



TAOIST INTERNAL ALCHEMY

An Anthology
of Neidan Texts

Translated from the Chinese,
introduced, and annotated
by Fabrizio Pregadio



Golden Elixir Press

Fabrizio Pregadio

Taoist Internal Alchemy

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Preview

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Cover: The Taoist Immortal Lü Dongbin,
related to several Neidan traditions. Hanging scroll, ca. 1300.

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Preview

Foreword

This anthology presents complete or partial translations of sixteen important works belonging to the Taoist tradition of Neidan, or Internal Alchemy. While the selections are far from covering the whole field of Neidan—a virtually impossible task, given its width and variety—they are representative of several lineages and branches. Texts have been selected in this perspective, and they are arranged chronologically in order to provide an overview not only of Neidan, but also of the history of its discourses and practices.

The anthology opens with three foundational works, the first two of which were actually written before the rise of Neidan, but are part of its main writings: the *Seal of the Unity of the Three* (*Cantong qi*), the *Book of the Hidden Agreement* (*Yinfu jing*), and the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine* (*Ruyao jing*). There follow several works belonging to the three main lineages created between the tenth and the twelfth centuries. The first is the *Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin* (*Zhong Lü chuandao ji*), associated with the Zhong-Lü lineage. Three works are related to the Southern Lineage (Nanzong), namely the *Awakening to Reality* (*Wuzhen pian*), by Zhang Boduan; the *Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir* (*Jindan sibai zi*), also attributed to Zhang Boduan; and the *Pointers to the Mystery* (*Zhixuan pian*), by Bai Yuchan. Next, the *Fifteen Essays by Wang Chongyang to Establish the Teaching* (*Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun*) is representative of the Northern Lineage (Beizong).

Two texts document the integration of the Southern and Northern lineages in the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries: the *Harmony of the Center: An Anthology* (*Zhonghe ji*), by Li Daochun, and the *Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir* (*Jindan dayao*), by Chen Zhixu. Later Neidan lineages, established between the sixteenth and the eighteenth centuries, are represented by Lu Xixing's *Rectifying Errors for the Seekers of the Golden Elixir* (*Jindan jiuzheng pian*); the anonymous *Principles of the Conjoined Cultivation of Nature and Existence* (*Xingming guizhi*); the *Secret of the Golden Flower* (*Jinhua zongzhi*), attributed to the Taoist immortal, Lü Dongbin; and the *Discriminations on Difficult Points in Cultivating Reality* (*Xiuzhen biannan*), by Liu Yiming.

Two other works, written in the twelfth and the thirteen centuries, are concerned with Neidan terminology: the *Model Images of the Golden Elixir* (*Jindan faxiang*), by Weng Baoguang, and the *Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir* (*Jindan wenda*), by Xiao Tingzhi.

Four of the sixteen texts are integrally translated. Six texts and two commentaries are translated here (entirely or partially) for the first time into English. Except for the *Seal of the Unity of the Three*, the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine*, and parts of the *Awakening to Reality*, which I had previously published in other books, all translations have been prepared for the present anthology.

The origins and main features of each text are presented in the short introductions to each chapter. Here I will only point out a few general aspects of the works translated in this book. Despite its compendious nature, this anthology attests to the variety and diversity of the Neidan tradition. While each text may be seen as a testimony to a particular aspect of Neidan, it should also be read in light of the lineage to which its author belonged, and of the time in which it was written. Only in this way can one appreciate the differences between doctrinal treatises (from the *Seal of the Unity of the Three* to Liu Yiming's *Discriminations*) and works that focus on inner alchemical practices (the commentaries to the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine* and to the *Four Hundred Words* are two of the main examples). The different backgrounds and dates of the texts should also be taken into account in order to make sense of the evident, and often disconcerting, contrasts that exist within the literature. To give a few examples limited to this anthology, the scope of Neidan texts ranges from works that display influences of Confucianism and Neo-Confucianism (for instance, the commentary to the *Book of the Hidden Agreement* and Li Daochun's *Harmony of the Center*) to works related to sexual practices (Lu Xixing's *Rectifying Errors*); and from works that place emphasis on the Neidan views of the body (in particular, the *Transmission of the Dao*) to others that discuss points of doctrine (Bai Yuchan's *Pointers to the Mystery*, and several others), or even the adept's "life style" (the *Fifteen Essays* by Wang Chongyang).

Closely related to the above is the complex issue of the "grades" of Neidan. Not only is Neidan subdivided into different lineages and branches, but several masters emphasize that it can be understood and practiced at different levels. Even the same technical terms take on

different meanings according to the “vehicles” (a term borrowed from Buddhism) that a master teaches and a disciple learns. One of Bai Yuchan’s essays, as well as portions of the chapters devoted to Li Daochun and Chen Zhixu, deal with this subject and are valuable to approach this important feature of Neidan.

Two other subjects that deserve mention are the importance of poetry in Neidan, and the nature of the commentaries to earlier works. Four texts translated in this book are written in verses: the *Seal of the Unity of the Three*, the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine*, the *Awakening to Reality*, and the *Four Hundred Words*. All of them rank among the main Neidan scriptures, and poems are found in several other works translated here. While this may be a further hurdle for a Western reader, the use of poetry, as opposed to a linear form of writing, is one of the aspects of Neidan—especially in its earlier stages—that require consideration. With regards to the three commentaries translated in this book, it is sufficient to remind that their authors did not merely explicate earlier works, but they did so according to the tradition that they followed and the time in which they lived. In other words, what we read in a commentary does not necessarily reflect the intention of the author of the original work, but in the first place the views of the commentator.

A final point that requires attention is the language of the texts. I have always tried to respect the rhetoric and the terminology of the works I have translated, with no attempt to adapt them to the taste of the modern Western reader. Two different translators of Classical Chinese texts might render the same passage in different ways, and both translations might be correct. When facing a choice between the source and the target languages, my preference as a rule has gone to the former; for this reason, independently of their accuracy, I would agree with anyone who regards my translations as being too “literal”.

The book is concluded by several tables and by an index of the main terms. Coming upon an unfamiliar term, the reader may consult the index in order to refer to other pages of this book that mention or define it.

As always, I am grateful to Xiaokun, without whose help this book would have never seen the light. Any error is entirely my responsibility.

Fabrizio Pregadio
March 2019

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Preview

Translations

Preview

1 The Seal of the Unity of the Three

Cantong qi 參同契

Attributed to Wei Boyang 魏伯陽

The *Zhouyi cantong qi*, or *Seal of the Unity of the Three, in Accordance with the Book of Changes*, is the main text of *Neidan*. Traditionally attributed to Wei Boyang and dated to the mid-second century, it did not reach its present form before the mid-fifth century, and possibly one or even two centuries later. Its reputed author was an alchemist from south-eastern China (present-day Zhejiang province), but clear evidence shows that the text was originally attached to the northern cosmological traditions centered on the *Yijing*, or *Book of Changes*.

Within the greatest part of the Chinese alchemical tradition, the *Cantong qi* has been read and interpreted as a work exclusively concerned with *Neidan*. According to a less well-known view, instead, it deals with three major subjects, which—as the title indicates—are merged and integrated into a single doctrine. The three subjects are: (1) The relation of the cosmos to the Dao, explained according to the system of the *Book of Changes*; (2) The realized state of the saintly person (*shengren*), defined according to the teachings of *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue) on “non-doing” (*wuwei*); (3) Alchemy as the practice that leads to the realization of the Dao and to the state of sainthood.

The selections translated in this chapter contain twelve of the eighty-eight sections of the text. They are excerpted from my complete translation, published as *The Seal of the Unity of the Three* (Golden Elixir Press, 2011). If the subdivision of the *Cantong qi* into three subjects is taken into account, sections 1 and 7 are concerned with the Dao and the cosmos; sections 18, 20, 26, 58, and 60 are concerned with the state of realization; and sections 22, 23, 39, 40, and 72 are concerned with the alchemical practice.

Section numbers correspond to those of my complete translation. Besides footnotes to several verses, I have added general notes to the translated sections.

I: QIAN AND KUN, KAN AND LI

“Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ are the door and the gate of change,”¹
 the father and the mother of all hexagrams.²
 Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are the inner and the outer walls,³
 they spin the hub and align the axle.
 Female and male, these four trigrams
 function as a bellows and its nozzles.

