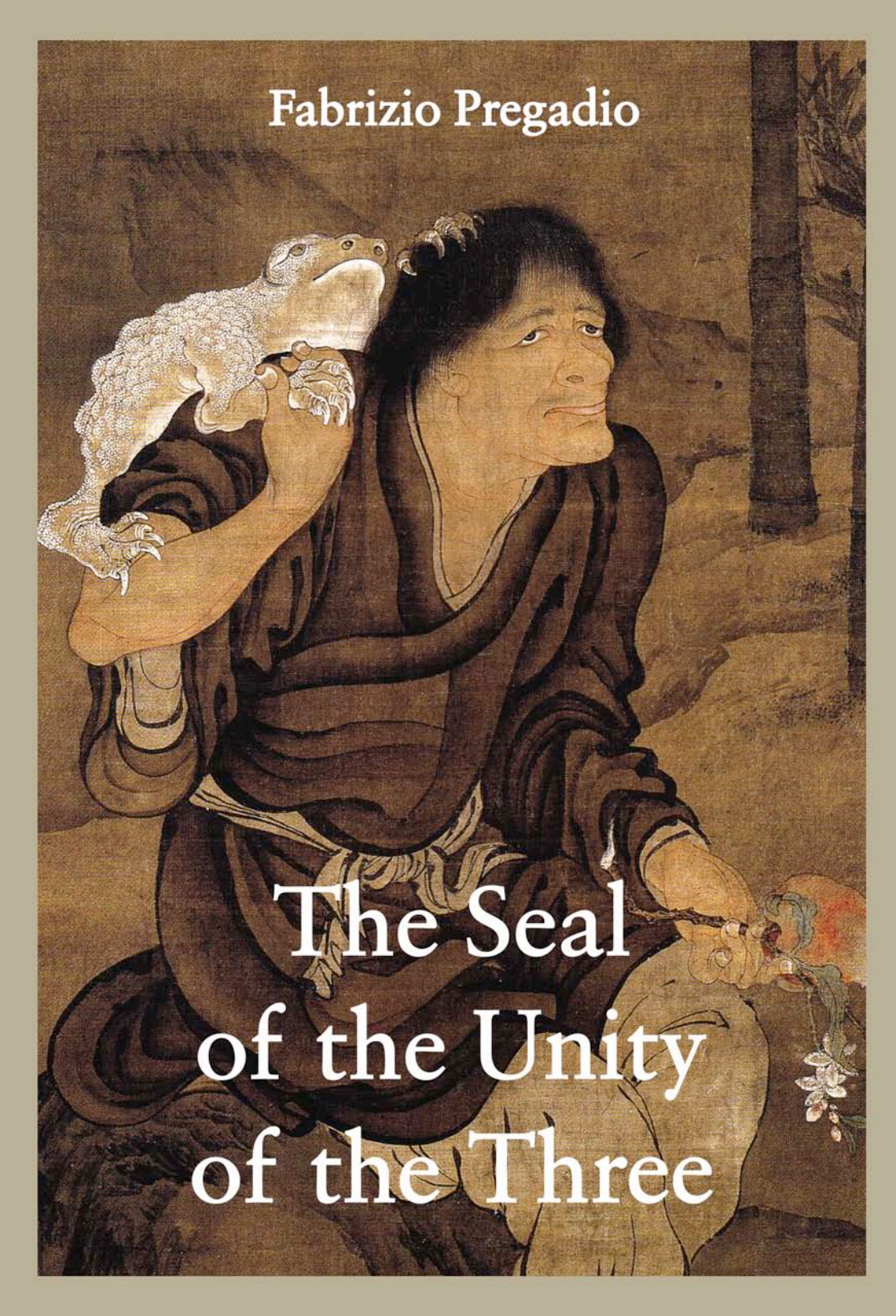


Fabrizio Pregadio

A traditional East Asian painting, likely a woodblock print or a similar style, depicting a woman in a dark, flowing robe. She is seated and looking towards the right. On her left shoulder, she holds a white, fluffy dog. In her right hand, she holds a branch with small, light-colored flowers. The background is a textured, brownish-grey wash. The overall style is characteristic of traditional Chinese or Japanese ink and wash painting.

The Seal
of the Unity
of the Three

THE SEAL OF THE UNITY OF THE THREE

By the same author:

Great Clarity: Daoism and Alchemy in Early Medieval China (Stanford University Press, 2006)

The Encyclopedia of Taoism, editor (Routledge, 2008)

Awakening to Reality: The “Regulated Verses” of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy (Golden Elixir Press, 2009)

Fabrizio Pregadio

The Seal of the Unity of the Three

A Study and Translation of the *Cantong qi*,
the Source of the Taoist Way of the Golden Elixir

Golden Elixir Press

This sample contains parts of the Introduction, translations of 9 of the 88 sections of the *Cantong qi*, and parts of the back matter.

For other samples and more information visit this web page:

www.goldenelixir.com/press/trl_02_ctq.html

Golden Elixir Press, Mountain View, CA
www.goldenelixir.com
press@goldenelixir.com

© 2011 Fabrizio Pregadio

ISBN 978-0-9843082-7-9 (cloth)

ISBN 978-0-9843082-8-6 (paperback)

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Typeset in Sabon. Text area proportioned in the Golden Section.
Cover: The Chinese character *dan* 丹, “Elixir.”

To Yoshiko

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Introduction

“The *Cantong qi* is the forefather of the scriptures on the Elixir of all times. Its words are ancient and profound, arcane and subtle. No one can fathom their meaning.” Thus begins a preface found in one of the commentaries to the *Zhouyi cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three, in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*). These words express several significant features of the work translated in the present book: the charm of its verses, the depth of its discourse, its enigmatic language, and its intimate relation to the Taoist alchemical traditions.¹

Many earlier and later authors and commentators have written similar words to describe this work. Under an allusive poetical language and thick layers of images and symbols, the *Cantong qi* (as the text is often called) hides the exposition of a doctrine that inspired a large number of commentaries and other works, and attracted the attention not only of Taoist masters and adepts, but also of philosophers, cosmologists, poets, literati, calligraphers, philologists, and bibliophiles. At least thirty-eight commentaries to the *Cantong qi* written through the end of the nineteenth century are extant, and dozens of texts found in the Taoist Canon (*Daozang*) and elsewhere are related to it. The two main Tang poets, Li Bai (Li Po) and Bai Juyi, wrote poems about this work, and a short text by the same title was composed by Shitou Xiqian (700–91), the reputed forefather of the Caodong lineage of Chan Buddhism (better known in the West under its Japanese name, Sōtō Zen). Except for the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, few other Taoist works have enjoyed a similarly vast and diversified exegetical tradition.

Despite this textual profusion, several circumstances have contributed to persisting issues in understanding this work: its obscure language, the wide range of interpretations offered in the commen-

¹ The passage quoted above is found in Ruan Dengbing’s preface to Yu Yan’s *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui*, 1a, composed in 1284.

taries, the contrasting views on its nature and history, and, not least, the multiple possible meanings of several terms and verses. These issues have been augmented—and, in part, inevitably caused—by the fact that the main tradition on which the *Cantong qi* has exerted its influence, and by which it has been read and interpreted, is Taoist alchemy, in both of its branches: Waidan, or External Alchemy, and Neidan, or Internal Alchemy.²

In particular, Neidan is the legacy that has contributed to shape the dominant image and understanding of the *Cantong qi* in China, by placing this work at the origins of its teachings and practices, and by offering explications that differ in many details among different authors, but have one point in common: the *Cantong qi* contains a complete illustration of the principles and methods of Internal Alchemy. According to this view, the *Cantong qi* is an alchemical text, and in particular, is the first Neidan text. In addition to this one, there has been, within the Taoist tradition, a second, less well-known way of reading the text. This reading takes account of a point that is reflected in the title of the *Cantong qi*, is stated more than once in its verses, and is often discussed by its commentators, including some of those associated with Neidan: the *Cantong qi* is concerned not with one, but with three major subjects, and joins them to one another in a single doctrine, of which alchemy is one aspect. To introduce our discussion of this point, we shall look at one of the most visible, but also most complex, aspects of the *Cantong qi*, namely, its title.

§ 1. THE TITLE OF THE CANTONG QI

In its complete form, the title of the *Cantong qi* is made of two main parts. The first part, *Zhouyi* 周易 (Changes of the Zhou), is another name of the *Yijing*, or *Book of Changes*, whose cosmological system plays a fundamental role in the *Cantong qi*.³ Placing the name of one

² External Alchemy is based on the refining of minerals and metals, which are heated in a vessel in order to extract their pure essences and compound them into different elixirs. In Internal Alchemy, the ingredients of the Elixir are the prime components of the cosmos and the human being, and the entire process takes place within the practitioner. External Alchemy is documented from the second century BCE, and Internal Alchemy from the eighth century CE.

³ The Zhou (1045–246 BCE) is the dynasty during which, probably as early

of the Classics before the actual title of a work reflects the usage of the “weft texts” (*weishu*, commonly referred to as the “apocrypha” among Western scholars), an early textual corpus whose cosmology is rooted in the *Book of Changes*.

