

# The Quest for Spiritual Orgasm

## Daoist and Tantric Sexual Cultivation in the West

Author: Michael Winn

*By abstaining from intercourse, the spirit has no opportunity for expansiveness,  
yin and yang are blocked and cut off from one another.*

– Classic of Su Nu (Wile, 1992, 7)

Sexual love can be one of the most powerful human experiences. Over the past two thousand years, certain Daoist and Tantric cultures sought to tap the power of sexuality to cultivate elevated spiritual states of awareness and achieve immortality. These practices appear to have originated in China and India and later spread to Tibet and elsewhere in Asia. Daoism and Tantrism are both experiential approaches to life, and share similar microcosmic-macrocosmic theories of the human body as an inner mirror of outer Nature. The body-centered cosmology of each has led to a spectrum of sexual practices that range from ritualized physical sexual intercourse to celibacy accompanied by conscious subtle-body love making. (Bokemkamp, 1997, 43; Wile 1992, 25, White, 2000, 15).

Both posit a multi-dimensional universe governed by divine, all pervading polar energies identified in Tantra as Shakti-Shiva deities or in Daoism as the yin-yang forces of Heaven and Earth. These polar forces arise from a mysterious non-dual unity, whose dance within the physical plane follows a five-fold pattern of harmony governed by five families of deities or five phase principles. Both offer alchemical maps, often hidden within mandalas interiorized within the body – yantras in Tantra and I Ching (Yijing) patterns in Daoism – that can be fully understood only by the initiated adept. These subtle body maps allow the adept to navigate the apparent chaos of conflicting physical and sexual desires to find the way to the true self at the still center of the drama of creation. Despite these underlying similarities in their cosmology, the Tantric and Daoist methods of sexual cultivation, both physical and subtle body, are radically different.

Since the late 1970's Daoist-Tantric sexual practices have been widely publicized and taught in the West. As a student, teacher, and private scholar of these practices during this period, I took it upon myself to "test" the methods of different Tantric and Daoist schools that washed up on Western shores. I was driven by an intense curiosity about the nature my own sexuality, which I intuitively felt to be central to my spiritual evolution. This journey led me to travel widely in China and India to investigate the cultural context of these practices and discern their differences as paths emphasizing Fire (Tantric) or Water and Fire (Daoist).

My goal is to show how Western sexual needs have shaped the teachers and teachings of Daoist and Tantric sexual practices in the West. I will examine the sexual behavior, attitudes, lineage, and methods of different teachers, and if their practices were largely re-invented or presented in radically different ways from traditional Asian lineages. I hope to clarify the relation between physical sex, subtle body sex, the issue of celibacy, and the traditional distinction between medical-therapeutic sexual practices and mystical approaches to sexuality. I'll explore why sexuality is so crucial to spiritual transformation, and describe the different kinds of subtle body orgasm one might evoke using Daoist and Tantric methods.

The broad framework of my study is that (1) there is a deep tension in every human being between a non-sexual, non-dual core Being and a sexually polarized male-female Body. This tension is

alleviated by development of an intermediate Energy Body that is androgynous (both male and female) in nature, and which is the deepest drive behind all forces of spiritual evolution. (2) This tension between Being and Body is so powerful that most “Enlightenment” states cannot bridge it, despite claims to the contrary. It is only bridged by what are called Immortality practices in both Tantra and Daoism.

In general, I found more detailed medical and internal sexual practices available in the Daoist tradition, described in a concluding overview. This paper is titled *The Quest for Spiritual Orgasm* because in the course of teaching sexual practices to Westerners, I have polled thousands of students to find out why they are learning a sexual practice. Asked to select between understanding their sexuality, improved sexual performance, better love relationships, and having a spiritual orgasm, about eighty percent choose spiritual orgasm.

Because the river of Daoist and Tantric history is so vast, with so many tributaries, generalizations are inevitable in my thumbnail sketches of a wide array of teachers and teachings I encountered. The obstacle to all research on sexuality is widespread lying and concealment. Subtle body sex complicates this problem, since by definition the Daoist-Tantric experience of the body-as-divine-cosmos-copulating-within-itself is personal in nature. In the spirit of creating a new openness about delicate sexual-spiritual issues, and to vivify the reader’s senses, I often shift to a first person narrative. I accept (on behalf of my unnamed informants) full responsibility for any inaccuracies in my brief footnote to this chapter of Western religious history.

### **Sexual Revolution as Cultural Context**

Tantrics and Daoists have often assumed the role of rebelling against the prevailing social and sexual values, which were dominated by a strict caste system in India and overtly anti-female values of Confucianism in China. Tantrics and Daoists were also early experimenters with “external alchemy”, the use of mind-altering natural substances to quicken one’s spiritual evolution. It is not surprising that their ideas came into widespread popularity in the West during a period of widespread cultural rebellion in the 1960’s with mind expanding drugs, pelvic-undulating rock music, and a pill-provoked Free Love movement, all designed to topple Establishment values. The Western sexual revolution occurred without any Eastern stimulus; but once it was happening, it needed somewhere to go, and Tantric and Daoist teachings offered a new and more spiritual direction into which the sexual revolution could mature. If we imagine that planet earth has a single global libido, I suspect these ancient teachings would have surfaced any place where sexual freedom was exploding.

It is important to first remove a naivete common to Westerners about oriental sexual practices. Teachers of traditional sexology, whether medical or spiritual, are difficult to find today in either China or India. On seven trips to China, despite an extensive network of Daoist contacts, no one knew of a single teacher of Daoist sexual cultivation, even though all were well aware of its historical and textual presence. There are two reasons. One, Daoist sexology has a bad historical reputation for being abused and used to promote sexual vampirism, making it risky to teach in Communist culture. Two, as Fang Ru Ruan’s *Sex in China* study notes, ancient China produced the world’s oldest and most detailed sexology texts, but modern China is one of the most sexually repressed countries in the world – sale of pornography is punishable by death. The neo-Reichian Yugoslav filmmaker Dusan Makaveich showed in his 1972 film *Mysteries of the Organism* that as political repression increases, sexual freedom decreases. This political repression may be a factor in recent medical reports in mainland China of increasingly widespread sexual dysfunction. Most current Daoist books on sexology are coming from Taiwan and Hong Kong, often centered around trained courtesans (Lai 2001, McNeil 1999), or from Chinese living in Thailand (Chia/Winn 1984, Chia 1986, 1996, 2000).

Three trips to India, numerous contacts and books on Tantra convinced me the situation there is not much different. Mainstream educated Hindus are puritanical in their sexual mores, and Tantrism is seen as low caste and morally suspect excuse for black magic, especially seduction spells (vashikarana), suitable for entertaining stories but not serious pursuit. It is an underground subculture, with a invisible subset of adepts skilled in the esoteric sexual rites described in classical Tantric scriptures, erotic paintings and sculpture. Tantric practices are kept alive by secrecy: “publicly Vedic, secretly Tantric” is the Indian aphorism that summarizes the situation. My thesis is that amongst the Tantric male teachers who brought their sexual wares to the West, few had any actual training in physical sexual practices. I believe most recreated them from ancient texts or invented them out of their own needs or the expectations of their Western students.

Asian sexual practices would likely not have taken root in the West except for the ground being prepared by Sigmund Freud (d. 1939), his students Carl Jung (d.1961)and Wilhelm Reich (d.1957), and the early sex researcher Havelock Ellis (d.1939). The widespread acceptance of the theory of sexual impulse being a fundamental shaping force of the personality opened Westerners to the Daoist-Tantric metaphysic that went one step further, giving sexuality a key role in spiritual evolution. Jung expanded this greatly with his explorations into eastern mysticism, writing introductions to both Tantric and Daoist esoteric texts. In his essay on the Secret of the Golden Flower, Jung tried (without success, in my opinion) to impose his anima-animus psychological archetypes on yin-yang theory. Jung lacked the practical energetic methodologies (beyond “talk” therapy) for directly experiencing and guiding these subconscious male-female forces in the body into superconscious states.

Reich tried to fill this gap, and died in prison in the U.S. for spreading his teachings and devices promoting a universe – and human body – centered around orgasm, through the medium of “orgone”, similar to prana in India and qi in China. The ideas of these psychologists later became increasingly mainstream, and set the stage in 1972 for bestselling self-improvement books like *The Joy of Sex*, by Alex Comfort, a scholar of Tantric erotic art and philosophy. The appearance of crazy wisdom teachings from Tibetan Buddhist Tantrics like Chogyam Trungpa (d.19 89) inspired beatniks and poets like Allen Ginsberg, who as a homosexual in a homophobic society was attracted to a teaching claiming enlightenment could be achieved by following and completing your ordinary desires.

Two early major stimuli to the growth of Asian sexual practices in the West were 1) publication of *From Sex to Super Consciousness* (1974) by Bhagwan Sri Rajneesh and his growing popularity as a “sex guru” of Tantric and new age mysticism, and (2) publication of the bestselling *Sexual Secrets* (1979) by Nik Douglas and Penny Slinger , with classical texts and six hundred illustrations of Tantric and Daoist sexual iconography. Unlike previous erotic art books, it offered a living spiritual path. These events put images and a vision of sexual-spiritual liberation into popular media with a psychology accessible to Westerners.

