



Gendering Sexual Pleasures in Early and Medieval China

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Abstract

Early and medieval Chinese texts on sexual body techniques frame sexual pleasure in a gendered way. The texts display a psychodynamic scenario for sexual encounters between men and women wherein the woman is staged in her full potency, as emitting fluids and ejaculating, as experiencing uncontrolled muscular spasms and having immense pleasure (*kuài* 快) during the enfolding events. Male ejaculation is seen as a short-time pleasure (*zàn kuài* 暫快); it is considered better to avoid it, and instead attempt to stay in an intermediate state of bliss, and eventually to experience illumination, by way of controlled counter-measures and by being fully focused to female bodily signs, to which the male partner should be prepared to react adequately.

Keywords

Sexual body techniques, gendered conception of sexual pleasure, male and female ejaculation, textual study, early and medieval China

1. Introductory remarks

Specific issues of personal wellness like pleasure and euphoria are thematised in Chinese medieval ‘nourishing life’ texts; they are not necessarily the most central issues discussed therein, but nevertheless occur prominently in several techniques.

Thematically we will focus merely on texts dealing with sexual body techniques, where the ‘nourishment’ is gained in an imagined transfer, running one-sidedly from the female partner to the male adept; that is, the asymmetrically construed sexual encounters of partners of unequal sex are treated as a conveniently bundled illustrative case for my study of satisfaction and euphoria.

Meditative single-person techniques indeed do share a certain outlook with these paired techniques, but then the ‘nourishment’ is regarded as an inner process, or ‘inner work’, where the technique aims at the processing of inner

streams, or it depends on the intake of a specific diet, or the absorption of sun or moonlight, etc.¹

Several ancient Chinese texts about sexual body techniques will be approached from two sides:

- Paratextual and structural features of the texts will be illustrated because such textual peculiarities may lead to new conceptual frames. Viewed in diachronic perspective, adapted language is sometimes seen to be thereby introduced, or more general rewriting occurs.
- A close reading of passages on female satisfaction will show how gender-specific versions of sexual pleasure emerge and convey sexual tension to the sexual encounter; at the same time this creates different target values for men and women.

2. Source texts

Table 1 notes some basic background about the source texts: the earliest extant texts dealing with sexual body techniques were found in Mawangdui Tomb Number Three, which was closed in 168 BCE. It is the tomb of an aristocrat and contained a large collection of manuscripts written on silk and bamboo slips.² Only two Mawangdui bamboo manuscripts will be considered in this paper: *The Discussion of the Utmost Method under the Sky* (*Tian xia zhi dao tan* 天下至道談) and *Uniting Yin and Yang* (*He yin yang* 合陰陽).³

The second entry on the timeline of Table 1 is centuries later, and has probably to be dated to about the 6th century CE. Nevertheless, it contains passages that are directly comparable to those from the two Mawangdui texts just mentioned. *The Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* (*Yu fang bi jue* 玉房秘訣) are not extant in their original textual composition and entirety, but we find them quoted extensively in the Japanese manuscript *Ishinpō* 醫心方

¹ On ‘nourishing life’ and medical gymnastics, see Lo 1998; Lo 2001; Stein 1999; Kohn 2008b; on early Chinese sexual body techniques, see Pfister 2013; on meditative techniques, see Kohn (ed.) 1989; Kohn 2008a. (See below Table 4.) On the ‘inner work’ or ‘inward training’, see Roth 1999.

² Harper 1998 translates the entire Mawangdui medical corpus, altogether 14 texts. Pfister 2013 provides a new transcription and preliminary edition, together with the German translation and extensive interpretation of the three Mawangdui texts on sexual body techniques.

³ The title *Tian xia zhi dao tan* occurs on slip 17, *He yin yang* is the title given by the editors (see Mawangdui Hanmu Boshu Zhengli Xiaozu (ed.) 1985).

Table 1. Timeline

Early 2nd C BCE Tomb closure 168 BCE	Six Dynasties 220–589 CE (?) quoted in <i>Ishinpō</i> of 984 CE	Ming dynasty preface 1566 CE
<i>Tian xia zhi dao tan</i> <i>Discussion of the Utmost Method under the Sky</i>	<i>Yu fang bi jue</i> <i>Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber</i>	<i>Su nü miao lun</i> <i>Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Woman</i>
<i>He yin yang</i> <i>Uniting Yin and Yang</i>		
Mawangdui Bamboo Texts	Paper Manuscript	Block Print

(*Core Prescriptions of Medicine*), of the 10th century CE, a compilation that excerpts Chinese medical texts. Finally, the passages on female pleasure can be found in a late imperial printed text, the *Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Woman* (*Su nü miao lun* 素女妙論) of the 16th century CE, but are now put in a much altered language.⁴

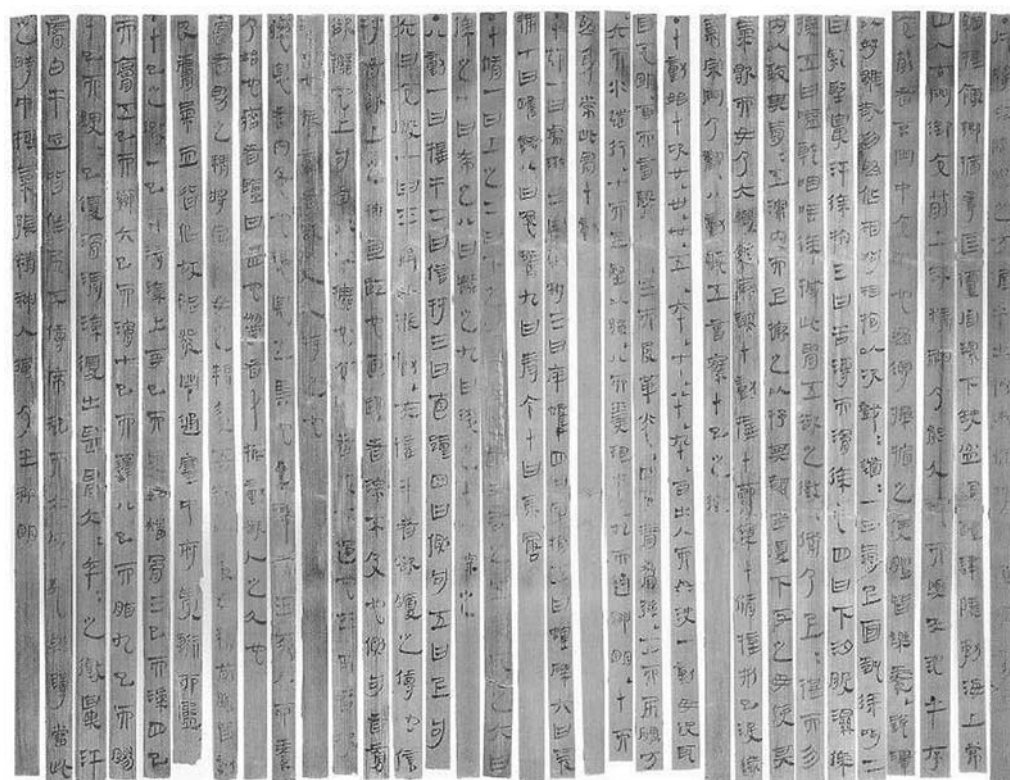
3. Modular text structure

The Mawangdui text *Uniting Yin and Yang* (*He yin yang*) serves us as introduction to the modular text structure used in many Chinese technical texts of early and medieval times. Its features are basic and simple, and they could easily be modified and varied (see Figures 1–2).

- *Uniting Yin and Yang* consists of 32 bamboo slips, which are about 23 cm long and 1 cm wide; this results in a writing surface of about 23 cm on 32 cm, just about the size of a laptop or a table set. This is only a small roll and can be easily glanced through.

⁴ Unfortunately, the original blockprints (at least two editions existed), seem to be no more available. A handwritten transcription can be found in Van Gulik [1951] 2004, vol. 2, pp. 123–47, and some textual notes and translated excerpts in vol. 1, pp. 121–7 (see also Van Gulik [1961] 2003, pp. 270–7). There exist translations into English (Wile 1992, pp. 122–33), Italian (Santangelo 1993) and French (Lévy 2000).

A Japanese treatment of similar contents by the medical practitioner Manase Dōsan 曲直瀬道三 (1507–94) are the *Admirable Discourses of the Yellow Emperor and the Plain Girl* (*Kōso myōron* 黄素妙論). For a note on this text, see Ishihara and Levy 1969, p. 207.



