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Authoring virile bodies: self-cultivation and textual production in early China

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ABSTRACT

The recently excavated Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan manuscripts have been instrumental in reconstructing early Chinese self-cultivation practices, such as meditation, calisthenics and sexual exercises, providing scholars with new information that was not preserved in the received literature. This article focuses on the production, dissemination, and use of these manuscripts and their role in promoting regimens of self-cultivation. Fusing two theoretical frameworks, the 'religio-medical marketplace' model and the 'supply-side religious economy' paradigm, with a close reading of excavated and received sources, I suggest that the production of these manuscripts can be seen as a component of a conscious strategy employed by 'masters of techniques' in their attempts to attract the patronage of elite customers in the religio-medical marketplace. This was done by employing a multifaceted approach: couching these manuscripts in familiar terminology and literary allusions, presenting the problems of their clientele, aging men, as solvable conditions, and limiting access to their texts and techniques in order to package them as luxury items. Uncovering the methodology and ideology behind the manufacturing of these manuscripts, I argue, allows us to determine the utility, pragmatics, and cultural practices embedded and reiterated in their narratives and shed new light on the role of textual production in the propagation of self-cultivation regimens in early China.

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Introduction

The Warring States period (453–211 BCE) is often described as the age of the 'Hundred Schools of Thought.' Motivated by the decline of the centralized Zhou regime and the increasing brutality of everyday life, early Chinese thinkers took it as their mission to offer possible solutions to this state of chaos. Their new ideas about the self and its relationships with social and political institutions subsequently found articulation in a growing corpus of literature. This intellectual awakening also produced a growingly sophisticated discourse on the topic of the human body and its cultivation, prompting some scholars to designate the fourth century BCE as China's 'discovery of the body' and as the 'bodily turn' in the development of classical Chinese thought.¹

Until the last few decades, attempts to outline the emergence of this discourse and the actors involved in its production were limited by the nature of the available primary sources. Descriptions of self-cultivation techniques, such as meditation, sexual practices and calisthenics in transmitted sources are rather fragmentary. In the *Mengzi* 孟子, for instance, we find a brief reference to the circulation of flood-like *qi* as a component of an overarching regimen of moral self-cultivation, but the author's description of this practice is lacking in detail.² Another Warring States text, the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, contains references to practices that seem meditative in nature: 'sitting and forgetting' (*zuo wang* 坐忘) and 'the purification of the mind' (*xin zhai* 心齋). Both techniques involve dimming sense perception and discarding emotions and desires in order to achieve an altered state of consciousness, but again, their particulars are not entirely clear.³ The most detailed account of seated meditation practices can be found in several chapters from the *Guanzi* 管子, an eclectic text traditionally believed to have been compiled in the state of Qi 齊 in the late Warring States period, most famously in an essay called the *Inward Training* (*Neiye* 內業). While not a meditation manual per se, the *Neiye* does include multiple references to body alignment, breathing exercises, and emptying one's mind. This has led some scholars, most notably Harold Roth, to argue that the text was a product of a single lineage that held spiritual self-cultivation through corporal practices as its main goal.⁴

While these examples point to the existence of a culture of self-cultivation in the mid- and late Warring States period, utilizing received sources to reconstruct specific practices can be problematic, as many of the passages describing such techniques take the form of a criticism. The *Zhuangzi*, for example, provides a reference to a regimen that involves breathing and calisthenics exercises and the expulsion and ingestions of *qi* 氣 designed to prolong one's natural lifespan, known as 'guiding and stretching' (*daoyin* 導引). This brief description, however, is followed by an immediate denouncement of such practices as incomplete and inferior to the author's own rival techniques of 'nourishing the spirit' (*yangshen* 養神) and 'guarding the spirit' (*shoushen* 守神), a fact which might lead a cautious reader to take previous depictions of 'guiding and pulling' exercises with a grain of salt.⁵ Fortunately, recent archaeological excavations have unearthed a large number of manuscripts that belong to a different literary genre – technical literature. These include medical recipes, prognostication and divination manuals, demon-quelling techniques, ritual instructions, and self-cultivation regimens, which offer us a glimpse into the realm of religious adepts, astrologers, physicians, and diviners, whose writings played a significant role in the shaping of Warring States and Qin-Han intellectual culture.⁶

Two archaeological sites in particular contain a plethora of excavated manuscripts pertaining to the cultivation of the human body. Excavated in the 1970s and 1980s, the tombs in Mawangdui 馬王堆 in modern-day Hunan Province and Zhangjiashan 張家山 in modern-day Hubei, held multiple technical manuals.⁷ Sealed in the early decades of the Han Dynasty (168 and 186 BCE respectively), the dating and authorship of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan self-cultivation manuscripts are a matter of scholarly debate. Chemical analysis reveals that the tombs were both sealed in the first half of the second century BCE, but an examination of various linguistic components suggests that the manuscripts might have been produced earlier and copied in different times by different scribes. Based on an analysis of the script and the use of taboo words, Donald

Harper argues that the Mawangdui texts were copied between 220 and 168 BCE, roughly the same period in which, according to Peng Hao and Vivienne Lo's assessment, the Zhangjiashan texts were compiled. Most scholars, however, agree that these manuscripts reflect a textual corpus that was already circulating as early as the third century BCE.⁸

Widely recognized as a turning point in the study of early China, some scholars have gone so far as to argue that the information contained within the excavated manuscripts requires us to reassess everything we know about early Chinese intellectual history.⁹ Attempts to match excavated manuscripts with known figures and lost texts mentioned in the bibliographical treatises of official histories have led to the rise of a booming cottage industry, largely in Mainland China.¹⁰ Particularly important here, exploring the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan corpuses, scholars have identified the earliest stages of what would later become one of the main tenets of Chinese religious practice: the cultivation of the body and the attainment of longevity. Beginning in the 1980s, scholars including Anna Seidel and Yamada Toshiaki suggested that many of the practices found in medieval Daoist texts could be traced back to the early imperial or even the pre-Qin periods.¹¹ The discovery of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan manuscripts has reinforced this position, providing information about the early stages in the development of various self-cultivation techniques, from calisthenics and dietary regimens to sexual practices.¹² In addition, historians of medicine such as Donald Harper and Vivienne Lo have offered new readings of excavated manuscripts that place them against the backdrop of canonical texts in order to produce a more nuanced outline of the development of classical Chinese medicine, revealing the diversity of early Chinese religious and regional healing techniques and the existence of a flourishing culture of macrobiotic hygiene in early China.¹³

