

Liu Yiming

CULTIVATING THE TAO

Taoism and Internal Alchemy

The Xiuzhen houbian (ca. 1798)

translated by Fabrizio Pregadio

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CULTIVATING THE TAO

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The *Xiuzhen houbian* (ca. 1798)
translated with Introduction and Notes
by Fabrizio Pregadio

Golden Elixir Press

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INTRODUCTION

This book contains a complete translation of one of the main works by the Taoist master Liu Yiming (1734–1821). Divided into 26 short chapters, *Cultivating the Tao* is at the same time a comprehensive overview of the basic principles of Taoism and an introduction to Taoist Internal Alchemy (Neidan), written by one of the most important representatives of this tradition.

Born in the present-day Shanxi province, Liu Yiming was an 11th-generation master of the northern Longmen (Dragon Gate) lineage.¹ Having recovered from severe illness in his youth, he undertook extended traveling that led him to meet his two main masters, both of whom he mentions in the present book. In 1779, he visited the Qiyun mountains, in the present-day Gansu province, and decided to settle there. He devoted the second half of his life to teaching and writing, and to charitable activities including restoring shrines and buying burial ground for the poor. Liu Yiming's works mainly consist of writings on Internal Alchemy and of commentaries on its major scriptures. Most of them are found in a collection entitled *Twelve Books on the Tao* (*Daoshu shi'er zhong*), which was edited and published by his disciples. In addition, he wrote little-known commentaries to Taoist and Buddhist texts, as well as works on ophthalmology, a subject that he studied in his youth.

Cultivating the Tao is one of the *Twelve Books on the Tao*. Its original Chinese title is *Xiuzhen houbian*, which can be translated as *Further Discriminations in Cultivating Reality*. As its title indicates, Liu Yiming meant this work as a continuation of his *Discriminations on Difficult Points in Cultivating Reality* (*Xiuzhen biannan*), written in 1798 and framed as a sequence of questions and answers—about 120 altogether—between him

and a disciple. The present book bears no date, but seems to have been completed shortly later. It takes up most of the subjects discussed in the previous work, but arranges them as short essays, each of which is devoted to a particular subject.

The word “discrimination” (*bian*) in the original titles of both works is significant. Liu Yiming continuously reminds his readers of the need to use discernment in their way of seeing and their practice. For this reason, he repeatedly compares and contrasts different views and methods, pointing out why they can or cannot lead to complete realization. Liu Yiming is aware that the issue of “true” versus “false” and “right” versus “wrong” may be thorny, but he deals with that issue in an exemplary way. As he writes in the Preface to *Cultivating the Tao*, the Tao cannot be discussed and cannot even be spoken, and “when no discussions or speeches are possible, how can there be discriminations?” He answers this question by saying that when one maintains oneself in the state in which there are no discussions and speeches on the Tao, one immediately knows “what is true and what is not true, what is false and what is not false.” He complies with his function of Taoist master from that perspective, and presents discussions and speeches based on discriminations so that “students can gradually awaken to the Tao that cannot be discussed, and inwardly comprehend the Tao that cannot be spoken.”

Few other Chinese authors have illustrated the relation between Taoism and Internal Alchemy as clearly as Liu Yiming does in this book. Grafting Internal Alchemy onto the teachings of the *Book of the Way and Its Virtue* (*Daode jing*) and of the later Taoist tradition, he shows how the way of the Golden Elixir can lead to the highest state of realization according to the Taoist principles. While each reader will find his or her own way of reading this book, probably by moving back and forth through its chapters (as most alchemical texts require one to do), I will attempt in this introduction to summarize the main points of Liu Yiming’s teaching, adding references to the chapters in which he discusses them in detail.

PRECELESTIAL AND POSTCELESTIAL

The distinction between the “precelestial” (*xiantian*) and the “postcelestial” (*houtian*) domains is essential to understand the whole of Liu Yiming’s discourse on Taoism and Internal Alchemy. Liu Yiming deals with this subject especially in Chapters 1 and 2 of *Cultivating the Tao*.²

The precelestial is the domain prior to the generation of the cosmos. The Tao does not manifest itself in this state, which can only be described by the name of the principle to which it pertains, Non-Being (*wu*). The postcelestial domain, instead, pertains to the principle of Being (*you*). This is the domain in which the individual creatures, objects, and phenomena live, exist, and occur; each of them is one of the “ten thousand things,” the innumerable transient forms generated by the formless Tao.

Although the precelestial domain is a state of non-manifestation, it harbors the three main constituents of life: Essence (*jing*), Breath (*qi*), and Spirit (*shen*).³ In the precelestial state, these constituents are in their “original” condition; as Liu Yiming says, they are “not provided with form.” More precisely, the precelestial Original Essence, Original Breath, and Original Spirit cannot even be distinguished from one another: they “have three names, but in fact they are one.” Their unity is their foundation (*ti*), their division into three is their operation (*yong*).

The operation of Original Essence, Breath, and Spirit results in the generation of the postcelestial state: “Through them, what is devoid of form generates form, and what is devoid of substance generates substance.” In the human being, Original Essence manifests itself in the postcelestial domain mainly as semen (the “essence of the intercourse”) in males and menstrual blood in females; Original Breath manifests itself as the ordinary breath of inspiration and expiration; and Original Spirit manifests itself as the cognitive spirit (*shishen*), that is, the thinking mind. Two points require attention about this view. First, the precelestial state is Yang, while the postcelestial state is Yin. The shift from one to the other state is seen as inevitable:

reiterating the general Chinese view on this subject, Liu Yiming repeatedly states that “when the Yang culminates, the Yin is born.” The precelestial state, however, is not erased, but only “concealed by the postcelestial”; few persons have an inherent capacity to preserve it before it withdraws. Second, unlike breathing and the cognitive spirit, which begin to develop immediately after birth, the postcelestial essence “comes into being after one’s birth.”⁴ As we shall see, these points bear important consequences on Liu Yiming’s teachings on Internal Alchemy.

Above the precelestial and postcelestial domains, Liu Yiming places the Precelestial Breath of True Unity. This state, which is the subject of Chapter 3, is beyond definition or description, and can be referred to only by negative statements: “It cannot be compared to the postcelestial breath of inspiration and expiration, the thinking spirit, and the essence of the intercourse; and it also cannot be equated to the Original Essence, the Original Breath, and the Original Spirit.” With regard to the human being, moreover, the Precelestial Breath of True Unity cannot be located in, or equated with, any of its physical or mental features. The only “place” in which it is to be found is actually devoid of location: the One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier, on which we shall return presently. In alchemical terms, as Liu Yiming says, the Precelestial Breath of True Unity is the Golden Elixir. The Elixir, therefore, consists in the conjunction of the precelestial and the postcelestial, and grants access to the higher state of non-duality, or True Unity.

