

Activating Twenty-four: Time, Space, and Body

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Abstract

Numbers structure reality and define the way people live. Both in Daoism and in Daesoon Jinrihoe they signify key concepts, notably the cardinal numbers from one through nine that classify different dimensions of the cosmos. Beyond these, the number twenty-four plays an important role. In a temporal mode, it marks the divisions or seasonal periods of the year. Consisting of fifteen days each, these periods signal (and are named after) changes in dominant weather patterns and the position of the sun. Generally activated in the body through particular seasonal activities and dietary prescriptions, in Daoism they are also the root of a series of healing exercises and certain refinement practices of internal alchemy. In Daesoon Jinrihoe, moreover, they are activated by chanting a specific incantation that invokes the twenty-four divine rulers of the divisions, originally a group of Tang Dynasty officials that in nature and function resemble the spirit generals of the early Celestial Masters. Beyond this, the number twenty-four also applies to space. Not unlike the twenty-eight lunar stations or mansions, traditional cosmology acknowledges twenty-four directions, made up of six constellations each in the four cardinal directions, complete with starry deities and divine generals. Their powers are activated with the help of written characters rather than vocal incantations, using techniques common both in Daoism and Daesoon Jinrihoe.

Keywords: Numbers, Daoism, Twenty-Four, Time, Space, Daesoon Jinrihoe

Introduction

Numbers in many ways organize and structure reality, determining the way people conceive of and manage their world. Thus, in our daily lives today, we get up and work at certain hours as defined by a count of numbers, we find locations by the number of the highway or subway line and their various exits equally marked by numbers, we gather information from books and newspapers numbered in chapters or sections and pages, we measure wealth by assigning numbers to money or assets, we judge the value of something according to its numbered worth or price, we eat foods determined according to a certain number of calories, we classify our health status based on numbers such as heart rate, blood pressure, platelet count, and so on. It is not just that reality is classified and arranged in numerical structures, but we also live in the shadow of these structures, so that any adjustment made to them has a major impact on the way we conduct and conceive of ourselves.

In the light of the pervasive importance of numbers and closely inheriting the traditional Chinese and Daoist preoccupation with the numerically definable rhythms of the celestial bodies (Hsieh 2020, 271), it is no accident that Kang Jeungsan (姜甌山, 1871–1909), commonly known as Sangje, the incarnated Supreme God of the Universe, placed great importance on setting or recalibrating the Degree Numbers (度數, *dosu*) of various cosmic and social entities (*Acts* 3: 53)¹ as part of his Great Reordering works, focusing most importantly on that of the Former World to open the destined pathway to limitless divine immortality in the Later World and establish a paradise (*Reordering Works* 1: 2; Hsieh 2020, 269). Based on traditional Chinese cosmology as expressed in the *Yijing* (易經, Book of Changes), recorded variously in dynastic histories, and activated in medieval Daoist visions of cosmic revolutions (DIRC 2020, 272-73), this involves improving the way reality functions, but in some cases, it also means predicting calamities or other future events on the basis of numbers (*Acts* 3: 54). As he said himself, “Whatever I do, even if it’s just a small joke, all of it is related to Degree Numbers and spreads to heaven and earth” (*Acts* 4: 15).

Numbers in Daoism

Daoists, too, have placed great importance on numbers in their history. According to them, the universe proceeds in an orderly fashion, definable through numbers and measurable by count (Bodde 1991, 136). The various beings and entities of the world are classified into distinct categories with the help of numbers—which, as Nathan Sivin notes, are not used “as measures but as a means of ranking phenomena into a qualitative order” (1976, 521). Expressing particular qualities of things, they allow an overall patterning of existence and, through changes in assigned meanings, present possible

models of dynamic unfolding (Robinet 2011, 46-47). “The arithmetic manipulation of numbers was intended to account for the structure of situations and their changes, and thus to make the world understandable” (2011, 48).

The basic understanding in this cosmic context is that one represents primordial unity, the chaos at the brink of creation, underlying all existence, while two signifies yin and yang, the sun and the moon, gold and jade—the core pair of creative energies in the world that brings forth the myriad beings in all their permutations (2011, 48; 1989, 313).

Next, all odd numbers are yang in quality, while even numbers are yin. Thus, closely echoing the *Xici* (繫辭, Appended Judgments; trl. Wilhelm 1950; Sung 1971), an *Yijing* supplement in two parts that makes up the fifth and sixth of the Ten Wings (1.9). The twelfth century manual of internal alchemy known as the *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* (鍾呂傳道集, Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli to Lü; DZ 263, chs. 14-16)², says, “Heaven is one, earth is two, heaven is three, earth is four, heaven is five, earth is six, heaven is seven, earth is eight, heaven is nine, earth is ten” (ch. 13; Kohn 2020a, 41).

From two, as already pointed out in the ancient classic *Daode jing* (道德經, Book of Dao and Its Virtue, ch. 41), the universe evolves into three. Three marks the three central powers heaven, earth, and humanity, represented in the human body as the three elixir fields, in turn inhabited by central deities of the universe, the so-called Three Ones (Andersen 1980). The number four connects to space, setting the four directions (四方, *sifang*), while the number five links to time, signaling the five phases or movements (五行, *wuxing*) of yin and yang as they continue to rise and fall in close interaction. From here, six relates to the pitch pipes, sound markers that define and classify the flow of cosmic and vital energy (氣, *qi*), while seven is the number of the planets and also of the stars of the Northern Dipper, the central constellation of the Daoist universe in charge of destiny and cosmic evolution (Robinet 2011).

Eight is the most important number in the *Yijing*, according to which the two forces yin and yang, symbolized by twofold and single lines, evolve into the so-called four images or emblems (四象, *sixiang*), which in turn produce the eight trigrams (八卦, *bagua*) by combining the lines into sets of three (Wilhelm 1950, 319; Sung 1971, 299). They in turn symbolize various features of the world and appear in two major schemes, one showing the world in its pre-creation state, the other in post-creation (Hsieh 2020, 275).