The relation of the *Cantong qi* to this corpus will be examined below; as we shall see, it is not entirely clear whether the relation has textual grounds, or only lies in the background that the *Cantong qi* shares with the cosmological traditions. The last word in the second part of the title of the *Cantong qi*, nevertheless, also suggests an association with the “weft texts.” *Qi* 契, literally meaning “token, pledge, seal” or “contract,” belongs to a series of closely related words that appear in the titles of several apocryphal texts, and later also became important in Taoism. These words—which include *you* 郵 (mark), *qian* 鈐 (seal, badge), and especially *fu* 符 (*symbolon*, sign, token, tally)—refer to two significant aspects of the apocrypha and of the Taoist writings that share similar perspectives. A text belonging to this genre is a manifest sign of a divine revelation; at the same time, it represents its legitimate possessor’s intangible but unbreakable bonds to the source of the revelation, and grants access to it.⁴

Concerning the expression *cantong* 參同, commentators and other authors have offered two main interpretations. According to the first view, *can* 參 means “merging, being one,” and *tong* 同 means “unity.” Since *qi* 契 also indicates the idea of “joining into one” (in this case, the possessor of the text and the source of its doctrine), all three words in the title of the *Cantong qi*, according to this view, refer to the ideas of union and oneness. On the basis of this reading, the title of the *Cantong qi* should be translated, for example, as *Joining as One with Unity*. This interpretation was first stated in the anonymous

as the ninth or the eighth century BCE, the divinatory portions of the *Book of Changes* were composed. Most of the cosmological portions date, instead, from the third-second centuries BCE. These portions include the *Xici* or *Appended Statements*, from which the *Cantong qi* draws several sentences. According to another view, *zhouyi* means, approximately, “cyclical change.” A synthetic but highly reliable survey of the composition and the dating of the *Book of Changes* is found in Shaughnessy, “I ching (Chou i).”

⁴ These features of the apocrypha were clearly stated in a masterly study by Anna Seidel: “. . . a typical apocryphal title always indicates that its text, besides telling of divine revelation, is in itself a certificate testifying to the owner’s favor with Heaven” (“Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments,” 309).

Waidan commentary (ca. 700), and later in the commentaries by Peng Xiao (947) and Zhu Xi (1197). The *Cantong qi* itself uses the word *can* with this meaning in one of its verses (43:12).

According to the second view, *can* 參 means, or rather stands for, *san* 三, “three.” In this view, the title of the *Cantong qi* alludes to its property of being a *seal* that testifies to the *unity* of *three* components and, for that reason, enables its possessor to comprehend their unity. This reading of the word *can* was first explicitly suggested in the commentary by Yu Yan (1284), and was later accepted by several other commentators and authors.⁵

Which of the two interpretations is correct is not a meaningful question, since whoever chose the title *Cantong qi* was certainly aware of its dual sense. It is, instead, worthy of note that those who favor the second reading often support it by quoting passages found in the final portions of the *Cantong qi* (sections 84 and 87). These passages state that the *Cantong qi* is concerned with “three ways,” which stem from, and lead to, the same source. The three ways are defined as the system of the *Book of Changes*, Taoism (Huang-Lao, so called from the names of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi), and alchemy (“the work with the fire of the furnace”).

The order in which the three subjects are mentioned is significant—so significant that, to my knowledge, all authors and commentators who mention the three subjects refer to them in the same order, even when they refer to them with different Chinese terms.⁶ The reason of this arrangement can be understood in light of the *Cantong qi*’s own doctrines. “Cosmology” in the *Cantong qi* is not only an explication of the functioning of the cosmos, but in first place an

⁵ It should be noted that, although the anonymous Waidan commentary explains *can* as meaning “to merge” (*za* 雜), it mentions the merging of “three things” (*sanwu* 三物), identifying them in alchemical terms as Water, Soil, and Metal. See *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu*, 1.1a.

⁶ Several commentators, for example, refer to the “three ways” as those of “government” (*yuzheng*), “nourishing one’s Nature” (*yangxing*), and “preserving and ingesting” (*fushi*). The use of the term “government” is explained by the fact that at the center of the Chinese cosmological system stands, in both a symbolic and a literal way, the ruler, who is, in the human realm, the supreme guarantor of the balance among Heaven, Earth, and Man. In accordance with this view, the ruler is often mentioned in the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi*. On the term *fushi* see the textual note to verse 27:3, page 236.

exposition of the relation of the cosmos to the Dao, and of man's position in relation to both. Based on this fundamental view, the *Cantong qi* presents two ways of realization. The first is what it calls Taoism ("Huang-Lao"), which for the *Cantong qi* is the way of "non-doing," canonized in the *Daode jing*. The second is alchemy—in the form canonized by the *Cantong qi* itself—which is the way of "doing." Borrowing two terms from the *Daode jing*, the *Cantong qi* defines these two ways as those of "superior virtue" and "inferior virtue," respectively (see section 20).

When this understanding of the purport of the *Cantong qi* is taken into account, certain important aspects of the text are clarified. First, it is not difficult to identify, within the mystifying, but certainly not haphazard, sequence of poems in the first two Books, several contiguous portions that are devoted to each of the three main subjects:

Book 1: sections 1–17, Cosmology; 18–27, Taoism; 28–42, Alchemy

Book 2: sections 43–52, Cosmology; 53–61, Taoism; 62–74, Alchemy

As suggested below (pp. 29 ff.), the final Book 3 is made of later, miscellaneous materials.⁷ Second, this understanding of the purport of the *Cantong qi* helps to make sense of other issues, such as the different traditional views on its authorship, and the dating of its alchemical portions.

The next three sections of this Introduction (§ 2–4) are concerned with these and other related questions. They are followed by a short presentation of the main commentaries to the *Cantong qi* (§ 5), and by an overview of its three main subjects (§ 6–8). The concluding section (§ 9) looks at the pivotal role played by this work in the shift from External to Internal Alchemy.

§ 2. A SINGLE AUTHOR, OR MULTIPLE AUTHORS?

For about a millennium, the authorship of the *Cantong qi* has been attributed to Wei Boyang, a character with distinctly legendary

⁷ Sections 22–25 contain a general description of the principles of alchemy as the way of "inferior virtue," and thus pertain to the "Taoist" portions. The subdivisions suggested above are close to those that Liu Yiming adopts in his version of the "Ancient Text" of the *Cantong qi* (1799). The main differences are that, in Liu Yiming's text, sections 37–38 concern cosmology; 39–40, Taoism; 61, alchemy; and 70–71 and 74, Taoism. On the "Ancient Text" see below, pp. 31 ff.

features said to be an alchemist, and to come from the Shangyu district of Kuaiji, in the southeastern region of Jiangnan.⁸ According to the most recurrent account, Wei Boyang first transmitted his work to Xu Congshi, a native of Qingzhou in the present-day northern province of Shandong, who wrote a commentary on it. At the time of Emperor Huan of the Later Han (r. 146–167), Wei Boyang again transmitted the *Cantong qi* to Chunyu Shutong, who also came from Shangyu and began to circulate the text.

While Wei Boyang was a southern alchemist, Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong were representatives of the Han-dynasty cosmological legacies of northern China. One of the questions raised by the account summarized above is the following: Why does an alchemist transmit his work to two cosmologists? To answer this question, we must first look closer at the identities of the three masters who, according to tradition, were involved in the creation and the early transmission of the *Cantong qi*.

Wei Boyang

The best-known account of Wei Boyang is found in the *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of the Divine Immortals), a work attributed to Ge Hong (283–243). According to this record (translated below, p. 263), Wei Boyang was a native of Wu (present-day Jiangsu, and parts of Anhui and Zhejiang) and was “the son of a high-ranking family.” The story tells that Wei Boyang and three disciples retired to a mountain and compounded an elixir. When they tested it on a dog, the dog died. Despite this, Wei Boyang and one of his disciples decided to ingest the compound, and they also died. After the two other disciples had left, Wei Boyang came to life again. He poured some of the elixir into the mouths of the dead disciple and the dog, and they also revived.

Pages 7-26 are omitted from this Sample

⁸ In the second century CE, when Wei Boyang is deemed to have composed the *Cantong qi*, Kuaiji was a large commandery corresponding to present-day eastern Jiangsu and western Zhejiang. Its territory partially overlapped the region south of the lower Yangzi River known as Jiangnan. Wei Boyang’s birthplace is said to correspond to present-day Fenghui in Shangyu, about 80 km east of Hangzhou.

different parts of the *Cantong qi*, one hand—the anonymous, collective “hand” of the southern Taoist traditions—revised the text, probably after the end of the fourth century.

Conclusion

This survey has by no means answered all questions concerning the date of the *Cantong qi*: as we shall see, the different prosodic forms of the text, the tradition that it contains a “Canon” and a “Commentary,” and the virtually certain later date of Book 3 raise further issues. We may, nevertheless, briefly summarize the main results of our inquiry.

One or more texts entitled *Cantong qi* may have existed during the Han period, but if any such text did exist, it was certainly not the present one. With regard to the individual components of the present-day *Cantong qi*, its cosmological portions definitely reflect a Han background. However, they were almost certainly composed, or at least completed (possibly on the basis of one or more Han-dynasty texts), after the end of the Han period by lineages that transmitted the “Studies of the *Book of Changes*” and the apocrypha in Jiangnan. Yu Fan’s lineage was almost certainly one of those involved. The alchemical portions also cannot date from the Han period. Their precise time of composition remains unknown; we do know that the *Cantong qi*, in one or another of its forms, was used in association with alchemy by the end of the fifth century, but its alchemical model began to affect the history of Chinese alchemy only from the seventh century for Waidan, and from the eighth century for Neidan. As for the Taoist portions, it is virtually certain that they were not composed before the end of the fourth century.

We may conclude, therefore, by saying that the *Cantong qi* was composed in different stages, perhaps from the Han period onward, and did not reach a form substantially similar to the present one before ca. 450, and possibly one or even two centuries later.

More important than any attempt to establish a precise date, however, is the fact that, in light of what we have seen, Wei Boyang is much more than a semi-legendary alchemist who lived in the mid-second century. Just like the Boyang who preceded him is for the *Daode jing*, Wei Boyang is the symbolic representative of a nameless “collective entity”: the tradition that integrated the different components of the *Cantong qi* with one another, and created with this work the main exposition of the Way of the Golden Elixir.

