

## Article

# In Search of *Qi* Immortality: A Study of Heshanggong's Commentary on the *Daodejing*

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**Abstract:** Immortality has recently become a prominent topic of discussion, particularly in light of advancing technologies aimed at enhancing human life expectancy. Proposed scenarios encompass improved treatments for various diseases and the development of longevity medicine. In this essay, I examine the theory of the self and the concept of immortality as presented in Heshanggong's commentary on the *Daodejing*. This analysis serves as a case study aimed at illuminating a unique perspective on the self that contributes to contemporary discussions of immortality. I argue that Heshanggong's commentary emphasizes the significance of *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, and *shen* 神, positing that our essential property is to have the essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神). Furthermore, it suggests the possibility of a disembodied form of immortality without a physical human body. This interpretation of immortality offers a novel understanding of how immortality may be achievable.

**Keywords:** *Daodejing*; Heshanggong; self; immortality; *jing*; *qi*; *shen*

## 1. Introduction

Immortality is a central theme in transhumanist philosophy, representing one of the most extreme transformations that human existence may undergo as a result of scientific and technological advancements. Proposed scenarios include improved treatments for various diseases, the development of longevity medicine, and, ultimately, technologies capable of regenerating our bodies. The transformation exercise assumes that our persistence is determined by the continuity of the physical organism or the living body.

Nevertheless, the concept of “digital immortality” also emerges, which involves the transfer of our psychological attributes—such as memories, life goals, habits, interests, and personality traits (e.g., being helpful and friendly), as well as psychological dispositions like being prone to anger—into a digital medium. This approach assumes that we are fundamentally mental existences and that our persistence is determined not by the continuity of our physical bodies but by the continuity of our psychological states. This view is supported by philosophers such as John Locke (1975), Derek Parfit (1984), Sydney Shoemaker (1984), and others.

Another perspective is the soul view, which states that we are fundamentally souls and that our persistence is determined by the sameness of the soul. This view is often regarded as religious, as it poses challenges for verification; it is difficult for individuals to ascertain the sameness of souls, as noted by philosophers such as Thomas Nagel (1986) and Eric Olson (2007). Proponents of soul theory, including Roderick Chisholm (1976) and Richard Swinburne (2013), argue that the existence and persistence of souls are not determined by any observable or qualitative properties or the relationship between them, rendering it, in principle, unverifiable. Consequently, the soul view of immortality carries



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a degree of mystery, often relying on predominantly religious explanations, such as the assertion that the sameness of souls can only be known by God or other supernatural beings.

These theories support the notion of immortality in various ways. For instance, philosophers who assert that we are fundamentally animals advocate for the extension of our lifespan through technologies aimed at enhancing the physical condition of our bodies, thereby increasing our life expectancy. Conversely, those who subscribe to the psychological continuity theory of personal identity propose technologies that involve uploading information containing our psychological attributes to computers or AI systems, allowing us to continue existing without being physical organisms or organic at all. In contrast, soul theorists are likely to rely on supernatural powers, such as divine salvation, grounded in the faith of the believer.

Bernard Williams (1973, pp. 87–91) proposes two criteria for immortality to hold. With John Martin Fischer's (2009, p. 80) clarification and modification, the first condition is named "identity condition", according to which it will be me who is going to live forever. The second condition is called the "attractiveness condition", according to which the interest I will have in the future is sufficiently related to the same interests that currently motivate me. Aaron Smuts (2009, pp. 137–44) interprets Williams as stating that the categorical desires (i.e., desires for things that one seeks without conditions) a person will have in the future must be identical to those one now has.

The above theories of immortality satisfy at least the identity condition, as they presuppose a clear boundary of the self along with a defined set of persistence conditions. For instance, many animalists assert that we are human animals or physical organisms, arguing that our persistence conditions are determined by the continuity of the living animal. Additionally, animalists offer a concrete principle of individuation, which holds that "I am this particular human animal, but not other human animals".

However, ancient Chinese philosophers introduced a distinctive concept of immortality. I refer to this form of immortality as "*qi* immortality". The idea can be summarized as follows:

1. Our essential property is *jingshen* 精神, which is made up of *qi* 氣.
2. *Qi* is an undifferentiated, fundamental constituent of the universe.
3. It is possible for us to be disembodied.
4. Immortality can be achieved by either being disembodied or embodied.

As I will demonstrate, the theory of "*qi* immortality" does not presuppose a clear boundary of the self. Furthermore, the idea that immortality can be achieved by either being disembodied or embodied opens up a new direction in ways to achieve immortality. *Qi* immortality presents a unique approach to achieving immortality, offering valuable insights into our understanding of identity, persistence, and the feasibility of immortality.

In this paper, I have chosen to focus on Heshanggong's commentary on the *Daodejing*. The *Daodejing*, a renowned Chinese classic, is traditionally attributed to Laozi and is believed to have been composed around 400 BC, although there is ongoing debate regarding the existence of Laozi and the exact date of the text's composition and compilation. The concepts of *Dao* 道, or the Way; virtue or individual essence (*de* 德); naturalness (*ziran* 自然); and non-action (*wuwei* 無為) are well-known to many.

There are numerous commentaries on the *Daodejing*, among which Heshanggong's commentary on the *Daodejing* (老子道德經河上公章句, HSG) stands out as one of the most influential.<sup>1</sup>

Heshang Gong 河上公 is recognized as the author of the HSG, dating back to the latter part of the Han dynasty 漢朝 (202 BC–9 AD, 25–220 AD). He is believed to have been a reclusive Chinese hermit from the 1st century CE, though little is known about his life. His name, which translates to "the senior at riverside", seems to indicate that he lives near

the shore of a river (Reid 2015, ii). Most of what is known about Heshang Gong comes from the preface written by the 3rd century Daoist, Ge Xuan 葛玄, where Heshang Gong is depicted as an immortal (Erkes 1945, p. 124f.).