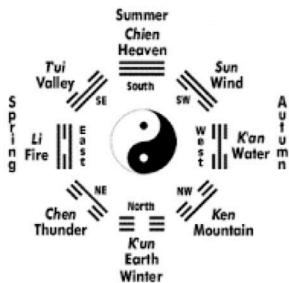


Figure 1. The Pre-creation Trigrams

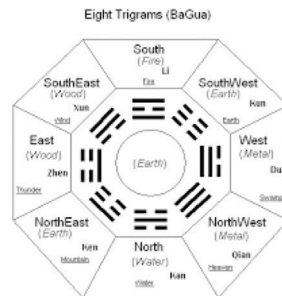


Figure 2. The Post-creation Trigrams

The trigrams, then, stand for the core powers of heaven and earth, water and fire, mountain and lake, thunder and wind, together representing key features of reality. Daoists use them variously to designate directions, alchemical substances, and internal energies as well as to symbolize major aspects of life, and apply them in philosophical speculation, divination, fengshui, and internal alchemy. In addition, the eight trigrams are combined into sixty-four hexagrams, representing major events and states of life and thus forming the backbone of the ancient system of divination.

Nine, finally, is three squared and thus represents a high potency of yang. It first appears in the understanding of the world as consisting of a square earth covered by the round dome of heaven, which gives it the overall shape of a turtle. The earth, moreover, was seen to consist of nine concentric squares, with China in the center (Middle Kingdom), friends and allies in the cardinal directions, and the so-called barbarians on the periphery. The country itself was further divided into nine provinces, the capital city was laid out to have nine major wards, and the palace contained a ritual space to show the world in miniature (see Allan 1991; Wheatley 1971). When Yu the Great, the mythical founder of the Xia dynasty—today tentatively associated with a chalcolithic site at Erlitou in Henan (1900-1600 BCE)—tamed the flood, he moved back and forth through the nine provinces, establishing order and claiming power over the country.

Daoists activate it in numerous different ways in ritual and cosmology. For example, the Daoist's staff, a sign of sacrality and authority, is made from bamboo and has nine knots, named after planets, lunar stations, and starry constellations. In the otherworld, Daoists occupy nine celestial ranks, and many dignitaries wear robes of nine colors. Scriptures, rules, heavens, and more all come in multiples of nine, the numbers thirty-six and eighty-one appearing most often (Kohn 2020b, 34).

Within this overall context, the number twenty-four plays an important role as a structuring factor of time, space, and the human body, activated in cultivation and ritual. It marks a cross-road of many other important numbers, being divisible by two, three, four, six, eight, and twelve, and linked intimately to the three powers that mark the vertical structure of the universe and the eight trigrams that signify the key factors of the world.

The Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

The twenty-four seasonal divisions (節, *jie*, KR: *jeol*) form part of the traditional Chinese calendar. Like the Jewish, Persian, and Indian, it goes back to the Babylonian (Schafer 1977, 10) and is a combination of lunar and solar—unlike the Islamic (entirely lunar) and the Julian or Gregorian (purely solar). Determined by court astronomers, it marked the division and measurement of time at the core of smooth social functioning (Loewe 1995, 308), its main function being ritual rather than economical or agricultural. As Paul Wheatley says,

The Shang year count bears the impress of officialdom. It was not concerned with the needs of the farmer—who continued to regulate his activities by the onset of floods, the coming of the rains, the heliacal rising of a star, or some similar phenomenon—but rather was one of a set of accounting devices fashioned to facilitate the ritualistic and managerial functions of sacrally oriented elites. (1971, 385-86; Schafer 1977, 15)

This calendar, still actively used and available every year in the *Farmer's Almanac* (農曆, Nongli), is based on twelve lunar months of thirty days each in a solar year of 360 days, thus requiring the insertion of an intercalary month every few years (Loewe 1995, 318). It divided the year into four seasons, peaking at the solstices and equinoxes—in contrast to the Western system, where the latter mark the seasons' beginning—and added the eight trigrams by dividing each season. In addition, the annual structure was also applied to the months and days, as shown in table 1.:

Each season, moreover, spans three months or ninety days on the lunar level and comprises six seasonal divisions, also known as “nodes” or “*qi*-periods” of fifteen days each on the solar plane, marking the advance of the sun by fifteen degrees over the length of the elliptic course of the planet. Each division is further subdivided into three groups of five days, called a base-week (候, *hou*), counted by the names of the ten-day week first established in the Shang dynasty and today known as the heavenly stems (天干, *tiangan*).

Table 1. The Trigrams in Time

Year	Month	Day	Trigram
winter solstice	new moon	12 midnight	Kan/Water
spring beginning		3 / am	Gen/Mountain
spring equinox	first quarter	6 / am	Zhen/Thunder
summer beginning		9 / am	Xun/Wind
summer solstice	full moon	12 noon	Li/Fire
fall beginning		3 / pm	Kun/Earth
fall equinox	last quarter	6 / pm	Dui/Lake
winter beginning		9 / pm	Qian/Heaven

In total, the seasonal divisions come to twenty-four. As the Song Dynasty manual of internal alchemy *Lingbao bifa* (靈寶畢法, Conclusive Methods of Numinous Treasure, DZ 1191) says,

Each year begins at the division of the winter solstice. At this time, yang ascends from earth, and in the course of one seasonal *qi*-period or fifteen days, it reaches 7,000 miles. Three *qi*-periods make one segment or forty-five days, during which yang ascends 21,000 miles. Two segments make one season or ninety days, during which yang ascends 42,000 miles. Reaching the midpoint between heaven and earth, it touches the domain of yin. At this time, yang is halfway in the midst of yin. The weather [*qi*] changes to being warm: the time of the spring equinox has come. (Kohn 2020a, 193)

Defined by the continuous elliptic course of the sun, the seasonal divisions are marked by climatic conditions typical for each period (Loewe 1995, 312) and serve to chart the agricultural year. They are as shown in table 2.

Based on the changing weather patterns as relevant for the agricultural year, the twenty-four seasonal divisions provide structure for overall patterns and a framework that opens guidelines of behavior. Human beings not only match their work in the fields to these divisions but also arrange their daily lives in accordance, wearing appropriate clothes, eating the right kinds of food, and engaging in proper activities.

