



# Internal Alchemy for Everyone

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Internal Alchemy  
for  
Everyone  
by  
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## Dedication

To My Wonderful Grandmother

Li Gui 李桂

(1901-1973)

A Memorial in Her Honor

The life of my grandmother has had a direct influence on the writing of this book. She had two boys, the first of whom was my father. Soon after the second was born, my grandfather died. She decided not to remarry and instead worked to support the family. In 1953, when I was two years old, my mother fell ill and died. After that, my grandmother took over my upbringing.

In 1970, I contracted a serious disease, and she took care of me in the hospital 24 hours a day. She was a devout Buddhist, always reading sutras and chanting incantations to the bodhisattvas. In 1973, when her end drew near, she said to me, “Don’t be sad, but spend more time studying religions.” She said that many bodhisattvas had come to her hospital room, welcoming her to the eternal world. Then she passed with a smile.

After this, I transferred my major from engineering to philosophy, but after receiving the B.A., I found myself betraying philosophy since I deeply disliked its more speculative side and especially Western forms—however much they were of theoretical interest—because they did nothing much to help solve the problems of human life.

I duly took up the study of Buddhism in graduate school, but again found it disappointing. Except Tantrism, nearly all Buddhist schools stress the reading and interpretation of the sutras, believing that one can become a Buddha only through disciplined practice over many lives of transmigration and rebirth. Therefore, I continued to seek a system that would actually address the problems of current living.

Eventually, I came across Daoist internal alchemy. Its master Zhang Boduan (987?-1082) said, “No longer waiting for other lives through many rounds of transmigration, I now have acquired the supernatural powers of Buddhism.” This was very inspiring. I have since then spent several decades studying and practicing internal alchemy. This book is the result.

## Introduction

This book makes the self-cultivation of Chinese internal alchemy available to everyone. It is a practice simpler, easier, more comfortable, and more

effective than Indian yoga, Daoist meditation, or Buddhist insight. Its practice provides excellent health in a short period of time as well as a new understanding of life and world, leading to an overall improvement of the quality of life.

Chinese alchemy divides into the two areas of external ( *waidan* 外丹) and internal ( *internal alchemy* 內丹). The former is a form of early chemistry and as such can be easily understood, while the latter is an esoteric system and thus tends to be shrouded in mystery. Over the past century, many scholars have attempted to interpret it, using different academic categories, including philosophy, psychology, physiology, biochemistry, and qigong 氣功. It is still not clear, however, whether any of them really came close to explaining it, as none of them have provided a fully satisfactory explanation.

I would, therefore, like to start from another angle. Avoiding predetermined academic categories, I propose to dive right into an outline of its basic concepts while providing simple and satisfactory explanations, then follow those up with detailed and easily accessible instructions on how to practice.

When people hear of internal alchemy, they think it is just a kind of ancient lore, a dead subject, something that exists only in the reference shelves of the library and has nothing to do with our lives. However, it is in fact a very practical subject, based on the physical training of adepts and the enhanced states of life they experience. Practicing its methods, everyone can gain numerous benefits, including freedom from disease, an extended life expectancy, increased wisdom, and more.

## Connection to Science

This book is entitled *Internal Alchemy for Everyone* , indicating that it presents the system in an easily understandable way. It not only describes internal alchemy as a theory, but also makes it available through experimental verification and wide application. Interpreting its concepts, I invoke the terms of evolutionary theory, because the approaches of both are similar. The theory of evolution is that the human body and mind took many millions of years to evolve into what it is today. Compared to other

animals, human beings have high intelligence, the result of this long period of evolution. Based on evolutionary theory, we expect the people of the future to have even larger brains, higher intelligence, and longer life expectancy—a vision that results in pictures of them as aliens with large heads. This vision of human evolution is highly relevant to internal alchemy, since its practice enhances human capabilities—physical, mental, and spiritual.

Modern science has contributed greatly to the expansion of human knowledge; however, the unknown still far exceeds the known. Historically, adepts of internal alchemy carefully observed the changes in human life and discovered that there is a cosmic, vital energy called *qi* 氣 in the body that controls survival and lasts beyond death. By expanding and transforming this energy, people can evolve more rapidly. This cosmic power or vital energy appears in the form of gas in the body, activated at several points, most notably the Compass Center ( *guizhong* 規中). When the yang spirit ( *yangshen* 陽神 ) enters it, the original substance of the human being is formed into a newly evolving entity, which alchemists call the holy fetus ( *shengtai* 聖胎).

Its composition and development are different from the sexual creation of children, since it comes about due to a process of self-insemination and asexual reproduction. Because men do not have a womb, it grows in the Compass Center for ten months, then moves to the brain for nine years. This feature also holds true for women who have a womb. The holy fetus as based on cosmic energy will developed and grow in the brain for nine years, which is why the brain gets larger and manifests aspects similar to those occurring during the rapid evolution of the human race. The theory may sound incredible, but in many ways it is compatible with science and biology.

Over the last several thousands years, Chinese adepts have actively practiced both by themselves and in religious communities. Even today, they follow their masters and work according to the methods recorded in the classics, practicing every day. Although each person is different, most people have similar results: they live longer, are free from disease, and become wiser. As this study shows, adepts who successfully practice and

develop the holy fetus evolve rapidly. Their heads become larger and their wisdom grows substantially; they can understand others by mere thought and without words, even the members of other species. Their vision and hearing are much more acute than those of ordinary people, and some even develop supersensory powers.

However, not every practitioner successfully grows the holy fetus, only those of high moral standing who practice rigorously. Morals here have little to do with ancient Chinese ethics; rather, they indicate the importance of internal purity. A lack of ethics means the commitment of even minor misdeeds, which, buried deeply in the subconscious, turn into practice barriers. In addition, there are also people unsuited for internal alchemy, and some may experience various problems in the process. To attain basic health and long life, a hundred days of first-stage practice is the simplest, easiest, and most effective way, suitable for everyone.

In terms of human evolution, internal alchemy can contribute much to a better understanding and more rapid development. There is no reason that knowledge going back a thousand years is not worth learning. When acupuncture was first introduced to the West, it proved efficacious, yet people did not know why. It worked on the basis of the ancient Chinese theory of energy conduits and meridians, without any modern scientific concepts, terminology, or precise instruments. Still, its theory was thorough and profound. The holy fetus is just like that: it is not an empty theory or metaphor. Although the overall success rate of internal alchemy is unknown, for over a thousand years many practitioners managed to gain great benefits. To me, it is both immensely practical and consistent with modern science and with what we know of the human body-mind, even if some of its concepts are still beyond modern scientific knowledge.

Recent research on out-of-body and near-death experiences has revealed much about the mystery of life. When a spirit or soul is felt to float above the body in the near-death state, this closely echoes what internal alchemists describe as the holy fetus leaving the body. Once fully matured, the holy fetus breaks through the top of the head, then looks down on the physical body, which appears as if dead. Practitioners can control whether the fetus reenters or leaves the body forever, which places them in marked contrast to



Western patients. In addition, the holy fetus may develop supernatural powers and ascend to the immortals.

## Internal Practice

Although internal alchemy forms part of Daoism, this does not mean that only Daoists can practice it. Daoism goes back several thousands of years, developing from the careful observation of nature by ancient masters. Its philosophy was first formulated by Laozi 老子 (ca. 500 BCE), the ancient thinker whose vision stands at its root. In his wake, many Chinese masters have reflected on nature and its laws, prominently considering issues of health and longevity as well as the attainment of eternal life. Therefore, many wise men in traditional China pursued the practice of internal alchemy. The modern quest for better health and an increased life expectancy has much in common with their key concerns, however much they work with different concepts and paradigms.

It is important to understand the major concepts and key theories that underlie internal alchemy as well as verify their value in actual practice. Theories must have a practical application, otherwise they are just empty words. Ideally, once a theory is activated in experience, it should be easily verifiable as well as offer benefits to humanity. As a result, internal alchemists tend to emphasize that practice is more important than theory. Most practitioners do not start with the intention to create a holy fetus, but undertake self-cultivation to attain health and longevity. For this, practicing the methods of Stage One for a hundred days should suffice—that is, if one is of average health. People in very good health may not even take that long, while those in ill health may need longer.

This book describes the practices in great detail, providing several model schedules for daily practice and precise instructions regarding location, clothes, food, sleeping arrangements, and more. Everyone can attain excellent health if they practice properly. However, higher-level practices of Stages Two to Four are not equally suitable for all. Their pursuit and attainment depend on individual qualifications and dedication.

Generally, the practice offers the following benefits:

1. Increased longevity. People today are getting older than those of the past, mainly due to advances in medicine and fewer wars of mass destruction. Still, the human life span, the natural limitation of human life, commonly set at 120 years, is not actually lengthened despite this being an ancient dream of humanity. Ancient Chinese alchemists managed to attain very long lives by experimenting with their bodies. Applying their techniques, I believe, it is possible to extend human life by 5 to 50 percent, depending on the degree, quality, and length of individual practice.

2. Freedom from disease. All people hope that they do not get sick, but for most this is impossible. Even just catching a common cold, they are cast down and in misery. Internal alchemy allows us to realize a lifetime free from disease, establishing a level of immunity and resistance quite different from that in ordinary people, one that holds firm even during sudden temperature changes or extreme weather conditions.

3. Healing. Severe diseases, of course, require medical treatment, but internal alchemy allows the easy healing or alleviation of minor and/or chronic conditions. Its effect is obvious.

4. Perfect body. Not only will internal alchemy help to bring the body back to its natural level of health, but it also corrects any irregularities, like being too fat or too thin. Also, other common physical issues disappear, such as lack of strength or insomnia.

5. Increase in wisdom. Both mental concentration and precision in thinking improve greatly through the practice. Memory, intelligence, learning capability, and analytical powers all grow substantially.

6. Reversal of entropy. Once practitioners attain a high level, several features of reversal tend to appear. They include:

A. White hair turns black or recovers its original color.

B. Hair falls out and grows back completely.

C. Any reduced hearing or eyesight is restored.

D. Lost teeth grow again in their original place.

E. One attains a childlike complexion and look upon reaching the stage of the holy fetus.

F. At the same stage, with dedicated and continuous practice, the body becomes light while retaining its original size; the size of the head may even increase.

G. Upon completion of the holy fetus, one attains various supernatural and supersensory powers. All these features may seem impossible, but they are commonly described in ancient Chinese alchemical records and manuals.

7. Profound understanding. Upon reaching a high level of attainment, practitioners gain deep insight into the inherent veracity of religions and the mysteries of the universe. Many have frequent mystical experiences and can directly experience the truth of sacred texts, intimately perceiving the great mysteries of life.

8. Eternal life. The holy fetus, after being nurtured to maturity over a period of nine years, eventually breaks through the top of the adept's head to enter the cosmic spheres, where it enjoys a permanence beyond life and death, possibly opting for rebirth in yet another physical body as it pleases.

## Outline of the Book

Describing these various features, this book divides into two parts. The first part (chs. 1-7) outlines the overall theory and general principles of internal alchemy, providing a necessary foundation that everyone should read, even if they are mainly interested in experience. The second part (chs. 8-14) focuses on practice, describing each stage in the order of procedure, including ample references to the classics. If you really want to dedicate yourself to everyday practice, you must follow the list of rules since misguided or ignorant practice may have serious consequences.

More specifically, the section on theory presents the development of internal alchemy in ancient China as well as its ultimate purpose. Previous

studies have tended to see this as the pursuit of health and longevity, but I think that its core goal is transcendent life. In this context, I outline the historical development of internal alchemy, beginning with Laozi, the ancient thinker at the root of Daoism, exploring what exactly the relationship is between his thought and the world of internal alchemy. After that, I focus on two highly important representatives of internal alchemy, Wei Boyang 魏伯陽 (fl. 2nd c. CE) and Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?-1082), briefly outlining their main ideas.

Next, I present the basic concepts of internal alchemy, which also form part of Daoist thought, expressing them largely in modern terms to make understanding easier. Among all the concepts, the most important is the idea of the holy fetus, often also called the immortal embryo. Holy in this context obviously stands opposite to ordinary, but how exactly is this fetus holy? How does it differ from the embryo of regular pregnancy? How can a male get pregnant with it? These and other questions are discussed in detail, as well as the theories and visions of immortality, the ultimate result of creating a perfect holy fetus.

The part on practice first dispenses with the erroneous notion that the purpose of internal alchemy is to make the physical body eternal. This is blatantly wrong, mainly because, even if we managed to double our average life expectancy or increase the biological human life span, a time would still come when we have to face death. The highest goal of Daoist practice is the attainment of immortality, which is more a spiritual and less a physical state. Its end result is the true person or perfected (*zhenren* 真人), an eternal being refined on the basis of the human body.

To practice successfully, adepts must fulfill all sorts of conditions, lest they cause damage to their body. Quite a few people completely have realized the ultimate goal, as ancient documents attest. I present these, detailing their successes while also emphasizing various potential hazards and danger. Also, the practice comes in distinct steps and stages, each manifesting in different states of body and mind. Once this is understood, the system becomes simple, clear, and easy to pursue.

All this leads to a new vision and more precise definition of internal alchemy in modern terms and concepts as well as the confirmation that it

presents a great way to increase the speed of human evolution. Based on many decades of practice, I can attest that the human body has supernatural powers beyond the wildest imagination of ordinary people. These normally would take ten thousand or more years of natural evolution to develop, but internal alchemy brings them into our grasp here and now.

## Practicalities

Any study of internal alchemy faces numerous difficulties, beginning with the esoteric nature of the sources and the highly specialized, technical language of the texts. Original sources are hard to understand, even for the Chinese. Not only is Classical Chinese a highly complex and sophisticated language, but its writing was restricted to the upper classes and learned communities who delighted in esoteric concepts and obscure formulations, using each character both with precision and ambiguity, enriched by context and content.

Beyond this, internal alchemy is not a unified system but consists of numerous schools, each with its own take on things. Their members relied heavily on oral transmission within trusted master-disciple lineages. Masters, moreover, feared that their essential concepts and core theories might fall into the wrong hands or would not be passed on properly to later generations, and thus used written documents only as supplementary aids, often expressing themselves in poetry. It is not that they liked to write poetry, but verse, rhythmic and often rhymed, had several advantages. It was easy to memorize and recite, lent itself to partial or impressionistic expressions of content that only initiates and advanced disciples could understand, and was simple to copy and hand down.

Working within this framework, my goal is to clarify internal alchemy for Western readers, hoping to offer them a new, scientific perspective and thus a better overall understanding. I also wish to present both theory and practice in equal measure, giving detailed descriptions of the latter. Internal alchemy needs to be experienced to be understood, involving actual practice as much as scientific validation in addition to theoretical appreciation. This, moreover, also necessitates a good grasp of Daoism and its relation to the alchemical tradition.

To ensure that anybody can understand internal alchemy, I have endeavored to keep concepts simple and straightforward, taming more abstruse ideas and focusing more strongly on general notions. This made it necessary to exclude quite a few of the more difficult and complicated aspects and to minimize the use of philosophical terms. Over the last several millennia, thinkers of internal alchemy have developed numerous philosophical concepts and terminologies. While it is certainly of value to understand them within their particular theoretical systems, this is neither the only nor the best or easiest approach. It is much better to work with them on the basis of practice. For this reason, this book, unlike some studies, does not present much philosophical discussion, but focuses on the most fundamental and original level of alchemical thought.

Throughout, I rely heavily on traditional texts and original sources. I cite numerous passages from the scriptures, allowing readers to see just how alchemists work with the written word, and especially with poetry. My goal is to let primary sources speak directly to modern readers. In contrast, I do not dwell extensively on the history of internal alchemy, but refer to other relevant studies for more information.

## Part One

### Theory

## Chapter One

### Studying Alchemy

#### Forms of Practice

Looking at Chinese history, it is quite obvious that alchemy developed because people longed for longevity and the attainment of immortality. Its earliest form was external or operative, working with compounding natural substances and heating ingredients in a crucible (Needham et al. 1974). Later it was internalized and became internal alchemy, the creation of an

elixir within the body through refining sexual and other forms of energy (Needham et al. 1976; Kohn and Wang 2009). In contrast to external practitioners who hoped to gain longevity or immortality by swallowing a chemically-based elixir, adepts of internal alchemy have never been primarily concerned with life extension.

Even its first text, the *Zhouyi Cantong qi* 周易參同契 (The Seal of the Unity of the Three Based on the Zhou [Book of] Changes, DZ 999; [1]\_trl. Pregadio 2011; hereafter abbreviated *Cantong qi* ), associated with Wei Boyang, defines becoming a true person or perfected as its ultimate aim (Pregadio 2011). A true person is someone who ascends to heaven, transcending life and death, thus reaching eternal life. The Chinese word for true, *zhen* 真, is the opposite of *jia* 假, which means fake or false. Anyone living in the realm of birth and death is essentially fake, since he or she does not have eternity. In other words, the term “true person” implies the idea of eternity.

Both branches of Chinese alchemy call their tradition the Way of the Golden Elixir (*jindan zhi dao* 金丹之道). Gold (*jin* 金) represents a state of constancy and immutability—found in precious metals externally and in the immutability of the adept’s body after absorbing the elixir internally. It also manifests in the golden hue the adept’s body emits after he or she fully completes the practice. As Zhang Boduan notes in his *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Awakening to Perfection, DZ 263, chs. 26-30; trl. Cleary 1987; Pregadio 2009), “The entire body emits a golden light; I do not speak of it to ordinary people.” [2]\_In his *Qinghua biwen* 青華秘文 (Secret Text of Clear Florescence, ZW 150), [3]\_he says, “After first completing the elixir, . . . it is gradually nurtured by true gold to become a pure, golden body, so the golden light radiates through the adept’s entire body, . . . The elixir is called the golden elixir, and the adept is called a golden immortal.” [4]

Eternal life comes into it when adepts in external practice physically ingest an elixir (*dan* 丹) to become immortal or, in internal alchemy, when they produce an elixir within the body by refining sexual energy into pure yang spirit. In either case, the elixir has profound powers of transformation. As Zhang Boduan notes, “The elixir is the greatest treasure in the material body; once completely refined, it can effect infinite transformations.” [5]

Especially the external elixir tended to consist of various noxious substances and was highly poisonous—one reason for the shift toward more internal practice, which first became pronounced in the late Tang dynasty (618-907) (Pregadio 2006).

## Research Modes

Research studies of internal alchemy, both in East and West, have worked mainly in four dimensions: philosophy, psychology, biochemistry, and qigong cultivation.

Philosophy is by far the oldest, going back over a thousand years in China and centering on key concepts, such as yin and yang, lead and mercury, and the five phases (wood, fire, earth, metal, and water). Especially yin and yang present fundamental concepts of Chinese culture, applicable to all sorts of dimensions of world and life. In internal alchemy texts, they may refer to theory or practice, which has caused some uncertainty in understanding (Robinet 2011).

Over the past hundred years, Western philosophy has begun to influence Chinese thought, inspiring scholars to apply epistemology to interpret internal alchemy. Although this offers a new presentation, it still does not touch the core—which goes far beyond theory and centers on practice, always closely linked to verification of concepts through actual experience. Overall, we can thus say that, despite many years of philosophical discussion and interpretation, the approach of philosophy does not offer a perfect interpretation.

Psychology is a lot more recent. Its impact on the study of alchemy began in 1929 with the German translation of two Qing-dynasty documents by the China scholar Richard Wilhelm (1873-1930) in cooperation with, and commentary by, the psychoanalyst Carl Jung (1875-1961). The texts are the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* 太乙金華宗旨 (The Secret of the Golden Flower, ZW 334; trl. Wilhelm 1962; Cleary 1992), associated with the immortal Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (b. 798?), and the *Huiming jing* 慧命經 (Scripture of Wisdom and Life, ZA 131), by the cultivation master Liu Huayang 柳華陽 (1735-1799). In his translation, Wilhelm links notions of internal alchemy



with Western psychological concepts, for example, by relating consciousness and unconsciousness to cognitive spirit ( *shishen* 識神) and primordial spirit ( *yuanshen* 元神).

In his commentary, Carl Jung describes the practice of internal alchemy as a way to return to the unconscious state of the deep mind, facilitating the manifestation of the Collective Unconscious. He argues that our states of mind combine consciousness, individual unconsciousness, and the Collective Unconscious. The phrase, “egress of the pure yang spirit,” he interprets, “We do not understand what the text means when it speaks of detaching completely from the world, and we do not want to understand it” (Tong 1993).

How and what, then, is this consciousness that has completely detached itself? Psychologists have no answer to this question. The mysterious, and mystical, experiences of advanced adepts cannot be accurately explained by science. Despite the two scholars’ laudable efforts and valiant attempts to gain scientific access to internal alchemy, the transcendental phenomenon of spirit remains elusive. The only way to understand it is through personal practice. Thus, I continue to emphasize that experience is more important than theory.

Biochemistry represents the next approach to the study of internal alchemy. Its main representative is Joseph Needham (1900-1995), documented notably in his series, *Science and Civilisation in China* (1976). He and his collaborators present a complete history of Chinese alchemy, offering an overall exposition with much detailed information that has led to numerous other inquiries in recent years. The key to this approach is the examination of chemical and biological reactions, ultimately verified by objective scientific tests undertaken in a laboratory.

Comparable Western medical techniques, such as artificial insemination, in-vitro fertilization, and various test-tube experiments, make the embryo formation quite obvious. However, in internal alchemy it all takes place within the adept’s body, and it is hardly possible to examine the joining of the yang spirit in the Compass Center in a scientific laboratory. All this means, then, that we still depend on the experiences and reports by

practitioners, possibly getting some ideas from biochemistry but no in-depth analysis.

Last but not least, modern qigong cultivation can shed some light on internal alchemy. The two have much in common, but are not identical. For forty years, since the end of the Cultural Revolution in 1976, masses of people have practiced various forms of qigong for health and longevity. They never even considered internal alchemy, which was not on the government's horizon, either. Today, many people understand internal alchemy as a rather strange precursor of qigong, speaking about it in various documents, publications, and practice sessions. Still, the mass movement is a far cry from the highly specialized alchemical practice and, despite superficial similarities, does not shed much light on it.

## Problem Factors

Internal alchemy is a most difficult subject to study. Although present for over a thousand years, it is still obscure, and people do not understand it. Several factors have contributed to this situation. First, it is fundamentally an esoteric system: masters transmit their teachings orally and do not typically commit anything to writing. The belief is that they would be punished by heaven for possibly revealing things to the uninitiated.

Yet, at the same time, masters also worry about interrupting the transmission of the system to the next generation if they do not leave any written documents behind. As a result, they end up writing obscure treatises and expressing themselves in poetry. Avoiding clear documentation of key principles in a book, they also resort heavily to metaphors—all the while stressing that adepts must seek masters and learn by direct contact and through oral transmission.

Another key feature of internal alchemy is that, in their effort to set up a great overarching system, the authors of major texts tend to focus on correlative thinking. Any statement or theory accordingly can apply to either external or internal practice. The writings of Wei Boyang and Zhang Boduan are prime examples. In addition, many phrases can apply to either solo practice or dual cultivation, that is, be read as referring to individual

efforts or those undertaken in cooperation with the opposite sex. All this is further complicated by later writers, who not only followed earlier masters but also developed their own readings and interpretations.

Taken together, this means that scholars, whether in ancient or modern times, are having quite a hard time understanding the texts correctly and in some depth. Some spend a lifetime of study yet never fully comprehend the works. In face of this situation, I have adopted the following approach.

First, I consider internal alchemy as an integrated system fully functioning in itself, which means it has no need to borrow terms or concepts from other systems, such as external alchemy. I clearly distinguish, therefore, physiological alchemy from proto-chemistry, seeing the two systems as very different. While internal alchemy texts borrow many terms from operative alchemy, including lead, mercury, Yellow Sprout, White Snow, and more, I do not think they are necessary for a proper understanding and can be safely ignored in this presentation. This eliminates a great deal of complication, opening an easier access to the original face of internal alchemy.

Second, I think that internal alchemy is an experimental science, which cannot be studied only in theory. It is best to read the writings of previous practitioners as the results of experiments they undertook in their own bodies and apply them to our own practice.

Third, I find it essential to clearly read the basic concepts, examining the writings not only of master alchemists such as Wei Boyang and Zhang Boduan, but also more general works, including the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi 莊子 (369-286 BCE) and the medical texts associated with the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi 黃帝). Internal alchemy, after all, stands at the end of millennia of development of Daoist concepts, terms, and ideas, many closely related to its process of self-cultivation and immortal transformation.

Altogether, there are over a thousand volumes of texts on internal alchemy, most of them full of metaphors, symbols, technical terms, and cosmological or philosophical concepts, such as yin and yang. It is nearly impossible to examine them all in depth to clarify their meaning, even after a lifetime of

study. The variety of sources, moreover, has led to the situation that scholars differ in their reading and interpretation of many aspects. Not only do they bring different approaches to bear, but they are also limited by their choice of sources and use of terminology.

In addition, a key factor is that they usually do not express the notions of internal alchemy in modern terms and concepts, but continue to echo ancient ideas, hoping to grasp what they meant a thousand or more years ago. All of this contributes greatly to the overarching confusion about the meaning and practice of internal alchemy. It is changing only gradually, as some scientists have begun to look at the issues and are offering interpretations with the help of modern scientific terms, however limited these may be in their turn.

Based on previous readings, scientific studies, and my own practice, I propose a reconstruction of internal alchemy as an integrated system. To me, it is not particularly complicated. From the very beginning, as documented in Wei Boyang's *Cantong qi*, it has had three major components: Daoist thought, the *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes), and operative alchemy. While the theories presented in this classic are new and unique in many ways, they suffer from the fact that they borrow the terms of external alchemy and the symbolism of the *Yijing*. Since the *Cantong qi* applies various terms that do not belong to internal alchemy itself, the text has been quite difficult to understand. Still, it has remained highly influential: since its completion in the early middle ages and well into the 19<sup>th</sup>, nearly all writings on internal alchemy have followed its model, including also the *Wuzhen pian*. They equally share its obscurity of style and content.

To clarify the overall system, scholars from the four major disciplines mentioned above have applied various theoretical frameworks, including phenomenology, psychoanalysis, and hermeneutics. For the most part, these efforts have resulted in even more complicated explanations.

In contrast, I propose a simple outline that allows people to understand internal alchemy with ease and recovers the simplicity of its original structure. I present a few basic concepts and key principles, reasoning by deduction on the basis of textual analysis and practical application. To me,

it makes perfect sense when Zhang Boduan says, “Those advancing find it simple and straightforward; those deviating find it confusing and complicated.” [6] Thus, I propose to reconstruct the system of internal alchemy in a way that is simple, easy to understand, and in accordance with modern science.

At the same time, I respect the nature of the tradition as esoteric, which means much of its deeper mysteries must remain secret and cannot be explained in distinct, open language. It is a major characteristic of internal alchemy to be paradoxical: the system needs to be transmitted yet also kept mysterious. As Wei Boyang notes, “I have learned much by talking with the wise; how can I possibly put it all in writing? If I restrain my tongue and keep it unclear, I am guilty of disrupting the way. If I write it clear and easy, I worry about betraying the secrets of heaven.” [7] This is the crux of the matter.

## Reconstructive Measures

I propose four measures to make reconstruction of the system possible: purification, simplification, popularization, and scientific explanation.

By purification I mean the elimination of all sorts of extraneous and superfluous terms and concepts. From the very beginning in the *Cantong qi*, descriptions of internal alchemy have utilized terms from external alchemy as well as concepts from traditional philosophy, such as yin-yang cosmology, Chinese medicine, and the *Yijing*. All these contributed to Wei Boyang’s major system, which expressly integrates the three dominant strands of Daoist thought, the *Yijing*, and alchemy. However, to me all these extraneous concepts are unnecessary, because internal alchemy itself is a complete system. They should be eliminated so that we can recover its original dimensions.

Simplification, next, means that internal alchemy should be made easy to understand by reducing synonymous and overlapping ideas. The early classics tend to present rather simple descriptions, but over the course of time, more and more complicated comments began to appear. There is a clear a trend for interpretations to increase in complexity as the tradition

evolved from the *Cantong qi* to the 19<sup>th</sup> century. The *Wuzhen pian* of the 12<sup>th</sup> century in this context marks its full maturity, defining it as consisting of four stages: a basic practice period of a hundred days, followed by the refinement of essence to energy, energy to spirit, and spirit to emptiness.

In later centuries, the *Xingming guizhi* 性命圭旨 (Pointers to the Cultivation of Inner Nature and Life-Destiny, ZW 314; dat. ca. 1600; see Darga 1999), divided the system into nine stages. The *Xingming fajue mingzhi* 性命法訣明指 (Illuminating Pointers to the Methods and Instructions of Inner Nature and Life-Destiny; dat. 1920; see Lu 1970; Despeux 1979), presents it in sixteen. These are clear examples that show how the process has become increasingly complex in the course of its historical development.

I also find that internal alchemy needs to increase in popularity. There are three major obstacles that prevent this. First, the system requires that potential adepts seek out perfected masters. This is widely recognized as an absolute necessity, the key path to follow. Zhang Bo-duan says, “Do not procrastinate and remain mired in the lowly and vulgar. Hurry up to seek out perfected masters to gain access to the primordial pointers.” [8] This feature has been pervasive in the tradition throughout the ages. Most classics stress the importance of seeking out perfected masters. Thus, Lü Dongbin learned from as many as sixty or seventy masters, and so did Zhao Bichen 趙避塵 (1860-1942), the author of the *Xingming fajue mingzhi* .

