

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

INNER ALCHEMY (*NEIDAN*)

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## DESCRIPTION

*Neidan* 内丹 or “inner alchemy” refers to a range of esoteric doctrines and practices that adepts use to transcend the individual and cosmological states of being. Although its origins are obscure, scholars have isolated several strands that have contributed to its development. They derived from diverse sources, including classical Daoist texts, correlative cosmology, *Yijing* 易經 (Book of Changes) lore, meditational and physical disciplines of *yangsheng* 養生 (nourishing life), cosmological traditions of *waidan* 外丹 (external alchemy), medical theory, Buddhist soteriology and Confucian moral philosophy. By the twelfth century, adepts had woven these various strands into codified traditions. *Neidan* traditions enabled them to reach their goal by adopting doctrinal elements from these different sources, synthesizing and re-elaborating a range of practices, from physical to meditational, and engaging in intellectual speculation on the nature of being and nonbeing (Robinet 1989, 301; and 1997, 207).

## HISTORY

While today the term *neidan* typically covers this complex of spiritual teachings and their transcendent aims, for most of the last millennium *jindan* 金丹 (Golden Elixir) was a more common designation. The term *neidan* originally had other meanings: at least through the Tang period, it indicated meditation and breathing exercises (Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 178-81), and some Tang and later texts saw *neidan* and *waidan* as different stages or aspects of inner alchemical work (Robinet 1991). These changes in meaning, and the fact that the associated doctrines and practices were highly syncretic parts of local traditions, make it difficult to assign *neidan* a definite starting place. This historical sketch will first explore some early sources, and then highlight the main stages in the development of two overlapping legacies between the late Tang and early Ming periods, the Zhong-Lü 鍾呂 tradition and the Nanzong 南宗 (Southern Lineage).

Current research suggests that *neidan* traditions developed through three main phases: 1. an embryonic phase, with isolated references to notions and figures central to later traditions; 2. “early *neidan*,” basically the Tang period, when *neidan* and cosmological forms of *waidan* interacted in different combinations and with varying emphases; and 3. a mature stage, from the late Tang onwards, marked by adepts’ repeated efforts to codify texts, stabilize language and elaborate standard practices and spiritual genealogies in new cultural and religious circumstances.

**EARLY AND MEDIEVAL SOURCES.** *Neidan* sources do not give historical accounts of the origin of their doctrines. Many assert that divine revelation led to their circulation in the world. Only a few of the divine beings and immortals who made these revelations are well known; most are anonymous. Among the better known is Laozi 老子, who reportedly passed on his inner alchemical teachings to Yin Xi 尹喜 (Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 171-77). Until the late Tang and Song, anonymous immortals and other divine beings are typically the sources of *neidan* traditions. From the eleventh century onward, however, adepts increasingly claim to have derived their teachings from a small group of identifiable transcendent beings.

Several early references show that by the Six Dynasties adepts described inner meditation in terms of alchemical language and symbolism. The *Laozi ming* 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi; dat. 165 C.E.), for instance, states that Laozi “moves in and out of the Elixir Furnace (*dalu* 丹爐), rising from and descending into the Yellow Court (*huangting* 黃庭)” (Seidel 1969, 47-48, 128). This correlation between the Yellow Court (one name for the center of the body) and the Elixir Furnace shows that these terms refer to loci in the person, and that alchemical terms were applied to inner practices as early as the Eastern Han. An early fifth-century Lingbao scripture states that “the Golden Elixir is in your body” (*Bawei zhaolong miaojing* 八威召龍妙經, CT 361; Robinet 1997, 228).

A fuller view of the context for these references appears in Ge Hong’s 葛洪 (283-343) *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (Inner Chapters of the Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature, CT 1185; trl. Ware 1966), completed around 317 and revised around 330. Ge mentions the three *dantian* 丹田 or Elixir Fields (or Cinnabar Fields) in the head, the chest and the abdomen (Ware 1966, 302; Kohn 1993, 199), each governed by the One (Yi 一), a supreme divinity abiding in everyone. He also describes transcendent beings, the Yellow Court, and other loci of the inner body that would later play central roles in *neidan* (Ware 1966, 99-100; see also 121).

Ge Hong’s text shows that the above notions were part of meditational practices in fourth-century Jiangnan 江南 (southern Jiangsu). Their textual foundation is the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Scripture of the Yellow Court), a short, poetical work of the third century that

describes the human body as home to multitudinous divine beings. Among its allusions to meditation and breathing the *Huangting jing* contains alchemical symbolism, mentioning the Elixir Fields, the refining (*lian* 煉) of the primary constituents of the person, and the birth and nourishment of the inner embryo (Hu 1989, 5). Some descriptions of the divinities and the palaces they inhabit in the body also bear the stamp of alchemical imagery.

About half a century after Ge Hong, the *Huangting jing* became a central scripture for Shangqing Daoism. Based on revelations received around Nanjing between 364 and 370, Shangqing teachings emphasized meditation and visualization. Although the school adopted some *waidan* texts of the earlier southern tradition of Taiqing 太清 (Great Clarity), it assigned *waidan* a low place in its hierarchical arrangement of disciplines and practices (Robinet 1984, 1: 35-48; 1995, 16). Since Shangqing saw elixir compounding as primarily image-based meditation, some scholars have seen it as the first unequivocal evidence of the interiorization of the alchemical process (Strickmann 1979, 169-78; Robinet 1984, 1: 176-80).

Within a century of the Shangqing revelations, another set of alchemical doctrines appeared in Jiangnan. Unlike the Taiqing scriptures, this distinctive elixir tradition used alchemical symbolism to guide cosmological speculation. Its alchemical theory became central to most later *neidan* theories.

The main scripture expounding this tradition is the **Zhouyi cantong qi** 周易參同契 (Token for the Agreement of the Three according to the Book of Changes). Traditionally ascribed to a legendary Han immortal, Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, it was originally part of the "Study of the Changes" (*yixue* 易學) traditions, and may have been an apocryphon to the *Yijing*. The dearth of references to the *Cantong qi* in the Six Dynasties has prompted some scholars to suggest that the original work was lost after the Han, and re-written in Tang times (Fukui 1974, 29-30; Chen G. 1983, 352-55). However, citations of the *Cantong qi* by authors with strong links to the Jiangnan region—such as Jiang Yan 江淹 (444-505), Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456-536), Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531-591) and perhaps Ge Hong himself—show that a text with this title circulated at the same time and place where the *Huangting jing* and Shangqing Daoism emerged (Pregadio forthcoming). A poem by Jiang Yan shows that some had already associated the *Cantong qi* with *waidan* before the sixth century (Waley 1930, 8), and suggests that Jiangnan alchemical lineages had turned the original Han text into an alchemical treatise.

The *Cantong qi* uses an obscure metaphoric structure and an extremely complex terminology to link alchemical processes with various cosmogonic and cosmological patterns. The two main emblematic substances in its theories are mercury and lead, symbolizing Real Yin (*zhenyin* 真陰) and Real Yang (*zhenyang* 真陽), respectively. While

the discourse and symbolism of the *Cantong qi* differ from Taiqing and Shangqing alchemy, parallel expressions in the *Huangting jing* suggest that the *Cantong qi* was also influenced by Shangqing forms of alchemical meditation.

In the late **Six Dynasties**, several sources associate *neidan*-like practices with other southern traditions beyond both Jiangnan and Daoist movements (Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 164-71). A Buddhist source, for instance, claims that Deng Yuzhi 鄧郁之 retired on Mount Heng 衡山 (Hunan) at the turn of the sixth century to "cultivate the inner and outer elixirs" (*Nanyue zongsheng ji* 南嶽總勝記, T. 2097). Huisi 慧思 (517-577), who taught the founder of Tiantai 天台 Buddhism, Zhiyi 智顛 (538-597), also resided there. In a vow said to have been taken around 560, Huisi states he would "cultivate the inner elixir (*neidan*) with the help of the external elixir (*waidan*)" (*Nanyue Si dachanshi lishi yuanwen* 南嶽思大禪師立誓願文, T. 1933). Although these sources likely resulted from retrospective hagiographical elaborations rather than from the recording of historical facts, Buddhist and Daoist figures did indeed interact on Mount Heng (and elsewhere). Daoist practices also influenced the development of Tiantai Buddhism, and a later resident on the mountain, the Chan master Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700-791), composed a Buddhist text called the *Cantong qi* (Robson 1995, 245-63).

Elsewhere in the late Six Dynasties, the semi-legendary *neidan* adept Su Yuanlang 蘇元郎 reputedly resided on Mount Luofu 羅浮山 (Guangdong). A passage in the Ming-dynasty *Luofu shan zhi* 羅浮山志 (Gazetteer of Mount Luofu) states that Su directed his disciples to find the medicine of immortality within themselves (Chen G. 1983, 314-18; Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 165-67). Su is also credited with authorship of the *Taiqing shibi ji* 太清石壁記 (Records from the Stone Wall of Great Clarity, CT 881), a *waidan* anthology which nonetheless contains a "Method for Making the Inner Elixir" (2.4b).

