

Health-preserving Thought of "Huai Nan-zi"

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Abstract—With the continuous improvement of living standard today, people pay more and more attention to health preserving, and Taoist health keeping is our most well-known health-keeping thought. As a great masterpiece of Huang-lao Taoism, the book "Huai Nan-zi" is compiled by the the king of Huainan in Western Han Dynasty Liu An and his companions. It deserves to be called an encyclopedia-like treatise, which implies abundant health preserving thought. It holds that body, spirit, and energy are the three major elements of human life, together constituting the human life, and the three are indispensable. Therefore, this article discusses the health keeping thoughts contained in "Huai Nan-zi" from three aspects: body preserving, spirit preserving and energy preserving.

Keywords—*Huai Nan-zi; health preserving; body preserving; spirit preserving; energy preserving*

I. INTRODUCTION

Both in ancient times or modern times, people value their lives. In ancient times, Taoism treasures the life mostly and Taoism also regards immortality as the ultimate pursuit. As a Taoist works, "Huai Nan-zi" contains a large amount of content about health preserving. On the structure of life, "Huai Nan-zi" puts forward the idea of "Body is the house of the life, energy is dominator, and spirit is full of the whole body. If one of them is absent, the person will fall ill due to the loss of balance.¹ This idea means three major elements of life are the body, spirit and energy, and each of them has their own status and role, so losing either of them will cause damage of the three. Therefore, health preserving must start from these three aspects, and none of them can be neglected. We should take full account of body, spirit and energy, and make target to each of them. This is the idea mentioned in "Huai Nan-zi original Tao training" that "Therefore, sages will preserve their energy, weak their spirit and exercise their bodies".

II. BODY PRESERVING

What is the body? For people, body is people's shape and body, including human's skeletal muscle, internal organs, skin and tendons and so on. In Huai Nan-zi, the body is "the house of live"² as well as the carriers of the existence of life. Human life cannot exist without body, and body is the basis of the existence of life. Therefore, health preserving should

pay attention to body that is the basis for health preserving. "Huai Nan-zi" believes that preserving the body require us to "keep the body comfortable".³ In "Huai Nan-zi", the interpretation of "comfortable" is the "there is nothing with the body"⁴, which means that one can often avoid being interrupted by other things so as to achieve peaceful, calm and discard all desires and worries from one's mind, instead of being tired of external objects. Overwork will result in "the body will be damaged if one doesn't rest after overwork"⁵. Although "Huai Nan-zi" holds that "the body" should be peaceful and calm without overwork. At the same time, however, it also believes that "preserving the body" should combine movement and quiescence to play the role of moderate sports in preserving the body.

"Huai Nan-zi" mentions "Breath can help people spit filthy gas and inhale fresh air, like a bear hanging, a bird stretching the neck, a duck floating, an ape jumping, an owl looking around, a tiger looking back. The people who do such actions just want to maintain their body, but the real person does not have to worry about these techniques."⁶ It suggest people to breath to exhale dirty gas and inhale fresh gas, like a bear hanging, a bird stretching, a duck floating, an apes jumping, an owl watching around and a tiger looking back. These are all done by the the people who preserve the body. The methods mentioned in "Huai Nan-zi" are actually the most important way of Taoist to preserve health by exercising one limb. It develops the two kinds of guiding action mentioned in "Zhuangzi deliberate": "breath help people spit the filthy gas in chest to absorb the fresh air, like a black bear climbing quotes and a bird flying wings, which is good for longevity; the people who do like this are people good at health preserving. This is what the long-life people like Peng Zu pursues." (Bears hanging and birds stretching) to the above mentioned six animals. So what is the guide? Guide is the guidance of breath (respiratory exercise). Leadship refers to the guidance of body (body exercise). This is similar to the hygienic gymnastics we do now, which is a basic method of preserving the body.

It is not enough to preserve the body only by exercising the body. Food is the paramount necessity of the people, so the food is the main guarantee that maintains the normal life activities of the human body as well as an indispensable part

