

## Introduction: Bodily Cultivation as a Mode of Learning

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The human body is not to be viewed simply as the passive recipient of “cultural imprints,” still less as the active source of “natural expressions” that are “clothed in local history and culture,” but as the *self-developable* means for achieving a range of human objects... [Asad 1997, emphasis by the author]

Almost all cultures recognize that placing bodies in certain cultural programs is a way of achieving religious and spiritual goals (*xiuxing* 修行), cultivating moral and emotional virtue (*xiuyang* 修養), or simply transposing ideas into bodily practices (*shijian* 實踐). Fasting, meditation, vegetarianism, and *qigong* come readily to mind when “bodily cultivation” is discussed. But rather than highlight these obvious examples, which are habitually associated with Eastern cultures, this special issue will examine culturally driven bodily practices, including proper ways to walk, sit, sense, and gesture, which may appear trivial in their repetitions, but are often endowed with rich cultural meanings and considered key in the learning and cultivation of values and virtues. Those practices generally perceived as art forms (e.g., tea ceremonies, *bonsai*, music performances, calligraphy, sphymology) at first glance may not seem to have direct ties to the physical body because they stress as a primary goal the cultivation of emotional poise and temperament (*yiqing yangxing* 怡情養性). In these cases, bodily cultivation is considered a *channel* for learning, manifesting, developing, or shaping cultural concepts and ideals. In this issue, the authors define bodily cultivation in a broader sense, so that cultural learning encompasses exercise, nurturance, and physical training as special *modes of concept construction*.

The authors do not focus on mind-body dualism/interaction, a popular analytical topic for over two decades, or on contrasts between East and West, differences that have probably been over-exaggerated, especially in terms of bodily cultivation. Instead, we direct our attention to how diverse forms of bodily cultivation have been adopted for purposes of internalizing cultural ideas, morality, and knowledge, whether they involve intentional designs or unintentional programs, professional or amateur training, spiritual or secular in orientation, or mundane or hedonistic/ascetic principles. Our goal is to explore how the body plays a part in the processes of cultural learning.

## Inspiration from Eastern Traditions

While bodily cultivation can be observed in most cultures, those in Asia provide a broad range of theories deserving special attention. Yuasa (1993:18) believes the most important question in Eastern body-mind theory is, “How does the relationship between the mind and the body come to be through cultivation?” This question, which stresses “what does it come to be” instead of “what is the relationship between X and Y,” emerges from an experiential assumption that mind-body modalities change in step with cultural forms of training or cultivation. Kasylis (1993) further notes that most Asian traditions do not assume a sharp distinction between body and mind. Accordingly, there are no Asian equivalents for the relational theories developed in the West, including parallelism (mental and somatic events accidentally coinciding without causal relation), reductionism (mental events are actually bodily events or vice versa), and interactionism (bodily states both influence and are influenced by mental states, or one state affects the other but not vice versa). Many Asian traditions stress mind-body integration through cultivation rather than searching for constant and unchanging interrelationships. Hence, Asian philosophers view mind-body disconnects as issues of practical dysfunction rather than philosophical import. The key precept in Asian traditions is the need to achieve (rather than discover) unity between mind and body. Bodily cultivation is considered key to this task.

Take Confucianism for example. The following statement from the Confucian classic *Da-xue* 大學 (*Great Learning*) is perhaps the most often quoted comment on *xiu shen* 修身 (literally, cultivation of the body): “From the Son of Heaven down to the commoner, all should take self-cultivation as the foundation” (自天子以至於庶人，壹是皆以修身為本). Although the literal translation of *xiu shen* emphasizes the body, classical texts, for example, *Lun-yu* 論語 and *Meng-zi* 孟子, make it clear that aspects of both mind and body must be considered when discussing the term. Thus, *xiu shen* is

often brought up in discussions of *xiu de* 修德 (cultivating virtue) and vice versa. Kasylis points out that Confucian teachings do not contain specific distinctions between mind and body cultivation; instead, they encourage integration through the training of both (Kasylis 1993). When specific methods are mentioned, the bodily aspect is clearly part of the discussion. For example, despite their divergent views on whether man is born good or bad, Mencius 孟子 and Xunzi 荀子 both stress either cultivating *qi* (*yangqi* 養氣) or regulating *qi* (*zhihqi* 治氣) as the key to obtaining wisdom and virtue. The classics often equate *qi* with the body (Yang 1993)—in other words, both Mencius and Xunzi stress the embodiment of cultural concepts and values and the nurturing of social personhood through bodily cultivation.