Not only limited by a close link to established masters, internal alchemy also strongly relies on oral transmission as the most important vehicle of instruction. Practice details are to be learned only from masters in person, and not from books, classics, or other writings. The *Cantong qi* says, “It can be passed on in oral transmission, but it is hard to write down in a book.” [9] Zhang Boduan similarly states, “Unless you encounter a perfect master, don’t worry about guessing at the practice. Working on the golden elixir without oral instruction, how could you know how to form the holy fetus?” [10] All this shows that oral transmission from a perfected master is an essential feature of internal alchemy, preventing its wider spread.

A third obstacle is that the master usually passes on his full teachings to just one major disciple who then inherits his lineage, moving the system from one generation to the next in a rather limited fashion.

To me, all three of these obstacles need to be overcome: the narrow system of learning and transmission must be abolished. Instead, internal alchemy should be transparent, open to the public, and easily accessible. In other words, it should cease to be an esoteric system.

My last point concerns the scientific interpretation of terms and concepts. Internal alchemy has evolved over a thousand years, becoming increasingly archaic and abstruse. Today it is in urgent need of reform. Its key ideas should be presented in modern ways and made understandable and accessible so that the overall system becomes easy to comprehend and straightforward in its presentation. For this, modern research is helpful if not yet sufficient, scientific notions and ideas presenting a starting point for reconstruction. They help to make the tradition available to people today and relevant for human biological and cultural evolution in the future.

## Chapter Two

### Historical Connections

#### The Daoist Heritage

Historically internal alchemy has evolved in close connection to all three major religions of China, Daoism, Buddhism, and Confucianism. With regard to Daoism, it has certain key features in common with the meditation methods and body cosmology of the early middle ages, notably the school of Highest Clarity (Shangqing 上清), which emerged on the basis of a series of revelations in the 360s (Robinet 2000). Visualization techniques appear first in a group of texts that slightly predate the school: the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Yellow Court Scripture, DZ 401-403) and the *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Scripture of Laozi, JHL 79), [\[11\]](#) as well as in Ge Hong's 葛洪 *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity, DZ 1185; trl. Ware 1966).

According to these sources, the head is the celestial headquarters, matching the immortals' paradise of Mount Kunlun 崑崙山 and described as a large, luscious mountain surrounded by a wide lake and covered with palaces and orchards. Between the eyes (sun and moon), one can move inside to the Hall of Light ( *mingtang* 明堂), one of nine major palaces located there. Best reached by passing through the deep, dark valley of the nose, it is guarded by the two high towers of the ears. To attain entry one has to perform the physical/ritual exercise of “beating the heavenly drum”: with both palms covering the ears, snap the index and middle fingers to drum against the back of the skull.

From the Hall of Light, one moves deeper into the head to reach the Grotto Chamber ( *dongfang* 洞房), then goes on to the center and enters the upper elixir field, also known as Niwan 泥丸, the residence of a central deity and major chamber of alchemical transmutation. The remaining six palaces are placed around the central three, housing further deities and symbolizing the totality of the universe in the human being, matching the nine sectors of earth and the nine provinces of China. Adepts thus gain access to the greater cosmos and its ruling divinities through internal visualization.

The same pattern also holds true for the torso. Again beginning with conscious breathing at the nose, adepts may travel downward through its valley to find the mouth as a small lake. Filled by divine fluid that is experienced as saliva, this regulates the water level of the upper lake in the head and raises or lowers it as necessary. Crossing the mouth-lake over a bridge (tongue) and moving further down, adepts reach the Twelve-storied Tower of the windpipe, then come to the Flowery Canopy (lungs), the Scarlet Palace (heart), the Yellow Court (spleen), the Imperial Granary (stomach), the Purple Chamber (gall bladder), and other starry palaces transposed into the body's depth. Going ever deeper, another cosmic region is reached, with another sun and moon (kidneys). Beneath them, the Ocean of Energy ( *qihai* 氣海) extends with another Mount Kunlun in its midst. Various divine beings reside throughout, creating vitality and providing spiritual resources (see Neswald 2009).

Even in these early visualization texts, a certain level of alchemical imagery is used to describe the internal dynamics of the body. Thus, for



example, the desired goal is often formulated in terms of a divine elixir; a number of internal fluids match alchemical substances; and in some cases the deities are envisioned as emerging from alchemical cauldrons and stoves (see Pregadio 2006).

Followers of internal alchemy commonly use visualization in conjunction with the guiding of vital energy. For example, they unite yin and yang energies by sensing them as kidney water and heart fire in internal circulation of energy. They move toward the Yellow Court in the center of the torso, which becomes the nuptial chamber where the energies merge. Their successful union brings forth the mysterious pearl, the core of the holy fetus.

In addition, early meditation texts also describe a key deity residing in the human body: the infant known as the Red Child (Chizi 赤子) or Child-Cinnabar (Zidan 子丹). He resides in the abdomen and represents the practitioner's true self (*zhenwo* 真我) (Pregadio 2006, ch. 3), being thus functionally similar to the holy fetus that later adepts would generate and nurture. In terms of character and function, this key body god of early Daoist meditation is both the same and different from the holy fetus. To wit, both represent the adept's true self, called the spirit of pure yang in internal alchemy, and their departure spells immediate death. However, while the infant resides in the abdomen, where it lives on Yellow Essence, Red Breath, and the practitioner's salivary juices, the holy fetus lives in the upper elixir field and takes his nourishment from the energy of the entire body. In addition, the holy fetus also has various supernatural powers and the ability to manifest in many different form beyond the body.

## Complete Perfection

Another important connection to Daoism lies in the fact that internal alchemy is the main meditation practice of the Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真) school, which goes back to the 12<sup>th</sup> century. Its founder Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1112–1170) was born among local gentry in northwest China (Shanxi), received a classical education, and spent most of his life as an official in the military administration of the Central Asian dynasty of the Jurchen-Jin.

In 1159, at age forty-eight, Wang retired from office and withdrew to the Zhongnan mountains 終南山 near modern Xi'an, where he built a thatched hut and began to lead the life of an eccentric hermit, then had an ecstatic vision, receiving practice instructions from the immortals Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 and Lü Dongbin. Wang intensified his dedication and asceticism and, in 1167, burned his hut to the ground while dancing around it. He moved to Shandong in eastern China, where he preached his visions and began to win followers. He established the four stages of internal alchemy, including the hundred days of basic practice, and founded five religious communities that continued to spread his teaching (Eskildsen 2004, 4-11).

After he passed on the higher spheres in 1170, his work was continued by seven disciples, six men and one woman, known collectively as the Seven Perfected ( *qizhen* 七真; see Wong 1990). After observing the standard three-year mourning period for their master, they went separate ways to spread his teaching in different parts of north China, each founding various communities that developed into separate branches or lineages ( *pai* 派). The most important among these disciples is Qiu Chuji 丘處機 (1148–1227), better known as Master Changchun 長春先生, the founder of the leading Longmen 龍門 lineage, named after a mountain range in Shanxi, where he spread the teaching.

As patriarch of the school, he was summoned to see Genghis Khan in his Central Asian headquarters in 1219 and soon after appointed as the leader of all religions of China, causing his followers to be exempt from taxes and labor. This, in one stroke, made the Complete Perfection school the most powerful and popular religious group in north China and contributed greatly to its prominence which it enjoys to this day (Goossaert 2001). As a result, internal alchemy has remained prominent within Daoism and continued to flourish in multiple ways and venues, bringing forth various lineages and specialized techniques, including separate methods for women ( *nüdan* 女丹; see Valussi 2009).

## Buddhism

As regards Buddhism, internal alchemy most importantly has adopted the notion of transmigration and rebirth ( *lunhui* 輪迴). Described with the

Sanskrit word *samsara* , this indicates that the life of all creatures, including human beings, moves in endless cycles from birth to death and again rebirth. Adopted into Chinese culture after the arrival of Buddhism, it has had a major impact on the country. It centers on the belief that all present and future lives develop on the basis of karma ( *ye* 業), active causes people establish at some point, which eventually grow to fruition and produce a particular effect. Life does not end at death, but a spark, a spirit, or a soul transmigrates to be reborn in a new body, “cause and effect operating over three successive generations” ( *sanshi yinguo* 三世因果 ), that is encompassing past, present, and future.

Karma consists of the sum of the person’s actions in one of his successive lives: it determines his fate in the next rebirth. Karma applies to all living creatures and can be understood as an energy that both conserves established patterns and acts as a catalyst of change. Anytime a cause produces a certain effect that leads to a particular event or situation, this effect immediately becomes the cause of the next event. For example, if you kill—or have someone else kill—a cow or a pig, certain reactions of pain, anger, helplessness, and violence are produced. These reactions are summarized as “killing karma.” They are a particular energy flow that stays on after it arises, being conserved in the atmosphere in and around the people involved (see Kohn 1998).

Over time, when similar actions are repeated, killing karma accumulates and increases, possibly reaching a level where it creates violent effects in the form of war or disaster. Within the individual, killing karma accumulated due to the consumption of pork or beef may well lead to rebirth in the form of a pig or cow in a future life. Thus, Buddhists, and in their wake also Daoists, advocate the protection of all life, including that of animals and plants, even a tiny ant or a blade of grass. They believe that all good actions will have positive effects, over time eliminating all residue of bad karma of the past. Therefore, Buddhist center their practice on the purification of consciousness. As the verse has it,

To abstain from evil in any form,

Always perform all sorts of good deeds,

And continuously purify the intention:

This is the teaching of all the Buddhas. [\[12\]](#)

## Karma in Internal Alchemy

Based on the Buddhist understanding, masters of internal alchemy also believe that karmic cause and effect are buckled together like a never-ending chain. They assert that the power of causality, unless interrupted, will run through many generations and over innumerable lifetimes. Continuing infinitely, it causes people to be caught in endless transmigration. Echoing the teaching of the Buddhas, the masters thus never tire to advise people to break the karmic bonds through personal cultivation, lest they get stuck in everlasting transmigration. As Zhang Boduan says in his *Wuzhen pian*, “Wives and wealth are no longer yours after your demise, but sins and karma will continue: so, stop deluding yourself!” [\[13\]](#)

People’s actions and intentions make an impact on their consciousness while also operating within the body energy. In fact, consciousness is a form of vital energy, existing anytime and anywhere from birth to death and beyond, active constantly, even in one’s sleep. Any passion or desire experienced by consciousness is both an effect of a previous action and reaction and also a cause of the next, able to continue even after death: such is causation. This means, the chain of causation is really just the succession of energy, the underlying force and pattern of being existence that in many ways matches the law of conservation of energy in modern physics.

A key factor in Buddhism (and Daoism) to modify the karmic chain of cause and effect is the conscious development of goodness and compassion. Thinking positive thoughts, cultivating virtues, and doing good deeds, especially anonymous ones, have a powerful impact on one’s consciousness and vital energy. Whether in intention or action, good and compassionate energy invites a positive response from heaven, which extends appropriate rewards in the form of good karmic effects. Therefore, Buddhist texts emphasize that people should protect all life, including that of plants, animals, and insects. Ancient adepts, including Daoists, are thus often depicted with a small horsetail broom in their right hand: this is to sweep

small insects, such as ants and roaches, out of the way, protecting their lives. By extension, practitioners should also treat other animals and people with kindness and respect.

Karmic causation and virtuous behavior are two areas where internal alchemy is heavily indebted to Buddhism, using its terms to explain its own ideas more clearly while pointing to essentially identical ideas. Both internal alchemy and Buddhism are systems that require verification through practice and cannot stand as theories alone. They, moreover, form essential parts of the three teachings of traditional China, i. e., Buddhism, Daoism, and Confucianism. Zhang Boduan in his *Wuzhen pian* clearly states that he verified the claims of internal alchemy as well as those of Buddhism through his personal practice. According to him, the unity of the three teachings is not just a theoretical synthesis but a practical dimension, a more accurate description of their nature.

Karma and transmigration, then, both in Buddhism and internal alchemy, form the core characteristic of the ocean of birth and death, signifying that people move in endless cycles. Internal alchemy adepts believe that life functions in endless cycles and is dominated by transmigration. The only way to escape this wheel is through practice. By completing the golden elixir, as the *Wuzhen pian* has it, we can “forever escape the sea of birth and death.” [14]

Escaping transmigration for internal alchemists is the pathway to both eternal and infinite life, the ability to be fully present in the present moment and the potential to continue forever. The *Wuzhen pian* says, “I know my life is forever, the same as heaven.” [15] Control over one’s life, Zhang Boduan emphasizes, lies fully with oneself, and he stresses that “following the course of nature leads to ordinary existence, while reversing it leads to immortality.” Thus he recounts the ancient saying, “My life is my own! It does not rest with heaven!” [16]

Attaining a state of inner freedom and immortality, one can be open and unfettered, like the perfected described in the *Zhuangzi*, without any ties, social, natural, or cosmic. This level of being means that there is no more

birth and death, only coexistence with heaven that lasts forever. Again, the *Wuzhen pian* has, “Once I connect with the host of immortals I remain, however much oceans and fields, hills and mountains continue to change.” [17] Being among the immortals also means having complete control over oneself as well as utter freedom from pain, worry, and death. It is the ultimate realization of free will. As an immortal, one has the supernatural powers and lives on in heaven forever and ever, serving as a deity among the sages and immortals. This is the ultimate result of internal alchemy.

## Confucianism

As for Confucianism, a key concept that also plays an important role in internal alchemy is benevolence (*ren* 仁), a term often also rendered as humaneness, goodness, kindness, caring, or compassion. Already emphasized by Confucius (551-479 BCE) and Mencius (c. 372-289 BCE), it signals a central feature of human inner nature. As Confucius says in the *Lunyu* 論語 (Analects; trl. Lau 1979), “benevolence means to love others” (*renzhe airen* 仁者愛人). The ideal in Confucianism is that people expand this inherent trait and eliminate all evil or bad intentions.

A more practical approach to the concept appears in the *Sishu* 四書 (Four Books; trl. Legge 1962), which include also the *Daxue* 大學 (The Great Learning) and the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (The Doctrine of the Mean) besides the *Lunyu* and the *Mengzi* 孟子 (Book of Mencius), as well as in the *Liji* 禮記 (Book of Rites). They teach people how to activate benevolence in every respect of daily life. The major Confucian thinker of the Tang dynasty, moreover, Han Yu 韓愈 (768-724), in his *Yuandao* 原道 (The Origins of the Way), interpreted the concept as “the universal love for all, that is benevolence” (*boai zhiwei ren* 博愛之謂仁). A fundamental characteristic of humanity, this is beyond any race or religion, marking the universal nature of early Chinese thought.

Confucianism is an important teaching for the world today, which in many ways is much like it was in the days of Confucius. There still are warfare, massacres, refugees, racial discrimination, genocide, and a great disparity between rich and poor. Confucianism advocates that we should realize a world of Great Togetherness ( *datong* 大同 ), where everyone treats all others with kindness and benevolence. Internal alchemists in many ways respect and uphold the same idea, hoping to contribute to making the world a place of peace and harmony.

All three teachings support this basic notion, agreeing that people should always do good and eliminate evil. In this sense “the three teachings unite as one” ( *sanjiao heyi* 三教合一 ). Thus, Zhang Boduan contends that the general characteristics of all three teachings are verified in his own bodily experience through the practice of internal alchemy, however different they may look in their specific features.

Another principle that all three teachings have in common and which also matches the outlook of modern science is that consciousness is energy. They all recognize a power or force greater than the individual or even the community that can be accessed through devotion and prayer as well as activated within the person through good deeds, kind thoughts, and self-cultivation. For internal alchemists, this means recognizing and harnessing the essence, energy, and spirit and actively refining them to ever higher levels of purity, thus creating a perfect self and making the world more whole and complete.

## Chapter Three

### Major Texts and Lineages

#### Laozi and Zhuangzi

The *Daode jing* 道德經 (Book of the Way and Its Virtue, DZ 3; dat. ca. 400 BCE), associated with the ancient thinker Laozi, is the first text to focus on the concept of Dao as a cosmological, creative power, the ineffable dynamic source of multiplicity. It outlines the process of creation from the One to the

many, then encourages people to reverse it and return to unity by means of nonaction ( *wuwei* 無為), a personal, social, and political attitude.

The next major Daoist thinker, Zhuangzi, in a compendium of essays and philosophical works called the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang, DZ 1487; trl. Watson 1968), expands this vision to describe sagely and mystical people, of immortal nature and supernatural powers, who identify themselves with the universe and live free from any natural restrictions. He says,

There are spirit people living on faraway Gushe Mountain, with skin like ice or snow, and gentle and shy like young girls. They do not eat the five grains, but suck the wind, drink the dew, climb up on the clouds and mist, ride flying dragons, and wander beyond the four seas. By concentrating their spirit, they can protect creatures from sickness and plague and make the harvest plentiful. ( *c h.* 1) [\[18\]](#)

A key concept of internal alchemy that goes back to the *Daode jing* is the idea of the Mysterious Female ( *xuanpin* 玄牝). The text has,

The valley spirit does not die,

It is called the mysterious female.

The gate of the mysterious female

Is called the root of heaven and earth.

Forever and ever, it exists continuously,

Use it, yet you'll never wear it out. ( *ch.* 6) [\[19\]](#)

This term is of great importance in internal alchemy, influencing many thinkers and frequently used in later texts. Another major concept is reversal. As the *Daode jing* has,

Reversal is the movement of Dao.



Weakness is its function. [20](ch. 40)

The first line of this passage refers to the circulation of energy needed to reverse the process of body and life; the second indicates the way the mind makes the energy burn, that is, through weakness, not strength. The *Cantong qi* has a similar phrase: “Reversal is the verification of Dao; weakness is the grip on virtue.” [21]

Third, followers of internal alchemy rely heavily on nonaction, described as a key characteristic of superior virtue ( *Daode jing* 38). Superior virtue here is attained by entering a state of nonaction; it forms the foundation of becoming a perfected or true person. Inferior virtue, in contrast, relies on intentional, interfering actions and thus includes the undertaking of practice, that is, the alchemical process. Whether external or internal, it is based on action, on focused, purposeful doing. The *Cantong qi* again echoes this, “Superior virtue rests in nonaction—it neither examines nor seeks. Inferior virtue works with action—its functioning never stops.” [22]

## The *Cantong qi*

The *Cantong qi*, attributed to the alchemist Wei Boyang of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century, divides into three parts plus a poem called “Song of the Tripod” (Pregadio 2011, 120-21). Written in verse, it integrates three major strands of traditional Chinese thought—the divination oracles of the *Yijing*, fundamental Daoist concepts, and the worldview of operative alchemy—into a single doctrine, laying the foundation of the alchemical system. The text is described as “the king of all alchemical texts over ten thousand years” ( *wangu danjing wang* 萬古丹經王). No other work surpasses it in depth or scope.

The *Cantong qi* outlines the three main factors of alchemy: furnace and cauldron, ingredients, and firing times. It uses the trigrams Heaven (Qian 乾 ☰) and Earth (Kun 坤 ☷) to represent the cauldron and furnace, Water (Kan 坎 ☵) and Fire (Li 離 ☲) to symbolize the main ingredients, and the sixty-four hexagrams to represent the firing times. The ingredients, moreover, it describes variously, adopting rather enigmatic language, such as, for example, black and white, metal and wood, dragon and tiger, spirit

soul and material soul, etc. The firing times it refers to as “the method of matching the stems” (*najia zhi fa* 納甲之法).

Its genius combined with intense obscurity has led to the creation of about forty commentaries over the past two millennia. The most widely circulated among them is Peng Xiao’s 彭曉 *Zhouyi Cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi* 周易參同契分章通真義 (The Meaning Reaching to Perfection of the Divisions and Chapters of the *Zhouyi Cantong qi*, DZ 1002; dat. 947; see Pregadio 2011). The text says,

The great *Yijing* in nature and essence follows its measures. The teachings of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi with analytical study are simple to grasp. The work of fire and furnace is based on ultimate truth. These three ways are originally one; together, they yield one path.” [23]

The *Cantong qi* further refers to three kinds of transmission that connect closely to each other: the earthly golden elixir refined in the furnace, the human golden elixir in the teachings of yin and yang, and the heavenly golden elixir in pure cultivation. It spells out the secret transmission of the teachings of yin and yang, using rather enigmatic language and linking it both to internal cultivation and external elixir concoction.

## The Wuzhen pian

The *Wuzhen pian* is the second most important text of the tradition. It was written by Zhang Boduan, the founder the Southern School, who also wrote the *Qinghua biwen* and the *Jindan sibaizi* 金丹四百字 (Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir, DZ 1081). Written entirely in verse, the *Wuzhen pian* opens the internal alchemy teachings of the *Cantong qi* to the public. However, Zhang Boduan states definitely that his work only describes the internal cultivation without any operative or external components, however much he may use those terms in his descriptions. He says,

There is no need to refine the three yellows or four divine substances.

It is an even greater mistake to go and seek herbs.

People today must recognize that true lead and mercury

Are not material substances, such as cinnabar or mercury. [24]

In addition, the work uses many phrases with a double meaning and metaphors of great complexity in the description of the alchemical process. This means, it can be interpreted either in terms of the teachings of yin and yang or as outlining the process of cultivation. As regards Buddhism, it shows an obvious influence, but Zhang Boduan clearly notes that he personally verified each idea and concept through practice. This leads to a situation where many terms, although from either internal alchemy or Buddhism have identical meanings and closely match each other. Adepts speak of this tendency as “the three teachings harmonizing in oneness, ” emphasizing that they have much in common and go back to the same ultimate source of enlightened beings, be they called immortals, Buddhas, or sages. As the *Wuzhen pian* notes,

Although the teachings divide into three, their ways all go back to the same. Over later generations, the different factions of Daoism and Buddhism emerged, adepts each transmitting their own take on the truth and establishing divisions of right and wrong. Eventually this led to a state when the important core of each teaching was lost and their common ground could no longer be identified. [25]

Based on this position, there is the theory that Laozi was the original founder also of Buddhism, as described especially in the *Laozi huahu jing* 老子化胡經 (Scripture of Laozi’s Conversion of the Barbarians; see Zürcher 1959), which arose in the 3<sup>rd</sup> century but was later relegated as fictional. It claims that Laozi emigrated to the west, where he became the Buddha Sakyamuni, practiced self-cultivation, and established Buddhism in India. This in due course was imported into China, being in effect just a return of Daoism in a different guise.

Unlike this, most Daoists and also the major masters of internal alchemy like Zhang Boduan have proposed that both teachings arose independently in different places and cultures, but ultimately go back to highly similar

mystical experiences and thus propose matching methods and visions of attainment. It is thus not surprising that an image of an enlightened figure ( *arhat* ) in a Buddhist temple should show him holding the holy fetus of internal alchemy (see Fig. 1).

## Major Lineages

There are five important schools of internal alchemy (see Pregadio 2006):

1. Northern School (Beizong北宗), founded by Wang Zhe王喆 (1112-1170)
2. Southern School (Nanzong南宗), initiated by Zhang Boduan張伯端 (987-1082)
3. Central Lineage (Zhongpai中派), begun by Li Daochun李道純 (fl.1290)
4. Western Lineage (Xipai西派), founded by Li Xiyue李西月 (1806-1856)
5. Eastern Lineage (Dongpai東派), started by Lu Xixing陸西星 (1520-1601)



Fig. 1. One of the 500 arhats ( *luohan* 羅漢) at Baoguang si 寶光寺 near Chengdu 成都, Sichuan.

They all acknowledge the authority of the ancient classics, including the *Cantong qi* , *Wuzhen pian* , and *Daode jing* , each interpreting their statements, written in enigmatic language, in their own unique way. Within this framework, moreover, two major tendencies have unfolded, centering on the teachings of yin and yang or focusing on pure cultivation ( *qingxiu* 清修). Their main difference is that the former emphasizes partner practice and includes ritual forms of sexual intercourse, while the latter is a solo undertaking centering on meditative and physiological techniques. Both use the same texts but interpret their writings differently.

While many practical instructions in the classics, therefore, are ambiguous and can be read in a variety of ways, there are certain central concepts original to them that are not difficult to understand in theoretical terms. The most important among these are the principles of inversion ( *diandao* 顛倒) and categorical sameness ( *tonglei* 同類) (Robinet 2011). Of no great concern in the writings of pure cultivation practitioners, they are central in the teachings of yin and yang.

In addition, both are perfectly in line with the teachings of yin and yang, whose practices focus on concocting the golden elixir in a very short time. As the *Wuzhen pian* has it, “The illustrious golden elixir takes one day to complete;” or, “Within a single double-hour, the basic elixir is all done.” The principles are simple to the point that “people laugh when you tell them.” [26]

Zhang Boduan emphasizes that internal alchemy practice is the same as that of Buddhism. In later years, practitioners of the teachings of yin and yang developed a cultivation process very close to that of the sexual practices undertaken in Tantric Buddhism. This was inevitable, given the basic theories outlined in Wei Boyang and Zhang Boduan. Joseph Needham and his cooperators (1954), too, noticed and contrasted the two systems of practice. It is hard to say, though, which one came first and whether one copied the other. Both share some fundamental ideas and original meanings, but they communicate and express them in different terms and phrases.

Tantric Buddhism, like the practice of yin and yang in internal alchemy, is an esoteric system whose concrete operations are only transmitted orally from master to disciple and never put down in writing. If the practitioners of dual cultivation ever gave up on their enigmatic language and obscure metaphors, explaining their techniques in clear, everyday terms, they would face serious repercussions. People would come to regard internal alchemy, and through it Daoism as a whole, as unorthodox, finding its texts obscene and pornographic. Furthermore, the teachings would stand in direct conflict with the moral standards of society, especially nowadays. Ultimately, this would spell ruin for the entire system. For this reason, for the past thousand and more years, adepts have formulated internal alchemy teachings and

practices using enigmatic language. Zhang Boduan clearly understood this. As he says in the *Wuzhen pian* ,

My words basically serve to clarify phenomena; once one has grasped the phenomena, they forget the words. In the same way, phenomena are established to point to deeper meaning, and once one has awakened perfectly to the deeper meaning, phenomena can be eliminated. [27]

Zhang Boduan hopes that people can awaken to perfection through his rather enigmatic language and poetical verses. Ultimately words are unnecessary; they become superfluous once one has deeply grasped the deeper meaning. Although this sounds like a good method to get people to engage with the texts, in actual fact, people rarely find awakening through them. Thus, despite the long history of internal alchemy, writers have continued to work with obscure language and even academics and research scholars have not—until now, at least—managed to provide explanations and commentaries that are clear, accurate, and detailed. For the most part, extant commentaries in the tradition focus on the *Daode jing*, *Cantong qi*, *Wuzhen pian* , and the like, authors typically coming from the teachings of yin and yang and reading them to refer to their version of concrete operations of practice.

## Chapter Four

### Key Concepts

The Great Ultimate



The central concept of internal alchemy is the Great Ultimate (Taiji 太極), a term mentioned first in chapter 8 of the *Zhuangzi*, closely followed by the *Xici* 繫辭 (Appended Sayings; trl. Wilhelm 1950) commentary to the *Yijing*. Here it denotes the origin of the cosmos in the phrase, “All changes contain the Great Ultimate” (*yiyou taiji* 易有太極). The Great Ultimate represents the deepest order of the cosmos and thus is closely related to Dao and the two fundamental forces yin and yang, covering the complex multiplicity of all that is.

The terms yin and yang originally indicate the shady and sunny sides of a mountain, in expansion leading to their association with feminine and masculine, dark and light, moist and dry, warm and cold, and so on. The *Yijing*, then, presents a divination system predicated on the assumption that any given situation can be described in terms of the interaction between the two. It says,

They [the hexagrams] are taken to represent all possible forms of changes, situations, possibilities and institutions, . . . instead of a universe controlled by spiritual beings whose pleasures can only be discovered through divination, we have a natural operation of forces which can be determined and predicted objectively. (Chan 1963, 263)

## Pure Yin and Pure Yang

Yin and yang, two different yet interdependent dimensions of energy, ideally have to be in balance and harmony wherever they manifest, an especially in the human body. Chapter 42 of the *Daode jing* describes this,

All living creatures are surrounded by yin and envelop yang; the harmony of their life processes depends upon a harmony of these two



*qi* . [28]\_(Needham et al. 1976, 274)

Yin-yang theory is central to internal alchemy. Here, the distinction between human beings, ghosts, and immortals depends on the relative amount of yin and yang energy they possess. Thus, ghosts are or pure yin ( *chunyin* 純陰 ) without any yang whatsoever; immortals are the exact opposite, pure yang ( *chunyang* 純陽 ) without any yin; and human beings consist of a mixture of the two. The goal of alchemical practice, therefore, is to eliminate yin in favor of becoming entirely a being of pure yang. This is the way of attaining immortality.

Typically in the literature of internal alchemy, this process is described in terms of *Yijing* trigrams. For example, the *Wuzhen pian* has,

Taking the solid line in the center of the trigram Water (Kan) and move it to replace the central yin line of the trigram Fire (Li). In this way, the body matches the trigram Heaven (Qian), an organism of pure yang. As such, it can be visible or invisible, fly and leap, as the mind-and-heart desires.

