Palpable Access to the Divine: Daoist Medieval Massage, Visualisation and Internal Sensation

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Abstract
This paper examines convergent discourses of cure, health and transcendence in fourth century Daoist scriptures. The therapeutic massages, inner awareness and visualisation practices described here are from a collection of revelations which became the founding documents for Shangqing (Upper Clarity) Daoism, one of the most influential sects of its time. Although formal theories organised these practices so that salvation superseded curing, in practice they were used together. This blending was achieved through a series of textual features and synesthetic practices intended to address existential and bodily crises simultaneously. This paper shows how therapeutic interests were fundamental to soteriology, and how salvation informed therapy, thus drawing attention to the entanglements of religion and medicine in early medieval China.

Keywords
Massage, synæsthesia, visualisation, Daoism, body gods, soteriology

The primary sources for this paper are the scriptures of the Shangqing 上清 (Upper Clarity), an early Daoist school which rose to prominence as the family religion of the imperial family. The soteriological goal was to join an elite class of divine being in the Shangqing heaven, the Perfected (zhēn 真), who were superior to Transcendents (xiānren 仙). Their teachings emerged at a watershed point in the development of Daoism, the indigenous religion of

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China, and as such have been the focus of numerous studies. The formative text is the Zhen’gao 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected) HY 1010, a collection of revelations which detail the lives and concerns of the gentry class Xu 許 family, in fourth-century Jiankang 建康 (modern-day Nanjing) between 363 and 370 CE. The text’s diaristic nature makes an ideal counterpoint to the abstract sectarian arguments of many Daoist scriptures. Initially revealed to the medium and libationer (jijiu 祭酒) Yang Xi 楊羲 (330–386?), the revelations’ intended audience was primarily the Grand Secretary Xu Mi 許謐 (303–?) and his two sons, the elder Xu Lian 許聯 (328–404) and the younger Xu Hui 許翽 (341–c. 370). The original manuscripts of these revelations were compiled by the imperial alchemist and pharmacist Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–546), around 500 CE.

The two most frequently used forms of therapy in the Zhen’gao are drugs and massage. While Daoist use of drugs has been frequently addressed in the secondary literature, massage has not. This analysis follows a progression of successively interiorising practices from massage to preparatory visualisation to a highly regarded early Shangqing meditation. This progression demonstrates how descriptions of corporeal details successively interiorise the practitioner’s awareness. This interiorisation shows how the practices and the bodies of those who performed them, became identified within a distinctly Shangqing soteriology.

1) Massage in the Han and Six Dynasties

Massage is a simple, practicable technique, easy for family members to perform on each other, or individuals on themselves. It requires no special training

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2 The major works of scholarship on this sect are referenced in Robinet, ‘Shangqing’ and ‘Zhen’gao’ in Pregadio 2008, pp. 2.858–66 and 1248–50. A significant recent study is Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, which periodises the revelations to the Xu family.
3 HY numbers refer to text titles from the Daoist Canon (Zhengtong Daozang 正統道藏), according to the index by Weng Dujian 翁獨健 and Hung 1966 (1935). YJQQ numbers refers to juan numbers in the Seven Slips of the Cloudy Satchel (Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籤 HY 1026), an encyclopædia within the canon.
4 Xu Mi attained the rank of Grand Secretary (zhangshi 長史), Xu Lian worked in the Personnel Division of the Assistant Magistrate’s Office (zhubu gongcao 主簿功曹). Xu Hui only became an accounts clerk to the Assistant Magistrate (jiyuan zhubu 計掾主簿).
5 Cognates in Yangsheng literature describe sexual cultivation resulting in spirit illumination (shenming 神明). The Mawangdui text, for example, the He Yinyang 合陰陽, Conjoining Yin and Yang, has been studied by Harper 1987 and Li Ling 李零 and McMahon 1992, and translated by Wile 1992, pp. 78–9 and Harper 1998, pp. MS VLB 412–22. Lo 2001 contextualises the physiological depictions of He Yinyang in wider yangsheng cultivation literature.
or technical materials, such as acupuncture needles or complex decoctions. Massage was thus more accessible to the wider public than the more theory-bound medical arts, in the same way that Yangsheng 養生 (nourishing life) practices and moxibustion enabled one to cultivate health and treat disease by oneself. As these techniques circulated through different communities, they accreted new and different interpretations. Thus, despite their easy practicality, or possibly because of it, they were not simple, neutral practices. They held different kinds of cachet according to the milieux in which they circulated.

Massage practices circulated in a variety of genres in early imperial China. They appeared in medical literature, in biographies of transcendents, Buddhist texts, and in Yangsheng texts favoured by intellectuals of the xuanxue 玄學 philosophical movement. Records of massage as therapeutic treatment for specific ailments exist from the early second century BCE, appearing in the Zhangjiashan 張家山 tomb texts. The Yinshu 引書 [Writings on Pulling], primarily a manual for stretching, shaking and more vigorous exercises, includes prescriptions for specific problems such as pain in the head, heart, shoulders and eye, as well as nasal congestion. Massage practices continued to be collected with daoyin 導引 (guiding and pulling) exercises through at least the Tang dynasty, when, for example, the anonymous compiler of the Yangxing yanming lu 養性延命錄 HY 837 (Records of Nourishing Inner Nature and Extending Life, hereafter YXYML) included both daoyin and massage in the same chapter and entitled it Daoyin anmo pian 導引按摩篇 [Chapter on Daoyin and massage] (2.3a–4b).

The locus classicus for early medieval Yangsheng material is the Yangsheng yaoji 養生要集 (Collected Essentials of Nourishing Life) compiled by the southern intellectual Zhang Zhan 張湛 (fl. 370), also responsible for the

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6 Lo 2005 and Despeux 2005 describe home care treatments with moxibustion and daoyin for pain, digestive ailments, locomotive disorders and psycho-spiritual discomfort.


received edition of the hagiography of the transcendent Liezi 列子. It contained various therapeutic massages and daoyin exercises, among other dietary regimens, visualisations and exercises. Although this text no longer exists as an independent work, later major medical works dealing more broadly with massage as a discrete topic preserve some passages. These include Chao Yuanfang’s Zhubing yuanhou lun 諸病源候論 (Discourse on the Origins and Symptoms of Various Diseases, submitted 610), Sun Simiao’s Qianjin yaofang 千金要方 (Essential Formulas worth a Thousand Gold, submitted 652), Tanba no Yasunori’s Ishinpo 醫心方 (Recipes at the Heart of Medicine, submitted 984), and the YXYML. These remnants suggest that Zhang Zhan mixed massage and daoyin as a single, related category of practices.