¹ Huai Nan-zi original Tao training

² Huai Nan-zi original Tao training

³ Huai Nan-zi interpretation training

⁴ Huai Nan-zi interpretation training

⁵ Huai Nan-zi Spiritual Training

⁶ Huai Nan-zi Spiritual Training

of human life. Therefore, the diet is essential for human health as well as for health preserving. Regular diet, ensuring food safety, and supplying the nutrition needed by the body through food can play a role of health preserving. Conversely, if the diet is not regular, the food used is not hygienic, and some of the basic nutrition needed by the body cannot be met, it will harm human health. Therefore, on the aspect of "preserving health", there are a lot of ideas in Huai Nan-zi about how should people eat food and adjust diet, which has reached the goal of health preserving. "Huai Nan-zi Spiritual Training" warn people that "Eating all kinds of delicious together will make the taste out of order." It warns people that the disease comes from the mouth, so we should pay attention to diet. In addition, we must also note that we should not eat too much or less, and pay attention to proper diet. Eating too much will aggravate the gastrointestinal burden of the people. In the long run, it will lead to the occurrence of obesity and some diseases. "Huai Nan-zi Tai Zai Xun" says that "eating too fat and too much but still desiring to eat is harmful to health preserving." "Huai Nan-zi" not only persuaded people not to eat too much at ordinary times, but also not eat too much in the relatively hungry state. This would result in unequal hunger that will bring the burden to the stomach and harm to the body. That is what is said in "Huai Nan-zi interpretation training": "drinking water when thirsty is pleasant; eating much food when hungry is also pleasant; we can't do this because it will harm our health." It is not uncomfortable to drink raw water when you are thirsty; it is also not unsatisfied to eat a lot when you are hungry. However, we can't do this because this will harm our life. However, eating less can also bring harm to the human body. People cannot get the nutrition needed by life activities through diet, which is detrimental to people's health. Therefore, "Huai Nan-zi" stresses the health preserving ways of saint and perfect man is to "eat according to the appetite". That is to say, the health preserving way of long-life people is to eat proper diet according their own conditions.

Throughout the ages, health-care workers in whatever period attach great importance to the health care effect of daily life on people. They think that people can become vigorous, healthy and energetic if they achieve the laws of life and rest in a stable manner. On the contrary, if people do not work and rest following the laws of nature, but violate the laws of nature for a long time, they will lack energy and be in poor health. The Huangdi Neijing contains the exposition on regular daily life: "people who can eat and drink temperately, have regular daily life and do not work hard will preserve both body and energy, so that they will live all their life to 100 years old." Taoist health preserving stresses that regular daily life not only present as adapting to the external natural environment but also present as the regular adaptation of all aspects in the human body. 7"Huai Nan-zi" thinks the human body is a small world, and our small world must be compatible with the big natural world. Therefore, people's daily life should comply with the law of yin and yang changes in the world. "Huai Nan-zi time training" gives people a detailed account of production and

living arrangements and issues requiring attention in the twelve months of the year, such as "in the second month of autumn..... people should all come indoor since cold air comes together so that people can't bear " In September, the second month of autumn, the cold air invades. People should conform to the natural changes in the world, and come indoors to avoid the cold. Another example is "in the second month of winter ...in this month, the day is shortest and yin and yang fight with each other. Man should fast and must hide his residence to make the body peaceful. One must abandon voice and sex and forbid the desire to calm the body and settle the mood." 8 In the second month of winter, November in lunar calendar, daytime is short while night is long. Yin qi and yang qi confront each other. Since this solar term, Yang qi begin to rise. At this time, yin qi is in a period of great prosperity, while yang qi just starts to grow. People should control their desire and calm down their bodies to stabilize their own spirit, and maintain yin essence so as to gradually increase yang in the body. Just because we conform to the changing laws of the yin and yang in the world and have a regular daily life, we can reduce the risk of illness or injuries caused by not adapting to the external environment so that we can achieve good health and reach the goal of longevity.

For people, no matter how people pay attention to diet, exercise and regulate daily life, they will inevitably get sick. Therefore, for the health preserving people, preventing disease and treating disease as early as possible is particularly important. Therefore, people often underestimate trivial matters and neglect them so much that they regret it after catastrophe. People begin to worry after disaster comes, which is like to seek good medicine after being in critical condition. Even if there are such doctors Bian Que and Yu Xuan, it is also difficult to cure the illness. 9Therefore, for those small problems, whether it is a trouble or a disease, we should pay attention to it even if it is small. We need to take preventive measures; otherwise it cannot be saved if it becomes disaster. If we get such a serious illness even superb doctors like Bian Que and Yu Fu cannot save us. Therefore, we must take preventive measures as the mainstay of health preserving. Prevention is greater than cure, but we must promptly treat if the disease is prevented effectively.

III. SPIRIT PRESERVING

"Spirit" is a very important ancient philosophical category in Chinese culture. At the same time, it also plays an important role in health preserving science. Taoism school attaches great importance to it and advocates preserving spirit. Zhuangzi thinks that "people live because of the gathering of spirit. If spirit scatters, people will die." 10

In the opinion of the Taoist school, "spirit" is a crucial link in the process of Tao creating everything. Taoism believes that "Tao" is the ultimate root of all things in the world, but "Taoism" cannot directly produce everything in

⁷ Yang Yuhui. Research on Taoist Personality. Kunming: Bashu publishing house, 2010: 215.

⁸ Huai Nan-zi time training

⁹ Huai Nan-zi the world training

¹⁰ outer chapters of Zhuangzi northern travel

the universe. It must be realized through the key medium of "Qi".

