

ISABELLE ROBINET

The World Upside Down

Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy



Golden Elixir Press

THE WORLD UPSIDE DOWN

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Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste: De l'unité et de la multiplicité. Avec une traduction commentée des Versets de l'éveil à la Vérité (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1995).

Lao zi et le Tao (Paris: Bayard Éditions, 1996).

Taoism: Growth of a Religion (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997).

Isabelle Robinet

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Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy

Edited and translated by

Fabrizio Pregadio

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Cover: The *xuanpin* (Mysterious-Female), a Taoist symbol that represents the unity of Yin and Yang. The two trigrams are Fire (Yang, above) and Water (Yin, below), which respectively enclose True Yin and True Yang, represented by their inner lines.

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The World Upside Down in Taoist Internal Alchemy

INTRODUCTION

Internal alchemy, or Neidan, is a technique of enlightenment whose earliest extant written records date from the eighth century. It appeals both to rationality, which gives order to the world, and to what transcends rationality: the unspeakable, the Totality. Its main tools are the trigrams of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes) and a number of key metaphors, some of which are alchemical in nature, whence the name, “internal alchemy.”

Alchemy begins with a binary structure made of two complementary and antagonistic terms: pure Yin and pure Yang. However, their binary structure admits complexity with two other mixed terms, born from the union of the first two: Yin containing Yang, and Yang containing Yin. A neutral term, the Center, is beyond the conjunction and the disjunction of the other two.

The principle consists in ordering the world by means of multiple and complex reference points built on the basis of these initial data and of a multi-layered structure. Here lies the rationality of alchemy, in the sense of providing order and intelligibility. However, being a didactic technique oriented toward mysticism, alchemy also involves the denial of its own system. This denial is achieved by several means: the reminder that silence is the foundation of the word; the continuous evocation of Unity, which merges and abolishes all reference points; the adoption of a fundamentally metaphoric language that must be surpassed; the recurrent disruptions in the continuity of discourse; the use of images that play at several levels, operating now in one direction, now in the opposite, levels that are related to one another until being unified; the ellipsis that handles two different

entities as equivalent; the reciprocal encasing of all images, so that “the child generates its mother” and the contained is the container; the multiplicity of facets, times, and reference points superimposed above one another, which counteracts the fragmentation wrought by rational analysis.

The alchemists, therefore, use a highly structured language, but transgress it by introducing a negation of their own system, and by expressing, through a system of reciprocal encasing, a duality absorbed into Unity, a rationality traversed by irrationality. The language of alchemy is a language that attempts to say the contradictory.

One facet of this system is the theme of the “world upside down.”

Look at the gate of death as the gate of life,
Do not take the gate of life to be the gate of death.
The one who knows the mechanism of death and sees the reversal
Begins to understand that the good is born within the evil.¹

The Sun in the West, the Moon in the East. Heaven is Earth, Earth is Heaven. This symbolizes the growth and union of Yin and Yang, the reversal [of the course] of the five agents.²

“Reversal” (*diandao*) is one of the basic principles of internal alchemy. This principle takes many forms and is applied in different ways. To obtain the Golden Elixir—the equivalent of the Philosopher’s Stone—one should go through several reversals. According to a sentence often quoted in the texts, “Those who go in the ordinary sense give birth to human beings; those who go backward find immortality.”

Li Daochun (fl. ca. 1290) explains that there are two directions. One of them follows the ordinary course and goes toward the end: it is the “operation” (*yong*), the actuation. The other goes backward, and consists in returning to the Origin: it is the “substance” or the “body” (*ti*) of all things.

If you know the origin and ignore the end, you cannot expand; if you know the end and ignore the origin, you cannot attain the foundation of subtlety. Those who go back to the Origin are vaguely and indistinctly joined with the Ultimateless; those who

¹ *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” poem no. 62.

² *Ziyang zhenren wuzhen pian zhushu*, 8.13b.

The World Upside Down

go to the end are born, transform themselves, and die endlessly. Going backward and going forward are necessary to one another, because the origin and the end are not two.³

However, the ordinary persons who “follow the course” generate other beings. The seekers of immortality, who go backward, generate an embryo of immortality within themselves: they self-regenerate.

The ordinary course follows the sequence of the seasons—winter, spring, summer, and autumn—and the sequence of four of the five agents associated with the seasons: Water, Wood, Fire, and Metal (see tables 1 and 2). The alchemists often insist that the opposite course causes Water to generate Metal, and Wood to generate Fire. Since Metal is related to the West and its traditional emblem is the Tiger, they say that the Tiger emerges from Water and the North. Similarly, Wood is related to the Dragon and the East, but emerges from Fire and the South. Therefore the backward rotation is performed by going from North to West, and from South to East. Time is traced in a backward sequence. The normal flow of time leads to death; those who seek immortality move toward youth and birth.

The wheel of Heaven turns to the left; the Sun, the Moon, and the planets turn to the right. The wheel of Heaven turning to the left causes the movement of the four seasons; the Sun and the Moon turning to the right transform the ten thousand beings.

Therefore red cinnabar, which symbolizes Fire, is placed in the South, and is the Red Bird. As it moves to the East, this cinnabar generates Mercury, which is of a green color and symbolizes Wood; it is placed in the East and is the Green Dragon. Black lead belongs to Water, is placed in the North, and is the Dark Warrior. As it turns to the West, black lead generates White Silver.

Therefore it is said that Fire turns to the East and is the Dragon (while Fire traditionally is the Red Bird and turns to the West), and Water turns to the West and is the Tiger (instead of being the Dark Warrior).

This means that the True Breath of the Great Tripod secretly moves according to the turning of Heaven; and as for the symbolism of the Moon, the Sun and the planets, they turn to the right.

³ *Quanzhen jixuan biyao*, 9b-10a.

But within the Tripod there is only the One Breath, and not external objects.⁴

Thus, Fire going East and Water going West turn toward the left, contrary to the traditional sense.

YIN AND YANG

One of the basic principles of Chinese internal alchemy consists in using two elements that by themselves summarize the entire alchemical Work. The two principles are Yin and Yang, but can be symbolized by West and East, Metal and Wood, Dragon and Tiger, Fire and Water, the feminine and the masculine, and so forth. However, an important feature of this discipline is that it is only concerned with True Yin, which is the Yin enclosed within Yang, and with True Yang, which is the Yang enclosed within Yin. These are the concealed core, the hidden internal truth; they are the materials or the “ingredients” of alchemy. The goal here is to bring the internal and the hidden toward the external and the visible.

In terms of trigrams, the picture can be described as follows (see tables 6 and 7). Two trigrams are at the origin of all others, their father and mother. They are Qian ☰, which is related to Heaven and is made of three Yang solid lines, symbolizing pure Yang; and Kun ☷, which is related to the Earth and is made of three broken lines, symbolizing pure Yin. Qian and Kun joined and gave birth to the other trigrams, two of which are especially important for the alchemist: Kan ☵ and Li ☲. The inner line of Kan (a Yang line enclosed between two Yin lines) and the inner line of Li (a Yin line enclosed within two Yang lines) are True Yang and True Yin, respectively. Their multiple meanings and functions cannot be fully described here. Let it suffice to say that they represent the trace and the union of the father and the mother; and that they express above all a fundamental principle of interdependence: there is no Yin without Yang, and vice versa, or there would be sterility.

Pages 5–16 are not included in this preview

⁴ *Jindan fu*, 24a-b.

The Alchemical Language, or the Effort to Say the Contradictory

INTRODUCTION

The alchemical masters face the universal problem of transmitting and translating the unspeakable into words. “How can we seek the mysterious and the wondrous in a discourse?” asks Zhang Boduan.¹ The Dao is unspeakable and the mystical experience is inexpressible; yet, say the masters, in order to expound and transmit them, one is bound to use the language. Mindful of the words of Zhuangzi, according to whom one could speak for a whole day without saying anything, but also be speechless for a whole day without ever being silent,² they resort to a language that leaves space to silence, which they always evoke, to the unspoken, and to the additional meanings. Since there is always something left unexpressed, the masters summarize and remind what has already been said, they repeat and expand the old discourses, attempting at the same time to recover the world, the language, and the use that was done of it, and to complete and renew it.

The alchemists’ undertaking, nevertheless, consists in methodically relying on language in order to transmit and to instruct. Reminding the value of silence is not sufficient: they try to introduce it in their discourse. They reiterate that their discourse is only a vehicle that leads to the wondrous, or—using another image of the *Zhuangzi*—a

¹ *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” poem no. 2.