Despite these efforts, however, many questions about the authorship, production, and dissemination of these manuscripts still remain unanswered. Authorship, for example, is a highly controversial topic in the study of early Chinese texts. While the provenance and approximate dating of excavated sources can be determined with some degree of accuracy, especially when they are compared with transmitted texts, in most cases these materials do not contain their author's name.¹⁴ Faced with these challenges, contemporary scholars adopt two main approaches. The first, utilized by many of the individuals mentioned above, treats these sources as repositories of ideas, and reads them against the received literature in order to offer a richer account of Chinese philosophy, religion and medicine. The second approach involves putting a greater emphasis on the materiality of excavated manuscripts in an attempt to determine the reasons for their production and the identity of their authors, as well as readers. Texts, argue the proponents of this approach, are not simply containers of ideas but products of social realities and contexts of transmission, their meaning largely determined by their pragmatic functions.¹⁵

Drawing inspiration from the latter position, this article attempts to understand the production, dissemination and utilization of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan manuscripts. A pair of theoretical models provides help in fleshing out the meaning of these primary sources. The first is the 'religio-medical-marketplace' paradigm that has been used by historians of China to map out the development of healing and self-cultivation techniques in the early medieval period. The second is the notion of a 'supply-based

religious economy' that has been utilized productively by sociologists of religion to discuss the emergence of new religious movements in contemporary North America. Fusing these models with a close reading of excavated and received sources, I will attempt to offer a persuasive working hypothesis regarding the utility, pragmatics and cultural practices embedded and reiterated in these narratives and shed new light on the role of textual production in the propagation of self-cultivation regimens in early China.

Religio-medical market economies

The term 'religio-medical marketplace,' which is currently used to explain the intricate context in which various techniques of healing and self-cultivation were produced, exchanged, and discussed in early medieval China, was first put into use by C. Pierce Salguero in his study of the translation of early Buddhist scripture. Defined as 'the competitive social environment in which healing specialists contended for patronage and cultural capital,' Salguero primarily used this term as an analytical tool to explicate the efforts of Buddhist translators in introducing their healing approaches to a Chinese audience. Michael Stanley-Baker picks up this term, which he then describes as a field of 'discursive and economic competition' comprised of diverse actors attempting to assert the supremacy of their own technologies of cure and salvation over that of their rivals, to analyze the role of therapeutics in the formation of Daoist beliefs and practices in the early medieval period. Stanley-Baker's work endeavors to go beyond well-heeled categories such as the religion-science dichotomy or the classification of Daoist religion into distinct sects, and to instead investigate the various strategies employed by individual actors to 'negotiate their ideological, institutional, social and physiological concerns.'¹⁶

The Warring States period is known as a time of great intellectual fermentation and the actors involved in it have previously been characterized as 'merchants of ideas.'¹⁷ The religio-medical marketplace paradigm thus offers us a solid methodological framework to discuss the production of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiaoshan self-cultivation manuscripts. But, in order to utilize this paradigm in a constructive manner, we must first understand the basic mechanism that drives its operation, namely: how do ideas, beliefs, and practices emerge? What causes some of them to prosper and others to die out? Who are the actors that participate in this marketplace? To answer these questions, I will draw on a model of religious economy developed by sociologists Rodney Stark and Roger Finke, which argues that all social systems have a distinctive subsystem of supply and demand that governs religious activity. This subsystem, which they call 'a religious economy,' includes a pool of current and prospective members, one or more organizations seeking to attract or maintain the support of these members, and a shared set of ideas, beliefs, and practices that can be used to accomplish this task. According to this paradigm, changes in religious preferences can be explained in two different ways. The first model, which Stark and Finke identify as the paradigm traditionally used by scholars of religion, argues that new ideas and practices emerge as a response to shifting demands, as members begin to develop unmet needs and turn to religious institutions to meet them. The second model, advocated by Stark and Finke themselves, argues that religious economies consist of relatively stable market niches. People, they argue, do not tend to suddenly develop new needs. Instead, it is individuals and organizations who

create and disseminate fresh ideas and practices as part of their attempts to enter an already established niche in the marketplace. Moreover, their ability to tap into an unserved or underserved niche thereby displacing their competition determines their level of success.¹⁸

Critics of Stark and Finke's supply-side model of religious economy have argued that this paradigm is not that different from the old paradigm they so vehemently oppose, as it overlooks regional and cultural differences in an attempt to offer a universal theory of religion.¹⁹ However, I believe that if applied responsibly, it can open up exciting new ways to understand the early Chinese religio-medical marketplace. In the past, the emergence of self-cultivation practices in the fourth and third centuries BCE has been explained by a shift in demand, the result of the decline of the Zhou regime and the sociopolitical and religious order it represented. This change created a fundamental need for religious innovation, which in turn resulted in the production of new cosmological and philosophical schemes that aimed to redefine the relationship between the human and divine realms.²⁰

In this article, however, I will offer a different take on this phenomenon, emphasizing the role of individual agents and the texts they produced in the propagation of religious innovation. In doing so, I will attempt to avoid the traditional assignation of certain ideas to philosophical 'schools of thought' and instead stress the role of agents whose work was not preserved in the transmitted canon but who were nonetheless an integral part of the Warring States intellectual scene. Drawing on Donald Harper's comprehensive study of the culture of self-cultivation that arises from the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan corpuses, I will move forward based on the working hypothesis that these manuscripts were produced by a loose group of actors, whom I will refer to as 'masters of techniques,' or 'technical masters,' that operated in the same cultural and intellectual space as their philosophical counterparts.²¹ While I acknowledge that we do not know if those actors belonged to a cohesive social class or a distinct community with a shared sense of identity, I will argue that we do know that the texts they produced drew from the same pool of ideas, metaphors, and terminology as the ones produced by the philosophical masters. Moreover, much like the philosophical masters, the technical masters were engaged in the art of persuasion, trying to prove the supremacy of their methods over the ones advocated by their rivals.²²

In the following pages, I will offer a new reading of several key passages from the Zhangjiashan *Yinshu* 引書 (*Stretching Book*) and the Mawangdui texts the *Shiwen* 十問 (Ten Questions) and *Tianxia Zhidao Tan* 天下至道談 (Discussion of the Culminant Way of All under Heaven) against the backdrop of a supply-side model of religious economy. These examples, I will argue, suggest that the technical masters were engaged in an attempt to penetrate a particularly lucrative niche in the marketplace, namely affluent and educated members of the elite that had the time and resources to devote to their own self-cultivation. In order to do so, they employed a multifaceted strategy comprised of three interrelated components: the use of literary devices designed to attract an elite readership, the construction of a new discourse on the human body that presented the common problems of their target audience, mainly aging men, as solvable conditions, and the deliberate esotericization of their texts and techniques in order to present them as luxury items and markers of cultural prestige.