THE TANG DYNASTY was a turning point in Chinese alchemy, witnessing both the high point of *waidan* and early systematic presentations of *neidan* teachings (Li D. 1994). Several Tang sources refer to simultaneously preparing elixirs in laboratory crucibles and the human person, showing that adepts often saw *neidan* and *waidan* as part of a single process of cultivation (Meng 1989, 1: 36-38; Needham et al. 1983, 218-29), something also reflected in the shared language and imagery (Meng 1989, 2: 19-21). Theoretical medical writings by Wang Bing 王冰 (fl. 762) provided new cosmological models valuable to *neidan*, and adepts began emphasizing the cultivation of an endowed primordial breath (*yuanyi* 元氣 or *yuanyi zhi qi* 元一之氣) in each person, distinct from ordinary breath (Maspero 1981 [1937], 465-69). Tang practices of *zuowang* 坐忘 (sitting in oblivion; Kohn 1987) and *neiguan* 內觀 (inner contemplation; Kohn 1989) likewise contributed to the elaboration of *neidan* techniques of

meditation. The emphasis in *neiguan* on contemplation and silent meditation rather than the visualization of deities, in part derived from Buddhist meditation, also became part of most later inner alchemy traditions (Sakade 1988; 1991a; Robinet 1997, 202-11).

Two *waidan* commentaries (*Zhouyi cantong qi* 周易參同契, CT 999; and *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu* 周易參同契注, CT 1004) show that the *Cantong qi* reached its present form before the eighth century (Pregadio forthcoming). Thereafter, the *Cantong qi* became central to the development of *neidan*. We see this first in the *Riyue xuanshu lun* 日月玄樞論 (Discourse on the Sun and the Moon, the Mysterious Axis, in *Daoshu* 道樞, CT 1017, 1.10b-11a; better version in *Quan Tang wen* 全唐文, 334.12a-21a) by Liu Zhigu 劉知古 (ab. 661-742). Written during Xuanzong's reign (r. 712-56), this is both the earliest extant essay related to the *Cantong qi* and the first datable *neidan* source. Besides summarizing the *Cantong qi*, the essay emphatically criticizes its *waidan* interpretations. Several other Tang cosmological sources of *waidan* related to the *Cantong qi* are also crucial to developments in *neidan*. They contain much of the same imagery characteristic of later *neidan* works, such as the use of cosmological emblems to represent inner processes (Robinet 1995, 33-36).

At this stage (**seventh to eighth centuries**), *neidan* lacked the stable form it exhibits from the tenth century on. This is seen first of all in the term *neidan* having no constant meaning. A Tang commentary to the *Taixi jing* 胎息經 (Scripture of Embryonic Breathing, CT 130, 1b, 3b) says that *neidan* is the combination of a breathing technique and guarding the spirits of the body (Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 180). The *Lingjian zi* 靈劍子 (Scripture of the Numinous Sword Master, CT 570, 8a) identifies *neidan* with swallowing breath (Meng 1990, 43). Finally, a text attributed to Wu Yun 吳筠 (d. 778), with a spurious preface (Schafer 1981, 381) but likely compiled in the Tang, says that "assembling the (body's) divinities" (*shenji* 神集) produces the inner elixir (*Nantong dajun neidan juuzhang jing* 南統大君內丹九轉經, CT 1054, 1a; Baldrian-Hussein 1990, 180).

Another gauge of developments in *neidan* from Tang times is the **Zhenyuan** 真元 (True Origin) corpus (Robinet 1990). The nine extant texts with this term in their titles likely date from Song times, but were based on mid-Tang materials. Even though much of the vocabulary, imagery and divinities in these texts derive from Shangqing Daoism, they reflect a much broader synthesis. One text claims the *Yijing* and some medical and materia medica works as its foundation, while another bears the stamp of Daoist classical philosophy, *neiguan* contemplation and Buddhist metaphysics. The texts also expound a morality rooted in classical Confucian virtues. The range of elements woven into the Zhenyuan texts point toward the emergence of distinct and comprehensive *neidan* systems.

**THE SONG-YUAN PERIOD.** The more coherent and formalized *neidan* sources surviving after the tenth century show a greater convergence of texts, teachings and masters into discrete and enduring legacies. Adepts who formed these legacies often identified their learning with the oral and literary revelations from a small group of semi-divine figures, reflecting the new priorities of the examination system, civil service, urbanization and economic expansion in that time (Baldrian-Hussein 1986). Their teachings emphasize new forms of self-cultivation grounded in cosmology, traditional self-cultivation disciplines that centered on the body and older forms of Daoist meditation—often parallel with or superior to those available in the highly spiritual Chan Buddhism.

The three main *neidan* legacies that existed between the tenth and fourteenth centuries became known anachronistically as the Zhong-Lü 鍾呂, Nanzong 南宗 (Southern Lineage) and Beizong 北宗 (Northern Lineage, more accurately Quanzhen 全真 or Complete Perfection). Nanzong and Beizong were terms borrowed from earlier usages in Chan Buddhism and literary criticism; they were used by some southern literati-officials close to the new Ming emperor to show that the *neidan* legacy that had received patronage under the Yuan (i.e., the Beizong) was no longer the superior tradition for the new era of Chinese rule. In line with earlier practice, these literati used Nanzong to elevate a southern *neidan* heritage with links to Northern Song traditions and simultaneously demote the Beizong (or Quanzhen), which had been a favorite of many of the early Mongol Khans. Since the Quanzhen movement has a separate article in this volume, the following sketch will focus on the Zhong-Lü and Nanzong legacies.

The activities of the semi-divine pair, **Zhongli Quan** 鍾離權 (2<sup>nd</sup> c.?) and **Lü Dongbin** 呂洞賓 (b. 798?), underlay the main tenth- and eleventh-century *neidan* legacies. Contemporary adepts credited them with an important *neidan* textual corpus and miracles, and developed rituals of worship for them. Today scholars usually use "Zhong-Lü tradition" (Baldrian-Hussein 1984, 23-31; Boltz 1987, 139-43) to refer to the cluster of prose texts whose doctrines apply alchemical language and imagery to earlier regimens of corporeal practice, especially "embryo respiration" (*taixi* 胎息) and "returning the seminal essence to restore the brain" (*huanjing bunao* 還精補腦), with few allusions to cosmological speculation (Robinet 1997, 222). Equally important, however, were the many miracles which they performed for the faithful (Baldrian-Hussein 1986). Both texts and miracles shaped their cults, their worship and their popularity in drama between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries (Hawkes 1981; Baldrian-Hussein 1986).

By the twelfth century, some adepts had begun to see the Zhong-Lü pair together with more recent disciples. Two are particularly im-

portant. In the Poyang 鄱陽 region (Jiangxi), Shi Jianwu 施肩吾 (fl. 820), a late Tang adept of the Xishan 西山 (Western Hills) tradition, was credited with transmitting several texts in the Zhong-Lü legacy, and with inheriting the laboratory alchemy tradition from an important regional saint, Xu Xun 許遜 (239-292/374?). In the north, the adept Liu Haichan 劉海蟬 (fl. 1031) was first a cohort of Zhong-Lü in the heart of early Quanzhen, and was later credited with the status of patriarch and the composition of some important instructional verses.

In the late eleventh century, as the Zhong-Lü legacy flourished in both north and south China, a new tradition emerged in Sichuan, which formed the foundations for the Nanzong legacy (Baldrian-Hussein 1986; Chen B. 1985; Boltz 1987, 173-75; Ren and Chen 1989; Yu 1991). Adepts in this tradition stressed the cosmological underpinnings of *neidan* practices while aiming to refine their spiritual and corporeal aspects; they borrowed from both the Zhong-Lü tradition and Peng Xiao's 彭曉 (d. 955) reworking of the *Cantong qi*. They also fashioned a multi-generational line of patriarchs and made *neidan* central to the new Daoist ritual systems of the period.

In 1069, **Zhang Boduan** 張伯端, secretary of the new governor of Chengdu 成都, received "instructions on the fire-phasing of medicinal ingredients for the Golden Elixir," which he crafted into three series of verses, entitled *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Chapters on Awakening to Perfection, Imai 1962; Fukui 1987; Azuma 1988; 1995; Miyazawa 1988a; Ren L. 1990). They deal with the basic levels of *neidan* practice, and were supplemented by material on higher levels and related notes on Buddhist spiritual cultivation. Zhang spent the final years of his life among officials and Buddhists; he died in 1082 and was cremated by his disciples (Hussein 1976). His writings and post-mortem appearances continued to influence people well beyond the next century.

Until the fall of the Song to the Jurchen in 1126, most of those associated with Zhang's teachings were based in the north. Thereafter, more southerners wrote of Zhang and his teachings, but only as one of many *neidan* traditions. Two twelfth-century adepts who claimed to perpetuate Zhang's teachings in master-disciple relations later became important links in their perpetuation. Shi Tai 石泰 (d. 1158) was a minor Shaanxi official who met Zhang and received his teachings, which he in turn transmitted to the Shaanxi Buddhist monk Xue Shi 薛式 (d. 1175/1191). Most other twelfth-century figures emphasized either direct spiritual encounters with Zhang or possession of *Wuzhen pian* manuscripts. By mid-century, scholar-adepts concerned with the genuine meaning of Zhang's text began writing commentaries, with a split arising between interpreters stressing new cosmological theories and those focusing on Buddhist philosophy.

Early thirteenth-century Fujianese adepts began claiming ties to Zhang's teachings through Shi and Xue. Chen Nan's 陳楠 (d. 1213) disciple, **Bai Yuchan** 白玉蟾 (1194-ca.1227), formed a genealogy for their spiritual practice (Miyakawa 1978; Liang 1993). He and his disciples were among the first to use *neidan* to upgrade some of the new southern Daoist ritual systems and attract the support from literati adepts. In identifying themselves with a single genuine line of transmission stemming from Zhang Boduan, and making Zhang's teachings central to the new Daoist ritual systems they propagated, the circle of disciples around Bai effectively formed the Southern Lineage (Chen B. 1984; Berling 1994; Yokote 1996).

