

养生之道

# In a Daoist Circle

When eyes do not see, *hun* returns to Liver. When ears do not hear, *jing* is in the Kidneys. When the tongue is still, *shen* is in the Heart. When there is no awareness of odour, *po* is in the Lungs. When these four do not leak, the *jing* water, *shen* fire, *hun* wood and *po* metal all collect in the centre, harmoniously.

– Caption to an illustration in the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*  
(Principles for Essence and Life)

**By Xiaoyao Xingzhe**

“It’s cruel, in my opinion.”

“What is?” Xiaojing was pruning a bonsai, bending her tall body, studying the branches and making occasional precise clips. We were in the upper room of Shijie’s

restaurant, waiting for the others. I had wanted to turn on the heater, but she had objected that the room would soon warm.

“Forcing what could be a beautiful large tree to live in such a cramped and confined space.”

She just looked at me and rolled her eyes.

“What, you think I am being over-sentimental?”

“Not at all. I think you are being deliberately stupid, trying to annoy me.”

I frowned. Frankly, I didn’t have a clue what she meant.

“You really don’t understand, do you? Well, Shijie encourages us to look and think about what we see around us. You have heard of *wu yan zhi jiao* – silent teaching? You have been around us long enough to know that, at least.”

She brushed up the snippings. The silence grew awkward.

Finally she turned to me and said “All right, if you must be told. That bonsai is us. We live cut off from our deepest source of nourishment, that which would allow us to grow into our greatest potential.” She emptied the snippings into a container destined for the compost, then continued. “Society trains us, constrains us, forces us to direct our energies into certain narrowly defined directions.”

“Yes, it’s cruel, terrible, like I said.”

“But there is more. Silent teaching is never just one side, it is always a whole, multi-dimensional. For example, here we have a chance to see that sometimes training and restraint can lead to extraordinary beauty; that submission to a higher design brings out abilities we would never naturally develop, and that we can turn for our nourishment from a lower to a higher source.”

“So which is right?”

Xiaojing’s voice rose. “I don’t know what makes you so dumb, but it really works. If your ...”

“What’s all the noise?” Shijie swept in, heading a train of her disciples, most of whom worked there at the restaurant. A few, however, were removing outdoor winter jackets and scarves. They fanned out around the room, arranging tables, and setting the chairs into a rough circle.

“Shijie, it’s nothing. Only Xiaoyao ...”

“I know he annoys you,” Shijie said. “That’s why I asked you to look after him when I found out Fatty couldn’t make it. Now I want you to turn to him and thank him sincerely for helping you to refine yourself.”

“But Shijie ...” Xiaojing stopped as Shijie gave her a steady look, then pressing her lips together turned to me, bowed and said quickly “Thank you for making me a better person.” She then spun on her heel and crossed the room to put as much distance between us as possible.

The other disciples settled themselves into a circle, some on chairs, some on the floor, while Shijie pulled a cushion into the centre.

“As the harmony of this room has been somewhat disturbed,” she said, sitting, “after our usual several minutes of opening silence, I want to go through the *bai gu guan*, the white bone contemplation – just

the short version – before the sub-group begins their look at the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*.” She looked around. “All right, settle down, and remember to extend yourself towards contact with that spirit that moves with the Dao.”

The chair scrapings and rustlings gradually ceased, and we sank into silence. I had no idea how to “extend myself towards contact with that spirit” so I simply deepened my breathing, quieted my internal dialogue somewhat, and tried to assume an attitude of openness.

### The White Bone Contemplation

After three or four minutes Shijie began to speak in a calm voice, modulated to just reach every part of the room.

“The *bai gu guan*, for those few who have not done it before, is a contemplation in your mind’s eye of the human skeleton, in as much detail as possible. In the old days, my teacher told me, it was not uncommon to find an old battlefield with skeletons everywhere. All one had to do was sit on a rock or log and study one, memorising every bend and crack, turning away and visualising, locating unclear areas, then going back, until it was better than a photograph; it was three-dimensional. One should be able examine the skeleton in your mind’s eye from all angles with incredible accuracy.”

She looked around at the silent circle. The windows were shaded but the light of the evening sun crept through the gaps, tinging the room blood-red.

“All right, let’s start. Imagine the space between your eyebrows, *yintang*, and the brows themselves, no flesh covering the bones. Look carefully how white and clean the bones of the skull are.” She paused for the space of a breath.

“Now move to the eye sockets, just under the bumps of the brows, no flesh, no eyeballs, just deep round crevices extending back into the skull.” Another breath.

“Now see how between the eye sockets, there is a hole where the nose would be, just a short bone there, no cartilage, just empty.” A slightly longer pause.

“To either side, the cheek bones stretch around, back to the bones around the ear



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canal. No ears, just a hole.” Her voice had become a soothing drone.

“Look at the mastoid process on each side, stretching down, then examine the bones along behind it, back to the occiput.”

