



400 Words
on the
GOLDEN ELIXIR

Contents

[Title Page](#)

[Copyright Page](#)

[Introduction](#)

[Poem 1](#)

[Poem 2](#)

[Poem 3](#)

[Poem 4](#)

[Poem 5](#)

[Poem 6](#)

[Poem 7](#)

[Poem 8](#)

[Poem 9](#)

[Poem 10](#)

[Poem 11](#)

[Poem 12](#)

[Poem 13](#)

[Poem 14](#)

[Poem 15](#)

[Poem 16](#)

[Poem 17](#)

[Poem 18](#)

[Poem 19](#)

[Poem 20](#)

[Table 1](#)

[Table 2](#)

[Table 3](#)

[Golden Elixir Press](#)

Notes

Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir

Jindan sibai zi 金丹四百字

A Poetical Classic of Taoist Internal Alchemy

Attributed to Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (987?–1082)

Commentary by Peng Haogu 彭好古 (fl. 1586–99)

Translated from the original Chinese

by Fabrizio Pregadio

Golden Elixir Press

This ebook is excerpted from:

[Taoist Internal Alchemy: An Anthology of Neidan Texts](#)

by Fabrizio Pregadio (Golden Elixir Press, 2019)

Golden Elixir Press

Mountain View, CA

www.goldenelixir.com

© 2019 Fabrizio Pregadio

All rights reserved

INTRODUCTION

The *Jindan sibaizi*, or *Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir*, is attributed to Zhang Boduan, the well-known author of the [Wuzhen pian](#) (*Awakening to Reality*). Although this attribution does not seem to be trustworthy, the association with the first master of the [Southern Lineage](#) (Nanzong) is one of the reasons of the popularity enjoyed by this work within the Neidan tradition.

The text, here entirely translated with a commentary, is made of twenty poems, each containing four verses of five characters. Several verses or parts of them are repeatedly quoted in later Neidan works, often with no need of a precise reference to their source given its renown. To give two examples, these include the verse “This Opening is not a common opening” (in poem 7) and the whole poem 13, concerned with the difference between ordinary time and the inner time of Neidan.

The commentary translated here is by Peng Haogu (fl. 1586–99, from Hubei). Few details about him and his life are available. He is also known for a commentary to the [Cantong qi](#) (*The Seal of the Unity of the Three*) and for several other works on Neidan, which he published in 1599 in a collection entitled *Daoyan neiwai bijue quanshu* (*Complete Writings of Secret Instruction on Internal and External Taoist Teachings*). Peng Haogu’s work is one of many examples showing that commentaries to Neidan texts not only offer explications of the original texts, but are Neidan works to all effects and reflect the perspectives of their authors.

POEM 1

True Soil seizes True Lead,
True Lead controls True Mercury.
Lead and Mercury return to the True Soil,
body and mind are silent and unmoving.

COMMENTARY

When a human being is born, Heaven, whose number is 1, generates the Kan ☵ Water, which is the kidneys. The Water of the kidneys, which sinks downwards, is an image of Lead. The kidneys generate the Breath (*qi*). The one particle of Essence of True Unity within the Breath is True Lead.

The Earth, whose number is 2, generates the Li ☲ Fire, which is the heart. The Fire of the heart, which flies upwards, is an image of Mercury. The heart generates the Liquor (*ye*). The one particle of Breath of Correct Yang within the Liquor is True Mercury.¹

Within Kan there is the wu-Soil, and within Li there is the ji-Soil.² Water in the first place is Yin, but within the Yin there is True Yang; Fire in the first place is Yang, but within the Yang there is True Yin. These two are the True Soil. The conjunction of Yin with Yang and of Yang with Yin entirely depends on the True Soil.

True Lead is the Breath within the body; True Mercury is the Spirit within the mind; True Soil is the Intention within the body and the mind.³ Sincerity (*cheng*) can set in motion one's own True Intention: it causes Mercury constantly to greet Lead, and Lead constantly to control Mercury. When "Lead and Mercury return to the True Soil," Spirit and Breath inchoately merge, nature (*xing*) and emotions (*qing*) join as one, and body and mind are "silent and unmoving."⁴

Although it says "unmoving," within pure Suchness (*ruru*) there is complete realization (*liaoliao*), and within darkness there is

brightness. The errant mind is removed, but the bright mind is not obscured; the body of flesh appears to be dead, but the dharmabody (*fashen*) is constantly alive.⁵ This is not falling into “idle emptiness” or coveting to be “withered and rotten.”⁶

POEM 2

Emptiness and Non-Being generate the White Snow,
silence and quiescence send forth the Yellow Sprout.

In the Jade Furnace the fire is warm,
a purple mist flies above the Tripod.

COMMENTARY

Emptiness and Non-Being, silence and quiescence concern the work done when one practices in order to collect the Medicine. The White Snow and the Yellow Sprout are images of the birth of the Medicine within oneself. There is a difference, however, between the White Snow, which pertains to Emptiness and Non-Being, and the Yellow Sprout, which pertains to silence and quiescence: while the White Snow is born from Emptiness, the Yellow Sprout needs nourishment by Fire to be born, because it is from Fire that one can generate Soil.⁷

At the time of the Gou ☱ hexagram, Heaven conjoins with the Earth; in Emptiness and Non-Being, the White Snow is spontaneously generated. At the time of the Fu ☷ hexagram, the Earth conjoins with Heaven; in silence and quiescence, the Yellow Sprout is spontaneously sent forth.⁸ It is just like in our world:⁹ after the Yang culminates there is the Yin, and the white snow falls from the sky; after the Yin culminates there is the Yang, and the yellow sprouts grow from the earth.