Massage was also one of the practices which distinguished Buddhist medicine in this period. The earliest known Indian medical institutions included massage as an important part of their therapeutic repertoire. Charaka’s description of the earliest Indian hospital (c. 100 BCE–CE 150) includes massage among its treatments, and describes the preparation of clinical space and topical unguents for the doing of it. It is evident from the appearance of numerous massages in the Buddhist canon that related methods were transmitted to China. Non-Buddhist literature from this period also marks specific massage texts for their Indic origins. Massages from the Jin dynasty survive under such titles as ‘Indian Massage Techniques’ Tianzhu guo anmofa 天竺國按摩法 and ‘Brahmanic techniques’ bolomen fa 婆羅門法. These same exercises are listed elsewhere as ‘Brahmanic Daoyin’ Poluomen daoyinfa 婆羅門導引法. These titles indicate that the massages were likely of Indian origin, or if not, that it was important, most likely for reasons of exoticism and foreign prestige, to mark them as such.


10 Other works which cite the yangsheng yaoji also include massage practices as part of a broad category of manual manipulations for yangsheng.


12 Sun zhenren bei ji qianjin yaofang 孫真人備急千金要方 HY 1155, 27.1a.

13 Sheheng zuanlu 攝生纂錄 HY 578, 2a–3a. These passages are similar to sections of the Taiqing daolin shesheng lun 太清道林攝生論 HY 1416, a text attributed to one Daolin 道林. (Despeux, “Sheheng Zuanlu” in Schipper and Verellen 2004, p. 1.356). Daolin is also cited in Yangsheng yaoji remnants such as Yangxing yanming lu 養性延命錄 HY 837. Daolin’s identity is complicated; Stanley-Baker 2006 pp. 125–130.
2) Hierarchies of practice

During the Six Dynasties, it became commonplace for practice regimes to articulate roughly three levels of bodily development on a linear continuum. These regimes ranged from curing disease (zhìbìng 治病), to improving general health and nourishing vitality (yángshēng 養生), a higher biospiritual state associated with supernatural powers and longevity or immortality known as transcendence (chéngxiān 成仙, dùshì 度世, guòdù 過度). This kind of hierarchy was a means for comparing the relative merits of practices in circulation, bringing them together under a single rubric, organising them, and placing them in order of importance. One such was the following by the renowned alchemist and doctor Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343), who prioritised the alchemy of the Grand Clarity (Tàiqīng 太清) sect thusly:

Even if you practise breathing exercises and daoyin, and ingest drugs from herbs and trees, these can only extend your life, but cannot stave off death itself. Ingesting divine elixirs causes your lifespan to be limitless, equal to Heaven and Earth, and enables you to ride the winds, harness a dragon, and ascend to and descend from the lower Grand Clarity [Heaven].

「雖呼吸道引, 及服草木之藥, 可得延年, 不免於死也。服神丹令人壽無窮已, 與天地相畢, 乘雲駕龍, 上下太清。」

Forty or more years later, the Upper Clarity sect developed another, expanded schema. The following passage in the Zhen’gao, a revelation from the Shangqing holy being Pei Xuànren 裴玄人 develops a hierarchy which incorporates Ge Hong’s, but culminates in recitation of the Great Cavern Scripture, the ultimate Shangqing practice, which supersedes all the others.16

Lord Pei said: If you take drugs from herbs and trees, without knowing methods of sexual cultivation or the circulation of qi and daoyin then the medicines will be of no benefit, and in the end you will not attain the Way. If with utmost determination you stimulate the spirits, then what you visualise must invariably

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14 This tripartite division was widespread, and organised such texts as the pharmacopoeia, the Shennong bencao jing 神農本草經. Similar hierarchies appear in YJQQ HY 1026, 67.7a, Baopuzi neipian 抱朴子內篇, pp. 11.189 and 13.221–3. Scholars who also adopt this schema in their own work include Kohn 2009, p. 1; Robinet 1984b, Vol. 1, p. 36. Campany makes the distinction that this was an aggregation of different techniques according to hierarchy and prestige, but not a ‘system’. Campany 2003, p. 8.

15 Baopuzi neipian, p. 65.

16 Considered the apex of Shangqing cultivation, this scripture consists of a series of incantations to heavenly gods who also exist in the body, and who prevent the entry of ‘lethal qi’ (sǐqi 死氣). It survives as Shangqing dadong zhenjing 上清大洞真經 HY 6; Robinet 1993, pp. 97–117; Robinet 2008; Mugitani Kunio 麦谷邦夫 1992. Late textual layers postdate the Yang-Xu revelations; Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, pp. 225–52.
manifest, and you won’t need the supplementary benefits of plant drugs. If you only know how to practise the arts of the bedchamber, *daoyin* and *qi* circulation, but do not know the method for Divine Elixir, then you also will not attain transcendence. If you acquire the Divine Elixir of Golden Liquor, then you won’t need other arts, and can immediately transcend. If you acquire the *Great Cavern Scripture of Perfection* (*Dadong zhenjing* 大洞真經), you won’t need the way of the golden elixir either. Upon reciting\(^\text{17}\) it ten thousand times, you will then transcend. As for sexual cultivation, *daoyin*, and circulation of *qi*; there are scriptures among the generations, and I need not go over them one by one.

These hierarchical levels were not only a means for evaluating different bodily practices, or charting the progress of an individual in their cultivation, each practice served as a synecdoche for practitioners, teachers and sects who competed on the religio-medical market, as seen in table 1 below.

**Shangqing Therapeutics and Visualisation**

How far did this ideal hierarchy represent actual therapeutic practice, and how did massage fit within the broader aims of the Shangqing sect? Lord Pei claims that ‘If you acquire Golden Liquor and Divine Elixirs, then you don’t need other arts’, implying that each layer of the hierarchy made lower practices successively redundant. As an adept progressed to more arcane practices of salvation he or she no longer required the therapeutic ones. Yet close reading shows that lower-level massages were developed on the basis of higher practice, and that they were prescribed after adepts had moved on to higher levels. Despite Lord Pei’s ideal, therapy was still prescribed for senior adepts.

