

# The Sexual Body Techniques of Early and Medieval China—Underlying Emic Theories and Basic Methods of a Non-Reproductive Sexual Scenario for Non-Same-Sex Partners

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The sexual body techniques of early and medieval China are treated heuristically to form a sexual scenario for non-same-sex partners that is discussed in (1) textual sources dating from approximately 200 BCE to 1000 CE. These sources were transmitted and reformulated throughout this period as part of the wider sexual knowledge culture of imperial China (Wells and Yao Ping 2015; Yao Ping 2018). Minimal referential series of short extracts from such sources will be presented in historical order to illustrate some fairly consistent basic ideas, concepts, theories and practical advice documented therein. This concise review will discuss (2) general aspects of the sexual scenario in which gender-specific roles during the sexual encounter must be emphasised. As ‘essence’ is considered to be the most precious generative fluid in the human body, men are advised to (3) deal with male essence as a scarce good, and thus learn to avoid emission and ejaculation during a sexual encounter. In stark contrast to this male preoccupation with containment, women are thought to be a superior source of nourishment. Repeated (4) female ejaculation provides the ‘female essence’ that can be absorbed by the man. (5) Performing a sexual encounter means mutual stimulation to this end during foreplay and onset phase, followed by a series of penetrative ‘advances’ with ‘intermissions’, and culminating in a ‘grand finale’.

## (1) Textual Sources to a Sexual Knowledge Culture, 200 BCE to 1000 CE

Tangible *textual evidence* for sexual body techniques comes early in China—about five hundred years before the Indian *Kāmasūtra*, which is considered to date from c. 300 CE (tr. Doniger and Kakar 2002)—in the bamboo and silk manuscripts excavated from Tomb 3 at Mawangdui 馬王堆 (near Changsha, in today’s Hunan province, China), which date to the late

third, or the early second century BCE. (See the archaeological reports Fu Juyou and Chen Songchang 1992; He Jiejun ed. 2004. For source texts, see Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu Zhengli Xiaozu 1985; Ma Jixing 1992; Qiu Xigui ed. 2014; Ōgata 2015.)

Two of the recovered bamboo manuscripts—*Uniting Yin and Yang* (\**He yinyang* 合陰陽)<sup>1</sup> and *Discussion of the Utmost Method Under the Sky* (*Tianxia zhidao tan* 天下至道談)—are concerned exclusively with a sexual scenario for non-same-sex partners. A third—*Ten Interviews* (\**Shiwen* 十問)—includes additional advice for general health, breathing techniques and wellness. The first two manuscripts mentioned are made up of small modular text sequences that are organised as a hypertext, which the reader has to mentally construct by jumping from module to module. The third text consists of ten dialogues in question-and-answer format. These early sources are written in a concise, often metrically regulated language. They use lists and rhyme to facilitate memorisation, and develop a special technical vocabulary that now needs to be reconstructed and interpreted as its terminology became obsolete early on, or underwent considerable changes in transmission (Pfister 2013). (Tr. in Wile 1992; Harper 1998; Pfister 2003; Ōgata 2015; cf. Harper 1987; Li Ling and McMahon 1992; Li Ling 2006.)

The sexual scenario falls within the overall topic of nurturing life techniques (*yangsheng*), which receive further treatment in silk manuscripts. *Recipes for Nurturing Life* (\**Yangsheng fang* 養生方) includes prescriptions to cure various sex-related health issues, to increase arousal and to stimulate sexual performance, as well as a line drawing of the vulva labelled with the names of outer aspects of the genital

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<sup>1</sup> Manuscript titles are starred when their title was added by modern editors. Translations of titles and excerpts of source texts are those of the present author throughout.

area and locations inside the vagina (Pfister 2016).

During the Han dynasty ‘arts of the bedchamber’ (*fangzhong shu* 房中術, in Japanese *bō-naijutsu*) became a bibliographic label for various sexual body techniques, set apart from medical and nurturing life writings, but this distinction was not followed in later Sui dynasty listings. (Chen Guofu 1963: 365–9; Okaniishi 2010, vol. 2: 1183–8; Lin Fu-shih 2008: 335–7; Li Ling 2011a: 207–10.)

In 984 CE Tamba no Yasuyori 丹波康賴 (912–995 CE) presented a monumental work to the Japanese Emperor Enyū 円融. His *Core Prescriptions of Medicine* (*Ishinpō* 醫心方) is a large compilation of thirty scrolls, giving a comprehensive tenth-century view of Chinese medicine. (Tamba 1955(2000); Liu Xiuqiao ed. 1976; Gao Wenzhu *et al.* 1996; *cf.* Ōta Tenrei 1976; Society for the Commemoration of the One Thousandth Anniversary of the ‘Ishimpō’ 1984; Triplett 2014.)

Tamba excerpted mainly medical texts brought to Japan from China, and noted assiduously the title of a source text for each quoted passage. Many of the titles mentioned were subsequently lost in part or entirely in China. Scroll 28 is entitled ‘On the Chamber-Intern’ (*bōnei* 房內 in Japanese, or *fangnei* in Chinese). *Nei* 內 means both the ‘inner quar-

ter’ reserved for women in a major household, and the women as ‘inmates’ themselves. The chapter title thereby points politely to the sexual encounters of a patriarch with his several women in their closed sphere; however, the process of them ‘being brought in (the household)’ (*na* 納) is not discussed. Issues of reproduction are treated separately in Scroll 24.

