material Culture in the Late Ming: Some Thoughts on Zunsheng bajian
遵生八牋 (Eight Discourses on Respecting Life, 1591)*

Chen Hsiu-fen 陳秀芬

Abstract
This article sets out to explore the ideas and practices of 

yangsheng 養生 (nourishing life or health preservation) in the late Ming, i.e. late sixteenth- and early seventeenth-century China. Yangsheng had long played a key role in the traditions of Chinese medicine, religions and court societies. Initially restricted to certain social classes and milieux, knowledge of yangsheng began to spread much more widely from the Song dynasty (960–1279) onwards, mostly owing to rapid social and economic change. In this context, the theories and practices of yangsheng attracted the attention and curiosity of many scholars. The popularisation of yangsheng peaked in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries. Numerous literary works, essay collections and household encyclopaedias for everyday use have passages and sections on yangsheng. They describe various ideas and techniques of yangsheng by means of regulating the body in daily life, involving sleeping, exercising, washing, eating, drinking, etc. Through a survey of the most famous late Ming work on yangsheng, Zunsheng bajian (1591), this article attempts to highlight how yangsheng came to dominate the scholarly lifestyle. It will give a clear picture of the ideas of a late Ming literatus on prolonging life and replenishing the body, while showing how these practices were inspired by the flourishing material culture of the late Ming as a whole.

Keywords
literatus, self-cultivation, health preservation, Confucianism, Daoism, Buddhism, Ming dynasty

Introduction

Yangsheng 養生 (self-cultivation aimed at health preservation) has at different times been a much discussed topic among traditional Chinese doctors, Daoists and in aristocratic court circles. By contrast, Confucian attitudes towards health-preserving culture are less well known. From the Song dynasty (960–1279 CE) onwards, improved and more widespread printing technology,
along with a developing and prosperous economy, permitted the publication of works on a wide range of subjects in ever increasing quantities. Under these conditions, knowledge previously limited to specific classes or schools of study was rapidly disseminated. As a result, health-preserving techniques once rooted in a religious environment or in specialised forms of practice started to appear elsewhere. Throughout the Ming dynasty (1368–1644 CE), writing on health preservation is found not only in the practice manuals of Daoism and the medical classics, but also in literature, in the notes and essays of the educated elite and in the popular daily-manuals or household guides. These contain many different kinds of comments and ideas. This phenomenon reached its apogee in terms of quality and quantity in the late Ming dynasty, marking a sea change from previous era.

Taking the known surviving texts published on the subject in the mainland of China as an example, we see that in the Song there were ten recorded publications and in the Yuan (1271–1368) there were eight. During the Ming, this rose to 66, 70 per cent of which were published between 1550 and 1644—the main period of focus for this article. If books on dao-yin 导引 (leading and guiding, a form of therapeutic exercise), qigong 气功 (qi techniques), and liandan 炼丹 (inner alchemy) are included the increase is even greater. This huge difference is partly accounted for by the fact that the Song was violently overthrown over seven hundred years ago and the succeeding Yuan dynasty itself lasted just under a century. However, an even more significant factor were the developments in Ming culture during the span of that dynasty. As to the subject matter, yangsheng health-preserving techniques were not only discussed and recorded in medical and religious works such as those that form the Daozang (Daoist Canon) but also in the essays and commentaries written by the literati elite as well as a number of daily household guides.

These texts were as diverse in style and approach as they were in authorship: literati and commoners, doctors and Daoists, and many who straddled a number of these categories all contributed. As a result of the then popular concept of Sanjiao heyi 三教合一 (Three Teachings in One), which seeks to show that Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism are all complementary

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1 See National Union Catalogue of Chinese Medicine, Library of the China Academy of Traditional Chinese Medicine 1991, pp. 606–11. Note that accounts of yangsheng in the Ming period are issued either as single volumes or as parts of a series, and thus include many re-edited or recompiled works. These have been discounted from the publication figures referred to in this article.


3 For details of publishing in the Jiangnan Region in the late Ming period, see Ōki Yasushi 1991. For the Jianyang Region, Fujian Province, see Chia 2002, especially Chapters 5 and 6.
aspects of the same unified whole, many of the Confucian literati elite would have had substantial knowledge of Buddhism and Daoism, as well as *yangsheng* health preservation and medical knowledge.4

In previous eras, the discourse on *yangsheng* had been framed by its relationship with Daoist and medical practices, with little focus on literati interests. In this article, we will look at the *Zunsheng bajian* 遵生八牋 (Eight Discourses on Respecting Life) by Gao Lian 高濂 (ca. 1527–1603) as an example of how *yangsheng* became part of the discourse of literati culture in the late Ming.