THE HUMAN BEING

Liu Yiming’s view of the human being is complex and can only be gleaned through statements found in different chapters of his book. It revolves, however, around the main concepts outlined below.

The Mysterious Barrier. The One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier (*xuanguan yiqiao*) is the spaceless center of the human

being. Liu Yiming describes its features in Chapter 16, where he lists some of its alternative names: Door of Yin and Yang, Land of the Immortals and the Buddhas, Cavity of Empty Non-Being, and several others—including two terms derived from the *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*, namely Gate of All Marvels and Gate of the Mysterious-Female.⁵ He also devotes a poem to this subject, where the Mysterious Barrier is represented as a place that is “not round and not square,” inhabited by a True Man (*zhenren*, a realized person) who “eats a broth of millet” (Pearl of Millet is a common synonym of the Elixir) and “drinks the liquor of the boundless” (an allusion to the inchoate state prior to the birth of the cosmos). The name of this immortal is Spirit of the Valley, another term derived from the *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*.⁶

Although one is bound to describe it as a “place,” Liu Yiming points out that the One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier is devoid of dimension, and is to be found “neither inside nor outside” the illusory body. He adds: “The Mysterious Barrier has no form and no image: how could it have a position? It is not form and it is not emptiness: how could it have a place?” Here Liu Yiming gives an example of the “discriminations” that he sets forth in this book: although the Mysterious Barrier has often been identified with one or another part of the body, he concurs with earlier masters of Internal Alchemy in saying that the center of the human being pertains neither to the body nor to the mind.

“*My House*” and the “*Other House*.” The One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier harbors the True Yang, which is the Precelestial Breath of True Unity and which Liu Yiming also calls the “treasure of Heaven” (Chapter 3).⁷ With the shift from the precelestial to the postcelestial, the True Yang withdraws, and the recognition of the spaceless center is lost. Liu Yiming uses the terms “my house” (*wojia*) and “other house” (*tajia*) to refer to the split that occurs at this crucial junction: “When we speak of ‘my house,’ we mean that one’s own True Yang has separated

from oneself. . . . When we speak of the ‘other house,’ we mean that one’s own True Yang has been trapped by the Yin” (Chapter 13; see also Chapter 8).

In other words, after the subdivision of the One into the two, the precelestial True Yang becomes hidden within the Yin that rules on the postcelestial domain as a whole. In the language of alchemy, this True Yang becomes the True Lead found within ordinary black lead. In the images of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*), it becomes the solid Yang line (—) found within Kan ☵, surrounded by two broken Yin lines. The trigrams also enable a clear overall representation of the movement from the precelestial to the postcelestial: “The Yang in the Palace of Qian ☰ [True Yang] moves to the Palace of Kun ☷ [True Yin]. At that time, Qian becomes empty and turns into Li ☲, and Kun becomes full and forms Kan ☵” (Chapter 13). When it is represented through these emblems, the purpose of alchemy consists in regaining the Yang within Kan ☵ (the “other house”) and in using it to replace the Yin within Li ☲ (“my house”). This allows Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ first to be reconstituted, and then newly conjoined.

Nature and Existence. Liu Yiming also uses the terms “my house” and “other house” to describe the main poles of one’s life as a human being: Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*). “Nature” is intended as one’s authentic, inner Nature, which is innately perfected; being clear and quiescent of its own, it pertains to the Yin principle. “Existence” refers to one’s life as an individual being, including one’s function in existence as a whole; being distinguished by the continuous movement and change of the outer world, it pertains to the Yang principle. As Liu Yiming says in Chapter 5, the True Yang principle now found in the “other house” serves to stabilize one’s Existence. Then one should look for the True Yin found in “one’s house,” and release it from confinement within the false Yang (the thinking mind) in order to reveal one’s true Nature.

The doctrines concerning Nature and Existence are deemed to be fundamental in Liu Yiming’s works and in many earlier or

later texts. Earlier masters, for instance, called Nature and Existence “the roots of self-cultivation,” “the secret of the Golden Elixir,” “the essentials for refining the Elixir,” and “the learning of the divine immortals.”⁸ Liu Yiming himself writes in another work: “The Way of the Golden Elixir is the Way of cultivating Nature and Existence.”⁹ In *Cultivating the Tao*, Nature and Existence are repeatedly mentioned and are the main subject of Chapter 5, where Liu Yiming gives an important explanation of their properties. The shift from the precelestial to the postcelestial, he says, involves that both Nature and Existence take on two aspects: (1) A true (precelestial) Nature bestowed by Heaven, and a false (postcelestial) nature consisting in one’s character (or personality, temperament); (2) A true (precelestial) Existence consisting in the Breath of the Tao, and a false (postcelestial) existence consisting in one’s “destiny.” With “true Existence,” Liu Yiming means that each individual is given life by the One Breath of the Tao, and is in fact nothing but a transient form created by the One Breath. Within this broad framework, each individual is supposed to perform its own function as part and parcel of existence as a whole. This is one’s “true destiny,” different from the ordinary concept of destiny as a passively acquired or endured sequence of events that make up one’s life.

Just like one’s true Nature can be hidden by one’s false personality, so can one’s true Existence (one’s “true destiny”) become concealed by “following the course” (*shun*) of life. With its gradual backward process—which, in fact, is an *upward* process—Internal Alchemy provides a means for “inverting the course” (*ni*), making it possible first to “return to one’s destiny,” and then to “see one’s Nature.”

Body and Mind. Chapter 4 of *Cultivating the Tao* opens by saying: “People nowadays speak of the body and the mind, but they only know the illusory body and mind, and do not know the true body and mind.” In Liu Yiming’s view, the illusory body is “the body of flesh,” and the illusory mind is the ordinary thinking mind. Their authentic counterparts are the “dharma-

body” (*fashen*) and the “celestial mind” (*tianxin*). Liu Yiming describes the celestial mind as “utterly empty and utterly numinous, silent and unmoving,” and adds that it “pervades throughout by responding to impulses.” As for the dharma-body, a term that in Buddhism means the awakened “body” of the Buddha, it has “no head and no tail, no front and no back; it stands at the center and does not slant.” The center mentioned in Liu Yiming’s description of the dharma-body is also explicit in the Chinese name of the “celestial mind”: *tianxin* literally means Heart (or, Center) of Heaven. The “true” body and mind, therefore, are two aspects of the same center defined as the One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier, as we have seen above.