Read from top to bottom, from right to left

Slips: ca. 23 cm long and 1 cm wide

Writing surface: ca. 23 cm × 32 cm

Original binding: decayed, traces of a secondary binding visible

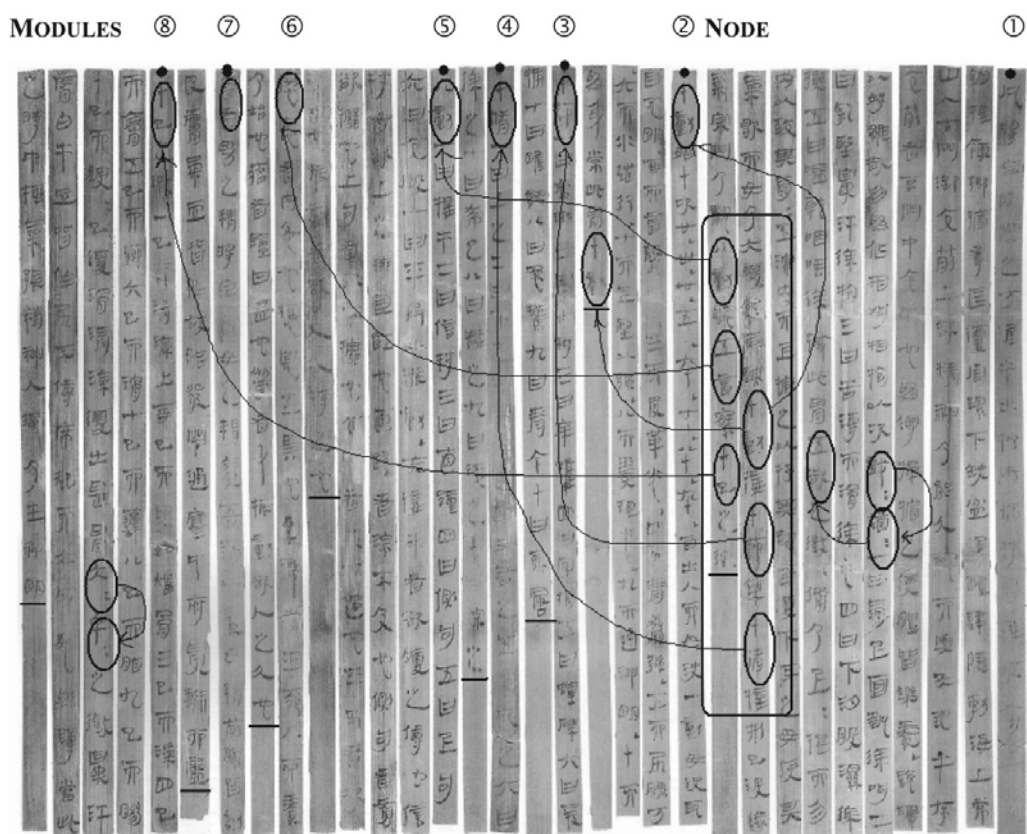
Fig. 1. *He yin yang*, slips 102–133 (32 slips)

- Not all space is used to write with brush and ink. Certain spaces are intentionally left blank. Together with an initial black dot, these empty spaces mark out a SENSE UNIT, which I call a MODULE.⁵

4. Hypertextual linking

- On Figure 2 SENSE UNITS are marked with a black dot • and a short horizontal line __, just before the blank unwritten space of the bamboo slip. This divides the text into eight separate MODULES ①–⑧, one after the other from the right to the left, and read vertically.

⁵ On the textual analysis of manuscript texts and transmitted textual compilations, see Keegan 1988 and Pfister 2013 (for medical texts), Boltz 2005 and Meyer 2012 (for excavated texts). The terminology used in our analysis will be set in SMALL CAPS hereafter.



MODULE ①: INTERNAL LINK, followed by textual NODE, or LINKING TEXT, comprising six TECHNICAL TERMS, referring to MODULES ②③④⑤⑥⑧ respectively; MODULE ⑦: contains no LINK; MODULE ⑥: does not use TECHNICAL TERMS as LINK/TITLE; MODULE ⑧: contains additional internal link. Sense unit marked by black dot • (beginning) and __ (empty space at end).

Fig. 2. Hypertextual linking in *He jin yang*

- TECHNICAL TERMS used in the text are encircled and linked up with each other, when they occur two or three times. These lines' arrows show a possible way the eyes of a reader could follow in order to find out more discussion of the respective technical expressions.
- This discussion takes the form of a list. As in this case, it does usually not contain a definition of the technical expression itself, but rather speaks in a sequential manner about specific aspects of a sexual encounter, such as the Five Sounds or the vocalisations of the woman during one sequence of sexual arousal.
- The MODULES are placed simply one after the other, and the order of many of them could easily be changed, as the aspectual character of their descriptions does not necessarily imply a reading from A to Z, from the right beginning to the left end of the text.
- In the rectangularly marked zone of MODULE ① six TECHNICAL TERMS concentrate. MODULES displaying such a concentration of technical expressions

and summarising the contents of other MODULES in more general ways, or bringing them into interplay, which may thereby serve the orientation of the reader or give more coherence to the overall text, are here called LINKING TEXTS or NODES.

- In this text can be found only one such NODE, which contains the majority of the TECHNICAL TERMS used, and thereby contributes much to create an integrated text from a mere assembly of eight separate MODULES.
- In fact, this constitutes a SMALL COMPILATION, as many of its MODULES could also be used flexibly in other texts for either similar or completely different purposes. In a given case, helped by general additions or framing devices like dialogue structure, or context, this can affect deeply the understanding of a passage, or even make it incomprehensible; for example when much coded language is used, or when MODULES get in disorder. This last case might occur when the order of the bamboo slips has been wrongly reconstructed after the original binding has disintegrated.
- Finally, we see also some special cases, when a LINK works only within a single MODULE, or when there is no LINK at all. This again shows the flexibility of such basic text-building features, and in each text we have to expect different features at play, as they do not preclude any kind of text structural device.

However, in this short bamboo book all this can be scanned at a glance, whereas the same or similar features are less clearly seen in the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*, as its modular quotations are strewn over a large COMPILATION. Nevertheless, I hope to demonstrate soon that they too can be found in the latter text.

5. Organisation of *Ishinpō*

But first a few words have to be said on the large compilation of Chinese medical knowledge, entitled the *Core Prescriptions of Medicine* (*Ishinpō* 醫心方) in which most of the transmitted quotations from the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* are preserved.⁶

⁶ On *Ishinpō*, cf. Gao Wenzhu *et al.* 1996, p. 796 on *Yu fang bi jue* 玉房秘訣. Today the text is only extant in 28 quotations in *Ishinpō*, rolls 7, 13, 21, 24, and 28. The last character of the title is consequently written *jué* 決, the popular graph for *jué* 決, ‘to decide, decision’ (see Huang Zheng 2005, p. 214). The latter word is sometimes written *jué* 訣, for which in recent translations ‘instructions’, ‘formulas’, or ‘prescriptions’ was given. However, the phrase *bi* or *mì jué* 秘訣 means ‘trick, knack’, leading to a colloquial rendering of the title as ‘bed trick(s)’, an intended pun.



Fig. 3. Portrait of Tamba no Yasuori (912–995 CE)

Figure 3 shows a portrait of Tamba no Yasuori 丹波康賴, who lived from 912–995 CE. He presented his monumental work in the year 984 to Emperor Enyū 円融, and it was kept in the Imperial Palace until the 16th century. By imperial grant, it then passed to Nakarai Mitsushige 半井光成, the Head of the Imperial Office of Medicine under Emperor Ōgimachi 正親町, who reigned from 1558 to 1586, and ever since kept by the Nakarai family, today being a National Treasure of Japan (see Figure 4 below).

Several other partial manuscripts copies are known, but there was no printed version until the 19th century. The Tokugawa 徳川 *shogun* borrowed the Nakarai family manuscript, and published it in the 7th year Ansei 安政, in 1859. This is called the Ansei edition, which was copied and printed again in 1909 by the antique bookshop Asakuraya (Bunenroku Asakuraya 文淵閣浅倉屋) in Tokyo, and contains the commonly used text (see Figure 5 below).⁷

Tamba no Yasuori's *Core Prescriptions of Medicine* give a comprehensive view of Chinese medicine by the 10th century CE. Its 30 rolls contain treatments of all body parts, ulcers and abscesses, poisoning by elixirs, gynaecologic and paediatric conditions, to name but a few.

⁷ On the textual history of *Ishinpō* and especially on its 40 extant manuscript versions, see Liu Xiuqiao 1976, Society for the Commemoration of the One Thousandth Anniversary of the 'Ishimpo' (ed.) 1984; Gao Wenzhu *et al.* 1996.