By naturally reverting the energy of living yang, you can eliminate all forms of killing yin. Eliminate yin, so demons and ghosts can no longer invade. Once all yin is eliminated completely, the elixir matures. Yang at its ultimate, yin all gone, gradually the body transforms. [29]

## Prenatal Energy

The prenatal energy of perfect oneness ( *xiantian zhenyi zhi qi* 先天真一之炁 ) appears in almost all texts on internal alchemy. Energy here is *qi* , written in two different versions as 氣 and 炁, relating respectively to breath and vitality and representing more cosmic and more body-internal dimensions. In both forms, *qi* represents a primordial, original level of cosmic connection, a prenatal power deep within, so we call it energy. Prenatal ( *xiantian* 先天 ), literally “before heaven,” means that this energy existed before the universe was created. Perfect oneness means that it represents a state of unity before creation, the Great Ultimate at the dawn of

all existence, the vast emptiness of the unfolding universe, from where it manifests in various levels.

Infusing everything, this energy exists in all beings. As the *Zhuangzi* has it, “The energy of oneness pervades all under heaven. Thus, the sages prize oneness” (ch. 22). [30] It manifests on all different levels and pervades the multiple dimensions of the greater universe.

Within this framework, then, the *Xingming guizhi* describes the formation of the human embryo as originating from three sources: the semen (essence) of the father, the egg (blood) of the mother, and the prenatal energy of perfect oneness from cosmic emptiness. The *Wuzhen pian* echoes this when it says, “Dao generates the energy of oneness from emptiness and nonbeing.” [31] Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (1290-1368?), in his *Jindan dayao* 金丹大要 (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir, DZ 1067), similarly notes,

Only the prenatal energy of perfect oneness can be refined and reverted to form the elixir, since it alone comes from emptiness and nonbeing. This energy has the surname White and is also called the minister of Great Oneness, with the personal name appellation Primordial Energy. . . . Its nickname is Seed of Perfection. The perfect energy arose from before heaven and earth; it is the most valuable treasure in the human being. . . . What is perfect lead? It is the prenatal energy of perfect oneness. [32]

The *Wuzhen pian*, moreover, emphasizes that perfect lead forms the basic ingredient of the inner elixir. The *Jindan dayao* insists that this is nothing but the prenatal energy of perfect oneness. It is thus a key concept in all of internal alchemy.

## The Mysterious Female

The Mysterious Female (*xuanpin* 玄牝) in internal alchemy is the name of a central, rather obscure energy center in the body that is even more important than the three elixir fields. It is so mysterious because it does not exist in the body physically or even originally, but only arises when the

practitioner begins to practice and starts to feel it (Despeux 2012, 108). The term appears first in the *Daode jing*, which speaks of the “spirit of the valley” that does not die and is known as “mysterious female” (ch. 6), a phrase that has been interpreted variously (Robine 1998, 131). The *Wu-zhen pian* uses these terms when it says,

If you want to make sure that the spirit of the valley never dies, you must lay a foundation by working with the Mysterious Female. When yin and yang are fully nurtured, the spirit naturally starts to pervade all, exiting and entering yet never leaving the Mysterious Female. [33]

Zhang Boduan further speaks of this in his *Jindan sibaizi* ,

You must know that there is an energy hub in the body called the Mysterious Female. It is neither the heart, the kidneys, the mouth nor the nose. It is not the same as the spleen, stomach, anus, bladder, elixir field, or Niwan. Once you know this energy center, it becomes the core of everything: the winter solstice [starting point], the prime ingredients, the firing times, the cleansing, the fetus formation, and the fetus’s delivery. However, this center is boundless and neither located inside nor outside. Rather, it is the root of spirit and energy, the valley of emptiness and nonbeing. Just look for it inside the body; you cannot find it outside. [34]

From its description in many texts, this center, moreover, matches an energy vortex known as the Compass Center. The *Cantong qi* has, “The perfected withdraws to the depths of the abyss; drifting and roaming, he keeps to the Compass Center.” [35]

Among all the various texts on internal alchemy, the one with most details on this point is the *Guizhong zhinan* 規中指南 (Pointers to the Compass Center, DZ 243) by Chen Chongsu 陳冲素 (13<sup>th</sup> c.). He says,

There is an energy in the body called the Mysterious Female. It lives by receiving energy and serves as the mansion of spirit. Here the three primes gather, joining together without distinction. Essence and spirit as well as the spirit and material souls also meet in this center. It at is

the root of reverting the golden elixir, where the holy fetus of spirit immortality takes shape.

Where, then, is this energy center located? I say, according to the wondrous formulas, it is called the Compass Center. If you keep your intention focused there and never let it scatter, you will be able to form the holy fetus.

It is in the deepest center of heaven and earth as they manifest in the human body, where the eight extraordinary vessels, the lines from the nine orifices, as well as the various meridians and conduits meet. It is an empty and open space, and within it a pearl about the size of a grain of millet is suspended, floating freely with no support from the body, arising solely from by embodying pure Dao.

This center, moreover, is boundless and limitless: it has neither inside nor outside. If you try to look for it through the physical body, material organism, visible reality, or phenomena, you are making a huge mistake. [\[36\]](#)

These various citations show that masters of internal alchemy tend to use two different names—the Mysterious Female and the Compass Center—to refer to the same energy center. These are only its most common appellations: other texts show even more variety. It is present in the body, but it is neither an organ nor part of one. Unlike other centers, it does not have an appreciable location and remains invisible even when the body is dissected. Based on its description in the *Guizhong zhinan*, we can create a visual representation as follows (see Fig. 3).

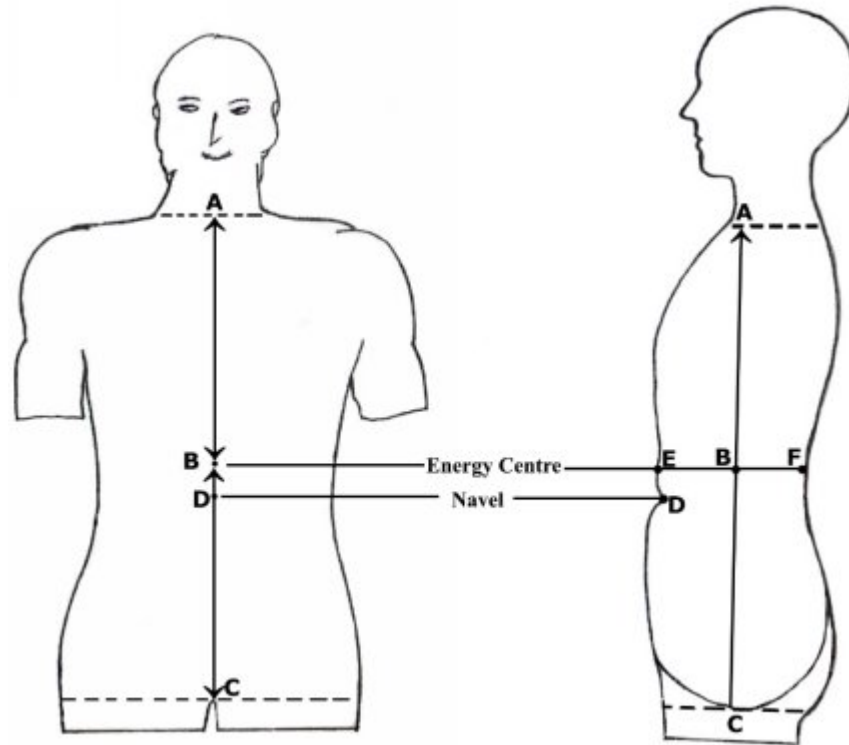


Fig. 3. The main energy hub: Compass Center ( *guizhong* 規中 ) or Mysterious

Female ( *xuanpin* 玄牝 ). B = Compass Center; D = Navel;  $AB = BC$ ,  $EB = EF$ .

The only way to feel it is through practice as described above. In ancient China, nearly all masters taught this method to their disciples through oral instruction. The Compass Center is regarded as the most important of all, because it has various functions, including connection, convergence, activity, and domination. Among all the various organs and energy centers, it is the most potent.

According to various tales, myths, and hagiographies, some vertebrates other than human beings can also create the elixir, especially foxes and dogs. After a long period of refinement, they can transform into immortals, although their practice is instinctual and they are not aware of the fact that what they are doing is internal alchemy. Records of external alchemy also note that some dogs and chickens managed to become immortal after taking

the dregs of the golden elixir. All this gives us reasons to believe that all vertebrates have this energy center as the foundation of their vital energy and life.

Within the body, moreover, the Compass Center evolves with the heart in fetal development and disappears as a function before the heart stops beating at death. This is because, according to the sources, the center functions through energy and comes first, while the heart is responsible for blood and in charge of maintaining the operation of all the other organs, coming second.

In this book, I strive to interpret the entire system of internal alchemy with regard to two aspects, energy and human evolution. To me, its practice is a process of transformation that utilizes the energy and raw materials of the human body. The completion of the holy fetus demonstrates the success of this transformation, which in turn depends on fundamental changes in energy. The process, then, requires a core center, a dominant matrix of transformation. Also the center of energy and the most essential location of the body, it is very much like the nucleus of a cell. To signify this, traditional authors speak of the Compass Center rather than using the appellation Mysterious Female.

## Prime Ingredients

Several key concepts of internal alchemy go back to external alchemy. They include most importantly the furnace and cauldron, the firing times, and the prime medical ingredients (*yaowu* 藥物). The latter include essence (*jing* 精), which also involves various body fluids and other key substances; energy (*qi* 氣), often associated with the breath; and spirit (*shen* 神), the more elusive, even divine dimension of being. Together they are called the Three Treasures (*sanbao* 三寶) (see Clary 1991). The former two are substances, while spirit is a function, operated on the basis of energy supply. Another way to classify these three is with the two categories of primordial and secondary, so that many internal alchemy texts speak of primordial essence, primordial energy, and primordial spirit.

Everybody has the Three Treasures in their body and survives as long as they remain, but people are not aware of them in daily life. According to Chen Zhixu's *Jindan dayao*, the Yellow Emperor said, "Who knows and cultivates them through refinement, is called a sage." [37] In practice, the system of internal alchemy activates them in three distinct procedures of transformation: refining essence to energy, energy to spirit, and spirit to return to emptiness.

The entire process consists of four stages, including also the creation of a solid foundation. Throughout, the prime object of refinement is always the Three Treasures as they transform from one into the next and influence each other in their various dimensions, such as primordial and secondary. Many internal alchemy texts speak of them as essentially identical yet existing in different states. To begin, the *Jindan dayao* describes essence:

The florescence and inner beauty of everything you eat and drink in the course of a day becomes essence, a term that consists of the words for "rice" (*mi* 米) and "purity" (*qing* 青) . . .

When we speak of essence in the human body, we refer to the postnatal essence of heaven and earth. When we discuss the reverted elixir, we do not mean this essence. The essence of the golden liquid and the reverted elixir is called Gold, with the appellation Nine-Three. . . . This essence is prenatal; it constitutes the most valuable treasure in the human body. [38]

That is to say, postnatal essence emerges from the absorption of nutrients taken from food and drink, while prenatal or primordial essence comes from the parents at birth, stored deeply in the inner organs. Postnatal essence, moreover, manifests in the body fluids, including semen, eggs, sexual fluids, saliva, and other body secretions, hormones, and glandular emissions.

Energy, second, is closely related to breath and the cosmos. Usually written 氣, in texts of internal alchemy it often appears in the variant 炁, combining the words for "already" and "fire." The latter indicates the prenatal energy deep in the body, while the former expresses its postnatal dimension. The two interact, so that energy appears in three forms.

First, prenatal energy is called *xiantian zhenyi zhiqi* 先天真一之炁, literally “energy of perfect oneness prior to heaven,” alternatively named primordial energy (*yuanqi* 元炁) when it exists in the individual. Second, postnatal energy (*qi* 氣) is called the breath, but also involves energy from food and drink. Third, when both merge, perfect energy (*zhenqi* 真炁) is formed.

When I translate the terms in this book, I use “energy” for the first and the third, and refer to the second as “breath.” This matches the definition in the *Jindan dayao*, “When we speak of the postnatal energy of heaven and earth, this comes from grains, so we use the term *qi* 氣 which consists of the words for “rice” (*mi* 米) and “gas” (*qi* 气). It gathers in the stomach. The stomach receives grain and produces breath.” [39]

An overview of the main differences appears in Table 1 below. The information on temperature and location outlined here comes from observations by those who have completed the second stage.

The third treasure is spirit, which also divides into primordial and secondary or prenatal and postnatal. Zhang Boduan describes it in his *Qinghua biwen*,

As regards spirit, there are primordial spirit and the spirit of desire. Primordial spirit comes from before heaven [is prenatal] and appears as a dot of numinous light. If people have confusing thoughts or impure intentions, it goes into hiding, to reappears as and when one gets rid of those impure thoughts. [40]

Supplementing this, the *Xingming guizhi* notes, “After essence is fertilized by the parents, a dot of numinous light . . . comes from emptiness. This is my primordial spirit. [41]\_This clearly shows that secondary or postnatal spirit is the spirit of desire, developed through the activities of mind and consciousness. The texts call this the conscious or cognitive spirit (*shishen* 識神); it refers to all the various activities and thinking processes of the mind, as they develop in life and through social learning. As long as the cognitive spirit is in active operation, the primordial spirit, the subconscious or unconsciousness functions of the greater mind, remains in hiding.

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<b>TABLE 1</b>		
Character	氣	炁
Pronunciation	<i>qi</i>	<i>qi</i>
Nature	postnatal ( <i>houtian</i> 後天)	prenatal ( <i>xiantian</i> 先天)
Translation	breath	energy
Origin	atmosphere	pre-creation universe
Chemistry	mainly oxygen/nitrogen	unknown
State	gas	gas
Color	none	none
Weight		less than oxygen
Temperature	atmosphere dependent	>37.5*C, more than body
Location	lungs, blood vessels	inner organs, energy centers,

		meridians, muscles, skin
Storage	lungs	kidneys
Initiation	none	controlled breathing
Function	supplies oxygen to the body	supplies energy to the organs
Accumulation	none	kidneys, energy centers
Manifestation	none	can solidify

## Furnace and Cauldron

Concepts borrowed from external alchemy, furnace and cauldron indicate the location where the main ingredients are refined. This location, however, as much as their size and dimension, is not the same throughout, but changes with the different stages of practice. Furnace and cauldron are the root location of refining essence, energy, and spirit. All refinement begins and ends with the furnace, while the particular rising of spirit and energy takes place in the cauldron. They are typically closely linked with the elixir fields in the body.

The two are where alchemical firing takes place. This depends closely on the harnessing of the internal fire, in internal alchemy linked with intention (*yi* 意) and mental focus (*nian* 念). The firing process, executed according to precise timing and different in the various stages, serves to join primordial spirit with the essence and energy in the body. During each stage, the practitioner's intention has to be activated properly. Intention here is the focusing of spirit, which is the alchemical fire. Breathing is the wind

or air flow, which pushes the energy forward into circulating along the microcosmic orbit or small heavenly circuit ( *xiao zhoutian* 小周天).

Because perfect energy relies on perfect intention activated within the body, it also works with breathing to move outside the body. Breathing in its turn depends on the guidance of the intention. This means, intention and mental focus regulate the breathing patterns, matching the correct firing times during practice. This overall process is different from individual to individual. Thus, ideally the exact techniques of the firing process are tailored to the person and transmitted only orally, each disciple being carefully guided under a master's supervision.

## Centers and Lines

In addition to the Mysterious Female, also known as the Compass Center, there are several other important energy centers in the body. Open, spherical spaces rather than energy points, they are located variously in the body, most prominently in the three elixir fields.

Most important among them is the lower elixir field, located behind the navel and in front of the kidneys. Right in the middle of the abdomen is a place called the Crescent Moon Jar ( *yanyuehu* 偃月壺 ), alternatively known as the Ocean of Energy. The lower elixir field is located either 1.3 or, according to some sources, 3.6 inches below this. It is often also called the Flowery Pond ( *huachi* 華池).

The middle elixir field is located below the heart. In this area, there is first an opening called the Red Chamber ( *chifang* 赤房 ). 3.6 inches directly beneath it is a space known as the Earth Pot ( *dihu* 地壺 ) or the Yellow Court ( *huangting* 黃庭 ). This is the middle elixir field. Many texts of internal alchemy confuse it with the Mysterious Female.

The upper elixir field is usually called the Niwan. It is a spherical opening 1.3 inches in diameter, functioning as repository of spirit. It is located three inches behind the center of the eyebrows, right in the middle of the skull.

The location of these three fields is described in detail by Zhang Boduan. Besides these, female practitioners also work with the Milk Creek ( *ruxi* 乳

溪). The center of female energy, it has a diameter of 1.2 inches and is located in the middle between the breasts, about 1.3 inches below the point Chest Central (*tanzhong* 檀中).

In terms of energy lines, the human body contains eight extraordinary vessels (*qijing* 奇經), also known as the eight conduits (*bamai* 八脈) (see Appendix 1). Two of them are major, the others are minor. The two major vessels are the Governing Vessel (*dumai* 督脈) and the Conception Vessel (*renmai* 任脈), also known as the black and red path, respectively. They run vertically along the back and front of the torso, connecting at the pelvic floor. Their conjunction is called the River Chariot (*heche* 河車).

In medical literature, these two are channels of breath and postnatal energy, finding common use in acupuncture. Even without needles, they can help in the healing process if activated with intention. However, if worked too hard, their conscious activation can lead to high blood pressure and even to cerebral hemorrhage.

A third vessel that plays a certain role in internal alchemy is the Yellow Path, technically known as the Thrusting Vessel (*zhongmai* 衝脈) or Central Yellow (*zhonghuang* 中黃). It runs vertically along the center line of the body from the Empty Rooftop (*xuwei xue* 虛危穴) point at the top of the head through the chest (center of earth) and the heart. It only transports primordial essence and energy. The internal alchemist Min Yide 閔一得 (1748-1836) thinks that the Three Treasures in their prenatal form do not go through the regular vessels but rise up through the yellow path, a feature called the “direct operation of the Central Yellow” (*zhonghuang zhitou* 中黃直透).

The formation and nourishment of the holy fetus happens here, which is why it is important. However, this vessel is different from the other two and in practice cannot be controlled by intention. If activated intentionally, the texts speak of “intruding into the yellow” (*chuanghuang* 闖黃), which can lead to serious disturbances in the body. Working with this channel requires the practice of nonaction, remaining firmly in a state of emptiness and stillness. Then it functions naturally.

Overall, any form of energy work but especially internal alchemy has to be done with caution and undertaken gradually. Thus, the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* teaches practitioners to focus the intention at the head, which for a beginner may produce the same results as activating the Thrusting Vessel.

## Chapter Five

### Body and Life

#### Body and Energy

The human body is a complex organism still far from being fully understood in all its secrets, even by science today. Modern medicine determines death when there is no more breathing or heartbeat. However, according to internal alchemy, one can still be alive even if there is neither breathing nor heartbeat, resting in a state of suspended animation not uncommon in Stage Three. This theoretical understanding rests firmly on practice and has been verified variously. It supposes that adepts can maintain their body in a living state due to the presence of *qi* 炁, that is, prenatal or vital energy.

This power is different from the breath and other forms of postnatal energy. As noted earlier, there are two types of *qi* : breath and energy. In internal alchemy, energy is in charge of the body's survival, development, reproduction, and death. Already, the *Zhuangzi* has, "Life is due to the gathering of breath-energy. When it comes together, there is life; when it disperses, there is death" (ch. 22). <sup>[42]</sup> Although energy is more important than breath in the body, they stand in a close relationship. As Cui Xifan 崔希范 (ca. 880-940) says in his *Ruyao jing* 入藥鏡 (Mirror of Compounding Medicines, DZ 263, ch. 21), "When you obtain prenatal energy and postnatal breath you feel as if drunk." <sup>[43]</sup>

This means that breath and energy by necessity operate at the same time. A more detailed understanding emerges from Fu Jingquan's 傅金銓 (1765-1844) commentary to this work, the *Ruyao jingzhu* 入藥鏡注 (Commentary on the "Mirror of Compounding Medicines"). He says,

When latent, we speak of energy 炁; when formed, we speak of breath 氣 . . . The prenatal ancestral energy of primordial beginning always fills the entire body. Without the presence of postnatal breath-energy, the prenatal energy of cosmic oneness cannot circulate. Without primordial energy, there is no entity to govern postnatal breath. [44]

In terms of location within the body, energy resides in the Compass Center rather than in the heart. In the system of internal alchemy, breath and energy, although closely related, flow through different circuits of operation. Breath flows mainly through the nose, windpipe, and lungs, while energy moves through the Governing and Conception Vessels. Thus, the *Zhuangzi* notes that “energy circulates through the Governing Vessel” (ch. 3), [45] and Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1518-1593) in his *Qijing bamai kao* 奇經八脈考 (An Investigation of the Eight Extraordinary Vessels) says, “The two vessels, Governing and Conception, are the central front and back axis [ *ziwu* 子午 ] of the body, its mainstays of circulation. Here primordial energy flows.” [46]

Primordial energy descends into lower elixir field after birth and from there serves as the engine that activates the functions of the inner organs and viscera as well as breathing and all the various conduits and meridians. The body only works as long as there is primordial energy, but this, as noted earlier, also requires the presence and activation of breath. Both have to operate at the same time but run through different circuits. As a result, texts on internal alchemy insist, in practice breath should be gathered in the lower elixir field and there connects to energy. Powered by this, energy can circulate through the Governing and Conception Vessels.

Once it does so, it undergoes various transformations. As Cao Wenyi 曹文逸 (1009-1126) states in her *Lingyuan dadao ge* 靈源大道歌 (Song of the Great Dao of the Numinous Origin, ZW 160; see Despeux and Kohn 2003, 133-40),

Primordial energy . . . has no fixed status but transforms according with the times and follows along with different states of mind. For example, in the body it turns into sweat when there is heat; in the eyes it turns into tears when there is sadness; in the kidneys it turns into

essence when there is sexual desire; and in the nose it turns into mucus when there is wind. [47]

## The Human Life Cycle

In the course of life, energy first increases to reach its fullest, then gradually decreases to zero, matching the stages of infancy, puberty, adulthood, decline, old age, and death. This sequence is natural, but practitioners of internal alchemy strive to reverse it as they reach for immortality. Energy to them is a kind of gas, an air-like substance that is described variously, on occasion presented in quantitative figures. For example, it is said to be present even in the very smallest unit of the ancient Chinese weight system, something called a *zhu* 銖, making up a tiny portion of a Chinese pound. In addition, it also dynamically changes in the course of life, matching stages described with the sixty-four hexagrams of the *Yijing* that, as first outlined in the *Cantong qi*, are also used to designate the changes of yin and yang in the course of the year (Pregadio 2011, 189-90). The *Xingming guizhi* says,

From one to three years of age, primordial energy grows to sixty-four *zhu*; this matches the hexagram Return (Fu復) with one yang line at the bottom. By age 5, it grows by another sixty-four *zhu*, which matches the hexagram Approach (Lin臨) with two yang lines. By age 8, it grows sixty-four *zhu* more, matching the hexagram Peace (Tai泰) with three yang lines underneath three yin lines. By age 10, it grows by yet another sixty-four *zhu*, made visible in the hexagram Great Strength (Dazhuang大壯) with four yang lines. By age 13 it grows sixty-four *zhu* more, apparent in the hexagram Parting (Jue夬) with five yang lines. By age 16, it grows another sixty-four *zhu*, made visible in the hexagram Heaven (Qian乾), which consists of entirely of six yang lines. This shows its fullest level.

At this point, people have taken 364 *zhu* of positive energy from heaven and earth. They have also received 24 *zhu* of ancestral energy from their father and mother, making a total of 384 *zhu*. This completes the increasing transformation of the body, its energy weight being equivalent to a full pound. At this point the body consists entirely of pure yang, with no yin sprouting forth. Essence and energy

are at their fullest. With proper instructions from a master on how to cultivate and refine inner nature and life-destiny, one can attain immortality immediately.

Starting from here, however, desires and sexual passions arise, causing primordial energy to leak out. Uncontrolled by prohibitions and taboos, lust and greed are bottomless. Between the ages of 16 and 24, therefore, primordial energy lessens by sixty-four *zhu*, matching the hexagram Encounter (Gou 姤), which consists of five yang lines over one yin line. Here yin first arises. Outside things and other people create stimulation, and the juices of life start to scatter. Although one is not yet far from the origin, one fails to observe the restrictions and yin appears in the first line. Still, if one were to diligently practice refinement, it is quite possible to return to wholeness.

By age 32, it lessens by another sixty-four *zhu*, corresponding to the hexagram Withdrawal (Dun 遁) with two yin and four yang lines. The power of yang gradually reduces, desires and worries arise in spades, and perfect, original energy flows out. However, blood and energy are still strong and, with strong determination and vigorous daring, the diligent practice of cultivation, one can still establish a good foundation for the elixir, easily working with power.

By age 40, the next sixty-four *zhu* of primordial energy leave, a state made visible in the hexagram Obstruction (Pi 否), consisting of three yin lines underneath three yang lines. At this point, heaven and earth no longer interact smoothly, and the two kinds of energy are separate: yin working on the inside while yang stands on the outside. Still, with diligent practice, dangers can still be eliminated and what was lost can still be recovered.

By age 48, there are again sixty-four *zhu* less, matching the hexagram Contemplation (Guan 觀). Its two yang lines are at the top, showing the gradual decrease in the power of yang while yin rises and its energy starts to dominate. Yet, even from here, with diligent cultivation and refinement, one can weaken the rise of yin and support the virtue of yang.



By age 56, the body loses the next sixty-four, corresponding to the hexagram Splitting Apart (Bo 剥), with a single yang line resting on top of five yin lines. Here yin energy is broad and pervasive while yang power is barely present. Practicing diligently is a major effort, like feeding wood to an all-consuming fire or pouring rain over barely sprouted seedlings.

By age 64, the energy of the entire body is yin, and all 384 *zhu* of energy one received from heaven and earth, father and mother—the whole pound of primordial power—is gone. This is manifest in the hexagram Earth (Kun 坤), which consists solely of yin with no yang. With very diligent cultivation practice, by constantly gathering the ingredients and keeping them well together, yin can be brought to reach its extreme, from which yang arises anew. From an extreme height one can descend again: the soft and weak return to firmness, one reverts old age and becomes strong again. [\[48\]](#)

As this outlines, the majority of energy comes from the universe: it governs the growth, development, and death of the body. All people once born must die: such is the unchangeable law of biology. However, we can prolong life and attain optimal health by controlling the body's energy through the practice of internal alchemy.

## Energy Centers

The heart, as we all know, is a key energy hub in the body. The presence of its beat indicates life; its absence is a sign of death. Besides the heart, though, internal alchemy acknowledges four other vital organs, the liver, spleen, lungs, and kidneys, plus a few that are not commonly described in medical literature.

First among them is the Compass Center, also called the Mysterious Female and by various other names. It is where the holy fetus is formed, but not identical with the Yellow Court or middle elixir field. As the *Guizhong*

*zhinan* notes, the eight extraordinary vessels, nine orifices, conduits, and meridians all meet here: it is the core energy center of the body. It may not be easily detectable and only form with conscious intention in cultivation practice, but once present it is very strong. Nearly all texts of internal alchemy describe it as mysterious and difficult to locate. Yet they also point out that it is of utmost importance. Without it, one cannot concoct the golden elixir. All the energy of the body gathers here: essence, energy, and spirit. It truly is the prime energy center.

Second is the upper elixir field, close in importance to its lower counterpart. Both play key roles in the practice, and the main work of “wall gazing” during the nine years of Stage Three happens here. Practitioners gather all the different forms of energy, including essence, energy, and spirit as well as that of the five organs.

Third is the lower elixir field, also known as the Energy Cavern ( *qixue* 炁穴). The texts describe it as the place where primordial energy, the prenatal energy of perfect oneness, settles after birth. This energy, once settled, can produce the essential ingredients of the elixir. The *Wu-zhen pian* notes, “Make sure to know the place where the ingredients spring from: it is none other than the home county in the southwest [lower elixir field].” [\[49\]](#) Gathering the ingredients is the first of the four steps in Stage Two, refining essence to energy. Being centered in the lower elixir field, it is rightfully called the Energy Cavern, the base where one begins to “concentrate the spirit” ( *ningshen* 凝神).

## Transformations

The path of internal alchemy is one of sublimation: it begins with the lowest, most concrete stage and ends with the highest, most imperceptible level, moving from essence through various transformations to emptiness. Essence, as noted above, is liquid in nature while emptiness is void, an unknown state of existence. In practice, there is a vast distance between them, breached by four stages (Pregadio and Skar 2000, 488-90).

After a thorough preparation and in-depth healing during Stage One, Stage Two works on refining essence to energy. It lasts one hundred days and

begins with the liquid potency of essence stored in the inner organs. Various techniques allow its transformation into energy, moving from liquid to gaseous forms. The process here relies entirely on breathing and controlled intention; however, it affords real and concrete changes as evident in the shrinking of outward sexual organs in practitioners of both sexes.

It works on the basis of traditional body cosmology that sees it as consisting of four forms of existence: solid, solid plus liquid, liquid, and gaseous. Thus, bones and vertebrae are solid; organs, muscles, tendons, brain matter, marrow, and blood vessel are both solid and liquid; blood, semen, eggs, sexual fluids, saliva, tears, urine, sweat, and other body secretions of hormones and glands are liquid; and the breath and the different forms of energy are gaseous .

Essence in this context manifests variously, called by different names and apparent in different compositions, as semen, eggs, sexual fluids, saliva, and other body secretions of hormones and glands. They all can transfer and transform from one to another. Lü Dongbin is credited with the following verse, frequently cited in alchemical texts:

A beautiful girl of two-times-eight [sixteen] with a body so soft:

Your sword [penis] between her thighs will kill you, foolish man!