Scroll 28 contains thirty subchapters or rubrics that deal with various aspects of sexual body techniques (Table 1; Pfister 2013). This topical categorisation allows us to assess the relative importance of the sources quoted therein. Most prominent is *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* (*Yufang mijue* 玉房祕決), which is quoted in most rubrics before any other source text, and from which several rubric titles are probably derived (see Table 1); it is followed by *Master Dong Xuan* (*Dongxuan zi* 洞玄子), *Essentials of the Jade Chamber* (*Yufang zhiyao* 玉房指要), *The Book of the Dark Woman* (*Xuannü jing* 玄女經), and several others. (Tr. Van Gulik 1951(2003), 1961(2004); Umayahara Shigeo *et al.* 1967; Ishihara and Levy 1969; Hsia *et al.* 1989; Wile 1992. For critical reviews of Van Gulik, see Furth 1994, 2005; Hinsch 2005.)

Table 1: The thirty rubrics of scroll 28 <i>On the Chamber-Intern</i> in <i>Ishinpō</i>	
1 Culminant Principles	16 Eight Increases [of Qi] ¶
2 Nourishing Yang	17 Seven Decreases [of Qi] ¶
3 Nourishing Yin ¶	18 Reverting the Essence
4 Harmonise Strivings	19 [Male] Emission and Ejaculation
5 Approaching the Ride	20 Treating Damages ¶
6 Five Constants ¶	21 Seeking Offspring
7 Five Proofs ¶	22 Attractive Women
8 Five Desires ¶	23 Repulsive Women
9 Ten Stimulations ¶	24 Interdictions and Avoidances
10 Four Optima [of male erection] *	25 Interception of Ghost Intercourse ¶
11 Nine Qi [of the woman] *	26 Use of Herbs and Minerals
12 Nine Procedures *	27 Small Jade Stalk [Penis]
13 Thirty Procedures *	28 Wide Jade Gate [Vagina] *
14 Nine States *	29 Pains of Young Women
15 Six Positions *	30 Injuries of Grown-up Women
* Rubrics that do not quote the <i>Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber</i>	
¶ Rubrics quoting exclusively the <i>Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber</i>	

Even though *The Book of the Plain Woman* (*Sunü jing* 素女經) is quoted only twice in *Ishinpō* 28.1 and 28.5, and despite Tamba no Yasuyori's explicit titling of all citations, Ye Dehui 葉德輝 (1903: 1a–11b) assembled all the *Ishinpō* passages mentioning the interlocutor *Su nü* 素女 (Plain Woman) into a composite work of his own making. By assigning those passages a single title, it conflates several sources, including cases when passages contradict each other, or otherwise do not fit. Yet Ye's *rifacimento Sunü jing* of 1903 was received as the major work on sexual techniques in the twentieth century. (Tr. Mussat 1978; Wile 1992: 84; 85–94, *The Classic of Su nü*; cf. Rocha 2015.)

Tapping into the same early medieval texts as the *Ishinpō*, the famous medical writer Sun Simiao 孫思邈 (581–682) includes in his voluminous work of 652 CE—titled the *Essential Prescriptions Worth a Thousand in Gold for Urgent Cases* (*Beiji qianjin yaofang* 備急千金要方)—a chapter on 'Replenishing and Benefiting in the Bedchamber' (*juan* 27, ch. 8, 'Fangzhong buyi' 房中補益). (Sun Simiao 1955 (1994): 488–91; tr. Wile 1992: 114–1; Wouters 2010: 73–8.) This chapter shares its composite character, its intertextual relationship with predecessors, and the combination of health-related and Daoist religious concerns with 'Losses and Benefits in Steering Women' (*Yunü sunyi* 御女損益), Chapter 6 in the *Records on Nourishing the Disposition and Prolonging the Mandate of Life* (*Yangxing yanming lu* 養性延命錄) of unknown date and origin (tr. Wile 1992: 119–22).

The sexual rites of Celestial Master (*Tianshi* 天師) Daoism—'merging the pneumas' (*he qi* 合炁)—were distinguished from the arts of the bedchamber by this religious community itself, which criticised the latter, and they appear to have been socially oriented *rites de passage* rather than focussing on the sexual encounters of couples. (Maspero 1937: 401–13; Kalinowski 1985; Raz 2008, 2012; Kleeman 2014; Mollier 2016.) The relationship of the sexual body techniques with various Daoist religious movements awaits further clarification. (See Maspero 1937; Needham 1983; Hidemi 1991; Zhu Yueli 2002; Lin Fu-shih 2008; De Meyer 2006: 345–74; Hudson 2007.)