The Jade Furnace is the Yellow Court (*huangting*), and the “fire” is Spirit. When Spirit guides Breath, Fire is within the Jade Furnace. “Warm” means that one is practicing the Fire phases (*huohou*).

The Tripod is the position of Qian ☰, and it is Spirit’s own palace. As the black turns red and becomes purple, Fire flies upwards and becomes mist. This mist and this Fire are not two different things.

“In the Jade Furnace the fire is warm” means that the brightness of Spirit from the Palace of Qian ☰ enters the Palace of Kun ☷. When “a purple mist flies above the Tripod,” Kun receives the Fire of Qian. As it manifests itself outside the Palace of Kun, there is the image of “flying.”

POEM 3

In the Flowery Pond the lotus flowers bloom,
in the Spirit Water the golden waves are quiescent.

Deep at night the Moon is fully bright,
Heaven and Earth are one round mirror.

COMMENTARY

Ziyang (Zhang Boduan) says in his Preface: “When Lead calls on Mercury, this is called Flowery Pond (*huachi*). When Mercury enters Lead, this is called Spirit Water (*shenshui*).”¹⁰ This shows that the Flowery Pond is the Stem of Existence (*mingdi*) and the Spirit Water is the Root of Nature (*xinggen*).¹¹ If you wish to merge Nature (*xing*) and Existence (*ming*) inchoately, first use Mercury to seize Lead, then use Lead to control Mercury. The Essence of True Unity in the Palace of Kan ☵ ascends carrying the Breath of Correct Yang; Breath is similar to the blooming of the lotus flowers. The Breath of Correct Yang in the Palace of Li ☲ descends following the Essence of True Unity; its quietude and purity are similar to the purity of golden waves.¹²

When the time of the zi hour comes,¹³ Water is pure and Metal is white: these are Nature and Existence, Spirit and Breath inchoately joined with one another. Therefore it says: “Heaven and Earth are one round mirror.”

All of this lies only in joining Nature with Existence, and in coagulating Spirit so that it enters the Cavity of Breath (*qixue*).¹⁴ An ancient man said:

“To refine the Elixir there is no other method: just lead the Spirit Water to enter the Flowery Pond, and the ten thousand pursuits are completed.”¹⁵

This is exactly what he meant.

POEM 4

The Vermilion Sand refines into Yang Breath,
the Water Silver boils into Essence of Metal.

Essence of Metal with Yang Breath:

Vermilion Sand and Water Silver.

COMMENTARY

The Vermilion Sand is the Breath of Correct Yang within the Liquor. The Water Silver is the Essence of True Unity within the Breath.¹⁶ To replenish the Yin within the Palace of Li ☲, collect the Breath of Correct Yang within the Liquor. To take the Yang within the Palace of Kan ☵, collect the Essence of True Unity within the Breath.

“Essence of Metal with Yang Breath” means that you refine one by means of the Yang Fire (*yanghuo*), and it becomes like the Vermilion Sand; and you nourish the other by means of the Yin Response (*yinfu*), and it becomes like the Water Silver. They are not two different things.¹⁷

POEM 5

The Sun's *Hun*-soul, the lard of the Jade Hare;
the Moon's *Po*-soul, the marrow of the Golden Crow.

Once collected, they return to the Tripod,
and transmute themselves into a clear pool of water.

COMMENTARY

The Wood and Fire of Great Yang are the *Hun*-soul of the Sun. The *Hun*-soul stores the Spirit, but within the Yang there is the Yin: that Yin is the *Po*-soul of the Moon. Without the Moon, the Sun could not generate its radiance. Therefore it says "the lard of the Jade Hare," because the lard pertains to Essence.

The Metal and Water of Great Yin are the *Po*-soul of the Moon. The *Po* stores the Essence, but within the Yin there is the Yang: that Yang is the *Hun*-soul of the Sun. Without the Sun, the Moon could not complete its body.¹⁸ Therefore it says "the marrow of the Golden Crow," because the marrow pertains to Spirit.¹⁹

It is like the Vermilion Sand, which is the Essence of the Sun; as it is touched by the glow of the Moon, it generates the True Breath. [It is also like] the Water Silver, which is the glow of the Moon; as it is touched by the Essence of the Sun, it generates the True Lead.

Among those who practice the great cultivation, the superior persons transmute Breath by means of Spirit, and Essence by means of Breath; the average persons preserve Breath by means of the Essence, and Spirit by means of Breath. When Essence and Spirit inchoately join and harmonize with one another within the precious Tripod, the Sweet Dew spontaneously descends and becomes "a clear pool of water."

POEM 6

The Medicine is born in the Mysterious Opening,
the Fire phases come forth from the Yang Furnace.

When Dragon and Tiger conjoin,
the Golden Tripod gives birth to the Mysterious Pearl.

COMMENTARY

The Mysterious Opening is the Mysterious-Female. The Mysterious is Yang, the Female is Yin. Together they are called “Mysterious Opening.”

In the human body, the lower [Cinnabar] Field is the Furnace, the place where Spirit lodges. Fire is sent forth from here; therefore it is called “the Yang Furnace.” Above the Furnace there is the Tripod. When quiescence culminates and there is movement, the Medicine is spontaneously born. You should collect it at that time. After you have obtained it, if it is not heated and refined by means of the Fire phases, it would disperse again. If that happens, how could the Mysterious Pearl be generated? This is why you must “turn the gear of the barrier in the sinciput” and “steal the Pearl under the chin of the Black Dragon.”²⁰

The Medicine is Fire, and Fire is the Medicine. When Medicine and Fire join as one, Dragon and Tiger conjoin, and the precious Tripod of the Suspended Womb spontaneously gives birth to the Mysterious Pearl, sized as a grain of millet.²¹ Therefore you can send forth the Fire from the Yang Furnace only after the Mysterious Opening has generated the Medicine. If the right moment has not yet come, and you cause it to grow it ahead of time, the external Fire (*waihuo*) would circulate, but the internal Response (*neifu*) would not be in accord with it. You would just set your body on fire.

