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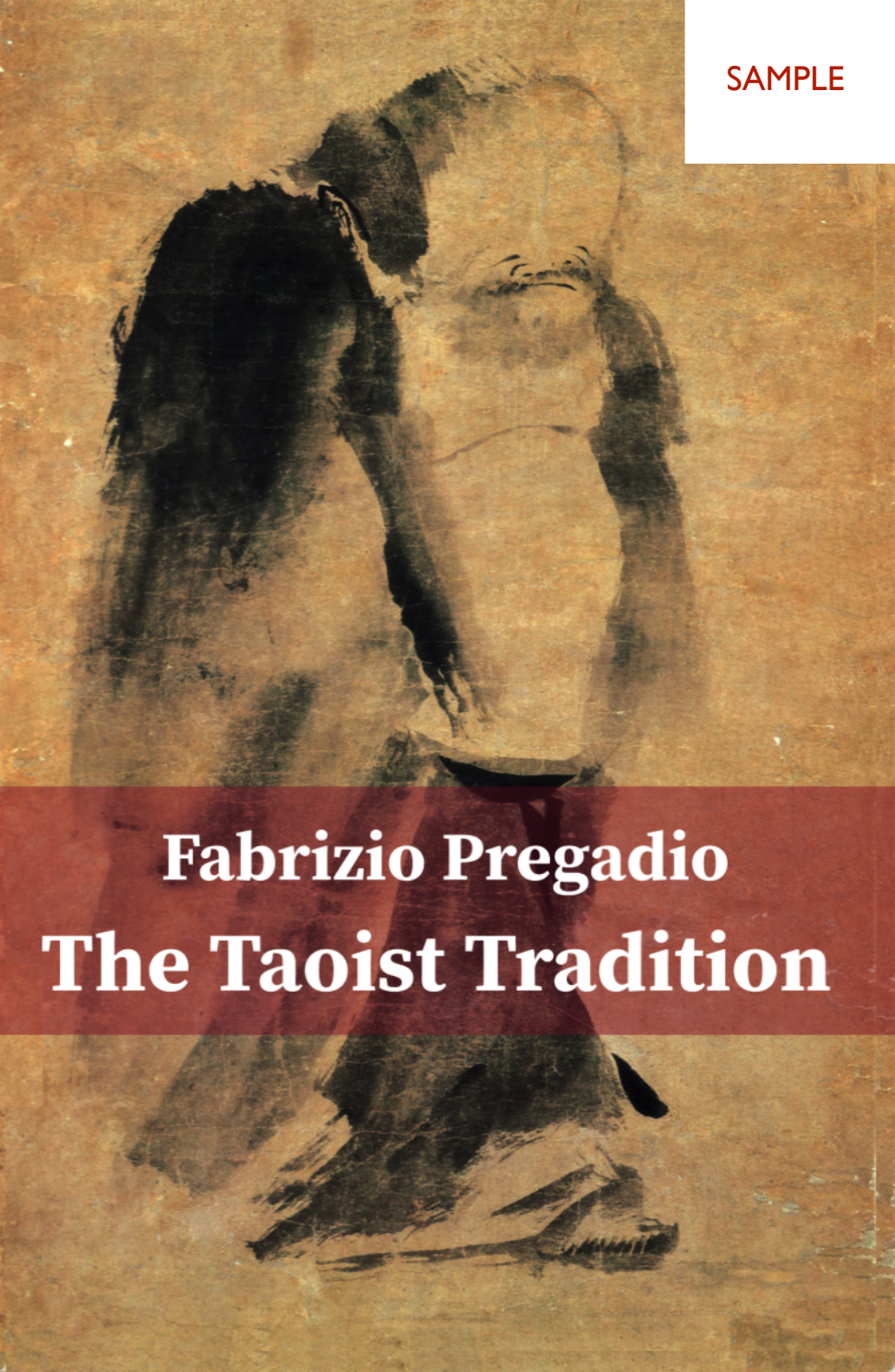

Fabrizio Pregadio

The Taoist Tradition

THE TAOIST TRADITION

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

The Encyclopedia of Taoism, editor (Routledge, 2008)

The Seal of the Unity of the Three: A Study and Translation of the Cantong qi (Golden Elixir Press, 2011)

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Fabrizio Pregadio

The Taoist Tradition

An Introduction to Teachings, Schools, and Practices

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(*) The Six Dynasties proper are Wu 吳 (222–80), Eastern Jin 東晉 (317–420), Liu Song 劉宋 (420–79), Southern Qi 南齊 (479–502), Liang 梁 (502–57), and Chen 陳 (557–89), but the term is often applied to the whole period from 220 to 589.

Foreword

This book has slowly evolved from notes prepared for my undergraduate and graduate courses, taught nearly every year since 1995 in the United States (Stanford University), Canada (McGill University), Italy (Sapienza University in Rome and Istituto Universitario Orientale in Naples), and Germany (Technische Universität Berlin and Friedrich-Alexander-Universität Erlangen-Nürnberg). Almost every time, I have added some portions, omitted others, changed the sequence of topics, divided one subject into two or more classes, or, vice versa, merged different subjects into one class. The students' interest, or lack of it, towards certain themes and issues has always been of help not only in making adjustments to the earlier content, but also in improving my understanding of how it should be presented. I am therefore grateful in the first place to all students who have taken part in my college courses. Unwittingly, but in more than one way, they have helped to write this book.

In recent years, I have had two opportunities to shape my notes into more coherent written narratives: first as an article for the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, edited by Edward N. Zalta,[1] and later when my friend and colleague Donatella Rossi invited me to contribute one chapter on Taoism to her book on Asian thought and religions.[2] While both contributions—especially the former one—were significantly shorter than the present book, they have provided its basic framework. My thanks go to

1. "Religious Daoism," in Edward N. Zalta, ed., *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (plato.stanford.edu, 2016).

2. "Il Taoismo" [Taoism], in Donatella Rossi, ed., *Fili di seta: Introduzione al pensiero filosofico e religioso dell'Asia* [Silk Threads: An Introduction to Asian Philosophical and Religious Thought], 277–400 (Roma: Casa Editrice Astrolabio - Ubaldini Editore, 2018).

both editors, for the trust they have had in me and for playing important roles in the history of this book.

Finally, I was fortunate for the opportunity to use my drafts in courses taught at the magnificent Centre Ming Shan, directed by Fabrice Jordan and Sarah Blanc in Bullet, Switzerland. It was a true pleasure—and a surprise—to realize for the first time that my notes could also help to introduce Taoism outside of an academic context. The Ming Shan students, Sarah, and Fabrice receive my heartfelt thanks, as I ultimately owe to them my decision to publish this book.

I am also grateful to the Internationales Kolleg für Geisteswissenschaftliche Forschung (IKGF) in Erlangen, Germany, directed by Professor Michael Lackner. From late 2011 to mid-2023 I have found there an ideal environment to pursue my research work, surrounded by several dozen scholars of different backgrounds and interests.

The book was written with two primary audiences in mind: college students (or students of equivalent grade) and anyone who may be interested in Taoism without being a specialist in the field. I have always tried to use a language as simple as possible to me, but not to simplify what is by its own nature complex. Needless to say, the aspects of Taoism not covered in this book are much more numerous than those I have been able to describe. Readers are invited, whenever possible, to consult additional works, including those listed in the final bibliography of secondary studies. With one exception, given the anticipated readership of the book, the bibliography only contains Western-language works.

Unless otherwise specified, translation from Chinese texts are mine. In quotations from Western-language works, I have sometimes modified transliterations and other conventions for consistency with those used in the present book.

Fabrizio Pregadio
Fall 2025

Introduction

There could be no better introduction to this book than the following passage, quoted from one of the main Western scholarly works on Taoism (or Daoism):

> It has become a sinological dogma to distinguish between the so-called Taoist school (*daojia*), said to have produced the classical mystical texts . . . and the so-called Taoist religion (*daojiao*), often said to have begun in the Later Han period [i.e., the first-second centuries CE]. The successive *Daozang* [Taoist Canons] never made this distinction. When we look at the way the terms *daojia* and *daojiao* occur in the texts preserved in the Ming Canon [published in 1445], we see that they are practically synonymous and interchangeable.[1]

The two terms mentioned in this passage, *daojia* and *daojiao*, are usually translated (or rather, interpreted) in Western-language studies as "Taoist philosophy" and "Taoist religion," or as "philosophical Taoism" and "religious Taoism." Taoist texts, however, do not speak of "philosophy" or "religion," two terms and concepts that do not even exist in the premodern Chinese language. They speak, instead, of what they call the "house," "family" or "lineage of the Dao" (*daojia*, also translatable in the plural), and the "teachings of the Dao" or "on the Dao" (*daojiao*). Taoists, who obviously have understood these terms in their literal senses, have seen them as definitions closely related to one another: there cannot be "teaching" (*jiao*) without "lineage" (*jia*), and vice versa.

1. Kristofer Schipper, in Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, 6. Text in square brackets added.

With regard to the Western definitions, it is not clear, in particular, which entity the term "religious Taoism" should define: different scholars might explain its meaning in different ways. If "religion" should include all of Taoism except for its thought, this would probably exclude the doctrines of the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue; see Chapter 1), which Taoists have seen as an integral part—in fact, as the source—of their tradition. Defining Taoism by omitting these doctrines would be in a way analogous to writing a survey of Christianity that intentionally neglects to consider the thought of the theologians, or even one of the founding texts. If, instead, "religion" should only include ritual—with the related pantheons of gods on the one hand, and the priestly and monastic institutions on the other—one should exclude meditation, alchemy, and other individual practices that Taoists have seen as major components of their tradition.

Taoism is a tradition as complex and heterogeneous as Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, or Christianity. The modern categories of philosophy and religion can help to comprehend its "otherness" compared to better-known traditions, by interpreting its different manifestations according to frameworks generally shared by those who use them.[2] Yet, the use of these categories could also lead one to look only at the aspects of the tradition that fit one's chosen framework, and only within the terms and limits of that framework. This may result in creating distinctions—such as the one between philosophy and religion—that do not exist within the tradition itself. In the worst case, the whole issue might simply consist in imposing one cultural model over a different one.

This book attempts to take into account the Western scholarly views on Taoism as well as the Taoists' views of their own tradition. While it presents, in a synthetic way, Taoist thought and religion, it does not make any fundamental distinction between them, and especially does not give priority to either, attempting instead, despite its limits, to point out whenever possible the close

2. Seidel, "Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China," 39.

ties between them. As a consequence, this book is based on a definition as broad as possible of what we might call Taoist religion (a term that should replace the odd "religious Taoism"), and also includes views that pertain to what we might call Taoist philosophy (or Taoist thought, a term more appropriate than "philosophical Taoism").[3]

3. Among the now numerous general works on Taoism, one can recommend those by Kristofer Schipper, *The Taoist Body,* and by Isabelle Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion.* More concise descriptions can be found in Schipper, "The Story of the Way"; Bokenkamp, "Daoism: An Overview"; and Seidel, "Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China." On traditions, persons, texts, and the main technical terms see the articles in Kohn, ed., *Daoism Handbook*; the entries in Pregadio, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*; and the text summaries in Schipper and Verellen, eds., *The Taoist Canon.*

1

Laozi

It would hardly be possible to identify a school or a lineage in the history of Taoism which denies that the entire tradition, in the forms in which it has been transmitted for about two and a half millennia, derives in the first place from Laozi and from the work ascribed to him, the *Daode jing* or *Book of the Way and Its Virtue*.

As we shall see, Taoism is far from having evolved exclusively on the basis of this work, and there is no evidence of a historical continuity between Laozi and the *Daode jing*, on the one hand, and the different forms in which Taoism has developed, on the other. Equally significant, however, is the fact that, in a traditional doctrine such as Taoism, history in the ordinary sense of the term can be altered at will to frame a "sacred history" of the teaching. The main point is establishing and exhibiting a bond between an integral exposition of the doctrine—which Taoists find in the *Daode jing*—and the teachings and practices of the individual schools or lineages. To give a few examples, this can be done by asserting that the Taoist "way" (*dao*) derives from a revelation by Laozi, in his human or his divine aspect; or by placing Laozi at the origins of (or within) the different Taoist lines of transmission; or simply by using, in the textual sources, key terms or sentences derived from the *Daode jing*. In these and several other ways, Laozi and the *Daode jing* are, for the Taoists, one of the main vehicles used to declare their identity as Taoists.

Immediately after the *Daode jing,* the Taoist tradition usually places the *Zhuangzi* (see Chapter 2). While the *Daode jing* consists of aphorisms and short statements, the *Zhuangzi* differs from it in its formal features, containing stories, anecdotes, and reflections. Despite differences in emphasis, however, the two works present the same view of the Dao and its relation to the world.

A third text, the *Liezi*, has fallen into a sort of limbo, especially after A.C. Graham demonstrated that parts of the received text are not authentic and date from the fourth century CE (instead of the fourth century BCE, as was supposed earlier). Recently, though, efforts have been made to rehabilitate this work, also motivated by the fact that it appears to contain lost fragments of the *Zhuangzi*.[1]

THE *DAODE JING* (BOOK OF THE WAY AND ITS VIRTUE)

Current Western scholarship is virtually unanimous in asserting that Laozi is not a historical person. The reputed author of the *Daode jing*, whose name means Old Master and who is also known as Lao Dan and Li Er, can best be seen as a "collective entity" who embodies the tradition—without name and, as far as we know, based to a large extent on oral transmission—that is at the basis of the text, and the ideal of sainthood that the text describes.

While the author and his work are traditionally dated to the sixth century BCE, the Mawangdui and Guodian manuscripts (discovered in 1972 and 1993, respectively) have helped to establish that the earliest known exemplars of the *Daode jing* circulated by the latter half of the fourth century BCE.[2] It is also usually acknowledged, however, that the text incorporates earlier oral traditions. While this makes a precise dating virtually impossible, it also suggests that probably there was never an "original" and complete exemplar of the text, which existed in several versions of varying content and length until, probably around the late third century BCE, it was compiled in a form close to the one we know today. The two main received versions, which differ in

1. See Graham, "The Date and Composition of *Liehtzyy*," and Barrett, "Reading the *Liezi*."

2. These manuscript versions are translated in Henricks, *Lao-Tzu: Te-Tao Ching*, and Henricks, *Lao Tzu's Tao Te ching*, respectively.

minor details from one another, are those that include the commentaries by Heshang gong (traditionally dated to the second century CE, but written at least two centuries later) and by Wang Bi (226–49).

Fig. 1.1. Laozi riding his buffalo, with the scroll of the *Daode jing* in his hand. Zhang Lu (ca. 1490-ca. 1563). After Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 117.