“Contemplate the bones of the back of the skull, moving up to the vertex, at *Baihui*, then down again to *Yintang*, to the eye sockets, to the cheekbones.”

A pause.

“Now view the upper jaw, white teeth extending downwards, no lips covering them, roots of the teeth reaching upwards deep into the bones of the skull.

“Look at the lower jaw ...”

As she went on Shijie’s voice slowed, each instruction leaving plenty of time to view the structure in question, imagining in detail at each part of the skeleton from the skull down to the vertebrae of the neck, the clavicle, the scapula, the thoracic vertebrae, the ribs in order, the sternum. Then she went back up to the humerus, down to the radius and ulna, the bones of the wrist, the metacarpals, the phalanges.

Slowly she back-tracked up the arm, over the clavicle again and the scapula, then down the thoracic vertebrae to the lumbar area, the sacrum, the ilium, the pubic bone, then down to the femur, slowly slowly down to the heels, metatarsals, and toes, then back up, just as slowly, redoing the arms, down and then back up, all around the back and vertex of the skull, until she reached the place where we had begun, the brows.

When her voice stopped it was a long time before I opened my eyes. My whole body tingled from the force of the attention that had been poured into it, and it felt as if the room itself had been energised. Many of the people in the circle sat with their eyes half-closed; some had them open and were looking at Shijie. There was a solemn silence.

“Any questions?”

A young girl on the other side of the room, next to Xiaojing, cleared her throat, then asked “There are differences between a man’s skeleton and a woman’s. Does it matter which we visualise?”

“A woman ideally should visualise a woman’s skeleton.” Shijie said. “Harder to find on a battlefield, though.” Her mild jest lightened the atmosphere of the room.

She continued “but it’s about the same these days. Audio-visual replications are OK, but if you can find the real thing it is more effective.”

One of the men in the circle, who wore a stained kitchen apron and looked like a cook, said “When should we use this contemplation? You have taught us that we should be turning the light around and looking back into the source of mind, whatever we are doing throughout the day, but this seems quite different and specific.”

“Yes,” Shijie said. “This is quite specific, and not something you want to habituate yourself to. In fact, ideally you end up dissolving that skeleton away completely, and your sense of self with it.” She looked around, then continued, “but the expedient use of this contemplation is very valuable, for instance, when you find yourself unable to settle your mind, or distracted by desires, especially sexual desires ...”

There was a rustling across the room, the young girl next to Xiaojing seemed to have nudged her. But Shijie continued “and that is why it is best for men to visualise a male skeleton, and women a female skeleton.”

“Unless you’re gay,” the girl spluttered. I saw Xiaojing inch away from her, but there was low laughter around the room. Shijie smiled too. “Naturally you use your common sense and do what it takes to achieve your aim. You want to lessen your fixation, not increase it.”

She stood up and directed the rest of us to do likewise. We all stretched for a few minutes. I turned to the older woman next to me and was just going to make small talk when she shook her head and put her hand by her chest, palm facing me. It seemed clear that it was preferable to stay in tune with the group mind, rather than split into individual discussion. Later I was to see that two-person interchanges were not uncommon, but that they tended to express the questions or concerns of the group as a whole, basically bringing them out of the group subconscious for general observation, and sometimes for explicit comment by Shijie.

At the moment, however, people around the



room seemed to maintain an awareness of everyone else, a presence within the whole. Shijie signalled everyone to sit down again, and said “Lingling’s comment is quite useful as a reminder that eyes are the key to this work. All of the basic texts have statements like this. Lao Zi said *refusing to look at the desirable makes your heart peaceful*. But pay attention here: it is not that you put a lot of effort into refusing to look at desirable things – that just makes you more fixated on those things. It is rather that as you are looking back into your heart and mind, you value the peace you find there more than whatever momentary pleasure you may have gotten from the outward view. It is a subtle point, but important for success.”

The cook indicated a desire to speak, and Shijie nodded slightly.

“When I was younger, I studied with a Daoist who quoted the *Yin Fu Jing* which says ‘the mechanism is in the eyes’. But he said that this meant that every time you inhaled, you swivelled your eyes upward, and every time you exhaled, you rolled your eyes downward.”

There were a few chuckles around the circle. But I had heard or read something similar, and was not sure.

“The *Zhong He Ji* says that there are 36 hundred side paths, and we should aim at the highest practice. Here, we can actually find a useful quote in the book that a few of us will be starting to look at tonight, the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*. In the chapter called ‘the first oral teaching’ it says: *the heart is the pivotal mechanism, but eyes are the robbers. When desire subverts the heart, it first captures the eyes*.”

Xiaojing asked: “What does it mean, the heart is the pivotal mechanism?”