Bai and his major disciples promoted the teachings of his master Chen Nan on *neidan* and Thunder Rituals (*leifa* 雷法), marking the first time that Zhang's teachings become part of Taoist ritual (Strickmann 1975; He 1992). They also repeated Chen's claims that his alchemy had derived from the Buddhist priest, Xue Shi, whose reputed master Shi Tai had said he was Zhang Boduan's disciple. This five-generation line of *jindan* adepts—Zhang Boduan, Shi Tai, Xue Shi, Chen Nan and Bai Yuchan—became the genealogical centerpiece that literati from the early Ming onward would call the Southern Lineage (Imai 1961). Around 1217, Bai and his disciples stopped recognizing Zhang Boduan's instructress as Xihua zhenren 西華真人 and began claiming that Liu Haichan had been Zhang's teacher, effectively grafting Zhang Boduan's line of patriarchs onto the Zhong-Lü tradition. This move appealed to a broader audience of potential literati adepts, since Liu Haichan had ties to northern traditions in Shaanxi. Bai and his literati disciples also made *neidan* practice the heart of Daoist therapeutic and exorcistic ritual practices that had emerged and consolidated in the south during the previous three centuries.

In 1260, a second-generation disciple of Bai Yuchan named **Xiao Tingzhi** 蕭庭芝 (fl.1260) framed the same patriarchy in a thirty-six-generation heritage extending beyond Lord Lao (CT 687, pref. 5a-8a; Yokote 1990). Xiao portrayed this heritage as dividing, after Liu Haichan, into a branch passing through Zhang Boduan and his successors (called the Southern Lineage a century later), and another branch passing to Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (1113-70) and his seven major Quanzhen disciples (the later Northern Lineage). For Xiao, both legacies had their roots in the Zhong-Lü-Liu tradition of Shaanxi, but the former, to which he was privy, was superior. This genealogy was included in a text dated 1298 (*Daode zhenjing sanjie* 道德真經三解, CT 687, pref. 2b). Its patterns of citation show a preference for the legacy Xiao inherited, similar to the preferences of other southern adepts.

In the YUAN AND EARLY MING, all three *neidan* codifications developed and consolidated further. Although the main centers of

**Quanzhen** teachings remained in the north, some Quanzhen adepts began promoting their teachings in the south, which resulted in a mix of traditions promoted by Bai on contemplation and exorcism. Among the best known figures for their *neidan* writings in the Yuan were Li Daochun 李道純 (fl. 1288-90), his disciple Miao Shanshi 苗善時 (fl. 1288-1324) of Jiangsu and Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (1289-after 1335) of northern Jiangxi (Sun 1968; Chen B. 1986; Yokote 1990). All three claimed to have inherited the Golden Elixir heritage through the legacy of Bai Yuchan, but were also familiar with Quanzhen teachings and saw them all as originating from Lü Dongbin. By the end of the Yuan and the beginning of the Ming, the teachings of the three main *neidan* traditions circulated among various literati interested in self-cultivation and cosmological speculation, as well as among adepts wanting to practice the new Daoist ritual in their local communities. Some early Ming literati from Zhejiang enshrined the regional line of spiritual patriarchs between Zhang Boduan and Bai Yuchan as the Nanzong, implicitly demoting the Quanzhen movement by giving it the inferior label Beizong and inaugurating a new spiritual heritage within the cultural foundations of the Ming dynasty.

#### TEXTS

Most of the roughly 150 *neidan* writings in the *Daozang* are either independent works dealing with doctrines or practices, or annotations of important scriptures. Collections from late imperial times—notably the *Daozang xubian* 道藏續編 (1834), the *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (1906), the *Daozang jinghua lu* 道藏精華錄 (1922), the *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華 (1963, with later additions) and the *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (1992, 1995)—have much higher percentages and numbers of *neidan* texts, suggesting a growing popularity among literati. The present survey centers on early texts and commentaries, the main sources of the early Zhong-Lü tradition and representative works of the Nanzong heritage (see also Li Y. 1988, 163-211; Ren J. 1991; Pregadio 1996).

**EARLY CLASSICS.** The **Huangting jing** (Scripture of the Yellow Court; trl. Huang 1992, 221-54; Saso 1995; partial trl. Kohn 1993, 181-88; Kroll 1996) appears in two recensions: a *Neijing jing* 內景經 (Scripture of Inner Effulgences), in 437 heptasyllabic lines divided into thirty-six sections, and a shorter *Waijing jing* 外景經 (Scripture of Outer Effulgences) in 194 heptasyllabic lines divided into three parts. While scholars agree that the “Inner” version emerged from the Shangqing milieu, opinions differ on its relation to the “Outer” version. Some hold that the “Outer” version summarizes the “Inner” version (Wang M. 1984, 329-38), while oth-

ers argue that the “Inner” version is an expansion of the “Outer” version (Schipper 1975, 2-11; Strickmann 1981, 68). Still others assert that, whatever the dates of these texts, the two versions were texts for initiates and non-initiates, respectively (Robinet 1993, 56-59). Mugitani (1981, 31-37) cogently argues that the “Inner” version derived from the “Outer.”

The *Huangting jing* describes the human person and his inner divinities (Robinet 1993, 55-96; Despeux 1994, 108-33, *passim*; Homann 1971). After describing the revelation of the scripture, the text reviews the gods of the head (sect. 7 of the “Inner” version) and the viscera (sects. 8-15), giving their names and details on their physical appearance and garments to aid adepts in visualizing them. Most of the rest alludes to breathing and meditation techniques. The conception of the person in the *Huangting jing* partly overlaps with what may be an earlier text, the *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Scripture of Laozi, CT 1168, *Yunji qiqian* 18-19; see Schipper 1979; 1995; Maeda 1988).

The main early commentaries date from the Tang period. One is by Liangqiuzi 梁丘子 (Bai Lizhong 白履忠, fl. 729) and another is ascribed to the immortal Wuchengzi 務成子. Liangqiuzi wrote the *Huangting neijing yuying zhu* 黃庭內景玉經註 (CT 263, j. 55-57, and CT 402, 3 j.) and the *Huangting waijing yuying zhu* 黃庭外景玉經註 (CT 263, j. 58-60). Wuchengzi's commentary is in the *Taishang huangting waijing jing* 太上黃庭外景經 (*Yunji qiqian* 12.28a-56b). The initial portion of his work on the “Inner” version is preserved in the *Shangqing huangting neijing jing* 上清黃庭內景經 (*Yunji qiqian* 11-12.27b), which continues with Liangqiuzi's commentary from section 3 onwards.

The **Cantong qi** set out the doctrinal foundation for much of *waidan* and the whole of *neidan* (Zhou and Pan 1981; Meng 1993a; Meng and Meng 1993; trl. Zhou 1988; Wu and Davis 1932). Two *waidan* commentaries (*Zhouyi cantong qi*, CT 999, 3 j.; and *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu*, CT 1004, 2 j.) are our closest witnesses of its Tang editions, but six other *neidan* exegeses are found in the *Daozang*. Altogether, at least forty commentaries are extant in more than two hundred editions, excluding reprints.

**Peng Xiao** 彭曉 (d. 955), zi Yongchuan 永川, hao Zhenyizi 真一子, wrote the *Zhouyi cantong qi fen zhang tong zhenyi* 周易參同契分章通真義 (Real Meaning of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, Arranged into Paragraphs, CT 1002, 3 j.), with a preface dated 947; this is the earliest extant *neidan* commentary to the text (Meng 1993b, 41-44; Robinet 1995, 36-39; Li D. 1996). Peng substantially rearranged the Tang text of the *Cantong qi*, dividing it into ninety paragraphs and putting the portion entitled “Song of the Tripod” (*Dingqi ge* 鼎器歌) in a separate section, relocating several phrases and changing many characters. However, because Bao Huanzhi 鮑澣之 (fl. 1207-10) modi-

fied Peng's edition in 1208, we do not know the exact extent of Peng's editorial work. Bao's remarks imply that the original recension was closer to the Tang text than the current version (Pregadio 1995, 171). His postface, together with the "Song" and the "Eulogium" (*Zanxu* 讚序) and a cosmological diagram by Peng Xiao (Needham and Lu 1983, 55-59), is printed separately in the *Daozang* as *Zhouyi cantong qi dingqi ge mingjing tu* 周易參同契鼎器歌明鏡圖 (The Song of the Tripod and the Diagram of the Bright Mirror of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, CT 1003, 12 pp.).

**Zhu Xi's** 朱熹 (1130-1200) fame in the last two dynasties ensured that his *Zhouyi cantong qi kaoyi* 周易參同契考異 (A Critical Investigation of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, CT 1001, 3 j.), written between late 1197 and early 1198, became the best known commentary outside the alchemical tradition (Azuma 1984; Wong 1978a). The text offers a cosmological interpretation of the *Cantong qi* which downplays its alchemical import. Contrary to the promises of the title and remarks in the author's postface, the *Kaoyi* has only a few critical notes and ignores variants and emendations that Zhu Xi points out elsewhere. This suggests that most of the critical notes were expunged either by Huang Ruijie 黃瑞節, who edited the text in 1335 for inclusion in his *Zhuizi chengshu* (Complete Works of Master Zhu), or by an earlier unknown editor.

