TRADITIONS

FABRIZIO PREGADIO

The Essential *Cantong qi*

An Abridged Translation of
The Seal of the Unity of the Three,
the Source of the Taoist Way of the Golden Elixir

Golden Elixir Press

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Preface to the Original Edition

This book contains a complete translation and a study of the *Zhouyi cantong qi* (The Seal of the Unity of the Three, in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*), the text that most lineages of Taoist alchemy place at the origins of their traditions.

My work on the *Cantong qi* began in the autumn of 1990, when I translated parts of Peng Xiao's text found in the Taoist Canon (*Daozang*). As my work progressed, I became aware of the remarkably large textual tradition of the *Cantong qi*, and began to acquire reproductions of editions found in libraries in China, Japan, and elsewhere. A major turning point occurred in 2001, when I happened to find the apparently single extant exemplar of the earliest edition of Chen Zhixu's commentary, published in 1484 and now preserved at the Shanghai Library. I still remember the smile of the librarian when she realized that I had made a complete photocopy of the text with my own hands, but allowed me to keep it. That exemplar is at the basis of the translation found in the present book.

Eventually, the Shanghai text became one of several editions that I used to compare and collate the text of the *Cantong qi* found in different commentaries: the two extant Tang-dynasty commentaries (both dating from ca. 700) and the commentaries by Peng Xiao (947), Zhu Xi (1197), Yu Yan (1284), and Chen Zhixu (ca. 1330). In addition to revealing a synopsis of the textual history of the *Cantong qi*, the collation clarified several points, two of which are especially important with regard to this translation.

First, the collation showed to me that the "true" form of a work of this nature is not to be found at the purely textual level. Not only is the *Cantong qi*, in the first place, the work of an anonymous "collective entity" (see my Introduction, § 3), and therefore cannot be tied to the intent of an individual author; but to varying extents, the authors of the different commentaries have shaped the text in

the variant forms in which we know it today, by introducing new readings, emending errors found in earlier editions, polishing supposed imperfections, establishing sections of different length, moving certain poems from one part of the text to another, normalizing the four- or five- character verses, improving the rhymes, and so forth. Like the major scriptures of all traditions, however, the "original" *Cantong qi* is not found in any of its particular redactions or editions.

Second, having resolved that my work would not be based on a reconstructed text, the collation served to identify the edition that I have used to translate the *Cantong qi*. Whether or not this may also deemed to be true of his commentary, Chen Zhixu's redaction is likely to contain the best version of the *Cantong qi* among those composed before the Ming period (i.e., until the mid-fourteenth century). The two Tang redactions present a fascinating, but "raw" state of the text; Peng Xiao's redaction, despite its renown, is not authentic, having undergone contamination in the early thirteenth century with dozens of readings drawn from Zhu Xi's redaction; Zhu Xi's redaction in its turn introduces many peculiar variants; and Yu Yan's redaction, while being quite elegant and accompanied by a learned commentary, sometimes makes bold choices among different possible readings. Although Chen Zhixu's text presents its own issues (about four dozen readings are not documented in earlier extant sources, but most of them are of little or no consequence), it contains a mature and reliable state of the text before the Ming- and Qing-dynasty commentaries—most of which, incidentally, are entirely or partly based on this redaction.

As a result of the collation, I decided therefore that my translation would be based on the 1484 edition of Chen Zhixu's text, edited and newly subdivided into sections according to the criteria documented elsewhere in the present book. I re-translated the portions that I had already rendered into English, and continued to work on those that I had not yet translated.

In due course, another issue that I had become aware of, but had decided to leave for as long as possible unanswered in order to focus on the translation, confronted me directly. Since the beginning, I had intended to provide, in addition to the translation, short explications of the subject of each section, and notes on individual verses.

Influenced by the later tradition of Neidan (Internal Alchemy), almost all commentators and a large majority of adepts and scholars have read the *Cantong qi* as the earliest Neidan text, maintaining that the whole work pertains to alchemy and was composed by a single author, Wei Boyang, during the Later Han dynasty (according to tradition, around 150 CE). In this perspective, virtually every statement of the text is understood as being originally written with reference to Neidan. To give only one example, the descriptions of the three main cosmological cycles—the day, the month, and the year—are read as veiled accounts of the alchemical "fire times" (*huohou*), although it should be clear that here, as in many other cases, the *Cantong qi* expounds doctrines that later traditions have used to devise their practices. Moreover, the earliest sources that document what we now call Neidan and draw on the *Cantong qi* were written no less than six hundred years after its reputed date. Should I, nevertheless, present the *Cantong qi* as a Neidan text—and if so, on the basis of which particular commentary?