Therapeutic practices prescribed in the *Zhen’gao* were highly eclectic, and included herbal and mineral drugs, acupuncture, moxibustion, visualisation, talismans, ritual petitions, grave-quelling remedies, and other apotropaic practices. More often than not, these were prescribed in combination, so that multiple modalities were used to address a single syndrome. Daily regimens were also used to develop and maintain health, including breathing exercises, combing the hair, clacking the teeth, swallowing and bathing. All of these

\(^{17}\)‘Recitation’ here implies visualisation and incantation.

\(^{18}\) *Zhen’gao* 5.11b1–8. Translation informed by Pregadio 2006, pp. 142–43. Robinet 1984b, Vol. 1, p. 36, argues that this passage indicates that therapy was of minor interest to the Xus.
### Table 1. Lord Pei’s practice hierarchy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Practice</th>
<th>Biospiritual Effects</th>
<th>Socio-Religious Status</th>
<th>Sect</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Great Cavern Scripture (Meditation on Body Gods)</td>
<td>Perfection, Name in Jade Registers, Immortality, Govern the Celestial Bureaucracy</td>
<td>Perfected 真人</td>
<td>Upper Clarity 上清</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ingesting Golden Elixir (Outer Alchemy, Cinnabar Ingestion)</td>
<td>Transcendence, Uncommon Longevity, Office in Celestial Bureaucracy</td>
<td>Transcendent 仙人</td>
<td>Great Clarity 太清</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Plant Drugs</td>
<td>Lengthen life, cure disease</td>
<td>Doctors 醫</td>
<td>Short lineages, or textual affiliation</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

practices were usually combined with the Shangqing hallmark of an incantation and/or visualisation, often of gods or celestial forces entering and inhabiting the body.

Although I use the word visualisation throughout this chapter, this belies a complex set of Chinese terms for inwardly directed awareness, which allow for synaesthesia blending with the tactile, palpated sensations of massage. These include visualisation or ‘actualisation’ (cún 存), dreams (mèng 夢), seeing within (nèishi 內視), contemplation (sīnian 思念) and meeting or seeing (jiàn 見). Another important verb in Shangqing interior practice is shòu 守, ‘to guard’, cognate with cún 存, the root meaning of which is ‘to preserve’ or ‘conserve’. The conservative, protecting nature of shòu and cún implies the intention to achieve consistency and to stabilise the vision, and is cognate to

[^19]: Although massage is not mentioned, it was typically grouped with daoyin in texts from this period including both imported Brahmanic texts and the native YXYML, as shown above. Tao Hongjiing also grouped massages with other yangsheng exercises in Zhen’gao j. 9 and 10, and Dengzhen yinjue 登真隱訣 HY 421 (Secret Instructions for Ascent to Perfection, hereafter DZYJ) j. 2. Massage thus properly falls in the second bottom category.
other practices of keeping the cloudsouls (hun 魂) and whitesouls (po 魄) contained, as well as the broad practice category of ‘conserving life’ (shesheng 攝生), a lesser-used synonym for ‘nourishing life’ (yangsheng 養生).

With these cognate practices in mind, it becomes more intuitive that cun 存 is not simply a visual but also an embodied experience, with proprioceptive qualities of sensing where the visualisation is located, and perhaps other more refined kinaesthetic sensations that specialists in this practice differentiated. Cultivation literature and classical literature is replete with words to describe inner bodily sensations.\(^{20}\) Other verbs used to describe interior sensations in Six Dynasties cultivation literature include turbid (zhuo 濁), congealed (ning 凝), stuck (zhi 滞), and their opposites like clear (qing 清), flowing (liu 流) and penetrating or connected (tong 通). These synaesthesic continuities, slippages across different sensory modes, between the body’s sense of itself and visualisation of the interior, inform continuities between therapeutic self-massage and salvific visualisation.

3) Simple practices made complex

Massages are the most numerous therapies among the Zhen’gao therapies apart from drug formulas. There are 13 recipes and three mentions in brief hagiographies. The massages are relatively simple, and involve rubbing or pressing the philtrum beneath the nostrils, pressing the eyes, the corners of the eyes, rubbing the head and neck, the ears, the shoulders, and pressing areas of illness such as the arm. They initially focus the practitioner’s attention on the exterior surface of the body, and draw the attention inwards, sometimes calling on divine powers to populate the interior of the body. In this way, they function to repel illness on one hand, and on the other, to induce the subjectivity of a Perfected (zhenren 真人).

Unlike the therapies from recipe (fang 方) literature which were comparatively unadorned, the Zhen’gao revelations contained a host of textual features with very specific implications, a few of which are discussed below.\(^{21}\) These are indicated in square brackets [\].


\(^{21}\) On recipe literature, see Harper 1998; Li Ling 李零 2006; Li Ling 李零 2000. A massage recipe which compares strongly with the one below is Lo 1998 p. 352.
Scripture Titles [1]

Each of the massages begins by mentioning the title of the esoteric scripture from which it has been cited.22 The Shangqing theory of scriptural genesis held scriptures to be emanations of the primordial breaths of the Dao, heavenly responses to the human realm (tianren ganying 天人感應), and contractual bonds between master and disciple.23 Scriptures were the primary medium of exchange between the gods, Yang Xi and the Xus; the gods possessed a full corpus of Shangqing scriptures which they would reveal to the Xus over time, partially or fully as they deemed appropriate.

These partially revealed scriptures were imbued with an aura of secrecy that characterised Daoist knowledge as a whole.24 The transactional model of transmission was fundamental to social relationship in the Shangqing sect, and Daoist culture as a whole, as well as early fangshi 方士 (technical masters).25 Ritual transmission of scripture (or talismans or registers) ensured the continuance of early Six Dynasties sects and authorised their members, and forms the core of Daoist identity in the period. Attributing the massages to scripture elevated them and their recipients to the highest level of authority, bound recipients into a sacred social lineage, and inscribed the bodies of practitioners with a Shangqing identity.

The titles mentioned above imply that the massages drew on the authority and salvific power of the Great Cavern Scripture for their efficacy. The Xus had already received the Cavern Scripture and, according to Lord Pei’s claim, should have progressed beyond the need for “minor” therapies. However, despite

22 E.g. these two titles which refer to the Great Cavern Scripture, ‘Dadong zhenjing gaoshang neizhang exie dazhu shang fa 大洞真經高上內章遏邪大祝上法’, Zhen’gao 10.8a9 and ‘Dadong zhenjing jingjing anmo pian 大洞真經精景案摩篇’ 9.3b1.
24 Campany 2009, pp. 88–100, develops a typology of ways that texts ‘self-esotericise’, or advertise their secrecy and power. Access to scriptures was limited by 1) infrequent transmission 2) physical remoteness 3) formal transmission rites and oaths 4) secrecy of oral instructions 5) trials of worthy recipients. The titles alone of the massage scriptures would have evoked aspects 1, 2, 3 and 4.
having achieved this high level of initiation, the Xus still received massage therapy revelations for minor ailments and for nourishing life.\textsuperscript{26} In contrast to Lord Pei’s progression, the Xus still resorted to therapy after initiation into the highest practices. To understand better whether these references to high scriptures were just window-dressing, or if there was more in the conception of the massages themselves, we turn to other textual features.