The *Daode jing* discusses three main subjects: the Dao, the saint (or the realized person), and the ruler and his government. The next three sections of this chapter are concerned with these subjects.[3]

THE DAO

Several traditions throughout Chinese history speak of a *dao*, or "way," but the *Daode jing* is the earliest work that uses this word to refer to the absolute principle and the origin of existence. The main statement in this regard is found in the first section of the *Daode jing*, which begins by saying:

> A *dao* that can be said to be the Dao
> is not the constant Dao;
> a name that can be named
> is not the constant name.[4]
>
> (*Daode jing*, 1)

The first two lines refer to the multiple "ways" that exist in the world; the next two lines, to the names used to define the Dao itself as well as the different objects and phenomena. None of those ways and none of those names, according the *Daode jing*, is "constant": the ordinary ways of the world are transient, and the common words are as impermanent as the objects and the phe-

3. On the *Daode jing* see Chan, "The *Daode jing* and Its Tradition"; Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 215–35; and Schwartz, "The Thought of the *Tao-te-ching*." On its exegetical tradition see Chan, *Two Visions of the Way*, and the two studies by Robinet, "Later Commentaries: Textual Polysemy and Syncretistic Interpretations" and "The Diverse Interpretations of the *Laozi*."

4. It is virtually impossible to translate the first line of this passage into a Western language in a suitable way. Among other possible ways to render it is the following: "A *dao* (*or*: The Dao) that can be spoken is not the constant Dao." — Further references to the *Daode jing* in this chapter will contain only the number of section.

2

Zhuangzi

Zhuangzi, whose name was Zhuang Zhou, probably lived between 370 and 280 BCE. According to his biography in the *Shiji* (Records of the Historian; ch. 63), his doctrine "derives from the words of Laozi" and "illustrates the arts of Laozi." In addition to its value in the history of Taoism and Chinese thought, the work that goes under his name is deemed to be one of the masterpieces of Chinese and world literature.

The *Zhuangzi* consists of three main parts. Zhuangzi actually wrote only the first of them, the so-called Inner Chapters ("Neipian," 1–7). The two other parts, namely the Outer Chapters ("Waipian," 8–22) and the Miscellaneous Chapters ("Zapian," 23–33), contain writings by different groups of authors and reflect different trends of thought. On the basis of several studies,[1] the contents of these additional portions can be summarized as follows:

1. "Primitivists" chapters (chapters 8–10, most of 11, last part of 12, and most of 16). Written by authors active around the first half of the second century BCE, influenced by the political and social thought of the *Daode jing* (in particular, with regard to the view that the ruler should practice self-cultivation).

2. "Syncretist" chapters (last part of chapter 11, most of 12, 13–15, last part of 16, and 33.). Written by eclectic thinkers who share their views with the authors of the "primitivist" chapters, but also integrate political and social views drawn from other early traditions.

1. In particular, Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 170–211; Mair, "The *Zhuangzi* and Its Impact"; Roth, "Zhuangzi."

3. Chapters written by authors belonging to a "school of Zhuangzi" or by "followers of Zhuangzi" (chapters 17–22).[2] Contain narratives similar to those found in the Inner Chapters, including some featuring Zhuangzi himself. It is worthy of note that, since these portions contain quotations and terms drawn from the *Daode jing*, they document the existence of an early Taoist tradition whose name is unknown, but included both the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi* among its main sources.
4. "Anthological" chapters (chapters 23–27 and 32). Contain different materials, including some that are consistent with the thought of the Inner Chapters and may derive from Zhuangzi himself.
5. Chapters written by followers of the so-called "individualist" thinker Yang Zhu (fifth century BCE; chapters 28–31). Probably dating from around 200 BCE.

An edition of the *Zhuangzi* in 52 chapters was compiled during the Han period, possibly at the court of Liu An (180–122 BCE).[3] Later, this version was in turn edited and shortened into the 33 chapters of the current text by the commentator Guo Xiang (252?-312), who also devised the subdivision into Inner, Outer, and Miscellaneous chapters. In addition to the one by Guo Xiang, the main early commentary to the *Zhuangzi* was composed by Cheng Xuanying (fl. 631–50).[4] In order to provide an overview of Zhuangzi's own views, most quotations in the present chapter derive from the Inner Chapters.

2. The definition of "school of Zhuangzi" is used by Graham. The definition "followers of Zhuangzi" is used by both Mair and Roth.

3. Liu An was the king of Huainan, under whose patronage the *Huainan zi* was composed. See Chapter 3.

4. On Guo Xiang, see Knaul, "Kuo Hsiang and the *Chuang tzu*," and Robinet, "Kouo Siang ou le monde comme absolu." Cheng Xuanying also wrote a commentary on the *Daode jing*; see Assandri, *The* Daode jing *Commentary of Cheng Xuanying*.

"THE KNOWLEDGE THAT DOES NOT KNOW"

Zhuangzi's view of the Dao is in agreement with Laozi's view:

> The Way has its reality and its signs (*xin*)[5] but is without action or form. You can hand it down but you cannot receive it; you can get it but you cannot see it. It is its own source, its own root. Before Heaven and Earth existed it was there, firm from ancient times. It gave spirituality to the spirits and to the [Celestial] Emperor; it gave birth to Heaven and Earth.[6] It exists before the Great Ultimate (*taiji*), and yet you cannot call it lofty; it exists beneath the limit of the six directions, and yet you cannot call it deep. It was born before Heaven and Earth, and yet you cannot say it has been there for long; it is earlier than the earliest time, and yet you cannot call it old. (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 6; trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang-tzu*, 81, slightly modified)

The expressions "beyond the Great Ultimate" and "beneath the limit of the six directions" refer to the spacelessness of the Dao; the phrases "born before Heaven and Earth" and "earlier than the earliest time," to its timelessness. This agrees with the view of the *Daode jing* that the Dao precedes the emergence of the cosmos, whose two main features are space and time.

However, to a much larger extent compared to the *Daode jing*, Zhuangzi repeatedly brings forth the issue of whether and how the Dao can be known. Being the absolute principle, the Dao cannot be made an object; therefore its knowledge cannot be attained by ordinary thought, which functions by establishing

5. Zhuangzi uses here the same term that appears in a passage of *Daode jing* (sec. 21) quoted in the previous chapter: "Within there is a sign." Toshihiko Izutsu notes about the meaning of the term *xin* ("sign"): "The Way (Dao) has a reality as an actus, and presents unmistakable evidence of its existence and the effects it produces" (Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 396 note 54).

6. The Celestial Emperor (Di, or Shangdi, Supreme Emperor) was the supreme deity of the ancient Chinese religion.

distinctions between "self and other," "this and that," and other analogous concepts contrary but relative to one another. Even less can it be attained by moral values such as "good and bad," "right and wrong," or by ethical values such as "benevolence" (*ren*) and "righteousness" (*yi*), which are distinctive of Confucianism:

> Where there is recognition of right there must be recognition of wrong; where there is recognition of wrong there must be recognition of right. Therefore the sage does not proceed in such a way, but illuminates all in the light of Heaven. (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; trans. Watson, 40)

Zhuangzi questions the merit of these and similar categories and their utility as means of knowledge.[7] He maintains that the knowledge provided by them is based on names and words and therefore is not true knowledge, because names and words cannot lead to the knowledge of the Dao. In a passage that brings to mind the initial lines of the *Daode jing* ("A *dao* that can be said to be the Dao is not the constant Dao; a name that can be named is not the constant name"), he says:

> The Great Way is not named; great discriminations are not spoken . . . . If the Way is made clear, it is not the Way. If discriminations are put into words, they do not suffice. . . . Who can understand the discriminations that are not spoken, the Way (Dao) that is not a way (*dao*)? (*Zhuangzi*, ch. 2; trans. Watson, 44–45)

This shows that Zhuangzi is not merely a "skeptical" thinker, as has often been suggested. Surely Zhuangzi is skeptical with regard to the validity of ordinary thought categories and logics as means of knowledge, but his aim is to demonstrate that there is another way of knowing—as long as ordinary knowledge recognizes its own limits. In other words, Zhuangzi's skepticism does not aim to show that the true cannot be known. It aims instead to

7. On this subject see Graham, *Disputers of the Tao*, 176–83, and Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism*, 319–31.

3

The Ancient Period and the Divinization of Laozi

In addition to the teachings of the *Daode jing* and the figure of Laozi, several other components—often not directly related to one another—contributed to the early development of Taoism. This chapter surveys some of the most important ones.

THE "SHAMANS"

We may begin from exorcism, a set of diverse practices based on the belief that illnesses and other disturbances are caused by malevolent entities, including spirits and demonic beings. The officiant who takes charge of these phenomena is the *wu*, a term that denotes a male or female medium or healer but is often translated as "shaman." The *wu* is capable of communicating with the realm of demonic creatures and administers proper remedies to those affected—for example, protective talismans (*fu*) and herbal medicines. While these and similar practices have continued to exist throughout the history of Taoism, it should be noted that "trance" (a state in which one partly or entirely loses consciousness and does not respond to external stimuli) has never been part of Taoist practices.

Some scholars have suggested that shamanism is related to another theme incorporated in the later Taoist traditions: the so-called "far roaming" (*yuanyou*), or journeys to the extremities of the world or to the farthest regions of the cosmos.[1] The best-known account of these journeys in the ancient literature is the

1. See Kohn, *Early Chinese Mysticism*, 96–104.

eponymous "Yuanyou" (Far Roaming) poem, attributed to Qu Yuan (late fourth century BCE) but perhaps dating from the second century BCE. In his work, one of the most celebrated pieces of Chinese poetry, the author describes an "ecstatic journey" during which he visits the remotest regions of the earth, encounters realized beings, ascends to celestial palaces, and finally enters the realm of the Great Beginning (*taichu*). The following are a few verses selected from the 178 of the complete work, here quoted from Paul Kroll's remarkable translation:

> Spirit now flicks forth in a flash, not to turn back again —
> While physical form, withered and desiccate, will remain alone.
> What is inward I examine, indeed, with discipline most firm —
> And seek that which is the source of truest Vitality. . . .
>
> Sup on the Six Pneumas (*qi*) and quaff the damps of coldest midnights —
> Rinse my mouth with truest sunlight and imbibe the aurora of dawn;
> Conserve the limpid clarity of the divine and illuminated —
> As Essence and Vitality enter in, and pollution and filth are expelled. . . .
>
> At dawn washed my hair in the Vale of Sunshine —
> And at dusk dried myself in the realm of Ninefold Sunlight;
> I sucked in the tenuous liquor of the Flying Springs —
> Took to heart the floriate blooms of gorgeous gemstones. . . .
>
> Now I ranged and roamed the Four Wastes —
> Sweeping in circuit to the Six Silences.
> I ascended even to the rifted fissures —
> Descended to view the great strath.
>
> In the sheer steepness below, Earth was no more —
> In unending infinity above, Heaven was no more.
> As I beheld the flickering instant, there was nothing to be seen —
> Giving ear to the humming hush, there was nothing to be heard.

Gone beyond doing nothing, and into utmost clarity,
Sharing in the Great Beginning, I now became its neighbor.[2]

("Yuanyou"; trans. Kroll, "On 'Far Roaming'")

Later Taoist traditions have used the "far roaming" imagery in different contexts: breathing techniques for the absorption of the pure energies (*qi*) emanated at the boundaries of the cosmos; meditation practices that involve walking on heavenly constellations; and accounts of initiatory journeys to the four directions of the world made by saints and immortals, who in this way find texts and receive teachings from divine beings.

THE *FANGSHI*, OR "MASTERS OF THE METHODS"

Besides the *wu*, another class of practitioners with remarkably different features is defined by the generic name of *fangshi*, usually rendered as "masters of the methods" or "of the recipes." Their fields of expertise included different cosmological and esoteric arts: astronomy and astrology; various divination techniques; medicine and healing; alchemy; and sexual, breathing, and other longevity practices.[3] The *fangshi* operated within Chinese society as a whole, but at least from the fourth century BCE onwards they were also invited by several rulers and emperors to reside at court.

Although the *fangshi* shared part of their system of ideas with the Confucian court officers, they differed from them because, in Anna Seidel's felicitous definition, they had the "know-how," that is, skills in techniques particularly appreciated by rulers as they promised benefits ranging from knowledge of the future to achieving long life.[4] In a broader perspective, it is important to

2. See also trans. Hawkes, *The Songs of the South*, 193–99. In the final verse, Paul Kroll's translation has Grand Primordium for Great Beginning.

3. See Ngo, *Divination, magie et politique dans la Chine ancienne*, and DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China*.

4. Seidel, "Imperial Treasures and Taoist Sacraments, 294.

note that several methods originally associated with the *fangshi* were later incorporated, with appropriate changes, into Taoist practices. With this class of practitioners, we are in fact close to what a significant part of Taoism would become in later times: as noted by John Lagerwey, not the "shaman" (with his or her ecstasies and trances), but the "diviner" (who fashions a "rational" world relying on images and emblems with precise meanings and functions) is the predecessor of the Taoist master and the Taoist priest.[5]

Unlike those of the *wu*, several practices associated with the *fangshi*—in particular, their mantic arts—were based on the Chinese cosmological system, which began to take shape in the third and second centuries BCE.[6] The main features of this system and its function in Taoism will be described in Chapter 5. Here we should note two points. First, Chinese cosmology is not tied to particular intellectual or technical legacies. Its creation can be seen as the result of a collective effort to elaborate a comprehensive system open to application to a large variety of fields, with contributions from specialists of various traditional sciences—especially diviners, astronomers, and physicians—and from thinkers of different currents. Second, as was noted by Isabelle Robinet, "unlike other religions, we must look for the fundamental structure, the unity, and the continuity of Taoism in its cosmological discourse and not in its pantheon."[7] While Taoism has had different pantheons in different places and different times (see Chapter 6), its doctrines on the relation between Dao, cosmos, and human being have remained substantially unchanged throughout its history, and a substantial portion of these doctrines have been formulated on the basis of the common Chinese cosmological system.

5. Lagerwey, "Écriture et corps divin," 282–83.

6. See Harper, "Warring States Natural Philosophy and Occult Thought"; Csikszentmihalyi, "Han Cosmology and Mantic Practices"; Kalinowski, "Technical Traditions in Ancient China and *Shushu* Culture in Chinese Religion."