² *Zhuangzi*, chapter 27; trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 304: “With words that are no-words, you may speak all your life long and you will never have said anything. Or you may go through your whole life without speaking them, in which case you will never have stopped speaking.”

net that must be discarded once the prey has been captured.³ They intend to “give form to the Formless by the word, and thus manifest the authentic and absolute Dao,” says Li Daochun (fl. ca. 1290), who adds that words are only steps to be climbed, and that once the highest point has been reached, no word applies anymore.⁴ “There is a mechanism that surpasses them. This is not easy to explain, but one should comprehend beyond words.”⁵

Chen Zhixu (1290–ca. 1368) makes a distinction between “the way that establishes a discourse,” which consists not only of words but also of practices, fasts, meditations, etc., and the “transmission of the heart,” a concept borrowed from Buddhism. This transmission tightly combines action and non-action, and is the “Great Way” of alchemy. Chen Zhixu explains that the intent of Taoism is to convey the “wonder” of true emptiness, the fullness intertwined within emptiness—unlike Buddhism, whose mission is to show that “wondrous emptiness is not empty.” In other words, the task of the Taoists is to insist on the positive aspects of emptiness. They emphasize, to a larger extent compared to the Buddhists, the reality of the world, which is made even more real by being traversed by emptiness. This is why, adds Chen Zhixu, one should give materiality to that reality by the intermediation of language.⁶

Peng Xiao (?–955) designates the cosmic Man, founder of the world, as the Saint. Accordingly, he states that “he has not lightly created a discourse that would mislead the future generations. Therefore he has called the Sun and the Moon as his witnesses, has examined the luminous spirits, has separated the firm (Yang) from the flexible (Yin), has shown and revealed Metal and Water, has taken the Dragon and the Tiger as metaphors, and has used images (*xiang*).”⁷ For the alchemical masters, however, saying is not enough. They want to show. They must actively urge their disciples to walk along the

³ *Zhuangzi*, chapter 26; trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 302: “The fish trap exists because of the fish; once you’ve gotten the fish, you can forget the trap. The rabbit snare exists because of the rabbit; once you’ve gotten the rabbit, you can forget the snare. Words exist because of meaning; once you’ve gotten the meaning, you can forget the words. Where can I find a man who has forgotten words so I can have a word with him?”

⁴ *Zhonghe ji*, 3.13a-b.

⁵ *Id.*, 3.22b.

⁶ *Shangyang zi jindan dayao*, 8.3b-4a.

⁷ *Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi*, 1.6b.

same path and find out by themselves. Li Daochun says: “I would like to show you directly [the meaning of my discourse], but I am afraid that you will not believe me and will not be able to put it into operation (*yong*). You must know by yourselves.”⁸

In fact, the alchemical masters deliberately use metaphors that they invite to surpass:

The way of alchemy entirely consists of metaphors (*xiang*). It takes Lead and Mercury as substances, but one must know that the “essence of Lead” and the “marrow of Mercury” are nothing but metaphors. It is based on the terms Li and Kan, but one must know that the “Kan boy” and the “Li girl” are nothing but empty terms. It uses the forms of the Dragon and the Tiger, but one must know that the “Dragon-Fire” and the “Tiger-Water” have no form. It talks about the “yellow sprout,” the “divine water,” and the “flowery pond,” but these are things that can neither be seen nor used.⁹

Just like one should go beyond the phenomenal appearance of things, so it is necessary to surpass the letter of the texts and of their codes, pondering at the same time the inexhaustible meaning that they contain. When the alchemists say that all of their language consists only of metaphors, this means that they disguise the Truth, that they do not speak it because this is something that cannot be done. It also means that what they speak about differs from the meaning of the words that they use, because this is, paradoxically, the most correct way of conveying what is impossible to say. Their language functions by means of a distantiation that is continuously reminded: the finger is not the moon, the net is not the prey. Only the allusive mode that they systematically use can account for the double character of existence—which is and at the same time is not, which acquires fullness by being traversed by Emptiness but cannot be apprehended in itself, and of which one can only grasp the appearance and the trace.

The alchemists, therefore, create their own language. Somehow it must function—they *must* make it function—in front of the adept in order to say what has already been said many times, and could be summarized in a few words. Paradoxically, the speaker is not the

⁸ *Zhonghe ji*, 3.3b.

⁹ Xiao Yanzhi, mid-thirteenth century, in *Xiuzhen shishu*, 9.12b.

master himself. On the one hand it is the Dao: like the Saint, one should “establish the teaching by embodying Heaven, and transform the people through the action of the Dao.”¹⁰ But, on the other hand, it also the Neidan, the method, the pedagogic artifice—that is, the language. Witness to this are the many quotations and the constantly repeated *leitmotifs* that embroider the texts: their redundancy is intentional. And since this language is symbolic and possesses multiple facets that are revealed by making them turn around and around under different lights, the masters are not weary of letting this language mirror itself, of playing its multiple layers, of discovering in it relations and enunciations that are always new. Their language, in fact, is also the fruit of a reflection on language; and it aims to stimulate the continuation of that reflection.

The word “mirror” leads us to consider another aspect of this manipulation. The alchemical language is a mirror play, an immense enigma that embeds many smaller ones, a *koan* similar to those of Zen. Neidan indeed acts on the adept as a *koan*, as a conundrum whose efficacy resides precisely in the sort of seduction and fascination that it clearly instigates on those who use it—be they the masters or the adepts. It is a mechanism that they are never tired of playing: chants, poems, essays, dialogues, and charts are produced by the masters and are requested by the disciples, are unceasingly transmitted, augmented, broken up, and then recomposed. The numerous commentaries on the major Neidan texts are examples of these decipherings that could vary without end. The masters display in them their creativity; the adepts find in them something on which they can fix their spirit, and make it operate. But, as the texts say, it is in emptiness that the figures of this language, the *xiang*, are suspended, all fastened to one another.

Yet, the masters entrust these figures, the *xiang*, with the task of operating on the spirit of their disciples. In a way, this alchemy forms an immense synecdoche. The entire Yin-Yang binary system on which it operates is the sail that is blown by the boat, but at the same time makes the boat move. This discourse by means of figures serves to indicate that the discourse *in its entirety* consists only of figures. And this rhetoric of provisional figures aiming to their resolution is on its own a figure of speech, and signals a speech on the figures.

¹⁰ *Zhonghe ji*, 3.4a.

The conception that the masters have of the operational mode of language is intimately related to the conception that the Chinese tradition has of it; under this light, it is probably not by chance that Taoism—the religion that, unlike Buddhism, has the deepest roots in China—has followed this way. As is well known, the Chinese have little inclination for theoretical and abstract thought, independent of factual situations. Abstract names are absent from their language, and the conditional is hardly used in it.¹¹ Neidan shares the same active conception of language with Confucianism, even though it maintains that language cannot really convey the entirety of meaning.

Made of a constant intertextuality and a constant production of meaning, the texts labor and are themselves a labor, a practice. They can be perpetually reinvented starting from a paradigm that is never exhausted, from a founding Text that is not written but is readable, which is the Dao, or the Truth, and from the method of interpretation, the alchemy. Each user of a text is inevitably called to be one of its creators: here lies the very function of a text. He is invited to find new forms for it, in a ludic way. This paradigmatic text is therefore a collective work, whose origins cannot be located and whose individual particularizations—through its reading, its performance, its writing, or its system of expressed or implicit references—are single instances that open themselves up onto all others. Each text and each commentary is an example of productive and creative reading in an infinite play of mirrors that reflect one another as far as the eyes can see, even though each of them is oriented in a slightly different way so that the aggregate, which is never finished and is always plural, opens itself up onto the entire universe, which is never closed or never finished. In this sense, the texts do not let themselves be measured. Thus the true reader is the one who perceives the infinite plurality of the text, which is an image of the plurality of the universe, of its multivalence that admits its own reversibility and its own contradictions; and the one who perceives the non-canonicity of the “canonical” texts like, for example, the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality). This means that these texts are “classical,” canonical, and foundational because they do not have only *one* real sense, and are created precisely in order to contain simultaneous multiple senses.

¹¹ Hall and Ames, *Thinking Through Confucius*, pp. 269 and 272.

In addition to being a medium of communication, language is also a means of ordering the world and of giving it a meaning. Through language, a possible world can be articulated and a desired world can be structured; through language, that project can be communicated and the creation of that world can take place. According to the Confucians, as Léon Vandermeersch has aptly remarked, the prince owns the word: he names, and by doing so, he “gives order.” The founding heroes of Chinese civilization, Yu the Great or Fu Xi, who drew the world in order to organize it, are witnesses of this. The “names” are the tools by which the sage organizes the world—this is an axiom that enjoys a large consensus among Chinese thinkers. This conception has led them to reflect on the good use of language. For them, language affects the behavior, and the effect verifies the sense and the truth of a term or a discourse.¹² Within Confucianism, for which the social tissue is a fundamental reality, the name of an individual and even his title correspond to a personal and ontological reality. They are not merely signals, but testimonies of intelligibility: the problem of language is related to the axiological status of beings and entities. The same conception of the active force of language and of names is also found within the Shangqing tradition of Taoism, where knowing the names of divine places and divine beings is indispensable for salvation. This conception of language allows one to consider that language may be re-generating, that the subject can be re-created by means of the language. This is context in which the alchemy takes place.