The constant conjunction of Qian and Kun, the active and the passive principles, gives birth to all phenomena in the world of change. Therefore Qian and Kun are “the door and the gate” through which change arises, and “the father and the mother” of all emblems that represent change. As they join with one another, Qian ☰ entrusts his generative potential to Kun and, in doing this, becomes Li ☲; Kun ☷ receives the essence of Qian to bring it to fruition and, in doing this, becomes Kan ☵. Since Kan and Li embrace Qian and Kun, represented by the respective inner lines, they provide “inner and outer walls” to Qian and Kun: the Yin principle (☷) harbors True Yang (—), and the Yang principle (☰) harbors True Yin (--).



Fig. 1. “Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are the inner and the outer walls.”

¹ This line is an almost literal quotation from the “Appended Sayings” (“Xici”) of the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*: “Qian and Kun are indeed the door and the gate of change!” (B.5; see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 343).

² Compare *Book of Changes*, “Explanation of the Trigrams” (“Shuo-gua”): “Qian is Heaven, therefore he is called the father. Kun is Earth, therefore she is called the mother” (sec. 9; see Wilhelm, p. 274).

³ In the trigrams Kan ☵ and Li ☲, the lower lines are the “inner wall,” and the upper lines are the “outer wall.” The central lines belong to Qian ☰ and Kun ☷, respectively.

2 The Hidden Agreement

Yinfu jing 陰符經

Anonymous (sixth to eighth centuries)

Commentary by Yu Yan 俞琰 (1258–1314)

Despite its brevity, the *Yinfu jing*, or *Book of the Hidden Agreement*, is one of the most obscure and difficult Taoist texts. Traditionally attributed to the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi, one of mythical founders of Chinese civilization, and the foremost one in the eyes of the Taoists), it dates from between the late sixth and the eighth century. It exists in two main versions, containing slightly more than 300 and slightly more than 400 characters, respectively.

Later Neidan texts have often placed the *Yinfu jing* with the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue) and the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three) at the origins of their teachings (for one example, see below, p. 84). Within Neidan, the text is especially well-known for its idea of “stealing the mechanism” (*daoji*), which Neidan adepts understand as meaning the inversion of the process that leads from the precelestial to the postcelestial domains.

Several dozen commentaries to the *Yinfu jing* are found both within and outside the Taoist Canon. The commentary translated here is by Yu Yan (born in Suzhou, 1258–1314), a learned and prolific author who wrote both independent works and commentaries to earlier texts. Part of his works examine the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*) and Chinese cosmology, while others are concerned with Neidan (including a major commentary to the *Cantong qi*). While Yu Yan is one of the authors who incorporate key concepts of Neo-Confucianism in their Neidan, his writings display a remarkable knowledge of both Nanzong (Southern Lineage) and Beizong (Northern Lineage) literature.

This chapter contains a complete translation of the *Yinfu jing* with Yu Yan’s commentary. As he explains at the end of his work, Yu Yan uses the shorter version of the *Yinfu jing*. Divisions into sections follow the original Chinese text; I have added section numbers.

I

Contemplate the Way of Heaven, hold to the operation of Heaven: this is completeness.

COMMENTARY

Being of itself as it is is the Way of Heaven; revolving to the left and turning to the right, without interruption day and night, is the operation of Heaven.

The *Zhongyong* (The Middle Course) says: “Sincerity is the Way of Heaven.”¹ It also says: “Utmost sincerity has no pause.”² Sincerity means to “be true and devoid of artificiality,” and to “match the principle of Heaven” of being so of itself.³ As this sincerity has no pause, it nourishes with continuity, moment after moment, without interruption for even one instant. If one can contemplate the Way of Heaven and preserve one’s sincerity, and if one can hold to the operation of Heaven by being “strong and untiring,” then one is a “companion of Heaven.”⁴

“This is completeness” means that although the words “contemplate the Way of Heaven, hold to the operation of Heaven” are concise, their meaning is complete. There is nothing to add.

2

Heaven has five bandits; the one who sees them flourishes. The five bandits are in the Heart; they perform their operation in Heaven.

¹ *Zhongyong*, sec. 20. The *Zhongyong*, one of the main early Confucian works, is often quoted by authors of Neidan texts.

² *Zhongyong*, sec. 26.

³ These sentences are drawn from Zhu Xi’s (1130–1200) works; see *Zhuzi yulei*, ch. 16 and 61, respectively.

⁴ The expression “strong and untiring” derives from the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), “Image” (“Xiang”) on the hexagram Qian ☰ (no. 1; see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 6). “Companion of Heaven” derives from the *Zhuangzi*, ch. 4 (see Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 56).

3 Mirror for Compounding the Medicine

Ruyao jing 入藥鏡

Attributed to Cui Xifan 崔希範 (ca. 880–940)

Commentary by Wang Jie 王玠 (?-ca. 1380)

The *Ruyao jing*, or *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine*, is attributed to Cui Xifan (ca. 880–940). With the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three; above, Chapter 1), the *Yinfu jing* (Book of the Hidden Agreement; above, Chapter 2), and the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality; below, Chapter 5), it is one of the texts most frequently quoted in works belonging to the Neidan tradition.

The text has been transmitted in different forms, among which the version at the basis of this translation is the only one to have entirely survived. This version summarizes the main Neidan principles and practices in twenty-one short poems, each of which is made of four verses of three characters (except for the last poem, which contains only two verses). The term *ruyao* in the title, literally meaning “to enter the ingredients,” is used in Waidan (External Alchemy) and in pharmacology to mean that the ingredients are placed in a vessel to compound an elixir or a medicine. The word “mirror” (*jing* or *jian*) appears in the titles of several Chinese texts to indicate that they provide models for the application of fundamental principles or ideas.

The commentary translated here is by Wang Jie (?-ca. 1380). Also known as Wang Daoyuan and Hunran zi (Master of the Inchoate), he was a second-generation disciple of Li Daochun (late thirteenth century; see below, Chapter 11) and is the author of several Neidan works, including both original writings and commentaries to earlier texts.

These selections contain ten of the original twenty-one poems. They are drawn from my complete translation of both text and commentary, published in Wang Jie, *Commentary on the Mirror for Compounding the Medicine* (Golden Elixir Press, 2013).

I

Precelestial Breath,
 postcelestial Breath.
 Those who obtain them
 always seem to be drunk.

COMMENTARY

The precelestial Breath is the original and initial Ancestral Breath. This Ancestral Breath is in the true center of Heaven and Earth within the human body. [Placed between] the Secret Door and the Gate of Life, hanging in the middle, it is the Heart of Heaven.¹ The self-cultivation of the divine immortals only consists in collecting the precelestial One Breath and using it as the Mother of the Elixir.

The postcelestial Breath is the Breath that circulates internally: one exhalation, one inhalation, once coming, once going. “Exhaling touches onto the root of Heaven, inhaling touches onto the root of Earth. On exhaling, ‘the dragon howls and the clouds rise’; on inhaling, ‘the tiger roars and the wind blows.’”²

When [the postcelestial Breath] is “unceasing and continuous,”³ it returns to the Ancestral Breath. The internal and the external

¹ This sentence alludes to the description of the center of the human body in the *Huangting jing* (Book of the Yellow Court): “Above is the *Hun* Numen, below is the Origin of the Barrier; on the left is the Minor Yang, on the right is the Great Yin; behind is the Secret Door, in front is the Gate of Life” (“Inner” version, poem 2). The Secret Door (*mihu*) is the kidneys, or a point in their region. The Gate of Life (*shengmen*) is the lower Cinnabar Field, or a point in its region. — The *Huangting jing*, originally dating from the second or the third century, is one of the main texts on early Taoist meditation. It exists in two versions, called “Outer” and “Inner.” The “Inner” version” is later and longer compared to the “Outer” version.

² This passage is quoted, without attribution, in the *Jindan wenda* (Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir). It is also found in Li Daochun’s *Zhonghe ji* (The Harmony of the Center: An Anthology), ch. 4, translated below, p. 174.

³ This expression derives from the passage of the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue) quoted at the end of the commentary to the present section.

4 The Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin

Zhong Lü chuandao ji 鍾呂傳道集

Attributed to Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (fl. 820–35)

The *Zhong Lü chuandao ji*, or *Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin*, is the main text of the Zhong-Lü school, the first clearly identifiable lineage in the history of Neidan. Both Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin are among the most renowned Taoist immortals. In addition to being placed at the origins of the Zhong-Lü lineage, which takes its name from their surnames, they are also among the patriarchs of both the Southern and the Northern lineages (Nanzong and Beizong) of Neidan.

