

The Daoist *Shangqing* School's Meditation from the Phenomenological Perspective: Taking the Method of "Swallowing the Qi of the Sun" from the *Lingshu Ziwen Shangjing* as an Example

Xiaoming Wang

School of Philosophy, Beijing Normal University, Beijing 100875, China

Abstract: *The phenomenological perspective provides us with a new outlook on ancient Chinese studies. Many traditional thoughts and practices, which have been conceptualized and empirically viewed as primitive, simple, and lacking in rational depth for over a century by Western conceptual and empirical approaches, now have the potential for new interpretation and understanding. As the most significant cultivation practice of the Daoist Shangqing School, the Meditation (cun si) serves to continuously adjust the consciousness and sensory state of individuals, enhancing and stabilizing the momentum of the formation and composition of the "body-field", thus laying a solid foundation for connecting to deeper and broader possibilities of life.*

Keywords: Phenomenology, Temporal Haloning, Meditation.

1. Introduction

The most distinctive cultivation method of the *Shangqing* School is the Daoist Meditation. These methods of nurturing body and mind have been passed down from ancient times and form the core of a series of practices such as recitation, breath control, chanting, and wearing talismans. They have had a significant influence on later Taoist practices of inner cultivation and ritual ceremonies. Upon encountering these Taoist texts, the non-worldly significance and religious elements presented in their content undoubtedly pose a significant challenge to modern rational thinking. However, if we shift our perspective and adopt the approach of phenomenology pioneered by Husserl, we may have a different understanding and cognition of these practical life techniques. This shift in perspective, stemming from Husserl's phenomenology, maintains an inherent connection with traditional Western philosophy but presents a new ideological perspective in its methodology. Its modes of thinking and expression can help us reexamine and understand ancient Chinese studies, including the content of early Taoist scriptures. Through the "phenomenological reduction" of these ancient Taoist knowledge and practices, a deeper understanding of their original meanings is revealed, presenting themselves in the guise of modern knowledge. This can aid us in exploring life itself with greater richness and depth, potentially offering more appropriate responses to the various modern crises we face today.

2. Overview of Phenomenological Methods and Related Philosophical Ideas

Phenomenology, established by the German scholar Husserl at the beginning of the 20th century, is a philosophical school. Husserl described phenomenology as "simultaneously and primarily signifying a method and a mindset" [2]. The uniqueness of phenomenology lies not in its subject matter, but in its approach and attitude toward examining and studying objects. This attitude and method are distinct from

the ready-made conceptualization, conceptual rationalization, and objectification of empiricism in Western traditional philosophy. Instead, phenomenology engages with vivid and immediate experiences, exploring the possibilities of implication rather than relying solely on pre-existing intuitive experiences. The well-known slogan of phenomenology, "turning toward the things themselves", refers to the actual state of affairs before abstraction by traditional methods of understanding. Phenomenology demands a transcending reflection on the thought logic imposed upon it, surpassing the preceding "suspension".

In traditional philosophical cognition, the ever-changing and complex phenomena often lead to confusion and perplexity. It's believed that without rational analysis, abstraction, and synthesis in the general sense, exact knowledge cannot be attained. However, through a profound analysis of human consciousness phenomena, Husserl saw the "true face" of phenomena that had previously been denigrated and overlooked. Starting from an analysis of consciousness, he regarded conscious life as the foundation for constructing the meaning of all reality. Consciousness has two fundamental meanings: intentional experience and consciousness as inner perception [3]. Intentional experience appears to be consciousness about something, a form of objectified conscious experience. However, this consciousness involving something is not autonomously acting; rather, it is constituted within an intertwined inner state of horizons. It is not fully objectified and always exhibits a non-objectified "overflow". Therefore, it is always accompanied by inner perception consciousness, which is also non-objectified and directed towards itself.

Husserl thus revealed that conscious activities have premises and backgrounds, which manifest as their "horizon" nature. The purest form of this horizon is internal time consciousness, also known as the "temporal horizon"[4]. This "horizon" can be understood as a non-objectified constructive space. Ni Liangkang states, "'Temporal horizon' in Husserl's phenomenology refers to the active space of various

temporalities being actualized (re-collection and pre-collection). This potentiality is constructed within the passive and continuous original synthesis of 'internal time consciousness' or 'living present' through continuous retention (and corresponding protention) implicative construction of itself" [5]. This consciousness space, which enables activities like recollection and anticipation to become actualized in the "living present", appears in a form of "dizziness" or "flow". It is more fundamental and primal than "impressions", "concepts", or "entities". It facilitates the possibility of recollection and imagination without presupposing subjectivity and is the true source of meaning.

