

ART OF THE BEDCHAMBER

*The Chinese
Sexual Yoga Classics
Including Women's
Solo Meditation Texts*



DOUGLAS WILE

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PART ONE
INTRODUCTION

I. MOTIVE AND FOCUS

Sex, like music, is considered something of a universal language, but anyone who has listened to Chinese music will tell you how different *la différence* can be. To Chinese sexual sensibilities, the Western sexual ideal—two souls striving to be one, who tune their instruments to the same pitch, make beautiful music together for a short duet, share the glory of a crashing crescendo, and console each other through a languorous denouement—is so much adolescent thrashing. How different the Chinese ideal, for here the male conductor rehearses each member of his female orchestra through the entire score, only to rest his baton as she reaches crescendo, absorbing the exhilarating waves of sound, before he retires to his dressing room to count the evening's receipts. As Western culture begins to ask itself, "Now that we can do anything we want, what do we want to do?" Chinese sexual yoga arrives with a fresh perspective that will stimulate even the most seasoned sinologists and jaded satyrs.

This source book in Chinese sexual yoga seeks to make a number of contributions. It is the first comprehensive collection of all published primary material to appear in any language, including Chinese. The translation itself aspires to a new standard of accuracy and felicity,

and the annotations attempt both to elucidate unfamiliar terminology in the text and be fully accountable for differences between the present translation and all previous efforts. Emendations to the original texts are undertaken with full disclosure of the background to the reader. By presenting the broadest possible spectrum of primary sources, the reader is able to witness the evolution of sexual practices in China, the key issues that divide its several schools, and the relationship of the "paired practices" (*shuang-hsiu* 雙修) camp to its detractors. Additionally, this broad base of primary materials will give humanists, scientists, and the general reader a more complete picture of Chinese sexual practices and a more complex matrix of data for comparative studies. The section devoted to women's practices, though of the "solo" rather than "paired" persuasion, marks the debut of these texts in translation and highlights the importance of sexual energy and the reproductive function in Chinese meditation. Finally, this retrospective of traditional teachings attempts to provide a baseline for assessing contemporary publications on Chinese sex techniques and to offer new paradigmatic and practical possibilities at a turning point in Western sexuality.

Methodologically, this work is pri 3

marily philological and historical rather than anthropological or literary and, accordingly, is not concerned with erotic literature or art, sexual mores or deviance, prostitution, concubinage, gay quarters or harem life, venereal disease, homosexuality, eunuchs, fetishism, or paraphernalia. Neither is it a systematic comparative study of Western and Chinese sexuality or of the esoteric practices of China and other non-Western traditions such as India, Tibet or Japan. The focus of this work, then, is chiefly the written record of Chinese sexual yoga, which may be defined for the present as the practice of sexual intercourse for the purpose of intergender harmony, physical and psychological health, and ascended states or immortality. The introductory chapters attempt to place these sexual techniques in the larger context of medicine and esoteric macrobiotics and provide the reader with the conceptual tools necessary to crack the terminological code.

Judging from the bibliographic catalogues of the dynastic histories and references to sexual titles in secondary sources, the extant corpus is far outnumbered by the missing in action. The various works in this anthology survived through different strategies. The "Uniting Yin and Yang" and "Highest Tao" are time capsules recently recovered from a Han tomb after more than two millennia. The *Ishimpō* fragments, from which four of the classics in the second section of this collection were reconstructed, survived in the Imperial Library of Japan and returned to China at the beginning of the twentieth century after more than a thousand years in exile. Another group of texts, *The Prescriptions of Su Nü*, "Health Benefits of the Bedchamber," and "The Dangers and Benefits of Intercourse with Women," were granted asylum in the Chinese medical sanctuary, but the *True Classic of Perfect Union*, *Exposition of Cultivating the True Essence*, and *Wondrous Discourse of Su Nü* again were lost in the land of their nativity, surviving only under Japanese patronage. The sexual alchemy texts of Sun

hsing, all of them Ming, needed to survive only four centuries of secret circulation to be preserved for the present. The sixteen "paired practices" documents in this translation, spanning almost 2,000 years, allow us to approach with some confidence the task of understanding Chinese sexual self-cultivation from very nearly its inception to the present.

These works, essentially instructional manuals, may be analyzed from a number of different perspectives, but to judge them on their own terms would be simply to test them in the bedroom and evaluate their contribution to health, happiness, and enlightenment. To see these texts "through Chinese eyes," of course, is not the same as objectivity; and as the texts themselves reveal, there was more than one pair of "Chinese eyes." The Ma Wang tui manuscripts, dating from the early Han, show no hint of defensiveness, though later authors sometimes were openly apologetic. Chinese detractors—Confucian, Buddhist, and Taoist "pure practitioners"—condemned both the ethics and efficacy of sexual practices, and some Western critics undoubtedly will take exception to them on physiological, psychological, or moral grounds. Some will feel that Chinese sexual yoga elevates sex to the level of spirituality, and others that it degrades meditation to the level of masturbation.

Open-minded Western scholars such as Robert van Gulik have been sufficiently impressed with the basic rationality of Chinese sexual practices to pronounce them "normal and healthy." The empirical observation and analysis of human sexual response found in these documents sound positively "modern," and paradoxically, the earliest texts are among the most strictly "scientific" in their outlook. However, to express our admiration for Chinese sexual practices by appealing to Western scientific categories, as if these represented an absolute and objective standard of authority, is like praising Confucius or Lao tzu on the basis of their approximating Jesus. Issues of methodology and scholarly stance will be discussed at length in Chapter VI of this introduction, but suffice it to say here

that the Chinese have done for sex what they have done for the soybean. Taking the raw material of biology beyond the realm of simple stew, they have completely transformed it into a wide variety

of nourishing new forms. Confucius said, "Eating and sex illustrate our intrinsic natures"; and it is clear that from the point of view of East-West cultural diffusion, food was first but sex may well be next.

II. THE ETHOS OF CHINESE SEXUAL PRACTICE

The sexual beliefs and practices outlined in the texts in this collection express an ethos shaped by other elements in the culture—medicine, metaphysics, and meditation—but they have also contributed to these elements; as Kristofer Schipper states in his "Science, Magic, and Mystique of the Body": "Sexuality, far from being relegated to a clandestine and apocryphal sphere, is found to be the pivot of ideas and activities." These texts reflect an elite, even esoteric, tradition—based on *coitus reservatus* and multiple partners—but belief in the dangers of sexual excess and the benefits of what Charlotte Furth calls "mild continence" were the common property of all classes. To duplicate the Chinese recipe for sophisticated sex, however, we cannot simply subtract the ingredient of ejaculation from the mix, for this ignores the many cultural values that shaped the Chinese taste. With no attempt to ascribe direct causality, this section explores themes in the texts and clues in the wider culture that help explain the emergence in China of a unique and highly developed set of sexual practices.

Kristofer Schipper has identified three modes of conceptualization in Taoist literature: "the empirical, symbolic and theological." Corresponding to the first two of these, the "Empirical" and "Metaphysical" sections of this chapter look within the sexual literature for the inductive and deductive ideas that informed its development, whereas the remaining five sections examine some of the social factors and values that had an

impact on the sexual sphere and gave these texts their language and form.

The Empirical Ground

The empirical or inductive mode of conceptualization is very prominent in the sexual literature. Scientific observation in China, as elsewhere of course, takes place through a cultural filter, and then data are organized into a theoretical framework that reinforces more fundamental values in the culture. This section attempts to analyze the experiential foundations of sexual practices in China and the unique interpretation that the Chinese gave to them. Experience and interpretation are difficult to separate, but insofar as possible, our purpose here is to identify the Chinese response to the most objectifiable aspects of sexual experience.

The first formative datum of experience encountered in these classics is that energy is lost through ejaculation. Post-coital enervation impressed the ancient Chinese more than any heights achieved through orgasm. As the legendary P'eng Tsu states in the *Classic of Su Nü*, "When *ching* is emitted the whole body feels weary." Ejaculation brings enervation not relaxation, homeostatic holocaust not emotional catharsis. Detumescence of the penis is consistently analogized in these texts with death. In precisely parallel passages, the "Shih wen" and *Prescriptions of Su Nü* ask, "Why is it that the penis, which is born together with the

body, dies before it?" For the Chinese sexual ideologues there is no glory in fallen heroes. A paradigm of tension-release thus was rejected in favor of one of sufficiency-deficiency (*hsü shih* 虛實). The Yellow Emperor, summarizing the lessons of his sexual initiation in the *Classic of Su Nü*, concludes, "The essential teaching is to refrain from losing *ching* and treasure one's fluids." Because loss of semen depresses the body's entire energy economy, semen is seen as possessing a material (*ching-ye* 精液) and energetic (*ching-ch'i* 精氣) aspect. To use the oil-lamp metaphor of the "Health Benefits of the Bedchamber," "If the fuel is exhausted the flame expires"; however, if the semen is retained, the sexual energy will support superior health. Loss of any of the body's substance, in fact, including breath, saliva, sweat, flatulence, and menstrual blood is regarded as depleting, and even the religious saving and composting of fecal waste may be seen as part of the same conservative mentality. The soporific state following emission also may have inspired the conceptual link in medical theory of *ching* and will (*chih* 志), both associated with the urogenital system (*shen* 腎) and of the urogenital system and the brain.