§ 4. THE THREE BOOKS AND THE “ANCIENT TEXT”

The textual form of the *Cantong qi* is defined by two main features:

- (1) In all redactions until the one produced by Chen Zhixu in ca. 1330, and in most of the later ones, the *Cantong qi* is divided into three main parts, or “Books” (*pian*).
- (2) The last part, or Book 3, contains three distinct compositions, which in certain redactions are followed by an additional “postface.”

Speculations about the authorship of the three main parts abound in both commentaries and modern studies, where they are variously attributed to Wei Boyang, Xu Congshi, or Chunyu Shutong. Whoever stands behind these names, it may be safely assumed that the text found in Books 1 and 2 (corresponding to sections 1–42 and 43–74 in the present translation) and the additional compositions found in Book 3 (sections 75–88) originated separately from one another.

Books 1 and 2: The Main Text

Except for a few passages in prose, Books 1 and 2 are made of rhymed verses in four or five characters. Sections written in either prosodic form follow one another without any order or regularity; the only noticeable feature in this regard is that the five-character verses prevail in Book 1, while Book 2 is almost entirely made of four-character verses. This is unrelated to any prevalence of subjects, which are written in one or the other format and, as we have seen, are equally treated in both Books. Several commentators and scholars have suggested that the two meters are related to the tradition—developed on the basis of early accounts on the creation of the text—that the *Cantong qi* contains a main text, or “Canon” (“Jing”), and a “Commentary” (“Zhu”). There is no agreement, however, on which portions might constitute the “Canon” and the “Commentary.”

On the other hand, one of the most evident, but also most enigmatic, features of Books 1 and 2 is the fact that several sections written in different meters mirror one another. Some of the main

Pages 29-32 are omitted from this Sample

mentary” are rearranged according to their subjects—cosmology, Taoism, and alchemy—in such a way that they follow corresponding sequences. This enables Liu Yiming to precisely point out for each portion of the “Commentary” a corresponding portion of the “Canon.” Regardless of whether the *Cantong qi* actually does contain a “Canon” and a “Commentary,” Liu Yiming’s work is the one that best brings to light certain correspondences that exist among different portions of the *Cantong qi*, but are not easily discerned in the standard text.

§ 5. MAIN COMMENTARIES

At least thirty-eight traditional commentaries to the *Cantong qi* are extant, written between ca. 700 and the final years of the Qing dynasty. Different sources—in particular, bibliographies and premodern library catalogues—yield information on about twice as many lost commentaries and closely related works.¹

Commentaries in the Taoist Canon

The Taoist Canon (*Daozang*) of 1445 contains the following commentaries to the standard text:

- (1) *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu* (Commentary to the *Cantong qi*). Anonymous, dating from ca. 700, containing the only surviving explication of the *Cantong qi* as a work concerned with Waidan. Only the portion corresponding to Book 1 is extant.²
- (2) *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Attributed to a venerable Taoist immortal, Yin Changsheng, also dating from ca. 700.
- (3) *Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi* (True Meaning of the *Cantong qi*, with a Subdivision into Sections). Peng Xiao (?–955), dating from 947. The portion entitled *Zhouyi cantong qi dingqi ge mingjing tu* (The “Song of the Tripod” and the “Chart of the

¹ On these works, see my *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, vol. 2: *Bibliographic Studies on the Cantong qi* (forthcoming).

² The preface describes the work as consisting of three parts. Moreover, the commentary refers twice (1.19b and 1.20a) to passages that should be found in the missing part of the text. This shows that the work originally included the entire *Cantong qi*.

Bright Mirror” of the *Cantong qi*) is printed as a separate work in the Taoist Canon.³

- (4) *Zhouyi cantong qi kaoyi* (Investigation of Discrepancies in the *Cantong qi*). Zhu Xi (1130–1200), dating from 1197.
- (5) *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Chu Yong (also known as Chu Huagu, fl. ca. 1230), dating from ca. 1230.
- (6) *Zhouyi cantong qi jie* (Explication of the *Cantong qi*). Chen Xianwei (?–after 1254), dating from 1234.
- (7) *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui* (Elucidation of the *Cantong qi*). Yu Yan (1258–1314), dating from 1284. The portion entitled *Shiyi* (Explication of Doubtful Points) is printed as a separate work in the Taoist Canon.
- (8) *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu* (Commentary to the *Cantong qi*). Anonymous Neidan commentary, dating from after 1208.

Four of these commentaries—those by Peng Xiao, Zhu Xi, Chen Xianwei, and Yu Yan—are also extant in several other editions.

The first two commentaries present a somewhat unrefined state of the text, not divided into sections, with several sentences not yet normalized into four- or five-character verses, and—a significant detail—with more explicit allusions to Waidan compared to the later redactions (where certain sentences appear in slightly modified forms). In the mid-tenth century, Peng Xiao revised the text and produced the version that is, directly or indirectly, at the basis of most later commentaries. His work, which is divided into 90 sections, has not reached us in its original form; there is clear evidence that it was altered in the early thirteenth century with the incorporation of several dozen readings drawn from Zhu Xi’s text. The revised version of Peng Xiao’s text is faithfully followed by the anonymous Neidan commentary. The first text to be based on a comparison of earlier editions was established by Zhu Xi, but his work was deprived of most of its critical notes by the mid-fourteenth century. Zhu Xi’s text in turn served as a model to Chu Yong. The two remaining commentaries in the Taoist Canon are those by Chen Xianwei, whose text derives from Peng Xiao; and by Yu Yan, who based his work on Zhu Xi’s text, but eliminated many of the archaisms and the peculiar

³ The “Chart” is Peng Xiao’s own work. It illustrates several sets of cosmological emblems used in the *Cantong qi*, with explanatory notes.

readings that had been introduced by Zhu Xi. Yu Yan's learned commentary contains quotations from about one hundred different texts, and is accompanied by philological notes on variants found in earlier editions.

Later Commentaries

The Neidan commentary by Chen Zhixu (1290–ca. 1368) is entitled *Zhouyi cantong qi zhujie* (Commentary and Explication of the *Cantong qi*) and dates from ca. 1330. Like Peng Xiao had done before him, Chen Zhixu proposes a new arrangement of the *Cantong qi*. In addition to the customary three Books, he subdivides the text into thirty-five chapters (*zhang*). His text is ultimately based on Peng Xiao's redaction, but contains about four dozen readings that are not documented in earlier extant works. It became well known—albeit anonymously—to a large number of literati through its inclusion in the *Han Wei congshu* (Collected Works of the Han and the Wei Dynasties), a highly regarded and well-distributed compilation that contains the text found in Zhang Wenlong's commentary of 1566, which is based in turn on Chen Zhixu's redaction.

With the exception of Zhu Xi's work, all extant commentaries to the *Cantong qi* written through the Yuan period (1279–1368) are related to the Taoist alchemical traditions. During the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, the *Cantong qi* continued to exert its prestige on Neidan, but its influence also extended to other fields. Zhu Xi's commentary, in particular, inspired many literati to read the text and write about it. The commentaries by Xu Wei (ca. 1570) and Wang Wenlu (1582) during the Ming period, and those by Li Guangdi (ca. 1700), Wang Fu (ca. 1750), and Li Shixu (1823) during the Qing period, are representative of this trend. The redaction by Chen Zhixu was, either on its own or in a substantial way, at the basis of the commentaries by Xu Wei, Wang Wenlu, Li Guangdi, and Wang Fu, as well as those by Zhang Wenlong (1566), Zhen Shu (1636), and Dong Dening (1787). Other commentators, including Lu Xixing (1569, revised in 1573) and Zhu Yuanyu (1669), based their texts on other redactions.⁴

⁴ These details are provided on the basis of major textual variants found in different redactions of the *Cantong qi*, which can serve as main indicators of textual filiation. See my work cited in note 1 above.

During the Ming period, as we saw above, Du Yicheng created the “Ancient Text” (“Guwen”) version of the *Cantong qi*. Ten commentaries to this version are extant, including those by Wang Jiachun (1591?), Peng Haogu (1599), Qiu Zhao’ao (1704), and Liu Yiming (1799), whose authors were affiliated with different Ming and Qing lineages of Neidan.

§ 6. DAO, COSMOS, AND MAN

The main purpose of the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* is to define the relation of the cosmos to the Dao. This relation is described by means of emblems that represent the modes taken on by the Dao in its self-manifestation, and the corresponding main features of Being. On the basis of this definition, a set of principles is derived that serve to establish the cosmological science of alchemy, described elsewhere in the *Cantong qi*.

The cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* give prominence to the role and functions of the ruler. The king, being placed at the symbolic center of the human realm—his kingdom, and more specifically his court—should guarantee the reciprocal agreement of Heaven, Earth, and mankind. Trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, and other related emblems, enable him to comprehend the patterns of Heaven and Earth, and to model his governance on those patterns. These portions of the text could be read literally as advice given to the ruler, or metaphorically as instructions addressed to the alchemist. It should not be forgotten, however, that in a work like the *Cantong qi*, the ruler in his relation to the kingdom is, in the first place, a subordinate counterpart of the sage in his relation to the whole of Being (in accordance with the principles of the *Daode jing*).

