



(RESEARCH ARTICLE)



## The essence of Chinese Taoist medical philosophy

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### Abstract

The Chinese Taoist medicine has a deep foundation in natural philosophy. It not only respects nature, rationally arranging life and health in accordance with the laws of nature, but also emphasizes nurturing the spirit and peace of the mind. Integrating physiotherapy, psychotherapy, spiritual belief therapy and social therapy, it has a holistic, dialectical, comprehensive and diversified medical model with practical healthy methods on seasons, food and mind. The secret of Chinese Taoist medicine is to advocate the harmony among human body and mind, inside and outside, nature and society.

**Keywords:** Taoist medicine; Natural philosophy; Health preservation; Nourishing the spirit

### 1. Introduction

The emergence of the Taoist medical model has its deep natural philosophical foundation. The Taoist medical model is a comprehensive and diversified medical model that combines physiotherapy, psychotherapy, spiritual belief therapy and social therapy. This medical model emphasizes the unity of body, mind and medical world from the perspective of the interrelationship and coordination between human body, mind, nature and society. Prof. Chen Guying (陈鼓应), a well-known Taoist, believes that Laozi's Taoism (老子的道家) "incorporates the life of the universe into the whole of reflection and grasp. "The metaphysical system constructed by it is the first breakthrough in Chinese philosophical theory.<sup>[1]</sup> "

### 2. Respect nature

Laozi said that mankind was abstracted from the world, the world from nature, nature from the way, and the way from what is beneath abstraction. The universe operates according to the laws of nature. Human beings exist in the universe, so the way of life of human beings should also follow nature. Taoist medicine believes that man is a minor whole, a part of the nature of heaven and earth, nature provides the necessary conditions for humankind survival, and man should conform to the relationships and laws of nature of heaven and earth. The basic concepts of Taoist health preservation ideology of essence, energy and spirit have been mentioned and reflected in many aspects. Medical methods such as Massage (按摩法), Breathing (呼吸法), and Internal Alchemy (还丹内炼法) are all closely related to Taoist thoughts. More than ten works by Taoists, such as *Laozi* and *Zhuangzi* (《庄子》), have become references cited by Taoist doctors.

The profound life wisdom of Taoism lies in the fact that a gentleman's life should always return to nature, maintain authenticity, and adhere to singleness. To this end, we should first have a philosophical worldview (Cosmology) that world is very simple, and life should be carried out according to this reference, so that we can do nothing, but leave nothing undone, and not be troubled by complexity. Go with the flow, cure the disease and prolong

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the year. Laozi said that the way of the law was natural. If they can be effectively implemented, they will be of infinite use. Laozi believed that nature was the source of human life, and in order to maintain life activities, people must follow nature and adapt to the laws of natural changes, so that life can come naturally and we can enjoy it. Prof. Lin Anwu (林安梧) pointed out: "The so-called 'origin' refers to a state before construction, from which the 'origin' before construction is manifested and there is a new construction. I think this is the most resourceful in the entire Chinese cultural tradition. The ones which reflect the most and have the most resources are Taoists namely Laozi and Zhuangzi [2].