Table 2. The Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

No.	Seasonal Division	No.	Seasonal Division
1	Spring Beginnin 立春	2	Rain Fall 雨水
3	Insects Rousing 驚蟄	4	Spring Equinox 春分
5	Clear and Bright 清明	6	Nurturing Rain 穀雨
7	Summer Beginning 立夏	8	Minor Ripening 小滿
9	Seeds Sprouting 芒種	10	Summer Solstice 夏至
11	Minor Heat 小暑	12	Great Heat 大暑
13	Fall Beginning 立秋	14	Limit of Heat 處暑
15	White Dew 白露	16	Fall Equinox 秋分
17	Cold Dew 寒露	18	Frost Descending 霜降
19	Winter Beginning 立冬	20	Minor Snow 小雪
21	Great Snow 大雪	22	Winter Solstice 冬至
23	Minor Cold 小寒	24	Great Cold 大寒

Embodied Practice

Daoists consistently emphasize the need for moderation and adjustment. They follow instructions first documented in the ancient manuscript *Yinsbu* (引書, Pulling Book), discovered at Zhangjiashan and dated to 186 BCE (Kohn 2008; Lo 2014). It says,

Spring days. After rising in the morning, pass water, wash and rinse, clean and click the teeth. Loosen the hair, stroll to the lower end of the hall to meet the purest of dew and receive the essence of Heaven, and drink one cup of water. These are the means to increase long life. Enter the chamber [for sex] between evening and late midnight [1 am]. More would harm the *qi*.

Summer days. Wash the hair frequently, but bathe rarely. Do not rise late and eat many greens. After rising in the morning and passing water, wash and rinse the mouth, then clean the teeth. Loosen the hair, walk to the lower end of the hall and after a while drink a cup of water. Enter the chamber between evening and midnight. More would harm the *qi*.

Fall days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. As regards food and drink, let hunger or satiation be whatever the body desires. Enter the chamber however often the body finds it beneficial and comfortable—this is the way to greatest benefit.

Winter days. Bathe and wash the hair frequently. The hands should be cold and the feet warm; the face cold and the body warm. Rise from sleep late; while lying down, stretch out straight. Enter the chamber between evening and early midnight [11 pm]. More would harm the *qi*. (Harper 1998, 110-11)

The Tang physician and Daoist Sun Simiao (孫思邈, 581-682), moreover, specifies certain kinds of food to be eaten in accordance with the seasons. As outlined in his *Sbeyang lun* (攝養論, On Preserving and Nourishing [Life], DZ 841), during the two seasonal divisions of the first month one should be aware that the kidneys (associated with winter) may be prone to ailing and that the function of the lungs (the organ dominant in the fall) is still reduced. To help with these conditions, limit the intake of salty and sour foods and increase pungent flavors in the diet but still avoid fresh scallions which reduce body fluids and blood as well as fresh ginseng which creates fatigue. Also, do not eat the flesh of hibernating animals which will lessen your life energy or the meat of predators, such as foxes, which will agitate your spirit. Generally taking care to balance the diet will support the kidneys and tonify the lungs, calm and

balance the spleen and stomach.

Similarly, in midsummer, the liver and heart *qi* are lessening and the lungs are rising as the dominant organ. One should keep calm and at peace in all emotions, increase salty and reduce pungent flavors, thus nourishing the spleen and stomach—which are supported by the changing emphasis in diet in all seasons and not allotted a specific period, such as the Indian summer, to themselves. As in winter, one should balance one's temperature, avoiding heavy sweats without strongly resisting the heat and engaging in extreme cooling measures. One should not eat pork and avoid thinking evil thoughts. Again, certain days are best for personal hygiene, such as taking baths and cutting hair; others are ideal for devotions and fasting; yet others should not be used for travels or new adventures (Kohn 2008, 135; 2012, 124-25).

The most detailed Daoist instructions for the twenty-four seasonal divisions appear in a set of healing exercises associated with the early Song immortal Chen Tuan (陳搏, d. 989), a figure of some renown (Kohn 2001). They are recorded in the *Ersbisi zuogong daoyin zhibing tu'an* (二十四坐功導引治病圖案, Twenty-four Illustrated Seated Exercise Practices to Heal Diseases), contained in the *Neiwai gong tushuo jiyao* (內外功圖說輯要, Collected Essentials and Illustrated Descriptions of Inner and Outer Practices, *Daozang jinghua* 2.10: 133-81).³



Figure 3. The Seasonal Exercise for the Summer Solstice

The diseases they propose to heal tend to be associated with *qi*-blockages, including joint pains, digestive issues, and muscular weakness, but as they work on all the different parts of the body in the course of the year they provide well-rounded care. Their timing is in the early morning hours, around midnight or 1 am in the winter months (11th, 12th,

1st) and after sunrise or 5 am in the height of summer (4th, 5th). During the remainder of the year, it is best to perform them at the crack of dawn around 3 am. In each case, after the physical stretch or movement, adepts are to click their teeth and swallow the saliva, guiding it to the area activated. Each exercise is repeated five or seven times. The instructions in each case mention that one should alternate the practices to the right and left (R/L) and practice them on each side for the given number of repetitions (e.g., 15x). The practices are gentle and, with two exceptions, undertaken while sitting down. They should not take more than ten minutes or so to complete, helping people to keep their joints moving and their energies harmonious as the seasons march through their preset path (Kohn 2008, 69-70). They are as shown in table 3.

In addition to the seasonal exercises, texts of the late Ming also present simple moves and stretches for specific medical conditions. Associated with famous immortals of various ages and provenance, they specify briefly which symptoms they are good for, give a concise description of the practice, and illustrate it in a pertinent ink drawing. They also provide an herbal remedy, usually consisting of five to eight different ingredients (often including ginseng, angelica, China root fungus, and various animal and mineral substances) to supplement the regimen, and outline a more metaphorical and symbolic version of the practice—often replete with alchemical imagery—in a practice poem of four lines of seven characters each.

