

FILIPPO COSTANTINI
(University of Costa Rica, UCR)
ORCID: 0000-0002-5799-0004

Disgusting vegetables: Wuxin taboo in Daoist prescription's texts

Abstract

Precepts and taboos play a central role in the systematization of Daoist communities. On this set of rules hinges the development of various Daoist movements and the establishment of different Daoist schools. In this article, I investigate the proscriptions about the five pungent vegetables (wuxin 五辛 or wuhun 五葷, allium vegetables) consumption in Daoist early medieval prescription's texts. Whereas previous scholarship has analyzed the influence of Buddhism in Daoist monastic rules, this paper turns the attention to the way in which the five pungent vegetables taboo was elaborated in Daoist discourse, especially in texts from the early medieval era. It argues that in Daoist prescription's texts, the allium vegetables taboo is supported and justified by the aversive emotion of disgust. By describing the five pungent vegetables as polluted, defiled and even dangerous items, Daoist texts construct the perfect condition for their repulsion and the taboo's final systematization.

Keywords: Chinese Philosophy, Chinese Religion, Daoism, Food taboos, Early Medieval China, Disgust

If you do not have time for longevity practice, you should not consume meat and pungent vegetables. In that way, even if your lower *qi* is released, it will not smell too much. Instead, when you undertake the practice of avoiding grain, whether you release your lower *qi* once or twice, it will be



completely without smell. Moreover, do not come into contact with what produces defiled and disgusting qi, and with all forms of serious illness.¹

The above passage, an excerpt from the Tang text *Taiqing tiaoci jing* 太清調氣經 (Great Clarity Scripture on the Regulation of Breath DZ 820)² aims at dissuading people from the consumption of meat and the five pungent vegetables, and from the contact with any form of impure elements. Bad *qi* 氣 relates with stench, pollution, dirt, all elements that block the flow of one's own pure vital energy causing illness and even death. In Daoism, specific food selection and dietary practices form a central part in the doctrine's purity rules. These sets of rules contribute in shaping the construction of the doctrine on several levels: the construction of specific *ways* of cultivation of the body, the regulation of the monastic life, and the constitution of rituals and ceremonies. Among those precepts, taboos play an important role in creating an ideal way of life where principles such as communal harmony and individual immortality can be promoted. Building on this premises, this paper explores the abhorrence for *wuxin* 五辛 or *wuhun* 五葷 (hereafter five pungent vegetables or allium family vegetables) in Daoist medieval precepts' texts. Due to the recurrent presence of the taboo in Daoist materials, I focus my attention to the period between the 3rd and the 8th century.

The taboo about the five pungent vegetables is testified to by the vast majority of Daoist prescription texts since early medieval China. However, total or partial avoidance of allium family vegetables emerges also in different kind of early sources not directly related to Daoist movements. The first kinds are Buddhist scriptures, mainly *vinayas* monastic codes and *Mahayana* sutras; the second are miscellaneous texts detailing rituals and Confucian practices such as the *Yili* 儀禮 (Book of Etiquette and Ceremony), the *Xunzi* 荀子 (Master Xun), and early Daoist related texts such as the *Zhuangzi* 莊子 and the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 (Master Embracing Simplicity).

Specific dietary regimes were among the prescriptions and proscriptions coming with the introduction of Buddhism and the translations into Chinese of sutras and monastic codes. The Indian *vinayas* – four of which translated in Chinese at the beginning of the 5th century – are one of the main sources for dietary taboos in Buddhism. These texts present a set of precepts, following an ideal frugal lifestyle with a strict ban of contaminating foods and drinks. Among the proscribed food stands the consumption of garlic which is allowed only for medical purposes. The reason behind this restriction lies in its strong odor which can bother monks and lay followers. The avoidance of onions and the other pungent vegetables appear in the *Mahisasakavinaya*, for reasons similar to those related to the avoidance of garlic.

¹ 'Taiqing tiaoci jing', in: *Daozang*, vol. 18, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 408. All translations of Chinese quotes are mine unless otherwise indicated. Texts from the *Daoist Canon* (*Daozang* 道藏) are retrieved from complete 36 volumes published together in 1988 by Wenyi chubanshe, Shanghai shudian and Tianjin guji chubanshe.

² Hereafter, texts in *Daozang* are cited by their number in Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, Chicago 2004.

The most influential Buddhist sources for monastic precepts in China are the *Mahayana* texts, translated into Chinese from the mid 5th century onward. The three main sources for what concern *wuxin* in Chinese Buddhism are the *Mahāparinirvāṇa-sūtra*, the *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra*, and the 5th century Chinese apocryphon *Fanwang jing* 梵網經 (Scripture of Brahma's net). All these texts similarly condemn the consumption of garlic, onion, and pungent vegetables because considered unclean and smelly. The main difference between *vinayas* and *Mahayana* texts is the shift from a mere doctrine argument to moral ones; in the latter, monastic rules did not just serve the regulation of the monastic life, but offer an ethical model based on Bodhisattva ideal of compassion. The rejection of garlic and pungent vegetables was seen an act of compassion toward fellow monks and Buddhist followers. In addition, it is with those texts that the rejection of pungent vegetables is finally linked to the one of meat and alcohol.³

While in Chinese Buddhist texts the rejection of *wuxin* can be categorized as a taboo, for what concerns the miscellaneous early references, the avoidance seems to be more a suggestion limited to specific contexts such as fasting before rituals and mourning periods. Garlic, onions, and the other pungent flavor vegetables, on the one hand, appear frequently in early texts since they are commonly used as seasonings in the preparation of specific plates such as meat dishes (*Liji* 禮記) and broths (*Houhan shu* 後漢書), and in medical and calendrical texts.⁴ On the other hand, their consumption is forbidden or at least discouraged in specific occasions. To give some examples, the *Yili*, a Han systematization text of pre-Qin ritual materials, discourages eating *hun* as this element is said to compromise the quality of rest.⁵ In the *Xunzi Ai gong* 哀公 (Duke Ai) chapter, when one wears the sacrificial vest cannot eat *hun* food.⁶ In the same chapter, Confucius claims: “one who wears the ceremonial robes and hat and rides in the ceremonial cart does not focus his intentions on eating pungent vegetables (*hun*)”.⁷

The prohibition of pungent vegetables and meat occurs in several sources linked with religious ritual practices and mourning periods. Descriptions of methods and items depend on the kind of ceremony and sources. Texts such as the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Master Mencius)

³ See Ann Heirman and Tom De Rauw, ‘Offenders, Sinners and Criminals: The Consumption of Forbidden Food’, *Acta Orientalia* 59/1 (2006), pp. 57–83. And John Kieschnick, ‘Buddhism Vegetarianism in China’, in: *Of Tripod and Palate: Food, Politics, and Religion in Traditional China*, ed. Roel Sterckx, New York 2005, pp. 186–212.

⁴ For references on the use and consumption of pungent vegetables in early texts, see Yü Ying Shih, *Chinese History and Culture Vol. 1: Sixth Century BCE to Seventeenth Century*, New York 2016, pp. 75–76; Brian Dott, *The Chile Pepper in China: A Cultural Biography*, New York 2020. Wang Maohua, Wang Zengyu and Hong Chengkui, ‘Luelun lishishang dongya sanguo lajiao de chuanbo’ 略論歷史上東亞三國辣椒的傳播 [A Brief Discussion on the Spread of Chili Pepper in the History of the Three East Asian Countries], *Zhongguo yanjiu* [Research on Chinese History] 101/4 (2016), pp. 287–328.