For a writer of the 10th century, Tamba noted very consequently the sources he used. Each quotation cites the title of the work, sometimes with an abbreviated or otherwise varied title of the source text; it is followed by the word *yún* 云, meaning here as much as ‘writes’ or a functional equivalent of a colon. Many of the titles he mentions were subsequently lost entirely or partially in China herself, including the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*.

Roll 28 is entitled *bōnei* in Japanese, or *fáng nèi* 房內 in Chinese, ‘On the Chamber-Intern’. *Nèi* 內 meaning the ‘inner quarter’ reserved for women in a major household and it addresses them as ‘internals’. So the chapter title points politely to the sexual encounters of a patriarch with his several women.

Roll 28 contains 30 subchapters or rubrics that deal with various aspects of the sexual body techniques (see Table 2). Rubrics that do not contain any quotation of the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* are marked with an asterisk *.

The list starts with Culminant Principles, where some basic points are made, moves on to Nourishing Yang, the man, respectively Yin, the woman; in rubrics 4–15 it then deals with various aspects to be observed during a sexual encounter, among them rubrics 6–8, the Five Proofs, the Five Desires and the Ten Stimulations, which will be discussed later. These form together a SMALL COMPILATION on female satisfaction.

The Eight Increases of Qi detail ways to bolster male potency, whereas the Seven Decreases do not only describe seven detriments to male sexual health, but advise him also how to cure each by therapeutic ways of intercourse, whereby the woman takes an active part, riding the man, and nourishing him with her ejaculated fluids.

Chinese sexual body techniques explicitly separate reproduction from the sexual act, and teach the man ways to avoid emission and ejaculation. Seeking Offspring, therefore, is here not treated extensively, but rather in several rubrics of roll 24. The chapters on Attractive or Repulsive Women focus on physical traits. Chen Hsiu-fen studied Interception of Ghost Intercourse in her article ‘*Dreaming Sex with Demons*’: *The Pathological Interpretations in Ancient Chinese Medicine*.⁸

Small Jade Stalk and Wide Jade Gate describe measures to enlarge the penis or to tighten the lumen of the vagina respectively. The two last chapters mention treatments against pains and injuries inflicted during sexual intercourse. At the end of each roll, Tamba attaches his reading notes, *zhá jì* 札記, wherein he meticulously annotates the excerpted text passages.

⁸ See Chen Hsiu-fen 2000.

Table 2. The 30 rubrics of roll 28 *On the Chamber-Intern* in *Ishinpō*

1 Culminant Principles	16 Eight Increases [of Qi] ¶
2 Nourishing Yáng	17 Seven Decreases [of Qi] ¶
3 Nourishing Yīn ¶	18 Return the Essence
4 Harmonise Strivings	19 [Male] Emission and Ejaculation
5 Approaching the Ride	20 Treating Damages ¶
6 Five Constants ¶	21 Seeking Offspring
7 Five Proofs ¶	22 Attractive Women
8 Five Desires ¶	23 Repulsive Women
9 Ten Stimulations ¶	24 Interdictions and Avoidances
10 Four Optima *	25 Interception of Ghost Intercourse ¶
11 Nine Qi *	26 Use of Herbs and Minerals
12 Nine Procedures *	27 Small Jade Stalk (Penis)
13 Thirty Procedures *	28 Wide Jade Gate (Vagina) *
14 Nine Ways *	29 Pains of Minor Women
15 Six Positions *	30 Injuries of Grown-up Women

* Rubrics that do not quote the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*

¶ Rubrics quoting exclusively the *Secret Decisions*

6. Organisation of the *Secret Decision* quotations

How did Tamba organise the many quotations of roll 28?

- In Table 2 the nine rubrics marked with ¶ cite the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* exclusively.
- Only seven rubrics out of 30 do not cite the *Secret Decisions*.
- Eight quotations are found outside of roll 28, but as six of them are duplicated in roll 28, we can neglect them for present purposes.
- The sequence of the texts' quotations is also telling, as in the greater part of the cases (17 in total) the first quote within a rubric is adduced to the *Secret Decisions*.

It seems therefore probable, that many of the rubric titles were also derived from this text. Obviously, Tamba considered the *Secret Decisions* to be his major source on the subject. It is therefore safe to say that this text influenced greatly the structure of his compilations on the sexual techniques.

However, as an aside to reception history, it must be stated, that Ye Dehui (1864–1927), in an early attempt to reconstruct the texts of the sex techniques,

took out all passages of the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* in which occurred dialogues with the Plain Woman (Su nü 素女). He mounted them into another text, called the *Scripture of the Plain Woman* (*Su nü jing*), which is cited only twice in roll 28 of the *Ishinpō*, namely in rubrics 1 and 5. Even though Ye Dehui clearly noted the source of the individual passages of his collage, it was nevertheless this conglomerate of two different texts which was often translated into Western languages under the title of *Su nü jing*.⁹

7. The two introductory quotes [9.a] and [9.b]

The first rubric of roll 28 is called Culminant Principles, where the two introductory quotes [9.a] and [9.b] begin the subchapter:

Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber: The Master of Emptiness and Balance (Chong He zǐ) says: As to one *yīn* and one *yáng*, this is called the way (*dào*); joining the essences [of man and woman] and transforming them into a [new] life forms its use: how remote its principle! Therefore, Emperor Xuan [i.e. the Yellow Emperor] asked the Plain Woman and Peng Keng [i.e. Ancestor Peng] responded the King of Yin—finely giving [us] the objectives!

The text introduces here legendary figures as dialogue partners, a common device to frame technical discussions.

The Yellow Emperor asked the Plain Woman (Su nü): My *qì* (breath/ flow) is declining and unbalanced, within the heart no mirth (*lè*), and my self often anxious about dangers; how does it come to this?

The Plain Woman says: That by which a man is made to decline and to attenuate is generally being injured on the path (*dào*) of mutual contacts of *yīn* and *yáng* [i.e. during sexual intercourse].

As to women winning over men it is similar to water extinguishing fire. Knowing to practise it is like one is able with pots (*fǔ*) and tripods (*dǐng*) to mix the five tastes in order to accomplish broths (*gēng*) and soups (*huò*).

One who is capable to know the way of *yīn* and *yáng* accomplishes the five [sensual] pleasures/fivefold mirth (*lè*). One unknowing of it is going to cut off (*yāo*) the bodily mandate (life), and how would he gain joy and mirth? Could one be inattentive to it?¹⁰

⁹ Ye Dehui 1903. For a short critique of Ye Dehui's 'numerous errors in transcription and collation', see Li Ling and McMahon 1992, pp. 148–9. *Su nü jing* was several times translated as a putative textual unit, a recent example is Wile 1992, pp. 85–94.

¹⁰ *Yu fang bi jue* quotations [9.a–b] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.1, p. 2a.1–8/579. [9.a] 玉房秘訣云: 沖和子曰: 夫一陰一陽謂之道。構精化生之為用, 其理遠乎。故帝軒之問素女彭、鏗之酬^b(酬)殷王, 良有旨哉。 [9.b] 黃帝問素女曰: 吾氣衰而不和, 心內不樂, 身常恐危, 將如

Clearly, the fragile man, confronted with the supreme sexual potency of woman, is at a loss. Please note, linguistically the advice is here not merely organised, as it often is, as a kind of sex contest (under the assumption that women inevitably win out), but in addition also as a delicate cooking operation (where chances for men appear to be better).

Already in this opening passage, our subject, ‘pleasure’ or ‘mirth’ (*lè* 樂), is introduced as a promise to him, and we assume that his attention is by such positively valued words guided to choose the correct way provided by the text.

8. NODE [12.b]

Quotation [12.b] can serve as an example of a textual NODE. It reads:

And further: The Yellow Emperor says: If one forcefully urges to have sexual intercourse but the jade stalk (penis) does not rise, one faces shame (*cán*) and expects blame (*xiū*), [so much so] that sweat comes in pearls. As the heart and feelings are greedy and desirous, one forcedly aids with the hand. How could it be forced? I am willing to hear about its method.