Gao Lian 高濂 and the Zunsheng Bajian

Gao Lian, alias Shenfu 深甫, also known as Ruinan Daoren 瑞南道人 (The Daoist Ruinan) or Hushang Taohua yu 湖上桃花漁 (Peach flower fisherman from the West Lake), was born in Qiantang 錢塘 (modern Hangzhou) in Zhejiang Province. Gao was famed for his work in the opera and was at one time an official candidate of the Honglusi 鴻臚寺 (Ministry for Royal Rituals and Foreign Affairs) in Beijing,5 after which he retired to live by the West Lake in Hangzhou since 1575.6

He wrote many works of which the *Zunsheng bajian* (1591) is the best known. From its style and content it was classified in the Qing dynasty *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 as ‘Zi bu: Zajia lei’ 賈物志 (along with the equally famous *Zhangwu zhi* 長物志 (Records of Superfluous Things) by Wen Zhenheng 文震亨 (1585–1646). The *Siku quanshu* is less enthusiastic in its recommendation of the *Zunsheng bajian*: ‘This book is only suitable for mild diversion (and not to be taken seriously)’. It goes on to say: ‘There are many mistakes, but since there were so many materials included, these also serve as good references’. The Qing cataloguers recorded that the *Zunsheng bajian* has detailed discussions on antiques, and contains many simple prescriptions, which are sometimes useful. This book is better than those which only aspire to literary

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4 The term *literatus* or ‘educated person’ in this article refers by and large to those who have received a classical Confucian education, sat the national exams, and sought or achieved an official government position. The minimum standard for inclusion in this class is the degree of *Shengyuan* 生員, one who has passed the local provincial exams.

5 The Honglusi was an institution of government charged with entertaining foreigners. Gao Lian’s involvement can probably be seen as supporting the idea that he was someone who would have had a fastidious sensibility for etiquette and finery. This may well have informed his controversial attitude towards *wu*, which Tu Long was at pains to defend in his preface (see pp. 4b–5a).

6 For a full biography of Gao Lian, see Xu Shuofang 1993, juan 2, pp. 197–222. See also ‘Notes’ in Gao Lian in Zhao Lixun (ed.) 1994, pp. 812–13.
elegance and lack any practical purpose’. The Qing dynasty scholars who compiled the *Siku quanshu* classed the *Zunsheng bajian* as being part of the apparently ephemeral *xiaopin* style of writing from the Ming era. This was a loose format including commentaries, essays and collections of dicta borrowed from earlier authors, works pioneered by Chen Jiru 陳繼儒 (1558–1639) and Li Yu 李漁 (1610–80). The Qing scholars also classified it under *zaji* or casual notes, books which had some reference value but were unreliable in that they contained many errors in transcription.

The rather variegated *xiaopin* style was popular in the late Ming dynasty because it allowed the literati of the time to freely express their interests and wide-ranging knowledge. While the Qing scholars regarded *Zunsheng bajian* as light reading, today’s scholars read it as a guide to the leisured appreciation of art. However, this was not Gao Lian’s main purpose when he wrote it. According to Tu Long 屠隆 (1542–1605), Gao Lian ‘suffered from serious illness when he was young, and subsequently worried about his health. Therefore he travelled much to meet people who practised various (medical or health-preserving) techniques, and he collected secret prescriptions and classic books on these subjects.’

Gao Lian himself also describes how he fell ill when young and later in life developed eye problems. This drove his interest in medicine and after collecting several volumes of notes, he was able to successfully treat himself, strengthening his body and improving his eyesight. Gao Lian came from a wealthy family with ample resources for him to pursue his interests in book collecting and studying. This, combined with his experience of his own health problems, constituted the two key factors in allowing him to complete the *Zunsheng bajian*.

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8 *Xiaopin* or *xiaopinwen* is a free literary form combining features of both essay and verse. The aim is to allow free expression of the intellect and/or a poetic verbal sensibility. This can include extensive quotation from previous works or simply heightened descriptions of everyday phenomena. It was regarded as a form of light relief for the otherwise constrained intellectual. See Zhang Dejian 2005, pp. 295–8.
9 The term ‘leisured appreciation of art’ is adopted from Mao Wenfang 2000.
10 Tu Long’s preface to *Zunsheng bajian*, 1988 edn, p. 4a. Tu Long, (aka Changqing, Weizhen, Chishui, Hongbao Jushi, or Taoguang Jushi) was born in Yinxian, Zhejiang. He became a Jinshi (i.e. passed the national examinations) in the fifth year of Wanli (1577). He was a successful district magistrate of Yingshang and was promoted to Libu Langzhong (a director of the Ministry of Rites). Subsequently however, due to Yu Xianqing’s false accuse he was removed from his position. He also wrote the four-volume *Kapun yushi* 考槃餘事.
The *Zunsheng bajian* quickly obtained a wide circulation in literati circles and became very influential. Large sections of it are repeated in *Kaopan yushi* 考槃餘事 (Desultory Remarks on Furnishing the Abode of the Retired Scholar) by Tu Long, and *Zhangwu zhi* by Wen Zhenheng. The fact that Qing dynasty scholars regarded it as a predecessor of the works of Chen Jiru and Li Yu can be seen to confirm it as being genuinely representative of late Ming *yangsheng*.14