⁵ In the commentary, Zheng Xuan specifies that the category of *hun* includes onion (*cong* 蔥) and scallion (*xie* 薤). See ‘Yili zhushu’ 儀禮注疏 [Commentary on the Yili], in: *Hanji quanwen ziliao ku* 漢籍全文資料庫, Viewed 10 September 2021, <<http://hanchi.ihp.sinica.edu.tw/ihp/hanji.htm>>.

⁶ Wang Xianqian, *Xunzi jijie* 荀子集解 [Collected Explanations of the Xunzi], Beijing 1988, p. 544.

⁷ Eric Hutton (trans.), *Xunzi: The Complete Text*, Princeton and Oxford 2014. Follow the commentary of Wang Xianqian 王先謙 (1842–1917), the category of *hun* includes onion and scallion, Wang, *Xunzi jijie*, p. 538.

and the *Liji* show that the fasting during the mourning was rigid, and the abstention from meat and strong flavors were required.⁸ A similar abstention can be found in fasting before religious sacrifice, as the *Zhuangzi* states:

Yan Hui asks, my family is poor, we did not have alcohol nor *hun* food for several months. Can this count as fasting? Confucius answer: This is the fasting you undertake during sacrificial rites, which is not the fasting of the mind.⁹

The reason behind this ban seems to be twofold: first, strong flavors distract the attention of the performer by linking him to the mundane pleasures. Second, pungent vegetables, together with wine and meat, hinder the ritual performer's ability to properly intercede with spirits and the deaths, as the *Baopuzi* (DZ1185) shows:

One should go up a famous mountain and undertakes one hundred days of fasting. He /she should abstain from eating the five pungent vegetables and raw fish, and also avoid ordinary people. Only then one can begin to prepare the great medicine.¹⁰

In order to complete the purification process, one needs to wash his/her body and hair and attain a state of cleanliness. Here the rejection of pungent flavors and fresh fish relate with their strong smell, an element associated with the profane realm and thus antagonistic to the preparation of the medicine of the immortals.

All the examples above are important for two reasons. First, they show that the five pungent vegetables taboo is well established in Buddhist *vinayas* and *Mahayana's* texts that begin to be translated into Chinese from the 5th century onward. Their influence on the Daoist precept texts is difficult to underestimate. Second, even though we do not have sufficient sources to attest a systematic aversion to the consumption of garlic and pungent vegetables in pre-Buddhist period, their ingestion was at least discouraged in specific contexts where purification of the body was required. The rejection of *wuxin* as part of the practice to prepare for a ritual indicates that consumption of *wuxin* is considered to make someone impure or unworthy attending rituals and meditation practices. The prohibition to consume such elements prior to religious practices is motivated, as Xunzi points out, by the fact that pungent foods inevitably drive the attention of the consumer to the pleasures of the mundane world.

The repudiation of pungent vegetables is a shared characteristic of Daoist precept texts since the early medieval period. In these texts, the proscription becomes part of the lists of taboos within several monastic institutions. The majority of scholarship tends

⁸ Roel Sterckx, *Food, Sacrifice, and Sagehood in Early China*, Cambridge 2011, pp. 30–33.

⁹ Wang Xianqian commentary reads *hun* as pungent vegetables (*xincai* 辛菜), Wang, Xianqian, *Zhuangzi jijie* 莊子集解 [Collected Explanations of the Zhuangzi], Shanghai 1988, pp. 22–23.

¹⁰ 'Baopuzi neipian', in: *Daozang*, vol. 28, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 187.

to present the *wuxin* taboo as a direct influence and extension of Buddhism over Daoist monastic rules. I propose an alternative perspective, namely to consider the sensory perception innate in human beings. Drawing from anthropological research, and in light of Daoist prescription texts in medieval China, I claim that the aversive sense of disgust is used in Daoist discourse to enforce the taboo of the five pungent vegetables in Daoism. In these sources, the pungent vegetables are described as polluted and defiled items. In virtue of such characteristics, the vegetables trigger a sense of repulsion – both physical and moral – which in the Daoist practice becomes indexical of the individual adept and his/her community to prevent the danger of contamination of the sacred realms.¹¹

In the Daoist tradition, contamination takes place on three intertwined levels: the individual body (psychophysical level), the community (social level), and ritual practice (religious level). The human body must be kept undefiled because body's contamination with impure elements leads to premature death. On this level disgust manifests as a physical reaction that defends the individual from polluting elements. Moving from the individual to group membership or the social level, the purity of the community enables its survival. The Daoist doctrine labels some aliments as disgusting setting prohibitions against actions and beliefs connected to them. The third level concerns the rituals, the realm of the ultimate connection between humans and divinities. On this level, the repulsion emerges as a reaction against the violation of divinity and requires the adept/priest to delineate a disgust-free zone where the sacred-individual conjunction can be realized.

Disgust and Purity rules

The study of disgust has become a hot topic of academic investigation in recent decades. Scholarship dealing with this complex emotion spans over multiple fields such as anthropology,¹² psychology,¹³ philosophy,¹⁴ to mention a few. The interest for what can be labeled *disgust studies* needs to be connected, at least partially, to a renewed interest for moral psychology.¹⁵ Broadly speaking, scholars conceive disgust as a primarily

¹¹ As Blidstein points out, religions are central in definitions of disgust, where the violation of gods' rules and immoral acts in general seem to act as disgust elicitor. Moshe Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual in Early Christian Literature*, New York 2017, p. 8.

¹² See for instance, Paul Rozin and April Fallon, 'Perspective on Disgust', *Psychological Review* 94/1 (1987), pp. 23–41; William Miller, *The Anatomy of Disgust*, Cambridge MA 1997; Max Price, *Evolution of a Taboo Pigs and People in the Ancient Near East*, New York 2020.

¹³ See for instance, Andras Angyal, 'Disgust and related aversions', *Journal of Abnormal and Social Psychology* 36 (1941), pp. 393–412; Paul Rozin et al., 'Disgust: Preadaptation and the Cultural Evolution of a Food-Based Emotion', in: *Food Preferences and Taste: Continuity and Change*, ed. Helen Macbeth, New York and Oxford 1997, pp. 65–82; Nina Strohminger, 'Disgust Talked About', *Philosophy Compass* 9/7 (2014), pp. 478–493.

¹⁴ See for instance, Aurel Kolnai, *On Disgust*, Chicago and La Salle 2003; Winfrid Menninghaus, *Disgust: Theory and History of a Strong Sensation*, Albany 2003; Martha Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought: The Intelligence of Emotions*, Cambridge 2001; Colin McGinn, *The Meaning of Disgust*, New York 2011.

