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11<sup>th</sup> International Conference on Daoist Studies

Panel: *Shamanistic Vestiges of Daoist Ritual*

**Animal Forms and Ancestral Masters:  
Two Patterns of “Direct Contact” in Daoist Ritual**

I first want to thank Thomas Michael to have gathered such an interesting and fruitful panel. He gave me the occasion to go back into materials that I collected during my doctoral fieldwork between 2004 and 2009 in a village temple of rural Hunan Province, called the Belvedere of Intensifying Transformations (*Zenghua guan*). A daoist Master of the Quanzhen order, named Li Jiazhong, was invited to stay in this temple by the local chiefs - who are mainly patrilineage elders, rural manufacturers and communist leaders -, in order “to perform the *dao* through martial arts” (*yiwu yandao*) and “to lead the [communal] ritual space” (*zhutan*). Today’s paper will propose a first analyze of my observation of his bodily practices and of the interviews I had with him, taking care to remain as close as possible to the vocabulary and the expressions he explicitly uses<sup>1</sup>.

Master Li Jiazhong was born in 1967, and we can consider him as a “Master of the New generation”, since his life trajectory incarnates in a lively manner several social dynamics which are typical of the reconstitution of ancient traditions and local communities in China after the Cultural Revolution (1966-76)<sup>2</sup>. The analytical composition of his biographical portrait is the object of another work. Suffice here to say that his passion as a kid for heroic martial arts movies and his motivation to really explore martial and healing practices led him to the Southern Peak (Nanyue) and other sacred mountains, such as Laoshan and Wudangshan, in the 1980s and 1990s. There he received the transmission of elder masters who had been initiated before the Cultural Revolution, in a setting of deep social change, since these mountains, their temples and pilgrimage networks were reinvented in a

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<sup>1</sup> When bodily forms, interactions and speech acts are partly observable from the outside, inner sensations and representations are not accessible to outer observation and I can only analyze the *a priori* or *a posteriori* discourse of Master Li, when he gives instructions to a disciple or answers my questions about his own experience of contact with ancestral masters.

<sup>2</sup> Goossaert & Palmer (2011).

patrimonial, touristic, and nationalist manner. In 1990, he took part in the first program of the Chinese National Daoist Academy at the White Cloud Temple in Beijing, where he learned some academic approaches to History and Philosophy, along with training in Religious administration. This was also the period of “qigong fever”<sup>3</sup>, during which he learned martial arts of the internal tradition (*neijia quan*) in the Capital’s urban parks. After a few years, he went back to the Southern Peak in Hunan and assumed provincial level responsibilities in the Daoist State Association. Confronted by both the authoritarianism of the communist officials and the competition among several daoist ritual kinship groups, and feeling that his many official activities of representation were diverting him from his bigger goals and projects, he stepped back from his institutional involvements. After sojourning in several temples, he has been invited in 2005 by the rural community of Increasing Transformations, where he still lives and puts his martial and ritual skills into practice.

The local chiefs of this local community were looking for a daoist master to take their village’s ritual life in charge. Officially registered as a religious master and having received teachings from famous masters from important sacred sites throughout China, Master Li was prestigious and legitimate in the eyes of the local community. He took this opportunity to dwell in this local setting, which was quiet enough for him to continually develop his bodily techniques and write a book about them and, as he puts it, to externalize his personal achievements for the benefit of the society. The unformal and customary contract passed between Master Li and the local chiefs who invited him to stay in their temple was based on the ritual efficacy that the community attributed to him. From the local perspective, his official registration conferred legal authority and administrative legitimacy to Master Li. However, even if it allowed a better articulation between the Local and the State, it did not guarantee the durability of this “chief-ritualist” dyadic relationship which is a politico-religious foundation of Chinese Local society<sup>4</sup>, particularly since several other officially registered masters had previously been invited and later expelled for inefficient ritual behavior.

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<sup>3</sup> Palmer (2007).

<sup>4</sup> See Goossaert (2006). For a comparison with Buriat society, see Hamayon (1986).