You don't see how you are losing your head,

Have no clue how imperceptibly your bones and marrow start to wither. [\[50\]](#)



Fig. 4. Meditation on the divine child.

The early Ming-dynasty master Zhang Sanfeng 張三豐 expresses the same idea in his *Zhang Sanfeng taiji liandan mijue* 張三豐太極煉丹秘訣 (Zhang Sanfeng's Secret Instructions on Practicing Taiji and Refining the Elixir), when he says, "Lots of sex harms the marrow." [51]

Stages Three and Four, then, focus on nourishing yang by transforming energy into spirit, storing it in the upper elixir field, where it keeps growing

as more energy is supplied. Adepts meditate on the growing child until it eventually exits through the top of the head (see Fig. 4).

Energy, therefore, serves as the key the nutrition of the fetus, enhancing its transformation to more gaseous level. This transformation, moreover, reverses the unfolding of the cosmos, which Laozi describes in the *Daode jing* :

Dao brings forth the One.

The One brings forth the Two.

The Two bring forth the Three.

The Three bring forth the myriad beings. (ch. 42)

This outlines the creation of the universe, the unfolding of existence, from original oneness to the myriad beings. However, the process describes a difference in quantity and not in nature. Laozi did not explain in detail how exactly Dao brought forth the One: it is something that just happened. Then, however, the One bringing forth the Two should logically be different. But again, it is not spelled out. So different interpretations of the unfolding of the world are possible. The standpoint of internal alchemy appears in the *Wuzhen pian* :

From emptiness and nonbeing, Dao generates the One. The One is the prenatal energy of cosmic oneness. It brings forth yin and yang, then they combine to form a third organism. This third organism then combines again with the other forces to bring forth the myriad beings.

[52]

Here Zhang Boduan defines the terms Laozi used, explaining Dao in terms of emptiness and nonbeing, the One as prenatal energy, the Two as yin and yang, and the Three as an integrated living organism. Clearer than the *Daode jing* , this interpretation presents the view of internal alchemy. Later masters have stressed the notion of “following the natural processes, one generates a person; reversing them, one completes the elixir” ( *shun shengren, ni chengdan* 順生人, 逆成丹). That is to say, going along with

the course of cosmic generation as described by Laozi and Zhang Boduan, human beings come into existence. On the contrary, reversing it means going back to emptiness, which is creating the elixir. The *Jindan dayao* has,

What does “following the course of nature” mean? It means that “the One brings forth the Two, the Two bring forth the Three, the Three bring forth the myriad beings.” In other words, emptiness transforms into spirit, spirit transforms into energy; energy transforms into essence, essence transforms into the physical body, and the physical body constitutes a human being.

What does “reverse the course of nature” mean? The myriad contain the Three, the Three go back to the Two, the Two revert to the One. If you understand this way you can nourish spirit to preserve the physical body, nurture the body to refine essence, accumulate essence to transform it into energy, refine energy to merge with spirit, and refine spirit to return to emptiness: thus the golden elixir is complete. [53]

Modern science tells us that nearly 70 percent of the blood in the human body accumulates in its lower part due to the gravity of the earth. According to the understanding of internal alchemy, human body fluids form part of essence, including blood, which means that most essence gathers in the lower body. Essence is also essential for digestion, breathing, and excretion, but its main task is reproduction. All this means that essence flows down in ordinary people, but reverts upward in practitioners of internal alchemy. The more they work on this reversion of the natural tendency, the closer they come to attaining immortality.

## Mind and Spirit

The mind is a complex subject in both Western and Eastern studies. In internal alchemy, matching certain views in Western psychology, the key concepts are the cognitive and primordial spirit. More specifically, the *Xingming guizhi* has, “After the parents fertilize the essence, there is a tiny dot of spirit light . . . Primordial, it comes from emptiness: this is my primordial spirit.” [54]

This form of spirit is prenatal, while cognitive spirit is postnatal. They reside within the individual at the same time and are both under the control of the mind. When impure thoughts get overwhelming, the primordial spirit disappears; when they are eliminated, it manifests again. Zhang Boduan notes in the *Qinghua biwen*, “Actively doing is a manifestation of the mind of daily function; nonaction is an application of the mind of the golden elixir. . . . When primordial spirit is manifest, primordial energy is brought forth; when it is brought forth, primordial essence is produced.” [55]

Thus, refining the golden elixir is a process of eliminating the cognitive spirit and increasingly manifesting primordial spirit. The latter is present in each and every human being, and it depends on their attitude, actions, and practice whether or not they create the golden elixir. Thus, some masters of internal alchemy say that all human beings have the golden elixir already complete within. Examples include Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734-1821), Li Daochun 李道淳 (fl.1290-1320), and Yu Yan 俞琰 (1258-1314). The notion is similar to the Buddhist doctrine that “everyone has Buddha-nature and can become a Buddha.”

## Chapter Six

### The Holy Fetus

#### Vital and Sexual Energies

The natural process of life involves birth, reproduction, and death. Life is short and transient; it seems meaningless unless there is reproduction and the rearing of the next generation. From the viewpoint of internal alchemy, life relies on vital energy while reproduction depends on sexual energy. Indeed, some creatures die in the process of mating, which clearly shows the connection. In the human body, sexual energy urges people to reproduce as soon as the body has reached maturity; when it is lost, the body is close to death. We cannot deny that human beings are living creatures, which means that people are just as strongly controlled by the natural laws of biology as other animals.

The physiological structure of the human body is such that one of its major energies is sexual and reproductive. Every day the body relies on food and drink to maintain life. Food enters the stomach, and its energy, through the process of digestion, is pushed upward into the heart and circulated in the blood vessels before reaching the Conception Vessel. Here the blood gradually becomes grey-white and sticky; it starts to produce the generative fluids that form the source of sexual desires. When the genital duct dilates, there is arousal: women have the desire to engage in sexual intercourse, while men have an erection. This typically happens during the night and particularly around midnight, that is, during the *zi* 子 hour (11 pm -1 am).

Internal alchemists think that this sexual power of arousal can be collected and transmuted into the kind of pure sexual energy that circulates in the extraordinary vessels, thus supporting the production of the golden elixir. The *Wuzhen pian* says, “Lead [primordial energy], during the *gui* period [before it transforms into semen], must be quickly gathered; metal, after the full moon, will no longer be perfect. . . . When the one yang [member] gets aroused, do not delay to enhance the fire with breathing.” [56]

Liu Huayang 柳華陽 (1735-1799), in his *Fenghuo jing* 風火經 (Scripture of Wind and Fire), a work contained in the *Jinxian zheng lun* 金仙證論 (Testimony of the Golden Immortals, ZW 132), similarly notes,

The practice of the golden elixir begins when the yang [member] experiences an erection in the course of the night. Using concentrated spirit, guide the energy into the Energy Cavern, drumming it along like a blacksmith using his bellows. Breathing steadily, blow the air into the furnace, allowing a wind to arise that gets the inner fire blazing.

Once the fire blazes, sexual power transforms into essence. Once essence is transformed, energy arises naturally. Gather this vital energy and make it move up and down in ongoing revolutions: this is called the small heavenly circuit. The way of the golden elixir works just like this! [57]

Internal alchemists believe that people produce the next generation following the natural course of their generative fluids, while their reversal leads to the production of the golden elixir. This, then, is what they mean by



“following the natural processes, one generates human beings; reversing them, one completes the elixir.” However, it is important to note that the generative fluids are liquid while the sexual energy needed to form the golden elixir is gaseous. This means that the transformation also involves is a process called “refining essence transform it into energy” ( *liangjing huaqi* 煉精化炁 ). It is, in fact, somewhat more complicated than the description by Liu Huayang suggests, especially for women: beginners require detailed instructions of practice.

## The Place of Gestation

The holy fetus, then, first arises in the Compass Center, also known as the Mysterious Female. Some works place it into the Yellow Court, that is, the middle elixir field, an area more easily accessible and thus more convenient for practice. Unlike the former, the Yellow Court has a clear size and fixed location: it easy to find and activate. The Compass Center typically appears quite close to it, so that the results of the practice are by and large the same. How best to locate the Compass Center is explained in the *Guizhong zhinan*

To pinpoint the unique opening of the Mysterious Pass, the gate of the Mysterious Female, focus on the foundation of all creative transformations as indicated by the spirit immortals. . . . In my wondrous teaching, this is the Compass Center. Keep your intention focused there and never let it scatter, thus you can form the holy fetus. . . .

It is located in the very center of the heaven and earth within the human body, the cross point of the eight vessels and nine orifices, of all the different conduits and meridians. It is an empty and spacious opening, freely hanging like a seed of grain or a pearl, arising from formlessness and appearing only in embodied practice. . .

The secret formula states: one inch in diameter, it merges the three powers. Located above the kidneys and below the heart, it is vague and elusive: we call it the Mysterious Pass.

Keep your will undivided and concentrate the spirit, purify your mind and eliminate all thoughts. Make your breathing even, maintain serenity and steady radiance, never allowing the mind to be scattered or confused. Steady the breath to be very calm and harmonious, a perfected entering deep absorption.

Once in deep absorption, turn your vision inward and look at the internal landscape. Eventually you feel an intention arise, minute and subtle like a tiny sprout. Then you become aware of a subtle breath moving in the Compass Center, integrated and continuous, towering and soaring. Hold on to it with sincerity, listen to it with your mind, all six senses stable and focused. Now you can practice fetal breathing in deep concentration, neither holding nor counting the breath, but letting it move of its own accord. . . .

The place where this breath arises is the Mysterious Pass. It is neither above nor below, neither right nor left, neither in front nor behind, neither slanted nor inclined but at the very center of the human body universe. That is its location. . . .

In this center, yang expands and yin diminishes, it is originally formless and only opens when intention reaches there. It has fixed times of opening and closing and needs a hundred days to be established properly. Nourish it and it will become the mother of all energy. An empty chamber, it brings forth a white light, which you start to see naturally. [\[58\]](#)

These two passages make it clear that the Compass Center and the Yellow Court are two different energy centers in the body. Although close in location, the former is the center of energy and unites various vessels and centers, allowing access to all sorts of different energy centers and conduits. The latter is similar but not quite as powerful.

## Male Pregnancy

Medicine notes that a fetus forms on the basis of the three essential factors of sperm, egg, and fertilization. In internal alchemy, the holy fetus requires only two, yang spirit and correct location. When the three biological factors

come together, a new life is formed that is different from that of the parents. However much it inherits genes and various other characteristics from them, it is not only unique but also independent: it does not belong to either father or mother. Buddhists, too, share a similar vision. To them, a new life comes from the semen of the father and the blood of the mother in combination with the conscious spirit carried by the karma of past lives.

Table 2 shows how the holy fetus is formed when the yang spirit and energy enter the Compass Center. The process is similar to a zygote being established in the womb in ordinary life. The classics of internal alchemy describe this in terms of male pregnancy. For example, Chen Nan 陳楠 (d. 1213) says in his *Cuixu pian* 翠虛篇 (On Verdant Emptiness; DZ 1090),

Weird things happen in the world that make people laugh. Still today, a man can get pregnant by himself. Semen and blood combine within and, miracle of miracles, husband and wife appear within the body! [59]

This, then, may be considered a form of self-insemination and male pregnancy in the language of modern biology. The subsequent section of the same text outlines that primordial essence must be sent down from the brain to form either an ordinary or a holy fetus, allowing various hereditary characteristics to be passed on to it. Chen Nan says, “A fetus appears in the middle elixir field; its face looks just like me.” [60]

Not just the face, the holy fetus is actually the entire adept himself. It is not a new life, but an extension of the adept, an alter ego that develops and grows to maturity. The difference between an ordinary person and a Daoist adept is that the latter can produce the holy fetus, thus gaining many benefits, while the former produces a new life, which in the end does not belong to him. In structural terms, an ordinary fetus requires the semen to combine with the egg, while the holy fetus needs nothing of the kind. As Zhang Boduan notes in his *Jindan sibaizi*, “The golden elixir produces being from nothingness. Nurture it and it grows into an infant.” [61]

## Conception

The notions of sperm and egg as the root of pregnancy, common in modern biology, played no role in ancient classics of internal alchemy. Daoist scriptures often say that the embryo arises from the essence of the father and the blood of the mother ( *fujing muxue* 父精母血 ). When the two combine, a zygote is formed. Modern medicine asserts that some fluids in the brain that contain genetic material will flow into the genitals with the semen when a male reaches the sexual climax during copulation. Similarly, Chinese medicine believes that the brain is the ocean of marrow, from where original essence descends at times of sexual excitement, flowing out through the testicles and spermatic duct together with the semen. In other words, science and internal alchemy agree fundamentally on how the process works.

Next, life is created in the mother's womb or the adept's Compass Center, which exists in everyone, even a newborn baby. As the *Jindan daoyao* describes it,

It rests in a center that is essentially a place of emptiness and nonbeing, having neither form nor shadow. It is formed as and when the energy [of pregnancy] arises; supported by breathing, it appears at first vague and diffuse. . .

It has many names, all equally referring to it. . . . This energy center is great indeed! Before the parents even create anything, just about when the mother gets pregnant, it appears. . . .

Thus, the Buddhas felt great compassion and revealed a method of cultivation and refinement, teaching people to enter into the womb to enter once again and newly create their inner nature and life-destiny . . .

They let their personal spirit and energy enter here to merge in oneness, thereby forming the seed of perfection [the holy fetus]. This is just like the ordinary people who let their essence and energy enter here to merge in oneness, thereby forming a pregnancy [the ordinary fetus]. The basic principle is the same in both cases.” [\[62\]](#)

In biological terms, not only human beings but all mammals have the invisible center of energy in their body. Sperm and egg combine here to form a zygote, which then grows into an embryo and develops into a fetus. Thus works the process of fertilization. The embryo enters into womb that is only the function of nourishment and expansion. At the same time, Chen Zhixu speaks of the Buddhas ( *tathagathas* ) rather than Daoists or masters of internal alchemy as the key people who transmitted the practice. As already noted with regard to the works of Zhang Boduan, this is a way of integrating the three teachings, confirming the claim that Buddhists, Daoists, and Confucians have the same goals and work from similar premises.

## Formation

The formation of the fetus, whether ordinary or holy, requires vital energy as a major mover of transformation. Zhang Boduan says in his *Wuzhen pian*, “The tiger [primordial energy] leaps as the dragon [primordial spirit] soars: they mate in wind and waves. In the key position of the center, they produce the mysterious pearl. Fruit grows on trees, ripening in due course: how could the child in the womb be any different?” [\[63\]](#)

Zhang describes the elixir as a pearl yet at the same time he confirms that this pearl is the same as the fetus. The mysterious pearl, therefore, represents the primary state of the newly formed fetus, matching the zygote in ordinary gestation, except that the holy fetus comes from spirit and energy and develops in the Compass Center rather than the womb. He clearly locates the fetus in the very center of the body, meaning the Compass Center although he does not use the term. He also points out that both kinds of fetus need ten months of development to mature fully. What, then, drives this development? He says,

*Wuji* 戊己, by natural reversion, brings forth the number five [completion]. The three aspects come together to form the growing child. Thus we know that the Great One contains perfect energy. After ten months, the womb fills to completion: this is the foundation of the holy fetus. [\[64\]](#)

*Wuji* is a symbol of the sexagenary cycle. In the *Cantong qi*, it stands for the intention toward perfection focused fully in the middle elixir field (Pregadio 2011, 165). The three aspects that come together are this intention toward perfection, the potency of the physical body or primordial energy of the kidneys, and the pure power of the mind, that is, the primordial spirit of the heart. When they come together fruitfully, the fetus is formed.

In other words, the intention toward perfection is the driving force that brings the different forms of potency together, joining the energies of body and mind, heart and kidneys. In due course, the yang spirit appears and forms the embryo—not entirely different from ordinary pregnancy. In both cases, the gestation period is ten months and the ultimate result is the birth of an infant, something that can happen as often as once a year. The *Jindan sibaizi* describes this as “A baby a year, and each able to ride the crane [of the immortals],” [65] while the *Cuixu pian* has, “A baby born every year, son producing grandson, and so on forever more.” [66]

## Chapter Seven

### Fetal Unfolding

#### Pure Yang

As the fetus begins to grow, its essential components are transformed into the spirit of pure yang. This manifests when yang spirit and energy enter the Compass Center during Stage Two, that is, at the beginning of the ten months of gestation. Adepts have to systematically nourish and purify their yang spirit, so that it can transform into the spirit of pure yang. This, then, is none other than the transformation of the energy embryo into the holy fetus, which duly comes to rests in the adept’s body.

The process of refinement starts with both yin and yang present in the body, however, through consistent practice, yin gradually is reduced to zero while yang comes to fill it all. Eventually yang reaches a state of utmost purity when, as texts say, “yin is gone and yang is pure” (*yinjin yangchun*

陰盡陽純). Zhang Boduan explains in his *Wuzhen pian* , “The mysterious pearl [yang spirit] appears as it grows together with yang. Yang reaches its ultimate as yin diminishes and gradually disappears. Over ten months, the frost settles and the elixir begins to mature. At this time, gods and demons start to be in awe.” [67]\_The *Qinghua biwen* notes,

When the fire is sufficient and there enough energy, primordial essence, primordial energy, and primordial spirit unite fully into one. Then the child is created. How is this done? As the fire up burns all yin, the fetus can first from the body. This is the method by which the child is created.

The human body is all yin with the exception of a tiny spot of yang. In practice, I take this tiny spot of yang . . . and use it to beat the mass of yin into retreat. As I do so, the parts that are yang increase while those yin in nature diminish. Ultimately a stage is reached where yin is gone and yang is pure. At this time, the elixir starts to ascend to the Niwan . . . This and nothing else is the way of the golden elixir. [68]

<b>TABLE 3</b>		
<b>Item</b>	<b>Ordinary Fetus</b>	<b>Holy Fetus</b>
Pregnant person	Female	Adept (he/she)
Raw materials	Sperm, egg, and prenatal energy of oneness	Yang spirit and energy
Gender	Male or female	Neutral, face = adept
Location	Mother’s womb	Compass Center

Nutrition	Blood and fluids from the womb	Energy from the whole body
Identity	A new life different from the parents	Same as the life of the adept
Growth period	About ten months	About ten months
Birth process	Through birth canal	Through spine
Living space	On earth	Upper elixir field
Quantity	1-2 babies / pregnancy	1 child each year
Weight	A few pounds	Unknown
Time to maturity	About 16 years	About 9 years
Reproduction	1-2 babies / pregnancy	Multiple billions
Powers	Hardly any	Many
Life expectancy	80 or so years	Infinite and eternal



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## Transfer to the Brain

Once the holy fetus is formed, the primordial or yang spirit manifests fully. Quite like an ordinary fetus created through the combination of sperm and egg, it needs to be nurtured in its development for about ten months. At that point, the yang spirit is refined to a state of being completely pure. Once this level is reached, the holy fetus “separates from the womb” (*tuotai* 脫胎) and “transfers to another cauldron” (*yiding* 移鼎).

The new cauldron is the upper elixir field. The holy fetus remains here for nine years to develop and grow into maturity. When the transfer happens, it means that the formation of the holy fetus is complete, but it also means that it has been born just as a baby would take birth from its mother. In other words, it is no longer in the belly but still has to grow for a long time. The *Guizhong zhinan* says, “It upsets the cauldron and kicks over the furnace: the work is done! Creating the mysterious pearl, we return to the root and recover life-destiny, embrace the origin and revert to emptiness.” [69]

The upper elixir field is the repository of spirit, where the holy fetus continues to grow. This process is described in terms of nurturing the baby from infancy to childhood while also teaching it to multiply into several millions or even billions of replicas of itself, a feature known as “having many bodies beyond this body” (*shenwai youshen* 身外有身).

Modern medical research has shown that during copulation a male typically ejaculates sperm to the tune of 300 million. This matches the notion of primordial essence in internal alchemy, which flows from the brain into the genitals during sexual intercourse. In other words, the source of reproduction, the power to create large numbers of separate bodies, comes from the brain, the upper elixir field.

In another understanding, the holy fetus reproducing so many replicas can also be compared to cell division in biology. Again, the *Guizhong zhinan* ,

After working with fire for 300 days and nurturing the fetus for 1000 days, mind separates from body, coming and going spontaneously. Looking back at myself, I seem like a pile of old bones, a heap of dirt or soil. As it moves out first ten steps, then a hundred, I carefully look after it. . . . The child is still in its infancy, not yet matured; it relies on nourishment and support from the parents. After nine years of practice, three years of work, it can traverse heaven and earth on its own. [70]

The *Jindan dayao* adds, “When the holy fetus is developed fully, it reaches completion as a perfected, then transfers its residence the upper elixir field. Resting in the core of the hexagrams Heaven and Earth, it newly brings forth yin and yang. Sons give birth to grandsons, numbering in the billions.” [71]

### 圖胎出



Fig. 5. The holy fetus breaks away from the top of the adept's head.

## Going Beyond

After the holy fetus has been transferred to the upper elixir field and has been nurtured to maturity, it can break away from the body, typically exiting through the top of the head (see Fig. 5). This process is the culmination of the practice. Zhang Boduan describes it in his *Jindan sibaizi* , “Essence coagulates, spirit keeps concentrating. . . . With every day and every hour, as they gradually concentrate and assemble more tightly, a substance is produced from non-substance: thus the holy fetus takes shape.” [72] Similarly, Chen Zhixu says in his *Jindan dayao* ,

The holy fetus originally has neither form nor image, but requires outside help to complete it. This comes from my spirit and energy. First, I take spirit and infuse it into energy, then I let energy be completely enveloped by spirit. Eventually the two merge into one. I keep my intention serene and utterly unmoving: this creates the fetus. The more densely the energy coagulates, moreover, the more numinous the spirit gets. . . . This process is one of daily increase and enhanced growth. Eventually the energy is sufficient and the fetus perfect. Then it can exit through the top of the head. [73]

According to these two passages, the energy of the holy fetus coagulates as the adept practices over time. It produces a substance from non-substance as energy accumulates within itself. Thus, the holy fetus consists of a subtle substance that can activate abilities superior to the six senses and other supernatural powers. It can also go beyond life and death, attaining infinite existence and eternal life in immortality.

Immortality has both a spiritual and mythical dimension. In the Daoist universe, the heavenly administration keeps records containing the names and fates of all beings, including people and immortals. Once an adept has successfully created the holy fetus and nurtured it to maturity, his name will be transferred from the books of life and death to the ledgers of immortality.

At the same time, the senior officials will issue an imperial edict to the immortals to welcome their new member. The *Wu-zhen pian* notes,

The holy fetus leaves the body and transforms into a spirit [immortal]. His name is duly recorded in their ledger; he holds the title and rank of perfected. . . . Tigers and other wild animals, knives and various weapons can no longer harm him. He is free from all fires and disasters, hardships and imprisonment. Once the precious edict has been issued, he attends court in heaven, riding about in wondrous carriages and phoenix chariots. [74]

To Zhang Boduan, the way of the golden elixir is the same as Buddhist enlightenment or the attainment of bodhisattva status. As he says,

The pearl of Buddhism is the same as my pearl; my inner nature returns to the vastness of Buddha-nature. . . . No longer dependent for life on taking rebirth in another body for many generations, right here and now, before my very eyes, I have acquired the supernatural powers of the Buddhas . . . A living testimony to the thirty-two manifestations of the Bodhisattva Guanyin 觀音 [Avalokitesvara], my transformations and appearances are unfathomable. I have fully realized the state of free and easy wandering. [75]

In other words, the successful complete of the process of internal alchemy means to be one of the immortals in Daoism or equal to the bodhisattvas in Buddhism.

## Part Two

### Practice

## Chapter Eight

### Preparation

## Preliminary Conditions

Chinese alchemists, whether they focus on external or internal practice, need to ensure they have the proper conditions to pursue their quest. This involves correct instructions, material necessities, suitable companions, and a secluded location: together they are known as the four preliminary conditions. Whether undertaking only the basic practice of a hundred days or dedicating one's entire life to the great work, they have to be fulfilled.

More specifically, instructions refer to the methods of concocting the cinnabar elixir in external alchemy and to the various ways of energetic refinement in internal practice. They are typically transmitted orally rather than found in written documents, so that students tend to spend a lot of time, even several decades, seeking a competent master who agrees to take them on. On the other hand, there are some historical manuals, such as the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*, where Lü Dongbin says, "What I have revealed here in a few words will save you several decades of seeking for a master." [76] Working from texts, though, it is important to study carefully and let yourself be guided by experience.

Material necessities, next, indicate the presence of enough money to cover living expenses as well as the laying-in of supplies needed for the practice period. Above and beyond the hundred days of the first stage, the quest takes nine years or more. It is important that practitioners have sufficient funds to cover their living expenses, medical expenditures, and travel costs.

In addition, if practice is to be full-time, adepts will need to hire help for the necessities of daily life, such as shopping, cooking, cleaning, security, and so on. All this means that ordinary working folk, who do not live in a monastic community that provides all this, will have a hard time getting to this point and may opt to pursue the basic practice of one hundred days, then continue to do as much as they can in everyday life while attending retreats and workshops a few times every year.

The third condition is having the right companions or desired partners. Those are people who pursue the same goals and come together to practice. It is important to have a support group, often disciples of the same master.

Adepts can study together and protect each other, sharing cultivation questions and experiences as well as assisting with necessary household chores. In a temple or monastery, obviously, all these tasks are shared and distributed evenly.

Last but not least, location matters. It is of utmost importance to have a place that supports tranquility and serenity. There must be absolute silence without any noise whatsoever, that is, no sounds of traffic, construction, or living activities. If this is not feasible, one can also work by sound-proofing a given space. A second major condition is a natural setting, that is, an area with fresh air and good vital energy.

## Sex and Age

There are some gender differences in the practice due to elementary physiology, notably in Stages One and Two. (Three and Four are essentially the same.) The principles are same for both, that is, sexual energy is refined and transmuted into perfect energy, from which the holy fetus takes shape and the golden elixir grows. Once the fetus is formed, women have it easier and tend to move ahead faster: it may take them only five rather than nine years. The reason for this is that they naturally have the ability to get pregnant. They are also more subtle, often having characteristics such as gentleness, softness, and tranquility—all beneficial in the process.

Still, in the early stages, the practices are quite different, and close contact with members of the opposite sex is not helpful. As a result, the genders should be segregated throughout, working in different locations and living in separate buildings. They should not disturb each other or even have contact. Meditation requires that one empties the mind and rests in emptiness and stillness, fully focused and deeply concentrated. This matches what Laozi says in the *Daode jing*, “Do not show them anything likely to excite their desires: this is the way to keep their minds from disorder” (ch. 3). [\[77\]](#)

As regards age, internal alchemy can be practiced at any time and by anyone, especially the fundamental methods of basic practice in Stage One. To commence the undertaking, one must have fulfilled the four preliminary

conditions, most importantly taking care of living expenses. This is all the more essential if one sets out on a long-term quest for up to nine years.

In addition, it is helpful to have completed procreation, making sure that the next generation is present and taken care of. In the course of alchemical refinement, practitioners become more and more gender-neutral, which means they can no longer reproduce. It is, therefore, strongly suggested that adepts make sure they either have completed procreation or are comfortable without it. Closely connected to this issue are other family responsibilities, such as providing for one's parents.

Given this situation, it is quite common that adepts of internal alchemy are forty-five years or older. They can enjoy successful endeavors well into their eighties, after which time, for most people, health begins to decline and the practice becomes that much more difficult. Of course, all this depends on the individual, and it is also quite possible that younger people are attracted to the system. Those under sixteen, moreover, have not lost enough of their primordial energy to make recovery necessary. They can begin with Stage Three.

## Family and Business

In traditional China, a family consisted of several generations living together. So, if one member left to pursue internal alchemy, it would throw the entire family dynamic out of order. As a result, although nuclear families are becoming increasingly common, practitioners may encounter strong objections from their family even today. To overcome those, they have to be both considerate and determined, taking good care of everyone else while pursuing their ultimate goal. Zhang Boduan notes in his *Wuzhen pian*,

To study Dao, you must be fierce and determined, without emotions and with a heart-and-mind firm as iron. Tell your sons and daughters, wives and concubines directly as it is, explaining to them clearly why have to leave home. . . Why should you shoulder the responsibility for your family and be besotted with your wife and children? [78]

Traditionally, Chinese men were the pillars their families, guaranteeing social status, financial support, and official relations for everyone: parents, wives, children, plus servants, often even including also aunts, uncles, and cousins. As a result, historical sources of internal alchemy suggest that adepts should engage in the practice only after they have fulfilled their household responsibilities, that is, after their parents have passed on and their children have reached maturity. This would make the average adept somewhere between forty-five and sixty-five years old, an age that I think is very appropriate. Once making the decision to move out to practice full-time, then, one should set up proper arrangements for all family affairs.

Both Daoism, especially Complete Perfection, and Buddhism offer monastic institutions, where recluses live the simplest of life with just the bare necessities and no wealth or obligations. They even beg for their daily food, thus realizing the ideal of emptiness on both the mental and material planes. This is extremely helpful, since the mind cannot concentrate on spiritual practice as long as it needs to deal with material goods, even more so if the latter are rich and varied, engaging the five senses.