Substantially, when Spirit and Breath harmonize and merge with one another, the Mysterious Opening spontaneously appears. After the

Mysterious Opening has appeared, the Fire phases (*huohou*) are spontaneously known. After the Fire phases are known, Dragon and Tiger spontaneously pair with one another. After Dragon and Tiger have paired with one another, the Mysterious Pearl is spontaneously formed. The wonder of this lies between “movement” and “quiescence”: you cannot make an error as fine as a hair.

POEM 7

This Opening is not a common opening:

it is formed by the joining of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷.

It is called Cavity of Spirit and Breath,

and within there are the essences of Kan ☵ and Li ☲.

COMMENTARY

“This Opening” means the Mysterious Opening mentioned above.²² It does not pertain to Being or Non-Being, and it does not fall into any category or rule; it lies outside and beyond the body and mind, and it emerges from the “vague and indistinct.”²³ Therefore it says, “is not a common Opening.”

In the human body, Qian ☰ is above and Kun ☷ is below. The central line within Qian seeks Kun and forms Kan ☵. Kan dwells in the position of Kun, and Breath dwells there. The central line within Kan seeks Qian and forms Li ☲. Li places itself in the position of Qian, and Spirit dwells there.²⁴

Spirit is the Mercury within the mind, Breath is the Lead within the body. The mind is the chamber of Spirit, the body is the seat of Breath.²⁵ Therefore it says, “it is called Cavity of Spirit and Breath.”

Within the body there is a particle of Breath of True Yang; that Breath pertains to Li ☲. Within the mind there is a particle of Essence of True Yin; that Essence pertains to Kan ☵. Therefore it says, “within there are the essences of Kan ☵ and Li ☲.”

POEM 8

Wooden Mercury, one particle of red,

Metallic Lead, four pounds of black.²⁶

Lead and Mercury coalesce and form the Pearl:
shining, it takes on the color of purple gold.

COMMENTARY

The one particle of Essence of True Yin within the heart is called “Wooden Mercury.” Wood pertains to number 3 and holds the Breath of True Yang, whose number is 1; therefore it says “one particle.” Since Wood is able to generate Fire and the color of Fire is red, it says “one particle of red.”

The one particle of Breath of True Yang within the body is called “Metallic Lead.” Metals pertains to number 4; therefore it says “four pounds of Lead, black in color.”²⁷ Since Metal and Water share the same Palace, it says “four pounds of black.”

First you cause the red to enter the black, then you refine the black so that it enters the red. When the red and the black seize one another, they coalesce within the precious Tripod into the Mysterious Pearl sized as a grain of millet, which shines with a color similar to purple. Since purple is midway between red and black, it says “it takes on the color of purple gold.”

However, Lead and Mercury are not fixed objects, red and black are not fixed colors, and “one particle” and “four pounds” are not fixed numbers. Those who are accomplished know this by themselves.

POEM 9

In the house garden the sight is beautiful:
wind and rain are like those of deep spring.
Without spending your strength for plowing and digging,
the whole great Earth is yellow gold.

COMMENTARY

The “house garden” is the True Soil within the body. The “sight” is the images of the ingredients within the body.

At the moment of the return of the initial Yang, you should only activate the wind of Xun ☴ so that it blows upon Kan ☵.²⁸ This means leading the Spirit Water to moisten the Flowery Pond. At the time of the conjunction in Tai ☰ (Peace), with its three Yang lines,²⁹ you should carefully refrain from spending your strength in order to collect [the Medicine]. Just “neither forget nor assist,” and the Yellow Sprout of the Great Earth will burst forth of its own from the soil.³⁰ It is called “gold” because it will coalesce and form the Golden Elixir.

POEM 10

True Lead is born in Kan ☵,
but its operation is in the Palace of Li ☲.

From black it turns red:
in the whole tripod the cloud's breath is dense.

COMMENTARY

The kidneys generate Breath (*qi*); the Water of True Unity within Breath is True Lead. This Water of True Unity [is collected] when the Breath of Correct Yang in the Palace of Li ☲ sees the Liquor, and they conjoin. What you should collect is the Water of True Unity within the Breath, and not the Breath of Correct Yang within the Liquor.³¹

Just like a mother and a child meeting and not wishing to leave one another, so does Metal hide itself within Water, and there is no way to cause it to ascend. Indeed, that Spirit should guide the Breath is the most important instruction transmitted from Heart to Heart throughout all times. Therefore it says “its operation is in the Palace of Li ☲,” because the foundation (*ti*) is in Kan and the operation (*yong*) is in Li.³²

After Lead has emerged by means of Fire, Water “from black turns red.” The Medicine is Fire. It will go through the route of the Three Barriers until it reaches the top of the ninefold Heaven.³³ It rises vividly, it ascends as if it drifts in the air, it steams harmoniously, and it coagulates like mist. Its Breath is as dense as the clouds, and it ascends until it enters the Tripod.

POEM 11

True Mercury is born in Li ☲,

its operation instead is in Kan ☵.

The Lovely Maid goes past the southern garden

holding a jade olive in her hands.