At the same time, while I was consulting several traditional commentaries in order to translate the text, I had begun to notice that, in addition to the mainstream Neidan interpretation, there has also been a different, less well-known way of reading the *Cantong qi* within the Taoist tradition. In this view, alchemy is one of the three major subjects dealt with in the text, and referred to in its title; the other two are a cosmology that explicates how the world is related to the Dao, and a description of the highest state of realization, which is defined as the Taoist "non-doing," or *wuwei*. Seen in this perspective, alchemy is—in the very words of the *Cantong qi*—the "lower" gradual path that, once accomplished, opens the gates to the "higher" state, which is instantaneously realized and involves going beyond alchemy (see my Introduction, § 7). It should be noted that this view does not refute the Neidan readings of the *Cantong qi*, but broadens the definition of Way of the Golden Elixir (*jindan zhi dao*) to include not only the Neidan practices, but also their doctrinal foundations, while retaining the necessary distinctions between doctrines and practices. It also has an effect on a significant point: The *Cantong qi* is not the first Neidan text, but the first text of Neidan.

As I note in my Introduction, this perspective clarifies several

aspects of the *Cantong qi*, including not only the import of its poems, but also its dating and its influence on the history of Chinese alchemy. It also sheds light on one of the many puzzling aspects of this text, namely the sequence of its poems: each of the two main Books of the *Cantong qi* is made of three parallel parts, respectively concerned with the three subjects mentioned above—a feature that is hardly possible to notice if the whole text is read from the perspective of Neidan in the strict sense.

I began therefore, at first tentatively, then more confidently, to rewrite my earlier notes by taking account of this way of reading the text. I also decided to present my work in a first version, found in the present book, that omits most of the historical, textual, and bibliographic details, and focuses almost exclusively on the translation and the annotations. Other parts of my work will be published at a later time.

I express here all my gratitude to Noreen Khawaja for the advice and guidance that she has given in improving my translation. When, in the early summer of 2011, we revised the last verse of the last poem, it seemed impossible to believe that we had worked together for four years. Her knowledge of Classical Chinese, her immediate understanding of the meaning of verses of the *Cantong qi*, and her elegant English have surprised (and confounded) me many times. Any reader who enjoys the translation of the *Cantong qi* found in this book should remember that Noreen shares at least a substantial part of the merit, and usually more than just a part. I alone bear full responsibility for any errors found in the translation and in other parts of the book.

Several friends have shared, at one or another stage, my work on this book. First, let me thank Carla Bonò, formerly librarian at the Fondazione Giorgio Cini in Venice. In her name I also express my gratitude to her colleagues who, in different parts of the world, have assisted me in finding, consulting, and reproducing a substantial number of editions of the *Cantong qi*. I am deeply grateful to Benjamin Brose, George Clonos, Franco Gatti, Laura Mariano, Jason Avi Protass, Donatella Rossi, Alessandra Sisti, Dominic Steavu, Su Xiaoqin, Elena Valussi, and Yang Zhaohua. All of them have helped to clarify not only my understanding of the text, but also the purpose of my work, and therefore have contributed to shape this

book. My only regret is that Monica Esposito, who left us sooner than expected, could not see this book, after all the conversations that she and I had on the *Cantong qi*, in Kyoto and elsewhere, and her constant encouragement to complete and publish my translation.

Fabrizio Pregadio
Summer 2011

Preface to the Abridged Edition

The present abridged edition contains 32 of the 88 poems of the *Cantong qi*. Instead of presenting the text in its original sequence, the individual poems are subdivided into three main sections, entitled "Cosmology," "Taoism," and "Alchemy" (corresponding to the three main subjects of the *Cantong qi*). Within each section, the poems are arranged according to their subjects, and the explications and line notes follow immediately each poem.

A "Finding List of Poems" has been added to help locate each poem in this version (see p. iv).

Apart from these differences, the text of each poem is translated in full, and the explications and line notes are the same as those found in the unabridged version, with the only exception of minor changes made for the sake of inner consistency (e.g., several references to poems not found in this version have been omitted).

The Introduction, the tables, the glossary of Chinese characters, and the list of works quoted are reproduced entirely. The textual notes, the appendixes, and the final index of subjects are omitted.