In Western traditional epistemology, there is a presupposition of the dualistic separation between the knowing subject and the object of knowledge. Taking empiricists as an example, they believe that perception of ready-made objects in reality begins with the passive reception of simple stimuli or impressions by the senses, which are then formed into concepts through the mind's associations or spontaneous connections. However, with the perspective of the "temporal horizon," Husserl pointed out that human perception of a ready-made object is not solely derived from present impressions and sensory concepts, nor is it limited to the aspect presented as ready-made. Instead, one can simultaneously perceive the various possible manifestations associated with it. Through the analysis of phenomena like musical melodies, he revealed the existence of background horizons. This latent "non-actualizable" aspect forms the basis for our present cognition, enabling the occurrence and continuity of "actualizable" cognition. All our perceptions are manifested within the "temporal horizon" and temporal dizziness flow, integrating multiple dimensions internally. What people perceive and become conscious of surpasses the mere existence of ready-made entities. In other words, our perception is such that we may even say we live within the possibility of the "flow of dizziness". The punctual actuality is merely a part of the many rich possibilities that manifest spontaneously, and the dynamic "temporal dizziness flow" forms the foundational basis of all primal reality. Moreover, because the constitutive nature of this internal time consciousness flow has already dissolved the dualistic separation of subject and object [6] within its essence, the nature of the world and all things perceived and conscious of as objects will be the same.

Heidegger applied Husserl's method of analyzing consciousness phenomena to a broader scope, namely within the realm of "lived experience". The most significant characteristic of human lived experience is that the subject experiencing, and the object being experienced have not yet been separated. We exist dynamically and spontaneously within various potential networks, perceiving and directing ourselves towards our surroundings. The dualistic objectification of subject and object is already a state that occurs after the generation of meaning and pre-apprehension. The mode of experience in our lived experience is initially non-objectified; we coexist with the world, and original meanings arise here. At this pre-objective level, Heidegger utilized and developed Kant's deduction in the first edition of the Critique of Pure Reason, introducing the third basic cognitive faculty between sensibility and intellectual intuition—imagination (Einbildungskraft) [7]. This

imagination is not normative or framework-oriented; its purest construct is time. It inherently embodies a domain structure of pure occurrence, upon which all objects' capacity to give rise to limited beings like ourselves depends. This structure generates the domain of primordial ontology within the "flow of dizziness" [8]. Heidegger reveals that human beings, as finite beings, fundamentally exist within this primordial domain, rather than as isolated ready-made entities in the general sense. From a primordial perspective, humans and the world are intertwined within this continuously generative domain structure. Previous conceptualized, substantial understandings of existence have already been ready-made and divorced from an understanding of the domain structure. Including humans, the entire world is continuously generated and sustained dynamically from its roots. The "true face" of this dynamic "existence" must be understood non-conceptually and domainally through human lived states. Heidegger describes the mode of experience in this "lived experience" as "indifference" (Indifferenz) [9] meaning it has not yet been objectified because, within the primordial domain, all things in the world are originally mixed and connected. Furthermore, due to the continuous retention and protention of the flow of time, there is always a changing differentiation structure. This continuous and intertwining flow of time enables the continual generation and occurrence of original meanings.

This primordial structure of meaning emergence reveals a dynamically vivid domain of significance, within which both humans and the world coexist. Any ready-made state arises from this domain. People's perception of the world, and even the way the world operates, is always domainal, potential, and occurrent. It is constituted within the "temporal domain" [10], where objectivity, readiness, and regularity follow afterwards. The essence of human nature is constituted by domainality; there is no such thing as a ready-made essence. Humans are not rigid subjects; they merely manifest within the world as circumstances permit. Humans and the world are mutually constituted within the primordial domain.

Maurice Merleau-Ponty, building upon Husserl's concept of internal time consciousness and incorporating Heidegger's idea of the mutual constitution of humans and the world, applied these insights to the understanding of the body. In Western traditional epistemology, the body has long been neglected. The concept of the "temporal dizziness flow" inspired his idea of "bodily spatial dizziness". Perception, in his view, first occurs within the "body-field" or "perceptual field", which is non-objectified and has its own intentional space. These spontaneous formations are non-objectified, implying that the potential field already exists beforehand. Thus, it is necessary to break through the traditional division between subject and object, and even the dichotomy between mind and body. This signifies that in the primordial domain, subject and object merge, and there is no distinction between mind and body. The body is not merely a material body but a combination of body and consciousness, the source of both. When born into the world, one first integrates with the world as a "body-field". Merleau-Ponty used many vivid examples to elucidate the reality of this "body-field" [11]. The presentation of various extraordinary skills requires novelty and ingenuity, which cannot be explained or achieved by objectified consciousness such as reflexes, memories,

associations, or speculations. Our primordial perception of self and the world occurs within these various fields represented by the body-field [12].

In conclusion, phenomenology, compared to traditional Western philosophical systems, is a method that conducts analysis at the foundational level, offering fresh perspectives and angles of inquiry. It breaks through the dichotomy between phenomena and essence in a rational manner, making it possible for the individual and the universal to penetrate each other intuitively. While addressing the phenomena presented to us, phenomenology also brings into philosophical consideration the part that is non-ready-made and non-actual, forming a deeper and more personal perspective on problem-solving. This allows many previously excluded and overlooked aspects—those that are more original, richer, and subtler—to emerge. Phenomenological methods, its conception of time, the notion of domainal constitution, the pursuit of intuition, and even specific expressions such as "body-field", provide valuable inspiration for our understanding of life practices such as the Meditation.