7. Robinet, *Taoism: Growth of a Religion*, 260.

4

Main Schools and Lineages

Historically, the Taoist tradition has consisted of different schools, or rather lineages, usually based on one or more fundamental texts related to one or more divine beings, including Laozi in his deified aspect. On the whole, these lineages, schools, and textual corpora have represented the higher but—with few exceptions—"unofficial" form of the Chinese religion.[1] Without claiming to present a complete survey of the history of Taoism, this chapter is dedicated to an overview of the main Taoist traditions.[2]

TIANSHI DAO (WAY OF THE CELESTIAL MASTERS)

In one of his numerous transformations, Laojun (Lord Lao) appeared—in 142 CE, according to the traditional date—to Zhang Daoling, establishing with him the Covenant with the Powers of Correct Unity (*Zhengyi mengwei*). This revelation is at the origins of Tianshi dao, the Way of the Celestial Masters. Zhang Daoling, who may have been a healer, was appointed Celestial Master (*tianshi*) by Laojun, and in turn pledged to establish a community that would follow Taoist principles.[3]

1. As Anna Seidel shows in her brief but excellent introduction to Taoism ("Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China"), despite its own nature as a native Chinese religion, Taoism has always occupied a subordinate position with respect to the imperial (i.e., "official") cults of Confucian inspiration. The main reason is that allowing state rituals to assume a Taoist form would have meant giving the Taoists a role in the administration of the empire. The typical Confucian official therefore condemned or simply preferred to ignore the purely religious expressions of Taoism.

2. For more extended surveys, see the works cited in footnote 3, p. 3.

3. On the origins and the early history of the Way of the Celestial

> On the first day of the fifth month in the *renwu* year, the first year of the Han'an reign period [June 11, 142 CE], Lord Lao met with the Taoist priest (*daoshi*) Zhang Daoling in a stone chamber on Mount Quting in the Commandery of Shu. . . . The Most High announced to him: "The people of this generation do not hold in awe the True and the Correct, but [only] fear the deviant and demonic. Thus I have proclaimed myself the Newly Appeared Lord Lao." He forthwith honored Zhang as the Master of Three Heavens of the Correct and Unified Breaths (*qi*) of the Great Mysterious Metropolis and entrusted to him the Way of the Covenant with the Powers of Correct Unity to govern in the name of the Newly Appeared Lord Lao. In doing so, Lord Lao abrogated all authority of the age of the [demoniacal] Six Heavens with its Three Ways. Zhang was to stabilize and correct the Three Heavens, eradicating the frivolous and returning the people to simplicity and truth. . . .
>
> The people were not to wantonly carry out improper sacrifice to the demons or spirits belonging to other groups. This was to deprive demons of sacrificial sustenance. [Further, according to the covenant,] masters are not to accept money or in any other way illicitly steal from the people. They are to cure the ill and may not drink alcohol or eat meat.[4] (*Santian neijie jing*, ch. 1; trans. Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 215–16, slightly modified)

Zhang Daoling was succeeded in 179 by his son, Zhang Heng, and then by the latter's son, Zhang Lu. With Zhang Lu, the movement of the Celestial Masters organized itself as a politically and economically autonomous enclave in Hanzhong—between present-day northeastern Sichuan and southeastern Shaanxi—

Masters see Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*; Hendrischke, "Early Daoist Movements"; and Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 21–37 and 149–61.

4. On this passage, see also Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 61. On the interdictions mentioned in the last paragraph, see Schipper, "Le pacte de pureté du taoïsme."

subdivided into twenty-four "administrations" (*zhi*, sometimes rendered as "parishes" by scholars who see analogies with the early Christian church).

Religious and Social Organization

The history of Taoism as a structured religion based on cults addressed to deities begins with the Way of the Celestial Masters. Since its origins, this movement proposed to establish an exemplary and comprehensive model of religious and social organization. With regard to the religious aspect, the cults and rites of the Celestial Masters—just like those of the entire Taoist tradition in later times—intended to distinguish themselves from those of the common religion, defined in Taoism as "licentious," "excessive," or "illicit cults" (*yinsi*). In its struggle against those cults, the Way of the Celestial Masters used a strict regulation of religious practices, based on a bureaucratic relation to the deities and on the use of written documents—redacted by Taoist officiants—to communicate with them. With regard to the social aspect, the population was organized and governed on the basis of "registers" (*lu*), which existed in two forms: household registers, recording births, marriages, and deaths; and individual registers, conferring rank in the social and celestial bureaucracies, and listing the spirits under a person's command, whose number increased dependent on age.[5]

Below the Celestial Master were the Libationers (*jijiu*), whose duties consisted, among others, in educating the people to Taoist principles, directing assemblies, collecting contributions in rice, and maintaining the "charity lodges" (*yishe*) available to those in need.[6] The main Tianshi dao communal rituals were the Three Assemblies (*sanhui*), performed on the seventh day of the first month, the seventh day of the seventh month, and the fifth day of the tenth month. One of the purposes of those gatherings was the

5. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, 274–82.
6. Kleeman, *Celestial Masters*, 56–57 and 385–87.

recording of important changes in the community—such as births, deaths, and marriages—so that not only the Libationers, but also the deities could update their own registers. The Assemblies also included communal meals (*chu*, "cuisines") as well as the chanting and the oral explication of the *Daode jing* performed by the Libationers.

Ethics and Morals

In the early period, healing rites were one of the main practices of the Way of the Celestial Masters. Illnesses were not seen as caused by demonic influences (as they are in exorcism) or by an imbalance of cosmic forces (as they are in traditional Chinese medicine), but by sins committed by the individual (in some cases, also by his or her ancestors). Healing, therefore, required the mediation of a religious specialist different from both the "shaman" and the physician. After confession of sins, an officiant submitted a written petition—reporting the petitioner's fault, repentance, and request for release—in three copies addressed to the three main deities: the first was burned to reach the Office of Heaven, the second was buried to reach the Office of Earth, and the third was thrown into a watercourse to reach the Office of Water. Replacing sacrifice, similar bureaucratic procedures to address the deities have continued to exists throughout the history of Taoism.[7]

Emphasis on ethics and morals is also the main feature in the best-known early Tianshi dao text, a commentary to the *Daode jing* now only partially preserved.[8] On the basis of the text and the commentary, the later Taoist tradition drew a well-known list of nine cardinal ethical precepts:

7. On the developments of this system during the Six Dynasties see Verellen, *Imperiled Destinies*, 51–122 and *passim*.

8. A translation and study of this commentary is found in Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 29–148. The commentary includes only the portion corresponding to sections 3–37 in the current text.

5

Dao and Cosmos

This and the following three chapters are concerned with subjects relevant to Taoism as a whole: the relation between the Dao and the cosmos; gods and rituals; soteriology (the Taoist ways of liberation); and the views of the human body in Taoism. In different ways and to different extents, these four subjects are part of the doctrines and practices of every Taoist school and lineage, and in several cases serve as their basis.

THE DAO AND THE TEN THOUSAND THINGS

Whether it addresses itself to the community or the individual, Taoism purports to provide ways and methods for "returning to the Dao" (*fandao*, *huandao*). Discussing this and other major points of doctrine before approaching their particular subject is—in addition to more or less explicit references to Laozi and the *Daode jing*, as we mentioned in Chapter 1—one of main ways used in Taoist texts to declare their ties to Taoism.

In the Taoist view, the Dao is both the Ultimateless (or Infinite, *wuji*) and the Great Ultimate (*taiji*).[1] In the first sense, the Dao is the infinite and the absolute, and is therefore devoid of definition, determination, form, name, attributes, and qualities. For this very reason, it can comprise all definitions, determinations, forms, etc., none of which could exist outside of it or they would cause a limit to the Dao. From the perspective of the "ten thousand things" (*wanwu*, the objects that exist and the phenom-

1. The word *ji* originally means the horizontal axis along which the roof of a house culminates; hence the sense of "pole," i.e., the end and the limit of something and, in a vertical axis, its highest point.

ena that occur in the manifested world), all that can be said is that they are generated by the Dao, but the Dao does not identify itself with any of them, or else it would be subject to, and limited by, their individuality, form, change, and transitoriness.

When the Dao, in the second sense, is understood as the Great Ultimate, it is seen as the principle of Unity. This Unity, or Oneness, is meant both as the transcendent unity beyond multiplicity (1 as the origin of numbers, but itself not a number) and as the origin of the many (1 as the first number). The Great Ultimate is often called Pure Yang (*chunyang*), where Yang is not the opposite principle to Yin, but the state in which Yin and Yang are joined to one another.[2]

As we have seen (Chapter 1), these two aspects of the Dao correspond in the *Daode jing* to the Dao as "absolute" and as "mother." The two main ontologic and cosmogonic stages respectively prior and posterior to the *creatio continua* of the cosmos are often referred to as *xiantian* ("before Heaven," precelestial) and *houtian* ("after Heaven," postcelestial). For all these and other dual aspects that may be distinguished regarding the Dao, the statement of the *Daode jing* (sec. 1) cited above applies: "These two come forth together but have different names."

ESSENCE, BREATH, SPIRIT

In its self-manifestation, the Dao generates the three main components of the cosmos and the human being. Often called the "three treasures" (*sanbao*), these components are *jing*, or essence, *qi*, or breath, and *shen*, or spirit.[3] Each of them has two aspects,

2. Unity is designated as Pure Yang because in the representation of a creative process—in this case, the process of creation itself—there is a need for an "initial impulse," a movement that is the very nature of the Yang principle.

3. Translations and definitions of these terms are complex. In particular, *qi* may also be rendered as "pneuma," "vapor," "energy," and in

related to their precosmic or "precelestial" natures and to their "postcelestial" forms in the manifested world.

In their precosmic aspects, *shen*, *qi*, and *jing* represent—in this order—three consecutive stages in the process of the generation of the cosmos, from the initial state of Non-Being and Emptiness (*wu*, *xu*) to the coagulation of the essence that gives birth to the "ten thousand things." *Shen* is the principle that presides over non-material entities (including deities, which are also called *shen*, "spirits"); *qi* is the principle that maintains the whole cosmos in existence throughout its extent and duration; and *jing* is the principle that presides over material entities. Under these aspects, *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* are often prefixed by the word *yuan*, "original" (i.e., *yuanjing*, *yuanqi*, *yuanshen*). In certain cases, Original Breath (*yuanqi*) is also seen as a principle prior to and higher than the separate emergence of essence, breath, and spirit. In this case, Original Breath is also called Ancestral Breath (*zuqi*) and is deemed to be virtually equivalent to the Dao itself.

In the manifested world, the three components take on different aspects. With regard to the human being, *shen* emerges as the mind (the "cognitive spirit" or "conscious spirit," *shishen*, or "thinking spirit," *sishen*); *qi* appears primarily as breath; and the main materializations of *jing* are—in addition to other liquid components of the body, such as saliva and tears—semen in men and menstrual blood in women.

COSMOGONY

To explain the relationship between the Dao and the cosmos, the *Daode jing* describes a sequence of phases, corresponding to

other ways. While "breath" does not cover all the senses of *qi*, this translations offer the advantage of rendering with the same term the *qi* of the Dao and the *qi* of the human being, which manifests itself primarily as breathing. The French word *souffle* (and related words in other Roman languages) might be more appropriate to render this and other senses of the word *qi*.

states taken on by the Dao: the Dao itself, Unity, duality (Yin and Yang), and finally multiplicity. As we have seen, the *Daode jing* expresses this view in its famous saying, "The Dao generates the One, the One generates the Two, the Two generate the Three, the Three generate the ten thousand things" (sec. 42). This primary sequence is always respected in Taoist texts, even though different authors may add intermediate stages or exclude them (as does the *Zhuangzi*, ch. 23: "The ten thousand things come forth from Non-Being"). Clearly this ontology only makes sense from a relative point of view: before the generation of the cosmos there are no space and time and therefore there are no conditions for the existence of domains or states that succeed one another. However, the vertical arrangement of the stages serves to illustrate the process of descent from the Dao to the cosmos, and also implies—and often explicitly outlines—a corresponding process of ascent from the cosmos to the Dao, to be performed with the support of suitable practices.

When this hierarchical arrangement is represented as a sequence of temporal stages, the discourse shifts from ontology to cosmogony, which in Chinese thought are closely linked if not equivalent to one another. Throughout its history, Taoism has elaborated several metaphoric accounts of the process of generating the cosmos.[4] Many of these narrations use the concept of *hundun*, a term usually rendered as "chaos" or "the inchoate," in the sense of something that has barely begun to be, but already contains all that evolves from it (cf. *Daode jing*, sec. 25: "There is something inchoate and yet accomplished, born before Heaven and Earth"). In a famous story told by Zhuangzi, the original state of "chaos," and the shift to "cosmos," are represented by an emperor called Hundun, who reigned on the Center. Since his body had no openings, the emperors of the North and South decided to give him a look similar to that of a human being, and opened his eyes, ears, nostrils, and mouth:

4. See Robinet, "Genèses: Au début, il n'y a pas d'avant."

6

Heavens, Deities, and Rituals

In China, the boundaries among Taoism, Buddhism, and the common religion are much less marked compared to those among monotheistic religions developed within other cultures. According to individual needs and circumstances, a lay person may address prayers and petitions indifferently to Taoist, Buddhist, or popular deities. In that person's perspective, those deities belong to the pantheon of "divine beings," and that pantheon is ultimately all-inclusive.[1]

If on the one hand this has placed Taoism in close touch with the common religion, it has also been the reason for a controversial relation. Taoists have often attempted to undertake the ideal dual task—in most cases, it should be said, without success—of drawing people closer to the deities that represent the Dao, while at the same time responding to their more immediate religious demands. As a consequence, in the words of Peter Nickerson, "Taoists, precisely because they relied upon traditions of practice they claimed to have superseded, were compelled to try to distinguish themselves from their popular predecessors and competitors."[2] Demonizing the gods of popular religion was one of the

1. By "common religion" I mean the wide variety of beliefs and cults mainly concerned with divine or spiritual beings or entities often not encompassed within the Taoist or Buddhist pantheons—the main example is one's own ancestors—but also addressed to Taoist or Buddhist figures (and even to several Confucian "sages") with little or no regard to the respective backgrounds. "Common religion" may be a more appropriate term than "popular religion" if the latter term is only meant to define beliefs and cults of the lower social classes. The upper classes—including, as it has been shown, members of an emperor's own family—often shared the same beliefs and cults.

2. Nickerson, "Taoism and Popular Religion," 148.

options:[3] in the course of its history Taoism has prohibited cults addressed to minor deities and spirits, just like it has proscribed acupuncture (healing is supposed to occur through confession of sins or other ritual means overseen by a Taoist officiant) and divination (performed by lay specialists who do not belong to Taoist schools or lineages).[4] Yet, one also observes a large number of examples of the opposite attitude, namely the integration of those cults and practices: to quote Nickerson again, "already in early medieval times, Taoism was including in its rites a number of prohibited practices, and the popular cults themselves were beginning to employ Taoist priests."[5]

One reason at the basis of these divergent—or if one prefers, contradictory—attitudes may be the intent of exploiting the popularity of certain cults and the demand for basic religious services. Another reason may be the attempt of not alienating lay persons and of paying tribute to local religious traditions. A third reason, which partly combines the previous two, may be the intent of providing the necessary support to one's activities and those of the local temple. In all of these cases, Taoism has not only incorporated practices of the common religion into its rites, but has also included gods of the common religion into its pantheon. Nevertheless, the stated purpose of Taoism remains that of "transforming" (*hua*) the people, a term that in this context means educating them to venerate the deities that impersonate the Dao, instead of relying on cults to minor deities and spirits and on rites performed by other officiants—in particular, the spirit-medium or "shaman." Taoism defines such cults and rites

3. See Mollier, "Visions of Evil: Demonology and Orthodoxy in Early Daoism."

4. For one of the best-known examples of proscription of acupuncture and divination, see Nickerson, "Abridged Codes of Master Lu for the Daoist Community." On divination, see below in the present chapter.