Fabrizio Pregadio
Spring 2012

Introduction

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

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

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

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

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

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

§ 1. THE TITLE OF THE *CANTONG QI*

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

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

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

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

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

[3] The Zhou (1045–246 BCE) is the dynasty during which, probably as early as the ninth or the eighth century BCE, the divinatory portions of the *Book of Changes* were composed. Most of the cosmological portions date, instead, from the third-second centuries BCE. These portions include the *Xici* or *Appended Statements*, from which the *Cantong qi* draws several sentences. According to another view, *zhouyi* means, approximately, "cyclical change." A synthetic but highly reliable survey of the composition and the dating of the *Book of Changes* is found in Shaughnessy, "I ching (Chou i)."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Book 1: sections 1–17, Cosmology; 18–27, Taoism; 28–42, Alchemy
Book 2: sections 43–52, Cosmology; 53–61, Taoism; 62–74, Alchemy

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

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

§ 2. A SINGLE AUTHOR, OR MULTIPLE AUTHORS?

For about a millennium, the authorship of the *Cantong qi* has been attributed to Wei Boyang, a character with distinctly legendary features said to be an alchemist, and to come from the Shangyu

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

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

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

Wei Boyang

The best-known account of Wei Boyang is found in the *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of the Divine Immortals), a work attributed to Ge Hong (283–243). According to this record, Wei Boyang was a native of Wu (present-day Jiangsu, and parts of Anhui and Zhejiang) and was "the son of a high-ranking family." The story tells that Wei Boyang and three disciples retired to a mountain and compounded an elixir. When they tested it on a dog, the dog died. Despite this, Wei Boyang and one of his disciples decided to ingest the compound, and they also died. After the two other disciples had left, Wei Boyang came to life again. He poured some of the elixir into the mouths of the dead disciple and the dog, and they also revived. Thus Wei Boyang and his faithful disciple, "whose surname was Yu," attained immortality. With an abrupt change in tone and language, the account ends with a final paragraph, which mentions Wei Boyang's authorship of the *Cantong qi* and of another work entitled *The Five Categories* (*Wu xianglei*), and

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

criticizes those who read the *Cantong qi* as a work concerned with cosmology instead of alchemy. As we shall see, this is the first of several hints about the different views between these two traditions with regard to the *Cantong qi*.

Several centuries later, Peng Xiao (?–955) gives an entirely different portrait of Wei Boyang in his well-known commentary, dating from 947 CE. The alchemist who retires on a mountain with his disciples, tests his elixir on a dog, and is reborn after death becomes, in Peng Xiao's account, a learned master who is competent in prose and poetry, is versed in the esoteric texts, cultivates the Dao "in secret and silence," and nourishes himself "in Empty Non-being." In another passage of his work, moreover, Peng Xiao reveals an important detail about the authorship of the three Books of the *Cantong qi*, which differs from the account found in the *Shenxian zhuan*:

> Some texts on the Dao say that the *Cantong qi* is in three Books, and that Master Wei [Boyang], Xu Congshi, and Chunyu Shutong each wrote one Book. However, the Master also wrote *The Five Categories*, where he says, "I now write again to fill the lacunae."[9] Clearly [the whole *Cantong qi*] was written only by the Master. (*Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi*, commentary to *zhang* 83)

As shown by this passage, in Peng Xiao's time a different view existed that attributed each of the three Books of the text to Wei Boyang, Xu Congshi, and Chunyu Shutong, respectively. Peng Xiao rejects this view and states that Wei Boyang wrote the entire *Cantong qi*.

Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong

The variant accounts in the *Shenxian zhuan* and in Peng Xiao's commentary reflect differences in the traditional views on the authorship and, especially, the nature of the *Cantong qi*. Before we consider these differences, we should look at the identities of the two other masters.

Very few details, even hagiographic, are available about Xu Congshi. From Peng Xiao we only learn that he was deemed a native of Qingzhou, in the present-day northern region of Shandong; other sources suggest that he was an attendant at the Qingzhou local court

[9] This sentence is found in the present text of the *Cantong qi*, 83:7–8.

(as also shown by his personal name, *congshi*, which means "retainer"). Details about the tradition represented by Xu Congshi emerge, nevertheless, in relation to Chunyu Shutong, the third master mentioned by Peng Xiao in his account. The most elaborate narrative about him is found in Tao Hongjing's (456–536) *Zhengao* (True Revelations), where he appears in a section devoted to the administration of the otherworld. His charge in that context is to examine those who have attained the Dao.[10]

Tao Hongjing's account deserves attention. First, he reports that Chunyu came from Shangyu—the same birthplace of Wei Boyang—and was proficient in the "arts of the numbers" (*shushu*), i.e., cosmology, prognostication, and the related sciences. At the time of Emperor Huan (r. 146–167) he was a District Magistrate in Xuzhou (present-day southern Shandong and northern Jiangsu). Later he returned to the Wu region in the south, where he received an alchemical text from an immortal named Huiche zi. Emperor Ling (r. 168–189) intended to summon Chunyu to the capital, but he declined the offer. Tao Hongjing then quotes a passage on Chunyu's life as coming from the *Cantong qi*, which is not found in its present-day text. Here he is indicated as a disciple of Xu Congshi, and his activities are described in more detail:

> At the time of Emperor Huan, Chunyu Shutong, who was a native of Shangyu, received the arts [of the numbers] from Xu Congshi, who was a native of Qingzhou. Looking above and observing the signs of Heaven, he was able to deal with calamities and unusual events. There were several confirmations [of his predictions]. Because of his knowledge of those arts, he was appointed "master of the methods" (*fangshi*). (*Zhengao*, 12.8a-b)

Other sources confirm that Chunyu Shutong was an expert in the *Book of Changes* and the "weft texts" (i.e., the apocrypha), and recount his divinatory feats. The main feature of the passage quoted above, however, is the mention of the *fangshi*, or "masters of the methods," a general designation of practitioners whose homeland—in an actual or emblematic sense—was Shandong. These practitioners

[10] The *Zhengao* (a title also translated as *Revelations of the Perfected*) is a major Taoist work of the late Six Dynasties, where Tao Hongjing reports and codifies the story and the contents of the revelations at the basis of the Shangqing (Highest Clarity) tradition of Taoism, which occurred in 364–70.

were admitted to court by several emperors and local rulers, especially during the Han dynasty, to give advice on governance and other subjects. Their expertise included numerology, astrology, divination, and other sciences that share the same background as the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi*.[11]

Two Views on the Authorship of the Cantong qi

It is hardly possible to overlook the absence of the alchemist Wei Boyang from both accounts reported by Tao Hongjing—who was himself a southerner, a practitioner of alchemy, and a very learned authority on the Taoist local traditions of Jiangnan. Even when Tao Hongjing depicts Chunyu Shutong as a student of alchemy, his master is not Wei Boyang. As we shall see, this is not the only detail suggesting that, while in Tao Hongjing's time Wei Boyang was known as an alchemist, he was not yet known as the author of the *Cantong qi*.[12]

In the next section of his Introduction, we shall look at the broader context of these issues, which directly affect the dating of the text. Here we only need to note that sources dating from the Tang period (seventh-ninth centuries) show that, at that time, there were two main views regarding the authorship and the early transmission of the *Cantong qi*. Both views relate the composition of the *Cantong qi* to the *Longhu jing* (Book of the Dragon and Tiger), an earlier, enigmatic work on which we shall return shortly (pp. 12 ff.).

According to the first view, the primary creator of the *Cantong qi* is Xu Congshi, the master of the "arts of the numbers" who came from Shandong. His disciple, Chunyu Shutong, is a *fangshi* expert in the same field and in the science of prediction. These skills show that those who maintained that the *Cantong qi* originated with Xu Congshi saw the text as a product of the northern *fangshi* milieux based in

[11] On the *fangshi* see Ngo Van Xuyet, *Divination, magie et politique dans la Chine ancienne*, and the biographies translated in DeWoskin, *Doctors, Diviners, and Magicians of Ancient China*.

[12] It should be added that, in another work in which Tao Hongjing ranks a large number of deities and immortals according to the heavens that they inhabit, he cites again Chunyu Shutong (under one of his additional names, Chunyu Zhen), but makes no mention of Wei Boyang. See *Dongxuan lingbao zhenling weiye tu*, 21a and 22a.

Shandong, and as a work belonging in the first place to the cosmological and the esoteric traditions of the Han dynasty. According to this view, Wei Boyang is a disciple of either Xu Congshi or Chunyu Shutong. In more detail, there are three different accounts of the relations among the reputed authors of the *Cantong qi*.[13] (1) Xu Congshi receives the *Longhu jing* from an immortal, and transmits it to his disciple Chunyu Shutong, who writes the second chapter; Wei Boyang's role merely consists in changing the title of this work to *Cantong qi*. (2) Xu Congshi writes the *Longhu jing*; Wei Boyang writes the *Wu xianglei* (The Five Categories) and re-entitles the whole work *Cantong qi*; Chunyu Shutong writes an additional chapter. (3) Xu Congshi writes the first chapter of the *Cantong qi* using the *Longhu jing* as his model; Wei Boyang writes the second chapter; Chunyu Shutong writes the third chapter.[14]

According to the second view, it is Wei Boyang, the master of the alchemical arts, who writes the whole *Cantong qi* on the basis of the *Longhu jing*. As we have seen, Wei Boyang's biography in the *Shenxian zhuan* depicts him as a recluse adept from Jiangnan, who withdraws on a mountain with his disciples in order to compound an elixir that bestows life free from death. The traditions that attributed the authorship of the *Cantong qi* to Wei Boyang deemed the text to be a creation of the alchemical lineages of southeastern China.