3. The Daoist *Shangqing* School's "Swallowing the Qi of the Sun" Practice from the Phenomenological Perspective

The goal of longevity and becoming an immortal in Daoism expresses the direction of the meaning of life and the understanding of life's true essence. The pursuit of longevity directly addresses the fundamental religious question of life and death liberation. Unlike other religions that place the realization of life ideals in an illusory afterlife, Daoism is concerned with how one can achieve immortality in this present life, believing that freedom and liberation in life can only be realized in the present [13]. Ascending to the realm of "immortals" outwardly represents Daoist practitioners' religious understanding of earthly life. However, if we conduct a phenomenological reduction, the state of "immortality" with religious connotations can be understood as the liberation of body and mind, attaining the greatest freedom in life. The series of cultivation techniques developed by Daoism, such as meditation, breath control, chanting, consuming elixirs, and practicing sexual cultivation, combined with talismans and invocations, form a system of life cultivation. Among these practices, meditation is the most important practice technique of the *Shangqing* School [14], which flourished in the Jiangnan region during the Eastern Jin and Southern and Northern Dynasties. Subsequently, various Daoist sects developed a series of fasting rituals and ceremonies based on these foundational principles of thought and practice.

In academia, the understanding of such Daoist practices often follows the path of Western traditional scholarship. It is commonly believed that these practices may have some psychological significance, but beyond that, they are often viewed as irrational subjective behaviors. Descriptions of these practices are considered literary constructs, daydreams, symptoms of mental illness, or even deliberate lies for certain purposes. For instance, Ge Zhaoguang stated, "Daoism has a method called 'contemplating gods through visualization', which allows people to fantasize in front of objects of belief, thus entering the realm of transcendental experience. This

phenomenon of seeing ghosts in broad daylight undoubtedly raises suspicions of mental illness, but it does have certain psychological basis, because in such delusional states, people often fall into hallucinations as if the images they usually think about are actually appearing before their eyes" [15]. However, these mature cultivation techniques have been repeatedly documented in history and validated through practical verification [16]. Moreover, there are numerous cases in modern society that go beyond ordinary experiences and are related to these practices.

Inspired by the phenomenological perspective of domainal constitution and the "temporal dizziness flow", we attempt to present some understanding of the contemplative practice from a phenomenological viewpoint, using the example of the "Swallowing the Qi of the Sun" technique from the Daoist *Shangqing* School's *Lingshu ziwen shangqing*. The "Swallowing the Qi of the Sun" technique undoubtedly involves the Daoist *Shangqing* School's comprehension of Qi. As we know, Daoist cultivation techniques draw primarily from Laozi and Zhuangzi's understanding of the Dao and Qi. In Chapter 21 of the *Dao De Jing*, it is said, "The appearance of great virtue appears like nothing but Dao. Dao, when looked at, cannot be seen; It seems as if it is faint and obscure. Faint and obscure, yet within it, there is form. Obscure and faint, yet within it, there is substance. Vacant and empty, yet within it, there is essence. Its essence is exceedingly real; It is therein that the truth resides". From a phenomenological perspective, these understandings of the Dao are not abstract higher entities, not laws and principles of things, not ready-made "whatness", but rather a constitutive force filled with experiential sensation. It is faint, obscure, and obscurely profound, continuously changing at the base, the natural truth of the entire world. In Chapter 42 of the *Dao De Jing*, it is stated, "The Dao gives birth to One, One gives birth to Two, Two gives birth to Three, and Three gives birth to all things. All things carry the Yin and embrace the Yang, blending their Qi to achieve harmony" [17]. Here, Qi is not a objectifiable state of material particles but a non-ready-made domain and disposition. All things in the world are in a state of interplay and harmony through this blending of Yin and Yang Qi. In *Zhuangzi's Knack*, it is said, "Life and death are but followers of each other, and death is the beginning of life. Who knows their true principles? Human life is the gathering of Qi. When gathered, it brings life; when dispersed, it brings death". Humans, too, are formed by this foundational disposition. Life and death are the natural changes of this disposition, cyclically constructing each other. Zhuangzi further elucidates the path to attaining the true state through "heart fasting" [18] and "sitting in forgetfulness" [19], wherein individuals can attain the authentic state by merging with the universal Qi.