Nowadays, many scholars are interested in the *Zunsheng bajian* but few consider its real significance in literati culture from the perspective of *xiushen* 修身 (cultivating one’s physical body) and material culture (*wuzhi* 物質). We will now look at this in relation to four particular areas: daily life, self-cultivation, bodily regulation and material culture.

**Health preservation in daily life**

The title of Gao’s book, *Zunsheng*, can be translated as ‘respecting life’, denoting honouring the value of life, and following its natural path while the words *Bajian* 八箋 (eight discourses), sometimes written as *Bajian* 八簡, refer to eight books, the *Qingxiu miaolun jian* 清脩妙論箋, *Sishi tiaoshe jian* 四時調攝箋, *Qiju anle jian* 起居安樂箋, *Yannian quebing jian* 延年卻病箋, *Yinzuan fushi jian* 飲饌服箋, *Yanxian qingshang jian* 燕閒清賞箋, *Lingmi danyao jian* 靈秘丹藥箋, and *Chenwai xiju jian* 塵外遐舉箋, which are divided into 19 treatises.15

Gao Lian’s personal attitude to self-cultivation is exemplified in the eighth volume of the *Bajian*, under the rubric *Gaozi yiyang licheng* 高子怡養立成. Here *Gaozi* 高子 refers to Gao Lian himself, *yiyang* 怡養 means moral cultivation and *licheng* 立成 means that Gao Lian sought a quick and simply mastered form of practice which others could easily follow.

The best time to practise is said to be in the morning. So Gao Lian’s method begins in the morning after getting up. It is called *Tianyang yiri zhifa* 恬養一日之法 (Single day practice method for cultivation).

One should wake up with the cock’s crow. Then blow once or twice into your hands to expel the toxins accumulated during the night. Rub both hands together to create heat. Use the hands to rub and warm the eyes five or seven times. Then massage the ears, rolling them backwards and forwards five or seven times. Put

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13 For a detailed comparative study, see Mao Wenfang 1998; Ou Yihong 1998.
14 Chen Jiru (1606) and the chapter on ‘Yiyang’ 頤養 (Keeping fit and healthy in Li Yu (1671) are famous works of yangsheng).
both hands on the back of your head and use the index finger and the middle
finger to tap the back of the skull [at the junction with the spinal column] 24
times. Then open the shoulders and stretch the arms as if firing a bow five or seven
times on the left and the right sides alternately. Stretch both legs five or seven
times, knock the teeth together and gargle with the saliva generated before swallowing it
down three times. Then rest awhile.17

Since ancient times, *yangsheng* practitioners and doctors have paid great atten-
tion to the smooth circulation of *Qi* and blood in the body. A blockage in the
flow could manifest as pain. After a night’s sleep, they imagined a stagnation
of *Qi* and blood in some parts of the body, which could be countered by
exhaling, massage and stretching. This was also supposed to help clear the
mind and stimulate the practitioner’s energy. Knocking the teeth and gargling
with saliva are practices closely associated with Daoism. In the Six Dynasties
era (Liuchao 六朝, 220–589 CE), famous Daoists like Ge Hong 葛洪 (281–
341) and Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536) promoted this practice, believing
saliva to be the *yu ye* 玉液 (essential liquid) of the body. Swallowing the saliva
in the prescribed manner nourished the internal organs and refreshed the
body.18 The massage that Gao Lian recommends are very simple and easy to
learn, so ordinary people who could not read the Daoist texts could under-
stand and acquire these techniques. In Ming times, they appeared in the *Tang
Song yangsheng ge* 唐宋衛生歌 (Tang and Song chant of nourishing life, 1597),
part of the *Yimen guang du* 夷門廣讀 (Extensive Records from the School of
[Chen Xi]yi).19

As regards diet, clothing, lifestyle and exercise, Gao Lian had equally
detailed recommendations. Clothing should be adjusted according to the sea-
sons and the changing temperature. Diet should be based on three meals per
day. Breakfast should consist of one or two bowls of thin porridge, followed by
vegetables. Spicy, raw or cold foods should be avoided. At lunch you should
eat according to the size of your stomach, but not overeat, and again foods
with strong flavours should be avoided as these damage the five internal organs
(heart, lungs, liver, kidneys and spleen). After lunch you can drink one or two

17 *Ibid.*, p. 216a. Tapping the back of the skull is called ‘Ming tiangu’ 鳴天鼓 (Beating the
drum of heaven). See also note 39 below.