After the foundational works at the basis of the previous three chapters of this anthology, the *Zhong Lü chuandao ji*—which, despite its traditional attribution, probably dates from the tenth century—is the first major doctrinal treatise of Neidan. It is divided into eighteen chapters, concerned with different aspects of Internal Alchemy, such as “Heaven and Earth,” “Sun and Moon,” “The Five Agents,” “Water and Fire” “Lead and Mercury,” and “Having Audience at the Origin.” In each chapter, Lü Dongbin asks a question, Zhongli Quan replies, then Lü Dongbin summarizes the main points of the reply and asks a new question. Another Zhong-Lü text, the *Lingbao bifa* (Complete Methods of the Numinous Treasure), is said to outline the practices related to the principles described in the *Zhong Lü chuandao ji*.

The chapter translated below is concerned with two of them main emblems of Neidan. It is representative of the perspectives of the Zhong-Lü lineage, which is characterized by extremely detailed correlations between cosmos, human body, and Neidan practice.

8: DRAGON AND TIGER

Lü Dongbin said: The Dragon is in the first place the image of the liver, and the Tiger is the form of the lungs. [However,] the Liquor generated within the Fire of the heart is the True Water; this Water, “dim and obscure,” hides the True Dragon. Thus the Dragon is not the liver but comes forth from the Palace of Li ☲.¹ What is the reason?

[Similarly,] the Breath generated within the Water of the kidneys is the True Fire; this Fire, “vague and indistinct,” stores the True Tiger. Thus the Tiger is not the lungs but comes forth from the position of Kan ☵.² What is the reason?

Zhongli Quan said: The Dragon is something Yang. It flies in Heaven, and when it howls, the clouds rise. When it finds a marsh, it gives benefit to the ten thousand things. Among the images, it is the Green Dragon; among the directions, it is JIA and YI; among the substances, it is Wood; among the seasons, it is spring; among the ways, it is benevolence; among the trigrams, it is Zhen ☳; and among the five viscera of the human body, it is the liver.

The Tiger is something Yin. It runs on the Earth, and when it roars, the wind blows. When it finds a mountain, it subdues the hundred animals. Among the images, it is the White Tiger; among the directions, it is GENG and XIN; among the substances, it is Metal; among the seasons, it is autumn; among the ways, it is righteousness; among the trigrams, it is Dui ☱; and among the five viscera of the human body, it is the lungs.

The liver is Yang but is found in the position of Yin. Therefore the Breath of the kidneys is conveyed to the Breath of the liver.³ As the Breath follows the mother-child relationship, Water generates Wood. When the Breath of the kidneys is plentiful, it generates the Breath of the liver. After this, the excess of Yin in the kidneys is extinguished, and what ascends is the Pure Yang Breath.⁴

¹ Li ☲ is the trigram that represents Fire and the heart.

² Kan ☵ is the trigram that represents Water and the kidneys.

³ The kidneys, like the liver, are also found in the “position of Yin.”

⁴ The “Lun wuxing” (On the Five Agents) chapter of the *Zhong Lü chuandao ji* says: “What generates is called the mother, and what is generated

5 Awakening to Reality

Wuzhen pian 悟真篇

Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?–1082)

The *Wuzhen pian*, or *Awakening to Reality*, describes in a poetical form, and in a typically cryptic and allusive language, several facets of Neidan. Its author, Zhang Boduan, was placed in the early thirteenth century at the origins of the Southern Lineage (Nanzong) of Neidan. Since that time, it has been the main textual source of that lineage. The *Wuzhen pian*, however, has played a vast and visible influence on the whole history of Internal Alchemy.

The text is divided into three main parts, all of which consist of poems written in different meters. The first part contains sixteen poems in “regulated verses” (eight-line heptasyllabic poems, known as *lüshi*). The second part contains sixty-four poems in “cut-off lines” (four-line heptasyllabic poems, *jueju*). The third part contains eighteen poems, written in different meters and divided into three sets: one pentasyllabic poem, twelve “lyrics” (*ci*) of irregular length, and five more poems in “cut-off lines.” Certain editions also include a final series of poems that use Buddhist terminology, probably added after the completion of the main text. Many Nanzong adepts have read in the *Wuzhen pian* allusions to the different stages of the Neidan practice.

The selections translated in this chapter consist of eight poems in “regulated verses” and eighteen poems in “cut-off lines.” The translations of the poems in “regulated verses” are based on those in my *Awakening to Reality* (Golden Elixir Press, 2009), which contains a general introduction to the *Wuzhen pian*, line-by-line annotated translations, and selections from the commentary by Liu Yiming (1734–1821). The poems in “cut-off lines” have been translated for the present anthology.

Poems are numbered as in the original Chinese text. Several other

is called the son.” In the “generation” sequence of the five agents, Water (associated with the kidneys) generates Wood (associated with the liver); therefore the Breath of the kidneys generates the Breath of the lungs.

poems or verses of the *Wuzhen pian* are translated in different chapters of the present book. Another work attributed to Zhang Boduan (the *Jindan sibaizi*, or *Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir*) is translated in Chapter 6.

POEMS IN “REGULATED VERSES”

3

If you study immortality, you should study celestial
immortality:
only the Golden Elixir is the highest principle.
When the two things meet, emotions and nature
join one another;
where the five agents are whole, Dragon and Tiger
coil.

Rely in the first place on WU and JI that act as go-
betweens,
then let husband and wife join together and rejoice.
Just wait until your work is achieved to have
audience at the Northern Portal,
and in the radiance of a ninefold mist you will ride
on a soaring phoenix.

This poem uses traditional images to describe the main features and benefits of the Golden Elixir. There are several grades of transcendence, but for the very fact of being graded, they pertain to the realm of relativity in which we live. Only “celestial immortality,” says Zhang Boduan, grants complete transcendence, the removal of distinctions between the precelestial and postcelestial domains.

Inner nature (*xing*) is essentially pure and unaffected by phenomena or events of any kind. Emotions (*qing*, a word also meaning feelings, sentiments, passions) tend to disjoin from one’s inner nature and become uncontrolled. Only when True Yin and True Yang (the “two things”) merge can one’s inner nature and emotions be in agreement with one another.

“The five agents are whole” refers to the inversion from multiplicity to

6 Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir

Jindan sibai zi 金丹四百字

Attributed to Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?–1082)

Commentary by Peng Haogu 彭好古 (fl. 1586–99)

The *Jindan sibai zi*, or *Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir*, is attributed to Zhang Boduan (the author of the *Wuzhen pian*, partly translated in Chapter 5 above). Although this attribution does not seem to be trustworthy, the association with the first master of the Southern lineage (Nanzong) is one of the reasons of the popularity enjoyed by this work within the Neidan tradition.

The text, here entirely translated with a commentary, is made of twenty poems, each containing four verses of five characters. Several verses or parts of them are repeatedly quoted in later Neidan works, often with no need of a precise reference to their source given its renown. To give two examples, these include the verse “This Opening is not a common opening” (in poem 7) and the whole poem 13, concerned with the difference between ordinary time and the inner time of Neidan.

The commentary translated here is by Peng Haogu (fl. 1586–99, from Hubei). Few details about him and his life are available. He is also known for a commentary to the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three) and for several other works on Neidan, which he published in 1599 in a collection entitled *Daoyan neiwai bijue quanshu* (Complete Writings of Secret Instruction on Internal and External Taoist Teachings). Peng Haogu’s work is one of many examples showing that commentaries to Neidan texts not only offer explications of the original texts, but are Neidan works to all effects and reflect the perspectives of their authors.

I

True Soil seizes True Lead,
 True Lead controls True Mercury,
 Lead and Mercury return to the True Soil,
 body and mind are silent and unmoving.

COMMENTARY

When a human being is born, Heaven, whose number is 1, generates the Kan ☵ Water, which is the kidneys. The Water of the kidneys, which sinks downwards, is an image of Lead. The kidneys generate the Breath (*qi*). The one particle of Essence of True Unity within the Breath is True Lead.

The Earth, whose number is 2, generates the Li ☲ Fire, which is the heart. The Fire of the heart, which flies upwards, is an image of Mercury. The heart generates the Liquor (*ye*). The one particle of Breath of Correct Yang within the Liquor is True Mercury.¹

Within Kan there is the wu-Soil, and within Li there is the ji-Soil.² Water in the first place is Yin, but within the Yin there is True Yang; Fire in the first place is Yang, but within the Yang there is True Yin. These two are the True Soil. The conjunction of Yin with Yang and of Yang with Yin entirely depends on the True Soil.