\textit{Cure [2] and Cultivation [3]: Embodied states and status}

The predominant focus of the massages is to improve the eyesight and hearing. Although the revelations do not contain complex etiological arguments,\textsuperscript{27} they respond to a diverse set of syndromes, derived from both external pathogens and from failure of elaborated corporeal structures. Physiological signs of functional decline and old age include poor eyesight or hearing, white hair, age-spots and balding, and ontological concepts include invading wind-\textit{qi}, vicious communicable diseases (惡疾), damp and demonic invasion.\textsuperscript{28} While most of the terms used are common symptoms, some are drawn from the technical language of the \textit{Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經} (The Yellow Emperor’s Inner Classic), such as stagnant blood (\textit{ningxue 宁血}), floating pulse (\textit{fumai 浮脈}), wind \textit{qi} and \textit{bi}麻痹-syndrome.\textsuperscript{29} Still other effects of the massages are dispelling demons and ghosts, bestowing protection for entering inauspicious places, or keeping the whitesouls (\textit{po 魄}) contained within.

In addition to curing disease, these massages were also thought to bestow positive health benefits, miraculous powers, and elevated spiritual status.

\textsuperscript{26} These revelations were composed after the Great Cavern Scripture is clear. The scripture was 1) part of the early revelations to the Xus by their first priest Hua Qiao 華僑, the first libationer attached to the Xu family (Chang Chao-yan 張超然 2007, pp. 23–88), and 2) the therapies clearly draw on the authority and charisma of the Cavern Scripture for their own efficacy.

\textsuperscript{27} Barring the acupuncture revelation discussed in Kleeman 2009.

\textsuperscript{28} On the notion of communicable disease and epidemics in early imperial China, see Lin Fushi 林富士 2008.

\textsuperscript{29} The term \textit{bi}麻痹, sometimes translated as blockage, impediment, or numbness, refers to a state of \textit{qi} which can result in lack of mobility, numbness, and gradual atrophy of the limbs (Lo 1998 p. 112 n. 199). Gao Dalun argues that an early reference to this illness term is in the Zhanjiashan strips Gao Dalun 高大倫 1992, cited in Lo 1998. \textit{Suwen 43} describes \textit{bi} as the convergence of cold, wind and damp, with or without symptoms of pain or numbness. \textit{Juan 10} of the \textit{Zhen’gao} describes \textit{bi} as the result of the afterlife bureaucracy sending watery \textit{qi} to strike the victim as a punishment for negligence. (Kleeman 2009, pp. 228–9 and passim). Because the disease term \textit{bi} covers a broad variety of symptoms and refers to various pre-classical and classical disease notions, I have opted not to translate the term. The usage here appears to draw on \textit{Huangdi neijing} notions.
On the one hand, they were thought to improve the complexion and circulation, improve the eyesight, cleanse, make fragrant, and strengthen mental faculties (yi 意). They were also thought to enable one to see 1,000 li (roughly 300 miles), to see and hear ghosts, to see in eight directions simultaneously, or bestow a divine voice that could be heard in the eight directions. After long periods, some massages were thought to bestow power over the practitioner’s own cloudsouls (hun 魂) and whitesouls (po 魄), over demons and ghosts, and the ability to fly up to heaven in broad daylight. These powers were signs of elite spiritual status marking the adepts as ready for promotion to Perfected beings (zhenren 真人), whose names would be thus recorded among the Hidden Registers (xuanlu 玄錄). Corporeal improvement moved the adept into a new habitus, a higher echelon of spiritual society, which embodied new, more refined physical attributes.

Taken together, these passages articulate a body permeable to the material influences of qi and seasonal weather, as well as to the spiritual influence of the unseen worlds of ghosts, demons and the afterlife bureaucracy. The act of touching one’s own body in a powerful way was considered to purge illness both natural and demonic, creating continuity between this world and the next, mediated through bodily contact.

4) Interior Awareness as a key element in creating a continuum between body and self

The continuum between healing the physical body and transforming spiritual status was present in claims made about efficacy, and structured the performance and experience of practitioners. The logic of this continuum is best articulated by the following massage, which draws together three separate concerns of Xu Mi: his failing eyesight, his desire to be able to see, hear and communicate with the ghosts and spirits, and his desire to attain the status of a Perfected:

Lady Wang of the Misty Woods says: The way of Transcendents and Perfected places primary emphasis on the eyes and ears: If one has licentious desires then the eyes go dark, if one has extensive worries, then the ears stop up. These two illnesses come from within and race outwards. There is no other [source for the disease]. Now, to cause people’s hearing and sight to increase is easy, but for those who don’t do [what I’m about to tell you], then it’s hard. If you want to thoroughly reflect communications above, and to see ghosts and spirits at your side, you ought to cleanse your heart-mind and cut off thoughts, give up excessive licentiousness. This means be strict about its inception!
Lady Wang refers to transcendents of old, whose hearing was penetrating (cong 聰) and vision was bright (ming 明), equating biospiritual status with heightened sensory acuity, a theme repeated in other massages.31

Reading with a sensitivity to the phenomenology of her practice, we can trace the adept’s intended journey from the outside in, drawing the reader’s awareness from the external senses of the eyes and ears to the inwardly-sensed stirrings of desire. Awareness is drawn from the physical senses to the subjective interior of the bodily self wherein they arise. Lady Wang admonishes Xu Mi that he should be ‘strict about their inception’; that is, pay heightened attention to that mixed place of emotions, desires, sensations, the phenomenological body.

At the same time the practitioner enters his internal, embodied subjectivity, the potential for other, disembodied subjectivities arises. Ghosts and spirits are thus reflections of the interior self that is accessed through, but which somehow transcends corporeal awareness. The simultaneous awareness of one’s interior being and of the presence of ghosts and spirits suggests that both are part of the same processes of bodily consciousness. The internally-sensed self is transcendent, eternal, the adept who has acquired the Dao, and whose ultimate cultivation is transformation into a Perfected. The sense of eternal life, of a self which transcends, yet is rooted in the physical form, is intimately bound up with phenomenological self-awareness, a physically sensed, ahistorical, arational sense of being.