The homophily principle: attracting elite readership

One of the main salient points of Stark and Finke's model of religious economies is the relative stability of the various market niches of potential adherents. People, they argue, are creatures of habit, reluctant to leave the security of their group in favor of new beliefs and practices. Moreover, even if they opt to leave their pack in favor of a new organization, they still tend to associate with those they perceive to be similar to themselves in social status and cultural preferences. This phenomenon, which Stark and Finke label the 'homophily principle,' dictates the way new groups try to enter an already established religious marketplace and their eventual success depends on their ability to tread the thin line between familiarity and uniqueness. While some groups consciously appeal to marginalized sectors by emphasizing the tension between their beliefs and practices and mainstream societal norms, most new organizations begin by opting for a more conventional approach, trying to appear as congruent as possible with established preferences.²³

The homophily principle offers us a new way of reading the self-cultivation manuscripts produced in the third and second centuries BCE. Addressing educated affluent elites, the authors had to make sure that their novel techniques were accompanied by literary forms and tropes that appealed to the cultural sensibilities of their audience, such as references to cultural exemplars and the use of common structures such as the dialogue form. One of the most apparent features of the techniques described in the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan manuscripts is their association with certain exemplary figures. A good example is the *Shiwen*, a text comprised of 10 dialogues in which mythical sovereigns such as Yao 堯, Shun 舜, Yu 禹, and the Yellow Emperor 黃帝 ask their personal physicians and advisors about the self-cultivation methods and the philosophy behind them. The dialogue is, of course, one of the basic literary forms in early Chinese literature. Some texts, such as the *Lunyu* 論語 (The Analects), *Mozi* 墨子, and the *Mengzi*, were written almost entirely in dialogue. Others, such as *Xunzi* 荀子 and the *Zhuangzi*, embed dialogues between exemplary figures within their philosophical arguments to lend them an aura of authority.²⁴ The formal structure of the *Shiwen* would thus be quite familiar to the educated reader, as well as the exemplary figures featured in it.

The fifth dialogue, for example, features a conversation between Yao and Shun, two of the most well-known paragons of rulership in Chinese history. The rhetorical use of a conversation between the two can be found in other early texts. In the 'Human Nature is Bad' (*Xing'e* 性惡) chapter of the *Xunzi*, for example, the author uses Shun's answer to Yao's query about human dispositions to advocate his own theory of ethical self-cultivation. In the *Zhuangzi*, on the other hand, an interchange between Yao and Shun is used in the 'Way of Heaven' (*Tiandao* 天道) chapter to promote the author's image of the ideal ruler as a sagely figure that transcends human values and instead models his behavior on the patterns of Heaven and Earth.²⁵ In the *Shiwen*, while this basic structure is maintained, the content of the conversation between the two revolves around the loss of male sexual potency and entails a detailed regimen of sexual cultivation titled 'Shun's technique for *yin* intercourse and regulating *qi* 舜之接陰治氣之道.'²⁶

The same pattern recurs in the first four dialogues of the *Shiwen*, which all feature the Yellow Emperor asking various advisors general questions about the nature of life and death and the physiological make-up of humans. While his conversation partner in the third dialogue, Cao Ao 曹熬, is not attested in the received literature, the remaining three are well-known figures. Various received sources identify the protagonist of the second dialogue, Great Perfection (Dacheng 大成) as the teacher of the mythical Yu the Great, the flood-tamer, including the *Lüshi Chunqiu* 呂氏春秋 (The Spring and Autumn Annals of Master Lü).²⁷

The first conversation partner, who is addressed as the Heavenly Teacher (*tianshi* 天師), also features prominently as the Yellow Emperor's conversation partner in one of the classical Han works of traditional Chinese medicine preserved in the received canon, the *Huangdi Neijing Suwen* 黃帝內經素問 (The Basic Questions of the Yellow Emperor's Inner Canon).²⁸ In the first chapter, 'Discourse on the Divine Perfection of High Antiquity' (*Shanggu Tianzhen Lun* 上古天真論), the Yellow Emperor asks the Heavenly Teacher about the difference in the physiological make-up between the people of antiquity and people today. The following lines refer to the respondent as Qi Bo 岐伯, leading the Tang dynasty commentator Wang Bing 王冰 to claim that the Heavenly Teacher is simply his title. The close relationship between the Yellow Emperor and Qi Bo, as well as their association with the technical arts, is further attested in the bibliographical 'Yiwen Zhi 藝文志' chapter of the *Hanshu* 漢書 (History of the Han), in the form of a reference to a now-lost text called the *Massage [Techniques] of the Yellow Emperor and Qi Bo* 黃帝岐伯按摩 and the designation of Qi Bo as one of high antiquity's foremost masters of recipes and techniques (*fangzhi* 方技).²⁹

Similar to the Yellow Emperor, his fourth conversation partner, Rong Cheng 容成, is a sagely figure from the ancient past.³⁰ The earliest reference to this figure in the received canon can be found in the *Zhuangzi*, where he is mentioned alongside mythical bearers of culture such as Fu Xi 伏羲 and the Divine Farmer Shennong 神農 as one of the 12 sage rulers of high antiquity. Unlike the Yellow Emperor, however, Rong Cheng is not associated with medicine or self-cultivation but with the passage of time, as the inventor of the calendar.³¹ The *Shiwen* most fully develops Rong Cheng's association with time, especially his control over time, presenting him offering a theory of aging and providing the Yellow Emperor with a technique that will allow him to prolong his natural lifespan.³²

Finally, another mythical character that makes an appearance in the *Shiwen* is Ancestor Peng 彭祖, the figure most often associated with the notion of longevity in early China. In addition to being mentioned in numerous sources as a paragon of old age,³³ masters of techniques often used the figure of Ancestor Peng to add a degree of authority to their self-cultivation regimens. The *Zhuangzi* states that followers of the 'guiding and stretching' techniques take Ancestor Peng as their role model. The opening section of the *Yinshu* reiterates this notion in a passage identifying the basic regimen of creating concordance between the practitioner's bodily cycles and the cycles of nature as the 'Way of Ancestor Peng 彭祖之道也'.³⁴ Similarly, the author of the *Xunzi* criticizes practitioners of 'nourishing life' techniques and offers his own regimen of moral self-cultivation that will allow its followers to live longer than Ancestor Peng.³⁵ The *Shiwen* pairs Ancestor Peng with yet another mythical figure, Wangzi Qiaofu 王子喬父 (also known as Wang Qiao 王喬), discussing a sexual technique designed to

prolong the adept's life. While the latter is not associated directly with longevity, several early sources, such as the *Chuci* 楚辭 (*Songs of Chu*) and the *Huainanzi*, describe him as a mythical figure who was able to achieve supernatural powers as a result of his self-cultivation.³⁶

The use of mythical figures was a common literary technique in early Chinese literature. By presenting their ideas through dialogues between such familiar figures as the Yellow Emperor, Yao and Shun, Rong Cheng, and Ancestor Peng, the compilers of the *Shiwen* would have made their text more palatable to some educated elite readers. In addition to lending their manuscript a sense of familiarity, this literary device also associated a self-cultivation technique with established figures of authority, some of them already identified in the third and second century cultural milieu with issues of longevity, manipulation of time, and health. This allowed them to pursue their main goal – the construction of a new mode of discourse on the human body that presented the common problems of their target audience, aging men, as treatable conditions.