**Yu Yan's** 俞琰 (1258-1314) remarkable *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui* 周易參同契發揮 (Elucidation of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, CT 1005, 3 j.), with a preface dated 1284, includes a collection of textual notes separately printed in the *Daozang* as *Zhouyi cantong qi shiyi* 周易參同契釋疑 (Explication of Doubtful Points in the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, CT 1006, 25 pp.). The *Fahui* is firmly rooted in the main *neidan* textual legacy, quoting from nearly one hundred texts valued by this heritage. Yu Yan also wrote a work explaining how to apply the *Yijing* to alchemy, entitled *Yuwai biezhuan* 易外別傳 (The Separate Transmission of the Changes, CT 1009, 24 pp.; Zhan 1989, 83-96).

**MISCELLANEOUS EARLY WORKS.** Other short works became canonical for *neidan* adepts before the *Wuzhen pian* in the late eleventh century. Among the most prominent was the *Yinfu jing* 陰符經 (Scripture of the Hidden Talisman; or Scripture for Joining with Obscurity; trl. Rand 1979, 133-37), which dates from the late sixth century. As an alleged revelation from the Yellow Emperor, known as the ancestor of the Song dynasty, the *Yinfu jing* became canonical in bibliographies from this time. Because *yinfu* originated as a military term, some have made military interpretations of the cryptic text, suggesting that the work itself may have originated as a military treatise (Reiter 1984). The *Yinfu jing* presents a view of the grand cosmic order through recondite statements, and is often quoted in *neidan* texts (Robinet 1997, 210-11; Miyakawa 1984a, 1984b). There are two main editions, an older one of 300 characters and a more re-

cent one of 400 characters, with several dozen commentaries extant, the two better known being those by Li Quan 李筌 (8<sup>th</sup> c.; see Rand 1979; Li G. 1992) and Zhu Xi (Sueki 1984).

The *Ruyao jing* 入藥鏡 (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) is attributed to Cui Xifan 崔希范 (fl. 880-940; see Wang J. 1987). All but one edition consists of three-character lines, and the other is in prose with a preface dated 940. The earliest version by this title is a verse in Zeng Cao's *Daoshu* 道樞 (CT 1017, j. 37; Boltz 1987, 234). About a century after Zeng, Xiao Tingzhi (fl. 1260) added notes as the *Jiezhu Cui gong Ruyao jing* 解注崔公入藥鏡 (The Annotated *Ruyao jing* by the Honorable Cui), which asserts that the text deals with sexual practices. His commentary is found in the *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (CT 263, 13.1a-9b) with a very different prose work entitled *Tianyuan ruyao jing* 天元入藥鏡 (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine of the Celestial Primordial, CT 263, 21.6b-9b). It contains a preface signed by Cui Xifan and dated 940. This latter text appears in a chapter signed by a Linwu shanren 林屋山人 (probably Yu Yan 俞琰) that discusses the reworking of Cui Xifan's text. Finally, from around the same time, the Yuan scholar Wang Jie 王介 (fl. 1310) of Nanchang 南昌 (Jiangxi) annotated the basic verse as the *Cui gong Ruyao jing zhujie* 崔公入藥鏡註解 (Annotations to the *Ruyao jing* by the Honorable Cui, CT 135, 16 pp.). All of these variant versions need to be studied in greater detail to unravel their provenance and specific aims.

Finally, the *Qinyuan chun* 沁園春 (Springtime in Qin Gardens; trl. Baldrian-Hussein 1985), the only major early work in verse ascribed to Lü Dongbin, is a set of lyrics (*ci* 詞) which existed before the mid-eleventh century. Two commentaries on the verse from between 1260 and 1310 survive in the *Daozang*. The first, *Jiezhu Lü gong Qinyuan chun* 解注呂公沁園春 (The Annotated *Qinyuan chun* by the Honorable Lü, CT 263, 13.9b-17b), is by Xiao Tingzhi; the second, *Lü Chunyang zhenren Qinyuan chun danci zhujie* 呂純陽真人沁園春丹詞註解 (Annotations to the Elixir Lyric *Qinyuan chun* by the Honorable Lü, CT 136, 11 pp.), is by Yu Yan.

**ZHONG-LÜ TEXTS.** The basic Zhong-Lü texts are in prose and focus on linking corporeal practices to cosmic patterns. The *Baiwen pian* 百問篇 (Chapter with a Hundred Questions, CT 1017, j. 5; trl. Homann 1976) has Zhongli Quan respond to queries from Lü Dongbin in simple, straightforward prose on microcosm-macrocosm correspondences. The main Zhong-Lü text, called either the *Chuandao pian* 傳道篇 (Chapters on Transmitting the Way, CT 1017, j. 39-41) or the *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* 種呂傳道集 (Anthology of the Transmission of the Way from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin, CT 263, j. 14-16; Sakauchi 1985), contains eighteen systematic essays on the doctrines and practices central to this legacy. It closely parallels the *Michuan Zhengyang zhenren Lingbao bifa*

祕傳正陽真人靈寶畢法 (The Concluding Numinous Treasure Rites, Secretly Transmitted by Perfected' Zhongli Zhengyang, CT 1191, 1 j., abbreviated as the *Lingbao pian* 靈寶篇 [Chapter on the Numinous Treasure], CT 1017, j. 42; trl. Baldrian-Hussein 1984) and elaborates Zhong-Lü practices. The *Xishan qunxian huizhen ji* 西山羣仙會真記 (Anthology of the Transcendent Hordes and Assembled Perfected of the Western Hills, CT 246, 5 j.; *Huizhen pian* 會真篇 [Chapters on the Assembled Perfected], CT 1017, j. 38; j. 4.2b credits it to Liu Haichan), ascribed to a follower of Shi Jianwu named Li Song 李聶, contains twenty-five systematic essays (*pian* 篇) on a wide range of topics, including longevity and *neidan* practices.

*THE WUZHEN PIAN* 悟真篇 (Chapters on Awakening to Perfection) is a seminal *neidan* text composed by Zhang Boduan 張伯端 around 1075 from revelations he received in 1069 (Wong 1978b; Kaltenmark 1972-73; Boltz 1987, 173-74; Yan 1992-94; trl. Davis and Chao 1939; Cleary 1987; Robinet 1995). It is the most renowned collection of verses on alchemy compiled in the Northern Song, and became central to the Nanzong heritage around Bai Yuchan. The number of its annotations are second only to those of the *Cantong qi* (Qiu 1989 [1713]). The core of the work consists of stanzas divided into sets of sixteen, sixty-four and twelve verses (corresponding to various sets of cosmological aspects of the universe), which systematically deal with the fundamental stages of *neidan* practice. Most editions add thirty-two supplementary essays and songs to the main text on more spiritual aspects of self-cultivation related to Buddhism (Imai 1962; Azuma 1986). None of the six editions in the *Daozang* are identical, because the text passed through independent lines of transmission in the Yuan and Ming.

The earliest version of the *Wuzhen pian* is **Zeng Cao's** abbreviated version in his *Daoshu* (CT 1017, j. 18; Miyazawa 1988), which is identical with parts of existing editions. A commentary by Ye Wenshu 葉文叔, based on cosmological theories, appeared in 1161 (parts in CT 263, j. 26-30) and provoked criticisms and a new interpretation by Weng Baoguang 翁葆光 (fl. 1173-75) of Siming 四明 (Zhejiang). Weng's commentaries and supplementary materials highlight the parallels between the *Wuzhen pian* and Chan Buddhism (*Wuzhen pian zhushu* 悟真篇註疏, CT 141, 8 j.; *Wuzhen zhizhi xiangshuo sansheng miyao* 悟真直指詳說三乘祕要, CT 143, 33 pp.; *Wuzhen pian shiyi* 悟真篇拾遺, CT 144, 11 pp.). The Zhejiang scholar **Dai Qizong** 戴起宗 (fl. 1333-37) later augmented and re-edited them (CT 141, CT 143). Another annotated edition with an undated preface by Weng (CT 145, 3 j.) has many textual variants in comparison to the above commentary. An overlapping, but still distinct, tradition of interpretation bears the names **Xue Shi** (mostly assembled from Weng Baoguang's writings), Lu Shu 陸壑 and Chen Zhixu, and was edited by the latter around 1335 (*Wuzhen pian sanzhu* 悟真篇三註, CT 142,

5 j.). Finally, **Xia Yuanding** 夏元鼎 (fl. 1225-27), associated with several figures in the circle of Bai Yuchan, compiled a commentary to Zhang's work (*Wuzhen pian jiangyi* 悟真篇講義, CT 146, 7 j.) with prefaces by the scholar-officials Liu Yuangang 留元剛 (fl. 1210-28) and Zhen Dexiu 真德秀 (1178-1235).

Besides the *Wuzhen pian*, another famous *neidan* work bearing Zhang Boduan's name is the **Jindan sibai zi** 金丹四百字 (Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir, CT 263, j. 4, and CT 1081, 11 pp.; trl. Davis and Chao 1940a; Cleary 1986). Its earliest commentary dates from 1240, but was likely transmitted by Ma Ziran 馬自然 to Bai Yuchan before 1218. The *Yuqing jinsi Qinghua miwen jinbao nei liandan jue* 玉清金笥青華祕文金寶內鍊丹訣 (Instructions on the Inner Refinement of the Elixir, [based on] the Green Florescence [Perfected's] Secret Writ and Golden Treasure, from the Golden Lockbox of Jade Purity, CT 240, 3 j.; Davis and Chao 1940b) also dubiously claims to originate with Zhang Boduan. This highly theoretical work, which contains much of the language of neo-classical Confucian philosophy, likely does not date before Ming times.