¹⁵ For a general overview on the topic, see Strohminger, *Disgust Talked About*, pp. 478–493.

biologically based aversive emotion characterized by culture-driven elements. Similar to the perception of distaste – a sensory (primarily oral) based rejection – the perception of disgust also involves the cognitive sphere. The emotions of distaste and disgust both produce in the individual a sense of revulsion when in proximity to specific elements. The repulsive object here acts as contaminant that can jeopardize the integrity and the purity of someone or something. Disgust is therefore a defensive mechanism which evolved to protect humans against infections (pathogens), pollutions, and morally unbearable acts. Despite this general consensus in characterizing the primary feature of the emotion of disgust, there is still disagreement over how to classify the different kinds of disgust. The most influential taxonomy is that developed by Rozin and his colleagues.¹⁶ This taxonomy recognizes four general types of disgust: core disgust (toward food, body wastes, and animals); animal reminder disgust (sex, hygiene, decay, body violation); interpersonal disgust; and moral disgust.¹⁷

Although disgust's biological origin and its universal ground, what acts and what elements are considered polluted are cultural-specific.¹⁸ In Rozin's et al. own terms, "disgust is culture's most effective means to enforce a prohibition".¹⁹ Religious institutions in general, historically have played and continue to play a central role in defining what is pure and what is not. Particularly important for this paper's argument is the fact that the emergence and the development of many taboos and purity codes are directly linked with disgust which emotionally enforce the rules and the fear about the danger of its transgression.

Taboos and purity codes are devices of order deployed for the preservation of the integrity of a group. In this sense, on the one hand, taboos and purity codes act as identity marker that strengthen the bond between the elements inside the group. On the other, they also mark the difference from what stands outside the group. This holds true for people, for objects, and for actions. Hence, defiled and impure things are nothing but things *out of places* in a specific context.²⁰ As a protective mechanism, disgust contributes to preserve the identity and the integrity by marking boundaries between what fits and what does not. Put it in other words, disgust erects a boundary between healthy/pure elements and harmful/polluted elements. As Jonathan Haidt has put it, "disgust is the guardian of the temple of the body"²¹ that can be thought as individual and communal.

¹⁶ Paul Rozin, Jonathan Haidt and Clark McCauley, 'Disgust', in: *Handbook of Emotions*, eds. Michael Lewis, Jeanette Haviland-Jones, and Lisa Feldman, New York 2010, pp. 757–776.

¹⁷ A recent synthesis and modification of this taxonomy has been proposed by Joshua Tybur, Debra Lieberman and Vlada Griskevicius, 'Microbes, Mating, and Morality: Individual Differences in Three Functional Domains of Disgust', *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology* 97/1 (2009), pp. 103–122. They recognize three categories of disgust: pathogens, sex and moral.

¹⁸ Disgust as a powerful vehicle of social teaching is developed by Nussbaum, *Upheavals of Thought*.

¹⁹ Rozin et al., *Disgust*, p. 79.

²⁰ On the topic, see Mary Douglas, *Purity and Danger*, London 2002.

²¹ Jonathan Haidt, *The Happiness Hypothesis: Putting Ancient Wisdom to the Test of Modern Science*, London 2007, p. 187.

Therefore, religions tend to recognize certain elements as disgusting and hence prohibit contact with such elements.²²

Food taboos are disgust elicitors *par excellence*. In fact, eating is the main way in which humans materially incorporate the out-side world into the self, and through this act they risk ingesting something offensive and polluted. This risk is implicit in the popular maxim – *you are what you eat* – as well as in *the magical law of contagion*, the belief that contact between two entities inevitably leads to cross-contamination. In this sense, eating is a primary way of becoming impure.²³

Food taboos in Daoist texts are framed either as pure (qing 清) and impure (zhuo 濁/hui 穢), thus directly subject to disgust understood in term of the emotion that protects from pollution. Among the several approaches that can be used to understand the pure/impure dichotomy in Daoist prescription texts, particularly useful is the *truce* and *battle* perceptions – a heuristic device developed in the field of religious studies. The truce perception sees purity and impurity as statuses, conceived as normal expression of human life and of the order of the world. There is no attempt to totally eradicate one or the other. Impurity is seen as temporary obstruction – usually linked to the mundane pleasures. The act of purification consists in the separation of pure from impure. Under this understanding, purity is a second-order mechanism that helps to define borders and contributes to the creation of cosmic or social order. On the other hand, battle perception is where the impurity and purity are recognized as opposing active forces, generally associate with the eternal struggle between good and evil. Since the two forces are active, they may defeat each other.²⁴

We can recognize both truce and battle perceptions in Daoist discourse and each involves a specific aspect of the purity rules. For instance, truce impurity perception, as second-order mechanism, involves the maintenance of social and monastic structures and the construction of the ethical practice within the doctrine. Some rules that emerge in various Daoist communal texts can be framed in these categories since they primarily contribute to the regulation of life in the religious communities. On the other hand, battle perception, as external and internal struggle against defilement, emerge in self-cultivation and purification rules, and in the definition of the doctrine against other religions and beliefs.

In general, the view of purity and impurity in truce/battle terms is useful to understand the formulation of precepts and proscriptions that begins to appear in early Daoist institutions. First, the systematization of purity rules was central for marking the cultural boundaries in a competitive religious context. Pure and good rules were often put in opposition with other *deviant* beliefs (*weizhi* 偽伎). Second, pure and good rules operate as a protective tool for the correct function of the monastic communities. For example,

²² See McGinn, *The Meaning of Disgust*, p. 217.

²³ The law of contagion is one of the laws of sympathetic magic that can be usually found in traditional cultures. The law was first formulated by the anthropologist Taylor and expanded by Sir James Frazer. In Paul Rozin et al., 'Operation of the Sympathetic Magical Law of Contagion in Interpersonal Attitudes among Americans', *Bulletin of the Psychonomic Society* 27/4 (1989), pp. 367–379.

²⁴ In Blidstein, *Purity, Community, and Ritual*, p. 11.

the praise of honest behaviors and the promotion of moral rules contributes to the correct functioning and to the preservation of the monastic society. Third, these rules define cultivation and purification methods that preserve the individual and promote longevity. Within these methods, it is interesting to note that several of these precepts include the need of purification; high hygiene requirements; and the avoidance of food, things and acts considered dirty, polluted, morally deplorable, that could harm individuals and, by extension, the entire community. Among those precepts are included the five pungent vegetables – sometimes together with alcohol and meat consumption. These elements are often depicted as evil/disgusting food (*ecai* 惡菜),²⁵ described by their disgusting odor (*echou* 惡臭), and linked with pollution (*zhou* 濁) and filth (*hui* 穢). This uses of impurity discourse can be read as a tool used to convey emotions of disgust and contamination that serve as a moral defense against impurity and evil. Taboos and purity rules help to create a disgust-free zone where the adept can recognize his/her true self and discard the defiled part of his/her body and society.

Daoist precepts and taboos

The formulation of precepts and proscriptions in Daoism dates back at least to the late 2nd century when the first Daoist communities took roots in Southwest China (the Celestial Masters) and Eastern China (the Great Peace movements). These precepts contributed to regulate Daoist community life, and formed an important foundation of practice in all different schools, as attested by the over seventy precept texts that remain in the early Ming dynasty version of the *Daoist Canon*, the *Zhengtong Dao Zang* 正統道藏 (the Daoist Canon of the Zheng Tong Era). From those texts it emerges how precepts regulate the community on several levels, from the ritual religious activities to social moral laws, and even for what concerns individual life preservation. The precepts describe how each individual should live in order to maintain the integrity of his/her own life and of his community.