Defying aging and restoring vigor: cultivating the male body

As in all economic systems, securing one's position in the early Chinese religio-medical marketplace was not an easy task. According to Stark and Finke's paradigm, when new religious firms try to break into an existing scene, their level of success mostly depends on the conditions of the market, namely the variety of existing religious groups, the efficiency of their services, and the appeal they represent. Any chance of success ultimately lies in the ability of the new group to study the market and identify the appropriate niche into which they would then insert themselves. In many cases, however, in order to create a need for a certain service, one has to produce a new discourse that transforms a previously natural condition into a chronic yet treatable disorder.³⁷

Applying Stark and Finke's model, I would argue, allows us to see the late Warring States 'bodily turn,' namely the emergence of a theoretical discourse on the human body, not as a response to a shift in demand but as a conscious attempt by the technical masters to instigate a shift in supply and break into one of the most lucrative and prestigious market niches – educated affluent male elites. These efforts were accompanied by the production of texts in which they redefined the problems afflicting aging men, such as lack of energy and a loss of virility, as treatable conditions that can be cured by a strict adherence to their regimes of self-cultivation.³⁸ Given the cross-fertilization of ideas between the technical and philosophical masters, this discourse was also manifested in the received canon in works such as the *Laozi*, the *Zhuangzi* and the *Xunzi*. The fact that technical manuscripts were not preserved in the canon, leaves the impression that this was a wholly philosophical discourse. The discovery of the Mawangdui, Zhangjiashan, and other excavated sources, however, allows us to better ascertain the role of masters of techniques in the development of early theories of the human body and its cultivation.

One of the key steps in attracting the attention of a desirable market niche is identifying a common issue that might be insufficiently addressed by other religious and social firms. In reading the *Shiwen* and the *Tianxia Zhidao Tan*, we can see that the issue in question is the process of aging and it accompanying ailments, especially the

loss of sexual virility. Consider, for example, the following dialogue, told through the mouths of two iconic exemplars of longevity, Wangzi Qiao and Ancestor Peng:

Wangzi Qiaofu asked Ancestor Peng: 'Of the *qi* of man, which is the most essential?' Ancestor Peng replied: 'Of the *qi* of man, none can compare with penile essence. When penile *qi* is congested and clogged, the hundred vessels produce illness. When penile *qi* is insufficient, you cannot procreate. Thus, [the key for obtaining] longevity lies entirely with the penis.'⁴⁰

王子喬父問彭祖曰：「人氣何是為精乎？」彭祖答曰：「人氣莫如脬精。脬氣鬱閉，百脈生疾。脬氣不成，不能繁生，故壽盡在脬。」³⁹

Focusing on the male sexual potency and identifying the male sex organ as the key component in the quest of longevity and health can be construed as a calculated move by the authors, as it creates a strong link between the male body and their gendered regimen of self-cultivation. The problem, of course, is that male sexual potency tends to decrease with age. The opening paragraph of the *Tianxia Zhidao Tan* explains this natural process:

The Yellow Spirit asked the Left Spirit:⁴² 'Why is it that the *yin* [i.e. the penis] is born together with the nine apertures and twelve joints, yet it alone dies prematurely?'⁴³ The Left Spirit replied: 'It is not utilized in strenuous activity; when there is sorrow and joy it is not used; it is not involved in drinking and eating. It dwells in deepest darkness and does not see the light of day, yet it is employed in a sudden and abrupt fashion, with no regard to its state of arousal. Unable to withstand the 'double hotness,' it is therefore severely hurt. Its name is avoided and its body concealed, yet it is employed very frequently and unceremoniously. Therefore it is born together with the body, yet it alone dies prematurely.'⁴⁴

黃神問于左神曰：「陰陽九竅十二節俱生而獨先死，何也？」左神曰：「力事弗使，哀樂弗以，飲食弗右，其居甚陰而不見陽，猝而暴用，不待其壯，不忍兩熱，是故亟傷。諱其名，匿其體，至多暴事而無禮，是故与身俱生而獨先死。」⁴¹

The *yin*, which is born with the rest of the body but is one of the first to stop functioning properly, is the male sex organ. Buried in one's clothing, never to be mentioned in society, it still occupies the minds of every man, as procreation and the pursuit of sexual pleasure are defining human characteristics.⁴⁵ 'What all men enjoy without exception,' argues the author of this text only a few lines later, 'are women.'⁴⁶ Yet, as male bodies age, certain changes begin, chief among them is the issue of impotence, defined here as premature waning or death (*xian si* 先死). This next paragraph in the *Tianxia Zhidao Tan* explains this process as follows:

[In Cultivating] *qi* there are eight proliferations and seven diminutions.⁴⁸ If you are unable to utilize the eight proliferations and eliminate the seven diminutions, then, at the age of forty, your *yin qi* will half itself; at fifty, your mobility will decline; at sixty, your hearing will no longer be acute and your vision will no longer be clear; at seventy, your lower [body] will wither and your upper [body] will unravel, your *yin qi* [i.e. sexual virility] will be rendered useless, and mucus and tears will flow out.⁴⁹

氣有八益，又有七損。不能用八益、去七孫損，則行年四十而陰氣自半也，五十而起居衰，六十而耳目不聰明，七十下枯上脫，陰氣不用，灌泣流出。⁴⁷

This brief description of the gradual deterioration of the male body includes a list of symptoms that would look familiar even to a modern reader. The middle-aged man,

approaching the age of 40, begins by losing the masculine vigor of his youth, referred to in this passage as *yin qi*. This is followed by a loss of mobility, a decrease in hearing and sight, and shrinkage of the limbs, culminating in sexual impotence. The crux of this gendered theory of aging is twofold. First, it describes aging as a natural decrease in the levels of *qi* found in the male body. The role of *qi* as a life giving force that allows for the growth and maturation of all living things is in fact a common topic in the *Shiwen*.