This conception of efficient or inefficient ritual behavior is based on two main criteria. The first concerns the practices of sexual and food avoidances, both taken as ascetic ways to reach and maintain quietness. Following antique conceptions of politico-religious government, the villagers considered that their ritualist has to heal and organize his own body and person in order to organize the community around him<sup>5</sup>. Sexual desire and eating meat (and other exciting foods, *huncai*) are considered by villagers and masters alike as sources of confusion and agitation. By contrast, they conceive their temple and its ritual space as a center of clearness and quietness (*qingjing*) from which virtuous and efficient actions and interactions arise. The second criterion of ritual efficacy deals with the ability of the master to execute properly ritual gestures, ritual recitations and ritual music; he must use his “bodily form” in a good manner or “style” in order to successfully invite the tutelary gods of the community. This refers to the notion of *xingshi*, “form and style”. In the daoist tradition, *xing* refers to the bodily form taken in a process of dynamic interactions, which is considered as the intermediate link between the immanent and macrocosmic *dao* and the dwelling of a particular animated being in the world<sup>6</sup>. It is not the body conceived in a materialistic manner, but a conception close to the phenomenological concept of “Lived body” which has already been used by Jean-François Billeter to analyze the Zhuangzi<sup>7</sup>. Complementarily, *shi* refers to the outer and observable aspect of the practice, its “style”. If the ritualist’s body movements seem to respect the adequate style, then the villagers will conclude that the vital breaths and the gods will be efficacious for them. In other words, experienced ritual participants and masters consider that they can evaluate the ritual efficacy of a master, which for them relies on internal foundations of clearness and quietness (*qingjing*), through the observation of outer behaviors and bodily movements. In this sense, it is not surprising that the local chiefs asked Master Li to both “lead the [communal] ritual space” and “perform the *dao* through [internal] martial arts”, a set of practices which, in a daoist context, includes martial-exorcistic aspects and also gymnastic, respiratory and mental techniques.

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<sup>5</sup> Kalinowski (1982)

<sup>6</sup> Pregadio (2004), Ingold (2000)

<sup>7</sup> Billeter (2002, 2004), see also the notion of “*médiance*” in the human relation to environment developed by Berque (2000).

We scholars often distinguish the two categories of “personal bodily or ascetics practices” such as *yangsheng*, *neidan* or martial arts on the one hand, and, on the other hand, “ritual” understood as communally encoded practices. Recently, several approaches have been developed in order to analyze the interactions between these different kinds of practices; notably textual analyzes underlying the links between visualization techniques in “inner alchemy” (*neidan*) and in communal ritual. Here, my aim is to explore an approach based on the “lived body” and its refinement through its form. Ten years ago, I was talking with Zhengyi master Wu in Shanghai. He told me that a main difference between Zhengyi and Quanzhen<sup>8</sup> practices is that when “internal practices” (*neigong*) are included as sequences in Zhengyi communal rituals, Quanzhen masters practice them separately and in a private setting. I further discussed this issue with Quanzhen Master Li in Hunan. He explained that a lot of bodily techniques are basically the same in both settings, and that the “inner accomplishment” (*gongde*, *gongfu*, *fashu*) developed in private is the foundation of the ritual efficacy which is externalized in communal rituals; in smaller healing, divinatory or exorcistic séances; and more generally in daily life. According to him, from the perspective of bodily techniques, the main difference is that, in communal ritual, the officiant has to follow a fixed procedure and respect the “form and style” (*xingshi*) prescribed by the texts and by customary transmission. By contrast, when practicing in a private context, the aim is first to “experiment” (*shiyān*) with the bodily form, the circulation of the vital breaths and inner strength<sup>9</sup>, as well as to search and perceive the spirits and the gods.

When he acts as the chief officiant in communal rituals, Master Li explains that his aim is to “invite the spirits and the gods” (*qingshen*) inside the ritual space. In this context, bodily movements should be recognized by the participants as respectful of the tradition and as a component of a (partly) understandable ritual apparatus which carries the syntax and the semantic of the ritual: the more or less dramatized and fixed forms of ritual sequences, the recited text that encodes the identity of the gods and their secret formulas, and the use of multiple ritual representations and instruments. The fact that the text is chanted and that officiants play music (here a drum and other metallic and wooden percussions) is believed,

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<sup>8</sup> Zhengyi master mostly live at home and transmit their authority and knowledge inside their family (primarily son or nephew...), when Quanzhen masters mostly live in monastic communities and are inscribed in a ritual parenthood and genealogy detached from their patrilineal transmission.

<sup>9</sup> Strength (*li*) and “vital breath (*qi*) are interchangeable in the martial context.

according to the Chinese ritual tradition, to initiate the interaction between human beings and the gods, and to create a social whole, a “temporary autonomous zone” as Kenneth Dean puts it<sup>10</sup>. For this, Master Li says that his main purpose as the leading officiant is to remain quiet and stable (*jing & ding*) while observing his “sensations” (*ganjue*) and the melodic rhythms (*yun*) of the music and the chanting, which he sometimes actively regulates with his drum. At the same time, the participants individually express their own sufferings, projects and requests to the gods that have been made present. If we follow Master Li’s explanations, we can consider that the material, symbolic and rhythmic aspects of the ritual apparatus provokes, structures, and gives meaning to the lived and subjective interactions of the participants.