The Plain Woman says: What the Emperor asks about is what many men have. Whenever you wish to have [sexual] contact with a woman, resolutely hold to the [following] guiding discipline: It is necessary first to blend the *qi* (breath/flow events) [of the partners], the jade stalk then rises. Go along with her ‘Five Constants’; envision her being affected at the nine parts. The woman has ‘Five Colours’ [probably local colour changes on the body surface due to excitement]; examine closely where she resists the beating (*dǐ kòu*) [of the vulva with the penis]. Gather her overflowing essences; collect the fluids in the [vaginal] opening. The essence returns and the *qi* is transformed, they will fully fill up marrow and brain. Avoid the interdiction of the ‘Seven Decreases’ and practise the methods of the ‘Eight Increases’ [of the bodily flow (*qi*)]. Do not go against the ‘Five Constants’, and then your body can be protected. If correct *qi* is inwardly filling, what ailment does not leave? Treasure houses and granaries [the viscera] are calm and tranquil, radiant and glossy are the fibres moistened, and with every [sexual] contact now will raise the force of one’s [bodily] flow a hundredfold. If the rival has to submit (*bīn fù*), what shame exists anymore?¹¹

之何。素女曰：凡人之所以衰微者，皆傷於陰陽交接之道尔(爾)。夫女之勝男，猶水之滅火。知行之，如釜鼎(鼎)能和五味以成羹臠，能知陰陽之道者(者)成五樂。不知之者，身命將夭，何得歡樂。能不慎哉。(a) 札記 1a: 、蓋誤加。(b) 札記 1a: 酬之異構。(c) 札記 1a: 恐者之草體。Ye Dehui, Van Gulik 道, 悉。Gao Wenzhu 道, 志。鼎: variant of 鼎。Ye Dehui p. 1a.4 misreads 滅火 as 勝火。

¹¹ *Yu fang bi jue* quotation [12.b] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.4, p. 9b.3–9/582. 又云：黃帝曰：今欲強交接，玉莖不起，面慙(慙)意羞，汗如珠子。心情貪欲，強助以手。何以強之，願聞其道。素女曰：帝之所問，眾人所有。凡欲接女，固有經紀，必先和氣，玉莖乃起。順其五常，存感九部。女有五色，審所(氏)扣。採其溢精，取液丁(→于)口。精氣還化〔地イ〕，

Now, the sex battle is opened; again the fragile constitution of the male is stressed. He is eager to somehow influence the outcome with force. But what men often ask for is not necessarily considered to be the best advice by the text.

The promises of the sexual techniques are evoked in a manner typical for NODES: several TECHNICAL TERMS are mentioned without further explanation; they provoke easily further questions, and the content of the questions is guided and focused by them throughout the further dialogue.

While expressions like the Five Constants, the Seven Decreases and the Eight Increases are explained in the quotations of the text in *Ishinpō* (see below), the Five Colours are not, and we are left to ponder what their referent might be, and if something was cut out of the text and is now lost.¹² If the LINK of a LINKING TEXT is broken, coherence and integrity of the text are compromised, as in this case.

9. Satisfaction [14.a–c]

The *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* contains the interesting and unique passage [14.a–c] on the satisfaction or pleasure of women. The word used to describe it, *kuài* 快, covers meanings like ‘joyful, pleasant, to be satisfied’. It is a quality of the heart, the seat of emotion and cognition. When the heart is ‘not pleased’ one experiences inner dissatisfaction. If somebody suffers from illness and is therefore ‘not in a pleasant state’ at all, one might add a negation and say, he or she is ‘uneasy’, *bù kuài* 不快. Otherwise, if the pleasure is too great, this is negatively connoted as exuberance, and one says ‘a person takes delight in’, *rén yǒu kuài* 人有快, thereby implicitly stating, ‘takes too much delight in’.

In the *Secret Decisions*, the word *kuài* 快 is used to address the satisfaction of women in a very similar way as the French words *jouir* or *jouissance* do, in an attempt to describe her sexual delights of a very bodily nature.

填滿髓(髓)草腦(腦),避七損之禁,行八益之道。無逆五常,身乃可保。正氣內充,何疾不去。府藏安寧,光澤潤理,每接即起氣力百倍。敵人賓(賓)服,何慙(慙)之有。(a) 札記 2a: 足恐目古以字。Ye Dehui 足。Gao Wenzhu 彳 = 氏。(b) Ye Dehui 於; Gao Wenzhu → 于 (?). (c) 賓 variant of 賓.

¹² The Mawangdui bamboo manuscripts mention colour changes due to excitement on the face, and as a result of stimulation at the anterior upper vaginal wall (see Pfister 2013). Erotic flushes elsewhere on the body surface and increased vasocongestion of erectile tissues in the vagina resulting in a deepening of red tones might add up to five distinct colour changes required by our text here.

9.1 Paratextual features

The *Secret Decisions*' manuscript text with the three quotations [14.a–c] is shown in the Nakarai edition (Figure 4), and in the Asakuraya edition (Figure 5). These quotations form the structural components, or MODULES, that are used as text blocks for the discussion of 'jouissance' or 'satisfaction' (*kuài* 快).

Translation: *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* [14.a–c]

7. Five Proofs

[14.a] *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*: The Yellow Emperor asks: Whereby do I recognise the satisfaction (*jouissance*) of a woman (*nǚ zhī kuài*)? The Plain Woman says: There are the Five Proofs (*zhēng*), the Five Desires (*yù*) and also the Ten Stimulations (*dòng*). By observing their changes, you recognise their cause.

Now the signs of the Five Proofs: The first is, as the face reddens, leisurely let it [the penis] join her. The second is, as her nipples harden and the nose sweats, leisurely let it penetrate. The third is, as her throat dries and the pharynx salivates, leisurely flap it to-and-fro. The fourth is, as her hidden parts (*yīn*) become slippery, leisurely let it go deeper. The fifth is, as her saps run to the buttocks, leisurely withdraw it.

8. Five Desires

[14.b] The Plain Woman says: It is by the Five Desires you know her response. The first is, as the desire of her imagination is winning over, she holds the breath and the [inner] flow of air (*bǐng xī bǐng qì*). The second is, as the desire of her hidden parts (*yīn*) is winning over, the nose and mouth doubly open. The third is, when the desire of her essence is agitated, she trembles, swings and embraces the man. The fourth is, when the desire of her heart is fulfilled, sweat flows and wets cloth and underwear. The fifth is, when at the utmost of her satisfaction and desire, the body straightens and the eyes close.

9. Ten Stimulations

[14.c] The Plain Woman says: The effects of the Ten Stimulations: The first is, when she embraces the [male] person with both hands, it [the situation] demands the body parts pressing and the hidden parts nestling against each other. The second is, when she spreads both her thighs, rub hard (*qiè mó*) against the upper parts [of the vagina]. The third is, when she tautens the belly, it demands flatness [of penetration]. The fourth is, when her buttocks are moving, satisfaction is superb. The fifth is, when she lifts both her feet to clutch the partner, it demands depth [of penetration]. The sixth is, when she crosses both her thighs, an inner itching makes her lusting and lewd. The seventh is, when she throws herself to the side, it demands deep rubbing to the left and right [sides of the vagina].

養身乃壽也
 五欲第七
 玉房秘訣云黃帝曰何以知之快也素女曰有五欲
 五欲又有十動以觀其變而知其故
 夫五欲之條一日面赤則徐、合之二日乳堅則徐、
 徐、內之三日盜汗則徐、徐、三日陰滑則徐、
 徐、五日尻傳浪徐、別之
 五欲第八
 素女曰五欲者以知其應一日意欲得之則并息并氣
 二日陰欲得之則鼻口兩張三日精欲煩者振掉而抱男
 四日心欲滿者則汗流濕衣裳五日其快欲之甚者身直
 目眠
 十動第九
 素女曰十動之効一日兩手抱人者欲體相薄陰相當
 也二日伸云其兩胛者切磨其上方也三日脹腹者欲
 其淺也四日尻動者快善也五日舉兩脚抱人者欲其
 深也六日交其兩股者內痒滋也七日側搖者欲深
 切左右也八日舉身迫人淫樂甚也九日身布縱者支
 體快也十日陰液滑者精已洩也見其効以知女之快也
 四五第十
 素女經云黃帝曰意欲交接而並不起可以強用下女
 其日不可矣未欲交接之道男注淫至乃可致女九氣

Fig. 4. Nakarai edition of *Ishinpō*

五欲第八 素女曰五欲者以知其應一日意欲得之則并息并氣 二日陰欲得之則鼻口兩張三日精欲煩者振掉而抱男 四日心欲滿者則汗流濕衣裳五日其快欲之甚者身直 目眠	十動第九 素女曰十動之効一日兩手抱人者欲體相薄陰相當 也二日伸云其兩胛者切磨其上方也三日脹腹者欲 其淺也四日尻動者快善也五日舉兩脚抱人者欲其 深也六日交其兩股者內痒滋也七日側搖者欲深 切左右也八日舉身迫人淫樂甚也九日身布縱者支 體快也十日陰液滑者精已洩也見其効以知女之快也
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Fig. 5. Asakuraya edition of *Ishinpō*

The eighth is, when she lifts her body towards the partner her lewd pleasure is extreme. The ninth is, when she stretches the body and relaxes, extremities (*zhī*) and body parts (*tǐ*) are satisfied. The tenth is, when the saps of the hidden parts (*yīn yè*) become slippery, her essence (*jīng*) has already been emitted [i.e. she has ejaculated]. As you see the effects you thereby recognise the satisfaction of the woman.¹³

Tamba no Yasuori took the entire passage from the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* and inserted three SECTION TITLES (boldface in the translation). He thereby made clear that he understood the three textual portions to be independent textual MODULES, to which a dialogic FRAME was added only secondarily.