Second, it was observed that the activation of sexual energy (*ching*) floods the entire system with positive vital energy (*ch'i*). The Ma Wang tui text, "Shih wen," calls this energy "divine wind" (*shen-feng* 神風), and the sexual liturgy of the *Shang-ch'ing huang-shu kuo-tu i* (Yellow book salvation ritual, a Shang-ch'ing scripture) often repeats the formula, "Yin and yang unite harmoniously and living *ch'i* flows throughout." The release of *ching-ch'i* into the system has a general tonic effect and the power, as the "Uniting Yin and Yang" states, "to open closures and unblock obstructions." Because *ch'i* is fundamental to the Chinese understanding of the nature of homeostatic health, it was natural that sex be given high points for its ability to promote *ch'i* circulation. These positive effects are immediately negated, however, if the energy elevated through sexual play is lost through ejaculation. It therefore was

necessary to make a yoga of sex, a system of techniques for simultaneously stimulating and conserving sexual energy. Therefore, *The Classic of Su Nü* and *Wondrous Discourse*, in discussing the benefits of sexual practice, both employ the compound *tao-yin* 導引, the traditional term for yoga.

Third is the experience that sexual potency declines with age. As the "Highest Tao" states, "By forty our sexual energy (*yin-ch'i* 陰氣) is halved." What ejaculation is to our short-term experience of *ching* loss, age is to our long-term experience, and both demonstrate the dependent relationship between that which has the power to create new life and our own moment-to-moment state of vitality. This observation led the physicians to conclude that sexual energy is a finite quantum in any organism, hence, as the "Shih wen" states, "What is lost must be supplemented." Taking this reasoning one step further, the inner alchemists believed that it is not age that causes sexual decline, but rather sexual mismanagement that causes aging. In the final stage of thinking, it was concluded that by suppressing the onset of puberty, the aging process itself could be defeated. Describing this state of suspended animation, the notes to the *True Transmission* say, "At this moment [fifteen years], the *ching-ch'i* is replete and the state of pure *Ch'ien* is realized. . . . If he receives enlightening instruction from an adept, then his foundation may be secured by itself."

Fourth, it was observed that ejaculation, although depleting physical reserves, has the opposite effect on sexual desire. After an immediate postcoital letdown, there is a rapid psychological rebound and an intensification of erotic interest. This sexual law of inertia, the tendency of a body in motion to remain in motion, or sexual addiction, is best expressed in the traditional medical metaphor of fire unchecked by water (*yin hsü huo wang* 陰虛火旺) and the Taoist aphorism, "when the *ching* is full one is free of lustful thoughts." It was noted that premature ejaculation (*tsao-hsieh* 早瀉), spermatorrhea (*hua-ching* 滑精), and nocturnal emissions (*meng-i* 夢遺)

were associated not with a high level of sexual energy but with deficiency, often resulting from what the *Classic of Su Nü* calls, "expenditure without restraint." Thus sexual prowess came to be defined not as the ability to expend semen but to save it. Certain herbs, yogic practices, and *coitus reservatus* itself can all contribute to "strengthening and stabilizing the *ching*" (*ku ching* 固精).

Fifth is the belief that sexual energy is capable of transfer from one organism to another, an opportunity to go beyond conservation to acquisition, as the *Summary of the Golden Elixir* states, "saving *ching* means saving one's own *ching*; accumulating *ch'i* means accumulating your partner's *ch'i*." When practicing *coitus reservatus*, as the "Health Benefits" points out, "Constant intercourse with the same woman results in a weakening of her *yin-ch'i*." It thus was assumed that the sexual energy released during the fission reaction of female orgasm could be "drunk" (*he* 喝), "consumed" (*shih* 食), or "inhaled" (*hsi* 吸) through the penis of the passive male partner who had learned the proper techniques of absorption. The logic of traditional energetics seemed to suggest, at least to the sexual school, that energy lost through sexual activity could be replaced most efficiently only by sexual energy itself: as the commentary to the *True Transmission* states, "If bamboo breaks, bamboo is used to repair it; if a human being suffers injury, another human being may be used to repair the damage." Lesser potencies of assimilable supplementation also may be absorbed from the woman's breath, saliva, or breasts. Sexual energy is considered a natural resource, to which, like other resources in traditional Chinese society, the elites enjoyed privileged access. Partners are chosen then on the criteria of looks, feel, freshness, and taste—like fruit in the marketplace. However, unlike the energy derived from food, the only limit placed on the amount of *ching-ch'i* that may be absorbed in a single fueling session is the availability of sources. For this reason, the *Secrets of the Jade Chamber* advises, "Even greater benefits are reaped by

frequently changing partners." Women are depleted significantly by orgasm and menses, but intolerably by childbirth; as the *Essentials of the Jade Chamber* states, "Choose women who have not yet given birth."

Sixth is the observation that the period from infancy to puberty is characterized by abundant *yang* energy (*ching-ch'i*) and an absence of seminal (or menstrual) leakage and sexual desire. This is the time of wholeness, of physiological integrity. If we would turn back the clock on aging (*fan-lao huan-t'ung* 返老還童), we must take youth as our model. This is expressed, perhaps, earliest in the *Lao tzu*, which states, "The infant knows nothing of male and female, but its penis erects. This is the height of *ching*." Here then is the innocent hardness (*yang*) that springs to life in the midst of supreme softness (*yin*). The alchemists, inner alchemists, and sexual alchemists all pursued strategies of supplementation to regain sexual essence lost through puberty and subsequent sexual activity; and the most radical "pure practitioners" (*ch'ing-hsiu* 清修) sought to head off puberty itself. Ming sexual alchemists became increasingly focused on capturing the partner's sexual essence just before the "flowers fall," and female solo practitioners declare in the words of the *Correct Methods of Women's Practice*, "Within the human body, pubescent essence is the source for cultivating life."

Seventh, abstinence from intercourse, whether voluntary or enforced, was observed to produce both psychological and physiological aberrations. Exceptions were very advanced age or a high level of yogic attainment. The *Classic of Su Nü* explains, "By abstaining from intercourse the spirit has no opportunity for expansiveness, and *yin* and *yang* are blocked and cut off from one another." Physiologically, abstainers were likely to find their sexual energy "die in its lair," as the *Secrets of the Jade Chamber* puts it, resulting in a general decline in vitality and longevity. Psychologically, frustrated sexual desire could lead to what the "Dangers and Benefits" calls "mental instability" (*i tung* 意動) or even seduction

by incubi (*kuei-chiao* 鬼交) and ultimately death. Abstinence, then, is as dangerous as indulgence. It should be noted, however, that the harmful effects of abstinence are attributed to deprivation of sexual contact and not of orgasm, although the early texts concede that repression in the face of repletion may be harmful as well.

Eighth, man's arousal time is faster than woman's, but his own passion is even faster than his physiology. Being *yang*, man is "easily moved and easily stilled," as the *Exposition* says; thus slow and complete arousal is as important when practicing *coitus reservatus* as on the rare occasions when one ejaculates. If it is normally harmful to emit semen, it is even more harmful before the whole system has warmed up. The "Highest Tao's" "three levels" and *Classic of Su Nü's* "four levels" correlate the size, hardness, and temperature of the penis during foreplay with the sequential arousal of such systems as skin, muscle, and bone. The disastrous consequences of incomplete arousal are among the sex related disorders detailed in such standard symptomology patterns as the "ten exhaustions" and "seven injuries." *Reservatus*, then, cannot be practiced in a passive state, for only with full arousal is the semen secure; as the *Classic of Su Nü* states, "When the four *ch'i* [of arousal] have arrived, and they are regulated by means of the *tao*, then one will not foolishly release the mechanism nor shed the *ching*."

Ninth, the mingling of sexual essences has the power to create new life; as the commentary to the *True Transmission* says, "A human being is endowed with father's *ching* and mother's blood, and from this his body is formed." Conception proves the existence of prenatal essence within the postnatal physical body. The importance of *ching* is experienced in a negative way in the aftermath of its loss and in a positive way through the pleasure of its stimulation and the strength of its preservation. Its power is preeminently manifest, however, in its role in procreation. The link between procreative potential and longevity is expressed

as early as the "Shih wen," which states, "If the penile *ch'i* fails to develop, there can be no reproduction. Therefore, long life depends completely on the penis." Restating this theme in the context of male-female relations, the *Exposition* declares, "When man and woman have intercourse, by practicing absorption long life is gained, and by ejaculating the womb is calmed and conception takes place." Through an inwardization of the concept of male fertility, there is a progression from the *Ishimpō's*, "obtaining offspring" to the "Dangers and Benefit's," "If the *ching* goes forth, it creates new life, but if it is retained, it gives life to one's own body," until finally reaching in the sexual alchemists the spiritual parthenogenesis of what the *True Transmission* calls "forming the holy fetus."

Tenth, not surprisingly it was observed that sexual compatibility is the foundation of conjugal harmony. The *Exposition of Cultivating the True Essence* says, "Without sexual intercourse there would be no way for man and woman to harmonize their feelings." Harmony requires a detailed understanding of the partner's emotional state and arousal rate; therefore, couples must monitor each other's responses, pace their own level of excitement, and actively promote their partner's pleasure. At very least, the man must delay his climax to adjust for the differential in arousal time between "fire and water" and to ensure the woman's full satisfaction. For the purpose of preserving his own health on most occasions the man should refrain from emission, but the *Classic of Su Nü* notes that avoidance of satiety also contributes to preserving long-term interest in a partner, "Although exercising self-control and calming the passion, love actually increases, and one remains unsatiated." Sexual felicity is a precondition not only for personal pleasure and mutual satisfaction, but for the family fortunes and progeny as well. The "Benefits of the Bedchamber" says, "If couples have intercourse in the proper way, they will be blessed with children who are fortunate, virtuous, wise and good. . . . The

way of the family will be daily more prosperous.”