The HSG is considered one of the earliest proponents of Daoist meditative practices, emphasizing the cultivation of the “three treasures” of essence (*jing* 精), *qi* 氣, and spirit (*shen* 神). The esteemed sinologist, Eduard Erkes (1945, pp. 127–28), observes that the purpose of the HSG extends beyond merely explaining the *Daodejing*; it also serves to guide practitioners in meditation and in cultivating a life that aligns with Daoist principles. Additionally, Livia Kohn (2008, p. 118) characterizes the HSG as the first classic text on Daoist meditation, emphasizing a concentrated focus on breathing as a means to achieve immortality. Similarly, Daoist scholar Dan G. Reid (2015, ii) highlights that the HSG’s insights into cosmogony and meditative practices have been instrumental in understanding the cultural context of the *Daodejing* throughout Chinese history, significantly influencing subsequent commentaries and translations of the text.<sup>2</sup> The HSG is particularly noted for its focus on the preservation of both body and spirit, as well as the pursuit of longevity, concepts that resonate with the teachings of the Huanglao school.<sup>3</sup> Huanglao is generally understood as a syncretic school of thought that laid the groundwork for what would become religious Daoism, particularly through its emphasis on the pursuit of immortality.

The term “*Daojia* 道家” (Dao family or “school”), likely coined by Sima Tan 司馬談, reflects the Huanglao content and is traditionally classified within the broader framework of Daoism. Additionally, the Daoist title “*Daode Tianzun* 道德天尊” represents a deification of Laozi as a reincarnated embodiment of the *Dao*, further illustrating the school’s profound influence on the development of Daoist thought. Based on this historical background, Heshanggong’s commentary on the *Daodejing* warrants further investigation because it describes the intricate relationship between the mind and body, elucidating the essence of the self and the prospect of disembodiment.

There are several compelling reasons for selecting Heshanggong’s commentary on the *Daodejing* as the focus of this paper. First, the HSG is widely believed to be one of the earliest Chinese texts that offers a comprehensive exploration of the three treasures (*jing* 精, *qi* 氣, *shen* 神), along with detailed descriptions of immortality.<sup>4</sup> Second, it connects the idea of the self to that of oneness by examining the ontology of *qi* 氣, thereby providing a robust metaphysical framework that situates us within the unity of *qi*. Additionally, Heshanggong’s commentary serves as a singular compilation that encompasses these discussions, making it a comprehensive and concentrated text for analysis.

Another significant reason for selecting Heshanggong’s commentary is its status as one of the earliest Chinese texts to articulate two distinct forms of immortality: embodied and disembodied immortality. In contrast, most early Chinese classics that discuss *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, *shen* 神, and immortality, such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and *Neiye* 內業, primarily emphasize the notion that immortality must manifest in an embodied form. Specifically, these texts suggest that immortality can only be attained by extending the lifespan of the living human body.<sup>5</sup> Heshanggong’s commentary can be considered a historical precursor to the later development of disembodied immortality as described in religious Daoist texts such as the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 and *Zhengao* 真誥.<sup>6</sup> In this paper, I will show that the HSG’s ideas of embodied and disembodied immortality open up a novel direction for the notion of the self, our persistence, and contemporary discussions of immortality.

In this paper, I investigate pivotal concepts such as *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, and *shen* 神 presented in Heshanggong’s commentary, intending to reconstruct its theory of self and immortality based on these findings. To conduct this study, I adopt the Chinese version owned by the Xian family in the Song Dynasty 宋朝 (960–1279), which is dubbed “*jing chang shou xianshi tieqin tongjian lou cang song han ben* 景常熟瞿氏鐵琴銅劍樓藏宋刊本”, and Misha Tadd’s

(2013) English translation. The latter is a recent translation that includes a comprehensive philosophical analysis of the text. Some modifications are made to Tadd's translation, the rationale for which will be explained in the footnotes of the corresponding quotations. If no reference is provided, the translation is my own.

This essay is organized into three sections. The first section discusses what constitutes the self through investigating the concepts of *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, and *shen* 神, presented in Heshanggong's commentary. The second section explores the notion of immortality (*changsheng busi* 長生不死) within the commentary, aiming to demonstrate the existence of two forms of immortality, embodied and disembodied, as described in the text. The final section discusses how these two types of immortality illuminate contemporary discussions regarding our essential properties, the conditions for our persistence, and the practical considerations surrounding the attainability of immortality.

## 2. The Self in Heshanggong's Commentary

During the period in which Heshanggong's commentary (HSG) was written, a well-established theory of yin-yang cosmology had already emerged. In this framework, lighter and more refined *qi*, referred to as "*yang* 陽", rises and transforms into various gases, while heavier and denser *qi*, known as "*yin* 陰", descends and manifests as multiple liquids and materials. Influenced by this context, the HSG interprets the *Daodejing* as advocating for the governance of the state through non-action (*wuwei* 無為) and the preservation of both body and spirit through the cultivation of *jing* 精, *qi* 氣, and *shen* 神.<sup>7</sup> In what follows, I argue that the HSG holds that our essential properties are *jingshen* 精神, which is made up of *qi* 氣.

### 2.1. Our Essential Properties

The HSG emphasizes that essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神) are the essential elements of human beings:

Humans live because they have essential spirits (精神).<sup>8</sup>

「人所以生者，以有精神。」《老子河上公章句·德經·愛己》<sup>9</sup>

(Tadd 2013, chap. 72, p. 559)

However, not only humans (*ren* 人) have essential spirits as their essential element of living. Ghosts (*gui* 鬼) also have essential spirits as their essential element of existence. The HSG states the following:

Humans will complete their nature and lifespan, and the ghosts will protect their essential spirit (精神).

「人得保全其性命，鬼得保其精神...」《老子河上公章句·德經·居位》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 60, p. 542)

The above paragraphs indicate that the essential property of a ghost is having essential spirits, and the essential property of human beings is having their lives (*xingming* 性命).<sup>10</sup> This suggests that a ghost does not require a living physical body, such as a human body, for its existence, whereas humans must possess a living physical body in conjunction with their essential spirits. In other words, the fundamental property for a ghost's existence is its essential spirits, while the essential properties of a human being include both the essential spirits and a corresponding living organism. This distinction highlights a key difference between humans and ghosts.