Nik Douglas was an English rock music producer who went to India for eight years in the 60’s, several of them wandering about as a Tantric sadhu, stirring the ashes of his guru’s sacred dhouni fire. Douglas made the first film on Tantra in English, financed by Mick Jagger — a clear statement of alignment between Tantra and rock music subcultures. Douglas published *Chakra* magazine in India and had an indirect but pivotal role in introducing the Beatles to their guru, Maharishi Mahesh. This subsequently gave other Indian gurus instant rock star status, promoting their teachings to the rebel youth culture in the West. Maharishi’s Transcendental Meditation movement passes itself off as Vedic, and completely avoids sexual issues and practices. But as Douglas points out in his history of Tantra, *Spiritual Sex* (1997), the TM power mantras given to initiates, chosen by birthdate, are Tantric. The Vedas themselves are hymns to be sung, but do not offer mantras, which Douglas traces to the older Dravidian vegetative fertility cults in India.

Traditionally, in Hindu Tantra a lineage transmission is essential, a personal initiation by a guru. Rajneesh (1931-90) was an Indian professor of philosophy who basically had no guru – he got his initiation from books. From his wide readings and direct experimentation, Rajneesh “self-invented” a Tantric path for Westerners to explore themselves. He forbade his Indian followers from using the techniques devised for Westerners, as he felt that Western minds worked differently. He had a genius for translating obscure mystical concepts into a workable Western psychology. He offered Westerners exactly what they wanted: freedom from guilt about sex, the promise of enlightenment, and a smorgasboard of workshops led by followers that allowed them to explore and integrate their eclectic mix of Eastern and Western methods. Having no lineage, he invented a feeling of lineage for Westerners by requiring them to wear swami-like robes.

Rajneesh set the stage for his Western followers to appropriate the five element Tantric chakra system and psychologize it to fit their own spiritual needs and Western archetypes. This trend towards a “self-invented” spirituality became a hallmark of the New Age movement in the West. Tantra and Daoism both have a long history of experimenting with and absorbing new spiritual technologies, so I do not use the term “self-invented” pejoratively, but only to distinguish it from teachings adopted from traditional lineages in India or China.

Nik Douglas, who met Rajneesh in India before he was famous, told me his main recollection of him was of a “nice professor type who wanted me to set him up with intellectual Jewish girls who would fuck”. This suggests an early stage of trying to reconcile his sexual and intellectual identities. Rajneesh was later touted as the “sex guru” by the media because he told his followers to have as much sex as they could possibly tolerate until they no longer desired it. This was his novel application of a traditional Tantric principle of using ordinary desire to obtain enlightenment. At seminars he would begin by requiring everyone to strip off their clothes and sniff the armpits and genitals of a member of the opposite sex. Rajneesh reportedly entered a phase of natural celibacy between the ages of forty-two and fifty-five, so he was not having sex at the height of his fame as a sex guru. This highlights the paradox, found in many traditional Tantric and Daoist lineages, of an approach that advocates celibacy yet employs sexual energy as the main force in their meditation.

### **Personal Account: Kundalini Rising in the West**

My own first spiritual initiation experience offers a snapshot of how Tantric methods leapt across cultural lines without a lineage to define it, and how the Tantric-induced experience of kundalini, the female Shakti force rising within the body, itself blurred the boundary between the sexual and the spiritual. I was working as a free lance war correspondent in Africa in 1978. Enroute to the airport leaving the U.S. I grabbed Rajneesh’s Book of Secrets, his compilation of a hundred different Tantric methods. I had never heard of Rajneesh. Later, stuck waiting for a visa in Dar Es Salaam, Tanzania, I had time to browse the book.

I had never had a guru or any meditation training. Rajneesh’s Book of Secrets overwhelmed me with the number of techniques in it. So I picked the simplest one I could find, a breathing method. It instructed me to follow my inhalation and exhalation, while gradually increasing the length of the pause between breaths. I got deep into the process, lying on a straw mattress in a sweltering \$3. per night flea bag hotel, shared with a black South African refugee whose epileptic seizures were my only distraction. I practiced for three to five hours at a time, and found I could slow my breath down until the pauses seem to last interminably.

One day, after two weeks practice, I felt my breath stop completely. During a long pause between breaths, I entered a deep, peaceful state, and felt I no longer needed to breathe air. Suddenly my whole body shook, then exploded in an intense orgasm and I watched myself catapulted into the space around me, with a clear vision of my body expanding rapidly through the walls of the room. After this initial explosion, I felt like a mushroom cloud above a nuclear blast, with the debris of my

former consciousness blown to bits and slowly raining back down on my transparent body in blissful droplets. I was shocked, scared, and excited.

I realized I had entered some other dimension of myself, and decided I had to make it a priority in life to find a way to stay connected to it. I decided to give up meat, drugs, and sex, the latter decision particularly shocking to me as at that time I was prone to having three girlfriends at once. Since my beyond-the-body experience was a thousand times more orgasmic than the best sexual orgasm I had previously experienced, being celibate didn't seem to matter. I didn't know it then, but I had entered the realm of my subtle bodies and their spontaneously orgasmic properties. I had no guru or formal initiation, my only teacher was a book, yet I found myself celibate, on the Tantric path, and questing for a repeat spiritual orgasm.

When I returned to New York, I hunted down the nearest Rajneesh ashram, a dingy cellar in Tribeca. I did Rajneesh's Dynamic Meditation to arouse the kundalini, but it didn't work for me, and I didn't like the "group grope" feeling of the people there. I didn't want strangers grappling with my newly delicate energy field, and the methods seemed to lack sufficient internal focus. The only book in print that seemed to confirm the reality of my experience was Gopi Krishna's *Kundalini: The Serpent Power*, an account of his twelve year ordeal with his kundalini current run wild, finally cured by simply eating meat. Krishna published many later books claiming the kundalini – the dance of the ida (solar), pingala (lunar), and sushumna (central) currents of prana up the spine — was the evolutionary force behind all genius and all genetic evolution. When I interviewed Gopi Krishna shortly before his death in 1984, I was not impressed by his spiritual presence. He seemed very intellectual, an Indian pundit with thick black glasses whose energy was mostly in his head.

I began practicing White Tantric Yoga, taught by Yogi Bhanan and his 3HO organization, and found that it systematically stimulated and sustained the blissful experience I had in Africa. I practiced this system of kundalini yoga daily for four years, which employed a rigorous combination of yogic asanas (postures), "breath of fire" (rapid belly breathing), yogic locks (squeezing different body parts tightly), mudras (hand positions) and mantras. I took ice cold showers at 4 am, and found my sleep needs reduced to four hours. I also began experiencing different siddhis or spiritual powers, ranging from bursts of telepathy and foreknowledge of the future (useful in planning my free lance writing career) and, more dramatically, having repeated experiences of the entire universe collapsing into a single point. I would be immobilized for up to an hour, as if my being were condensed into a heavy steel ball at the center of the universe, with a contracting pressure so intense not even my mind could escape its gravitational power.

Being a self-employed writer, I was able to practice four to eight hours a day. The link between kundalini and sexuality was self-evident. My testicles pulsed day and night, I could feel and internally hear my sexual energy rushing up my spine and throbbing in my third eye. At other times I experienced fiery sexual-like currents of electricity flowing throughout my body. I felt like I had discovered organic LSD, and walked about in an ecstatic state, feeling ten foot tall and looking down from above my head into the mundane reality below. I was still celibate, but had so much sexual energy I masturbated daily to release the pressure. My conversion of sexual energy into blissful subtle energy must have been unbalanced, as it eventually led to a weakening of my physical body. This subsequently led to my shift to Daoist inner sexual alchemy practices.

I was told that I was practicing the traditional ancient science of Tantra, but later investigations by myself and others into Yogi Bhanan raised serious questions as to whether his methods were "self-invented" from a hodgepodge he had collected while formerly a customs official in Delhi. Bhanan had no identifiable guru, no specific Tantric lineage or school, and had mixed his yogic methods with a curious blend of religious worship of Sikhism. I went to the Punjab state in India, and widespread inquiries produced no one who had ever heard of any Sikh Tantrics there. This is not to judge

Bhajan's methods as ineffective, but simply to note the pattern of self-invented Tantrics coming to the West to seek a following. One of his innovations was to line up male yogis and female yoginis facing each other in long rows, up to a hundred people in length. They would stare into their opposite sexed partner's eyes while doing rapid breath of fire in different asanas, building up a tremendous sexual energy field that would shift into a higher octave of shared collective bliss.

Bhajan offered little real training on sexual energy management, other than the advice to limit sex to once a month with a married partner. The only specific technique for men was to sit with their perineum over the heel (mulabanda), to block the upward flow of sexual feeling from going out the penis. Yet his ashrams, with serene white-turbaned and long-bearded Western yogis, were filled behind the scenes with frequent sexual affairs between adepts who could not follow their guru's admonitions. One of Bhajan's inner circle at the time revealed to me the existence of lawsuits against Bhajan (who was married) by female followers for sexual abuse, and told of a coterie of sexual favorites and "deviant" sexual practices in his inner Tantric circle.

A different yogi, also a leader in 3HO, later left to become a Daoist student of Mantak Chia, from whom he learned the Microcosmic Orbit meditation, a method of circulating energy up the spine and down the front channels of the body. This radically differed from kundalini yoga in suggesting the subtle energy circulated in endless loops that ultimately spiraled into the center of one's core consciousness, instead of a linear flow from lower chakra to upper chakra to union with an absolute self somewhere above the head. The Orbit is also the key Daoist channel for circulating sexual energy. Before he left Bhajan's organization, Bhajan's lieutenant introduced the Microcosmic Orbit meditation into the White Tantric practice. It later became standard practice to help ground the many spacy yogis, who, like myself, were literally floating out of their bodies. America had become an accelerated microcosm of the Orient, where different Tantric and Daoist schools traded methods over the centuries along the Silk Road trade routes.