True Lead is the Breath within the body; True Mercury is the Spirit within the mind; True Soil is the Intention within the body and the mind.³ Sincerity (*cheng*) can set in motion one's own True Intention: it causes Mercury constantly to greet Lead, and Lead constantly to control Mercury. When "Lead and Mercury return to the True

¹ The terminology used in these two initial paragraphs is complex, but the main points can be rephrased as follows: The first paragraph says that the kidneys are Yin and pertain to Kan ☵ and Water. The Yin Breath (*qi*) of the kidneys contains the True Yang, which is True Lead and is also called Essence of True Unity. The second paragraph says that the heart is Yang and pertains to Li ☲ and Fire. The Yang Liquor (*ye*) of the heart contains the True Yin, which is True Mercury and is also called Breath of Correct Yang.

² The wu-Soil and the ji-Soil are the Yang and the Yin aspects of Soil, respectively. Soil is the agent that represents the unity of Yin and Yang, and therefore makes their conjunction possible.

³ In Chinese, the word for "heart" and "mind" is the same, *xin*.

7 Pointers to the Mystery

Zhixuan pian 指玄篇

Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–1229?)

Bai Yuchan is one of the main figures in the history of Neidan. Despite his apparently brief earthly existence (he might have lived until 1289, but this seems improbable), he is ascribed with a remarkably vast literary production, which includes—in addition to anthologies, treatises, and a large number of poems—a noteworthy commentary to the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue). Although he was the fifth master of the Southern Lineage (Nanzong), his works go beyond the boundaries of particular schools. In addition to Neidan, he was also a practitioner of the Taoist exorcist rituals known as Thunder Rites (*leifa*).

The two essays translated here are found in a collection entitled *Zazhu zhixuan pian* (Pointers to the Mystery: A Miscellany), which is attributed to Bai Yuchan and contains works by authors related to the Southern Lineage. The “Essay on Resolving Doubts in the Cultivation of Immortality” (“Xiuxian bianhuo lun”) is presented as a dialogue between Bai Yuchan and his master, Chen Nan (?–1213, also known as Chen Niwan). The essay is especially concerned with the different levels of Neidan; what might at first appear to be the most difficult level is defined as “extremely easy to achieve,” while the procedure most commonly followed is said to be “difficult to achieve.” The text also shows that the same terms take on different senses according to the different levels (or stages) of Neidan. The second selection, entitled “Essay on ‘The Spirit of the Valley does not Die’” (“Gushen busi lun”), consists of a commentary on one of the passages of the *Daode jing* most frequently quoted in Neidan texts.

ESSAY ON RESOLVING DOUBTS
IN THE CULTIVATION OF IMMORTALITY

Bai Yuchan, who came from Hainan, had been a disciple of Chen Niwan since his young age. All of a sudden, nine years had already passed. One day, they were both under a pine on the cliff of a mountain. The wind was clear and the moon was bright; the night was calm and the air was cool. Thinking of the great matters of life and death, and of the fast pace of impermanence, Yuchan bowed down twice and asked: I have not been your disciple for a long time, and I reckon that my fortune and destiny are flimsy and shallow. Yet, I dare ask you: Is my destiny to become an immortal in this life?

Chen Niwan said: Anyone can do it, and this is even more true of you.

Yuchan said: I cannot avoid the obligation of showing respect to you, but I will ask a presumptuous question. How many gateways are there to the cultivation of immortality? How many methods are there to refine the Elixir? I am like one who cannot distinguish jade from the ordinary stones, but I wish to attain realization¹ through your word.

Chen Niwan said: Come here, I will tell you. In the cultivation of immortality there are three degrees, and in refining the Elixir there are three accomplishments.

In the Way of Celestial Immortality, one can undergo transmutation and ascend in flight to Heaven. Superior persons can study this Way. Lead is the body (*shen*) and Mercury is the mind (*xin*); Water is concentration (*ding*) and Fire is wisdom (*hui*). In the blink of an eye, one can coagulate [the Elixir], and in ten months, one achieves the birth of the embryo. This is the alchemical method of the higher degree. There are no trigrams and no lines, no pounds and no ounces. Its method is simple. Therefore it is transmitted through the Heart and is extremely easy to achieve.

¹ In the Way of Water Immortality one can enter and exit the manifested and unmanifested domains. Median persons can study this Way.

¹ *Dianhua*, lit., “transformation.” This term, which is also used in Buddhism, means attaining realization through an external influence, especially of a master.

8 Model Images of the Golden Elixir

Jindan faxiang 金丹法象

Weng Baoguang 翁葆光 (fl. 1173)

Although the *Jindan faxiang*, or *Model Images of the Golden Elixir*, does not rank among the main Neidan texts, it is included in the present anthology as it contains one of the most comprehensive lists of synonyms and secret names found in the literature of Internal Alchemy.

The author, Weng Baoguang, wrote one of the main commentaries to the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality), entitled *Wuzhen pian zhushu* (Commentary and Subcommentary to the *Wuzhen pian*). In addition, he composed the *Wuzhen zhizhi xiangshuo sansheng biyao* (Straightforward Directions and Detailed Explanations on the *Wuzhen pian* and the Secret Essentials of the Three Vehicles), which contains supplementary materials on the *Wuzhen pian*. The *Jindan faxiang* is the last part of the *Biyao*.¹ It is divided into seven sections, entitled “Yang” (92 synonyms), “Yin” (id.), “Yin within Yang” (88 synonyms), “Yang within Yin” (id.), “Central Palace” (96 synonyms), “External Medicine” (93 synonyms), and “Internal Medicine” (35 synonyms).

In this translation, I have arranged the synonyms of “Yin” and “Yang,” and those of “Yin within Yang” and “Yang within Yin,” into parallel columns, as the terms in each pair of synonyms perfectly match one another. The synonyms of the “Central Palace” are translated in a separate section. In the received text, the final two sections of the text (“External Medicine” and “Internal Medicine”) contain errors and omissions. Reconstructing the correct sequences of synonyms appears to be impossible, and these sections are omitted from the present translation.

¹ The expression “Model Images” (*faxiang*) in the title of Weng Baoguang’s work derives from a sentence in the “Appended Sayings” (“Xici”) of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*): “Among models and images, none is greater than Heaven and Earth” (A.11; see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 319). This sentence is also found in the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), 77:1 (see Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, p. 115).

YIN AND YANG

Translator's note: With a few exceptions, terms related to “Yang” are in the left column, and terms related to “Yin” are in the right column.

Heaven	Earth
Sun	Moon
<i>Shen</i>	<i>Shang</i> ²
Qian ☰	Kun ☷ ³
Li ☲	Kan ☵ ⁴
Father	Mother
Husband	Wife
Lord	Subject
Host	Guest
Wife	Husband ⁵
Nature	Emotions
Breath	Essence
Spirit	Existence
Capping ceremony	Marriage ceremony ⁶

² *Shen* and *Shang* are two of the twenty-eight lodges (*xiu*, constellations crossed by the apparent path of the Sun around the Earth) respectively belonging to the western and the eastern sectors of Heaven (see table 8, p. 264). *Shang* is usually called *xin* 心.

³ Qian and Kun represent True Yang and True Yin, respectively.

⁴ Li and Kan represent Yang containing True Yin and Yin containing True Yang, respectively.

⁵ Note that, three lines above, these terms are inverted. There could be many reasons why, in a Neidan context, the “wife” is Yang and the “husband” is Yin; broadly, they derive from the view that Yin contains True Yang, and Yang contains True Yin.

⁶ *Cantong qi*, 11:5: “The auras of the capping and the marriage ceremonies are tied to one another” (Pregadio, *The Seal*, p. 73). Traditionally, the “capping” ceremony (*guan*, for the coming of age) and the marriage ceremony (*hun*) marked the acquirement of social status for a male and a female, respectively.

9 Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir

Jindan wenda 金丹問答

Xiao Tingzhi 蕭廷芝 (fl. 1260–64)

The *Jindan wenda*, or *Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir*, is one of several works found in the *Jindan da chengji* (A Great Anthology on the Golden Elixir). It is entirely made of short explanations of several dozen terms and sentences found in Neidan texts, often with the support of quotations from earlier works.

The author, Xiao Tingzhi, was a second-generation disciple of Bai Yuchan (1194–1229?) through his master, Peng Si (fl. 1217–51), and as such belonged to the Southern Lineage (Nanzong) of Neidan. His work, however, shows that he also drew from texts belonging to the Zhong-Lü lineage. Other works in the *Jindan da chengji* include commentaries to the *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) and to the *Qinyuan chun* (Spring at the Qin Garden), one of the main Neidan poems attributed to Lü Dongbin.