The functions of precepts emerged already in one of the earliest references related to the Daoist community of the Celestial Masters: *Xiang Er zhu* 想爾注 (the Xiang Er commentary) of the *Daodejing* 道德經, dated around the 3rd century. As the text excerpt highlights, the precepts indicate how to preserve and construct a just and harmonious society yet, at the same time, they are also an essential part of the self-cultivation process. For instance, the practice of non-action (*wuwei* 無為), purity and stillness (*qingjing* 清靜), and goodness (*shan* 善) are, on the one hand, social oriented precepts. At the same time, however, they also form also an essential part of the self-cultivation process. This is evident from the final commentary of the nine precepts, which states:

²⁵ The Chinese character *e/wu* 惡 can be understood as evil, when is opposed to *shan* 善 or *hao* 好 (good); and as distaste or disgust when it is in opposition to *hao* or *yu* 欲 (pleasure, desire, taste). Within the latter understanding, disgust is one of the six basic human emotions. For the interpretation of *e/wu* as disgust, see Curie Virág, *The Emotions in Early Chinese Philosophy*, New York 2017, pp. 183–184.

These nine practices, [drawn] from the two parts of the 81 chapters [of the Daodejing], bring together assemblies and build residences of the Dao and are respected by the elders and the novices. Those who manage to complete the higher practices will reach the state of immortality. Those who complete the remaining six will double their life expectancy. Those who succeed in putting the lower three into practice will extend their lives without dying prematurely.²⁶

The commentary shows that the ultimate aim of the practices (precepts) is nothing but to extend one's own life span, and finally reach the state of immortality. In addition, the precept indicates that community social harmony is the context where the cultivation can be realized in its full potential. A similar message is conveyed in the introduction of the 5th century Celestial Masters' text *Laojun Shuo yibai bashi jie* 老君說一百八十戒 (180 Precepts Spoken by the Lord Lao, DZ 786. Hereafter *Laojun yibaiba*) when states: "if you hold to the precepts, you will serve as a heavenly official, ascending to immortality through corpse-liberation".²⁷

To live an ethical life without committing crimes and being virtuous helps to become an ethical model for the preservation of the community and, at the same time, contributes to the extension of one's own life span. Daoist laws are thus moral rules that regulate the community life, and they operate on three levels: the individual or medical level (since they define a way of cultivation for the preservation of the body of the adepts); the social or administrative level (they mark what is favorable and what is not within the Daoist community); and the religious or ritual level (by describing the procedures, when and who can perform religious activities).

In all three levels, Daoist laws emphasize the purity element. Impurity of the body impede longevity; impure actions fail to enhance social harmony and the preservation of the community; being polluted and perform rituals is an offence against the sacred which affect the whole monastic community. Hence the core idea is that there is an intimate connection between moral failure, illness, and impurity. To provide some examples, the early Celestial Master text of the 3rd century, *Dadao jialing jie* 大道家令戒 (the Commands and Admonitions for the Families of the Great Dao)²⁸ states:

When libationers take care of diseases, they should do so at the onset of the illness. But, once the illness is cured, if it returns again, that person is evil ... those who, from today on, practice good actions will find that

²⁶ 'Taishang Laojun jinglü', in: *Daozang*, vol. 18, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 218.

²⁷ Following the work of Hendrischke and Penny, this quote is retrieved from the *Taishang Laojun jinglü*. Barbara Hendrischke Barbara and Penny Benjamin, 'The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao: A Translation and Textual Study', *Taoist Resources* 6/2 (1996), p. 21.

²⁸ This text is part of the collection entitled *Zhengyi fawen tianshi jiaojie kejing* 正一法文天師教戒科經 [Scripture of the Regulatory Writings of Orthodox Unity and Teachings, Precepts and Ordinances of the Celestial Master DZ 789] in: *Daozang*, vol. 18.

disaster and disease melt away from them, and will become seed people of the later age.²⁹

In similar fashions, the early *Shangqing* school corpus of texts *Lingshu ziwen shangjing* 靈書紫文上經 (Upper Scripture of Purple texts Inscribed by the Spirits DZ 639, Hereafter *ziwen shangjing*), probably dated around the 4th century, the text *Taiwei lingshu ziwen xianji zhenji shangjing* 太微靈書紫文仙忌真記上經 (Supreme Scripture on Taboos for Transcendents Recorded by the Perfected, from the Purple Texts Inscribed by the Spirits of Grand Tenuity DZ 179. Hereafter *Ziwen xianji*) states:

Do not become sullied and impure. Filth and impurity lead to the clear spirits' loss of perfection. Your essences and cloud-souls will not then remain, and the worms will be produced in the Three Palaces. While the Ruddy Infant floats off or flies away, your blood will thicken and your marrow rot. The spiritual luminescences will depart their lodgings and your white-souls will flee to the gates of evil to seek your book of death.³⁰

These passages indicate that within the early Daoist communities, precepts not only define the moral rules that help social order and promote individual life, but also contribute to establish the ordination system. Since rituals and religious activities in general were strictly linked with precepts and proscriptions; and since those rules were directly connected with the gods and the powers of Dao; effective rites were possible only if performed by one who had abided to highest and most extensive precepts. The most effective and powerful masters were those able to follow deeply all rules. This could give a high status or even leadership roles within the community.³¹

In order to take the precepts and thus perform the ritual activities, the master needed to go through an extensive process of purification, which was generally referred as *zhai* 齋. The *zhai* purification included taking bath, the avoidance of impure food and drink such as alcohol, meat, and the five pungent vegetables. The procedure is stated in the introduction of the *Laojun yibaiba*: “When it is time to take possession of the precepts, disciples bathe, do not eat the five flavorful foods or the five pungent vegetables, and they change their dress”.³² A similar idea is conveyed in the oldest scripture of the *Lingbao* 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure) tradition, the *Taishang Lingbao Wufuxu* 太上靈寶五符序 (Array of the five talismans of the Numinous Treasure DZ388, Hereafter *Wufuxu*):

²⁹ Stephen R. Bokenkamp (trans.), *Early Daoist Scriptures*, Berkeley and Los Angeles 1997, p. 181.

³⁰ In ‘*Ziwen xianji*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 3, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 402. See the translation of Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, pp. 362–363.

³¹ A clear example of this is that precepts are usually directed to libationers (*jijiu* 祭酒), high-ranking members and religious leaders of the monastic communities. See Anna Seidel, ‘Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments: Taoist Roots in the Apocrypha’, in: *Tantric and Taoist Studies*, ed. Michel Strickmann, Brussels 1983, pp. 291–371.

³² In ‘Yaoxiu keyi’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 6, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 944. Translated by Hendrischke and Benjamin, *The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*, p. 21.

You should not eat raw fish, pork meat, and chives like vegetables. You should not meet neither those who mourn nor corpses, as well as dogs and pigs who are giving birth or defecating.³³

According to these two examples, before a ritual the adept of the Dao must follow several purity rules as a general mode of living, followed by a strict period of purification preceding any rituals. Analogous directions are found in the majority of Daoist precept texts, thus being a common feature in Daoist schools at large. Undergoing a purification process before the rites was seen an essential element because it prepares the individual to encounter the divinity in a pure and refined form in order to welcome the gods in the best way possible, and thus receive their powers. Following this idea, it is not hard to understand why hygiene and dietary regimes play a key role within this process, and form an essential precondition for getting closer to a higher realm.

Directly linked to the mundane world and the pleasure of the flesh – and sometimes to the underworld – strong and flavorful food were considered dangerous and thus impure, an obstacle in the purification process. The five pungent vegetables are one of the recurrent elements within the lists of forbidden foods in precept texts.