Bhajan's pattern of appearing sexually conservative in public while engaging in sexual practices in private was common in other Tantric gurus in the 1980's, most famously Swami Rama of the Himalayan Institute in Honesdale, Pennsylvania and Swami Muktananda at his Siddhi Yogi ashram in New York's Catskill Mountains. Both were discovered to be giving "Tantric initiations" to dozens of young female devotees in the guru's private boudoir. There is a tradition in Indian Tantra of gurus initiating with a drop of semen or saliva, or performing ceremonial sexual rites where sexual union with a low caste or untouchable virgin female is used by male adepts to enter a divine state of union (White, 1996).

But the Tantric sex scene in America more closely resembled the groupie music and movie star scene. The young girls who were "gifted" with the guru's initiating lingam (penis) reported that it was quick sex, and felt like a man masturbating inside them, with no deep ceremonial, emotional, or spiritual connection made. There was no body-specific training in the Siddha Yoga program at that time in transmuting sexual energy into spiritual energy, other than what occurred naturally through devotional chanting. All the acharyas (novitiates) and Western swamis had to take strict vows of celibacy. Swami Rama's followers were particularly galled by his insistence that male and female yoga students were not allowed to hold hands, under penalty of being expelled from the ashram.

Was this seemingly compulsive sexual behavior by enlightened masters a kind of crazy wisdom, an intentionally paradoxical Tantric behavior that we morality-bound Westerners could not understand, or was there something else going on here? Thousands of followers would testify to the spiritual powers of these men. For me, it raised a new question: is it possible to be spiritually enlightened, and at the same time be an emotional and sexual midget? Over time, my later study of Daoist subtle body development suggested this was likely the case. Muktananda and Rama were trained by

Tantrics that emphasized austerities, including abstention from sex, while driving all energy into the head to nourish the spiritual body. They likely had no previous sexual experience in India.

These head centered (third eye and crown) practices are typical of “fire” school methods for achieving rapid enlightenment, which often suppress physical body urges to achieve this expanded head-enlightened state. These repressed sexual urges can later suddenly emerge powerfully, amplified by the active fire energy of the adept’s spiritual body seeking to ground itself in the sexual waters of the earth plane/physical body. The trigger activating this release could have been the shift from the sexually repressive culture of India to the free-sex culture of New York. The unconscious desire of the young female devotees to have sex with their guru may also have been a factor; to Rama and Muktananda’s opened subtle vision these sexual desires may have been perceived consciously, and they may have been simply unable to resist an opportunity to seek balance for their excess spiritual fire.

A Tantric might argue these events were simply life offering a new opportunity for exploration by all concerned, to be viewed without any moral judgement. But was there a patriarchal blindness and excess male-fire insensitivity to the very goddess Shakti force which Tantrics universally claim to worship? Swami Rama escaped to India for two years at the height of his scandal to let things cool off. When he returned, I had the opportunity to personally ask him, what is the purpose of sexuality in spiritual evolution? His answer was evasive, mentioning that some cultures allowed multiple wives, implying sexual-spiritual development was completely culture-determined rather than obeying some cosmic law.

Muktananda was brought to the West in 1971 by his student Albert Rudolph, a Brooklyn Jew, former nightclub bouncer and later an art dealer. Muktananda inducted Rudi into his religious order, and so Swami Rudrananda (“Rudi” to his followers) donned traditional swami saffron robes. But Rudi didn’t follow traditional swami rules. Rudi was open about his Tantric self-inventedness, and was open about his sleeping with both male and female followers to intensify their spiritual awakening. His honesty about this was refreshing and shocking, exemplified by his book title, *Spiritual Cannibalism*. I saw from a video of Rudi that he had excess kundalini, causing his head to whip back and forth ferociously. Rudi’s creative re-invention of an American Tantra was cut short by a 1973 plane crash. He trained a new generation of American Tantrics who spread his experimental approach to Tantrism, often blending it with Tibetan Tantric and later Daoist alchemical teachings.

Two of Rudi’s top students, John Mann and Lar Short, exchanged teachings with me and my first Daoist teacher Mantak Chia in the mid 80’s when Chia rented Rudi’s Big Indian ashram in the New York Catskills. Some of that ended up in *The Body of Light* (1988), Mann and Short’s comparison of the subtle bodies in the Hindu, Buddhist, and Daoist traditions. Chia learned from them the Tibetan Powa technique of shooting one’s essence (bindu) out of the physical body before death, which he borrowed and integrated into his Daoist teachings. This ejected essence is, in my view, the sexual-spiritual substance that allows one to create a new incarnation, a specialty in the Tibetan tradition. While editing the Daoist chapter in *The Body of Light* I took of number of their Tantric initiations, and tried Rudi’s experimental method of making sexual love with any astral beings met while travelling in the subtle planes. I later rejected this (and the powa practice) as unnecessary and potentially distracting to the process of Daoist inner sexual alchemy. The low astral plane is filled with half-beings of low vibration and hidden agendas. In Daoist alchemy one is kept busy sexually coupling sun, moon, planet and star energies of higher frequencies.

One discovery that emerged from our sharing of Daoist, Tantric, and Bon Dzogchen teachings that had been absorbed into Tibetan Buddhism was the clear similarity of Daoist alchemy subtle body coupling using pearls and channels to the completion stage annutarayoga Tantric practices with its colored male and female drops and winds. Detailed in Geshe Gyatso’s *Clear Light of Bliss* (1982),

these vajrayoga practices emphasize the value of having a physical sexual consort to speed the opening of the heart needed for highest attainment and interpenetrating mind awareness.

John Mann later developed an innovative two person Tantric meditation method called Divine Androgyny, which I consider a quintessential Tantric sexual coupling of higher subtle bodies. A male and female adept sit on chairs facing one another and do nothing except stare in each other's eyes and surrender to whatever flows through. This creates a build up in the sexually polarized subtle energy field between them which eventually begins to pulsate. If the adepts are highly skilled and attuned, the pulsating field becomes quite intense, tangible to anyone sitting in between, and can result in deep healing for all involved in the process. (Mann, 2000)

In the late 70's and early 80's I also took a series of Tibetan Tantric initiations from two lineage heads, the Karmapa and Dalai Lama. I never pursued these practices in depth, as I did not feel drawn to their complex mandalas of visualized deities and their guru worship. But friends who studied Tibetan Buddhist Tantrism reported they kept their sexual practices very secret from Westerners.

A Western female acquaintance went on a three-year Buddhist retreat, believing she would practice various austerities. She afterwards reported the retreat was a "veritable Peyton Place," with lusty Lamas besieging her to become a consort and thus speed their path to enlightenment. I heard reliable reports of another lama who insisted all the western women on retreat become his consort. Two of the four major Tibetan sects require celibacy, but all four teach methods for sublimating sexual energy into subtle bodies, projected as various deities. Skill in this kind of astral projection creates the possibility of "astral sex affairs" that occur mostly in dream time or meditative states.

A different female friend, involved in helping Tibetan teachers, confided to me she was under "astral rape" attack for months by a Tibetan Tantric practitioner who became obsessed with her as his consort after she terminated a brief sexual affair. I shared with her some Daoist methods for defining the boundaries of one's subtle bodies, which seemed to help. Sexual intercourse opens subtle body connections that can be extremely difficult to dissolve. Men become obsessed with pornography for the same reason: they are having astral sex with their own projected fantasy in the low astral plane, the subtle body closest to the physical.

Any divorced or separated couple also knows too well how difficult it is to cut the bonds of sexual attachment, especially in cases of first true love. This is often because their sexual energy bodies have been "glued" together in the low astral plane. My own experience is that this can go beyond a strong subtle body sexual relationship. It may involve the exchange of what the Daoists call the jingshen, the vital organ spirits that animate the personal body. It is difficult to separate from someone else because a part of their consciousness is actually living inside your body, and vice versa. Similar situation may be found in certain deep child-parent relationships, which may be intensified by an unspoken sexual polarity. This is a vast topic, beyond the scope of this paper, but it does imply a spontaneous and high level of subtle body sex that is usually unconsciously willed.

## **California Tantra**

One of Rudi's New York students was Franklin Jones (b. 1939), who left Rudi to try Scientology for a year before starting his own movement. Jones moved to California and became the self-proclaimed God-man and World Teacher Da Free John (later changed to numerous other names). It appeared Da Free John had such an extreme case of rising kundalini heat that it permanently burned off his hair. Jones-Free John is clearly a case of second generation Western self-invented Tantrism, a showman who created a Wizard of Oz mystique by teaching from behind panels, too sacred to be viewed by his followers. He later added a modern twist. He lived for a long time on an island in Fiji,



surrounded by multiple wives and “gopis” (female devotees-lovers), and daily instructs his followers in a California ashram in the most minute aspects of their lives by computer email. Jones may be another Tantric case of excess fire seeking female sexual water to cool and ground itself.

