

BLUE PAPERS

Qīngjìng 清靜

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Qīngjìng 清靜 / 清淨 (“**clarity-and-stillness**”), which is also translated as “purity and tranquility,” is a classical and foundational Daoist principle, value and quality as well as one of the primary connective strands throughout the Daoist tradition.

The **Chinese character** *qīng* 清 consists of *shuǐ* 水 (‘‘water’’) and *qīng* 青 (‘‘pure’’), while *jìng* 靜 consists of *qīng*-pure and *zhēng* 爭 (‘‘contend’’). So, on the most basic level, clarity may be compared to clear water, while stillness corresponds to non-agitation.

The paired phrase of *qīngjìng* first appears in the texts of the **inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism**. For example, chapter 45 of the anonymous, fourth-second century BCE *Dàodé jīng* 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power) explains, ‘‘Clarity and stillness are the alignment of the world.’’ Stillness appearing independently is even more common, as in the phrase *shǒujìng* 守靜 (‘‘guarding stillness’’) as a designation for Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation. This overlaps with related terms like *shǒuyī* 守一 (‘‘guarding the One’’) and *shǒuzhōng* 守中 (‘‘guarding the Center’’).

Qīngjìng further relates to two other paired terms, namely, *dòng* 動 (‘‘movement’’) and *zhuó* 濁 (‘‘turbidity’’). On the most basic level, these are **cosmological concepts** related to heaven/yang and earth/yin, respectively. As chapter 3, titled ‘‘Tiānwén’’ 天文 (Celestial Patterns), of the late second-century BCE *Huáinánzi* 淮南子 (Book of the Huainan

Masters) tells us, ‘‘The clear and light rose to become the heavens; the heavy and turbid sank to become the earth.’’ The terms eventually became used to map Daoist cultivation, contemplative states, and alchemical refinement, specifically, the movement from agitation/turbidity to clarity/stillness. One way of understanding this is true yin within yang (stillness within agitation) and true yang within yin (clarity within turbidity). This is often compared to the emergence of a lotus flower (realization) out of the mud (emotionality) of a settled pond (heart-mind).

Clarity-and-stillness, in turn, appear as the fifth of the **Nine Practices** (*jiǔxíng* 九行) of early Tiānshī 天師 (Celestial Masters) Daoism. It eventually became the inspiration behind the **Clarity-and-Stillness Literature** of the Táng dynasty (618-907), with the anonymous, eighth-century *Qīngjìng jīng* 清靜經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) being most influential and important.

The *Qīngjìng jīng* later became one of the three core scriptures of **early Quánzhēn** 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism, with the other two being the *Dàodé jīng* and anonymous, sixth-century *Yīnfú jīng* 陰符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman; DZ 31). As expressed in the *Qīngjìng jīng*, ‘‘The human spirit is fond of clarity,/But the heart-mind disturbs it./The human heart-mind is fond of stillness,/But desires meddle with it.’’ Committed Daoist practitioners thus aspire to realize the state of constant clarity and stillness. This is the fusion of original spirit (*yuánshén* 元神) and original qi (*yuánqì* 元氣).

The scripture was so central in Quánzhēn that Liú Tōngwēi 劉通微 (Mòrán 默然 [Silent Suchness]; d. 1196), one of Wáng Zhé’s 王嘉 (Chóngyáng 重陽 [Redoubled Yang]; 1113-1170) senior disciples, wrote a **commentary**. Notations *within* clarity-and-stillness.