If we now observe the private practices and transmissions of Master Li, it is clear that his pedagogy is mainly based on the demonstration, imitation, repetition and experimentation of bodily techniques. When he instructs his more advanced disciples to follow their sensation (*ganjue*), which he equates with the perception of, and the silent communication with spirits and gods, he doesn’t feel concerned with their subjective representations and impulses. For this inner aspect, his main aim is that each disciple develops “himself by himself” (*ziran*) both the ability to structure his lived body according to outer representations (*yi*), and a fluid and detached consciousness (*wangwo*). I thus propose the hypothesis that bodily postures and movements become, in a shamanistic way, the mediating structure between a lived and subjective experience and a wide range of forms and representations which are more or less socially shared and thus partly objectified. These bodily practices include several sets of techniques inherited from ancient gymnastic and breathing techniques (*daoyin, yangsheng*) and different internal martial arts (*baguazhang, taijiquan, xingyiquan...*). They include immobile postures, simple and repeated movements, and sequences of different movements. These movements are mainly executed slowly in order to better observe and pacify the bodily form and sensations (*shili*), yet also in a tonic manner in order to activate and externalize the inner strength (*fali*). There are thus two main poles in these individual practices: one pole deals with quietness, silence, perception and stability, and the other pole with tonicity, gesture, utterance and interaction. However, there is a processual hierarchy between these two poles and the two processes of

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<sup>10</sup> Dean (2001), Bey (1991).

internalization and of exteriorization. According to Master Li “Quietness is the axis of Movement” (*dongzhong youjing*), and this notion is remarkably actualized by the importance of circles and spirals in the postures and movements. These abstract forms evoke the *dao* and the *taiji* diagram, and are said by Master Li to ensure the continuity of the movement and the connection between different parts of the body, the circulation of the vital flow and inner strength, and to develop non-oppositional interactions. In practice, they are notably experienced and refined through snake and dragon forms (*shexing*, *longxing*). Among daoist individual bodily practices, a lot of techniques involve “playing” with animal “forms”. Among the bodily techniques of Master Li, it is the case of the ancient set of *daoyin* movements named “Play of the five wild animals” (*wuqinxi*), the *xingyiquan* set of “Five [animal] forms boxing” (*wuxingquan*) and the series of Wudang *taijiquan* 108 movements.

Catherine Despeux has shown the historical and technical links of the *daoyin* techniques with the *wu*-shamanism of Chinese antiquity. The main ancestral masters of these early daoist traditions (what Thomas Michael calls *yangsheng*-Daoism in his paper) were *wu*-shamans and had official functions in ancient and mythical kingdoms. Furthermore, *daoyin* techniques share similar functions with shamanic and exorcistic dance, especially through the notion of “drawing in” (*yin*) the spirits, as well as of “drawing out” the malevolent ones from the body. From a ritual point of view, this notion, which is nowadays reduced to the materialist idea of “stretching”, points at exorcistic, healing and soteriological practices<sup>11</sup>. In this frame, the idea of “play” (*xi*) means (like in French or English) both taking part in a game and playing a role in theater. A first analysis of the instructions given on these bodily techniques shows that the imitation and experimentation, the “as if” (*ru*), focuses on postures and movements, yet also on attitudes, behaviors and interactions with the environment, considered as typical of such and such an animal. For example, the tiger is majestic and ferocious, the bear is massive and lumbers when he walks, the panther is fast and straightforward, the monkey jumps from branch to branch, picks fruits and is a prankster, the bird is light, subtle and flies in the sky<sup>12</sup>... A kind of “direct contact” is thus built up between the bodily form of the

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<sup>11</sup> Despeux (2004).

<sup>12</sup> The much more recent *taijiquan* techniques (19<sup>th</sup> century probably) also involves interactions with animals imagined outside of the practitioner, such as “to part the wild horse’s mane” (*yema fenzong*) or to “spurn the tiger back to the mountain (*baohu guishan*)... Which opens to inquiries into domestication, subjugation and rationalization.

practitioner and a representation (*xiang*) of an animal, in an environmental social setting where there is very few wild animals left. Not a representation of the whole animal form or identity, not of a group or “people” of animals, but of some specific facets of the animal capacities and behaviors which are interpreted as useful by the Daoist master. According to Master Li, these imitations help to “nourish the lived body” (*yangxing*), meaning to develop bodily skills and health, and they are believed to lead to sainthood and immortality beyond the decay and disappearance of the flesh body (*routi*)<sup>13</sup>. I also propose that this “chimeric”<sup>14</sup> approach to animal representations leads the adept to experiment with alterity and transformations through his lived body, and, along with the practice of quietness, leads him to develop a certain detachment from, and perception of, his own person and behavior.