COMMENTARY

Mercury is born in the Palace of Li ☲, but until it finds the Correct Breath of the North that controls and subdues it, it “desires ever to leave you”³⁴ and cannot coagulate. Therefore it says, “its operation instead is in Kan ☵.”³⁵

The Lovely Maid is Mercury, and the “southern garden” is Li. As soon as the Mercury within Li sees the Lead within Kan, Lead and Mercury seize one another. Mercury leaves the Palace of Li ☲, then they descend together to the position of Kan ☵.³⁶ Therefore it says, “goes past the southern garden.”

As soon as it has gone past the “southern garden,” Mercury forms the White Snow. Jade represents the whiteness of its color, and the olive represents the fact that it is neither square nor round.³⁷

POEM 12

Zhen ☵ and Dui ☱ are not East and West,

Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are not South and North.

As the Dipper's handle revolves along the Celestial Circuit,

all the people should gather together.

COMMENTARY

Zhen ☵ in the East, Dui ☱ in the West, Li ☲ in the South, and Kan ☵ in the North are the positions of the eight trigrams. The Way of Heaven follows its course without pause, and the Dipper's Handle turns around, pointing each month to a different direction. Yin and Yang, cold and heat never make errors in their time spans.

The human body is a whole Heaven and Earth. Rising from the Mysterious Valley to the Muddy Pellet, and then descending again through the Storied Pavilion to return to the Northern Ocean, is called the Celestial Circuit (*zhoutian*).³⁸ The mechanism of this rotation also depends on the Dipper's Handle.

In one year there are 12 months, in one month there are 30 days, and altogether there are 360 days. In one day there are 100 notches, and one year amounts to 36,000 notches.³⁹ The practice of one day can seize the Breath of 36,000 notches. Those who cultivate the Elixir revolve the Fire phases of an entire Celestial Circuit in one day. By replacing the year with the day, and the 12 months with the 12 [double] hours, they gather one year in one day and converge one month into one [double] hour.

To establish the circular movement, it is sufficient to follow the Dipper's Handle; then there is no more need to mention East, West, North, and South. However, if there is a single error in the Dipper's Handle, the time segments would be mistaken. Be careful! Be careful!

POEM 13

The Fire phases do not use the hours,
and the winter solstice is not at zi.

As for the method of bathing,
the times of mao and you are empty similitudes.

COMMENTARY

Fire is something that causes burning if it is too strong, and chilling if it is too weak. The essential lies in harmonization and in finding the balance. This is why, with regard to Fire, it is necessary to speak of its phases.

In one [double] hour there are six phases (*hou*); these are the nodal phases (*jiehou*) found within oneself. No matter what the hour may be, when quiescence culminates and there is movement within oneself, this corresponds to the winter solstice with regard to the months, and to the zi hour with regard to the day. Greet that opportunity and move in agreement with it. The Fire phases consist in this.

On the whole, the initial Yang ascends from zi, and the initial Yin descends from wu; the Yang ascending and the Yin descending are mao, and the Yin ascending and the Yin descending are you. When we say, “distinguish zi and wu within the time that has no notches,” we mean that one should not take the winter solstice as zi, the summer solstice as wu, and the months of the hare and the rooster as mao and you.⁴⁰ For example, with regard to the External Elixir, advancing the Fire is zi, reducing the Fire is wu, and neither increasing nor decreasing the Fire is “bathing.” Do not rigidly adhere either to zi and wu, or to mao and you.⁴¹

POEM 14

The Crow's liver and the Hare's marrow
are seized and share the same place.

Grain after grain,
from tenuous it becomes manifest.

COMMENTARY

The human being is endowed with the True Original Breath of Heaven and Earth. There are 384 scruples (*zhu*) of this Breath, which altogether amount to one pound. Eight ounces are the Essence of the Sun; therefore it says "the Crow's liver," which is the Liquor of Wood. Eight ounces are the Essence of the Moon; therefore it says "the Hare's marrow," which is the Essence of Metal.⁴²

Since Metal and Wood are separated from one another, you should avail yourself of wu and ji as go-betweens, and use Fire to refine them. Each day one grain is generated, sized as a grain of millet and weighing 1 scruple and 8 parts. "From tenuous it becomes manifest," and by accumulation it forms the [required] ounces: after 30 days it weighs 38 scruples and 4 parts, and after 300 days it weighs 384 scruples.⁴³ "Square and round, one inch is its diameter," and it weighs one pound.⁴⁴

POEM 15

The Inchoate embraces Emptiness,
Emptiness holds the Three Worlds in its hands.

Seek its origin and root:
one grain sized as millet.⁴⁵

COMMENTARY

As there is the world, there are the Three Powers; as there are the Three Powers, there is Emptiness; as there is Emptiness, there is the Inchoate. “The Inchoate embraces Emptiness, Emptiness holds the Three Worlds in its hands.”⁴⁶

When you seek the instant in which you first received Breath within yourself, it was nothing more than “one grain sized as millet.” This is the “origin and root” of human life: those who cultivate the Elixir should know this. Therefore it is said:

“If anyone wants to look for the instructions on long life,
Just go seek the root of creation and transformation.”⁴⁷

POEM 16

Heaven and Earth exchange their true liquors,

Sun and Moon hold their true essences.

If you comprehend the foundation of Kan ☵ and Li ☲,

the Three Worlds return to the one body.

COMMENTARY

The Liquor of the heart descends, and the Breath of the kidneys ascends. [In the present poem] this Liquor and this Breath are both called “liquors.” This is the meaning of “Heaven and Earth exchange their true liquors.”

The *Hun*-soul is the Essence of the Crow, and the *Po*-soul is the Marrow of the Hare. [In this poem] they are both called “essences.” This is the meaning of “Sun and Moon hold their true essences.”

Kan ☵ pertains to the Yin. Kan stores wu within, which is the Yang Soil. This Yang is the “foundation of Kan.” Li ☲ pertains to the Yang. Li stores ji within, which is the Yin Soil. This Yin is the “foundation of Li.”