As a consequence, once again, of the shift from the precelestial to the postcelestial domains, the awareness of the “true” body and mind is lost: “. . . the dharma-body is buried and the illusory body takes charge, the celestial mind retires from its position and the human mind takes power.” Internal Alchemy, as Liu Yiming writes in Chapter 9, makes it possible to attain “the utmost of quiescence,” which is a property of the celestial mind. When the inner alchemical process is fully achieved, it culminates in the completion and the birth of the Embryo of Sainthood (*shengtai*): “Like a fruit that ripens and falls to the ground, you deliver your dharma-body.” What many authors describe as the alchemical “embryo,” therefore, is equivalent to one’s dharma-body, or “true body.”

THE TWO WAYS

The main section concerning Internal Alchemy in *Cultivating the Tao* is Chapter 19, “Superior Virtue and Inferior Virtue.” Here Liu Yiming makes a fundamental distinction between two ways of self-cultivation, respectively called “superior virtue” (*shangde*) and “inferior virtue” (*xiade*). Both terms derive from the *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*, where they refer to “non-doing” (*wuwei*) and “doing” (*yowwei*), respectively.¹⁰ Superior

and inferior virtue are also mentioned in the main text of Internal Alchemy, the *Seal of the Unity of the Three* (*Cantong qi*), where they denote the two ways of realization upheld by this text, one based on “non-doing” and the other based on “doing.”¹¹

According to Liu Yiming’s explanation, the higher way pertains to the state in which “one’s body is intact and one’s virtue is full”: the precelestial has not been damaged and the original state of Unity is unspoiled. As mentioned above, few persons have an inherent potential to preserve this state, and only need to know how to “protect it and guard it.” This requires receiving the instructions of a master, but the method (*fa*) ultimately consists in following the Tao itself: there is no need to “do” a practice, and one operates by “non-doing.” This is the way of superior virtue. If this original state is not preserved, the precelestial is dispersed and the postcelestial takes over. To recover the precelestial state, represented by the trigram Qian ☰, one cannot anymore operate by “non-doing” and instead must “do”: one needs a technique (*shu*) through which one can rejoin the True Yang (—) and True Yin (--) now found within the postcelestial Yin (☷) and Yang (☰), respectively. This is the way of Internal Alchemy, which—however unexpected this might at first sight appear—is the way of inferior virtue.

An important aspect of Liu Yiming’s discourse on superior and inferior virtue deserves attention. In Chapter 19, he emphasizes that maintaining Unity means preserving the integrity of the precelestial state itself: “it does not mean that the postcelestial body has not lost its integrity.” These words touch on a major issue within Internal Alchemy as a whole. According to certain traditions, “losing integrity” (*poshen*) refers to the first emission of the essence (*jing*, semen) in a male, an event that is deemed to cause, and to signal, the loss of the precelestial state: the first emission of the essence is seen as equivalent to the shift from Qian ☰ to Li ☲ that occurs when the postcelestial state is generated. In this view, recovering the state of Unity (Qian ☰) involves recovering the fullness of one’s essence.

Liu Yiming rejects this view: the state of the postcelestial essence, he says, cannot be the criterion to distinguish superior virtue from inferior virtue. This is because the postcelestial essence pertains to the postcelestial “illusory body,” and not to the “dharma-body.” Moreover, the postcelestial essence, as he writes in Chapter 2, “comes into being after one’s birth,” and for this reason cannot be used to recover the precelestial state. The conclusion, says Liu Yiming, is that “when the precelestial is intact, that is superior virtue, and when the precelestial is lacking, that is inferior virtue.”

INTERNAL ALCHEMY AND THE ELIXIR

In Chapter 15 of *Cultivating the Tao*, Liu Yiming writes: “The Golden Elixir is the Great Ultimate. . . . All discourses about refining the Golden Elixir are teachings about the Great Ultimate.” The Great Ultimate (*taiji*) is the state of Unity prior to the division of the One into the two: Yin and Yang, precelestial and postcelestial. Being obtained through the conjunction of Yin and Yang, the Elixir opens the gate to the realization of the state of Unity.

“*Doing*” and “*Non-Doing*.” In addition to this central definition, Liu Yiming establishes a key difference between two aspects, or stages, of the Elixir. As he points out in Chapter 19, these stages focus on the cultivation of Nature and Existence, and they correspond to the ways of superior and inferior virtue, respectively. Those who are able to follow the way of superior virtue perform the two stages simultaneously: “In superior virtue, there is no need to cultivate Existence and one just cultivates Nature: when Nature is fulfilled, then Existence is also fulfilled.” Everyone else should perform the two stages in sequence, starting from the lower one and then proceeding to the higher one: “In inferior virtue, one must first cultivate Existence and then cultivate Nature; after Existence is fulfilled, one must also fulfill Nature.”¹²

The way of superior virtue attains both stages instantly by “non-doing.” Inferior virtue, instead, is the gradual way: Internal Alchemy enables one first to recover the True Seed by “doing,” and then to nourish it by “non-doing.” Here Liu Yiming adds an important remark: when both stages of the Way of inferior virtue are fulfilled, “then this road has led to the same destination as superior virtue.” As he states in Chapter 20, this should be the proper way of understanding the terms “non-doing” and “doing”: *Awakening to Reality (Wuzhen pian)*, a text cherished by all masters and practitioners of Internal Alchemy, establishes this sequence in one of its poems, which Liu Yiming quotes at the beginning of that chapter.

The Two Elixirs. When the two ways of realization are accomplished beginning from inferior virtue, the stages mentioned above correspond to two different Elixirs. In Chapter 8, Liu Yiming calls them Internal Medicine and External Medicine. In Chapter 9, he calls them Small Reverted Elixir and Great Reverted Elixir. The Small Reverted Elixir “consists in returning from the postcelestial to the precelestial.” This is the movement of ascent, the “inversion of the course” performed through Internal Alchemy. Liu Yiming describes it by means of familiar alchemical images that represent the conjunction of Yin and Yang, such as Lead and Mercury, or the Lord of Metal and the Lovely Maid. The practice, however, is completed only by compounding the Great Reverted Elixir. At this stage, one performs the complementary movement of descent, returning “from Non-Being to Being, and from the subtle to the manifest.” Thus Internal Alchemy, through its gradual process, enables one to ascend to the precelestial, but its practice is concluded when the descent to the postcelestial is also performed. Then the precelestial and the postcelestial become one, and one operates by transforming (*hua*) the postcelestial into the precelestial and vice versa.