## 2.2. The Nature of Jingshen 精神

One may inquire about the nature of essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神). In this section, I demonstrate that essential spirits are composed of *qi* 氣. The HSG does not provide a specific definition of essential spirits. However, we can analyze the two components of the term separately. The term consists of “*jing* 精”, typically translated as “essence”, and “*shen* 神”, usually translated as “spirit”. The HSG indicates that the essence is concealed within the five viscera:

“Spirit” refers to the five spirits of the internal organs. The liver stores the cloud soul; the lungs store the white soul; the heart stores the spirit; the kidneys store the essence; and the spleen stores the intent. When the five internal organs are beyond repair, then the spirits depart. <sup>11</sup>

「神，謂五臟之神也。肝藏魂，肺藏魄，心藏神，腎藏精，脾藏志，五藏盡傷，則五神去矣。」《老子河上公章句。道經。成象》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 457)

The concept that different aspects of the spirits are associated with various bodily parts is prevalent in Han dynasty texts, such as the *Huainanzi* 淮南子, and has its roots in the esteemed medical text, the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經. The principles governing the human body are analogous to those that govern the universe. Thus, preserving spirits involves maintaining the spirits stored within the five viscera. Definitions of essence (*jing* 精) and spirits (*shen* 神) can be found in the *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經:

Therefore, the origin of life is called *jing*; the clash of two [kinds of] essence is called *shén*. What comes and goes following spirit is called *hun*; what enters and leaves along with essence is called *po*.

生之來謂之精；兩精相搏謂之神；隨神往來者謂之魂；並精而出入者謂之魄...」  
《黃帝內經。靈樞經。本神》

(LS 8.191–95, cf. modified from Unschuld 2016, pp. 148–49; Jiayi Jing 1.1–2)

According to Manfred Porkert (1974, p. 193), the term “*jingshen* 精神” consists of two complementary antonyms: “*jing* 精”, which denotes the potential for development (referred to by Porkert as “structive potential”), and “*shen*”, which is understood as a configurative force. Porkert asserts that the cloud soul, or *hun* 魂, and the white soul, or *po* 魄, serve as reservoirs for the active force of development within each individual. He argues that *jingshen* represents a generic and universal phenomenon, while the *hun* and *po* are specific to the individual. Under this interpretation, neither *jingshen* nor the *hun* and *po* should be equated with Cartesian souls, which are characterized as simple, indivisible mental substances.

As stated above, essence (*jing* 精) is the essential element that comes with human life, and “*shen* 神” is defined as the interaction of the two essences. What, then, are the two essences? As discussed in the HSG, *yin* 陰 and *yang* 陽 are two fundamental elements interacting with each other:

The One generated *yin* and *yang*.

「一生陰與陽也。」《老子河上公章句。德經。道化》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 516)

Only the Way is abstruse and hidden without form. Within its midst, essence is full, illuminated spirit interpenetrate, and *yin* and *yang* merge and join.

「道唯窈冥無形，其中有精實，神明相薄，陰陽交會也。」《老子河上公章句。道經。虛心》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 516)



We can infer that the essential spirit (*jingshen* 精神) is a vital element associated with life and represents the interaction between two fundamental forces: *yin* and *yang*. What exactly are *yin* and *yang*? *Huangdi Neijing* 黃帝內經 repeatedly asserts that they are manifestations of *qi* 氣:

The *yang qi* 陽氣 nourishes the spirit when it is refined and nourishes the muscles when it is gentle.

「陽氣者，精則養神，柔則養筋。」《黃帝內經·生氣通天論》

In the HSG, there is a term “*jingqi* 精氣”, translated as “essential *qi*”, which alludes to the pure and undifferentiated *qi* present at the universe’s genesis:

The One is born of the Way’s beginning and is the essential *qi* (精氣) of Great Harmony (太和).

「一者，道始所生，太和之精氣也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·能為》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 10, p. 461)

Essential *qi*, as it appears in the HSG, is the element that constitutes the Great Harmony (*taihe* 太和): the unity of *Oneness* created by the *Dao* at the universe’s inception. It possesses the characteristic of undifferentiated *Oneness* (*yi* 一). Furthermore, it is also portrayed as the *qi* from which everything is created:

Because presently all the myriad beings come to life by gaining the Way’s essential *qi* (精氣). They move and live, and if not for the Way, this would not be the case.

「以今萬物皆得道精氣而生，動作起居，非道不然。」《老子河上公章句·道經·虛心》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 21, p. 483)

Essential *qi* participates in the creation process of everything with the *Dao* and persists with the myriad entities after the creation process as they move and live, owing to the Way’s essential *qi*. We can understand essential *qi* as a kind of fundamental, pure, and undifferentiated *qi* that also serves as the constituent of everything. Consequently, it would be problematic to employ Cartesian notions of pure mentality or Platonic concepts of pure spirit, which are capable of detaching from the physical, in order to understand the idea of essence (*jing* 精) in the HSG. Instead, the HSG proposes a kind of monism, according to which there is only one type of fundamental kind of thing: essential *qi*, which composes all the myriad entities. Objects can perform their specific functions due to the activity of their embedded essential *qi*. Additionally, the HSG explicitly states that essential *qi* resides within our bodies:

If one focuses and preserves the essential *qi* (精氣), keeping it from disorder, then one’s bodily form and structure will be able to respond to it and become soft and flowing.

「專守精氣使不亂，則形體能應之而柔順。」《老子河上公章句·道經·能為》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 10, p. 461)

As is evident, essential *qi* constitutes everything, including inanimate objects like trees, mountains, rivers, and so on, whereas essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神) are exclusive to beings such as humans and ghosts. Based on this construal, the relationship between essential *qi* and essential spirits is one of composition: essential *qi* composes our essential spirits. This interpretation aligns with 湯一介 Yijie Tang’s (1988, p. 118) interpretation of the HSG that both *jing* 精 and *shen* 神 are the product of *qi*.

### 2.3. Am I One Essential Spirit or Many?

There are still more questions. How should we understand essential spirits? Am I one single essential spirit, or composed of lots of essential spirits? Should we understand essential spirit as something like energy that is stored in one's physical body, or should we understand it as a soul-like fundamental entity that is an indivisible substance?