5. Nickerson, "Taoism and Popular Religion," 148. On this subject, see also Stein, "Religious Taoism and Popular Religion from the Second to Seventh Centuries"; Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual in Chinese Society and History*, 241–52.

as "excessive" (or "illicit," *yin*), as we have already mentioned (Chapter 4), and as "vulgar" (or "profane," *su*), and has condemned them throughout its history.[6] As has been noted, the main competitor of the Taoist priest within local communities, in past and present times, is not the Buddhist monk or the Confucian officer, but the spirit-medium who operates by communicating with the realm of spirits.[7]

TAOIST HEAVENS

Along with ritual, which we discuss later in this chapter, the main feature that distinguishes Taoism from the common religion is the representation of the celestial domain. During its history, the Taoist tradition has represented this domain under the form of different systems of heavens, usually arranged hierarchically. In several cases, those domains are the residences of deities, but are also associated with the revelation of teachings and textual corpora, and moreover correspond to degrees of priestly ordination and to inner spiritual states. The existence of multiple systems of heavens reflects the development of Taoist religion: different traditions have created their own systems in order to demonstrate that the respective methods derive from a superior celestial domain compared to those of other traditions, and therefore grant access to higher inner states.

Ancient religion and thought refer to a single Heaven (*tian*), seen as the residence of Shangdi (the Supreme Emperor) or considered in itself a divine entity that acts in an intentional way. Around the second century BCE the idea of the Nine Heavens (*jiutian*) originated, seen as nine horizontal sectors of space, corresponding to the center and eight directions and complementing the Nine Continents (*jiuzhou*) on earth. Some later

6. See Kleeman, "Licentious Cults and Bloody Victuals."

7. Seidel, "Taoism: The Unofficial High Religion of China," 62. See also Lagerwey, *Taoist Ritual*, 216–18, for an emblematic episode.

Taoist texts inherited this view; more often, however, the Nine Heavens are represented in Taoism in a vertical (i.e., hierarchical) arrangement, and each of them is seen as a stage in the progressive differentiation of the Original Breath (*yuanqi*) of the Dao during the process of its generation of the cosmos. In other instances, the Nine Heavens are the product of the breaths (*qi*) of the Three Clarities (Sanqing), the main Taoist deities. These three deities first produce the breaths called Mysterious (*xuan*), Original (*yuan*), and Inaugural (*shi*); then each breath divides itself into three. In this way, the Nine Heavens constitute a finer subdivision of the heavens of the Three Clarities.

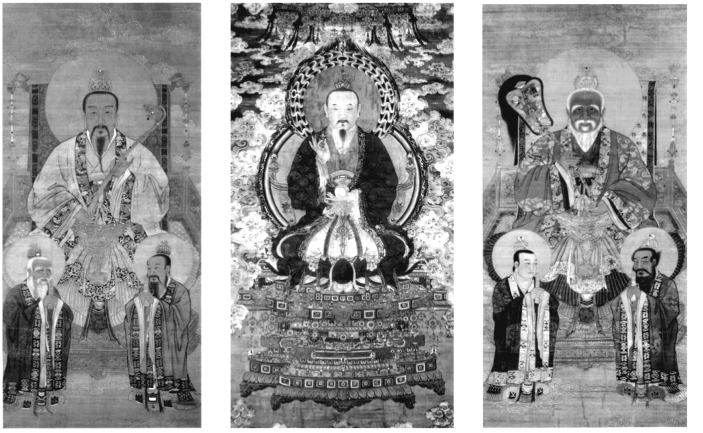

Fig. 6.1. The Three Clarities (Sanqing). Center: Yuanshi tianzun (Celestial Venerable of the Original Commencement); left: Lingbao tianzun (Celestial Venerable of the Numinous Treasure); right: Daode tianzun (Celestial Venerable of the Dao and Its Virtue). Ming and early Qing dynasties. After Little, *Taoism and the Arts of China*, 228–30.

The idea of the Nine Heavens continued to exist during the Six Dynasties, but in a different configuration, related especially

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Ways of Liberation

Reaching longevity (*changsheng*, *shou*) or attaining immortality (*busi*, "not dying") is the stated purpose of practices related to many Taoist traditions. These and similar terms are among the most recurrent ones in Taoist literature. The concepts of longevity and immortality, moreover, are regularly part of descriptions of the state of sainthood or realization.

In general, liberation has been represented in Taoism according to two main models: "union with the Dao" (*hedao* and similar terms) and incorporation into the celestial bureaucracy (typically as an officer of that bureaucracy). The highest form of liberation is often described as "ascending to Heaven" (*shengtian*), attaining "celestial immortality" (*tianxian*), or in analogous terms. However, the general concept of immortality has been construed in ways that differ according to the perspectives of different lineages, texts, and authors. The theme is vast and complex, and in this chapter it will be possible to present only some of its aspects.

TERMINOLOGY

Taoist soteriology consists of teachings on salvation (*du*, lit. "crossing over," "going beyond"; *chaofan rusheng*, lit. "transcending the ordinary and entering sainthood"; etc.) and liberation (*jie*, "release, emancipation"), and on the states of sainthood and realization. Before we approach this subject, it is useful to look at some features pertaining to Taoist soteriology as a whole, and in particular its terminology.

Taoist terms that refer to sainthood and realization include *shengren* (saint or sage); *shenren* (divine man or literally "spirit man"); *zhenren* (realized man, true man, perfected, or in French "homme véritable"); *xianren* (immortal, transcendent); and *zhiren* (accomplished man).[1] These terms are often used interchangeably, and even when different texts describe or imply hierarchies of sainthood or realization, the terminology is far from being consistent. Generally, though, the *shengren* (saint or sage) and the *shenren* (divine man) are deemed to possess their status since birth; *shengren*, in particular, is the term used in the *Daode jing* to describe the fully realized being. The condition of realized (or "true," or "perfected") man (*zhenren*), instead, may either be innate or result from the accomplishment of Taoist practices.[2]

Fig. 7.1. A "winged man" (*yuren*) bearing the "hare in the Moon." Later Han (first-second century CE).

1. The word *ren*, which is part of all of these compounds, does not mean "male." "Man" is used in these translations and elsewhere in the present book in the premodern sense of "person, human being."

2. On the "realized man" and the sense of the word *zhenren* see Lagerwey, "Zhenren," and Schipper, "Le vocabulaire du taoïsme ancien."

The most general of the above terms is *xianren*, usually rendered as "immortal" or "transcendent," even though neither is an actual translation. Classical Chinese dictionaries define *xian* (originally written 僊, an early form of the currently-used graph 仙) as a verb meaning "to rise in flight by moving the sleeves"—that is, the arms—in a way similar to wings.[3] This definition matches early graphic representations of the "winged men" (*yuren*), who are the progenitors of the immortals as beings who rise to heaven; it pertains to the ancient theme of the man-bird (*renniao*), intermediary and messenger between heaven and earth.[4]

Among several others, a description of the degrees of transcendence that has become classical in Taoism is found in the *Baopu zi* (The Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature; ch. 2), dating from ca. 320. Here Ge Hong mentions three degrees, called "celestial immortality" (*tianxian*), in which at the end of one's life one ascends to Heaven; "earthbound immortality" (*dixian*), in which one continues to dwell on mountains; and "immortality through release from the mortal body" (*shijie xian*), which, as we shall see, requires going through a "simulated death." Concerning the ascension to Heaven, it should be noted that this way of liberation is the highest one, but does not turn a human being into a deity: instead of becoming a god, one becomes an assistant to the gods, or simply one of the many immortals who inhabit the Taoist celestial realms.[5]

3. To my knowledge, this definition was first given by the lexicographer Duan Yucai (1735–1815), and is often quoted in later sources and studies. While this is a relatively late definition, *xian* is also phonetically and graphically related to other words meaning "to rise, to ascend."

4. See Pregadio, "The Man-Bird Mountain."

5. Lagerwey, *Wu-shang pi-yao*, 181–85. For a different view, see Puett, *To Become a God*, *passim*.

LIBERATION IN TAOISM

The state of complete liberation in life, which in Taoism is the union with the Dao, is at the basis of the *Daode jing* and is described in many passages of the *Zhuangzi* and in several other works. For the person who attains that standing, even ascending to Heaven does not entail a change of state. Having achieved liberation, he maintains himself in the world until the conditions that support his existence are exhausted. Nothing is left to be perfected before or after his existence is concluded: "Life and death do not differ for him," says the *Zhuangzi* (ch. 2); "he takes life and death as a single transformation (*yihua*)," adds the *Huainan zi* (ch. 7). Having spent his life either in accordance with the "mandate" or the "destiny" (*ming*) that he was assigned by Heaven, or simply in a "spontaneous" (*ziran*) way, he leaves the world when he has completed to perform his function in it.

In different contexts, this fundamental view is defined more precisely or is modified in several ways. First, the state of perfection can be innate or attained by means of practices. In accordance with the statement of the *Daode jing,* these practices as a rule do not consist in increasing one's potential for realization, but in reducing what obstructs it: "For learning, one increases day by day, for the Dao, one decreases day by day. Decrease and then again decrease until there is no doing—there is no doing, yet nothing is not done" (sec. 48). The "reduction" may take several forms: for instance, reducing worldly activities or pursuits (*shi*); terminating attachments, desires, and dependence on mental activity by means of meditation methods; or "refining" (*lian*) the grosser components of the human being by means of inner practices, especially alchemical.

Second, while the state of liberation can be attained in life, according to many Taoist texts it requires forsaking one's mortal body and generating an immortal person. This process often begins with the conception of a new inner "embryo." As we shall see later in the present chapter, there are several ways in which

8

Views of the Human Body

It is virtually impossible to distinguish the Taoist views of the human body from its views of the human being as a whole, and this point of its own constitutes a central aspect of the Taoist way of seeing. Taoism is not interested in anatomy or physiology. The physical body performs a different function: it supports various sets of metaphors that express the relation of the whole person to the ultimate principle, the Dao.

The emphasis placed on the symbolic aspects of the body is also the main aspect under which Taoism differs from Chinese traditional medicine: Taoism sees the body as an instrument for "returning to the Dao." Catherine Despeux draws attention to this point by noting that Taoists "have considered the body in its practical ends, in its uses, developing all kinds of body techniques that intend to liberate the individual from the constraints of the physical body, and consequently to entrust a major role to the symbolic body."[1]

BODY, FORM, PERSON

The ordinary Western understanding of the body as physical frame or structure cannot convey the complexity of the premodern Chinese view. This view revolves around three main terms. The first, *ti* 體, or "body," refers to the corporeal frame as an ordered whole made of interdependent parts; it denotes the physical body made of skin, flesh, limbs, bones, muscles, tissues, vessels, and all other material components. The second term, *xing* 形,

1. Translated from Despeux, "Le corps, champ spatio-temporel, souche d'identité," 87–88.

or "form," is the most complex. It is best understood—at least in a Taoist perspective—in contrast to the idea of "formlessness" (*wuxing*), one of the qualities attributed to the Dao. In this sense, "form" refers to the embodiment as the feature that identifies every entity in the "world of the form," distinguishing it from, but also relating it to, all other entities. Thus the "form," rather than the "body," is the principle of individuality at the physical level, and it is therefore on this aspect that a Taoist works in order to "return to the Dao."[2] The third term, *shen* 身, is the broadest and most comprehensive: it denotes the human being in all of its aspects, both physical and non-physical. *Shen* often is best translated as "person" and at times can also be rendered as "oneself." For example, an expression such as *xiushen* means "cultivating one's person" or "cultivating oneself"; it refers to cultivating not only the body, but the entire person.[3]

Each of the three facets of the "body" mentioned above obviously requires the other two, but the variety of concepts embraced by these terms raises the question of which among them is at the center of the Taoist discourse. It could hardly be said that Taoism focuses on the physical body: as shown below, several loci at the basis of Taoist practices—for instance, the three Cinnabar Fields (*dantian*)—do not even exist at the purely physical level. In other cases, the loci at the basis of Taoist practices have corporeal counterparts, but their emblematic functions are more significant than those performed by the body parts themselves. The main example is the five viscera (*wuzang*): in its discourse on the viscera, Taoism shows little or no interest in the physical organs per se. The viscera serve, instead, as material supports for the network of correspondences that tie the human being to its immediate and remote surroundings: society and cosmos.

2. This is also why the purification/refinement of the body is called in Taoism *lianxing* or "purification/refinement of the form."

3. Other explications of these terms, some of which differ from those suggested here, are found in Kohn, "Taoist Visions of the Body," 241–47; Sivin, "State, Cosmos, and Body in the Last Three Centuries B.C.," 14; Despeux, "Le corps, champ spatio-temporel, souche d'identité," 88–89; and Engelhardt, "Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine," 95–96.

MODELS OF "SYMBOLIC BODY"

A merely anatomical view of the body, therefore, is the least of all concerns in Taoism. Rather than *ti* (the physical body), the Taoist discourse and practices focus on *xing* (the "form") and *shen* (the whole person). Maintaining the physical body in good health is not an end in itself; it serves to ensure that the body and its parts and organs may fulfill their emblematic functions.

Those emblematic functions pertain to what Catherine Despeux has called the "symbolic body" and Kristofer Schipper has called the "symbolic vision" of the body.[4] This view is centered on several key notions and representations, which receive more or less emphasis according to the individual cases. Five different models of the body can be distinguished within Taoism as a whole:[5]

1. The cosmological model, where the human being is seen as a microcosm that contains and reproduces all of the main features of the macrocosm. (See fig. 8.1.)
2. The political model, where the human being is likened to an administrative system, which in turn parallels the bureaucratic systems of the state and of the heavens.
3. The theological model, which sees the body as the residence of inner gods visualized and nourished in meditation.
4. The natural model, which pertains to representations of the body as a landscape—in particular, a mountain—with peaks, watercourses, and other features corresponding to specific internal loci or to "flows of energy" (see fig. 8.2).[6]

4. Despeux, "Le corps, champ spatio-temporel, souche d'identité," 98; Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 104 ff.