More tangible examples can be found in Confucian teachings on gestures, physical movements, and the regulation of sensuous perceptions and pleasures. In his instructions of Confucian principles for the very young (*yangzheng yigui* 養正遺規), the Song dynasty scholar Zhu Xi 朱熹 made bodily practices a major focus, including ways of walking (e.g., holding back when accompanying elders), sitting (e.g., refraining from occupying too much space), dressing (e.g., tightly fastened hats, clothes, and shoes), and practicing calligraphy (e.g., properly proportioned strokes). Encouraging youth to renounce indulgence in sensuous enjoyment and giving advice on regulating one's senses have been stressed since Confucius and highlighted in various Confucian instructional principles. These rather tedious teachings, called *lijiao* 禮教 (teaching of etiquette), were designed to help students internalize Confucian concepts. If we disregard the social and political implications of what Foucault (1979) called "body politic" and focus only on the aspect of Chinese *xiu shen*, it is possible to recognize how important a mode of learning bodily cultivation has been the Confucian tradition, not to mention Daoist and Buddhist traditions, which take *xiuxing* their main focus. Based on this view of cultural learning, one's consciousness (of perceptions) is not learned in a ready-made, packaged fashion through a process often called enculturation by anthropologists, but a quality that emerges and becomes more articulated and extensive through one's experiences and processes of cultivation (Johnson 2000). Body and mind are considered to enrich each other during processes of cultivation. Also, body is not regarded as merely the source of individual sensations and universal desires that may be disruptive of culture; when cultural ideals are incorporated in practices, it becomes key to the internalization or manifestation of those ideals.

The authors of the articles herein address two issues. First, Chinese and other Asian (especially Japanese) conceptualizations of bodily cultivation perceive it as central to nurturing morality, cultural values, thought, and aesthetics, rather than epistemology, thus inspiring us to seriously reconsider the past research emphasis on the "problem" of mind-

body dualism that is in fact derived from a Western problematic. An Asian approach offers the benefit of examining how body and mind augment one another in cultural processes, as opposed to finding static body-mind interrelationships on which to build theory. Second, whether one prefers using the term “enculturation,” “socialization,” “embodiment,” or “learning,” acquiring culture frequently entails diverse forms of bodily cultivation. The importance of this cultivation underscores Bloch’s (1985) idea of how culture is not (as some anthropologists have suggested) simply handed down from previous generations. Culture—and other anthropological ideas like “collective representation,” “cognition,” and “ideology”—is neither an unexplained given nor a product of non-individual transformation processes outside of complex learning actions. Instead, the role played by bodily cultivation suggests that cultural learning involves a complex mix of long-term processes that proceed in a piecemeal fashion. Individual cultures have bodily cultivation practices that are viewed as taking a full lifetime to accomplish (or, for Buddhists, several lifetimes). In other words, one’s personhood is not endowed by culture, but achieved through cultivation, and the much-stressed and deeply analyzed “rite of passage” is but a small part of this unending process. Other deliberate programs as well as the mundane, everyday kinds of bodily cultivation that should be taken into account are brought into sharper focus in this special issue.