In internal alchemy, unless they join a monastery, adepts have to rely on their own wealth to support their practice while completing the process, however, this wealth must not become a preoccupation or central concern. One must have enough, invested well enough, to provide for one's needs during and also after completing the practice, without letting it interfere with the process. Thus Chen Zhixu states in his *Jindan dayao* ,

Having wealth is a great help in setting up the cauldron and attaining Dao. Someone undertaking the great quest of cultivation must obtain enough wealth so he can purchase the ingredients. Once he has the necessary ingredients, he can concoct the elixir. After completing the elixir, he should take his remaining wealth and give it all away: in this way, he is different from ordinary people. [79]



# Chapter Nine

## Potential Hazards

### Sensory Engagement

The *Cantong qi* says, “Ears, eyes, and mouth are [another set of] Three Treasures: close them and let nothing pass through!” [80]\_This, to Wei Boyang, is the starting point of the long journey to becoming a perfected. Only when intention is empty and one rests in a state of nonaction, can primordial spirit manifest as the pearl. Even the early *Daode jing* recognizes the hazard of sensory involvement,

The five colors blind the eyes;

The five tones deafen the ears;

The five flavors numb the taste buds. [81]\_(ch. 12)

That is to say, engaging the five senses prevents the attainment of any form of emptiness and stillness, leading only to a greater addiction to physical pleasures. At the same time, the mind keeps getting drawn to the senses, as are the other organs in the body. In other words, the digestive organs connect to the desire for food and drink while the genital organs want us to engage in sexual relations.

All this spells great trouble for the adept, confirming Laozi’s dictum, “The greatest trouble I have lies in having a body.” [82]\_Really, it is not just trouble but a serious obstacle on the path to achieving eternal life. For most people, the trouble with the body is that it lacks permanence and will decline and eventually die, which Laozi refers to when he says, “Without this body, what trouble would I have?” [83]\_Zhang Boduan picks up on this in his *Wuzhen pian* ,

Having a body means having trouble. Without this body, where would trouble come from? Yet without being embodied in this organism, how

could we ever get close to Dao? . . . Dao is totally amazing, unbelievably profound! People of the world, in contrast, are foolish and deluded by nature, holding on to having a body while hating death and relishing life. Thus, they have great difficulty in attaining awakening. [84]

Every time we engage the senses, the conscious spirit is preoccupied and no longer focused or concentrated in emptiness, but completely absorbed in sensory experiences. This prevents progress, making sensory involvement the first and most common hazard of practice.

## Passions and Desires

Another way to speak of spiritual cultivation is in terms of “self-refinement” ( *lianji* 練己 ). This involves four factors, as Chen Zhixu outlines in his *Jindan dayao* .

Adepts who wish to cultivate the elixir must first refine themselves by eliminating desires and containing passions through undergoing ascetic practices and maintaining stolid forbearance.

Then, when they enter the mediation chamber, their six senses are peaceful and stable, which allows them to become pure and vibrant. Forgetting all until there is nothing left to forget, they can pursue the great work!

People of the world, in contrast, know nothing about the great work of self-refinement, and foolishly desire to make efforts for an hour or two quarters. They expect results even in such a short time, but in fact they never get anywhere. . . .

What, then, does it mean to refine oneself? It includes four factors: eliminate passions and desires, cutting off love and relationships, ease away from material objects and wealth, and diligently do good deeds. These are the great essentials of self-refinement. [85]

In more detail, this means,

Once you eliminate passions and desires, your essence and energy are whole. When they are whole, you can vanquish the dragon [primordial spirit] and subdue the tiger [primordial energy]. Once they are under control, you can gather the prenatal energy of cosmic oneness. . . .

Being addicted to love and desires will cause your essence and energy to be exhausted. Emotions are hard to cut off, and the more you are in their thrall, the more your spirit will be lost; the more your intention is agitated, the more your energy will scatter. Once spirit and energy have perished, your life-destiny is close to extinction. Sex is a power all in itself: without actually being a knife or razor, it kills people even more efficiently!

Love and affection arise in conjunction with close relationships. Once you have a close connection with someone, affection arises, and from affection, love begins to grow. Therefore, to eliminate love and affection, get rid of all close personal relationships. Once you manage to connect with people but no longer enter into closeness with them and become free their attraction, your thinking will be pure. . . .

Virtue, moreover, can move heaven and earth, while good conduct can rouse gods and demons. In the great effort of self-refinement, these are of primary importance. Engaging in the skillful means of anonymous good deeds you accumulate fundamental goodness: this is virtue! Deeply respecting and honoring oneself, never deluding your own mind: this is good conduct! [\[86\]](#)

Why, then, are these so important in the practice of internal alchemy? Chen Zhixu continues,

Zhang Boduan said, “If you want to cultivate yourself and concoct the ninefold reverted elixir, you must first of all refine yourself and control your mind.”

Lü Dongbin said, “To produce the sevenfold reverted elixir, the very first thing to refining yourself and waiting for the right time.” [\[87\]](#)

In other words, the key practices that eliminate the hazard of passions and desires involve self-refinement and the stilling of the mind. Intention must be clear and focused, the heart must be at peace, the body must be controlled—thus one can hope for success in the practice.

## Personal Ethics

To make sure the heart remains at peace, one has to develop strong personal ethics. The texts strongly emphasize the importance of virtuous conduct, often described in terms of anonymous good deeds or philanthropic actions. Zhang Boduan discusses this in the *Wuzhen pian* ,

If you behave with virtue in 800 or more instances and do more than 3,000 anonymous good deeds, always spreading your benefits equally to all beings and reaching out to family and foe alike, you begin to match the original vow of the spirit immortals. . . . Without accumulating anonymous virtue in the process of cultivation lack, anything you do will be plagued by obstacles demons throw your way. [\[88\]](#)

This clearly documents that good personal ethics and impeccable moral character, matching the inner quality of bodhisattvas and immortals, form a basic requirement for the practice of internal alchemy. Not limited to one's character, virtue must also manifest in day-to-day conduct and all one's actions in the world. Plus, these actions can be counted, leading to quite specific conditions to indicate readiness. Alchemical texts generally contain only few descriptions of moral and ethical dimensions. However, there are plenty of other Daoist texts to supply them. For example, the *Taishang ganying pian* 太上感應篇 (Impulse and Response According to the Highest Lord, DZ 1167; trl Suzuki and Carus 1973) says,

Accumulate virtue and pile up meritorious deeds.

Extend your compassionate heart toward all beings.

Be loyal and filial, friendly and brotherly.

Straighten yourself and transform others.

Care for orphans and be nice to widows.

Respect the old and cherish the young.

Look after insects, grasses, and trees,

Hurting not even a single one.

Have compassion for those in misfortune.

Rejoice in the goodness of others.

Help people in emergencies.

Rescue those who are in perils.

As regards the good person, all people respect him, the way of heaven supports him, good fortune and emoluments follow him. The many evils stay far away from him, while all the spiritual powers protect him. Anything he undertakes is bound to succeed, and he can attain spirit immortality. If you desire to pursue celestial immortality, first of all do 1, 300 good deeds; if you want to become an earth immortal, start with 300. [\[89\]](#)

## Demonic Attacks

While pursuing the state of pure yang, practitioners will face various tests in the course of their practice, especially during Stage Four, refining spirit to return to emptiness. These tests consist of visions during deep meditation that evoke various kinds of desires, emotions, and reactions, all harmful to the refinement process. They are collectively known as the “ten demonic attacks” (*shimo* 十魔) and sometimes also described as manifestations of “dark spirits” (*yinshen* 陰神).

Essentially aspects of the conscious spirit in combination with subconscious processing, they appear due to the accumulated karma of former lives. As adepts overcome and eliminate these, their yang spirit is increasingly purified. The Complete Perfection patriarch Qiu Chuji outlines

them in his *Dadan zhizhi* 大丹直指 (Pointers to the Great Elixir, DZ 244; trl. Komjathy 2014; see also Eskildsen 2004, 106).

1. Six Desires ( *liuyu* 六欲). You may hear the music of reeds and pipes, look at fleeting attractions, taste delicious food, or smell strange fragrances. If that happens, your thoughts and emotions get agitated while your awareness and focused energy start to scatter. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of the six desires.

2. Seven Emotions ( *qiqing* 七情). You may notice the touch of a soft wind, the pleasure of warm sunlight, the moisture of heavy rain with rolling thunder, the brightness of lightning, the vibrancy of music and song, or the sounds of weeping and sorrow. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of the seven emotions.

3. Wealth ( *fu* 富). You may wander through fabulous pavilions with magnificent towers, elegant chambers with fragrant orchids, turquoise curtains with strands of pearls, sculptured walls with high ceilings, all sorts of places full of jewels and treasures, or halls filled with gold and jade. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of conspicuous wealth.

4. Honor ( *gui* 貴). You may get involved in the activity of generals and ministers, the exercise of power in the eight directions, the enjoyment of carriages and court robes, the splendor of banners and flags, the meeting of aristocrats and officials, and the richness of boots and tablets. If you encounter any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of the strife for honor.

5. Love and affection ( *en'ai* 恩愛). You may be around children who suffer from sickness and disease, parents who pass away, brothers far away from home, wives and children living in separation, families facing adversities, or clans suffering calamities. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of love and affection.

6. Calamities and Difficulties ( *zainan* 災難). You may be in danger of perishing in a hot cauldron, falling off a high cliff, being punished or executed, getting poisoned, pursued by pernicious devils, chased and mauled by violent animals. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of calamities and difficulties.

7. Swords and Weapons ( *daobing* 刀兵). You may find yourself in a battle field, full of soldiers, both infantry and cavalry, swords and weapons glittering like frost, spears and axes raised, bows and crossbows drawn, fighting around you to the death, or full of amazing courage and agility. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of swords and weapons.

8. Sages and Worthies ( *shengxian* 聖賢). You may see the Three Pure Ones and the Jade Emperor, the Ten Kings of Hell, Four Sages, the Nine Dipper Lords, the Emperors of the Five Directions, or the Three Officials [of heaven, earth, and water]. They all carry banners and emblems that rise wondrously into the sky. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of Sages and Worthies.

9. Entertainment and Pleasure ( *jile* 妓樂). You may be surrounded by scores of immortal ladies and jade maidens, their music and singing filling the air, their dance colorful in variegated silks, their services skillful in their red sleeves as they offer you wine in golden chalices. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of entertainment and pleasure.

10. Sexual Attraction ( *nüse* 女色). You may encounter beauties with charming looks and rich adornments, skillful entertainers at home in elegant settings, bodies smooth and scantily clad, who lean close to you, trembling seductively, inviting to have sex. If you experience any of these, do not engage them but recognize them as a demonic attack of sexual attraction. [\[90\]](#)

All these various forms of demonic attack are really the manifestation of subliminal desires in the conscious spirit, often closely reflecting the

experiences and yearnings of previous lives. Adepts must recognize each and every one of them for what they are: imaginary visions, aspects of their own psychological make-up made visible and tangible. However ultimately unreal they may be, they still present an obstruction to the increasing purification of the yang spirit in deep meditation. They must, one and all, be completely eliminated.

Unless they are gone completely, the practice fire as steered by the intention will run wild and one will get involved with the demons ( *zouhuo rumo* 走火入魔 ). This, in turn, leads to the demons getting bigger and stronger, causing potential mental disorders and bodily harm. Only if they are vanquished can the pure yang spirit come forth. Thus Zhang Boduan says in his *Qinghua biwen* , “Eliminate all distracting thoughts, and primordial spirit will appear.” [\[91\]](#)

## Other Hazards

There are a few other hazardous conditions that may arise in the course of practice. Everyone should be aware of them, so they can prevent them. This is very important, since failure to avoid any given hazard may result in the irrevocable failure of the entire process. The *Jindan dayao* lists the following seven:

Shangyangzi 上陽子 [Chen Zhixu] said, “Being aware of hazards and preventing dangers play an important role in the golden elixir. . . .

“This does not just involve one thing, but quite a few. For example, when you first start to gather the ingredients, the sun [yang] and the moon [yin] must be in auspicious conjunction, the dragon [primordial spirit] and tiger [primordial energy] must intermingle.

“When they start to battle, the perfected is already hidden in the depths of the abyss, drifting and roaming as he carefully protects the Compass Center. At that time, firmly lock the Three Treasures [ears, eyes, mouth]. Make sure to firmly focus your intention and concentrate your will, lest you forsake your body and lose your life.”



Master Ziyān 紫陽翁 [Zhang Boduan] noted, “The white tiger first becomes truly precious: spirit water, flowery pond, perfect gold!” [92] He also said,

1. Make sure to have the right time for gathering, being sometimes firm and stable, sometimes drifting and roaming. As you increase the fire, make sure to prevent dangers and extremes. Most importantly, tighten the first pass. This is the first [hazard to avoid].

2. When, as you gather the ingredients, yin and yang are confused and the sun and moon in disjunction, you may activate the fire on the outside, but on the inside respiration is blocked and there is no response. You are wasting your spirit in this effort. This is the second.

3. If your firing times are irregular, your water is not stable, your spring is turbid and muddled, and the ingredients are not perfect, things will diminish rather than increase. This is the third.

4. Once you have entered the seed of grain or pearl into the cauldron, make sure to keep it warm and well nurtured, keeping your heart-and-mind constantly at peace. If you are not doing this right, I’m afraid, the fire will change too fast and the elixir will be lost. This is the fourth.

5. During practice you may think of having to pass through hardships and difficulties. Strongly aware of hazards and dangers, your heart and gall bladder are startled and in terror. If you constantly harbor such feelings, when you work on growing the elixir in the cauldron, you will tend to rush the process and not pay attention.

Make sure to clear these feelings completely, so you are not bothered by mental hang-ups and stale worries, lest they upset the heart-and-mind. This is called rinsing the thinking or washing the mind; it is also known as cleansing. If any disturbing thoughts remain, I am afraid, your lead and mercury will fly off. This is the fifth.

6. When the ten months are over and fetal development is complete, the child moves on and transfers to a new cauldron. If you are unable to protect the pure yang spirit, letting it flutter about, the child will go

astray as soon as it emerges, losing its way with no chance of return. This is the sixth.

7. Even after the elixir is complete, you must still watch out for true and false. If your practice efforts are not totally done, you may unexpectedly see many wondrous and weird things before your eyes, strange creatures emerging in the hundreds, events from previous lives making an appearance, or divine beings showing up, whom you think you know by sight.

However, all and any of these are demonic blockages with no truth or reality to them. Do not take them for numinous, divine, or sagely entities! Be aware that they are devious and false, magical and illusory, claiming to be signs that your Dao is complete when in fact they entice you into evil ways and mess up your perfection. At this time, by all means stick tightly to your wisdom, protect and nurture your complete perfection. This is the seventh.

Make sure to guard well against all these seven hazards! If you fail even in one of them, you cannot complete the elixir and, I'm afraid, you will lose all and perish. [\[93\]](#)

In this outline, the first two items focus on potential dangers while gathering the ingredients for the elixir, reminding the practitioner to take good care. First, they must gather them at the right time; second, they have to match the patterns of yin and yang and manage the firing times accordingly. The third item, too, is concerned with the firing process, again emphasizing its smoothness and matching the appropriate time.

The next several hazards concern the importance of nurturing the pearl while keeping the mind at peace and cleansing it of all fear and fright, lest it be lost. In addition, adepts must train and control the pure yang spirit carefully to make sure all proceeds according to plan.

The last item describes various visions of events and supernatural figures. Unlike the ten demonic attacks that reflect the conscious spirit of the practitioner, these arise from the depth of the subconscious mind and should be recognized as major obstacles to success.

# Chapter Ten

## Stage One: Basic Practice

### Laying the Foundation

The basic practice of internal alchemy is a hundred-day retreat. Everyone can undertake this: old or young, male or female, of any race and religion, for any number of goals—be it keeping fit, achieving good health, curing diseases, or obtaining longevity. It is best undertaken in a collective setting, matching the practice of ancient Daoists, but it can also be done by oneself, working closely with a guide and following the instructions below. Either way, to gain the best results, practitioners must commit themselves full-time with no break or interruption and closely observe the appropriate schedule.

Laying a foundation in alchemical practice is similar to building the basement and fundamental structures of a house in construction. In a hundred days, practitioners can remedy all sorts of ailments and make up various deficiencies in their body and mind they have accumulated in the course of their lives. Since everyone loses energy due to stress in the work place, sexual activities, environmental pollution, toxic food, and various other factors, the first step of practice is to eliminate all disease factors, open the energy vessels and meridians, and establish healthy habits of physical exercise and meditation. The texts of internal alchemy, after all, insist that only a healthy body can achieve the stages of the holy fetus.

Working through this initial stage, people can reach a high level of health and attain great benefits. Freed from the major factors of potential diseases, practitioners find relief of common stress-related ailments, in Chinese medicine due to obstructions in the energy flow of the body, such as heart attacks, high blood pressure, and the like. Practicing exercises and meditation in a serene setting, they also improve conditions of sexual dysfunction, diabetes, insomnia, and more. Everyone achieves their optimal weight and improves their skin, overall getting to look better. Plus, they get to maintain this good health since they have learned key practices and daily

rules. All this, moreover, serves to increase life expectancy and enhance longevity.

Everyone who makes the effort to complete Stage One will feel different in body and mind. However, how exactly they feel different varies with each individual, depending on age and sex as well as their base constitution and particular condition. Typically, young people need less than the full hundred days to achieve the desired results, while older folks may need a little more time. Also, experience shows that women progress faster than men and those starting out with relatively good health move more quickly than those with more ailments.

The basic program, then, of self-refinement includes four key aspects to be practiced during the period: eliminating sexual desires, cutting off love and affection, overcoming luck, and developing personal virtue. All four are essential if one is to purify consciousness and mind. Once there is a fundamental level of purity, there are no more obstacles to more advanced forms of practice. Alternatively, one can go back, live in society, and engage in relationships, but on a much healthier level.

## Scheduling

Based on the different physiology of the sexes, there are two separate practice schedules. They take effect two days after the practice period commences, after practitioners have undergone a physical check-up: blood pressure, blood sugar, and weight should be recorded for later comparison. Also, on the second day, they should review the system in theory and practice, consulting with their guide and getting themselves ready in body and mind.

Practice from the third day onward follows a detailed schedule, different for men and women. This has to do with the nature of personal energy flow. According to the texts of internal alchemy, the highest energy level in men is during the *tzu* 子 hour (11 pm-1 am), while in women it is much longer, ranging from *chou* 丑 to *wu* 午 (1 am-1 pm). Since the schedules are so different, moreover, practitioners should either work by themselves or with members of the same sex.

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<b>Men</b>	<b>Women</b>	<b>Activity</b>
1:00 am	8:00 pm	Sleep
8:30-9:30	3:30-4:30 am	Wake up, wash
9:00-10:00	4:00-5:00	Breakfast
10:00- 10:30	5:00-5:30	Personal time: maybe outdoor
10:30-11:00	5:30-6:00	Preparatory exercise
11:00-1:00 pm	6:00-8:00	Meditation
1:00-2:00	8:00-9:00	Lunch
2:00-4:00	9:00-11:00	Personal time: maybe indoors
4:00-4:30	11:00-11:30	Meeting with guide or fellows
4:30-5:00	11:30-12:00	Preparatory exercise
5:00-7:00	12:00-2:00 pm	Meditation

7:00-8:00	2:00-3:00	Dinner
8:00-10:30	3:00-5:30	Personal time: activity or rest
10:30-11:00	5:30-6:00	Preparatory exercise
11:00-1:00 am	6:00-8:00	Meditation

## Meditation

Meditation best happens in a quiet indoor place, either together in a communal hall or in one's own room. The site must be completely free of noise, including any sounds made by planes, cars, phones, people, and animals. This is because any sound influences consciousness and changes internal focus.

The body should be comfortable and the circulation free, so ideally practitioners should wear long and flowing garments like the robes of religious adepts. Otherwise, make sure to loosen any garments or belts before sitting. Sitting, then, should be cross-legged on a cushion, with the spine straight and as unmoving as possible. The posture should be comfortable, relaxed, calm, and natural, optimizing the conditions for meditation.

The next task is to focus the mind by becoming aware of the sensations in the body, the quality of internal energy, and the flow of consciousness. The *Huangdi neijing suwen* 黄帝内经素问 (Yellow Emperor's Inner Classic: Simple Questions, DZ 1021) says, "The essential florescence [spirit] in the human body must be concentrated and moved upward into the empty space." <sup>[94]</sup> For this, we close the eyes and the mouth, withdrawing attention from the ears.

Especially “the eyes are key,” <sup>[95]</sup> as noted in the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 (Scripture of Hidden Agreement, DZ 31; trl. Legge 1891; Komjathy 2008). Similarly, the *Taixi jing* 胎息經 (Scripture of Fetal Breathing, DZ 819) has, “The heavenly spirit arises from the sun; the human spirit springs from the eyes. Wherever the eyes go, the mind follows.” <sup>[96]</sup> Zhang Boduan in his *Qinghua biwen* adds, “The eyes are where the spirit flows. When the spirit flows to the eyes, it can be controlled by the mind. This means that, controlling it through the eyes, we can revert it to the mind-and-heart. This, in turn, means that when the heart-and-mind is still, the spirit is also at peace.” <sup>[97]</sup>

Commonly, from the moment we wake up in the morning, our mind and spirit are activated through the eyes by looking, reading, driving, watching, working, and so on. Thus, for alchemical practice it is absolutely essential to close the eyes to focus inward and meditate. However, ideally a tiny slit of the eyes should remain open, closing them only to about 80 or 90 percent, lest we fall asleep during practice. Once the eyes are closed and contained, moreover, ears and mouth follow suit. This fulfills the dictum of the *Cantong qi*, “Ears, eyes, and mouth are the Three Treasures: close them and let nothing pass through!”

This sensory withdrawal helps to get a firm hold of the intention and establish clear control over the mind. It will serve us well throughout the process of internal alchemy. As the *Guizhong zhinan* says,

Take a firm hold of the wild horse of the intention and tightly lock up the monkey mind, then gradually you can refine lead and mercury [primordial spirit and essence]. The great Dao teaches us to start by stopping all thoughts: if they are not settled, they will keep running off. <sup>[98]</sup>

## Breathing

The first technique, after settling down to meditate and focus the mind is swallowing the saliva. It involves touching the palate with the tongue and swishing it around in the mouth to increase the flow of saliva. When the mouth is so full that you can hold no more and you are about to spurt it out,

you swallow it down, mentally guiding it through the Conception Vessel into the lower elixir field. It serves to activate the channels and energy centers and is also an efficient way to strengthen the function of the genitals, especially for older people. It can also be undertaken outside meditation hours, if there is a sense of weakness or obstruction.

Next is breathing, carefully controlled and adjusted to open the mind and empty the thinking. There are many different methods, but we tend to favor “breathe and hold” (*bixi* 閉息) in the manner described by Zhang Boduan in the *Qinghua biwen*. According to this, one inhales to the fullest and holds the breath while counting from one to ten, then exhales and repeats. All the while the mind should be focused on the three elixir fields.

This method is very efficient in concentrating the mind, making it hard to think of anything else. As soon as the mind is completely empty, there is no more need to continue with this and you can revert to natural breathing. When you do so, focus the mind on the lower elixir field, keeping it there firm and steady. As soon as the mind wanders off from there, go back to “breathe and hold.”

Once the mind rests in emptiness for a prolonged period, it will gently notice the breathing but remain concentrated and free from extraneous thoughts. Eventually you reach a stage where “mind and breathing are mutually interdependent” (*xinxi xiangyi* 心息相依). This will allow you to guide the energy to flow wherever you like, enhancing the function of the organs, energy centers, blood vessels, meridians, and more. Not only helping with healing, it also greatly supports health maintenance and increases longevity.

## Taiji quan

To balance sitting in meditation, Stage One also requires the practice of preparatory exercise on a daily basis, usually about thirty minutes of taiji quan, qigong, or some martial equivalent. This is best undertaken before meditation, since it improves circulation and deepens the breath. Besides providing physical movement, taiji quan has various other benefits, as it involves conscious breathing and an open yet clear mental focus. It invites



practitioners to engage their conscious mind in leading energy to flow into to any part of body while in motion. Again, there should be no noise or extraneous sound to enhance concentration.

Taiji quan is an excellent choice of exercise, because it enhances health without consuming energy. Most sports or physical activities like jogging tend to consume or even exhaust energy, while in taiji quan we actually accumulate and enhance it. As a practice, it is said to go back to Zhang Sanfeng's retreat experiences on Mount Wudang 武當山 in Hunan. In his *Xue taijiquan xu lianshen juqi lun* 學太極拳須斂神聚氣論 (To Study Taiji Quan One Must Refine Spirit and Accumulate Energy), he says,

Studying taiji quan lays the foundation of entering Dao. Entering Dao, then, centers on nurturing the mind, stabilizing inner nature, accumulating energy, and controlling the spirit. Thus, practicing this technique, one does all these things. [\[99\]](#)

He then describes the goal of the practice,

I wish for it to help all the exceptional practitioners in the world to extend their years and increase their longevity, not just serve to enhance their technical skills. [\[100\]](#)

To him, the secret of taiji quan is “use intention rather than strength” (*yongyi buyongli* 用意不用力), which is why it is ideally suited to serve as the foundation of internal alchemy. Using clear intention, one can easily focus energy in any part of the body: arms, hands, legs, feet, head, and more. Thus, the push of an arm or the flick of a finger, infused with potent energy, can strike down an opponent much more powerfully than the use of muscles. However, students should not get caught up in these features, but remain aware that in all its 108 poses (see Appendix 2) it serves strictly as a preliminary exercise for meditation.

## Internal Techniques

Men begin by focusing on the breath. As you breathe in, draw your breath down to the lower elixir field, allowing it to expand with each inhalation

and relaxing and slightly contracting it with each exhalation. Keep your mind there since “where the mind goes, the energy follows.”

During the first meditation period in late morning (11 am-1 pm), focus on the upper elixir field, making sure to touch the tongue to the upper palate. During the next sitting (5-7 pm), concentrate your attention on the middle elixir field. Then, for midnight practice (11pm-1 am), center on the lower elixir field. Rub your hands together to generate some heat, then lightly press them on this area.

Women, too, start by calming the mind through conscious, intentional breathing. Then, during their first period of sitting in the early morning (5-7 am), they focus on Milk Creek right between the breasts. During the next period (10 am-12 noon), keep your intention on the middle elixir field. After that (3-5 pm), center on the upper elixir field.

Both men and women, to avoid possible harm from the practice, should work according to their blood pressure. Those with normal blood pressure should practice as outlined above; those whose blood pressure is elevated best work with the lower rather than the upper elixir field. Also, women should not practice during menstruation. Post-menopausal women may experience renewed flow due to higher energy. This is no cause for alarm: it will cease naturally in the course of training.

## Further Arrangements

There must be no sexual activity during the entire hundred-day period of basic practice. Without this restriction, you cannot succeed. Sexual energy is the main source of refinement: it has to be transmuted to perfect energy and made to circulate around the body. It is activated, moreover, not just in sexual congress but also in desires, thoughts, and fantasies: they, too, present a major obstacle to focusing the mind in meditation.

Some people may think that this is not a big deal, but it really is. As Chen Zhixu says in his *Jindan dayao* , “People of the world only know that nourishing life involves the prohibition of [sexual] desires; they do not realize even a single thought in that direction already causes mind, and with it energy, to scatter as well as energy, and with it vital essence, to perish.” [\[101\]](#)

The three meals practitioners are to take every day should be strictly vegetarian, dairy-free, and low in sugar and fat. This is mainly because it takes less time to digest such foods and thus allows lighter sitting and better blood circulation in meditation. Meals ideally should be grain based and also include fruit. There is no smoking or drinking of alcoholic or caffeinated beverages during the hundred days.

On the other hand, every day allows for eight hours of sleep, which may or may not match the individual’s needs. Practitioners may sleep in accordance with their personal preferences, spending any additional time in meditation or other activities, such as taking a walk, watching nature, stretching, and the like.

A regular daily meeting with one’s guide or fellow practitioners helps to keep one on track. It can be done in person or over the phone. Ideally it involves a progress report and offers the opportunity to ask questions. Other than this, there should be no outside communication, all material needs being provided by assistants who come and go silently.

## Chapter Eleven

### Effects and Benefits

#### Physical Effects

There are various effects that come with the continued systematic practice of the fundamental methods. For one, the lower elixir field will start to produce heat. Deep breathing in conjunction with the conscious expansion and contraction of the lower abdomen will activate this area. Practitioners

will feel heat rising from under the navel that gradually spreads to other parts of the body. Another effect is that the body will naturally be straight and erect. Even someone who tends to slump over in the early days will find his body getting stronger and sit taller with greater ease.

Then again, there is an overall increase in body temperature. This is a well-known phenomenon from sports and physical exercise, but it also happens here as circulation and metabolism get stronger. Typically, it rises by about 1.5 degrees Celsius. As muscles relax and adjust, moreover, there may be some spontaneous body movements and shakes, sometimes affecting the entire body, sometimes only the pelvis, sometimes also the extremities. None of this is any cause for concern. It is just a sign that internal energy is getting activated.

The same energy, next, may flow into the genital area, causing some congestion and intense feelings. Men may experience spontaneous erections even if their minds are completely free from sexual desires. This is because the energy is getting strong in the lower elixir field and spreads from there into the genitals. Women may experience sudden waves of sexual desires, without even the slightest focus on sex; this too is due to the increased energy in the elixir field. If this situation prevails, it may be helpful to switch the meditative focus to the upper elixir field for a while.