Table 3. Seated Healing Exercises for the Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions

No.	Division	Practice
1	Spring Beginning	Sit cross-legged, press both hands on R/L knee, turn neck R/L, 15x
2	Rain Fall	Press both hands on R/L thigh, turn neck and torso R/L, 15x
3	Insects Rousing	Make tight fists, lift arms to elbow level, turn neck R/L, 30x
4	Spring Equinox	Stretch arms forward, turn neck R/L, look over shoulders, 42x
5	Pure Brightness	Pull arms into shooting bow position R/L, 56x
6	Nurturing Rain	Lift arm up, palm out, place other arm across torso, turn shoulders, 35x
7	Summer Beginning	Sit cross-legged, interlace fingers, hug knee into chest R/L, 35x
8	Minor Ripening	Lift one arm up, palm out, press other arm on legs, press R/L, 35x
9	Seeds Sprouting	Stand up, lift both arms to ceiling, slight back bend, 35x
10	Summer Solstice	Sit with legs out, lift one leg, hold with both hands, stretch R/L, 35x
11	Minor Heat	Kneel on one leg, stretch other leg away, lean back, R/L, 15x
12	Great Heat	Sit cross-legged, lean forward over legs, push floor, turn neck R/L, 15x
13	Fall Beginning	Sit cross-legged, press both hands on floor, push body up, 56x
14	Limit of Heat	Lifting the chest, turn the head R/L, drum fists on back, 35x
15	White Dew	Press hands on respective knees, turn neck R/L, 15x
16	Fall Equinox	Interlace hands behind head, lean sideways R/L, 15x
17	Cold Dew	Lift arms overhead in V position, pressing upward, 35x
18	Frost Descending	Sit with legs out, hold both feet, stretch and lift, 35x
19	Winter Beginning	Sit cross-legged, stretch both arms to one side, turn head to the other, 15x
20	Minor Snow	Press one hand on knee, hold at elbow with other hand, R/L, 15x
21	Great Snow	Stand up, cross legs at knees, open arms to the side, press, 35x
22	Winter Equinox	Sit with legs straight, press arms on knees with vigor, R/L, 15x
23	Minor Cold	Sit cross-legged, push one arm up, looking at it, other arm on floor, 15x
24	Great Cold	Kneel on one leg, lean back, bend and straighten the other leg, R/L, 15x

Internal Alchemy

In a yet different mode, working with a reversal of, rather than an adaptation to, the natural cycles, Daoists use the twenty-four seasonal divisions as part of internal alchemy. Shown in the *Xiuzhen tu* (修真圖, Chart of the Cultivation of Perfection; Despeux 2019) as found on a stele of the late Qing (see Figure 4) along the vertebrae of the spine, they match its divisions (分, *fen*) and fill its three major sections, divided by passes or barriers (關, *guan*). As the *Lingbao bifa* says,

The bottom three vertebrae sit right opposite the kidneys. The top three are called the Heavenly Pillar, while the area above them [of the head] is known as the Jade Capital. Below the Heavenly Pillar and above the vertebrae opposite the kidneys, that is, above the Tail Gate, there are eighteen vertebrae. The central among them is called the Double Barrier: there are nine above and nine below it. (ch. 5; Kohn 2020a, 47)



Figure 4. The Xiuzhen tu

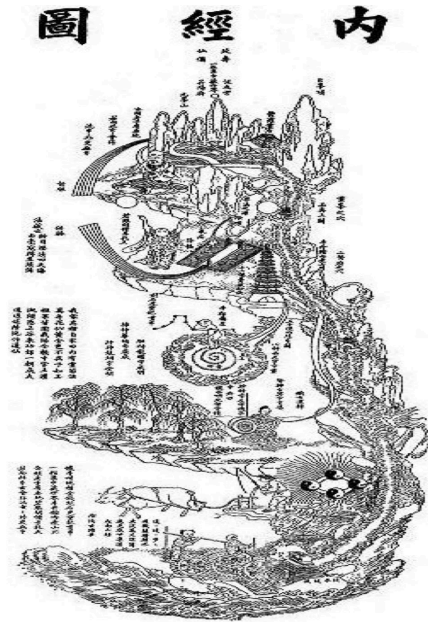


Figure 5. The Neijing tu

Thus, the spine, which is like a flowing river, contains not only three major barriers but also twenty-four nodes or knobs, matching the seasonal divisions of the year. The *Xiuzhen tu*, moreover, links this to the internal circulation of energy, as its inscription suggests, “Moving with the natural flow means ordinary life; going against it leads to sagehood.”

Textual sources supplement this with descriptions of the “small celestial circuit” or “microcosmic orbit” (小周天, *xiao zhoutian*), more comprehensively described as “yin and yang completing a full loop around the universe.” Practitioners inhale pure *qi* through the nose and guide it first into the abdomen to reach the lower elixir field, then sink it to the perineum and from there move it up along the spine and across the head to complete one circuit.

The *Neijing tu* (內經圖, Chart of Internal Passageways; Komjathy 2009), another major visual representation of internal alchemy (see Figure 5), shows a platform with radiantly blossoming trees beneath the heart where a lady is engaged in weaving. They symbolize perfect inner nature and primordial feeling that reside in the liver and the lungs.

The blossoming tree, a spring willow, indicates the new emergence of vegetation after a long winter, the new rise of yang energy, the fertility of clouds and rain, and the overall renewal of energy. At this time, the hexagrams Tun (屯, Difficulty at the Beginning) and Zhen (震, Arousing) come to the fore, signaling the new beginning of the annual and agricultural cycle. They lead up to the hexagram Wuwang (无妄, No Error), which matches the seasonal division Spring Beginning, when “yang is in harmony, insects arise, and all things are springing forth.” This is how things should be, when the energy of the annual cycle is in its proper mode—happy growth and new potency on the rise.