Massages [4]: Stimulation of corporeal divine powers

Lady Wang’s teaching goes on to show how bodily sensations reveal the presence of divinity:

While lying down at night first tightly close the eyes and face east.32 Using [base of] the thumbs and the rear of the palms, on both the left and right, press the

30 Zhen’gao 9.11a6–10. This passage is incorporated into and annotated in the YJQQ HY 1026, 53; Za mi yaojue fa 雜祕要訣法 HY 1026YJQQ 53 (Methods from Various Secret and Important Teachings). Tao Hongjing also includes it in DZYJ 2, adding further annotations.
31 Zhen’gao 9.6a10–6b1 states: “The eyes and ears are ladder rungs to seeking the Perfected, the gateway to all the numens”.「耳目是尋真之梯級, 綜靈之門戶。」
32 East was the direction of incipient Yang 陽, associated with the dawn, new life, and five phasal associations such as wood, spring time, and the liver. In the Huangdi neijing, the liver was understood to govern the eye and the power of eyesight, and the liver channel was considered to
eyes, wipe back towards the Gate of the Ear,\textsuperscript{33} and cause both palms to completely meet together behind the neck twenty-seven times. Visualise in the eyes—there ought to be three colours of \textit{qi}—purple, blue-green and red—which emerge before the eyes. This is an internal pressing of the three pure clouds which irrigates and harmonises the eyeball-child (童子).\textsuperscript{34}

夜臥先急閉目東向，以手大指後掌，各左右按拭目就耳門，使兩掌俱交會於項中三九過。存目中當有紫青絳三色氣出目前。此是內按三素雲以灌合童子也。

The massage is simple and fairly universal. Pressing the eyes is a common gesture performed around the world to produce an immediate sense of release. Furthermore, it is very similar to other massages in the \textit{Zhen'gao}, such as a scalp massage at \textit{Zhen’gao} 9.3a3–3b1. The above massage moves from the eyes across the ears to the nape of the neck, the latter moves the fingers from the eyes over the scalp to the nape. The former treated the vision and eyesight, whereas the latter treated old age and greying hair in particular. The movement from the eyes to the nape has been adapted and re-revealed to meet changing concerns of the end recipient, Xu Mi. Rather than the simple cultivation of health leading to normal longevity, the above massage bestows paranormal longevity of the Perfected, including key markers of this status, miraculous eyesight and hearing.

The revelation calls one to ‘visualise’ (\textit{cun} 存) triple-coloured lights of purple, green and red when rubbing the eyes. The effect of pressure on the eyes to stimulate inner lights, known in biomedicine today as pressure phosphenes, was recorded in ancient Greece as early as the 5th century BC by Alcamaeon of Croton.\textsuperscript{35} Newton, observing this effect, considered them to be the result of spirits in the eyes.\textsuperscript{36} Current medical theory understands this to be the result of pressure stimulating the cones inside the cornea. The cones on the cornea respond to light in three wavelengths, appearing as blue, green and red, colours quite similar to Lady Wang’s purple, blue-green and red.

enter the eye, which could be used to diagnose the condition of the liver. Whether the author was aware of these notions of the liver is unclear here, as the first three associations would have been sufficient grounds to use this direction.

\textsuperscript{33} In this context, this term is probably a general anatomical reference to earhole and the flap of skin which covers it and acts as a ‘gate’. There is also the possibility, however, that this refers to the classical acupoint \textit{Ermen} 耳門 SJ 21 on the Triple Heater (Sanjiao 三焦) channel, which is located just in front of the ear flap. \textit{Huangdi zhenjiu jiayi jing} 黃帝針灸甲乙經, p. 703.

\textsuperscript{34} \textit{Zhen’gao} 9.11a10–b4. The term ‘child of the eyeballs’ turns on a pun in Chinese, where eyeball (\textit{tong} 瞳) is a homophone of the word child (\textit{tong} 童). Esoteric \textit{Shangqing} scriptures prescribed visualising a god, a small child, in the eyeballs, and propitiating him to preserve and strengthen the eyesight.

\textsuperscript{35} Grüsser and Hagner 1990.

\textsuperscript{36} Gleick 2003, pp. 61–2.
In this passage, the verb *cun* 存, rather than creating images within the mind, refers to observation of the internal effects of the massage. For early practitioners, this amounted to the same thing, as visualisation of body gods was also considered to be an observation of forces physically present there. Massaging the eyes stimulates these inner lights, which were understood to be divine powers which could heal the eyes, improve vision, and, if stimulated for long enough, bestow paranormal sight and hearing. The movement of the hands from the eyes over the ears to the back of the neck also appears intended to spread the triple *qi* to the ears. Repeated over a long enough period, this exercise was thought to accumulate benefits which included relief from eye-strain, improved vision, and then miraculous eyesight, which could see long distances and descry ghosts:

After about a year, the eyes and ears will become refined and illumined. If practised for a longer period, [then you will acquire] vision that penetrates a thousand miles, scattered reflection of the spirits, and the ability to hear the faintest of sounds.37

一年許,耳目便精明;久為之,徹視千里羅映神靈,聽於絕響者也。

Thus we see a very direct way in which corporeal self-awareness of inner powers comes into contact with interior divinities who both heal and help achieve transcendent goals.

[5] Incantation: Socialising and mapping corporeal domains

There is one further element of Shangqing massage that is important to consider. While the miraculous appearance of the three colours in the eyes was considered a sign of divine powers, these were not thought to be simply material forces, but conscious subjects, deities who dwelled within. As such, they were not addressed simply through material methods of massage and other bodily manipulations, but approached through social ritual—using the uttered word, addressing them each by name, and forming verbal requests, asking them to bestow their beneficent powers. Upon completing his massage, the adept is then instructed to quietly chant:

The three clouds of the eyeball-child, Perfected Lords of the two eyes, Floriate Brilliance,38 pour essence [into me], open and communicate with the pure spirits,