The skin, too, can be affected by the overall intensification of energy, resulting in itches, either localized in certain parts or spreading through the whole body. Some people may feel as if ants are crawling over their skin; others may have the sensation of the pores opening and closing, pulsing rhythmically as if they had many hearts instead of just one. The phenomenon is entirely natural and will ease off after a short time.

Eventually, after a longer period of consistent practice, adepts begin to feel the movement of perfect energy. With every bit of practice, this energy accumulates and at some point it starts to manifest, in some people deep within, in others closer to the surface—face, ears, hands, feet. Typically it starts about halfway to two-thirds into the hundred days, but in some cases it may not happen—which actually just means it is happening but you are not aware of it. Most commonly, perfect energy manifests as a flow of heat, tangible above the average body temperature. Once it starts, it tends to

increase with each day, seeking out a path throughout the entire body that leads from head to feet and back to the head. As Wei Boyang notes in the *Cantong qi* , “From the head it flows down to the feet. Once it reaches them, it reverts course and rise up again.” [\[102\]](#)

As the perfect energy courses through the body, it also opens the Governing and Conception Vessels and begins to run through the body in the small heavenly circuit. Practitioners typically feel a heat flow beginning in the lower elixir field, feeling it rise up along the spine, move across the head, then descend through the face and along the front of the torso back to the elixir field. This happens naturally and is no reason for concern. Just keep on meditating, without trying to direct or control it, never breathing into any particular place. Having the circuit open is very beneficial to health, however, it may take time. You still benefit even without it, so never try to push or force it.

## Health

Even in such a short time as a hundred days, the practice of internal alchemy will substantially increase physical health. Some diseases, and especially chronic conditions, will be eliminated completely. A prime example is high blood pressure, a very common condition today. Many adepts testify that their practice had outstanding results in balancing their blood pressure, bringing it back to normal from being either too high or too low. However, it is important to follow all instructions, including dietary and other restrictions. Also, to maintain healthy levels, continuing lifestyle changes may be necessary.

Closely related to this, the practice also alleviates cardiac conditions and reduces the risk of heart attacks. In Chinese medicine, the heart is the organ at the center of all circulation, being subject to ailments and blockages as and when the various meridians and channels are impaired. Since the practice serves to open the channels and increase circulation, strong blood vessels and positive heart health are the result.

The same also holds true for sexual dysfunction, another common phenomenon today, often the results of environmental pollution and

unhealthy lifestyles. Common disorders include spontaneous emission and premature ejaculation in men as well as menstrual irregularities and lack of sexual desire in women. All these improve or get back to normal in the course of practice, but again, to ensure continued well-being, some people may need to stick to the rules even after they return to ordinary life.

Other conditions typically improved or remedied through internal alchemy include indigestion, insomnia, and colds—issues that tend to arise when people are under a lot of stress, eat unhealthy foods full of meat, dairy, sugar, and chemicals, and have an irregular schedule or difficult relationships. They all benefit from a healthier diet in combination with calmer, less stressful and more regular lifestyle that ideally continues the practice of both taiji quan and meditation.

## Continued Practice

These health benefits are easy to maintain as long as, after returning to ordinary life, you set yourself up for continued practice. Ideally, and to keep health at its best, sit in meditation for at least about fifteen to thirty minutes every day, practicing at the level you reached at the end of the hundred days. Men should keep the mind focused on the lower elixir field; women on the area between the breasts. Anyone older, retired, or suffering from chronic conditions should practice half an hour to a whole hour everyday—increasing the time as and when possible.

According to the texts, the ideal state is when breath and mind flow closely together and are mutually interdependent. Breathing should be “natural and oblivious,” that is, there should be no awareness of anything else. Just breathe! Don’t do anything else! Don’t think of anything else! This is what Lü Dongbin means when he speaks of “acting in nonaction” in the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*.

It is important to work with this nonaction and let things happen naturally. Certain qigong masters teach students to use their conscious mind and actively lead the energy to open the vessels and meridians, intentionally moving the breath to circulate through the body. According to internal alchemy, this may cause damage and is strongly discouraged. Once the

Governing and Conception Vessels open spontaneously, all the other channels and meridians will follow suit. At this point, the body becomes very strong and the various ailments disappear.

In addition to making daily time for meditation, certain rules are very beneficial to keep healthy and enhance longevity. The first among them is the control of sexuality. As already the Confucian classic *Liji* said, “Food and drink and sexual relations are people’s greatest desires.” [\[103\]](#) This is just the way of human nature.

Internal alchemy connects sexuality to prenatal, primordial energy. People receive it at birth from heaven and earth, and store it in the kidneys. They use it in the course of life, supplementing it with postnatal energy gained from breath, nourishment, and social interaction. The more there is, the healthier the body is and the longer the person can live. At the same time, this energy is also in charge of growth and reproduction. Once the person becomes sexually active, essential fluids and secretions drain from the kidneys, causing primordial energy to leave through the lower part of the body. The more it decreases, then, the weaker the body gets. Thus, ever since antiquity, Chinese texts have emphasized the importance of cherishing seminal essence and guarding the life-force. In other words, sexual control—not complete abstinence but moderation—is an essential rule for leading a healthy life.

Another major factor is food, the other core desire of humanity. While it provides essential nutrients, it can also cause great damage if used improperly. Chinese medical classics insist that one should never fill the stomach completely at any one meal. A lot of food requires a long time of digestion; it can also cause the blood flowing wildly through the body, damaging the heart and arteries. Ideally, one should eat only to about 50 percent stomach capacity, taking smaller meals more often. The same also applies to drink. Together, they will protect health.

Closely linked with this is the avoidance or at least minimizing of intoxicants, such as tobacco, caffeine, and alcohol. Ideally one should eliminate them completely, since they not only harm the body but also cause addiction and damage the mind. If that is not feasible, close control, small amounts, and periods of complete abstention are desirable.

## Qigong

Qigong is a common way to maintain and enhance health in China and the West today. It works with gentle body movements in conjunction with deep breathing and the mental guiding of energy as well as sitting meditation. Like the basic practice of internal alchemy, it encourages stillness of mind, adjustment of body, concentration of intention, control over desires as well as relaxation, naturalness, deep breathing, and more. However, there are also some major differences, most importantly that qigong followers use the Three Treasures—essence, energy, and spirit—in their postnatal rather than their prenatal dimension.

In internal alchemy, the three are the main ingredients of the elixir, centered in the cauldron and heated by the fire of intention and mental concentration. They circulate through the Governing and Conception Vessels as well as the various organs, reversing the evolution of creation. As Laozi says, “Reversal is the movement of Dao” (ch. 40). [\[104\]](#) In qigong, on the other hand, practitioners intentionally guide essence and energy through the various organs and meridians without first accumulating them in their prenatal form. This matches Laozi’s statement, “The mind moves energy: this is strength” (ch. 55). [\[105\]](#)

Qigong practice has attracted many people over the last several decades since it efficiently cures a variety of diseases, especially chronic conditions. However, as is well documented, it can also cause problems as people practice a lot, leading to uncontrolled energy movements and mental disorders as well as damage to the organs, encephalemia, and suicide . The reason for this is that practitioners do not control the power and let an overwhelming force of energy that is fundamentally dissociated from its prenatal roots circulate through their body, causing major imbalances. As already Zhang Boduan realized,

Swallowing the saliva and taking deep breaths are practices people commonly do. However, only by gathering ingredients can one bring about any creative transformation. Practicing while the cauldron is devoid of the seed of perfection it is like boiling water in an empty pot [which will be damaged]. ( *Wu-zhen pian* ) [\[106\]](#)



There is no way in internal alchemy to use the conscious intention and push energy into circulation. Rather, practitioners let it needs to accumulate to the requisite levels, at which point circulation starts automatically. While meridians are opened and health benefits accrue in both, for higher attainments of the holy fetus, qigong is entirely insufficient.

## Higher Stages

After completing basic practice, independent of what results have manifested, the time comes to make a major decision of whether or not to pursue advanced techniques and enter the highest stages of the holy fetus. Two issues deserve serious consideration.

One is that the higher stages take a long time, as many as nine years. Unless one has the support of a spiritual community, such as a traditional monastery, this requires sufficient financial support for practice at a level of intensity that makes ordinary activities quite impossible. One cannot do any work or household chores, including shopping, cooking, laundry, cleaning, and more. It also means that one has to have someone to take care of all this, a family member or hired help. Resources, therefore, must suffice to cover basic expenditures plus the wages of this help as well as medications and travel costs.

The other issue is the transformation of sexual identity through the practice. If you decide to pursue the holy fetus, you will become a sexless person, no longer male or female. As you transform your sexual energy into perfect energy, your genitals lose their function and begin to wither. In men, this means that the penis and scrotum shrink to eventually contract into the abdomen, a feature called “retracting the genitals like a horse” ( *mayin cangxiang* 馬陰藏相 ) in Daoist or Buddhist terminology. In women, menstruation ceases and the breasts get smaller until they reach the size of those in a little girl.

Once sexless, you cannot recover your original state, which means you will not be able to reproduce and have to give up any hopes of spawning the next generation. For this reason, it is best to undertake the higher stages after middle age. At this point people commonly have fulfilled many goals

in their life, including study, marriage, child rearing, and wealth accumulation. It will be easier to separate from society and live away from the love of one's spouse, children, and other relatives.

Make sure to consider all these factors carefully and deliberately. Traditionally, only few people pursued internal alchemy, typically residing in monastic communities. This may be one reason why ordinary people tend to be uneasy with the system and hesitate to undertake retreats and join workshops, often nervous about spiritual instructions and esoteric transmissions. Today, it may be easier for them if they think of the practice as a scientific experiment, taking internal alchemy increasingly out of the mysterious and bringing it into the rational.

## Chapter Twelve

### Stage Two: Refining Essence

#### The Process

By refining essence to energy ( *lianjing huaqi* 煉精化炁), adepts start the process of creating the holy fetus. This requires full-time meditation for another hundred days, which means that practitioners cannot do anything in daily life and have no personal time except to eat and sleep.

The work begins with gathering the medical ingredients, which are then entered into cauldron inside a furnace, where they are transmuted in accordance with the proper firing times. The main ingredients are the Three Treasures of essence, energy, and spirit. Each of them comes in two forms, prenatal and postnatal, also known as primordial and secondary. Internal alchemy utilizes only the primordial.

However, at the same time, the Three Treasures are originally identical, going back to a singular cosmic and vital energy. They have three names to indicate a difference in terms of state: essence is fluid while energy is gaseous, that is, energy flows faster and accumulates easier than essence. Energy, moreover, is not only present in energy centers and conduits, but

also enters into organs, muscles, and skin, pervading the entire body. Beyond that, it can activate the function of objects, accelerating or slowing their growth.

To create the holy fetus, adepts have to have a strong presence of energy, which means they must transmute cosmic power from its fluid state as essence to a more gaseous quality. To explain the process, the masters of old applied correlative thinking and borrowed several ideas from external alchemy, most importantly the notions of ingredients, cauldron, and firing times.

In practice, refining essence to energy means that adepts draw the body fluids from various organs into specific energy centers, then bring them to a boil through controlled breathing (fire). The resulting gas is perfect energy, more volatile and of wider usage than blood. It can activate the energy centers, accumulate in the organs, circulate through the channels, and supply nutrition to the entire body. It can also coagulate to form an essential potency in the form of a seed of grain or a pearl, from which eventually holy fetus begins to grow. Energy as refined from essence, therefore, is a key factor in creating the holy fetus.

## Specific Methods

In ordinary life, essence manifests as sexual fluid, the semen of the father and the blood of the mother that combine to create new life. Essence is transmuted in the body from energy in a process of sinking down and turning from gas into fluid. Reproduction, therefore, requires a great deal of energy, the creation and nurturing of a child consistently depending on this process. Along similar lines, but reversing the direction, in internal alchemy, adepts create eternal life in the form of the holy fetus by reverting essence to energy. The first step in this process is to stop using essence for sexual activity and reproduction, instead moving it upward and transforming it back to energy to supply proper nutrition to the holy fetus.

The classics present numerous different methods of how to accomplish this. The easiest and most effective is a meditation practiced for a hundred days, where essence is gathered in the lower elixir field, boiled into gas, and

harvested as energy. It starts by identifying the prime location of essence, that is, the kidneys, from where it spreads through the body in the form of various fluids, such as semen, blood, saliva, lymph, hormones, and other gland excretions.

Through refinement, it is centered in the lower elixir field and circulated through the Governing and Conception Vessels. More specifically, this happens in four steps, beginning with gathering the ingredients. As the *Wuzhen pian* has, “Make sure to know the place where the ingredients spring from: it is none other than the home county in the southwest [lower elixir field].”

To gather the ingredients (*caiyao* 採藥), one begins with a sense of sexual arousal, which signifies that essence fills the kidneys and flows out from there. Mentally focusing on this sensation, adepts tighten the sexual musculature and mentally guide the essence as arousal feeling upward instead of allowing it to flow down and transform into sexual fluids. Make sure to meet it when it happens. Once the time of arousal is over, the ingredients can no longer be gathered.

The second step is to “seal and stabilize” (*fenggu* 封固) these ingredients by sending them into the furnace in the lower elixir field. That is, mentally focus on the area of the lower abdomen and pull the essence there.

Third comes “boil and refine” (*penglian* 烹煉), the heating process during which the ingredients are turned over and over inside the elixir field and circulated 360 times along the small heavenly circuit. The activating point is the River Chariot, a point of energetic conjunction at the pelvic floor. The process not only produces gaseous energy but also coagulates it into perfect energy, the root of spirit.

Step four in this process is “ceasing the fire” (*zhihuo* 止火), an action performed as soon as there are “three flashes of bright light” (*yangguang sanxian* 陽光三現), a manifestation of internal brightness and radiance that signals the successful refinement. It means that the ingredients have been properly prepared and there is need for further practice at this stage.

The *Cantong qi* describes these activities in terms of “mastering the five metals by activating the River Chariot” [107] (Pregadio 2011, 154). This is done through concentrated, actively guided breathing, quite unlike that used in Stage One. Breathing here is “martial fire” ( *wuhuo* 武火), a powerful force activated through hard and strenuous breathing that boils essence and pushes energy into coagulation. After energy has circulated for some time, moreover, the location of practice shifts to the upper elixir field or Niwan as the cauldron and the lower field as the furnace.

Practitioners move energy through focused breathing from the pelvic floor (Meeting Yin) up along the Governing Vessel. In the process they push through the Three Barriers ( *sanguan* 三關): the Tail Gate ( *weilü* 尾閭) at the base of the spine, the Narrows ( *jiaji* 夾脊) in the mid back, and the Jade Pillow ( *yuzhen* 玉枕) at the back of the head. Thus, they reach the Niwan at the top of the head, the opposite point or 180-degree rotation of the River Chariot. From here they flow the energy down across the face and along the Conception Vessel, into the lower elixir field, and back to the pelvic floor.

This circulation depends entirely on focused intention. Breathing is strongest in the beginning and the end as the energy rises and gathers; it softens a bit while coursing through the upper regions. The *Cantong qi* calls this “martial at the beginning and the end, civil in the middle.” [108]

## Guidance for Men

In men, the process starts with an erection as a visible sign of sexual arousal, showing that essence in the kidneys is full to overflowing. They manually press against the perineum to prevent ejaculation. Breathing strongly and with fierce intention, they move essence away from the penis and back into the lower abdomen where it can be processed. This must be

done quickly and at the right time. The proper moment is brief and easy to miss, which means the chance of refining energy is lost. As the *Xuanyao pian* 玄要篇 (Essentials of the Mystery, QYC 25), [109]\_associated with Zhang Sanfeng, says,

When yang arises [in erection], stop everything else and do not let essence leak. Immediately close off the Barrier of Great Mystery [by pressing the perineum]. With strong fire forces the ingredient past the Tail Gate Barrier [at the base of the spine], gathering it firmly with your eyes set on the Niwan [at the top of the head]. [110]

At the same time, it is also helpful to follow the supplementary instructions of the *Xingming guizhi* and practice sucking ( *xi* 吸), pressing ( *tian* 舐), pinching ( *zuo* 撮), and stopping ( *bi* 閉). These refer to different muscle activities: inhaling and exhaling in short gasps, pressing the tongue against the upper palate, tightening the anus in and up, and holding the breath as the eyes focus on the Niwan center. Together, these four make sure “the fire forces metal into moving” ( *huobi jinxing* 火逼金行), that is, strong intention gets the energy activated in the right direction. Eventually, men will no longer be tempted to release their arousal in ejaculation. At this time, they have succeeded in “subduing the white tiger” ( *fu baihu* 伏白虎).

The energetic power resulting from these actions is called external ingredient or medicine ( *waiyao* 外藥), minor ingredient ( *xiaoyao* 小藥), or seed of perfection ( *zhen zhongzi* 真種子). It appears after energy has been circulated through the small heavenly circuit 360 times. From here, some part of it congeals into spirit and enters the Energy Cavern, where it turns into the internal ingredient ( *neiyao* 內藥). These two then unite, signified by the appearance of three flashes of bright light that appear in the head. This signals the conclusion of State Two.

## Guidance for Women

In women, the key energy centers are Milk Creek between the breasts and the Ocean of Blood ( *xuehai* 血海) in the uterus. The goal of refinement is to have the breasts contract and menstruation stopped altogether, which means one has succeeded in “decapitating the red dragon” ( *zhan chilong* 斬

赤龍). As the *Qiaoyang jing* 樵陽經 (Scripture of Processing Yang, ZW 387) notes,

The ways in which people of greater yin [women] refine their bodies are largely the same as the cultivation practices of male adepts, showing only minor differences. Women begin by lowering their hands, closing their eyes, and focusing on the spirit, thereby entering a relaxed state. They calm their heart-and-mind and steady their breathing, then concentrate the spirit and focus it on the Energy Cavern (in the center between the breasts).

Next, they cross over their hands and place them on the breasts, lightly massaging them 20 times, as they breathe up very gently from the lower elixir field 36 times. Continuing with the hands on the breasts, they turn their vision inward and again steady the breath.

After doing this for a prolonged period, perfect energy will naturally arrive. Opening and closing it in steady rhythm, they nurture it to create a large region as big as the cities Gen 鄆 and E 鄂. Spirit and energy will be full and complete, and perfect yang naturally comes to dominate. Menstruation will spontaneously cease, the breasts will retract to look like a man's: this is called "decapitating the red dragon."

Proceeding like this for a long time, there will be no more need to hold the breast or inhale with intention. Just concentrate the spirit in the Energy Cavern, revert the light and focus your vision inward. This is called "opening the gate of the Mysterious Female." . . .

Eventually, you will become aware of a tiny dot of numinous light, neither outside nor inside, flowing from the lower elixir field up to the Scarlet Palace [heart] and the Niwan, then again descending through the Twelve-storied Tower [windpipe] and into the golden womb and spirit chamber. Reverting the light and concentrating the spirit, this perfect energy is made to settle into the cauldron of the Central Palace—none other than the Spirit Chamber, Mysterious Female, and Womb of Immortality. It signals the dropping of the tiny dot into the Yellow Court.

Ten months after this, the great work is complete, and the yang spirit will emerge, ready to be refined to emptiness. From here on in, the cultivation of perfection is the same as for men. There are no more differences between the sexes. [111]

For women who are post-menopausal and no longer menstruate, the practice is different. It begins with various techniques to recover the menses, including focused breathing on the lower elixir field, breast massages, and herbal supplements. Once menstruation has been reestablished, they can proceed as described.

## Bodily Changes

There are five major changes in the body that signify success in the practice during this stage. To begin, the genitals wither as soon as perfect energy is created and flows through the small heavenly circuit. This prevents essence from transforming into the various fluids of the reproductive system, leaving only pure essence and energy in the body, thus causing genital reduction.

In women, menstruation ceases and the breasts shrink. In men, the penis and testicles reduce in size and eventually retract into the abdomen. It is significantly different from impotence in that it affects not only one particular function but the entire reproductive system. In many ways it is similar to the physiological changes experienced by eunuchs after castration. No longer having genitals, their hormonal structure changes, causing them to have larger chests, higher voices, and no Adam's apple.

Another feature is that practitioners become immune to heat and cold, equalizing winter and summer in their experience. As perfect energy pervades their bodies, the varying temperatures of the four seasons make no difference to them. In addition, their hair recovers its original coloring, losing all gray or white strands, while any lost teeth grow again in their original location. Beyond this, adepts also find that they require a great deal less food and sleep. Since they are full of perfect energy, the need for outside sustenance is massively reduced. Since their spirit is full and vibrant, sleep becomes extraneous.



Another important sign of success is the appearance of three flashes of bright light. The strong presence of energy in the lower elixir field radiates out and up, leading to an experience of a shining radiance anywhere between head and chest. When this happens, it feels like lightning, and there is a sense of bright whiteness in the room. This is the sign to stop firing and energy circulation, and revert to natural breathing.

## Chapter Thirteen

### Stage Three: Refining Energy

#### Overview

This stage serves to refine energy into spirit ( *lianqi huashen* 煉炁化神), that is, into pure yang. Isabelle Robinet calls it “the phase of yang-ization” (1989, 319). Here adepts practice the macrocosmic orbit or large heavenly circuit ( *da zhoutian* 大周天), which centers on the middle elixir field and reaches throughout the whole body.

The *Cantong qi* speaks about it in terms of “ *zi* [1] added to *wu* [2] makes three; the number of *wuji* 戊己 is five” [\[112\]](#) (Pregadio 2011, 166). Here *zi* represents water or primordial energy centered in the kidneys, while *wu* indicates fire or primordial spirit residing in the heart. They join together to form a third entity, the holy fetus. In addition, *wuji* represents earth, matching the intention toward perfection focused in the Central Palace or middle elixir field. This intention brings everything to completion and is thus symbolized by the number five. Through it the primordial powers of the kidneys and the heart can come together.

According to most classics of internal alchemy, during this stage the fetus grows in the Yellow Court, the middle elixir field. However, as noted earlier, it really happens in the center known as the Mysterious Female or the Compass Center, the unique energy nexus in the individual that, unlike other organs or centers, does not have a fixed position. It is commonly placed below the heart and above the kidneys and discovered by focusing the intention on the middle elixir field. In other words, even if the texts state

that the fetus forms in the middle elixir field, they really mean that it grows in the Compass Center, identified by focusing on the field. Here the ingredients are gathered and the divine pregnancy commences (see Fig. 6).

### 圖胎道

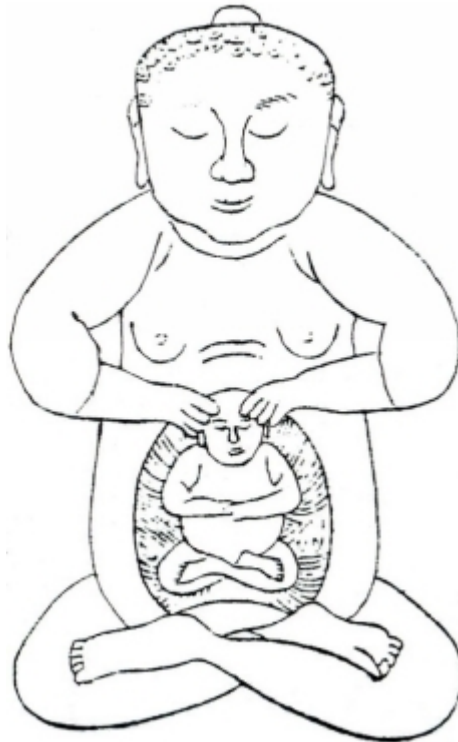


Fig. 6. The holy fetus in the body of the adept.

## Practice Instructions

To begin, adepts must assemble the great medicine ( *dayao* 大藥 ) in continuation of the operations during the last stage, which saw the emergence of both external and internal ingredients. These two combine into the great medicine, consisting of primordial essence, energy, and spirit. It forms the foundation of the holy fetus. It takes about seven days of intense practice to complete this, after which the ten months of nurturing begin.

For this, adepts “extract lead to increase mercury” ( *chouqian tiangong* 抽鉛添汞 ), that is, they sublimate energy in the body and refine it into spirit—

the key practice of this stage. Having refined all essence into energy, there are only energy and spirit left in the body, but energy is clearly dominant. This vast reservoir of energy has to be transformed into spirit, lest it flows anywhere in the body or even exits from it. The holy fetus, an entity of pure yang spirit, gradually grows as adepts supply a constant flow of energy, just like an embryo in the womb obtains nutrition from his mother through the umbilical cord. In both cases, the pregnancy lasts for ten months.

In this stage, the primordial spirit is also called the yang spirit. As Wu Shouyang 伍守陽 (1552-1641) says in his *Neilian jindan xinfa* 內煉金丹心法 (Essential Methods of the Internal Refinement of the Golden Elixir, ZW 865),

The spirit in ordinary people is active half the time, radiating in yang mode during daylight hours. The other half of the time, during the night, it is still and shadowed in yin.

Practitioners of cultivating refinement must take hold of the dark, shadowy yin and slowly remove it, . . . gradually reaching a point where yin is dissolved to 100 percent and yang is increased to 100 percent. Then we speak of pure yang. [\[113\]](#)

In alchemical terminology, energy here is lead and spirit is mercury. When spirit grows by 10 percent, that much energy is removed. Gradually, there is less and less lead and more and more mercury, until energy has all been transformed into spirit and the latter is present to 100 percent, fully perfect. This happens month by month.

In the first month, energy still moves about as normal. In the second month, it starts to slow down. By the third month, it is reduced and moves very slowly, only present in the middle and lower elixir fields. In the fourth and fifth months, it stops moving altogether. By the sixth and seventh months, it is refined and purified so that, in the eighth to tenth months, spirit develops fully. The *Jindan dayao* describes it as follows,

“Extracting and increasing” means that, after one has set up the procedure of taking lead [energy] to enhance mercury [spirit], one fires them for many successive days. In this manner, one gradually

increases mercury, so that mercury gets to be more and more while lead becomes less and less.

After a long time, the lead will be completely gone while mercury will dry, transforming into elixir powder. It is called, “liquid metal reverts to the pure yang of the elixir.” By this process we can know that the body first transforms into energy, then energy transforms into spirit. The latter, then, is the divine child; it is also the yang spirit. [\[114\]](#)

The next major practice is embryo respiration or fetal breathing ( *taixi* 胎息 ). After assembling the great medicine, practitioners begin using “civil fire” ( *wenhuo* 文火 ), that is, gentle, soft breathing, getting to a point where mind and breathing are mutually interdependent. Focusing more closely on the spirit and the internal transformation, breathing becomes ever slower and softer, until outer respiration through the nose becomes unnecessary. Instead, adepts practice body respiration through the pores, a form of breathing with no heart beat and pulse matching that of the embryo in the womb.

Physiologically it may seem that adepts at this point are dead, however, they are still quite alive. In fact, they feel very good and enter a state of great ecstasy during fetal breathing. The practice continues for the entire period of ten months, after which the child is born by leaving the Compass Center and moving to the upper elixir field for continued growth.

## Specific Techniques

Assembling the great medicine for seven days comes with various phenomena and techniques. First, the “six senses erupt” ( *liugen zhendong* 六根震動 ) as a result of heat developing in the lower elixir field, which causes the kidneys to become hot like boiling water and brings about various changes in the sense organs. The eyes see a golden light, the left ear hears a tiger’s roar, while the right ear hears a dragon’s hum. The back of the head vibrates, bubbles rise in the body, and spasms shake the nose. All these indicate that the great medicine is starting to get active.

As in the previous step, adepts practice sucking, pressing, pinching, and stopping, but in a somewhat different manner. For example, pinching is

done by the adept's companion who squeezes the Governing Vessel as he or she assembles the great medicine. Stopping similarly involves outside help: one sits on a wooden bun that closes the anus, applies a clothes-pin to shut the nostrils, and uses a finger to press on the perineum.

Next, “the five dragons lift up the sage” ( *wulong pengsheng* 五龍捧聖). Here the number five symbolizes earth while the dragon stands for the primordial spirit, and the sage is the great medicine on the rise. The phrase indicates the technique of holding up the perineum with one hand, backed by perfect intention, causing the medicine to soar.

Another aspect of the process involves the “three hitched chariots” ( *sanche qianyin* 三車牽引). Hitched to a ram, a deer, and an ox, these represent different levels of speed and strength in the process of assembling the great medicine, moving through the three barriers along the spine.

Utilizing all these dimensions, adepts constantly concentrate their mind and inner vision on the lower elixir field. As time goes along, the six senses will start to erupt. The purified energy of the great medicine moves from the testicles to the perineum, which is shut tight. Still, it will pass through it to thrust up to the heart, where it stops because the Thrusting Vessel in the center of the torso is not open. From here it flows down along the Governing Vessel, but is impeded because the Tail Gate at the base of the spine is closed.

Continuing to move, the energy veers away from here to find an outlet in the anus, which is a natural opening. However, this would mean that it exits and is lost for refinement purposes. At this time, a companion must help by pinching the base of the spine. This causes the power to flow back inside and ascend along the Governing Vessel.

## Energy Moving

This ascent should happen naturally, without the practitioner pushing or forcing the energy to move. Just wait for it to move of its own accord. When it suddenly starts to move and thrusts into the coccyx, assist it by pressing a finger on the perineum, raising your eyes at the same time to help it ascend. Then gently and slowly roll your eyes, imagining a ram slowly

pulling a chariot uphill: this helps the ascent. Also, press your tongue against the upper palate and suck in a breath through the nose.