18 Alternative terms for *tuoye* (saliva) include *lingshui* 靈水 (numinous water), *shenshui* 神水
(spirit water), *jinjiang* 金漿 (golden liquid), and *yuquan* 玉泉 (jade source). See Zheng Jinsheng
1999, pp. 12–16.

19 *Tang/Song weisheng ge* 唐宋衛生歌 is made up of two parts: ‘Weisheng ge’ 衛生歌 (Chant
of protecting life), which is attributed to Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581–682) of the Tang period, and
‘Xu weisheng ge’ 續衛生歌 (Continuation of the chant of protecting life), by Zhen Dexiu 真德秀
(1178–1235) of the Song dynasty. The *Tang/Song Weisheng ge* 唐宋衛生歌 was edited together
in the Ming dynasty by Zhou Lujing 周履靖 in *Yimen Guangdu* 夷門廣讀. See Zhou Lujing
1966, casket 1, part 19, pp. 1–10.
cups of tea. You should then gargle with the tea in order to clear away any food left in between the teeth. Supper should again be decided by your appetite and accompanied by ten several cups of alcohol which can help harmonise the meridians, but you should not get drunk.\textsuperscript{20} Gao Lian’s dietary plan is mainly about eating regular amounts guided by your own feelings. But excess of any sort must be avoided. Tea and alcohol are both beneficial in moderation. Sticky or fried food and food that is too hard or greasy are also all off the menu.\textsuperscript{21} In short, whether eating or clothing oneself, one should always maintain a carefully balanced harmony with one’s circumstances. Exercises are divided between the indoor and outdoor. Indoor activities are mainly post-prandial, such as walking around the room to aid digestion while gently massaging the belly. Walking outside can be practised as a solitary activity. Forest walks, stick in hand, are good for the circulation of the blood. Accompanying guests on short walks or visiting the vegetable garden to supervise activities and collect flowers to decorate one’s study are also recommended.\textsuperscript{22}

As for sleeping, Gao Lian thought that winter evenings were ideal for reading poetry or fiction. One should go to bed between 9 and 11 at night. This is at variance with the traditional idea of allowing the seasons to dictate one’s habits and going to bed earlier in the winter.\textsuperscript{23} But Gao Lian believed that the head of the household should retire relatively late in order to keep watch for thieves or fire breaking out.\textsuperscript{24} Elderly people who were vulnerable to cold should use a warming pot filled with hot water to warm the bedclothes and then warm their feet.\textsuperscript{25} To sleep well one should avoid dreaming, and especially nightmares! So before going to bed one should not ruminate over past or future problems. If you think only pleasant thoughts, you should not be plagued by nightmares.\textsuperscript{26} To cure nightmares he has several approaches, including: ‘taking 3 qian of zhusha \textsuperscript{27}朱砂 (cinnabar) place it in a red silk bag on top of your head. At the same time put some musk inside your pillow.’ Or one can read aloud Vasanta-vayantī \textsuperscript{28} (Poshan po Yandi 婆珊婆演底) 21 times before sleeping. This is said to be a particularly good method.\textsuperscript{27} According to Bencao gangmu (Li Shizhen, Systematic Materia medica, 1593), which was contemporary with the Zunsheng bajian, cinnabar benefits the spirit, resting the hun

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{20} Gao Lian 1988, pp. 216a, 216b.
  \item \textit{Ibid.}, p. 216b.
  \item \textsuperscript{21} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 216a, 216b.
  \item \textsuperscript{22} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 216a, 216b.
  \item \textsuperscript{23} Zheng 1999, p. 25.
  \item \textsuperscript{24} Gao Lian 1988, p. 216b.
  \item \textsuperscript{25} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 217a.
  \item \textsuperscript{26} \textit{Ibid.}, p. 216b.
  \item \textsuperscript{27} \textit{Ibid.}, pp. 216b–17a. Vasanta-vayantī (Poshan po Yandi 婆珊婆演底, or 婆刪婆演底) refers to a guardian of the night or of sleep in Sanskrit. ‘Poshan po Yandi’ is simply an onomatopoeic rhythm.
\end{itemize}
and po souls of the body, and tonifies the Qi and clears one vision, driving away ghosts and bad spirits. Sheqixiang 麝臍香 (musk) also expels evil and so stops nightmares.\(^{28}\) The verse Poshan po Yandi refers to the god said to dominate the hours of darkness and this type of recitation for nightmares reflects the influence of Buddhism.\(^{29}\)