This typically Chinese conception of language is supplemented by the alchemical masters with a concern—no less typically Chinese—for *determining* the position of concepts and images in relation to one another; in other words, for marking the distances that exist between the individual concepts and images and the paths that lead from one

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¹² Hall and Ames, *id.*, p. 263.

Role and Meaning of Numbers in Taoist Cosmology and Alchemy

“Thou hast ordered all things
in measure and number and weight.”
Book of Wisdom, XI.20

“He measured with his ray
the boundaries of Heaven and Earth.”
Rg-Veda, VIII.25.18

INTRODUCTION

I will not dwell in this essay on the importance of numbers in China and on the role that numbers play in the Chinese civilization. Marcel Granet has examined these subjects at length in his *La pensée chinoise*, and I refer the reader to his discussion. I will not address either the role of numbers in divination, which is related to Taoism but is not specifically part of it. On the other hand, I will take into account several traditional data, to the extent to which the Taoist reflection on numbers and their manipulation is based on them.¹ It goes without saying that the limited scope of this essay will not permit an exhaustive presentation, and I will merely provide some of the main data.

¹ We can distinguish in this respect two main sources, even though in most cases they merge with one another: the school of Yin-Yang and the five agents (*yinyang wuxing*), on the one hand, and the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), on the other. The difference between them consists mainly in the distinction made in the *Yijing* between odd and even numbers, and in the speculations on the trigrams and the hexagrams related to the numbers. The influence of the *Yijing* is more clearly visible in internal alchemy, whose first certain traces date from the eighth century CE.

As we shall see in more detail, we can distinguish several functions performed by numbers in Taoism:

- (1) Numbers are used to count, and therefore to date. In this sense, they include the sexagesimal cyclical signs known as “celestial stems” and “earthly branches,” two groups of ten and twelve items, respectively, that existed at least since the Yin dynasty (see tables 8 and 9). The nature and function of these emblems are very similar to those of the numbers.²
- (2) Numbers serve to distinguish and to group sets of items. In general, they emphasize the existence of a common element and make it possible to correlate those groups to one another, mainly on the basis of a single system of operation.³ By doing so, numbers provide a model and, through this model and the correspondences that numbers can establish, they serve to build the “miniature worlds” (or microcosms) on which the Taoist works.⁴

² In the history of numbers inherited by the Taoists, an important role was played by the necessity, especially felt during the Han period, of harmonizing different spatiotemporal systems of reference with one another: the sexagesimal cyclical signs, the four seasons, the five agents, the first nine numbers that preside over a system of nonary distribution, the eight trigrams and the sixty-four hexagrams, the twelve months of the year, the twelve hours of the nycthemeron, the twelve pitch pipes, the twenty-four breaths (one per fortnight), the twenty-eight constellations of the zodiac, the seventy-two periods of five days of the year, and so forth. This was mainly the work of Meng Xi and Jing Fang in the first century BCE, and later of Zheng Xuan (127–200). They attempted to solve these issues by arranging those quantities or groups on the perimeters of concentric circles, in order to try to divide symmetrically, for example, what is counted by five and what is counted by twelve, even though the symmetry is sometimes inevitably broken by arranging them into groups of two or three. It seems to me that concern with computation arose mainly with regard to these issues.

³ For example, numbers make it possible to connect temporal alternation and spatial distribution, and thus a rhythm with a place. They do so without any true idea of spatial measurement, but rather with regard to position, function, and quality.

⁴ Numerology plays an important role in Taoist cosmology because it is one of the tools that establish relations between different domains (for example, the cosmos and the human body), which they also make *commensurable*. This is one of the foundations of analogy, which builds relations based

- (3) Numbers assign a quality: for example, Yin or Yang, terrestrial or celestial, fullness, center, etc. Whether one takes into account their group of functioning or their quality, they establish affiliations, and therefore assign meanings.⁵
- (4) The same number does not always have the same meaning.⁶ Numbers obtained by addition or multiplication take their meanings according to the qualities of the numbers that produce them. As we shall see, their meanings vary according to how they deconstructed.

NUMBERS PRODUCE THE WORLD

Numerological cosmology

According to certain authors, the numbers preceded the “images” (*xiang*); according to others, it was the opposite. In either case, images and numbers are deemed to be primordial: they appeared before ideas or concepts, and before names and forms.⁷ The *Zuozhuan* (late fourth century BCE) says that first there were the “images,” related to the divination by the tortoise; then those images

on attributes or functions, and bridges the gaps between different areas in order to recover or introduce a unity of meaning. The “measures” established by the numbers are one form of these analogies. They make it possible to constitute something similar to “blocks” of thought that provide organizing structures.

⁵ In addition, numbers can make symmetry apparent; for example, the symmetry between right and left, above and below, and Yin and Yang. The articulation of thought then is made by means of references to images and structures symmetrically arranged. This acquires the value of a convincing picture of reality, and therefore of a demonstration.

⁶ For example, we shall distinguish between Two in the sense of couple, of duality, of division, of duplication, and of second; between Three in the sense of fusion of two into one, of a hierarchical triad, etc.

⁷ There are exceptions to this statement; the *Zhong Lü chuandao ji* (Records of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin), for example, places the appearance of forms before the appearance of numbers. See *Xiuzhen shishu*, 14.9a.

multiplied themselves and generated the numbers, associated with the milfoil.⁸ Taoist authors often quote this statement.⁹

The use of numbers to represent the world in its multiple aspects and distributions is a fundamental feature of the science of *xiangshu* (“images and numbers”). This science is intimately linked to the exegesis of the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), and it is well known that the Taoists have drawn from it. The arithmetic manipulation of numbers was intended to account for the structure of situations and their changes, and thus to make the world understandable: knowing the structure of numbers results in a better comprehension of the world. In this respect, the Taoists are fully in line with this tradition.

For the Chinese, and especially for the Taoists, the numbers produce the world. In the words of a fourteenth-century Taoist commentator:

Heaven and Earth circulate and operate by numbers, and the ten thousand beings are born by numbers. The numbers are the movement and the rest of Yin and Yang in the Great Ultimate (*Taiji*).¹⁰

According to *Yuanyang zi*, the numbers are spirits.¹¹ For the *Hunyuan bajing zhenjing* (True Scripture of the Eight Luminous Spirits of the Inchoate Origin), when the numbers of Fire and Water were “complete” (*manzu*) they began to “coalesce into chaos” and “the One Breath of the cosmos emerged” (here the numbers come even before Unity); when the numbers of Yin and Yang and the Sun and the Moon were complete, stars and constellations were born; when the numbers of the revolutions of Yin and Yang and the five agents were complete, they could reach accomplishment; and the same is true of the alchemical Work, where each of the five agents must attain the fullness of its number.¹²

⁸ Couvreur, *La chronique de la Principauté de Lou*, vol. I, p. 306.

⁹ See, for example, *Daode zhenjing jiyi*, 2.6b; and *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu*, 3.14a.

¹⁰ *Wenchang dadong xianjing*, 1.13a.

¹¹ *Yuanyang zi jinye ji*, 10a.

¹² For these four statements, see *Hunyuan bajing zhenjing*, 1.1a, 1.1b, 1.2a, and 4.2a-3b, respectively.

The notion of the “complete” state of numbers is complemented by the notion of their “exhaustion,” which marks the end of the world.¹³ Obviously, these notions are based on ideas of cosmic cycles and of times of maturation and decline; they pertain to the ancient arithmology associated with divination and to the cosmic arithmology that accompanied it. However, while the numbers applied to these cycles express a course in time, they concurrently attest to a state (more or less young, mature, or old), a configuration in space, a structure. A number does not measure a quantity: it indicates a moment, a sequence, and a point in a configuration. In other words, numbers assign a position within time and space; time and space, in turn, provide the setting for the manifestation of possibilities, and by doing so they assign a quality and a relation. Their function is both to mark a difference, a discontinuity (differences in quality and space), and at the same time to ensure continuity in the form of a sequence.

Therefore numbers account for the order of the world. They represent an organic and hierarchical order that is the foundation of the work done by the Taoist adept who, in his role of demiurge, is similar to the mythical emperor, Yu the Great: he measures Heaven and Earth, places markers on them, and organizes them. With the “images,” the numbers are one of the tools that make this work possible.