This translation contains about one third of the text (thirty-two of the original ninety-three entries). It is based on the version found in the *Xiuzhen shishu* (Ten Books on the Cultivation of Reality), a vast anthology of materials mainly related to the Southern Lineage. Another edition is found in the *Yangsheng bilu* (Secret Records on Nourishing Life). I have added titles and short notes to almost all translated entries.

 THE REVERTED ELIXIR OF THE GOLDEN LIQUOR

Question: Why is [the Elixir] called Reverted Elixir of the Golden Liquor (*jinye huandan*)?

Answer: Golden Liquor means Metal and Water. “Metal is the mother of Water—the mother is hidden in the embryo of her son.” Therefore it is called Reverted Elixir.

A worthy man of the past said: “Elixir (*dan*) means the Cinnabar Field (*dantian*), Liquor means the liquor of the lungs.” Since the liquor of the lungs reverts to the Cinnabar Field, it is called Golden Liquor reverted to the Cinnabar [Field].

Xiao Tingzhi gives two explanations of the term “Reverted Elixir of the Golden Liquor.” Both are based on the sense of the word *jin* in the system of the five agents, where this word does not mean “gold,” but “metal.” According to the first explanation, “gold” and “liquor” respectively refer to Metal and Water, and “reverted Elixir” means the inversion of the generative sequence of these two agents that occurs in the alchemical process. Ordinarily, Metal is the child of Water, but in alchemy Water is the child of Metal; therefore Water is found in the womb of Metal. The quotation from the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), sec. 23 (translated above, p. 11, refers to this inversion.

To make sense of the second explanation, the term *jinye huandan* requires a different translation. Here *dan* does not mean Elixir, but is an abbreviation of *dantian*, the lower Cinnabar Field. The Golden Liquor is the essence (“liquor”) of the lungs (associated with the agent Metal) that returns to the Cinnabar Field.

THE FIRE

Question: What is Fire (*huo*)?

Answer: Fire is the True Breath of Great Yang; it is the Yang within Kan ☵. This is what the Realized Man Ziqing (Bai Yuchan) meant when he said: “Fire is kindled within Kan.”

Bai Yuchan (1194–1229?) is the fifth patriarch of the Southern Lineage.

10 Fifteen Essays to Establish the Teaching

Lijiao shiwu lun 重陽立教十五論

Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113–70)

Wang Chongyang was the founder of the Northern Lineage (Beizong) of Neidan. Also known as Wang Zhe, he apparently led a rather turbulent life until 1159, when he is said to have met Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin (see above the introduction to Chapter 4) and to have become an ascetic. From 1167, he began preaching with his followers in the north-eastern province of Shandong. In the strict sense, the Northern Lineage consists of Wang Chongyang and his seven main disciples, among whom Qiu Chuji (1148–1227) is the most important for the later history of Neidan.

The Northern lineage is the original nucleus of Quanzhen (Complete Reality), which continued to develop and is in the present day, with Tianshi dao (Way of the Celestial Masters), one the two main branches of Taoism, headquartered in the Baiyun guan (Abbey of the White Cloud) in Beijing. Within Neidan, the Northern Lineage is especially important for its teachings on inner Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*), on the equivalence between inner Nature and the Golden Elixir, and on the practice of “clarity and quiescence” (*qingjing*). As we read in the present text, “Nature and Existence are the root and foundation of self-cultivation.” In another work, Wang Chongyang states that “the original True Nature is called Golden Elixir,” and that “the only important things are the words ‘clarity and quiescence,’ which are found within one’s heart. Nothing else is a practice of self-cultivation.”¹ These and several other statements, some of which reveal a clear relation to Buddhism, reflect the main points

¹ *Chongyang quanzhen ji* (Complete Reality: A Collection by Wang Chongyang), ch. 2 and 10, respectively. The expression “clarity and quiescence” (*qingjing*) derives from the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 15.

of distinction between the Northern and the Southern lineages.

While there are reasons to doubt that the *Chongyang lijiao shiwu lun*, which combines doctrinal teachings and advice on lifestyle, is actually Wang Chongyang's own work, it is nevertheless deemed to be an original Beizong/Quanzhen document. The text is entirely translated below. Section numbers and titles are found in the original Chinese.

I: LIVING IN A CLOISTER

All those who leave their families should first seek shelter in a cloister. A cloister is a dwelling place on which one can rely. When there is a place on which one can rely, the mind gradually attains peace. When Breath (*qi*) and Spirit are in harmony and at ease, one enters the True Way.

In anything you do, you should not strain yourself: if you strain yourself, this will decrease your Breath. But you should not be motionless: if you are motionless, your Breath and blood will become stagnant. It is essential that movement and quiescence are balanced: only then can you embrace constancy and be secure in all circumstances. This is the way to reside in peace.

2: WANDERING IN THE CLOUDS

There are two ways of traveling. One way is to look at mountains and rivers, beautiful sceneries, and the red and green colors of flowers and plants. Some enjoy bustling and lively towns and cities, others admire the buildings and pavilions of temples and monasteries; some visit friends at random, others are absorbed in clothes and food. Those who are like this may travel ten thousand miles but will only exert and wear out themselves. They may see all the sights in the world, but their minds will be confused and their energy will wane. They are people who travel in vain.

The second way is to look for the principles of one's Nature and Existence, climbing perilous high mountains to seek the subtle and the mysterious, tirelessly searching for enlightened masters, crossing

11 The Harmony of the Center

Zhonghe ji 中和集

Li Daochun 李道純 (fl. 1288–92)

Li Daochun is one of the great masters of the Mongol Yuan dynasty (1279–1368), an extremely important period in the history of Neidan. The reunification of the Chinese empire after the division into the Jin and the Southern Song dynasties (in the north and the south, respectively) had the indirect consequence of encouraging several attempts to “merge” the Northern and Southern lineages (Beizong and Nanzong), which had independently developed in the previous two or three centuries. Li Daochun is the creator of one of the most remarkable of these attempts. As a major example of the Neidan gift of “crossing boundaries,” his works also incorporate Buddhist and Neo-Confucian concepts.

The *Zhonghe ji* (The Harmony of the Center: An Anthology), compiled by one of his disciples, is Li Daochun’s most important work. “The Harmony of the Center” may serve to render its title into English, but is not a precise translation of the term *zhonghe*. This expression derives from the *Zhongyong* (The Middle Course), one of the main early Confucian texts, where *zhong* denotes the state in which “emotions” (*qing*, defined in this work as pleasure, anger, sorrow, and joy) do not emerge, and *he* denotes the state in which, after they emerge, they follow proper degrees or rhythms. “Centrality and Harmony” or “The Center and its Harmony” might therefore be more precise translations of the title of Li Daochun’s work.

The selections translated here show that Li Daochun establishes two main levels of Neidan, summarized by the terms Internal Medicine and External Medicine. The higher level, inspired by the principles of the Northern Lineage, is reserved to those who have an innate comprehension of the Dao. The lower level, which substantially corresponds to the principles and practices of the Southern Lineage, is addressed to all other adepts. The first way focuses on the cultivation of inner nature (*xing*); the second one gives initial priority to the cultivation of individual existence (*ming*). The first way is said to lead to the “immediate awakening”; the second one follows the gradual process of the Southern Lineage with its

classical subdivision into three stages. Both ways, however, are said to lead to the same result.

THE GOLDEN ELIXIR¹

Ding'an asked:² When the Golden Elixir is achieved, can it be seen?

The Master answered: Yes, it can be seen.

He asked: Does it have a form?

The Master answered: No, it has no form.

He asked: If it has no form, how can it be seen?

The Master answered: "Golden Elixir" is only a name used by necessity:³ how can it have a form? When I say that it can be seen, it cannot be seen with the eyes.

The Buddhists say: "In not seeing, you see it closely; in seeing closely, you do not see it."⁴ The *Book of the Way [and its Virtue]* says: "Watching, you do not see it; listening, you do not hear it."⁵ This is what we call the Dao: watching, you do not see it—but never are you not seeing it; listening, you do not hear it—but never are you not hearing it.

When I say that it can be seen and heard, I do not mean that it is within the reach of the eyes and the ears. It can be seen only with the Heart (*xin*), and it can be heard only with the Intention (*yi*). It is like the blowing of a strong wind that shakes the trees on a mountain or rouses the waves on the water: could you say that the wind is not there? But listening, you do not hear it, and grasping, you do not get it: could you say that the wind is there?

The same is with the foundation (*ti*) of the Golden Elixir. There-

¹ Title added by the translator.

² Zhao Ding'an was one of Li Daochun's main disciples.

³ See above, p. [Referenced content is missing.] note [Referenced content is missing.].