The five pungent vegetables

In medieval texts, the five pungent vegetables are presented in the same section as *wuxin*, *wuhun* or even *wuzhong hunxin* 五種葷辛. Nonetheless, there is no single and coherent list of what these five vegetables. In the monumental work *Bencao gangmu* 本草綱目 (The Compendium of Materia Medica), the Ming scholar Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518–1593) recognizes a general difference between the list of the five pungents in Buddhist texts, alchemical practitioners (*lianxingjia* 鍊形家) and Daoist texts.³⁴ However, this synthesis tends to simplify a more complex reality. In Buddhist texts of the 5th century, while the *vinayas* focus on the prohibition of garlic, the *Mahayana*'s sutras translated into Chinese present two different lists of the five. The *Laṅkāvatāra-sūtra* speaks of the five *xin* vaguely enlisting onions and all type of chives and garlics; the *Scripture of Brahma's net* is much precise defining the five *xin* as garlic (*dasuan* 大蒜), three types of onion (*cicong* 慈葱, *gecong* 茗葱 and *lancong* 蘭葱), and asafetida (*xingqu* 興渠).³⁵ In Daoist texts of the medieval period, the *wuxin* lists are less coherent. The majority of texts refer to the five pungent vegetables generally without enlisting them, or through the individuation of garlic and the general term *wuxin*. In the 7th century encyclopedia *Sandong Zhunang* 三洞珠囊 (*A Bag of Pearls from the Three Caverns* DZ 1139) – a collection of passages from earlier sources – emerges one of the early

³³ In 'Wufuxu', in: *Daozang*, vol. 6, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 324.

³⁴ In Wang, Wang and Hong, *Luelun lishishang*, pp. 289–290.

³⁵ See Heirman and De Rauw, *Offenders, Sinners and Criminals*, p. 64.

list can be found in the *Daoist Canon*. The text quotes a lost treatise called *Jinshu Zhenji* 金書真記 (*The Golden Book Recorded by the Perfected*) which presents the five as onion, garlic, Chinese chives, shallot (*xie* 薤), and asafetida.³⁶ Other two examples from medieval sources can be found in Tang codes texts such as the *Dongxuan Lingbao Daoxue keyi* 洞玄靈寶道學科儀 (Rules and Observances for Students of the Dao of the Mystery Cavern of Numinous Treasure, DZ 1126. Hereafter *Daoxue keyi*) and the *Taiji zhenren shuo ershisi menjie jing* 太極真人說二十四門誠經 (*Twenty-four Precepts for Followers Spoken by the Perfected of Great Ultimate*, DZ 183. Hereafter *Taiji ershisi men*). The former lists five kind of pungents as chives, garlic, small garlic, onion, and scallion; while the latter enlists just four of them (onion, garlic, chives and scallion).³⁷ Later Daoist sources often add coriander (*husui* 胡荽),³⁸ and sometimes non allium family elements such as ginger (*jiang* 姜), cassia cinnamon (*gui* 桂), sichuan pepper (*shujiao* 蜀椒), and today even chili pepper (*lajiao* 辣椒).³⁹

The classification of the five pungents emerges around the medieval era, probably under the influence of Buddhist texts and specific food proscriptions. Nevertheless, positive references to pungent vegetables appear sometimes in other kind of texts such as medical treatises and calendrical texts that indicate the five pungents' popular consumption. To give a few examples, the Tang medical and dietary text, *Shiyi xinjing* 食醫心鏡 (Reflections of the Court Dietitian), affirms that "one should eat the five pungent vegetables as protection against virulent airs".⁴⁰ Similarly, the Jin dynasty *Feng tuji* 風土記 (Records of Costumes and Geographical Surroundings) reports that "on New Year's Day one prepares plates of the five pungent vegetables. On the first day of the first month, the five piquant vegetables refine the [body] form".⁴¹

Medical texts are important sources that show the uses of pungent vegetables in medicinal preparations. For instance, in *Mawangdui Medical Scriptures*, garlic chives was central in both rituals and medical recipes. It was in fact considered the herb of immortals. The text reports that the physician Wen Zhi 文摯 praises chives for its power to calm skittishness, improve vision and hearing, and prevent illness.⁴² In the *Baopuzi*, onion was used together with aconite to cure hearing problems, or mixed with cinnamon as a magic potion that enable to walk on water.⁴³ Scallions were an essential component of the sesame paste used as longevity recipe in several texts such as the *Baopuzi* and the

³⁶ In 'Sandong Zhunang', in: *Daozang*, vol. 25, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 319.

³⁷ 'Daoxue keyi', in: *Daozang*, vol. 24, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 767; 'Taiji ershisi men', in: *Daozang*, vol. 3, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 413.

³⁸ See for examples *Guiguzi* 鬼谷子 (Master of the Valley of Demons DZ 1026), *Taishang huangting neijing yujing* 黃庭內景玉經 (Jade Scripture of Inner Landscape of the Yellow Court DZ 331), *Shangqing Lingbao dafa* 上清靈寶大法 (Great Rites of the Numinous Treasure of Highest Clarity DZ 1221), among others.

³⁹ About the inclusion of chili pepper in the list see Dott, *The Chile Pepper in China*.

⁴⁰ In Ian Chapman, 'Festival and Ritual Calendar', in: *Early Medieval China: A Sourcebook*, eds. Wendy Swartz, Robert F. Campany, Yang Lu, and Jessey J.C. Choo, New York 2014, p. 476.

⁴¹ In Chapman, 'Festival and Ritual Calendar', p. 475.

⁴² See Donald Harper, *Early Chinese Medical Literature*, New York 2009.

⁴³ 'Baopuzi neipian', p. 183.

Wufuxu among others. Chinese traditional medical texts also recognized the beneficial properties of garlic. The *Bencao* lists several beneficial properties: the consumption of garlic unblocks the five yin organs (heart, lung, spleen, liver, and kidney), helps to expel inner cold and dampness, drives out noxious pathogens, reduces swollen sores, transforms fixed abdominal masses and accumulated food stagnation from meat.⁴⁴ All those examples show that, according to several medical and calendrical texts, the usage of the five pungent vegetables is associated with positive effects.

Beyond medical uses, pungent vegetables were common food since the Han dynasty, and their cultivation has been reported in various sources such as the *Hou Hanshu* 後漢書 (the Book of the Later Han) and the *Shiji* 史記 (Record of the Historian). Generally speaking, as Yü has pointed out, “garlic and scallions were most likely to be on the food list of the impoverished” and avoided by people of high social status, but sometimes they could be very expensive depending on who ate them.⁴⁵ This very idea cannot be confirmed from the sources, and probably their rejection did not involve all parts of high society and every season of the year. However, even though we cannot affirm that the pungent vegetables were categorized as “low class food”, we can surely state that their consumption or avoidance mark a dichotomous difference between what was considered high and low, pure and impure, sacred and profane, good and bad, clean and dirty, fragrant and stinking and even life and death. This happened especially within religious movements and institutions where pungents’ avoidance – among several other food taboos – contributes to establishing cultural and religious boundaries and thus to maintain the integrity of the community itself.