The main subjects of the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* are the following (references are to the numbers of sections):

1. Qian and Kun, Kan and Li: 1, 4–5, 43
2. Sun and Moon: 7, 8, 10, 48
3. Day (60 hexagrams): 3, 45
4. Month (8 trigrams): 13, 49

5. Year (12 hexagrams): 51–52

6. Ruler and governance: 2, 14, 15, 17, 44, 47

Qian, Kun, Kan, Li

Although the names Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li belong to the vocabulary of the *Book of Changes*, it would be impossible to understand the functions that they play in a work like the *Cantong qi* as long as they are seen as no more than trigrams or hexagrams. From the perspective of the *Cantong qi*, Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li are formless principles that serve to explicate how the Dao generates the relative domain and manifests itself in it. The corresponding trigrams and hexagrams are symbolic forms (*xiang*) used to represent those principles.

Qian and Kun are the two primary modes taken on by the Dao in generating the world:

Great indeed is Qian, the Origin! The ten thousand things owe their beginning to him . . . Perfect indeed is Kun, the Origin! The ten thousand things owe their birth to her. (*Book of Changes*, “Commentary on the Judgement” on the hexagrams Qian ☰ and Kun ☷)

Qian is the active (“creative”) principle, essence, Yang, and Heaven; Kun is the passive (“receptive”) principle, substance, Yin, and Earth. Being permanently joined to one another in the precosmic domain, Qian entrusts its creative power to Kun, and Kun brings creation to accomplishment.

In the everlasting instant in which Qian and Kun give birth to the cosmos, the Yang of Qian moves into Kun, and, in response, the Yin of Kun moves into Qian. In the symbolic representation by the corresponding trigrams, Qian ☰ entrusts its essence to Kun and becomes Li ☲; Kun ☷ receives that essence from Qian and becomes Kan ☵.

Kan and Li, therefore, replace Qian and Kun in the cosmic domain. Since they harbor the Yang of Qian and the Yin of Kun, respectively, as their own inner essences, they enable the Yin and Yang of the precosmic domain to operate in the cosmic domain. For this reason, Kan and Li are said to be the “functions” (*yong*, a word also meaning “operation”) of Qian and Kun, while Qian and Kun are the “substantive basis” (*ti*) of Kan and Li (see section 4). The main images of Qian and Kun are Heaven and Earth, which are immutably joined to one

another. The main images of Kan and Li are the Moon and the Sun, which alternate in their growth and decline during the longer or shorter time cycles. This alternation (day and night, seasons, etc.) is the main visible sign of the operation of Qian and Kun in the cosmos.

This vision pertains to the relative world in which we live, and is meaningful only within its boundaries. Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li fundamentally reside within the Dao, undifferentiated from one another (43:13–14). By analogy, they also reside within the spaceless and timeless point at the center of the cosmos, namely, the Heart of Heaven (*tianxin*), at the core of multiplicity and change (12:1). Their differentiation occurs only within the relative domain, where they serve to explicate the relation of the Dao to the world, and its constant presence throughout space and time.

The Five Agents

The five agents are Wood, Fire, Soil, Metal, and Water (see tables 1 and 2). They carry the Original Breath issued from the Dao into the cosmos, and represent its differentiation in the world of multiplicity. In a different but related function, moreover, the five agents make it possible to classify items belonging to different sets—directions of space, segments of time cycles, numbers, colors, planets, minerals, and organs of the human body, to mention only the sets used in the *Cantong qi*—into five emblematic categories, in order to show the relations that occur among items belonging to the same category and among those that belong to different categories. For example, with regard to the first type of relation, the agent Wood associates the east, the spring, the numbers 3 and 8, the color green, the planet Jupiter, and the organ liver with one another. With regard to the second type of relation, spring and summer, respectively associated with Wood and Fire, exemplify two different states of the Yang principle (the same it true, therefore, of Jupiter and Mars, the liver and the heart, and so forth).

The agents are generated in the first place by the division of original Unity into Yin and Yang, and by the further subdivision of Yin and Yang into four states. These four states are defined by two distinct series of terms. The first series emphasizes stages of cyclical

Pages 39-52 are omitted from this Sample

mance of incorrect practices, or the incorrect interpretation of certain notions and terms, will continue in later traditions related to the *Cantong qi*, often becoming even more radical.

The second kind of criticism is addressed to alchemical practices that are not based on the principle of “being of the same kind” (or “category,” *tonglei*), a principle that receives one of its first enunciations in the *Zhuangzi*.¹ Section 36 of the *Cantong qi* reproves several Waidan methods. It is enough to read that section with attention to notice that the criticism is not addressed to Waidan per se, but to the Waidan methods that are not based on the conjunction of lead and mercury. Only lead and mercury, according to the *Cantong qi*, are of the “same kind” as Qian and Kun, and can represent and enable their conjunction.

§ 8. ALCHEMY IN THE *CANTONG QI*

For its own nature, the alchemical language lends itself to two main functions. The first is the description of alchemical ideas and practices in the strict sense. The second is the illustration of metaphysical and cosmological doctrines, many of whose features can be expressed by means of alchemical symbolism and vocabulary. When the symbolic usage of the language prevails over the literal one (as it does in the *Cantong qi*), the alchemical terms connote in the first place formless principles, and the material entities or phenomena literally denoted by those terms are seen as instances of those principles. A particular alchemical term, in this way, essentially becomes another name of the principle that it connotes; as such, it can also be used to refer to any entity or phenomenon that, in the alchemical discourse, is seen as an instance of that principle. To give one example, the alchemical term “true lead” denotes refined lead, but connotes the principle of True Yang. “True Lead” thus becomes another name of True Yang, and in this function refers not only to refined lead, but also to other instances of the same principle. Analogously, any other term or image that literally denotes an instance of True Yang can connote “true lead”: for

¹ See below the note to sentence 35:9. The *Zhuangzi* passage is found in one of the later portions of this work, which seem to date from the third century BCE.

instance, Metal, the White Tiger, the color white, Kan ☵, the earthly branches *geng* 庚 and *xin* 辛, and so forth.

It is essentially for this reason that, although the alchemical portions of the *Cantong qi* refer to Waidan methods, they can be read as descriptions of Neidan practices. This possibility is not only entirely coherent with the nature of the alchemical language, but is also implied in it: the alchemical language is based on the notion of analogy. Although this should be sufficiently clear, it may be useful to add that Neidan is by no means equivalent to the “symbolic” aspects of Taoist alchemy: as a practice, its position compared to the plane of the doctrines is largely equivalent to the position of Waidan. The doctrines of the *Cantong qi*, in other words, do not belong to either Waidan or Neidan: they pertain to both.

Under this light, it seems clear that the *Cantong qi* provides an alchemical model that can be applied to both Waidan and Neidan; but it uses the language of Waidan to describe the compounding of the Elixir for the simple reason that Waidan was the form in which alchemy existed when the text was composed. In other words, it is not the task of the *Cantong qi* to describe Neidan under the guise of Waidan. Leaving aside the historical questions that it would raise, this view would be reductive for a work of this scope. The task of the *Cantong qi* is not to describe alchemical practices, as many other texts do, but to show how the practice of alchemy can comply with the principles of metaphysics and cosmology.

The main subjects dealt with in the alchemical portions of the *Cantong qi* are the following:

1. Lead and Mercury: 28–29, 68
2. Description of the method: 39–40, 62, 78
3. The five agents and the Elixir: 32–33, 41, 63, 72, 79
4. The principle of “belonging to the same kind”: 34–35, 69, 74, 80
5. The principle of “inversion”: 64, 73
6. The tripod: 82
7. Erroneous alchemical methods: 36, 65

Pages 55-62 are omitted from this Sample

is God Himself, the Great One (Taiyi), the Oneness of Being, without whom cosmogony could not occur and the whole edifice of cosmology could not be built (19:5, 27:11). It is important to note that, with regard to this point, the same process invests both the earlier Waidan traditions and the meditation practices: the gods who were addressed by means of invocations and pleaded to favor the compounding of the elixirs—or to provide an elixir “internally” to the practitioner of meditation—play no role in the Waidan and Neidan traditions based on the *Cantong qi*. This does not mean that the ritual features of the external or the internal practices are entirely removed: as a practice, alchemy itself is a “cosmological ritual.” In their intermediary function between the domains of Formlessness and form, however, the deities of the external and the internal pantheons are replaced by other images: the emblems of cosmology and the alchemical symbols proper.

It does not surprise, therefore, that the *Cantong qi* explicitly advises against meditation on the inner gods (26:1–2). Certain clusters of terms that recur in the *Cantong qi* show that the focus is a different one. Now the adept examines, investigates, searches, inquires, quests, and inspects; he gauges and measures; he reflects, ponders, infers, and assesses.¹ This is not mere intellectual activity in the modern sense of the term: it relies on the intellect as the knowing faculty of Spirit, and takes place through “contemplation” (*guan*; 11:8, 14:5) and the cessation of the flow of thoughts (59:4).

With the changes mentioned above, the whole outlook is transformed. The shift from Waidan to Neidan occurs first at the doctrinal level; the new practices result from the grafting of earlier methods onto a different doctrine. The change is first clearly visible in Waidan, where the conversion of earlier practices to different doctrinal foundations resulted in a new way of compounding the Elixir. With another analogous, decisive shift, the earlier meditation methods were replaced by Neidan.

In other words, the same unchangeable doctrine inspired changes within both “external” and “internal” forms of practice. The *Cantong qi* expounds this doctrine.

¹ All terms mentioned above (*cha* 察, *kao* 考, *tan* 探, *ji* 稽, *xun* 尋, *shen* 審, *cun* 忖, *du* 度, *si* 思, *lü* 慮, *tui* 推, *kui* 揆) are found in different sections the *Cantong qi*.

Translation

This translation is based on the text found in Chen Zhixu's *Zhouyi cantong qi zhujie* (Commentary and Explication of the *Cantong qi*), composed in ca. 1330. For details on this text, see pp. 266 ff. The edited text is transcribed on pp. 269 ff.