To these primarily andocentric experiences of sexual energetics, Chinese sexologists added a series of observations based on female response. As early as the Ma Wang tui era, and continuing through the Ming, the woman was said to love “slowness” (*hsü* 徐) and “duration” (*chui* 久), and abhor “haste” (*chi* 急) and “violence” (*pao* 暴); all of which, for better or worse, have far-reaching physiological consequences. The woman expresses her desires through “sounds” (*yin* 音), “movements” (*tung* 動) and “signs” (*cheng* 徵 or *tao* 到). In her sexual responses she is compared to the element water, “slow to heat and slow to cool,” and in her fertility to the moon, which gave its name, *yüeh* 月, to the menses (*yüeh-ching* 月經, *yüeh-shih* 月事, or *yüeh-hsin* 月信). Her sexual satisfaction was considered an objective condition for timely conception and healthy offspring. Prolonged foreplay always is presented as the necessary precondition for orgasm, whereas orgasm itself always is accomplished through penile penetration. At the same time, she was subjected to rigorous scrutiny for the proper physical characteristics (*ju hsiang* 入相) and disqualified as a sexual partner, in some cases after puberty, after childbirth in others, but certainly no later than menopause.

The language of the sexual literature does not distinguish between “facts” based on the direct experience of the author, the collective experience of generations, or deductive extrapolations from theoretical models of traditional science or cosmology. That enervation follows ejaculation or that virility declines with age may seem nearly universal experiences of sexuality, but knowledge of the more rapid recovery time associated with frequent *reservatus* and occasional emission or the necessity of full arousal for seminal security may be accessible only to those, borrowing Sivin’s phrase, “in a heightened state of awareness.” Determination of the optimal days of female fertility as the first five after the last day of menstruation would seem to be the product of collective observation and cor-

respond quite closely with current Western thinking. Other beliefs, such as the consequences of conception at times contraindicated by astrology, geomancy, or meteorology (lightning produces insanity, thunder deafness, and so on) may be less a case of empiricism than biological “pathetic fallacy.”

The experiential crucible of Chinese sexual practices is best summarized by the legendary P’eng Tsu when he says in the *Classic of Su Nü*:

When *ching* is emitted the whole body feels weary. One suffers buzzing in the ears and drowsiness in the eyes; the throat is parched and the joints heavy. Although there is brief pleasure, in the end there is discomfort. If, however, one engages in sex without emission, then the strength of our *ch’i* will be more than sufficient and our bodies at ease. One’s hearing will be acute and vision clear. Although exercising self-control and calming the passion, love actually increases, and one remains unsatiated. How can this be considered unpleasurable?

The early sexual theorists concluded that orgasms past (and all orgasms are past in seconds) are not so sweet as sweet *ch’i* present. The whole of Chinese sexology may be seen in some sense as a response to the trauma of postejaculatory betrayal. The alternative esthetic of anticlimax they propose offers a solution to the dilemma so vividly portrayed in these texts as going to woman with a hunger and coming away with a hemorrhage, seeking to be full of her but becoming empty of oneself. In a passage in the “Shih wen” one might style, “the education of the penis,” the Emperor Shun declares: “One must love it and please it; educate it and reason with it, and give it food and drink. Cause its peak to be strong and employ it with slowness. It must be fed but not spent; it must be given pleasure but not ejaculate. In this way resources accumulate and *ch’i* is garnered.” Out of this developed a peculiarly Chinese brand of sexual epicureanism, requiring that one “know the white but maintain the black”—in sexual terms, an attitude of black *yin* coolness during the white heat of *yang* sexual combustion.

The drive to “plant one’s seed” (*chung* 9

tzu 種子), as important as that was in traditional Chinese society, became for some, less compelling than the desire to live forever. Learning from nature came to mean not repeating nature's mistakes, for if the exoteric process of nature is to bear fruit and die, then the esoteric reversal must be to withhold one's seed and thus preserve one's own life. Procreation may be nature's necessity, but immortality would be mankind's masterpiece. In some texts, the archetype of immortality is taken from the perpetual motion of the celestial spheres and in others from the biological processes of conception, gestation, and birth. In theory, the breach created by puberty could be repaired by limiting future leakage and by supplementation through absorption of female essence. The decision, then was made to shift investment from orgasm to the more profitable and sustainable feeling of strength and health associated with nonejaculation. Orgasm should not be compared with our normal state but rather with our postcoital condition, not the baseline of the curve with the peak but the baseline with the low point. *Coitus reservatus* is then experienced not as an unbearable itch or pressure, but fullness and vigor. Beyond this, the waters of *ching*, an unfailing source of primal sanguinity, could be used to irrigate the spirit.

Consistent with Taoist yoga or the internal martial arts, the emphasis in sexual practices is on arousing and circulating internal energy without engaging in kinetic overkill or allowing the energy to escape. There is an attempt to maximize the anabolic advantages of relaxation, oxygenation and circulation as against the catabolic disadvantages of oxygen debt, lactic acid build-up, and sweat. The concept of climax, so much a part of the Western artistic, athletic, and even religious esthetic, is replaced by a system of positive abstinence in which potential energy is valued over kinetic. An internal esthetic of sustainable whole-body positive *ch'i* replaces the localized and transient pleasure of erogenous titillation and muscular spasm.

Is the practice of *coitus reservatus* merely the logical solution, as many have

speculated, to the burdens of polygamy? If this were the case, we should expect to encounter countless cross-cultural parallels, particularly in view of the prevalence of polygamy throughout history and in widely scattered societies around the world. Although the practice of *reservatus* may be found in other cultures, nowhere else is there comparable evidence for its independent origination or is its theory so elaborated. In her counsel to the Yellow Emperor, the goddess Su Nü teaches that the two-edged sword of polygamous sex can cut either in the direction of burden or opportunity. As a practical matter, the techniques of *reservatus* may be applied to satisfying the sexual needs of many wives, but the motivation can hardly have been altruism or even expedience. After all, why acquire more wives if there is not something to be gained for oneself? Chinese landlords did not acquire more land simply to increase their responsibilities, and certainly the anticipated rewards of polygamy tended to evaporate if it merely increased the opportunities for loss. Somehow, theoretical dissonance resulting from the dilemma that greater consumption leads to greater loss had to be resolved. Whether the origins of polygamy can be explained by the theory of "absorbing sexual energy" (*ts'ai-pu* 採補), or whether the theory represents a resolution of contradictions inherent in the institution itself is a question best left for future studies.

The Metaphysical Ground

Were the sexual practitioners scientists in search of a theory or metaphysicians in search of a practice? In terms of their intellectual orientation, the Ma Wang tui, *Ishimpō*, medical and householder manuals leaned toward the former, whereas the sexual alchemists leaned toward the latter. Both were interested in changing the material conditions of life, and both continually generated theory to account for their experience and project new possibilities. The general theory of *yin* and *yang* was congenial to all sexual practitioners and left plenty of room to man-

ever as they struggled to square their theory with the facts of life and changing intellectual trends. Later, the Five Phases, trigrams and hexagrams, Stems and Branches, and so on, provided additional intellectual leverage for the sexual alchemists in constructing their theory. Sexual practice as an evolving system of thought will be analyzed in later sections of this Introduction, but here let us explore some of the fundamental intellectual issues confronting those who sought to make sex the solution to the problems of health and salvation. How many were won over to the sexual school by the force of its theory and how many by personal proclivity is a question that may be asked of any doctrine.

In the beginning was not the "Word," but cosmic sex, the mating of *Ch'ien* (The Creative) and *K'un* (The Receptive), heaven and earth. "One *yin* and one *yang* is called the *tao*," declares the *I ching*, "male and female mingle their *ching* and all creatures are born." It is no wonder, then, that echoing these words, the *Wondrous Discourse* reminds us, "The sexual union of man and woman is the *tao* of *yin* and *yang*." Sex is *yin* and *yang* in action; *yin* and *yang* are sex writ large. The sexual adept could no more enter the bedchamber free of centuries of cosmological baggage than could the connoisseur of art behold a painting in a vacuum. The followers of the sexual school of Taoism encouraged the development of a sexual sensibility that invested every act of coition, indeed, every organ, posture, and sensation with an indelible metaphysical significance. Man and woman are heaven and earth; heart and genitals are fire and water; sexual arousal is the rising sun. Cosmic configurations and celestial movements are reflected in the sex act. As a preparation for their mating, "the man sits on the woman's left and she on his right," for as the *Tung Hsüan tzu* continues, "heaven revolves to the left and earth spins to the right. . . , therefore, the man should revolve to the left and the woman to the right. . . . What is above acts, and what is below follows; this is the way of all things." The individual's role is not larger than life, but one could not

forget (even beneath the quilt) that it was certainly part of the larger life of the universe. As Kristofer Schipper observes in *Le Corps Taoïste*, "Its centrality in the cosmological concepts of *yin* and *yang* indicate, as Marcel Granet was fond of saying, that it was 'more sacred than we regard it!' Each union was taken as sanctified by heaven, and without the intervention of religion or political authority." Chinese sexual theoreticians had the audacity to believe that any metaphysics worth its salt should be valid in the bedroom, and one senses that much of Chinese metaphysics itself was actually inspired by the mundane physics of sex.