Numerological cosmogonies

According to different authors, the One is either identified with the Dao or—following Laozi—regarded as being produced by the Dao. These perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but are complementary. They correspond to two conceptions of the One: on the one hand, the metaphysical One, which is not a number;¹⁴ on the other, the One as the producer, which as such is the first number.¹⁵ Typically, One—the origin of life—is the number assigned to Water, and therefore to the

¹³ *Taishang miaoshi jing*, 1b.

¹⁴ See Solomon, “‘One is no Number’ in China and the West.”

¹⁵ I will not dwell on this point, which would require an extended discussion and will be the subject of a separate study. [See Isabelle Robinet, “Un, deux, trois: Les différentes modalités de l’Un et sa dynamique,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 175–220. — Ed.]

Yin principle, as the first element, the origin of all things; in this case, One is deemed to be a Yin number.¹⁶ This is the general rule in Taoist texts. In contrast to it, the exegetical schools of the *Yijing* assign number One to Qian ☰, the Origin, pure Yang, and Heaven; in this case, the origin of the world is the movement that pertains to Yang.

The One as producer of the world reflects the fundamental monism of the Chinese: the world is the effect of the unfolding of the One into multiplicity. The transition to multiplicity occurs by the intermediation of the Two (“The One generates the Two,” says Laozi), represented by what the *Yijing* calls “the two Principles” (*liangyi*). With few exceptions, this expression designates Yin and Yang, the bipolarity, the existence of two extreme poles whose tension and mutual attraction support the dynamism of the world. At the origin of the world, in this case, is the Two, as in the Heaven-Earth couple. Two is duality. But in another sense, it is the number of Yin, of Kun ☷, and of the Earth. It comes second after the One, which is the number of Yang, of Qian, and of Heaven. This is the Two seen as discontinuity; it is the broken line of the *Yijing*, opposite to the solid line of the One, the Yang. Two also means duplication: according to a general interpretation that has no historical truth but is symbolically meaningful, the original trigrams were later doubled to form the hexagrams. Duplication pertains to the earthly Two, and means that we enter the world of phenomena.

In Taoism, generally—and again following Laozi—the Two generates the Three (and not the Four, as it does, for example, in the *Yijing* and in Shao Yong). According to a famous sentence in the calendrical chapter of the *Hanshu* (History of the Former Han Dynasty; chapter 21A), often referred to by the Taoists, the Three is contained within the One of the Great Ultimate (*Taiji*). It represents the agreement of the two complementary forces, Yin and Yang, and their product. It is the sign of the unity restored after the separation that establishes the world: on the one hand, the binary fission; on the other, the fertility of the union of the complementary opposites. The Three is Harmony, agreement, the Son, Man, or the human world,

Pages 51–74 are not included in this preview

¹⁶ See *Zhouyi cantong qi*, 1.35a.

On the Meaning of the Terms *Waidan* and *Neidan*

INTRODUCTION

Chinese bibliographers and modern historians of Taoism commonly use the term *neidan* (Internal Elixir) in contrast with *waidan* (External Elixir). While *waidan* refers to laboratory alchemy, *neidan* designates a new discipline that appears within Taoism from the eighth century (from this time, at least, we have its first written traces).

One reason for using the term *neidan* can be found in the earliest texts, such as the one by Tao Zhi (?–826), that emphatically distinguish themselves from laboratory alchemy, repeating with insistence that their Work is not concerned with “external things” (*waiwu*).¹ Another justification is provided by the *Yunji qiqian* (Seven Lots from the Bookbag of the Clouds), a major anthology of Taoist texts that presents the works of this discipline under the rubric of *Neidan*. In the *Yunji qiqian*, however, the works concerned with “chemical” alchemy are not classified under the heading of *Waidan*, but of *Jindan* (Golden Elixir). In fact, the term *neidan* is used in an entirely different way in the texts of this discipline, where the discipline itself is typically designated as *jindan* (Golden Elixir), *dadan* (Great Elixir), or *jinye huandan* (Golden Liquor and Cyclical Elixir).²

¹ *Huanjin shu*, 5a.

² I translate *huandan* as “cyclical elixir” instead of “transmuted elixir,” as is often done, on account of a fundamental idea frequently expressed in the texts—namely, the perpetual cyclical movement and the principle of circularity and transitivity in both directions: Water generates Metal that generates Water. See, for example, *Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi*, 2.23a. We observe very often the pattern “A generates B that generates A”: for example, Non-being generates Being that returns to Non-being; or, Cinnabar generates Metal that returns to Cinnabar. See *Longhu huandan jue*, 1.4a, 1.6a.

To avoid confusion, I will use in this essay the term “internal alchemy” to describe the discipline itself, and the term *neidan* (Internal Elixir, in contrast with *waidan*, External Elixir) to designate the object of my discussion.

Chen Guofu appears to have been the first scholar who tried to trace the contours of internal alchemy.³ According to Joseph Needham, the term *neidan* appears for the first time in the sixth century under the brush of the Buddhist monk Huisi. *Neidan* refers at that time to physiological alchemy, but the relevant source may contain an interpolation.⁴ Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein provides further evidence of this use, possibly dating from the fifth century but based on later secondary sources. She concludes by suggesting that while the term *neidan* may have been used earlier, it became current only during the Song period.⁵ This is quite reasonable, as it was at that time that internal alchemy became widespread and truly aware of its uniqueness.

Except for this, we have no explanation of the meaning of the term *neidan* in the earliest stages of its use. The study by Baldrian-Hussein provides information on the terms *neidan* and *waidan*, *waiyao* and *neiyao* (External and Internal Medicine), *yindan* and *yangdan* (Yin and Yang Elixir), and *dadan* and *dayao* (Great Elixir and Great Medicine). The author, however, does not truly pronounce herself on their meanings, since her study, as suggested by its title, is mainly concerned with the “origin and use” of those terms. The passages devoted by Needham to this subject are based on few and fragmentary texts, and his conclusions are at times somewhat hasty.

Without pretending to be comprehensive, I will try to clarify this issue. In different times and according to different authors, the terms *neidan* and *waidan* take on different shades of meaning, and are indeed confusing. Both terms, moreover, were used within both laboratory alchemy and internal alchemy.⁶ I propose to throw some light on these different meanings, limiting myself to the texts of internal alchemy.

³ Chen Guofu, *Daozang yuanliu kao*, pp. 438–53.

⁴ Needham, *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. V, pt. 5, p. 140.

⁵ See Baldrian-Hussein, “Inner Alchemy: Notes on the Origin and Use of the Term *Neidan*.”

⁶ See Baldrian-Hussein, *id.*, p. 179.

The question is not simple, and has been further complicated by some Taoist scholars. Li Yuanguo, for instance, relates it to the sexual practices.⁷ In his view, the External Medicine (*waiyao*) would be gathered by a man from a woman during sexual intercourse. Li Yuanguo bases himself on the commentaries to the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) by Weng Baoguang and by Chen Zhixu (also known as Shangyang zi), respectively dating from the twelfth and the fourteenth centuries.⁸ Li Yuanguo's interpretation is unwarranted: as we shall presently see, those authors give quite different explanations. More importantly, the remarks made by those authors against the sexual practices are as much deprecatory as those of other authors whom Li Yuanguo ranks among the opponents of sexual practices, exactly on the basis of those remarks.

In particular, Weng Baoguang clearly explains in his commentary to the *Wuzhen pian* that those who, in order to translate the *neidan* in terms of sexual practices, base themselves on the argument of the infertility of pure Yin and Yang (an argument relied on by Li Yuanguo as well, but which is present everywhere, beginning with the *Cantong*

⁷ See Li Yuanguo, *Daojiao qigong yangshengxue*. The issue of sexual practices in *Neidan* is complicated by the fact that while these practices probably existed, this does not mean that the masters recommended them. Joseph Needham's positivist spirit pushes him too often to regrettable misunderstandings, analogous to his claim that a text such as the *Huangqi yangjing jing* (Scripture of the Yellow Breath and the Yang Essence) teaches the practice of "heliotherapy," while it deals with meditations on the Sun and the Moon that can be performed in the shade of a room. It is a true contradiction when, in his *Science and Civilisation in China*, vol. V, part 5, p. 212, Needham translates for the purposes of his "sexual" thesis: "As for disclosing [the nature of] the lead in the reaction-vessel, if you wish to judge of it, it is necessary to fix the Yang fire so that it plays underneath, but it must not be allowed to spread so that it attains the intensity of human passion. This is to show the practitioner under instruction where he must stop. This decision is called the Mysterious Axis." Having said earlier that the woman's body is the "reaction-vessel" and the man's body is the stove, Needham adds that fire is "of course the masculine ardour," and that the text deals with *coitus interruptus*. However, the passage simply states: "You must learn the precise rules governing the Tripod and the Lead, so that the Yang fire may descend and spread. If you do not meet a perfect man who gives you teachings, how can you discover the Mysterious Axis?" See *Jinye huandan yinzheng tu*, 3b.