It is worth noting that in Daoist classics, to emphasize the primordial nature of Qi, the initial Qi is referred to as "Yuan Qi" [20]. For example, in the *Three-Treasures Proper Dharma Sutra*, it is stated, "The Nine Heavenly True Kings, the Primordial Celestial Kings, inherit the natural heritage and establish the titles of the Nine Heavens" [21]. This sentence is annotated by Qingtongjun, stating, "The Nine Heavenly True Kings and the Primordial Celestial Kings were both born from the Nine Qi, and their forms were formed when Qi condensed" [22]. In the *Supreme Secret Essentials*, Volume

One, *The Great Dao Chapter*, it is said, "The Supreme Dao is formless, blending into the body, profound and mysterious, encompassing the vast and the minute, encompassing the extremes of stillness and motion, thus elucidating the origin and establishing the chapters" [23]. In the *Chapter on the Transformation of Qi*, it is stated, "Within the blend, there is vast obscurity, transforming from nothingness to existence, all arising from Qi's establishment, hence the second in sequence" [24]. It further states, "The division of Qi gives rise to the heavens and completes the earth, forms are then unfolded, and various species are planted, hence this place becomes three" [25]. It can be seen that Daoism's understanding of the Dao, Yin and Yang, heaven and earth, the sun and moon, and the spiritual and physical aspects of human existence is holistic. Humans and the world are interconnected through Qi, and their foundational disposition can be understood as an incessantly generating constitutive force.

It can be said that in the vast domain where there is no subjectivity, substantiality, or givenness, the constitutive disposition of the primordial domain, which is non-objectified, naturally manifests as the common root of humanity and the entire world. In this domain, the flow of Qi circulates and connects everything, and humans and the world are originally intertwined in the Dao and Qi. The entirety of human experience is immersed in this unity. As subjective beings, neither I nor the external world as objects have true mastery due to the foundational nature of their constitution. To truly experience this interconnectedness, one can start by adjusting the subjective consciousness, undermining its givenness, and allowing both subject and object to merge into the domain of the authentic constitution. As representatives of Yin and Yang sensations between heaven and earth, the sun and moon play a significant role. The Qi of the sun can be understood as the state where the Yang energy dominates within the Yin and Yang energies [26]. "Swallowing the Qi of the sun" is an endeavor to connect with the sensation of Yang energy emanating from the sun. Through a series of practices that undermine fixed perceptions, individuals can harmonize with the non-authentic heterogeneity of the sun, thereby eliciting corresponding sensations. It is through such cultivation practices that actual validation of life can occur.

The "Sun Swallowing Qi Method" recorded in the *Lingshu ziwèn shàngjīng* is as follows: "When the sun rises, face the east, knock the teeth nine times, recite the Yin mantra in your heart, call the name of the sun soul, recite the five Emperor's names: Sun Soul Zhu Jing Zhao Tao, Green Reflections Back to Dawn, Red Child Black Flame Gale Image. After reciting these sixteen words, close your eyes and firmly grasp, visualize the five-color streamer of the sun coming down to the body, down to the feet, and then visualize the five colors rising to the top of the head. Then, the sunlight streamer, along with the five colors, enters the mouth. In the stream of sunlight, there is also a purple Qi, as large as an eye, accumulating several tens of layers, shining brightly among the five lights, called the Flying Root Water Mother. Together with the five Qi, it enters the mouth, swallowing the sunlight, performing forty-five swallowing breaths. After swallowing the breaths, swallow the saliva nine times, and then knock the teeth nine times, and softly chant: Red Lu Dan Qi, Round Sky Cultivating Essence, Strength to Receive Softness, Flame Fire

Yin Hero, Sun Origin Scene, named Great Brightness. Nine Yangs merge, two smokes arise together, condense the soul and harmonize the soul, essence of the five Qi, birth of the Five Emperors, riding light to control form. Pluck the flying to emptiness, stop the root to attain fullness, wear the dragon's crown, wear the vermilion belt, harness the bird's flowing mystery, reflect the Upper Clear. Receive the book of jade, carve the name on the golden cabinet, eat the morning and evening, unite with the true spirit, fly to the Celestial Terrace, ascend to the Purple Court. After that, bow to the sun again. Among the true immortals, no one knows the name of the sun soul. This Dao is profound, not to be heard by those who seek blood and flesh. If it is cloudy without sun, it can be practiced in a clean place indoors. Clear Daoist practitioners, those who are proficient in spiritual sensitivity, do not need to see the sun to practice. If Daoist practitioners retreat to the mountains, fast for long periods, avoid worldly affairs, and yearn for purity, they will receive the sunlight essence every day, swallow the essence of the sun, and then awaken their bodies, with radiant faces. For those entangled in worldly affairs, unable to achieve tranquility, wandering the world with their minds entangled in fame and wealth, they should follow the above method on the new moon, the third day, the fifth day, the seventh day, the ninth day, the thirteenth day, the fifteenth day, the seventeenth day, the nineteenth day, and the twenty-fifth day of the month, ten times in a month. These days are when the sun soul descends, the flying roots are full, and it is the time to dispel dreams with water and wood. After practicing for eighteen years, one will refine oneself into true gold in the Upper Clear, shining with jade light, and will be positioned as the Jade Emperor, flying in the sky, riding the Three Pure Ones, illuminating the world. Additionally, there is the Taiwei Drinking Sun Qi Ming Ling Talisman:



Note: If unable to regularly inscribe the talisman at midnight on the last day of the lunar month, one must not miss the opportunity of the rare last day of the lunar month.