5. See Pregadio, "The Alchemical Body in Daoism."

6. On fig. 8.2, see Despeux, *Taoism and Self Knowledge*, 29–33. For other graphic representations, see Huang, *Picturing the True Form*, 78–81.

5. The alchemical model, where the body contains the ingredients of the elixir and the tools required to compound it, including the furnace, the tripod, and the fire.

Fig. 8.1. Human figure surrounded by cosmological emblems: Dragon (Yang) and Tiger (Yin); the hare in Moon (Yang within Yin) and the crow in the Sun (Yin within Yang); the five agents (*wuxing*); trigrams of the *Book of Changes*; and names of ingredients of the Internal Elixir. *Danlun jue Qi bitu* (Secret Charts of the *Seal* [*of the Unity of the Three*] on the Great Reverted Elixir), in *Yunji qiqian*, ch. 72.

9

"Nourishing Life"

Self-cultivation teachings and practices integrated in—or related to—Taoism can be subdivided into three main groups, which will be subjects of this and the following three chapters:

1. Yangsheng (Nourishing Life), including such methods as *daoyin*, breathing, and sexual practices
2. Meditation, including visualization of the inner gods, meditation on Unity (or the corresponding deity, the One or Great One), inner journeys to constellations or to remote corners of the cosmos, and practices of contemplation and insight
3. Alchemy, including Waidan (External Alchemy) and Neidan (Internal Alchemy)

The term *yangsheng*, however, is more complex than this schematic subdivision might suggest. On the one hand, "nourishing life" can denote the operation of the Taoist saint and the realized person, whether it is based on innate qualities or is the result of practices. On the other hand, *yangsheng* is a technical term that designates a variety of practices mainly devised to give benefit to the body.[1] In fact, in this second sense as well the term is so indefinite that no precise list can be drawn of which practices pertain to "nourishing life." Nevertheless, relevant methods would certainly include *daoyin*, breathing, sexual practices, and certain dietary regimes. Other practices, created in relatively recent times and widespread in the present day, such as Qigong and Taiji quan (both often defined as "Taoist"), may also be included in the general category of Yangsheng.

1. See Engelhardt, "Longevity Techniques and Chinese Medicine."

In addition to the techniques themselves, self-cultivation in most cases also explicitly involves the observance of ethical principles. Before describing a few of those techniques and their relationship to Taoism, we will briefly look at this subject.

ETHICS AND SELF-CULTIVATION

The cultivation of ethical principles is seen in Confucianism as the most important task in a person's life. Benevolence (or "humanity," *ren*), righteousness (*yi*), propriety (*li*), wisdom (*zhi*), and sincerity (or "trustworthiness," *xin*) are the five cornerstones of social life in the Confucian view, and they are therefore fundamental requirements for individual life.[2] These virtues are illustrated by exemplary models that include not only several historical persons, but also and especially the early mythical rulers who established the foundations of civilized life.

Taoism does not reject these principles, but sees them as secondary compared to the primary principle, namely the Dao and its cultivation both by the individual and, at least ideally, by society as a whole. This view is expressed in the most explicit way in a passage of the *Daode jing*, which states that "superior virtue" (*shangde*) is non-doing (*wuwei*). Benevolence, righteousness, and other ethical principles, instead, are forms of "inferior virtue" (*xiade*), and their elevation to primary principles only emerges when "the Dao is discarded" (sec. 18 and 38). Yet, those principles are not repudiated. As one passage of the *Daode jing* says:

> In relating to others, goodness lies in being benevolent;
> in speaking, goodness lies in being trustworthy.
>
> (*Daode jing*, sec. 8)

2. *Li* means more in general "rite," but also designates the rituality required in everyday behavior among different people, which in turn is closely linked to social hierarchies; for instance, those between sovereign and subject, husband and wife, and father and son.

In Taoism as a whole, however, ethics is not only a branch of philosophical thought, but pertains in the first place to the field of self-cultivation. The Taoist discourse on ethics, therefore, also involves a large number of elementary principles of behavior, often expressed in the shape of "precepts" (*jie*). Taoism deems those elementary principles to be the most basic foundation of self-cultivation in order to "return to the Dao." As Livia Kohn has remarked, "one cannot connect to the ultimate goals as envisioned by the tradition—however defined—unless one reaches a certain level of purity. This purity carries an ethical dimension and is, at least in the beginning, often expressed as moral rules and precepts."[3]

In addition to the nine precepts drawn from the *Daode jing* (see Chapter 4), one of the main Taoist works on this subject is the *Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie*, or *180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao*, which seems to date from the mid-fifth century or earlier.[4] Kristofer Schipper has assigned most of the precepts listed in this work to the following main categories: eating and dietary precepts; proper sexual behavior; respect for women, seniors and juniors, family, worthy people, servants and slaves, and animals; precepts concerning one's own possessions (e.g., against avarice) and other people's possessions (e.g., against stealing); and precepts agains killing living beings.[5] Among the precepts mentioned in this work are the following:

> (2) You should not debauch the wives and daughters of other men. (32) You should not speak about the dark secrets of others. (39) You should not participate in killing. (44) You should not consider yourself to be superior. (48) You should not use bad language or curse. (50) You should not deceive others. (56) You should not take lightly or show contempt for the teachings of the scriptures and sacred teachings. (64) You should not show anger

3. Kohn, *Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation*, 2.

4. This work is translated in Hendrischke and Penny, "The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao."

5. Schipper, "Daoist Ecology: The Inner Transformation," 84–85.

> or displeasure. (79) You should not harm or kill any living thing through fishing or hunting. (92) You should not harm others through your position in or connection with the local administration. (98) You should not cage birds or animals. (102) You should not deceive the old and the young. (152) Each time you burn incense you should pray on behalf of the ten thousand families and that the empire should attain Great Peace. Do not do it simply for yourself. (153) Whenever someone addresses you as Libationer, be careful to move them to awe. Do not act frivolously and hastily or make yourself laughable. (163) Men's and women's clothing should not exceed three sets. (166) In this generation, evil people are numerous and good ones are few. Do not be depressed. The Dao itself protects its law. (167) If others abuse you, you should simply hear it through. Do not respond. (169) If others wrong you, repay it repeatedly with kindness. (Commentary: Being kind destroys evil as water extinguishes fire.) (*Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie*; trans. Hendrischke and Penny, "The 180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao")

As shown by these quotations, while the *180 Precepts* were primarily addressed to the Libationers (*jijiu*) of the Way of the Celestial Masters (see above, Chapter 4), many of them, if not all, also applied to lay adepts, and continued to do so in later times. Several Tang-dynasty works on Yangsheng and meditation contain sections devoted to similar fundamental ethical rules.[6]

MAIN PRACTICES

Among various methods that can be deemed to be part of Yangsheng, here we shall briefly present three of the most important.

Daoyin (lit. "guiding [*qi*] and pulling [the limbs]") has been defined, in Western terms, as a sort of gymnastics, in the sense

6. See the texts translated in Kohn, *Sitting in Oblivion: The Heart of Daoist Meditation*.

10

Meditation and Contemplation

Meditation practices play an important role in several Taoist traditions. These practices can be divided into four main types: (1) visualization of the inner gods; (2) meditation on Unity, or visualization of the correspondent deity, the One or Great One; (3) "excursions" to constellations and astral bodies, or to the remotest poles of the cosmos; (4) contemplation and insight. Common to these different practices is the fact that, unlike ritual where people communicate with the deities through the intermediation of a priest and by means of written documents (as we have seen in Chapters 4 and 6), in meditation the approach with the sacred or the divine is personal and direct. Yet, as we shall see, even in this case the administrative metaphor plays an important role.

Practices based on the visualization of the inner gods, documented from the second century CE, began to be replaced by methods of contemplation from around the seventh century. However, the inner gods have continued to perform an important function in Taoist ritual until the present day: in the main act of the ceremony, the priest sends forth his own inner deities to Heaven in order to submit the "statement" (or "memorial," *shu*) to the gods. In addition, meditation is closely related to some practices pertaining to Nourishing Life (Yangsheng, especially those related to breathing), and also plays an important role in Internal Alchemy (Neidan).

THE INNER GODS

According to Taoist traditions documented from the second century CE, the human being hosts a veritable pantheon of gods.

The most important among them represent the different degrees of the subdivision of Unity (the Great Ultimate, *taiji*) into multiplicity, and are related to the main features of the cosmic domain: in particular, the central celestial pole (residence of the One, Yi, or Great One, Taiyi, and equivalent to the heart in the human being); the vertical axis (subdivided into three segments, corresponding to the three Cinnabar Fields); and the horizontal axis (made of four directions arranged around a central point, equivalent to the five viscera). In addition, the inner gods perform multiple roles related to one another: they allow the human being to communicate with the corresponding gods of the celestial pantheon, serve as administrators of the human body, and guard the balance of the body's main functions.

Several texts describe the features of the inner deities. In the early centuries of our era, two works are especially important. The first is the *Huangting jing*, or *Book of the Yellow Court*, a work in poetry that exists in two versions, one called "Outer" ("Wai"), probably dating from the second century, and one called "Inner" ("Nei"), dating from the second half of the fourth century.[1] The second is the *Laozi zhongjing*, or *Central Book of Laozi*, written in prose in ca. 200 CE.[2] The methods at the basis of these two works were re-codified in the second half of the fourth century following the Shangqing revelations (see Chapter 4). As we have said, the main text of this school, namely the *Dadong zhenjing* (True Book of the Great Cavern), consists almost entirely of methods for the visualization of inner gods.[3]

1. On the *Huangting jing* see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 55–96, and Despeux, *Taoism and Self Knowledge*, 163–74.

2. On the *Laozi zhongjing* see Schipper, *The Taoist Body*, 100–12; Schipper, "The Inner World of the *Laozi zhongjing*"; Lagerwey, "Deux écrits taoïstes anciens"; Puett, *To Become a God*, 238–44.

3. See Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 97–117. On the deities mentioned in another Shangqing revealed scripture, the *Lingshu ziwen* (Numinous Writ in Purple Characters), see Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 284–85 and 326–27.

The *Book of the Yellow Court* mentions, among others, a series of gods that live within the five viscera. Significantly, these organs are called "departments" (*bu*, the same term that denotes the ministries of the government), and each god resides in its own palace. In other words, these descriptions combine what we have called the theological and the administrative models of the body (see Chapter 8). For example, the god of the heart is described as follows:

> The Palace of the heart department is a lotus bud.
> Underneath is the home of a young lad, Cinnabar Origin (Danyuan):
> he presides over cold and heat, and harmonizes the constructive and the defensive [breaths].[4]
> Wearing a flying gown of cinnabar brocade, wrapped in a jade gauze,
> he placidly sits with golden pendants and a vermilion sash.
> He regulates the blood and adjusts the vital force so that one does not wither.
> Outside he corresponds to the mouth and the tongue, and exhales the Five Flowers.[5]
> If you call him on the point of death, you will instantly revive,
> and if you practice this for a long time, you will fly to the Great Mist (*taixia*).
>
> (*Huangting jing*, sec. 10)

Here as in all texts on the inner gods, details such as names, appearances, dimensions, and garments of each deity are mentioned to serve as supports for visualization. In agreement with the classical Chinese views on the fateful separation of the spirit (*shen*) from the body, several works warn that if the inner gods

4. The "constructive breath" (*yingqi*) circulates within the duct system (the so-called "meridians") and nourishes the whole body. The "defensive breath" (*weiqi*) circulates between the skin and the flesh, and protects against diseases and other disorders.

5. The Five Flowers (*wuhua*) are the essences of the five viscera.

(also called *shen*) leave their residences, a person dies. "Maintaining one's thoughts" on them (*cun*, i.e., visualizing them), and feeding them and their residences with appropriate nourishment—in particular, one's own breath (*qi*) and bodily essences (*jing*)—enables one to keep them in their corporeal dwellings, where they may perform their functions.

These deities do not possess physical existence in the ordinary sense of the term, and pertain instead to an intermediate domain between formlessness and form. As was noticed by Isabelle Robinet, the inner gods are "images" (*xiang*) that play an intermediary function "between the world of sensory realities and the world of the unknowable."[6] The person in whom they reside is neither possessed by them nor "deified" by their presence.[7] The practitioner, instead, becomes the focus of a divine representation, of which he is the lone creator and the lone spectator. The organs and loci where the gods reside cease to be mere bodily parts, and become the supports that make that representation possible.

The Supreme Great One and the Red Child

The inner gods are literally innumerable and different texts describe different pantheons.[8] Here we can mention only two among the most important, both of which belong to the inner pantheon of the *Central Book of Laozi*. The first is the Supreme Great One (Shangshang Taiyi). The description of this deity—which in a strict sense is not "inner" as it lives just outside of one's body, but is nonetheless part of the personal pantheon—is similar in style and content to those of other deities mentioned in the same text:

6. Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 50.

7. For a different understanding, see Puett, *To Become a God*, 226–27.

8. On the pantheons of the *Huangting jing* and the *Laozi zhongjing*, see Pregadio, "Early Daoist Meditation and the Origins of Inner Alchemy," 131–41. On the pantheon of the *Dadong zhenjing* see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, 100–3.

11

External Alchemy (Waidan)

Chinese alchemy is divided into two branches, namely Waidan, or External Alchemy, and Neidan, or Internal Alchemy. Waidan (lit. "external elixir"), which arose earlier, is based on compounding elixirs through the manipulation of natural substances—minerals and metals—which release their essences when they are submitted to the action of fire. Neidan (lit. "internal elixir"), the subject of the next chapter, aims instead to produce the elixir within the person itself, according to two main models of doctrine and practice: by causing the primary components of the cosmos and the human being—Essence, Breath, and Spirit—to revert to their original states, or by purifying one's mind of attachments, desires, and other defilements in order to "see one's inner nature" (*jianxing*).

Neither alchemy as a whole, nor Waidan or Neidan individually, constitutes a Taoist "school" with a definite canonical corpus and a single line of transmission. On the contrary, each of the two branches displays a remarkable variety of doctrinal statements and forms of practice. Beyond its different formulations, however, Taoist alchemy is founded on principles concerning the relation between the Dao and the world. As we have seen in the previous chapters of this book, the cosmos as we know it is conceived of as the last stage in a series of transformations that lead from the Dao to Unity (*yi*), duality (Yin and Yang), and finally multiplicity (the "ten thousand things," *wanwu*). Alchemy intends to trace this process—which occurs constantly—in a reverse sequence and return to its inception.