It was all well and good to define man and woman as the microcosmic embodiment of heaven and earth, and especially thereby to place man in the superior position, but the *Classic of Su Nü* could not avoid confronting two disquieting dissonances: female sexual superiority and human mortality. The *Classic* says, "Woman is superior to man in the same way that water is superior to fire," and "Because heaven and earth have attained the *tao* of union, they are eternal; because man and women have lost the *tao* of intercourse, they suffer the onset of early death." *Coitus reservatus* addressed the first crisis on a practical level by extending male stamina and, later, by substituting the trigram *Li* for fire, gave additional theoretical clarity to male "weakness in the middle," offering a logical source of supplementation in *K'an*, his mate.

Evening the odds in the "battle of the sexes" was one thing; matching the cosmic standard of longevity of heaven and earth was quite another. Chuang tzu's gentle, "merging with the processes of transformation of heaven, earth and all creation" might satisfy the mystics, and the "Dangers and Benefits" homely, "The *tao* of heaven and earth is to store its *ching* in the winter; if man can emulate this he can live a long time," might satisfy the physicians. However, some like P'eng Tsu, in the "Shih wen," envisioned an immortality both literal and personal, "*Yin* and *yang* do not die. . . thus are men of the *tao*." In the

same work, fellow Immortal, Jung Ch'eng, further elaborates this theory of cosmic mimesis:

The gentleman who desires long life must follow and observe the *tao* of heaven and earth. The *ch'i* of heaven waxes and wanes with the phases of the moon, and therefore it lives forever. The *ch'i* of earth alternates cold and hot with the seasons of the year; the difficult and the easy supplement each other. In this way, the earth endures without corruption. The gentleman must study the nature of heaven and earth and put this into practice with his own body.

No one could dispute that nature was the proper model for humanity, but deciphering her secrets proved to be a bit like interpreting "God's will."

Somehow heaven and earth conduct their relations so as to demonstrate a perfect conservation of matter and energy, or should we say *ch'i*, and thus achieve eternity. Human beings should expect no less of themselves. The spontaneity of sexual response, its independence from conscious will, which so disturbed St. Augustine, was taken by the Chinese as a sign of its naturalness, as the *Tung Hsüan tzu* says, "It is a natural response without the need for human effort." However, emulation of nature could not mean simply "doing what comes naturally." The urge to interact was natural; the urge to ejaculate was like overeating—too much of a good thing. The fact that heaven and earth "mated" without apparent loss to either side implied a kind of cosmic *coitus reservatus*. Human beings rarely arrive at this realization until well past puberty, when sexually speaking, they have already crossed into the postnatal (*hou-t'ien* 後天) realm; and it is for this reason that sexual disciplines are necessary.

The beginning of the *Wondrous Discourse*, echoing the *Su wen*, "Shang-ku t'ien-chen p'ien," speaks of a prehistoric period when every sage was a Methuselah, but even in the present age, immortality still is assumed to be a universal birthright. The universe as a whole possesses these pre- and postnatal aspects—one pure and permanent and

the other impure and impermanent—and so does every human being. The emphasis on pre- and postnatal dualism, which does not become prominent in the extant sexual literature until the Ming, helps finally to give theoretical justification for seeming to "go against" nature. By making use of the age-old Taoist concept of "reversal" (*fan* 返), it becomes possible to pull oneself upstream (*ni* 逆) against the current of postnatal nature and to soar with the power of pure *yang* into the prenatal paradise of infinity (*wu-chi* 無極). The inner alchemist's theory of the etheric fetus (*sheng-t'ai* 聖胎), of course, was tailor-made for the sexual practitioners, who could now explain male absorption of female *yang* essence as resulting in a form of spiritual pregnancy.

For the Taoist practitioner, the body is truly the laboratory of the spirit. While the Confucianists honored the body as an inheritance from the ancestors, the Taoists saw the body as a miniature heaven and earth. In matters of sex, both Confucianists and Taoists were more rational than romantic, however, although applying a strict cost-benefit analysis, they came to different conclusions. The Confucianists felt that marriage was too important a social institution to confuse with love, and the Taoists felt that sex was too powerful a spiritual crucible to corrupt with romance. The Confucian sexual mystery is immortality in one's progeny; to the Taoist it is the transformation of one's own body chemistry. The Confucianists take the family as the microcosm; the Taoists take the body. For the later Taoists, by a painstaking technical process of self-transformation, one could become a god, whereas for the Confucianists, a reasonably righteous life and filial descendants was sufficient to secure one's comfort in the other world. Both aspired to another world, but the Taoists did not want to die to get there. For the "paired practices" school of Taoism, it seemed logical to seek the source of life eternal in the "gate of birth" (*sheng-men* 生門), the female vagina.

Although there is a strong metaphysi-

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cal resonance to Chinese esoteric sex, this should not be confused with sexual mysticism. It may be possible to argue that the conscious enactment of the union of *yin* and *yang*, like, for example, self-identification with Shiva and Shakti, is mystical, but mysticism in the sense of experiencing the dissolution of self in other and bursting through to oneness with the divine does not describe the Chinese sexual ethos. In fact, only one expression of classical mystical experience is found in these texts, and it appears in the women's section. Ts'ui O Hsien tzu is quoted in a note to the *Queen Mother of the West's Ten Precepts on Women's Practice* as saying, "I forgot my own identity. . . . Suddenly I had another revelation and said, 'Heaven and earth are as one body with me.'" In "paired practice" sexual cultivation, however, over and over the man is warned to keep emotional distance from the woman, for what he is really seeking is fuel for his own journey. As for orgasm, it is not a flash of ecstasy that reveals our divine nature or potential for bliss, but a stupefying crash that leaves one dull and depleted.

The closest approximation of mystical longing in the sexual literature is a kind of metaphysical memory of the prenatal state of *wu-chi* (infinity), which preceded the division and interaction of *yin* and *yang*, a noumenal state above forms that one approaches by "transmuting the *ching* into *ch'i* and the *ch'i* into spirit, reverting to the void and becoming one with the *tao*." The goal of sexual cultivation is to isolate the prenatal aspect of each of the "Three Treasures"—the internal *ch'i*, the unexcited *ching*, and the desireless spirit. As the adage has it, "Speaking little preserves the *ch'i*; ejaculating little preserves the *ching*; worrying little preserves the spirit." The early Taoists were content with spiritual liberation in the midst of materiality, but the sexual yogi's ambition, if you will, was to develop sufficient escape velocity to leave the material plane. This was to be accomplished in a succession of booster phases by burning ever more refined physiological fuels.

The private Taoist citizen at times was tolerated and at other times persecuted for engaging in sexual practices; his writings were sometimes more or less freely circulated and sometimes very effectively censored. As late as the early Republican period, Yeh Te-hui, in van Gulik's words, was "branded with the *hic niger est*," for publishing the *Ishimpō* sexology classics, and the Ming *Tao tsang* barred any works on sexual yoga. Mass religious movements, featuring sexual rites as a means to health and salvation, flourished during periods of popular unrest, but were generally stamped out with the reestablishment of strong central authority. However, whereas sex as a spiritual or religious practice always was on the defensive and often driven underground, the public ideal of the Emperor, the embodiment of *Ch'ien* on earth, nourishing his *yang* energy through contact with countless ranks of wives and consorts, was a permanent institutionalized model of the efficacy of *coitus reservatus* and multiple partners.

Based on Marcel Granet's seminal study, *Le Polygynie Sororale et le Sororat dans la Chine Féodale* (1920), van Gulik summarizes the sexual ideology of imperial rule in these words:

In the human sphere the union of king and queen, the man and woman *par excellence*, epitomizes the balance of the positive and negative elements in the realm and the world. . . . Since the king has a maximum of *te*, he needs a large number of female partners to nourish and perpetuate it through sexual intercourse.

The orthodox ideology reinforced and even prescribed a regimen of self-strengthening sessions with wives of lower rank, culminating with full climax once a month with the Empress. The goal was both a heightening of imperial charisma and a eugenic pursuit of fit male heirs. The Emperor, ever jealous of his prerogatives, combed the countryside for the

most beautiful women. As the Emperor and his household were a kind of living museum of the most cherished values of the race, there was a constant tendency for the other members of the aristocracy to arrogate these privileges to themselves. Wang Mou, a twelfth century Confucian conservative, wrote in his *Yeh-k'o ts'ung-shu*, "Nowadays, the princes and nobility keep large numbers of consorts and concubines which they use as a kind of medicine in order to obtain the 'true essence' and thus to strengthen their vitality." Statuary in the form of Tantric "double deities," set up by the Mongol rulers in their Peking palaces during the thirteenth century, was still in evidence well into the Ming, when Shen Te-fu (1578-1642) says of these images in his *Pi-chou-chai yü-t'an*, "They represent pairs of Buddhas, richly adorned, embracing with their genitals touching." Shen tells us that their purpose was to instruct princes in the various methods of sexual congress, and thus answer on a grand scale to the sex manuals of private households. Hence, although the medieval court had no interest in popularizing sexual practices, as the absence of sexual titles from the official histories of the Yüan, Ming, and Ch'ing attests, they also could not help but preserve them in their very way of life.