The five pungent proscription in Daoism

The earliest set of prescription about the five pungents relates to the first Daoist religious institution: the Celestial Masters. Even though the *Xiang Er Daodejing* makes no explicit references about the specific taboo of the five pungents, nonetheless it warns to avoid foods with strong flavors. For example, commenting *Laozi* 13, the text affirms:

Yearning for glory and fame, exhausting one’s essence and thought with the pursuit of wealth, and pampering the body with refined food; this means to love the body. In this way, one does not concord with the Dao.⁴⁶

⁴⁴ For the curative properties of garlic and onion see the work of Zhang Zhibin and Paul Unschuld on the *Bencao*. Zhang Zhibin and Unschuld Paul U. (eds), ‘Chinese Historical Illness Terminology Vol. 1’, in: *Dictionary of the Bencao gang mu*, Oakland 2014.

⁴⁵ Yü, *Chinese History and Culture*, p. 110.

⁴⁶ Rao Zongyi, *Laozi Xiang Er xiaozheng* 老子想爾校正 [Annotations and Corrections to Laozi Xiang Er], Beijing 2015, p. 22.

A direct reference of the taboo of the five pungents on Celestial Master's related texts can be found in the introduction of the *Laojun yibaiba* – as already mentioned – and more specifically in precept number ten: “you should not eat garlic or the five pungent vegetables”.⁴⁷ The *Laojun yibaiba* presents a set of precepts focuses on the cultivation of the individual body, on the regulation of the community life and on the correct procedure of ritual practices. Following the same basic idea presented in the *Xiang Er*, food taboos are framed in this triple function: on the individual level, the adept should not submit to the pleasure of the senses – in this case the flavorful food –; on the social level, he/she should not act improperly toward the monastic and the outside community; on the religious level, the adept should purify him/herself avoiding impure food.

In the *Shangqing* tradition, early references about the five pungents taboo emerges in the *Purple* texts. In the first text, the *Huangtian Shangqing Jinque dijun lingshu ziwen shangjing* 皇天上清金闕帝君靈書紫文上經 (Superior Scripture of the Numinous Writings in Purple Script of the Imperial Lord of the Golden Portal of the August Heaven of Highest Clarity DZ 639) states:

The Great Spirit, Lord of the Palace of Life, prohibits human from eating living full-blooded creatures. He prohibits the cooking of the six domestic animals, fur – bearing animals, the peels or leaves of onion, or any of the strong-smelling herbs [pungent vegetables]. All of these attack and disturb the fetal pneumas and injure the newborn spirits with their stench.⁴⁸

The second reference is found at the end of the fourth text, the *Ziwen Xianji* that enlists the proscription within the nine taboos predicted by the community:

Do not eat the five bitter herbs [five pungent vegetables]. If you do your five viscera will develop an evil stench, the three floriate palaces will collapse in disorder, and the spirits will be unable to finally reach them. The essential embryos will sink in the mire and your soul will depart. The Ruddy infant will be beset with trouble, since the flying spirit will fail to Guard it. Your vision will wonder distractedly.⁴⁹

From the *Purple Texts* it can be inferred that the taboo of the five pungent vegetables in the *Shangqing* tradition was strictly connected with longevity technics and beliefs. The danger of the consumption of onion and garlic lies in the potential harm they could produce in relation to the spirit (*shen* 神), the essence (*jing* 精), and the energy (*qi* 氣)

⁴⁷ In ‘*Taishang Laojun jinglü*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 18, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 219. See the translation of Hendrichke and Benjamin, *The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*, p. 22.

⁴⁸ In ‘*Ziwen shangjing*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 11, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 385. See the translation of Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 331.

⁴⁹ In ‘*Ziwen xianji*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 3, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 402. See the translation of Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, p. 364.

of the individual who ingest them. Moreover, the explanation of their harmful effect resides in their evil/disgusting stench (*echou* 恶臭) that causes disorder and unbalance in the inner energy.

Beside their harmful effect for the human body, the consumption of the five pungent vegetables enhances emotions and thus disturbs the clarity of one's mind. The Inner Alchemical (*neidan* 内膳) text, the *Shenxian shiqi jingui miaolu* 神仙食氣金櫃妙錄 (Marvelous Record from the Golden Chest on Qi-Eating [as Practiced] by the Immortals DZ 836. Hereafter *Shenxian shiqi*), states:

If you eat raw and cold food, the five strong vegetables, meat and fish, and tend to be given to joy and anger, sadness and rage and yet try to guide *qi* like this, the practice will not have any benefit.⁵⁰

A direct clue of this disturbing effect is that the consumption of the five pungents is often linked with alcohol, sex, anger and related activities connected to emotional unbalance and the pleasures of the mundane realm. Given the prominence of physical cultivation and meditation within Daoist's longevity technics, it is not hard to understand how the five pungent vegetables could represent a danger for the life of the adept.

Along a similar path, one of the oldest text of the *Lingbao* tradition – the *Wufuxu* – among the several recipes to attain longevity and immortality and related admonition, affirms that pungent odors and flavors must be rejected because they upset the balance of the *qi* within the body of the adept.⁵¹ Since Daoism generally understands illness and unbalance in the semantic frame related with pollution, sin, impurity, and evil, in moral term, to act against one's body and one's life is an act against the whole community and the gods as well. For this reason, in several Daoist ordinance, the infringement of this taboo is punished with expulsion from the monastic community.

The early 8th century collection of Daoist practices, the *Yaoxiu keyi jielü chao* 要修科儀戒律鈔 (Transcriptions of the Codes, Rites, Precepts and Regulations for Essential Cultivation DZ 463. Hereafter *Yaoxiu keyi*), includes numerous references on the proscription of the five pungents, and the punishment for not respecting such prohibition. To give some examples: “priests and nuns submitting memorials are not allowed to drink alcoholic drinks, eat meat or the five pungent vegetables. The violation of the rule will cause a punishment of one hundred days”;⁵² and “when follow the precepts, the adept must take bath, avoid the consumption of the five flavors, the five pungent vegetables, and change clothes”.⁵³ The danger of the ingestion of the five pungent vegetables is thus not just on the physical and spiritual levels, but also on the social one. Within the purity

⁵⁰ See ‘*Shenxian shiqi*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 18, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 461. See the translation of Kohn in Livia Kohn Livia, *A Source Book in Chinese Longevity*, St. Petersburg 2012, p. 85.

⁵¹ Shawn Arthur, *Early Daoist Dietary Practices: Examining Ways to Health and Longevity*, New York 2013, p. 37.

⁵² See ‘*Yaoxiu keyi*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 6, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 977.

⁵³ *Ibidem*, p. 944.

discourse, this danger is understood primarily in terms of disorder and separation. The disgusting stench that upsets the delicate balance of qi within one body, harms social and religious gathering and activities. The consumption of the allium family vegetables causes flatulence, bad breath, and bad qi. In addition to the harm to one's body, bad qi impedes regular circulation of energy inside and outside the body and even normal relations between people. It is also interesting to note that the bad qi produced by the incorporation of the pungent vegetables is equivalent to that produced by one's contact with pollution, dirtiness, and illness. In other words, the five pungents are dangerous for the human body because considered dirty and polluted. Moreover, their ingestion affects the purity of the individual making him/her inappropriate for community's gatherings and ritual performances.