A debate has centered on whether an individual spirit resides in each human body like the idea that each human being is a single, individual soul, or whether the spirit is more akin to energy or water, lacking individuality. Scholars have examined the historical roots of the two perspectives, which relate to (1) numerous gods and goddesses in early China and (2) a naturalistic oneness of *qi* that emerged during the Han dynasty. Manfred Porkert (1974, p. 27) argues that *shen* is a type of energy or abstract force responsible for movement and material construction, translating the word as “configurative force”. This aligns with the Han dynasty's worldview, which views the world as reducible to the distribution of *qi*. As a result, since an individual is also composed of a specific configuration of *qi*, they participate in the natural flow of *qi* and are united with the universal *qi*. Similarly, Harold D. Roth (1999, p. 196) posits that *shen* is depicted as water-like in classics such as *Neiye* 內業 and *Huainanzi* 淮南子. He translates it as “numen” and understands it as a form of mental energy. On the other hand, Paul U. Unschuld (1985, p. 54) argues that the human body is closely connected to deities and cosmic energies, based on ancient China's religious worldview. For him, the essence residing in the human body is conscious and autonomous *qi*, similar to a deity or a soul. Likewise, Michael Puett (2002, pp. 22–23) argues that the term “*shen*” refers to both an individual deity and a specific configuration of *qi*.

In my opinion, as stated in the HSG, there is not a one-to-one relationship between human beings and essential spirits. First, an infant's body can contain an abundance of essential *qi* (*jingqi* 精氣), as indicated by the use of the term “*duo* 多” to describe this condition:

Infants have yet to know the union of male and female, but their *yin* parts (genitals) are aroused because their essential *qi* (精氣) are plentiful (多).

「赤子未知男女會合而陰陽作怒者，由精氣多之所致也。」《老子河上公章句·德經·玄符》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 55, p. 533)

Similarly, essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神) can be drained out (*xie* 泄), scattered (*sanwang* 散亡), and emitted (*shi* 施):

One should also revert the illumined light inward, not letting the essential spirits (精神) drain out (泄).

「復當返其光明於內，無使精神泄也。」《老子河上公章句·德經·歸元》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 52, p. 529)

Human essential spirits are inclined toward peace and tranquility; however, rapid breathing causes the essential spirits (精神) to be scattered (散亡), leading to a state of madness.

「人精神好安靜，馳騁呼吸，精神散亡，故發狂也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·檢欲》

[T]he hands do not wantonly handle things, the feet do not wantonly step, and essential spirits (精神) are not wantonly donated (施).

「手不妄持，足不妄行，精神不妄施。」《老子河上公章句·德經·貴生》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 50, p. 525)<sup>12</sup>

If essential spirits can be drained, scattered, and emitted, it follows that there is not a single essential spirit within each human body. Otherwise, the idea of spirits being scat-

tered would be hard to understand. Furthermore, if there were only one essential spirit in each human, its loss would lead to death rather than madness. It is more plausible that a human being experiences madness due to the loss of some, but not all, of their essential spirits. Additionally, the possibility of essential spirits being wantonly donated supports this claim. In other words, the nature of essential spirits must differ from that of a Cartesian soul, which is understood as a simple, indivisible mental substance, with each human being possessing only one Cartesian soul.

For the HSG, the nourishment and storage of essential spirits can prevent humans from dying:

If people can nourish the essential spirits, then they will not die.

「人能養神則不死也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·成象》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 457)<sup>13</sup>

We may conceive of the human body as a container for essential spirits, much like a glass is a container for water. When the human body is full of essential spirits, like a glass full of water, the person is brimming with energy. Conversely, if the human body lacks essential spirits, organs malfunction, and one cannot think and behave normally. Without any essential spirits, a human being dies. However, it does not mean that essential spirits and the human body are two distinct things composed of different substances. It is not like Cartesian dualism, according to which the soul and the body are two distinct, fundamental substances that cannot produce each other. Conversely, as noted above, all the myriad entities, including both the human body and its essential spirits, are made up of essential *qi*. What, then, are the differences between essential spirits and the human body? The HSG explains this by introducing concepts such as *qing* 輕 and *zhuo* 濁:

The five *qi* are clear and fine. They become the essence and spirits, hearing and vision, voice and sound, which are collectively referred to as the five natures.

「五氣輕微，為精、神、聰、明、音聲五性。」《老子河上公章句·道經·成象》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 457)<sup>14</sup>

The five flavors are turbid and gross. They become external and internal structures, bones and flesh, blood and meridians, which are collectively referred to as the six emotions.

「五味濁辱，為形、骸、骨、肉、血、脈六情。」《老子河上公章句·道經·成象》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 457)<sup>15</sup>

The diverse configurations of essential *qi* give rise to different entities. In the context of the HSG, the clear and refined *qi* stored within the five viscera contributes to the formation of essence and spirit, as well as sensory functions such as hearing, vision, and vocalization. Conversely, the turbid and coarse *qi* is responsible for the development of external and internal structures, including bones, flesh, blood, meridians, and the six emotions.

Nevertheless, it is important to note that there is a term, “*shenming* 神明”, translated as “illuminated spirits”, that frequently appears in the HSG and bears resemblance to the concept of Cartesian souls. For example, in the commentary, “*shenming* 神明” refers to an entity that can bless (*you* 祐) and protect (*yinghu* 營護/*baoyou* 保祐) human beings:

The common people cherish him like a parent and the illuminated spirits (神明) protect (祐) him like an infant. Thus, he can exist forever.

「百姓愛之如父母，神明祐之若赤子...」《老子河上公章句·道經·韜光》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 7, p. 458)

The Sage is loved by the people and protected (祐) by illuminated spirits (神明). Is this not the result of his fairness and selflessness?



「聖人為人所愛，神明所祐，非以其公正無私所致乎。」《老子河上公章句。道經。輶光》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 7, p. 459)

This indicates that the illuminated spirits (神明) protect (營護) them, and so these creatures do not dare harm them.

「言神明營護之，此物不敢害。」《老子河上公章句。德經。貴生》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 50, p. 526)

The illuminated spirits (神明) protect (保祐) people who possess virtue as parents would an infant.

「神明保祐含德之人，若父母之於赤子也。」《老子河上公章句。德經。玄符》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 55, p. 532)

Illuminated spirits reside within the body and are nurtured through the elimination of emotions and desires:

He preserves the five natures and removes the six emotions. He restrains intentional qi and nourishes the illuminated spirits (神明).

「守五性，去六情，節志氣，養神明。」《老子河上公章句。道經。檢欲》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 12, p. 465)

[I]f people can purge emotions and desires, restrain sense feelings, and clarify the five organs, then the illuminated spirits (神明) will come to reside within them.