⁴ These sentences derive from the commentary to the *Heart Sutra* by the Chan Master Dadian Baotong (732–824).

⁵ *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 14: "Watching, you do not see it: it is called invisible. Listening, you do not hear it: it is called inaudible. Grasping, you do not get it: it is called imperceptible."

12 The Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir

Jindan dayao 金丹大要

Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (1290-ca. 1368)

Like Li Daochun a few decades before him (see the previous chapter), Chen Zhixu was another Yuan-dynasty Neidan master who focused on merging the doctrines of the Northern and Southern lineages (Beizong and Nanzong). As a representative of the “Yin-Yang” branch (*yinyang pai*), his Neidan includes sexual conjunction among its practices, a feature that was emphasized by later exponents of the same trend and has led some Western scholars to call him a “sexual alchemist” (a term that has no correspondence in Chinese).¹

While it is affected by a rather personal style of writing, the *Jindan dayao*, or *Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir*, is a monumental compendium of Neidan. The three essays translated here can hardly testify to its width and complexity. “The Wondrous Operation of the Golden Elixir” contains one of the clearest explanations of the alchemical equivalence among Metal, Lead, and the Elixir. “The Wondrous Operation of the Medicine” deals, in terms similar to those used by Li Daochun, with the distinction between the Internal Medicine and the External Medicine. “The Wondrous Operation of the Transmutation of Spirit” is concerned with the last stages of the practice (i.e., “refining Spirit and returning to the Dao”) and describes the “gestation” and birth of the alchemical embryo.

Section titles are found in the original Chinese text.

¹ The “Yin-Yang” branch is distinguished from the “pure cultivation” branch (*qingxiu pai*). Neither terms denotes a lineage, and defines instead a type of Neidan, especially with regard to the practices. Each branch subsumes several lineages and sublineages in the proper senses. In addition, certain Neidan lineages (e.g., the Southern Lineage) are sometimes subdivided into “pure cultivation” and “Yin-Yang” branches.

THE WONDROUS OPERATION OF THE GOLDEN ELIXIR

The *Jinbi guwen* (Ancient Text on Gold and Jade) says:

Within the arts of the Elixir, nothing is greater in sending forth their light than Metal and Fire.²

Metal and Fire are the True Lead. It also says:

When the Original Princess begins to refine Mercury,
the Spirit Chamber holds the cavernous Void.
The Mysterious and the White generate the Lord of Metals:
it is eminent and lays the beginnings.³

It also says:

Only when the function of the Spirit Chamber is at work
can the Golden Elixir be achieved.⁴

The Realized Man Boyang (Wei Boyang) said:

When Metal goes back to its initial nature,
then you can call it Reverted Elixir.⁵

Shangyang zi said:⁶ “Metal” is not what is [commonly] called metal:

² *Guwen longhu jing zhushu* (Commentary and Subcommentary to the Ancient Text of the *Book of the Dragon and the Tiger*), sec. 11. This sentence is a paraphrase of a passage in the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), 8:2–3: “Among the suspended images that send forth their light, none is greater than the Sun and the Moon” (see Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, p. 72). The *Cantong qi* in turn quotes this passage from the “Appended Sayings” (“Xici”) of the *Book of Changes* (A.11; see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 319). “Suspended images” means planets and asterisms, which appear to be hanging in the sky.

³ *Guwen longhu jing zhushu*, sec. 12. Original Princess (Yuanjun) is usually the name of Laozi’s mother. According to a passage found elsewhere in the *Jindan dayao* (ch. 6), Chen Zhixu understands the “mysterious” as meaning Yin within Yang, and the “white” as meaning Yang within Yin.

⁴ *Guwen longhu jing zhushu*, sec. 20.

⁵ *Cantong qi*, 41:13–14 (see Pregadio, *The Seal*, p. 90).

⁶ Shangyang zi (Master of Highest Yang) is Chen Zhixu’s own appellation (*hao*).

13 Rectifying Errors for the Seekers of the Golden Elixir

Jindan jiuzheng pian 金丹就正篇

Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1606)

Lu Xixing (from Yangzhou, Jiangsu) is the beginner of the Eastern Branch (Dongpai) and, like Chen Zhixu (see the previous chapter), a representative of the “Yin-Yang” variety of Neidan. Almost all of his works are included in a collection entitled *Fanghu waishi* (The External Secretary of Mount Fanghu). One of them, the *Jindan jiuzheng pian*, or *Rectifying Errors for the Seekers of the Golden Elixir*, is translated here mainly in order to allow comparison with other Neidan texts.¹

Although Lu Xixing distinguishes his Neidan from the ordinary “arts of the bedchamber” (*fangzhong shu*), the entire alchemical discourse and symbolism reflected in this work is focused on the physical body. Lu Xixing’s Neidan, in addition, is clearly addressed to male practitioners: while the male adept supplies his own Mercury (True Yin within Yang), the other ingredient of the Elixir, namely True Lead (True Yang within Yin), should be collected by means of sexual conjunction with a female.

With the exception of the prefaces, this chapter contains a complete translation of Lu Xixing’s text. The subdivision into three untitled parts is found in the original Chinese text.

¹ My translation of this title is somewhat free. The title derives from the *Lunyu* (Sayings of Confucius), 1.14: “When he eats, the noble man does not look for gratification of his appetite, and when he is in his dwelling place, he does not look for comfort. He is earnest in his activities and careful in his words; he seeks those who have the Way so that he may be rectified. Such a person may be said indeed to love to learn” (see Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 1, pp. 143–44).

I

Someone asked Qianxu zi:² The books on the Elixir say that the precelestial One Breath should be sought in what is “of the same kind” (*tonglei*). What does this mean?

I said: I heard my Master say that the Way of the Golden Elixir must rely on the conjunction of Yin and Yang in order to be achieved. Yin and Yang are the male and the female, Li ☲ and Kan ☵, Lead and Mercury. These are the ingredients of the Great Elixir.

Now, the True Breath of Kan is called Lead, and the True Essence of Li is called Mercury. The precelestial Essence is stored in “me”; the precelestial Breath is taken from the “other.” Why? The “other” is Kan. Kan ☵ is Yin outside and Yang inside; among the images it is Water and the Moon, and among humans it is the female. “Me” is Li. Li ☲ is Yang outside and Yin inside; among the images it is Fire and the Sun, and among humans it is the male. Therefore in the Way of Yin and Yang of the male and the female, “following the course” generates other human beings, and “inverting the course” achieves the Elixir. Their principles are the same.

He said: The *Book of Changes* clearly says that Kan is the middle son and Li is the middle daughter. Why do you say instead that “I” am Li?³

I said: This discourse is based on the positions [of the trigrams] in the “precelestial chart” (*xiantian tu*).⁴ Master Shao (Shao Yong) said: “The essences of Yin and Yang are hidden in each other’s house.”⁵

² Qianxu zi (Master Secluded in Emptiness) is Lu Xixing’s own appellation (*hao*).

³ This question is clearly asked from the perspective of a male. In the *Book of Changes*, the conjunction of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ gives birth to three “male” and three “female” trigrams, called “elder,” “middle,” and “younger.” The elder son is Zhen ☳, the middle son is Kan ☵, and the younger son is Gen ☶. The elder daughter is Xun ☴, the middle daughter is Li ☲, and the younger daughter is Dui ☱.

⁴ See table 3, p. 259.

⁵ This and other similar sentences (e.g., “The essences of Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are hidden in each other’s house”) are attributed to Shao Yong and other authors.

14 Principles of the Conjoined Cultivation of Nature and Existence

Xingming guizhi 性命圭旨

Anonymous (ca. 1600)

The *Xingming guizhi*, or *Principles of the Conjoined Cultivation of Nature and Existence*, dates from around 1600 and is attributed to an anonymous disciple of an equally unknown Yin Zhenren (Realized Man Yin). Because of its renown and its wide circulation, it has sometimes been seen as a work that reflects the “popularization” of Neidan during the Ming and the Qing periods (1368–1644 and 1644–1912). While this is to some extent true, the *Xingming guizhi* also ranks among the main doctrinal treatises of this tradition.¹

The work is broad and has a complex structure. It is divided into four main parts, with sections within each part made of an illustration followed by explanatory texts. The explanatory texts in the first part are called “Explanations” (“Shuo”) and deal with general subjects. Those in the other three parts are arranged into nine sets of “Oral Instructions” (“Koujue”) and follow the sequence of the Neidan practice, culminating with “The Egress of the Yang Spirit.” Large portions in all sections are made of quotations from earlier works.