In the first dialogue, the Heavenly Teacher describes divine *qi* (*shenqi* 神氣) as the component that allows the myriad things to move, the grass and trees to grow, and the sun and the moon to glow. In the third dialogue, Cao Ao depicts *qi* as that which causes people to die but can also grant them life.⁵⁰ Second, and more importantly, despite the emphasis on the naturalness of aging, the author is also careful to stress that this process is far from inevitable, as the seven diminutions of *qi* can be counteracted with its eight proliferations. In other words, as long as the practitioner has access to the services of the right technical masters and their efficacious regimes, aging can be reversed:

Now, there is a technique to restore vigor. Eliminate the seven diminutions, thereby shaking off its ailments. Utilize the eight proliferations, thereby assisting its *qi*. This way, the aged will be restored to vigor, and this vigor will not wane. The gentleman dwells in peace and happiness. Drinking and eating as he pleases, the pores and interstices of his skin are glossy and taut, his *qi* and blood are full and replete, and his body is light and lithe. But if he has intercourse impulsively, he will be unable to guide⁵² (his *qi*) and will fall ill. Sweating and panting, his insides will become feverish and his *qi* disordered.⁵³

令之復壯有道，去七損以振其病，用八益以貳其氣，是故老者復壯，壯者不衰。君子居處安樂，飲食恣欲，皮腠曼密，氣血充贏，身體輕利。疾使內，不能導，生病出汗喘息，中煩氣亂。⁵¹

The reversal of aging and the restoration of potency is a common theme that runs throughout the Mawangdui texts. In the second dialogue of the *Shiwen*, Great Perfection supplies the Yellow Emperor with a regimen of dietetics and sexual exercises designed to 'prevent aging and restore vigor' (*qulao fuzhuang* 卻老復壯). The same phrase and a similar regimen recur later in the final dialogue between a technical master called Wang Qi 王期 and King Zhao of Qin 秦昭王 (r. 325–251 BCE). In all cases, the invigoration of *qi* through ritualized sexual intercourse is presented as a remedy for the maladies of old age. It is important to note, however, that at least in the case of the *Tianxia Zhidao Tan*, this technique is also accompanied by a warning. The manipulation of *qi*, argues the author, is a dangerous affair that can either inflict damage or improve one's health. Thus, it is important to follow the correct instructions of a proficient technical master who has access to an exclusive body of knowledge. This point is best articulated in the fourth *Shiwen* dialogue, which takes place between the Yellow Emperor and the sage Rong Cheng.

As we recall, received literature mentions Rong Cheng as the sagely inventor of the calendar. This dialogue utilizes his association with seasonal cycles and control over time to offer the reader a technique of *qi* manipulation aimed at transcending the bodily process of aging. The passage begins with the following set of questions, posed by the Yellow Emperor:

'When people first dispense the purity that flows into the form⁵⁵, what is obtained so that life occurs? When flowing into the form produces a body, what is lost so that death occurs? Among people of the age, why are some foul while others are fair; why do some die young while others are longlived? I wish to hear the reason why people's *qi* thrives or shrinks, why it is loosened and tautened.'⁵⁶

民始賦淳流形，何得而生？流形成體，何失而死？何世之人也，有惡有好，有夭有壽？欲聞民氣羸屈、弛張之故。⁵⁴

The Yellow Emperor's queries pertain to the natural cycles of life – from the formation of the fetus in the womb to its maturation and eventual death. In addition, while he clearly understands that aging is determined by the depletion of *qi*, the Yellow Emperor wishes to ascertain the reasons behind the vast differences in the pace of this process. Why do some age faster than others? Why do some retain their vigor and age gracefully while others wither away rapidly? Rong Cheng's answers:

'If you, sir, wish to achieve longevity, then you must examine and follow the Way of Heaven and Earth. The *qi* of Heaven is exhausted and replenished according the lunar [cycle]; thus it is able to live long. The *qi* of Earth during the year is cold and hot, and the precipitous and the gentle complement one another; thus the Earth endures and does not deteriorate. You, sir, must examine the features of Heaven and Earth and enact them with your body. Some secrets can be known. I have heard that there are some things that even sages are unable to understand, only those who have obtained the Way. The culminant essence of Heaven and Earth is born in the indefinite, grows in the formless, and is perfected in the bodiless. He who obtains it can obtain longevity, he who loses it dies young ... Old *qi* leads to aging, while new *qi* brings longevity. He who is skilled at regulating *qi* lets old *qi* disperse at night and new *qi* gather at dawn, thus penetrating the nine apertures and filling the six palaces.'⁵⁸

君若欲壽，則順察天地之道。天氣月盡、月盈，故能長生。地氣歲有寒暑，險易相取，故地久而不腐。君必察天地之情，而行之以身。有徵可知。問雖聖人，非其所能，唯道者知之。天地之至精，生于無微，長於無形，成於無體。得者壽長，失者夭死... 宿氣為老，新氣為壽。善治氣者，使宿氣夜散，新氣朝最，以徹九竅，而實六府。⁵⁷

The idea of expelling old *qi* and replacing it with new *qi* was quite common in early self-cultivation literature.⁵⁹ For our purposes, however, this passage is significant since it associates such techniques with an esoteric body of knowledge that is not accessible to most people. The secret for longevity, argues Rong Cheng, lies in understanding the patterns of Heaven and Earth. Unlike human bodies, which tend to suffer from a decrease in *qi* with age, cosmic *qi* is indefinite and is continuously replenished throughout the passage of time. Thus, those who know how to emulate its circulation within their bodies are able to transcend the natural waning of *qi* thereby extending their lives. This knowledge, however, is only reserved to those who, like Rong Cheng, have attained the Way and who have in turn passed it down to the technical masters. Their techniques and texts, this passage implies, are a valuable and desirable product in the religio-medical marketplace.

Secret knowledge for special bodies: esoteric texts as markers of prestige

In addition to using literary devices to attract an elite readership and constructing a new discourse that presented the common problems of aging men as solvable

conditions, the compilers of these materials deliberately rendered the texts and techniques esoteric in order to construct them as luxury items and markers of cultural prestige. While the concern with the problems of aging men and the presentation of loss of sexual virility as a treatable disorder might invite some comparison to the rise of drugs like Viagra in contemporary societies, fundamental differences seriously hinder the potential of such comparative efforts. In the last few decades, in the hope of capturing the attention of a potentially profitable segment of the population in many countries around the globe, medical experts and pharmaceutical companies began constructing a new discourse of masculinity, portraying the once natural process of aging and its accompanying byproducts as pathological ailments that fall under medical jurisdiction and can be pharmaceutically solved. Age-related decline in testosterone levels, for example, was 'rebranded' as andropause, a pathology that requires medical intervention through testosterone supplementation. The same can be said about the new category of erectile dysfunction (ED). Prompted by the initial slow sale of Viagra, Pfizer Pharmaceuticals launched a massive campaign based on the direct-to-consumer model, expanding the original target market share of aging men to include men of all ages by presenting it as a 'technology of the gendered body,' a way to transcend our natural biological limitations through bio-medical enhancement.⁶⁰

The situation in the second and third centuries in China, however, was fundamentally different. While we know that affluent elites hired scribes to copy manuscripts for their own use, real commercial book trade only began to emerge in the first century CE.⁶¹ The dissemination of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan texts was, in fact, highly regulated. According to Harper, receiving such books 'constituted an initiation which bound the disciple to the physician and sanctified the books, confirming the exclusiveness of the knowledge they contained.'⁶² This is further supported by the fact that the manuals themselves offer very terse instructions, often revealing only half the story. From this we can assume that these texts were meant to be read together with a master in order to be understood and used in everyday practice.