Master Li insists on the fact that quietness should remain the foundation of postures and movements, and more specifically, that the disciple should not let animal behavior or impulses enter the “heart-mind” (*xin*) - the organic system of the medical and daoist traditions where the vital breaths and spirits meet, and the governing center of the individual. Interestingly, it is on this very point that Master Li makes a distinction between the direct contact he builds with animal forms and the one he builds “intimately” (*xixi xiangguan*) with his ancestral master Zhang Sanfeng, whose “voice and image” (*shengxiang*) should flow down (*jiang*) from above his head to the center of his heart-mind (*xinzhong*) and then dissolve (*ronghua*). Zhang Sanfeng is a famous legendary figure associated with Mount Wudang<sup>15</sup> and is widely considered to be the ancestral founder of both the broad tradition of Chinese internal martial arts<sup>16</sup> and of a more specific genealogy of daoist masters and disciples. However, the Wudang line of transmission has a special feature compared to other daoist genealogies such as those of Longmen, Huashan or Chunyang. For them the transmission of knowledge and authority are genealogically structured, whereas the adepts of the Wudang tradition consider that one should “know the ancestor and ignore the master” (*renzu bu renshi*). In other words, in the Wudang tradition, the cult<sup>17</sup> is directly addressed to

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<sup>13</sup> Pregadio (2004)

<sup>14</sup> Severi (2007)

<sup>15</sup> Seidel (1970)

<sup>16</sup> Shahar (2008)

<sup>17</sup> Master Li uses the term « cult, sacrifice » (*ji*), and in the same thematic field the words “respect, veneration” (*qin*) and “inner sincerity” (*cheng*). On the importance of this last notion in the cultic practices see Snyder-Rilke (2009).

the founding ancestor Zhang Sanfeng and not to the masters of the several generations. When they directly contact in a mediumistic or shamanistic way the founding ancestor (to make his representation become a “real host”, *zhenke*), Master Li and other Wudang adepts bypass the genealogy and the very historicity of their transmission. This shamanistic relation is defined by Master Li as a one of “resonance” (*ganying*) between his own lived body and the actualized representation of his tutelary ancestor. Still according to him, this creates a “vein of [direct] transmission” (*famai*) which gives “strength” (*liliang*) to his bodily form and “perspicacity” (*zhihui*) to his mind, increases his “merit and accomplishment” (*gongde*) as well as his “potential of action” (*nengliang*), sometimes provides him with insights on specific aspects of his techniques, and ultimately guides him on his way to immortality, if after his death the trace of his lived body (*xing*) were to be transformed into an efficient representation (*xiang*) by following generations.

The analysis of Master Li’s practices and discourses can lead us to distinguish two kinds of “direct contact” in Daoism. The first one works through the bodily form imitating and playing with specific facets of animal postures and movements. The second one works through the identification with his divinized ancestral master. Both mobilize partly-shared representations (of specific animals or ancestors) and both are said to nourish and structure the lived body and interactions of the adept. However, these two kinds of direct contact are described as coming from two different directions towards the “heart-mind”: one from the bodily form in movement and interaction, and the other from a transcendental realm of ritually refined representations and vital breaths. Even if the animal impulses and affects should be pacified, several animal ways of dwelling in the world have a role to play in the daoist process of cultivation towards cosmological and divine models of virtues and efficacy.

For concluding and opening to a new question, I will briefly introduce another system of practice and pedagogy which might lead to the identification of a third kind of “direct contact”, this time between two (or more) lived bodies in interaction. Sometimes Master Li gathers several disciples of the neighborhood and organizes “mutual encounters” (*jiaoliu*). The practitioners are then invited to put the postures and movements that they practiced



alone into interaction with other practitioners<sup>18</sup> (*tuishou*, *biwu*). They are again instructed to remain quiet and clear when experimenting with a direct contact with another lived body. When the flow of interaction prevails, the bodily form and inner structures have to adapt to the other's movements and impulses. This itself develops a celestial kind of "regimen of activity" as Jean-François Billeter puts it from the Zhuangzi, a state of free and dense presence inside a situation where the lived body expresses himself beyond the conscious and strategical recourse to "re-presentations". These interactive practices are structured by two kinds of exercises, which are linked to two kinds of subjective experiences, namely, "attunement" and "confrontation". Two notions which can more generally be considered as two foundational principles of religious and social interaction<sup>19</sup>. This kind of direct contact between lived bodies can indeed be found in a broad range of practices: massage, dance, martial arts, sexuality, music, poetic battles, daily conversations... And the daoist practices of ritual experimentation of Master Li proposes to explore the gradations and transformations between these two founding principles.

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<sup>18</sup> This include « pushing hands » (*tuishou*) and "comparing martial [accomplishment]" (*biwu*).

<sup>19</sup> See the importance of sexual and fighting movements in Buriat Shamans' dance, see Hamayon (1998).

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