The natural way that health preservation follows is the natural realm of the unity of heaven and earth. The ideal model of life pursued by Laozi is to integrate the individual into the whole nature, respect nature, conform to nature, and become the fundamental principle of health, heart and spirit. Calm breath is soft, and stillness is the right. Laozi believes that the gentle Qi (breath, 气) is innate and is the most vigorous of the human body, just like the birth of a baby full of vitality and vigor, which is conducive to the true energy of the human body, which is called Yuanqi (vitality, 元气) by later generations of doctors, guiding the theory of health preservation, and evolving into the foundation of Taoist Qigong (气功) that overcomes rigidity with softness and brakes with static brakes. Laozi advocates static health preservation, static braking, indifference and complacency, so as to be the medicine of immortality, which is invincible. The Tao in the process of life lies in ruling without doing anything, doing nothing and leaving nothing undone, being able to look down on fame and wealth, not pursuing power, not turning to the powerful, and living and personalities is independent, free, and dashing. The Yellow Emperor's Internal Canon (《黄帝内经》) says: "Those who knew Taoism in ancient times, were following Yin and Yang (阴阳), conforming to the law, eating in moderation, keeping a regular routine and not doing work in vain, so that they can form and be with the gods, and spend all their days and years, and go to the age of a hundred." People don't do like this today... They don't know how to keep the spirit full, do not understand the principle of saving the spirit, blindly pursue the pleasure of the senses, contrary to the real pleasure of life, and do not follow the rules of life, so they easily be senescent at fifty years old." Everyone needs to reasonably arrange their daily work, study, exercise, diet, living and other daily activities according to their own circumstances, and adhere to and form a regular for a long time to make their lifestyle healthier, which is very important. The word "keeping healthy" appeared in "Zhuangzi Health Lord" (《庄子·养生主》) Health preservation is to nourish the body and bones through food, and maintain the connotation through cultivation of the mind, so as to cultivate both inside and outside to achieve the purpose of prolonging life. Adjust your life to climate change throughout the year. Taoist medicine pays attention to "five elements, five qi, five organs, five flavors, and five colors", and they are connected with each other, promoting each other, and overcoming each other. Whether the five elements are harmonious or not are related to physical health, and any imbalance will have corresponding physical symptoms, so understanding the five elements of the body is also necessary for health. Prof. Ji Xianlin (季羨林, 1911-2009), a famous professor at Peking University (北京大学) in China, emphasized that the way to longevity lies in "health preservation without skills is a skill", advocated the "three noes" (no exercise, no picky eating, no muttering),

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### 3. Follow the seasons

Taoist medicine emphasizes the health preservation principle of spring germination, summer growth, autumn harvest, and winter storage, regulating living time, eating regularly, and sleeping on time. It is also necessary to combine the twelve o'clock of the day with the internal organs to follow the regular health preservation.

- Spring. Spring is the season of wood. The organs that need attention is liver, gallbladder and eyes during this period. When working too hard, the first thing to protect is the liver. Because the liver is the organ in the body that concentrates blood. The more you work, the more blood it has to store. The five elements were originally born in the direction of liver, heart, spleen, lungs and kidneys. If the liver was overworked and weak, the heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys will all enter the scope of impact, and the anger accumulated by overwork would also hurt the liver. So you might as well prepare some sour snacks during overtime, such as plum. If a certain organ of the wood system feels uncomfortable, you can eat more green food belonging to wood, which corresponds to the liver and gallbladder of the human body, containing a large amount of chlorophyll, vitamins and cellulose, which can help the organ accelerate the excretion of toxins from the body. Spring is characterized by anger. Unique taste of this period is sourness. Spring food is characterized by green food, and commended foods are as follows: cabbage, spinach and other leafy vegetables.
- Summer. Summer is the season of fire. Organs that require special attention: heart, small intestine, tongue. Summer is characterized by pleasure. Outstanding taste in summer is bitterness. Healthy food in summer is red food. The heart belongs to fire, at this time it is easy to get inflamed, the mind is restless, the heartbeat is faster, and the burden on the heart is increased, so the most important thing in summer is to nourish the heart. It is

best to eat some red food, which corresponds to the same red blood and the heart responsible for the blood circulation. People who have a cold physique with poor complexion and cold limbs can eat more. Recommended foods in summer are red beans, dates, carrots, red peppers, and tomatoes. Indian friends drink mung bean soup in summer, which is similar to China, is conducive to reducing temperature and health care in summer.

- Autumn. Autumn is the season of gold. The most important thing to maintain in autumn is the lungs, and the most common disease is cough, which is the spiritual effect of the five elements. In autumn, the grass and trees begin to wither, which is easy to make people sad and depressed. In autumn, human organs need to be paid special attention to the lungs, large intestine, and nose. Autumn is characterized by sadness for some reasons. Taste in autumn is spicy. Recommended food for autumn is white food. Gold food corresponds mainly to the lungs, and most of them are white food. They have a flat and cool temperament, which can strengthen the lungs and clear our throats, promote gastrointestinal peristalsis, strengthen metabolism, and make the skin full of elasticity and radiance. Healthy foods in autumn are pears, white radish, yams, almonds, lilies, silver fungus, etc.
- Winter. In the farming era, there is not so much work in winter agricultural leisure, health maintenance will not delay farm work, and the general climate in winter is cold, people's physical energy will be consumed, this time of replenishment can be twice the result with half the effort. As soon as spring comes, it is necessary to do farm work, and it is more powerful to raise the body and work. Winter organ condition and health care: kidneys, bladder, ears. Eating too much outside can hurt the kidneys, which is the organ we care about the most. The common feature of chef cooking is too much of oil and salt. Although this is more fragrant and the right amount is beneficial, the excessive is bad for kidney. Winter is characterized by fear for some reasons. Special taste in winter is salty. Foods that stand out in winter are black foods. These foods correspond to the kidneys and bones, and regular eating can help the metabolism of the kidneys, bladder and bones close to normal, so that excess water will not accumulate in the body causing edema on the body surface, which has the effect of strengthening bones.