Literary treatments that use the vocabulary of sexual body techniques, like the *Rhapsody on the Great Pleasure in the Mutual Joys of Heaven and Earth, Yin and Yang* (*Tiandi yinyang jiaohuan da le fu* 天地陰陽交歡大樂賦, tr. Idema 1983; cf. Umekawa 2005a; Harper 2010; Yao Ping 2013.), the art of charming (Li Jianmin 1996; Zhang Hanmo 2013), aphrodisiacs (Harper 2005; Umekawa (2005b; Lo and Re'em 2018), and treatment strategies for sexual disorders or sexual medicine (e.g. Liu Jie 1995; Fan Youping *et al.* eds 2007), as well as later developments of the art of the bedchamber (see Van Gulik 1951(2003), 1961 (2004); Kobzev 1993; Li Ling 2006; Sakade and Umekawa 2003; Marié 2007; Tsuchiya Eimei 2008; Chen Hsiu-fen 2009: 83–128; Yao Ping 2015; Wells and Yao Ping 2015; Umekawa and Dear 2018), lie outside the topical or temporal focus of the present entry.

A note of caution and critique is due regarding the twentieth-century reception of the textual sources of the arts of the bedchamber: not only did translation of this ancient knowledge culture pose exceptional difficulties (as especially Wile 1992 has amply documented in his notes, albeit not without adding *Verschlimmbesserungen*), but also the conceptual frameworks used did not attempt to recover or reconstruct the emic perspective on body, consciousness and disease concepts of their times. (On the emic-etic distinction, see Headland, Pike, Harris eds 1990; de Sardan 1998.) Instead, various kinds of then new, normative approaches to sexological issues were anachronistically inserted without discussion of their being etical terminology. For example, 'orgasm' is considered as being synonymous with male ejaculation or used to translate a medieval Chinese term for male and female satisfaction (*kuai* 快), but without reflection on orgasm's shifting technical meaning and conceptual development in modern sexology. (For critical remarks on orgasm, and the development of this paradigm, see Walter 1999; Lewandowski 2001; Janssen 2007. On satisfaction, see Pfister 2012.) Some terms like 'ejaculation' and 'sexual energy' are applied to translate terms or to paraphrase concepts, but while this might appeal to a fashionable *Zeitgeist*, it does not render faithfully the Chinese wording and emic perspective. (General over-

views of the field include Wile 2018, Wells and Yao Ping 2015, and Yao Ping 2015, 2018. For insights into the reception process and hybrid popularisations, see Rocha 2011, 2012.)

## (2) General Aspects of the Sexual Scenario

The *sexual scenario* of the arts of the bed-chamber does not discuss same-sex relations, and it is necessarily based on a two-sex model, wherein men are classified as *yang* and male, and women as *yin* and female. This applies also to haptic pleasures during sexual acts: ‘What is categorised as male, rubs the outside; what is categorised as female, rubs the inside. This is called the skill of *yin* and *yang*.’ (*Tianxia zhidao tan*, slip 65) During non-same-sex encounters the superior female potency (Sherfey 1966) wins out against male impotence and weakness: ‘If the woman defeats the man, it is like water extinguishing fire.’ (*Yufang mijue* [9b], *Ishinpō* 28.1: 2a) In most texts, male fragility is emphasised and foregrounded; it receives a phantasmatic treatment in the sexual techniques and is medicalised prominently in the recipe literature. In contrast, female strength and capacity for nourishment forms an implicit background against which the sexual techniques seek to address men’s health issues especially those of men past forty (*Beiji qianjin yaofang* 27.8: 488b). Thus, *yin* and *yang* are used to describe a fundamental and dynamic *asymmetry* in female and male sexual responses, and each gender is advised to adopt a specific kind of learned behaviour—or sexual body technique—to play out the basic programme that unites *yang* with *yin*. (On the concept of body techniques, see Mauss 1935, and Crossley 2005.) The *yin-yang* language obscures to a certain extent hierarchies and asymmetric conceptual features as applied to sexual intercourse – or *jiaojie* 交接, an ‘exchange’ (*jiao* 交) (of bodily fluids) and ‘contact’ (*jie* 接) (by touch).

To create norms for sexual behaviour is conceptually naturalised: ‘When humans are born only two things are not to be learned: the first is breathing, the second is eating. Besides these two, there is nothing that has not to be learned and practised. Because what reproduces life is eating and what diminishes life is sensuality (*se* 色), sages must have standards

(*ze* 則) for uniting men and women.’ (*Tianxia zhidao tan*, slips 40–41) Such teaching offers guidance in potentially life-threatening situations. As humans leak, the ‘nine openings’ of the body—the two of the lower body, anus and urethral meatus, and the seven of the sense organs—are problematic spheres of in- and outflow. They are inroads for diseases, and the generative fluid or ‘essence’ (*jing* 精) escapes during ejaculatory coitus. The learnt practice is meant to overcome men’s most serious problem of losing a scarce good necessary for life-maintenance. From an outsider perspective and psychologically speaking, sexual body techniques open detailed standardised ways for phantasmatic self-affection (Lohmar 2008), but emically and androcentrically these are seen as a self-reproductive process: ‘The Daoist considers essence (*jing*) as a treasure. If spent, it engenders others; if retained, it engenders oneself.’ (*Yangxing yanming lu* 6: 8b. A similar formulation is found in *Wangwu zhenren koushou yindan mijue lingpian*, *Yunji qiqian* 64: 19a.)