The main designations of the elixir are *huandan*, or Reverted Elixir, and—especially in the "internal" branch—*jindan*, or Golden Elixir. Gold (*jin*) represents the state of constancy and immutability beyond the change and transiency of the cosmos. As

for *dan*, "elixir," the semantic field of this term—which also denotes a shade of red—evolves from a root-meaning of "essence"; its connotations include the reality, principle, or true nature of an entity, or its most basic and significant element, quality, or property. On the basis of this term, the authors of alchemical texts often call their tradition the Way of the Golden Elixir (*jindan zhi dao*).

In both Waidan and Neidan, the practice is variously said to grant transcendence (a state described by such expressions as "joining with the Dao," *hedao*), immortality (meant as a spiritual condition, but also represented in Neidan as the birth of a new inner body), longevity, healing (either in a broad sense or with regard to specific illnesses), and—especially in Waidan—communication with the deities of the celestial pantheon and protection from spirits, demons, and other malignant entities.

THE EARLIEST WAIDAN METHOD

Nothing is known about the historical origins of alchemy in China. The early texts attribute their doctrines and methods to deities who first transmitted them to one another in the heavens and finally revealed them to humanity. Other sources, especially hagiographic, consist of tales on the search of immortality, or of legends on a "medicine of deathlessness" found in the paradises of the immortals.

The earliest historical record of Waidan is tied to one of the Han-dynasty *fangshi* ("masters of methods"; see Chapter 3). Around 133 BCE, Li Shaojun suggested that Emperor Wu of the Han should emulate the mythical Yellow Emperor by performing offerings to an alchemical stove in order to summon supernatural beings. In their presence, cinnabar would transmute itself into gold; eating and drinking from cups and dishes made of that gold would prolong the emperor's life and enable him to meet the immortals. Finally, after performing the major imperial ceremonies to Heaven and Earth, the emperor would attain immortality.

> [Li] Shaojun told the emperor: "By making offerings to the stove, one can summon the supernatural beings. If one summons them, cinnabar can be transmuted into gold. When gold has been produced and made into vessels for eating and drinking, one can prolong one's life. If one's life is prolonged, one will be able to meet the immortals of the Penglai island in the midst of the sea. When one has seen them and has performed the Feng and Shan ceremonies [to Heaven and Earth, respectively], one will never die. The Yellow Emperor did just so." . . .
>
> Thereupon the emperor for the first time personally made offerings to the stove. He sent some *fangshi* to the sea to search for Penglai and for those like Master Anqi (*an immortal of antiquity*), and also occupied himself with the transmutation of cinnabar and other substances into gold. (*Shiji*, ch. 28)

While this account shows that alchemy existed in China by the second century BCE, it does not describe the actual procedure for making an elixir. On the other hand, as we shall see, the ritual aspects involved in Li Shaojun's method would continue to perform a major role in the later Waidan tradition.

THE TAIQING (GREAT CLARITY) TRADITION

Details about the first clearly identifiable tradition of Waidan emerge only about three centuries after Li Shaojun. The Taiqing (Great Clarity) tradition, named after the heaven that granted its revelation, originated in Jiangnan, the region south of the lower Yangzi River that was also crucial for the history of Taoism during the Six Dynasties (see Chapter 4). Its texts and methods were first transmitted to the Yellow Emperor by the Mysterious Woman (Xuannü), one of several divine beings from whom this mythical emperor received teachings in the esoteric arts. Then, around the year 200, a "divine man" (*shenren*) revealed the Taiqing texts to Zuo Ci, another *fangshi*, and one century later they came into the possession of the family of Ge Hong (283–343), who summarizes them in the Inner Chapters of his *Baopu zi*

(The Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature). The three main texts are the *Taiqing jing* (Book of Great Clarity), the *Jiudan jing* (Book of the Nine Elixirs), and the *Jinye jing* (Book of the Golden Liquor). The versions of these works found in the Taoist Canon make it possible to reconstruct the main aspects of early Chinese alchemy.[1]

Ritual Features

In the Taiqing tradition, compounding the elixir is the central part of a process that involves several stages, each of which is marked by the performance of rites and ceremonies. The alchemical practice consists of this entire process, and not only of the work at the furnace. On the basis of the Taiqing texts and other early related sources, the process can be summarized as follows.

To receive texts and oral instructions, the disciple offers tokens to his master and makes a vow of secrecy. Then he retires on a mountain or in a secluded place with his attendants and performs the preliminary purification practices, which consist of making ablutions and observing the precepts for several months. He delimits the ritual space with talismans (*fu*) to protect it from harmful influences, and builds at its center the Chamber of the Elixirs (*danshi*, the alchemical laboratory), where only he and his assistants may enter. When the purification practices are completed, the fire may is started on a day indicated as suitable by the traditional calendar. This stage is marked by an invocation addressed to the highest gods, namely the Great Lord of the Dao (Da Daojun) and his two attendants, Lord Lao (Laojun, the deified aspect of Laozi) and the Lord of Great Harmony (Taihe jun).

> When you start the fire you should perform a ceremony beside the crucible. Take five pints of good quality white liquor, three pounds of dried ox meat, the same amount of dried mutton, two pints of yellow millet and rice, three pints of large dates, one

1. On the Taiqing tradition see Pregadio, *Great Clarity*.

12

Internal Alchemy (Neidan)

Neidan, or Internal Alchemy, could easily be construed as a mere transposition of the "external" practices of Waidan to an inner plane, but this view would be reductive. Needless to say, Neidan draws from Waidan several fundamental terms that refer to alchemical operations (e.g., "to refine," "to compound"), instruments ("tripod," "furnace"), ingredients ("lead," "mercury," "cinnabar," "silver"), and most important, the term "elixir" (*dan*) itself. Despite these and other obvious analogies, however, Neidan owes its origins to the meditation methods on the inner gods more than it does to Waidan. Elements borrowed from those methods—which, as we have seen in Chapter 10, already contained alchemical imagery—are combined with concepts and emblems drawn from the Chinese cosmological system, with alchemical terms and images, and with elements of other traditions and practices.

THE NEIDAN SYNTHESIS

Neidan masters often state that their tradition synthesizes the Three Teachings (*sanjiao*), i.e., Confucianism, Taoism, and Buddhism. In fact, the components of Neidan are more numerous. Granting a remarkable freedom in formulating doctrines and framing methods, Neidan draws teachings from the *Daode jing*, vocabulary from the *Zhuangzi*, cosmological emblems from the *Book of Changes*, aspects of methods based on visualization and meditation, physiological practices from the disciplines of Nourishing Life (Yangsheng, especially those related to breathing), representations of the human body from traditional medicine, alchemical language from Waidan, and doctrinal concepts from Buddhism, early Confucianism, and Neo-Confucianism.

This unique combination of components results—with one important exception to be mentioned presently—in the virtually complete disappearance of the inner gods. Their dismissal has two main reasons. First, incorporating the inner gods into Neidan would require a nearly impossible "re-mapping" of the inner pantheon onto a different cosmological model, the one provided by the *Cantong qi* (Seal of the Unity of the Three; see the previous chapter). Second, it would be unfeasible to represent by means of deities, either internal or external, the reintegration of each ontologic stage (multiplicity, duality, unity) into the previous one. The only, but major, exception is the Red Child (Chizi), the innermost deity of early Taoist meditation (see Chapter 10). When he reappears in Neidan, the Child continues to represents the "true self," but he is not a god possessed by all human beings: he is now an image of the Elixir to be generated by means of the alchemical practice.

As one may expect, the instances of borrowing mentioned above occur to different degrees of extent and depth according to the various Neidan subtraditions and their individual representatives; but given their variety, it seems meaningless to suppose that any of them has simply played an "influence" on the birth and the development of Neidan. Each element, rather, functions as one of several "building blocks" that the masters, centered on a fundamental way of seeing, use freely, and as they may deem it worth, in order to frame their discourses and methods. Several authors, in particular, point out that Internal Alchemy can only be understood in light of the *Daode jing*, which they see as "the origin of the Way of the Golden Elixir."[1] Buddhist terms and concepts are used frequently in some works, and not at all in others. Another major component, namely correlative cosmology, provides images (*xiang*) used not only to show how the cosmic patterns of space and time are replicated in the practice, but also, in the words of Li Daochun, to "give form to the Formless by the word, and thus manifest the authentic and absolute Dao."[2]

1. On this subject, see Pregadio, "Laozi and Internal Alchemy."
2. *Zhonghe ji*, ch. 3, quoted in Robinet, *The World Upside Down*, 18.

MAIN LINEAGES

As far as we know, Neidan originated around the early eighth century. Since then until the present day, it has been transmitted in different lineages, each of which has had its own views of Neidan itself and of its practice.[3] The main lineages are the following:

1. Zhong-Lü. Named after Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, two illustrious Taoist immortals who are also associated with other Neidan lineages, this tradition, which probably developed from the ninth century, is characterized by a focus on physiological practices, closely correlated to cosmological principles. Its main text is the *Zhong Lü chuandao ji* (Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin), the first important doctrinal treatise of Neidan. Its practices are detailed in the *Lingbao bifa* (Complete Methods of the Numinous Treasure).[4]

2. Nanzong (Southern Lineage). After the *Cantong qi*, the main text of Neidan is the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality), entirely written in poetry by Zhang Boduan (987?-1082) around 1075. In the thirteenth century, Zhang Boduan was placed at the origin of Nanzong, and the *Wuzhen pia*n became its main textual source.[5]

3. Beizong (Northern Lineage). As we have seen in Chapter 4, Beizong is the original core of the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) school of Taoism, which was founded by Wang

3. See Yokote, "Daoist Internal Alchemy in the Song and Yuan Periods."

4. The *Zhong Lü chuandao ji* is translated in Kohn, *The Zhong-Lü System of Internal Alchemy*, 119–90. The *Lingbao bifa* is translated in Baldrian-Hussein, *Procédés secrets du joyau magique*, and in Kohn, *id*., 191–233.

5. The *Wuzhen pian* is translated in Cleary, *Understanding Reality*, and in Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 205–54. Translations of the first series of sixteen poems are found in Crowe, "Chapters on Awakening to the Real," and in Pregadio, *Awakening to Reality*.

Zhe (Wang Chongyang, 1113–70). Neidan texts are attributed both to Wang Zhe and to Qiu Chuji, one of his disciples, but their authenticity is uncertain to say the least.

4. Longmen (Dragon Gate). In the Ming and the Qing periods (mid-fourteenth to early twentieth centuries), several Neidan masters declare their affiliation with the Longmen lineage of Taoism (both before and after its official establishment by Wang Changyue, 1592–1680) or with one or another of its numerous branches. The renowned work known as *The Secret of the Golden Flower* was included by Min Yide (1748–1836) within the textual corpus of one of those branches, where it is deemed to be one of the the main texts on the cultivation of inner nature and the doctrine of "healing the world" (*yishi*).[6]

NATURE AND EXISTENCE

Especially in its forms that integrate elements derived from Buddhism and Neo-Confucianism, Neidan bases its discourse and practice on *xing* and *ming*, two cardinal concepts in its view of the human being.[7] Different Neidan works define *xing* and *ming* as "the root and foundation of self-cultivation," "the secret of the Golden Elixir," "the essential for refining the Elixir," "the learning of the divine immortals," and in several other similar ways.

6. The title *Secret of the Golden Flower* was created by Richard Wilhelm when, in 1929, he translated this work into German, supplemented by a "Commentary" contributed by the psychoanalyst Carl G. Jung (for the English translation, see Wilhelm and Jung, *The Secret of the Golden Flower: A Chinese Book of Life*). The original title of the text is *Taiyi jinhua zongzhi*, or *Ancestral Teachings on the Golden Flower of Great Unity*. See also above, p. 113.

7. See Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 165–95, and Pregadio, "Destiny, Vital Force, or Existence? On the Meanings of *Ming* in Daoist Internal Alchemy and Its Relation to *Xing* or Human Nature."

GLOSSARY OF CHINESE CHARACTERS

An Lushan 安祿山 (703–57)
anmo 按摩 (massage)
Anqi, Master 安期生 (an immortal)
bagua 八卦 (eight trigrams)
Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (Abbey of the White Cloud)
bamai 八脈 (eight vessels)
bashi 八史 (Eight Archivists, or Eight Envoys)
Bao Xi 包犧 (other name of Fu Xi)
Baopu zi 抱朴子 (The Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature)
baoshou 保守 ("preserve and guard")
baoyi 抱一 (embracing Unity)
beidou 北斗 (Northern Dipper, *Ursa Major*)
Beizong 北宗 (Northern Lineage)
benxing 本性 ("fundamental Nature")
bigu 辟穀 (abstaining from grains)
bigua 辟卦 ("sovereign hexagrams")
biqi 閉氣 (retaining breath)
bu 部 (department)
bugang 步綱 (Pacing the Celestial Net)
buqi 布氣 (spreading breath)
busi 不死 ("not dying," immortality)
Cang Jie 蒼頡 or 倉頡 (a mythical emperor)
Cantong qi 參同契 (Seal of the Unity of the Three)
Cao Cao 曹操 (155–220)
Chan (Zen) 禪 (a Buddhist school)
Chang'an 長安 (Shaanxi)
changsheng 長生 (long life, longevity)
Changsheng dajun 長生大君 (Great Lord of Long Life)
chaofan rusheng 超凡入聖 ("transcending the ordinary and entering sainthood")
Chen Yu 陳豫 (a name of Lord Lao)
Cheng 稱 (Designations)
Chijing zi 赤精子 (a name of Lord Lao)
Cheng Xuanying 成玄英 (fl. 631–50)
chimei 魑魅 (demons of the mountains)
chiqi 赤氣 (red breath)
Chizi 赤子 (Red Child)
Chizi zhi fu 赤子之府 (storehouse of the Red Child)
Chongxuan 重玄 (Double Mystery)
chu 廚 ("cuisines")