These selections consist of four sections of the first part. I translate both the text found in the illustration and the relevant “Explanation.” Section titles are found in the original Chinese text.

¹ *Xing* and *ming*, which form part of the title of the *Xingming guizhi*, are two of the main terms in Neidan. *Xing* can be understood and translated as “nature,” in the sense of “human nature,” “inner nature,” or “inborn nature.” *Ming* is in several respects a more complex concept. In addition to the literal translations as “order, command, mandate,” this term means “destiny,” “fate,” “existence,” and has also been understood by some Western scholars as “vital force.” Several works translated in the present anthology also deal with these subjects. — The third word in the title, *gui*, represents in Neidan the balance and conjunction of Yin and Yang.

THE FIRE-DRAGON AND THE WATER-TIGER

[Text in fig. 3]

In the art of the reversal of the five agents,
the Dragon comes forth from Fire.

When the five agents do not follow their course,
the Tiger is born within Water.²

Explanation

Translator's note: This section is based on the initial part of Peng Xiao's *Jin yaoshi* (The Golden Key), which also contains the lines translated above.³

The Water-Tiger, or Black Lead, is the root that gives birth to Heaven and Earth; it is provided with both substance and Breath (*qi*). The Fire-Dragon, or Red Lead, is the foundation that gives birth to Heaven and Earth; it is provided with Breath but is devoid of substance.

What is provided with substance is True Lead. This is the essence of the Great Yin, the Moon, which is the mother that nourishes the bodily forms of the ten thousand things in Heaven and Earth. What is devoid of substance is True Mercury. This is the radiance of the Great Yang, the Sun, which is the father that gives birth to the ten thousand things in Heaven and Earth. The bodies of Lead and Mercury procreate and reproduce one another, moving in a ring without interruption. They can be called the ancestors that generate Heaven, Earth, and the ten thousand things.

The accomplished people of antiquity knew that the Divine Substance (*shenwu*) is hidden within them. By adopting model images

² Xiao Tingzhi quotes the same sentences in his *Jindan wenda* (Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir), where they are attributed to the Realized Man Taibai. See above, p. 146.

³ Peng Xiao (?–955) is better known as the author of the earliest extant Neidan commentary on the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three). The *Jin yaoshi* is found in the *Yunji qiqian*, ch. 70.

15 The Secret of the Golden Flower

Jinhua zongzhi 金華宗旨

Attributed to Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓

The *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* is probably the best-known Neidan work outside China. The text, especially renowned for its teaching on “reversing the light” (*huiguang*, sometimes translated as “circulating the light”), probably dates from the late seventeenth century. Although, after Richard Wilhelm’s translation, it has usually been called *The Secret of the Golden Flower*, its title actually means *Ancestral Teachings on the Golden Flower of Great Unity*.¹

There are several versions of the *Jinhua zongzhi*, none of which can be considered as the “authentic” one. The selections below are translated from the version found in the *Daozang xubian* (Sequel to the Taoist Canon). This version belongs to the Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage, and in particular to its Jingai branch, which regards the *Jinhua zongzhi* as the main text on the cultivation of inner Nature (*xing*).²

There are several differences between the selections published here and the corresponding portions in other published translations of the text. In particular, the first section is much longer and detailed compared to the version translated by Thomas Cleary, and certainly contains portions written by Min Yide (1748–1836, the main Jingai master) himself or by another author before him (possibly Tao Sixuan, ?–1692, another Jingai master).

Section titles and their numbers are found in the original Chinese text.

¹ Or, *Teachings of the Ancestor on the Golden Flower of Great Unity*. Compare this passage in section 1: “In our practice, we should only take the Great Unity as the root and the Golden Flower as the branch.” The “ancestor” is Lü Dongbin, who revealed this work through “spirit writing.”

² Richard Wilhelm’s translation, which includes a “psychological commentary” by C.G. Jung, is based on an edition published by Zhan Ranhui in 1921. Thomas Cleary’s translation (also entitled *The Secret of the Golden Flower*) is based on the edition in the *Daozang jiyao* (Essentials of the Taoist Canon), first published by Jiang Yuanting in ca. 1800.

I: THE CELESTIAL HEART

Our Patriarch (Lü Dongbin) said: The Celestial Heart (*tianxin*) is the Heart with which the Three Powers are equally endowed.³ This is what the books on the Elixir call the Mysterious Opening.⁴ Everyone has it, but in the worthy and the wise ones it is open, in the foolish and the deluded ones it is closed. If it is open, one lives a long life; if it is closed, one dies prematurely.

All of us can see that the years of our lives are counted. We all wish to search for life, but we are all going towards death. As we have a body, could it be otherwise?⁵ The six senses entice it and the six defilements distress it.⁶ The years decrease quickly, and in the blink of an eye we meet our end.

Feeling concern for all this, the men of greatest attainment have transmitted the Way of greatest attainment. However, “I taught you with assiduous repetition, and you listened to me with contempt.”⁷ Why? Essentially, because people do not understand the foundation (*ti*) and the operation (*yong*) of the Great Dao, and they injure and

³ The Three Powers (*sancai*) are Heaven, Earth, and Man. — To appreciate the sense of this and the next section of the *Golden Flower*, it should be considered that the term *xin* literally means “heart,” but in several instances it can more appropriately be rendered as “mind.” A third meaning, namely “center,” also applies in several cases, including the present one. In other words, *tianxin* can be rendered in at least three ways: “Heart of Heaven” (i.e., Celestial Heart), “Mind of Heaven,” and “Center of Heaven.”

⁴ The Mysterious Opening (*xuanqiao*) is the same as the One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier (*xuanguan yiqiao*). The *Golden Flower* also calls it Celestial Heart.

⁵ For “body,” the text uses the expression “lungs and intestines” (*feichang*), an expression drawn from the poem “The Young Mulberry Tree” (“Sangrou”) in the *Book of Poems* (*Shijing*).

⁶ In Buddhism, the six senses (*liugen*) are eye, ear, nose, tongue, body, and mind. The “six defilements” (*liuchen*) are the respective fields: form, sound, scent, flavor, the physical domain, and the mental domain.

⁷ This sentence is made of two verses from the poem “Outward Demeanor” (“Yi”) in the *Book of Poems*.

16 Discriminations on Difficult Points in Cultivating Reality

Xiuzhen biannan 修真辨難

Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821)

Liu Yiming is one of the greatest masters in the history of Neidan. While his views are grounded in some of the most deep-rooted aspects of this tradition, they are also adverse to convention and often do not follow accepted standards. His works represent, however, one of the main instances of an integral exposition of doctrine in the history of Internal Alchemy.

Born in present-day Shanxi province, Liu Yiming was an eleventh-generation master of the Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage and the founder of one of its northwestern branches. Having recovered from severe illness in his youth, he undertook an extended period of traveling throughout northern China that led him to meet his two main masters. In 1779, he settled on the Qiyun mountains, in present-day Gansu province, and devoted the second half of his life to teaching and writing. His works include commentaries to Neidan texts, the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), the *Yijing* (Book of Changes), and Buddhist texts; independent works on Neidan; and a voluminous commentary to the Ming novel, *Xiyou ji* (Journey to the West), explicated in light of Neidan.

The *Xiuzhen biannan*, or *Discriminations on Difficult Points in Cultivating Reality*, is one of the works included in the *Daoshu shi'er zhong* (Twelve Books on the Dao; actually containing about twenty texts). Written in 1798, it is framed as a sequence of questions and answers—about 120 altogether—between Liu Yiming and a disciple. The sequel to this work, entitled *Xiuzhen houbian* (Further Discriminations in Cultivating Reality) has been translated into English under the title *Cultivating the Tao: Taoist and Internal Alchemy* (Golden Elixir Press, 2013).

The original text is not divided into sections. I have added titles to the selected portions.

THE DAO AND YIN AND YANG

He asked: What is the Dao?

I replied: The Dao is the Ancestral Breath prior to Heaven that generates all things. “Watching, you do not see it; listening, you do not hear it; grasping, you do not get it.”¹ It envelops and enwraps Heaven and Earth, and gives life and nourishment to the ten thousand things. It is so great that there is nothing outside it, so small that there is nothing inside it. Confucians call it Great Ultimate (*taiji*); Taoists call it Golden Elixir (*jindan*); and Buddhists call it Complete Enlightenment (*yanjue*). Fundamentally it has no name or title, but if we are forced to give it a name, we call it Dao. If it is determined, one is in error; if it is discussed, one loses it. It has no shape and no image; it is not form and it is not emptiness; it is not Being and it is not Non-Being. If it is attributed the images of form and emptiness, of Being and Non-Being, it is not the Dao.