心神、肝神和肺神与节气、易卦的关系图

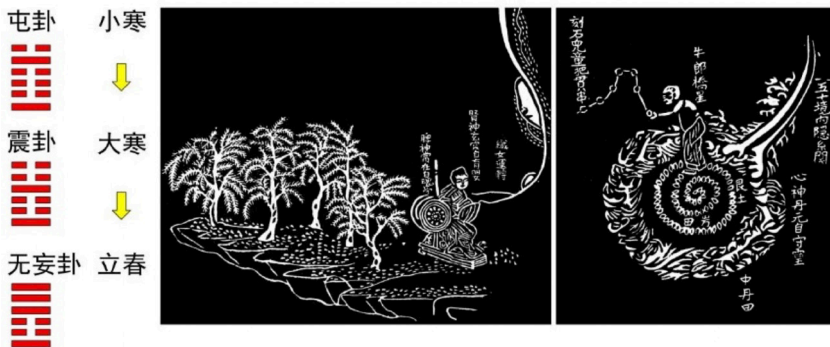


Figure 6. The representation of the liver and beginning of spring.

The lady engaged in weaving, on the other hand, symbolizes the core inner nature of an infant, its most primitive essence, activated during practice in extremely soft, long, and deep breathing, pure energy moving in and out of the body and rising through the body to the upper elixir field in the head, known as the Niwan Palace (泥丸宮). The weaving of the breath in the right manner and at the right time opens the infinite

sequence of time and space, and activates the meridians to prepare for the ultimate transformation of energy.

After Spring Beginning, the world sees an increasing balance of yin and yang, water and fire, as well as more agricultural activities, leading to the solar periods Rain Fall, Insects Rousing, and Spring Equinox. The *Neijing tu* depicts this with the images of an ox pulling a plow, two youngsters running a waterwheel for irrigation, and the reversal of the water flow (see Figure 7). These are not only images of spring planting activities, but they also match the hexagrams Jiji (既濟, After Completion), Feng (豐, Abundance), and Tongren (同人, Human Community).

In terms of internal cultivation, they indicate the reversal of essence, the transformation of kidney water toward heart fire, the increasing momentum of the microcosmic orbit. The ox plowing the land symbolizes the process of “emptying the heart and filling the belly” (*Dao de jing Ch.3*), of planting the seeds of new wealth, which involves specific abdominal breathing methods. The two youngsters running the waterwheel indicate the reversal of essence and its impending transformation into energy as well as the coordination of various forms of internal fire, marking the beginning of the process that continues along the same lines as the chart proceeds (Li 2020, 198-99).

内经图下丹田重要图像与节气、易卦的关系图



Figure 7. The various spring planting and irrigation activities in the *Neijing tu*.

Sangje’s Application

In close conjunction with the Daoist application of the twenty-four seasonal division, Sangje notes that they are crucial for farming and determine food, clothing, and activities throughout the year. He refers variously to their nature and qualities. For example, at one time, on the second of the three Dog Days (中伏, *zhongfu*, KR: jungbok), a time of extreme summer heat in the 6th month, he said, “If no thunder roars today, insects will damage crops.” When there was no sign of a thunderstorm, moreover, He accused heaven of damaging people's lives and took corrective measures.

He had a disciple bring a piece of dried straw. And He cut the straw to be as long as His ring finger, put it upright in a furnace, and burned it away. Suddenly, lightning flashed, only in the north. Again, Sangje shouted as if to scold Heaven: “Is it right if only people in the north should survive while those in other places die?” Then, in all directions, lightning and thunder started. (*Authority and Foreknowledge 2: 17*)

More generally, in accordance with the project of recalibrating the Degree Numbers, Sangje reordered twenty-four divisions in a new fashion. Matching the more advanced Daoist modality, he replaced their usual starting point at Spring Beginning with the Winter Solstice, the high point of yin and first rise of yang (DIRC 2020, 575). He also insists that it is essential for practitioners to know and follow the seasonal divisions closely: “Someone with good sense knows them. Not knowing them, acting in disregard of seasonal cycles is *cheol buji*” (*Reordering Works 3: 34*).

Rather than working with physical exercises or internal energy circulation, He brings the seasonal divisions into the human body with two different methods. One is the Seventy-twofold Art of Transformation, a detailed way of adapting to the seasonal changes in five-day increments that goes back to ancient fortune-teller Jiang Taigong (姜太公) and illuminates the transformations that occur in heaven and earth in the course of each year. Sangje applied it to set up the Fire Art of Transformation and establish appropriate Degree Numbers (*Prophetic Elucidations 20*). On one occasion, He made two chests

The larger one, which He named the “Creation Chest,” was placed in the Copper Valley (Donggok) Clinic. The smaller one, which He named the “Transformation Chest,” was left in Shin Gyeong-Su’s house after He used it as the chest of the Seventy-twofold Art of Transformation. (*Reordering Works 3: 10*)

The other way is through chanting an incantation that activates the seasonal divisions in the human body as it serves to adjust and maintain the yin-yang degrees of heaven and earth (*Reordering Works 2: 16*). It is recited along with many others commonly used that similarly reflect essential Daoist notions. They include the Incantations of Perfected Dharma, the Twenty-Eight Constellations (lunar stations), the Seven Stars (of the Northern Dipper), the Five Inner Organs, of Dispelling Demons, Unifying Essences, Grand Opening, Jade Pivot, and Great Ultimate, as well as the *Scripture of Yin and Yang* (*Progress of the Order 2: 42*). Their purpose in all cases is to enhance and maintain harmony in the universe, increase the smooth flow of life energy, and provide corrective impulses as and when needed.

In content, the Incantation of the Twenty-four Seasonal Divisions consists of the names of their divine leaders. In China recorded in Sima Guang's (司馬光, 1918-1086) *Zizhi tongjian* (資治通鑑, Comprehensive Mirror to Aid in Government; ch. 196; Hsieh 2020, 280, 289), it ends with the classical formula, "In accordance with the statutes and ordinances (急急如律令, *jiji ru liling*)", which has formed an essential part of Daoist ritual since the inception of communal religion in the second century CE (*Progress of the Order* 2: 42). The twenty-four divine leaders, moreover, go back to the early Tang dynasty, first listed in the *Xin Tangshu* (新唐書, New History of the Tang). They all played important roles in the establishment of the dynasty after the conquest, notably under the rule of Taizong, Li Shimin (李世民, 599-649). Squashing wide-spread local rebellions and designing efficient forms of civil administrations, they served both as advisors and military officers.