38 Floriate Brilliance is an eye-god referenced in other eye-massages (*Zhen’gao* 9.8a9) and in contemporary texts such as *Taishang laojun zhongjing* 太上老君中經 HY 1160, 4a, 16a–17b (Hereafter *Laojun zhongjing*).
Cloudy Bearing and Numinous Pride\textsuperscript{39} of the Grand Mysterium you flit about; Protect and augment the two gatehouses\textsuperscript{40} and open wide the nine doors,\textsuperscript{41} [cause my] hundred joints to reverberate with sound, and visit bodily liquids unto the muddy pellet, [That I may] bodily ascend to the Jade Palace, [and my name be] listed among the Supreme Perfected.\textsuperscript{42}

Incantation is a central feature of the Shangqing body practice, of addressing the conscious, divine forces that dwell within it. Unlike the material forces of classical medicine—the various types of \textit{qi}, essence and blood, which are material in nature, and manipulated by material means such as acupuncture, moxibustion and drugs—as conscious beings, the gods required social forms of address. Shangqing social forms are distinctive from other forms of the period in their emphasis on ecstatic poetry, devotional addresses and invoke relations between the gods and the adept tinged with intimacy, and great power. The gods, after all, dwelled within the adept’s own body and meditating on them came close to assuming a divine identity for oneself.\textsuperscript{43}

In Shangqing practice, incantation also almost always implied simultaneous visualisation of that which is being invoked. Here three gods are invoked: Floriate Brilliance, Cloudy Bearing and Numinous Pride. They are the anthropomorphic forms of the triple-coloured lights revealed by the massage. These gods appear in a number of roughly contemporary scriptures which draw on elements from the Shangqing oeuvre although they are not part of the Shangqing canon and likely represent the work of compilers in parallel, competing lineages.\textsuperscript{44} One description of the two goddesses describes them as part of an

\begin{flushright}
眼童三雲，兩目真君，
英明注精，開通清神，
太玄雲儀，靈驕翩翩;
保利雙闕，啟徹九門，
百節應響，朝液泥丸，
身升玉宮，列為上真。」
\end{flushright}

\textsuperscript{39} In general, Floriate Brilliance is the god of the eyes, sometimes referred to as the eyeball-child (see above). Cloudy Bearing and Numinous Pride are ear goddesses. Cloudy Bearing usually always bears the same name, but Numinous Pride’s names vary as Winsome Maid (嬌女) and Jade Florescence (玉華).

\textsuperscript{40} This refers to the Guarded Inch, see below.

\textsuperscript{41} This refers to the Nine Palaces, see below.

\textsuperscript{42} \textit{Zhen’gao} 9.11b4–7.

\textsuperscript{43} For example, the \textit{Laojun zhongjing} HY 1160 elides the voice of the speaker with the voice of the primary god of the text, the Ruddy Infant (\textit{chizi} 赤子), merging both into a single subjectivity, the goal of the text’s meditation. Iliouchine 2011; Lagerwey 2004.

\textsuperscript{44} This god and two goddesses appear in other contemporary texts, including the \textit{Taishang lingbao wu fu xu} 太上靈寶五符序 HY 388, 1.23a, \textit{Dongyuan taishang sa lingyuan da you}
early warning system, so that when they sense deviant forces trying to enter, they ring alarm bells in the head to rouse the other gods to the defences. This is experienced by humans as ringing in the ear.\(^{45}\) However, other features of this visualisation draw on high-level Shangqing practices which are oriented expressly towards attaining Perfection.

5) Guarding the Inch 守寸

The appearance of these deities in the massage incantation invites further investigation into the bodily structures referred to in the massage revelations. The ‘twin gatehouses’ in the incantation above refers to a location referred to as the Guarded Inch (shoucun 守寸), which was thought to lie 3 fen 分 behind the region between the eyebrows. Therein lay a narrow pass which acted as a barrier between the outside world and the interior of the brain and from there, the rest of the body. On either side of the Guarded Inch were two structures each one fen wide—a Yellow Gatehouse (huang que 黃闕) and a Crimson Platform (jiang tai 絳臺)—that sit three fen apart, guarding the thoroughfare between them through which the spirits travel when entering the body.\(^{46}\)

Visualising this structure and the deities walking between them was considered a preparatory exercise for three important practices: the Nine Palaces Method (jiugongfa 九宮法), the Cavern Chamber (dongfang 洞房), and Guarding the Three Ones (shou sanyi 守三一).\(^{47}\) Each time before beginning these practices adepts were to first Guard the Inch.\(^{48}\)

\(^{45}\) Sanyi jiugong fa 三一九宮法 in Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籤 HY 1026 50.3a.

\(^{46}\) The attached picture is representative, although late, datable only as early as the sixteenth century.

\(^{47}\) Numerous variants refer to Guarding the One or the Ones, including 真一之道, 守真一, 守一. The earliest references to Embracing the One (baoyi 抱一) are in the Daodejing 道德經. The Three Ones was among the earliest practices revealed to the Xus. Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, pp. 54, n. 25 and 76–88.

\(^{48}\) Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, p. 62.
6) The Nine Palaces and the Cavern Chamber 洞房

The Nine Palaces Method is referenced in the above incantation as the ‘nine doors’. The palaces were lined up inside the head, one behind the other, the first one lying one inch behind the space between the eyebrows, five on the first layer, and four more on another upper layer. This practice is referred to repeatedly throughout Shangqing salvational schemes, and constituted one of the higher level practices which led to practice of the Great Cavern Scripture.

Among these palaces, one is explicitly cited in the massage incantation. Practice manuals refer to the ‘Cavern Chamber (Dongfang 洞房)’ as the second of the nine palaces in the head, and also as its own independent visualisation, as below, a place where the Three Ones come to rest:

There are three lords within the Cavern Chamber: on the left is Prince Wuying; on the right is the Lord Baiyuan; in the middle is Lord Huanglao. These three people together govern the Cavern Chamber.