**NEIDAN COMPENDIA.** The earliest extant compendium of *neidan* writings is the **Da huandan zhaojian** 大還丹照鑒 (Reflective Mirror of the Great Cyclically-Transformed Elixir, CT 926, 23 pp., pref. 962; Boltz 1987, 174). Its thirty-four separate sections include many early works otherwise lost, and duplicates some texts published elsewhere in the *Daozang*, such as Tao Zhi's 陶埴 *Neidan fu* 內丹賦 (Rhyme-prose on the Inner Elixir; close to the *Jindan fu* 金丹賦, CT 259).

The **Daoshu** 道樞 (Pivotal Essentials of the Way, CT 1017, 42 j.) is a compendium of self-cultivation texts assembled by the Jinjiang 晉江 (Fujian) scholar Zeng Cao 曾慥 (fl. 1131-55). While its exact date is unknown, it may have been compiled around 1150, when Zeng completed his famous *Leishuo* 類說 encyclopedia. Its forty-two chapters include summaries, abbreviations and full texts on various aspects of self-cultivation, separated into 118 *pian* which draw from 108 separate titles (Miyazawa 1988a; 1988b; Boltz 1987, 231-34). It was one of various attempts by early Southern Song scholars to recoup the traditions lost or destroyed by the fall of the Northern Song to the Jurchen and to recover some of their cultural dignity. Selections range from parts of the early medical classics to those of the famous Northern Song scholar, Chao Jiong 晁迥 (951-1034), to Zhang's *Wuzhen pian*. Zeng Cao also includes texts under the names of Tang and Five Dynasties figures such as Li Guangxuan 李光玄, Ye Fashan 葉法善 (616-720?), Liu Zhigu and Shi Jianwu, and long variant quotations from the treatise attributed to Tan Qiao 譚峭, the *Huashu* 化書 or "Book of Transformations" (j. 1, here called the *Wuhua pian* 五化篇; see Didier 1999). It also contains one-third of a

series of 100 alchemical verses (j. 13) by the Tiantai adept Zhang Wumeng 張無蒙 (fl. 985-1065) and a set of essays on the *Cantong qi* (j. 32-34). Besides including the Zhong-Lü tradition's *Baiwen pian* (j. 5), the work ends with two complete treatises from this tradition (j. 39-41, *Chuandao pian* and j. 42, *Lingbao pian*).

The *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (Ten Compilations on Cultivating Perfection, CT 263, 60 j.; Boltz 1987, 234-37) is an anonymous collection of writings subdivided into ten "written compilations" (*shu* 書). Completed around the year 1300, it is the consummate assemblage of Golden Elixir teachings in the line of Zhang Boduan and Bai Yuchan. Its ten separate titles aim to guide its readers toward "cultivating perfection," a common synonym for *neidan* practices in imperial times. While the latest date in the work (1244) is by the otherwise unknown Liao Zheng 寥正, there are two references to later figures, an heir to the Song throne named Zhao Ruqu 趙汝渠 who had a post in Jianning and a Linwu yiren 林屋逸人, likely referring to Yu Yan.

The ten compilations are:

1. *Zazhu zhixuan pian* 雜著指玄篇 (Chapters by Various Authors on Pointing to the Mysteries, j. 1-8), with writings and diagrams related to Bai Yuchan and his teachings;
2. *Jindan dacheng ji* 金丹大成集 (Great Compendium on the Golden Elixir, j. 9-13), an anthology of writings on the Golden Elixir by Bai's second-generation disciple Xiao Tingzhi;
3. *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* 種呂傳道集 (j. 14-16), said to be transmitted by Shi Jianwu;
4. *Zazhu jiejing* 雜著捷徑 (Short-cuts by Various Authors, j. 17-25), by authors such as Zeng Cao and Yu Yan;
5. *Wuzhen pian* (j. 26-30), by Zhang Boduan with annotations by Ye Wenshu, Yuan Gongfu 袁公輔 (fl. 1204), and others;
6. *Yulong ji* 玉隆集 (Anthology of the Yulong Temple, j. 31-36) centered on the Xu Xun 許遜 cult on Xishan 西山 (Jiangxi);
7. *Shangqing ji* 上清集 (Anthology of the Shangqing Temple, j. 37-44) centered on the Celestial Masters of Longhu shan 龍虎山 (Jiangxi);
8. *Wuyi ji* 武夷集 (Anthology of the Wuyi Abbey, j. 45-52) centered on the ritual activities in northern Fujian, all by Bai Yuchan and his disciples;
9. *Panshan yulu* 盤山語錄 (Recorded Sayings of [Wang] of Panshan, j. 53, a rearrangement of CT 1059), by Wang Zhijin 王志謹 (1178-1263) and his disciples;
10. *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (j. 54-60), with two Tang commentaries.

The text aims to show the continuity of Golden Elixir teachings from early times to the present and their relevance to Chan Buddhist con-

templation, Neo-Confucian moral self-cultivation and Daoist ritual practice.

LATER WORKS. Two works organized similarly to the *Wuzhen pian* were ascribed to two successive generations of Zhang's disciples and became integral parts of the Nanzong heritage. These are Shi Tai's 石泰 *Huanyuan pian* 還源篇 (Chapters for Returning to the Well-springs, CT 1091, 9 pp., and CT 263, 2.1a-13b) and Xue Shi's 薛式 *Huandan fuming pian* 還丹復命篇 (Chapters for Restoring Destiny via the Cyclically Transformed Elixir, CT 1088, 11 pp., and CT 263, 7.4b-10b). The received versions of both works bear prefaces with late Northern Song dates. Yu Yan suggested that the similarity between the terminology and phrasing in these two works and writings by Bai Yuchan made their ascribed authorship suspicious. The work ascribed to Shi Tai consists of 85 five-syllable verses in the cut-off form, all dealing with the Golden Elixir. Although the independently circulating text has no preface, the version in the *Xiuzhen shishu* has an undated preface signed by Shi Tai. The more complicated independent work ascribed to Xue Shi has sixteen five-syllable regulated verses and nine lyrics in the "Xijiang yue" 西江月 (West River Moon) tune, followed by a separate collection of thirty-four songs called *Dansui ge* 丹髓歌 (Songs on the Marrow of the Elixir). The version in the *Xiuzhen shishu* contains the same songs, but unlike the previous version has an afterword by Shi Tai.

Texts signed with **Chen Nan's** 陳楠 (d. 1213) name include those dealing with both *neidan* and Daoist ritual, and are part of sources compiled by Chen's disciple, Bai Yuchan or his followers. The *Cuixu pian* 翠虛篇 (A Folio of [Chen] Cuixu, CT 1090, 26 pp.) has an undated preface by the Yuan scholar Wang Sicheng 王思誠 (1291-1357), who says that the work is the culmination of Zhang Boduan's teachings on the Golden Elixir (Boltz 1987, 175). A work entitled *Cuixu pian* in the *Xiuzhen shishu* (CT 263, 17.1a-22b) is attributed to Chen Pu 陳朴 and followed by a different set of *neidan* instructions called "Secret Instructions on the Ninefold Cycles of the Golden Elixir."

Several *Daozang* works perpetuate the teachings and traditions of the Fujianese painter, alchemist and Daoist **Bai Yuchan** (1194-1227), some relating to his contemplative practices, others to his ritual activities (Imai 1963; Yokote 1996). Certain significant treatises resulted from the teaching encounters of his disciples: the *Haiqiong chuandao ji* 海瓊傳道集 (Anthology of [Bai of] Haiqiong's Transmission of the Way, CT 1309, 16 pp.), *Haiqiong wendao ji* 海瓊問道集 (Anthology of [Bai of] Haiqiong's Queries on the Way, CT 1308, 21 pp.) and the *Haiqiong Bai zhenren yulu* 海瓊白真人語錄 (Recorded Sayings of Perfected Bai of Haiqiong, CT 1307, 4 j.). A fourth work, the *Jingyu xuanwen* 靜餘玄問 (Tranquil Remnants and Abstruse Queries, CT 1252, 6 pp.), contains several identical passages as the *yulu*.



Finally, most of the first compilation of the *Xiuzhen shishu* contains teachings either from the hand of or reshaped by Bai Yuchan.

The Yizhen (Jiangsu) adept, exegete and Daoist priest **Li Daochun** 李道純 (fl. 1288-90) was among the first to revere both the legacy of Zhang Boduan and the Quanzhen patriarchy. He has left us the most complete record of contemplative alchemy among literati in early Yuan times. From the eighteenth century onward, his teachings were associated with what scholars now call—in symmetry to the Southern and Northern Lineages—the Central Branch (*zhongpai* 中派) of *neidan*. His teachings stressed the similarities between the Buddhist Prajñāpāramāta tradition, the Daoist classics, the teachings of early Chan Buddhist masters, the cosmological speculations of Zhou Dunyi 周敦頤 (1017-73) and the ideas of earlier alchemists like Zhang Boduan, Bai Yuchan and Wang Chongyang. The most renowned work containing his teachings was the *Zhonghe ji* 中和集 (Anthology of Medial Harmony, CT 249, 6 j.; Boltz 1987, 181-82). His *Qing'an Yingchanzi yulu* 清庵瑩蟾子語錄 (Recorded Sayings of [Li] Qing'an, the Master of the Shining Toad, CT 1060, 6 j.; Boltz 1987, 180-81) is a treasure trove of material related to his teachings among his disciples in Jiangsu, and bears comparison with the extensive writings of his disciple Miao Shanshi 苗善時 (fl. 1288-1324; see Boltz 1987, 182-83).