This idea emerges clearly in the *Lingbao* tradition, one of the main sources for the description of the five pungents taboo. From the 7th century code rules text, the *Daoxue keyi*, which directly describes the taboo of the five pungents:

Every adept must know how to cultivate the body and purify the mind without violating the proscriptions. If a priest or a nun eat the five pungent – called evil/disgusting vegetables – will violate the internal and external laws and should not be committed. What are the five kinds? the first is chives; the second is garlic; the third is garlic chives, the fourth is onion and the fifth is Chinese onion. All of those correspond to the pungent category which cause four kinds of harm and three kinds of failings. What are the four kinds of harm? The first is the harm to the five organs, the second is the harm to the Daoist practice; the third is the harm to the monastic community; the fourth is the harm to the outside community. The respect to the above, the petition of the middle, and the transformation of the below are the three failings. The first is the failure in the Daoist ritual's perform; the second is the failure in inviting the enlightened spirits [into the body]; the third is the failure in the conversion of the people. Respecting those three deeds, nothing will drive your thought, nothing command the request of your body, nothing will appeal your mouth; the enlightened spirits will be subtle, Daoist ritual will be attended, and the people converted. The organ will be pure and clean; the breath will be fragrant; from morning to the night one will pay respect to the community.⁵⁴

The danger of the five pungent vegetables is described on three levels: the first is the harm toward the individual person and his/her body. The ingestion of the five pungents harms the organs and constitutes an obstacle for the preservation of the spirits within the body. The second is the violation of the purity rules in the sacred realm. The adept

⁵⁴ See 'Daoxue keyi', in: *Daozang*, vol. 24, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 767.

who consumes the impure vegetables becomes impure and not worthy to perform the rites. The third is the danger on the social level. The strong and smelly odor caused by the consumption of the five pungents represents an obstacle to the spread of the doctrine of the Dao. On the contrary, by avoiding the five pungents, the adept preserves the purity and the fragrance within his/her own body and mind. Therefore, the sacred can be approached appropriately. In turn, this will benefit the community at large.

In all of these three levels – individual, communal and religious – the taboo elicits a sense of disgust principally conveyed by the smelly odor the vegetables produce in the consumer. This odor is considered impure because remind the stench coming out from putrid things, diseases and rotten corpses. All typical defiled images and disgust elicitors. The texts that more evidently employs the disgust factor to enforce the five pungents taboo are the *Lingbao* karmic texts.

There are two important texts from 6th and 7th centuries that directly convey this idea: the *Taishang dongxue lingbao yebao yinyuan jing* 太上洞玄靈寶業報因緣經 (Condition of Karmic Retribution, Contained in the Mystery Cavern of Highest Numinous Treasure DZ 336. Hereafter *Yinyuan jing*) and the *Dongxuan lingbao sandong fengdao kejie yingshi* 洞玄靈寶三洞奉道科戒營始 (Practical Introduction to the Rules and Precepts for Worshiping the Dao of the Three Caverns Contained in the Mystery Cavern of Numinous Treasure, DZ 1125. Hereafter *Fengdao kejie*). The two works, which are very similar in some of their parts, employ the Buddhist idea of karma – cause and effect of good and bad deeds – in order to set precepts and proscriptions. About the rules concerning pungent vegetables avoidance, both texts indicate the taboo in two ways: the positive effect of not eating the five pungents; and the negative effect of eating them. This strategy is important for two reasons. On the one hand, it shows the correct and moral conduct and its retribution. On the other, it warns the followers about the danger of breaking the rules. Hence, while the avoidance of the five pungents allows the adept to preserve the purity of the body and to attract the love and blessings from people and the gods; their ingestion has bad consequences in the present and further lives. The two texts coincide affirming: “A fragrant and pure body, loved and admired by people, comes from the avoidance of alcohol, meat and pungent vegetables. In this way [the body] can keep its purity constantly”.⁵⁵

On the other hand, the *Fengdao kejie* remarks about the negative effect of consuming one of the five pungents: “Who likes eating pungent and defiled foods in the current existence will get a foul-smelling body. Because of this past, his/her rebirth will be among feces and filth”.⁵⁶ Moreover, the *Fengdao kejie* also states: “Smelling, dirty and impure body given to lasciviousness comes from the enjoyment of the five pungent vegetables

⁵⁵ See ‘*Yinyuan jing*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 6, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 86; and ‘*Fengdao kejie*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 24, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 744. For a study of the *Yinyuan jing* and the formulation of the karmic retributions of the text see Kohn (1998). For a translation of the *Fengdao kejie*, see Livia Kohn, *The Daoist Monastic Manual: a Translation of the Fengdao Kejie*, New York 2004.

⁵⁶ ‘*Fengdao kejie*’, p. 742.

or having been a pig or dog in past lives”.⁵⁷ In the same direction, in the *Yinyuan jing* it is stated:

The indulgence in the meat of wild animals will cause serious diseases in the current life. Because of this past, he/she will reincarnate into a deer. The indulgence in alcohol and sex, will cause madness and anger in the current life. Because of this past, he/she will reincarnate among mud and filth. The indulgence in the pungent vegetables, will cause one's body to stink as a mutton and often lose temper in this current life. Because of this past, he/she will reincarnate among feces and filth.⁵⁸

The description of the karmic effects on the indulgence on the five pungents is quite rich and include the reborn among insects, worms, pigs and other impure animals.⁵⁹ However, it is interesting but not very surprising to note that the punishments increase when the taboo is broken before specific religious practice such as offerings and rituals. This remark points at the antagonist relation between purity rules and the polluting effect of the five pungents. The *Fengdao kejie* states: “Coming to life in the form of a worm or a bug is the consequence of having approached the Three Treasures after the consumption of the five pungent vegetables”.⁶⁰ And the *Yinyuan jing*: “Being submerged in water, carried off and drowned comes from having drunk alcohol and eaten smelly foods and having been foul or disrespectful to the Three Treasures”.⁶¹

Approaching to the sacred being polluted by the consumption of five pungent vegetables is cause of severe consequences to the adept, in the present, and especially in future lives. Besides the punishments that take place in this world, the offense against the sacred have also a repercussion in the afterlife. Another *Lingbao* texts from Tang dynasty, the *Taiji ershisi men*, shows that the transgression of the five pungent taboo is punished in the corresponding hell:

The nineteenth precept affirms: you should not randomly eat the pungent vegetables such as onion, garlic, chives and scallion. [Consuming them] your body will be foul-smelling and the spirits will not come to reside in it. Doing that during chanting and cultivation violate the sacred spirit. The sinner who passes through this, will be punished in hell by swallowing fire and charcoal.⁶²

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ ‘*Yinyuan jing*’, p. 87.

⁵⁹ See Livia Kohn, ‘Steal Holy Food and Come Back as a Viper: Conceptions of Karma and Rebirth in Medieval Daoism’, *Early Medieval China* 1 (1998), pp. 1–48.

⁶⁰ ‘*Fengdao kejie*’, p. 743.

⁶¹ ‘*Yinyuan jing*’, p. 87.

⁶² ‘*Taiji ershisi men*’, in: *Daozang*, vol. 3, Beijing–Shanghai–Tianjin 1988, p. 413.

The foul-smelling and thus defiled body produced by the consumption of the pungents is a violation of purity rules and an offense to the divinities. For that, the punishment is severe and resemble the effect of the ingestion of the food in the body. Again, stench and dirt are the disgusting features that depict the sinner which have terrible consequences.

From the above examples, we can draw the following conclusions. First, the proscription against the five pungents seems to be rooted and justified by an early idea that links garlic and pungent flavors with mundane pleasures. Strong flavors divert the attention from the ultimate meaning of cultivation, doctrine teachings and ritual practices. We can find this idea in some early pre-Qin and Han texts such as *Zhuangzi*, *Xunzi* and *Yili*, and later development in alchemical texts such as the *Baopuzi*, the *Huangting* and the *Wufuxu*.