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#### 4. Food therapy

The following is only from the maintenance of some organs of the human body, to give 2 examples.

- Liver. The "Yellow Emperor's Internal Canon" (《黄帝内经》) compares the liver to the general's officer, and uses the general's strong and noisy character to describe the physiological characteristics of the liver. People who hurt the liver and have a quick temper are often fiery livers, so when a person loses his temper, you needn't argue with him. His liver qi (肝气) was too strong and turned into anger, and he could not restrain it. Irritable people often slap on the table and shout, he must send this breath out, the heart will feel better, otherwise it will be sick in the heart. When this qi dissipated, it was natural to be calm. However, if a person is always angry, his blood pressure will be high, and the worst will cause liver fibrosis. Zhou Yu (周瑜) in Romance of the Three Kingdoms (《三国演义》) burst into a sword wound in anger and fell to the ground and died, which is a typical case of rage impairing liver. It is very important to treat others and yourself with a tolerant attitude and maintain peace of mind in life. The liver stores blood, and we can judge the rise and fall of liver blood from the condition of the nails and eyes. The nails on the human hands are a barometer of the rise and fall of liver blood. If the nails are thinner, brittle and white than the average person, it is insufficient liver blood. The health of the liver is reflected in the eyes. If the eyes are often dry and easy to tear in the wind, it indicates that the liver yin blood is not enough. If the liver function is abnormal, it will often appear some liver disease symptoms such as bitter mouth, dizziness, dry eyes, red and painful eyes, rib swelling pain, irritability, liver disease, high blood pressure, high blood lipids, dry nails and other symptoms. Liver nourishing food therapy attaches importance to sour foods such as plum, vinegar, hawthorn, green foods such as mint and celery, chrysanthemum, onion, lychee, papaya, peach, carp, and people believe that they are all good products for liver nourishment.
- Lung. The "Yellow Emperor's Internal Canon" says: The lungs are the qi of the whole body, controlling the breath and fur, and operating with the nose. The lungs are known as the masters of the human body and are in charge of the operation of the qi engine of life. Sadness can block the operation of the human body's qi machine, so too much sadness will hurt the lungs. The sentimental Lin Daiyu (林黛玉) in Red Dreams (《红楼梦》), who was depressed and sad all day and finally died of lung disease, is a typical example of hurting lungs with sadness. Therefore, we should maintain an optimistic attitude and avoid unnecessary sadness, otherwise it is harmful to the lungs. If the disease offends the lungs, resulting in the imbalance of lung qi descent and unsolvable, the following symptoms are common: cough, shortness of breath, coughing up blood, easy to catch a cold, slow branch, asthma, rhinitis, chronic pharyngitis, etc. Over time, the Qi (气) will cause rough skin, acne, etc. According to the Five Elements Doctrine (五行学说), white and spicy taste belong to the lung gold

system. Therefore, white silver fungus, lilies, and pears are all good products for nourishing the lungs and yin; spicy ginger juice, onions, coriander and so on all can open the lungs, and it is best taken when you have a cold.

## 5. Mental countermeasures

Taoist doctors say that the heart hides the spirit, the heart is filled with qi and blood, and the spirit can be nourished, then people will have a clear mind, a quick mind, and a sweet sleep. On the contrary, if people's memory declines, sleep is shallow and dreamy, it indicates that the qi of heart and blood is not enough, and it is necessary to replenish it as soon as possible. If people want to avoid illness and get less sickness, they must follow the laws of heaven and earth and the four seasons, so as to conform to nature, imitate heaven and earth, accumulate merit, plant blessings, and do all good and do no evil. This can be described as a good medicine and life-saving remedy for patients who are impetuous, insane, extreme thinking, abnormal behavior, and even intrigue and competition for fame and fortune. Taoist doctors believe that being overjoyed will hurt hearts. That is to say, excessive surprise can impair the function of the heart. For example, Fanjin Zhongju (范进中举) in *The History of Rulin* (《儒林外史》) is a typical example of hurting hearts with great joy.

