

**Reading the Signs:
Philology, History, Prognostication**

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Iwo Amelung and Joachim Kurtz

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Laozi and Internal Alchemy

Fabrizio Pregadio

Taoist Internal Alchemy, or Neidan 內丹, offers a large number of examples concerning the relation between a doctrinal authority and a later tradition that traces its origins to it. In this context, “authority” refers to one or more sources—textual or human, but usually represented by texts—that set forth foundational teachings. Later traditions use different sets of textual and non-textual devices, including spurious scriptural attributions and non-historical lines of transmission, in order to show that they derive from that source and therefore provide access to it. A tradition needs not only to state the relation to its source, but also to formulate that relation and remind it repeatedly.

As a tradition that is by nature syncretic, different aspects of Neidan can be traced back to multiple doctrinal authorities, including some pertaining to Buddhism, Confucianism, and Neo-Confucianism. As a Taoist tradition, however, the main authorities in the eyes of its masters and practitioners are undoubtedly Laozi 老子 and his *Daode jing* 道德經 (Book of the Way and Its Virtue): Neidan is seen by its adepts as a science that applies the doctrines of the *Daode jing* to the microcosmic domain. This essay provides examples of different ways used in Neidan works in order to show that their teachings and practices have the *Daode jing* as their direct or ultimate source. These include the creation of the image of Laozi as an alchemist, as the originator (or a component) of Neidan lineages, and as the author of Neidan texts; the composition of commentaries to the *Daode jing* by authors of Neidan works; and the unacknowledged but evident references to the *Daode jing* in Neidan scriptures and texts. In all these cases, the aim is the same: to establish and exhibit the bond between an integral exposition of the doctrine—which Taoists find in the *Daode jing*—and the principles and practices of Neidan.

Every subject touched upon in this essay would deserve more thorough study. Here I attempt to provide a general overview. Despite its many limits, I am pleased and honored to dedicate this essay to Michael Lackner, as a small

token of gratitude for the support he has offered to my work throughout many years.¹

Laozi, the Alchemist

Including Laozi in the history or the “pre-history” of Neidan required fashioning a new persona, parallel to his identity as the author of the *Daode jing*. In this way, Laozi could be presented as the originator of Neidan and be involved in the transmission of its doctrines. Within this context, Laozi was also ascribed the authorship of a few Neidan works.

Laozi as an Alchemist

The earliest alchemical persona of Laozi was created by Taoist hagiographers, but it was related to Waidan 外丹 (External Alchemy).² In their works, the alchemist Laozi has two separate but related identities: he is either a student of the arts of the elixir, or their master. In the first case, Laozi’s teacher is his mother, usually known as the Primordial Lady (Yuanjun 元君), who instructs him on alchemy and several other subjects. Her role as a mentor is also mentioned in a few Waidan sources, but hagiographers develop and expand it.³ Through his mother’s teachings, Laozi becomes a master of Waidan. During his meeting with Yin Xi 尹喜 (the Guardian of the Pass), Laozi

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- 1 In the present essay, *Daozang* 道藏 editions are indicated by the abbreviation DZ, followed by the catalogue number according to *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, ed. Kristofer Schipper and Franciscus Verellen (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004). Several titles are cited in abbreviated forms.
 - 2 On Laozi’s Taoist hagiographies see Livia Kohn, *God of the Dao: Lord Lao in History and Myth* (Ann Arbor: Center for Chinese Studies, University of Michigan, 1998), 7–36.
 - 3 Xie Shouhao 謝守灝 (1134–1212), *Laozi shilüe* 老子史略 (A Short History of Laozi; DZ 773), 2.19a–22b; idem, *Hunyuan shengji* 混元聖紀 (Annals of the Saint of the Inchoate Origin; DZ 770), 2.41b–44b. See also the biography of the Primordial Lady in Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933), *Yongcheng jixian lu* 壙城集仙錄 (Records of the Immortals Gathered in the Walled City; DZ 783), 1.7a–8a; translated by Livia Kohn, in “The Mother of the Tao,” *Taoist Resources* 1.2 (1989): 99–100. On the Primordial Lady and Waidan see Fabrizio Pregadio, *Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2006), 40–41 and 114. It should not be forgotten that, according to Taoist doctrine, Laozi’s mother was generated by Laozi himself in his pre-cosmic aspect, so that he could descend to earth and transmit his *Daode jing*.

transmits to him not only the *Daode jing*, but also alchemical scriptures and instructions, including the *Jiudan jing* 九丹經 (Book of the Nine Elixirs) and other works of the early Taiqing 太清 (Great Clarity) corpus. He then recites verses on the alchemical practice, one of which is a “Song” (“Ge” 歌) in three-character lines to which I will return later in this essay.⁴

Neidan inherits both of these images. Like Huangdi 黃帝, the Yellow Emperor, did before him, Laozi practiced alchemy, and this granted him his status. Among those who hold this view is the southern Quanzhen 全真 master, Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (1290–ca. 1368), who writes: “The Way of the Golden Elixir was cultivated by the Yellow Emperor, and he ascended to Heaven; it was cultivated by Laozi, and he became the patriarch of the Way.”⁵ Laozi’s teacher in Neidan is once again his mother. When Chen Zhixu states, “The Supreme Primordial Lady told Laozi: ‘The accomplishment of long life depends on the elixir, and the achievement of the elixir depends on spirit,’” he is reporting word for word a passage found in the chronicles of Laozi.⁶ The hagiographic nature of these and similar passages is plain, but the purpose of their authors is the opposite compared to the hagiographers: instead of enhancing Laozi’s persona with the attribution of alchemical knowledge, they emphasize that Neidan derives from the *Daode jing*. For example, the teachings that Laozi received from the Primordial Lady are an occasion for Chen Zhixu to underline a point that goes beyond hagiography:

無上元君謂老子曰：神丹入口，壽無窮矣。老子修之，是大道祖。後言金丹之道為黃老術，不知聖人所傳乃金丹至道，脩仙作佛之大事，非術也，是道也。

The Supreme Primordial Lady told Laozi: “When you ingest the elixir, your longevity will be limitless.” Laozi cultivated this and became the patriarch of the Great Way. Later, it has been said that the Way of the Golden Elixir is a technique of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi. [Those who say this] do not know that the perfect Way of the Golden Elixir transmitted by the sages, the great undertaking for cultivating immortality and becoming a Buddha, is not a technique (*shu*), it is a Way (*dao*).⁷

4 *Taishang Hunyuan zhenlu* 太上混元真錄 (True Records of the Most High of the Inchoate Origin; DZ 954), 7a–9a; *Laozi shilüe*, 3.14b–17b; and, *Hunyuan shengji*, 3.10b–13a. On the transmission of Waidan from Laozi to Yin Xi see Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein, “Inner Alchemy: Notes on the Origin and Use of the Term *Neidan*,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 5 (1989): 172–74.

5 *Jiudan dayao* 金丹大要 (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir; DZ 1067), 1.1a.

6 *Ibid.*, 3.1a and 13.16b. Cf. *Laozi shilüe*, 2.9a; *Hunyuan shengji*, 2.41b.

7 *Ibid.*, 14.7b. In another passage, Chen Zhixu states even more emphatically: “It has been said that the way of cultivation and refinement consists of the techniques of the Yellow

According to Chen Zhixu, Neidan is in the first place a doctrine, and not simply a technique, because its roots are found in the *Daode jing*.

Laozi as the Originator of Neidan

The identity of Laozi as a Neidan master or disciple has therefore one purpose: to show that the *Daode jing* is the main source of Neidan. Chen Zhixu himself plainly says that “the Way of Laozi is nothing but the Way of the Golden Elixir” 老子之道，唯金丹之道。⁸ Other works contain analogous statements, including the following: “The five thousand words of *The Way and Its Virtue* that the Most High Laozi, August Emperor of the Mysterious Origin, transmitted to Yin Xi, the Guardian of the Pass, entirely contain the true and entire purport of the Reverted Elixir (*buandan* 還丹).”⁹ We also read that it was only due to the compassion of Laozi that “the Great Way of the Golden Elixir began to exist, through which he taught people the discourses on returning [to the Dao].”¹⁰

In addition to these broad statements, others have a more precise import. Perhaps the main example is found in the preface to Zhang Boduan’s 張伯端 (ca. 987–1082) *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 (Awakening to Reality), almost certainly spurious but authoritative because of its attribution. The origins of Neidan are credited to both Laozi and the Buddha (one of its additional doctrinal authorities), but the discourse of the author is not limited to issues of ascription:

老釋以性命學，開方便門，教人修種，以逃生死。釋氏以空寂為宗，若頓悟圓通，則直超彼岸。如有習漏未盡，則尚徇于有生。老氏以煉養為真，若得其要樞，則立躋聖位。如其未明本性，則猶滯于幻形。

Laozi and the Buddha used the learning of *xing* (inner nature) and *ming* (destiny, existence) to open the gates of expedient methods (*fangbian*), and taught people to cultivate the seed in order to escape [the cycles of] birth and death. For the Buddha, the source lies in emptiness and silence. If one suddenly awakens and attains

Emperor and Laozi. No more of this nonsense! This is the Great Way of the Golden Elixir, and it cannot be called a technique.” *Ibid.*, 3.4b.

8 *Ibid.*, 14.13a.

9 Lin Taigu 林太古 (fl. ca. 1000), *Longhu buandan juesong* 龍虎還丹訣頌 (Instructions and Songs of Praise on the Reverted Elixir of the Dragon and the Tiger; DZ 1082), 9b. Although this work is probably written in the perspective of Waidan, the views of its commentary (written by Gushen zi 谷神子, identity unknown), which contains the passage quoted above, correspond at least in part to those of Neidan.