If you comprehend that the wu-Soil within Kan has its foundation and origin in the Yang, and that the ji-Soil within Li has its foundation and origin in the Yin, then the Heaven and the Earth within the body, and the Sun and the Moon within the body, will operate by relying on True Soil. Then “the Three Worlds return to the one body.”⁴⁸

POEM 17

The Dragon comes from the Eastern Sea,
the Tiger rises from the Western Mountains.

The two beasts fight in the same place
and transmute themselves into the marrow of Heaven and Earth.

COMMENTARY

The Breath of Correct Yang within the heart is the Dragon. Wood can generate Fire. Since Zhen ☵ pertains to Wood, “the Dragon comes from the Eastern Sea.”⁴⁹

The Essence of True Unity within the kidneys is the Tiger. Metal can generate Water. Since Dui ☱ pertains to Metal, “the Tiger rises from the Western Mountains.”⁵⁰

If, when “the Dragon howls and the clouds rise,” you are able to cause it to descend, and, when “the Tiger roars and the wind blows,” you are able to cause it to ascend, then the “two beasts” will meet and fight against one another in front of the Yellow Room.⁵¹ Then the Dragon ingests the Tiger’s marrow, and the Tiger swallows the Dragon’s essence. Wind and clouds will have the “blissful meeting.” As they inchoately merge to become one, they transmute into “the marrow of Heaven and Earth.”

POEM 18

The Golden Flower opens petals of Mercury,
the Jade Stem grows branches of Lead.

Kan ☵ and Li ☲ have never been separate,

Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ stand through the whole of time.

COMMENTARY

The Golden Flower is in the first place the embryo achieved when True Lead avails itself of Mercury. The Jade Stem is in the first place the form achieved when True Mercury avails itself of Lead. In the human body, Mercury is Spirit, and Lead is Breath. “The Golden Flower opens petals of Mercury” means that in the “vague and indistinct,” Spirit is born within Water. “The Jade Stem grows branches of Lead” means that in the “dim and obscure,” Essence is born within Fire.⁵² Those who receive the instructions should wait until the Golden Flower manifests its dew and the Jade Stem sends forth its buds. These are the “petals” and the “branches,” or ji and wu, of Lead and Mercury.⁵³

At that time, you should advance the Fire to collect the Medicine, causing Kan and Li to revolve between the East and the West, and Qian and Kun to rotate between the top and the bottom. One comes, the other goes, one ascends, the other descends, like a ring that has no end or beginning and cannot be paused for even one instant.⁵⁴

Indeed, before you obtain the Medicine you must recognize the opening of the petals of Mercury and the growth of the branches of Lead. After you obtain the Medicine, you should also know the wonder of “coming and going” and the principle of “ascending and descending.” Only then will beginning and end be both completed, and will the Embryo of Sainthood be attained.

If Qian ☰, Kun ☷, Kan ☵, and Li ☲ do not move in a ring for ten months, the Medicine within the tripod would be entirely lost. How could you protect the Golden Flower so that it does not languish? How could you protect the Jade Stem so that it does not wither?

POEM 19

When you bathe, avoid all dangers,
when you extract and augment, be careful and continuous.

Altogether there are thirty thousand notches:
make an error as fine as a hair, and you lose it.

COMMENTARY

In one year there are twelve months, which altogether amount to 36,000 notches (*ke*); they are gathered together into one day.⁵⁵ Within the twelve months, you perform the Fire phases for ten months. When the Yang is born, collect the Medicine from the palace of zi and cause it to ascend by inverting the course (*ni*). This is called “extracting Lead” (*chouqian*). When the Yin is born, withdraw the Fire from the position of wu, and cause it to descend by following the course (*shun*). This is called “augmenting Mercury” (*tianhong*).

As for the remaining two months, during the mao month you increase Water and let Metal rest, and during the you month you circulate Fire and stop Water. You only perform the Water phases and do not perform the Fire phases. This is called “bathing” (*muyu*).⁵⁶ Since during the mao month there is taking life within giving life, and during the you month there is giving life within taking life, you should avoid that Fire causes excessive heat, or you would be in danger.⁵⁷

Excluding the 6,000 notches of those two months, in ten months there are 30,000 notches. Therefore it says, “altogether there are thirty thousand notches” If in the 30,000 notches of practice there is an error as fine as a hair, then Yin and Yang would miss the correct timing. You should not only avoid all dangers, but also know how to be careful and continuous, and “give your mind and bend your will” within an enclosure.⁵⁸ Manifest yourself in movement, and conceal

yourself in quiescence. In the span of one year you will be able to nourish the Infant, and you will transcend the world as an immortal.

POEM 20

When husband and wife conjoin,
in the Cavern Chamber there are clouds and rain.

In one year one infant is born;
each of them can ride on a crane.