The key figure among them was Wei Zheng (魏徵, 580-643), his most loyal retainer and frequent advisor. After his death, Li Shimin established an ancestral tablet for him in the Lingyan Pavilion (凌煙閣) on the palace grounds and there hung the portraits of all twenty-four founding contributors in commemoration of their accomplishments. The twenty-four were arranged in geographical directions and also came to symbolize temporal divisions. Wei Zheng in this system is the master of Spring Beginning, the core starting point of the traditional year. He supposedly ascended to the Jade Palace of Heaven at night to serve the Supreme God and attended to Emperor Taizong of the Tang during the day (*Dharma* 3: 33). All twenty-four, moreover, are worshiped as divine generals in Daesoon Jinrihoe, their names making up the text of the Incantation.

The notion of divinities as military leaders of great martial prowess, like the formula at the end of the Incantation, goes back to the first organized Daoist community, known as Orthodox Unity (正一, Zhengyi) or Celestial Masters (天師, Tianshi), that began in the latter half of the second century CE. Faced with major natural disasters, demonic infestation, and social instability, they created "a new covenant that bound the demons and faithful into an alliance through a mutual oath to adhere to sets of rules and prohibitions" (Lai 2002, 270). At the same time, they made their members into supernatural officers, serving as "minor functionaries on the margins of the vast bureaucratic pantheon of the otherworld" (Nickerson 1994, 49), thus forming a "guild of ordained religious specialists" (1994, 64). In this function, they had control over an extensive corps of divine or spirit generals—heavily armored, fierce, and awe-inspiring—that would make short shrift of any potentially harmful supernatural entity (Kleeman 1998, 72; 2016, 189; Kohn 2019, 37)

Everyone, from children on up, underwent formal initiations at regular intervals to receive registers (籙, *lu*) that contained a list of such spirit generals and specified its bearer's identity, rank, and home district. Although these divinities lived within the body of the bearer, he or she had to wear the written list in a piece of silk at the waist constantly, removing it only temporarily (Kleeman 2016, 275-76; Bumbacher

2012, 108). At about age seven, youngsters typically received nine soldiers and clerks; after five years of training, during adolescents, they advanced to be protected by one divine general complete with extensive troops and administrative staff. After another four years, as young adults, members commanded a set of ten spirit generals and were able to represent the pleas of others, submitting petitions to the otherworld (Kleeman 2016, 278). Eventually leading register disciples held as many as seventy-five generals if unmarried, and 150 if a married couple. “Reaching this level of register, one would have a full complement of spirits” (2016, 279).

These spirits were activated through ritual which also included spells and incantations; they served to exorcise demons, heal diseases, and generally enhance harmony and well-being. The Daesoon Jinrihoe practice of chanting the names of inspiring leaders, honored as divine generals, thus follows the ancient Daoist model, bringing the twenty-four seasonal divisions into practitioners’ daily lives.

The Twenty-four Directions

Another major application of the number twenty-four is spatial in addition to temporal and manifests in the so-called twenty-four directions. They appear first in the early Celestial Master community in Sichuan as a set of twenty-four districts or parishes, called *zhi* 治, a word that means “to order” or “govern.” Each of these was governed by a so-called libationer (祭酒, *jijiu*) who served as its leader and reported directly to the Celestial Master himself, marking the system of twenty-four as the backbone of the organization (Kleeman 2016).

In more abstract cosmology, the directions consist of six distinct positions in each of the four cardinal directions, marked by star clusters that the sun passes through in the course of the year. In that, they are not unlike the twenty-eight lunar stations or mansions (宿, *xiu*), which represent constellations that the moon passes through, allotting thirteen days on average for each, but in fact varying in duration (Hsieh 2020, 279, 289).

The Chinese stations follow the same principle as the Indian *nakṣatras* and the Arabic *manzils*, but are fundamentally different (Kotyk 2021). They divide into groups of seven, one each located in the cardinal directions of the night sky and illustrating their dominant animals. Thus, for example, the eastern stations describe positions on the dragon, including its horn (角, *jiao*), neck (亢, *kang*), heart (心, *xin*), and tail (尾, *wei*), while those of the south indicate parts of the bird, indicating its wings (翼, *yi*), extension (張, *zhang*), and likeness to the willow (柳, *liu*). Each station, moreover, carries content in that its days are good for certain activities, and Daoists take care to observe their warnings (Kohn 2021, 78).

The main way of understanding the four directions as intersected by both solar and lunar circuits in traditional China is in terms of the “four images” (四象, *sixiang*) or

heraldic animals (四靈, *siling*). Massive constellations in the night sky that comprise a number of stars not unlike Western zodiac images, they are most potent guardians of the universe (Staal 1984; Major 1986; Chao 2011, 15-20).

Thus, the immense constellation of the cerulean (green or blue) dragon (青龍, *qinglong*), representative of the east, includes stars from *Virgo to Scorpio* (Pankenier 2013, 45). The vermilion or red bird (赤鳥, *chibiao*) in the south “extends from lunar mansion *Willow* (δ Hya) to *Chariot Platform* (β Crv)” (2013, 196). In their animal shape, including also the white tiger (白虎, *baihu*) in the west and the turtle, later combined with a snake and known as the dark warrior (玄武, *xuanwu*), in the north, all four appear first as mussel shell mosaics in a Neolithic tomb of the Yangshao (仰韶) culture, dating from the late fourth millennium BCE (Pankenier 2013, 337). After this, they are depicted on a dragon basin and mentioned in an oracle-bone inscription of the Shang dynasty (1953-1046 BCE), then appear on an eave tile from Fengjing (豐京), one of the capitals of the Zhou before they conquered the Shang (2013, 78, 212).



Figure 8. The Four Heraldic Animals

Essential to Han cosmology and calendrics, the four heraldic animals with their changing positions in the course of the year, like various other celestial omens, provided divine guidance of when to sow and plant in agriculture, when to advance and retreat in warfare. The physical root of the idea of the heavenly mandate (天命, *tianming*), they literally guided the ancients in their most essential undertakings and were responsible for the survival and prosperity of nations. Having them as personal guardians, therefore, provided a level of protection like none other.