## A Brief Review

Bourdieu’s conceptualizations of *habitus* and body hexis (bodily orientation) arguably come closest in Western anthropological terms to the Chinese theories discussed above. He notes how routine, everyday bodily practices allow children to acquire *habitus* without going through discourse or consciousness but passing “from practice to practice.” Cultural schemes become embodied through ways of walking, standing, speaking, holding a knife in the right hand, and the like. These robust habits are transformed into permanent dispositions in dialectic relations between body and space, as well as between embodiment and objectification. In Bourdieu’s (1977) words, *habitus* is “the appropriating by the world of a body thus enabled to appropriate the world” (1977: 89). Bourdieu does recognize a role for the body in the process of inhabiting the structure of the world; he nonetheless considers body hexis as a form of realizing a “political mythology” and thus predominantly configured by social structures (Hoy 1999). For Bourdieu, bodily practice does not play an active role, but is merely a vehicle for internalizing cultural cosmology.

The authors in this issue argue that bodily practices play a more important role than Bourdieu allowed, not only in learning processes, but also in the construction of cultural ideas. Recent anthropological studies of human senses are providing new insights. Similar to Mauss's (1979) argument that the human body is culturally invested, the anthropology of the senses stresses the importance of exploring the cultural dimensions of sensory experiences—sometimes referred to as the “dynamic constitution of embodied senses.” If cultures are recognized as “ways of sensing the world,” as David Howes (1991) proposes, ethnographers must learn how to use and combine senses in accordance with the preferences of the cultures we study “so that we actually *make sense of them*” (1991: 8, emphasis original). Paul Stoller's (1984) “apprenticeship in hearing” is another demonstration of how learning to develop the senses is key to understanding other cultures. His Songhay sorcerer master once told him, “You look, but you do not see. You touch, but you do not feel. You listen, but you do not hear... But you must learn how to hear, or you will learn little about our ways” (1984: 560). Stoller used his field experience to re-examine the Western epistemology that conceives/perceives the world in terms of space rather than sound. In this issue we will emphasize that for both researchers and the subjects of their research, practicing how to hear and cultivating hearing competence play central roles in learning ways of life. For it is the *practiced ear* (or eye, or mouth) that remembers and interprets sounds, fills cultural content with embodied experiences, and allows one to understand the cultural meanings of sounds that are heard.

Similar studies regarding the cultivation of memory and sensibility in acquiring knowledge are found in the literatures of other disciplines. The “professional vision” of archeologists (e.g., Goodwin 1994; Grasseni 2007), the “tactile diagnostic skill” of physicians (e.g., Kuriyama 1999; Rose 1999), and the “skilled touch” of healers (e.g., O'Malley 2004) all stress cultivation of the senses as one portal to knowledge. Along these lines, Mei-ling Chien develops the “ethnographer's ear.” She emphasizes that without the intensive training of one's senses, the ethnographer cannot develop the body techniques and sensibility to acquire understanding and cultural knowledge. In other words, all of the authors in this issue consider the body as playing a central role (as opposed to acting as a simple conduit) in the acquisition and exercise of cultural knowledge. That is, enculturation is achieved in the acquisition of techniques or improvement of competencies derived from the cultural programs of bodily cultivation.

## Bodily Cultivation as a Mode of Learning

The papers that make up this issue of *Taiwan Journal of Anthropology* were prepared for the workshop entitled “Bodily Cultivation” (身體修練) organized by Institute of Ethnology, Academia Sinica in September 2006. The contributors come from different disciplines—anthropology (Mei-ling Chien, Chi-Fang Chao, and Shuenn-Der Yu), Chinese literature (Liang Ting) and religious studies (Yi-Jia Tsai), and our papers clearly reflect these individual backgrounds and disciplinary characters. The aim of the workshop was to explore the diverse roles of bodily cultivation in social and cultural processes; the five papers that form this special issue focus on learning and embodying cultural ideas and values. The contributors take on diverse topics, from dances in Okinawa, tea tasting and the tea ceremony in Taiwan, Daoist cultivation ideas and Christian asceticism, to the ethnographer’s own fieldwork. They elucidate a few key themes: the nature of bodily cultivation as a mode of learning, body technique and learning categories of bodily experience, aims and processes of bodily cultivation, movement and the embodiment of cultural ideas and history, and so on.