Shijie smiled. “Good question. To really get this, you need to understand that we as individuals are composed of layers and levels, some layers more material and gross, others more subtle. The more we turn towards the world with our mind and heart, the more we are pulled towards that gross material realm. When we turn the light around, we are turning towards the more subtle realm. In the beginning, all is darkness there, but as we pay attention into it, it begins to open up for us. This is how

we accumulate *de*, that energy that helps us approach the Dao.”

“Oh, I get it,” Lingling said. “So it is our heart that decides to look inward or outward, and that is why it is the pivot.”

“Yes,” said Shijie. “Of course, we use the eyes to do that, actually or metaphorically, so you could just as well say *the mechanism is in the eyes*. If you are not careful, though, the eyes take over, and suddenly all that *de* is just pouring outward through them.”

She turned to me. “Xiaoyao, didn’t the Abbott tell you something about that?”

“He said that when we look at something, we should draw their essence and spirit inward through our eyes, don’t pour our own essence and spirit outward.” I thought for a moment. There was something more, what was it? “Oh yes, he said to be careful about what we look at like this.”

“What do you think he meant by that?”

I didn’t know what to say, at first. I heard Xiaojing snicker on the other side of the room, and felt my cheeks grow hot. Finally I said “I think he meant that we can open ourselves deeply to bad influences, and so we should learn to use our discernment.”

“For example? What do you think, Xiaojing?” Shijie must have heard the snicker.

Xiaojing sat up straight and said with composure, “I think he meant we can and should look deeply at things that have a natural beauty, like trees or flowers, things that possess *de*, like certain rock formations. We should be careful of man-made things, unless they are artefacts made by skilled artisans who put love into their work, or artists who have a natural or cultivated link with the Dao.”

So she had already thought about this. I had to admit I was surprised.

Lingling, next to her, chimed in “Advertising, factory-made plastic junk, horror movies, porn.” There was a general rumble of agreement.

“Yes, Lingling is right, these are definitely things to avoid if you are opening yourself to outside influences.” Shijie said. “And it is worse than you may think: we each of us are portals into the general mind of humanity. Humanity is one big organism! And what we pay attention to finds its way



*It is not that you put a lot of effort into refusing to look at desirable things – that just makes you more fixated on those things.*



*So when you have bad or evil thoughts, that does not mean you are evil – these can well up in anybody, even saints – the important thing is whether you allow those thoughts to remain, or even worse, invite them in and feed them.”*

into that mind, enriching it or poisoning it as the case may be. So our actions do not just affect ourselves.”

There was a stirring around the circle. Members looked at each other, disturbed.

“On the other hand,” Shijie continued, “as my teacher told me, many of our impulses and thoughts also well up from that same source. So when you have bad or evil thoughts, that does not mean you are evil – these can well up in anybody, even saints – the important thing is whether you allow those thoughts to remain, or even worse, invite them in and feed them.”

She turned and picked up a book lying next to her cushion, opened it in the middle, then flipped a few pages, then pointed with her finger. “It is as this quote says, *Do not fear the arising of thoughts, only fear noting them too slowly. The arising of thought is the sickness, and here is the cure: Don’t follow them through.* That quote is contained in the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*. Most of you know this book well. After our break, those of you who are already familiar with it can leave, or work on your own practice separately; I’ll work with the sub-group that is going to look at it in detail: Xiaoyao, Lingling and Xiaojing.” She rose gracefully to her feet. “But first, let’s have some tea.”

### The Xing Ming Gui Zhi

Xiaojing and the young girl Lingling sat with Shijie and I at a table. The room had emptied except for one or two people sitting on cushions in different corners.

Shijie turned to me. “Did you have a look through the whole book as Shidi asked you to?”

“Yes.”

“What struck you?”

I thought for a moment, then said: “The number of quotes from Confucian and Buddhist books, together with Daoist ones. When put together like that, they seemed to all be referring to the same thing.”

“Indeed they do, for the most part. That is one reason this book is so valuable. They are all talking about the same basic experience, the experience of living a fully human life. And we can see how three different traditions, from three different angles, bring out distinct facets of certain

aspects of being.”

She opened the book, found a page, and said: “For example, in relation to what we were discussing before the break, here is a quote from a Buddhist scripture: *Throughout the Three Realms, the mind is the master. Those who can observe the mind will attain liberation, those unable to observe it will, in the end, sink.*

She looked down again at the book. “Right next to that quote is this one from the Song dynasty Confucian scholar Zhu-Xi. He says *Control the outside so as to nourish your inside*, and next to that is this quote from the Analects of Confucius: *If it is improper, don’t look at it.*”

Lingling rolled her eyes. “Sounds like my parents.”

Shijie nodded. “Yes, that is a problem nowadays. Many centuries of these Confucian sayings have been used to bludgeon people into submission, and they come with so much emotional baggage now that it is almost impossible to take advantage of their original intent.”

“It is the same back in Europe,” I said excitedly. “The churches got involved in politics, torturing and killing while quoting scriptures, and now I have friends who can’t even listen to a reading from the Bible without feeling sick.”