Chuci 楚辭 (Songs of Chu)
chui 吹 (a sound issued during breathing practices)
Chuncheng zi 春成子 (a name of Lord Lao)
Chunqiu 春秋 (Springs and Autumns)
Chunqiu fanlu 春秋繁露 (Luxuriant Dew on the *Springs and Autumns*)
chunyang 純陽 (Pure Yang)
cun 存 ("maintain one's thoughts"; visualize)
Da Daojun 大道君 (Great Lord of the Dao)
Dadong zhenjing 大洞真經 (True Book of the Great Cavern)
dafan yinyu 大梵隱語 (Secret Language of the Great Brahmā)
Daiyu 岱輿 (a residence of the immortals)
Daluo 大羅 (Grand Veil)
dan 丹 (elixir)
danlu 丹廬 (Cinnabar Hut)
danshi 丹室 (Chamber of the Elixirs)
dantian 丹田 (Cinnabar Field[s])
Danyuan 丹元 (Cinnabar Origin)
Dao, *dao* 道 (Way, "way")
Daode jing 道德經 (Book of the Way and Its Virtue)
Daode tianzun 道德天尊 (Celestial Venerable of the Dao and Its Virtue)
Daode zunjing jie 道德尊經戒 (Precepts of the *Venerable Book of the Way and Its Virtue*)
daojia 道家 ("house," "family" or "lineage of the Dao")
daojiao 道教 ("teachings of the Dao" or "on the Dao")
Daojun 道君 (Lord of the Dao)
Daomen keliüe 道門科略 (Abridged Codes for the Taoist Community)
daoshi 道士 ("master of the Dao"; Taoist priest)
daoyin 導引 ("guiding [*qi*] and pulling [the limbs]")
Daozang 道藏 (Taoist Canon)
"Dazhuan" 大傳 (Great Commentary)
de 德 (virtue, efficacy, power)
di 帝 (Emperor)
Di Ku 帝嚳 (a mythical emperor)
Ding, Cook 庖丁 (a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
dixian 地仙 (earthbound immortality)
Diyi zunjun 帝一天尊 (Venerable Lord Emperor One)
diyu 地獄 (Earth Prisons; hell)
dizhi 地支 (earthly branches)
Dong Zhongshu 董仲舒 (ca. 179–105 BCE)
dongfang 洞房 (Cavern Chamber)
Dongshen 洞神 (Cavern of Spirit)
Dongxuan 洞玄 (Cavern of Mystery)
Dongzhen 洞真 (Cavern of Reality, or Cavern of Perfection)
Doumu 斗姆 (Mother of the Dipper)
du 度 (crossing over, going beyond)
Du Guangting 杜光庭 (850–933)
Duan Yucai 段玉裁 (1735–1815)
duan 段 (stage)

dumai 督脈 (Control vessel)
Duren jing 度人經 (Book of Salvation)
fandao 返道 ("returning to the Dao")
Fanghu 方壺 (a residence of the immortals)
fangshi 方士 (masters of the methods, masters of the recipes)
fangzhong shu 房中術 ("arts of the bedroom")
fantai 返胎 ("returning to the embryo")
fashi 法師 ("ritual masters")
Feng 封 (name of an imperial ceremony)
Fengdu 豐都 (a name of the realm of the dead)
fu 符 (talisman)
fu 釜 (crucible)
Fu Xi 伏羲 (mythical emperor)
fuluan 扶鸞 ("support of the phoenix"; spirit-writing)
fuqi 伏氣 ("stored breath")
fuqi 服氣 ("ingesting breath")
fusheng 復生 ("rebirth," "second birth")
gaiming 改名 ("changing name")
gaiming 改命 ("changing destiny")
ganying 感應 (resonance, "impulse and response")
Gaozu 高祖 (Tang emperor, r. 618–27)
Ge Chaofu 葛巢甫 (fl. 402)
Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343)
Ge Xuan 葛玄 (164–244)
gongde 功德 (Merit)
guaci 卦辭 ("Hexagram Statement")
guan 官 (a "post")
guan 灌 (irrigate)
Guangcheng zi 廣成子 (master of Huangdi; a name of Lord Lao)
Guanyin 觀音 (name of a deity)
guanyuan 關元 (Origin of the Barrier)
Guanzi 管子 (Master Guan)
Guo Xiang 郭象 (252?-312)
Guodian 郭店 (archaeological site)
guoqiao 過橋 (Crossing the Bridge)
Gushe, Mount 姑射山
gushen 谷神 (Spirit of the Valley)
Han'an 漢安 (a reign period, 142–44 CE)
Hangzhou 杭州 (Zhejiang)
Hanzhong 漢中 (Sichuan)
Hao Datong 郝大通 (1140–1213)
Hao Guangning 郝廣寧 (other name of Hao Datong)
heche 河車 (River Chariot)
hedao 合道 (joining with the Dao, union with the Dao)
heqi 合氣 (Merging Breaths)
Heshang gong 河上公 (trad. second century CE)
houtian 後天 (postcelestial, "after Heaven")
Hu 忽 (Indistinct, a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
hua 化 (to transform)
hua zhongsheng 化眾生 ("transforming all living beings")
Huainan 淮南 (name of a kingdom)

Huainan zi 淮南子 (The Master of Huainan)
Huan 漢桓帝 (Han emperor, r. 147–68 CE)
huan 還 (revert)
huandan 還丹 (Reverted Elixir)
huandao 還丹 ("returning to the Dao")
Huangdi 黃帝 (Yellow Emperor, a mythical emperor)
Huangdi neijing 黃帝內經 (Inner Book of the Yellow Emperor)
huangjing 黃精 (yellow essence)
Huang-Lao dao 黃老道 (Way of the Yellow Emperor and Laozi)
Huanglao jun 黃老君 (Yellow Old Lord)
huanglu zhai 黃籙齋 (Yellow Register Retreat)
huangting 黃庭 (Yellow Court)
Huangting jing 黃庭經 (Book of the Yellow Court)
huanjing bunao 還精補腦 ("reverting the essence to replenish the brain")
Hui 惠 (king of Wei, r. 370–319 BCE)
huiyin 會陰 (Gathering of Yin)
hun 魂 ("celestial soul")
hundun 混沌 (chaos, the inchoate)
Hundun 混沌 (Emperor Chaos, a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
huo 火 (Fire)
huohou 火候 (Fire phases)
Huxian 戶縣 (Anhui)
ji 技 (technique)
ji 紀 (sequence)
jia 家 (house, family; lineage)
Jian Wu 肩吾 (a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
jianggong 降宮 (Crimson Palace)
jianggong jinque 降宮金闕 (Golden Portal of the Crimson Palace)
Jiangnan 江南 (the region south of the lower Yangzi river)
jianxing 見性 ("seeing one's [inner] nature")
jiao 教 (teaching)
jiao 醮 (Offering)
jie 節 (nodes)
jie 戒 (precepts)
jie 結 (knots)
jie 解 (release, emancipation, liberation)
Jie Yu 接輿 (a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
jiejie 解結 (Untying the Knots)
jijiu 祭酒 (Libationer)
jin 金 (Metal; gold)
jindan 金丹 (Golden Elixir)
jindan zhi dao 金丹之道 (Way of the Golden Elixir)
jing 精 (essence)
jing 經 (book, scripture; "classic")
jing 靜 (quiescence)
jingshi 靜室 (pure chamber)
jinli 金醴 (Golden Nectar)
jinlu zhai 金籙齋 (Golden Register Retreat)
jinye 金液 (Golden Liquor)
Jinye jing 金液經 (Book of the Golden Liquor)
jiuchong 九蟲 (nine worms)
Jiudan jing 九丹經 (Book of the Nine Elixirs)

Jiuku tianzun 救苦天尊 (Celestial Worthy Who Relieves Suffering)
jiutian 九天 (Nine Heavens)
jiutian zhi qi 九天之氣 (breaths of the Nine Heavens)
jiuzhou 九州 (Nine Continents)
jue 角 (a musical note)
jun 君 (lord)
junzi 君子 ("noble man")
Kaifeng 開封 (Henan)
"Kaitian cexuan jing" 開天策玄經 (Book of the Opening of Heaven and the Framework of Mystery)
Kaiyuan Daozang 開元道藏 (Taoist Canon of the Kaiyuan Reign Period)
koujue 口訣 (oral instructions)
Kuoshu zi 廓叔子 (a name of Lord Lao)
Lao Dan 老聃 (other name of Laozi)
Lao Zhuang zhi shu 老莊之術 ("arts of Laozi and Zhuangzi")
Laojun 老君 (Lord Lao)
Laojun shuo yibai bashi jie 老君說一百八十戒 (180 Precepts Spoken by Lord Lao)
Laozi 老子 (Old Master)
Laozi bianhua jing 老子變化經 (Book of the Transformations of Laozi)
Laozi ming 老子銘 (Inscription for Laozi)
Laozi zhongjing 老子中經 (Central Book of Laozi)
lei 類 (kind, category)
li 利 (benefit)
li 禮 (propriety; rite, rituality)
Li 李 (a surname)
Li, Lady 麗姬 (a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
Li Daochun 李道純 (fl. 1288–1306)
Li Er 李耳 (other name of Laozi)
Li Shaojun 李少君 (fl. ca. 133 BCE)
Li Yuan 李淵 (personal name of Tang Gaozu)
lian 煉 (refine, refining)
liandu 煉度 (Salvation through Refinement)
lianjing huaqi 煉精化氣 ("Refining the Essence to Transmute it into Breath")
lianqi 煉氣 (refining breath)
lianqi huashen 煉氣化神 ("Refining the Breath to Transmute it into Spirit")
lianshen huanxu 煉神還虛 ("Refining the Spirit to Return to Emptiness")
lianxing 鍊形 ("purification/refinement of the [bodily] form")
Liexian zhuan 列仙傳 (Biographies of Exemplary Immortals)
Liezi 列子 (Master Lie)
Liji 禮記 (Record of Rites)
Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure)
Lingbao bifa 靈寶畢法 (Complete Methods of the Numinous Treasure)
Lingbao dafa 靈寶大法 (Great Rites of the Numinous Treasure)

Lingbao tianzun 靈寶天尊 (Celestial Venerable of the Numinous Treasure)
Lingbao wufu xu 靈寶五符序 (Explanation of the Five Talismans of the Numinous Treasure)
Lingshu ziwen 靈書紫文 (Numinous Writ in Purple Characters)
Liyang 歷陽 (Anhui)
Liu An 劉安 (180–122 BCE)
Liu Changsheng 劉長生 (other name of Liu Chuxuan)
Liu Chuxuan 劉處玄 (1147–1203)
Liu Haichan 劉海蟾 (an immortal)
Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821)
liuchi 琉池 (Pond of Lapis Lazuli)
liuyi ni 六一泥 (Mud of the Six-and-One)
liuyu 六欲 (six desires)
Longhu, Mount 龍虎山 (Jiangxi)
Longmen 龍門 (Dragon Gate)
lu 籙 (register)
Lu Xiujing 陸修靜 (406–77)
Lu Zhong 陸終 (a descendant of the mythical emperor Zhuan Xu)
Lü Dongbin 呂洞賓 (an immortal)
Luoyang 洛陽 (Henan)
Lüshi chunqiu 呂氏春秋 (Springs and Autumns of Mr Lü)
Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 (other name of Ma Yu)
Ma Yu 馬鈺 (1123–84)
Maocheng zi 茂成子 (a name of Lord Lao)
Maoqiang 毛嬙 (a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
Maoshan 茅山 (Mount Mao, Jiangsu)
Mawangdui 馬王堆 (archaeological site)
Mazu 媽祖 (name of a deity)
miao 妙 (wonder, subtlety, sublimity)
miedu 滅度 ("transfer through extinction")
miexin 滅心 ("extinguishing the mind")
Min Yide 閔一得 (1748–1836)
ming 命 (mandate, command; destiny, life, lifespan; existence)
mingmen 命門 (Gate of Destiny, Gate of Life)
mingtang 明堂 (Hall of Light)
mu 木 (Wood)
Mulian 目連 (a literary character)
Nangong 南宮 (Southern Palace)
Nanhua zhenjing 南華真經 (True Book of Southern Florescence)
Nanjing 南京 (Jiangsu)
Nanzong 南宗 (Southern Lineage)
"Nei" 內 ("Inner")
Neidan 內丹 (Internal Alchemy)
Neiguan jing 內觀經 (Book of Inner Contemplation)
Neijing tu 內景圖 (Chart of the Inner Warp; or Chart of the Inner Landscape)
"Neipian" 內篇 (Inner Chapters)
neiyao 內藥 (Internal Medicine)
Neiye 內業 (Inner Training)
niaoshu 鳥書 (bird writing)
niwan 泥丸 (Muddy Pellet)

Pan Shizheng 潘師正 (585–682)
pangmen 傍門 ("side gates")
Penglai 蓬萊 (a residence of the immortals)
Pengzu 彭祖 (an immortal)
Pi 鈚 (a name of Lord Lao)
ping 平 (peace; equity)
po 魄 ("terrestrial soul")
poyu 破獄 (Destruction of Hell)
pudu 普度 (universal salvation)
qi 氣 or 炁 (breath, air, "energy")
Qian Jian 籤鑑 (name of the immortal Pengzu)
qiangong 乾宮 (Palace of Qian)
qianqi 潛氣 ("hidden breath")
Qigong 氣功 (a modern Yangsheng practice)
qihai 氣海 (Ocean of Breath)
qijing 奇經 ("extraordinary channels")
qing 清 (clear, pure)
qingjing 清靜 (clarity and quiescence)
Qingjing jing 清靜經 (Book of Clarity and Quiescence)
Qingwei 清微 (Pure Tenuity)
qingxiu 清修 ("Pure Cultivation," name of a Neidan branch)
Qiu Changchun 邱長春 (other name of Qiu Chuji)
Qiu Chuji 邱處機 (1148–1227)
Qu Yuan 屈原 (late fourth century BCE)
Quanzhen 全真 (Complete Reality, or Complete Perfection)
Quting, Mount 渠亭山 (Sichuan)
ren 人 (person, human being)
ren 仁 (benevolence, humanity)
ren zhi dao 人之道 (way of man)
renmai 任脈 (Function vessel)
renniao 人鳥 (man-bird)
renwu 壬午 (the nineteenth day or year in the sexagesimal cycle)
sanbao 三寶 (three treasures)
sancai 三才 (Three Powers)
sandong 三洞 (Three Caverns)
sandu 三毒 (three poisons)
sanguan 三官 (Three Offices; Three Officers)
sanguan 三關 (Three Barriers)
Sanhuang 三皇 (Three Sovereigns)
Sanhuang wen 三皇文 (Script of the Three Sovereigns)
sanhui 三會 (Three Assemblies)
sanjiao 三教 (Three Teachings)
Sanqing 三清 (Three Clarities)
sanshi 三尸 (three corpses)
santu 三塗 (Three Paths [of existence])
Sanyi 三一 (Three Ones)
Shan 禪 (name of an imperial ceremony)
shangde 上德 (superior virtue)
Shangdi 上帝 (Supreme Emperor)
Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity)
Shangshang Taiyi 上上太一 (Supreme Great One)
shen 神 (spirit; god, deity)
shen 身 (person; body; "oneself")
shen zhi wai shen 身之外身 ("a person outside the person"; "a self outside oneself")
shen zhong yiqiao 身中一竅 (One Opening at the Center of the Person)