At an early stage of my work, I have subdivided the text into sections. These subdivisions are based on the following criteria, listed in order of importance: (a) Changes in the number of characters in rhymed lines; (b) Major changes of rhyme patterns; (c) Major changes of subject matter. Beyond these criteria, I have not followed any particular model to determine the extent of each section.

For ease of reference, and in order to provide a pointer to their main subjects, I have assigned titles to the individual sections. (Sections dealing with the same subjects bear identical titles.) These titles are not found in Chen Zhixu's text, and neither correspond to, nor are inspired by, those found in the other redactions of the *Cantong qi* that I have seen. The subdivision of each section into stanzas is based on the rhyme patterns and usually follows the basic quatrain framework, which, however, the *Cantong qi* does not use consistently.

Verses are numbered consecutively within each section. A reference given in the form "24:11" means "section 24, verse 11."

Sentences that are literally or almost literally quoted from other texts are translated within quotation marks.

The earlier English translations of the *Cantong qi* by Wu Luch'iang and Tenney L. Davis (1932), Zhou Shiyi (1988), and Richard Bertschinger (1994), as well as the Japanese translation by Suzuki Yoshijirō (1977), have been extremely useful. I have also consulted translations of individual passages found in works by Joseph Needham, Ho Peng Yoke, Nathan Sivin, Chan Wing-tsit, Liu Ts'un-yen, Imai Usaburō, Murakami Yoshimi, and other scholars. The present version differs from earlier translations just as much as each of them differs from all the others.

With much initial hesitancy, I have translated each verse on a separate line, instead of rendering the entire text in a looser prose form. While this has not by any means resulted into a "poetical" translation, I am ultimately pleased with this choice, as it has led me

to adhere to certain formal features of the verses and to convey them, to some extent, into English. Once again, let me remind that Noreen Khawaja deserves my gratitude, and all due credit, for innumerable corrections and suggestions that have improved this translation. I bear full responsibility for any error.

My comments are in two forms: section notes and verse notes. Although I have consulted several commentaries, including those to the “Ancient Text”, the section notes are not based on any specific source. I have also used modern annotated versions, especially those by Suzuki Yoshijirō, Fang Xu, and Wu Enpu. Facing different explications given by commentators and scholars—variously leaning toward Waidan, Neidan, cosmology, or other subjects, and with remarkable differences within each of these fields—I have tried to focus on the features that connect the varying interpretations to one another and that, in the first place, make them possible. Besides this, I have attempted to read, translate, and annotate the individual parts of the text from the perspective of their respective main subjects—i.e., cosmology, Taoism, or alchemy, according to the traditional understanding of the *Cantong qi* (about these subjects, see above the Introduction, § 6, § 7, and § 8).

The verse notes contain references to quotations from earlier sources; translations of closely related passages found in earlier texts; references to comparable sentences found elsewhere in the *Cantong qi*; and additional remarks on certain terms or passages. The main textual and technical notes are collected in a separate part of the book (pp. 231 ff.).

Finally, in order to avoid unnecessary complications, I often refer to Wei Boyang as the author of the *Cantong qi* in my notes, in agreement with the established tradition.

This Sample contains 9 of the 88 poems of the *Seal of the Unity of the Three*.
Page numbers do not correspond to those in the complete version of this book.

BOOK 1

- 1 *Qian and Kun, Kan and Li*
- 1-6 “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.
Female and male, these four trigrams
function as a bellows and its nozzles.
- 7 *Sun and Moon make change*
- 1-4 *Wu* in Kan ☵ is the essence of the Moon,
ji in Li ☲ is the radiance of the Sun.
Sun and Moon make change,
the firm and the yielding match one another.
- 5-10 Soil rules over the four seasons,
entwining beginning and end;
green, red, black, and white
each dwells in one direction.
All are endowed by the Central Palace
through the efficacy of *wu* and *ji*.
- 10 *The joining of the Sun and the Moon*
- 1-5 Between the month’s last day and dawn on next month’s
first day, Zhen ☳ comes to receive the token. At that moment,
Heaven and Earth merge their essences, and the Sun
and the Moon reach out for one another and hold onto
one another.

- 6–9 The masculine Yang spreads his mysterious emanation,
the feminine Yin transforms her yellow wrap.
In indistinction they conjoin;
at this incipient time, the root is planted.
- 10–13 Steadily and orderly the seed is nourished;
from the coagulation of Spirit the corporeal frame is
formed.
This is how living beings come forth:
even the wriggling worms all proceed from this.
- 18 *Nourishing inner nature*
- 1–4 Innerly nourish yourself,
serene and quiescent in Empty Non-Being.
Going back to the fundament conceal your light,
and innerly illuminate your body.
- 5–8 “Shut the openings”
and raise and strengthen the Numinous Trunk;
as the three luminaries sink into the ground,
warmly nourish the Pearl.
- 9–10 “Watching, you do not see it” —
it is nearby and easy to seek.
- 22 *The principles of alchemy*
- 1–2 “Know the white, keep to the black,”
and the Numinous Light will come of its own.
- 3–6 White is the essence of Metal,
Black the foundation of Water.
Water is the axis of the Dao:
its number is 1.

7–10 At the beginning of Yin and Yang,
Mystery holds the Yellow Sprout;
it is the ruler of the five metals,
the River Chariot of the northern direction.

11–14 That is why lead is black on the outside
but cherishes the Golden Flower within,
like the man who “wears rough-hewn clothes but cherishes
a piece of jade in his bosom,”
and outwardly behaves like a fool.

26 *Incorrect practices*

1–8 This is not the method of passing through the viscera, of
inner contemplation and having a point of concentra-
tion;
of treading the Dipper and pacing the asterisms, using the
six *jia* as markers of time;
of satiating yourself with the nine-and-one in the Way of
Yin, meddling and tampering with the original womb;
of ingesting breath till it chirps in your stomach, exhaling
the pure and inhaling the evil without.

9–12 Day and night you go without slumber,
month after month, you never take rest.
From exhaustion your body daily grows weak:
you may be “vague and indistinct,” but look like a fool.

13–16 Your hundred vessels stir and seethe like a cauldron,
unable to settle and clear.
Amassing soil you set up space for an altar,
and at daybreak and sunset you worship in awe.

17–20 Demonic creatures reveal their shapes,
at whose sight in your dreams you sigh with emotion.

Rejoiced in your heart, pleased in your thoughts,
you tell yourself, surely, your life will grow long.

21–24 But death, unexpected, comes ahead of its time,
and you forsake your body to rot.
Your deeds have rebounded,
for you were defiant and let slip the hinge.

25–30 The arts are so many —
for each thousand, there are ten thousand more.
Their tortuous routes run against the Yellow Emperor and
the Old Master,
their winding courses oppose the Nine Capitals.
Those who are bright comprehend the meaning of this:
in all its breadth they know where it comes from.

29 *The “two eights”*

1–2 The waxing quarter is Dui ☱, its number is 8;
the waning quarter is Gen ☶, it is also 8.

3–6 The two quarters join their essences,
forming the bodies of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷.
Two times 8 corresponds to one pound:
the Way of the *Changes* is correct and unbiased.

55 *Water, the beginning*

1–4 “Qian ☰ is movement and is straight”:
Breath spreads and Essence flows.
“Kun ☷ is quiescence and is gathered”:
it is the hut of the Dao.

5–8 The firm gives forth and then recedes,
the yielding transmutes and thereby nurtures.

The 9 reverts, the 7 returns,
the 8 goes back, the 6 remains.

9–12 Man is white, woman is red;
Metal and Fire seize one another.
Water then stabilizes Fire:
it is the first of the five agents.

13–18 “Superior goodness is like water”
because it is flawless and clear.
These are the forms and images of the Dao,
but True Unity can hardly be charted:
it alters itself and distributes by parting,
and each part dwells alone, on its own.

72 *“The three things are one family”*

1–4 When the Wooden essence of cinnabar
finds Metal, they pair with each other:
Metal and Water dwell in conjunction,
Wood and Fire are companions.

5–8 These four, in indistinction,
arrange themselves as Dragon and Tiger:
the Dragon is Yang, its number is odd,
the Tiger is Yin, its number is even.

9–12 The liver is green and is the father,
the lungs are white and are the mother,
the kidneys are black and are the son,
the heart is red and is the daughter.

13–16 The spleen is yellow and is the forefather,
and the son is at the origin of the five agents.
The three things are one family:
all of them return to *wu* and *ji*.

Notes

This section contains notes on 9 of the 88 poems of the *Seal of the Unity of the Three*. Page numbers do not correspond to those in the complete version of this book.

BOOK 1

1. Qian and Kun, Kan and Li

Sections 1–17 of Book 1 are devoted to cosmology. The constant conjunction of Qian and Kun, the active and the passive principles, gives birth to all phenomena in the world of change. Therefore Qian and Kun are “the door and the gate” through which change arises, and “the father and the mother” of all emblems that represent change. As they join with one another, Qian ☰ entrusts his generative potential to Kun and, in doing this, becomes Li ☲; Kun ☷ receives the essence of Qian to bring it to fruition and, in doing this, becomes Kan ☵. Since Kan and Li embrace Qian and Kun, represented by the respective inner lines, they provide “inner and outer walls” to Qian and Kun: the Yin principle (☷) harbors True Yang (—), and the Yang principle (☰) harbors True Yin (--).

If the two sets of walls are shaped as joined semicircles, they form a wheel (see fig. 3). The central hub is the emptiness from which existence comes forth; the axle passing through the hub is Qian and Kun, which hold the wheels in position; and the wheels with their spokes are the compass of space and the cycles of time governed by Kan and Li. The *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and its Virtue) uses the same images to illustrate the operation (or “function,” *yong*) of emptiness at the center of the cosmos: “Thirty spokes share one hub: wherein there is nothing lies the function of a carriage. . . . Therefore in what is there lies the benefit; in what is not there lies the function” (*Daode jing*, 11).

Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li are also compared to a bellows and its nozzles. The bellows (Qian and Kun) is empty, but sends forth its breath through the nozzles (Kan and Li). This image too alludes to a passage in the *Daode jing*, which refers to the empty center that brings about existence 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” (*Daode jing*, 5).

1. “*Qian and Kun are the door and the gate of change.*” This sentence is an almost literal quotation from the “Appended Sayings” of the *Book of Changes*: “Qian and Kun are indeed the door and the gate of change!” (B.5; see Wilhelm, 343).

2. *The father and the mother of all hexagrams.* Compare *Book of Changes*, “Explanation of the Trigrams”: “Qian is Heaven, therefore he is called the father. Kun is Earth, therefore she is called the mother” (sec. 9; see Wilhelm, 274). See also the “Commentary on the Judgement” on the hexagrams Qian (no. 1) and Kun (no. 2): “Great indeed is Qian, the Origin! The ten thousand things owe their beginning to him . . . Perfect indeed is Kun, the Origin! The ten thousand things owe their birth to her” (see Wilhelm, 370 and 386).

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

7. Sun and Moon make change

The Moon is Kan ☵ and the Sun is Li ☲. However, although the Yin trigram Kan is associated with the Moon, it encloses a solid Yang line that belongs to Qian ☰. This line corresponds to the celestial stem *wu* 戊, an emblem of the active, creative aspect of the One. Analogously, the Yang trigram Li is associated with the Sun, but encloses a broken Yin line that belongs to Kun ☷. This line corresponds to the celestial stem *ji* 己, representing the passive, fulfilling aspect of the One. When Qian and Kun are contained within Kan and Li, they are called the “essence” (*jing*) of the Moon and the “radiance” (*guang*) of the Sun.

The alternation of the Sun and the Moon produces change. With regard to this, the *Cantong qi* observes that when the graphs that represent the Sun and the Moon are joined to one another, with the graph for “sun” (*ri* 日) placed above the graph for “moon” (*yue* 月), they form the graph for “change” (*yi* 易). This etymology of the word “change” does not pertain to philology, but is an example of the analogical function of images and forms.

In addition to being associated with True Yang (Qian) and True Yin (Kun), the celestial stems *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己 are also emblems of the central agent Soil, which, like the One, comprises Yin and Yang halves. Soil transmits the One Breath to the four directions and the

four seasons—i.e., to space and time—which correspond to the agents Wood, Fire, Water, and Metal, referred to here by the colors green, red, black, and white. In reiterating the unity of Qian and Kun, Kan and Li, and *wu* and *ji*, Soil guarantees the conjunction of the world of multiplicity to the Absolute.

10. The joining of the Sun and the Moon

The joining of Kan ☵ and Li ☲ (Sun and Moon) occurs in the night between a month's last day and next month's first day; it replicates within space and time the joining of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ (Heaven and Earth) in the precelestial domain. When Kan and Li join one another, the active and the passive principles return to the original state of indistinction. Qian endows Kun with its essence (which is "mysterious," *xuan*, a word emblematic of Heaven), and the womb ("wrap") of Kun (which is "yellow," the color emblematic of Earth) is impregnated. Spirit produces that essence through its own coagulation (*ning*). Thus Kun receives the seed of Qian, and brings it to fruition. All forms of life are generated in this way.

In the cosmos, the joining of the Sun and the Moon gives birth to a new time cycle, the lunar month. The first half of that cycle is ruled by the Yang principle, which flourishes until it culminates at the middle of the month. The second half is ruled by the Yin principle, which similarly grows until it overcomes the Yang principle at the end of the month. Then the Sun and the Moon join once more, the Yang principle is reborn, and the cycle begins again.

The trigram Zhen ☳ (Thunder) symbolizes the first stage of the rebirth of luminous Yang after the obscurity of Yin. Its Yang line at the bottom (the position of the initial line) is an image of regeneration after stagnation, represented in the *Book of Changes* by the crack of thunder produced by the conjunction of Yin and Yang. At the beginning of the month, Heaven assigns Zhen the task of ruling over the first stage of the newly-born time cycle (the initial five days) and the corresponding sector of space (East). Having been reborn, the Yang principle begins a new cycle of ascent and descent. Section 13 describes this cycle.

4. *Heaven and Earth merge their essences.* Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "Heaven and Earth mesh together, and the ten

thousand things proliferate by transformation. Male and female join their essences, and the ten thousand things are born by transformation” (B.4; see Wilhelm, 342–43).

22. The principles of alchemy

Sections 22–25 concern the way of inferior virtue. This portion of the *Cantong qi* begins with a description of the principles of alchemy.

Alchemy seeks the principle that gives birth to, and is hidden within, the manifest cosmos. Among the emblems of the *Book of Changes*, this principle is represented by the solid Yang line contained within Kan ☵ (Water), which originally belongs to Qian ☰. Alchemically, it is represented by the True Lead found within “black lead,” or native lead.

The opening sentence, borrowed from the *Daode jing*, states that one should “keep to the black” in order to “know the white.” Black (Yin) represents the agent Water, the outer Yin lines of Kan ☵, and native lead; it is the world in which we live. White (Yang) represents the agent Metal, the inner Yang line of Kan, and True Lead; it is the One Breath sought by the alchemist. “Keeping to the black” and “knowing the white” generates the Numinous Light (*shenming*), which in the alchemical metaphor is the Elixir.

Therefore the precelestial Breath is to be sought within Water. As a cosmological principle, Water is the first of the five agents (here called the “five metals”); it is “the beginning of Yin and Yang,” and is represented by number 1 and by the northern direction. Because of its primal position within the cosmos, Water is the “axis of the Dao,” and all changes and transformations derive in the first place from it. For the same reason, Water is also the element that supports the River Chariot (*heche*), the vehicle that transports the One Breath (Metal, True Lead, True Yang) back and forth in its cycles of ascent and descent within the cosmos.

Water is the “mystery” (*xuan*): it stands for obscurity, the north, and black lead, but it holds light and, being the “axis of the Dao,” is intimately connected to the center. In alchemical language, this hidden principle is referred to as the Yellow Sprout (*huangya*), a term that connotes both the essence of Metal (True Yang) found within Water (Yin), and the first intimation of the birth of the Elixir (denoted as “yellow” for its association with Soil, the agent that represents the

center). Analogously, lead is black outside, but harbors the white and luminous Golden Flower (*jinhua*) within. Quoting another passage from the *Daode jing*, the *Cantong qi* likens the authentic principle hidden in the darkness of the world to the treasure concealed by the saintly man, who disguises himself as a common mortal.

1. “*Know the white, keep to the black.*” This sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 28: “Know the white, keep to the black, and be a mold for the world. If you are a mold for the world, the constant virtue does not depart from you, and you return to the Ultimateless.”

2. *And the Numinous Light will come of its own.* Compare *Daode jing*, 73: “The Dao of Heaven does not contend but is good at overcoming, does not speak but is good at responding, is not summoned but comes of its own, seems to be slack but excels in planning.”

3–4. *White is the essence of Metal, Black the foundation of Water.* For several commentators, “white” stands for True Lead; for others, it means either mercury, or silver, or gold. These varying views reflect different configurations of the alchemical emblems, in whose contexts the same principle can be represented by different terms and symbols. “White,” in all cases, alludes to the authentic principle contained within the “black.” Being the True Yang within Yin, this authentic principle is the opposite of black lead, and therefore is called True Lead. For the same reason, it may be called “mercury,” which in Chinese alchemy stands in a polar relation to lead. Because of its white color, it can also be called “silver,” in contrast to black native lead. Finally, since True Yang is the precelestial One Breath, it may be called “gold,” the metal that more than any other represents the Elixir.

6. *Its number is 1.* Compare the “Monograph on the Pitch-pipes and the Calendar” in the *History of the Former Han Dynasty*: “By means of number 1, Heaven generates Water. By means of number 2, Earth generates Fire. By means of number 3, Heaven generates Wood. By means of number 4, Earth generates Metal. By means of number 5, Heaven generates Soil” (*Hanshu*, 21A.985; the same passage is also found in several other texts). These are the so-called “generation numbers” (*shengshu*) of the five agents. The “accomplishment numbers” (*chengshu*) are obtained by adding 5 to each “generation number.” See table 4.

9. *It is the ruler of the five metals.* The five metals are gold, silver, copper, iron, and lead. Here they are meant as mere emblems of the five agents:

Water is the first of the five agents, and lead, which is related to Water, is “the ruler of the five metals.”

10. *The River Chariot of the northern direction*. In Neidan, River Chariot refers to path of the circulation of Breath (*qi*) through the *renmai* and *dumai* vessels, respectively running along the back and the front of the body. This circulation is analogous to the circulation of the One Breath in the cosmos along the cycles of time and the compass of space.

13. *Like the man who “wears rough-hewn clothes but cherishes a piece of jade in his bosom.”* This sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 70: “It is only because they have no understanding that they do not understand me; but since those who understand me are few, I am honored. Thus the saint wears rough-hewn clothes, but cherishes a piece of jade in his bosom.”

26. Incorrect practices

Sections 26–27 conclude the portion of Book 1 concerned with the general principles of superior virtue and inferior virtue. The present section consists in an admonition against fruitless practices.