Judging from the extant corpus and titles cited in secondary sources, the majority of works written during more tolerant periods and addressed primarily to the householder were written in the emperor-counselor dialogue form, whereas those written in a less liberal environment, or for restricted private readerships of connoisseurs (e.g., *Tung Hsuan tzu*), religious devotees (e.g., *Shang-ch'ing huang-shu kuo-tu i*), or serious adepts (e.g., *True Transmission*) adopt an alternative literary form or straightforward expository style. The mytho-imperial convention, then, seems to coincide with the more mainstream transmissions of sexual practices, whereas all other styles represent less sanctioned private practices. The reclusive Taoist was always regarded by the court as one who, so to speak, "sought salvation outside of

the Church" and, if he gained a reputation for perfecting any of the arts of longevity, was likely to receive an imperial summons. The biographies of adepts and immortals recount the various ruses employed to avoid the audience hall and the kiss of death of imperial favor. Perhaps the emperor-tutor dialogue form flattered the monarch's sense of self-importance and illustrated a willingness on the part of accomplished adepts to share the secrets of the sex arcana with him.

The Battle of the Sexes

Against a background of economic scarcity and the perception of sexual energy as a natural resource, the "battle of the sexes" in China took on a more than metaphoric significance. In Taoist circles, the sex act was called "the battle of stealing and strengthening" (*ts'ai-pu chih chan* 採補之戰), indicating in somewhat ominous terms the potential for increasing one's own treasury at the enemy's expense. Of course, the methods of engagement follow classical Taoist military strategy, which forbids storming the gates, but employs instead a series of feints and maneuvers designed to sap the enemy's resistance.

On the mythological plane, the initiated hero and his sex quest remained a literary convention from the Han to the Ming. In the "Uniting Yin and Yang," "The Highest Tao," and especially the "Shih wen," the cast of heroes and initiators, including mortals and immortals, is large but exclusively male. By the time of the *Ishimpō* texts, perhaps five centuries later, the Yellow Emperor and his trio of initiatrices have become the central story, and the Queen Mother of the West emerges as the patroness of would-be women adepts. The Yellow Emperor and Queen Mother never meet in the mythology, but the dramatic possibilities of such an encounter are intriguing to contemplate. The rise of Su Nü, Ts'ai Nü and Hsüan Nü does not necessarily signal an advance in gender equality during this period, for the earlier Ma Wang tui texts

are almost entirely free of theories prejudicial to women, although beauty contests, multiple female partners, and essence theft already have begun to creep into the *Ishimpō* material.

Metaphysically wedded to the paradigm of *yin* and *yang*, the Taoists were obliged to concede, in the words of the *Ch'ien-chün fang*, that "man cannot be without woman nor woman without man," for as the *Classic of Su Nü* says, "*yin* and *yang* require each other to function; thus when a man is excited he becomes hard and when a woman is moved she opens up." However, even the idea that health is impossible without sexual contact is never as lofty an ideal as "sprouting wings and ascending to heaven." Obviously such tensions could never be fully resolved in practice. *The History of the Former Han* calls sex, "The highest expression of natural feelings, the realm of the highest *tao*," but the *Secrets of the Jade Chamber* warns that, "Those who would cultivate their *yang* must not allow women to steal glimpses of this art." Even though the earlier texts do not turn away from the sensuous joys of sex, they also prefigure the planned obsolescence of the need for physical union between man and woman. In the oft-repeated legend, "The Yellow Emperor had relations with 1,200 women and ascended into heaven," the accent falls upon the ascension rather than the 1,200. The worldly obligation to produce progeny is dealt with somewhat grudgingly, and usually in the back pages, until it disappears altogether in the sexual alchemy texts. The "pure practices" school totally rejected carnal techniques in favor of the mystical marriage of male and female principles within the body of the meditator, and even the later "paired practices" adepts regarded relations with the opposite sex as an expedient to entering a paradise free of sexual desire.

The techniques described in these texts make it possible for the male to surmount his inherent handicap in the bedroom, to triumph over woman, who not only holds the power to bring forth life, but walks away so little diminished (or worse, unsatisfied) from the sex act. They

give him courage in the presence of his "enemy," who is "superior to man in the same way that water is superior to fire," and allow him to emerge strengthened from his bouts in the bedroom. For the patriarch of the polygamous household, outnumbered by the adult females, the one chink in his amour is closed, and he is able to uphold his *yang* dominance over the *yin* majority. Each act of coition with emission exposes his "Achilles heel" and saps his will to rule, but multiple contacts without ejaculation reinforce his right to dominance. Perhaps this is compensation or face saving, or perhaps a subconscious primitive fear of the death of *yang* observed in night, in winter and in solar eclipse? In China, male mastery of feminine libido was accomplished not by clitorrectomy as in some cultures, but by tapping female energy through *coitus reservatus*.

Once Taoist practices became focused on the pursuit of pure *yang*, then Taoism comes full circle and man once again is enjoined to "play the role of woman," to "play the guest" in sex. Outer *yang* is cultivated through activity, but inner *yang* prospers through passive inaction. Here, however, *yang* is not identified with the hard and aggressive as in the *Lao tzu* and *I ching*, but the light, the spiritual and the heavenly. The mutual longing of *yin* and *yang* for each other that marks the early sexual texts disappears in the writings of the sexual alchemists, who are concerned to steal a bit of masculine *yang* essence from the heart of *yin*, to repair the broken link, and return to the adamant state of pure *yang*. Woman now is defined as the most convenient source of prenatal *yang* energy. Theft of the feminine principle is philosophical Taoism's subtlest victory for the patriarchy; theft of masculine essence from the female body is the contribution of sexual alchemy.

The Cult of Youth

We are accustomed to thinking of China as a culture that respects age above all else, where status soars as the years

accumulate, somewhat softening the sting of old age. The Taoist ideal, however, has nothing to do with status and everything to do with youth. In fact, we might say that the Taoist ideal of eternal youth seeks the best of both worlds: a youthful glow on an old man. This is a common theme in popular iconography and a motif met with more than once in the sexual literature and art. We see, too, the glorification of the infant, the innocent adolescent, the virgin, and finally the fetus itself. The baby boy's spontaneous erections represent the innocent exuberance of the *ching*, the sweet sunrise of the *yang* force. For both sexes, prepubescence is a time not just of innocence but of sexual capital formation. The adept who guards his *ching* can hope to recapture both the function and appearance of adolescence. The higher adept retraces the fetal state by gestating a perfect etheric replica of himself. Nothing seemed more logical to the Taoists than the pursuit of immortality by the attainment of higher and higher states of health, "reversing the aging process and reverting to youth."

Finally, more than sympathetic magic favors partners of peak freshness, for the process of what the *Exposition of Cultivating the True Essence* calls "rejuvenation through grafting" is technique not merely metaphor. Modern man goes to bed with fears of contracting sexually transmitted diseases; the Taoists worried about losing their seminal assets, but also cherished the hope of capturing their partner's youthful essence. Something of the blush of youth rubs off through sexual transmission; as the *True Classic of Perfect Union* says of the Immortal Lü Tung-pin, "the more intimate he was with women, the higher his spirits." Even in solo practice, the adept is advised to gather the inner elixir while it is "fresh" and not yet "old." Youth indeed is the holy grail of Taoist science. If nature bestows it once, the means to reclaiming it a second time must be "available in every home." In sexual practices, the source of "eternal spring" (*yung-ch'un* 永春) is sought in the "springlike youth" (*ch'ing-ch'un* 青春) of young women.

Sexual Practices and Ethics

Confucius expressed his attitude toward sexuality with characteristic irony: "I have never seen a man who loved righteousness as much as sex," and Han Confucianists were already of two minds on the subject of sexual cultivation. The *History of the Former Han* editors were apparently sympathetic, for in commenting on the sexual titles in the "Bedroom Arts" bibliography, they note, "Those who abandon themselves [to sexual pleasure] pay no heed [to the precepts in the sex manuals], thus falling ill and harming their very lives." The *Po-hu t'ung* (Comprehensive discussions in the White Tiger Hall), a record of discussions on the Confucian classics held in 79 A.D., shows a similar atunement to the principles of sexual practices, reminding gentlemen of a concubine's right to regular sexual satisfaction "up to the age of fifty," and the necessity for men over seventy to resume sexual relations, "lest in sleeping alone they not be warm."

There were some skeptical voices in the Confucian camp, however, as rationalist, Wang Ch'ung (27-97 A.D.) protests in his *Lun heng*, "Ming-i," "Su Nü explained the method of the five females to the Yellow Emperor. This art not only brings physical harm to father and mother, but threatens the nature of sons and daughters." A thousand years later, Wang Mou in his *Yeh-k'o ts'ung-shu*, Chapter 29, again warned against the health hazards of sexual practices. However, when Wang laments that even the great Confucian champion, Han Yü, succumbed to sexual teachings, we cannot help but conclude that, in the main, sexual techniques were not seen as incompatible with Confucian values. *Coitus reservatus* could be reconciled with the Doctrine of the Mean, and the *History of the Former Han's* "pleasure with restraint" perfectly summarizes the Confucian position that moderation, rather than indulgence or repression of natural urges, was conducive to mental balance. Deprived of any sense that sex itself was sinful, and hardly defenders of equality

for women, the majority of Confucianists were not about to set themselves four-square against the sexual arts, particularly when these corresponded in principle with medical opinion and just might lead to immortality. Not until the Ming do the handbooks of sex disappear altogether from the official bibliographic catalogues, and the survival of sexual texts seems to have been most precarious during the Mongol and Manchu dynasties.