The dialogue consists of a single question asked by Huang Di, the Yellow Emperor, which is answered by Su nǚ, the Plain Woman. As the introductory sentence ‘the Plain Woman says’ is repeated three times, one can assume the lower two to be EDITORIAL INSERTIONS by Tamba, who just wanted to make clear who is speaking.

The creative re-use of textual MODULES in order to create new content or to present a new concept, and often with only slight changes to the original MODULE text, is a very common device in technical literature on medical and ‘nourishing life’ (*yǎng shēng*) issues, and we find it used here too.

There are three MODULE TITLES: Five Proofs, Five Desires and Ten Stimulations; their respective three SENSE UNITS follow each other after some introductory sentences in the first case, or after the sentence ‘the Plain Woman

¹³ *Yu fang bi jue* quotations [14.a–c] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.7–9, pp. 12b.4–13b.3/583–584.

五徵第七 [14.a] 玉房秘訣云：黃帝曰：何以知女之快也。素女曰：有五徵，五欲，又有十動。以觀其變而知其故。夫五徵之候。一曰：面赤，則徐 “ 合之。二曰：乳堅鼻汗，則徐 “ 內之。三曰：噙乾咽唾，則徐 “ 搖之。四曰：陰滑，則徐 “ 深之。五曰：尻傳液，則徐 “ 引之。

五欲第八 [14.b] 素女曰：五欲者，以知其應。一曰：意欲得之，則并(屏)息并(屏)氣。^a二曰：陰欲得之，則鼻口兩張。三曰：精欲煩者，振掉而抱男。四曰：心欲滿者，則汗流濕衣裳。五曰：其快欲之甚者，身直目眠。

十動第九 [14.c] 素女曰：十動之效：一曰：兩手抱人者，欲體相薄陰相當也。二曰：伸(云) ^b其兩(臍)者，切磨其上方也。三曰：張腹者，欲其淺也。四曰：尻動者，快善也。五曰：舉兩脚拘人者，欲其深也。六曰：交其兩股者，內痒淫淫也。七曰：側搖者，欲深切左右也。八曰：舉身迫人，淫樂甚也。九曰：身布縱者，支體快也。十曰：陰液滑者，精已洩也。見其效以知女之快也。

(a) Gao Wenzhu *et al.* 1996, p. 583 n. 13 assume that Ye Dehui’s (1903, p. 4a) silently proposed loan reading of *bǐng* 屏, ‘stop, hold (breath)’, for 并 is correct. Both *bǐng xī* 屏息 and *bǐng qì* 屏氣 describe an irregular breath pattern. Therefore, ‘holding the (inner) air flow’ describes probably blocked breath patterns becoming visible in the overall body reaction, as opposed to ‘holding the breath’ meaning apnoea or gasping for air, seen at the head and mouth, together with sounds. (b) (云) Ye Dehui omits 云; Tamba notes in his *Zha ji*, that there must be a mistake in this sentence; Gao Wenzhu says 云 is a superfluous character. (c) *bì, pí 臍 = bì 臍 = bì 臍* (see Hanyu Da Zidian Bianji Weiyuanhui 2006, vol. 3, p. 2048).

Translations: Van Gulik [1951] 2004, pp. 44–5; Van Gulik [1961] 2003, pp. 139–40; Ishihara and Levy 1969, pp. 41–2; Hsia *et al.* 1986, pp. 173–4; Wile 1992, pp. 87–8.

Table 3. Diachronic comparison of Satisfaction MODULES

Mawangdui early 2nd C BCE	Mawangdui early 2nd C BCE	220–589 CE (?) quoted in <i>Ishinpō</i> of 984 CE	Ming dynasty preface 1566 CE
<i>Tian xia zhi dao tan</i> Discussion of the Utmost Method under the Sky	<i>He yin yang</i> Uniting Yin and Yang	<i>Yu fang bi jue</i> Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber	<i>Su nü miao lun</i> Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Woman
Five Signals <i>wǔ huī</i> 五徽	Proofs of the Five Desires <i>wǔ yù zhī zhēng</i> 五欲之徵	Five Proofs <i>wǔ zhēng</i> 五徵 Five Desires <i>wǔ yù</i> 五欲	The Indications of the Five Desires <i>wǔ yù zhī hòu</i> 五慾之候
Eight Stimulations <i>bā dòng</i> 八動	Eight Stimulations <i>bā dòng</i> 八動	Ten Stimulations <i>shí dòng</i> 十動	The Indications of the Ten Stimulations <i>shí dòng zhī hòu</i> 十動之候
		▽ Satisfaction <i>kuài</i> 快	fulfilling imaginations & satisfying desires <i>yì mǎn yù zú</i> 意滿慾足

says'. The FRAME of this passage happens to be very short, and it merely repeats the MODULE TITLES.

Table 3 shows that each of these three MODULES is (partly) known from other texts that existed before or after the *Secret Decisions*.¹⁴

¹⁴ (A) Five Signals (*wǔ huī* 五徽(徽)): *Tian xia zhi dao tan* slip 55; Proofs of the Five Desires (*wǔ yù zhī zhēng* 五欲之徵): *He yin yang* slip 108; Five Proofs (*wǔ zhēng* 五徵) and Five Desires (*wǔ yù* 五欲): *Yu fang bi jue* [14.a–b]; Indications of the Five Desires (*wǔ yù zhī hòu* 五慾之候): *Su nü miao lun* 4: fol. 127/135.

In summary, the two early Han Mawangdui bamboo manuscripts, which were entombed in the early 2nd century BCE, both contain similar MODULES, but these do not follow each other in sequence, and are not grouped together to form a larger SENSE UNIT that would describe the concept of satisfaction.

To the contrary, the Five Signals or the Proofs of the Five Desires also do not describe the full sexual response of the woman as we see it in the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*, but they talk about her reactions to stimulation before any penetration takes place, during what is nowadays called the fore-play. And instead of ten they talk of only Eight Stimulations.

The 16th-century CE *Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Woman* again does not arrange the MODULES to form a continuous discussion; instead the Indications of the Five Desires and of the Ten Stimulations are contrasted with the Indications of the Five Damages, which result if her partner stimulates the woman unfittingly. The language for pleasure has also slightly changed, as this text speaks now of the ‘fulfilling of her imaginations’ and of the ‘satisfying of her desires’ (*yì mǎn yù zú* 意滿慾足).

It seems necessary to compare diachronically the textual structure because of two main reasons. First, this produces evidence for the transport of certain content matter throughout the ages, thereby testifying if a certain practice was at all transmitted, and what concrete form this might have taken. Otherwise we might be left with isolated quotes only. Secondly, it shows how textual MODULES were re-worked, re-used and re-written in the transmission process of certain techniques, and to what extent this had consequences for the development of new contents.

In our example of ‘satisfaction’, the framing of three MODULES to form a discussion of female satisfaction seems to be a new feature. The better we understand the re-shaping of contents, the more we begin to have material for a historical treatment of ‘nourishing life’ practices.

9.2 *A concise close reading of quotes* [14.a–c]

Let us look module by module at the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber* quotations [14.a–c]; the Five Proofs read:

[14.a] The Yellow Emperor asks: Whereby do I recognise the satisfaction (*jouis-sance*) of a woman (*nǚ zhī kuài*)? The Plain Woman says: There are the Five Proofs (*zhēng*), the Five Desires (*yù*) and also the Ten Stimulations (*dòng*). By observing their changes, you recognise their cause.

(B) Eight Stimulations (*bā dòng* 八動): *Tian xia zhi dao tan* slips 49, 52–56; *He yin yang* slips 120–124; Ten Stimulations (*shi dòng* 十動): *Yu fang bi jue* [14.c]; Indications of Ten Stimulations (*shi dòng zhī hòu* 十動之候): *Su nü miao lun* 4: fol. 128–129/136–137.

Now the signs of the Five Proofs: The first is, as the face reddens, leisurely let it [the penis] join her. The second is, as her nipples harden and the nose sweats, leisurely let it penetrate. The third is, as her throat dries and the pharynx salivates, leisurely flap it to-and-fro. The fourth is, as her hidden parts (*yīn*) become slippery, leisurely let it go deeper. The fifth is, as her saps run to the buttocks, leisurely withdraw it.