These two views coexisted during the Tang period. In the mid-eighth century, Liu Zhigu—who belongs to the alchemical tradition—

[13] These views are documented by Liu Zhigu's *Riyue xuanshu lun* (Essay on the Mysterious Pivot of the Sun and the Moon), in *Daoshu* (Pivot of the Dao), 26.1a-1b; and by the prefaces to the two Tang-dynasty commentaries to the *Cantong qi*, on which see below, § 5. Liu Zhigu's work, dating from ca. 750, is the first extant essay on the *Cantong qi*.

[14] To quote one example of these views, the anonymous Waidan commentary to the *Cantong qi*, dating from ca. 700, is quite explicit about the roles played by Xu Congshi, Chunyu Shutong, and Wei Boyang in the creation of the text: "Xu Congshi transmitted it to Master Chunyu Shutong . . . who wrote another part entitled *The Five Categories* (*Wu xianglei*). . . . Chunyu was the first to transmit the whole text to Master Wei Boyang" (*Zhouyi cantong qi zhu*, Preface, 1a-2a). Elsewhere, this commentary ascribes the *Cantong qi* to Xu Congshi alone. For example, the notes on the verse, "He contemplates on high the manifest signs of Heaven" (11:8), state: "The True Man Xu Congshi looked above and contemplated the images of the trigrams; thus he determined Yin and Yang." Analogous statements are found in the notes to sentences 14:47–49, 37:19–20, and 42:15–16.

reports the second and the third accounts of the creation of the *Cantong qi* cited above; he concludes, however, that Wei Boyang is actually the author of the whole text. Two centuries later, another alchemist, Peng Xiao, also refers to accounts of a shared authorship, but cites and praises Liu Zhigu's discussion, and becomes the first major author to promote the same view.[15] Peng Xiao's narrative, moreover, transforms Wei Boyang into an alchemist who was also a specialist of the "weft texts," precisely the lore in which Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong were also expert. With the development of the Neidan traditions, this view became established. Since then, there has been virtually unanimous consent that the *Cantong qi* was not only transmitted, but also entirely composed, within the context of the alchemical tradition—at least until the early sixteenth century, when the "Ancient Text" of the *Cantong qi* was created, and the two other masters were again assigned a role in its composition (see below, pp. 31 ff.).

The question asked earlier—why an alchemist should hand down his work to two cosmologists—can now be answered, and the answer is plain. When the views of the authorship of the *Cantong qi* changed, the roles of the three characters were inverted. The alchemist is no more a disciple of cosmologists: Wei Boyang is now the master of Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong.

§ 3. THE DATING RIDDLE

The two possible ways of reading of the *Cantong qi* defined at the beginning of this Introduction should be taken into account with regard to any attempt to discuss and establish the date of the text. According to the first reading, the *Cantong qi* has provided the alchemical traditions with an integral description of the principles at the basis of their practices. In agreement with their perspectives, these traditions have called the *Cantong qi* an "alchemical text" and have interpreted all its verses as related to alchemy—including those found in portions concerned with cosmology, with actual or symbolic astronomical phenomena (for example, the joining of the Sun and the Moon at the end of a time cycle), with the True Man and the sage ruler (both seen, in this light, as metaphors of the alchemist), and

[15] See Liu Zhigu's *Riyue xuanshu lun*, 26.1b; and Peng Xiao's commentary to *zhang* 83, quoted above.

with virtually any other subject. This reading has certainly been the most widespread, and has led to the view that the *Cantong qi* has a single author (Wei Boyang), a single date (the Han period), and a single subject (alchemy).

In the second reading, alchemy constitutes, with Taoism (in the sense defined above) and cosmology, one of the three main subjects of the *Cantong qi*, and each subject forms one of three main textual components. The three subjects are integrated with one another into a unique presentation of a doctrine that includes a metaphysics, a cosmology, a description of the highest realized state, and a canonical form of practice. From this perspective, it should be sufficiently clear that those who wove the fabric of this presentation cannot have been either the cosmologists or the alchemists, but only the anonymous authors of the Taoist portions, which describe the state of complete realization by drawing concepts, terms, and images from the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi* (see especially section 18). Being possessed of this state is called in the *Cantong qi* the way of "superior virtue." Alchemy, the only form of practice that the *Cantong qi* upholds, is the complementary, and preparatory, way of "inferior virtue."

The first perspective reflects a traditional truth that can hardly be disputed, and is in all respects inalienable and virtually impervious to historical analysis. The second one, instead, allows a broader scope to inquiries into the origins of the three subjects and the respective textual components. This perspective also clears the complex issue of dating the *Cantong qi* of some of its burden: the received text is the product of a composition process that involved representatives of different traditions, and was completed in several stages. This, in turn, helps to clarify certain controversial aspects of the text and its history.