**Confucian practitioners living a reclusive life**

The *Tianyang yiri zhifa* described by Gao Lian is clearly aimed at the privileged adult male. Living in comfortable retirement from society, he was able to avoid the many troubles of ordinary daily life. Whether a retired official, an unsuccessful examination candidate or simply taking a rest cure, he had the leisure to think, study, meditate, wander in gardens, burn incense and pray to the Buddha. He was insulated from experiences that might excite violent or unhealthy emotions. This description offers many clues as to the nature of this self-cultivation.\(^{30}\)

In fact, this sort of moral self-cultivation often took place in the hermetic environment of a *shanren* 山人 (mountain man). Many lived such a life while remaining in the city and travelling about to meet other *shanren* from time to time, as they saw fit. *Shanren* had become a popular self-proclaimed identity during the Ming. While many were serious scholars, many self-styled *shanren* just sought fame and fortune while others had little or no scholarly credentials and simply wanted to present themselves as *shanren* for social or other advantage. Li Zhi 李贄 (1527–1602), for one, wrote criticising the abuse of this term. Indeed there were businessmen who had no real interest in scholarship but called themselves *shanren* in the hope of using this to curry favour with government officials.\(^{31}\)

The term *shiyin* 市隱, meaning a hidden or reclusive scholar living in an urban or suburban environment, became another popularly adopted form of self-identification for those members of the literati who had not ascended to official rank. While Qing scholars saw Gao Lian in the same light as *shanren* like Chen Jiru, his interpretation of *yiyang* 怡養 and *tianyang* 恬養 was dif-

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29 Li Fang et al. 1961, *juan* 283, p. 2261. The original record is found in Duan Chengshi, 段成式 *Youyang zazu* 酉陽雜俎.
31 Li Zhi 李贄 (alias Zhuowu 卓吾) believed that ‘today’s Shanren are actually businessmen who cannot write essays or verse. They claim themselves to be Shanren in order to make friends with officials. This is a pity’. Quoted from Li Shaowen 1965, p. 123a.
ferent from the reclusive paths of Buddhism or Daoism. Gao’s philosophy of yangsheng included an active participation in society and family life. The head of the family should dedicate the mornings to supervising his children’s education. The afternoon allowed time for meeting friends and acquaintances, but care should be taken to avoid discussing contentious topics like politics and finance, which from his remarks we can assume were likely to be the dominant subjects of interest for a typical Ming literatus.32 Instead, shanren concerned with health-preservation should discuss the underlying theories of their adopted lifestyle and avoid those things likely to disturb their calm. Sleeping, reading poetry, chatting with friends and playing music on the qin (a traditional stringed instrument) were all to be preferred over arduous debating.33

Gao Lian’s regimen also includes taking several tonic medicines during the course of one’s daily cultivation routine. Pills and tonics were a common part of Daoist medicine. In the morning after rising, he prescribes two or three mouthfuls of baihe tang 白滾湯, a medicinal soup of boiled water, followed by pills to aid the spleen and stomach and harmonise their workings. Before sleeping, one should drink a decoction to remove phlegm and prevent stagnation of the Qi. He also recommends burning an incense made from cangzhu 蒼朮 (magnolia), which drives away evil spirits.34

This amalgam of various rules and procedures from different sources is a clear indication that Gao Lian had embraced a synthesis of the available Confucian, Buddhist and Daoist ideas, in keeping with the popular Sanjiao trend. Tooth tapping, swallowing one’s saliva and massage are all Daoist in origin, while burning incense and reciting prayers are Buddhist, but the core attitudes are those of the Confucian patriarch. Withdrawn from society or not, one cannot evade one’s social responsibilities, and moral self-cultivation remains the highest goal. Gao Lian gave expression to this goal in Yiyang licheng. The term yiyang contains both yangxing 養形 and yangshen 養神 (cultivating one’s spirit). Yangxing embraces both the body and the temperament. It can be practised in all aspects of daily life. Yangshen emphasises cultivating the spirit through emotional balance and intellectual engagement. Walking, sleeping, writing, painting, reading, playing chess or musical instruments, meditation, or travelling, were all activities that could be turned to this objective, while still serving the social purposes of the literati class. Disseminating Confucian social values in education and family affairs was one of the key distinguishing features of the ‘popularising’ movement of the late Ming yangsheng.