Nothing is said about anyone's pleasure, but we learn something about the dynamics of the encounter: the male observer is reacting with five different ways of penetration, leisurely and slowly applied, to the female sexual signs. The emission of fluids is prohibited for the man, but female ejaculation is seen as a sign of completion in one round of stimulation.

The Five Desires MODULE elaborates on the dynamics between woman and man:

[14.b] The Plain Woman says: It is by the Five Desires you know her response. The first is, as the desire of her imagination is winning over, she holds the breath and the [inner] flow of air (*bǐng xī bǐng qì*). The second is, as the desire of her hidden parts (*yīn*) is winning over, the nose and mouth doubly open. The third is, when the desire of her essence is agitated, she trembles, swings and embraces the man. The fourth is, when the desire of her heart is fulfilled, sweat flows and wets cloth and underwear. The fifth is, when at the utmost of her satisfaction and desire, the body straightens and the eyes close.

The female signs are decoded for the benefit of the man, who prepares to react in a controlled manner to each of her specific 'answers' or 'responses' (*yīng 應*). These outwardly displayed, visible signs and body movements can be interpreted by him as manifestations of five kinds of desires, coming from inside.

These desires are moving around inside her body and build up in several steps the 'female pleasures' (*nǚ kuài 女快*). Gasping for breath, opening of upper body orifices, agitation of the essential fluids, and profound sweating culminate in a release of body tension and turn her awareness to the inner world when she is closing her eyes. The structural feature of the list contributes to the impression, that the process of carefully building up pleasure is what the man should take care of, and certainly is advised not to focus merely on the result of a final climactic point, or orgasm. Quite ironically, the 20th-century fetish 'orgasm' was inserted in the discussed texts as several translators used it to render *kuài* 快, thereby inadvertently reducing the 'female pleasures' to some defining concluding moment.

The third MODULE Ten Stimulations elaborates on the dynamics and the interaction necessary during a sexual encounter:

[14.c] The Plain Woman says: The effects of the Ten Stimulations: The first is, when she embraces the [male] person with both hands, it [the situation] demands the body parts pressing and the hidden parts nestling against each other. The

second is, when she spreads both her thighs, rub hard (*qiè mó*) against the upper parts [of the vagina]. The third is, when she tautens the belly, it demands flatness [of penetration]. The fourth is, when her buttocks are moving, satisfaction is superb. The fifth is, when she lifts both her feet to clutch the partner, it demands depth [of penetration]. The sixth is, when she crosses both her thighs, an inner itching makes her lusting and lewd. The seventh is, when she throws herself to the side, it demands deep rubbing to the left and right [sides of the vagina]. The eighth is, when she lifts her body towards the partner her lewd pleasure is extreme. The ninth is, when she stretches the body and relaxes, extremities (*zhi*) and body parts (*ti*) are satisfied. The tenth is, when the saps of the hidden parts (*yīn yè*) become slippery, her essence (*jīng*) has already been emitted [i.e. she has ejaculated]. As you see the effects you thereby recognise the satisfaction of the woman.

Ten times, female pleasure is taken care of by way of the variation of the style of penetration. The male observer interprets her bodily signs directly as demands for an appropriate counter-measure; such action is seen as contributing to the enhancement of her satisfaction. Please note that variation of penile thrusting is a controlled action, whereas the female sexual response is presented as occurring spontaneously and as an effect of prolonged stimulation.

The man is required to abstain from ejaculation and to avoid strong noisy breathing during the sexual act. But in the *Secret Decisions*' quotation [17.a] even the female interlocutor of Ancestor Peng, himself the specialist for sexual questions and longevity, is asking the question everyman would ask: 'But where is the pleasure for men in all this?'

The Selected Woman says: To have sexual intercourse with the ejaculation of the essence passes for pleasure. Now if one locks the essence and does not ejaculate, whereby does pleasure arise?

Ancestor Peng answers: If the essence is emitted, the trunk and the body parts become sluggish and limp, the ears are bitterly buzzing, the eyes can hardly be kept open, the throat is drying out, and bones and articulations loosen and decay. Even though there is occasionally a short-time satisfaction, in the end it is not pleasurable.

The overall assessment is negative, to ejaculate is merely a 'short-time satisfaction' (*zàn kuài* 暫快) for the man, and he derives not much 'pleasure' from it. Ancestor Peng consequently advises to avoid ejaculation, when he continues with this:

If one only stimulates and does not ejaculate, the force of the *qi* has a surplus, trunk and body parts are capable to be at ease, ears and eyes are sharp and bright. Even though he restrains and calms himself, imagination and care are emphasised

even more. It is constantly as if it were not enough, how can this not be pleasurable?¹⁵

10. Female and male satisfaction separate ways

Table 4 summarises in tabular form (a) on the left two columns the differences in the conception of female satisfaction and the male intermediate state of bliss, and compares (b) in the right two columns the advice against too much laughter (to be found in ‘nourishing life’ techniques) and euphoric states in certain meditative states:

- Clearly, the pleasures of man and woman are gender-specifically construed.
- Restraining himself helps the man to stay in an intermediate state of continued want and prolonged sensation of desiring more. The emission of fluids would constitute a loss of life force, and an immediate termination of such pleasurable sensations to him.
- To aim at this intermediate state of bliss marks a clear contrast to the convulsions seen in female pleasure, which also builds up continuously, but ends with the emission of fluids like sweat or the female essence.
- It is the woman who reacts in a muscular way with jerks and carpopedal spasms, and who by the force of her inner desires acts out. She builds up more and more tension, only to be released in multiple ejaculations, in a series of encounters which stimulate her time and again, and which prolong the overall session time considerably.
- The modularly fanned-out view of a tumultuous sexual encounter does not focus singularly on the climax and a terminal point; to the contrary, it follows specified bodily signs through several plateaus of arousal. Pleasure is savoured throughout the experience.
- The male observer takes up her bodily signs in order to respond in an adequate and overall rather controlled manner. Together with his intermediate state of bliss comes an euphoric state that leads to the feeling of bodily lightness, and an overall sense of wellness and strength, to a glossy skin and sensory acuteness. It culminates in being flooded by a bright inner light, during what seems to be a rather relaxed state of mind.

¹⁵ *Yu fang bi yue* quotation [17.a] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.18, p. 22a/587. 采女曰:交接以寫精為樂,今閉精而不寫,將何以為樂乎。彭祖答曰:夫精出身體怠倦,耳苦嘈",目苦欲眠,喉咽乾枯,骨節解墮。雖復暫快終於不樂也。若乃動不寫,氣力有餘,身體能便,耳目聰明。雖自抑靜,意愛更重。恒若不足,何以不樂耶。(Also translated in Wile 1992, p. 91.)

Table 4. Comparison of satisfaction with avoidances and meditation

	♀ female satisfaction	♂ male intermediate state of bliss	– advice against too much laughter	+ euphoria in certain meditative techniques
orientation	outward	inward	outward	inward
body	involuntary muscular movements carpopedal spasms irregular breathing	voluntary movements regular breath	involuntary muscular movements shaking of organs	voluntary movements or resting position
sound	vocalisation	silence	vocalisation	silence
first-person experiences	(Five Proofs) (Five Desires) (Ten Stimulations)	<i>qi</i> has surplus: ⇒ body at ease ⇒ sharp senses ⇒ spirits illuminated	raising <i>qi</i> : ⇒ panting ⇒ belching	optimal <i>qi</i> : ⇒ phosphenes, white inner light, glow ⇒ spirits illuminated ⇒ spirits wind
	emission of fluids	all-body lightness	fullness	all-body lightness
response	building up of arousal ejaculation uncontrolled (observed)	pleasurable continued want controlled interaction observer	involuntary to compulsive uncontrolled	induced by technique(s) controlled
third-person judgement	<i>jouissance</i> (desired state)	pleasure desired state	illness symptom state to avoid	wellness, en-hanced vitality desired state
transfer	nourishing	nourished		

- Furthermore, the man's zealousness is aroused by nourishment fantasies. As a result of prolonged penetration and stimulation of the woman, the texts promise him to receive one-sidedly a nourishment of his life force by a postulated transfer of her precious fluid.
- This is psychodynamically remarkable as it helps him—like a bait—to keep up with the required restraint. I mischievously assume that to the male mind it is a much more interesting incentive to try to steal her *qi* or her seminal 'essence' (*jīng* 精) by making good use of all the variation, care and skilled action the texts do provide, than to engage in a simple plot of 'harmony of Yīn and Yáng', which theoretically could be thought to be mutually benefitting, but actually is likely to result in a quite tensionless event. It is not by chance that the sexual encounter is called a 'flowery battle' (*huá zhàn* 華戰), which seems to imply some suspense. There must be a strong motor to curb a man's quick nature.¹⁶

Others have taken this much more literally, and regarded the 'plucking battle' (*cǎi zhàn* 採戰) as a kind of 'sexual vampirism'. Even though *Nourishing Yin* is the one and only rubric in the *Secret Decisions* where the direction of the nourishing transport is changed and said to flow towards the woman, some saw therein 'the power of yin'.¹⁷ However, I remain suspicious of such qualifications as long as we find recipes to help the man to bolster his essence (seminal strength), whereas the woman seems nowhere in explicit need of a similar supplementation for sexual purposes, and certainly not in the *Secret Decisions*.¹⁸

¹⁶ On female ejaculation and essence, see Pfister 2013.