On the night of the last day of the lunar month, inscribe the talisman in vermilion on green paper. Face eastward and swallow it, thus informing the Sun Spirit in advance. When about to drink the talisman, hold your breath, grasp the talisman with your left hand, and pray in your heart: 'The Vermilion Book of the Supreme Void, named Open Illumination. To summon the Sun Spirit, to transform into a certain form. At dawn, solemnly attired, it shall emerge from the circular court. The Water Mother of Flying Splendor, the Golden Essence of the Sun Root. Illuminated in purple radiance, known as the Five Spirits.' After the prayer, proceed to drink the talisman" [27].

We select distinctive aspects from this cultivation method and attempt to offer insightful interpretations.

Firstly, calling upon the name: "Inwardly recite the Yin incantation, call upon the name of the Sun Spirit, the characters of the Five Emperors of the Sun are as follows: Sun Spirit Zhu Jing, with the characters of the Five Emperors being Qing Emperor Zhaotao, Red Emperor Lüying, White Emperor Huixia, Black Emperor Xuanyan, and Yellow Emperor Biaoxiang". Here, it indicates that the name of the Sun Spirit is Zhu Jing, with each of the Five Emperors having specific characters: Qing Emperor is represented by Zhaotao, Red Emperor by Lüying, White Emperor by Huixia, Black Emperor by Xuanyan, and Yellow Emperor by Biaoxiang [28]. We observe that these divine names, such as "Zhaotao", "Lüying", "Huixia", "Xuanyan", and "Biaoxiang", all contain the essence of a halo-like realm, signifying that practitioners visualize the realm of sunlight by invoking these names, thereby evoking corresponding sensations of Yang energy within themselves.

Secondly, the practice of meditation: "Close your eyes and grasp firmly, envisioning the five-colored flowing radiance of the sun, all descending to the body down to the feet, and also causing the five colors to rise to the top of the head. Then, the sunlight's flowing radiance, along with the five colors, enters the mouth. Within the flowing radiance of the sunlight, there is also a purple aura, as large as a child's eye, appearing repeatedly, dazzling within the five colors, known as the Flying Root Water Mother. All of these, along with the five energies, enter the mouth, and the practitioner swallows the radiance forty-five times. After swallowing the radiance, swallow the saliva nine times". It is important to note that here, it first requires "closing the eyes", indicating an inward gaze rather than staring directly at the sun, which involves softening and focusing one's subjective imagination. The "flowing radiance of sunlight" is a form of soft imagery rather than a physical entity, and while the meditation of these "purple aura", "flowing radiance of sunlight", "five colors", and other imagery may seem to objectify them, they are not conceptual or ideological but rather pure potentialities, directly perceptible. In terms of practical experience, contrived sensory imagery seems to be just the initial requirement. As these sensations become habitual and sustained, deeper layers of imagery and sensations automatically emerge, no longer requiring a deliberate effort to observe something specific; it is a "passive" presentation, not a reflective consciousness detached from the present moment, but an accompanying awareness inherent in present conscious activity, leading to a sensory understanding different from cognitive recognition. The clarity of these internal experiential sensations is not about knowledge of the external world but rather the deepening and refinement of sensory experience within the "body field". Through this adjustment, the mind and body focus on this realm without external distraction, aligning with the most responsive imagery, allowing the mind and body to soften and directly experience the flow of phenomena.

Thirdly, the subtle incantation: "The subtle incantation goes: 'Red Lu's red energy, nurturing essence in the round sky, firm yet receptive to gentleness, the Yin excellence of blazing fire, the primal scene of the sun's essence, known as Great Clarity. The nine yang harmonize and the two smokes arise together, condensing the soul and harmonizing the spirit, the essence of the five energies, generating the five emperors, riding light

and mastering form. Gathering the essence in emptiness, ceasing roots to achieve fullness, donning the dragon's robe and tying the red sash, harnessing the bird's flow and reflecting the mysterious, with the radiance illuminating the Upper Clear Realm. Given books of jade and inscribed names on golden halls, partaking in the morning splendor, merging with the true spirit, ascending to the celestial realms. Upon completion, bow once again to the sun". In these invocations, the crucial aspect is not the reference objects of the language, nor is it about literary flourish. Modern evaluations often focus on these two aspects, hence neglecting the significance of these invocations. However, for the practitioner, the invocations do not merely denote something; rather, they open up a realm through their fervor and spontaneity. Through the subtle incantations, the practitioner actively participates in the construction of the thoughts and imagery within, thus genuinely experiencing the original divine realm. These invocations can be understood as prompts into the realm of creative formation, akin to the lines of inspiration in poetry or the language of world-building. They call upon the practitioner to engage in constructing that hazy and ethereal realm, where images materialize on their own [29].