Shenghua chaodu yinlian bijue 生化超度陰煉祕訣 (Secret Instructions on the Hidden Refining for the Return to Life and the Salvation of Souls)
shengren 聖人 (saint, sage)
shengshen 生身 (living being)
shengtian 升天 (ascending to Heaven)
shenming 神明 (Numinous Light)
shenni 神泥 (Divine Mud)
Shennong 神農 (a mythical emperor)
shenren 神人 (divine man, "spirit man")
shenshen 神身 (divine person)
Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳 (Biographies of Divine Immortals)
Shenxiao, *shenxiao* 神霄 (Divine Empyrean)
shenxing 身形 ([bodily] form)
shi 事 (activities, pursuits)
shi 始 (inaugural)
shi 尸 (corpse; mortal body)
shi 時 ("double hour")
Shiji 史記 (Records of the Historian)
shijie 尸解 ("release from the mortal body" or "from the corpse")
shijie xian 尸解仙 ("immortality through release from the mortal body")
Shijing 詩經 (Book of Odes)
shishen 識神 (cognitive spirit, conscious spirit)
"Shiyi" 十翼 (Ten Wings)
shou sanyi 守三一 (guarding the Three Ones)
shou 壽 (longevity)
shouyi 守一 ("guarding Unity," "guarding the One")
shu 疏 (statement, memorial)
Shu 儵 (Dim, a character in the *Zhuangzi*)
Shu 蜀 (Sichuan)
shui 水 (Water)
Shujing 書經 (Book of Documents)
Shun 舜 (a mythical emperor)
"Shuogua" 說卦 (Explaining the Trigrams)
si 思 (reflect; meditate)
sifu 四輔 (Four Supplements)
Silu 司錄 (Administrator of the Registers)
Sima Chengzhen 司馬承禎 (647–735)
Sima Tan 司馬談 (fl. ca. 135 BCE)
Siming 司命 (Administrator of Destinies)
sishen 思神 (thinking spirit)
su 俗 (vulgar, profane)
Sun Bu'er 孫不二 (1119–83)
Sun Qingjing 孫清靜 (other name of Sun Bu'er)
taicang 太倉 (Great Granary)
taichu 太初 (Great Beginning)
Taihe jun 太和君 (Lord of Great Harmony)
taiji 太極 (Great Ultimate)
Taiji quan 太極拳 (a modern Yangsheng practice)
Tainan 台南 (Taiwan)
taiping, Taiping 太平 (Great Peace)
Taiping jing 太平經 (Book of Great Peace)

Taiqing 太清 (Great Clarity)
Taiqing jing 太清經 (Book of Great Clarity)
Taishang Daojun 太上道君 (Most High Lord of the Dao)
taixi 胎息 ("embryonic breathing")
Taixi jing 胎息經 (Book of Embryonic Breathing)
taixia 太霞 (Great Mist)
taixian 胎仙 ("embryonic immortal," "immortal at the embryonic state")
Taixuan 太玄 (Great Mystery)
Taixuan yinsheng zhi fu 太玄陰生之符 (Talisman of Great Mystery of Living Unseen)
Taiyi 太一 (Great One)
Taiyi jinhua zongzhi 太一金華宗旨 (Ancestral Teachings on the Golden Flower of Great Unity; "Secret of the Golden Flower")
Taiyin 太陰 (Great Darkness)
tan 壇 (altar)
Tan Chuduan 譚處端 (1123–85)
Tang Changzhen 譚長真 (other name of Tan Chuduan)
Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536)
Taokang 桃康 (Peach Vigor)
ti 體 (body)
tian 天 (Heaven)
tian zhi dao 天之道 (Way of Heaven)
tiangan 天干 (celestial stems)
tianguan 天關 (Heavenly Barrier)
Tianlao 天老 (a name of Lord Lao)
tianming 天命 (Celestial Mandate)
tianmu 天目 (Celestial Eye)
tianshi 天師 (Celestial Master)
Tianshi dao 天師道 (Way of the Celestial Masters)
Tiantai 天台 (a Buddhist school)
Tianwang 天王 (Celestial Kings)
tianxian 天仙 (celestial immortality)
Tianxin 天心 (Celestial Heart)
tiaoqi 調氣 (harmonizing breath)
tishen 替身 (substitute body)
tonglei 同類 ("being of the same kind")
tu 土 (Soil)
"Tuanzhuan" 彖傳 (Commentary on the Judgements)
tugu naxin 吐故納新 ("exhaling the old and inhaling the new [breath]")
tuna 吐納 (exhaling and inhaling)
tuosi 託死 ("simulating death")
"Wai" 外 ("Outer")
Waidan 外丹 (External Alchemy)
"Waipian" 外篇 (Outer Chapters)
waiyao 外藥 (External Medicine)
Wang Bi 王弼 (226–49)
Wang Changyue 王常月 (1592–1680)
Wang Chongyang 王重陽 (other name of Wang Zhe)
Wang Chuyi 王處一 (1142–1217)
Wang Yuanzhi 王遠知 (trad. 528–635)
Wang Yuyang 王玉陽 (other name of Wang Chuyi)
Wang Zhe 王嚞 (1113–70)
wangliang 魍魎 (demons of the waters)

wanwu 萬物 (ten thousand things)
Wei 魏 (name of a kingdom)
weilü 尾閭 (Caudal Funnel)
weiqi 衛氣 (defensive breath)
Wen Yuanshuai 溫元帥 (Marshall Wen)
Wenchang 文昌 (name of a deity)
wenjiao 瘟醮 (Plague Offerings)
"Wenyan zhuan" 文言傳 (Commentary on the Words of the Text)
Wenshuang zi 溫蕤子 (a name of Lord Lao)
wu 巫 (medium, healer, "shaman")
wu 無 (Non-Being)
Wu 梁武帝 (Liang emperor, r. 502–49)
Wu 漢武帝 (Han emperor, r. 140–87 BCE)
wuhua 五華 (Five Flowers)
wuji 無極 (Ultimateless; Infinite)
wuming 無名 ("without a name")
wunian 無念 ("being without thoughts")
wuqi 五氣 (five breaths)
Wushang biyao 無上祕要 (Supreme Secret Essentials)
wuwei 無為 (non-doing, non-action)
wuxing 五行 (five agents; five phases)
wuxing 無形 (formlessness)
wuya 五芽 (five sprouts)
wuzang 五臟 (five viscera)
Wuzhen pian 悟真篇 (Awakening to Reality)
xiade 下德 (inferior virtue)
xiang 象 (image)
xiangke 相剋 (mutual conquest)
xiangsheng 相生 (mutual generation)
xiangshu 相術 (physiognomy)
"Xiangzhuan" 象傳 (Commentary on the Images)
xianren 仙人 (immortal, transcendent)
xiantian 先天 (precelestial, "before Heaven")
xianxing 現性 ("manifesting one's [inner] nature")
xiaoshu 小術 (minor arts)
"Xici" 繫辭 (Appended Sayings)
xin 信 (sign; sincerity, trustworthiness)
xin 心 (heart; mind; center)
xing 形 (form bodily form body)
xing 性 (Nature, human nature, inner nature)
xingming shuangxiu 性命雙修 ("conjoined cultivation of nature and existence")
xingqi 行氣 ("circulating breath")
Xinshu 心術 (Arts of the Mind; Arts of the Heart)
xinzhai 心齋 ("fasting of the mind")
xiushen 修身 ("cultivating one's person," "cultivating oneself")
Xiuzhen houbian 修真後辨 (Further Discriminations on the Cultivation of Reality)
Xiuzhen tu 修真圖 (Chart for the Cultivation of Reality, or Chart for the Cultivation of Perfection)

Xiwang mu 西王母 (Queen Mother of the West)
xu 呴 (a sound issued during breathing practices)
xu 虛 (Emptiness)
Xu Hui 許翽 (341-ca. 370)
Xu Mi 許謐 (303–73)
xuan 玄 (mysterious)
xuande 玄德 (mysterious virtue)
xuanguan 玄關 (Mysterious Barrier)
xuanguan yiqiao 玄關一竅 (One Opening of the Mysterious Barrier)
Xuannü 玄女 (Mysterious Woman)
xuanpin 玄牝 (Mysterious-Female, "the Mysterious and the Female")
xuantai 玄胎 (Mysterious Embryo)
Xuanxue 玄學 (Learning of the Mystery)
xuanzhu 玄珠 (Mysterious Pearl)
"Xugua" 序卦 (Hexagrams in Sequence)
xuxin 虛心 ("making the mind empty")
Yan Hui 顏回 (Confucius' disciple)
Yang 陽 (the active principle)
Yang Xi 楊羲 (330-ca.386)
Yang Zhu 楊朱 (fifth century BCE)
yangsheng, Yangsheng 養生 (Nourishing Life)
yangxing 養形 ("nourishing the [bodily] form")
Yao 堯 (a mythical emperor)
yaoci 爻辭 ("Line Statements")
yi, Yi 一 (One, Unity)
yi 意 (intention)
yi 義 (righteousness)
yi xingming 異姓名 ("changing name")
yihua 一化 ("single transformation")
Yijing 易經 (Book of Changes)
yin 淫 (excessive, illicit)
Yin 陰 (the passive principle)
yingqi 營氣 (constructive breath)
Yingzhou 瀛洲 (a residence of the immortals)
yinsi 淫祀 ("licentious" or "illicit cults")
yinyang 陰陽 ("Yin-Yang," name of a Neidan branch)
yiqi 一氣 (One Breath)
yishe 義舍 ("charity lodges")
yishi 醫世 ("healing the world")
yixin 一心 (One Mind)
Yixue 易學 (Studies on the *Book of Changes*)
yong 用 (operate, function)
you 幽 (somber)
you 有 (Being)
youming 有名 ("with a name")
yu 宇 ("space")
yu 欲 (desire, intention)
Yu 禹 (a mythical emperor)
yuan 元 (original)
yuanjing 元精 (Original Essence)
Yuanming zhenren 元命真人 (Realized Man of Original Destiny)
yuanqi 元氣 (Original Breath)
Yuanqiao 員嶠 (a residence of the immortals)

yuanshen 元神 (Original Spirit)
Yuanshi tianzun 元始天尊 (Celestial Venerable of the Original Commencement)
yuanyou 遠遊 ("far roaming")
"Yuanyou" 遠遊 (Far Roaming)
yubu 禹步 (Steps of Yu)
Yudu shan 玉都山 (Mountain of the Jade Capital)
Yuhuang 玉皇 (Jade Sovereign)
yulu 玉爐 (Jade Furnace)
yunü 御女 ("riding women")
Yuqing 玉清 (Jade Clarity)
yuren 羽人 (winged men)
Yutang dafa 玉堂大法 (Great Rites of the Jade Hall)
yuzhou 宇宙 ("space and time")
"Zagua" 雜卦 (Hexagrams in Irregular Order)
zang 臟 (viscera)
"Zapian" 雜篇 (Miscellaneous Chapters)
zawei 雜猥 ("coarse and rustic")
Zen 禪 (a Buddhist school)
zhai 齋 (purification)
Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?-1082)
Zhang Daoling 張道陵 (second century CE)
Zhang Heng 張衡 (?–179)
Zhang Lu 張魯 (?-215 or 216)
Zhang Lu 張路 (ca. 1490-ca. 1563)
Zhang Wanfu 張萬福 (fl. 710–13)
Zheng Yin 鄭隱 (ca. 215-ca. 302)
zheng 正 (rectify)
Zhen'gao 真誥 (Declarations of the Perfected)
Zhengtong Daozang 正統道藏 (Taoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign Period)
Zhengyi 正一 (Correct Unity)
Zhengyi dao 正一道 (Way of the Correct Unity)
Zhengyi mengwei 正一盟威 (Covenant with the Powers of Correct Unity)
zhenhong 真汞 (True Mercury)
zhenqian 真鉛 (True Lead)
zhenren 真人 (realized man, true man, perfected; "homme véritable")
zhenru juexing 真如覺性 ("enlightened nature of true suchness")
zhenshen 真身 ("true person"; "true self")
zhenwu 真吾 ("true self")
Zhenwu 真武 (name of a deity)
zhenyang 真陽 (True Yang)
zhenyin 真陰 (True Yin)
Zhenzi 真子 (a name of Lord Lao)
zhi 志 (will)
zhi 智 (wisdom)
zhi 治 (administration)
zhi 芝 (an immortality plant)
Zhi Dun 支盾 (314–66)
zhiguo 治國 ("governing the country")
zhiren 至人 (accomplished man)
zhishen 治身 ("governing oneself")
Zhong-Lü 種呂 (name of a Neidan lineage)

Zhong Lü chuandao ji 種呂傳道集 (Anthology of the Transmission of the Dao from Zhongli Quan to Lü Dongbin)
zhonggong 中宮 (Central Palace)
Zhongguo daojiao xiehui 中國道教協會 (China Taoist Association)
zhonghe 中和 (Central Harmony)
Zhonghe ji 中和集 (Central Harmony: An Anthology)
Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 (an immortal)
zhongmin 種民 ("seed-people")
zhongxi 踵息 ("breathing through the heels")
zhou 宙 ("time")
Zhouyi 周易 (Changes of the Zhou)
Zhouyi cantong qi 周易參同契 (Seal of the Unity of the Three in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*)
zhu 主 ("to be in charge")
Zhu Rong 祝融 (a mythical emperor)
zhuan 傳 (biographies)
Zhuang Zhou 莊周 (name of Zhuangzi)
Zhuangzi 莊子 (ca. 370–280 BCE)
Zhuangzi 莊子 (Master Zhuang)
Zhuan Xu 顓頊 (a mythical emperor)
zifang 紫房 (Purple Chamber)
Zigong 紫宮 (Purple Palace)
ziran 自然 ("being so of its own" or "of its own accord"; spontaneity, spontaneous; nature, natural)
ziran huandan 自然還丹 (Natural Reverted Elixir)
Zuo Ci 左慈 (fl. ca. 200 CE)
zuowang 坐忘 ("sitting and forgetting")
zuqi 祖氣 (Ancestral Breath)

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From the Catalogue

Taoist Internal Alchemy: An Anthology of Neidan Texts, by Fabrizio Pregadio

This anthology presents complete or partial translations of sixteen important works belonging to the Taoist tradition of Neidan, or Internal Alchemy. The selections are representative of the main Neidan lineages and branches.

Foundations of Internal Alchemy: The Taoist Practice of Neidan, by Wang Mu

A clear description of the practice of Internal Alchemy, based on the system of the *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) with about two hundred quotations from original Taoist texts.

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, by Fabrizio Pregadio

Under an allusive poetical language teeming with images and symbols, the *Cantong qi* sets forth the teaching that gave origin to Internal Alchemy.

Cultivating the Tao: Taoism and Internal Alchemy, by Liu Yiming (1734–1821)

Written by one of the greatest masters of this tradition, *Cultivating the Tao* offers a comprehensive overview of the main principles of Internal Alchemy in 26 short chapters.

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The *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) is one of best-known Taoist alchemical texts. Written in the 11th century, it describes in a poetical form the main facets of Internal Alchemy.