32 Gao Lian 1988, p. 216b.
33 Ibid., p. 216b.
34 Ibid., pp. 216a–17b.
Health-preservation and body regulation

A striking feature of the regimen in the Zunsheng bajian is its imagination of the body as not confined to a specific location but extending into and continuous with all aspects of daily life. The yangsheng texts and healthcare classics give many prescriptions for all aspects of daily life, be it for sleeping, sitting, exercising, washing, diet or sex. They all seek to slow the ageing process and retain the energies of youth. The rules have both moral and practical physical dimensions. The essential goal here is to remove conflict between the body and the mind. If the rules are followed correctly, the body and mind will achieve zhongyong 中庸 (harmony) both in the inner and outer worlds. This will then achieve the aim of expelling disease, strengthening the body, and prolonging life.

From the discussion in the Zunsheng bajian, we can see the complex relationship between the physical body, yangsheng, hygiene, and the material environment. From the earliest times, Chinese doctors and yangsheng practitioners paid great attention to the threats to health posed by seasonal and environmental changes. In the ancient texts, we find terms for disease causation like waiyin 外因 (external causation), neiyin 內因 (internal causation), and bu nei/waiyin 不內外因 (causation that is neither internal nor external). These concepts, in addition to those like liuyin 六淫 (the six environmental excesses), qiqing 七情 (the seven emotions), wulao 五勞 (five types of fatigue), liuji 六極 (six kinds of extremities), qjshang 七傷 (seven types of injuries) and xusun 虛損 (deficient and damaged) were not simply confined to the medical sphere but were widespread in Chinese society.

Recently, Kuriyama has drawn attention to the fact that medicine in ancient Greece was primarily concerned with the problems of excess or shi 實 while in ancient China it was worries about xu 虛 or ‘deficiency’ that predominated. This inevitably led to differences in treatments between the two. Ruth Rogaski, in her study of health and hygiene regimens in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century China in comparison to practices in Europe, shows that pre-modern Chinese rules governing daily life were far more detailed.

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35 Waiyin 外因, or external cause, refers to liu qi 六氣, or liu yin 六淫, which are wind, cold, summer-heat, dampness, dryness, and fire. Neiyin 內因, or internal cause, refers to Qi qing 七情 (the seven emotions): anger (nu 怒), joy (xi 喜), anxiety (you 憂), pensiveness (si 思), sorrow (bei 悲), fear (kong 恐), and fright (jing 惊). Bu nei/waiyin 不內外因, causes that are neither internal nor external, are physical tiredness, too much sexual activity and irregular eating or sleeping habits.

36 For a discussion of xu lao (deficiency and weakness) and the female body in Chinese medical history, see Chen Hsiu-fen, forthcoming 2009.

and moral implications on health grounds were widely included. In particular, the anxiety about *xu* (deficiency) developed in response to a life that was too comfortable and well resourced. In other words, the practices of *shesheng shu* (the art of hygiene) were aimed at balancing the health needs and lifestyles of the wealthy classes. Compared to ordinary working people, the wealthy are seen as needing both more guidance and more careful nourishment.\(^{38}\) I can only concur with Rogaski in concluding that Gao Lian’s *Zunsheng bajian* is very definitely aimed at this section of the population, and more particularly its male members. Accordingly, we can assume that the constitutional ‘deficiencies’ from which these privileged persons suffered were substantially caused by the opportunities they had to indulge themselves.

However, such concerns about the frailty of the body were far from being the only reason for adopting a cultivation regime. Indeed contrastingly, even a limited amount of practice could be used to turn the body into a vehicle to combat malign influences. For example, the exercise called *Ming tiangu* (Sounding the drum of heaven)—the tapping of the back of the skull—which Gao Lian includes in his treatise, was said to drive away ghosts and evil spirits if you were up and about at night.\(^{39}\)

This was obviously a benefit anyone could enjoy irrespective of social background, and the extension of this idea, namely that through body refinement and transformation anyone could realise and extend their potential provides a new dimension to our understanding of the rationale for self-cultivation.

**Health-preservation and material culture**

The final aspect of the *Zunsheng bajian* is its crucial relationship to the material culture and culture of materialism exhibited in the late Ming. Traditional *yangsheng* culture is founded on *fangshu* (the art of remedies and

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\(^{38}\) Rogaski 2004, pp. 44–6.