Fourthly, swallowing the symbol: "When preparing to consume the symbol, close your breath and hold the symbol with your left hand, while mentally invoking: 'The elixir book of the Great Void, named Opening Clarity. Bestow upon the sun-soul above, transforming into a certain form. At dawn, solemnly attire, emanating from the circular courtyard. The flying lotus, the essence of the sun's root. The purple reflection in the flowing light, known as the Five Spirits'. The symbol for consuming the solar essence is named 'Opening Clarity', signifying the act of opening and revealing the yang and clarity. The lines of this symbol can be understood as the practitioner, after entering a state of meditation, inwardly visualizing the image of clarity-aligned Qi, and then projecting this image onto the symbol. It's important to note that this symbol does not have strict standardized patterns [30], but it's not entirely arbitrary either. Like the elusive and ethereal truth in the depths, it requires an understanding derived from the original intent that aligns with the generation of Qi. Though not explicitly stated, this symbol likely serves a visual meditation purpose, further reinforcing the practitioner's embodiment of the clarity of solar Qi after consumption.

In summary, the practice of "Meditation" as the most important cultivation technique of the *Shangqing* School, by continuously adjusting the state of consciousness of individuals, enhances and stabilizes the generative potential of the "body field", laying a solid foundation for connecting to broader possibilities of life. The language used in this practice often carries metaphorical and inspirational qualities. If one simply interprets it with everyday language in an objectified manner, it is easy to dismiss it as absurd, mysterious, and irrelevant to human affairs. These methods are not derived from certain laws or principles; rather, they are cultivation techniques that naturally emerged from ancient practitioners, following certain inspirations from within to manifest outwardly. It is difficult to justify their rationality using modern empirical scientific concepts. For those who are fixated on external, readily available phenomena, even if they have the opportunity to learn about these techniques, the

effects are often unsatisfactory. Moreover, they may even lead themselves further into illusions and attachments.

4. Conclusion

If we view the practice of Meditation as a religious activity, focusing on its "external appearance" and seeing it as a tangible existence, it may be understood as a means to establish, nurture, and strengthen beliefs. Naturally, this would lead to externalizing such beliefs into the form of an existing objectified "deity". However, this kind of belief can become alienated into a state of fixation and blindness, and in the long run, it may not bring about the beauty and tranquility of life. On the other hand, if we reframe it as a skillful "self-opening" or as preparation for entering the "Daoist realm", it may better align with the intentions of ancient practitioners. The phenomenological approach reminds us to perform a phenomenological reduction on behaviors that exhibit strong religious characteristics. This involves revealing the rich connotations, subtleties, and vividness inherent in the phenomena themselves, rather than merely settling for preconceived notions or extremes of elevation or denigration.

In the phenomenological perspective, the practice of Meditation can be stripped of its irrational religious connotations and is not simply categorized as mysticism. Instead, its true essence is revealed, resembling a natural unveiling of its "face". This practice helps us enter into a profound state of life permeated with vapor-like qualities, allowing us to deeply sense the "temporal circumstances". Through such experiential realms, we gain insights and understanding into various "opportunities" present in actual life. In this state, the consciousness that objectifies and conceptualizes is softened by various ethereal consciousness of phenomena. Following the natural unfolding of the "body-field", the deep dynamic structure of the entire consciousness world gradually becomes clearer. In this softened clarity, we can intuitively comprehend change, respond to it, and even proactively utilize it. Here, the primal vitality of life, having tapped into its source, naturally finds restoration, achieving dynamic harmony and stability amid changes. Humans possess an innate intuition and instinct to grasp the true essence of life, but this instinct only occasionally flashes in everyday life. Meditation can serve as one of the techniques to cultivate this instinct, helping us experience the dynamic momentum generated by the interplay of Yin and Yang, sense the vitality within, and grasp the potential meanings that may emerge. Through intuitive understanding, we can then respond appropriately, intuiting the ineffable, thereby helping us grasp the true essence of life in various situations.

However, it's important to note that practices like Meditation and other cultivation techniques, while helping us enter a relatively stable state of body and mind and providing deep experiential insights into the flow of Qi, should not be confined to extraordinary bodily sensations alone. In other words, although these experiences can deepen and sharpen our sensory perception of the body-field and enhance stability, in terms of truly understanding the essence of life, they can only be considered preparatory work. True understanding comes from facing the real frustrations within the flow of

phenomena in everyday life and engaging in self-cultivation. Only through this can we truly comprehend the original nature of the constitutive domain. Real wisdom transcends objectivity, conceptualization, and logical reasoning; it is a form of intuitive insight. This insight isn't abstracted from some fundamental truth but arises from the continuous unfolding of phenomena, enabling clear and insightful observation.