The Fire Phases and the True Fire. Another aspect of Liu Yiming’s views that deserves mention is his criticism of the

tendency of turning the formless into something provided with form in one's understanding and practice of Internal Alchemy. According to Liu Yiming, this results in confining oneself within the postcelestial, and removes the possibility of attaining the precelestial. In Chapter 15, for example, he says that the tripod, the furnace, and even the ingredients of the Elixir—True Lead and True Mercury—are only names and images that “serve to make a certain key point visible.” The same is true, with regard to the human body, of Kan ☵ (Yin containing True Yang) and Li ☲ (Yang containing True Yin), which should not be literally identified as the kidneys and the heart, respectively.

Equally important are the views expressed in Chapter 12, whose subject is the system used to determine the stages of heating the Elixir, known as “fire phases” (*huohou*). As is well known, this system uses cosmological emblems, including the twelve “earthly branches,” in order to match the inner cycling of “fire” to the outer cosmological cycles (in particular, the cycles of the day and the year).¹³ Faithful to the famous statement attributed to Bai Yuchan (1194–1229?), “the True Fire fundamentally has no phases,” Liu Yiming points out that the true fire phases have nothing to do with time in the ordinary sense, and even less so with the emblems used to mark ordinary time—in particular, the earthly branches *zi*, *wu*, *mao*, and *you*. Concerning this point, Liu Yiming writes: “Alas! Those are the *zi*, *wu*, *mao*, and *you* of Heaven: what do they have to do with me? Heaven has Heaven’s time, I have my own time.” Nonetheless, Liu Yiming also quotes a poem found in *Awakening to Reality*, which states: “Even if you discern the Vermilion Sand and the Black Lead, it will be useless if you do not know the fire phases.” Therefore, he says, “fundamentally there are no phases,” and yet one “must know the phases.” For Liu Yiming, this means that one should always regulate one’s operation, within and outside one’s practice, by “waiting for the proper time”: “When you encounter the phase of the birth of Yang, you advance the Yang; when you encounter the phase of the birth of Yin, you withdraw the Yin.” The timing of the alchemical work “does not concern the dead time phases of the ordinary hours and days.”

CRITICISM OF OTHER PRACTICES

As “discrimination” is the main theme underlying the teachings found in *Cultivating the Tao*, it is no surprise that Liu Yiming devotes much attention to the criticism of practices and methods that he sees as unproductive or even as harmful for one’s complete realization. In doing so, Liu Yiming looks into a theme that runs throughout the history of Internal Alchemy, beginning with the *Seal of the Unity of the Three*, continuing with *Awakening to Reality*, and later discussed by many of the major masters of this tradition. As other authors did before him, Liu Yiming calls these practices and methods the “external ways” (*waidao*) or the “side gates” (*pangmen*).¹⁴

In Chapter 20, Liu Yiming lists several practices that can be mistaken as forms of “doing” or “non-doing.” These practices include traditional forms of Taoist meditation—for instance, inhaling the essences of the Sun and Moon, ingesting the breaths (*qi*) of “the clouds and the mist,” and concentrating “on the tip of the nose”—as well as Waidan (External Alchemy). Among them, however, Liu Yiming also mentions methods that belong to Internal Alchemy itself: to mention a few, circulating breath (*qi*) between *zi* and *wu*, joining the breaths of the heart and the kidneys to one another, and “causing the Essence of Metal to ascend on the back of the body.”¹⁵ According to Liu Yiming, these practices are inadequate either because they “cling to phenomenal appearances” or, vice versa, because they “stick to emptiness.” Clearly Liu Yiming’s point here is not to criticize Internal Alchemy per se, which he does equate with the way of inferior virtue, but recommends to all those who cannot follow the way of superior virtue, adding that the two ways can lead to the same degree of realization. His point, rather, is to remind that one should not restrict oneself to the way of inferior virtue: in “doing” one’s practice, one should be able to “stop when it is sufficient” (Chapter 12) and then proceed to the way of superior virtue, where “non-doing” takes up a meaning different from the practices he mentions.

The other major focus of criticism is sexual practices. Liu Yiming constantly advises against “using women” for one’s practice (Chapter 15), and against taking women “as furnaces and tripods” (Chapter 11) in order to collect the ingredient of the Elixir, under the wrong belief that the term “other house”—the Yin containing True Yang—refers to “actual people” (Chapter 8). According to Liu Yiming, this error is even worse than the one made by those who practice alchemy by identifying formless principles with the “illusory body,” or by “relying on furnaces and stoves” and practicing External Alchemy. He explains the reason of the error by saying that “the coagulation [of the Elixir] occurs within Empty Non-Being,” and therefore it “neither has anything to do with men and women, nor is concerned with this skin bag made of breath and matter,” a Buddhist expression that denotes the illusory body (Chapter 15).

Chapter 14 of *Cultivating the Tao*, which is entirely concerned with the issue of sexual practices, requires some comments as this is probably, from the point of view of its language, the most complex section of the book. The term *shoujing*, which Liu Yiming uses in the title of this chapter, has two meanings, both of which should be taken into account to understand his discourse.

The first meaning refers to the cycle of the moon, which in Internal Alchemy is one of the favorite representations of the cyclical ascent and descent of Yin and Yang. Here *shoujing* refers to the initial (*shou*) stage of the course (*jing*) of the Yang principle during the lunar month. This initial stage runs from the 3rd to the 8th days. After the dominion of the Yin principle in the previous night of black moon, during those days the newly reborn Yang principle begins to rise. In Internal Alchemy, this stage represents the symbolic time in which one should collect the True Yang in its pristine state. The second meaning pertains to the sexual practices. Here the term *shoujing* refers to the first (*shou*) menstruation (*jing*), which traditionally is said to occur at 14 years of age. Adepts of sexual practices collected the “True Yang” through intercourse with females between the 3rd and the 8th day after their first menstruation.