The California Tantra scene in the 1980's and 90's was blossoming with its own flavor, and students (mostly of Rajneesh) sprang up teaching Tantric workshops. These typically were taught in the nude, and often encouraged participants to sexually partner with a stranger, with instructions to first tune into them by breathing together and holding one's hand over their partner's heart. This extremely simplified and re-invented Tantric sex ritual for Westerners may have cemented the media definition of Tantra as being primarily a practice of spiritualized sexual intercourse, which of course it never was in India. Even the famed Tantric ritual of the “Five M's” (pancha makara) that culminated with coitus (maithuna) was preceded by mantric initiation and ordinarily required lengthy prior subtle body training (Tigunait, 1999). But Californians wanted both quick sex and quick enlightenment, the latter being one promise of Tantra, and so market demand attracted the teacher supply to satisfy it.

This public sexual intercourse in a group workshop setting seems to be an enduring part of the Western reinvention of Tantra. It fits a general Tantric pattern of defying public mores for the purpose of shocking someone into enlightenment, but I put it more into the category of psycho-therapeutic or medical sexual therapy than subtle body practice. Participants are usually guided to take the sexual energy up the chakras in the spine, but may have little or no prior training in meditation or in stabilizing internal states of consciousness with mantra, yantra, internally created alchemical symbols or visualizations, or mudras, the hallmarks of traditional Hindu Tantrism. This may be because Rajneesh, the self-invented Tantric guru of many of them, did not himself have lineage training in these methods. Rajneesh also did not believe mantra was suitable for Westerners, as he felt it produced a soporific state of self-hypnosis in which it was difficult to be fully present in the body.

In 1997 I met Jwala, a woman who had been one of the first teachers on the California Tantra scene in 1980. Her practice of Tantric initiation involved gently masturbating men while guiding them to move their sexual energy up the chakras to their heart and head, and counseling them on sexual issues. She confirmed my perception of California Tantrism being more focused on physical sexuality as therapy, exemplified by her own professed challenge to spiritual progress in terms of building a stable subtle body awareness. I knew by then that if there is excessive focus on physical sexuality, the subtle body energy is pulled down and eventually dispersed.

This limitation of focusing excessively on physical sex may prove to be the force that moves California style Tantrism towards subtle body sexual cultivation practices. In 2000 I taught the Daoist inner sexual alchemy practices of Lesser Water and Fire in Switzerland. One of my students was the director of a Tantric Institute in Germany that was using Rajneesh inspired methods taught by Margo Anand, whose teachings and first book *The Art of Ecstasy*, was also influential amongst California Tantrics. (This book borrowed the Inner Smile technique from the books I had written with Chia, as well as material from Nik Douglas' *Sexual Secrets*, both without acknowledgement, which we both gracefully accepted at the time as her hidden fear of not having a tradition behind her). At the end of the retreat, this student, a male, broke down in tears. “I have been teaching and helping so many people with their sexuality”, he said. “But I have been personally at a dead end, I could not get beyond the boundary of my physical maleness and the limitations of physical sex. I was feeling very frustrated. But now I have a very great gift from you and from the Dao, the subtle love-making between my inner male and female souls. Now I have a way to move forward!”

**Kriya Yoga: Tantra and Celibacy**

In 1983, two years after I had shifted my main practice from White Tantric Yoga to Daoist internal alchemy, I stumbled onto Kriya Yoga, a Tantric method taught by Swami Paramhansa Hariharananda Giri ("Baba" to his followers). His Kriya Yoga was definitely not self-invented, but strictly followed the initiations he had received in India from Sri Yukteswar and from his student, Paramhansa Yogananda, who founded the Self-Realization Fellowship (SRF) in the USA the 1920's. Baba was later made President of Sri Yukteswar's ashram in Puri, India, and took higher level kriya initiations from other yogis in a lineage extending back to its founder Lahiri Mahasay. Lahiri, a railroad engineer with five children, claims an immortal being named Babaji appeared to him in 1862 and taught him six kriyas (Sanskrit root kri, to act, ya, divine soul). These kriyas offered a structured internal map of subtle body development, through six stages of samadhi. To objectively explore these practices, I eventually discontinued my Daoist internal alchemy practices for a few years.

Kriya Yoga is Tantric in its divinization of the body. In the first kriya, prana is circulated up and down the spine. In the second kriyas, internal seed (bij) mantras are silently chanted to infuse the spinal pathway and the multi-petalled lotuses visualized in the chakras and fifty body parts. Then the 50 letter-sounds of the sanskrit alphabet are spiralled around the cranium, activating the primordial sound which is gradually captured into the center of the cranial void space in higher kriyas. The higher kriyas drop all use of mantra as one enters the higher void spaces. Like Rajneesh, Hariharananda completely eschews all use of chanted mantra, which he considers an intermediate level of practice: "if you are busy shouting to your Mother, how can you hear God speak to you?" he would ask. In Kriya Yoga there is a typically Tantric progressive internalization of the cosmos within the body, which evolves into the experience of one's inner soul focusing on the subtle current of sound, light, and vibration/heat in the central channel (sushumna). Baba's private deity is Kali, the paramount Tantric goddess, who he claims has intervened to allow him an extremely long life (age 96 at this writing in 2002). He was 75 when I first met him, a few years after he arrived in the West.

Kriya Yoga is an interesting case. It was originally designed for householders, who could have sex and children, eat meat, and meditate at home to achieve enlightenment. The original technique was very Tantric in allowing one to indulge these worldly pleasures, but one had to watch from the soul level as one indulged. Lahiri insisted his students get married, and his subtle body teachings were quite sexually explicit: "I beheld the Red Lingam ("penis") of Shiva inside of me; it contained the energy of the Sun. Then I came up to the third eye, and entered the Maha Yoni ("Great Vagina"). (Satyeswarananda, 1988) But the lineage was virtually captured and shifted into the monastic Giri ("mountain") order of swamis who were forbidden from having sex, watching theatre, eating meat or any food cooked by a non-initiate. An American student of Baba's visiting Benares, India ran into the grandson of Lahiri Mahasay, who complained bitterly that Kriya Yoga had been hijacked by Hindu monks.

Yogananda did not think Westerners were prepared for Kriya's shakti power, and so only taught the first kriya to his followers, a method of circulating prana up and down the spine without mantras. Nonetheless, the SRF-simplified Kriya Yoga has spawned many splinter schools of American swamis claiming lineage and has achieved widespread acceptance in the West. Meanwhile, the SRF-promoted facade of Yogananda's yogic purity as a celibate is beginning to crumble under various challenges. I had a student whose father claimed to have been in Yogananda's inner circle, which he reported included sexual affairs. A man closely resembling Yogananda in appearance filed a lawsuit to examine genetic tests by SRF to determine if Yogananda was his father. SRF devotees and relatives claim the test results were negative. Hariharananda may eventually prove to be one of the few cases of complete sexual abstinence amongst Tantrics who have come to the West. He claims it was only when he gave up all sexual desire that he achieved enlightenment.

I found Hariharananda to be a fountain of illumination and wisdom, a Brahman with a tiger's mind who could recite the Bhagavad Gita and the Upanisads, yet who also radiated a heart that was lovingly pure and had a child-like innocence. It was impossible not to love him. After meditating for decades, at the age fifty Baba attained nirvakalpa samadhi, the sixth kriya and highest level of enlightenment possible. He is famous for his yogic power to stop both his breath and heartbeat for extended periods while in samadhi. Since then, for the last forty-five years, he has been revered as a fully realized "God man" in India. It is not my place to judge anyone's level of spiritual attainment, but I did have the expectation was that such an evolved being would at least be sex-neutral, if not sex-positive in his attitude.

I instead discovered he was both female-negative and sex-negative, raising the same question again: was sex and subtle body training incompatible? Or was cultural conditioning at work? Working for some years in close personal contact with Baba while editing his Bhagavad Gita in the Light of Kriya Yoga (1989), I noticed how his aversion to women also manifested itself as subtle attraction to and need for women to be around him. Privately he expressed anti-body sentiments ("from the senses down, the body is the domain of the devil"), and made anti-female comments ("if you marry a woman, they will constantly lure you to bed and weaken your power to meditate"). He often publicly recounted a favorite story of how once a foreign woman at his ashram in India had tried to seduce him. She crawled on top of him naked, but his steely control was such that neither his mind nor his penis was aroused.

Hariharananda's top-heavy, male-fire crown chakra consciousness seemed to regularly attract yogic successors-to-be who would act out his suppressed lower desires, involving themselves in money scandals and love affairs that invariably resulted in their dismissal. When I last saw him in 1999, he was having severe back pain. I read his pulses using Chinese diagnostic methods, and observed a kidney deficiency, a weakness in his water element. This was likely due to his practicing Fire methods his entire life. The thing that seemed to help his back pain was having teams of young female devotees massage his body, reminding me of the celibate Mahatma Gandhi sleeping beside two young teen girls to rejuvenate himself. The sexual energy Baba denied himself directly his entire life he could only allow himself to receive indirectly through female touch.

There may be other systems of Kriya Yoga with different attitudes about sex. The editors of Tantra Magazine in the 1980's were Kriya Yoga practitioners of a different Babaji lineage (Herakan Baba, an immortal whose followers claim he materialized in a body in India in the 1970's) and the magazine was definitely sex-positive. But it appeared their mix of Kriya and Tantra was not by lineage training but rather an integration of their own choice, a part of the trend amongst Westerners to reshape Tantric methods to fit their own sexual and spiritual needs.