洞房中有三真：左為無英公子；右有白元君；中為黃老君。三人共治洞房。


50 Suling daoyou miaojing HY 1303, 15a.
Within the Cavern Chamber, there is a yellow guard tower with purple doors and a chamber of black essence. This is where the Three Ones within the body, worthy lords, frequently rest.51

洞房之中, 自有黃闕、紫戶、玄精之室。身中三一尊君常棲息處所也。

Hagiographic literature identifies the Cavern Chamber as a crucial step within the career of the Perfected. It appears in one of the earliest teachings transmitted to the Xus, the biography of the Perfected Zhou Yishan 周義山.52 Zhou wandered across 24 mountains in his spiritual quest, and on his way, had a vision of Lord Huanglao 黃老君, who told him he could not receive the ultimate teachings until, through visualisation of his Cavern Chamber (洞房), Zhou eventually met the gods Huanglao, Wuying 無英 and Baiyuan 白源. After further travelling and meeting sages and gods, Zhou finally met the three deities on Empty Mountain (空山) in a cave.53 Following Huanglao’s instructions, Zhou gazed within, and ‘as a result, saw them within his [cranial] Cavern Chamber’.「果見洞房之中」,54 an experience which qualified him to receive the ultimate teaching, the Great Cavern Scripture. The same practice, the Cavern Chamber, was also a key stage in the career of Zhou’s teacher, Juanzi 湣子, leading him to higher attainments.55

The prominent place given to the Cavern Chamber in these hagiographies thus structured a practitioner’s relationship to the visualisation so that it became more than just a meditation of inner body gods, but also a recreation of the careers of their genealogical predecessors. The practitioner’s own cranium thus became the site for a historical re-enactment of Zhou’s pilgrimage and apotheosis. Inscribing the adept’s body with the locations and events from the hagiographies, this visualisation further divinized the body’s intuition as sacred tuition from Perfected beings.

Surviving texts do not describe the Cavern Chamber as a therapeutic practice in itself, but the reference to it in the massage incantation implies that its powers were thought to have therapeutic applications. The massage draws on the conceptual framework of the Cavern Chamber meditation; in order for its oblique references to the ‘twin gatehouses’ and ‘nine doors’ to be fully

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51 DZYJ 1.9b–10a, Sanyuan zhenyi jing HY 253, 1b–2c.
52 The Ziyang zhenren neizhuan 紫陽真人內傳 HY 303 and other related practices were transmitted to Hua Qiao, Zhou Yishan’s disciple and biographer, and the Xu’s family priest. Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, pp. 23–87; Tsai 2008; Miller 2008.
53 Zhou Yishan’s mountain wandering and two meetings with Lord Huanglao appear in Ziyang zhenren neizhuan HY 303, 8a6–9ab, 10b7–11b9, and are discussed in Tsai 2008, p. 200; Miller 2008, pp. 134–8, 146–51.
54 Ziyang zhenren neizhuan HY 303, 11b.
55 See Ziyang zhenren neizhuan HY 303, 13b–14a.
understood, an adept would had to have been initiated into the Cavern Chamber. This stands in contrast to Lord Pei’s and Ge Hong’s hierarchies above, where progress to advanced meditations obviate the need for therapy.

The focus on eyesight, hearing and communicating with the ghosts, means we can be almost certain this massage was intended for Xu Mi. Whether it was transmitted to him before he was initiated into the Cavern Chamber meditation or not, we cannot say for sure, since this revelation does not come with a date attached. However, since the Cavern Chamber was a preliminary meditation in Zhou Yishan’s, and was thus one of the earliest meditations transmitted to Xu Mi through Hua Qiao, it is fairly certain that the massage was transmitted later. This example confirms the suspicion that therapies were not superseded by the higher meditations—rather, higher meditations informed and structured the therapies. This massage is not unique—roughly half or more of the massages in the Declarations invoked gods from higher level meditations.

7) Advanced visualisations as body maintenance: Responding to functional/ontological diseases

The therapeutic uses of advanced meditations create further continuity between the goals of curing and salvation. The Cavern Chamber was considered best complemented by another meditation called Guarding the Three Ones. This practice is of interest because it is based on an understanding of the management of the body’s physiology as a bureaucratic network of internal body gods operating on a pre-determined, regular schedule on the one hand, and as martial demon-quellers on the other, thus encapsulating functional and ontological notions of disease in the same model.

According to Zhou Yishan’s spiritual hagiography, the Three Ones was an early stage meditation on the Cavern Chamber. Practice manuals imply the same relationship of progression, while also referring to their location in the body and in the head:

The Perfected of the Cavern Chamber require Guarding the Ones as their foundation; The Perfected who Guard the Ones need the Cavern Chamber as their floriate canopy.56

洞房真人須守一為根本; 守一真人須洞房為華蓋。

The Three Ones practice was the early ancestor of the huge variety of Daoist self-cultivation practices that focus on the three cinnabar fields. The idea of

56 DZYJ 1.10a–b, Sanyuan zhenyi jing HY 253 1b.
Guarding the One(s) goes back to citations in the Daodejing and the Zhuangzi. In post-Han sources it took various forms as a meditative absorption, or as a complex physiological visualisation of inner body gods. It was part of the earliest transmissions taught to the Xus by Hua Qiao, and was of great interest to Tao Hongjing, who writes extensive notes on it in DJYZ 1.57

At midnight on the first night of a new season and on the first of the sixth month, one should visualise the Three Ones: the Infant Babe (Ying’er 嬰兒); the Perfected Person (Zhenren 真人); and the Ruddy Child (Chizi 赤子)—star-gods of the dipper—along with one attendant (qing 卿) each, coming down, entering the body and taking up residence in one of three cinnabar fields (dantian 丹田):
in the head, three inches behind the area between the eyebrows lies a palace called the muddy pellet, (niwan 泥丸宮); in the chest there lies the crimson palace (jianggong 降宮) and three inches below the navel lies the lower cinnabar field, the yellow court (huangting 黃庭). Each god had its own secret name, byname and special coloured clothing. The gods carried with them sacred texts: the Great Cavern Scripture, the Dayou miaojing 大有妙經 (Miraculous Scripture of the Great Manifestation) and the Taishang sulingjing 太上素靈經 (Scripture of the Unadorned Numens of the Grand Supreme). The implication was that mastery of Method of the Three Ones allowed access to these higher scriptures.