Huai Nan Zi pointed out that "Tao" is the natural law and the origin of the universe as well as the ultimate source of all things in the universe, while "spirit" is the direct root of all things. The generation of all things is due to the constant change of "spirit." "Huai Nan-zi" interprets "spirit" producing everything like this: "积阳之热气生火，火气之精者为日；积阴之寒气为水，水气之精者为月；日月之淫为精者为星辰，天受日月星辰，地受水潦尘埃。"¹¹ The accumulation of the heat of the sun generates fire, and the essence of fire is the sun; the accumulation of the cold of yin generates water, and the essence of water is the moon; the quintessence of the sun and the moon are stars, the sky contains the sun, the moon and stars, while the ground accept water and dust. "天之偏气，怒者为风；地之含气，和者为雨。阴阳相薄，感而为雷，激而为霆，乱而为雾。阳气胜则散而为雨露，阴气胜则凝而为霜雪"¹² means the spirit gathered in deflect direction of the sky becomes the wind after being infuriated; the spirit absorbed by the earth becomes rain after neutralization. When the yin and yang approach each other, the feeling becomes thunder, the intense contact becomes the electricity, and the messy mixture becomes the fog. When the yang is better than the yin, it scattered as the rain, while if the yin gas surpasses the yang, it condenses into frost and snow.

Not only the sun, the moon and the weather in the universe are caused by "spirit", but people are also created by "spirit". "有二神混生，经天营地，孔乎莫知其所终极，滔乎莫知其所止息。于是乃别为阴阳，离为八极。刚柔相成，万物乃形。烦气为虫，精气为人。"¹³ means spirit is also the material needed by the inner life, which is indispensable to the normal operation of life in order to support the vitality of human life. And "夫性命者，与形俱出其宗，形备而性命成，性命成而好憎生矣" means that life and body both come from "Tao", so when there is the body, life is born. Once the life forms, feelings of like and dislike also rise. It can be seen that the relationship between body, spirit and energy is that the body and the spirit are born by the spirit, so it is said that "spirit" is the essence of man. Therefore, although preserving body is very important for health preserving, the lack of spirit preserving and energy preserving cannot achieve true health preserving. "今夫王乔、赤诵子，吹呕呼吸，吐故内新，遗形去智，抱素反真，以游玄眇，上通云天。今欲学其道，不得其养气处神，而放其一吐一吸，时诎时伸，其不能乘云升假，亦明矣。"¹⁴ That is to say, Wang Qiao and Chi Songzi now has become immortal, but those who only imitate their breathing and stretching without getting the mystery of them preserving spirit and energy will never become immortal.

"Huai Nan-zi" talks less about how to preserve the spirit and sometimes discusses it from the perspective of self-cultivation. "凡治身养性，节寝处，适饮食，和喜怒，便动静，使在己者得，而邪气因而不生。"¹⁵ That is to say, people are required to adopt the means of living regular life and calming their

mood in order to prevent the growth of evil spirits and achieve the goal of health preservation. Therefore, it seems that the fundamental purpose of preserving spirit is to prevent evil spirit from interfering with upright force. The so-called healthy atmosphere is "the activity in the heart makes the nature at ease, and external move is in line with justice. One should act according to the truth without interference from the outside world"¹⁶, while evil spirit is "Keen on generous delicious, indulge in the sensual, stirring in mood, regardless of future scourge"¹⁷. And upright force and evil spirit are in opposition to each other, and evil spirit can damage upright force. "Evil spirit can damage upright force and desire will harm nature. It is impossible for both to co-exist." Therefore, it can be seen that the main reason for culturing nature is to prevent evil spirit from harming upright force and prevent the generation of evil spirit. We cannot indulge in sensual pleasures, but should pay attention to self-cultivation.

The specific method of preserving spirit is mentioned in the "time training" that people's diet and daily life must be consistent with the law of spring, summer, autumn, and winter.

IV. PRESERVING ENERGY

The theory of preserving energy of "Huai Nan-zi" inherits the theory of preserving energy of Taoism in pre-Qin period and develops its own unique theory. According to Huainanzi, the body, spirit and energy are a unified whole. It advocates that the three should be preserved together, but emphasize that "energy is the master of life", which means energy is the master of life and dominate the life activity of human beings. It believes that "taking energy as domination, the body will get benefit while taking body as domination, the energy will be harmed".¹⁸ Thus we can see that "Huai Nan-zi" considers that man is dominated by energy, so health preserving should be based on energy preserving.

The key of energy preserving is "internal preservation" of the spirit rather than "foreign exceeding". So how can we achieve "internal preservation"? The most important thing is "quiet", which means to keep silence and nothingness. This is the nature of Tao. Doing nothing is the fundamental approach of preserving spirit. According to the description of "Huai Nan-zi", to do nothingness can proceed from the following aspects:

A. To Control the Desires

The so-called abstinence is controlling desires. "Huai Nan-zi" inherits the spirit of Taoism, thinking that want lead to mental disillusionment of people is the desire. The desire has been created to make people distracted so that people cannot rest their mind and cannot be idle. And the generation of desire is not only from its own reasons but also due to the external factors, so people must control these desires if they want to be quiet.