⁸ Li Yuanguo, *Daojiao qigong yangshengxue*, p. 412, quoting, without references, *Ziyang zhenren wuzhen pian zhushu*, 7.2a-b, and *Ziyang zhenren wuzhen pian sanzhu*, 1.10b.

qi) have not understood, because “man” and “woman” are not meant literally and should be intended as metaphoric terms.⁹ The same says Chen Zhixu in his *Jindan dayao* (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir).¹⁰ On the other hand, sexual metaphors are also used by such authors as Chen Nan, ranked by Li Yuanguo among the supporters of the “pure practice,” which excludes sexual practices.¹¹ One wonders on what grounds can one use the same argument first in one direction and then in the opposite direction, consider the denials of some authors and not those of others, and decide that some authors use metaphors while others should be understood literally. In fact, Li Yuanguo is aware of the fragility of his argument: he quotes Weng Baoguang’s remarks against the sexual practices, but immediately deprives them of authority with no other argument than his own personal interpretation.¹²

Reverting to our subject, that interpretation is partly based on the terms *waidan* and *neidan*, which Li Yuanguo relates, as do the authors of alchemical texts, to the terms *bi* (“the other”) and *wo* (“me”). These terms, which are deemed to be parallel—*bi* refers to the *waidan*, and *wo* to the *neidan*—are used in the *Wuzhen pian*. According to Li Yuanguo, *bi* means “she,” i.e., the woman from whom one should receive the External Elixir. A more careful reading of the texts will help us to understand what these terms refer to.

I will divide this essay into three parts, unequal in size but organized around the semantic content of the terms *neidan* and *waidan*. In the first part, I rely on several documents that illustrate the diversity of meanings, sometimes contradictory, taken on by these terms. The second part is devoted to the meanings attributed to these terms by several authors grouped, for convenience, around Chen Zhixu (1290–ca. 1368), as he is the one who appears to be the most explicit. These authors also include Weng Baoguang (fl. 1173), Yu Yan (1258–1314), Li Daochun (fl. ca. 1290), and Zhao Yizhen (late fourteenth century).

⁹ *Ziyang zhenren wuzhen pian zhushu*, 1.10b and 2.1b. In contrast, Ye Wenshu (also known as Ye Shibiao) seems to have interpreted the *Wuzhen pian* in terms of sexual practices, precisely what Weng Baoguang opposed vigorously. See *Xiuzhen shishu*, 27.3a.

¹⁰ *Shangyang zi jindan dayao*, 5.13a and 3.3b.

¹¹ *Zhixuan pian* (Pointing to the Mystery), in *Xiuzhen shishu*, 3.3b. See Li Yuanguo, *Daojiao qigong yangshengxue*, p. 399.

¹² Li Yuanguo, *Daojiao qigong yangshengxue*, p. 414.

Some of them are quoted by Chen Zhixu, who shares their views. It should be noted that they include authors whom Li Yuanguo claims to be supporters of sexual practices, as well as authors whom he deems to support the “pure practice.” The third and last part is devoted to further explanations given by some of these authors on the distinctions and interactions between the “external” and the “internal.”

I. DIVERSITY OF MEANINGS

To illustrate the variety of meanings given to the terms *neidan* and *waidan*, we shall begin by comparing two texts that in this regard are opposite to one another.

1. The *Taishang jiu Yao xinyin miaojing* (Most High Wondrous Scripture of the Mind Seal and Its Nine Essentials) briefly states that the *neidan* concerns the true Breath, in contrast to the *waidan* that concerns the breath of food, i.e., the ordinary and coarse human breath.¹³ This view is similar to the one of Qiu Chuji (1146–1227), for whom the true breath of original Yang is hidden inside, while the external concerns the (spermatic?) essence (*jing*) and blood, i.e., physiology.¹⁴

2. The *Xuanzong zhizhi wanfa tonggui* (Reintegrating the Ten Thousand Dharmas: A Straightforward Explanation of the Taoist Tradition) explains, instead, that the *neidan* concerns the personal vital breath, and the *waidan* concerns the primordial cosmic Breath. These two breaths are inseparable from one another; the terms *nei* (“internal”) and *wai* (“external”) have been used to teach that one should “know this (*ci*) and understand that (*bi*).” It is an error, adds this text, to have thought that “external” designates minerals and plants.¹⁵ Here, unlike the previous text, *waidan* refers to what pertains to the primordial Breath. Moreover, we find again the terms *bi* (“that,” “the other”) to designate the “external,” and *ci* or *wo* (“this” or “me”) to designate the “internal,” on which Li Yuanguo bases his interpretation discussed above. As we can see, here *bi* very clearly designates the cosmic Breath.

¹³ *Taishang jiu Yao xinyin miaojing*, 6a.

¹⁴ *Dadan zhizhi*, 1.1b.

¹⁵ *Xuanzong zhizhi wanfa tonggui*, 3.13b.

For the other texts that we shall present, *nei* designates the physiological techniques.

3. We should first discuss the *Chen xiansheng neidan jue* (Instructions on the Internal Elixir by Master Chen), attributed to Chen Pu and dating from the late Tang or the early Five Dynasties (ca. tenth century, with a preface dated to the eleventh century).¹⁶ This text exhibits hardly any of the typical features of internal alchemy: it rarely refers to trigrams and hexagrams, and contains few examples of the vocabulary of this discipline. However, it mentions one of the dominant and most representative principles of internal alchemy: True Yin and True Yang are extracted from their opposite principles (here the Sun and the Moon).¹⁷ The text provides a good example of a type of internal alchemy that is not yet very pronounced and is closely related to the methods of Shangqing Taoism, which in some respects constitute—as Michael Strickmann and myself have shown—an “astral alchemy.”¹⁸

In this text, *nei* designates the traditional physiological practices, and *wai* designates the “astral” meditation practices of Shangqing. The astral emanations are the external cosmic elements that allow one to “capture [the mechanism of] universal creation” (*zaohua*), one of the fundamental goals of internal alchemy and one of the formulations that its followers are most fond of. The asterisms provide the external Yin and Yang that are essential to the sublimation of the body, which the text emphasizes and on which it provides details.¹⁹

Pages 81–102 are not included in this preview

¹⁶ A variant version of this work is found in *Xiuzhen shishu*, 17.1b ff. The commentary is different, but the “oral instructions” are by Chen Pu. This version erroneously attributes the appellation Niwan xiansheng (Master of the Muddy Pellet), which belongs to Chen Nan (?–1212), to Chen Pu. It also erroneously refers to Chen Pu’s work as *Cuixu pian* (The Emerald Emptiness), which is the title of a work by Chen Nan. In other words, the *Xiuzhen shishu* makes confusion between Chen Nan and Chen Pu, to the detriment of the latter who is the actual author of the text discussed here.

¹⁷ *Chen xiansheng neidan jue*, 22a-b.

¹⁸ Strickmann, “On the Alchemy of T’ao Hung-ching,” pp. 169–78; Robinet, *La révélation du Shangqing dans l’histoire du taoïsme*, pp. 176–80.

¹⁹ *Chen xiansheng neidan jue*, 10a-b and 17b, respectively.

Tables and Pictures

Tables and Pictures

Table 1

	WOOD	FIRE	SOIL	METAL	WATER
DIRECTIONS	east	south	center	west	north
SEASONS	spring	summer	(midsummer)	autumn	winter
COLORS	green	red	yellow	white	black
EMBLEMATIC ANIMALS	green dragon	vermilion sparrow	yellow dragon	white tiger	snake and turtle
NUMBERS	3, 8	2, 7	5, 10	4, 9	1, 6
YIN-YANG (1)	minor Yang	great Yang	balance	minor Yin	great Yin
YIN-YANG (2)	True Yin	Yang	balance	True Yang	Yin
STEMS	<i>jia</i> 甲 <i>yi</i> 乙	<i>bing</i> 丙 <i>ding</i> 丁	<i>wu</i> 戊 <i>ji</i> 己	<i>geng</i> 庚 <i>xin</i> 辛	<i>ren</i> 壬 <i>gui</i> 癸
BRANCHES	<i>yin</i> 寅 <i>mao</i> 卯	<i>wu</i> 午 <i>si</i> 巳	<i>xu</i> 戌, <i>chou</i> 丑 <i>wei</i> 未, <i>chen</i> 辰	<i>you</i> 酉 <i>shen</i> 申	<i>hai</i> 亥 <i>zi</i> 子
PLANETS	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
RELATIONS	father	daughter	ancestors	mother	son
VISCERA	liver	heart	spleen	lungs	kidneys
BODY ORGAN	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears

The five agents (*wuxing*) and their associations.