10 Hu Huncheng 胡混成 (Song?), *Jindan zhengzong* 金丹正宗 (The Correct Lineage of the Golden Elixir; DZ 1087), 2b.

complete understanding, one directly transcends to the other shore; but as long as habits and contaminations are not exhausted, one is submitted to rebirth. For Laozi, the truth lies in refining and nourishing oneself. If one obtains what is crucial and essential, one immediately rises to the rank of a saint; but as long as one's fundamental nature is not comprehended, one is tied to the illusory body.¹¹

With his mention of *xing* 性 and *ming* 命, the author of the preface implicitly alludes to the “conjoined cultivation of Nature and Existence” (*xingming shuangxiu* 性命雙修), one of the main principles of Neidan. In the conventional view, Buddhism and Taoism were deemed to give emphasis to *xing* and *ming*, respectively. The preface points out that although Buddhism can lead to the “sudden awakening”, those who cultivate *xing* should not disregard removing the “habits and contaminations” associated with *ming*. Analogously, Taoism may focus on “refining and nourishing” the bodily form, but unless one also attends to *xing*, one remains tied to the “illusory body.”¹²

Laozi in the Neidan Lines of Transmission

As the originator of Neidan, Laozi was also included within its lines of transmission. These lines, summarized in charts or described in essays, display an intentional disregard of history in the ordinary sense of the term, and only intend to trace the doctrinal origins of Neidan.¹³

One example is provided by Xiao Tingzhi 蕭廷芝 (fl. 1260–1264), whose chart grafts the origins of Neidan onto the Taoist pantheon. The transmission begins with Yuanshi Tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Original

11 *Wuzhen pian*, preface, 1. This and the next references to the *Wuzhen pian* are to the text edited in Wang Mu 王沐, *Wuzhen pian qianjie* 「悟真篇」淺解 (A Simple Explanation of the *Awakening to Reality*; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1990).

12 Although the objections of Taoism and Buddhism to one another were to a large extent conventional, the two models of self-cultivation, respectively focused on *xing* or *ming*, played a major role in the history of Neidan, involving different views about which of them is the key for cultivating the other. See Isabelle Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste: De l'unité et de la multiplicité* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995), 184–91, and Fabrizio Pregadio, “Destiny, Vital Force, or Existence? On the Meanings of *Ming* 命 in Daoist Internal Alchemy and its Relation to *Xing* 性 or Human Nature.” *Daoism: Religion, History and Society* 6 (2014): 186–92 and *passim*. I will return to this subject below.

13 Several lines of transmission in Neidan are discussed in Yokote Yutaka 横手裕, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” in *Modern Chinese Religion*, part 1: *Song-Liao-Jin-Yuan* 2, ed. John Lagerwey and Pierre Marsone (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 1055–110.

Commencement) and the Three Clarities (Sanqing 三清).¹⁴ One of the latter, Daode Tianzun 道德天尊 (Celestial Worthy of the Way and Its Virtue), is Laozi in his divine aspect. It is he who passes on the teaching to several other deities and immortals, including his mother, until it reaches the “historical” Laozi. From him, through several intermediate steps, the transmission leads to Heshang gong 河上公 and then takes a series of unexpected turns: Heshang gong’s teachings are received by Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, the reputed author of the *Cantong qi* 參同契, or *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*; and he in turn passes them on to none other than Zhang Daoling 張道陵.¹⁵ The transmission continues until it reaches the Realized Man Huayang (Huayang zhenren 華陽真人), i.e., Donghua dijun 東華帝君 (Imperial Lord of Eastern Florescence). From then onwards, it continues in more familiar ways, with the legendary and historical patriarchs of the Northern and the Southern lineages of Neidan (Beizong 北宗 and Nanzong 南宗).¹⁶

Li Jianyi 李簡易 (fl. 1264–1266) introduces his collection of Neidan writings with an extensive transmission chart that begins with the Most High Lord Lao, Founder of the Teaching of the Inchoate Origin and Ancestral Master of Ten Thousand Generations (Hunyuan Jiaozhu Wandai Zongshi Taishang Laojun 混元教主萬代宗師太上老君). The transmission continues with Donghua dijun and includes the Quanzhen masters, as well as Zhang Boduan and the thirtieth Celestial Master, Zhang Xujing 張虛靖 (1092–1126).¹⁷

Finally, Chen Zhixu’s essay entitled “Xianpai” 仙派 (The Lineage of the Immortals) attributes the origins of Neidan to the Precelestial Laozi of the Great Ultimate (Taiji Xiantian Laozi 太極先天老子). It states that the Heavenly Emperor of Wondrous Non-Being (Miaowu tiandi 妙無天帝) gave

14 Here as elsewhere, Yuanshi Tianzun is both the highest deity and one of the Three Clarities immediately below him. In the present chart, his name in the first function is Fuli Yuanshi Tianzun 浮黎元始天尊.

15 In addition to involving the Way of the Celestial Masters (Tianshi dao 天師道) in the transmission of Neidan, the mention of Zhang Daoling may have another reason, as he was also subject to the creation of an alchemical persona during the Six Dynasties. See Pregadio, *Great Clarity*, 147–52.

16 “Dadao zhengtong” 大道正統 (The Correct Transmission of the Great Way), in Deng Yi 鄧錡, *Daode zhenjing sanjie* 道德真經三解 (Three Explications of the *True Book of the Way and Its Virtue*; DZ 687), preface, 5a–7b. Xiao Tingzhi does not place himself in the line of transmission, but he includes his master, Peng Si 彭耜 (fl. 1217–1251).

17 “Hunyuan xianpai zhi tu” 混元仙派之圖 (Chart of the Lineage of the Immortals of the Inchoate Origin), placed at the beginning of the *Danjing zhiyao* 丹經指要 (Essential Pointers on the Scriptures on the Elixirs; DZ 245). Li Jianyi includes himself in the line of transmission under his hao 號, Yuxi zi 玉谿子.

birth to the three Breaths (*qi* 氣) of the Dao—Mysterious (*xuan* 玄), Original (*yuan* 元), and Initial (*shi* 始)—within the Great Ultimate (Taiji 太極). The Initial Breath transformed itself into the Precelestial Laozi, who repeatedly descended to earth in the guise of fifteen immortals, including Guangcheng zi 廣成子, the Taoist master of the Yellow Emperor. Then, the Precelestial Laozi spent eighty-one years in the womb of his mother, and at the end of her gestation, the “historical” Laozi was born. This is the Laozi who gave teachings to Donghua dijun, laying the foundations for the Neidan lineage that continued with Zhongli Quan 鍾離權, Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓, and Liu Haichan 劉海蟾, and then with the Quanzhen masters, finally leading to Chen Zhixu himself.¹⁸

Laozi as the Author of Alchemical Works

Within Taoism as a whole, Laozi—either in his human or in his divine aspect—is ascribed with the authorship of several dozen works in addition to the *Daode jing*.¹⁹ Among them, those that exerted the greatest influence on the formation and the history of Neidan include two works on the inner deities, namely the *Huangting jing* 黃庭經 (Book of the Yellow Court) and the *Laozi zhongjing* 老子中經 (Central Book of Laozi); and two works on the nature of the mind and the troubles created by desires, passions, and attachments, namely the *Neiguan jing* 內觀經 (Book of Inner Contemplation) and the *Qingjing jing* 清靜經 (Book of Clarity and Quiescence). Once again, these works point to the role performed by Laozi in the origins of Neidan.

Other writings dealing with Waidan, but also read in the perspective of Neidan, are cited and quoted in Laozi’s hagiographies. One of them is a poem concerned with the Fire Phases (*huobou* 火候), which was subsequently reproduced in Neidan works.²⁰ More important is the “Song” in three-character verses mentioned above. This poem is an earlier and shorter version

18 *Jindan dayao xianpai* 金丹大要仙派 (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir: The Lineage of the Immortals; DZ 1070). Similarly, Chen Zhixu’s “Lixian zhi” 列仙誌 (Monograph on the Immortals; DZ 1069) opens with Donghua dijun, but in fact, again places Laozi above him when it says that Donghua “obtained the Way of Laozi” 得老子之道.

19 Kohn, *God of the Dao*, 7–36, lists about eighty works in the *Daozang* 道藏 (Taoist Canon) attributed to Laozi, or having him as their main subject.

20 See *Laozi shilüe*, 3.15b; *Hunyuan shengji*, 3.12a. Neidan works that reproduce this poem include Li Jianyi, *Danjing zhiyao*, 1.8a–b, and Xuanquan zi 玄全子 (late 13th century), *Zhuben neidan jiyao* 諸真內丹集要 (Collected Essentials on the Internal Elixir by the Realized Ones; DZ 1258), 2.6b.

of the “Song of the Tripod” (“Dingqi ge” 鼎器歌) found in one of the final sections of the *Cantong qi*. Before its inclusion in Wei Boyang’s work, the poem was associated with Laozi: the shorter version quoted in his hagiographies is entitled “Song of Lord Lao” (“Laojun ge” 老君歌).²¹ At the basis of this double attribution may lie the supposed identity between Laozi and Wei Boyang, whose first name is also one of the many names of Laozi. Hints in this regard appear occasionally in Neidan literature, but to my knowledge there is only one explicit mention of their identity: Chen Xianwei 陳顯微 (?–after 1254) “said that Master Wei called himself Boyang because he actually was the transformation body (*huashen* 化身, *nirmanakāya*) of Lord Lao.”²² Under this light, the frequent allusions to the *Daode jing* in Wei Boyang’s “autobiographic” sections at the end of the *Cantong qi* take on a more distinct significance.²³

On the other hand, only two works on Neidan are ascribed to Laozi, and neither left a decisive mark on its history.²⁴ There is no doubt that, in the eyes of its masters and adepts, Laozi’s most important contribution to Neidan was the *Daode jing*.

Daode jing Commentaries by Neidan Masters

Several authors of Neidan texts, or related to Neidan through the lineages to which they belonged, wrote commentaries to the *Daode jing*. In principle, none of their works can be called a “Neidan commentary”, as they do not read the *Daode jing* in light of Neidan: in the view of their authors, it is Neidan that should be understood in light of the *Daode jing*. The works known to me that form this corpus are listed below.²⁵

21 *Taishang Hunyuan zhenlu*, 8a; *Laozi shilüe*, 3.15a–b; *Hunyuan shengji*, 3.11b. The “Song of the Tripod” is translated in Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three: A Study and Translation of the Cantong qi* (Mountain View: Golden Elixir Press 2011), 120–21.