I recount the details of my experience with Hariharananda to highlight a recurring split amongst some Tantrics (and historically, Daoists) between sexual and subtle body development. It is ok for their lay followers to have sex or get married, but the elite cadre of acharyas and swamis who attain subtle body enlightenment need to be celibate. The equation of celibacy and anti-sexual attitudes with enlightenment led me to question whether Hariharananda's Fire path paradigm of nirvakalpa samadhi as enlightenment was complete. Despite his worshipping Kali and using Tantric meditation methods to divinize the body, underneath he seemed to reflect a widespread patriarchal based Indian spirituality that feared the sexual power of women, and perhaps deep beneath that, feared an earth centered consciousness. My desire to integrate my sexual and earth nature fully was a key factor in my resuming my Daoist Water and Fire inner alchemy practices.

### **Daoist Sexual Cultivation in the West**

In 1981 I became one of the first Westerners to study with Mantak Chia. He was a thirty-six year old Chinese married man working as a healer in New York's Chinatown. He left Thailand in 1976, chased out by Thai Western style medical doctors threatened by his Bangkok center offering low-

cost healing. For a few pennies people sat on a large platform, charged with a negative ion current strong enough to detoxify chronic ailments. Chia's unorthodox approach to life served him well in the West, where he wore multiple hats as healer, martial artist, and inner alchemist. He was eager to bridge the gap between modern science and ancient Daoist methods. He was equally comfortable with medical and bedroom sexual practices (fangzhong) and the subtle body coupling employed in internal alchemy (neidangong). Most important, he was willing to openly share his knowledge with Westerners. Other books have been published in the West on Daoist medical sexology (J. Chang 1977, S. Chang 1986, Heng 1997), but they lack deep understanding of Daoist alchemy or subtle body development.

Chia had studied in the mountains behind Hong Kong with One Cloud, a Daoist hermit, who transmitted to him Seven Formulas for Immortality. These alchemical meditations offered a subtle body map of spiritual development: one stage of clearing physical blockages and opening the channels of the energy body, followed by three stages of enlightenment and three stages of immortality. It embraced a paradigm of Water and Fire (kan and li), a continuous yin-yang, female-male, earth-heaven exchange of energies through a well-defined network of physical and subtle energy body channels. But it required first harnessing one's sexual energy as the raw fuel to be refined by spiritual practice. Sexual attraction was a very powerful aspect of one's worldly destiny (ming). It had to be cultivated and refined before one could restore one's original nature (xing). Sexual practice with a partner strengthened the yin-yang flow of qi, and thus rejuvenated the physical body. But as I explored deeper into One Cloud's alchemy formulas, I found that the higher sexual practice was dual cultivation of xing and ming, essentially the sexual coupling of the spiritual and earthly dimensions of oneself.

Apart from his difficulty translating obscure alchemy terms, Chia's teachings on Daoist alchemy and sexual energy cultivation had no complex layers of Chinese religious deities to peel off, no mantras in a foreign language, and did not require long waits by students humbly prostrated at the foot of a master. Chia broke with Chinese traditions of personal initiation and secrecy, and presented instead the beginnings of a spiritual science, accessible to Westerners, based on principles of resonance between cosmic forces of Nature and the human body, mapped and refined by generations of Daoists. The alchemy formulas appear to date back one thousand years to the tenth century teachings of the semi-legendary Daoist Immortal Lu Dong Bin.

Rather than employing mantra to vibrate the subtle bodies as in Tantra, Chia used a combination of physical qigong movement, natural healing sounds, and transformation obtained by alchemical coupling of polarized energies inside three subtle bodies defined by jing-qi-shen (sexual essence-subtle breath-spirit). These fire and water couplings occur within five-fold colored psychic spheres and eight deep "extraordinary" channels that form the infrastructure of one's energy body. This energy body is mapped out within an internal mandala of spinning bagua (eight-sided shapes), most likely derived from the Yijing (I Ching).

Daoist alchemy presents classical yin-yang theory as the cosmic pulsation of polarized positive-negative energy around a pole (chungmai) of neutral or Original Energy (yuanqi) that extends between Early Heaven (xiantian) and Later Heaven(houtian), or earth. The "ten thousand things" were procreated by the copulation of Heaven and Earth, and yin-yang is their eternal multi-orgasmic movement. The human sexual orgasm is an exquisite echo of that pulsation, and internal alchemy is the process of interiorizing within the physical body the cosmic subtle body love-making. By getting one's human qi – especially sexual energy (jingqi) – to flow in rhythm and harmony with the hidden cycles of Nature, one's personal energy gates open to the cosmic flow of inner light and spiritual powers (de) of the Way (Dao).

Nurturing healthy, non-depleting physical sexual orgasm is just the beginning level of Daoist cultivation practice. One Cloud's internal alchemy formulas created increasingly powerful subtle body orgasm. The sexual nature of these subtle body processes was quite explicit. The key practice in the second alchemy formula (Lesser Enlightenment of Water and Fire) is entitled "Self-intercourse". It requires the adept to revert to the androgynous state of his Early Heaven self. The adept gathers the five jingshen (deep body intelligences/spirits, or vital organ "gods") into two primal yin (inner female) and yang (inner male) forces that copulate in the lower dantian. This fire-water copulation births an immortal embryo, made of androgynous Early Heaven yuan qi that coagulates within the adept's physical body. This embryo is slowly birthed up the core channel, nourished by the copulation of natural sexually polarized geomantic forces within the earth below, planetary and stellar forces in heaven above. In the sixth formula this reaches a crescendo as the full-out sexual Congress of Heaven and Earth, a kind of multi-dimensional sexual coupling of their virtues. All of these copulations gradually restore the yuanjing, the pre-natal and pre-sexual substance of the adept's original nature (xing).

Chia told me he originally sought out Daoist medical and bedroom sexual practices because a Chinese doctor read his pulses and told him at age 21 that his kidneys were weak and that he would die very young. This motivated Chia to hunt down various Chinese teachers of Daoist sexology, and pay them large sums of money to get their secrets. In Chinese medicine, "the kidneys" is a broad energetic sphere that includes the sexual organs, kidneys, bladder and their meridians, and the breasts in women. The kidney spirit or intelligence is said to regulate the endocrine glands, blood, bone marrow, and sexual essence (jing), all essential to long life.

Jing, the subtle substance holding the form of one's body, is the key ingredient to apprehending the function of sexuality in this Daoist cosmology. Jing is perhaps best understood in Western terms as prime matter. Jing is the raw fuel that drives the pulsating rhythm of the body's moment-to-moment cellular division and reproduction of itself. In modern terms, it generates stem cells, genes, and the sexual energy of the glands, but is not sexual energy itself.

The jing is governed in humans by the kidney water spirit, called the zhi, literally the "will" to be in bodily form, to survive, to seek pleasure, and to fulfil a specific destiny while in a body. It is the jing that in the human animal is radiating polarized waves of male or female sexed energy we label charisma or magnetic power. In short, jing is the source of sexual desire and the feeling substance of earthiness. Without jing, spirit (shen) would not be able to embody its virtues or have direct sensory experience of physicality. If one is feeling "spiritual bliss", the bliss part is vibrating jing. Jing is also the main source of vexation for spiritual seekers who ignore it or run from their sexual impulses in order to chase after the other end of the spectrum of consciousness, the shen or spirit body, which spreads out as an infinite sea of pure awareness. This also defines the key difference between centering a meditation in the Fire-head-shen or Water-belly-jing cauldrons within the body.

One of the main ways Chia rebuilt his kidney jing was a method of semen retention and recirculation of sexual energy (jingqi) in the Microcosmic Orbit (xiao zhoutian). Recent scholarship suggests the Orbit began as a sexual practice to rejuvenate the brain (huanjing bunao) two thousand years ago and evolved to become a spiritual practice as the qi was observed to spiral inside the body. (Pregadio, 2000, 427). Skill in semen retention is essential to the successful male practice of One Cloud's internal alchemy. Other systems of neidangong may require celibacy in the hope that it will result in the indirect or spontaneous redirection of sexual energy to the subtle bodies. But this is a hit or miss proposition, and can result instead in sexual repression. Non-celibacy requires a deliberate method of guaranteeing the sexual energy is recycled in the Orbit, which is later refined and taken up the central subtle body channel.

How does it work? At a moment prior to ejaculation (whether in coitus with a woman or self-pleasuring), the orgasmically vibrating seminal qi is introjected by the man up his spinal yang fire channel (dumai, Governor Vessel) to refresh the brain and its master glands, the pituitary and pineal. If in coitus, the male draws up his partner's female sexual essence (jingqi) as well, and offers his to

her. When the brain is full of the rejuvenating sexual essence, it overflows down the yin front water channel (renmo, Conception Vessel) which clears and purifies qi flowing into yin meridians, heart, navel and sexual organs. The physical method can be done with a partner (dual cultivation) or without a partner (single cultivation), and is practiced using varying levels of non-aroused (cool) or aroused (hot) sexual energy.