「人能除情欲，節滋味，清五臟，則神明居之也。」《老子河上公章句。道經。虛用》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 5, p. 456)

It is challenging to determine whether an illuminated spirit can be regarded as a soul-like thinking thing or a spiritual being with personhood, which can think, engage in self-reflection, experience emotions, retain memories, and possess a personality characterized by traits such as joyfulness, positivity, consideration, and a willingness to assist others. What is clear is that illuminated spirits fulfill specific functions, such as blessing (*you* 祐) and protecting (*yinghu* 營護/*baoyou* 保祐) human beings. However, the text does not provide further details on how this protection is manifested. For instance, one might consider that certain medications can “protect” individuals from specific infections, yet this does not imply that these medications possess the capacity for thought, self-reflection, or emotion. Therefore, it remains unclear whether the actions of blessing and protecting imply the presence of a distinct personality.

According to 湯一介 Yijie Tang (1988, p. 118), the word “*shen* 神” in Heshanggong’s commentary is synonymous with the term “*shenming* 神明”. Indeed, the term “*shen* 神” usually means “*shenming* 神明” in the HSG, given that it is the most frequently occurring term featuring the word “*shen* 神”. However, “*shen* 神” can also refer to our essential spirits. As stated in the HSG, one who governs the body should eliminate emotions and desires and allow the five viscera to remain empty. This restores the spirit (*shen* 神) to the body:

For those who regulate the body, this means that they should expel emotions and remove desires to make the five organs empty and vacant; only then will the spirits (神) properly return to them.

治身者當除情去欲，使五藏空虛，神乃歸之。《老子河上公章句。道經。無用》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 11, p. 463)

In the quotation, the term “*shen* 神” refers to our essential spirits, particularly in the context of introducing the spirit of the five viscera. In this regard, I propose that “*shen* 神”

shares the same meaning as “*jingshen* 精神”, representing the essential element of human beings. Consequently, I believe that the term “*shen* 神” is ambiguous, encompassing two connotations within the commentary: one pertaining to illuminated spirits or *shenming* 神明 and the other aligning with the meaning of “*jingshen* 精神”, referring to the essential spirits. Therefore, we must be careful when determining which interpretation of the term is appropriate in a given context.

Michael Puett (2002) argues that early Chinese texts “represent an attempt to develop self-divinization claims (p. 28)”, suggesting that humans can attain the status of spirits. He explains that early Chinese perceptions of spirits are ghostlike entities transformed from deceased ancestors, now belonging to the divine realm. Similarly, Paul U. Unschuld (2003, p. 49) notes that Daoism generally acknowledges the existence of demon spirits; however, he observes that “no statement in Chinese history, at least by any of the well-known naturalists, suggests that there are spirits, demons, gods, or thearchs who are able to manipulate the workings of *yin* and *yang* (p. 50)”. While I find these observations about early Chinese texts to be insightful, it is important to clarify that the concept of essential spirits in the HSG should not be equated with demon spirits or ghostlike entities. The term “*shen* 神” encompasses two distinct meanings: it can refer to illuminated spirits (*shenming* 神明) and to *jingshen* 精神, as previously discussed. Even if the term “*shenming* 神明” refers to spiritual beings capable of thought, self-reflection, emotions, memories, and personality, there is no one-to-one relationship between a human being and an illuminated spirit. Therefore, it is not the case that each of us has only one single demon-spirit or ghostlike spirit to be retained upon one’s death. In other words, it is not accurate to assert that each human being possesses only one illuminated spirit as their essential element. As stated in HSG, if a person exhibits sufficient virtue, then ten thousand illuminated spirits can reside within a single human body:

Regulating the body with uprightness, one’s form attains unity and tens of thousands of illuminated spirits (神明) gather in one’s body.

「治身正則形一，神明千萬，共湊其躬也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·歸根》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 5, p. 456)

One might argue that while tens of thousands of illuminated spirits can inhabit a single body, there remains one primary illuminated spirit that corresponds to the individual, serving as the essential element of that person. This can be likened to the notion that each of us possesses a singular soul, which defines what we are, even if it is conceivable for one human body to contain multiple souls. I think the above understanding is incorrect. In response, if one interprets the terms “*shen* 神” and “*shenming* 神明” as referring to the same entity, then a one-to-one relationship between a human being and a spirit cannot be established. As indicated in the HSG, a single human body contains at least five spirits associated with the five viscera, with no single spirit corresponding to one human being (Tadd 2013, chap. 5, p. 457).

In summary, the term “*shen* 神” can sometimes refer to our essential spirits, or *jingshen* 精神. Alternatively, it may denote illuminated spirits, or *shenming* 神明. It is not accurate to assert that each human being possesses a singular, corresponding spirit; rather, the HSG states that each human being has at least five spirits. Furthermore, the HSG emphasizes the value of having numerous spirits within one human body, with none serving as the primary spirit associated with the individual. While it is difficult to ascertain whether each illuminated spirit possesses a distinct personality, it is clear that there is no singular soul-like entity that corresponds to each human being.

### 3. Immortality

In what follows, I investigate the idea of immortality in the HSG to understand our persistence conditions. As we can see, the HSG introduces the concept of immortals:

As a son and grandson, if one can cultivate the Way like this, then one will live on without death, generation after generation giving sacrificial offerings to one's progenitors, and one's ancestral temple will never be eradicated.

「為人子孫能修道如是，長生不死，世世以久，祭祀先祖，宗廟無絕時。」  
《老子河上公章句·德經·修觀》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 54, p. 531)

To regain life and thus prevent death, this is the constant function of the Way.

「復命曰常。復命使不死，乃道之所常行也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·歸根》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 16, p. 473)

The HSG states that longevity is attainable via extending one's lifespan:

Cultivating the Way in one's body, then one will cherish the *qi* and nourish the spirits. This increases longevity and extends one's lifespan.

「修道於身，愛氣養神，益壽延年。」《老子河上公章句·德經·修觀》

(Modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 54, p. 531)<sup>16</sup>

The constant Way simply employs non-action to nourish the spirits, and non-engagement to pacify the people

「常道當以無為養神，無事安民...」《老子河上公章句·道經·體道》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 1, p. 448)

For the HSG, immortality is possible if the spirits are nourished: It advocates breathing techniques and non-action to maintain tranquility within the body and mind, which, for the HSG, leads to everlasting life:<sup>17</sup>

“Valley” means ‘nourish (養).’ If people can nourish the spirits (神), then they will not die (不死).