More serious objections than the Confucianists could muster came from the Buddhist quarter. Apart from the Tantrists, the Buddhists in general were less impressed that sexual practices might lead to the accumulation of *ch'i* than they were certain it would lead to the accumulation of *karma*. However, because of their own celibate stand, the Buddhists could no more attack these Taoist practices as a threat to the family than could polygamous Confucianists, who may have used these techniques to keep the peace at home. Again, given the low status of women in both Confucianism and Buddhism, neither could claim to be defenders of women against the biological raiding practiced by some Taoists. Ironically, rather than the Chinese Buddhists being influenced by native sexual disciplines, a segment of the Taoists from the fifth century on actually embraced celibacy to prevent the Buddhists from capturing the moral high ground in their rivalry. Though the terms "false teachings" (*wei-chiao* 偽教) and "heterodox teachings" (*hsieh-chiao* 邪教) are used in relation to the sexual arts, neither Confucian nor Buddhist arguments have the ring of profound moral outrage. The Buddhist notion that sex was sinful or attachment forming was no more acceptable to the majority of Confucianists than it was to any but the most quiescent Taoists.

The central problems for the sexual theoreticians themselves were practical not ethical: the depletion of female partners and the need for self-control. However, issues that assume the character of ethical dilemmas within the sexual school include the necessity of householders to maintain decorum (*li* 禮) in their

sexual relations and the ability of adepts to remain detached and avoid using *reservatus* to merely prolong earthly pleasures. The "Highest Tao" speaks of "excessive roughness and lack of decorum," which all the texts thereafter decry as harmful to the health of both partners and to their emotional bond. The *Wondrous Discourse* warns against the abuse of technical skill: "If this is taken as the secret of relations with creatures of red rough within the bedcurtains, then one will surely suffer the disaster of fanning the flame while reducing the oil." Nevertheless, whatever tension existed between the claims of technique and ethics was generally resolved in favor of technique, especially when immortality was the end that justified the means. Ethical prerequisites are conspicuously absent from the sexual literature, and even in women's solo cultivation, which consistently emphasizes the need for moral development in tandem with practice, we find as in the *Ten Precepts*, "It is not sufficient to be merely good; to attain immortality one must know the art." Because ethics were so closely associated in the minds of the Taoists with the conventional morality of the Confucianists, it is not surprising that they refused to let this stand in the way of their pursuit of the natural, or even as here, supernatural salvation through the techniques of physiological manipulation.

In the Author's Preface to the *True Transmission of the Golden Elixir*, Sun Ju-chung discusses an ethical dilemma that disturbed him prior to putting his father's teachings into writing. Although he hoped that publication of this esoteric lore would save it from extinction, he also agonized over its falling into the "wrong hands." In the early sexual literature, the wrong hands meant committing gender treason by sharing secrets with the "enemy," but for Sun the wrong hands meant, "those who were only interested in using this art to achieve physical health" and did not proceed to the great work of preparing the elixir. It is clear from the sincerity and urgency of Sun's tone that the pursuit of immortality carried the force of ethical imperative.

*The Sexology Classics as
Literature*

Taken together, the sexology classics are decidedly didactic, but hardly tedious technical manuals or dry scientific treatises. The original audience for these works, the literati, expected all information to arrive in a pleasing literary package. Dramatic dialogue, verse, and aphorism, as well as the balanced alternation of empirical and theoretical passages all are blended with special delicacy in the sexual literature. As long as the *Kama Sutra* and *Ars Amatoria* are revered as landmarks of world literature, it would be difficult to deny that status to the *Tung Hsüan tzu*, *True Classic of Perfect Union*, or "The Rootless Tree," where literary values have created lively works of lasting beauty. Some day the physiological poetry of Chinese self-cultivation may be recognized as a literary genre in its own right.

The Ma Wang tui and *Ishimpō* texts, representing the early phase of sexual practice, have the clean-edge carved-in-stone quality of classics that were made to last. The dialogue style of these works, reminiscent of the earliest medical classics, contributes to the aura of authority and antiquity. The texts of the third group, being derivative, are more pallid stylistically, and though the *Wondrous Discourse* of the middle Ming returns again to the Yellow Emperor-Su Nü dialogue form, it now merely is a format, giving structure but not life to the work. The texts of the sexual alchemists show a new burst of technical and theoretical innovation, and the pages fairly crawl with bizarre linguistic creatures. How much of the technical jargon of the later texts was a convenient scientific shorthand, how much was intended to put outsiders off the scent, and how much was read as a kind of premodern fantasy or science fiction are questions begging further study. Certainly not all readers of the *True Transmission* and Chang San-feng texts were prepared to follow the instructions to the letter, but many were undoubtedly entertained and perhaps inspired in the bedroom by the compelling language of the writing.

Donald Harper is perhaps the first scholar to look at the sexual texts within the context of literary tradition. I agree from a literary standpoint that the use of verse in the texts is intended to "enchant" the reader and facilitate recitation and memorization, having its origins in rhetoric and magico-religious incantation. At the same time I also concur with Isabelle Robinet's observation in her *Méditation Taoïste*, which although not specifically addressed to the sexual literature, applies equally well: "It appears that in their present form, the great classics are the product of the transcription and codification of a certain number of incantations, formulae, methods or techniques—called *chüeh*, *fa*, or *tao*." The sexual aphorisms (*chüeh* 訣), such as "nine shallow, one deep" (*chiu-ch'ien i-shen* 九淺一深), "arousal without emission" (*tung erh pu hsieh* 動而不瀉), or "enter dead, withdraw live" (*ssu ju sheng ch'u* 死入生出) are examples of language in its most distilled and potentized form. Intended to facilitate replication of experience, the *chüeh* are both mnemonic and mantra, altering the subjectivity of the practitioner to catalyze physiological transformation.

Harper, like many other scholars, frustrated by philological headaches in the sexual literature, insists that, "The 'Ho Yin Yang' verse represents the earliest example of cryptic poetry composed in order to conceal a technique in a secret code." Ascribing motives to ancient and anonymous Chinese authors is risky business. We have little enough evidence of reader response to the content of the texts, much less the language. Medical works of the same period are no less difficult for the uninitiated, nor are the sexual texts more difficult than the medical after their terminology has been mastered. Harper himself says of the Ma Wang tui sexual texts, "they do not constitute an isolated set of esoteric teachings." Is the language of physicists or lawyers deliberately hermetical, or rather an attempt to communicate with precision and economy to an initiated readership? I believe what we see in the sexual literature is simply the language of specialists.

III. SEXUAL PRACTICES AND MEDICINE

The medical corpus provides our first glimpse into the principles of Chinese sexual practice. The *Huang-ti nei-ching su-wen* and *Ling shu*, of perhaps the seventh to third centuries B.C., established conservation as the cornerstone of medical advice on sex. The *Su wen*, "Shang-ku t'ien-chen p'ien" decries, "entering the bedchamber in a drunken state and exhausting the *ching* through desire," and the *Ling shu* "Hsieh-ch'i tsang-fu ping-hsing p'ien" warns, "excessive sexual exhaustion injures the kidneys (*shen*, urogenital system)." An interesting case history of "sexual exhaustion" from this period is preserved in the historical annals of the *Tso chuan*:

The Ruler of Chin requested medical advice from the state of Ch'in. Duke Ching of Ch'in sent Physician Ho to see him. Physician Ho declared: "The illness is incurable for the cause may be found in your entering the women's quarters. . . ." The Duke asked, "Should women be avoided?" Physician Ho responded, "Simply be moderate."

Another pre-Ch'in historical and philosophical work, the *Lü-shih ch'un-ch'iu*, "Ch'ing-yü p'ien," expresses the concept of moderation in the form of a parable, "If one understands how to be sparing in one's early years, the *ching* will not be exhausted. If cold comes early in the autumn the winter will surely be warm. Much rain in the spring means summer drought." The principle of the conservation of sexual energy thus was firmly established during the period of the great philosophers and physicians several centuries before the Common Era. Echoes of this medical advice can be heard in the philosopher Chuang tzu's, "Do not agitate your *ching*" and the *Lieh tzu*'s, "Sickness arises from starvation, satiety and sexual desire."

Although sexual continence as a tenet of medicine appears as early as our earliest medical text, the *Su wen*, sexual practice as a special branch of learning

cannot be documented until the Ma Wang tui "Uniting Yin and Yang" and "Highest Tao" and the *Han shu*'s "Art of the Bedchamber" bibliography. The existence of separate sexual texts in the Ma Wang tui corpus and the level of codification and terminological sophistication they reveal suggests a period of development reaching back at least to the late Chou. Though we can say with certainty that by the second century B.C., the "art of the bedchamber" had established itself as an independent state sharing borders with medical science and the yogic practices of self-cultivation, the regulation of sex life remained an important aspect of medical theory and practice. From the pre-Ch'in *Su wen* and *Ling shu* to the late Han *Chin kwei* of Chang Chi (Chung-ching) and Sun Ssu-miao's *Ch'ien-chin i-fang* of the T'ang, we see a consistent emphasis on the role of *ching* conservation in promoting general health. Specialized works such as Chu Tan-hsi's *Se-yü p'ien* (On sexual desire) and Chao Hsien's *Kua yü* (On reducing desire) counsel not only moderation in conjugal relations but late marriage and extreme caution in one's declining years. Although mainstream medicine and esoteric sexual practice share a common emphasis on conservation, where the two part ways is that the former stresses minimizing contact and reducing desires, whereas the latter seeks to maximize contact to stimulate the *yang* principle and absorb sexual essence from female partners. A figure like the great T'ang physician Sun Ssu-miao was able to maintain one foot in each camp. In his *Ch'ien-chin i-fang* he put the conventional medical wisdom on continence in the mouth of the legendary Immortal, P'eng Tsu: "The superior man sleeps in a separate bed and the average under separate quilt. A hundred doses of medicine are not as good as sleeping by oneself. Satiety at night costs one day of life, intoxication one month, but sex a year." However, in his earlier *Ch'ien-chin yao-fang*, "Fang-chung pu-i"

(Benefits of the bedchamber) he described nearly every technique of the sexual alchemists, including the path of "returning the *ching*" and meditative visualizations for use during intercourse.