22 *Zhouyi cantong qi jie* 周易參同契解 (Explication of the *Zhouyi cantong qi*; DZ 1007), postface by Wang Yi 王夷, 2.20a.

23 On these allusions, see note 44 below.

24 The two works are the *Laojun neidan jing* 老君內丹經 (Book of the Internal Elixir, by Laozi; DZ 643) and the *Nei riyong miaojing* 內日用妙經 (Wondrous Book for Inner Daily Practice; DZ 645). See Kohn, *God of the Dao*, 81–84.

25 Works for which I do not indicate a date do not bear dated prefaces or are anyway undated. In addition to the studies cited in the following footnotes, on the *Daozang* works listed below see the respective entries in Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon*. In the footnotes to this section, I use the following abbreviations: DZJH = *Daozang jinghua* 道藏精華

- 1) Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (1194–1229?), *Daode baozhang* 道德寶章 (Precious Stanzas of *The Way and Its Virtue*)²⁶
- 2) Peng Si 彭耜 (fl. 1217–1251), *Daode zhenjing jizhu* 道德真經集注 (Collected Commentaries to the *True Book of the Way and Its Virtue*; 1229; DZ 707)²⁷
- 3) Li Daochun 李道純 (late thirteenth century), *Daode huiyuan* 道德會元 (Comprehending the Origins of *The Way and Its Virtue*; 1290; DZ 699)²⁸
- 4) Deng Yi 鄧錡 (fl. ca. 1300), *Daode zhenjing sanjie* 道德真經三解 (Three Explications of the *True Book of the Way and Its Virtue*; 1298; DZ 687)²⁹

(Essential Spondors of the Daoist Canon; ed. of 2005–2006); ZHXDZ = *Zhonghua xu Daozang* 中華續道藏 (Sequel to the Daoist Canon of China; 1999); ZWDS = *Zangwai daoshu* 藏外道書 (Taoist Books Outside the Canon; 1992 and 1995).

- 26) Bai Yuchan was one of the main figures in the history of Neidan. Although he belonged to the Southern Lineage, many works ascribed to him—including the *Daode jing* commentary—go beyond the boundaries of particular schools. The two main editions of this work, which is not included in the *Daozang*, are found in the *Siku quanshu* 四庫全書 (Complete Texts of the Four Repositories) and the *Daozang jiyao* 道藏輯要 (Essentials of the Taoist Canon). See Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” 1068–71. The commentary is translated into Italian in Alfredo Cadonna, “*Quali parole vi aspettate che aggiunga?*” *Il commentario al Daode jing di Bai Yuchan, maestro taoista del XIII secolo* (Florence: Leo S. Olschki, 2001).
- 27) Peng Si was Bai Yuchan’s disciple. His work quotes a large number of earlier commentaries, including several that are not extant. It is followed by two appendixes, entitled *Shiwen* 釋文, with notes on terms and expressions, and *Zashuo* 雜說, reporting statements on the *Daode jing* found in dozens of earlier works. Both appendixes are printed as separate works in the *Daozang* (DZ 707 and 708). See Judith Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature: Tenth to Seventeenth Centuries* (Berkeley: Institute of East Asian Studies, University of California, 1987), 220–21.
- 28) Li Daochun seems to have been a second-generation disciple of Bai Yuchan, and is the first known Neidan master to have accomplished a merging of the Northern and Southern lineages of Neidan, and of the respective modes of self-cultivation. On him and his *Daode jing* commentary, see Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” 1084–87; Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 217–18; Liu Gusheng 劉固盛, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu* 全真道老學研究 (A Study of *Laozi* Learning in Quanzhen; Hong Kong: Qingsong chubanshe, 2010), 2–3; and idem, “Quan sanjiao zhi zhen” 全三教之真 (Fulfilling the Truth of the Three Teachings), *Quanzhen dao yanjiu* 全真道研究 1 (2011): 2. In another work, entitled *Qing’an Yingchan zhi yulu* 清庵瑩蟾子語錄 (Recorded Sayings of Li Qing’an, the Master of the Shining Toad; DZ 1060), Li Daochun gives explanations of each section of the *Daode jing*, followed by conversations with his disciples reported in *gong’an* 公案 (“public case”) style.
- 29) Deng Yi was a follower of the Southern Lineage of Neidan and appears to have been another second-generation disciple of Bai Yuchan. For each section of the *Daode jing*, the three explications in his work are concerned with the text itself, the Dao, and its “virtue” (*de* 德). The third part is especially concerned with Neidan. See Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 219–20; Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 3–5; and idem, “Quan sanjiao zhi zhen,” 2–4.

- 5) He Daoquan 何道全 (1319?–1399), *Taishang Laozi Daode jing shuzhu* 太上老子道德經述注 (The *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*, by the Most High Laozi)³⁰

Three other authors who lived during the Yuan dynasty deserve mention here, although their extant works do not include commentaries to the entire *Daode jing*. The first is Mu Changzhao 牧常晁 (late thirteenth century), whose work contains an essay entitled “Jie Laozi guisheng zhang” 解老子貴生章 (Explication of the *Laozi* Section on Cherishing Life) and repeatedly quotes the *Daode jing* elsewhere.³¹ The second is Miao Shanshi 苗善時 (fl. 1288–1324). The initial twenty-three of his sixty-four “public cases” consist of comments on statements of the *Daode jing*.³² The third is Chen Zhixu. Three portions of his *magnum opus*, the *Jindan dayao* 金丹大要 (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir), are concerned with the *Daode jing*, and he may also have written a now-lost complete commentary on Laozi’s work.³³

30 He Daoquan was a Quanzhen master. His work is not included in the *Daozang*. Reprints of an early Ming edition are found in DZJH, vol. 15.3, and in ZHXDZ, vol. 7. His discourses on Neidan are collected in the *Suiji yinghua lu* 隨機應化錄 (Records of Responsive Manifestations According to Circumstances; DZ 1076). See Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” 1105–8.

31 *Xuanzong zhibizhi wanfa tonggui* 玄宗直指萬法同歸 (Reintegrating the Ten Thousand Dharmas: Straightforward Pointers on the Taoist Tradition; DZ 1066), 2.5a–7a. Mu Changzhao’s work displays a particular concern with the integration of Neidan and Buddhism. See Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” 1091–93, and Robinet, *Introduction à l’alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 55–74 *passim*. His essay discusses *Daode jing* 50, which begins by saying: “In coming forth to life and entering into death, the companions of life are one third, the companions of death are one third, and those whose life takes them to the place of death are also one third” (*Sibu beiyao* 四部備要 ed.).

32 *Xuanjiao da gong’an* 玄教大公案 (Great Public Cases in the Teaching of Mystery; DZ 1065), 1.1a–20b. Miao Shanshi was a disciple of Li Daochun. See Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 182–83.

33 The three relevant portions of the *Jindan dayao* are the essay entitled “*Daode jing xu*” 道德經序 (Introduction to the *Daode jing*), 2.1a–7b; the notes on sec. 1, entitled “‘Dao ke dao’ zhang jie” 道可道章解 (Explication of the Section ‘A *Dao* that can be said to be the *Dao*’), 2.7b–12b; and the series of poems entitled “*Daode jing zhuanyu*” 道德經轉語 (The *Daode jing* Reworded; I borrow this translation from Judith M. Boltz), 10.1a–13a. In the preface to his commentary to the *Duren jing* 度人經 (Book on the Salvation of Humanity; DZ 91), 4a, Chen Zhixu writes: “I wished to make all ordinary people knowledgeable about this Way; therefore I have written commentaries to the *Daode jing* and the *Diamond Sutra* (*Jingang jing* 金剛經), and I have composed the *Jindan dayao*.” The *Diamond Sutra* commentary is also not extant. On Chen Zhixu and his notes on the *Daode jing* see Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy,” 1103–5; Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 185; Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 5–6.

Commentaries to the *Daode jing* written by Neidan masters during the Ming and Qing periods include the following:

- 6) Cheng Yining 程以寧 (fl. 1510?), *Taishang daode baozhang yi* 太上道德寶章翼 (Commentary to the *Precious Stanzas of the Way and Its Virtue*, by the Most High)³⁴
- 7) Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1601), *Daode jing xuanlan* 道德經玄覽 (Looking Through the Book of the Way and Its Virtue; 1566)³⁵
- 8) Peng Haogu 彭好古 (fl. 1586–1599), *Daode jing* 道德經³⁶
- 9) Pan Jingguan 潘靜觀 (seventeenth century), *Daode jing miaomen yue* 道德經妙門約 (A Token for the Gate of Wonders of the Book of the Way and Its Virtue)³⁷
- 10) Song Changxing 宋常星 (fl. ca. 1700), *Daode jing jiangyi* 道德經講義 (Explaining the Meaning of the Book of the Way and Its Virtue)³⁸

34 Chen Yining's commentary is closely related to those by Bai Yuchan and Li Daochun. Although it is published in the *Daozang jiyao* as sub-commentary to Bai Yuchan's commentary (no. 1 above), it is actually a self-standing work. See Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 7–8; and idem, "Quan sanjiao zhi zhen," 4.

35 Lu Xixing was the founder of the Eastern Branch (Dongpai 東派) of Neidan. The title of his work derives from *Daode jing* 10: "In cleansing and wiping the Mysterious Mirror (*xuanlan* 玄覽), can you be without flaws?" The commentary is part of the author's collected works, the *Fangbu waishi* 方壺外史 (The External Secretary of Mount Fanghu), published three times between 1571 and 1915. There are several reprints of the 1915 edition, including one in ZWDS, vol. 5. See Xie Zhengqiang 谢正强, "Lu Xixing *Laozi xuanlan* sixiang tese" 陆西星《老子玄覽》思想特色 (The Characteristics of Lu Xixing's *Laozi xuanlan*), *Xinan minzu daxue xuebao* 西南民族大学学报 (Renwen sheke ban 人文社科版) 2007.2: 73–6; Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 6–7; and idem, "Quan sanjiao zhi zhen," 8.

