

## BLUE PAPERS

# Jìngzuò 靜坐

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**Daoist quiet sitting** (*jìngzuò* 靜坐), which is also referred to as “tranquil sitting” and “sitting-in-stillness,” is one of the primary forms of Daoist meditation. Along with quiet standing (*jìngzhàn* 靜站), it is the essential and foundational meditation practice used in the Daoist Foundation.

The practice was originally referred to with a wide variety of **classical and foundational Daoist technical terms**, including *bàoyī* 抱一 (“embracing the One”), *shǒuyī* 守一 (“guarding the One”), *xīnzhāi* 心齋 (“fasting of the heart-mind”), *zuòwàng* 坐忘 (“sitting-in-forgetfulness”), and so forth. These terms appear in the texts of classical Daoism, the earliest Daoist writings (ca. 300s BCE) associated with the inner cultivation lineages. The terms clarify the practice. *Yī* 一 refers to the Dao (Oneness), the process (unification), and the associated state (union). As the **heart-mind** (*xīn* 心) is the psychospiritual center of human personhood from a Daoist perspective, “fasting” involves withholding mundane nutrients and ordinary sustenance in the form of perception, desire, thought, and the like. We discontinue habituated consumption. “Forgetting” directs us to sit and forget until even forgetting is forgotten. This is the state of forgetfulness, which parallels emptiness and stillness.

Because of the influence of the early 20<sup>th</sup>-century *Yīnshizi jìngzuò fǎ* 因是子靜坐法 (Master Yīnshi’s Quiet Sitting Methods), and the earlier practice of *jìngzuò* among late medieval Ruists (“Confucians”),

there has been misunderstanding about the Daoist origins and development. While the full history of the term and practice remains to be written, a relatively early Daoist precedent appears in Discourse 7 of **Wáng Zhé’s** 王嘉 (1113-1170) *Lìjiào shíwǔ lùn* 立教十五論 (Fifteen Discourses to Establish the Teachings): “If there is even the slightest trace of a thought about movement and stillness, this cannot be called quiet sitting.”

Our own practice of quiet sitting is based on the method transmitted in a poem by **Niú Jīnbǎo** 牛金寶 (1915-1988), an influential representative of the *Qiānfēng* 千峰 (Thousand Peaks) sub-lineage of *Lóngmén* 龍門 (Dragon Gate). In some sense, this is an application and quasi-commentary on the *xīnzhāi* passage in the *Zhuāngzi* 莊子 (Book of Master Zhuāng; ch. 4). Our understanding has been clarified by oral instructions from various other Daoists.

The practice basically involves **sitting-in-silence**, just letting any thoughts or emotions to dissipate naturally. It is contentless, non-conceptual, and non-dualistic. As such, it is a method informing and informed by *wúwéi* 無為 (“non-action”). We thus refer to it as **Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation**. The associated view is that our **innate nature** (*xìng* 性) is **stillness** (*jìng* 靜). This is our original and inherent connection to the Dao-as-Stillness. Thus, quiet sitting involves “returning to the root(s)” (*guīgēn* 歸根).

This form of Daoist meditation became the basis of the Chan/Zen Buddhist practice of “**silent illumination**” (*mòzhào* 默照), which is also known as *shikan-taza* 只管打坐 (“just sitting”). We may thus benefit from consulting manuals of Sōtō Zen meditation and other traditions emphasizing **contemplative silence**. Contemplative ways of being and living. **Interiority, awareness, presence.**