What may be considered as non-reproductive sexual behaviour (Wundram 1979) between non-same sex partners in early and medieval Chinese texts is indeed more than recreational sex—one of its twentieth-century interpretations (see Rocha 2012). For those earlier thought communities, sexual intercourse was supposed to nourish men in need of essence, and thereby ‘heal humans with humans’ (*Beiji qianjin yaofang* 27.8: 488b). In this connection the sexual arts are presented as a healing method with an assumed enormous therapeutic value for needy men. Androcentric self-reproduction—viewed as therapeutic process—serves to resolve male feeding envy. Grafting—a widespread metaphor for sexual intercourse (Taiz and Taiz 2017: 299–301)—is used to express this idea of nourishment linguistically. In *\*Shiwen*, several interviews describe methods titled with the phrase ‘to graft the privates’ (*jie yin* 接陰), implying a form of intimate contact in which the man—conceived as scion—draws up the sap from the woman’s slit—forming the rootstock, and thereby ‘feeds his spiritual flow’ (*shi shenqi* 食神氣). The eighth-century text *Numinous Tablets of the Secret Instructions on the Yin Elixir Orally Transmitted by the Perfected Person of Wang-*

wu (*Wangwu zhenren koushou yindan mijue lingpian* 王屋真人口授陰丹祕訣靈篇) takes up the idea as follows: ‘The arts of prolonging life are similar to the grafting of trees (*jie shu* 接樹), as one develops one life mandate with another life. (...) As one begins to open the jade gate, it should have the signs of blood; at the beginning its embankment veins (*chengli* 塍理) [i.e. the vasocongestion of the labia minora and suburethral region] start to become permeable. When *yin* and *yang* stimulate another, it is at this time that conception is going to occur. Whether one acts in such a way as to let the life mandate of descendants ripen [i.e. begets children], or develops the life mandate of us forebears [i.e. engenders oneself], are matters of one and the same category. The principle is clear as daylight, too. In this moment it is only important not to let [the essence] leak out (*wu xie* 勿洩).’ (*Yunji qiqian* 64: 19a) The late imperial *Exposition of Cultivating the True by the Great Immortal of the Purple Gold Splendour* (*Zijin guangyao daxian xiuzhen yanyi* 紫金光耀大仙修真演義, hereafter *Exposition of Cultivating the True*, fol. 111, tr. Wile 1992: 144) gives, in section 18 ‘Renewed Blossoming by Grafting on the Decayed (Rootstock)’, a slightly more eloquent description of the matter, including the motto: ‘Worldly people who do not know the principle of prolonging life merely have to look at the grafted pear in the mulberry’.

Conceptually speaking, this phantasmatic absorption theory is not presented as a negatively connoted ‘sexual vampirism’ (revamped by Goldin 2006), but rather as a men-centred optimisation process of self-growth whose possible adverse effects on women do not enter the picture. The subjective phantasmatic experienter perspective visualises textually the permeable, excited bodies, and assumes that as soon as their body images merge, the female essences can be transported from the female to the male system.

A concrete guide to literally drawing up female fluids by the penis could not be found in our Chinese sources. This kind of exploration of the humanly possible has apparently only been executed by Bengal yogins in Tārāpīṭh applying the *vajrolī mudrā* (lightning seal) for seminal retention and absorption of female fluids during sexual intercourse. They use

rubber or silver catheters to train their urogenital musculature in order to develop urethral suction (cf. Roşu 2002; Darmon 2002; Mallinson 2018). It remains unclear what emic perspective then explains what should happen with the fluids once they arrive in the urinary bladder.

Taken at face value, one might conceive of the rubric 3 ‘Nourishing *Yin*’ as the female counterpart to rubric 2 ‘Nourishing *Yang*’ (Table 1), where the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* advises menfolk to change partners frequently in order to benefit more (from the female partner’s fluids), to choose, preferably, young women—not under fourteen and up to thirty years old—who have not given birth, and to keep the sexual arts secret from them. Despeux and Kohn (2003: 36–40) claimed that three passages of the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* promote the ‘power of *yin*’ by embracing the woman’s female sexuality, ‘giving encouragement to all women who follow her’. However, their partial translations omitted all those passages in the text where female adepts are judged negatively. We read that the Queen Mother of the West ‘copulates once with a man, and this establishes damaging diseases’; and that she likes to have intercourse with young men, which is said ‘not to be admissible to teach to the world; why was the Queen Mother like that?’ The explicit call is for moderation and restriction; we read that an early exhaustion of a woman’s ‘*yin* essence’ (*yin jing* 陰精) should be ‘adequately restrained and observed’ (specifically when, on hearing that the man has had sex with others, she becomes jealous and agitated, so that her ‘essence juices’ flow out by themselves), and we are told that a woman who ‘knows the art of nourishing *yin*’ might ‘transform into a man’. Clearly, theories of equal benefit were secondarily emerging theories that did not even attempt to smooth out the theoretical inconsistencies with their forerunners. An early example for such an equal benefit scenario can be found in the *Biography of Lord Pei, the Realised Person of Pure Refinement* (*Qing Ling zhen ren Pei jun zhuan* 清靈真人裴君傳; cf. Raz 2012: 185–6).