By the first third of the fourteenth century, **Chen Zhixu** 陳致虛 (*hao* Shangyangzi 上楊子; 1289-after 1335, from Luling 廬陵 in Jiangxi) sought to identify the Way of the Golden Elixir with Quanzhen. While claiming to have inherited the tradition of the Song imperial clansmen Zhao Youqin 趙友欽 on Mount Heng in 1329, Chen asserted that he did not come to a genuine understanding until discovering the teachings of the Elder of the Qingcheng Mountains 青城山 (Sichuan). Chen's written genealogy, moreover, grafts the line of Zhao Youqin's two immediate predecessors onto a leading line of Quanzhen patriarchs. Simultaneously he places the patriarchy stemming from Zhang Boduan in an inferior position, thereby effectively identifying the Golden Elixir heritage (which had developed and circulated in the south) with the Quanzhen heritage. While Chen sometimes refers to himself as a Complete Perfection master, the significance he intended by this term is hard to determine. He compiled the most comprehensive set of treatises devoted to all aspects of the Golden Elixir heritage to date, spanning from practice and doctrine to hagiography and genealogy (*Shangyangzi jindan dayao* 上陽子金丹大要 [Great Essentials on the Golden Elixir of Shangyangzi], CT 1067; *Shangyangzi jindan dayao tu* 圖 [Diagrams], CT 1068; *Shangyangzi jindan dayao liexian zhuan* 列仙傳 [Hagiographies of the Transcendents], CT 1069; *Shangyangzi jindan dayao xianpai* 仙派 [Genealogical Account of the Transcendents], CT 1070), as well as a celebrated commentary to the *Cantong-qi* (*Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang zhu*

周易參同契分章注 [Commentary to the *Zhouyi cantong qi*, Arranged into Paragraphs]), not included in the *Daozang* but available in several other collections and independent editions.

#### WORLDVIEW

**DEFINITION.** The term *neidan* and its synonym *jindan* refer to three things: 1. a coherent body of oral and written teachings; 2. regimens of practices related to these teachings; and 3. an inner state realized through these practices. Reaching this state derives from generating and nourishing the perfected or realized one's (*zhenren* 真人) "holy embryo" (*shengtai* 聖胎).

Cosmological and alchemical emblems represent both the nature of reality and the process of self-realization. These emblems describe cosmogonic stages with the corresponding cosmological configurations, and the inversion of the cosmogonic process with return (*fan* 反) to the pre-cosmological state of being. *Neidan*, therefore, uses cosmological language both to articulate the fundamental patterns of the cosmos and to guide adepts to a primordial order. This distinguishes *neidan* from other modes of contemplation and physiological practices, allowing it to become a vehicle for intellectual speculation (Robinet 1997, 107, 216-17).

Authors such as Li Daochun, Chen Zhixu and Liu Yiming 劉一明 emphasize two routes to realizing *neidan*, sometimes designating them *shangde* 上德 or "higher virtue" and *xiade* 下德 or "lower virtue," terms found in both the *Laozi* (ch.38) and the *Cantong qi*. The way of lower virtue moves from the cosmos as we know it to its ultimate source and is based on self-conscious activity (*youwei* 有為). It requires discipline and uses cosmological and alchemical emblems as tools to guide the inner process of realization. The way of higher virtue, by contrast, starts with the awareness of the fundamental nature of reality and the human being. It is based on spontaneous, unself-conscious and non-intervening activity (*wuwei* 無為), permitting the immediate recognition of the real nature of oneself and the cosmos. Adepts only received it by direct transmission (*shouzhuàn* 手傳) from master to disciple.

**SYNCRETISM.** The lack of a central unifying authority meant that a multiplicity of local interpretations for *neidan* traditions could still share common doctrinal foundations. This ensured adepts in these traditions could relate themselves with ideas and practices of other traditions while retaining the emphasis of their teachers. Among the important sources of doctrines, notions and terms for *neidan* authors are Daoist classics like the *Laozi* and the *Zhuangzi*; the *Yi-jing* and other sources of classical cosmology; medical canons like the various recensions of the *Huangdi neijing* 黃帝內經 (Inner Scripture of

the Yellow Emperor); and, to a lesser extent, some early Confucian works like the *Zhongyong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the Mean) and Buddhist scriptures like the *Prajñāpāramitā-sūtra* (Sūtra of the Perfection of Wisdom).

The claim of the unity of three teachings (*sanjiao* 三教, i.e., Daoism, Buddhism and Confucianism) is an obvious expression of *neidan* syncretism. Common from Song times on, syncretism became fundamental to Ming and Qing traditions (Robinet 1995, 50-74; Dean 1998, 21-28; see also Liu 1984). *Neidan* masters often knew Buddhism and classical modes of self-cultivation, just as some Buddhists and classically-trained adepts mastered the new *neidan* traditions. This underlies their claims that realizing Nonbeing (*wu* 無) was the same as realizing Emptiness (*kong* 空), and that a “return to the origin” (*huanyuan* 還元) in *neidan* was the same as the Chan goal of returning to the “original mind” (*benxin* 本心; Li M. 1988; Robinet 1995, 74; Boltz 1987, 235-36). *Neidan* also provided a conduit for transmitting earlier philosophical and cosmological notions to Neo-Confucianism (Robinet 1997, 216; Imai 1960).

Various earlier practices were incorporated in *neidan* with modifications, such as breathing techniques (e.g., *taixi* or embryonic breathing), absorbing the essences of the Five Agents in the viscera and forms of meditation such as *zuowang* and *neiguan*. *Waidan* also gave *neidan* a rich stock of terms—names and secret terms of substances, instruments, and operations—and, more importantly, the binary model of the alchemical process based on the conjunction of Real Lead and Real Mercury.

**ORDERING DOCTRINES AND PRACTICES.** Because *neidan* was linked to a range of traditions and practices, some authors arranged them into stages (Robinet 1997, 252-56). Li Daochun devised the most elaborate classification, ranking the various “paths” (*dao* 道) into three main clusters (*Zhonghe ji* 2.12b-17a). The first, called Nine Grades (*jiupin* 九品), includes sexual practices, *waidan*, observing precepts, reciting scriptures, minor rites, diets, massage, *daoyin* 導引, breathing, circulating and ingesting *qi*, absorbing solar and astral essences, meditation, visualization, and other similar practices and techniques. The second, reaching into inner alchemy proper, consists of the Three Vehicles of Gradual Methods (*jianfa sansheng* 漸法三乘), corresponding to physiological, psychological, and spiritual *neidan* practices, respectively. Like other authors, Li Daochun locates a final cluster above the second, calling it the Most High One Vehicle (*zui-shang yisheng* 最上一乘), which is distinguished by nonactivity and by the spontaneous integration of one’s original nature (*xing* 性) with being in the world or “destiny” (*ming* 命), of one’s original nature with affections (*qing* 情), and of concentration (*ding* 定) with wisdom (*hui* 慧).

The outline of *neidan* doctrines in this and the following sections is mostly based on the Nanzong and later codifications. They, in turn, based their doctrines on classical cosmogonic and cosmological theories. Writers of inner alchemical works fully accepted classical views on the generation of the cosmos, the correspondences among its different plans and entities and the arrangements of cosmological emblems. However, they also stressed that these emblems are essentially “images” (*xiang* 象), mediating absolute existence and the mundane world (Robinet 1993, 48-54; 1995, 84-90). Cosmological notions and terms help structure and guide early phases of the *neidan* process by framing both its teachings and its practices. Still, they are simply, in Li Daochun’s words, an attempt to “render the Formless into form, and thereby manifest the authentic, absolute Dao” (*Zhonghe ji* 3.13a; Robinet 1995, 75-102).

While this awareness paradoxically seems to sanction an unrestricted freedom to multiply images and words (see Needham et al. 1983, 49-67; Meng 1990), the transcendent, speechless level of the Dao underlies all symbols and emblems. Notions and images illustrate the phases of the formation of the cosmos and help the adept to understand this process. Once understood, adepts may follow it in reverse. To do so, *neidan* continues basic notions of both classical Daoist thought and correlative cosmology, while stressing the awareness that cosmogony—which in *neidan* is a movement from the absolute to the conditioned—does not take place *in illo tempore* but is part of a regular process both fixed and perceived by the mind.

These ideas find their classical formulation in the *Laozi* (chap. 42), which is often quoted in *neidan* sources. This passage describes the cosmogonic process as moving from Nonbeing or the Dao to Oneness; the One then spontaneously divides into the two complementary principles (yin/yang), which in turn generate the “ten thousand things” (*wanwu* 萬物) or the manifest cosmos. This sequence also underlies *neidan* practice as it seeks to reverse the process in order to return to Nonbeing. After recovering the particles of original yin and yang energies which normally dissipate, the adept refines them and fuses them into the state of undifferentiated Oneness. This primeval, atemporal state has many names, among them *chunyang* 純陽 or Pure Yang, and is represented by the elixir, gold, Real Lead or the unbroken line of the *Yijing* (Robinet 1995, 114-20; Pregadio 1995, 160-62). Once this “particle” (*dian* 點) of Pure Yang is recovered, the adept can proceed further to gain access to the state of Nonbeing or the Dao itself.