36 I include Peng Haogu's work in this list although he only provides sparse explanations of the text. This work is included in the author's collection, the *Daoyan neivai bijue quanshu* 道言内外秘訣全書 (Complete Writings of Secret Instruction on Inner and Outer Taoist Teachings). A reprint of the first edition, published between 1597 and 1600, is found in ZWDS, vol. 6.

37 Pan Jingguan was a 5th-generation Longmen 龍門 master. The title of this work derives from *Daode jing* 1, where the Dao is said to be "mystery and then again mystery, gate of all wonders." Pan Jingyuan also wrote a commentary to the *Zhuangzi* 莊子, and is known for his editions of commentaries to the *Cantong qi* and the *Wuzhen pian* by his master, Zhu Yuanyu 朱元育 (fl. 1657–1669). I have not seen this commentary, which I know only through the notes in Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 8–11, and idem, "Quan sanjiao zhi zhen," 4–7.

38 Song Changxing was a seventh-generation Longmen master. Reprints of an early twentieth-century edition of his work are found in DZJH, vol. 3.2, and ZXHDZ, vol. 9. See Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 12; and idem, "Quan sanjiao zhi zhen," 7.

- 11) Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821), *Daode jing huiyi* 道德經會義 (Gathering the Meaning of the Book of the Way and Its Virtue; 1803)³⁹
- 12) Liu Yiming, *Daode jing yaoyi* 道德經要義 (The Central Meaning of the Book of the Way and Its Virtue; 1803)
- 13) Li Xiyue 李西月 (1806–1856), *Daode jing zhu* 道德經注 (Commentary to the Book of the Way and Its Virtue)⁴⁰
- 14) Huang Yuanji 黃元吉 (fl. 1850), *Daode jing jingyi* 道德經精義 (The Essential Meaning of the *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*)⁴¹

In addition to those listed above, entirely or partially extant *Daozang* commentaries to the *Daode jing* that contain materials related to Neidan include those by Chen Jingyuan 陳景元 (1072), Zhao Shi'an 趙實庵 (1152), Li Lin 李霖 (1172), and He Xinshan 何心山 (fl. 1387).⁴²

Neidan Doctrines and the *Daode jing*

References and allusions to Laozi and the *Daode jing* in Neidan literature are countless. Looking in detail at this vast amount of material goes beyond the limits of this essay. In this section and the next one, I pay attention instead to the references to the *Daode jing* found in the *Cantong qi* and the *Wuzhen pian*,

39 Despite the importance and renown of their author, who was an eleventh-generation Longmen master, this commentary and the next one—which is a shorter version of the present one—are still little known. Neither is included in Liu Yiming's collected works, the *Daoshu shi'er zhong* 道書十二種 (Twelve Books on the Dao). Transcriptions of both are found in Teng Shujun 滕树军 and Zhang Shengzhen 张胜珍, *Liu Yiming ji* 劉一明集 (Liu Yiming: A Collection), Part 1: *Wuyuan huizong* 悟元汇宗 (Sources on Awakening to the Origin; Beijing: Zongjiao wenhua chubanshe, 2015), 1–93 and 94–119. See Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 13; and idem, “Quan sanjiao zhi zhen,” 7–8.

40 Li Xiyue was the founder of the Western Branch (Xipai 西派) of Neidan. The commentary is included in his *Taishang shisan jing zhushi* 太上十三經注釋 (Commentaries and Explanations of Thirteen Scriptures of the Most High). Reprints of the entire collection are found in DZJH, vol. 2.4, and ZHXDZ, vol. 17. See Liu, *Quanzhen dao Laoxue yanjiu*, 14; and idem, “Quan sanjiao zhi zhen,” 8.

41 Huang Yuanji was associated with the Central Branch (Zhongpai 中派) of Neidan (he should not be confused with the homonymous Jingming 淨明 master, 1271–1326). Reprints of his work are found in DZJH, vol. 4.1, and ZHXDZ, vol. 10.

42 On these works, see the entries in Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon*, vol. 2, 641–43, 661–64, 652–63, and 669–70, respectively, all of which were contributed by Isabelle Robinet. Additional *Daode jing* commentaries found in the *Daozang jiyao* require more study to ascertain their possible relation to Neidan.

the two main scriptures of Neidan.⁴³ A more extensive investigation of the sources would certainly reveal other themes in addition to those discussed below, but it would likely confirm that the *Daode jing* performs two main functions in Neidan. First, as shown by the eight exemplary passages quoted in this section, Neidan draws several basic doctrines from the *Daode jing* and applies them to its own domain. These doctrines concern two of the three main subjects of the *Daode jing*, namely the Dao and the saint (*shengren* 聖人); its third subject—the ruler and his government—is virtually neglected in Neidan. Second, as shown in the next section, Neidan borrows from the *Daode jing* several terms and expressions that, in its own context, do not define fundamental doctrines. However, since any learned reader would recognize their source, those terms and expressions function as further pointers to the relation of Neidan to the *Daode jing*.

The *Cantong qi*—a work consisting of about six thousand characters, not much longer than the *Daode jing* itself—contains at least thirty terms, expressions, and sentences drawn from the *Daode jing*. Confirming that this work is made of different doctrinal and textual layers, corresponding to its three main subjects, the shared features prevail in the portions concerned with self-cultivation and are almost absent in the other portions.⁴⁴ As we shall see, the main subjects of these passages are the ways of “superior virtue” and “inferior virtue”, the nourishment of inner nature, and the relation between the domains of emptiness and form. In addition, the general description of the purport of alchemy in the *Cantong qi* contains several allusions to the *Daode jing*. In the *Wuzhen pian*, the subjects presented with references to the *Daode jing* include the generation of the cosmos from the Dao; the concepts of Yin

43 The *Cantong qi* was completed before the emergence of Neidan. Its alchemical portions (for details, see the next footnote) describe different aspects of Waidan. In later times, however, the whole text was read in light of the Internal Elixir, leading to its designation of the main source of Neidan. The *Wuzhen pian*, instead, was written in the context of Neidan. Although it is the foundational work of the Southern Lineage, it has been cherished by adepts belonging to different Neidan branches.

44 The three main subjects of the *Cantong qi*, alluded to in its title and enounced in sec. 84 and 87, are the relation between Dao and cosmos (sec. 1–17 and 43–52), self-cultivation (18–27 and 53–61), and alchemy (28–42 and 62–74). The final part of the text (sec. 75–88) is made of additional miscellaneous materials, including the “Song of the Tripod.” The sections on self-cultivation contain seventeen quotations from the *Daode jing*, while those on Dao and cosmos and on alchemy contain only two and one quotations, respectively. The other ten quotations that I have identified are found in the final part. Eight of them appear in two of the three “autobiographic” poems on Wei Boyang and his work (sec. 86 and 87). These and the next references to the *Cantong qi* are to the text edited and translated in Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, based on the Jinling shufang 金陵書坊 edition (1484) of Chen Zhixu’s recension.

and Yang, “true essence”, “non-doing”, and “returning to the mandate”; the terms Spirit of the Valley and Mysterious-Female; and the expression “emptying the heart, filling the belly”, which takes on an important meaning in Neidan.

Ontology, Cosmogony, and the Neidan Practice

(1) 道生一，一生二，二生三，三生萬物。

The Dao generates the One, the One generates the Two, the Two generate the Three, the Three generate the ten thousand things. (*Daode jing* 42)

This short passage has provided Taoism with an ontology, by establishing a sequence of hierarchical stages leading from the Dao to multiplicity, and a cosmogony, when that sequence is understood as occurring along metaphoric time stages. The same sequence has also supplied the main model for the Neidan practice.

In one of its poems, the *Wuzhen pian* rephrases the *Daode jing* passage as follows:

道自虛無生一氣，便從一氣產陰陽。陰陽再合成三體，三體重生萬物昌。
The Dao from Empty Non-Being generates the One Breath,
then from the One Breath it gives birth to Yin and Yang.
Yin and Yang join again and form the three bodies;
the three bodies repeatedly generate, and the ten thousand things thrive.⁴⁵

Commentators have understood the “three bodies” (*santi* 三體) as *shen* 神, *qi* 氣, and *jing* 精, or spirit, breath, and essence, the three main constituents of the cosmos and of the human being that the Dao generates—in this sequence—with its self-manifestation.⁴⁶ Spirit, breath, and essence are at the basis of the main codification of the Neidan practice, associated with the Southern Lineage and deemed to be disguised in the poems of the *Wuzhen pian*.

45 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju” 絕句 (Cut-off Verses), 12.

46 This is also one of several interpretations of the term “three” in the original *Daode jing* passage. See Isabelle Robinet, “Un, deux, trois: Les différentes modalités de l’Un et sa dynamique,” *Cahiers d’Extrême-Asie* 8 (1995): 207–9, and the detailed analysis in her, *Les commentaires du Tao t’i king jusqu’au VIIe siècle* (Paris: Collège de France, Institut des Hautes Études Chinoises, 1977), 174–84.

In this codification, the practice intends to reverse the sequence described in the *Daode jing* in order to return to its inception.⁴⁷ The forward (and downward) movement from the Dao to multiplicity is defined as “following the course” (*shun* 順), and the opposite backward (and upward) movement, as “inverting the course” (*ni* 逆). Li Daochun uses these terms when he represents the relation between the *Daode jing* and the Neidan sequences in a chart (see Figure 1), which can be translated as follows:

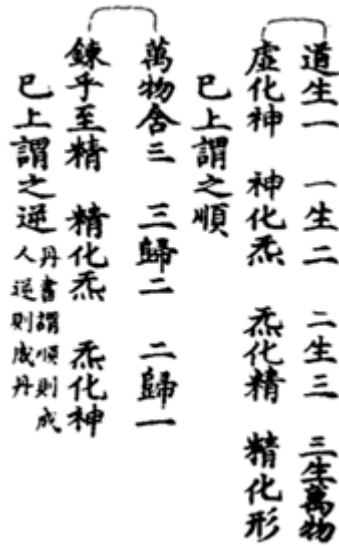


Figure 1: Relation between *Daode jing* 42 and the stages of *Neidan* practice. Zhonghe ji, 2.5b.