The most important concept shared by the medical and sexual traditions is *ching*. Western medicine regards sexuality largely in relation to the function of reproduction, but for the Chinese it is not only "what life comes from," as the *Ling shu* says, but in the words of the "Shih wen," "Nothing is more important for the *ch'i* of man than the *ching* of the penis." The theoretical primacy of the *ching* in medicine and sexual practices is illustrated in two Ming texts: Kung Yenhsien's medical classic, the *Shou-shih pao-yüan* and the anonymous *Wondrous Discourse of Su Nü*. Kung states, "We must not let the desires run wild or the *ching* will be exhausted. The *ching* must not become exhausted or primal purity dissipates. Therefore, *ching* generates *ch'i* and *ch'i* generates spirit." In parallel fashion the *Discourse* asserts, "The *tao* of cultivating life takes *ch'i* as its root. The *ch'i* can mobilize the blood and the blood can be transformed into *ching*. The *ching* can nourish the spirit." There also is agreement between these two works on the special importance of abstinence in adolescence and early manhood, the period when the *ching* is still fragile. As if with one voice, the *Shou-shih pao-yüan* warns, "If a man experiences his first emission too early this harms his *ching-ch'i*", and the *Discourse* cautions, "When a man is young his blood *ch'i* is not yet full and he must abstain from sex." Both medical and sexual practice serve the *ching*, but each in its own way.

If *ching* is the basic unit of sexual substance and energy, *shen* is the locus of its function. The term *shen*, often misleadingly translated "kidneys" or "renal system," is simultaneously a collective designation for the urogenital organs (kidneys and testes designated as "internal *shen*" and "external *shen*," respectively) and a network of interconnected systems of influence extending to include the brain, bones, and marrow, and at its outermost limit, the teeth and hair. Its

external orifices are the ears above and penis (or vagina) and anus below. Commenting on the significance of the *shen*'s anatomical location, the *Su wen*, "Chinkuei chen-yen lun," says, "The abdomen is *yin*, and the organ representing *yin* within *yin* is the *shen*." Another chapter, the "Liu-chieh tsang-hsiang lun" describes its special function, "The *shen* rules the root of hibernation and storage. It is the locus of the *ching*." The *Su wen*, "Hsüan-ming wu-ch'i p'ien," outlines the principal correspondences between the Five Viscera (heart, lungs, liver, spleen, and kidneys) and various external influences and internal interactions. The text explains that when the heart's fire is added to a deficiency in the *shen*, one experiences a feeling of "fearfulness" (*k'ung* 恐). This precisely describes the Yellow Emperor's condition in the opening paragraph of the *Classic of Su Nü* when he confesses his "fear of danger." The external secretion associated with the *shen* is saliva, and thus the *Exposition of Cultivating the True Essence*, Chapter 13, says, "The woman's 'upper peak' is called Red Lotus Peak. Its medicine is called 'jade spring.' . . . The man should lap it up with his tongue. . . . It nourishes the 'mysterious gate' (sexual organ) and fortifies the *tan-t'ien*." The *Su wen*, "Hsüan-ming wu-ch'i p'ien's" statement that, "afflictions of the *yang* principle manifest during the winter," explains the sexual aphorism's advice on coital frequency: "Thrice [a month] in spring, twice in summer, once in autumn, and none in winter." According to the *Su wen*, the aspect of human consciousness centered in the *shen* is "will" (*chih* 志), which explains postcoital enervation and lack of ambition in chronic *shen* deficiency. The relationship among the *shen*, brain, and ears helps to understand the emphasis in the sexual literature on "returning the *ching* to nourish the brain" and the "buzzing in the ears" associated with *ching* deficiency following emission.

The genital function of the *shen* has its *yin* and *yang* aspects. The *yin* aspect, considered postnatal and symbolized by the element water, is associated with semen; the *yang* aspect, considered prenatal and

symbolized by fire is associated with sexual energy. The theory of the pre- and postnatal aspects of the *shen* accounts for why the union of *yin* and *yang ching* (male and female) is necessary for conception, and yet the reproductive potential is not immediately operative in the offspring. The prenatal aspect of the *ching* passed on by the parents continues to guide the maturation of the offspring and is sustained by the “*ching* of water and grain” until the postnatal aspect reaches repletion at puberty. Because of the postnatal *ching*'s susceptibility to leakage, it poses a threat to the integrity of the prenatal *ching*, which now depends upon it, and indeed to the well-being of all the organs that look to the *shen* as a kind of reservoir of energy for the whole body. Of course, the heart, or “ruler” (*chün* 君) of the body is the supreme manifestation of the fire principle, but the “ministerial fire” (*hsiang-huo* 相火) of the *shen*, or “true fire within water,” earned for the *shen* the title of “lesser heart” (*hsiao-hsin* 小心). The seat of the sexual fire, or “true *yang*” (*chen-yang* 真陽), in the *shen* is called the “gate of life” (*ming-men* 命門), variously assigned in the classical literature to the right kidney or a point between the kidneys. The physiological alchemists, solo and sexual alike, referred to the “true *yang*” as “gold within water” and considered it the raw material of the elixir. For medicine, however, it is sufficient simply to preserve the balance of pre- and postnatal aspects of the *ching*, which may be accomplished by sexual continence and a tranquil mind.

Most of the primary classical definitions of *ching*, *shen*, and *ming-men* are more or less male biased, and it is necessary to cull fragmentary references to female sexuality in the general medical literature and specialized works on traditional gynecology. The *Su wen*, “Shangku t'ien-chen lun” explains:

At seven a woman's *shen-ch'i* is replete, her teeth change and hair grows. At twice seven she has reached maturity, her *Jen* meridian is open, her *Ch'ung* meridian full, and her menses flows at regular intervals. Now she is able to bear children. . . . At eight a man's *shen-ch'i* is full, his hair

grows and teeth change. At twice eight the *shen-ch'i* is replete, he reaches sexual maturity, and the *ching-ch'i* overflows. If *yin* and *yang* unite harmoniously, he is able to sire offspring.

This physiological account may be supplemented by an attempt at comparative anatomy from a treatise entitled *T'ai-hsi ken-chih yao-chüeh* found in the *Yün-chi ch'i-ch'ien*, Chapter 58:

The root and origin of the [primal *ch'i*] is opposite the navel, at the level of the nineteenth vertebra, in the space in front of the spine where it approaches the bladder from below. It is called the “stalk of life” (*ming-ti* 命蒂) “gate of life” (*ming-men* 命門), “root of life” (*ming-ken* 命根), or “abode of the *ching*” (*ching-shih* 精室). It is here that men store their semen and women their menstrual blood. This then is the source of the *ch'i* of long life and immortality.

It is axiomatic in Chinese medical parlance that “man is ruled by *ch'i* and woman by blood,” thus it is clear from the foregoing that the functional equivalent of the male *ching* for the female is blood. A woman's maturation and fertility are calculated in terms of blood, yet her transferable sexual energy in most of the sexual literature is referred to as *ching*. For the male, *ching*, orgasm, and conception coincide in one spasmodic event; for the female, blood, orgasm, and conception are not so neatly aligned. The *I ching* says, “Male and female mingle their *ching*.” But most medical texts describe conception as the meeting of *ching* and blood. The ovaries are not defined as such in Chinese medicine, much less the ovum, but both are subsumed under the categories of “womb” (*pao* 胞) and “blood.” For medical practitioners, the concept of the role of blood in female health and fertility was sufficient for most theoretical and practical purposes. However, for sexual practitioners, the object being absorption of sexual energy, the concept of blood must have proven exceedingly inconvenient.

In the early sexual literature and throughout the householder tradition, the focus was on female *ching* released

during orgasm without prescribing any schedule linked to her menstrual cycle; however, in the later sexual alchemy texts the menstrual cycle came to be used to calculate a woman's peak ripeness as an object of "medicine" gathering. Accompanying this shift in focus from orgasm to menses is a search for the *yang-ch'i* locked within the female body and an attempt to capture it before overripening into *yin* blood. Women's solo practices, too, seek to refine the "starlike heavenly treasure" before it degenerates into "red pearls" or the "red dragon." The literature of traditional Chinese gynecology is dominated by problems of menstruation, fertility, and childbearing, but two exceptions are the Ming *Wan-mi-chai fu-k'o* of Wan Ch'üan and the Ch'ing *Fu-k'o yü-ch'ih* of Shen Chin-ao, both of which provide detailed analysis of the stages of arousal, the signs of sexual satisfaction, and the symptoms of inappropriate sexual activity, which parallel the sexology classics in this collection.