Tables and Pictures

Table 2

FIRE South Vermilion Sparrow 2 cinnabar Original Spirit (<i>yuanshen</i> 元神)		
WOOD East Green Dragon 3 True Mercury inner nature (<i>xing</i> 性)	SOIL Center 5 intention (<i>yi</i> 意)	METAL West White Tiger 4 True Lead qualities (<i>qing</i> 情)
WATER North Dark Warrior 1 black lead Original Essence (<i>yuanjing</i> 元精)		

Spatial arrangement of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行),
with some of their main associations.

In agreement with traditional Chinese conventions,
this and the following tables show the North at the bottom,
the South at the top, the East on the left, and the West on the right.

Tables and Pictures

Table 3

	GENERATES	IS GENERATED BY	CONQUERS	IS CONQUERED BY
WATER	Wood	Metal	Fire	Soil
WOOD	Fire	Water	Soil	Metal
FIRE	Soil	Wood	Metal	Water
SOIL	Metal	Fire	Water	Wood
METAL	Water	Soil	Wood	Fire

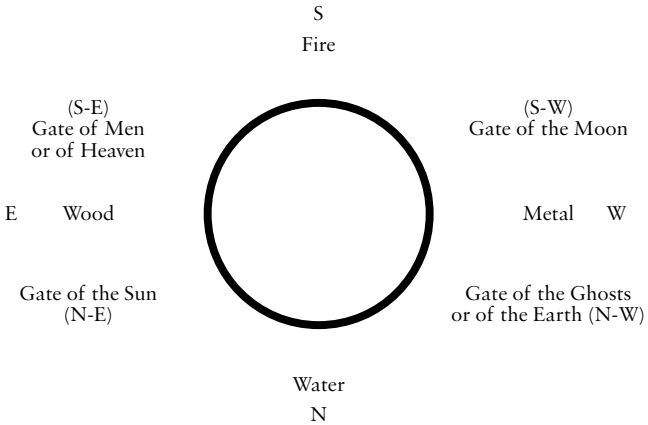
“Generation” (*xiangsheng* 相生)
and “conquest” (*xiangke* 相剋)
sequences of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行).

Table 4

AGENT	GENERATIVE NUMBER	ACHIEVED NUMBER
WATER	1	6
FIRE	2	7
WOOD	3	8
METAL	4	9
SOIL	5	10

“Generative numbers” (*shengshu* 生數)
and “achieved numbers” (*chengshu* 成數)
of the five agents.

Table 5



Spatial arrangement of the four external agents and the four gates. In agreement with traditional Chinese conventions, this and the following tables show the North at the bottom, the South at the top, the East on the left, and the West on the right.

Tables and Pictures

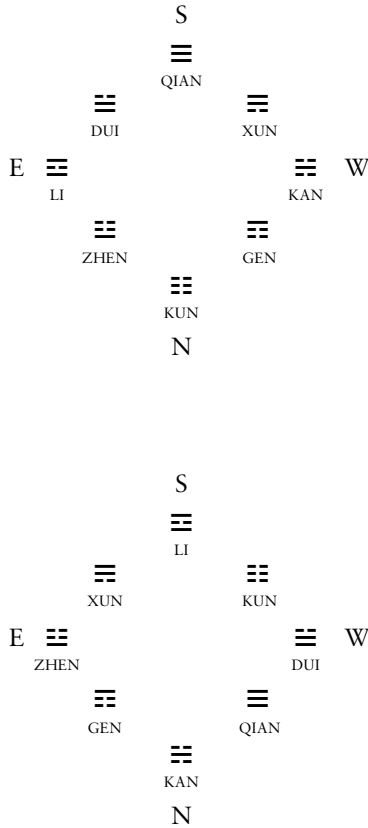
Table 6

☰	☱	☲	☳	☴	☵	☶	☷
乾	兌	離	震	巽	坎	艮	坤
QIAN	DUI	LI	ZHEN	XUN	KAN	GEN	KUN
heaven	lake	fire	thunder	wind	water	mountain	earth
father	youngest daughter	second daughter	eldest son	eldest daughter	second son	youngest son	mother
south	southeast	east	northeast	southwest	west	northwest	north
northwest	west	south	east	southeast	north	northeast	southwest

The eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) and their main associations. From top to bottom: elements in nature, family relations, and directions in the cosmological configurations “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian* 先天) and “posterior to Heaven” (*houtian* 後天).

Tables and Pictures

Table 7



Arrangement of the eight trigrams in the configurations “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian*, top) and “posterior to Heaven” (*houtian*, bottom).

Tables and Pictures

Table 8

	STEMS	AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	COLORS	VISCERA	NUMBERS
1	<i>ji</i> 甲	WOOD	east	green	liver	3, 8
2	<i>yi</i> 乙					
3	<i>bing</i> 丙	FIRE	south	red	heart	2, 7
4	<i>ding</i> 丁					
5	<i>wu</i> 戊	SOIL	center	yellow	spleen	5
6	<i>ji</i> 己					
7	<i>geng</i> 庚	METAL	west	white	lungs	4, 9
8	<i>xin</i> 辛					
9	<i>ren</i> 壬	WATER	north	black	kidneys	1, 6
10	<i>gui</i> 癸					

The ten celestial stems (*tiangan*) and their associations.

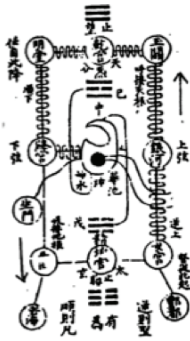
Table 9

	BRANCHES	AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	HOURS	NUMBERS
1	<i>zi</i> 子	WATER	N	23–1	1, 6
2	<i>chou</i> 丑	SOIL	NNE 3/4 E	1–3	5, 10
3	<i>yin</i> 寅	WOOD	ENE 3/4 N	3–5	3, 8
4	<i>mao</i> 卯	WOOD	E	5–7	3, 8
5	<i>chen</i> 辰	SOIL	ESE 3/4 S	7–9	5, 10
6	<i>si</i> 巳	FIRE	SSE 3/4 E	9–11	2, 7
7	<i>wu</i> 午	FIRE	S	11–13	2, 7
8	<i>wei</i> 未	SOIL	SSW 3/4 W	13–15	5, 10
9	<i>shen</i> 申	METAL	WSW 3/4 S	15–17	4, 9
10	<i>you</i> 酉	METAL	W	17–19	4, 9
11	<i>xu</i> 戌	SOIL	WNW 3/4 N	19–21	5, 10
12	<i>hai</i> 亥	WATER	NNW 3/4 W	21–23	1, 6

The twelve earthly branches (*dizhi*) and their associations.

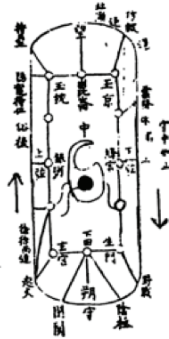
Figures 1-3

圖藥外



一
Médecine extérieure

圖候火



二
Régime du feu

圖藥內



三
Médecine intérieure

Top left: "Chart of the External Medicine" ("Waiyao tu").

Top right: "Chart of the Fire Regime" ("Huohou tu").

Bottom: "Chart of the Internal Medicine" ("Neiyao tu").

Li Daochun, *Zhonghe ji*, chapter 2.