\(^{39}\) *Ming tiangu* (鳴天鼓) refers to ‘Putting your hands over your ears and flicking the two bones at the back of the head (base of the skull) with your fingers 24 times’. See Feng Zhaozhang, *Feng shi jinnang milu zazheng daxiao hecan*, vol. 11, ‘Shier duan jin’ 十二段錦 (The Twelve Brocades) ‘Method of touching the teeth: touching the left side of the teeth is called *da tianzhong*, and touching the right side is called *chui tianqing*, touching the central part is called *ming tiangu*. If one suddenly comes across something auspicious, one should do *da tianzhong* 30 times. After auspicious occurrences, one should do *chui tianqing* 30 times. If one’s thinking brings bad consequences, one should perform *ming tiangu*. See Zhou Shouzhong, *Yangshenglei zuan*, juan 1, p. 188. On the subject of expelling inauspicious things, *Yanshou chi shu* 延壽赤書 (The Red Book of Longevity) states: ‘At night one should perform *ming tiangu* for a long time in order to expel all kinds of evils and ghosts’ (recorded in Tanba no Yasuyori 1996 [984], *Ishimpō*, juan 26, ‘Bixie mei fang’ 辟邪魅方 [Spirit remedies for averting evil]).
techniques), deeply influenced by theories and concepts from medicine such as *xu* and those of Daoism like *jing* 靜 (quietism), *yuhua* 成仙 (becoming an immortal), and *changsheng* 長生不老 (long life without ageing). But late Ming *yangsheng* did not exist in isolation from the rest of society with its highly developed material culture. Thus, in addition to his compilations from the ancient texts, Gao Lian also addressed such matters as interior decoration, horticulture, travel, haute cuisine and antique collecting. The *Zunsheng bajian*’s description of its contents tells us that we can expect guidance from Gao Lian on how to select, use and enjoy, in the proper fashion, everything from medicine, food, and plants to tools, furniture, incense, and stationery. After *Gaozi yiyang licheng*, Gao Lian talks about *yiyang dong yong shiju*怡養動用事具 (the happy care and employment of tools). In this section, he makes an extensive list of all the equipment which can be related to health-preserving. The list runs to over 30 items, and covers many of the items used in Buddhist worship. It is a clear demonstration of how closely Gao Lian’s *yangsheng* regimen was closely bound up with his approach to the rest of daily life and the literati cult of connoisseurship. This in itself was controversial in its own time. As a result, Tu Long, a friend of Gao Lian, wrote a defensive preface for the *Zunsheng bajian*.

Some say that the *da dao* (Great Way) honours emptiness. The body will be drained if over-stimulated. In Gao’s writing there are many complex and precious items; paintings, flowers, antiques and relics which decorate the scholar’s study. It is said these are a distraction in conflict with the principles of *yangsheng* and that collecting them will clutter the mind which should otherwise be empty. But Gao does not see this as a problem. He does believe the body and the mind should be empty, but that people are used to having objects around them. If you get rid of all these objects, the body and the mind will have no place to rest. The mind will be empty but without any self-knowledge. If the mind is truly at rest, then all the prescriptions and objets d’art will not distract it. In this way it will enjoy the profoundest calm. Then when the mind suddenly becomes enlightened, all material attachments will be as nothing. This is called *shefa* 舍筏, or *shuaishou* 甩手. But this can only be appreciated by those who have acquired the techniques.

Tu Long clearly knew that the Gao Lian’s refined materialism would lead to criticism that the mind should be empty, and all frivolities should be subject to the rules and meaning of respecting life. But since it was difficult for novice practitioners to shed their accustomed attachments, the medicines and artefacts described by Gao were tools to be used to temporarily focus the mind.

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40 Gao Lian 1988, Contents, pp. 8a–29a.
41 Ibid., juan 8, ‘Qiju anle jian’起居安樂箋; section headed ‘Yiyang dong yongshi ju’怡養動用事具, pp. 217a–24a.
instead of letting it wander blankly. When a practitioner reached the higher levels, they would become irrelevant.

We really do not know if Tú Long’s words accurately represent Gāo Lián’s ideas or not. But since Tú Long wrote the prologue for his book, we can assume Gāo was happy to go along with it. Gāo Lián and Tú Long both paid special attention to *wu* 物 (material things). Their ideas echo *Zhangwu* 長物 (superfluous things) in the book *Zhangwu zhi* by Wén Zhenheng. Wén discussed material culture in detail with great seriousness. This also explains why a *yangsheng* book like the *Shouqin yanglao xinshu* 寿親養老新書 addresses subjects like the best accessories for drinking tea or travelling.43

This once again shows the development of *yangsheng* culture in early modern China and is a key difference from previous eras. It is a reflection of the increasing material and intellectual wealth of the times. By the late Ming, in both *yangxing* and *yangshen* practice, associated objects, whether used for decor or appreciated for their beauty in their own right, were regarded as essential. Proper knowledge of them gave distinction to the educated classes and was a way of underlining their social status. Thus writing about *yangsheng* was a further demonstration of one’s own taste and accomplishment. And it had a commercial value as well. In his analysis of the material culture of the late Ming, Craig Clunas points out that there were fewer and fewer items that could not be made into commodities. Looking at the *Zhangwu zhi* of Wén Zhenheng, we see that everything described in it had a commercial as well as an artistic value.44 In this world the *yangsheng* books themselves were not simply a pure expression of the author’s engagement with his subject, but a commercial product to be sold in accordance with the demands of the market.45 The materialistic concerns of *Zunsheng bajian*, at one level, simply concur with this trend.