Second, while the consumption of the five pungents was usually encouraged in medical and calendrical texts if contextualized in the right time, right quantity and in combination with other substances, they were proscribed during the fasting period preceding sacred rituals. It is precisely in the sacred sphere that the rejection of the five pungents acquires its strength and produce the negative idea in the psychophysical and philosophical level. The idea of the five pungents as impure and contaminant food, which can be already found in several early texts, shapes the idea of their harmful effect on psychophysical cultivation in terms of energy unbalance, and emotion enhancer. This idea appears to be directly related with their pungent odors and flavors, and therefore with the reaction of disgust at both the psychophysical and at the symbolical levels.

Conclusions: five pungents taboos as disgust elicitor

The taboo of five pungent vegetables in early Daoist communities is primarily a mechanism in place to avoid impurity and its polluting effect on the body of the consumer. Consumption of impurity elements disrupts the inner balance of the individual by – for example – stimulating excessively the yang force and reducing the flexibility of the qi energy. In parallel, individual's consumption of impure elements affects negatively the collective body of the Daoist community, thus undermining the integrity of the community itself. In fact, the stench caused by consumption of garlic and the five pungents can repel the deities both from the individual body and from temples, thus hindering the community's ritual life.

From the examples above, it follows that one of the main reasons for avoiding the five pungents is the feeling of disgust. In relation to Daoist texts disgust can be understood on two intermingled levels: the first as a physical reaction against the bad odor they can cause. The second, as a moral reaction against the offense to the sacred. Physical and moral disgust seem to operate as a protective mechanism against the violations and contaminations of the sacred realm in both the individual and communal body. The danger of the contamination does not exclusively lie in some intrinsic dangerous quality of garlic or onion – given that they can be also used for medicinal purposes – rather in the symbolic relation between the internal and external effects they produce and the idea

of purity. Taking for example their odor, the idea of purity, holiness and even eternal life are often associated with fragrant aromas in countless different religious traditions and cultures; while repulsive smells link with the idea of pollution, illness, death and even the underworld.⁶³ Rotting corpses, waste products of bodily substances, decay and dirt, as Collin McGinn and others have pointed out, are typically disgust elicitors that keep us safe from contaminations.⁶⁴

Given Daoist adepts' goal of achieving longevity and even immortality, and given that fragrance and cleanliness are major indicators of purity and longevity, the Daoist attitude toward filth and stench cannot but be that of repulsion, and directed at erecting rules to avoid elements that cause such repulsion. In the *Lingbao* tradition, adepts and common people who break the rules of the Dao are considered sinners. Physical purification through hygiene of the body is a common rule in Daoist communities since the formation of the Celestial Masters tradition. As Hermann-Josef Röllicke pointed out, the basic idea is that "washing something off does away with something, but also does it in order to open up access to something hidden".⁶⁵ While the clean and fragrant open up the body welcoming the sacred and the gods, filth and stench impede this re-conjunction with the divinity, putting oneself 'out' of the sacred place.

Because is strictly linked with sins, illness, and death, the foul body represents the failure of the adept to proceed along the Daoist sacred path. As strong-smelling items, the five pungent vegetables embody the idea of pollution and cannot but be rejected. For this reason, the rules often describe the five vegetables as polluted element that offend sacred rituals. Approaching the Three Treasures ritual without a previous period of abstinence from the five pungents will result, according to Daoist codes, in a severe punishment in the next life. As the *Yinyuan jing* directly affirms, the insult to the ritual – and thus to the divinity – resides in the intrinsic *dirtiness* (hui 秽) of the five pungent vegetables. The same kind of insult toward the gods, takes place on the social level. Here the consumption of the five pungents shows not only a lack of respect in the holy sphere, but even in the social one being an obstacle for inter-human connection and communication. Given the central role of community cohesion, integrity and religious ritual life, undermining that with the consumption of impure food could cause even the expulsion.⁶⁶

⁶³ In his study, Simoon shows that garlic avoidance is present in several religious practices and rituals, and that this is primarily based on the rejection of its pungent odor. As a matter of fact, several cultures associate strong smelling vegetables with repulsion, and therefore use them against evil spirits. See Frederick Simoons, *Plants of Life, Plants of Death*, Madison 1998.

⁶⁴ McGinn, *The Meaning of Disgust*.

⁶⁵ Hermann-Josef Röllicke, 'Some Brief Notes on Purity in Chinese Daoism', in: *Discourses of Purity in Transcultural Perspective (300–1600)*, eds. Matthias Bley, Nikolas Jaspert, and Stefan Köck, Leiden and Boston 2015, p. 49.

⁶⁶ This happens especially in strict ordinances such as the *Quanzhen*, see Louis Komjathy, *Cultivating Perfection: Mysticism and Self-Transformation in Early Quanzhen Daoism*, Leiden 2007, p. 156.

Hence, three levels of rejection can be distinguished according to the response to disgust elicited by impure and polluted elements. Each level can be framed in the paradigmatic perception of truce and battle. The first level is psycho-physical. It emerges from the idea of strong flavors as dangerous to the body and to the mind's balance and harmony. Even more than strong flavors in general, the five vegetables affect the balance of the *qi*, attack and repel the spiritual elements of the organs, and disturb the clarity of the mind by enhancing desires. The smells produced by the body of the consumer is a sign of this unbalance that – by attacking one's nature (*faxing* 伐性) – can lead to illness and early death. We can frame this level in the battle perception mode: defilement is a dangerous element that must be eliminated; purification becomes an end itself.

The second level is the social. The social level lies in the preservation of the religious community and its ritual practices. Due to the disruptive power of the five pungents' strong odors, their consumption is proscribed and sometimes punished severely in most Daoist communities. The offense here moves from the sacred body to the social interrelation, where the preservation and promotion of the cult is necessary. This second level can be framed on the truce perception modality: here food avoidance proscriptions shape the monastic social and moral life. The prevalence of the truce modality is attested in several texts, especially in later period, where transgressions is sometimes permitted or lightly punished.

The third level concerns the religious sphere level. On this level the rejection of polluted and impure objects is motivated by direct interaction with the divinities. As smelling harmful food, the five represents the impurity that one must wash off in the purification process in order to be ready for the encounter with god and the sacred. The gods and the celestial beings are associated with fragrance and purity, thus they cannot communicate and reunite with a foul smelling and repulsive individual. For this reason, the consumption of five pungent vegetables is condemned as a sinful action implicating a lack of respect toward divinities. This last level is surely framed in the battle modality because there is no space for impurity. As illustrated in karmic retribution texts, purity in the sacred sphere is a serious matter that strongly influences one's present and future lives.

In all three levels emerge clearly the Douglas's idea of pollution and dirt as something *out of place* in a group or culture. In the Daoist discourse, to be out of place is to be in general disharmony in the physical, social, and religious level. In an inter-related world each realm affects one another, hence the adept who fails to attain harmony on the individual level is also a failure toward the community and gods. Given that the five pungent vegetables are *out of place* they cannot but be rejected. The taboo here directly connects with the aversive emotion of disgust understood as a protective mechanism against the danger of contamination of the pure and sacred body. The Daoist purity discourse, depicting the allium family vegetables in terms of polluted, defiled and foul items, sets the base for their physical and moral repulsion which is, in other terms, the emotion of disgust.

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