### (3) Dealing With Male Essence: On Male Ejaculation and How to Avoid It

‘Essences’ (*jing* 精) are fatty, whitish and slimy fluids in the body that get dispersed inside the body and into the hair-fine vessels. The *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* contrasts the healthy ‘manifest essence’ (*yang jing* 陽精)—which is thick and coagulates—with five kinds of spoilt ejaculated fluids, and their respective damaged body constituents, all of which are results of hectic intercourse, leading to abrupt and violent emissions (*Ishinpō* 28.20: 25a). Compare also the seven afflictions and seven injuries to the male uro-genital system as given by Marquis of White Waters in the Wuwei medical tablets 85A–85B (tr. in Yang and Brown 2017: 293–5), and in *Bei ji qian jin yao fang* (19.8: 354a).

‘Essence’ as such constitutes a scarce good. In 1335 CE, it was calculated by Master Shang Yang (Shangyang zi 上陽子) in his *Great Essentials on the Golden Elixir by Master Shang Yang* (*Shang Yang zi jin dan da yao* 上陽子金丹大要 3: 1a–2b) that at age sixteen the ‘essence’ in the body only amounts to about 1520 ml (1 *sheng* 升 6 *ge* 合) of liquid volume, which according to the text weighs 633 g (1 *jin* 斤). By a continent lifestyle, it can be continuously augmented up to about 2850 ml (3 *sheng*) at best. But each ejaculation results in a loss of about 47.5 ml (half a *ge*), which is of great concern!

Li Shizhen (1518–1593) cites the calculation without mentioning the source in his *Materia Medica Arranged According to Monographs and Technical Criteria* (*Bencao gangmu*, *juan* 52; vol. 2: 1932). By his time the total volume of essence in the body would vary from about one at sixteen years of age to about three litres in a continent life, and the ejaculation would amount to 50 ml. However, if Master Shang Yang had used earlier measure standards, all these volumes would have been slightly lower than indicated above.

Using the voice of the Selected Woman (Cai nü 采女), the everyman’s question ‘wherein lies the fun of preventing ejaculation?’ is answered by Ancestor Peng: ‘If the essence is emitted, trunk and body parts become sluggish and limp, the ears are bitterly (painfully) buzzing, the eyes can hardly be kept open, the

throat dries out, and the bones and articulations loosen and decay. Even though there is occasionally a short-term satisfaction, in the end it is not pleasurable. If one stimulates and does not ejaculate, the force of the *qi* has a surplus, trunk and body parts can be at ease, ears and eyes are sharp and bright. Even though one restrains and calms oneself, imagination and (loving) care are emphasised even more. It is constantly as if it were not enough, how can this not be pleasurable?’ (*Yufang mijue*, *Ishinpō* 28.18: 22a; cf. Pfister 2012: 52–3.) Thus, ejaculation—the ‘short-term satisfaction’ (*zan kuai* 暫快)—is contrasted with an intermediate state of bliss, echoing prepubescent boys’ orgasmic experiences. (On the principal and experiential separation of ejaculation and orgasm, see Marcuse 1922; Haeberle 1985: 266–8; Kothari 1990.) Several texts elaborate on the profitable health outcome of a series of prolonged sexual intercourse performed without ejaculation: from improved sight and hearing to a glowing skin, to strengthened spine and bones, to free-flowing waterways of the urogenital system, to a hard and strong erection; and as one’s strivings become untameable (a feeling of boldness). (*Tianxia zhidao tan*, slips 22–4; \**He yinyang*, slips 112–15; \**Shiwen*, slips 19–22). This culminates in an altered state of consciousness, during which subjective light experiences emerge as he ‘follows the heavenly blossom’, or his ‘spirit brightens up’. Clearly the sexually stimulated inner transports of the ‘essences’ benefit overall fitness and wellbeing—at least from the experiencer’s perspective—and contribute to agreeable psychological states, and a feeling of bodily lightness. (See Pfister 2006a on spirit brightening; Pfister 2012 on phosphenes, and Hsu 2012 on the feeling of lightness. On altered states of consciousness during sexual encounters, see Swartz 1994; Cohen and Lévy 1996; Meston *et al.* 2004; Safron 2016.) The basic methods to avoid emission and ejaculation are (a) the free-handed method, (b) the urethral pressure method, and (c) combinations thereof with visualisations. Ejaculation is not completely avoided, but simply decreases with age. (Maspero 1937; Needham 1983; Wile 1992; Pfister 1995; Karamanou *et al.* 2010.)

Rubric 18 of the *Ishinpō* 28 is named ‘reverting the essence’ (*huan jing* 還精), a term that de-

notes internal dispersion of the essence after high excitation during sexual intercourse and avoiding emission and ejaculation. However, the meditative texts of the Shangqing tradition use the term in solo practices that move around visualised contents and circle coloured *qi* inside the adept's body (Maspero 1937: 379–80; Robinet 1984, I: 175 n. 1; Hudson 2008: 413–30).