Xiaojing turned on me. “What are you bringing *them* up for? We have our own problems. If you are so worried about them, why don’t you go back where you came from?”

Lingling raised her eyebrows and looked back and forth between us, a slight smile on her lips.

Shijie ignored the outburst, remaining silent and running her finger down the page. Xiaojing looked at her, and murmured “Sorry, Shijie,” then turned to me and said “Sorry” in such a low voice that it was barely possible to make out the word.

Lingling pursed her smiling lips and looked down.

Shijie went on as if Xiaojing hadn’t spoken. “This book has some other unique features. It directly compares Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism, and minces no words in pointing out the weak spots of each approach. Xiaojing, do you feel capable of

saying something about this?”

Xiaojing swallowed and said “Of course, Shijie.” She composed herself for a moment and said “the author says that Daoists pay too much attention to qi as an aspect of life, and over-emphasise refining qi, and therefore are partial to life in preference to essence. Can I see the book for a moment?”

Shijie handed it over, and Xiaojing paged through it rapidly, slowed, then backed up a page and read: *they look for marvels in the realm of the water organ to establish their religion. Thus they talk in detail regarding life and hardly mention essence. This ignorance of essence, however, is in the final analysis actually ignorance of life as well.*

“Lingling,” Shijie said, looking at her, “what does that mean *marvels in the realm of the water organ?*”

“I think he means that Daoists emphasise the cultivation of the Kidney *jing* too much.”

“What is the problem with that?”

Lingling reddened.

Shijie said “I can see you know. It all too easily degenerates into focusing on sexual practices, and this is what they end up teaching others to do.” She took the book back from Xiaojing, looked at the same page, pointing at the words. “But he goes on to say that the Chan people take the spirit as essence, and make refining the spirit into their aim. They refine the practice of stillness in the Palace of *Li*, and make that into their religion; thus they talk in detail regarding essence and hardly mention life. This ignorance of life, however, is in the final analysis actually ignorance of essence as well.”

I asked “What is the Palace of *Li*?”

Xiaojing rolled her eyes, but kept quiet.

Shijie explained, “It’s the Heart/mind, symbolised by the trigram *Li*, just like the Kidneys are symbolised by the trigram *Kan*. We had better review these associations...”

Xiaojing burst out “Shijie, do we have to? That is first grade stuff! Why should we ...”

Shijie cut her off by raising a finger gently. “The Abbott instructed that we go through the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi* with Xiaoyao, to make sure he has a good grounding. You will benefit as well, and not only in cultivating your patience. We will do that as soon as we finish this topic.” She sighed. “It is all too easy to think we know more than we do.”

She turned back to the text. “He was saying that the Chan people focus on refining the spirit, and so over-emphasise essence, so they don’t understand how to refine life. Then he goes on to say:

*Don’t they know that essence and life are inseparable in their very root, and that Daoism and Buddhism are not different religions? Spirit and qi are two uses of the one fundamental thing, and thus essence and life need to be mutually developed. A wise person will both cultivate the spirit by turning the light around at all times to nourish essence, but will also refine the body in order to fulfil their allotted term of life.*

“The author then goes on to explain how to do that, in detail.”

“How?”

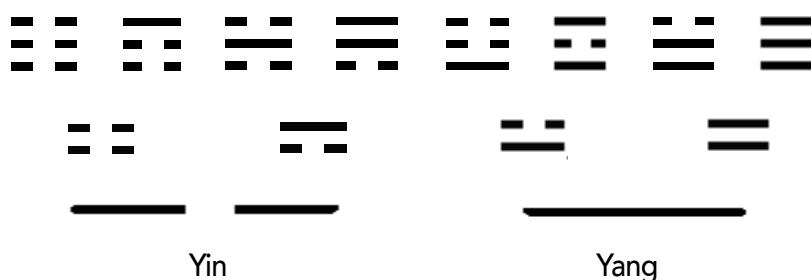
“We will get to that. But it is getting late now, and we have to look at some basic alchemical symbolism, particularly trigrams and hexagrams. I know you have at least some familiarity with the concepts, so I will be brief.”

Just then the double doors to the room opened and my friend the fat monk entered. He looked frazzled and exhausted, and exchanged looks with Shijie as he sat. “Done?” she asked, and he grunted in return. He poured himself some tea, and finished the leftover snacks the cook had made, and soon was back to his old self.

Meanwhile, Shijie continued.

“There are 64 hexagrams – *liu shi si gua* – in the *Yi Jing*, each made up of six lines – *liu yao*. Alternatively, you could see them as the total number of combination of eight trigrams – *ba gua* – each made up of three lines. These likewise are made up of the possible variations in four pairs of lines – the *si xiang* – plus one more line.”