Taoist doctors judge the function of the heart by observing the changes in the shape and color of the tongue, as well as the fluency of language expression. For example, people who often ulcerate on the tip of the tongue are excessive fire in heart; frequent breakpoints when speaking indicate the people are too tired, and his qi of heart is weak and not enough; the veins under the base of the tongue are purple and varicose, indicating that the cardiovascular system has arteriosclerosis. The function of the heart fire system is abnormal, and the following symptoms often occur: palpitations, pain in the precordial area, blue lips and nails, sores in the mouth and tongue, insomnia and dreams, neurasthenia, coronary heart disease, etc. When these symptoms occur, Taoist doctors will apply medicine according to indications, which is effective.

Psychotherapy is the key to Taoist medicine. Judging another persons feelings by oneself, facing everything with a detached realm and a calm and free mind, is the magic plan of Taoist medicine. Taoist medicine successfully elevates "nature" to a state of beauty, using secret language to express Lao Zhuang's metaphysics into philosophy in daily life, combining poetry and daily life, and creating new themes such as eclogue and philosophy of life. Being pure and kind, philosophical thinking on life, for future generations to build a "nest", a spiritual home, can be enjoyed, very conducive to nourishing the spirit, nourishing the mind, health, can make people rest physically and spiritual escape, comfort, detachment, leisure, unrestraint. Isn't it also a happy life to live in peace, to be happy in time, to avoid the negative thoughts and emotions of the world, not to be moved by material interests, and to be proud of divine poise and sage like features (仙风道骨) outside the material?

Being Similar to Yoga in India, the meditation method is very effective. Mind should be still rather than irritable. Tranquility generally refers to the state in which the spirit and emotions remain calm and tranquil. The pure and free of distractions can achieve the purpose of true qi memory and peace of mind. The body of the elderly is in the aging stage, where physiological and biochemical functions have declined, generally not being suitable for standing or strong exercises, but sitting static exercises, relaxation exercises or internal maintenance exercises. The method of meditation is very simple, taking some time out every day, loosening your clothes, crossing your legs, raising your palms with your hands, head and neck straight, and being naturally stable. After that, adjusting your breathing and connecting your heart. If you feel that this is still troublesome, you can also ignore any method and follow your own wishes. Shadowboxing(太极拳), which responds to movement with silence, is recognized by the world. Shadowboxing is a kind of smart method based on the philosophy of Taiji (太极) and grouping movements with Taiji graphics, so it is named "Shadowboxing". Its physical movements are based on circles, and each move is composed of various arc movements, which are composed of various movements according to the Taiji pattern, and use consciousness to guide the flow of qi and blood around the body like a ring without endpoint, and repeat. Taiji is one of the traditional sports of the Chinese nation, especially being suitable for the physiological characteristics of middle-aged and elderly people, so it has the reputation of "golden project" for middle-aged and elderly fitness and longevity. This item has the effect of regulating the central nervous system, enhancing blood circulation and heart contraction, strengthening the function of organs such as respiration, digestion and excretion, and improving the metabolic process of the human body. Therefore, Shadowboxing has good effects on adjuvant treatment of chronic diseases such as high blood pressure, heart disease, gastric ulcer, tuberculosis, arthritis, neurasthenia, as well as fitness, disease prevention, and delayed aging. In 1956, the National Sports Commission of China compiled and created simplified Shadowboxing (24 poses) based on Yang's Taijiquan(杨氏太极拳), and its movements ranged from simple to complex, from easy to difficult, step by step, which was convenient for popularization and mastery. The reason why regular shadowboxing can be done is that this exercise can clear the meridians and replenish the right qi, making people full of vitality, and be energetic.