「谷，養也。人能養神則不死也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·成象》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 6, p. 457)

This indicates that those who are peaceful still regain their nature and life and thus prevent death.

「言安靜者是為復還性命，使不死也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·歸根》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 16, p. 473)

In contrast, if the essential spirits are lost, then there is death:

At death, people's harmonious *qi* is exhausted, and essence and spirits are lost.

「人死和氣竭，精神亡。」《老子河上公章句·德經·戒強》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 76, p. 564)

The HSG defines physical death as the depletion of *qi*. To prevent death, one should eliminate emotions and desires and allow the five viscera to remain empty. By practicing this, the spirits can return to the body and reside within it:

For those who regulate the body, this means that they should expel emotions and remove desires to make the five organs empty and vacant; only then will the spirits properly return to them.

「治身者當除情去欲，使五藏空虛，神乃歸之。」《老子河上公章句·道經·無用》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 11, p. 463)

[I]f people can purge emotions and desires, restrain sense feelings, and clarify the five organs, then the illuminated spirits will come to reside within them.

「人能除情欲，節滋味，清五臟，則神明居之也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·虛用》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 5, p. 456)

With essence and spirits remaining calm within the body, a human being should be without deliberation or governmental business. In short, to attain longevity is to keep the spirits within the body such that the human being, or the human organism, does not die. Following this, mortality is to be attained by elongating the life span of the human organism by nourishing and keeping the essential spirits within one's physical body.

However, it seems that this is not the only way to attain immortality. The commentary also emphasizes the possibility of disembodied existence. According to the HSG, by shedding the physical body (*shen* 身), one can soar to the clouds and move unhindered. Only at this stage can one be considered entirely safe:

If I had no bodily form (身), attaining the Way's naturalness, lightly ascending on clouds, entering and exiting where there are no openings, joining the Way, and connecting to the spirits, how then could I suffer?

「使吾無有身體，得道自然，輕舉昇雲，出入無間，與道通神，當有何患。」  
《老子河上公章句·道經·厭耽》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 13, p. 467)

The above indicates that it is also possible for us to survive without a physical body. The method is to attain the Way's naturalness (*dedao ziran* 得道自然). One might ask whether it is attainable for us. That is, is it ever possible for human beings to attain the stage of attaining the Way's naturalness? The answer, according to the HSG, is positive. There are several descriptions of these Daoist sages, as stated in the HSG:

(Those of ancient times skilled as noble persons) This refers to the good men who obtained the Way.

「(古之善為士者)，謂得道之君也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·顯德》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 15, p. 470)<sup>18</sup>

The person of the Way discards emotions and removes desires; and their five internal organs are clear and still, achieving the extreme of emptiness.

「得道之人，捐情去欲，五內清靜，至於虛極。」《老子河上公章句·道經·歸根》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 16, p. 472)

"The great men" refers to rulers who have obtained the Way.

「大丈夫謂得道之君也。」《老子河上公章句·德經·論德》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 38, p. 509)

From the above, there are humans or persons (*ren* 人), good men or rulers (*jun* 君), and noble persons or officials (*shi* 士) attaining the Way (*dedao* 得道). Therefore, it is quite clear that humans can attain the stage of attaining the Way's naturalness (得道自然), which is described as the stage of no bodily form (*shen* 身).<sup>19</sup> Tadd (2013, p. 467) observes that the recommendation to abandon the body when achieving longevity contradicts the assertion

in chapter 11 of the HSG that the abdominal region of the body (*fu* 腹) is the place for storing spirits:

[S]pirits in the belly (腹) worry the bodily form will rot away.

「腹中有神，畏其形亡也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·無用》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 11, p. 464)

Tadd proposes that even though one may no longer possess a physical human body upon attaining the Dao, some form of existence may still be necessary. I concur with this perspective. The rationale is as follows: a conventional understanding of bodily form involves being a physical organism made of flesh, characterized by a well-defined, spatiotemporally delimited physical boundary and controllable appendages. One can envision that upon attaining the Dao, an individual may exist in a manner that does not include a human body and may not even have a fixed bodily form, whether human or animal. We may refer to this state of existence, which lacks a fixed body, as a “ghostlike form of existence”.

Nevertheless, according to the HSG, all entities are composed of essential *qi*. Therefore, even a ghostlike form of existence must still consist of *qi*. We can conceptualize this ghostlike existence of some indefinite and flexible amount of *qi* configured in a way to fulfill certain functions. Based on the common definition of “form”, it can indeed be considered to possess a certain “form”, as Tadd suggests.

According to the HSG, longevity can be achieved through various means. These different approaches to immortality can be understood as representing distinct levels or stages of immortality. Notably, immortality characterized by an infinitely extended physical organism is not the highest stage. There exists a superior stage of immortality, wherein one attains a ghostlike existence. This notion is reflected in the above quotation, where the HSG extols the benefits of transcending the limitations of the human body.

The idea of distinct levels or stages of immortality is further elaborated in various religious Daoist doctrines later on. For instance, the Shangqing Daoist patriarch during the Northern and Southern Dynasties 南北朝 (420–589 CE), Tao Hongjing 陶弘景, has described two kinds of immortality in his ingenious work, the *Zhengao* 真誥:

The white soul and cloud soul are preserved within the body, granting longevity and immortality.

「魂魄保守，長生神仙。」《真誥·卷十》

Flying immortals ascend to pure heights, living eternally with the sun and moon.

「飛仙上清，長與日月。」《真誥·卷十》

The first quotation describes immortality achieved by storing spirits within the human body; thus, it is a type of embodied immortality. The second quotation, on the other hand, plausibly describes immortality without the human body, as it describes immortals as staying up in the sky and living with the sun and moon. Similarly, there are descriptions of the different types of immortality in *Baopuzi* 抱朴子, a masterpiece written by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343 CE), a Daoist scholar during the Jin dynasty 晉朝 (266–420 CE):

The Immortal Classics state: The superior individual ascends and transcends, referred to as a celestial immortal. The intermediate individual wanders among the famous mountains, referred to as a terrestrial immortal. The inferior individual dies first and then transforms, referred to as a corpse-releasing immortal.