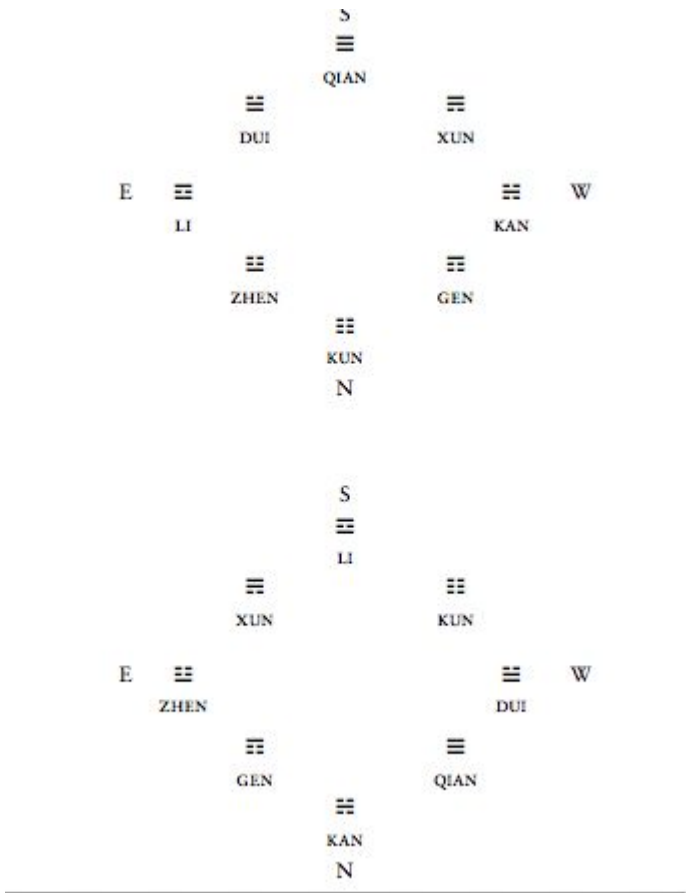
COMMENTARY

The “husband and wife” are the True Yin and the True Yang within yourself. When True Yin and True Yang find True Soil as a go-between, they tie to one another as husband and wife. When they conjoin in the Cavern Chamber, “the clouds rise and rain falls.”⁵⁹

In one year, you are pregnant for ten months and bathe for two months. When the embryo is complete and the Breath is plenty, you give birth to the Infant, who exits from your Palace of the Muddy Pellet riding on a crane.⁶⁰ In nine years you generate nine infants; therefore it says “each of them.” The myriads of transformation bodies are all one single body; therefore this does not mean that there are truly nine children.⁶¹

The Infant is a child (孩). When hai 亥 and zi 子 conjoin, they form the character “child” (孩). This is the essential in setting to practice in order to coalesce the embryo.⁶²

Table 1



Spatial arrangements of the eight trigrams (*bagua* 八卦) in the precelestial (*xiantian* 先天, top) and postcelestial (*houtian* 後天, bottom) configurations.

Table 2

STEMS	AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	COLORS	VISCERA	NUMBERS
1 JIA 甲	WOOD	east	green	liver	3, 8
2 YI 乙					
3 BING 丙	FIRE	south	red	heart	2, 7
4 DING 丁					
5 WU 戊	SOIL	center	yellow	spleen	5
6 JI 己					
7 GENG 庚	METAL	west	white	lungs	4, 9
8 XIN 辛					
9 REN 壬	WATER	north	black	kidneys	1, 6
10 GUI 癸					

The ten celestial stems (*tiangan* 天干) and their associations.

Table 3

FU	LIN	TAI	DAZHUANG	GUAI	QIAN	GOU	DUN	PI	GUAN	BO	KUN
子	丑	寅	卯	辰	巳	午	未	申	酉	戌	亥
zi	chou	yin	mao	chen	si	wu	wei	shen	you	xu	hai
黄鐘	大呂	太簇	夾鐘	姑洗	仲呂	蕤賓	林鐘	夷則	南呂	無射	應鐘
huangzhong	dalu	taicou	jiazhong	guxi	zhonglü	ruibin	linzhong	yize	nanlü	wuyi	yingzhong
11	12	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
23-1	1-3	3-5	5-7	7-9	9-11	11-13	13-15	15-17	17-19	19-21	21-23

The twelve “sovereign hexagrams” (*bigua* 辟卦) and their relation to other duodenary series: earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支), bells and pitch-pipes (*zhonglü* 鍾律), months of the year, and “double hours” (*shi* 時). After Kun 坤, the cycle continues with Fu 復, whose lower line represents the rebirth of the Yang principle.

Golden Elixir Press

www.goldenelixir.com

From the Catalogue

[*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.

[*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.

[*Awakening to Reality: The “Regulated Verses” of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy*](#), by Zhang Boduan (987?–1082).

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.

[*Commentary on the Mirror for Compounding the Medicine: A Fourteenth-Century Work on Taoist Internal Alchemy*](#), by Wang Jie (? -ca. 1380).

Dating from the 10th century, the *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) describes the principles of Internal Alchemy in 20 poems. This book contains a complete translation of the text and of the commentary by Wang Jie, affiliated with the Quanzhen (Complete Reality) tradition.

[*The World Upside Down: Essays on Taoist Internal Alchemy*](#), by Isabelle Robinet.

Four essays on Neidan translated for the first time into English. Their subjects are: (1) The alchemical principle of “inversion”; (2) The devices used by the alchemists to “manifest the authentic and absolute Tao”; (3) The role of numbers in Taoism and Internal Alchemy; (4) The meanings of the terms External Elixir and Internal Elixir.

Notes

1. The terminology used in these two initial paragraphs is complex, but the main points can be rephrased as follows: The first paragraph says that the kidneys are Yin and pertain to Kan ☵ and Water. The Yin Breath (*qi*) of the kidneys contains the True Yang, which is True Lead and is also called Essence of True Unity. The second paragraph says that the heart is Yang and pertains to Li ☲ and Fire. The Yang Liquor (*ye*) of the heart contains the True Yin, which is True Mercury and is also called Breath of Correct Yang.
2. The wu-Soil and the ji-Soil are the Yang and the Yin aspects of Soil, respectively. Soil is the agent that represents the unity of Yin and Yang, and therefore makes their conjunction possible.
3. In Chinese, the word for “heart” and “mind” is the same, *xin*.
4. In the conditioned state, emotions are separated from one’s inner nature. The Neidan practice allows them to reconjoin to one another. When that happens, the emotions become qualities that express one’s nature.
5. In Buddhism, the dharma-body (*dharmakāya*) is the true and unmanifested body of the Buddha. Several Neidan masters use this term to mean the equally true and unmanifested body of each person.
6. With these words, Peng Haogu criticizes erroneous practices performed by Buddhist and Taoist adepts. The first expression is often used to disapprove of Buddhist meditation on Emptiness. The second expression derives from the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and Its Virtue), sec. 76: “When the ten thousand things and trees and plants are born, they are yielding and supple; when they die, they are withered and rotten.”
7. In other words, according to Peng Haogu the appearance of the White Snow (True Yin) pertains to “non-doing” (*wuwei*) and occurs of its own in the higher stage of the Neidan practice, while the