¹⁷ See *Yu fang bi jue* quotations [11.a–d] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.3, pp. 7a–8a/581. Translations: Van Gulik [1951] 2004, pp. 69–70; Van Gulik [1961] 2003, pp. 158–9; Ishihara and Levy 1969, p. 27; Needham 1983, pp. 194–5; Hsia *et al.* 1986, p. 160; Despeux 1990, p. 39; Wile 1992, pp. 102–3; Despeux and Kohn 2003, p. 39 (partial); Goldin 2006, pp. 286–7 (partial).

Despeux and Kohn 2003, pp. 39–40, comment on the third rubric *Nourishing Yin* (see Table 2) as follows: 'Here the Queen Mother not only embraces her female sexuality, giving encouragement to all women who follow her, but even uses it in an aggressive, exploitative way to enhance her inner essences and thus increase her potential for health, beauty, and vitality (Furth 1994, 134). She dedicates herself selfishly to the attainment of pleasure and power, using enchantment to realize her sexuality and giving free reign to what mainstream society would consider shameful and dangerous. In this version of Xiwang mu's hagiography, sexuality is praised and intercourse with multiple partners is encouraged—preferably with real and living men, not imaginary couplings with ghosts and specters. This creates a scenario highly liberating for women, showing them that their sexuality and their inborn power of yin can be enjoyed for the sake of personal transformation and does not need to be harnessed and contained for reproduction or for the benefit of men.'

¹⁸ See the 'Recipes to Treat Exhaustion and Scant Essence (Seminal Fluids)' in *Ishinpō, juàn* 13.6, p. 14a/273; these are discussed together with earlier materials in Pfister 2013.

Quite strikingly, female potency is staged as a near endlessly flowing source of life, whereas male potency is of a more delicate nature: it is he who is frail and endangered by the emission of fluids through the body openings. Many a treatment strategy attempts just to avoid such undesired loss, or to supplement it. For the man, this constitutes certainly a serious problem.¹⁹

For women, we do not find a likewise elaborated discussion about methods to supplement such quite dangerous fluid losses, provoked by the series of prolonged sexual sessions. Care is expressed only casually in a discussion that favours the frequent exchange of women. As a singular female partner might get exhausted, or her lust might wither, ultimately she would emaciate; therefore, a sexual encounter would not be a ‘great profit’ (*dà yì* 大益) for the man.²⁰ One assumes that her losing weight is caused by the loss of female essence, considered to be a fatty substance.²¹

Why should one speak of ‘sexual vampirism’, even though the topic is largely neglected by our technical texts? Is this silence not precisely what reveals the outright imaginary character of the nourishing transfer? Texts on sexual body techniques are thus being silent, where literary, fictional texts fill in the blank space with the figure of dangerous fox ghosts that seduce men in human female appearance.²²

Attempts at spiritual illumination, imaginary flights into otherworlds during euphoric states, and a vigorous performance during the sexual encounter depict aspects of an assumed omnipotence of men that is in denial. Apparently, that male sense of potency constitutes a phantasmatic reversal of the common weaknesses affecting middle-aged and elderly men that are addressed by the many remedies that bolster virility.²³

The phantasmatic traits appear to be organised in a figure-ground relationship:

Whereas the tremendous female potency that underlies the sexual techniques is relegated to the background and scarcely mentioned, the woman is made to act as a kind of ‘nourishing mother’, feeding the man copiously.

¹⁹ On this ‘blocking complex’ and its implications, traceable throughout imperial times, see Pfister 2013.

²⁰ On the frequent exchange of female partners, see quotations [10.d–e] in *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.2, p. 6b/581.

²¹ For a discussion of female (seminal) essence (*nǚ jīng* 女精), and description of its consistency in *Uniting Yin and Yang*, see Pfister 2013.

²² On the fox woman, see Mondschein 1988 and Hammond 1996; more generally on fox lore, see Kang 2006.

²³ For examples, see *Ishinpō, juàn* 28.26 ‘Use of herbs and minerals’ and Harper 2005; on the ‘white diet’ used for the enhancement of sexual potency, see Pfister 2013.

The possibly overwhelming character of the female sexual response is toned down—even though by the extensive and detailed description it receives its fascination is betrayed, and the power aspect of their relation dimmed.

Thereby is the ground prepared, on which, in contrast, the envisioned nourishing transfer (that is sometimes elaborated into the picture of grafting) occupies the foreground, serving as the figure.²⁴

Aiming at the transfer is staged as convenient bait for the man's awareness. It absorbs him in a favourable way during her exaltation, focuses his attention inwardly, and it provides a reason to slow down movements and to act with circumspection, all necessary to receive the fluids that are said to nourish his life.

The one who accepts a gift of food is in the role of the guest. Therefore, by accepting the nourishing fluids of the hostess the man finds himself in the role of the guest, and that equals being dominated.²⁵ The implied inversion of social roles during the sexual encounter—in the inner quarters of the women—is usually well veiled by the texts, not the least by the great promises they purport to hold for the man.

11. Avoid too much laughter, seek euphoric states

The two columns on the right of Table 4 indicate two further subjects of self-formation presenting certain structural similarities with either the male or the female pleasure models.

- Column 3: 'Nourishing life' texts advise to reduce affective behaviour by self-regulation in daily life, and accordingly name the Twelve Lessenings (*shí èr shǎo* 十二少). Among these, less laughing and less pleasure are encouraged in order to achieve the fine-tuning of a male adept's emotional states during waking time.
- Column 4 lists how the subject of pleasure and euphoria is treated in certain texts on meditation.

The *Records on Nourishing the Life Dispositions and Prolonging the Life Mandate* (*Yang xing yan ming lu* 養性延命錄) cite the full statement on the Twelve Lessenings:

²⁴ On the conceptualisation of the nourishing process as a kind of grafting, see Pfister 2013.

²⁵ See Boileau 2006, who describes the interplay of reward and humiliation in early China. The language of food metaphors for aspects of the sexual techniques is further analysed in Pfister 2013.

The *Xiao you jing*²⁶ says: Less thinking, less brooding, less desiring, less doing, less speaking, less laughing, less worrying, less entertaining, less enjoying, less enraging, less liking, less loathing—these are the Twelve Lessenings (*shí èr shǎo*), that is to say the capital deed of nourishing life.

Too much thinking—the spirits are endangered. Too much brooding—the intentions disperse. Too much desiring—there is diminishing knowledge. Too much doing—the body form is spent. Too much speaking—the flow events [within the body] are contradictory. Too much laughing—the granaries [i.e. the (five) viscera] are damaged. Too much worrying—the heart is frightened. Too much entertaining—the imagination overflows. Too much enjoying—one is forgetful, mistaken, deluded and chaotic. Too much enraging—the hundred vessels [of the body] are unsettled/unstable. Too much liking—one is absorbed, fascinated and disordered. Too much loathing—one withers, is sorrowful and without pleasure. If these twelve kinds of too much are not discarded, they become the base of loosing one's life. Whoever has nothing [to lessen or nothing] too much is almost a true [or perfected] man (*zhēn rén*).²⁷

My article 'Attitudes Towards Laughter and Euphoria In Medieval Chinese Daoist Texts' looks at the reasons why we find an advice against too much laughter in medieval 'nourishing life' texts.²⁸ Therein laughter is seen as a rising

²⁶ The title *Xiao you jing* 小有經 is said to be a contraction of *Xiao you san huang wen* 小有三皇文 (*The Script of the Three Sovereigns from the Xiao-you [Cavern-Heaven]*), a text proscribed in 646 CE and long lost thereafter (see Chen Guofu [1963] 1985, p. 73; Schipper and Verellen (eds) 2004, pp. 266–9, 501–508; Pregadio (ed.) 2008, pp. 836–9, entry by Yamada Toshiaki). However, the title's words were—based on the content of the present excerpt—also interpreted to denote moderation, and translated as 'Classic on Possessing Less' (Hsia *et al.* 1986, p. 141), 'Klassiker der Beschränkungen' (Stein 1999, p. 110), or 'Guideline on Less Belongings' (present author). Several scholars gave the title as 'Scripture of Lesser Existence' (Engelhardt, Kohn, see footnote 27), thereby implying a Buddhist overlay, where *yǒu* 有 ('existence') is the Chinese translation of Sanskrit *bhāva*. Finally, if *xiǎo yǒu* 小有 indeed refers to the first of the Ten Cavern-Heavens, lying underneath Mount Wangwu (on which see Bokenkamp 1999, pp. 343–4), it is rendered sometimes as 'Lesser Possessions', in contrast to its counterpart *dà yǒu* 大有 ('Vast Possessions') (see Miller 2008, p. 137). In sum, the title might even be understood in a layered way—as 'Scripture from the [Cavern-Heaven] Lesser Possessions' or 'Scripture on Less [mental and material] Possessions'.