The first verse of *Awakening to Reality* that Liu Yiming quotes in Chapter 14 (“The initial flow of the White Tiger is the perfect Treasure”) has provided textual ground for both views. Different authors and commentators have taken that verse to mean the True Yang (the “perfect Treasure”) that is either re-born from the Yin (the “White Tiger”) a few days after the beginning of each month, or found within a female (another instance of the “White Tiger”) a few days after her first menstruation. Liu Yiming, who rejects not only the sexual practices per se, but especially their use in Internal Alchemy, expresses in this chapter his views on the meaning of the term “initial flow.” As part of his discourse, he calls attention on what he sees as a major error made by followers of those practices. If the term “initial flow” referred to the first menstruation of a fourteen-year old female, he says, that “would be a case of the Yang culminating and generating the Yin, and not of the Yin culminating and generating the Yang: blood pertains to the Yin, and the flowing blood is the manifestation of the birth of the Yin.” Beyond any other issue, therefore, in Liu Yiming’s view even the supposed rationale of sexual practices involves an error.¹⁶

Finally, it should be noted that traditional Chinese sexual practices, not only in their *fangzhong shu* (“arts of the bedroom”) version, but also in their application to Internal Alchemy, are primarily—if not exclusively—addressed to males. With regard to this point, Liu Yiming’s discussion of this subject in Chapter 14 includes a noteworthy remark: “Moreover, if a man would attain the Tao by means of a woman’s ‘initial flow,’ why should a woman not live a long life by means of a man’s ‘initial flow’? If men should cultivate the Tao using women, then women too should cultivate the Tao using men.” To my knowledge, no master of Internal Alchemy before Liu Yiming had ever made a similar remark in writing.

This translation the *Xiuzhen houbian* is based on the Yihua tang (Hall of Winged Transformation) edition of the *Daoshu shi'er zhong* (Twelve Books on the Tao), published in 1880 and reprinted first in 1990 (Beijing: Zhongguo Zhongyiyao chubanshe) and then in *Zangwai daoshu* (Taoist Texts Outside the Canon), vol. 8. My notes, found at the end of each chapter, attempt to explain the background of points that might not be immediately clear to modern Western readers; to provide references to chapters where a particular subject is treated in detail; and to identify the sources of the large number of quotations from earlier texts made by Liu Yiming.

I am grateful to Song Xiaokun, without whose support and advice I could not complete and publish this book. Any error in the translation and the notes is entirely my responsibility.

Fabrizio Pregadio
Autumn 2013

Notes

1. The Longmen lineage claims descent from Qiu Chuji (1148–1227), who was a disciple of Wang Chongyang (1113–70), the founder of the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) branch of Taoism.

2. The Chinese terms *xiantian* and *houtian* are often translated as Earlier Heaven and Later Heaven, or in similar ways. They refer, in fact, to the Opening of Heaven (*kaitian*), the actual “instant” in which the cosmos is generated.

3. As is well known, the Chinese term *qi* has no precise equivalent in English or other Western languages. Besides “breath,” it is often rendered as “energy,” “pneuma,” and in several other ways. In this and other translations, I use “breath,” mainly for one reason: the term *qi* denotes not only the “breath” of the Tao, but also the ordinary breath of breathing. These two meanings are closely related to one another, and choosing a different English term for *qi* when it refers to the Tao would hide the continuity that exists between them.

4. According to the traditional Chinese view, the postcelestial essence first manifests itself at the age of 14 in females, and of 16 in males.

5. *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 1 and 6, respectively. The compound word *xuanpin* is often translated as “mysterious female,” where “mysterious” is meant as an adjective of “female.” It is made, however, of two juxtaposed terms: “mysterious” (*xuan*, a property of Heaven) refers to the Yang, and “female” (*pin*) refers to the Yin. In other words, Mysterious-Female means the conjunction of Yin and Yang.

6. *Daode jing*, sec. 6.

7. With regard to this view, one point requires attention as it bears on Internal Alchemy as a whole. Taoist texts consistently refer to Unity (or the One) as “Yang.” This “True Yang” is not the Yang complementary to the Yin, but denotes the stage of Unity prior to the subdivision of the One into Yin and Yang. In turn, this implies that the Elixir, which represents the Unity obtained through the reconjunction of Yin and Yang, is also denoted as “Yang.” Similarly, Lead (True Yang) is complementary to Mercury (True Yin), but also denotes the Elixir itself. The same is also true of Qian ☰ (True Yang), which is complementary to Kun ☷ (True Yin), but at the same time represents their unity.

8. These definitions are found in works by, or attributed to, Wang Chongyang, Qiu Chuji, Li Daochun (late 13th century), and Wang Jie (14th century), respectively.

9. Commentary to the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality), “Jueju,” poem 42; see Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, p. 101, where Nature is translated as “essence,” and Existence as “life.”

10. *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 38: “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.” In this passage, note especially the association between superior virtue and “non-doing,” and between inferior virtue and “doing.”

11. *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), sec. 20: “Superior virtue has no doing: it does not use examining and

seeking. Inferior virtue does: its operation does not rest.” See Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, pp. 48–51, 78, and 152.

12. The two stages mentioned by Liu Yiming should not be confused with the common subdivision of the practice of Internal Alchemy into three, four, or more stages. In fact, Liu Yiming subdivides the practice into as many as 18 stages in Chapter 26, although—on the basis of their names—it seems possible to reduce them to the preliminary stage of “laying the foundations” followed by the customary three main stages. On the sequence of the practice in Internal Alchemy see Wang Mu, *Foundations of Internal Alchemy*.

13. See Wang Mu, *Foundations of Internal Alchemy*, pp. 102–5. For the four branches mentioned below (*zi*, *wu*, *mao*, and *you*) see the table on p. 133 of the present book.

14. For the *Cantong qi*, see especially sec. 26; trans. Pregadio, *The Seal*, pp. 80–81. For the *Wuzhen pian*, see especially “Lüshi,” poems 9 and 15; trans. Pregadio, *Awakening to Reality*, pp. 48 and 67.

15. On the first and the third practices mentioned above, see notes 2 and 4 to Chapter 20.

16. In my translation of Chapter 14 and elsewhere in this book, I have rendered the term *shoujing* as “initial flow,” which seems to suit its two possible meanings: the “first stage of a course” and the “first flow of blood.”

Translation

Preface

Zhuangzi says: “The Great Tao is not discussed, the great discriminations are not spoken.”¹ Essentially, since in the first place the Tao has no name, how can it be discussed? Since in the first place the Tao has no form, how can it be spoken? When no discussions or speeches are possible, how can there be discriminations?

Yet in the world there are some who discuss the Tao and make speeches on the Tao. As soon as there are discussions, right and wrong are mixed with one another and the Tao becomes not true; as soon as there are speeches, good and evil fight against one another and the Tao becomes false. Since their discussions on the Tao are not true and their speeches on the Tao are false, those people are not discussing the Tao and instead are slandering the Tao; they are not speaking on the Tao and instead are disparaging the Tao.

Slandering the Tao and disparaging the Tao close the gate to cultivating the True and obstruct the path to practicing the Tao. As these are the greatest of all harms, I cannot refrain from making thorough discriminations in order to break what is not true in those discussions, and from making fine discriminations in order to crack what is false in those speeches. By making discriminations on discussions that are not true and on speeches that are false, without hardship students can gradually awaken to the Tao that cannot be discussed, and inwardly comprehend the Tao that cannot be spoken. Enabling someone to awaken to something difficult to awaken to, and to comprehend something difficult to comprehend—these are the only purposes of making discriminations about what is difficult to awaken to and to comprehend.