Next, work similarly to push through the second barrier, the Narrows in the mid back, and the third, the Jade Pillow at the back of the head. At the second barrier, think of the energy moving like a chariot drawn by a deer, moving speedily uphill; at the third, visualize it as an ox pulling a chariot with great vigor. Once it has gone through all three barriers, it reaches the Wind Mansion (*fengfu* 風府) at the back of the head above the Jade Pillow, and from there goes to Mysterious Bridle (*xuanying* 玄膺) behind the heavenly pool above the mouth.

From here it starts to move down, crossing the forehead and trying to escape through the nose. If it is not held shut with a clothes-pin, the energy drains out. So, make sure to keep it tightly sealed. Once it realizes it cannot get out, it will descend further, moving through the Twelve-storied Tower to the Scarlet Palace of the heart to eventually reach the lower elixir field. Once it arrives here, the great medicine is complete, that is, spirit has been refined from energy.

Next, adepts refine and purify the yang spirit over the course of ten months. They begin by breathing with “civil fire,” a gentle form of respiration that leads to a state where mind and breath are mutually interdependent and allows the emergence of fetal breathing. For the entire ten months, then, adepts must breathe like this in deep meditation continuously, whether walking, standing, sitting, or lying down, at all hours, day and night. With each month, spirit gradually increases and adepts feel less and less hungry. Eventually, they are able to subsist only on water, no longer needing solid food. As the yang spirit gets purer and stronger, the various yin aspects of the body continue to decrease and, after six or seven months, adepts will no longer require sleep.

After the full ten months have been completed, all the body’s energy has been transformed into spirit. Then life can be maintained without any external factors of food, water, and air. Adepts will be entirely self-contained: free from breathing, heartbeat, and pulse, they yet stay warm and function well, even start to exhibit advanced faculties. At the same time, the pure yang spirit or holy fetus is now mature and ready to be born. It starts to

leave the Compass Center and moves into upper elixir field for continued growth, a move known as transferring the cauldron. This is the end of Stage Three.

## Results

Four distinct physical effects bear testimony that this stage has been completed successfully. First is the ability to fast or “abstain from grains” ( *bigu* 辟穀 ) for prolonged periods. After three months of practice, practitioners should have so much energy in their bodies that they no longer feel hungry. Deeply absorbed in fetal breathing, they can let their digestive system stop operating.

Second is the ability to live without sleep, which appears at six or seven months. The yang spirit being in a state of perfection, there are no more yin aspects in the body, which can function without getting tired or requiring sleep.

Another effect is the ability to stop the heart beat in a state not unlike suspended animation. Due to continued absorption in fetal breathing, after eight or nine months, practitioners will no longer breathe through the nose or mouth nor will they have a pulse or heartbeat. Instead, they exchange spirit with the greater universe through the pores.

Last but not least is the emergence of the six supernatural powers ( *liutong* 六通 ), defined by Wu Shouyang in his *Neilian jindan xinfa* as “heavenly sight or unlimited vision, heavenly hearing or the ability to understand all, spirit reflection or the ability to appear anywhere at will, knowledge of all previous lives, the ability to read others’ minds, and cessation of all outflows, that is, spiritual awareness free from all faults” [\[115\]](#) (see also Eskildsen 2004, 120).

# Chapter Fourteen

## Stage Four: Refining Spirit

## Nine Years of Practice

During this stage, adepts “refine the spirit to return to emptiness” (*lianshen huanxu* 煉神還虛). The spirit here is perfectly clear, consisting entirely of pure yang. Emptiness is Dao—an open void, the state before creation, the underlying potency of all. This final stage is also called the juncture of nine years: first three years are dedicated to breast-feeding, the other six to growing the child. In Buddhism, the nine-year period appears in the story of Bodhidharma (Damo 達摩), who sat motionless facing a wall for that length of time.

Throughout the nine years of practice, the yang spirit or divine child grows up like a human infant gradually moving toward maturity. Part of its training is to make sure it can exit the adept’s body, breaking out from the upper elixir field, described as “the yang spirit leaving the hollow” (*yangshen chuqiao* 陽神出竅). This does not happen all at once, but takes time and many efforts, beginning with small excursions and gradually engaging in bigger ventures. At all times, the spirit’s movements, moreover, have to be fully controlled by adept.

### Assembling Powers

The oldest instructions for Stage Four appear in the *Cantong qi*, which says, “Dedicate your will to returning to emptiness and non-being, make being free from thoughts your constant practice.” [\[116\]](#) Li Daochun 李道純 (fl. 1290-1320), the author of the *Zhonghe ji* 中和集 (Collection of Central Harmony, DZ 249), says, “Once your efforts have reached this far, not even a single word can be usefully applied.” [\[117\]](#)

This means, the key focus is on keeping the mind still and the thinking quiet, eschewing all language or formalities. There is also no need to follow any particular breathing technique. Adepts should allow the breath to be natural, remaining oblivious of everything, including meditation and breathing. Eventually they enter a state of great ecstasy, when their respiration automatically changes to fetal breathing as energy continues to transform into spirit.



Without much conscious effort then, “the three florescences assemble at the top of the head” (*sanhua juding* 三華聚頂). That is, primordial essence, energy, and spirit gather in the upper elixir field, from where the pure yang spirit breaks away and exits the body. Here adepts continue to raise the divine child, focusing any attention there.

In addition, “the five energies recover the prime” (*wuqi chaoyuan* 五炁朝元), which means that all five phases, the energies empowering the inner organs, revert to the upper elixir field, which becomes the sole source of physical functioning. As the *Xingming guizhi* outlines,

The body remains unmoving: essence stabilizes and water recovers the prime. The mind remains unmoving: energy stabilizes and fire recovers the prime. Perfect inner nature is serene: the spirit soul rests and wood recovers the prime. All foolish emotions are forgotten: the material soul submits and metal recovers the prime. The four elements are at peace and in harmony: the intention is settled and earth recovers the prime. This is called “the five energies recover the prime.” They all assemble at the top of the head. [\[118\]](#)

That is, they all come together in the upper elixir field, just as the florescences assemble here. In other words, all the different powers and functions of life are joined in one place, supporting the divine child.

The classics of internal alchemy assert that the yang spirit can multiply into several millions or even billions of replicas of itself once it has reached the full maturity of the pure yang spirit. Biologically speaking, this works like cell division, new cell containing the same characteristics and functions as the previous. The development of the pure yang spirit is just like this, working from the powers and energies of the entire body gathered in the upper elixir field. Over nine years of practice, this region becomes a highly charged, strong energy center, gradually developing and increasingly expanding. In other words, the field gets bigger and, by the end of the nine years, may well extend to the entire head. This, in turn, explains why adepts gain the six supernatural and other powers by completing this stage.

## Exit Training

The first concrete sign that the practice is moving in the right direction is the manifestation of coagulated spirit in the form of a snow flake which indicates that the divine child is ready to exit from the body. As Liu Huayang in his *Huiming jing* says, “The moment you see a snow flake, let it leave the physical structure.” [119]

As soon as this happens, adepts begin to train the yang spirit. They begin by keeping it close to the body since, as Wu Shouyang notes in his *Neilian jindan xinfa* ,

If it exits for a long time, I’m afraid, the spirit will be confused and get lost, getting its directions wrong. . . Thus the texts speak of ten steps, maybe a hundred steps, always keeping close enough so it can look back and see its home . . . Throughout this phase, spend much time keeping it in stillness and only a little time letting it go out. Also, make sure to take good care of it as it leaves and make it return quickly. [120]  
(see Fig. 7)

That is to say, adepts stand to lose all their efforts when the divine child moves to leave for the first time. Therefore, they should allow it to move out only in small increments, always keeping a close watch over it, just like one would take care of a newborn baby. When the yang spirit exits for the first time, it should stay close and return to the body very quickly. All fright and awe should be avoided, lest they startle it into going too far too fast.



Fig. 7. The divine child breaks through the head of the adept.

After three years, adepts can send the child further away, letting it explore distant places. It can go as far as half a mile or a mile, then return in good time, to move gradually on to further reaches. At first, it should stay in the body much longer than roam around outside. However, before too long, once it is familiar with coming and going, it can go further afield, moving out even hundreds or thousands of miles. This indicates that it has reached full maturity—a process that takes an additional six years after the basic three. Naturally it will gain confidence, become stronger and more powerful, and attain the various supernatural powers without much effort or special training.

These powers, though, belong to the divine child rather than the adept. As long as it stays in the body, the adept owns and controls them, but the moment it leaves, the adept is in suspended animation, still like a corpse. If the child never returns to the body, he or she will die. It is, therefore, absolutely essential to train the child well and keep tight control over its movements. Eventually, it becomes a true person and fully breaks through the top of the adept's head. As Lü Dongbin said, according to the *Jindan dayao* ,

After working well for nine years of firing times,

Suddenly it breaks through the Heavenly Gate at the top of the head.

It emerges as a true person and manifests supernatural powers,

Then receives congratulations from the celestial immortals. [\[121\]](#)

## Effects

In addition to becoming increasingly sexless, adepts undergo certain changes. The *Cantong qi* says,

White hair turns black again, lost teeth regrow, old men become young studs, and old women revert to being gentle maidens. . . . Practice diligently, never stopping day or night. When you have nurtured it for three years, your body will feel light and you can travel long distances in an instant, step into fire without getting burnt, jump into water without getting wet. You have control over life and death, are always happy and free from worry. [\[122\]](#)

In addition, over the nine years of nurturing and training the divine child, adepts are increasingly free from the need for food, drink, and sleep. They can breathe through the pores rather than nose and mouth; their heart beat and pulse stop, yet their bodies remain warm and alive. All these phenomena arise typically after at least five years of practice, women often reaching their fullness faster than men and those of greater determination making better progress than others.

The same holds also true of mystical masters in other traditions, such as the great yogis of ancient India and the enlightened beings of Buddhism. There is reason to believe that the spiritual regimes of the various religions lead to similar results, so that someone who has brought the holy fetus to maturity and attained immortality shares accomplishments close to those of a Buddha or bodhisattva.

## Conclusion

### The System

The system of internal alchemy, in theory and practice, has the ultimate aim of immortality, that is, infinite existence and eternal life. This comes with several supernatural powers; it goes beyond, yet also includes, the attainment of physical health and vigorous longevity.

In practice, the system works with strengthening and refining the energy of the body. This is cosmic, vital energy, gaseous in nature and present before birth. It transforms into essence and is expended as and when people procreate and give birth to the next generation. Each sexual act consumes this energy, and pregnancy takes a large amount of it. In internal alchemy, in contrast, adepts accumulate and refine this energy, giving rise to a holy fetus that becomes their spiritual alter ego. Unlike an ordinary infant, the holy fetus lives for eternity and possesses supernatural powers. As the texts say, “following the natural processes, one generates a person; reversing them, one completes the elixir [holy fetus].”

Human beings, being conscious and equipped with wisdom, unlike other creatures can make the intentional choice to bring forth either an ordinary or a holy fetus. In other words, they have the option of either living an ordinary life of birth and death or to pursue an eternal life of high spirituality. Internal alchemy, then, is more than just physiological practice: it is the transmutation of body energy.

In order to reverse the natural tendencies of vital energy to sink down and leak out, masters have devised a number of specific practice procedures that bring about major benefits in just a few months, including health, vitality,

and longevity. Those who pursue the creation of the holy fetus, a choice they make of their free will once they have experienced the fundamental practices, are set to gain eternal life and become beings of supernatural powers. Once they decide to leave this earthly plane, moreover, they transform into strong white light and ascend into the heavens as immortals. The texts call this “ascending to heaven in broad daylight” (*bairi shengtian* 白日升天) and show it as adepts riding on a crane or dragon and ascending into the sky (see Fig. 8).



Fig. 8. An adept riding a crane and ascending into heaven.

## Central Maxims

All this used to be presented in obscure form and was rather complicated. Now the time has come to revolutionize it and make it simpler in definition, presentation, and overall construction. Still, there are a few central maxims or statements in the literature that continue to apply. They include:

Make sure to work with an enlightened master: do not try to guess how to concoct the golden elixir. [\[123\]](#)\_( *Wuzhen pian* )

Neither the perfected nor technical masters have spirit originally: they all gradually accumulate essence and enhance energy to accomplish perfection. [\[124\]](#)\_( *Huangting jing* )

Dedicate your will to returning to emptiness and nonbeing, make being free from thoughts your constant practice. [\[125\]](#)\_( *Cantong qi* )

The firing times are not constrained by any one hour. Why labor in search of *zi* (midnight) and *wu* (noon)? [\[126\]](#)\_( *Jindan sibaizi* )

Actively doing is a manifestation of the mind of daily function; nonaction is an application of the mind of the golden elixir. [\[127\]](#)\_( *Qinghua biwen* )

People do not know that perfect fire ultimately has no times and that the great medicine cannot be measured in pounds. [\[128\]](#)\_( *Guizhong zhinan* )

Just calm the spirit and breathe naturally, day and night working in accordance with nature. Why would you seek special firing times? [\[129\]](#) ( *Guizhong zhinan* )

The ingredients are not a thing of substance or matter . . . There is no particular method to gather them, and whoever says there is one is dead wrong. [\[130\]](#)\_( *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* )

Once the energy is full, the Governing and Conception Vessels automatically open. [\[131\]](#)\_( *Jinxian zhenglun* )

## Core Characteristics

To summarize the central notions of these statements, a few core characteristics of internal alchemy can be defined. For one, mind and breathing are mutually interdependent. This is important from Stage One, making it possible for the energy to enter the centers and flow through the

channels. However, it is not easy and only achieved after some time of practice.

For another, spirit coagulates in certain energy centers, a key feature in Stage Two. Some of these are very important, notably the three elixir fields and the Compass Center, since they produce huge amounts of energy as and when spirit coagulates there.

Another major characteristic is the emphasis on natural processes, the importance of letting everything unfold spontaneously in meditation, not only in fetal breathing. As the *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi* says, “The firing times in the process of the golden elixir must always match what is natural.” [132]

This closely connects to another point, action in nonaction. Action means that adepts follow specific instructions and take a strong lead in the course of practice, intentionally moving energies this way or that. Nonaction, in contrast, means that there are no particular instructions or transmissions, no conscious guidance for the mind. Practitioners maintain a constant calm, meditative state, following the natural flow at all times. This will bring about wonderful effects. As Zhang Boduan notes in the *Qinghua biwen*, “At this time, just keep on meditating unceasing and continuous, resting in clarity and stillness, remaining in nonaction, and many wonderful scenes will appear naturally.” [133]

Flowing along with the natural processes works because the “heavenly pivot moves of itself” (*tianji zidong* 天機自動), as the *Guizhong zhinan* expresses it. That is to say, the body has an inbuilt, automatic system that gets activated once adepts begin the practice of internal alchemy. It naturally will reverse the direction of essence and fill up with energy, then equally naturally let adepts shift to fetal breathing, allow them to gather the ingredients, and work according to the right firing times.

However, adepts must remain in stillness and keep themselves very stable in meditation. This allows the vital energy to centralize and accumulate. Once it reaches fullness, it spreads throughout the energy centers and flows the eight extraordinary vessels, naturally opening the entire body. The *Guizhong zhinan* notes ,



The core of the great Dao has nothing much to do with the conscious mind, knowledge, or intention. Rather, it rests with the realization that there is a ruler in the body who controls all creation and transformation. It is what people today call the central pivot.

Once you become aware of this, just make stillness your root and stability your foundation. Practice from here, and soon the heavenly pivot will move of itself. Do not seek out the Compass Center: it will appear automatically. Do not pursue fetal breathing: it will happen spontaneously. Do not run after ingredients: they will come forth by themselves. Do not try to determine the firing times: they will emerge naturally.

All these function naturally of themselves. What need would there be to actively visualize and intentionally guard, to suffer hardships and labor the body, to make the mind to know things or the intention do stuff, to do the Dao in any way? [\[134\]](#)

Once the automatic system has started, every step in meditation will function of itself. This means that in actual practice, there is really only one process that continues to different levels, without the need to divide it into four stages. Nor is there any need to seek out masters and follow technical transmissions. The holy fetus or golden elixir will successfully come together after enough time has passed. The *Wuzhen pian* says, “As long as adepts inspect their mind and observe their inner nature, complete illumination appears automatically in substance and nonaction manifests naturally in function.” [\[135\]](#)

## Advanced Potencies

After completing the entire circuit of practices, adepts attain not only the six supernatural powers but also shamanic abilities. They can move mountains and seas, tame wild animals, call the wind, summon or stop the rain, transform the four seasons, command gods and demons, heal diseases, and even make the dead come back to life.

In addition, they gain a number of advanced potencies. The first among these is the realization of a body of pure energy that feels light and floating, like a balloon filled with hydrogen that easily rises into the sky. Wei Boyang describes this as “lightly ascending and traveling far,” [136]\_while Qiu Chuji speaks of it in terms of “the body being like a flying dragon.” [137]

Going even beyond this, the entire body becomes gaseous, a pure assemblance of energy like the transformation of the rainbow body (*honghua* 虹化), well known from Tantric Buddhism. Unlike there, however, where the rainbow body signals the transition from this earth to other spheres, in internal alchemy, adepts have the power to transform and yet stay, deciding whether to remain on earth or leave. Having such degree of control means that they have reached eternal life, a state of divinity beyond birth and death, the complete cessation of transmigration and rebirth. They are immortals, Buddhas, or bodhisattvas.

Another aspect of the advanced state in internal alchemy is that adepts control all their particular manifestations, having the ability to appear and disappear as they wish. They “assemble at will to form a body, disperse at will to be just energy.” [138]\_They can be visible or invisible, directing themselves in time and space, “for over a hundred generations continuing to wander freely among humanity, ” [139]\_as the *Cantong qi* has it and is described in many other texts. In addition, they can multiply themselves into many different bodies, that is, “have many bodies beyond this body.” As in cell division, the holy fetus divides and replicates innumerable times, each new entity possessing the same characteristics and powers as the original.

## Evolutionary Progress

Modern science, and especially biology, describes the development of life on earth in terms of evolution, that is, the gradual development of specific characteristics of plants and animals over many generations. The ancient Chinese only had a vague idea of this process, realizing that creatures developed differently in different regions and periods. Zhang Boduan expresses something similar in his *Jindan sibaizi* :

A year has twelve months, a month has thirty days, a day has a hundred quarter hours, which means that one month contains 3,000 quarters and ten months have 30,000. Practicing while walking, sitting, standing, and lying down, continuously without interruption, the holy fetus coagulates, the divine child starts to grow, and the mysterious pearl appears. They all come together in the perfection of great oneness.

All this evolves in 30,000 quarter hours, which, on the scale of the greater universe match the evolution of 30,000 years. How is this so? The alchemical work done in a single quarter hour is equal to the natural functioning of an entire year, thus, 30,000 quarters match 30,000 years. [\[140\]](#)

What he means by this is that adepts of internal alchemy shrink natural time to alchemical time and evolve a great deal faster than ordinary people. In addition, as noted earlier, as vital energy gathers in the head during the advanced practice of nine years, it develops and expands. This is why practitioners gain the six supernatural and other advanced powers. For the same reason, the upper elixir field rather than the lower is the second major energy hub after the Compass Center.

Also, if it is true, as Zhang Boduan claims, that internal alchemy is very close to Buddhist meditation, then the knob at the top of the head of a Buddha is none other than the development of the upper elixir field. Many Buddha figures, especially in southeast Asia, have a lump covered by coils of hair at the top of their head, while Daoist priests wear their hair tied into a topknot, both showing the expansion of the Niwan center in the upper elixir field. In most adepts, however, this remains hidden, covered by a hat or cap, so that they do not appear too different from ordinary people. As already Laozi notes, “The sage shades his brilliance and joins [others] in obscurity” (ch. 56). [\[141\]](#)

## Appendix One

### The Eight Extraordinary Vessels

The eight extraordinary or unpaired vessels are pre-organ functional containers of primordial energy and serve both in medical and spiritual practice. Called vessels (*mai* 脈) rather than meridians (*luo* 絡), they can be divided into two major groups of four, one set that is present in the body but does not get used very much in clinical and spiritual practice, and another that is rather important. The four less important vessels are:

1. Yin Activation Vessel (*yinqiao mai* 陰蹻脈). It begins at the ankle, the second point of the kidney meridian, and runs along the inner side of the leg and the center of the abdomen to the face, where it ends at the corner of the eyes, at the first point of the bladder meridian. Considered an offshoot of the kidney meridian, it exerts an influence on the energy-flow along this line and helps to tone leg muscles.

2. Yang Activation Vessel (*yangqiao mai* 陽蹻脈). It runs from the ankle along the outside of the legs and sides of the torso to the face, where it passes along the side of the eyes and ends at the ear. An offshoot of the bladder meridian, it influences the lateral aspect of the legs, back, neck, head, and eyes.

3. Yin Maintenance Vessel (*yinwei mai* 陰維脈). It runs from the central abdomen through the chest area to the throat, ending at the chin. It influences the chest and the heart, tonifies the blood, and connects all the various yin channels.

4. Yang Maintenance Vessel (*yangwei mai* 陽維脈). It begins at the outside edge of the foot slightly below the ankle, runs along the back of the legs, torso, and head, and ends at the neck. It connects all the yang channels and influences the lateral aspect of the legs, the sides of the body, neck, and head, as well as the ears.

The four more important extraordinary vessels include three vertical and one horizontal line of energy. The horizontal line is known as the Belt Vessel (*daimai* 帶脈). It runs around the abdomen a few inches below the navel, connecting the Ocean of Energy (*qihai* 氣海) point in the front with the Gate of Destiny (*mingmen* 命門) point in the back and linking both the vertical meridians and the major storehouses of energy and essence.

The other three extraordinary vessels are vertical lines through the torso, which link the pelvic floor with the head. The Thrusting Vessel (*chongmai* 沖脈) runs right through the center. It begins at the perineum, a small cluster of muscles located between the anus and the genital organs, and reaches to the crown of the head, to a point known as Hundred Meeting (*baihui* 百會; GV-20). It connects the kidneys and stomach, as well as the various centers of energy in the body, and is considered the main conduit of primordial energy. Used medically for gynecological problems, its main application is in meditative and religious practices, whose adepts send their intention through it into the depth of their cinnabar fields and thus open their centers and connect to higher levels.

Next are the Conception Vessel (yin) and the Governing Vessel (yang), which run along the front and back of the torso respectively, reaching from the pelvic floor to the head. They are of great importance both in healing and religion, serving to mix energy and blood and to guide the energy along the major centers of the body.

The Conception Vessel (*renmai* 任脈) begins at Meeting Yin (*huiyin* 會陰; CV-1) at the perineum, passes through the front of the body along its central line, and ends at the mouth. A carrier and major supporter of yin energy, it has many medical, psychological, and spiritual applications. Among its twenty-four points, most important are Ocean of Energy (*qihai*; CV-6) in the lower abdomen, Spirit Tower (*shenque* 神闕; CV-8) at the navel, and Ocean of Stillness (*jinghai* 靜海; CV-17) at the center of the chest. Two further points on this channel that are important in Daoist practice are Central Court (*zhongting* 中庭; CV-16, ) which matches the solar plexus, and Purple Palace (*zigong* 紫宮; CV-18), which matches the heart.

The Governing Vessel (*dumai* 督脈) begins at Extended Strength (*changqiang* 長強; GV-1) at the coccyx, then passes along the back of the body following the spine, moves across the top of the head, and ends inside the mouth at the upper gums. It transports and aids yang energy its points connect to other channels and the various inner organs. Its twenty-eight points include also the more spiritual points Gate of Destiny (*mingmen*; GV-4) at the 2<sup>nd</sup>-3<sup>rd</sup> lumbar vertebrae, Numinous Terrace (*lingtai* 靈台;

GV-10) at the 6<sup>th</sup> thoracic vertebra, as well as the Jade Pillow (*yuzhen* 玉枕; GV-17) at the back of the skull, matching the upper barrier in internal alchemy practice.

The two meridians connect at the mouth, with Fluid Receptacle (*chengjiang* 承漿; CV-24) located at the lower lip and Gum Intersection (*yingjiao* 巔交; GV-28) found at the upper gums. They also both continue internally, descending back to the pelvic floor and forming a continuous, intricate inner loop. Rather than using this path, however, adepts tend to activate them as one straight circle of energy-flow by pressing the tongue against the upper palate (Kohn 2005, 58-60).

## Appendix Two

### The Practice of Taiji Quan

Selections are translated from *Zhang Sanfeng taiji liandan mijue* 張三豐太極煉丹秘訣 (Zhang Sanfeng's Secret Instructions on Practicing Taiji and Refining the Elixir, JH 19), [\[142\]](#) contained in the *Taiji daoju* 太極道訣 (Instructions on the Way of Taiji).

#### To Study Taiji Quan

#### One Must Refine Spirit and Accumulate Energy

(*Xue taiji quan xu lianshen quqi lun* 學太極拳須斂神聚氣論)

Taiji quan has thirteen distinct moves: beating, hobbling, squeezing, pressing, picking, splitting, elbowing, striking, moving forward, moving back, looking right, looking left, and having central focus. These match the eight trigrams and follow the productive and control cycles of the five phases..

Also, lighten the spirit, relax the waist, contain [the chest] and extend [the back], clearly distinguish empty and full, sink and drop [the arms], use intention rather than strength, let the upper and lower body follow each

other, make sure inside and outside match each other, move continuously without stopping, and pursue stillness in movement—these are the ten essentials of taiji quan. They are the only way for students. [143]

## The Song of Taiji Quan

(*Taiji quan ge* 太極拳歌)

十三總勢莫輕視, Do not overlook any of the thirteen poses.

命意源頭在腰隙. The source of life-destiny is at the waist.

變轉虛實須留意, Mind the change of empty and full in striking,

氣遍身軀不少滯. And energy will fill the whole body without obstacle.

靜中觸動動猶靜, Begin to move in stillness, move as slowly as stillness,

因敵變化示神奇, Wonderful power appears due to the change of enemy,

勢勢揆心須用意, Every pose should be measured by intention,

得來不覺費功夫. Then it is not difficult to gain the power.

刻刻留心在腰間, Watch the waist at every moment,

腹內鬆淨氣騰然. Keep energy rising as the abdomen is still and relaxed.

尾闕中正神貫頂, Tail Gate energy runs up the spine and to the head,

滿身輕利頂頭懸. Feel light in body and heavy in the head.

仔細留心向推求, Focus carefully on the practice,

屈伸開合聽自由. And all of actions become natural.

入門引路須口授, Beginners should be led by oral teachings,

功夫無息法自休. Work with the breath lest efforts stop.

若言體用何為準? You ask: What's substance and function in practice?

意氣君來骨肉臣. Intention and energy are one, the body is the other.

想推用意終何在? Why use intention in practice?

益壽延年不老春. The answer is to gain longevity.

歌兮歌兮百冊字, This song contains over two hundred characters,

字字真切義無遺, Each one full of meaning, never losing track,

若不向此推求去, Without this song to seek the meaning

枉費功夫貽嘆息. Is a waste of time and effort, leading to regret.

棚 (履)擠按須認真, Beat, hobble, squeeze, and press conscientiously,

上下相隨人難進. Move hands up and down, enemies cannot breach.

任他巨力來打我, When a strike of huge power hits me,

牽動四兩撥千斤, I use four pounds to shift the opponent's thousand.

引進落空合即出, Leading the enemy's strike to fail, hitting immediately,

粘連黏隨不丟頂. Sticking, connecting, or following, intention focused.