Appendix

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- 1976 “Randonnées extatiques des taoïstes dans les astres.” *Monumenta Serica* 32: 159–273.
- 1977 *Les commentaires du Tao t'ou king jusqu'au VIIIe siècle*. Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises.
- 1979 *Méditation taoïste*. Paris: Dervy Livres, 1979. [Translated into English as *Taoist Meditation: The Mao-shan Tradition of Great Purity* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1993).]
- 1979 “Introduction au Kieou-tchen tchong-king.” *Society for the Study of Chinese Religions Bulletin* 7: 24–45.
- 1979 “Metamorphosis and Deliverance from the Corpse in Taoism.” *History of Religions* 19: 37–70.
- 1983 “Kouo Siang ou le monde comme absolu.” *T'oung Pao* 69: 87–112.
- 1983 “Le *Ta-tung chen-ching*; son authenticité et sa place dans les textes du Shang-ch'ing ching.” In Michael Strickmann, ed. *Tantric and Taoist Studies in Honour of Rolf A. Stein*, II:394–433. Bruxelles: Institut Belge des Hautes Études Chinoises.
- 1983 “Chuang-tzu et le taoïsme ‘religieux.’” *Journal of Chinese Religions* 11: 59–109.
- 1984 Entries in Denis Huisman, ed., *Dictionnaire des philosophes*. Paris: Presses Universitaires de France.
- 1984 *La révélation du Shangqing dans l'histoire du taoïsme*. 2 vols. Paris: École Française d'Extrême-Orient.
- 1984 “Notes préliminaires sur quelques antinomies fondamentales entre le bouddhisme et le taoïsme.” In Lionello Lanciotti, ed., *Incontro di religioni in Asia tra il III e il X secolo d.C.*, 217–42. Firenze: Leo S. Olschki Editore.
- 1985 “*Jing, qi* et *shen*.” *Revue française d'acupuncture* 43: 27–36.
- 1985 “L'unité transcendante des trois enseignements selon les taoïstes des Sung et des Yüan.” In Gert Naundorf, Karl-Heinz Pohl, and Hans-Herman Schmidt, eds., *Religion und Philosophie in Ostasien:*

Appendix

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Glossary of Chinese Characters

- Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾
bajie 八節 (“eight joints”)
bao 包 (“to contain”)
bei 備 (“complete”)
ben 本 (“fundamentally”)
benzhu 本注 (“original commentary”)
bi 彼 (“that,” “the other”)
Cantong qi 參同契 (Token for Joining the Three)
chan 產 (“emergence”)
chen 辰 (“marks”)
Chen Nan 陳楠
Chen Pu 陳朴
Chen xiansheng neidan jue 陳先生內丹訣 (Instructions on the Internal Elixir by Master Chen)
Chen Zhixu 陳致虛
cheng 成 (“achieved” numbers)
ci 此 (“this”)
cuanqu 攢簇 (“concentration”)
Cuixu pian 翠虛篇 (The Emerald Emptiness)
cun 存 (“to give presence”)
dadan 大丹 (Great Elixir)
dafu 大夫 (high official)
Dai Qizong 戴起宗
Daode jing 道德經 (Book of the Way and its Virtue)
Daofa huiyuan 道法會元 (Collected Essentials of Taoist Methods)
Daozang jiyao 道藏輯要
dayao 大藥 (Great Medicine)
dian 點 (“to project”)
dian dao 顛倒 (“reversal, inversion”)
dongtian 洞天 (Grotto-Heavens)
dou 斗 (“bushel”)
dunjia 遁甲 (Hidden Stem)
Duren jing 度人經 (Scripture on Salvation)
fa 法 (Dharma)
fangshi 方士 (“men possessing recipes”)
fashen 法身 (“body of the law,” *dharmakāya*)
fu 府 (“receptacles”)
fudi 福地 (Blissful Lands)
geng 庚 (one of the ten celestial stems)
gongfu 功夫 (“work”)
guan 官 (“officers”)
guan 關 (“barrier,” a stage of the alchemical practice)
Guanshiyin 觀世音
Guanyin 觀音
gui Yang 癸陽
Han Po 韓博
Hanshu 漢書 (History of the Former Han Dynasty)
hao 號 (“to be named”)
Hongfan 洪範 (The Great Plan)
hou 候 (a unit of time)
houtian 後天 (“posterior to heaven” or “to the world”)
hu xi huang xi 忽兮恍兮 (“vague and indistinct”)
Huainan zi 淮南子 (Book of the Master of Huainan)
huandan 還丹 (Cyclical Elixir)
Huang Ziru 黃自如
huanghu 恍惚 (“vague and indistinct”)

Glossary of Chinese Characters

- Huanzhen ji* 還真集 (Anthology of Reverting to Reality)
- huawei* 化為 (“to transform into”)
- hui* 慧 (wisdom)
- Huisi 慧思
- hun* 魂 (“Yang soul”)
- Hunyuan bajing zhenjing* 混元八景真經 (True Scripture of the Eight Luminous Spirits of the Inchoate Origin)
- huohou* 火候 (Fire regime)
“Huohou tu” 火候圖 (“Chart of the Fire Regime”)
- huoshu* 火數 (“numbers of fire”)
- ji* 即 (grammatical marker of copula)
- jia* 假 (“to borrow”)
- jiaming* 假名 (“to borrow the name of”)
- jie* 節 (a unit of time)
- jin* 斤 (“pound,” a unit of weight)
- Jin yuechi* 金鑰匙 (Golden Key)
- Jindan 金丹 (Golden Elixir)
- Jindan dayao* 金丹大要 (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir)
- Jindan sibi zi* 金丹四百字 (Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir)
- Jindan zhibi* 金丹直指 (Straightforward Directions on the Golden Elixir)
- jing* 景 (luminous celestial spirits)
- jing* 精 (essence)
- Jing Fang 京方
- jinjing* 金精 (Essence of Metal)
- jinye huandan* 金液還丹 (Golden Liquor and Cyclical Elixir)
- jiu* 九 (“nine”)
- jiu* 究 (“exhaustion”)
- ju* 聚 (“to gather” or “to collect”)
- kan-wu* 坎戊
- ke* 克 (“to conquest”)
- ke* 刻 (a unit of time)
- ke* 客 (“guest”)
- koan* 公案 (*gong’an*)
- kun xiantian qi* 坤先天氣 (Breath prior to Heaven of Kun)
- Laozi 老子
- li* 理 (“principles”)
- li* 里 (“mile”)
- Li Daochun 李道純
- li-ji* 離己
- liang* 兩 (“ounce,” a unit of weight)
- liangyi* 兩儀 (“two principles”)
- lianshen* 鍊神 (“purifying the spirit”)
- liao* 了 (“transcendence”)
- Liezi* 列子 (Book of Master Lie)
- ling gan* 靈感 (“divine animation”)
- Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure)
- Lingbao jun 靈寶君
- liuding* 六丁 (Six Ding)
- liube* 六合 (“six conjunctions”)
- liuji* 六極 (“six poles”)
- liujia* 六甲 (Six Jia)
- liumo* 六漠 (“six deserts”)
- liuwei* 六位 (six hexagrams lines)
- Lu Ziyue 陸子野
- lü* 呂 (pitch pipes)
- Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓
- luo* 絡 (vessels)
- man* 滿 (“full”)
- manzu* 滿足 (“complete, sufficient”)
- mao* 卯 (one of the twelve earthly branches)
- Meng Xi 孟喜
- ming* 名 (“to be named”)
- ming* 命 (“vital force”)
- ming* 明 (“comprehension”)
- Mingtang 明堂 (Hall of Light)
- mo* 脈 (arteries)
- Mu Changzhao 牧常晁
- muye* 木液 (Liquor of Wood)
- nayin* 納因 (“induced sounds”)
- nei* 內 (“internal”)
- Neidan, *neidan* 內丹 (internal alchemy, “internal elixir”)
- neishi* 內事 (“inner practice”)
- neiyao* 內藥 (Internal Medicine)
- “Neiyao tu” 內藥圖 “Chart of the

- Internal Medicine”
ni 逆 (“going backward,” “going against the current”)
ning shen ru yu kan qi 凝神入於坤臍
 Niwan xiansheng 泥丸先生
 Peng Xiao 彭曉
po 魄 (“Yin soul”)
qi 器 (“instrument”; “material entity”)
qi 氣 (1. breath; 2. a unit of time)
qian houtian qi 乾後天氣
Qian zuodu 乾鑿度 (Opening the Way to the Understanding of Qian ䷀)
qianjin 乾金 (“Qian-Metal”)
qing 情 (“emotional nature”)
 Qiu Chuji 邱處機
quan 全 (“making full”)
ren 仁 (“humanity”)
Sandong zhunang 三洞珠囊 (Pearl Satchel of the Three Caverns)
 Sanhuang 三皇
sanjiao 三焦 (“three burners”)
 Sanyuan, *sanyuan* 三元 (Three Primes; three major deities of the body)
seshen 色身 (“appearance body,” *rū-pakāya*)
sexiang 色相 (“forms”)
Shangdong xindan jingjue 上洞心丹經訣 (Instructions on the Scripture of the Heart Elixir of the Highest Cavern)
 Shangqing 上清
 Shangyang zi 上陽子
 Shao Yong 邵雍
shen 神 (spirit)
 Shenbao jun 神寶君
sheng 生 (1. “to generate”; 2. “emergent” or “generative” numbers)
shenqi 神氣 (“divine breaths”)
shi 是 (grammatical marker of copula)
shi . . . ye 是 . . . 也 (copula, grammatical pattern for a definition, e.g., “X is Y”)
shishi 識時 (“qualities and times”)
shiyin 世音
shuijin 水金 (Metal of the Water; “Water-Metal,” i.e., mercury)
shuiyin 水銀 (mercury)
shun 順 (going in the “right” sense)
Shuogua 說卦 (Explanation of the Trigrams)
sitai 四太 (“four greats”)
Taichu 太初 (Great Beginning)
Taiji 太極 (Great Ultimate)
Taiping jing 太平經 (Scripture of Great Peace)
Taishang juyao xinyin miaojing 太上九要心印妙經 (Most High Wondrous Scripture of the Mind Seal and Its Nine Essentials)
Taishi 太始 (Great Commencement)
Taisu 太素 (Great Purity)
Taiyi 太易 (Great Simplicity)
 Taiyin 太陰 (Great Yin)
 Tao Zhi 陶植
ti 體 (“substance,” “constitutive basis,” “body”)
tian 天 (Heaven, Nature)
 Tianbao jun 天寶君
tishu 體數 (“fundamental number”)
wai 外 (“external”)
Waidan, waidan 外丹 (external alchemy, “external elixir”)
Waidan neidan lun 外丹內丹論 (Treatise on the External and the Internal Elixirs)
Waiguo fangpin 外國放品 (Distribution of the Outer Realms)
waiwu 外物 (“external things”)
waixiang 外象 (“external symbols”)
waiyao 外藥 (External Medicine)
 “Waiyao tu” 外藥圖 (“Chart of the External Medicine”)
 Wang Bi 王弼
 Wang Dao 王道
wei 為 (grammatical marker of copula)
wei 衛 (“defense”)