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43 This book finds its source in *Yanglao feng qin shu* 養老奉親書 (1085) by Chen Zhi 陳直 of the Song dynasty. The title was changed to *Shouqin yanglao xinshu* 寿親養老新書 after it was re-edited in the Yuan dynasty (1307). According to *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, all the remedies and prescriptions in the *Sishi tiaoshe jian* 四時調攝篇 section of the *Zunsheng bajian* were taken from Yanglao fengqin shu 養老奉親書. It also says that the Ming editions of *Qingyan Xiaopin* 清言小品 are simply copies of *Shouqin yanglao xinshu* 寿親養老新書. See *Siku quanshu zongmu tiyao*, juan 130, ‘Zibu’ 13, Yijia lei yi 子部十三·醫家類一, pp. 2096–7.


45 For example, see Ming dynasty commercial publications like *Bao yan tang miji*, compiled by Chen Jiru, and *Gezhi gongshu* by Hu Wenhuan.
Conclusion

From the Warring States period onwards, Confucian discourses have dealt with the subject of *yangsheng*. Typically, moral and physical self-cultivation were combined and *xiushen* (including moral self-cultivation) was regarded as the foundation for managing the family, the nation, and the whole of world affairs.

In the past, when studying Confucian moral self-cultivation, scholars focused on the mental aspects. They thought that concepts like *ren* (benevolence), *yi* (righteousness) were key. Recently, scholars have started to take note that, for whatever reason, the *li* in the book of *Liji* (Record of Rites), and the dietary prescriptions in the *Lunyu* (Record of Sayings) all contain instructions for the cultivation and regulation of the physical body. In guiding the family or educating small children, the most basic concerns of cleaning and sweeping (*sasao*), answering (*yingdui*), and ‘advancing and withdrawing’ (*jintui*) were all simple physical exercises. So any discussion of self-cultivation in Confucianism must include both physical and psychological dimensions.

In the Song dynasty, the objectives of unifying mind and body, and of moral self-cultivation remained largely unchanged; the changes that occurred were in an increasing range of rationales and styles of practice. Again this was closely related to the changing lifestyle of the literati. Confucian, Daoist and Buddhist ideas began to be combined. The stress was on cultivating the mind to the correct moral standard, as can be seen from the *yangsheng* practices advocated by such scholars as Su Shi (1036–1101) and Lu You (1125–1201). As is evident in their writings, in addition to the neo-Confucian and Chan Buddhist influences apparent in silent sitting and contemplation, we start to see the influences of Daoist medicine in *daoyin* therapeutic exercises and massage techniques, while activities like playing musical instruments, chess, writing, painting, eating, clothing oneself and entertaining were also incorporated into *xiushen* and *yangxing*.

What distinguishes Song traditions from those of the late Ming? Looking at the *Zunsheng bajian* there are four key traits. Firstly, Gao Lian’s *Zunsheng bajian* is not simply a *yangsheng* manual or guide but covers a truly

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46 For example, Yoshimoto Shōjirō 1996, pp. 120–1. Confucius and Mencius both stressed the importance of honouring life and taking care of one’s body. However, to achieve a higher moral standard, namely, *ren* and *yi*, the sacrifice of individual life is permitted if necessary. For Xunzi, whether one was *guisheng* (cherishing life) or *le'an* (happily settled), one must always follow the principles of *li* and *yi*. See Shibata 1992, pp. 177–95.

encyclopaedic range of activities. Secondly the Zunsheng bajian is intimately bound up with the material culture of its time, and everything in it—food, medicines, animals, plants, furniture, stationery, incense and artefacts—is interpreted as having a yangsheng application or meaning. Thirdly, the Zunsheng bajian does not suggest that it is necessary or desirable to seek social isolation to further one's yangsheng practice. Finally, the Zunsheng bajian explicitly claims that its methods are the resolution of all the ideas of Confucianism, Daoism, and Buddhism.

Some may argue that these points are not necessarily new characteristics exclusive to the Ming, and that some of them can also be found in the Song literature. The crucial difference is this: by the late Ming dynasty, yangsheng literature had come to represent a mainstream cultural activity to which many authors contributed by presenting their own work and that of other writers. The Zunsheng bajian is but just one example. The characteristics of the other late Ming yangsheng texts is a subject I will return to in the future.

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