(a) The Mawangdui texts report a *free-handed method* closely linked with an altered state of consciousness: 'The matter of the spirit brightening consists in what is locked away; cautiously handle the jade lock (*yu bi* 玉閉), and spirit brightening will arrive.' (*Tianxia zhidao tan*, slips 18–19) While maintaining a light and regular breathing pattern throughout and avoiding vocalisations, the man reduces thrusting movement and 'contracts the ring' (*xi zhou* 翕州, i.e. the anal sphincter<sup>2</sup>) to maintain the 'jade lock' (and thus avoid emission and ejaculation); that is, by locking away his own 'essence', which is made one whole (*yi* 壹) that will be shifted (*qian* 遷) upwards in his body (slip 22). Before each 'intermission' (*yi* 已) he stops moving, sucks air in and presses the penis downwards, waiting for some time in order to 'retain the surplus', or washes the penis with an aphrodisiac lotion, so that it begins to erect itself anew; this action is called 'stabilising the tilting' (slips 31, 33–36). In all there are eight ways to 'increase (bodily) flow constellations' (*yi qi* 益氣) and overall stamina of the man (cf. Pfister 2006b: 90–97).

*Yufang zhiyao* (*Ishinpō* 28.18: 22b) adds some elements to guide the man's attention away, stating: 'When the essence is strongly aroused, you quickly raise your head, open your eyes wide and look to the left and to the right, upwards and downwards; you contract your lower body, hold your breath, and the essence is stopped by itself.'

(b) The *urethral pressure method* is considered by some a beginner's practice, which should, after some training, be replaced by the free-handed procedure. 'The method to revert the

essence and to replenish the brain (marrow) (*huan jing bu nao zhi dao* 還精補腦之道): As the essence is greatly aroused during sexual intercourse, and about to be emitted, press quickly to drive it back with the two middle fingers of the left hand behind the privates' bag [scrotum] and in front of the great opening [anus]. Press it during its bristling activity, prolongedly eject the breath while clapping the teeth ten times. Do not block off the breath, as in that case your essence will be released. Whereas if the essence is not allowed to be emitted, it returns and reverts in the jade stalk [penis], and moves upwards into the brain (marrow).' (*Yufang zhiyao Ishinpō* 28.18: 22b) More than a thousand years later, the method was integrated without further ado into planned parenthood tracts of the twentieth century, but now called the 'urethral pressure method to prevent conception' (*niaodao yapo fa* 尿道壓迫法, or *yapo niaodao biyunfa* 壓迫尿道避孕法; cf. Yang Geng 1964; Han Xiangyang 1972; Edwards 1976).

*Retrograde ejaculation* of semen into the bladder is an undesired outcome of cases when emission was already on its way, and urethral pressure applied a trifle too late. It would become apparent as cloudy urine in the lacquerware urinals in the form of a tiger (*hu zi* 虎子) that were used by men in well-to-do households in early China (Huang Gangzheng 1986). Ancestor Peng explains it to the Selected Woman: 'One forcefully presses [the essence in the urethra], and closes it off tightly; it being difficult to hold and easily lost, this causes one's essence to leak and the urine to be turbid.' (*Yangxing yanming lu* B.6: 9a; *Beiji qianjin yaofang* 27.8: 490a; Maspero 1937: 382.) The late imperial *Exposition of Cultivating the True* (fol. 104, section 12) describes the difficulties encountered by beginners who want to 'lock and bar the mysterious trigger', and quantifies the occurrence of reflux: 'Wanting to forcibly close it off (*qiāng bi* 強閉), the wasted essence (*bai jing* 敗精) necessarily silts up (*ni* 泥) and enters the urinary bladder and the kidney bags. (...) Out of a number of five thousand (sexual) excitations (*shān gu* 扇(扇)鼓), one only about once emits wasted essence.' (Revising Wile 1992: 140, 265 n. 3.) By this estimation, retrograde ejaculation is considered an occasional and relatively rare event,

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<sup>2</sup> The use of anal sphincters and genital musculature is in no way tabooed or restricted; insight into pelvic muscle function might have been furthered by squatting behaviour, and sitting on mats in Early China. On anal pleasures, see Lo and Barrett 2012.

which can be avoided by using a more gentle approach to prevent emission, the texts' own elaborate free-handed method.

#### (4) Female Ejaculation and Female Essence

At the end of the nineteenth century *female ejaculation* became a controversial topic in the then new research field of sexual science (*Sexualwissenschaft*, sexology), and it remains controversial to this day (Stifter 1988; Korda *et al.* 2010). However, the topic was prominently present in several ancient cultural spheres of Afro-Eurasia, e.g. in circum-Mediterranean cultures of antiquity (Andò 2009), ancient India (Syed 1999), and China (Pfister 2006b, 2007). Ancient and medieval Chinese texts on sexual body techniques integrate female potency and ejaculation into the body image of all women. A woman is capable of ejaculation, actively provoked by herself, solo or in combination with adequate stimulation by a partner or a sex toy.

The sixth of the Nine Procedures in *Xuannü jing* is called 'phoenixes soaring': The man kneels between the raised legs of the woman, supporting himself with his hands on the mat, thereby reducing physical contact with the genital area; he penetrates hard and hot, piercing the deepest vaginal portion of her cervix or 'descendant's pebble' (*kun shi* 昆石), and then drags out the penis along the upper vaginal wall. 'Let the woman move herself and perform the technique of three times eight: [three times] pressing her buttocks tightly against each other, and [eight times] opening and relaxing the female privates so as to drive out the essence juices (*jing ye* 精液) herself.' This position maximises friction for both. The woman is able to provoke ejaculation by repeatedly firmly pushing outward (as if to force urination) for some time, and then relaxing her pubococcygeal musculature (Sundahl 2003: 86–7, 102–3, 121–4).