## The Seventy-Two Poses of Taiji Quan

(*Taiji quan qishier lutu shi* 太極拳七十二路圖勢)

Fig. 1 太極起式—Taiji starting pose

Fig. 2-5 攬雀尾—Grasp the bird's tail

Fig. 6 單鞭—Single whip (Single hand facing enemy)



Fig. 7 提手—Raise hands

Fig. 8 白鶴亮翅—White crane spreads its wings

Fig. 9 擡膝拗步—Bend knee and barely walk

Fig. 10 手揮琵琶—Hands play the zither

Fig. 11-12 左右擡膝拗步—Bend knee and barely walk right and left

Fig. 13 手揮琵琶—Hands play the zither

Fig. 14-15 進步搬攔捶—Step forward and block the attack with fist

Fig. 16 如封似閉—Seal and close the area of defense

Fig. 17 十字手—Cross hands

Fig. 18 抱虎歸山—Embrace tiger, return to mountain

Fig. 19 肘底看錘—Watch fist from beneath the elbow

Fig. 20-21 左右倒輦猴—Repulse monkey to the right and left

Fig. 22 斜飛式—Slanted flying

Fig. 23 提手—Raise hands

Fig. 24 白鶴亮翅—White crane spreads its wings

Fig. 25 擡膝拗步—Bend knee and barely walk

Fig. 26 海底針—Pick a needle from the bottom of the sea

Fig. 27 扇通臂—Fan out the arms

Fig. 28 撇身錘—Throw the body to make the fist

Fig. 29-30 上步搬攔錘—Step forward and block the attack with fist

- Fig. 31-33 攬雀尾—Grasp the bird's tail
- Fig. 34-35 左右抁手—Cloud hands to the right and left
- Fig. 36 單鞭—Single whip
- Fig. 37 高探馬—High pet the horse
- Fig. 38-39 左右分脚—Spread feet to the right and left
- Fig. 40 轉身蹬脚—Turn body and lift foot
- Fig. 41 左右擣膝拗步—Bend knee and barely walk right and left
- Fig. 42 進步裁錘—Advance to strike with fist
- Fig. 43 翻身白蛇吐信—Turn the body like a snake sticking out tongue
- Fig. 44 上步搬攔錘—Step forward and block the attack with fist
- Fig. 45 蹬脚—Raise the foot
- Fig. 46-47 左右披身伏虎—Spread body to subdue tiger right and left
- Fig. 48 回身蹬脚—Turn the body around and lift the foot
- Fig. 49 雙風貫耳—Two winds pierce the ears
- Fig. 50 左蹬脚—Raise the left foot
- Fig. 51 轉身蹬脚—Turn the body and raise the foot
- Fig. 52-53 上步搬攔錘—Step forward and block the attack with fist
- Fig. 54 如封似閉—Seal and close the area of defense
- Fig. 55 十字手—Cross hands
- Fig. 56 抱虎歸山—Embrace tiger, return to mountain

- Fig. 57 斜單鞭—Slanted single whip
- Fig. 58-59 左右野馬分鬃—Separate the horse's mane to the right and left
- Fig. 60-63 上步攬雀尾—Step high and grasp the bird's tail
- Fig. 64-65 玉女穿梭—Jade maiden works the shuttle
- Fig. 66-67 上步攬雀尾—Step high and grasp the bird's tail
- Fig. 68 單鞭—Single whip
- Fig. 69-70 抔手—Cloud hands
- Fig. 71 單鞭下勢—Single whip, lower position
- Fig. 72-73 金鷄獨立—Golden rooster stands on one leg
- Fig. 74-75 倒輦猴—Repulse monkey
- Fig. 76 斜飛式—Slanted flying
- Fig. 77 提手—Raise hands
- Fig. 78 白鶴亮翅—White crane spreads the wings
- Fig. 79 擡膝拗步—Bend knee and barely walk
- Fig. 80 海底針—Pick a needle from the bottom of the sea
- Fig. 81 扇通臂—Fan out the arms
- Fig. 82 撇身錘—Throw the body to make a fist
- Fig. 83-86 攬雀尾單鞭—Grasp the bird's tail, single whip
- Fig. 87-88 抔手—Cloud hands
- Fig. 89 單鞭—Single whip

Fig. 90 高探馬—High pet the horse

Fig. 91 十字腿—Cross legs

Fig. 92 摟膝指 (月當) 錘—Bend knee and strike with fingers and fist

Fig. 93-96 上步攬雀尾—Lift the step and grasp the bird's tail

Fig. 97 上步七星—Pace the seven stars

Fig. 98 退步跨虎—Take a step back to ride the tiger

Fig. 99 轉脚擺蓮—Turn the foot to lift the lotus

Fig. 100 彎弓射虎—Pull the bow to shoot the tiger

Fig. 101-02 上步搬攔錘—Step forward and block the attack with fist

Fig. 103 如封似閉—Seal and close the area of defense

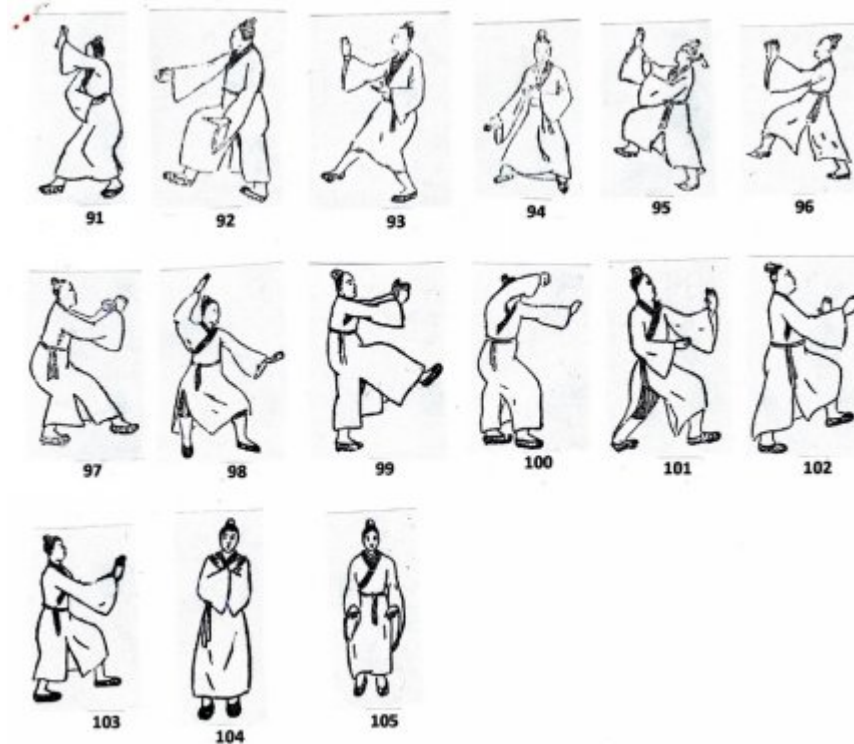
Fig. 104 十字手—Cross hands

Fig. 105 合太極—Harmonize the Taiji









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[1] DZ stands for *Daozang*, i. e., the Daoist Canon of the Ming dynasty (dat. 1445). The numbers follow Komjathy 20002; Schipper and Verellen 2004.

[2] 邇來透體金光現, 不與凡人話此規.

[3] ZW stands for *Zangwai daoshu* 臧外道書 (Daoist Texts outside the Canon), published 1992-1995. The numbers follow Komjathy 2002.

[4] 丹之初成也...後則以真金養成純金之體,故通體之光金色也...故曰金丹,又曰金仙.

[5] 丹是色身至寶,練成變化無窮.

[6] 達者惟簡惟易,迷者愈惑愈繁.

[7] 竊為賢者談,曷敢輕為書? 若遂結舌暗,絕道獲罪誅,寫情著竹帛,又恐洩天符.

[8] 莫因循,自貪鄙,火急尋師覓元旨.

[9] 可以口訣,難以書傳.

[10] 不遇真師莫強猜,只為金丹無口訣,教君何處結靈胎.

[11] JHL stands for *Daozang jinghua lu* 道藏精華錄 (Record of Essential Blossoms of the Daoist Canon), compiled by Ding Fubao 丁福保 (1874-1952) and published in Shanghai in 1922. The numbers follow Komjathy 2002.

[12] 諸惡莫作,衆善奉行,自淨其意,是諸佛教.

[13] 妻財拋下非君有,罪業將行能自欺.

[14] 從此永離生死海.

[15] 已知壽永齊天地.

[16] 順則凡逆則仙;我命在我不在天.

[17] 從此眾仙相見後,海田陵谷任遷移.

[18] 藐姑射之山,有神人居焉,肌膚若冰雪,綽約若處子.不食五穀,吸風飲露,乘雲氣,禦飛龍,而游乎四海之外.其神凝,使物不疵癘而年穀熟.

[19] 谷神不死,是謂玄牝.玄牝之門,是謂天地根.綿綿若存,用之不勤.

[20] 反者道之動,弱者道之用.

[21] 反者道之驗,弱者德之柄.

[22] 上德無為,不以察求,下德為之,其用不休.

[23] 大易性情,各如其度.黃老用究,較而可御.爐火之事,真有所據,三道由一,俱出徑路.



[24] 休煉三黃及四神,若尋眾草更非真.時人要識真鉛汞,不是凡砂及水銀.The three yellows (sanhuang三黃) are sulfur, realgar, and orpiment. The four divine substances (sishen四神) are cinnabar, mercury, lead, and nitre.

[25] 教雖分三,道乃歸一.奈何後世黃緇之流,各自專門,互相非是,致使三家旨要迷沒邪歧,不能混而同歸矣.

[26] 赫赫金丹一日成 ...一時辰內管丹成 ...說破人須失笑.

[27] 本立言以明象,既得像以忘言.猶設象以指意,悟真意則像捐.

[28] 萬物負陰而抱陽,沖氣以為和.

[29] 取將坎內心中實,點化離宮腹內陰;從此變成乾健體,潛藏飛躍盡由心 ...自然返陽生之氣,剝陰殺之形.消盡陰魔鬼莫侵.群陰剝盡丹成熟.陽極陰消漸剝形.

[30] 通天下一炁耳.聖人故貴一.

[31] 道自虛無生一炁.

[32] 唯先天真一之炁可煉還丹,乃自虛無中來.此炁姓白,喚太一郎,名元炁...乳名真種子.此為先天地之真炁,卻是人之至寶...何謂真鉛?即先天地真一之炁.

[33] 要得谷神長不死,需憑玄牝立根基.陰陽數足自通神,出入豈離玄牝.

[34] 須要知夫身中一竅,名曰玄牝.此竅者,非心,非腎,非口鼻也,非脾胃也,非谷道也,非膀胱也,非丹田也,非泥丸也.能知此之一竅,則冬至在此矣,藥物在此矣,火候亦在此矣,沐浴在此矣,結胎在此矣,脫體亦在此矣.夫此一竅,亦無邊傍,更無內外;乃神氣之根,虛無之谷;在身中而求,不可求於他也.

[35] 真人潛深淵,浮游守規中.

[36] 夫身中一竅,名曰玄牝,受炁以生,實為神府,三元所聚,更無分別,精神魂魄,會於此穴,乃金丹返還之根,神仙凝結聖胎之地也.然則何處?曰:我的妙訣,名曰規中,一意不散,結成胎仙.人一身天地之正中,八脈九竅,經絡

聯轉,虛間一穴,空懸黍珠,不依形而立,惟體道以生.然此一竅,亦無邊傍,更無內外,若以形體色象求之,則又成大錯謬矣.

[37] 知之修煉,謂之聖人.

[38] 日啖飲食之華美者為精,故從米、從青..此以人身中之精而言,乃後天地之精.若論還丹,卻非此精.夫金液還丹之精,姓金,喚九三郎.此乃先天地之精,卻為人之至寶.

[39] 今以後天地之氣為言,此氣生於穀,故從气從米,而蓄於胃,胃得穀而生氣.

[40] 夫神者,有元神焉,有欲神焉.元神者,乃先天以來一點靈光也.若雜念紛壇則元神即退,摒除雜念則元神即現.

[41] 父母媾精之後,一點靈光 ...元從太虛中來者,我之元神也.

[42] 人之生,炁之聚也; 聚則為生,散則為死.

[43] 先天炁,後天氣,得之者,常似醉.

[44] 藏則為炁,形則為氣.先天元始祖炁未嘗不充溢其中.非後天之氣,無以見先天一炁之流行; 非先天之炁,無以為後天一氣之主宰.

[45] 緣督以為經.

[46] 任督二脈,人身之子午也,此元氣之所由生,真息之所由起.

[47] 元氣...此物何曾有定位,隨時變化因心意.在體感熱即為汗,在眼感悲即為淚.在腎感念即為精,在鼻感風即為涕.

[48] 自一歲至三歲,長元炁六十四銖,一陽生乎復卦.至五歲,有長元炁六十四銖,二陽生乎臨卦.至八歲,又長元炁六十四銖,三陽生乎泰卦.至十歲,又長元炁六十四銖,四陽生乎大壯.至十三歲,又長元炁六十四銖,五陽生乎夬卦.至十六歲,又長元炁六十四銖,六陽是為乾卦.盜天地三百六十四銖之正炁,原父母二十四之祖炁,共得三百八十四銖,以全周天之造化,而為一斤之數也.此時純陽既備,微陰未萌,精炁充實,如得師指,修煉性命,立可成功矣.自此以後,慾情一動,元炁即泄,不知禁忌,貪戀無已.故自十六到二

十四歲,耗元炁六十四銖,應乎姤卦.一陰初生,品物咸章,淳澆樸散,去本雖未遠,履霜之戒,已見於初爻.若勤修煉,可謂不遠復者矣.至三十二歲,耗元炁六十四銖,應乎遁卦.二陰浸長,陽德漸消,慾慮蜂起,真源流蕩.然而血氣方剛,志力果敢,若勤修煉,則建立丹基,亦易為力.至四十歲,又耗元炁六十四銖,應乎否卦.天地不交,二氣各復其所,陰用事於內,陽失位於外.若勤修煉,則危者可安,亡者可保.至四十八歲,又耗元炁六十四銖,應乎觀卦.二陽在外,則陽德微重,陰上行而陰氣盛.若勤修煉,則可亦方盛之陰柔,扶向微之陽德.至五十六歲,又耗元炁六十四銖,應乎剝卦.五陰并升乎上,一陽將反乎下,陰氣橫潰,陽力僅存.若勤修煉,如續火於將窮之木,布雨於垂槁之苗.至六十四歲,卦氣已周,所得天地父母之元炁三百八十四銖,而為一斤之數者,耗散已盡,復反於坤卦.純陰用事,陽氣未萌.若勤修煉,時時採藥,時時栽接,則陰極而能生陽,窮上而能反下,革柔維剛,還老為強矣.

[49] 要知產藥川源處,只在西南認本鄉.

[50] 二八佳人體似酥,腰間仗劍斬愚夫,分明不教人頭落,暗裡教君骨髓枯.

[51] 多交傷髓.

[52] 道自虛無生一炁,便從一炁產陰陽;陰陽再合成三體,三體重生萬物張.

[53] 何謂順? 一生二,二生三,三生萬物;故虛化神,神化炁,炁化精,精化形,形乃成人.何謂逆? 萬物含三,三歸二,二歸一.知此道者,怡神守形,養形煉精,積精化炁,煉炁合神,煉神還虛,金丹乃成.

[54] 父母媾精之後,一點靈光...元從太虛中來者,我之元神也.

[55] 行為者,日用之心;無為者,金丹之用心也...元神見而元炁生,元炁生則元精產矣.

[56] 鉛遇癸生須急采,金逢望後不堪嘗...若到一陽才動處,便宜進火莫延遲.

[57] 金丹之道,自陽舉之時,凝神使入氣穴,鼓起橐籥之巽風,息息向爐中而吹噓,風生則火熾,火熾則精化,精化則炁自生,采此生炁,而使之升降往還,名為周天,金丹之道,即如此者也.

[58] 要知玄關一竅，玄牝之門，乃神仙聊指造化之基爾.....我的妙訣，名曰規中，一意不散，結成胎仙 ..人一身天地之正中，八脈九竅，經絡聯轉，虛閒一穴，空懸黍珠，不依形而立，惟體道以生...其密語曰：徑寸之質，以混三才，在腎之上，心之下，彷彿其內，謂之玄關...蓋用志不分，乃凝於神，但澄心絕慮，調息令勻，寂然常照，勿使昏散，候氣安和，真人入定.於此定中，觀照內景，才若意到，莫兆即萌，便覺一息從規中起，混混續續，兀兀騰騰，存之以誠，聽之以心，六根安定，胎息凝凝，不閉不數，任其自如 ..此息起處，便是玄關，非高非下，非左非右，不前不後，不偏不倚，人一身天地之正中，正此處也....然此竅陽舒陰慘，本無正形，意到即開，開闔有時，百日立基，養成炁母，虛室生白，自然見之。

[59] 怪事教人笑幾回，男兒今也會懷胎.自家精血自交結，身裡夫妻是妙哉!

[60] 有一嬰兒在丹田，與我形貌亦如然。

[61] 夫金丹於無中生有，養就嬰兒。

[62] 且此竅也，乃是虛無之窟，無形無影.炁發則成竅，機息則渺茫...名雖眾多，無非此一竅也...是竅也，大矣哉!父母未生此身，受孕之時，先生此竅...故如來發大慈悲，洩漏修煉之法，教人再入胞胎，重造我之性命...將我之神炁入於此竅之內，合而為一.以成真種.如父母之精炁入於此竅之內，合而為一，以成胎孕.其理一也。

[63] 虎躍龍騰風浪粗，中央正位產玄珠，果生枝上終期熟，子在胞中豈有殊。

[64] 戊己自歸生數五，三家相見結嬰兒，是知太一含真炁，十月胎圓入聖基。

[65] 一載一個兒，個個會騎鶴。

[66] 一載胎生一個兒，子生孫子孫又枝。

[67] 玄珠有象逐陽生，陽極陰消漸剝形，十月霜飛丹始熟，此時神鬼也須驚。

[68] 火足氣充，則元精，元炁，元神盡合而為一，故嬰兒產矣.嬰兒豈自產矣?火爍盡群陰，而胎始脫，到此方是產嬰兒 ...人一身皆屬陰，惟有一點陽耳.我以一點之陽 ...擊退群陰，則陽道日長，陰道日消.至於陰盡陽純，而丹始能升於泥丸 ...金丹之道如此而已。

[69] 掀倒鼎,踢翻爐,功滿也,產玄珠,歸根覆命,抱本還虛.

[70] 三百日火,一千日胎,其心離身,忽去忽來.回視舊骸,一堆糞土,十步百步,切宜照顧 ...孩兒幼小未成人,須藉爹娘養育恩,九載三年人事盡,縱橫天地不由親.

[71] 前胎完成,已成真人,則移居上田,卻重整乾坤,再造陰陽,子又生孫,千百億化.

[72] 精結神凝 ...隨日隨時漸凝漸聚.無質生質,結成聖胎.

[73] 蓋胎者,非有形,有像,而別物可以成之,實即我之神炁也.先以神入乎其炁,後炁來包乎其神.神炁相結,而意則寂然不動,所謂胎矣.且氣凝而後神靈...故曰,日益增長,炁足胎圓,從頂而出.

[74] 脫胎神化,名題仙籍,位號真人...虎兇刀兵不傷,無常火宅難牽.寶符降後去朝天,穩駕鸞車鳳輦.

[75] 佛珠還與我珠同,我性即歸佛性海...不待他身後世,眼前獲佛神通...觀音三十二應,我亦當從中證.化現不可思議,盡出逍遙之性.

[76] 今一言指破,省卻數十年參訪矣.

[77] 不見可欲,使民心不亂.

[78] 學道須教猛烈,無情心剛似鐵.直饒兒女妻妾,又與他人何別 ...何必擔家戀子妻?

[79] 大修行人,既得其財,即以求藥,得藥成丹,丹成而後,盡散其餘,此為異耳.

[80] 耳目口三寶,固塞勿發揚 .

[81] 五色令人目盲,五音令人耳聾,五味令人口爽.

[82] 吾之大患,在於有身.

[83] 及吾無身,吾有何患.

[84] 有其身則有患,若無其身,患從何有!夫欲免乎患者,莫若體乎至道....奈何此道至妙至微,世人根性迷鈍,執其有身而惡死悅生,故卒難了悟.

[85] 修丹之士必先煉己,懲忿窒慾,苦行忍辱,庶入室之時,六根泰定,方是純熟,忘無可忘,乃能就事.世人不知煉己事大,而欲妄行一時半刻之功,希冀成功,鮮不厥功矣...何謂煉己?去色欲,絕恩愛,輕財物,慎德行,四者為煉己之大要.

[86] 去色欲,則精氣全.精氣全,則能降龍伏虎.降龍伏虎,則可采先天之一炁...著於愛欲,精氣以竭,而情難割,情牽神失,意動氣散,神氣既喪,命亦隨逝.色之為物,本無鋒刃,而其殺人,甚於刀戟...恩愛起於對境,著境則恩生,恩生則愛起.故絕恩愛,失去執著,使對境而不著境,不著境,則念頭淨...夫財可以創鼎,可以成道...德可以動天地,行可以感鬼神.煉己之功,德行為先.陰行方便,積諸善根曰德.自己尊貴,不欺其心曰行.

[87] 張伯端曰:若欲修成九轉,先須煉己持心.呂洞賓曰:七返還丹,在人先須煉己待時.

[88] 德行修逾八百,陰功積滿三千.均齊物我與親冤,始合神仙本願...若非修行積陰德,動有群魔作障緣.

[89] 積德累功,慈心於物;忠孝友悌,正己化人;矜孤恤寡,敬老懷幼;昆蟲草木,猶不可傷;宜憫人之凶,樂人之善;濟人之急,救人之危...所謂善人,人皆敬之,天道佑之,福祿隨之.衆邪遠之,神靈衛之,所作必成,神仙可冀.欲求天仙者,當立一千三百善.欲求地仙者,當立三百善.

[90] 十魔君或而滿耳笙簧,觸目花芳,舌有甘味,鼻聞異香,情思舒暢,意氣洋洋.如見,不得認,是六欲魔.一也.或而和風蕩漾,暖日舒長,迅雷大雨,霹靂電光,笙歌嘹亮,哭泣悲傷.如見,不得認,是七情魔.二也.或而瓊樓玉閣,蕙帳蘭房,珠簾翠幕,峻宇雕牆,珠珍遍地,金玉滿堂.如見,不得認,是為富魔.三也.或而出將入相,威震八方,車服顯赫,使節旌幢,滿門青紫,靴笏盈床.如見,不得認,是為貴魔.四也.或而兒女疾病,父母喪亡,兄弟離散,妻子分張,骨肉患難,眷族災殃.如見,不得認,是恩愛魔.五也.或而失身火鑊,墮落高嶺,臨刑命喪,遇毒身亡,兇惡難避,猛獸逼傷.如見,不得認,是災難魔.六也.或而雲屯士馬,兵刃如霜,戈矛間舉,弓弩齊張,爭來殘害,驍捷難當.如見,不得認,是刀兵魔.七也.或而三清玉皇,十地當陽,四聖九曜,五帝三官,威儀隊仗,往復翱翔.如見,不得認,是聖賢魔.八也.或而仙娥玉女,羅列成行,笙歌鼎沸,對舞霓裳,雙雙紅袖,爭獻金觴.如見,不得認,是妓樂魔.九

也。或而幾多殊麗，艷質濃妝，蘭台夜飲，玉體輕裳，佞人嬌顫，爭要成雙。如見，不得認，是女色魔。十也。

[91] 摒除雜念，則元神即現。

[92] According to the *Jindan dayao* , prenatal energy, true lead, spirit water, the flowery pond, and perfect gold all indicate the same energy.

[93] 上陽子曰：慮險防危，金丹之大事也 ... 夫慮險防危，不啻一件，自有數說。其初采藥之時，日月歡會，龍虎將交，戰爭之際，真人已潛于深淵，浮游慎守於規中。蓋是時也，閉塞三寶，唯當專心致志。否則有喪身失命之事。紫陽翁云：白虎首經至寶，華池神水真金。又云：依時採取定浮沉，進火須防危甚，最為初關之緊切。此其一也。採取之時，若或陰陽錯亂日月乖戾，外火雖動而行，內符閉息不應，枉費神功。此其二也。若也火候過差，水銖不定，源流混濁，藥物不真，空自勞神，有損無益。此其三也。既得黍珠入鼎，須要溫養，保扶心君。苟或未善，即恐火化丹失。此其四也。至有學者，備歷艱難，屢經危險，心膽驚怖。平時在懷，得丹入鼎，切宜驅除，務令盡淨，勿使牽掛舊慮，以亂心君，是謂滌慮洗心，是謂沐浴。偶或留戀則恐汞鉛飛走。此其五也。及至十月胎完，脫殼換鼎，不能保固陽神，輕縱出去，則一出而迷途，遂失舍而無歸。此其六也。又有丹成之後，且要識真辨偽。若功行未滿，眼前忽見靈異多端，奇特百出，以至生生之事，如有神見，皆能明知。若此等件是為魔障已至，並非真實，不可認為己靈丹聖，茲乃邪偽妖幻見吾道成，乃欲引入邪宗，以亂吾真。于斯時也，且須堅固智慧，保養全真。此其七也。凡此七件，皆防慮之大者也。有一不防，非但無成，恐至失喪。

[94] 人身精華，皆上注於空竅是也。

[95] 機在目。

[96] 天之神發於日，人之神發於目，目之所至，心亦至焉。

[97] 眼者，神遊之宅也。神遊於眼，而役於心。故抑之於眼，而使之歸於心，則心靜而神亦靜矣。

[98] 牢擒意馬鎖心猿，慢著工夫煉汞鉛。大道教人先止念，念頭不住亦徒然。

[99] 學太極拳，為入道之基，入道以養心定性，聚氣斂神為主。故習此拳，亦須如此。

[100] 欲天下豪傑延年益壽,不徒作技藝之末也.

[101] 世人但知養生止於禁欲,殊不知一念若動,氣隨心散,精逐氣忘.

[102] 從頭流達足,究竟復上升.

[103] 飲食男女,人之大欲存焉.

[104] 反者道之動.

[105] 心使炁曰強.

[106] 咽津納氣是人行,有藥方能造化生,鼎內若無真種子,猶將水火煮空鑪.

[107] 五金之主,北方河車.

[108] 首尾武,中間文.

[109] QYC stands for *Qigong yangsheng congshu* 氣功養生叢書 (Collected Works on Qigong and Nourishing Life Practices), published in 29 volumes by Guji Publishers in Shanghai throughout the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The numbers follow Komjathy 2002.

[110] 一陽來復休輕洩,急須閉住太玄關;火逼藥過尾閭關,采時用目守泥丸.

[111] 太陰煉形與男子修煉之法大同小異.初工下手,閉目存神,大休歇一場.使心靜息調,而後凝神入於炁穴 (在兩乳間心窩上).將兩手交叉捧乳,輕輕揉摩二十遍,將氣自下丹田微微吸起三十六口,仍用手捧乳,返照調息.久久自然真炁往來,一開一合,養成鄴鄂,神氣充足,真陽自旺,其經水自絕,乳如男子,是謂斬赤龍.如此久久行持,後不必捧乳吸氣,只凝神於炁穴,迴光返照,是謂玄牝之門也....自覺一點靈光,不內不外,自下田上升繹宮、泥丸,下重樓,歸於金胎神室,回光凝神,真息住於中宮鼎內,是神入室矣.是為玄牝,是為胎仙,即一點落黃庭也.其後十月功夫,陽神出現,粉碎虛空,一路修真,與男子同,無彼此之別也.

[112] 子午數合三,戊己號稱五.



[113] 凡人之神,半動於晝而陽明,半靜於夜而陰昏.陽如生,陰如死.修煉之士,必以昏昧而陰者,漸消去之...漸漸逐分掙到消盡十分陰,添足十分陽,謂之純陽.

[114] 抽添者,以鉛制汞之後,逐日運火,漸添汞,汞漸多,鉛漸少,久則鉛將盡,汞亦乾,化而為丹砂,號曰金液還丹之純陽.則知形化為氣,氣化為神,是曰嬰兒,是曰陽神.

[115] 六通者: 天眼通、天耳通、神境通、宿命通、他心通、漏盡通.

[116] 委志歸虛無,無念以為常.

[117] 工夫到此,一個字也用不著.

[118] 蓋身不動,則精固而水朝元.心不動,則氣固而火朝元.真性寂,則魂藏而木朝元.妄情忘,則魄伏而金朝元.四大安和,則意定而土朝元.此謂五炁朝元,皆聚於頂也.

[119] 見雪花,離凡體.

[120] 若出之久,恐神迷失而錯念...故言十步,百步,切宜照顧者,此也...然是時也,入定時多,出定時少.又宜出之勤,而入之速也.

[121] 九年火候真經過,忽爾天門頂中破.真人出現大神通,從此天仙可相賀.

[122] 髮白皆變黑,齒落生舊所,老丁復丁壯,耆嫗成姪女...勤而行之,夙夜不休,伏食三載,輕舉遠遊,跨火不焦,入水不濡,能存能亡,長樂無憂.

[123] 不遇明師莫強猜.

[124] 真人術士非有神,積精累氣以成真.

[125] 委志歸虛無,無念以為常.

[126] 火候不拘時,何勞尋子午?

[127] 有為者,日用之心,無為者,金丹之用心也.

[128] 殊不知真火本無候,大藥不計斤.

[129] 但安神息在天然,晝夜屯蒙法自然,何用孜孜看火候?

[130] 藥非有形之物...並無采法,言采者大謬矣.

[131] 炁滿任督自開.

[132] 金丹火候,全要行為自然.

[133] 到此際,又綿綿若存,清淨無為,自然現出百般妙用景象.

[134] 蓋大道之要,凡屬心知意者,皆非也,但要知人身中一個主宰造化底.且道如今何者為機,若能知此,以靜為本,以定為基,一斡旋,頃刻天機自動,不規中而自規中,不胎息而自胎息,藥不求而自生,火不求而自出,莫非自然妙用.豈持存思持守、苦己勞形,心知之,意為之,然後為道哉.

[135] 人能察心觀性,則圓明之體自現,無為之用自成.

[136] 輕舉遠遊.

[137] 身體常似升龍.

[138] 聚則成形,散則成炁.

[139] 百世以下,遨遊人間.

[140] 夫一年有十二月也,一月三十日也,一日百刻也;一月總計三千刻,十月總計三萬刻.行住坐卧,綿綿若存,胎氣既凝,嬰兒顯相,玄珠成象,太乙含真.故此三萬刻之中,可以奪天上三萬年之數.何也?一刻之功夫,自有一年之節候,所以三萬刻可以奪三萬年之數也.

[141] 和其光,同其塵.

[142] JH stands for *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 (Essential Blossoms of the Daoist Canon), compiled by Xiao Tianshi 蕭天石 and published in Taiwan in 1963. The numbers follow Komjathy 2002.

[143] 太極拳總勢十有三：搯、(才履)、擠、按、採、(才列)、肘、靠、進步、退步、右顧、左盼、中定。按八卦、五行之生剋也。其虛靈、鬆腰、含拔、定虛實、沉墜、用意不用力、上下相隨、內外相合、相連不斷、動中求靜，此太極拳之十要，學者之不二法門也。 For other English renditions, see Liang 1977; Wile 1983.