As the deities took up their corporeal residences, they were given different titles to the ones they held in the heavens, representing their changed role. They maintained health in the body regions where they resided, defending from exterior ghosts and misfortune, while managing interior bodily processes. The attendant deities were characterised as the combined and transformed essential spirit of specific bodily fluids or tissues, i.e. they were the spiritual manifestation of the essence of these body regions. Along with the primary deity of their specific palace, they governed the operations of local body regions, as well as receiving reports from the three cloudsouls (hun 魂) and seven whitesouls (po 魄).60

In addition, the Three Ones governed 24 bodily Perfected, who corresponded to 24 perfected of the heavens, who themselves emerged from the 24 qi of the heavens.61 The qi of the heavens referred to the 24 solar nodes 節,

58 Roughly February 5 立春, May 5 立夏, August 7 立秋, and November 7 立冬; Gregorian dates varied according to the year. Major 1993, pp. 88–92.
59 Different texts locate the Yellow Court in different locations, such as the heart or spleen.
60 Sanyuan zhenyi jing HY 253 4a–6b.
61 Sanyuan zhenyi jing HY 253, 1a.
which were also marked out in Han astronomy by the position of the dipper as it rotated through the sky.62

The downward transfer, ingestion and embodiment of celestial forces was mirrored with a regular return to the heavens.63 The Wudou zhenyi jing 五斗真一經, instructed practitioners to visualise, at midnight on the solstices, equinoxes,64 and the fifteenth of the sixth month, the Three Ones and their assistants returning to the dipper with him or herself accompanying them.65 There the adept would be bestowed with ritual texts, clothing and talismans. Afterwards, the adept and the stars returned to earth and took up their bodily residences. Talismans (now lost) accompanied the two visualisations, and corresponded to each of the three cinnabar fields. These were to be ingested daily for the entire solar node following either visualisation, i.e. for 16 days including the day of the visualisation. When doing so, one was to visualise the talisman going to its respective palace. Another talisman could be worn in a golden-purple sachet 囊 on the elbow while the first was consumed, and then ingested after the visualisation was complete.66

The complete practice was a long way from simply imagining the three cinnabar fields as described in the Baopuzi. The adept not only ingested and embodied stellar gods in each cinnabar field, he also returned back to the heavens with them after a period of time, where he received various celestial empowerments. He also ate talismans after each initial descent. The Three Ones was thus not merely a bureaucratisation of the body, but also the ascent of the practitioner to the heavens, the attainment of flying, stellar travel, and joining the rank and company of celestial beings.

The physiological system imagined in the Three Ones is important for our discussion. Not only were the Ones responsible for defending their body from external attack by ghosts and spirits, they also employed the cloudsouls and whitesouls within to manage a complex bureaucratic network and keep bodily

62 Major 1993, pp. 88–92.
63 The different elements of the practice are described in Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, pp. 56–60.
64 Roughly, March 20 春分, June 21 夏至, Sep 23 秋分, Dec 21 冬至. The dates can vary depending on the year.
65 The best, most recent analysis of this practice, the relative age of its editions, and its genealogy is Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, p. 58. Source texts for this practice are: Shangqing jinque dijun wudou sanyi tujue 上清金闕帝君五斗三一圖訣 HY 764; Shangqing wozhong jue 上清握中訣 HY 140; Yuanshi tianzun shuo xuanwei miaojing 元始天尊說玄微妙經 HY 60; Suling daoyou miaojing HY 1303, 38a–40b; YJQQ 49.12a–14b. The Sulingjing version is discussed and partially translated in Robinet 1993, pp. 126–7.
66 DZYJ HY 421, 1a–1b, Chang Chao-jan 張超然 2007, p. 59.
systems running smoothly. When we recall the massage that was to open the Guarded Inch, it was this basic physiological make-up that lay in the background, and which its practice was reliant upon.

Thus not only were therapeutic practices imagined in the language and framework of the advanced meditative practices, but as this table demonstrates the advanced meditations were themselves grounded in concepts of basic hygiene and homeostasis. Therapeutics and keeping free from disease were two of the fundamental concepts by which the soteriological goals of the Shangqing were imagined.

8) Conclusions

When we step aside from conceiving Daoism exclusively as a religion, and include in our gaze the day-to-day concerns of practitioners we find that, contrary to the formal practice hierarchies, disease and its treatment were central issues as Daoists walked the path to their ultimate goals. Daoists did not ignore illness in their search; rather, they developed repertoires that responded
to both physiological and existential crises. The claim that one’s repertoire of practice is so advanced that therapy constitutes only the most basic level is itself a form of medical market competition.

Xu Mi’s requests for therapeutic remedies indicate that his physical well-being was just as much a concern as attaining salvation, and should be given appropriate consideration when approaching these scriptures. The attribution of the highest scriptures to these massages, and their reliance on physiological notions from late stages of practice indicate that salvation did not supersede treatment, rather it informed and shaped it. Conversely, Shangqing soteriology itself was conceived in metaphors of an ideal body with a perfectly maintained homeostasis. The continuum between treatment and salvation was reinforced in numerous ways, from claims of efficacy, to common physiology, to re-enacting hagiographies within visualisations in the practitioner’s body. The synaesthetic mixture of external massage and internal vision resulted in a subjectivity coeval with awareness of disembodied spirits and ghosts. These elements produced identification with a self at once grounded in, and transcendent of its corporeal nature.

The concentration of bodily practice in Shangqing Daoism makes it comparable to popular directions in the recent study of embodiment, such as cognitive science and phenomenology. The coalescence of bodily treatment and individual self-transformation are evocative of modern CAM clinical experiences. The example listed in this paper of the pressure phosphenes produced in eye massage suggests the potential convergence of cognitive science and Daoist history. In his study of charismatic Catholic healing, Thomas Csordas argues that self-transformative religious experience during ritual healing produces a new relationship between individuals and their bodies, supporting a type of attention to their levels of pain and other signs of onset, that produces a healing.67 Suzanne Cochrane describes the refreshed, revitalised sense of self and body that patients report during and after acupuncture treatment.68 Charles Chase, in teaching acupuncture needle technique, reports a distinct sense of ‘Settling, Slowing, and Integrating (SSI)’, or ‘that sweet aah feeling’ which the practitioner feels in his or her own body when locating the acupuncture point, preparing for insertion, and during needle manipulation.69 This same sensation is then experienced by the patient as an overall general effect of the treatment.

68 Cochrane 2011.
The mobility of bodies which navigate multiple epistemic discourses and social locations makes it difficult, if not impossible, to pin down a singular, universal body. It also, as shown in this article, is one of the features by which individuals constantly conflate bounded categories like ‘religion’ and ‘medicine’. Early medieval Daoist discourses allow room for this open-endedness of bodily signification by accreting newer discourses and incorporating the old in novel ways. This mercuriality is a feature of Daoist writing by which it portrays its universality, accommodating all manner of disparate technical domains under the same umbrella through subtle and almost imperceptible discursive shifts. These include astronomy, physiology, therapy, salvation, and socio-bureaucratic structure. This article thus proposes one way to understand the power and malleability of Daoist writing. By tracking the ways interior attention is directed through synesthetic slippage of bodily sensations, the moment-to-moment production of new subjectivities can be observed. This makes apparent the palpable connections between cultural domains frequently separated by modern categories of religion and medicine, the subtle interchanges between text, illness, corporeality and salvational aspiration.

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