The Cantong qi *and the* Longhu jing

One of the first questions to address concerns the supposed origins of the *Cantong qi* in an earlier scripture. Several commentaries and other works maintain that Wei Boyang wrote his *Cantong qi* by taking as a model the *Longhu jing*, or *Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger*, a work whose title immediately evokes the alchemical arts.[16]

[16] Dragon and Tiger are, usually, emblems of Yang and Yin, respectively.

This claim is widespread, but is perplexing, since no material or even bibliographic trace of a text called *Longhu jing* exists during the whole first millennium of our era.

The history of the *Longhu jing* is complex, but runs parallel to the traditions about the authorship of the *Cantong qi* that we have outlined above. In the earliest sources, as we have seen, the master associated with the *Longhu jing* is not Wei Boyang, the alchemist, but Xu Congshi, the cosmologist, who is depicted as the original recipient—or even as the author—of this text. In light of the controversies about the authorship of the *Cantong qi*, it seems clear that the accounts associating the *Longhu jing* with Xu Congshi served to answer an important question: How could someone known as a cosmologist and a diviner create a text like the *Cantong qi*, which is substantially (if not entirely, according to the prevalent view) devoted to alchemy? The reply was straightforward: Xu Congshi could write a work on alchemy because he had received—or even, according to some, written—an earlier alchemical text, the *Longhu jing*.

During the Tang period, when different views on the authorship of the *Cantong qi* were still current, a work entitled *Jinbi jing* (Scripture on Gold and Jade) was composed on the basis of the *Cantong qi*.[17] This work is a shorter paraphrase of the *Cantong qi*, approximately corresponding to the first half of Book 1 (sections 1–25 in the present translation). The paraphrase replaces the imagery of the *Cantong qi* with the language of alchemy, and does so with such consistency and persistence that one might call the *Jinbi jing* an alchemical version of the initial portions of the *Cantong qi*, which do not concern alchemy, but cosmology and the Taoist way of "superior virtue."[18] During the Song dynasty, the *Jinbi jing* was chosen to

In alchemy, their roles are inverted: the Dragon is an emblem of True Yin (True Mercury), and the Tiger is an emblem of True Yang (True Lead).

[17] The present version of this work, entitled *Jindan jinbi qiantong jue* (Instructions on Gold and Jade for Comprehending the Unseen by the Golden Elixir), is found in the *Yunji qiqian*, 73.7b-11b. While the present version is anonymous, bibliographic sources attribute this work to Yang Canwei (or Sanwei), adding that it was based on an even earlier work written by Liu Yan during the Six Dynasties. (The presence of the graph *can* 參, or *san* 三, in the author's name is certainly not due to chance.) On this work see Wang Ming, "*Zhouyi cantong qi* kaozheng," 279–83.

[18] To give one example of the textual correspondences, the initial verses of the *Cantong qi* (1:1–2) read: "Qian and Kun are the door and the gate of

represent the "ancient" (i.e., "authentic") text of the *Longhu jing*, and was reentitled *Guwen longhu jing* (Ancient Text of the Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger). Two editions of this work are contained in the Taoist Canon; their text is the same as the *Jinbi jing*.

When the issues of authorship were settled, and Wei Boyang was elected the only author of the *Cantong qi*, most commentators and other authors continued to claim that the *Cantong qi* derives from the *Longhu jing*, but made Wei Boyang, instead of Xu Congshi, the original recipient of this text. Other authors, however, were aware that the *Longhu jing* that existed in their times—in other words, the text that earlier was entitled *Jinbi jing*—was nothing but an alchemical rendition of the *Cantong qi*. For example, Yu Yan wrote in his commentary:

> Essentially, when Master Wei [Boyang] wrote the *Cantong qi*, he borrowed the images of the *Book of Changes* to illustrate the secrets of compounding the Elixir; he did not develop the discourses of the *Longhu jing*. Had he truly developed the discourses of the *Longhu jing*, he would have called his work "The Seal of the Unity of the Three in Accordance with the Dragon and the Tiger," and not "The Seal of the Unity of the Three in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*." (*Zhouyi cantong qi shiyi*, 3a-4a)[19]

The Cantong qi *and the "Studies of the* Book of Changes*"*

The roots of the cosmological discourse of the *Cantong qi* lie in the tradition usually designated in China as *Yixue*, or "Studies of the *Book of Changes*," whose essential elements were elaborated during the Han period (202 BCE-220 CE). This tradition, as its name implies, expands the views of the *Changes* into multiple directions, with emphasis on numerology and prognostication. To some extent, the *Cantong qi* is one example of these developments. Exactly for this

change, the father and the mother of all hexagrams." In the *Jinbi jing*, they read: "The Divine Chamber (i.e., the crucible) is the axis and the hinge of the Elixir, the father and the mother of all minerals." The whole text continues along similar lines.