The Dao generates the One, the One generates the Two, the Two generate the Three, the Three generate the ten thousand things. Emptiness transmutes itself into Spirit, Spirit transmutes itself into Breath, Breath transmutes itself into

47 The three main stages are called “refining the Essence to transmute it into Breath” (*lianjing buaqi* 煉精化氣), “refining the Breath to transmute it into Spirit” (*lianqi buashen* 煉氣化神), and “refining the Spirit to revert to Emptiness” (*lianshen buanxu* 煉神還虛). They are also described as the reversion from three to two, from two to one, and from one to the Dao. See Catherine Despeux, *Zhao Bichen: Traité d’Alchimie et de Physiologie taoïste* (Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1979), 48–82; Robinet *Introduction à l’alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 147–64; Wang Mu, *Foundations of Internal Alchemy: The Taoist Practice of Neidan* (Mountain View, CA: Golden Elixir Press, 2011).

Essence, and Essence transmutes itself into form.⁴⁸ The above is called “following the course.”

The ten thousand things hold the Three, the Three return to the Two, the Two return to the One. Having refined [the form] into the perfect Essence, Essence is transmuted into Breath, and Breath is transmuted itself into Spirit. The above is called “inverting the course.” The books on the Elixir say that “following the course” forms the human being, while “inverting the course” forms the elixir.⁴⁹

In another passage concerned with the Dao as the principle that generates existence, the *Daode jing* states:

- (2) 道之為物，惟恍惟惚。惚兮恍兮，其中有象。恍兮惚兮，其中有物。窈兮冥兮，其中有精。其精甚真，其中有信。

The Dao is something so vague, so indistinct! Indistinct and vague! Within there is an image. Vague and indistinct! Within there is something. Dim and obscure! Within there is an essence. This essence is extremely true. Within there is a sign. (*Daode jing* 21)

Despite its lack of features and qualities, the Dao contains an “image” (*xiang* 象) of what it generates, a “sign” (*xin* 信) of its self-manifestation, and an “essence” (*jing* 精) through which it gives birth to multiplicity. The *Wuzhen pian* refers to this passage when it says:

恍惚之中尋有象，杳冥之內覓真精。
Within the vague and indistinct seek the image,
inside the dim and obscure search for the true essence.⁵⁰

In Neidan, “true essence” (*zhenjing* 真經) is a synonym of Original Essence (*yuanjing* 元精), one of the three components of the Internal Elixir with Original Breath (*yuanqi* 元氣) and Original Spirit (*yuanshen* 元神). As Bai Yuchan points out in one of his poems, Neidan is not based on ordinary essence, breath, and spirit—semen and blood, the breath of breathing, and the “thinking spirit” or *liushen* 慮神, respectively—but on their “original”, precelestial counterparts:

其精不是交感精，乃是玉皇口中涎。其氣即非呼吸氣，乃知卻是太素烟。其神即非思慮神，可與元始相比肩。

This Essence is not the essence of the intercourse:
it is the saliva in the mouth of the Jade Sovereign.
This Breath is not the breath of inspiration and expiration:

48 The last stage corresponds to the generation of the “ten thousand things,” i.e., the world of form.

49 *Zhonghe ji* 中和集 (Central Harmony: An Anthology; DZ 249), 2.5b. A slightly expanded version of this passage is found in Chen Zhixu's *Jindan dayao*, 4.7a–b.

50 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 44.

know that it is the haze of Great Purity.
 This Spirit is not the thinking spirit:
 it can stand alongside the Original Commencement.⁵¹

In a third passage, the *Daode jing* alludes to the operation of the Dao within the domain that it generates:

(3) 三十輻共一轂，當其無，有車之用。埴埴以為器，當其無，有器之用。鑿戶牖以為室，當其無，有室之用。故有之以為利，無之以為用。

Thirty spokes share one hub: wherein there is nothing lies the function of the carriage. One molds clay to make a vessel: wherein there is nothing lies the function of the vessel. One cuts out doors and windows to make a room: wherein there is nothing lies the function of the room. Therefore in what is there lies the benefit; in what is not there lies the function. (*Daode jing* 11)

The space found within a wheel (its hub), a vessel, and a room is used in the *Daode jing* as a metaphor of emptiness: these three objects provide benefit to those who use them, but only because their function (*yong* 用) is to hold empty space within their forms. Beyond the metaphor, form is a receptacle of emptiness, and as such it allows emptiness to operate.⁵²

The *Cantong qi* expresses the same concept in these verses:

以無制有，器用者空。故推消息，坎離沒亡。

It is from Non-Being that Being is produced:⁵³
 the function of a vessel consists in its emptiness.
 Therefore infer the ebb and flow,
 and the waning and vanishing of Kan ☵ and Li ☲.⁵⁴

The Yin and Yang principles, represented by Kan ☵ and Li ☲, “ebb and flow”, following cycles of increase and decrease. Although they are emblems of duality, Kan and Li harbor the emptiness of the precelestial domain, represented by their inner lines. When they rejoin to one another, their function comes to an end and they vanish. Liu Yiming writes in his notes on this passage:

有以無為用，但無之為用，人難測度。故聖人推陰陽來往消息，坎離會合沒亡，以有象比無象，以有形喻無形。

51 “Bijing rendi ge” 必竟恁地歌 (Song of ‘It is Indeed Like This’), in *Xiuzhen shishu* 修真十書 (Ten Books on Cultivating Reality; DZ 263), 39.10a.

52 There seems to be no proper way to render the two senses of the term *yong* 用, which defines both “function” and “operation.” In general, *yong* defines the enactment (the “operation”) of a principle as well as the activity (the “function”) of what enables its enactment. This dual sense should be taken into account here and in the passages quoted below.

53 Cf. *Daode jing* 40: “Being is generated from Non-Being” 有生於無.

54 *Cantong qi* 5.

Non-Being is the operation of Being. However, we find it difficult to comprehend that Non-Being is the operation. Therefore the sages have inferred that Yin and Yang come and go and ebb and flow, and that Kan and Li meet and conjoin, wane and vanish. They have represented the Imageless (*wuxiang*) by means of images, and the Formless (*wuxing*) by means of forms.⁵⁵

As an emblem of the cycles of time and the directions of space that enable the Dao to operate, the wheel is one of the most recurring images in the *Cantong qi*, along with its hub and its spokes, and with the associated metaphors of the carriage and its axle.⁵⁶ The image of the hub is found in its opening section:

乾坤者易之門戶，衆卦之父母。坎離匡郭，運轂正軸。
 Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ are the door and the gate of change,
 the father and the mother of all hexagrams.
 Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are the inner and the outer walls,
 they spin the hub and align the axle.⁵⁷

Several commentators have noted that the *Cantong qi* here uses one the metaphors of *Daode jing* 11. The same section continues by describing the roles of the four main trigrams used in the *Cantong qi*, namely Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li:

牝牡四卦，以為橐籥。
 Female and male, these four trigrams
 function as a bellows and its nozzles.⁵⁸

Here again, commentators have connected these verses to the *Daode jing*, which refers to the empty center from which existence comes forth by saying: “The space between Heaven and Earth—is it not like a bellows? As empty, it is never exhausted; as it moves, it continues to pour” 天地之間，其猶橐籥乎，虛而不屈，動而愈出 (*Daode jing* 5).

55 *Cantong zhi zhi* 參同直指 (Straightforward Pointers on the *Cantong qi*), “Jingwen” 經文 (Canon), *Daoshu shi'er zhong*, eds. of 1819 and 1880, rpt. in ZWDS, vol. 8, 1.10a.

56 The wheel and the related images appear in sec. 1, 8, 43, 51, and 58. The wheel as a symbol of the cosmos also pertains to the passage of the *Daode jing* quoted above, as the “thirty spokes” are traditionally said to represent the days of the lunar month. All these images are in turn associated with the themes of “driving” (*yu* 御) a chariot as a metaphor of ruling (*yu* 御) the kingdom; and of charioteering as a Taoist art, which the *Cantong qi* shares with the *Zhuangzi* and the *Liezi* 列子. See Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, 45–47 and 197–98.

57 *Cantong qi* 1. As Kan and Li embrace Qian and Kun, represented by their inner lines, they provide “inner and outer walls” (*kuangguo* 匡郭) to Qian and Kun: the Yin principle (☷) harbors True Yang (☯), and the Yang principle (☰) harbors True Yin (☷).

58 *Cantong qi* 1.

The Spirit of the Valley and the Mysterious-Female

(4) 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。

The Spirit of the Valley does not die: it is called Mysterious-Female. The gate of the Mysterious-Female is called the root of Heaven and Earth. Unceasing and continuous, its operation never wears out. (*Daode jing* 6)

Both Spirit of the Valley (*gushen* 谷神) and Mysterious-Female (*xuanpin* 玄牝) are important concepts and technical terms in Neidan. An essay on the Spirit of the Valley attributed to Bai Yuchan opens by saying:

谷者，天谷也。神者，一身之元神也。天之谷含造化，容虛空，地之谷容萬，載山川。人與天地同所稟也，亦有谷焉。其谷藏真一，宅元神。

The Valley is the Celestial Valley. Spirit is the Original Spirit (*yuanshen*) within one's own person. The valley in Heaven harbors creation and transformation and comprises emptiness and void. A valley on the Earth comprises the ten thousand things and holds mountains and rivers. As the human being shares its endowment with Heaven and Earth, it also has a valley. That valley stores True Unity and houses Original Spirit.