She drew a diagram on the paper:



*Many centuries of these Confucian sayings have been used to bludgeon people into submission, and they come with so much emotional baggage now that it is almost impossible to take advantage of their original intent.*



Qian is Heaven



Kun is the Earth



Li is the Sun



Kan is the Moon

“As you can see, these lines are of two types. A yang line is solid, while a yin line has a gap in the middle.”

“Why is that?” I asked turning to the fat Daoist.

Xiaojie looked disgusted. Lingling laughed out loud.

“Don’t ask *me*,” he said, grinning. “I’m a monk.”

Shijie seemed to sigh, then went on: “Anyway, if you remember the line from the *Dao De Jing* that says *the Dao produces one, one produces two, two produce three, and the three produce the ten thousand things*, it is all illustrated there for you in that diagram. Dao, unseen, below the single yin and yang lines, those lines combine into two lines, and those combinations form three lines: the *ba gua* which encompass all changes. Those are the trigrams you see on the top line. The one to the far left is *Kun*, the most yin. That to the far right is *Qian*, the most yang. All the rest are variations on the interplay of yin and yang. Notice how the lines alternate.”

“Remember that yin is dense and heavy, but also takes in and nourishes, allowing growth. *Kun* ☷ is the Earth.

“Yang is immaterial, light, formless, but provides the impetus to start things. Yang sets things in motion, it is action. *Qian* ☰ is Heaven.

“These two are known as the doorway to the *Yi Jing*, the mother and father of all the changes. And even if you are not interested in the *Yi Jing*, these are important for understanding alchemical symbolism as well. In the earliest dictionaries we have, the word *gua* – hexagram or trigram – is explained like this: *gua zhe, gua ye*. *Gua* means ‘to hang’. And ...” Shijie stopped for a moment, then turned to the fat monk and said: “Do you remember, Shidi, when our teacher was telling us about these things for the first time?”

He chuckled, and his eyes brightened. “Like it was yesterday. That was the time we’d spent all day climbing. We’d reached a high point, and were looking south, when the clouds cleared. It was one of those rare evenings when the sun and the full moon

were together in the sky, equally visible, and our teacher used the chance to describe *Qian, Kun, Li* and *Kan*.”

Shijie looked pensive. “Yes, I too remember most clearly. Perhaps it was the drama of the setting. Our teacher said that all the phenomena we see in the universe, everything there before us, was as it were a painting hung before us, a moving canvas of change. And everything we see can be encompassed by the symbols of the trigrams and hexagrams: sun, moon, wind, thunder, mountain, waterways, it is all there. But Heaven is far above us, earth is solid beneath us, and all the realm of change happens between these two.”

They were both silent for a moment.

“We didn’t really *feel* what he meant, then, I think. He went on to talk about the Sun and Moon particularly, the two trigrams *Li* ☲ and *Kan* ☵ .

The fat monk said: “Yes, it was striking, what he said. Those two things, the sun and the moon, are the biggest things we see, and there they were hanging between heaven and earth, moving, circling, immense symbols of meaning forever in front of us, and forever ignored. Without these two there would certainly be no ten thousand things, or us either.”

He looked down, thinking, then continued “Later he explained that *Li* ☲ the Sun, with the broken line in the middle, is the symbol of Heaven, brought down into the realm of changes by the shift of its middle line to yin. *Kan*, the Moon, is a piece of the Earth, lifted into the heavens by its middle line of yang ☲.”

Xiaojing and Lingling looked at each other.

Shijie glanced at the two girls and said “our teacher went on to say that within the human body, *Li* symbolises the eyes, while *Kan* stands for the ears. So when you are meditating, these two should be circulating inside.”

Lingling said “Oh! It’s like the story of *Hundun*.”

Xiaojing looked puzzled.

“I know that one!” I said, proudly. “Its from *Zhuang Zi*. *Hundun* was the ruler of the central region, and had two friends,

Hurried and Heedless, who ruled the territories on the boundary of the central region. Hundun was very kind to them, and they wanted to repay him. So they said to each other 'Everyone has holes to see, hear, eat and smell, but our friend Hundun has none of these. Let's give him some!' So every day they drilled a hole in Hundun, and on the seventh day, he died."

Xiaojing looked even more puzzled. "What does that have to do with *Li* and *Kan*?" she asked me.

"Um, well," I said. "I just know the story. I didn't mean ..."

"*Ben dan!*" Xiaojing said, under her breath.

Lingling smiled and said, "I don't know, I just suddenly had a flash of insight when Shijie was talking about the eyes as the sun and the ears as the moon circulating inside of us as we meditate, and I realised that the story of Hundun was showing a picture of self-contained wholeness, ruined when essence leaked out through the senses," she finished breathlessly.