²⁷ *Yang xing yan ming lu, juàn shàng*.1: 5b–6a. 小有經曰:少思少念少欲少事少語少笑少愁少樂少喜少怒少好少惡,此十二少,養生之都契也。多思則神殆,多念則志散,多欲則損志(→智),多事則形疲,多語則氣爭,多笑則傷藏,多愁則心懾,多樂則意溢,多喜則忘錯昏亂,多怒則百脉不定,多好則專迷不治,多惡則憔悴無權。此十二多不除,喪生之本也。無多者,幾乎真人。

Translations: Engelhardt 1989, pp. 281–2 (partial); Kohn 1991, p. 113; Pfister 2012b, pp. 330–1 (see also pp. 333–4 the additional translated pericope of the same text, which follows after the above one; it contrasts the preferred lifestyles of different social groups and situates hermits and Men of the Dao as poor but healthy in an optional slot of the hierarchical society).

²⁸ Pfister 2012b. The article contains an appendix with the collated comparative source texts. This demonstrates that the Twelve Lessenings were transmitted widely over several centuries. A derivative and modified version of the Twelve Lessenings passage is translated in Kohn 2010, p. 7, but note 3 (p. 8) erroneously confuses the two versions.

flow event similar to belching and panting, leading to unduly shaken inner organs by the involuntary muscular movements.²⁹ In this regard, it can be easily compared to the muscular aspects of female satisfaction (see Table 4).

- Laughter is expressive, directed outwardly, to others, whereas meditation and its states are inwardly experienced. Likewise the man's intermediate state of bliss during a sexual encounter is a striving for inner experience.
- Laughter, belching, ejaculation are involuntary, muscular movements. The male uses controlled movement during the sexual encounter, or resting positions during meditation. The woman does not control or restrain herself, but acts out; her involuntary movements and carpedal spasms are observable signs to be interpreted by her partner.
- Ejection of air is treated on the same level as male ejaculation and as something to avoid. Female ejaculation forms an explicit part of her sexual response, and rated as profitable to the male partner.
- Laughter is loud, sounds are produced, the regular breathing pattern is changed. The man is advised not to emit sounds or speak during the sexual encounter, or to remain silent during meditation. Again, the woman's Five Sounds (throaty and wheezy breathing, continued wailing, calling out *hmaj hmaj*, grinding teeth, as described in the *Discussion of the Utmost Method under the Sky*) are taken as signs by the man to tell him how to react with adequate ways of penile thrusting.
- Fullness in the belly, raising flow events—localised as mounting from the belly and rising to the heart region—accompany laughter. Meditative states are felt as lightness, luminosity, calm, euphoric all over the body. Single-person meditation techniques directed at male adepts likewise favour inwardly directed, motionless procedures, which may lead to inner light experiences.³⁰ For a man, the sexual encounter ideally leads to a body at ease, subjectively felt as light, and to keener senses. Ultimately, this experience is experienced as a showering in bright light, or 'spiritual illumination' (*shén míng* 神明).³¹ The woman instead builds up a strong release: she moves through the Five Proofs, the Five Desires and the Ten Stimulations—in a word the full cycle of arousal and pleasurable experiences unto ejaculation.
- Laughter is involuntary, or even compulsive, whereas euphoric states are induced by special techniques, be these methods sexual or meditative.

²⁹ Laughter can also lead to a 'laughing disease' (*xiào jí* 笑疾), as Lee Jen-der 2004 brilliantly showed.

³⁰ Such are discussed in 'Phosphenes and Inner Light Experiences in Medieval Chinese Psychophysical Techniques. An Exploration' (Pfister 2012a).

³¹ On 'spiritual illumination', see Pfister 2006.

- Laughter is something to avoid, and sometimes an illness symptom, whereas euphoria is a desired state, conveying wellness and long life to the adept. The man fantasises himself as the one who is nourished by the female fluids, the recipient of life, whereas the woman plays the motherly role, overjoyed and giving without end.

Some overall tendencies can effortlessly be contrasted. The avoidance of muscular strain and involuntary movements is accompanied by a preference for feelings of well-being (euphoria). Discharge both of bodily fluids and uncontrolled emotion, or soundings of inner upheaval (be it laughter or panting) are discouraged in order to induce by clever techniques the inner processes thought to establish a calm mood, a feeling of lightness, and enhanced vitality.

12. Concluding remarks

Taking the early, small modular TEXT UNITS of the Mawangdui bamboo texts as their ready-made materials, redactors altered them in a double movement. Linguistic adaptations were made to the passages, and then the SENSE UNITS realigned in a new order. This brought about such an accentuated gender-specific treatment of the female sexual pleasures as it is found in the *Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*. But later hands separated them again, as seen in the *Wondrous Treatise of the Plain Women*. In this late text the reader once again has to combine the MODULES mentally to form conceptual groups.

The *Secret Decisions* mark a significant step in the transmission of the sexual techniques. Using three reworked MODULES of earlier writings and newly arranging them in succession, the text subsumes and highlights under the TECHNICAL TERM *kuài* 快 the novel conceptual aspect of female ‘satisfaction’. It makes readable and recognisable for the male participant observer that on the female side satisfying and pleasurable experiences may be ongoing in all the phases of the sexual encounter.

To achieve this continuous discussion it was only necessary to add an introductory passage in question-and-answer style—a LINKING TEXT—in front of the Five Proofs MODULE [14.a]. It contains the three MODULE TITLES (Five Proofs, Five Desires, Ten Stimulations), together with the unifying term ‘satisfaction of a woman’, and to round it off with an additional final sentence at the end of the Ten Stimulations MODULE [14.c].

Tamba no Yasuori then splits again this unified view in the *Ishinpō*, but his three rubric titles simply coincide with the TECHNICAL TERMS of the earlier MODULES. As he did not remove the introductory and final sentences, the earlier state of affairs is still transparent today.

The gender-specifically outlined general programme of the discussed texts promises a considerable and probably necessary level of arousal, excitement and sensual tension between man and woman during a sexual encounter.³² The texts display a psychodynamic scenario that stages the woman in full potency, as emitting fluids and ejaculating, as experiencing uncontrolled muscular spasms and having much fun all along the way. It advises at the same time the man to avoid ejaculation. He is occupied by controlled counter-measures and focused on her bodily signs, attempting to gain time as he strives to keep an intermediate state of bliss, and eventually to experience illumination. The early texts on sexual body techniques are explicit in their gendering of sexual pleasures: *yīn* (the hidden) and *yáng* (the manifest) find and follow each their own gender-specific expressions that in turn react on each other.

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³² The reworking towards a more symmetric scenario, which includes an explicitly balanced treatment of male and female 'benefits', occurred in a further step of theoretical development. An early formulation can be found in the pre-fifth-century hagiographic text *Qing Ling zhen ren Pei jun zhuan* 清靈真人裴君傳 (*Biography of Lord Pei, the Realised Person of Pure Refinement*), see Pfister 2013; Raz 2012, pp. 185–6. However, this separate scenario clearly reveals its dependency of the earlier one (as discussed in this paper), and there remain theoretical inconsistencies. It lays the emphasis on the regulation of inner streams of *qi* that are postulated for each of the partners differently. As it was likewise not oriented towards reproduction, it incurred critical assessments from within Daoist religious communities.

Yu fang bi jue 玉房秘訣 (*Secret Decisions in the Jade Chamber*), Six Dynasties (?), only extant in 28 quotations in *Ishinpō*, juàn 7, 13, 21, 24, 28.

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Errata

p. 40, 62	Yasuori	write	Yasuyori
p. 44 n. 10	能不慎哉	"	可不慎哉
p. 45 n. 11	填滿髓(髓)草腦(腦)	"	填滿髓(髓)腦(腦)