[19] Yu Yan's words reflect an earlier, similar statement by Zhu Xi, found in his *Zhouyi cantong qi* [*kaoyi*], 1.4b-5a.

reason, the parts of the text concerned with cosmology are those that present the most obscure issues with regard to their date, as they involve their possible origins—not only in a conceptual sense, but also in a hypothetical earlier textual form—within that tradition.

While many analogies are apparent, but not sufficient to shed full light on these issues, several scholars have suggested that the association between the *Cantong qi* and the "Studies of the *Book of Changes*" is manifest in the work of Yu Fan (164–233), the last great cosmologist of the Han period. In this connection, attention has been drawn to what could be the only piece of textual evidence concerning the Han date of the *Cantong qi*, or at least of its cosmological portions. A seventh-century lexicon of classical texts ascribes Yu Fan with a commentary to the *Cantong qi*, and cites a passage from that work that appears to refer to the sentence "Sun and Moon make change," found in the present-day *Cantong qi* (7:3). The passage reads:

> Yu Fan's commentary to the *Cantong qi* says: The graph *yi* 易 ("change") is formed by a "sun" 日 with a "moon" 月 below it. (*Jingdian shiwen*, 2.1a)[20]

This sentence would seem to show that a text entitled *Cantong qi* existed by about 200 CE, and that Yu Fan wrote a now-lost commentary on it. Whether the evidence is conclusive, however, is dubious. It seems impossible to disregard the fact that, if this evidence is accepted, the Han date of the *Cantong qi* is validated by a single sentence, quoted for the first time five centuries after its supposed original date not from the *Cantong qi* itself, but from a related work that is now lost.

The short passage translated above, however, raises other questions that indirectly help to throw light on the history of the text. The sentence apparently referred to by Yu Fan ("Sun and Moon make change") is attributed, by a major Han-dynasty source, to one or more "secret writings" (*bishu*), an expression that is usually deemed

[20] The Chinese text of this passage can also be punctuated in a different way, which yields a quite different translation: "According to Yu Fan's commentary [to the *Book of Changes*], the *Cantong qi* says that this graph (namely, yi 易, "change") is formed by a "sun" with a "moon" below it." The first punctuation, however, fits the pattern of quotations in the *Jingdian shiwen*, and appears to be more accurate than the second one.

to refer to the apocryphal texts.[21] Did Yu Fan, therefore, write a commentary to the *Cantong qi*, or was he ascribed with it by his lineage? If he did write a commentary, was that *Cantong qi* the same as the present-day text, or was it perhaps one of the apocrypha? If an "apocryphal" *Cantong qi* has ever existed, how would it be related to the present-day text? None of these questions can be answered on the basis of direct evidence. Certain bibliographic and textual details, however, clarify some of the issues.

First, Yu Fan is also ascribed with a lost commentary to a work by Jing Fang (77–37 BCE), an earlier cosmologist who had belonged to his own lineage. The title of this work—which is also lost—is *Cantong qi Lüli zhi* (possibly meaning "Monograph on the Pitch-pipes and the Calendar According to the *Cantong qi*").[22] Was this is the work on which Yu Fan wrote the commentary quoted in the seventh-century lexicon? This cannot be known, but is not the point at issue. The point, rather, is that at least one work appears to have existed under the title *Cantong qi*, even before the traditional date in which Wei Boyang is believed to have written the present-day work that bears this title. It is also worthy of note that one of the cosmological portions in the present-day *Cantong qi* contains the expression *lüli* ("pitch-pipes and calendar"; see verse 2:8). Whether Jing Fang's work, or any other lost Han-dynasty text, was a precursor of the current *Cantong qi*, however, is impossible to ascertain.

A second detail is of greater consequence. As we shall see (below, p. 42), the *Cantong qi* represents the cycle of the lunar month by means of the cosmological pattern known as Matching Stems (*najia*). The version of this pattern used in the *Cantong qi* is attributed to Yu Fan. A fragment of his lost commentary to the *Book of Changes* contains this description:

> On the evening of the third day, [the Moon] is an image of Zhen ☳ and comes forth at *geng* 庚. On the eighth day, it is an image of Dui ☱ and appears at *ding* 丁. On the fifteenth day, it is an image of Qian ☰ and is full at *jia* 甲. At the dawn of the sixteenth day, it

[21] See *Shuowen jiezi* (Elucidations on the Signs and Explications of the Graphs), 9B.18a, and the discussion in Wang Ming, "*Zhouyi cantong qi* kaozheng," 242–48. See also note 23 below.