The medical literature of *shen* dysfunction offers additional insights into the unique therapies recommended in the sexology classics. Medical theory generally attributes sexual dysfunction to deficiency syndrome in the *shen* sphere and, specifically, "deficiency of *yang*." The homeostasis of the *shen* is dependent on the complementary balance of water and fire, the "true *yin*" and "original *yang*." *Yang* deficiency of the *shen* allows the water to operate unchecked, resulting in the following symptoms: premature ejaculation, bloating, incontinence, and spontaneous sweating; *yin* deficiency allows the fire to operate unchecked and produces nocturnal emission, irritability, parched mouth, insomnia, and dizziness. To cure *yang* deficiency, traditional Chinese medicine addresses the *ch'i*; to cure *yin* deficiency it tonifies the blood. The medical syndrome known as "empty fire" (*hsü-huo* 虛火) explains the anomalous relationship between fire and water principles in the etiology of *shen* dysfunction: a deficiency of water brought about by excessive ejaculation actually allows the fire of sexual desire to rage unchecked

and results in a downward spiral of exhaustion. Thus in the medical literature, sexual excess (*fang-lao* 房勞) is seen as the chief threat to *shen* health and *ching* sufficiency. The Ma Wang tui and *Ishimpō* sexology texts share with the medical literature (e.g., *Chu-ping yüan-hou lun*, "Hsü-lao hou") the use of ejaculation analysis as a diagnostic indicator, usually referred to as the "seven injuries" (*ch'i-shang* 七傷). However, the sexual literature goes beyond the medical in tracing a host of illnesses to improper intercourse and in prescribing sexual yoga as a therapeutic modality. The sexual practitioners reject the conservative strategy of the physicians in treating *shen* deficiency, arguing that restriction may succeed in stemming *ching* loss, but the stagnant *ching* then will become moribund and unable to generate *ch'i* for the body. The "Dangers and Benefits" states the sexual school's position very succinctly: "By seeking to prevent the *ch'i* from becoming excited, they weaken their *yang* principle." This debate is reminiscent of the legend of Bodhidharma who is said to have introduced *kung-fu* exercises into the monastic routine of Shao-lin monks to offset the debilitating effects of sedentary meditation.

An interesting case study in the medical significance of sex-related conditions is revealed in the diaries of the late nineteenth century Manchu Emperor Kuang-hsü, who like many emperors experienced precocious sexual contact and hundred of wives and concubines vying for his favor. He recorded: "I have suffered from nocturnal emissions for twenty years. Ten years ago it would occur as many as ten times a month, but during the past ten years only two or three. Instances of emission without dreams or erection were especially serious during the winter." Here, then, is a perfect example of how, according to Chinese medical theory, spermatorrhea and nocturnal emissions are the result of deficiency and not repletion of *ching*, an instability resulting from the imbalance of fire and water. A similar confession appears in Chiang Wei-ch'iao's *Yin Shih tzu ching-*

tso fa (Master Yin Shih's meditation method), a widely circulated and influential work published in 1914. Correlating his poor health and sex-life, he says, "At twelve I began to masturbate and after habitual practice began to suffer nocturnal emissions, dizziness, waist pain, blurred vision, buzzing in the ears, and night sweats. . . . At twenty-two I was married. . . and was unable to control my sexual desire."

Because the practice of medicine is such a public affair, and because the corpus of received medical literature is so voluminous, it would be tempting to ask the question, What is the influence of medicine on sexual practices? However, the theoretical consonance of the Ma Wang tui medical and sexual texts, their equal level of development, the mixing of sexual and nonsexual modalities in some of the texts, and even their physical proximity on discovery point to a common lineage. That there already were specialized works on sexual practices by the early Han perhaps is natural, given the emphasis on sex life in health, and may be similar to the case of acupuncture and herbology, which existed as somewhat autonomous regions under a common constitution within the borders of medical science. Similarly, the juxtaposition of normal and paranormal health aspirations in the sexual literature parallels the situation of herbology, which at its outer fringe gave rise to the search for the external elixir of immortality, and acupuncture, which at its outer fringe inspired the belief that internal energy could be channeled and transformed to form the inner elixir.

Whether sexual practices should be traced as an independent movement; or whether it should be seen as a branch of medicine, yoga, or meditation or as part of a larger *yang-sheng* enterprise is open to question. What sexual practices share with medicine, for example, is not necessarily borrowed, but often seems to spring from a common matrix. Herbology attempts to influence our physiological

state through the digestive and circulatory systems; acupuncture and moxibustion through the meridians; yoga and meditation through the mind, musculature, and respiratory system; and sexual practices through the sex organs.

Though we have seen many examples of medicine and sexual practices sharing a common theoretical platform, it is rare to find a direct medical attack on the foundations of sexual practice. However, in this startlingly clinical analysis, the Ch'ing gynecologist, Shen Chin-ao says.

The *tao* of concentrating the *ching* consists of (1) reducing desires, (2) moderating intercourse, (3) stilling anger, (4) abstaining from alcohol, and (5) avoiding stimulating foods. Today, those who discuss health often mention gathering *yin* to supplement *yang* and prolonged sex without ejaculation. This is great nonsense! The *shen* is the center of the *ching*. Whenever man and woman have intercourse the *shen* is disturbed. As the *shen* is agitated the *ching* and blood will certainly be set in motion. Even if there is no external emission, the *ching* has already left its center. Even if one succeeds in restraining oneself, there are always a few drops of "true *ching*" which escape as the penis becomes limp. This is based on common experience. Just as fire produces smoke and flame, how could these return again to the log from which they spring?

The normally peaceful relations between medicine and sexual practice, based on a common concern for *ching* conservation, are shattered here by Shen Chin-ao, who denies any advantage to the *ching* resulting from sexual arousal and insists that stimulation, even without ejaculation, causes a tangible loss to the *ching*. Although Shen's argument is unusual in its thrust, it ultimately reinforces the very traditional medical and Taoist quietist positions that continence is the best medicine in sexual matters. This against the sexual school's conviction that an attenuated or homeopathic dose of sexual contact alone was capable of conferring immunity to leakage.

IV. SEXUAL PRACTICES AND TAOISM

The Position of Sexual Practices in Taoism

From the point of view of the official dynastic bibliographers, the association of sexual techniques and Taoism was not decisively accomplished until the Sung. After occupying a rubric of its own during the Han and sharing a section with "Medical Works" in the Sui and T'ang, sexual practices finally came to rest under "Taoist Works" in the *History of the Sung*. In fact, the Sung Taoist, Tseng Tsao, writing in his *Tao shu*, "Jung Ch'eng p'ien," associates the propagation of sexual teachings with "Taoist priests" (*fang-shih* 方士), who confuse the scholar class with teachings on the "battle of stealing sexual essences." Looking back to our earliest sexual texts, however, the "Uniting Yin and Yang" and "Highest Tao," apart from such expressions as "immortal" (*hsien* 仙) and "spiritual illumination" (*shen-ming* 神明), which strike us as distinctively Taoist, there is little else to indicate special philosophical affiliation. Even two hundred years later, in the first century of the Common Era, Wang Ch'ung tells us in his *Lun heng*, "Ming-i," that Su Nü transmitted the "method of the Five Females" without associating these practices with any philosophical school, despite ample opportunity to do so in the "Tao hsü" chapter devoted entirely to condemning Taoist macrobiotic techniques.

For Taoist alchemist, Ko Hung (283–363 A.D.), writing another two hundred years after Wang Ch'ung in his *Pao P'u tzu*, Chapter 8, sexual cultivation was enshrined as a desideratum in a trinity of fundamental techniques: "Those seeking immortality must perfect the absolute essentials. These consist of treasuring the *ching*, circulating the *ch'i*, and consuming the great medicine." For Ko, what it meant to be a Taoist in the fourth century was to be deadly serious about the busi-

ness of immortality, and he had very definite opinions about the role of sexual disciplines:

There are more than ten masters of the sexual arts. Some use them to cure injury, some to attack illness, some to strengthen the *yang* by absorbing *yin*, and some to achieve longevity. The essential teaching is to "return the *ching* to nourish the brain." This art has been orally transmitted from immortal to immortal without being recorded. Those who consume the most precious medicines, but fail to grasp the essentials of this art, cannot achieve long life. It is also the case that man cannot abstain from intercourse, for if *yin* and *yang* do not interact, this leads to diseases of obstruction. One becomes withdrawn and resentful, and thus sickly and short lived. Giving free rein to one's passions also shortens life, and thus only by restrained balance can one avoid harm. Without receiving the secret oral transmissions of the art, not one man in ten thousand can escape practicing this without injuring himself. The works of Hsüan [Nü], Su [Nü], Jung Ch'eng Kung, and P'eng Tsu record only the rough outline without committing the real secrets to writing. Those who desire immortality must conscientiously seek to discover it. My discussion here is based on the words of master Cheng Chun. They are for the benefit of future followers of the *tao* and are not merely personal conjecture. I have not myself exhausted the secrets of this art. One branch of Taoists seek solely by means of the art of intercourse to achieve immortality without preparing the medicine of the golden elixir. This is sheer folly!

From Ko's discussion, the only one of its kind from the pre-T'ang period, it is apparent that he accepted the general macrobiotic benefits of sex craft as set forth in the Ma Wang tui and *Ishimpō* literature. A confirmed alchemist, however, he saw the chief function of sexual techniques and yoga as extending life to "300 years," the range necessary for completing the true "golden elixir." For Ko, then, without sexual practice the best