"Indeed. And in the first chapter of the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi* there is actually a short quote from *Zhuang Zi* referring to Hundun," said Shijie. "It is in this passage:

*People are born due to the generative forces of Heaven and Earth, and up until puberty those forces remain fully yang and pure. Who isn't virtuous and righteous at that age? But then a command is received from Heaven, and those who wish to repay Hundun arrive, everyday drilling a hole, until the pure yang runs out, becoming yin in the second line. Thus Qian cannot remain pure, and becomes broken, turning into Li, and its middle yang line transfers to Kun, making it into Kan.*

"Oh, that's right," said Lingling. "Maybe I saw it there, and it stuck in my mind."

"This will often happen." Shijie said. "It is a process of digestion. An undigested concept will keep coming up, in ideas, in questions, in dreams, until we absorb it and move on."

"That's right," said the fat monk, glancing at me. "Some people keep asking the same questions, over and over, in different formats, and never seem to take in the answer."

Shijie continued. "And often they project those questions or problems onto the people around them, rather than recognise them as aspects of themselves that are irritating them inside, asking to be cured."

Lingling gave Xiaojing a pointed look.

"Anyway, to return to our topic," said the fat monk, "the trigram *Li* refers to the sun, but also to fire, to heat, and as we've said, to the eyes. The trigram *Kan* refers to the moon, but also to water, to cold, and as we've said, to the ears."

Xiaojing seemed more patient with me now that the fat Daoist had arrived, or maybe she was just tired. Lingling seemed in awe of him, but she gathered her courage and said "We talked about the Palace of *Li* earlier, and the Water of the Kidneys. That is related to these trigrams, right?"

He gave her an approving look, and nodded. "*Li* also stands for the Heart/mind, immaterial, engendering, active. Like the heart itself it is there, working indefatigably, in the chest. It stands for awareness, which is an attribute of Heaven. When the middle line changes from yang to yin," he said, dipping his finger in tea and drawing it on the table, "so that *Qian* becomes this trigram *Li*, this can mean two things. The first represents the usual uncultivated mind, the mind of everyday consciousness. In that case the yin line stands for the muddying effect worldly concerns have on our primal awareness, shown by the yang lines on the outside." Since the lines had dried out, he redrew two strong unbroken lines with tea.

"The second meaning is the opposite, the yin line shows receptivity in the midst of primal awareness, resulting in open consciousness."

He turned to me saying, "and before you ask, both are right."

I nodded, but my own consciousness had started to cloud at that stage. The girls by contrast seemed to be taking it all in.

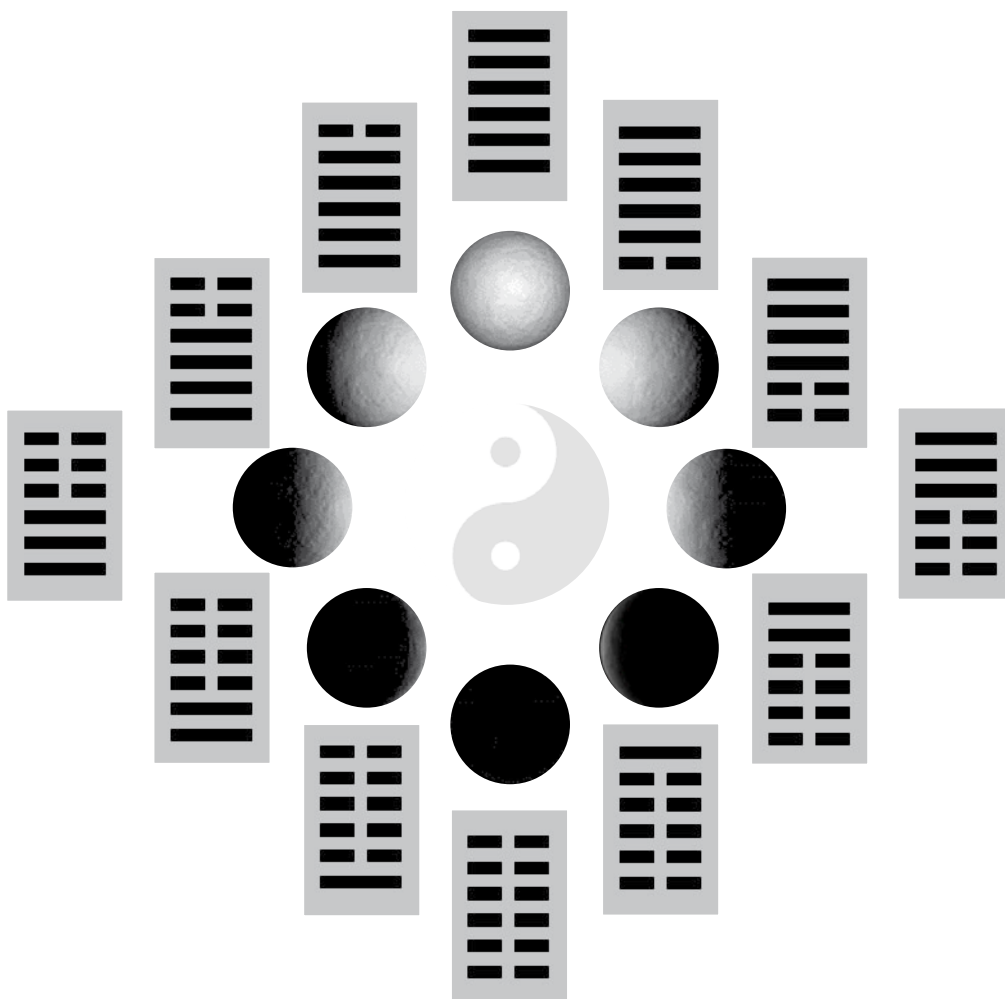
The fat monk went on: "*Kan*, on the other hand, is Kidney water, deep, quiet, storing, potential, but with a point of yang within, deep in the pelvis. It is that yang which stirs when your vitality is aroused." Again he drew the lines on the table, two broken lines on the outside, one solid one inside. "But *Kan* can also refer to the deep quiet original knowledge of the mind of *Dao*;