Sex training tools both for women and men have been archaeologically recovered in tombs of elite households from Early China: bronze dildoes to cover the man's penis, stone eggs to train the vaginal musculature, as well as bronze dildoes with bony rubbing devices aimed at maximal stimulation of the clitoral complex and upper vaginal wall (see Egge-

brecht 1994: Cat. 95; Chen Hai 2004; Khayutina ed. 2013: 291, fig. 198); Li Ling 2006: 343–70; Li Ling 2011b).

The *\*He yinyang* module eloquently describes, in 'proofs of the ten intermissions', the consistency and smell of the female emission as being variable, ranging from being emitted clear and fresh, like groats, smelling like cooked bones, smelling fishy or like grain, being creamy, slippery, viscous, tallowy, sticky, clotty; 'having clotted, it becomes slippery again, is again emitted clear and fresh; and that is called the 'grand finale' (*da zu* 大卒) [that includes carpopedal spasms, elevating the buttocks from the mat, pale lips, and a sweaty nose]. (Slips 129–32; the parallel passage of *Tianxia zhidao tan* ends with 'floodlike flow constellations are only now emitted', slips 56–8; Pfister 2006b: 98.)

*\*He yinyang* is unique in claiming a debit by postulating that a woman owes the man her ejaculate: 'In the evening the essences of the man are provided for (*jiang* 將) [by prolonged sexual intercourse without emission and ejaculation], in the morning the essences of the woman are demanded (*ze* 責) [i.e. emitted and ejaculated], and thereby my essence will be nourished by your essence.' (Slip 127) At the time of the 'grand finale', body boundaries are lost in the experiential perspective (Meston *et al.* 2004: 177), and this allows for the phantasmatic transport of essence from woman to man (slips 128, 133; Pfister 2006b: 97–100).

#### (5) Performing a Sexual Encounter

The scenario of sexual performance is developed in text modules. Such a presentation strategy parallels the breaking down of the apparent tumult of a sexual encounter into modular units, which in turn are cognitively manageable by the aspiring male participant and observer. The modules facilitate the learning of a specific descriptive and technical description language, and guide attention to observing and interpreting specific female bodily signs and kinetic reactions. He receives advice for adequate interaction, which in each case must be adapted to a variety of situational constellations.



(a) Foreplay, or the ‘playful ways’ (*xi dao* 戲道), sees the partners breathing upon each other’s bodies, embracing, snuggling, touching and arousing each other in a leisurely way. The man learns the five proofs of her fivefold desire, which are rising bodily flows and a heated face, hardened nipples and a sweating nose, descent of bodily saps and wet thighs; a dry throat and swallowing saliva. Only after all the proofs are seen, is he allowed to mount). A rich vocabulary is used to describe the caressing of her erogenous zones from the wrist, over neck, to ‘mount constancy’ (*chang shan* 常山), massaging her by breath, touch and body weight. (\**He yinyang*, slips 102–11; cf. Harper 1987; Li and McMahan 1992; Mid-dendorf 2007.)

(b) The onset phase, called ‘approaching the matter’ (*lin shi* 臨事), or ‘approaching the ride’ (*lin yu* 臨御)—despite being a regular rubric in the literature (*Ishinpō* 28.5)—has so far been overlooked by virtually all modern commentators. Onset is differentiated from foreplay—when fingers and tongue arouse the couple—by its use of the penis in order to promote frictional pleasure and to further tumescence of the erectile tissues of both parties. Here the distinction between ‘outer’ (*wai* 外) and ‘inner’ (*nei* 內) aspect of the female genitals is technically important. It is paralleled by the male actions of ‘mounting’ (*shang* 上) the vulva and *mons veneris*, and ‘entering’ (*ru* 入, *na* 內 or 納) the vaginal canal itself, where thrusting can be directed to both areas, varied and alternated in either a vulval or ‘shallow’ (*qian* 淺), or a vaginal or ‘deep’ (*shen* 深) fashion. During onset—that is, before any ‘deep’ penetration occurs—special attention is given for some time to the clitoral complex. (On the conception of the clito-urethro-vaginal complex, see O’Connell *et al.* 2008; Foldès and Buisson 2009; Jannini *et al.* 2014; Mazloomdoost and Pauls 2015; Levin 2018.) In \**He yinyang* he takes the penis or ‘jade whip’ to ‘hit upwards’ (*shang zhen* 上搵) without penetration in order to cause her bodily flows to arrive (*zhi qi* 致氣), producing ‘warmth’ (slips 108–9). In *Sunü jing* the woman reclines, and the man positions himself between her legs; he uses his lips on the ‘mouth’ and sucks the ‘tongue’ (clitoris) of her genitals, and by holding his ‘jade stalk’ then ‘beats’ (*ji* 擊) both