### **Ejaculation is Physical, Orgasm is Pulsing Chi**

One goal of the medical sexual practice is to shift from a limited “genital orgasm” to a pleasurable and healing “whole body orgasm”. Slowing or stopping “ejaculation” doesn’t prevent a man from having “orgasm” or being “multi-orgasmic”. Ejaculation is physical, orgasm is chi pulsating. One should not get obsessed with “stopping” ejaculation, but focus rather on opening up the chi channels and recycling sexual energy to one’s partner until you finally ejaculate. Then this physical ejaculation does not cause major loss of jing, as the essence is already extracted. Semen retention also slows down the man’s fiery nature to stay in closer harmony with the woman’s slower cycle of arousal. Another key in “sexual kung-fu” is understanding the relation between the fire element in the heart and the water element in the kidneys. These fire and water essences stimulate each other and keep the other in check. By keeping proper exchange between them, one enters a steady state that opens the door to subtle body love-making. By simply keeping an open heart you protect against blind lust, which ultimately injures the kidneys because it can never be satisfied by physical sex alone. All aloneness at core is the heart spirit (shen) seeking the love, sensual touch and sexual stimulation of the kidney shen, and the deeply embodied kidney spirit seeking the heart’s virtue of unconditional acceptance and love.

This kind of internal biological psycho-dynamics is currently opening for Western students the field of Daoist depth psychology. It promises to deepen the Freudian and Jungian approaches with a clearly defined network of energy channels and psychic spheres linking the physical and the spiritual realms.

### **Changing the Western Sexual Paradigm**

I had read of semen retention being practiced by Tantric yogis, but had assumed that I would have to sit in a Himalayan cave for twenty-five years and attain enlightenment before mastering it. Chia presented the reverse paradigm: one had to gain some mastery of semen retention (or the equivalent female practice, menstrual blood-ovary retention) before one could master the subtle body practices. Equally important, semen retention – an inner celibacy of one’s spirit (shen) attaining unity with one’s seed essence (jing) – freed the male adept from enforced outer celibacy. Practitioners could have their cake (physical sexual pleasure) and eat it too, as long as they maintained this inner unity of body essence and spirit.

The accessibility of this Daoist sexual practice to the average Western male offered them a radical and totally new approach to sexuality. It also offered a revolutionary and healthy way to alleviate male horniness. The learning context presented by Mantak Chia and his trained

Western instructors made it easy for Western students to accept. The practices were taught in an open and accepting atmosphere, with men and women studying each other’s “esoteric biology” in a shared and fun space. After the sexual repression I had witnessed in so many Indian teachers, I was shocked and pleased by Mantak Chia’s innocent directness about sexual matters.

Would these sexual teachings promote a culture of promiscuity amongst the Westerners who learned them? Chia and I delayed publication of our co-authored book on Daoist sex for nearly a year while pondering this question and its ethical ramifications. Looking back over the twenty one

years that I have known Mantak Chia, I never heard a single accusation of his sexual involvement with students. Certainly there was a degree of open experimentation between male and female students attracted to one another. But there was a strong caution placed against promiscuous and indiscriminate absorption of another's sexual energy (sexual vampirism), as sexual exchange was a double edged sword in which you also absorbed your partner's "psychic garbage". This meant sexual relations demanded deep transformational effort and great selectivity in choosing partners. It was the opposite approach of the Rajneesh inspired California Tantra of having sex with a stranger at a weekend workshop.

Shortly after meeting Chia, I described my White Tantric Kundalini Yoga practice to him. He diagnosed it as "heating the room" – I was driving all my sexual fire up the spine and out the crown, where it dispersed into the room. As soon as I learned to recirculate my rising kundalini energy down my chest through the front Orbit channel and began practicing semen retention, I quickly grew physically stronger and more grounded spiritually. Most Tantrics work only with the spinal fire path and not the water path in the front.

I gradually dropped my intense Kundalini Yoga sadhana as the Daoist methods grew on me. The lure of a more effortless practice (wu wei) attuned to nature, the grounding embrace of the feminine through qigong and in the Water and Fire subtle body practices, and a poetic yet scientific approach to spiritual development were the attractions. I was also learning new practices focused on circulating sexual energy in ways I never dreamed possible – through the bone marrow, or using it to give substance to an inner "pearl", which was circulated through the core channels and eventually into subtle body dimensions. Using the sexual essence as the catalyst to crystallize my subtle bodies in the lower dantian solved the problem I'd observed with most head-centered practices, that the "fire" – the clarity of meditative bliss – would gradually disperse in the chaos of modern life.

Later I would end up using the Orbit and other Daoist methods to heal many cases of "kundalini psychosis" – generally energy running up the wrong channel or stuck in the head. The condition is usually easy to correct if the person has not been heavily drugged by psychiatrists who do not understand the energy body. These cases were often Western Tantrics who believed, as I once did, that their energy flow was supposed to move only up the spine in a linear, one-way direction from lower to upper chakra. The Daoist model was that the energy was always moving in spirals, cycles, and orbits; the Orbit was a kind of unified chakra. Any energy movement up had to be balanced by a movement down, until one finally arrived at the still point of no movement at the intersecting center of the physical and subtle body, called the lower dantian ("field of the elixir"). This is the doorway to pre-natal jing, from which all embodiment effortlessly emanates. But to shift my spiritual focus from the third eye to my navel was extremely challenging, as my Tantric Fire teachers had always considered this a lower energy center to be swiftly left behind. It took me a while to understand that chakras are centers of post-natal energy, and are not operating at the pre-natal and inner dimensional depth as the dantian.

This shift in my practice led to my writing collaboration with Chia, which over time produced seven books on qigong and neigong ("inner skill"). Chia taught me the techniques he knew, and I would test them out on myself before writing about them, often under his name. Our second book, *Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy* (Aurora Press, 1984) catapulted him to fame, and sold hundreds of thousands of copies. The book became a key force in a larger paradigm shift in Western culture, begun earlier by an influx of Tantric ideas, that sexual and spiritual development were inseparable.

Why was a book on semen retention, radically antithetical to Western sexual values and even to Rajneesh-New Age Tantra style, so successful? One, it linked biological sex-as-natural-science to a kind of spiritual science, a comfortable fit for Western minds. This helped remove guilt promoted by

Judeo-Christian religious beliefs separating sex and spirit and labeling sex as sinful. Two, the book was written in my sophisticated Western literary voice, infused with insights from my years of Tantric practice, posing as Mantak Chia's voice, the Daoist transmitting his oral tradition. (This was such an effective literary device for entraining readers that it created confusion among readers who met Chia. Hearing his "Chinese English" created difficulty believing he was the author). Three, there was no missionary pressure on the reader to leave one's chosen path and join a Daoist religion. The sexual and energetic teachings were put out as the "energetic open architecture" of the Dao, from which one could take what one needed, whether for sexual health or spiritual health.

Chia and I were frankly surprised at the time by the diversity of response, and in retrospect, at the book's contribution to the globalization of emerging new spiritual attitudes towards sexuality. We received hundreds of letters from men following many other spiritual paths -Sufi, Buddhist, Christian, Jewish – thanking us for giving them a way to stay on their chosen path and embrace their sexuality instead of repressing it. For example, the well known Catholic mystic David Stendl-Rast wrote to say the book had been of immense practical help to him and he was recommending it widely to other Catholic priests to help them deal with their celibacy.

It was just as typical that a man with no spiritual background would show up at a "Healing Love" workshop because "I just met a girl and thought this might help." The sexual teachings became the hook that converted many such seekers with superficial external desires into serious students of Daoist internal cultivation. This book, Taoist Secrets of Love and its later sequels – Healing Love: Cultivating Female Sexual Energy (1986), The Multi-Orgasmic Man (1996), and The Multi-Orgasmic Couple (2000) – combined with a global network that grew to one thousand Healing Tao teachers in thirty countries certified to teach Daoist sexual and subtle body practices, became a major doorway for tens of thousands of Western spiritual seekers to enter on a path of the previously obscure Daoist alchemy formulas passed on by the hermit One Cloud. (Winn, 2001)

### **Daoist Female Sexual Practices in the West**

Teaching Daoist female sexual practices to Western women who expected equality of the sexes and wanted to use these practices to improve their personal relationships presented a special challenge. Douglas Wile in his definitive Art of the Bedchamber (1992) surveyed the last twenty five hundred years of Chinese texts on sexuality, and noted a progressive decline in the treatment of women and a proportional increase in patriarchal type of sex manuals in which the yin essence of women was used by male adepts for their own spiritual progress. The Chinese women who use these practices today are mostly Daoist nuns stopping their menstrual cycle because they've made a lifetime commitment to childless, monastic meditation – not a motivating factor for most women in the West.

In 1983 at a Daoist retreat I met a potential female consort, Joyce Gayheart, shortly after I had conveniently decided to drop my four year experiment with celibacy, in order to test the practices I was writing about in Taoist Secrets of Love . She later became my wife and has remained my partner for the last nineteen years, offering us the opportunity to explore the full range of Daoist physical and subtle body sexual practices that require time and maturity to master. Joyce taught me directly about my own hidden yin nature. I now recognize every relationship as a transmission to one's partner that the essence they are seeking is already hidden inside them as an inner male or inner female. In the early years we used Daoist methods to prolong physical love-making for many hours, interspersed with periods of meditation.