However, having made discriminations, can one call it “not speaking”? Having made speeches, can one call it “not discussing”? And having made discussions and speeches, is it still possible to make discriminations on discussions that are not true and on speeches that are false? Someone discusses and I also discuss; someone speaks and I also speak. How can I know that their discussion is true and my discussion is not true? Or that my discussion is true and their discussion is not true? How can I know that their speech is false and my speech is not false? Or that my speech is false and their speech is not false?

One knows what is true and what is not true, what is false and what is not false, only when one looks at all this by maintaining oneself in “not discussing the Tao” and “not speaking on the Tao.” Could I make discriminations about this?

Preface by the Master Who Awakens to the Origin²

Notes

1. *Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; see Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, p. 44.
2. Master Who Awakens to the Origin (Wuyuan zi) is Liu Yiming’s own appellation (*hao*).

Pages 23-38 are not included in this sample

4

True and False Body and Mind

(*Zhenjia shenxin* 真假身心)

People nowadays speak of the body and the mind, but they only know the illusory body and mind, and do not know the true body and mind. As they leave the true to follow the false, it is no wonder that even before their number of years is exhausted, their bodies and minds are worn out. They have the forms of living human beings, but their souls have entered the lair of demons.

Why is this so? The illusory body (*huanshen*) is the body of flesh; the illusory mind is the human mind. Eyes, ears, nose, tongue, mouth, and intellect all come forth from the illusory body; pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, love, hate, and desire all come forth from the human mind.¹ Each of the six senses as well as the gatekeeper is sufficient on its own to take your life; each of the seven emotions and each errant thought is capable on its own of giving you death.² If they are even accidentally activated, how many are those whose Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*) would not be harmed and injured? Deeming the illusory body and mind to be real is like mistaking a thief for one's son, or a servant for the landlord. If one day Heaven does not grant you one more year of life, where does the body go, and where does the mind go? There is no doubt that they are illusory things.

As for the true body and the true mind, they are the dharmabody (*fashen*) and the celestial mind (*tianxin*). Yin and Yang and

the five agents come forth from the dharma-body; the Infant, the Lovely Maid, the Mother of Wood, the Lord of Metals, the Yellow Dame, as well as coral, agate, crystal, jasper, and gold are all born from the celestial mind.³

The causes and conditions of the five natures are all seeds for attaining the Tao; the perfect treasures of the five qualities are all materials for refining the Elixir.⁴ When they are collected and refined, one rises from death and returns to life, one inverts aging and reverts to youth.

However, most people are not aware of this dharma-body and this celestial mind. Thus the dharma-body is buried and the illusory body takes charge, the celestial mind retires from its position and the human mind takes power. Therefore there are continuous births and deaths, transmigration is unceasing, and there is no solution to this.

This dharma-body “supports Heaven above and supports the Earth below.”⁵ It has no head and no tail, no front and no back; it stands at the center and does not slant. Through its firmness, it breaks up Emptiness; through its yieldingness, it puts the ten thousand things to rest; through its solidity and stability, it enters water without becoming wet, enters fire without being burnt, and enters metals and stones without meeting obstructions. A tiger cannot harm it, a weapon cannot impose itself on it.⁶ This is what your Existence depends on.

This celestial mind is neither dirty nor clean; it is utterly empty and utterly numinous, silent and unmoving, and pervades throughout by responding to impulses. In its quiescence, it is soundless and scentless; in its movement, it is utterly spiritual and utterly wondrous; in its form and its image, it is like the crescent moon, an upward-facing basin, and the Pearl of Millet.⁷ It is neither form nor emptiness, and yet it is both form and emptiness; it is neither Being and nor Non-Being, and yet it is both Being and Non-Being. This is what your Nature depends on.

When you know this body and this mind and cultivate your Nature and your Existence, then fulfilling Nature and Existence becomes as easy as turning over your hand. Therefore the ancients taught:

Ever and ever, the two words “body” and “mind”
are concealed in the ten thousand scrolls of scriptures on
the Elixir.⁸

If the illusory body and the human mind were actually luminous and bright, and if even a foolish man or a foolish woman were actually able to know them, why then should the ten thousand scrolls of scriptures on the Elixir keep this subject concealed and not talk about it? Obviously they keep it concealed because there is something secret and difficult to say in words. How could the illusory body and mind see it?

Alas! Are the body and the mind something easy to know? Unless you inquire into these principles and practice several dozens of years, the dharma-body will be not easy to see and the celestial mind will be not easy to understand. Until you know both the body and the mind, how can you cultivate your Nature and your Existence? Students should strive about this.

Notes

1. Although Liu Yiming refers to the six senses (*liugen*) in the next sentence, the list he gives here does not fully correspond to the ordinary Buddhist list of the senses, as he replaces the “body” (the organ of touch) with the mouth. By the mouth, Liu Yiming intends the organ of speech. Pleasure, anger, sorrow, joy, love, hate, and desire are the seven emotions (*qiqing*).

2. On the “gatekeeper” see note 5 to Chapter 3.

3. The Infant and the Lord of Metals are images of True Yang;

the Lovely Maid and the Mother of Wood are images of True Yin; and the Yellow Dame is an image of the True Intention, which makes the conjunction of True Yin and True Yang possible. Coral, agate, crystal, jasper, and gold are five of the “seven treasures” (*qibao*; other stones mentioned in different lists of the “treasures” include jade, amber, agate, pearls, etc.).

4. In Buddhism, the “five natures” (*wuxing*) correspond to five types of beings who have different possibilities of realization. In Confucianism, the “five qualities” (*wuban*) are the virtues of humanity (*ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and trustworthiness (*xin*).

5. These or similar words are attributed to several Buddhist masters, including Huineng (638–713), the sixth Patriarch of Chan (Zen).

6. These sentences allude to a passage in *Daode jing* 50: “I have heard that one who is good at assisting life travels by land and does not encounter rhinoceroses and tigers, passes through an army and does not bear armor and weapons. Rhinoceroses have no place to plant their horns, tigers have no place to thrust their claws, and weapons have no place to stab their blades.”

7. The “upward-facing basin” is a common image of Zhen ☵, the trigram that represents the crescent Moon, which in turn is an image of the first stage in the growth of the Yang principle. On the Pearl of Millet see note 12 to Chapter 3.