Glossary of Chinese Characters

- wei* 謂 (“to be named”)
Weng Baoguang 翁葆光
wo 我 (“me”)
wu 午 (one of the twelve earthly branches)
wu 無 (“non-being,” “non-existence”)
wu 物 (“thing”)
Wu Chongxu 伍冲虛
Wu Wu 吳悟
wuwei 無為 (“non-action”)
wuxiang 無象 (“having no image”)
wuxing 五行 (five agents)
 “Wuxing tu” 五行圖 (“Chart of the Five Agents”)
Wuzhen pian 悟真篇 (Awakening to Reality)
Xia Zongyu 夏宗宇
xiang 象 (“image,” “symbol,” “metaphor”)
xiangke 相剋 (“conquest” sequence of the five agents)
xiangsheng 相生 (“generation” sequence of the five agents)
xiangshu 象數 (“images and numbers”)
xiangying 相應 (“to respond to one another”)
Xianquan ji 峴泉集 (Anthology of Mountain Springs)
xiantian 先天 (“prior to heaven” or “to the world”)
Xiantian xuanmiao yunü taishang shengmu zichuan xiandao 先天玄妙玉女太上聖母資傳仙道 (The Way of Immortality Transmitted by the Most High Holy Mother, Precelestial Jade Woman of Obscure Mystery)
Xiao Yanzhi 蕭延芝
Xici 繫辭 (“Great Appendix” to the *Book of Changes*)
xin 心 (heart, the intuitive spirit)
xing 性 (“true nature,” “original nature”)
xing 行 (“practice”)
xing dao 行道 (“implementation of the Dao”)
Xiudan miaoyong zhili lun 修丹妙用至理論 (Treatise on the Ultimate Principles of the Wondrous Operation of the Cultivation of the Elixir)
xiuding 修定 (concentration)
Xiuzhen bijue 修真祕訣 (Secret Instructions on the Cultivation of Reality)
xuanji 玄極 (“hidden spring”)
Xuanxue 玄學 (“school of the Mystery”)
Xuanzong zhizhi wanfa tonggui 玄宗直指萬法同歸 (Reintegrating the Ten Thousand Dharmas: A Straightforward Explanation of the Taoist Tradition)
xubi 虛比 (“empty similitudes”)
Xue Daoguang 薛道光
yangdan 陽丹 (Yang Elixir)
yangsheng 養生 (“nourishing life”)
Yanluo zi 煙蘿子
ye 也 (grammatical marker of copula)
Ye Shibiao 葉士表
Ye Wenshu 葉文叔
yi 意 (“creative idea”)
yi 義 (“righteousness”)
Yijing 易經 (Book of Changes)
Yimen pomige 夷門破迷歌 (Yimen’s Song on Overcoming Delusion)
Yin Xi 尹喜
yindan 陰丹 (Yin Elixir)
ying 營 (“construction”)
yinyang wuxing 陰陽五行 (Yin-Yang and five agents)
yishen 移神 (“carrying one’s spirit”)
yong 用 (“operation,” “implementation,” “functioning”)
you 有 (“being,” “existence”)
you 酉 (one of the twelve earthly branches)

Glossary of Chinese Characters

- youming* 窈冥 (“dark and obscure”)
youwei 有為 (“action”)
yu 喻 (“metaphor”)
- Yu Yan 俞琰
 Yuanshi 元始 (Original Commence-
 ment)
 Yuanyang zi 元陽子
 Yuanyou 遠遊 (Far Roaming)
 Yunji qiqian 雲笈七籤 (Seven Lots
 from the Bookbag of the Clouds)
zaohua 造化 (“creation”)
- zhan* 戰 (“to fight”)
- zhang* 丈 (a unit of length)
 Zhang Boduan 張伯端
 Zhang Daoling 張道陵
 Zhao Yizhen 趙宜真
- zhen geng* 震庚
 Zheng Xuan 鄭玄
zhentu 真土 (True Soil)
zhenyou 真有 (“true existence”)
- zhi* 志 (will)
zhi 治 (“to control”)
- zhi* 知 (knowledge)
- Zhigui ji* 指歸集 (Anthology Pointing
 to Where One Belongs)
Zhixuan pian 指玄篇 (Pointing to the
 Mystery)
Zhong Lü chuandao ji 鍾呂傳道集
 (Records of the Transmission of
 the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü
 Dongbin)
zhonghe 中和 (“median harmony”)
 Zhongli Quan 鍾離權
Zhouyi lüeli 周易略例 (General Intro-
 duction to the Book of Changes)
- zhu* 主 (“master,” “host”)
- zhu* 銖 (a unit of weight)
Zhuangzi 莊子 (Book of Master
 Zhuang)
zhusha 朱砂 (Red Cinnabar)
- zi* 子 (one of the twelve earthly
 branches)
Zuozhuan 左傳 (Zuo’s Commentary
 [to the *Springs and Autumns*])

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Chen xiansheng neidan jue 陳先生內丹訣 [Instructions on the Internal Elixir by Master Chen]. Attributed to Chen Pu 陳朴, ca. tenth century. Daozang, CT 1096.

Chongyang zhenren jinguan yusuo jue 重陽真人金關玉鎖訣 [Instructions on the Golden Barrier and the Jade Lock by the True Man Wang Chongyang]. Attributed to Wang Zhe 王嘉 (1113–70). Daozang, CT 1156.

Cui gong ruyao jing zhujie 崔公入藥鏡注解 [Commentary and Explications on the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine* by Master Cui]. Wang Jie 王玠 (?–ca. 1380). Daozang, CT 135.

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WANG MU

**Foundations
of Internal Alchemy**
The Taoist Practice of Neidan



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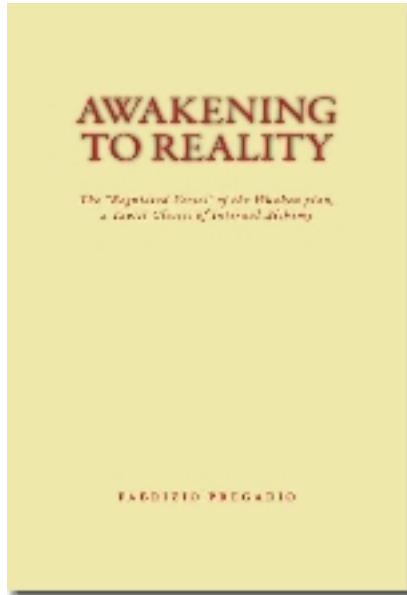
*Foundations of Internal Alchemy:
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Originally written for Chinese readers, this book provides a clear description of the Taoist practice of Internal Alchemy, or Neidan. The author outlines the stages of the alchemical practice and clarifies several relevant terms and notions, including Essence, Breath, and Spirit; the Cinnabar Fields; the “Fire Times”; and the Embryo. The book is based on the system of the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality), one of the main sources of Internal Alchemy, and contains about two hundred quotations from original Taoist texts.



Awakening to Reality
The "Regulated Verses" of the Wuzhen pian,
a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy

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Awakening to Reality (*Wuzhen pian*) is one of the most important and best-known Taoist alchemical texts. Written in the eleventh century, it describes in a poetical form several facets of Neidan, or Internal Alchemy. This book presents the first part of the text, consisting of sixteen poems, which contain a concise but comprehensive exposition of Neidan. In addition to notes that intend to clarify the meaning of the more obscure points, the book also contains selections from a commentary dating from the late eighteenth century, which is distinguished by the use of a lucid and plain language.

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