The first paper, by Chi-Fang Chao, stresses that body movements and the practice of dance are important vehicles of Okinawan, and specifically Taketomian, history and sociality. She demonstrates how dances, folk and classical alike, are learned not only through standard training but more importantly by means of body movements learned from childhood. It is only through this kind of life-long bodily learning that certain forms of *habitus* are acquired that allow islanders to perform their dances in the proper manner. In the process of learning and performing dances, islanders also establish gender and class body *habitus* as well as a local identity.

The second paper, by Shuenn-Der Yu, analyses the cultivation of body techniques in tea tasting and the aesthetics of performing the tea ceremony in Taiwan. Through his long-term participation in the activities of a Taipei tea club called *Julu* 菊廬, Yu is able to document how the expert opens the world of tea tasting to novices and, in turn, how students sensually learn the techniques of tea tasting through repeated practice. He argues that what makes the learning process possible is not only the lectures by which students learn to associate tea production knowledge with experiential categories of tea tasting, but also the development of sensual discrimination via physical techniques by which students learn to identify categories of fragrances, colors and key flavor notes of different kinds of tea. Furthermore, Yu also tries to interpret how the cultural (Taiwanese) concept of elegance becomes embodied in the performance of the tea ceremony through repeated practice. In conclusion, Yu stresses that bodily cultivation is an important

mode of learning, and competence is an issue not to be ignored by anthropologists when discussing cultural learning.

Mei-ling Chien takes on the ethnographer's own experience in the field as an example of self-cultivation. She points out that her long-term fieldwork, with its repeated exposure to sounds of daily and ritual activities, offered the best arena in which to practice hearing, to cultivate her "ethnographer's ear." In the case of the late-night knocking on windows in the Miao village where she worked, the ethnographer experienced how such sounds changed from being strange, rude, and meaningless to a natural and meaningful social voice laden with human value. This cultivation process does not stop at the ethnographer's learning to hear the content or sonic patterns of the late-night knocks; her *hearing* experience also links various personal emotions and furthers the transformation of these emotions as related to her identity as a fieldworker. Her paper presents a clear demonstration that going through culture shock in the field is not only a rite of passage but also part of a long-term process of cultivating the researcher's senses, emotions, and self-identity, and it examines this process in a way seldom seen in anthropological literature.

Ting Liang's paper analyzes the *Lao Tzu* to present Daoist cultivation theory. He points out that *shen* embraces both the physiological body as well as the psychological self, thus Daoist *xiu shen* involved cultivating both body and mind. Ting argues that Daoist *xiu shen*, as exemplified in the *Lao Tzu*, is not based in a Confucian moral appeal, nor on the notion of disciplined bodies, but on the very exercise of relaxing the conceptual classification system (also called *wuming* 無名, namelessness) and dissolving our attachment to bodily desires (also called *wuyu* 無欲, desirelessness). Ting's paper clearly demonstrates that Daoist *xiu shen* aims at the integration of body and mind, and it is through the dialectic relation between the two kinds of effort (*wenming* and *wenyu*) that the ideal Daoist state is achieved.

Yi-Jia Tsai's paper brings together Athanasius's hagiographical text on the life of Antony and Tao Yuan-ming's poem "Peach Blossom Spring" to create an inter-textual reading of Christian ascetic life. She uses four dialectical threads of disclosedness/inaccessibility, similarity/difference, unmindfulness/discrimination, and exile/sociality to analyze the Daoist world ideal and Christian ascetic practice and to explore how exemplification of the desert ascetic is accomplished by various techniques. Through a close textual examination of the intertwining religious ideas of renunciation, Christ imitation, redemption, and resurrection as well as religious practices of fasting, solitude, fighting with demons, and performing miracles, Tsai concludes that the body was considered a transformable medium in Athanasius's practice of religious cultivation. The new humanity was not an abstract religious ideal; it needed the body to be accomplished.

Tsai's paper contrasts in an interesting way with Ting's. While Daoist cultivation theory, exemplified in the *Lao Tzu*, emphasizes relaxation of conceptual structures as key to reaching the state of desirelessness, Athanasius chooses to face the desire directly by way of ascetic practices.

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