In addition, the four cardinal directions are ruled by a set of divine figures known as emperors (帝, *di*), grouped together as the Five Emperors, also adding a divinity

of the center. They are marked by the respective colors of their directions, matching the cosmology of the five phases or movements (Hsieh 2020, 278). The twenty-four directions, then, are subject to these emperors and placed within the constellations of the four heraldic animals. They consist of twelve positions plus twelve stars.

The twelve positions match the twelve earthly branches (地支, *dizhi*). Originally stations of the planet Jupiter, which orbits the sun once in twelve years, they go back to particular constellations that form the root of their unique names. In addition, since the 6th century BCE, they have been associated with twelve zodiac animals like sheep, dragon, or dog (Needham et al. 1958, 405) that still dominate the energy of individual years and are actively used in horoscopes. This twelvefold system applies to years and positions within the year; it is also used to name days and, most importantly, the double-hours within each day. To make up the full complement of twenty-four, there are also twelve stars that can be either auspicious or baleful and, like the seasonal divisions, are understood to appear as deities or divine generals.



Figure 9. A Starry Deity of the Twenty-four Directions.

The following table outlines the system, placing the branches and stars in the four directions and in the 24-hour system, complete with the starry deities as well as the zodiac animals and internal organs (Wu and Wu 2014, 95-167; Needham et al. 1958, 402-04; Hsieh 2020, 286).

Table 4: The Twenty-four Directions

Direct	Time	Branch	Star	Zodiac	Organ
North	21-23	Hai/Ha 亥	Dengming/Deungmyeong 登明	Pig	triple heater
Black	23-1	Zi/Ja 子	Shenho/Shinhu 神後	Rat	gallbladder
	1-3	Chou/Chuk 丑	Daji/Daegil 大吉	Ox	liver
East	3-5	Yin/Ihn 寅	Gongcao/Gongjo 功曹	Tiger	lungs
Green	5-7	Mao/Myo 卯	Taichong/Taechung 太沖	Hare	large intestine
	7-9	Chen/Jin 辰	Tiangan/Cheongang 天罡	Dragon	stomach
South	9-11	Si/Sa 巳	Taiyi/Taeceul 太乙	Snake	spleen
Red	11-13	Wu/Oh 午	Shengguang/Seunggwang 勝光	Horse	heart
	13-15	Wei/Mi 未	Xiaoji/Sogil 小吉	Sheep	small intestine
West	15-17	Shen/Shin 申	Zhuansong/Jeonsong 傳送	Monkey	bladder
White	17-19	You/Yu 酉	Zongkui/Jonggoe 從魁	Rooster	kidneys
	19-21	Xu/Sul 戌	Hekui/Hagoe 河魁	Dog	pericardium

Practice Activation

In traditional China, the twenty-four directions were activated in prayers and rituals to honor their deities as well as in the observation of precautions depending on the auspicious or baneful nature of the star. Thus, for example, the star called Xiaoji, “minor fortune,” by its very name indicated potential harm and its direction and days had to be treated with great care (see Hou 1979). The star known as Taiyi, “great oneness,” on the other hand, was linked with the prime origins of the universe and thus full of creativity, rising energy, and renewal.

In Daesoon Jinrihoe, the tendency is to use written characters rather than vocal incantations to activate the powers of the twenty-four directions. Thus, at one time

Sangje ordered Hyeong-Ryeol to mark the sixty-four hexagrams and write down the names of the twenty-four directions on paper and give them to Him. He then went out of the door with the paper and said, burning it towards the sun, “Stay with me” (*Progress of the Order* 1: 62).

Both the writing down and the burning of the paper in a particular direction are practices that go back to the early Celestial Masters. Firmly believing that any disease or misfortune was caused by the invasion of demonic forces due to moral failure, they focused on exorcism and divine magic as ways of healing. First, they isolated the sick

person in a so-called quiet chamber (靜室, *jingshi*), an adaptation of a Han institution for punishing wayward officials involving solitary confinement. There they had to think of their sins going all the way back to their birth to try and find an explanation for the illness.

Once certain sins had been identified, a senior master would come to write them down—in triplicate and together with a formal petition for their eradication from the person's divine record. The three copies would then, in a formal ceremony, be transmitted to the bureaus of heaven (by burning), earth (by burying), and water (by casting into a river), whose officials supposedly set the record straight and restored the person's good health. Another measure of purification that similarly involved the writing down of sacred words and burning was the ingestion of "talisman water" (符水, *fushui*)—the ashes of a talisman covered with holy writing dissolved in water (Bumbacher 2012, 65). By extension, more complex social issues would similarly be dealt with through exorcistic rituals involving celestial and starry deities, thereby righting the structures of the world and enhance the benefits of the Daoist community.

Another occasion of a formal ritual involving the twenty-four directions placed their names on a bell, again after having been written out on paper:

Sangje made a bell by tying an armful of rice straw together and proceeding to hang the bell from the ceiling in the middle of the room, around which He glued blank paper. After He wrote the characters of the twenty-four directions around the bell, He wrote additional characters between some of those characters. He then cut paper in the shape of fish scales and put all the pieces around the bell. It looked like a suit of iron armor (*Reordering Works* 2: 2).

The purpose of this was to purify the area and establish the correct Degree Numbers as part of the great Reordering Work. This is clarified in another entry of *The Canonical Scripture*:

When Sangje practiced a Reordering Work in Chest-Rock (Nongam) Hamlet, He said to Hyeong-Ryeol, "Strings of fortune are connected to the 12,000 floor boards of Immortal-Descending Pavilion (Gangseonru) in Converged Stream (Seongcheon) remodeled by Heo Misu, while an ominous energy is attached to the 12,000 peaks of the Geumgang Mountain. I shall rid the place of that ominous energy." He added, "With Kim Gwang-Chan and Shin Won-Il, cut blank paper into pieces of one square chon (1.19 inch) size and write the character *si* 侍, meaning "to serve," on each piece. But each of you must write this word 400 times each day for ten days and put them on the four walls. Also, you shall fetch a pot of fresh water and divide it into twenty-four bowls in the morning and in the evening every day. At night, recite the Scripture of the Seven Stars (Chilseong-gyeong 七星經) twenty-one times" (*Reordering Works* 2: 13).