8. These verses are quoted in the *Xingming guizhi* (Principles of the Balanced Cultivation of Nature and Existence), sec. “Heng,” no. 5, as coming from a poem in the *Qunxian zhuyu* (Pearls and Jade of the Immortals). Here the first line reads, “Ever and ever, the two words Nature and Existence . . .” There is no substantial difference in Liu Yiming’s quotation, as Nature pertains to the “mind” (*xin*) and Existence pertains to the “body” (*shen*).

6

Precelestial and Postcelestial Yin and Yang

(*Xianhou tian yinyang* 先後天陰陽)

The precelestial Yin and Yang are Being and Non-Being; the postcelestial Yin and Yang are the heart and the kidneys. The Yin and Yang of Being and Non-Being have no form; the Yin and Yang of the heart and the kidneys have images.

“Being” is the Yang within Kan ☵; it is the True Yang and the wondrous Being. “Non-Being” is the Yin within Li ☲; it is the True Yin and the true Emptiness. When the Yang is called “true,” we know that it is not the false Yang. When the Yin is called “true,” we know that it is not the false Yin.

Since there are a True Yin and a True Yang, there are necessarily a false Yin and a false Yang. The True Yin and Yang come forth from the precelestial, and operate within the Great Ultimate (*taiji*). The false Yin and Yang come forth from the postcelestial, and are stored within the body.

The false Yin and Yang are preserved until the body is preserved, and are gone when the body is gone: they are subject to damage. The True Yin and Yang come forth in what has no form, and operate in what has no image: they are indestructible.

Essentially, the Yin and the Yang of the heart and the kidneys are transformations of the essence and the blood of one’s father and mother at the time of their conjunction. They are provided with breath (*qi*) and substance; therefore they follow the body, and they either are there or are not there. Instead, the precelestial Yin

and Yang come forth in the dharma-body (*fashen*), and thus are generated by the One Breath of Empty Non-Being. They are provided with breath but are devoid of substance; therefore their longevity equals the longevity of Heaven and Earth.

This is one of the differences between the precelestial and the postcelestial.

However, while the precelestial Yin and Yang are born in the precelestial, from the very instant in which one has a body they are stored in the postcelestial, and therefore they pertain to Kan ☵ and Li ☲. Kan is externally Yin and internally Yang. Its external Yin is the postcelestial Yin, and its internal Yang is the precelestial Yang. Li is externally Yang and internally Yin. Its external Yang is the postcelestial Yang, and its internal Yin is the precelestial Yin.

This is another difference between the precelestial and the postcelestial.

Moreover, the postcelestial Yin and Yang only circulate within the body, following the course of creation and transformation. When the initial Yang is born in the *zi* hour, the breath (*qi*) of the initial Yang found in the kidneys ascends, and circulates in the blood vessels during daytime. When the initial Yin is born in the *wu* hour, the breath (*qi*) of the initial Yin found in the heart descends, and circulates in the blood vessels during nighttime. Yin and Yang alternate, and day and night move in a circle.¹

In the human being, after the precelestial state becomes concealed, the postcelestial takes charge. Excessive thinking harms the Spirit; lascivious desires and shallow pleasures deplete the Essence. When the Essence and the Spirit are damaged, they covertly extinguish the Breath. When the Breath is exhausted, one dies.

Instead, the precelestial Yin and Yang operate in Emptiness, inverting the course of creation and transformation. When the “living *zi* hour” arrives, the initial Yang within Kan returns; then you should “advance the Yang Fire” (*jin yanghuo*) to give life and nourishment to the dharma-body.² When the “living *wu*

hour” arrives, the initial Yin within Li comes across; then you should “withdraw the Yin Response” (*tui yinfu*) to warmly nourish the dharma-body.³ In this way, the dharma-body is attained. In ten months the Breath becomes plentiful, and you deliver the Embryo of Sainthood (*shengtai*).

This is another difference between the precelestial and the postcelestial.

Alas! The postcelestial Yin and Yang within the body cannot fulfill your Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*). The error made by those who perform evil practices thinking that Yin and Yang are man and woman cannot be described in words.

If students want to discern in a clear way the postcelestial Yin and Yang, they should hasten to seek the seal of verification of a true master, and they can hope to succeed. How could they do this without comprehending the true and the false Yin and Yang? How could they vainly attempt to obtain “one word or half a sentence” in order to “seize creation and transformation,” to transcend the ordinary and enter sainthood?⁴

How could students not reflect on this over and over again?

Notes

1. *Zi* and *wu* are the two earthly branches that represent the beginning of the Yang and the Yin stages of a cycle, respectively. See the table on p. 133.

2. The “*zi* hour” and the “*wu* hour” (mentioned in the next sentence) represent the moment in which the Yang and the Yin principles are reborn, respectively. “Living” means that these moments are distinct from the hours formally marked by *zi* and *wu* (23–1 and 11–13).

3. There is an additional meaning in these sentences. The Yang “returning” and the Yin “coming across” refer to the hexagrams Fu ䷗ (Return) and Gou ䷪ (Encounter). These hexagrams represent the

beginning of the Yang and the Yin halves of a Yin-Yang cycle, respectively. Therefore the two sentences can also be understood as: “When the living *zi* hour arrives, the initial Yang within Kan corresponds to the hexagram Return ䷗ . . . When the living *wu* hour arrives, the initial Yin within Li corresponds to the hexagram Encounter ䷗ (i.e., ‘coming across’).”

4. On the expression “one word or half a sentence” see note 9 to Chapter 12. On “seizing creation and transformation” see note 6 to Chapter 19.

Superior Virtue and Inferior Virtue

(*Shangde xiade* 上德下德)

An ancient scripture says:

Superior virtue has no doing: there is nothing whereby it does.

Inferior virtue does: there is something whereby it does.¹

Another scripture says:

Superior virtue keeps one's form intact by means of the Tao.

Inferior virtue extends one's existence by means of a technique.²

Both passages say that superior virtue and inferior virtue differ in status, and that their operation is also not the same.

Essentially, in superior virtue one's body is intact and one's virtue is full, and the Yang of Qian ☰ has never been damaged. "Never been damaged" means that the precelestial Yang has never been damaged; it does not mean that the postcelestial body has not lost its integrity.³ When the Yang of Qian is plentiful, with a pure and flawless perfect Essence and an inchoate One Breath, the five agents gather together and the four images join in harmony. All of the precious things are intact.

