Qīngjìng 清静 ("clarity-and-stillness"), which is also translated as "purity and tranquility," is a classical and foundational Daoist principle, value and quality as well as one of the primary connective strands throughout the Daoist tradition.

The Chinese character qīng 清 consists of shuǐ 水 ("water") and qīng 青 ("pure"), while jìng 静 consists of qīng-pure and zhēng 争 ("contend"). So, on the most basic level, clarity may be compared to clear water, while stillness corresponds to non-agitation.

The paired phrase of qīngjìng first appears in the texts of the inner cultivation lineages of classical Daoism. For example, chapter 45 of the anonymous, fourth-second century BCE Dàodé jīng 道德經 (Scripture on the Dao and Inner Power) explains, “Clarity and stillness are the alignment of the world.” Stillness appearing independently is even more common, as in the phrase shǒujìng 守靜 ("guarding stillness") as a designation for Daoist apophatic and quietistic meditation. This overlaps with related terms like shǒuyī 守一 ("guarding the One") and shǒuzhōng 守中 ("guarding the Center").

Qīngjìng further relates to two other paired terms, namely, dòng 動 ("movement") and zhuó 濁 ("turbidity"). On the most basic level, these are cosmological concepts related to heaven/yang and earth/yin, respectively. As chapter 3, titled “Tiānwen” 天文 (Celestial Patterns), of the late second-century BCE Huáinánzi 淮南子 (Book of the Huainan Masters) tells us, “The clear and light rose to become the heavens; the heavy and turbid sank to become the earth.” The terms eventually became used to map Daoist cultivation, contemplative states, and alchemical refinement, specifically, the movement from agitation/turbidity to clarity/stillness. One way of understanding this is true yin within yang (stillness within agitation) and true yang within yin (clarity within turbidity). This is often compared to the emergence of a lotus flower (realization) out of the mud (emotionality) of a settled pond (heart-mind).

Clarity-and-stillness, in turn, appear as the fifth of the Nine Practices (jiǔxíng 九行) of early Tiānshī 天師 (Celestial Masters) Daoism. It eventually became the inspiration behind the Clarity-and-Stillness Literature of the Táng dynasty (618-907), with the anonymous, eighth-century Qīngjìng jīng 清静經 (Scripture on Clarity and Stillness; DZ 620) being most influential and important.

The Qīngjìng jīng later became one of the three core scriptures of early Quánzhēn 全真 (Complete Perfection) Daoism, with the other two being the Dàodé jīng and anonymous, sixth-century Yīnfú jīng 隱符經 (Scripture on the Hidden Talisman; DZ 31). As expressed in the Qīngjìng jīng, “The human spirit is fond of clarity./But the heart-mind disturbs it./The human heart-mind is fond of stillness,/But desires meddle with it.” Committed Daoist practitioners thus aspire to realize the state of constant clarity and stillness. This is the fusion of original spirit (yuánshén 元神) and original qi (yuánqì 元氣).

The scripture was so central in Quánzhēn that Liú Tōngwēi 劉通微 (Mòrán 默然 [Silent Suchness]; d. 1196), one of Wáng Zhé’s 王畿 (Chóngyáng 重陽 [Redoubled Yang]; 1113-1170) senior disciples, wrote a commentary. Notations within clarity-and-stillness.

Louis Komjathy 康思奇, Ph.D., CSO Daoist Foundation 道教基金會