The cosmogonic stages through the division of the One into the two are embodied in the “prenatal” state “before Heaven” (*xiantian* 先天), while the cosmos of ordinary perception is called the “postnatal” state “after Heaven” (*houtian* 後天). These two major states take place before and after the process called the “opening of

Heaven" (*kaitian* 開天), the actual generation or manifestation of the cosmos. While yin and yang "before Heaven" are in their prime state and join to form Oneness, in the state "after Heaven" original yang is enclosed in yin entities ("yang within yin"), while original yin is found in yang entities ("yin within yang"). This notion underlies several modes of representation of the *neidan* process, and provides the foundations for recovering the primary constituents of the cosmos and the human person.

**REPRESENTATIONS.** The first representation is the doctrine of the three treasures (*sanbao* 三寶), namely *jing* 精 (essence), *qi* 氣 (vital energy/pneuma), and *shen* 神 (spirit), which are the basic ingredients of the *neidan* process (Wang Mu 1990, 272-80; Robinet 1985; Esposito 1997, 32-36). Each of the Three Treasures has an authentic and a conditioned aspect. In the state "before Heaven," energy is the principle of cosmic manifestation (i.e., the energy that makes the cosmogonic process happen), essence is the principle of material manifestation (as stated in *Laozi* 21) and spirit is the principle of subtle manifestation (including divinities, spirits and the human mind). These aspects of the Three Treasures are called "primordial" (*yuán* 元). In the state "after Heaven," as far as human beings are concerned, energy is manifested as breath, essence as an indeterminate force that may appear as male semen and female menstrual blood, and spirit as the mind. Each of the three conditioned aspects replaces the correspondent authentic aspects, but is also capable of revealing them when they are refined and restored to their primordial state through *neidan* practice.

The interplay of conditioned and authentic aspects is also apparent in another representation, based on cosmological emblems. *Neidan* texts underline the different values taken on by the same emblems in the two configurations of the *Yijing* trigrams traditionally attributed to Fu Xi 伏羲 and King Wen 文王, respectively. In the first configuration, which represents the unconditioned state "before Heaven," original yin and yang are represented by the trigrams *kun* 坤 ☷ at due North and *qian* 乾 ☰ at due South, respectively, while *li* 離 ☲ and *kan* 坎 ☵ are at due East and West, respectively. In the configuration related to the state "after Heaven," *qian* and *kun* are displaced to other positions, and their places are taken by *kan* (North) and *li* (South). In other words, *kan* is the conditioned aspect of *kun*, and *li* is the conditioned aspect of *qian*. However, the yin trigram *kan* or Water encloses a solid yang line, which is Real Fire ("yang within yin"), and the yang trigram *li* or Fire encloses a broken yin line, which is Real Water ("yin within yang"). The two inner lines symbolize the original yin and yang principles of "before Heaven" (see Needham et al. 1983, 40-41).

The same pattern can also be represented by alchemical emblems proper, which *neidan* draws from the cosmological tradition of *waidan*.

Native lead and cinnabar represent the yin and yang principles in their state "after Heaven." They contain Real Lead and Real Mercury, respectively, which correspond to the authentic yang and authentic yin of "before Heaven." Joining Real Lead and Real Mercury regenerates the state of Oneness. While the alchemical process in *waidan* ends here, the formation of the inner elixir is only a stage of the practice in *neidan*, which is completed when the adept returns to the Dao or Nonbeing.

**CONTINUATION AND INVERSION.** Authors of inner alchemical texts repeatedly state that cosmogony is the chief example of the process designed as "continuation" (*shun* 順, a sequence of stages that leads to degeneration and ultimately to death), whereas *neidan* is based on the opposite notion of "inversion" (*ni* 逆). In *neidan*, the alchemist's task is literally to turn upside down (*diandao* 顛倒) the normal processes of the cosmos (Robinet 1995, 131-45).

In the state "before Heaven," yin and yang have a tendency to descend and ascend, respectively. Alchemists see this in, for example, the fact that during the cosmogonic process yin forms Earth, and yang becomes Heaven (in traditional Chinese cosmology north or yin is below, and south or yang is above). In the state "after Heaven," where original yin and yang are enclosed within entities of the opposite sign, the descending movement of yin takes along original yang, and the ascending movement of yang takes along original yin: Real Fire goes down with Water (*kan* ☵), and Real Water goes up with Fire (*li* ☲). Original yin and yang, therefore, are bound to move in directions opposite to their authentic nature and to separate from each other.

*Neidan* aims to set the original yin and yang free from their corrupted counterparts and allow them to follow again their natural tendency. The inner yin line of *li* descends while the inner yang line of *kan* rises, and yin and yang can again join in the center, this time generating the inner elixir or embryo of immortality. With different imagery, the authentic principles released by the *neidan* process are Real Lead (yang) in native lead (yin) and Real Mercury (yin) in cinnabar (yang); or Real Fire (yang) in the kidneys (yin) and Real Water (yin) in the lungs (yang). This process is an inversion because it reverses the ascending movement of *li*/Fire and the descending movement of *kan*/Water; but simultaneously it is not, because the movement of the inner lines follows their natural inclination. "Inversion," therefore, is a release of the natural properties of original yin and yang: the *neidan* process, as one often reads in the texts, is "natural" or "spontaneous" (*ziran* 自然).

**THE VIEW OF THE HUMAN BEING.** *Neidan* writings often state that all the ingredients needed to compound the elixir are found within each person. The person is the alchemical laboratory, not only with the Three Treasures, but also with the Furnace (*lu* 爐) and the

Tripod (*dǐng* 鼎), two abstract notions which designate any pair of complementary entities such as body and mind, heart and kidneys, or mercury and lead (the fiery Furnace is yang, the receiving Tripod is yin; Robinet 1995, 92-95; Wang Mu 1990, 296-97). Moreover, *neidan* uses a large number of notions and terms to describe the human being and the alchemical process, in part inherited from Buddhism and traditional Chinese medicine. Some of these notions, like original nature, are entirely immaterial; others, like the Elixir Fields, refer to loci in the person (*shēn* 身) with no corresponding loci in the body (*tǐ* 體); in other instances, authors refer to a material organ of the body (e.g., the heart-mind) as the seat of an immaterial entity (in this instance, the spirit).

**CONCEPTION OF THE BODY.** The main pair of notions is that of *xìng* 性 and *mìng* 命. *Xìng* is one's original nature, and *mìng* is the unique "imprint" received from Heaven at birth, including the allotment of energy to spend in one's life. While *xìng* endures and is unchangeable, *mìng* has limits which an individual may modify to a degree. Human beings may or may not be able to actualize their *xìng* and *mìng* in their lifetimes; *neidan* texts ask them to "exhaust" them (*liǎo* 了, a term that also denotes thorough knowledge), that is, to merge them into a single entity and transcend them (Robinet 195-95; Despeux 1990, 223-27).

*Xìng* is also often paired with *qíng* 情, a term designating one's physical and emotional states and reactions which may overcome and obscure one's original nature. Several *neidan* authors assert that the shift from the authentic to the conditioned aspects of reality results from one's affections and senses overwhelming one's original nature. Here too, authors hold that nature and affections should be merged and unified.

The whole *neidan* process, with both spiritual and physical aspects, is guided by one's *xīn* (heart-mind). Not only is *xīn* the seat of the spirit, but several *neidan* authors describe it as the faculty making the realization of the Dao possible (Robinet 1995, 70-74; Despeux 1990, 230-36) *xīn*, in fact, is home to the *yì* 意 or "creative imagination" which guides and makes possible the joining of yin and yang and the generation and nourishment of the inner elixir (Robinet 1995, 191-95; Esposito 1997, 41-42).

Practice, as one often reads in *neidan* writings, involves opening the mysterious barrier (*xuanguan* 玄關), the discernment of which requires direct instruction from a master. Various located by different texts, the Mysterious Barrier is sometimes situated between the eyebrows, in the Yellow Court, or in the lower Elixir Field. Other writers, however, emphasize that it is not found at any particular place in the body. In fact, some expressions used in describing it ("it is a thing but is not a thing;" "it is nowhere in one's body, but should not be looked for outside one's body") suggest that the opening of the Mys-

terious Barrier is the first experience of realization during the practice (Robinet 1995, 103-7; Wang Mu 1990, 264; Esposito 1997, 43).

The main inner loci of the person are the three *dantian* 丹田 or Elixir Fields (also commonly rendered Cinnabar Fields), where the elixir forms and is nourished by the adept. The Three Fields are the *niwan* 泥丸 (Pill of Mud) in the head, the *zìgōng* 紫宮 (Purple Palace) in the chest and the *dantian* proper in the abdomen (Wang Mu 1990, 264-66; Despeux 1979, 23-27; Maspero 1981 [1937], 326-29 and 455-59). The Elixir Fields are found at least as early as Ge Hong, who makes them homes to the three Ones. In Shangqing Daoism, each of the three Elixir Fields houses a group of eight divinities imagined as "eight effulgences" (*bājīng* 八景).

Two channels, the *dūmài* 督脈 (Channel of Control) along the back and the *rènmài* 任脈 (Channel of Conception) in the front of the body, both well-known in traditional Chinese medicine, play an important role in the first phase of *neidan* practice (Despeux 1979, 27-47; Wang Mu 1990, 266-71; Esposito 1997, 40-41). In this phase, one's essence (*jīng*) circulates through the channels, repeatedly passing through the Three Barriers (*sānguān* 三關) named *wěiliú* 尾閭 in the coccyx, *jiǎjǐ* 夾脊 between the shoulder blades, and *yùzhěn* 玉枕 in the occiput (Despeux 1994, 80-87; Wang Mu 1990, 271-72; Esposito 1997, 51-63).