He asked: If the Dao has no shape and no image, if it is the inchoate One Breath, why does the *Book of Changes* say, “One Yin, one Yang, this is the Dao”?²

I replied: The words “one Yin, one Yang, this is the Dao” express the operation (*yong*) of the Dao. The words “it has no shape and it has no image” express the foundation (*ti*) of the Dao. Before the Great Ultimate divides itself [into Yin and Yang], the Dao envelops Yin and Yang. After the Great Ultimate divides itself, it is Yin and Yang that give life to the Dao.

Without Yin and Yang, the Breath of the Dao would not be visible. It is only in the alternation of Yin and Yang that the Breath of the Dao can grow and maintain itself for innumerable kalpas without being damaged.

In the precelestial, there is the Dao; in the postcelestial, there are Yin and Yang. The Dao is the root of Yin and Yang; Yin and Yang are the manifestation of the Dao.

¹ *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 14.

² *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), “Appended Sayings” (“Xici”), sec. A.4; see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 297.

Tables

Preview

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	JIA 甲 YI 乙	BING 丙 DING 丁	WU 戊 JI 己	GENG 庚 XIN 辛	REN 壬 GUI 癸
BRANCHES	YIN 寅 MAO 卯	WU 午 SI 巳	XU 戌, CHOU 丑 WEI 未, CHEN 辰	YOU 酉 SHEN 申	HAI 亥 ZI 子
PLANETS	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
RELATIONS	father	daughter	forefather	mother	son
VISCERA	liver	heart	spleen	lungs	kidneys
BODY ORGAN	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears

The five agents (*wuxing* 五行) and their associations.

Table 2

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

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

Table 3



Spatial arrangements of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) in the precelestial (*xiantian* 先天, top) and postcelestial (*houtian* 後天, bottom) configurations.

Table 4

FU	LIN	TAI	DAZHUANG	GUAI	QIAN	GOU	DUN	PI	GUAN	BO	KUN
子	丑	寅	卯	辰	巳	午	未	申	酉	戌	亥
zi	chou	yin	mao	chen	si	wu	wei	shen	you	xu	hai
黃鐘	大呂	太簇	夾鐘	姑洗	仲呂	蕤賓	林鐘	夷則	南呂	無射	應鐘
huangzhong	dalu	taicou	jiazhong	guxi	zhonglü	ruibin	linzhong	yize	nanlü	wuyi	yingzhong
11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23-1	1-3	3-5	5-7	7-9	9-11	11-13	13-15	15-17	17-19	19-21	21-23

The twelve “sovereign hexagrams” (*bigua* 辟卦)
 and their relation to other duodenary series:
 earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支), bells and pitch-pipes
 (*zhonglü* 鍾律), months of the year,
 and “double hours” (*shi* 時). After Kun 坤, the cycle continues
 with Fu 復, whose lower line represents the rebirth of the Yang
 principle.

Table 5

STEMS	AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	COLORS	VISCERA	NUMBERS
1 JIA 甲	WOOD	east	green	liver	3, 8
2 YI 乙					
3 BING 丙	FIRE	south	red	heart	2, 7
4 DING 丁					
5 WU 戊	SOIL	center	yellow	spleen	5
6 JI 己					
7 GENG 庚	METAL	west	white	lungs	4, 9
8 XIN 辛					
9 REN 壬	WATER	north	black	kidneys	1, 6
10 GUI 癸					

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

Table 6

	BRANCHES	AGENTS	LUNAR MONTHS	HOURS	NUMBERS
1	ZI 子	WATER	11 (solstice)	23-1	1, 6
2	CHOU 丑	SOIL	12	1-3	5, 10
3	YIN 寅	WOOD	1	3-5	3, 8
4	MAO 卯	WOOD	2 (equinox)	5-7	3, 8
5	CHEN 辰	SOIL	3	7-9	5, 10
6	SI 巳	FIRE	4	9-11	2, 7
7	WU 午	FIRE	5 (solstice)	11-13	2, 7
8	WEI 未	SOIL	6	13-15	5, 10
9	SHEN 申	METAL	7	15-17	4, 9
10	YOU 酉	METAL	8 (equinox)	17-19	4, 9
11	XU 戌	SOIL	9	19-21	5, 10
12	HAI 亥	WATER	10	21-23	1, 6

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

Table 7

1	jiazi	甲子	13	bingzi	丙子	25	wuzi	戊子	37	gengzi	庚子	49	renzi	壬子
2	yichou	乙丑	14	dingchou	丁丑	26	jichou	己丑	38	xinchou	辛丑	50	guichou	癸丑
3	bingyin	丙寅	15	wuyin	戊寅	27	gengyin	庚寅	39	renyin	壬寅	51	jiayin	甲寅
4	dingmao	丁卯	16	jimao	己卯	28	xinmao	辛卯	40	guimao	癸卯	52	yimao	乙卯
5	wuchen	戊辰	17	gengchen	庚辰	29	renchen	壬辰	41	jiachen	甲辰	53	bingchen	丙辰
6	jisi	己巳	18	xinsi	辛巳	30	guisi	癸巳	42	yisi	乙巳	54	dingsi	丁巳
7	gengwu	庚午	19	renwu	壬午	31	jiawu	甲午	43	bingwu	丙午	55	wuwu	戊午
8	xinwei	辛未	20	guiwei	癸未	32	yiwei	乙未	44	dingwei	丁未	56	jiwei	己未
9	renshen	壬申	21	jiashen	甲申	33	bingshen	丙申	45	wushen	戊申	57	gengshen	庚申
10	guiyou	癸酉	22	yiyou	乙酉	34	dingyou	丁酉	46	jiyou	己酉	58	xinyou	辛酉
11	jiaxu	甲戌	23	bingxu	丙戌	35	wuxu	戊戌	47	gengxu	庚戌	59	renxu	壬戌
12	yihai	乙亥	24	dinghai	丁亥	36	jihai	己亥	48	xinhai	辛亥	60	guihai	癸亥

Sexagesimal cycle of the celestial stems (*tiangan* 天干)
and the earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支).

Table 8

EAST			
1	<i>jiao</i>	角	Horn
2	<i>kang</i>	亢	Neck
3	<i>di</i>	氏	Root
4	<i>fang</i>	房	Room
5	<i>xin</i>	心	Heart
6	<i>wei</i>	尾	Tail
7	<i>ji</i>	箕	Winnowing Basket
NORTH			
8	<i>dou</i>	斗	Dipper
9	<i>niu (qianniu)</i>	牛 (牽牛)	Ox (or Ox Leader)
10	<i>nü (shunnü)</i>	女 (須女)	Maid (or Serving Maid)
11	<i>xu</i>	虛	Emptiness
12	<i>wei</i>	危	Rooftop
13	<i>shi (yingshi)</i>	室 (營室)	Encampment
14	<i>bi</i>	壁	Wall
WEST			
15	<i>kui</i>	奎	Stride
16	<i>lou</i>	婁	Bond
17	<i>wei</i>	胃	Stomach
18	<i>mao</i>	昴	Pleiades
19	<i>bi</i>	畢	Net
20	<i>zi</i>	觜	Turtle Beak
21	<i>shen</i>	參	Alignment
SOUTH			
22	<i>jing</i>	井	Well
23	<i>gui (yugui)</i>	鬼 (輿鬼)	Spirit (or Spirit Bearer)
24	<i>liu</i>	柳	Willow
25	<i>xing (qixing)</i>	星 (七星)	[Seven] Stars
26	<i>zhang</i>	張	Extension
27	<i>yi</i>	翼	Wings
28	<i>zhen</i>	軫	Chariot Platform

The twenty-eight lodges (*xiu* 宿). Translations based on Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 127.

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Under an allusive poetical language teeming with images and symbols, the *Cantong qi* sets forth the teaching that gave origin to Internal Alchemy.

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Commentary on the Mirror for Compounding the Medicine: A Fourteenth-Century Work on Taoist Internal Alchemy, by Wang Jie (?-ca. 1380).

Dating from the 10th century, the *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) describes the principles of Internal Alchemy in 20 poems. This book contains a complete translation of the text and of the commentary by Wang Jie, affiliated with the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) tradition.

The World Upside Down: Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy, by Isabelle Robinet.

Four essays on Neidan translated for the first time into English. Their subjects are: (1) The alchemical principle of “inversion”; (2) The devices used by the alchemists to “manifest the authentic and absolute Tao”; (3) The role of numbers in Taoism and Internal Alchemy; (4) The meanings of the terms External Elixir and Internal Elixir.