The valley of the *Daode jing*—another image of the emptiness of the Dao, capable of harboring all forms and phenomena—becomes with Bai Yuchan an image of the Celestial Valley (*tiangu* 天谷), one of the names of the upper Cinnabar Field. Located in the head and usually called Muddy Pellet (*niwan* 泥丸), the Celestial Valley is one of the residences of Original Spirit in the human being:⁵⁹

是以頭有九宮，上應九天。中間一宮，謂之泥丸。又曰黃庭，又名崑崙，又名天谷，其名頗多。乃元神所住之宮，其空如谷，而神居之，故謂之谷神。

Thus the head has nine palaces, which correspond to the Nine Heavens on high. The palace in the center is called Muddy Pellet. It is also called Yellow Court (*huangting*), Mount Kunlun, and Celestial Valley; it has many names. The palace where Original Spirit resides is as empty as a valley. Spirit resides there, therefore it is called Spirit of the Valley.⁶⁰

Bai Yuchan then explains the meaning of Mysterious-Female:

59 When the reference framework is the three Cinnabar Fields, spirit is located in the Muddy Pellet. Beyond this framework, it is located in the heart (*xin* 心), the center of the person.

60 “Gushen bu si lun” 谷神不死論 (Essay on “The Spirit of the Valley does not Die”), in *Xinzheng shishu*, 4.5a–b. Muddy Pellet is both the name of the central “palace” of the upper Cinnabar Field, and a name of this Field as a whole.

然谷神所以不死者，由玄牝也。元者，陽也，天也。牝者，陰也，地也。

However, it is only owed to the Mysterious-Female that “the Spirit of the Valley does not die.” The Mysterious is Yang and Heaven, the Female is Yin and Earth.⁶¹

This is one of many statements found in Neidan and other works showing that *xuanpin* is not understood as “mysterious female”, where “mysterious” is an adjective of “female.” *Xuan* and *pin* are both nouns, and the compound refers to the spaceless point of conjunction of Yin and Yang: the Mysterious denotes Heaven, and the Female refers to the Earth. Xiao Tingzhi writes in his lexicon of Neidan terms:

問曰：何謂玄牝。答曰：在上曰玄，在下曰牝。

Question: What is the Mysterious-Female? Answer: What is above (i.e., Heaven) is called the Mysterious, what is below (the Earth) is called the Female.⁶²

Zhang Boduan places this point at the basis of the whole of Neidan:

要得谷神長不死，須憑玄牝立根基。

If you want to find the Spirit of Valley and attain immortality, you must rely on the Mysterious-Female to establish the foundation.⁶³

On the other hand, Zhang Boduan rejects the view, first expressed in Heshang gong’s commentary to the *Daode jing*, that the term “gate of the Mysterious-Female” means the mouth and the nose and refers to breathing practices:⁶⁴

玄牝之門世罕知，休將口鼻妄施為。

Few in the world know the Gate of the Mysterious-Female: stop fiddling around with your mouth and your nose.⁶⁵

61 Ibid., 4.5b–6a. The text here has *yuan* 元, “origin,” which stands for *xuan* 玄, “mystery” or “mysterious.”

62 “Jindan wenda” 金丹問答 (Questions and Answers on the Golden Elixir), in *Xiuzhen shishu*, 10.23b.

63 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 39.

64 According to Heshang gong, “The Mysterious is Heaven; in man it is the nose. The Female is the Earth; in man it is the mouth” (commentary to *Daode jing* 6). See Wang Ka 王卡, *Laozi Daode jing Heshang gong zhangju* 老子道德經河上公章句 (The *Daode jing* by Laozi, Divided into Sections and Sentences by Heshang gong; Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1993), 21. This view became especially important in the Yangsheng 養生 (Nourishing Life) practices, which are often criticized in Neidan texts. Despite the different interpretation, Heshang gong also understands *xuan* and *pin* as two nouns.

65 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 40. Among Neidan authors who follow the view of the *Wuzhen pian* is Li Daochun: “Nowadays, people refer to the mouth and the nose and say that they are the Gate of the Mysterious-Female. This is wrong. The Mysterious-Female is the hinge of the opening and closing of Heaven and Earth” 天地闔闢之機. See *Zhonghe ji*, 3.31b.

The main synonym of Mysterious-Female in Neidan literature is One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier (*xuanguan yiqiao* 玄關一竅), a term often abbreviated to One Opening (*yiqiao* 一竅), Mysterious Barrier (*xuanguan* 玄關), Mysterious Opening (*xuanqiao* 玄竅), or simply Opening (*qiao* 竅). In the *Jindan sibaizi* 金丹四百字 (Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir), a poetical work attributed—once again, almost certainly spuriously—to Zhang Boduan, we read: “The Medicine is born in the Mysterious Opening” 藥物生玄竅.⁶⁶ The preface of this work first describes what the One Opening is not, and then places it at the center of Neidan:

要須知夫身中一竅，名曰玄牝。此竅者，非心非腎，非口鼻也，非脾胃也，非穀道也，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。

You should know that the One Opening at the center of the person is the Mysterious-Female. This Opening is not the heart or the kidneys, is not the mouth or the nose, is not the spleen or the stomach, is not the anus, is not the bladder, is not the [lower] Cinnabar Field, and is not the Muddy Pellet. If you are able to know this Opening, then the winter solstice, the Medicine, the Fire Phases, the “bathing”, and the coalescing and the delivery of the embryo are all found there.⁶⁷

Liu Yiming describes this point devoid of physical location by using several terms that allude to the conjunction of Yin and Yang:

夫所謂玄關者，乃四大不著之處。非有非無，非色非空，非內非外。又曰玄牝門，曰生殺舍，曰陰陽竅，曰生死關，曰混沌穴，曰龍虎壇，曰龜蛇，曰恍惚鄉，曰杳冥地，曰出納戶，曰戊己門。等等異名，總謂玄關竅。... 吾今與你指出。要知此竅在於六根不著之地，五行不到之處。恍兮惚兮，其中有竅。杳兮冥兮，其內有門，自開自闔。呼之則應，敲之則靈。

What we call Mysterious Barrier is the place where the four elements do not stick.⁶⁸ Neither it is, nor it is not; it is neither form nor emptiness; it is neither inside nor outside. It is also called Gate of the Mysterious-Female, Dwelling of Giving and Taking Life, Opening of Yin and Yang, Barrier of Birth and Death, Cavity of the Inchoate, Altar of the Dragon and the Tiger, Opening of the Turtle and the Snake, Village of the Vague and the Indistinct, Land of the Dim and the Obscure, Door of Entrance and Exit, and Gate of *wu* and *ji*. It has many different names, but in general it is called Opening of the Mysterious Barrier. ...

66 *Jindan sibaizi* 金丹四百字, in *Xiuqian shishu*, 5.7a.

67 *Jindan sibaizi* 金丹四百字, preface, in *Xiuqian shishu*, 5.4a. “Bathing” (*myu* 沐浴) denotes two moments of pause in the cycle of the Fire Phases, formally corresponding to the earthly branches *mao* 卯 and *you* 酉, the places and times of the emergence of Yang within Yin and Yin within Yang, respectively.

68 In Buddhism, the four elements (*sida* 四大) are Earth, Water, Fire, and Wind.

Let me tell you one thing. You should know that this Opening is in the land where the six senses do not stick, in the place where the five agents do not reach. Vague and indistinct! Within there is an opening. Dim and obscure! Within there is a gate. It opens and closes by itself. If you call out, it replies. If you knock, it responds.⁶⁹

The Black and the White

(5) 知其雄，守其雌，為天下谿。... 知其白，守其黑，為天下式。

Know the male, keep to the female, and be a ravine for the world. ... Know the white, keep to the black, and be a model for the world. (*Daode jing* 28)

The second sentence of this passage opens the description of the principles of alchemy in the *Cantong qi*:⁷⁰

知白守黑，神明自來。白者金精，黑者水基。

Know the white, keep to the black,
and the Numinous Light will come of its own.⁷¹
White is the essence of Metal,
Black the foundation of Water.⁷²

In these verses, the colors mentioned in the *Daode jing* coincide with those of two of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行): black, the emblem of the Yin principle, is also the color of Water, and white, the emblem of the Yang principle, is also the color of Metal. The respective alchemical symbols are “black lead” (*heiqian* 黑鉛, native lead) and True Lead (*zhenqian* 真鉛). Therefore the hidden principle sought by the alchemist—True Lead, the white within the black—is to be found within Water:

水者道樞，其數名一。陰陽之始，玄含黃芽。

Water is the axis of the Dao:
its number is 1.

69 *Xinzhen biannan* 修真辨難 (Discriminations on Difficult Points in Cultivating Reality), in *Daoshu shi'er zhong*, 1.7a. See also Li Daochun's descriptions of the Mysterious Barrier, quoted in Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 105–6.

70 This description (sec. 22–25) concerns the principles of alchemy, but belongs to the portions of the *Cantong qi* that discuss self-cultivation. Its purpose is to distinguish the way of “inferior virtue,” which according to the *Cantong qi* is alchemy, from the the way of “superior virtue,” which is based on the principle of “non-doing.” I will return to this subject below.

71 Cf. *Daode jing* 70: “The Way of Heaven ... is not summoned but comes of its own” (*zilai* 自來).

72 *Cantong qi* 22.