Our most powerful early experience together is interesting because it reversed my expectation that physical sex's main spiritual use was to jump start our subtle body meditations. The opposite proved to be true – our subtle bodies jumped in and made love first. We had sat naked for a few minutes, facing each other in a cross legged meditation position to tune in. We were both suddenly overtaken by a powerful energy field with extremely intense and unusual vibrations. Not a word was spoken, as



our mental, emotional, and speech faculties were completely suspended, but we later confirmed having an identical experience. One aspect of our consciousness began experiencing a very yang orgasm, expanding out of the bedroom faster than the speed of light, whizzing through galaxies, exploding supernovas, and then beyond. Another part of us was orgasmically imploding inward with opposite and equal force, grounding and concentrating inward this great intensity in our physical bodies. After a half hour in this wonderful sacred trance, the vibrational field subsided in intensity. We afterward made physical love as planned. It was pleasurable, but seemed anti-climactic, mostly a way to digest and ground the subtle body orgasm that had spontaneously enveloped us.

This permanently shifted the nature of our sexual relationship. Our subtle bodies would quickly attune and we found we could exchange deep sexual energy for hours, lying beside each other, naked or clothed, without any physical stimulation or intercourse. It was a direct exchange of sexually polarized subtle bodies. As our energy bodies mingled and coupled, we were infused with loving spiritual qualities. This led us to long periods of spontaneous abstention from physical intercourse that could last for many months, but with exquisitely sublime daily subtle body coitus. As our subtle bodies crystallized and became more “real”, it eventually graduated to astral sex – the ability to intentionally exchange orgasmic subtle energy at great distances. I attribute the longevity of our relationship to this subtle body love making, and it created a very solid foundation for making advances in our individual inner alchemy practices.

Joyce’s early experiences with the female sexual practices I anonymously appended to my third editing project, *Healing Love: Cultivating Female Sexual Energy* (1986), written under the name of Mantak and his wife Maneewan Chia. Maneewan in fact did not contribute any content to the book and appeared to me to be a non-practitioner. I was forced to resort to interviewing Joyce and dozens of Chia’s Western female students to evaluate the effectiveness of the Daoist female sexual practices because there was no pool of qualified Chinese Daoist female practitioners available.

The female sexual practices (Ovarian Breathing, Slaying the Red Dragon, and others) focus on initially reducing or later completely stopping loss of eggs and blood through menstruation, said to be the main source of women’s loss of jing. They progress to cultivation of ovarian essence, absorbing male sexual essence and redirection of the genital orgasm up the spine and or into the lower dantian and other vital organs until full body orgasm is achieved. Its medical applications include relief of Pre-Menstrual Syndrome and menopausal hot flashes, healing of infertility (“cold womb syndrome”) and a variety of glandular and sexual dysfunction including frigidity. But application of these practices to Western women was largely experimental, due to the lack of role models. Study groups were formed to compare results, resulting in deeper levels of female sexual practice. (Piontek, 2001) Several women did completely stop their menstrual cycle through voluntary internal practice. Most used it to simply lighten the amount and color of blood flow as they learned how to detoxify their blood. But most important was the paradigm shift of women gaining control of inner sexual forces and liberation of qi trapped in the uterus using Daoist subtle body methods.

### **Westernizing of Daoist Sexual Practices**

Editorial collaboration by myself and other senior students with Mantak Chia resulted in the conversion of what had been a one-to-one “ear-whispered” transmission in China into an open and detailed curriculum of progressive courses that Westerners could pay for and take when they were ready. Transmission was given according to the level of the teacher and received according to the openness of the students in the course. Those who didn’t get the transmission simply took the course again. The integration of sexual energy, whether physical-sexual or subtle body sexual polarities, remained central to this curriculum.

This process meant the information on Daoist sexual practices presented to the public was filtered through Western editors and teachers. Daoist principles were honored as the cornerstone of every practice. But the content of the books and courses was inevitably re-shaped to suit modern Western psychological and sexual needs. This included acceptance of gay, lesbian, and bi-sexual practitioners; the need to enhance the sexual and emotional quality of personal relationships, the relationship of sex to sports performance and artistic or career creativity. Supportive Western sexological research was marshaled showing the difference between the prostate spasm that causes ejaculation and the whole body physiology of orgasm. We presented Western scientific biological studies relevant to semen retention and longevity, showing how nematode worms, when genetically altered to stop sperm production, lived twice as long.

The Healing Tao organization was an educational structure created so Westerners would feel comfortable learning some times strange sexual practices that did not fit into the ordinary context of their culture. A good example is the Bone Marrow neigong practice of hanging weights of up to fifty pounds by a silk cord tied around the testicles and penis to strengthen the pelvic floor muscles and increase capacity to absorb sexual energy into the bone marrow. Or for women to exercise their vaginal muscles by inserting a jade egg into their vagina and move it about as an internal exercise. This evolved into an innovation for women drilling holes in their jade eggs in order to also hang two or three pound weights for greater isometric effect in strengthening the internal fascia. There was “tongue kung-fu” for strengthening that versatile sexual muscle, and methods for absorbing qi directly into the genitals from the sun. Sexual energy was cultivated (often by mixing it with qi drawn up the earth) to magnify one’s power of healing oneself and others, or to add power to martial arts skills like tai chi chuan.

Unlike Rajneesh’s promotion of Tantra in the West, there was a deliberate attempt to de-sensationalize these Daoist sexual practices. No nudity was allowed in workshops and teachers focused on them as primarily internal sexual-spiritual practices that could be practiced fully clothed, but also had optional application to the bedroom arts. California Tantrics criticized Healing Tao practitioners for their focus on semen retention, claiming it made men uptight and selfish about holding onto the seed instead of sharing it with women. This was sometimes true for men who did not integrate semen retention with other Daoist subtle body practices. I know of men who transferred old sexual patterns of guilt onto their inability to quickly master semen retention, instead of treating it as a gradual subtle body training process. In other cases, emotional struggle was created in their love relationships if men became too technique oriented. The transmission of these Daoist sexual practices to Westerners was complex, involving subtle body experiences, and not always successful.

Over the past two decades tens of thousands of Westerners learned these sexual practices with virtually no negative side effects. The few cases with side effects usually already had an extreme imbalance, they did not have a teacher, did not learn the other methods to open energy channels first, or used too much force. This is the problem inherent in people learning a powerful practice from a book. Yet periodically I was challenged by Chinese students who would repeat warnings from some mainland China qigong master that all sexual practices were very dangerous and should be avoided, as they can cause craziness and deep psychological disturbances.

Investigation led me to conclude that these warnings were valid – but mostly for mainland Chinese, whose culture of collective “face” suppresses individual emotional and sexual impulses in order to not disrupt the larger social harmony. The emphasis in China is on fitting in, not making trouble, but certainly not on personal self-improvement. Sexual kung-fu could unleash suppressed feelings in people that had no model for integrating them, and hence they “went crazy” from what are called “qi deviations” by qigong professionals. Western students occasionally reported similar problems, but these were almost always people who had bypassed all preliminary practices such as the Six Healing Sounds and Inner Smile.

Westerners are generally encouraged to explore their individual impulses. In my experience they are sexually and emotionally better equipped to practice Daoist sexual cultivation than the average Chinese person. This curious conclusion was confirmed by a top qigong teacher in Beijing, Dr. Cai Jun, one of the few Chinese with a Ph.D. in qigongology. Cai Jun told me it was easier for Western students to open their qi flow than for his Chinese students. He thought it was because the Chinese had fixed ideas about qi.

The addition of sexual force to any energetic practice is the equivalent of throwing gasoline on an open fire. The expansive force and multiplying nature of sexual energy needs a safe and clear energy channel to flow in, physically, emotionally, mentally, and spiritually. This integration must occur both internally and in one's outer relationships. This defined the Healing Tao's multi-level Daoist training as a far more complicated and ambitious transformational process than other meditation traditions which did not consciously engage sexual energy and its accompanying emotional and mental challenges.

Modern awareness of psychoanalytic processes and growing public acceptance of sexual equality, combined with the Daoist energy body training of the Inner Smile, Six Healing Sounds, Microcosmic Orbit, and Fusion of the Five Elements from White Cloud's first alchemy formula, allowed most Westerners the possibility of safely integrating the self-released sexual forces in a way suitable for their relationships and spiritual development. The methods taught by Chia have since been further developed by myself and others to deepen and simplify their psychological accessibility to westerners. In China this integration could also occur traditionally through close personal supervision by a qualified teacher. But since the cultural milieu is still largely Confucian, patriarchal, and sexually repressive, finding a suitable teacher and achieving a Daoist model of male-female harmony within oneself is difficult.

One very visible stage in the process of Westernizing Daoist practices was my founding in 1995 of Healing Tao University. This has a faculty of twenty Western and Chinese specialists teaching the full spectrum of Daoist Arts and Sciences, with the sexual cultivation and alchemy as the core curriculum. No similar institution exists today in China. Ironically, it is only in the West that Daoist sexual practices are being publicly taught. This sexual freedom is apparently irresistible to some young Chinese Daoists who migrate to the United States. I know of two Chinese priests, ordained in celibate Complete Perfection monasteries, who married here and are openly teaching practices of internal alchemy. In China they would be told that sex would spoil their practice, and asked to leave the order. In America, nobody cares or knows better. A New Yorker cartoon circa 1995 sums up public perception: a fashionably dressed young lady walking down the street exclaims to her friend, "Wow! You've just got to try Taoist sex!"

### **Sex, Enlightenment, and Immortality**

What is the functional relationship between ordinary human sexual desire and the more abstract realm of subtle bodies? The short answer is that physical sex nourishes post-natal qi, and subtle body sex nourishes pre-natal qi. Sexual intercourse can "cook" the male-female post-natal qi and speed its transformation back into the yuan qi from which they originated. The long answer is more complicated. Most people are stuck in deep struggle, paralyzed by the wide gap between their sexed animal body and their core non-polar original being. The experience of one's androgynous (bi-sexed) subtle body offers a transitional stage in both Daoist and Tantric esoteric traditions. Nature lures humans to pursue subtle body refinement by tantalizing them with the sublime experience of spiritual orgasm.