While the esoteric nature of their texts indicates that early Chinese masters of techniques did not launch an advertisement campaign in the modern sense, they did utilize the distinct conditions of the religio-medical marketplace to promote their services. Given the relative scarcity of underserved niches, the strategy they adopted highlighted the esotericity of their practices and manuscripts and presented them as markers of prestige reserved only for those who acquired access to their services. The affluent literate elite were, after all, the most potentially efficacious market niche able to help in the production and dissemination of the texts, ideas and practices of the technical masters. The use of literary devices and the production of a new discourse on the body were thus used to draw their patronage. In order to ensure the success of this project, however, the masters also had to convince their clientele that endorsing them was crucial for their pursuit for cultural prestige. In order to do so, they opted to frame their product as an exclusive luxury item that could set their benefactors apart from those who did not have access to it. Consider, for example, the following passage from the *Yinshu*:

The reason why people of high social status contract disease is that their joys and angers are not harmonious. When joyful, *yang qi* is in excess, and when angry, *yin qi* is in

excess.⁶³ On account of this, when those who follow the Way [of Ancestor Peng] are joyful then they quickly exhale, and when they are angry they increasingly puff out, all in order to harmonize [their emotions]. Inhaling the vital essence and *qi* of Heaven and Earth and honoring their *yin* [i.e. penis], they are able to be without disease. The reason why people of low social status contract disease is due to hard manual labor, hunger, and thirst. Sweating profusely, they plunge themselves into water and proceed to lie down on the cold earth, not realizing that they should put on clothes. For these reasons they contract disease. Moreover, lacking the knowledge of exhaling and puffing out in order to discard [bad *qi*], they contract many diseases and are quick to die.⁶⁴

貴人之所以得病者，以其喜怒之不和也。喜則陽氣多，怒則陰氣多，是以道者喜則急响，怒則劇吹，以和之。吸天地之精氣，實其陰，故能無病。賤人之所以得病者，勞倦飢渴，白汗夾絕，自入水中，及臥寒 之地，不知收衣，故得病焉，又弗知响呼而除去之，是以多病而易死。

The notion that intense emotions might lead to an imbalance of *qi* within one's body was by no means a new invention of the *Yinshu*. Amongst Warring States texts we find a plethora of techniques designed to manage one's emotions, ranging from moral self-cultivation, through participation in communal ritual activities, to individual methods of meditation.⁶⁵ The uniqueness of this passage lies in the author's attempt to create a distinction between the etiologies of people of high social status (*guiren* 貴人) and those of low social status (*jianren* 賤人). Overworked and malnourished, the common people are subjected to cold weather and taxing manual labor that weakens their bodies and causes them to contract diseases. People of high social status, on the other hand, live very different lives. They do not have to toil the fields or perform corvée labor. They do, however, still get sick, which, according to the author, is due to an overindulgence of the senses that leads to internal discord. Fortunately, this state of affairs can be remedied by an adherence to the self-cultivation regimens of the technical masters, which in this case involves a combination of breathing and sexual exercises. Moreover, emphasizes the author, these techniques are only accessible to elites and not to the common people, who lack any knowledge of them and thus tend to die prematurely.

More than just an indication that such techniques were 'very much the domain of the aristocracy and the upper classes,'⁶⁶ this passage can be read as a part of a coherent strategy designed to convince affluent, educated elites of the necessity of the services provided by technical masters. Hiring them can manifest their social pedigree and provide them with the cultural prestige reserved only to a chosen few. Evidence for this type of tactic can be found in the dialogue between the Yellow Emperor and Rong Cheng in the *Shiwen*:

If one encounters calamities in his life, this must be due to the leakage of *yin* essence and the clogging and affliction of the hundred vessels. Then joy and anger arise in an untimely manner, the Great Way is not understood, and the *qi* of life absconds. The uncouth man causes damage to [his own] life, and then relies on medium healers [to fix it]. His physical form will then be put to ground prematurely, even before he reaches middle age. To kill yourself by toiling at affairs is truly a grievous and sorrowful thing! Wherever life and death may lie, the erudite gentleman controls it. By filling what lies below and enclosing vital essence, *qi* does not leak out. If you take control over life and death through your mind, how can they defeat you? Carefully guard it and do not lose it, and you will enjoy long life for many generations.⁶⁸

彼生有殃，必其陰精漏泄，百脈鬱廢。喜怒不時，不明大道，生氣去之。俗人芒生，乃恃巫醫。行年黍十，形必天埋，庸事自殺，亦傷悲哉！死生安在，徹士制之，實下閉精，氣不漏泄。心制死生，孰為之敗？慎守勿失，長生累世，累世安樂長壽。⁶⁷

The etiology described in the first few lines corresponds to the previous passage from the *Stretching Book*. The gradual decline in masculine vigor leads to emotional discord, which, in turn, brings about a variety of health problems and even premature death. At this point, however, the author introduces a new element into his argument, juxtaposing two possible responses to this unfortunate situation – that of the uncouth man (*suren* 俗人) and that of the erudite gentleman (*cheshi* 徹士).⁶⁹ While the former turns to the services of medium healers (*wuyi* 巫醫) and ends up hurting his body even more, the latter knows to seek the services of educated masters of techniques, who teach him the proper techniques for prolonging his life. If we chose to accept the argument, presented recently by Nathan Sivin, that people from lower social classes in pre-modern China relied almost exclusively on the services of such popular healers,⁷⁰ it becomes evident that the objective of this passage is to produce a strong association between the technical masters and their regimens of self-cultivation with an elite culture and present the access to their literature as a marker of social and cultural prestige.

Conclusion

In this article, I set out to examine the utility, pragmatics and cultural practices embedded and reiterated in the Mawangdui and Zhangjiashan excavated manuscripts so as to offer new insights into the role of textual production in the propagation of self-cultivation regimens in early China. Utilizing two theoretical models – the religio-medical marketplace and the religious economy paradigm – as the basis for my working hypothesis, I suggested that the emergence of a new discourse on the human body was not simply an outcome of a shift in religious demands but a result of a calculated campaign launched by a group of active participants in the religio-medical marketplace designed to promote their self-cultivation regimens to affluent, educated male elites. In order to create demand for their services and establish personal self-cultivation as a legitimate elite pursuit, the technical masters turned to one of the main modes of expressing cultural authority in early China – the production of text. Moreover, they set to their task by adopting a multifaceted strategy. First, they used common literary devices, such as dialogues between exemplary figures and allusions to classical sources, to draw their desired audience in and help them feel that reading these texts and practicing the techniques described in them is a worthwhile elite pursuit. Second, they created a new discourse on the male body, presenting the collective problems of aging men as solvable conditions, thereby creating a demand for their services. Finally, they purposely limited access to their texts and practices in order to present them as luxury items intended for a selected group of people and establish them as markers of social and cultural prestige.