At the beginning of Yin and Yang,
Mystery holds the Yellow Sprout.⁷³

As the first agent generated in the cosmogonic sequence, Water is represented by number 1.⁷⁴ As the emblem of the Yin principle, it is the “mystery” (*xuan*); it stands for obscurity, the north, and black lead. However, Water stores the Yellow Sprout (*huangya* 黃芽), a term that in alchemy connotes True Lead and the first stage of the birth of the Elixir. Thus, although lead is black on the outside, it hides the white, luminous Golden Flower (*jinhua* 金華):

故鉛外黑，內懷金華。
That is why lead is black on the outside
but cherishes the Golden Flower within.⁷⁵

The next verses contain other expressions drawn from the *Daode jing*. The Golden Flower is likened to the treasure concealed by the Taoist saint, who “wears rough-hewn clothes but cherishes a piece of jade in his bosom” (*Daode jing* 70). The description of the principles of alchemy continues by saying that the elixir is “born before Heaven and Earth” (25). After it has been compounded, it should be guarded, because “when Spirit and Breath fill the chamber, no one can detain them” (9) and they might be lost.⁷⁶

The same passage of *Daode jing* 28 is at the basis of two verses in the *Wuzhen pian*:

黑中有白為丹母，雄裏懷雌是聖胎。
Within the black there is the white: the Mother of the Elixir;
the male harbors the female: the Sainly Embryo.⁷⁷

Here the *Daode jing* passage is applied to Neidan in a different way. While the first line refers again to True Yang, the second one refers to True Yin. The white alludes to Original Essence, which coagulates into the alchemical embryo and is called in Neidan the “mother of the elixir” (*danmu* 丹母). The female refers to the Original Spirit, equivalent to the “sainly embryo” (*shengtai* 聖胎).

Liu Yiming, who wrote commentaries to both the *Cantong qi* and the *Wuzhen pian*, gives an instance of the application of the terms and concepts

73 Ibid.

74 The “cosmogonic sequence” of the five agents is the order in which they are generated from Unity, namely Water (1), Fire (2), Wood (3), Metal (4), and Soil (5).

75 *Cantong qi* 22. More exactly, the Flower of Metal (its true essence), but Golden Flower has become the standard translation of *jinhua*.

76 *Cantong qi* 22, 24, and 25, respectively.

77 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 43.

mentioned above to the human being. The white is equivalent to the “mind of the Dao” (*daoxin* 道心), which holds true knowledge (*zhenzhi* 真知). The black is equivalent to the “human mind” (*renxin* 人心) and its volatile conscious knowledge (*lingzhi* 靈知).

白者，瑩淨，道心也。黑者，晦暗，人心也。知其白，則道心實。守其黑，則人心虛。道心實，則真知常存。人心虛，則靈知不飛。

The white, lustrous and pure, is the mind of the Dao. The black, dim and obscure, is the human mind. If you know the white, then the mind of the Dao becomes full. If you keep to the black, then the human mind becomes empty. When the mind of the Dao is full, true knowledge is constantly maintained. When the human mind is empty, conscious knowledge does not fly away.⁷⁸

Instead of conflicting with one another, the “mind of the Dao” and the “human mind” should operate in conjunction:

借道心制人心，以人心順道心，以真知統靈知，以靈知養真知。

By employing the mind of the Dao to control the human mind, one complies with the mind of the Dao by means of the human mind; one commands conscious knowledge by true knowledge; and one nourishes true knowledge by conscious knowledge.⁷⁹

Nourishing Oneself and Returning to the Mandate

(6) 致虛極，守靜篤。萬物並作，吾以觀復。夫物芸芸，各復歸其根。歸根曰靜，是謂復命，復命曰常，知常曰明。不知常，妄作凶。

Attain the ultimate of emptiness, guard the utmost of quiescence. The ten thousand things are brought about together: through them, I observe the return. Things are manifold, but each goes back to its root. Going back to the root is called quiescence, and this is returning to the mandate; returning to the mandate is called constancy; knowing constancy is called being luminous. By not knowing constancy, one foolishly brings about misfortune. (*Daode jing* 16)

This section of the *Daode jing* is one of the most important for Neidan. The *Wuzhen pian* summarizes it as follows:

萬物芸芸各返根，返根復命即常存。知常返本人難會，妄作招凶往往聞。

The ten thousand things are manifold, but each reverts to the root; as they revert to the root and return to the mandate, they are constantly preserved.

78 *Cantong zhi* 志, “Jingwen,” 2.9b–10a.

79 *Wuzhen zhi* 悟真直指 (Straightforward Pointers on the *Wuzhen pian*), *Daoshu shi'er zhong*, commentary on “Lüshi” 律詩, 4.

Knowing the constant and reverting to the foundation are difficult to understand:
We hear again and again of foolishly bringing about misfortune.⁸⁰

In the *Cantong qi*, the sections concerned with self-cultivation begin with this stanza:

內以養己，安靜虛無。原本隱明，內照形軀。
Innerly nourish yourself,
serene and quiescent in Empty Non-Being.
Going back to the fundament conceal your light,
and innerly illuminate your body.

These verses share several subjects with *Daode jing* 16: Emptiness (or Empty Non-Being), the return to the root (or “the fundament”), and the luminous quality of those who attain the state of quiescence (*jing* 靜). The next stanza asserts that attaining quiescence requires closing the “openings” (*dui* 兑), namely the eyes, the ears, and the mouth, and turning the light of these “three luminaries” (*sanguang* 三光) inwardly:

閉塞其兌，築固靈株。三光陸沈，溫養子珠。
Shut the openings
and raise and strengthen the Numinous Trunk;
as the three luminaries sink into the ground,
warmly nourish the Pearl.⁸¹

Elsewhere, the *Cantong qi* refers to ears, eyes, and mouth as the “three treasures” (*sanbao* 三寶):

耳目口三寶，閉塞勿發通。
Ears, eyes, and mouth are the three treasures:
shut them, and let nothing pass through.⁸²

80 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 51.

81 *Cantong qi* 18. In one of several interpretations, “numinous trunk” (*lingzhu* 靈株) refers to one’s inner nature. The expression “sinking into the ground” (*luchen* 陸沈) derives from the *Zhuangzi*: “[The saint] has buried himself among the people, hidden himself among the fields. . . . Perhaps he finds himself at odds with the age and in his heart disdains to go along with it. This is called ‘sinking into the ground.’” *Zhuangzi jishi* 莊子集釋 (Collected Explanations on the *Zhuangzi*), ed. Guo Qingfan 郭慶藩 (Beijing: Zhonghua shuju, 1961), 25.895. See Burton Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1968), 285–86.

82 *Cantong qi* 58. The mouth in *Neidan* is not the organ of taste, but rather the organ of speech. “Three treasures” is another term drawn from the *Daode jing*, although it is used there in a different sense: “I have three treasures, and hold to them and protect them. The first is compassion, the second is frugality, and the third is daring not be at the forefront in the world” 我有三寶，持而保之，一曰慈，二曰儉，三曰不敢為天下先 (*Daode jing* 67).

This principle and its formulation also originate in the *Daode jing*:

塞其兌，閉其門，終身不勤。開其兌，濟其事，終身不救。

Shut the openings, close the gates, and to the end of your life you will not toil.
Unlock the openings, meddle with affairs, and to the end of your life you will not
attain salvation. (*Daode jing* 52)

With the development of Neidan, the passage of the *Daode jing* translated at the beginning of this section was tied to its central subject, namely the cultivation of *xing* (human nature) and *ming* (destiny, existence), and especially to the issue of which between them should be the basis for cultivating the other. As the *Daode jing* gives emphasis to “guarding the utmost of quiescence,” and describes quiescence as the condition for “returning to the mandate (*ming*),” several Neidan masters saw in that passage an authoritative statement on the priority of *xing* over *ming*. Yet, as shown below, the opposite view was also formulated with reference to the *Daode jing*.

“Non-doing” and “Doing”

(7) 上德不德，是以有德，下德不失德，是以無德。上德無為，而無以為，下德為之，而有以為。

Superior virtue is not virtuous, thus it has virtue. Inferior virtue does not lack virtue, thus it has no virtue. Superior virtue has no doing: there is nothing whereby it does. Inferior virtue does: there is something whereby it does. (*Daode jing* 38)

According to this passage, superior virtue (*shangde* 上德) follows the principle of “non-doing” (*wuwei* 無為): it does not use anything in order to seek or display virtue. Inferior virtue (*xiade* 下德), instead, needs supports in order to seek and display virtue, and therefore it “does” (*weizhi* 為之). The passage continues by mentioning three examples of inferior virtue, namely *ren* 仁 or benevolence, *yi* 義 or righteousness, and *li* 禮 or propriety. These virtues emerge “after the Dao is lost” (*shi dao er hou de* 失道而後德) and when the cultivation of the highest principle—the Dao itself—is replaced by the cultivation of ethical principles.⁸³

This, however, is not the main concern of the *Cantong qi*, where the passage quoted above is at the basis of the following stanza:

83 See also *Daode jing* 18: “When the great Dao is abandoned, there are benevolence and righteousness” 大道廢，有仁義.

上德無為，不以察求，下德為之，其用不休。
 Superior virtue has no doing;
 it does not use examining and seeking.
 Inferior virtue does:
 its operation does not rest.⁸⁴

These verses concern the two ways of realization upheld by the *Cantong qi*: the way of “non-doing”, canonized in the *Daode jing*, and the way of “doing”, which is alchemy in the form canonized in the *Cantong qi* itself. The way of “non-doing” is superior virtue, and the way of “doing” is inferior virtue. In contrast to the dominant reading of the text, which understands it as entirely and exclusively concerned with Neidan, according to the *Cantong qi* alchemy is the way of inferior virtue.⁸⁵

The two main statements of the *Cantong qi* on this subject have been discussed above: the poems on “nourishing oneself” concern superior virtue, and those on “the black and the white” concern inferior virtue. With the emergence of the Northern and the Southern lineages of Neidan, the two ways of the *Cantong qi* were associated with two exemplary modes of self-cultivation, respectively based on cultivating *xing* and *ming*. The Northern Lineage advocates the way of “non-doing” and emphasizes “clarity and quiescence” (*qingjing* 清靜, another expression drawn from the *Daode jing*), maintaining that cultivating *xing* also involves the cultivation of *ming*. The Nanzong model, instead, follows a gradual process in which the cultivation of *ming* leads to the cultivation of *xing*.⁸⁶ This coincides with one of the *Daode jing* sayings on “non-doing”:

損之又損，以至於無為，無為而無不為。

Decrease and then again decrease until there is no doing. There is no doing, yet nothing is not done. (*Daode jing* 48)

Accordingly, the Nanzong practice begins with the “action” (*youzuo* 有作) required to cultivate *ming*, and ends with the “non-doing” required to cultivate *xing*:

84 *Cantong qi* 20.