The sexual identity issues are complicated by celibacy issues. When learning a new subtle body practice, it is often best to avoid sex as a distraction, but it may be resumed once the subtle body practice is stable. Or the reverse: many who learn Daoist alchemy "self-intercourse" find themselves

spontaneously losing outer sexual desire, and needlessly panic. It returns, just like a woman regains her sexual appetite after being occupied by pregnancy. But subtle body sex may trigger deep fears around changing one's physical sexual identity.

When one begins the Daoist subtle body practices of neidangong, the vertical axis of heaven-earth communication is activated. The coupling of yang jingshen (heart and liver spirits) with yin jingshen (kidney and lung spirits) causes one's parental and ancestral jing to begin resonating with its "true earth". This is the infinite pool of prenatal yuanqi flowing into the lower dantian through the Door of Life (mingmen), the point of moving qi between the kidneys. The attraction between inner male-inner female, water-fire, kidneys-heart, jing-shen, outer body passion – inner loving acceptance – all are polar forces of Destiny (ming) and Original Nature (xing) played out in a very dynamic theatre of meditative alchemy. But the bottom line is that the subtle body heaven-earth axis cannot fully open if the horizontal male-female axis has not first been made conscious and its impulses harmonized. Sexual balance precedes and is a prerequisite to stable experience of heaven-earth harmony. The opposite is also true; some practitioners rush this transition, and try to use the sexual force prematurely to open up the Heaven Earth axis without first balancing the male-female axis.

In the sexual cultivation process the human adept leads a double life. One life is physical, where the adept appears quite ordinary, and may have sexual relations as the desire to complete one's essence spontaneously arises. Physical sex may benefit health and add longevity, but not make one physically immortal. The other life is inner, where parallel relationships are played out between one's own polarized subtle bodies, and possibly with others. There are periods of intense subtle energy copulation and active love-making that birth new spiritual virtues and powers. These alternate with phases of deep stillness, gestation, and observation. The adept's inner life follows invisible currents flowing between heaven and earth. The inner and outer sexual couplings intersect and nourish each other. The human heart holding the balance point between the inner and outer lives is what defines humans as one of the three treasures of the Dao, along with heaven and earth. This is the human path of spiritual immortality.

### **West as Cauldron for Dao and Tantra**

The growth of Tantric and Daoist sexual cultivation practices in the West since 1974 initiated a period of remarkable experimentation, adaptation or outright re-invention inspired by ancient methods from Asia. Westerners radically reshaped these sexual practices to suit their own needs, a process likely to continue as they mature and study more deeply the subtle body maps of the Daoist and Tantric traditions. Since my explorations into Tantra in the 1980's, new writers on its theory and practice have published (Svoboda 1993, Frawley 1994, Tigunait 1999, White (2000). Whether they fuel a new wave of Westerners exploring lineage Tantric subtle body and sexual cultivation remains to be seen. Sales of Rajneesh's Tantra tapes and books, claimed to be in the millions sold, have reportedly increased every year since his death. Nik Douglas predicts Westerners will evolve virtual Tantric initiations, with mantras delivered over the internet.

On my journey seeking out Tantric and Daoist practices in the West, I observed three general approaches to sexual cultivation: physical sex only, celibate subtle body cultivation only, and physical and subtle body sex together. I noted a pattern among some highly achieved male teachers of a strong, possibly excessive kundalini fire in the head being a possible cause for seeking female energy and/or sex. My observation about these teachers is not meant as a criticism of their methods, as I personally used many of them for years to great benefit. Simple modifications to most methods can easily ensure energetic balance, and this has already happened as part of the globalizing process of Westerners exposed to both Tantric and Daoist practices. I found the Fire-solar culture of Tantra and the more Water-Lunar culture of Daoism (Torchinov, 1997) to balance each other.

Because I feel the current cosmic cycle is favoring the rebirth of the feminine, I eventually settled into Daoist practice.

The difficulty some highly achieved adepts had in balancing their sexual energy highlights the possibility that the cosmological splitting of our original non-dual being, first into an etheric androgyne and then into physical male and female sexed bodies has created a spiritual trauma so deep that it cannot be fully resolved by what are considered states of enlightenment in the Daoist and Tantric traditions. Individual self-realization may be insufficient to heal the vastness of this collective wound, which may be the core issue driving the human incarnational process. Sexual issues may continue to arise as long as one is still in a physically sexed form, perhaps a bleed over from the collective field of human sexual consciousness into the highly purified (non-polar) vessel of an individual adept. The resolution of this cosmic sexual tension may occur only by achieving what is called immortality, the alchemical re-fusion of spirit and body-matter into its original essence, requiring an adept to merge not only into the mind of Nature (enlightenment) but to merge fully into its body. This is the ultimate focus of subtle body sexual cultivation.

A major force attracting Western spiritual seekers to Daoism and Tantra is the drive to integrate their sexual desire into a subtle body experience that I term the quest for spiritual orgasm. This quest has put Daoist and Tantric sexual cultivation practices into a Western cultural cauldron and created positive evolutionary pressure on their traditional methods. I believe this process will ultimately birth a new spiritual science in the West with recognizable Daoist and Tantric principles as its foundation.

This article will be posted on [www.HealingDao.com](http://www.HealingDao.com), articles.

Permission granted to share it digitally as long as entire article is intact.

### **Bibliography**

- Bokenkemap, Stephen. *Early Daoist Scriptures*, UC Press, Berkeley 1997
- Chang, Stephen. *The Tao of Sexology: The Book of Infinite Wisdom*. Tao Publishing, SF 1986
- Chang, Jolan. *Tao of Love and Sex*, Dutton 1977
- Chia, Mantak & Maneewan. *Healing Love: Cultivating Female Sexual Energy*, Healing Tao, 1986.
- Chia, Mantak, and Abrams, Douglas. *The Multi-Orgasmic Man*, Harper 1996.
- Chia, Mantak, and Abrams, Douglas. *The Multi-Orgasmic Couple*, Harper 2000,
- Douglas, Nik and Slinger, Penny. *Sexual Secrets: The Alchemy of Ecstasy* Destiny Books, 1979
- Douglas, Nik *Spiritual Sex: Secrets of Tantra from Ice Age to New Millenium*, Pocket Books 1997
- Frawley, David. *Tantric Yoga and the Wisdom Goddess*, Morson Publishing, Utah 1994
- Gyatso, Kelsung. *Clear Light of Bliss*, Wisdom, London, 1982
- Hariharananda, Swami. *Bagavad Gita in the Light of Kriya Yoga*. Michael Winn, ed India 1989
- Heng, Cheng. *The Tao of Love*, Marlow, NY 1997
- Jwala. *Sacred Sex: Ecstatic Techniques for Empowering Relationships*. Inner Juice, Ukiah 1993
- Krishna, Gopi. *Kundalini: The Evolutionary Power in Man*, Shambala, London 1971
- Lai, Hsi. *The Secret Teachings of the White Tigress: Female Taoist Masters*, Destiny Books, 2001
- Mann, John. *Divine Androgyny*, Portal Press, 2000
- McNeil, James. *Ancient Lovemaking Techniques: The Journey to Immortality*. Pine Press, Calif. 1999
- Piontek, Maitreyi. *Exploring the Hidden Power of Sexuality*, Weiser 2001
- Pregadio, Fabrizio, and Skar, Lowell. *Daoism Handbook*, ed. L. Kohn. Brill 2000
- Rajneesh (Osho). *The Book of Secrets, 112 Meditations of Vignan Bhairav Tantra*, Osho Pub. 1998
- Ruan, Fang Fu. *Sex In China: Studies in Sexology in Chinese Culture*, Plenum Press, NY 1991
- Rudrananda, Swami. *Spiritual Cannibalism*, Overlook Press, NY 1978
- Rama, Swami. *Living with the Himalyan Masters*, Himalayan Institute, 1975
- Satyeswaranada, Swami. *Original Lahiri Mahasay: Father of Kriya Yoga*, San Diego 1988
- Short, Lar and Mann, John. *The Body of Light*, Fourth Way Books, 1988.
- Svoboda, Robert. *Aghora II, Kundalini*, Brotherhood of Life, 1993.
- Tigunait, Pandit. *Tantra Unveiled: Seducing the Forces of Matter & Spirit*, Himalayan Institute 1999

Tortchinov Evgueni. "The Doctrine of the Mysterious Female in Taoism" in Everything Is According to the Way (Bolder-Lok, Australia 1997 )

Wile, Douglas. Art of the Bed Chamber: The Chinese Sexual Yoga Classics. SUNY Press, NY 1992

Winn, Michael and Chia, Mantak. Taoist Secrets of Love: Cultivating Male Sexual Energy, Aurora Press, 1984

White, David Gordon. The Alchemical Body: Siddha Traditions in Medieval India, U of Chicago, 1996

-Ed, Tantra in Practice, Princeton 2000

Winn, Michael. "Daoist Alchemy as a Deep Language for Communicating with Nature " paper, May 2001 conference on Contemporary Daoism. [www.healingdao.com](http://www.healingdao.com), Articles