*An undigested concept will keep coming up, in ideas, in questions, in dreams, until we absorb it and move on.*



## The 12 sovereign hexagrams and their moon-cycle associations



that yang line on the inside shows the real knowledge we can access, but do not, because it is buried by the two yin lines, representing the everyday consciousness, the *shi shen* (识神), which blinds us.”

I was now thoroughly confused by all the changes in the meaning of the symbols, and said so.

“Change, fluidity, flow,” said the fat monk. “That what this is all about. A symbol can represent many things. The key though is that those things have common qualities. The symbol helps you look for that commonality.” He chuckled. “The changes keep your mind flexible.”

“But what does all this have to do with alchemy?” Xiaojing demanded.

“I was just about to read this next passage from the *Xing Ming Gui Zhi*, which follows

the one we looked at just before,” Shijie said.

*Now the spiritual sages know the reason for the separation of yin and yang, they know the reason for the beginning of life and death, they know why the yin and yang within Qian and Kun become interchanged, and thus why the celestial and the earthly become mixed. They know that the method must be to take Qian and Kun as root, while using Li and Kan to function. Holding tight to this handle of yin and yang, they can pass through the gate of life and death, taking the yang line from the midst of Kan in order to fill the yin line in Li. Li thus becomes Qian, and yang is restored to purity.*

The fat monk interrupted when he saw a look on Lingling's face. "Pure' here has nothing to do with sanctity or morality, it simply means 'not mixed'."

Shijie looked up, confirming, Lingling nodded, and Shijie concluded:

*Yang being restored, Hundun is back, the person is complete and able to fulfil the celestial mandate: a perfect human.*

We sat in silence for a few moments. The fat Daoist got up to refill the teapot. Shijie had her eyes closed, but then she opened them and said: "Shidi, we were talking before about the fundamental identity of the three religions, and the other day you were telling me something interesting you had found."

"What?" he said, frowning, as he returned to the table.

"About Chan and the symbols of the *Yi Jing*."

"Oh, yes," he turned to us. "It's fascinating when you look behind the scenes a little. Way back in the ninth century, the Chan school of Cao-Dong<sup>a</sup> used the hexagrams to illustrate their doctrine, especially Dong Shan." Teacups were replenished as he spoke. "Dong Shan talked about using the yang line in the trigram *Kan* to repair the hole in the middle of *Li*, of course this was referring to subtle aspects of meditation. Later this became a very popular part of the Golden Elixir alchemy. But it started with – or at least was preserved by – the Chan people. They were more Daoist than the Daoists!"

Shijie chuckled softly, tilting her teacup to look at her tea, then swirling it.

"It is getting pretty late," she said, "so we'd better finish up. I just wanted to preview the topic for the next meeting, so that you can roll it around in your minds. Remember that the eight trigrams show more subtle variations and combinations of yin and yang than the four simple pairs (*si xiang*) can do. Likewise the six-lined hexagrams can again show more subtle aspects of change than the trigrams alone."

She paused to sip her tea. "To round off

tonight, then, I just want to introduce you to the 12 sovereign hexagrams, the *bi gua*. We'll talk more about them next time. They clearly demonstrate ebb and flow, rising and falling, and are quite important for the alchemical work. I've made a copy of this diagram showing their relation to the waxing and waning of the moon, and I'd like you to become familiar with them. Perhaps when you see the phase of the moon, on clear nights, you can picture in your mind which hexagram that might be in the cycle of the *bi gua*."

She handed them out, then said "All right, let's finish as we began, taking a moment or two in silence to extend ourselves toward contact with that spirit that moves with the Dao."

## Home

Out on the street it was dark and cold, and even though there was no snow, there were few passers-by. Shijie waited to lock the door while the fat monk retrieved his bicycle from the lower hallway. Lingling had wound a scarf around her neck and was zipping up her yellow down jacket; Xiaojing was wearing an old-style *mian ao* and studiously ignoring me. The two girls walked off, arm in arm, then Lingling looked back over her shoulder to wink at me.