A yet more elaborate practice, also working with personal cultivation, is reported about Doju:

Doju finished the work in the ninth month of the Gyehae Year (1923). After building up a stone altar on the heights behind the Seven Stars Shrine (Chilseong-gak) in Tushita Hermitage (Dosol-am) of Pebble-Stream Temple (Jeokcheon-sa) and designating the twenty-four directions, he summoned divine beings of heaven and earth. Then he set up the time period for Holy Works: seven o'clock in the evening to six o'clock the next morning. And he, punctual down to the second, devoted his time to Holy Works for four months from the tenth to middle of the second month of the following year. (*Progress of the Order 2: 28*)

The most elaborate ceremony recorded in *The Canonical Scripture*, finally, involves both written pieces of paper and incantations. Accompanied by four disciples, placed in the four directions of a central room, Sangje ordered them to cut paper in the shape of money and stuff them into an ink-stone case.

Then Sangje had one disciple call out “Deungwu” when pulling out a piece and pass it on to the next. The recipient was to call out “Deungwu” and then pass it on to a third. Sangje had the last disciple say, “China knows the face.” He had them repeat the process but use “Ma Seong” and end with “Japan knows the face.” Next, the disciples were made to say “Oh Han,” followed by “Korea knows the face.” They did this until the Divine Generals of the Twenty-Eight Constellations and the Divine Generals of the Twenty-Four Seasonal Divisions had all been called out, and the disciples repeatedly picked up the paper pieces. Finally, there were no pieces left in the case, because their number was equal to that of the divine generals (*Reordering Works 3: 28*).

This, too, served to eliminate inauspicious influences, stabilize the energies of the various directions, and bring good fortune and well-being to the region.

Conclusion

Numbers pervade life. We use them in all different dimensions, but most importantly to mark and structure time, space, and the body, using them to establish calendars, schedules, regions, roadways, and a variety of different bodily signifiers, from age through height and weight to calorie intake and blood pressure.

Numbers in themselves are neutral, but they always come in sets and have an inbuilt dynamic, going from smaller to bigger, from higher to lower. This also means that they

consistently establish hierarchies and inevitably invite comparisons—between 8 am and 12 noon, road number 15 and highway 22, dress size 4 and dress size 10. They also create systems and ranked structures, so that getting first place means winning and ending on tenth place means losing, operating at the ninth level of the imperial bureaucracy is better and implies having more experience than being an initiate of the first.

What is more, human beings absorb the numbering systems of their respective cultures into their very bodies, leading to distinct physical and emotional reactions. For example, if you say to most people in the world, “It is 20 degrees outside,” they will feel comfortable and think of going for a walk. If you say the same to an American, he or she will start to shiver and imagine sitting by a warm fire. The number is the same, but the counting systems differ, referring to degrees Celsius and Fahrenheit respectively: 20 degrees in the latter match minus-7 in the former.

By the same token, working with a seven-day week is deeply ingrained in people today, and we all distinguish work-days from weekends and feel more relaxed on Saturday and Sunday. In contrast the traditional Chinese system worked with a five-day base-week. Using the ten heavenly stems, in close conjunction with the twelve earthly branches, as their names, it provided a more regular and predictable system, where the same kind of day appeared three times in any given month. Also, unlike the West, where days and most other time signifiers are neutral, in China, each day’s name also carries content. On days including the stem *jia* (甲), which means “scale,” for example, it is thus advisable to abstain from eating shrimp and shellfish—a feature that may well involve an active physical revulsion at this time. Altogether, being deeply rooted in the seven-day system, it is hard for us to imagine, let alone activate, this way of working with the rhythm of days—showing just how deeply embedded numbered structures are in the way we function in the world.

Beyond this, numbering systems are always political and reflect the exercise of power, often demanding a disregard of reality. Current examples include daylight-savings time, which everybody hates and nobody changes, expressing the power of governments to make people get up and work at an hour of their choosing—in complete disregard of the natural cycles, so that, instead of the sun reaching its zenith at noon, it gets there around 2 pm. Another example involves the medical profession, which uses numbers of weight, cholesterol, and blood pressure—to name a few—to create certain threats of disease and cause people to take medications that may or may not in fact be beneficial.

Changing numbering systems alters the way people think of themselves and the world, which is why Sangje was so intent on recalibrating the Degree Numbers of various cosmic entities. This is also the reason why Americans have resisted the mandate by Congress and still measure space in miles and temperature in Fahrenheit. On a more positive note, Americans did away with some key numbers in the life cycle and

eliminated the mandatory retirement age, allowing people to think of themselves as being strong and productive for many more years.

Traditional Daoist cosmology assigns strong meanings to each of the cardinal numbers from one to nine and, like many other early cultures, also emphasizes multiples of six, such as twelve, twenty-four, and thirty-six. The system of dividing the year into twenty-four divisions and the night sky into twenty-four directions is a key example on how numbering affects perception and embodied reality. Part of the same space-time, matching the visible progress of the sun through the four directions and the four seasons, the twenty-four divisions determine the time people get up and retire, the food they eat, the clothes they wear, and the way they relate to life. Activated in Daoist self-cultivation in a set of healing exercises and the internal circulation of energy, they are also at the core of spatial organization and ritual expression, notably among the early Celestial Masters. Many aspects of their worldview and practice, then, have made their way into Daesoon Jinrihoe as and when Sangje adapted the twenty-four based system to His own unique project. Not only changing the starting point of the seasonal division, He also encouraged the chanting of relevant incantations and writing of potent characters, allowing followers to connect to the cosmic patterns in their very own bodies and affecting change for the better in the world around them.

Conflict of Interest

No potential conflict of interest relevant to this article was reported.

Notes

¹ These numbers refer to the pages and paragraphs of *The Canonical Scripture*.

² The abbreviation DZ stands for *Daozang*, the Daoist Canon of 1445. The numbers refer to the index in Schipper and Verellen 2004.

³ The same set is also found in the *Zunsheng bajian* (尊生八箴, Eight Folios on Honoring Life), in 20 juan, by Gaolian Shenfu (高濂深甫) of the late Ming dynasty. Translated by John Dudgeon, it is found today in Berk 1986, 19-47.

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