sides of her ‘jade gate’ (aiming at the clitoral bulbs) for about the ‘time of a meal’ (*shi qing* 食頃; *Ishinpō* 28.5: 11b). Even more detailed is the description in *Dongxuan zi*: ‘The jade stalk drags at the mouth of the jade gate. (...) He then attacks and hits with the *yang* blade to and fro, or storms downwards to the jade streaks (*yu li* 玉理) [fourchette], or rams upwards to the golden ditch (*jin gou* 金溝) [pudendal cleft]; he hits and pierces the sides of the ring wall (*bi yong* 辟靡, read 璧靡) [the side areas around the urethral meatus, or periurethral glans (Levin 1991)], or rests at the right of the reddish jade platform (*xuan tai* 璿臺) [elevation of glans clitoridis].’ An added interlinear commentary specifies: ‘The above is wandering outside, and not yet copulation inside.’ To stimulate the clitoris, the clitoral bulbs and the area around the urethral meatus for quite some time by hitting with the penis guided by the hand is known in Rwanda as *gukubita rugongo*, ‘hit the clit’, and on the Chuuk Islands and the Ulithi Atoll it’s called *wechewechen Chuuk*, ‘Trukese striking or prodding’ (see Vincke 1991: 175; Bizimana 2005: 64; 2008: 60–64; Swartz 1958: 477–8, 481–3; Lessa 1966: 87). All three cultures prefer wet sex, and thus our last text concludes the passage with: ‘The woman’s lustful juices must spill from the cinnabar grotto, thereafter you throw your *yang* blade into the children’s palace [i.e. the vagina].’ (*Ishinpō* 28.5: 11a) The onset activity mimicks ways of same-sex and solo stimulation that further erection and tumescence. The deliberate insertion of such an onset phase, which specifically stimulates the clitoral complex modifies the influential, but often criticised four-phase model of the sexual response cycle—consisting of excitation, plateau, orgasm, and resolution phases—established by the modern sexologists Masters and Johnson (1966). (See also Haeberle 1985: 65–7; for criticisms, see Tiefer 1991; Levin 2001, 2008.) It is a research desideratum to analyse ancient Chinese recipes to tighten the vagina and other vaginal practices regarding the question if they further lubrication (wet sex preference), or rather dry up the vagina (dry sex preference) (Levin 2005).

(c) The linking passage in *Tianxia zhidao tan* elucidates what should be at one’s disposition during the encounter: ‘Hold ready the ten

embellishments, arrange conveniently the ten positions, and vary the eight ways [of thrusting]’ (slip 47). Purposefully using some adapted military terms, the sexual interplay is cadenced by ten ‘advances’ (*dong* 動), each followed by an ‘intermission’ (*yi* 已). (On metaphors of fighting and warfare, see Van Gulik 1951(2004): 68, 158–9; 1961(2003): 76, 157, 278–80, 320; Wile 1992: 35.) The scenario thus relinquishes the one-climax-structure for a ten-fold, longer and thoroughly modulated one. The ten positions have animal names; one needs to know in what position toads or dragonflies copulate to get the point of the list. Later texts list in dense description up to thirty variations (*Dongxuan zi*, *Ishinpō* 28.13: 16a–18a). Some positions are considered therapeutic, especially those to increase the man’s weakened *qi*, where the woman straddles over the reclined man and provokes the emission of her ‘essence juices’ that ‘overflow to the outside’, coming ‘like rain’ or a ‘spring’ (*Xuannü jing*, *Ishinpō* 28.12: 14b–15b). The sources transmit several paronymic sets of vulvo-vaginal locations, which allow insights into the prototypical cognitive representation of the female genitals (Pfister 2007, 2016; Middendorf 2007). The observance of the distinction between shallow and deep thrusting addresses stimulation to both vulval (clitoral) and vaginal locations in changing rhythms, which are organised into a series of thrusting, punctuated by intermissions. (On the role of rhythmic stimulation, see Safron 2016; Levin 2018.)

The male participant observer interprets her ‘five sounds’ or vocalisations to guide his acti-

vity: when her breathing is throaty or she catches her breath—she’s inwardly tight; when gasping—she reaches delight; when continuously wailing—insert the jade whip and the nourishing starts; when breathing with a *hmaj* sound—pleasant sweetness is extreme; if she’s grinding her teeth—he should wait for her. By carefully distinguishing the sounds, he recognises where her ‘heart’ (attention) is located; likewise, he knows by her ‘eight ways of [involuntary] movement’ where pleasure passes through. Four examples out of ‘eight observations’ may serve: if she reaches out for him with her hands, the bellies should draw close; if she extends her elbows, the hammering of the upper vaginal wall is wanted, while he supports himself with his hands on the bed; if she crosses her thighs, the piercing is greatly overdone; if she’s shivering, it’s excellent. (*Tianxia zhidao tan*, slips 50–53, 63–4; compare *\*He yinyang*, slips 120–26; see Levin 2006.)

Slowing down and lingering without losing persistence is the essential advice given to men at the end of the *Discussion of the Utmost Method Under the Sky*, adding a description of emotional afterglow: ‘For the teasing entertainment it is important to endeavour to linger on and hold out; if one is capable to linger on and hold out, a woman greatly rejoices. She will be attached to you as to her younger and older brothers, and take care of you as of her father and mother. Everyone who can go this way is called a heavenly master.’ (Slips 66–7)

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