appearance of the Yellow Sprout (True Yang) pertains to “doing” (*youwei*) and is the result of the initial stage or stages. — In the “generation sequence” of the five agents, Fire generates Soil.

8. These two hexagrams represent the rebirth of the Yin principle and of the Yang principle, respectively, and thus symbolize the appearance of the White Snow and the Yellow Sprout.

9. Lit., “between Heaven and Earth.”

10. These words are found in the preface to the *Jindan sibaizi*.

11. The Stem of Existence is located in the lower Cinnabar Field, and the Root of Nature is located in the upper Cinnabar Field. In this section, Peng Haogu refers to the two Fields as Palace of Kan and Palace of Li, respectively.

12. The main subject of this paragraph is the inversion of the ordinary courses of “essence” and “breath” of Yin and Yang. Instead of descending and being wasted, Lead (the Essence of True Unity, True Yang) ascends; and instead of ascending and being lost, Mercury (the Breath of Correct Yang, True Yin) descends. As Lead and Mercury are conjoined, they “carry” and “follow” one another.

13. Formally corresponding to 11pm–1am, but actually signifying the rebirth of the Yang principle.

14. The Cavity of Breath is the middle Cinnabar Field (also called Cavity of Spirit and Breath, *shenqi xue*).

15. These words are found in the *Jinhua bijue* (Secret Instructions on the Golden Flower), one of many Neidan texts associated with Lü Dongbin.

16. The Vermilion Sand (to be understood as Sand in the Vermilion) is Yin within Yang (the Yin Breath within the Yang Liquor, or Li ☲). The Water Silver (i.e., Silver in the Water) is Yang within Yin (the Yang Essence within the Yin Breath, or Kan ☵). The Yang Breath is True Yang, and the Essence of Metal is True Yin.

17. Fire makes it possible to extract the Yang from the Yin and to replenish the Yin within the Yang (in the first and the second halves of the cycle of the Fire phases, respectively). Thus the two become the same.

18. The Moon “completes its body” in the middle of the lunar month, when it appears to be full. At that time, which is the peak of the Yang principle, the Yin principle is at the lowest stage of its course: the Moon appears to be full because it is entirely enlightened by the Sun.

19. The complex imagery of this and the previous paragraphs can be summarized as follows. Although the Sun is Yang, it holds the Yin soul of the Moon as its “essence” (*jing*). This essence is symbolized by the hare, the animal that, according to a Chinese myth, lives on the Moon. Conversely, the Moon is Yin but holds the Yang soul of the Sun as its “spirit” (*shen*). This spirit is symbolized by the crow, the animal said to live on the Sun.

20. The first sentence is found in several texts, including Wang Jie’s commentary to the *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine), sec. 14. The second sentence is a line in a poem found in the *Lifeng laoren ji* (The Old Man of the Solitary Peak: An Anthology), ch. 1.

21. This simile is drawn from the *Cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three), 79:20, which says of the Elixir: “Ingest it in pills sized as a grain of millet.” — The Tripod of the Suspended Womb (*xuantai ding*) is, according to Weng Baoguang’s *Jindan faxiang* (Model Images of the Golden Elixir), an image of the Center.

22. See the previous poem.

23. *Daode jing*, sec. 21: “Vague and indistinct! Within there is something. Dim and obscure! Within there is an essence.”

24. The different positions of the trigrams represent the shift from the precelestial to the postcelestial domains. See table 1 at the end of this book.

25. Here again it is necessary to remember that the “mind” is also the “heart.”

26. Other versions of the *Jindan sibaizi* have “three pounds,” explained either as the symbolic weight of Lead in the Lead-Mercury compound, or (just like “one particle” in the previous line) as a number with no precise material correspondence.

27. This is not a precise quotation of the line in the poem above.

28. Among natural phenomena, the trigram Xun ☴ is represented by the wind. The expression “wind of Xun” therefore means the breath. Kan ☵ represents the lower Cinnabar Field.

29. Tai (Peace) is the hexagram (containing three Yang lines below and three Yin lines above) that represents the perfect state of conjunction and balance between Yin and Yang. Compare the “Image” (“Xiang”) on this hexagram in the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*: “Heaven and Earth are conjoined: Peace” (see Wilhelm, *The I-ching or Book of Changes*, p. 49).

30. The expression “neither forget nor assist” originates in *Mengzi*, 3:2: “Let not the mind forget it, but let there be no assisting it” (see Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, p. 190).

31. For the terminology and imagery used in this paragraph see page 88, n. 1 above. Here, however, Peng Haogu refers to the True Yang as Water of True Unity instead of Essence of True Unity. Essentially, this paragraph states that True Yang (the Water of True Unity) must be collected by means of True Yin (the Breath of Correct Yang, represented by the Yin line within the Yang trigram Li ☲). At that time, one should collect the Yang (the Water of True Unity) within the Yin (Breath), and not the Yin (the Breath of Correct Yang) within the Yang (the Liquor in the heart).