While this article focused on a relatively narrow selection of primary sources, this case study can be useful in reconstructing the intellectual, religious and medical history of early China. In recent years there has been a growing interest in the study of the interaction of China's religious traditions and the role of Buddhism, Daoism and

popular religion in the shaping of medieval concepts of the human body and the development of healing practices.⁷¹ Comparatively little work has been done on the impact of early Chinese religious ideas and practices on this field. A few interrelated factors may explain this situation. First, unlike Buddhism and Daoism, early Chinese religion is a particularly amorphous entity that does not conform to contemporary definitions of religion, as it lacks many of the features modern scholars view as fundamental, such as a canonical set of sacred scriptures, organized clergy or a fixed pantheon. In fact, the label ‘early Chinese religion’ does not refer to a specific empirical singularity. It is mainly used as a heuristic device, a term coined by later scholars to help make sense of a collection of phenomena. Second, until recently, received materials constituted our only source of information about early Chinese religious beliefs and practices. These are highly prescriptive in nature, describing an ideal model of religion that might not have been put into practice. In addition, these sources tend to adopt a highly critical attitude toward individual religious practices, reflecting in many cases a sense of disdain toward sexual cultivation among other things.

Fortunately, the discovery and steady publication of excavated manuscripts from the Warring States and Qin-Han periods is expanding our knowledge of early Chinese religion, helping us to construct a richer picture than the one reflected in the received literary tradition. In addition, the discovery of new literary genres, such as technical manuals, helps shed new light on the complex process of textual production and the relationship between authors and readers, masters and clients. Exposing the strategies used by the various actors in the early Chinese religio-medical marketplace to promote their services and attract new clientele can thus prove instrumental in understanding the intricacies of Chinese cultural and intellectual history.

Notes

1. Emerson, “Yang Chu’s Discovery of the Body,” 533; Brindley, *Individualism in Early China*, 29–30.
2. For more, see Edward Slingerland, *Effortless Action*, 153–5, and Mark Csikszentmihalyi, *Material Virtue*, 152–156.
3. Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 116–7, 205.
4. Roth, *Original Tao*.
5. Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 393.
6. For a survey of these texts, see Harper, “Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought,” and Kalinowski, “Technical Traditions in Ancient China.”
7. Tomb no. 3 in Mawangdui contains the first alternative versions of the *Daodejing* 道德經 (The Classic of the Way and its Power) and the *Yijing* 易經 (*Classic of Changes*), new philosophical and legal texts that were identified by some as the lost *Huangdi Sijing* 黃帝四經 (Yellow Emperor’s Four Classics), and a cache of medical manuscripts ranging in content, from descriptions of herbal recipes and formulas to self-cultivation regimens. See Henricks, *Lao Tzu: Te-Tao Ching*; Shaughnessy, *I Ching*; Yates, *Five Lost Classics*; and Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*. Tomb no. 247 in Zhangjiashan contains legal documents, mathematical treatises such as the *Suanshu Shu* 算數書 (Book on Numbers and Computation), and manuscripts that offer medical, dietary, and self-cultivation regimens. See Csikszentmihalyi, “Ethics and Self-Cultivation Practice in Early China,” 29–35; Peng, *Zhangjiashan Hanjian “Suanshu Shu” Zhushi*; and Lo and Li, “Manuscripts, Received Texts and the Healing,” 367–70, 393.

8. See Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 4, 19–20; Peng, “Daoyin Tu’ yu ‘Yinshu,’” 91; and Lo, “Imagining Practice: Sense and Sensuality in Early Chinese Medical Illustration,” 383–4, n.4.
9. Li Xueqin, *Chongxie Xueshushi*.
10. See for example, Li Ling, *Zhongguo Fangshu Xukao*, 368 and Li, “Yinshu yu Daoyin Tu,” 7–9.
11. Anna Seidel, “Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments,” and Yamada Toshiaki, “Longevity Techniques and the Compilation of the *Lingbao Wufuxu*.”
12. For calisthenics, see Kohn, *Chinese Healing Exercises: The Tradition of Daoyin* and Despeux, “La Gymnastique Daoyin dans la Chine Ancienne.” For the role of dietary regimens in self-cultivation, see Arthur, *Early Daoist Dietary Practices*. For sexual cultivation, see Wile, *Art of the Bedchamber*.
13. Lo and Li, “Manuscripts, Received Texts and the Healing,” 67–68, and Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*.
14. This has led scholars to argue that the great majority of pre-Qin texts were compositional in nature and not the work of an individual author. See Boltz, “The Composite Nature of Early Chinese Texts.”
15. Kern, “Methodological Reflections on the Analysis of Textual Variants,” 173. See also Meyer, *Philosophy on Bamboo*, 1–4.
16. Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine in Medieval China*, 12, 64; Stanley-Baker, “Daoists and Doctors,” 16–17.
17. Brindley, *Individualism in Early China*, xxii.
18. Stark and Finke, *Acts of Faith: Explaining the Human Side of Religion*, 193–5.
19. See, for example, the collection of articles in Jelen, *Sacred Markets, Sacred Canopies*, 188–9.
20. For a representative example of such an approach, see Puett, *To Become a God*.
21. Harper juxtaposes these individuals, whom he refers to as ‘natural experts and occultists,’ to the masters of philosophy (zi, 子). See Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 10. I have chosen the appellation ‘masters of techniques’ in order to simultaneously stress their close association to the philosophical masters while also emphasizing the differences between them.
22. I would like to emphasize that by designating these hypothetical agents as ‘technical masters,’ I am not identifying them with the *fangshi* 方士, translated as ‘masters of esoterica’ or ‘masters of methods,’ who are often mentioned in Han sources. While modern scholars have identified the crucial role of the ideas and practices espoused by the *fangshi* in the development of Daoist religion, there is no conclusive evidence that links the authors of the Mawangdui and Zhangjiaoshan manuscripts to the *fangshi*. For more information, see Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism*, 39–42, and Arthur, *Early Daoist Dietary Practices*, 4. For an opposing view, see Nathan Sivin, who argues that this term does not denote ‘a social grouping toward which people align themselves’ but a ‘catchall phrase’ used by authors and bibliographers in a somewhat derogatory manner, attached to agents who did not align themselves with the goals of the state orthodoxy. Sivin, “Taoism and Science,” 29.
23. Stark and Finke, 195, 205.
24. Billeter, “Étude sur sept dialogues du Zhuangzi,” 294–343 and Cua, “The Logic of Confucian Dialogues,” 18–33.
25. Xunzi Jijie, 444; Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 344–5.
26. Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu, 148.
27. Lüshi Chunqiu Yizhu, 102.
28. For a discussion on the dating of this text, see Sivin, “Huang ti nei ching,” 199–201; Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen*, 1–7.
29. Huangdi Neijing Suwen Jizhu, 7; Hanshu, 2407–9.
30. *Rongcheng Shi* 容成氏 (Master Rongcheng) is the title of a recently excavated text from the Shanghai Museum corpus that offers an account of Chinese history from the mythical

era to the establishment of the Zhou Dynasty. Surprisingly, Rong Cheng is not mentioned in the text itself, only as a title on the 53rd bamboo slip. This has led scholars to surmise that the first few slips of this text are missing. See Pines, “Political Mythology and Dynastic Legitimacy.”

31. Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 262; Lüshi Chunqiu Yizhu, 566; Huainan Honglie Jijie, 646.
32. The association of Rong Cheng with the extension of life through sexual cultivation can be seen in his biography in the early medieval compilation, the *Liexian Zhuan* 列仙傳 (Collected Biographies of Immortals), which credits Rong Cheng with the invention of a technique that can ‘turn white hair black and help falling teeth to grow back.’ See Campamy, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 359.
33. Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 10; Lüshi Chunqiu Yizhu, 684.
34. This assertion has led some scholars, such as Li Ling, to hypothesize that the *Stretching Book* might be the *Pengzu Yangxing Jing* 彭祖養性經 (The Classic on Ancestor Peng’s Cultivation of the Innate Nature), which appears in the bibliographical treatises from the Sui and Tang Dynasties. See Li, *Zhongguo Fangshu Xukao*, 368.
35. Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi, 393; Zhangjiashan Hanmu Zhujian, 285; Xunzi Jijie, 21.
36. Huainan Honglie Jijie, 361; Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 199–200. Wang Qiao and Chisong zi 赤松子, who is mentioned with him in the *Huainanzi* passage, become paragons of immortality in the Eastern Han. In the medieval period, Wang Qiao is incorporated as a minor deity in the Shangqing Daoist pantheon. See Pregadio, *Encyclopedia of Taoism*, 271–2, 1028–9.
37. Stark and Finke, 203; Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society*, 3–4.
38. In the early medieval period we see the emergence of a discourse and set of practices aimed not only toward men, but also toward women practitioners. See, for example, Valussi, “Female Alchemy: an Introduction.” Also see Arthur, *Early Daoist Dietary Practices*, 66. The content of the Mawangdui texts, however, suggest that despite their emphasis on coupled practices, they were mainly geared toward male practitioners.
39. *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 148.
40. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 400. My translations are largely based on Harper’s, with some alterations.
41. *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 163.
42. The Yellow Spirit is probably an alternative title for the Yellow Emperor. As for the Left Spirit, received literature does not mention this figure. The title ‘left,’ however, often refers to the senior of a double appointment (outranking ‘right’). The Left Spirit is thus probably a member in the celestial ranks, an advisor to the Yellow Emperor.
43. The original sentence mentions both *yin* and *yang*. Read against the backdrop of other examples from the *Shiwen*, I agree with the decision of the editors of the *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu* to treat *yang* as a possible scribal error. For these reasons, while I kept 陽 in the Chinese text, I omitted it from my translation. See *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 163. Another option is to read *yin* as a modifier and translate it as ‘hidden.’ I would like to thank the first of two anonymous *Studies in Chinese Religions* reviewers for drawing attention to this reasonable alternative.
44. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 425. A similar dialogue, between Yao and Shun, appears in the *Shiwen*. See *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 148. The meaning of the term ‘double hotness 兩熱’ is unclear. Harper believes this refers to the hotness emanating from the two partners during intercourse.
45. For a detailed analysis on the topic of sex in early Chinese philosophical discourse, see Goldin, *The Culture of Sex*, especially chapter 2.
46. *Ibid.*, 166.
47. *Ibid.*, 164.
48. The precise meaning of these two sets is unclear. Harper surmises that they refer to ‘some aspect of hygiene’ in men. See Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 428. We find a similar reference in chapter 5 of the *Suwen* in the context of a theory of aging. For a summary of various commentarial interpretations of this term, see Unschuld and

Tessenow, *Huangdi Neijing Suwen*, 113–4. These, argue the authors, have been superseded by the discovery of the Mawangdui texts.

49. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 428.
50. *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 145–6.
51. *Ibid.*, 164.
52. Following the editors of the *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, I am reading 道 as 導. This probably refers to a practice like *daoyin*.
53. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 428–9.
54. *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 146.
55. Create a new organism through sexual intercourse. As a verb, 淳 can mean ‘to mate.’ The phrase 流形 appears in another Mawangdui text, the *Taichan Shu* 胎產書 (*Book of Engendering the Fetus*), referring to the first stage in the development of the fetus. See Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 372–84.
56. *Ibid.*, 393.
57. *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu*, 146–7.
58. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 393–5. The nine apertures are the eyes, ears, nostrils, mouth, anus, and urethra. The six palaces are the large intestine, small intestine, stomach, bladder, gall bladder and a somewhat unclear sixth organ often translated as the ‘triple burner.’ See Unschuld, *Huang Di Nei Jing Su Wen*, 130.
59. The expression ‘expelling the old and taking in the new’ (*tugu naxin* 吐故納新) can be found in the *Zhuangzi* and in the *Huainanzi*, where this technique is attributed to our paragons of immortality, Wang Qiao and Chi Songzi. See *Zhuangzi Jinzhu Jinyi*, 393; *Huainan Honglie Jijie*, 361. The notion of emptying one’s body in preparation for the intake of vital essence also appears in the *Neiye*. See Roth, *Original Tao*, 54, 60.
60. Conrad, *The Medicalization of Society*; Mamo and Fishman, “Potency in All the Right Places.”
61. Tsien, *Written on Bamboo and Silk*, 15.
62. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 55. For detailed accounts on the role of esoteric transmission in the process of lineage construction in the Han and early medieval period, see Raz, *The Emergence of Daoism* (chapter 2) and Stanley-Baker, *Daoist and Doctors*.
63. *Yin qi* might refer to the *qi* stored in the five *yin* viscera: liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys. I would like to thank once again anonymous review 1 for this suggestion.
64. *Zhangjiashan Hanmu Zhujuan*, 299.
65. See Middendorf, “Emotion Management: Social Psychology and Social Techniques in Early China.”
66. Engelhardt, “Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine,” 88.
67. *Mawangdui Hanu Boshu*, 148.
68. Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, 397–8. I agree with Harper and Qiu Xigui 裘锡圭 that this sentence, which in the *Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu* appears as a part of the sixth dialogue, between Wangzi Qiaofu and Ancestor Peng, should be placed here. See Qiu, “Mawangdui yishu shidu suoyi,” 525–7.
69. To the best of my knowledge, the phrase 徹士 does not appear in other early texts. For this reason, I follow the gloss of the annotated Mawangdui edition of 徹 as 通. The phrase 通士 appears in several texts from the received canon and seems to refer to something like a ‘knowledgeable scholar,’ someone who possesses all-pervading knowledge. See *Xunzi Jijie*, 49; *Lüshi Chunqiu Yizhu*, 775.
70. Sivin, “Health Care and Daoism,” 2.
71. See, for example, Salguero, *Translating Buddhist Medicine*; Stanley-Baker, *Daoist and Doctors*; Sivin, “Health Care and Daoism”; and Mollier, *Buddhism and Taoism Face to Face*.

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