85 On superior and inferior virtue in in Neidan, a complex subject that here I can approach very briefly, see Pregadio, “Superior Virtue, Inferior Virtue: A Doctrinal Theme in the Works of the Daoist Master Liu Yiming (1734–1821),” *T'oung Pao* 100 (2014): 460–98.

86 On the relation between these two models of Neidan self-cultivation, see Yokote, “Daoist Internal Alchemy”; Pregadio, “Destiny, Vital Force, or Existence?,” 186–97; idem, “Superior Virtue, Inferior Virtue,” 472–78. For the expression “clarity and quiescence,” see *Daode jing* 45: “Clarity and quiescence are the norm of the world” 清靜為天下正.

始於有作人難見，及至無為眾始知，但見無為為要妙，豈知有作是根基。
 It begins with action, and hardly can one see a thing,
 when it comes to non-doing, all begin to understand.
 But if you only see non-doing as the essential marvel,
 how can you understand that action is the foundation?⁸⁷

The sequence of the Nanzong practice is also related to this passage of the *Daode jing*:

(8) 是以聖人之治，虛其心，實其腹，弱其志，強其骨。
 Thus the Saint in his government empties their hearts, fills their bellies, weakens their wills, and strengthens their bones. (*Daode jing* 3)

“Emptying the heart” (or “the mind,” *xuxin* 虛心) and “filling the belly” (*shifu* 實腹) are two technical terms in the Nanzong view of Neidan:

虛心實腹義俱深，只為虛心要識心。不若鍊鉛先實腹，且教守取滿堂金。
 Empty the heart, fill the belly: the meanings are both profound.
 It is only in order to empty the heart that you should know the heart.
 Nothing is better than first filling the belly by refining Lead;
 then, by guarding and collecting, you load the hall with gold.⁸⁸

Commentators and later authors have pointed out that this poem alludes to cultivating *xing* and *ming*: the heart and the abdomen are their respective symbolic residences in the human being. While the *Wuzhen pian* maintains that both should be cultivated, the third and fourth lines of this poem show that one should begin with the work on *ming* and continue with the work on *xing*, following first the way of “doing” and then the way of “non-doing.”

The *Daode jing* as a Storehouse of Terms and Phrases

In addition to the doctrines seen above, Neidan draws several other terms, expressions, and phrases from the *Daode jing*. While they do not concern major Neidan principles, they are also signs of the role played by the *Daode jing* as a doctrinal authority. Here again, I can only refer to the *Cantong qi* and the *Wuzhen pian*, without taking notice of the additional instances found in other sources. To give a few examples, these include descriptive terms concerning the Dao such as *hun Cheng* 混成 (“inchoate [but] accomplished,” *Daode jing* 25),

87 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 42.

88 *Wuzhen pian*, “Jueju,” 10. For the last line, cf. *Daode jing* 9: “Gold and jade fill your halls, but no one can guard them” 金玉滿堂，莫之能守.

huanbu 恍惚 (“vague and indistinct,” 14 and 21), *yaoming* 杳冥 (“dim and obscure,” 21), and *mianmian ruocun* 綿綿若存 (“unceasing and continuous,” 6); expressions such as *zhibi* 知止 and *zhibu* 知足 (“knowing where to stop” and “knowing what is sufficient,” 32, 33, 44, and 46); and phrases such as *zhuangqi zhirou* 專氣致柔 (“concentrating one’s breath until it is at its softest,” 10). The selected examples quoted below, however, should suffice to show the nature and the range of the borrowings.⁸⁹

Phrases and terms referring to the Dao include the following ones:

DDJ 1: “These two *come forth together but have different names*. Together, they are called a mystery: *mystery and then again mystery*, gate of all wonders.” 此兩者同出而異名同謂之玄，玄之又玄，眾妙之門。— CTQ 87: “I have tendered three twigs, but their branches and stalks are bound to one another: *they come forth together but have different names*, as they all stem from one gate.” 羅列三條，枝莖相連，同出異名，皆由一門。— WZP JJ 41: “Few people know that *they have different names but come forth together*. Both are *mystery upon mystery*: this is the essential key” 異名同出少人知，兩者玄玄是要機。

DDJ 14: “*Watching, you do not see it*: it is called *invisible*. Listening, you do not hear it: it is called *inaudible*” 視之不見，名曰夷，聽之不聞，名曰希。— CTQ 18: “*Watching, you do not see it*” 視之不見。— WZP JJ 54: “The Dao resides in the *inaudible* and the *invisible*, joined to spontaneity” 道在希夷合自然。⁹⁰

In the first example above, the *Cantong qi* borrows the sentence of the *Daode jing* about the unity of the two aspects of the Dao (the absolute and the “mother”) to refer to the unity of its own three subjects. Other borrowed phrases consist of statements and metaphors on the operation of the Dao:

DDJ 8: “*Superior goodness is like water*. Water is good at giving *benefit* to the ten thousand things without contending” 上善若水，水善利萬物而不爭。— CTQ 55: “*Superior goodness is like water*, because it is flawless and clear” 上善若水，清而無瑕。— WZP “Xijiang yue” 西江月 3: “Thus we know that in *superior goodness* the source of *benefit* is deep” 故知上善利源深。

DDJ 16: “Things are manifold, but each *goes back to its root*” 夫物芸芸，各復歸其根，歸根曰靜。— CTQ 87: “You will *go back to the root* and return to the origin” 歸根返元。

89 In the quotations that follow, I use these abbreviations: CTQ = *Cantong qi* 參同契; DDJ = *Daode jing* 道德經; WZP JJ = *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇, “Jueju” 絕句; WZP LS = *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇, “Lüshi” 律詩. Terms and phrases that are identical or almost identical are shown in italics.

90 See also DDJ 35: “Watch it: there is nothing to see. Listen to it: there is nothing to hear. Use it: there is nothing that comes to an end” 視之不足見，聽之不足聞，用之不足既。

DDJ 79: “*The Way of Heaven has no sympathies*: it constantly stays with the good man” 天道無親，常與善人。— CTQ 81: “*The Way of Heaven renders no favors*: it is always transmitted to those who are worthy” 天道無適莫兮，常傳於賢者。

Several examples pertain to the Taoist saint and the state of realization:

DDJ 20: “*I alone am different from all others*, and I value being fed by the Mother” 我獨異於人，而貴食母。— “Depending on myself, *I alone am different from all others*” WZP LS 4 都緣我獨異於人。

DDJ 22: “Thus the saint *embraces Unity* and is a model for the world” 是以聖人抱一為天下式。— CTQ 87: “*Embracing Unity* without neglect, you will be able to maintain yourself for long” 抱一毋舍，可以長存。

DDJ 41: “A superior person hears of the Dao, and *assiduously practices it*” 上士聞道，勤而行之。— CTQ 27: “*Assiduously practice it* from sunrise to nightfall, without taking rest” 勤而行之，夙夜不休。

DDJ 41: “An inferior person hears of the Dao and *greatly laughs at it*” 下士聞道，大笑之。— WZP “Xijiang yue” 2: “The practice is easy, the Medicine is not far away; if I said it all, people *could not help but laugh*” 功夫容易藥非遙，說破人須失笑。

DDJ 55: “*Holding the fullness of virtue* is similar to being an infant” 含德之厚，比於赤子。— CTQ 87: “*Hold the fullness of virtue*, and you will go back to the root and return to the origin” 含德之厚，歸根返元。

Further examples of borrowed terms and expressions include the following:

DDJ 39: “Do not desire what is as cherished as jade, but what is *as solid as stone*” 不欲球球如玉，珞珞如石。— CTQ 87: “These are not sentences merely strung together in order to embroider my writing. In them there is only the truth, *as solid as stone* to be seen” 非徒累句，諧偶斯文，殆有其真，礫硤可觀。

DDJ 58: “Calamity rests upon fortune, fortune conceals itself within calamity” 禍兮福之所倚，福兮禍之所伏。— WZP JJ 63: “The origins of calamity and fortune rest upon and conceal within one another” 禍福由來互倚伏。

DDJ 69: “About using weapons there is a saying: *I dare not be the host and instead am the guest*” 用兵有言，吾不敢為主，而為客。— WZP LS 4: “Who else can comprehend the floating and the sinking, and determine *the host and the guest*?” 誰

識浮沈定主賓。— WZP JJ 23: “*Let the other be the host, and you are the guest?*” 饒他為主我為賓。⁹¹

Conclusion

Concepts such as “appropriation” and “legitimacy” are often used to analyze and evaluate phenomena analogous to those observed in this essay, in which a tradition draws principles and terms from a doctrinal authority and applies them to its own domain. Whether those concepts are fruitful as analytical tools depends on the individual cases, but it seems clear that they would not suffice to describe the relation between the *Daode jing* and Neidan. Neidan neither appropriates the *Daode jing* nor seeks legitimacy by tying its own principles and practices to Laozi and his work. Its procedure is the opposite one: it draws doctrines from the *Daode jing* and applies them to its own field, the human microcosm.

In this and similar cases, the main doctrinal authority is deemed to contain an integral statement of all major principles. While its exposition is complete and self-sufficient, applying those principles to different domains is the task of other traditions. Any of these applications is necessarily partial, because it concerns a limited domain, and because the comprehensive doctrinal statement is only found in its source. However, the nature of these traditions would be radically different in the absence of the doctrinal authority.

This subject is complex but can be summarized in a few words: the *Daode jing* does not need Neidan, but Neidan needs the *Daode jing*.

91 The concepts of “host and guest” in Neidan are probably also indebted to the use of these terms in Chan Buddhism, exemplified in particular in the “recorded sayings” of Linji 臨濟.