Building on earlier traditions, especially those of the *Huangtīng jīng*, the *neidan* view of the human being has often been represented in diagrams and illustrations. The most famous are the *Nèijīng tú* 內經圖 (Chart of the Inner Warp), whose main version dates from 1886 and is found in Beijing's Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (White Cloud Temple), and the more detailed *Xiūzhēn tú* 修真圖 (Chart of the Cultivation of Perfection), transmitted in several versions (Despeux 1994; Sakade 1991b).

## PRACTICES

**OVERVIEW.** *Neidan* practices draw from the range of physiological and meditational techniques that appeared from the Han period onward. While many of these techniques belong to the vast domain of *yangsheng*, they are adapted to the purposes of *neidan* and reinterpreted through alchemical emblems. For instance, while the practice of *huānjīng bǔnǎo* 還精補腦 or "returning the essence to restore the brain" originally designates a sexual technique to preserve the male semen, in *neidan* it becomes the basis for the process of cycling one's essence. Even though many *neidan* traditions retain the symbolism of sexual union, sexual practices are not central to mainstream traditions (Robinet 1995, 48-50, and 1997, 227; the expression *shuāngxīu* 雙修 or "dual cultivation," sometimes taken to mean

sexual practices, usually describes the combined cultivation of *xing* and *ming*).

From the ninth century onward, *neidan* traditions developed different practices (Robinet 1995, 40-50; 1997, 225-27). The two main sources of these developments were the Zhong-Lü school (Baldrian-Hussein 1984, 53-193) which emphasized physical cultivation, and the Southern Lineage (Wang Mu 1990, 261-310) which stressed mental and spiritual aspects of self-cultivation. From the late fourteenth century, writers often describe the difference between the practice of *neidan* in the Southern Lineage and the Quanzhen or Northern Lineage traditions according to the relative priority of cultivating *xing* and *ming*. Most writers view Southern Lineage practices as focusing first on *ming* and then on *xing*, with the reverse true for Quanzhen. Yet texts of both traditions state that *xing* and *ming* should be cultivated together, and make no radical distinctions between their practices (Robinet 1995, 44-46). Other brands of practices were elaborated by later Ming and Qing schools (Despeux 1979, 48-82; and Esposito 1997, 31-63).

**THREE STAGES.** The most typical *neidan* practice consists of a preliminary stage and a longer portion divided into three parts. The latter three stages have symbolic lengths of one hundred days, ten months and nine years, respectively. Texts describing this model relate it to the cosmogonic process outlined in *Laozi* 42: “The Dao generates the One; the One generates the Two; the Two generate the Three; and the Three generate the Ten Thousand Things.” As shown in the table below, each stage of practice is associated with a stage of the cosmogonic process, and seeks to restore the conditions proper to that stage.

COSMOGONY: *shun* 順NEIDAN PRACTICE: *ni* 逆

	Dao 道	Emptiness ( <i>xu</i> 虛)
“The Dao generates the One”	○	☷ from Spirit to Emptiness (煉神化虛)
	One 一	Spirit ( <i>shen</i> 神)
“The One generates the Two”	○	☱ from Breath to Spirit (煉氣化神)
	Two 二	☳, ☵ Breath ( <i>qi</i> 氣)
“The Two generates the Three”	○	☷ from Essence to Breath (煉精化氣)
	Three 三	☳, ☵ Essence ( <i>jing</i> 精)
“The Three generates the 10,000”	○	☷ “laying out the foundations (築基)
		10,000 things ( <i>wanwu</i> 萬物)(*)

(\*) This stage corresponds to the 64 hexagrams and their 384 lines.

While this three-stage process is not mentioned in the *Cantong qi*, several poems of the *Wuzhen pian* allude to it, and it appears in Weng Baoguang’s commentary to the text (Wang Mu 1990, 262). Its elaboration would have to wait until Yuan times, and later it became central to the Wu-Liu 伍柳 school of Qing *neidan*. Some of its features and vocabulary also appear in other *neidan* subtraditions, which often modify them or use the same terms with different meanings. For more detailed descriptions of the process see Wang Mu 1990, 261-310 (summarized in Hu 1989, 15-21) and Robinet 1995, 147-64.

**Preliminary stage:** “Laying the Foundations” (*zhuji* 築基) is a stage in which adepts cultivate both *xing* and *ming*, seeking to replenish the essence, breath or energy and spirit, so they can become ingredients in the following stages. The actual practices used at this stage resemble those of present-day *qigong* and do not involve making an inner elixir.

**First stage:** “Refining Essence and Transmuting it into Breath” (*lianjing huaqi* 煉精化氣), also known as the “Barrier of Hundred Days” (*bairi guan* 百日關) with a nod to its presumed duration, cultivates *ming* and seeks to unify one’s essence and breath/energy. Essence becomes breath through a process of cycling called the microcosmic orbit (*xiao zhoutian* 小周天). The practices required to achieve this vary not only from tradition to tradition, but also from adept to adept. Most traditions imagine that the essence rises from the Gate of Life (*mingmen* 命門) in the lower abdomen when stimulated by breath, passes by way of the *dumai* through the Three Barriers to the head, and then descends in the *renmai* passing through each of the three Elixir Fields. This path of circulating essence inverts its normal tendency to flow downwards. The “fire times” (*huohou* 火候) system, inherited from *waidan*, formally divides each cycle into twelve parts marked by the twelve Branches of Earth (*dizhi* 地支) and the twelve “primary hexagrams” (*bigua* 辟卦) of the *Yijing* (Wang Mu 1990, 291-96; Robinet 1995, 120-31; Baldrian-Hussein 1984, 88-105; Esposito 1997, 45-50). Breathing rhythms are regulated in multiples of nine in the first part of each cycle phase and in multiples of six in the second part, with two intermittent phases of “bathing” (*myu* 沐浴) between each part. By repeatedly cycling essence in this manner, it becomes refined and forms the Outer Medicine (*waiyao* 外藥) in the lower Elixir Field.

**Second stage:** “Refining Breath/Energy and Transmuting it into Spirit” (*lianqi huashen* 煉氣化神), also called “Barrier of Ten Months” (*shiyue guan* 十月關, referring to the length of human gestation by Chinese reckoning), seeks to join one’s breath and spirit by cultivating the *xing*. Breath and spirit are imagined as Real Water in the lungs (yin within yang) and Real Fire in the kidneys (yang within yin). Their conjunction produces the Inner Medicine (*neiyao* 內藥), which adepts nourish between the lower and the middle Elixir Fields

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for ten symbolic months in a process known as macrocosmic orbit (*da zhoutian* 大周天). Texts state that this process begins spontaneously as one passes from self-conscious action into nonaction. At the end of this stage, essence, breath, and spirit are combined into one entity, and produce the Immortal Embryo (*xiantai* 仙胎).

**Third stage:** "Refining Spirit and Returning it to Emptiness" (*lianshen huanxu* 煉神還虛), also called the "Barrier of Nine Years" (*jiunian guan* 九年關, alluding to the legendary time Bodhidharma spent meditating in front of a wall), concentrates on cultivating one's *xing*. As the Embryo is nourished (*rubu* 乳哺, "breast-fed"), it grows until it is free to leave the adept's body through the upper Elixir Field in the head. As the practice ends, the adept returns to Emptiness, or the Dao.

**FEMALE INNER ALCHEMY** (*nüdan* 女丹). The first reference to *neidan* practices for women dates from 1169, when Xue Shi described their main features (*Wuzhen pian sanzhu*, CT 142, "ji" 記, 4a). While the contemporary female adept Cao Wenyi 曹文逸 wrote her *Dadao ge* 大道歌 (Song of the Great Way), its verses do not deal with women's alchemy (Despeux 1990, 83-93). Some contemporary poems attributed to Sun Bu'er, often deemed to be the earliest extant sources on *nüdan*, are probably apocryphal (Despeux 1990, 111-26).

*Nüdan* practices follow a similar three-stage process as that of men's *neidan* (Despeux 1990, 221-81; Hu 1989, 21-22), differing chiefly in the first and second stages because they acknowledge the physiological differences between women and men. While a man's energy resides in his lower Elixir Field, many texts assert that a woman's energy resides in a point between the breasts called *qixue* 氣穴 (Cavity of Energy, a name for the lower Elixir Field in a man's body). This energy produces secretions that become menstrual blood, which is the material aspect of essence in a woman's body. While the first stage of the practice for men reverses the downward dispersal of the essence by cycling it along the microcosmic orbit, in *nüdan* this is obtained by massaging the breasts with circular strokes, so that their secretions, rather than transforming themselves into blood and becoming lost, serve to enrich the woman's natural endowment of energy. This results in the progressive diminution and final disappearance of menses, a process called Decapitation of the Red Dragon (*zhan chilong* 斬赤龍). Moreover, the repeated circulation of essence in a man's body brings about the formation of a foetal "pearl" (*zhu* 珠) in his lower Elixir Field. Since this "pearl" already exists in a woman's inner body, her aim becomes one of retarding its degradation and collecting it when it is in full brilliance, two and a half days before each menstruation. In the second stage of the practice, the Pearl is nurtured into the inner elixir. The tasks involved at this stage are also said to be easier for women, who can more easily

generate the embryo of immortality and access the third and final stage of the practice.

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