32. That is, True Lead is found within Kan ☵, but it operates by means of the True Mercury found within Li ☲.

33. In ancient China, Heaven was described as made of nine horizontal layers. Here the term “ninefold” also alludes to the nine “palaces” or “rooms” of the upper Cinnabar Field.
34. *Cantong qi*, 62:1–2: “The Flowing Pearl of Great Yang (*i.e.*, Mercury) desires ever to leave you” (Pregadio, *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*, p. 101).
35. Just like Li ☲ contains True Mercury, so does Kan ☵ contain True Lead, which controls True Mercury and prevents its dispersion.
36. The Palace of Li is the upper Cinnabar Field, the “position of Kan” is the lower Cinnabar Field.
37. “Jade olive” (*yugan*) is a synonym of Mysterious Pearl (*xuanzhu*).
38. The Mysterious Valley (*xuangu*) is the kidneys. The Muddy Pellet (*niwan*) is the upper Cinnabar Field. The Storied Pavilion (*chonglou*) is the trachea. The Northern Ocean (*beihai*) is the lower Cinnabar Field (note that the North is traditionally placed “below” in premodern China).
39. In premodern China, the day was divided into 100 *ke*, equivalent to the notches there were marked on a water clepsydra. Each *ke* formally corresponds to about 15 minutes in modern reckoning.
40. The months of the hare and the rooster are the second and the eighth lunar months, corresponding to the earthly branches mao and you, respectively.
41. In *Neidan*, the term External Elixir (*waidan*) usually does not refer to External Alchemy. It denotes, instead, the initial stage of the compounding of the Internal Elixir, achieved by the practice of the Fire times. This seems to be the sense in which Peng Haogu uses the term in this passage of his commentary.
42. This paragraph uses images drawn from the ancient Chinese weight system. One pound (*jin*) contains 16 ounces (*liang*), and one ounce contains 24 scruples (*zhu*). Therefore one pound is made of

384 scruples. The symbolic “pound” of Elixir requires 8 ounces of True Yin (here called “Crow’s liver”) and 8 ounces of True Yang (here called “Hare’s marrow”).

43. Three hundred days correspond to ten months, the duration of gestation in the Chinese reckoning.

44. The phrase “Square and round, one inch is its diameter” derives from the *Huangting jing* (Book of the Yellow Court), “Inner” version, poem 7. In the *Huangting jing*, it refers to the upper Cinnabar Field. Neidan texts often borrow this verse and use it as a metaphor to the Elixir: “square and round” refer to Heaven and Earth, and “one inch” refers to the unity of Yin and Yang.

45. See above, note 21.

46. The “three powers” (*sancai*) here are True Yin, True Yang, and Soil. They are equivalent to the “three worlds,” on which see p. 104, note 49 below.

47. These verses are quoted from Bai Yuchan’s “Xuanguan xianbi lun” (Manifesting the Secret of the Mysterious Barrier), in *Haiqiong wendao ji* (Questions on the Dao by the Master of Haiqiong: An Anthology), ch. 2.

48. The “three worlds” (*sanjie*) here are True Yin (found within Li ☲), True Yang (found within Kan ☵), and Soil (which contains both True Yin and True Yang). When they are joined to one another through the intermediation of Soil, they become “one body.”

49. In the system of the five agents, Wood is associated with the East (the position of the trigram Zhen ☳). Wood generates Fire, which is “the Breath of Correct Yang within the heart.”

50. In the system of the five agents, Metal is associated with the West (the position of the trigram Dui ☱). Metal generates Water, which is “the Essence of True Unity within the kidneys.”

51. In Neidan, the term Yellow Room (*huangwu*) denotes both the middle and the lower Cinnabar Fields. This passage seems to refer to the middle Field.

52. For “vague and indistinct,” “dim and obscure,” see above, page 95 note 23.

53. The “petals of Mercury” are the Yin born from the Yang, and the “branches of Lead” are the Yang born from the Yin. The petals stand for Original Spirit, and the branches stand for the Original Essence. They are associated with *ji* and *wu*, respectively, the Yin and Yang celestial stems that represent the two halves of the One (see table 2 at the end of this book).

54. With reference to the Neidan practices, this refers to the “small celestial circuit” (*xiao zhoutian*) of the Fire phases. See Wang Mu, *Foundations of Internal Alchemy*, 71–86.

55. See above, note 39.

56. The *mao* and the *you* months are the second and the eighth lunar months, respectively. “Water phases” (*shuihou*) is a synonym of “bathing.”

57. “Giving life” (*sheng*) and “taking life” (*sha*) represent the operation of the Yang and the Yin principles, respectively.

58. The phrase “give your mind and bend your will” derives from *Mengzi*, 11.9 (see Legge, *The Chinese Classics*, vol. 2, p. 410).

59. This phrase derives from the *Book of Changes*, “Commentary on the Judgment” (“Tuanzhuàn”) on the hexagram Qian ☰ (no. 1; see Wilhelm, p. 370).

60. The Palace of the Muddy Pellet (*niwan gong*) is the upper Cinnabar Field.

61. The “transformation body” (*huashen*) is, in the first place, a body taken on by the Buddha in order to teach sentient beings.

62. Hai 亥 and zi 子 are the earthly branches associated with the hexagrams Kun 坤 and Fu 復, respectively (see table 3 at the end of this book. Together, they represent the rebirth of Yang (the lower, initial line of Fu) from Kun (Pure Yin). This symbolic etymology of the character *hai* 孩 (“child”) is also used in the *Duren shangpin miaojing neiyi* (Inner Meaning of the Wondrous Book of the Upper Chapters on Salvation), ch. 5.