Without a method for protecting and guarding this, the Yang necessarily culminates and generates the Yin; wholeness culmi-

nates and becomes lacking. Those who know this hasten to seek the oral instructions of an enlightened master. Without waiting for the birth of Yin, they use the method of “keeping one’s form intact by means of the Tao.” They set the natural True Fire in motion, and refine the Yin breath of the entire body; they use the Yin instead of being used by the Yin, and achieve efficacy in the postcelestial.⁴ When the Yin is exhausted and the Yang is pure, they live a long life free from death.

As for inferior virtue, after the Yang culminates and the Yin is born, the precelestial is dispersed. The five agents are divided from one another, the four images are not in harmony, and all of the precious things are lost. If you cultivate this state by the way of “non-doing,” it would be as if in the tripod there is no Seed; what is the purpose of using water and fire to boil an empty pot?⁵ You must “steal Yin and Yang,” “seize creation and transformation,” and return from the postcelestial to the precelestial.⁶ Only then can that old thing from times past be recovered: it had gone but now it returns, and comes again into your complete possession.

After you recover that original thing and the foundation of your Existence is firm, you should again set up the furnace and the tripod, and perform the way of non-doing. By “nourishing warmly” the Embryo of Sainthood (*shengtai*), in ten months the Breath (*qi*) becomes plentiful, and you deliver the dharma-body (*fashen*). Then this road has led to the same destination as superior virtue.

People in later times have not understood superior virtue and inferior virtue. They merely say that when the essence is given forth, that is inferior virtue, and when it is intact, that is superior virtue. This is a great error! The essence of the intercourse is something that comes into being after your birth: it is the impure within the impure. How could you take it as a criterion?⁷

As for the discourse about “losing integrity at the age of sixteen,” this number refers to “the two eights making one pound”: when the Yang culminates it generates the Yin, and after the Yin is generated, the essence is also generated.⁸ Therefore this a discourse about Yin and Yang, and not about the number of years. If it were a discourse about the number of years, in the world there are some who emit their essence for the first time at the age of sixteen, some who emit it for the first time before the age of sixteen, and some who emit it for the first time after the age of sixteen. How would they explain this?

From this we know that superior virtue and inferior virtue are not to be considered with regard to the postcelestial, but with regard to the precelestial. When the precelestial is intact, that is superior virtue, and when the precelestial is lacking, that is inferior virtue. This is the proper conclusion.

Then there are those who do not understand the Great Tao. They either say that Existence (*ming*) is more important and Nature (*xing*) is less important, or that Nature is more important and Existence is less important. This is all wrong. Nature and Existence must be cultivated together, but in the practice there should be two stages. In superior virtue, there is no need to cultivate Existence and one just cultivates Nature: when Nature is fulfilled, then Existence is also fulfilled. In inferior virtue, one must first cultivate Existence and then cultivate Nature; after Existence is fulfilled, one must also fulfill Nature. Fulfilling Existence is “doing,” fulfilling Nature is “non-doing.”

The Ways of “doing” and “non-doing” are established to provide a starting point to those who possess superior virtue or inferior virtue. When one comes to fully achieving the Great Tao, not only does the operation of “doing” not apply, but also the operation of “non-doing” does not apply. When one reaches the highest step there is a different wondrous operation, but it does not pertain to either “doing” or “non-doing.”

If students do not know the discourses about superior virtue and inferior virtue, and right away seek teachings about “doing” and “non-doing,” how can they know the true “doing” and the true “non-doing”? Without knowing the true “doing” and the true “non-doing,” not only would they be unable to keep their Nature intact, but they would also be unable to protect their Existence.

The relative status of Nature and Existence entirely derives from the distinction between superior virtue and inferior virtue. How could students not investigate this in depth?

Notes

1. *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 38.

2. These words are based on the *Huanghe fu* (Rhapsody of the Yellow Crane), attributed to Lü Dongbin. After an introductory stanza, the poem continues: “Superior virtue keeps one’s form intact by means of the Tao: / one’s Pure Qian ☰ has not lost its integrity. / Inferior virtue extends one’s existence (*ming*) by means of a technique: / one conjoins Kan ☵ and Li ☲ and there is achievement.” As stated in these verses, superior virtue consists in maintaining the precelestial state of Unity (Qian ☰), while inferior virtue consists in conjoining the True Yang and True Yin found within the postcelestial Yin and Yang (Kan ☵ and Li ☲).

3. With these words, Liu Yiming refers to the understanding of the term *poshen*, “losing integrity” as meaning the first emission of the essence (*jing*, semen) in a male. According to this understanding, the recovery of the fullness of Qian (Unity, or True Yang, the principle sought by the alchemist) occurs through the recovery of the fullness of one’s essence; and on this basis, “keeping one’s form intact” refers to the integrity of the postcelestial body. Liu Yiming rejects this understanding, and especially the notion that the state of the postcelestial essence may be the criterion to distinguish superior virtue from inferior virtue: the postcelestial essence pertains to the postcelestial body (*huanshen*, the “illusory body”), and not to the precelestial body (*fashen*, the dharma-body).

4. The “natural True Fire” is a Fire that is not intentionally timed according to the system of the “fire phases” (*huobou*), but spontaneously circulates within one’s body. The Yin principle in this sentence is represented by the number 6: “They use the 6 instead of being used by the 6.”

5. These sentences allude to a poem in the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality): “If in the tripod there is no True Seed, it is like using water and fire to boil an empty pot” (“Jueju,” poem 5; see Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, p. 63).

6. “Stealing Yin and Yang” is equivalent to “stealing Heaven and Earth.” These two expressions, which allude to those who seek and find the precelestial True Yang hidden within the postcelestial Yin, are found in earlier texts that played a major role in *Neidan*. The *Yinfu jing* (Scripture of the Hidden Agreement), sec. 2, says: “Heaven and Earth are the thieves of the ten thousand things, the ten thousand things are the thieves of man, and man is the thief of the ten thousand things.” The *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine), poem 8, says: “Steal Heaven and Earth, seize creation and transformation!” On the *Ruyao jing* passage see Wang Jie, *Commentary on the Mirror for Compounding the Medicine*, pp. 27–29.

7. On the formation of the “essence” see Chapter 2.

8. The term “two eights” (*erba*) is used in *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), 29:5 (Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, p. 82), and in the *Wuzhen pian*, “Lüshi,” poem 7 (Pregadio, *Awakening to Reality*, p. 42). In these works, “two eights” alludes to the balance of Yin and Yang: the symbolic pound (*jin*) of Elixir corresponds, according to the traditional Chinese weight system, to 16 ounces (*liang*), and is made of 8 ounces of True Lead and 8 ounces of True Mercury. Here Liu Yiming uses this term to represent the balance of Yin and Yang. If this state is not preserved, the Yang newly generates the Yin.

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