The *Cantong qi* repeatedly warns against the performance of practices deemed to be incorrect or unproductive for true realization. This section rejects meditation methods, breathing practices, sexual techniques, and the worship of minor deities and spirits. “Passing through the viscera” (*lizang*) is an early term that refers to visualizing in succession the gods residing within the five viscera. “Inner contemplation” (or “inner observation,” *neishi*, the reading found in other redactions of the *Cantong qi*) also refers to meditation on the inner deities. “Treading the Dipper and pacing the asterisms” denotes the meditation methods of “pacing the celestial net” (*bugang*). “Six *jia*” alludes to protective calendrical deities, and in particular to those associated with the talismans of the “six decades,” each of which begins on a day marked by the celestial stem *jia* 甲. “Way of Yin” indicates the sexual techniques, and the expression “nine-and-one” hints to the phrase *jiuqian yishen* (“nine shallow and one deep” penetrations in intercourse). “Ingesting breath” designates the breathing practices.

Not only does the *Cantong qi* reject these methods; it also refers to them with irony. “Exhaling the old and inhaling the new [breath]” (*tugu naxin*), a common designation of the breathing

practices, becomes “exhaling the pure and inhaling the evil without” (from the perspective of the *Cantong qi*, the “pure” is to be found in the first place within). Breath is ingested “till it chirps in your stomach.” The adept who devotes himself to these practices is “vague and indistinct,” an image that in the *Daode jing* denotes the Dao itself, but here quite literally refers to the practitioner who “looks like a fool.” Apart from this, the rejected practices, says the *Cantong qi*, are ineffective because they focus on the body and on the hope of extending one’s lifetime. For this reason, they go against the true Taoist teaching, which the *Cantong qi* associates with the Yellow Emperor and with Laozi, the Old Master.

4. *Using the six jia as markers of time.* The six *jia* (*liu jia*) are the six days of the sexagesimal cycle marked by the celestial stem *jia* 甲 (see table 15). Being especially important in hemerology, these days are associated with deities and with talismans that grant communication with those deities. — The word *chen* in *richen* (here rendered as “markers of time”) refers to the twelve earthly branches, which are used to mark the individual stages of duodecimal time cycles—in particular, the twelve “double hours” of the day and the twelve months of the year.

24. *For you were defiant and let slip the hinge.* The term *shuji* denotes the pivot, mainspring, or “vital point” of something, and derives from the “Appended Sayings” of the *Book of Changes*: “Words and deeds are the hinge of the noble man. As the hinge moves, it determines honor or disgrace” (A.6; see Wilhelm, 305).

25. *The arts are so many.* *Shu*, here translated as “art,” refers to various cosmological sciences and techniques—for instance, divination, physiological techniques, and alchemy—including both their doctrinal foundations and their specific methods.

28. *Their winding courses oppose the Nine Capitals.* *Quzhe* (“winding courses,” “crouchings and bendings”) connotes pointless and unproductive pursuits. See this passage of the *Zhuangzi*: “The crouchings and bendings of rites and music, the smiles and beaming looks of humanity and righteousness, which are intended to comfort the hearts of the world, in fact destroy their constant naturalness” (8.320; see Watson, 100). — The precise connotation of the term *jiudu* (“nine capitals”) is unclear in this context; it may refer to the Nine Palaces (*jiufu*) of the administration of Fengdu, the subterranean realm of the dead. The implication, nevertheless, is clear: the death of the adept of incorrect practices is a punishment delivered by Heaven.

29. The “two eights”

In addition to the inner line of Kan ☵, True Lead (True Yang within Yin) is also represented by Dui ☱, the trigram associated with the West and the White Tiger. Analogously, True Mercury (True Yin within Yang) is represented not only by the inner line of Li ☲, but also by Gen ☶, the trigram associated with the East and the Green Dragon.

Dui and Gen, in turn, respectively connote the first and the last quarter of the Moon (see table 10). In this role, they are both assigned the symbolic number 8, derived from the sequence of the lunar cycle. Dui is the waxing quarter, which occurs at the middle of the first half of the month, eight days after the black Moon (see 13:3–4: “On the eighth day, when Dui ☱ matches *ding* 丁, the waxing quarter is level as a string”). Gen is the waning quarter, which occurs at the middle of the second half of the month, eight days after the full Moon (i.e., on the twenty-third day; see 13:15–16: “When Gen ☶ aligns with *bing* 丙 in the south, it is the twenty-third, the waning quarter”).

Therefore Dui and Gen, in addition to being emblems of True Yang and True Yin, also signify the first and the second halves of the lunar month, respectively distinguished by the growth of the Yang and the Yin principles. As emblems of True Yang and True Yin, Dui and Gen are equivalent to the inner lines of Kan ☵ and Li ☲. Saying that “the two quarters join their essences,” thus, is equivalent to saying that Kan and Li join to one another and exchange their inner lines, reestablishing Qian ☰ and Kun ☷.

The sum of the numeric values of Dui and Gen is 16. In the traditional Chinese weight system, 16 ounces (*liang*) correspond to one pound (*jin*). The symbolic pound of Elixir, therefore, incorporates and unifies the whole set of cosmological and alchemical correspondences represented by its two ingredients, True Lead and True Mercury. (*)

(*) An additional correspondence between the Elixir and the emblems of the *Book of Changes* is mentioned in two verses not found in Chen Zhixu’s redaction of the *Cantong qi*. See the textual note to verse 29:6.

5. *Two times 8 corresponds to one pound.* In the later alchemical tradition, the expression “two eights” (*erba*, lit., “two times 8”) designates by

antonomasia the Elixir, which is formed by True Lead and True Mercury joined to one another in equal parts.

55. Water, the beginning

As does the passage of the *Book of Changes* from which verses 1 and 3 derive, the first stanza of this section describes the process that create life. Qian is movement, Kun is quiescence. Complying with their natures and qualities, Qian gives forth the Essence that generates life, and entrusts it to Kun; Kun receives the Essence of Qian, and brings creation to achievement.

The joining of essence and substance, or male and female, is in the first place a return to the state of Unity of Qian and Kun. This process can be portrayed in several ways, two of which are alluded to in the present section. The second stanza uses images related to the numeric values of the five agents. Unity here is not represented by Soil, which stands for the joining of Qian and Kun per se, but by Water, the first agent in the cosmogonic sequence (see section 22): the conjunction of Qian and Kun is now the precondition for the creation of a new life, the first stage of a process that awaits its unfolding, a reiteration of the process that leads to the birth of the whole cosmos.

The symbolism of verses 7–8 is complex, but deserves attention as this passage of the *Cantong qi* is quoted in several later texts. The return of the four external agents—Water, Fire, Wood, and Metal—to the state of Unity is described as “the 9 reverts, the 7 returns, the 8 goes back, the 6 remains.” These sentences refer to the “generation” and “accomplishment” numbers (*shengshu* and *chengshu*) of the agents, which respectively are 1 and 6 for Water, 2 and 7 for Fire, 3 and 8 for Wood, and 4 and 9 for Metal (see table 4). The state of Unity, to which the four external agents must return in order to generate life, is represented by number 1, which belongs to Water. Therefore Metal (9) “reverts,” Fire (7) “returns,” and Wood (8) “goes back” to the 1 of Water. Instead, Water (6) owns number 1 as its “generation” number; since it does not need to perform any movement, it “remains.”

In the third stanza, the male and female principles are represented by the respective essences, semen and blood. Their colors, white and red, are associated with the agents Metal and Fire. These images lead to another description of the same process, based on the sequence of

conquest among the agents (see table 3). Metal and Fire contend with one another, until Fire conquers Metal; then Water conquers Fire. Here Water is again the symbol of the return of Qian and Kun to the state of Unity, the very instant in which a new life is generated. Then this Unity “alters itself and distributes by parting”: duality and multiplicity emerge, and life begins its course.

1. “*Qian is movement and is straight.*” This sentence derives from the “Appended Sayings” of the *Book of Changes*: “Qian is collected in a state of quiescence, and straight in a state of movement” (A.5; see Wilhelm, 301).

3. “*Kun is quiescence and is gathered.*” This sentence derives from the “Appended Sayings”: “Kun is gathered in a state of quiescence, and open in a state of movement” (A.5; see Wilhelm, 301).

13. “*Superior goodness is like water.*” This sentence is quoted from the *Daode jing*: “Superior goodness is like water. Water is good at giving benefit to the ten thousand things without contending, and dwells in places that all people dislike; therefore it is close to the Dao” (sec. 8).

16. *But True Unity can hardly be charted.* Compare 14:3–4: “Original Essence is subtle and can hardly be beheld; infer its rules and attest its tokens”; 37:15–16: “What has form is easy to gauge, but the signless can hardly be envisaged”; and 43:9: “Mysterious and obscure, this can hardly be fathomed.”

72. “The three things are one family”

The Elixir is made of two ingredients, which in terms of the five agents respectively correspond to Metal and Wood, and in alchemical terms respectively correspond to True Lead and True Mercury. In the generative sequence of the agents, Metal generates Water, and Wood generates Fire. Through the inversion of this sequence that occurs in the alchemical process, Water (Yin) generates Metal (True Yang), and Fire (Yang) generates Wood (True Yin). In the language of alchemy, “black lead” (Water, Yin) generates True Lead (Metal, True Yang), and cinnabar (Fire, Yang) generates True Mercury (Wood, True Yin).

This inversion causes the postcelestial (*houtian*) aspects of Yin and Yang to be reintegrated within their precelestial (*xiantian*) aspects, which are of the opposite signs: the postcelestial Yin (Water) returns to precelestial True Yang (Metal), and the postcelestial Yang

(Fire) returns to True Yin (Wood). The precosmic and cosmic aspects of Yin and Yang are now joined again to one another: “Metal and Water dwell in conjunction, Wood and Fire are companions.”