「按仙經云，上士舉形昇虛，謂之天仙。中士游於名山，謂之地仙。

下士先死後蛻，謂之屍解仙。」《抱朴子·內篇·論仙》

Ge Hong indicates that there are various types of immortals. Those at the highest stage have their forms (*xing* 形) transformed into voidness or emptiness (*xu* 虛), making them akin to celestial beings; thus, they are dubbed “celestial immortals (*tian xian* 天仙)”.



At the intermediate level, immortals enjoy infinite lives in mountainous regions, earning them the designation of “terrestrial immortals (*di xian* 地仙)”. This characterization implies that this type of immortal likely has a form that is limited to activities on the ground rather than in the celestial realm or the sky. The lowest category of immortals must first experience the death of their human bodies before attaining immortality; thus, they are called “corpse-releasing immortals (*shijie xian* 屍解仙)”. While there is no explicit description of whether corpse-releasing immortals possess any forms after achieving immortality, it is reasonable to infer that their scope of activity should be more restricted than that of the terrestrial immortals.

The HSG presents a distinctive theory regarding personal persistence, holding that our continuity is not solely dependent on the physical organism; we can exist and persist even in a disembodied state. Contemporary theories of immortality typically adhere to the identity condition outlined by John Martin Fischer (2009, p. 80), which asserts that it will indeed be “me” who lives forever. For example, the animalist perspective on immortality assumes a clear delineation of the self, accompanied by a defined set of persistence conditions. Many animalists argue that we are human animals or physical organisms, asserting that our persistence is determined by the continuity of the living organism. Furthermore, animalists propose a specific principle of individuation, which asserts that “I am this particular human animal, but not other human animals”. Similarly, many soul theorists maintain a distinct boundary of the self, claiming that each soul is an indivisible substance. Our experiences are inherently private; thus, I cannot experience what you experience, nor can you experience what I experience.

In contrast, the HSG’s concept of disembodied immortality facilitates a flexible and potentially indeterminate boundary between the self and the external world. This boundary is flexible because, upon achieving disembodied immortality, no fixed or confined amount of *qi* constitutes a specific bodily organization. As described in the HSG, disembodied immortals do not possess a fixed physical form. Instead, they experience a seamless transition between everything and are as light as clouds (*qingju shengyun churu wujian* 輕舉昇雲，出入無間). Moreover, the boundary is indeterminate as these immortals align with the Way and connect with the spirits (*yu dao tong shen* 與道通神). When spirits are connected, it becomes challenging to differentiate between those that belong to the immortal and those that do not. Rather, it is more accurate to describe the situation as the immortal having merged with the great thoroughfare, no longer perceiving themselves as separate from the *Dao*. Daoist sages frequently assert their unity with the *Dao* and engage in practices that foster this sense of Oneness. Similar descriptions can be found in various Daoist texts, including the *Daodejing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and religious Daoist writings.<sup>20</sup>

Furthermore, the HSG does not provide evidence to support the notion that our persistence is determined by psychological continuity, a concept emphasized by many contemporary analytic philosophers; in fact, the HSG does not mention the significance of psychological continuity at all. From the HSG’s perspective, the concept of uploading one’s information—such as memories, psychological traits, personality, interests, and future goals—does not determine personal identity before and after the upload. Additionally, for the HSG, my persistence is not reliant on the sameness of my soul, as there is no one-to-one correspondence between a human being and a soul. According to the HSG, each human being possesses at least five spirits associated with the five viscera and potentially thousands of illuminated spirits that are connected to the human body.

The HSG’s concept of immortality aligns with the idea of leveraging technology to extend the human lifespan through methods such as disease treatment, maintaining a healthy and youthful body, and preventing illness. However, a critical question remains regarding whether technology can effectively help us store the essential spirits within our human

body. This question has yet to be addressed, and it is hoped that future advancements in science and technology will enable us to pinpoint the nature of *qi* and identify, measure, and assess its quality and quantity. At this stage, we can begin to explore the types of technology necessary for storing *qi* within the human body and what innovations could facilitate the preservation of one's essential spirits.

While current technology is not yet sufficiently advanced to enhance *qi* immortality, I believe *qi* immortality is more promising than the perspectives offered by soul theorists. As noted by many proponents of soul theory, the persistence of the soul is, in principle, impossible to verify, leaving the question of immortality unresolved. This perspective fosters a sense of pessimism regarding humanity's ability to achieve immortality through individual effort. It appears that soul theorists may need to depend on external forces, such as divine beings or other supernatural entities, to ensure the persistence of the soul and the possibility of immortality. In contrast, *qi* immortality presents a more optimistic view regarding the potential for individuals to achieve immortality through their own efforts. As this paper centers on the theories of self and immortality in the HSG, I have not provided a detailed discussion on the methods of achieving immortality. However, for those interested in this practical aspect, I have included below some relevant descriptions from the HSG that serious practitioners may consider when contemplating their efforts:

Those who regulate the body inaudibly inhale and exhale the essential *qi* (精氣), ensuring that nothing is heard by the ears.

「治身者呼吸精氣，無令耳聞。」《老子河上公章句·道經·能為》

(modified from Tadd 2013, chap. 10, p. 462)

The person of the Way discards emotions and removes desires; and their five internal organs are clear and still, achieving the extreme of emptiness.

「得道之人，捐情去欲，五內清靜，至於虛極。」《老子河上公章句·道經·歸根》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 16, p. 472)

If one can be like an infant—internally without deliberation and externally without governmental business—then the essence and spirits will not leave.

「能如嬰兒內無思慮，外無政事，則精神不去也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·能為》

(Tadd 2013, chap. 10, p. 462)

The HSG provides numerous descriptions of how to attain immortality through personal effort. The examples mentioned above include focusing on and preserving essential *qi* by avoiding deliberation and governmental affairs, distancing oneself from emotional disturbances, and nurturing one's illuminated spirit by refraining from impulsive actions, conserving energy, and safeguarding one's essential spirits. It provides breathing techniques and behavioral guidance for preserving essential *qi* and maintaining our essential spirits. These descriptions indicate that the essential spirits are within our control. While these practices may not be easy to implement, the HSG offers clear guidelines on attaining immortality, illuminating the possibility of achieving immortality through individual striving.