¹¹ Huai Nan-zi astronomy training

¹² Huai Nan-zi astronomy training

¹³ Huai Nan-zi Spiritual Training

¹⁴ Huai Nan-zi unified common training

¹⁵ Huai Nan-zi interpretation training

¹⁶ Huai Nan-zi interpretation training

¹⁷ Huai Nan-zi interpretation training

¹⁸ Huai Nan-zi original Tao training

However, the "abstinence" mentioned in "Huai Nan-zi" refers to controlling the excessive desires, namely controlling "appetite". "五色乱目，使目不明；五声哗耳，使耳不聪；五味乱口，使口爽伤；趣舍滑心，使行飞扬。此四者，天下之所养生也，然皆人累也。故曰：嗜欲者，使人之气越；而好憎者，使人心劳。" means that a variety of colors make people's eyes cannot see clearly, a variety of voices make people can't hear clearly, all kinds of smells hurt the mouth and the idea of chasing external objects makes people cannot stick to the heart. These four aspects are used to preserve health by people, but it has become an encumbrance for human. Therefore, too much lust makes people lose energy; likes and dislikes make people's mental fatigue. From this we can see that excessive desires can make people feel restless so that they can't do anything. However, "Huai Nan-zi" doesn't extremely require people to abstain from doing anything. Huai Nan Zi thinks that some desires are normal and won't harm their health. The desires that people possesses are the means of preserving health rather than the trouble for preserving health, but when the desire exceeds the threshold which is the so-called heavenly rule, it will become the harm to health. Therefore, preserving health does not require abstinence, but make desire in line with natural world.

B. To Maintain Emotion Stable and Calm

"Huai Nan-zi original Tao training" mentions that "夫喜怒者，道之邪也；忧悲者，德之失也；好憎者，心之过也；嗜欲者，性之累也。人大怒破阴，大喜坠阳，薄气发暗，惊怖为狂。忧悲多志，病乃成积；好憎繁多，祸乃相随。" That is to say, "Huainan Nanzi" thinks that people's temper will destroy the yin qi, so if people are overjoyed, their yang qi will be damaged. Short breath will lead to dumbness, panic will lead to madness; too much sorrow causes excessive resentment, and the disease will be accumulated; too much likes and dislikes will bring about disaster. Therefore, it is said that joy and anger, sadness, likes and dislikes are not conducive to health preserving. Thus, to preserve energy, people should not let changes of external objects to lead to emotional fluctuations. No matter where you are, you have to maintain a good mood, in order to achieve "quiet" and reach the purpose of maintaining the heart and preserving energy. That is "energy is composed of essence, energy, spirit and mind. If it can be stabilized and strengthened, the body will become healthier. On the contrary, if the spirit collapses or fails, the body will surely have to go downhill." mentioned in "Huainanzi Spiritual Training". It proves that preserving energy by "quietness" mentioned above is justified and necessary.

V. CONCLUSION

Health preserving thought of "Huai Nan-zi" inherits and develops the Taoism health preserving thought, which plays an important role in the development of Taoism. "Huai Nan-zi" discusses its health preserving thought and has its own unique health preserving ideas. The health preserving idea of Huai Nan-zi holds that the three aspects of "body", "spirit" and "energy" should not be considered at the same time instead of being neglected. As mentioned above, body is the house of the life, energy is dominator, and spirit is full of the whole body.. The three will be injured if one is out of position, the "body" is the basis because there is no life if

there is no body, let alone health preserving; "spirit" is a transition because it is in the "body" and provides life with pillar; "energy" is the root, because "energy" makes human life meaningful. The three are an entirety, so we need to combine the three to achieve the purpose of health preserving. And "Huai Nan-zi" reminds people that we need not put too much emphasis on health when preserving health, which means we should not preserve health for health preserving.

The health preserving thought in Huai Nan-zi, especially the idea of preserving energy has given descendants a good revelation. Now with the improvement of living standards and medical standards, we can do better in body preserving and spirit preserving. However, the serious materialization, excessive pursuit of fame and fortune, faster pace of life in our society lead us to lack energy preserving. Therefore, we should be "quiet" down to preserve our energy. Only in this way can we achieve the purpose of keeping in good health, and our body will become healthier. Although some of the theories in Huai Nan-zi may not be suitable for current society and some of them are not correct from the perspective of current level of scientific development, on the whole, as we deepen the study to the health preserving thought of "Huainanzi", the more and more value it contains will be discovered and will play a positive role in our life and health.

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