The belief and life practices of Taoism are oriented towards concrete actions. The theoretical expositions found in Taoist scriptures are tightly woven around the practices of previous practitioners, a characteristic that is particularly evident in the scriptures of the *Shangqing* School. These concrete actions and practices are not merely crude interactions with the external world; instead, they are intricately linked to the individual's state of body and mind. Through subtle adjustments to one's overall state, these practices facilitate changes and transcendence in one's life state. It can be said that the phenomenological approach provides us with a new perspective for understanding ancient Chinese learning. Many traditional thoughts and skills that have been considered primitive, simple, and lacking in intellectual depth by Western conceptual and empirical approaches for over a century now have the potential for new interpretation and understanding.

References

- [1] The full name of this scripture is *Huangtian shangqing jinque dijun lingshu ziwen shangjing*, which is an important early classic of the *Shangqing* School, dating approximately from the Eastern Jin to the Southern Dynasties period. For the sake of convenience, it is commonly referred to as the *Lingshu ziwen shangjing*. *The Daoist Canon, Vol. 11*[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: pp.380-385.
- [2] Edmund Husserl. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*[M]. translated by Ni Liangkang, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2007: p. 22.
- [3] Edmund Husserl. *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy*[M]. translated by Ni Liangkang, Beijing: People's Publishing House, 2007: p. 88.
- [4] American psychologist William James divided the stream of thought into the "real part" and the "transitional part", where the transitional part is what he referred to as the "stream" or "flow". He believed that thought is based on the structure of this "flow", which precedes the real part of thought. For more information, refer to William James. Chapter Nine, *The Stream of Thought*, in *Principles of Psychology*[M]. translated by Tian Ping, China City Press, 2003. Although this transitional part of the stream of thought is the reality of thought, it is difficult to grasp through reflective means, and thus has been overlooked by traditional modes of cognition. Husserl discovered the pure originality of this structure of the "stream of thought", as well as its latent feature of passive synthesis or "noema", revealing the ultimate nature of this stream of consciousness.

- [5] Ni Liangkang. *A General Explanation of Husserl's Phenomenological Concepts*[M]. Beijing: Sanlian Bookstore, 2007: pp. 531-532.
- [6] The contradiction and difference in objectified significance.
- [7] In the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant, in the deductive part, posits that besides sensation and thought, which are the sensory material received through the forms of time and space, and intellect, based on the categorial relations, there is also what he calls "transcendental imagination". This kind of imagination goes deeper than its psychological sense because it deals not with objectified material but with a pre-objectified "synthesis of reproduction". This ability even allows for the possibility of a synthesis between intuitive "apprehensive synthesis" and conceptual "cognitive synthesis". However, due to the synthetic and generative nature of this ability, there is a potential conflict with the system where logical synthesis predominates as the highest point of the subject. In the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant assigns this imaginative faculty to the subaltern of synthesis. For more details, refer to Zhang Xianglong. Heidegger's "Kantbuch", in *Collected Papers on German Philosophy*[M]. Beijing: Peking University Press, 1993, pp. 1-24.
- [8] This domain can be understood as the domain of Kant's sensory intuition and intellectual concepts. As finite beings, humans cannot make objects adapt to their intuitions and thought forms, nor can they simply accept objects or create them out of nothing. Therefore, they can only integrate into the field of vision of the "temporal halo" through transcendental imagination. There, the objects in the domain blend with the pure images presented by human imagination. Heidegger has already transcended the understanding of time beyond the domain of consciousness, regarding it as something original.
- [9] This can be understood as unimpeded, without the so-called subjectivity within it.
- [10] Heidegger's conception here has already transcended Husserl's level of consciousness. Through the analysis of phenomena such as language, he has softened the substantiality of the world. All existence (including the existence of the world) is constituted within the temporal halo of phenomenological time flow.
- [11] For example, "phantom limbs" and similar "illusions" are not merely psychological or purely objective phenomena; they arise from the inherent dynamics of the human bodily field. Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *Phenomenology of Perception*, provides the example of patient Schneider, who, due to shrapnel hitting his parietal lobe, experienced impaired visual function. While his organs' basic functions remained intact, he could still see and move, but he could not move his limbs based solely on verbal instructions. Instead, he needed to observe his limbs and mentally prepare himself within a certain context to perform actions. This indicates that his overall bodily field was disrupted, objectified, and the intermediary link between sensibility and intellect, the part responsible for integration and occurrence, was damaged. As a result, his sense of the original time, the domain of the "halo flow", weakened. Refer to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. *Phenomenology of Perception*, Chapter Three[M]. translated by Jiang Zhihui, Beijing: The Commercial press, 2001.
- [12] With the domain of "halo flow" as the cognitive basis, fields of perception, visual perception, and actual situations can all be similarly understood, presented in a manner of ambiguous presence. The "sensory impressions" of empiricism and the "ideal forms" of rationalism are already expressions of some kind of pre-existing "clarity", which, compared to what can be understood within the bodily field, obscures many contents through its pre-existing clarity.
- [13] Qiang Yu, *The Philosophical Themes and Logical Construction of Taoist Philosophy*[J]. *World Religious Studies*, 2004, Issue 2: p. 80.
- [14] Chen Guofu states: "The method of the 'Shangqing Scripture' primarily relies on visualization and employs talismans". Refer to Chen Guofu. *Research on the Origin of the Daozang (Revised Edition)* [M]. Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2014: p. 13.
- [15] Ge Zhaoguang. *The World of Imagination*[M]. Beijing: Modern Publishing House, 1990: p. 140.
- [16] Refer to *Comprehensive Mirror of Daoist Immortals Throughout the Ages* and other texts in the *Orthodox Daoist Canon*, Dongzhen Section, recorded under the *Biographies and Transmissions* category.
- [17] Yin and yang originally stem from the microscopic manifestation of sunlight. The changes in experiencing sunlight are the direct revelation of the natural seasons to humans. This is also how the ancient Chinese perceived and experienced the myriad phenomena in the world. As the foundational distinguishing state, this fundamental differentiation does not possess independent existence; rather, it always arises and is maintained within the interplay of mutual repulsion and interaction, constituting the primordial appearance of generative structure.
- [18] In the *Human World* chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, it says: "If there is one will, do not listen with the ears but listen with the heart; do not listen with the heart but listen with the Qi. Listening stops at the ears, the heart stops at the symbols. Qi is what waits vacantly for things. Only the Dao gathers vacancy. Vacancy is the fasting of the heart". Here, the senses of the ears and heart are situated at the level of receiving and conforming to objectified communication, while "Qi" represents the state where reception and conformity are realized as generative formation. Fasting of the heart requires adjusting the pre-existing sensations of the heart and ears to a state of vacancy, awaiting the emergence of generative formation.
- [19] In the *Great Master* chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, it says: "Abandon the body, reject intelligence, depart from form and forsake knowledge, and assimilate with the Great Harmony; this is what is called sitting in forgetfulness". "Body" and "intelligence" respectively represent the pre-existing "form" (sensory perception) and "knowledge" (intellectual framework). By not regarding these fixed experiences of the world as true (sitting in forgetfulness), one can allow the consciousness to flow without obstruction, thereby experiencing the continuous generation of the "temporal halo", or the domain of "Great Harmony".