"Waves crash to and fro on the surface, but ocean currents run deep," the fat monk said, cryptically, as he threw his leg over his bike. "See you next week."



Ante Babic's  
**Tips for running  
a successful clinic ...**

The key to that difficult case is almost always in the question you didn't ask.

a. The Cao-Dong school is perhaps better known as the origin of the Soto school of Zen. In Zen literature, Dong Shan is known by the Japanese name of Tozan.

# To the tune of Seeds of Sweet Grass

**A *cí*-poem of Liu Yong**

(translation by Steven Clavey)

秋暮。

乱洒衰荷，颗颗真珠雨。

雨过月华生，冷彻鸳鸯浦。

池上凭阑愁无侣。

奈此个情绪。

却傍金笼共鹦鹉。

念粉郎言语。

Autumn evening.

A scattering of rain on lotus

Left wet pearls on wilted leaves.

With the shower passed, the last gleam of moon emerged,

Still here on the banks of the Yuanyang Pu,

She is pierced through with cold.

"These ducks mate for life," he had said, yet

Now the pool is empty, and she has

Only the wooden railing to lean upon.

How can one cope with such feelings?

Back in her room,

She crouches by the golden cage

And trains her parrot to recite his words.

■ This is a poem in the *cí* form ("cí" is pronounced like "tsih") which borrowed popular tunes from Central Asia as a format for rhythm and structure upon which a new poem was constructed. The tempo and length could be either fast and short, or slow and long; this poem is an example of the latter, called *màn cí*.

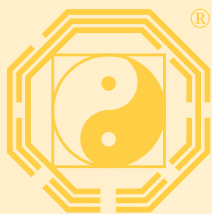
Liu Yong was a master, and some say the originator, of the long and slow form of *cí* poetry. Liu travelled to the capital Kaifeng to take the imperial examination, but failed each year, and remained to try again the next. This went on until he was 47.

In between exams he spent much of his time with the beautiful courtesans of the

city, and many of his poems describe their lives and the life of the emotions.

Simple in language, yet carefully crafted and hauntingly delicate, they remained widely popular for centuries, so that in the words of a later critic "the poems of Liu Yong are sung wherever people gather at a well".





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Correspondent's report from Shandong



# Chaos and clarity in the acupuncture department



Dr An Bao-Zhen



Dr Hou Shou-Wei

by Ken Smith

**I**N OCTOBER 2010, I studied for nine days at the Shandong Hospital of Traditional Chinese Medicine. The five-storey facility is in Jinan, a modern city of six million residents three hours by train south of Beijing. While a wide and varied number of conditions were treated at the hospital, the most common conditions I saw were facial paralysis, neck, back and knee pain.

The hospital was open seven days a week from 8.30 to 11.30 am, and then from 2 pm until closing at 5.30 pm. The cash rate for treatments was 40 *yuan* (\$6), with many patients receiving partial reimbursement through insurance. The treatment rooms were divided by curtains and had three tables on average. One room had 10 tables. The treatment rooms can at times be extremely chaotic as there are student interns, patients speaking with each other, new patients asking questions, a cell phone ringing – all while up to eight or more people are squeezed into a 12-foot-square room. There is no personal privacy in a Chinese acupuncture treatment room. The intake, questioning and condition of the patient is shared in front of one and all.

All doctors used .30-gauge needles with free hand insertion; the treatments were exactly 30 minutes (a written log was kept of the beginning and ending time), and the mornings were always busier than the afternoons. One doctor I worked with often

was Dr Hou Shou-Wei, who is 55 and has published 30 articles and research papers, nine of which were published nationally. On three very busy successive weekdays, I saw Dr Hou treat 39, 50, and 46 patients in less than three hours. When I mentioned that these were somewhat busy days, he replied that one day in July he had treated 66 patients in less than three hours. He went on to say that it was a bit much to handle that day, and that his students soon became tired following him as he walked quickly from treatment room to room!

While most doctors widely employed electro-stimulation, Dr Hou told me that he never used electro-stimulation because he got wonderful results without it.

During my conversations with Dr Hou, he indicated that *Fubai* GB-10 and *Fengchi* GB-20 was his favourite point combination to treat stroke, dizziness and a wide variety of other brain-related conditions.

A unique set of points Dr Hou uses for urinary incontinence are *Dadun* LIV-1, *Baihui* DU-20 and *Chengjiang* REN-24. By using *Baihui* DU-20 and *Chengjiang* REN-24, qi circulation is improved between the *Ren* and *Du* channels, and thus effectively raises the qi.

Needling *Shenting* DU-24 and *Baihui* DU-20 is Dr Hou's favoured combination for dizziness, headache, insomnia and stress.

While treating a patient in her 70s one day, Dr Hou indicated that *Daheng* SP-

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