In summary, even in ancient China, when technology was not yet advanced, the concept of immortality emerged, relying solely on the practice of *qi* manipulation. The methods for achieving this are well-defined, including techniques such as focusing the mind, minimizing emotions and desires, and reducing verbal communication. All of these practices are attainable through human effort.

## 4. Conclusions

In this essay, I study the theories of self and immortality in Heshanggong's commentary on the *Daodejing* (HSG). I propose that our essential property is having essential spirits (*jingshen* 精神) and that our essential spirits are made up of essential *qi*. I call the idea of immortality in the HSG “*qi* immortality”, which enables two types of immortality: embodied and disembodied immortality. *Qi* immortality offers valuable insights into the future of *qi* technology and presents a potential new pathway toward achieving immortality. While current scientific understanding of “*qi* technology” may be limited, individuals can still engage in *qi* practices to cultivate and preserve their vital energy. There are numerous concrete guidelines available for retaining one's essential spirits. This includes techniques such as non-action, breath techniques, minimizing emotions and desires, and reducing verbal communication. The concept of *qi* immortality instills hope by suggesting that immortality is attainable and provides practical guidance on how to pursue this goal. This perspective is particularly relevant for contemporary thinkers and scientists exploring avenues toward immortality.

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## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> 王卡 Ka Wang (1993, pp. 7–8, 16) and 小林正美 Masayoshi Kobayashi (1985, pp. 20–23; 2001, pp. 231, 237) compare different commentaries of the *Daodejing* and argue that the HSG is one of the most influential in China.
- <sup>2</sup> Cosmogony is widely regarded as the study of the origin of the universe. For more discussions of the philosophy of cosmogony, see Smeenk and Ellis (2017).
- <sup>3</sup> The Huanglao school (黃老) emerged as the most influential philosophical school during the early Han dynasty in China. The name “Huanglao” itself is a portmanteau, combining “Huang”, referring to the Yellow Emperor, and “Lao”, referring to Laozi.
- <sup>4</sup> 陳金梁 Kam-leung Alan Chan (1991, p. 114), 王明 Ming Wang (1984, pp. 293–323), and 王卡 Ka Wang (1993, p. 3) study the historical origin of the three treasures and conclude that the HSG can be regarded as one of the earliest texts which mention these ideas.
- <sup>5</sup> 馮友蘭 Youlan Feng (1985, pp. 142, 152–54) states that the *Huainanzi* 淮南子 and *Neiye* 內業 discuss immortality only in an embodied form.
- <sup>6</sup> Ka Wang (1993, pp. 3, 14, 16) examines the historical origins of the concept of disembodied immortality in religious Daoist texts, including the *Baopuzi* 抱朴子 and *Zhengao* 真誥, and identifies the HSG as one of their precursors in this context.
- <sup>7</sup> 黃釗 Zhao Huang (2001) notes that the HSG emphasizes state governance through non-action (*wuwei* 無為) in the context of cultivating the three treasures when interpreting the *Daodejing*.
- <sup>8</sup> Comparable descriptions of “*jingshen* 精神” as the essential element of humans can be found in chapters 5, 10, 12, 15, 26, 27, 28, 31, 43, 44, 54, 64, 71, 72.
- <sup>9</sup> The Chinese texts of the HSG quoted in this paper are all from 老子河上公章句. 《四部叢刊初編》中第532冊. 景常熟瞿氏鐵琴銅劍樓藏宋刊本. <https://ctext.org/heshanggong/zh> (downloaded on 15 February 2025).
- <sup>10</sup> The definition of essential property that I adopt is such that an entity *x* has an essential property *F* if and only if necessarily when *x* exists, *x* has *F*.

- 11 For more discussions of *hun* 魂 and *po* 魄, see Anna Seidel (1982), 余英時 Yingshi Yu (1987), Ken E. Brashier (1996), 羅月強 Yuet Keung Lo (2008), and Lisa Raphals (2023, pp. 55–56).
- 12 I use the term “donated” instead of “emitted”, as employed by Tadd (2013, p. 525), because “donated” more accurately reflects the meaning of the Chinese word “*shi* 施”, which connotes the act of giving.
- 13 Tadd (2013) employs different terms to translate “*jingshen* 精神” in various sections of HSG. To maintain clarity, I will use the term “essential spirits” instead of “spirits” or “essence and spirits” whenever I translate “*jingshen* 精神” in HSG.
- 14 I modified Tadd’s translation such that it is made explicit that the five natures refer to the essence and spirits, hearing and vision, voice and sound.
- 15 I modified Tadd’s translation such that it is made explicit that the six emotions refer to external and internal structures, bones and flesh, blood and meridians.
- 16 Tadd (2013) employs the term “bodily-self” to translate the word “*shen* 身”. Nevertheless, I opt to use the English word “body” to translate the Chinese word “*shen* 身”. I will explain this further in the following.
- 17 Examples of breathing techniques: 「人精神好安靜，馳騁呼吸，精神散亡，故發狂也。」《老子河上公章句·道經·檢欲》. Examples of non-action: 「常道當以無為養神，無事安民…」《老子河上公章句·道經·體道》.
- 18 I changed Tadd’s translation of the term “*jun* 君” from “rulers” to “good men”, and “*shi* 士” from “officials” to “noble persons”, as I believe that the HSG wants to include all the virtuous people who attained the Dao instead of only rulers in this context.
- 19 Tadd (2013) employs the term “bodily-self” to translate the word “*shen* 身”. My worry is that this translation can be a bit misleading as the translation somehow carries the message that we are necessarily embodied, which is not the case in the HSG. While a person is alive, one is indeed embodied. However, for the HSG, we can achieve a high stage of immortality, where one becomes a ghostlike existence without a human body or any fixed body of an organism. Consequently, I opt to use the English word “body” to translate the Chinese word “*shen* 身” rather than adopting Tadd’s translation of “*shen* 身” as “bodily-self” to convey the possibility of disembodiment.
- 20 Some examples are 「載營魄抱一，能無離乎？」《道德經·第十章》，「天地與我並生，而萬物與我為一。」《莊子·齊物論》，and 「隱身幽館，而修守一之業。」《真誥·卷十四》.

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