- [20] The term "Qi" (气) is homophonous with "qi" or "ch'i" in Chinese, but their original meanings differ. However, in the simplified Chinese script widely used today, "Qi" is commonly employed in various contexts. In the cosmological theory of Daoism, "qi" or "yuan qi" (元炁) is considered the most pure and fundamental constitutive force, while "Qi" has to some extent become objectified, with its constitutive force being somewhat limited and appearing as varying degrees of substance and pre-existing entities. In the practice of Daoist cultivation, different contexts may utilize different terms. Here, we blur the more specific usage scenarios to describe the existential states of various constitutive domains.
- [21] The Daoist Canon, Vol. 28[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: p.406.
- [22] The Daoist Canon, Vol. 28[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: p.406.
- [23] Wushang Mi Yao[M]. annotated by Zhou Zuoming, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016: p. 1271.
- [24] Wushang Mi Yao[M]. annotated by Zhou Zuoming, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016: p. 1271.
- [25] Wushang Mi Yao[M]. annotated by Zhou Zuoming, Beijing: Zhonghua Book Company, 2016: p. 1272.
- [26] In the Huangtian shangqing jinque dijun lingshu ziwen shangjing, there is also a method known as the "Swallowing the Essence of the Moon". This method primarily focuses on attaining the hidden sense of human concealment, emphasizing the concealed state of Yin. Different methods emphasize different aspects of sensory cultivation, thereby enabling individuals to achieve dynamic balance at a deeper level. Due to space constraints, further elaboration will be provided in a separate discussion.
- [27] The Daoist Canon, Vol. 11[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: pp.382-383.
- [28] Refer to the Shangqing taishang dijun jiuzhen zhongjing, where the characters representing the Five Emperors are described as follows: the Blue Emperor illuminates the Dragon's Secret, the Red Emperor is reflected in the Green Rainbow, the White Emperor returns in Golden Radiance, the Black Emperor records in Dark Mist, and the Yellow Emperor's image shines brightly. In the Lingshu ziwen shangjing, the central character is omitted, possibly for the sake of convenience in invocation. Both the Jiuzhen zhongjing and the Lingshu ziwen shangjing are important classics of the Shangqing School, and the methods of cultivation mentioned in the two classics often complement each other. Therefore, the content described in the Jiuzhen zhongjing is provided here as a supplement. The Daoist Canon, Vol. 34[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: p.39.
- [29] If approached with a reflective attitude, even what is called phenomenological reflection can become a kind of de-lifing behavior, because this outward-looking reflection turns flowing experiences into objects of observation, thereby altering the "stream of experience".
- [30] The "Opening Clarity symbol "in the Yuyi jielin benriyue tu is not the same as the figure of this talisman,
- and from the subsequent greetings, it can be seen that the two belong to the same practice method. The Daoist Canon, Vol. 6[M]. published by Wenwu Press, Shanghai Bookstore, and Tianjin Ancient Books Publishing House, 1988: p.701.