Since the four initial elements are merged “in indistinction,” they are reduced to two, symbolized by the Yang Dragon (whose numerical emblem is 3) and the Yin Tiger (whose numerical emblem is 4). With the addition of the central Soil, which enables True Yin and True Yang to conjoin, there are three sets, each of which has a numerical value of 5. The first set is made of Water and Metal (1+4); the second, of Fire and Wood (2+3); and the third, only of Soil (5). The main symbolic associations of each element are shown below:

(1)	WATER	1	north	dark warrior	black lead	kidneys	son
	METAL	4	west	white tiger	true lead	lungs	mother
(2)	FIRE	2	south	vermillion sparrow	cinnabar	heart	daughter
	WOOD	3	east	green dragon	true mercury	liver	father
(3)	SOIL	5	center	yellow dragon		spleen	forefather

The next verses mention the standard associations of the five viscera (liver, heart, spleen, lungs, and kidneys) with the five agents, here represented by their colors (green, red, yellow, white, and black) and by the family relations that occur among them (father, daughter, “forefather,” mother, and son). (*) The verse translated as “the son is at the origin of the five agents” can be understood in two ways, and the double meaning is certainly intended. In the first sense, *zi* 子 means “son”; the son is Water, which is generated by the One and is the first element in the “cosmogonic sequence” of the five agents (see above the notes to section 22). In the second sense, *zi* 子 is the name of the first earthly branch (see table 13), and the verse should be translated as “*zi* is the origin of the five agents.” In any of the two interpretations, the sense is the same: *zi* is the branch emblematic of the North, and the North corresponds to the agent Water.

The final two verses reiterate the reversion process: from 5 to 3 (Metal and Water; Wood and Fire; Soil), and from 3 to 1, when True Yin and True Yang are joined to one another in the Elixir. The One is indicated by *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己, the two celestial stems that represent Soil with its Yin and Yang halves.

(*) The associations of the five viscera with the five agents will play an important role in Neidan, where the Elixir is often said to be formed by joining the “fire of the heart,” which holds True Yin, with the “water of the kidneys,” which holds True Yang.

5. *These four, in indistinction.* This expression is also found in 43:13 with reference to Qian ☰, Kun ☷, Kan ☵, and Li ☲.

9–13. *The liver is green and is the father . . . The spleen is yellow and is the forefather.* For the variants found in these verses among different redactions of the *Cantong qi*, see the Textual Notes.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

	WOOD	FIRE	SOIL	METAL	WATER
DIRECTIONS	east	south	center	west	north
SEASONS	spring	summer	(midsummer)	autumn	winter
COLORS	green	red	yellow	white	black
EMBLEMATIC ANIMALS	green dragon	vermilion sparrow	yellow dragon	white tiger	snake and turtle
NUMBERS	3, 8	2, 7	5, 10	4, 9	1, 6
YIN-YANG (1)	minor Yang	great Yang	balance	minor Yin	great Yin
YIN-YANG (2)	True Yin	Yang	balance	True Yang	Yin
STEMS	<i>jia</i> 甲 <i>yi</i> 乙	<i>bing</i> 丙 <i>ding</i> 丁	<i>wu</i> 戊 <i>ji</i> 己	<i>geng</i> 庚 <i>xin</i> 辛	<i>ren</i> 壬 <i>gui</i> 癸
BRANCHES	<i>yin</i> 寅 <i>mao</i> 卯	<i>wu</i> 午 <i>si</i> 巳	<i>xu</i> 戌, <i>chou</i> 丑 <i>wei</i> 未, <i>chen</i> 辰	<i>you</i> 酉 <i>shen</i> 申	<i>hai</i> 亥 <i>zi</i> 子
PLANETS	Jupiter	Mars	Saturn	Venus	Mercury
RELATIONS	father	daughter	forefather	mother	son
VISCERA	liver	heart	spleen	lungs	kidneys
BODY ORGAN	eyes	tongue	mouth	nose	ears

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

Table 2

FIRE South Vermilion Sparrow 2 cinnabar Original Spirit (<i>yuanshen</i> 元神)		
WOOD East Green Dragon 3 True Mercury inner nature (<i>xing</i> 性)	SOIL Center 5 intention (<i>yi</i> 意)	METAL West White Tiger 4 True Lead qualities (<i>qing</i> 情)
WATER North Dark Warrior 1 black lead Original Essence (<i>yuanjing</i> 元精)		

Spatial arrangement of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行), with some of their main associations. In agreement with the traditional Chinese convention, North is shown at the bottom, South at the top, East on the left, and West on the right.

Table 3

	GENERATES	IS GENERATED BY	CONQUERS	IS CONQUERED BY
WATER	Wood	Metal	Fire	Soil
WOOD	Fire	Water	Soil	Metal
FIRE	Soil	Wood	Metal	Water
SOIL	Metal	Fire	Water	Wood
METAL	Water	Soil	Wood	Fire

“Generation” (*xiangsheng* 相生)
and “conquest” (*xiangke* 相剋)
sequences of the five agents (*wuxing* 五行).

Table 4

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

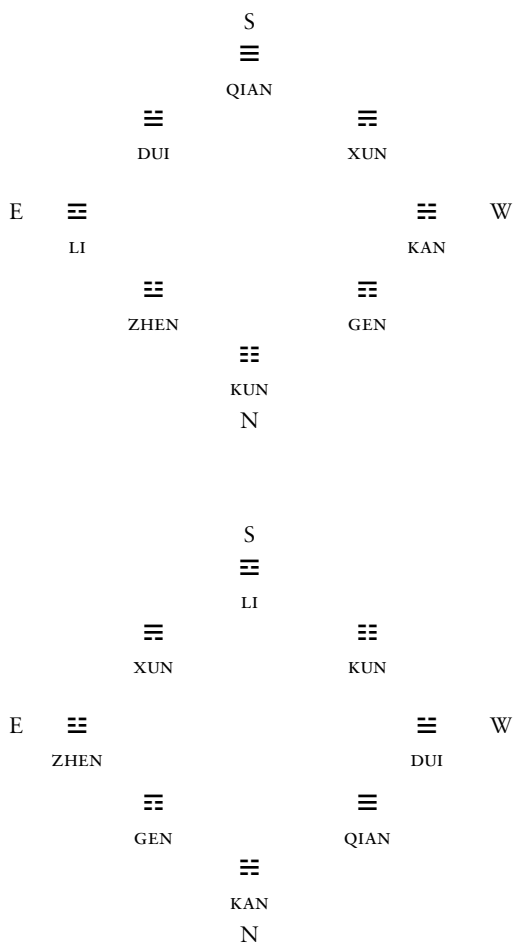
“Generation numbers” (*shengshu* 生數)
and “accomplishment numbers” (*chengshu* 成數)
of the five agents.

Table 5

							
乾	兌	離	震	巽	坎	艮	坤
QIAN	DUI	LI	ZHEN	XUN	KAN	GEN	KUN
heaven	lake	fire	thunder	wind	water	mountain	earth
father	youngest daughter	second daughter	eldest son	eldest daughter	second son	youngest son	mother
south	southeast	east	northeast	southwest	west	northwest	north
northwest	west	south	east	southeast	north	northeast	southwest

The eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) and their main associations. From top to bottom: elements in nature, family relations, and directions in the cosmological configurations “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian* 先天) and “posterior to Heaven” (*houtian* 後天).

Table 6



Spatial arrangements of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) in the cosmological configurations “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian* 先天, top) and “posterior to Heaven” (*houtian* 後天, bottom).

Table 7

	DAYTIME		NIGHTTIME
1	Zhun 屯	䷂	䷃ Meng 蒙
2	Xu 需	䷄	䷅ Song 訟
3	Shi 師	䷆	䷇ Bi 比
4	Xiaoxu 小畜	䷈	䷉ Lü 履
5	Tai 泰	䷊	䷋ Pi 否
6	Tongren 同人	䷌	䷍ Dayou 大有
7	Qian 謙	䷎	䷏ Yu 豫
8	Sui 隨	䷐	䷑ Gu 蠱
9	Lin 臨	䷒	䷓ Guan 觀
10	Shike 噬嗑	䷔	䷕ Bi 賁
11	Bo 剝	䷖	䷗ Fu 複
12	Wuwang 無妄	䷘	䷙ Dachu 大畜
13	Yi 頤	䷚	䷛ Daguo 大過
14	Xian 咸	䷞	䷟ Heng 恆
15	Dun 遯	䷠	䷡ Dazhuang 大壯
16	Jin 晉	䷢	䷣ Mingyi 明夷
17	Jiaren 家人	䷤	䷥ Kui 睽
18	Juan 蹇	䷦	䷧ Jie 解
19	Sun 損	䷨	䷩ Yi 益
20	Guai 夬	䷪	䷫ Gou 姤
21	Cui 萃	䷬	䷭ Sheng 升
22	Kun 困	䷮	䷯ Jing 井
23	Ge 革	䷰	䷱ Ding 鼎
24	Zhen 震	䷲	䷳ Gen 艮
25	Jian 漸	䷴	䷵ Guimei 歸妹
26	Feng 豐	䷶	䷷ Lü 旅
27	Xun 巽	䷸	䷹ Dui 兌
28	Huan 渙	䷺	䷻ Jie 節
29	Zhongfu 中孚	䷛	䷼ Xiaoguo 小過
30	Jiji 既濟	䷾	䷿ Weiji 未濟

Sequence of the sixty hexagrams
during the thirty days of the month.

Pages 253-284 are omitted from this Sample

【第八十八節】

委時去害、依託丘山、循遊寥廓、與鬼為鄰、5 化形而仙、淪寂無聲、百世而下、遨遊人間、敷陳羽翮、10 東西南傾、湯遭厄際、水旱隔并、柯葉萎黃、失其華榮、15 吉人相乘負、安穩可長生。

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