Herbal green therapy is a simple and easy method of Taoist medicine. This is based on a number of herbal medicines, aiming at five types of traditional Chinese medicine of insomnia, depression, liver depression, internal disturbance, yin deficiency, heart and spleen deficiency, heart and bile deficiency for the treatment of insomnia and depression and other neurological diseases, which is the research and creation technology of insomnia and depression diagnosis and treatment center of Tianjin North Hospital of China. With the help of the bioactive factors of pure herbal medicines, the active ingredients are selected in a targeted manner to enter the cerebral cortex, effectively nourishing and repairing cerebral cortex cells, improving cerebral blood circulation, ensuring the normal synthesis and metabolism of neurotransmitters, and improving sleep quality. The therapy has the effect of refreshing the brain and calming the mind, calming the wind and extinguishing the wind, nourishing the cranial nerves, comprehensively regulating the human nervous system, and increasing the body's immunity. The condition can be improved to varying degrees during 3-7 days. It can treat insomnia and depression in the short term and can prevent relapse in the long term. It gathers a variety of precious herbal Chinese medicinal materials that nourish the brain and heart, relieving liver depression, nourishing blood and calming the spirit. After scientific refining, it has formulated a number of sets of traditional Chinese medicine formulas and decoction such as "herbal nourishing soup", fully regulating the balance of yin and yang in the internal organs, rationalizing qi and relieving depression, and clearing the mind and calming the mind. Compared with sleeping pills, antidepressant drugs, etc., which have a lot of side effects and cause great harm to the human body. This green treatment is mainly based on Taoist medicine, supplemented by herbal Chinese medicine preparations, which greatly reduces the side effects of drugs and is a new treatment model advocated by the international medical community[4].

Involuntary, the heart as a form, is the fundamental crux of the mentality. The mind is physically served, doing many things against the heart, wanting to do but can't do, not wanting to do but have to do it, helplessly, tantamount to a slave. Some people have split personalities, or they are confined to the world for their own purposes, or they are obsessed with money, or they have nothing to do. Sometimes they bend over to others, flatter others, rely on others, depend on others, so they suffer from scorn and discrimination, feel condescension and boredom, which is undoubtedly adversity or tragedy in life. They are contrary to their feelings, against their will, defile their hearts, distort their souls, and grieve. Once he realized it, he felt that he should wake up from a dream, turning back to the shore, and deciding to either abandon the official and returning to the field, or returning to nature, or painfully correcting the past wrongs, which includes the rate of making up for the loss of sheep, the happiness that is not too late, and the pain of being trapped in the officialdom and making a big mistake. Waking up from a big dream, realizing oneself, blaming oneself and repenting, changing one's course, and returning to nature are the awakening of the realm of life and a necessary stage for nourishing and repairing the mind.

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## 6. Conclusion

To maintain health, nourish the heart and nourish the spirit, it is necessary to respect nature, revering nature, loving the environment, retaining green mountains and water, and making the natural ecology suitable. Adopting the Laozi Taoist avenue of respecting nature, we also need to use modern scientific and medical technology means to treat nature and the environment well, building a beautiful home for mankind, conforming to the new thinking of scientific development, conforming to the will of the people, and winning the hearts of the people. Now there are many unnatural phenomena, which are ecological perversions and even pathological manifestations, many of which are contrary to the laws of nature. For example, "off-season vegetables", "chemical ripening", "medicated hair dyeing", "plastic surgery", etc., artificially changing the original and true natural appearance is very numerous. Some are counterproductive, self-defeating, and even seriously endanger health and life. It would be helpful to revisit and learn from Laozi's views on how to behave as a gentleman. The serious harm of unnatural labor, which hurts people and wastes money, is shocking, and we must learn from it, waking up from a dream, and seriously studying and reflecting on Laozi's life wisdom. "Taoist philosophy may seem like a different system from modern biological science, but their views of death, regression (the periodicity of phenomena), the complementary interactions of dichotomous systems, and humanity's place in the universe are all strikingly similar. The knowledge of both systems is based on objective observation of natural phenomena, and the similarities arise naturally.[5]" Enjoying the tranquility of the state of mind and the edification of the landscape instead of participating in the discussions of the world, forgetting oneself, entering the realm of free and easy heaven and earth, all worries and troubles are swept away, which is very conducive to a healthy life. Spirit and energy are the treasures of the human body, which are important substances that maintain human life activities and determine the prosperity and decline of the human body, especially for the mind, which is the master of human life. To maintain health, we must first nourish the spirit, complementing the nourishment of the spirit. In short, the wisdom of Taoist medicine is worth learning.

## Compliance with ethical standards

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