[22] What the title *Cantong qi* may have meant in the first century BCE is an issue in itself. It is simply unimaginable that the "three," at that time, may have been cosmology, Taoism, and alchemy.

> is an image of Xun ☴ and withdraws at *xin* 辛. On the twenty-third day, it is an image of Gen ☶ and disappears at *bing* 丙. On the thirtieth day, it is an image of Kun ☷ and is extinguished at *yi* 乙. (*Zhouyi jijie*, 14.350)

The wording of this passage is notably similar to section 13 of the *Cantong qi*. Moreover, Yu Fan's commentary also contains a description of the conjunction of Sun and Moon at the end of each month (see the translation below, p. 43), a symbolic event that the *Cantong qi* describes, in its turn, in sections 10 and 48. Scholars who uphold Wei Boyang's authorship of the *Cantong qi* (in ca. 150 CE) have suggested that Yu Fan drew these descriptions directly from the *Cantong qi*. The reverse is more likely to be true: the *Cantong qi* presents a poetical rendition of Yu Fan's passages. If this suggestion is correct, not only Yu Fan could not write a commentary to the present-day *Cantong qi*, but the composition of these portions would be postdated by at least one century.

The Cantong qi *and the Apocrypha*

To answer the third question asked above—whether an "apocryphal" *Cantong qi* has ever existed—we should first look in some detail at its context. The tradition of the "Studies of the *Book of Changes*" is also associated with the "weft texts" (*weishu*), i.e., the so-called apocrypha. This body of writings was composed during the Han period with two main purposes, closely related to one another: the esoteric explication of the Classics (*jing*, a word whose primary meaning is "warp") and the legitimation of imperial authority, asserted by means of predictions that were supposedly concealed in the text of the Classics, and that the apocrypha finally disclosed by way of Heaven's revelations. In addition, as we saw at the beginning of this Introduction, these texts were proof of, and key to, access to the very source of those revelations. From this point of view, the *Cantong qi* would be a text that explains, or develops, certain concealed aspects of the *Book of Changes*. The apocrypha once formed a textual corpus of remarkable size. Due to their strong political overtones, however, they were often banned or destroyed in the course of Chinese history, and are now almost exclusively preserved in the form of short quotations in other works.

The association between the *Cantong qi* and the apocrypha has

been suggested by several commentators and many modern scholars. Doubtlessly, several details point to a relation to this body of literature. The most visible indicator, as we saw above, is the three-character title (*Cantong qi*) placed after the name of the correlated Classic (*Zhouyi*, or *Book of Changes*). The *Cantong qi* shares this feature with most apocrypha. For their ideas, imagery, and language, moreover, certain parts of the text seem to reflect the vision of the apocrypha; sections 15–17 may be the clearest example in this regard. The same is true of a few individual verses. The sentence "Sun and Moon make change" (7:3), already cited above in relation to Yu Fan, is said to reflect the views of the apocrypha, which emphasize the idea of the analogic function of forms, including the characters of the written language, and in this perspective develop symbolic etymologies for certain words (this is also the subject of section 6 of the *Cantong qi*).[23] The description of the state of transcendence found in section 27 concludes by saying that the adept will "obtain the Register and receive the Chart," one of similar expressions that in the apocrypha designate the mandate granted by Heaven to a sovereign.[24] The sentence "sesame extends the length of your life" (33:1) is also found, in exactly the same form, among the fragments of one of the best-known apocrypha.[25]

Despite this, there is no precise indication that the *Cantong qi* has ever been a "weft text" in the precise sense of this term at any time of its history. Its title has never been included in the lists of apocryphal works found in the dynastic histories, and none of its verses is quoted in the preserved fragments of those works. While the analogies between the *Cantong qi* and the apocrypha are not in doubt, they appear to derive, in the first place, from the grounds that its cosmological portions share with the "Studies of the *Book of Changes*."

To summarize this part of our discussion, the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* are obviously related to both the "Studies

[23] For example, one of the surviving "weft texts" associated with the *Book of Changes*, the *Qian zuodu* (Opening the Way to the Understanding of Qian ䷀), states that the main meaning of the word *yi* ("change") is "the Sun and the Moon holding one another." See *Isho shūsei*, 1A: 48.

[24] See Seidel, "Imperial Treasures," 308–9.

[25] *Yuanshen qi* (Seal of the Verification of Spirit), in *Isho shūsei*, V:50. Other passages of the *Cantong qi* that may be related to the apocrypha are quoted in Yang Xiaolei, "*Zhouyi cantong qi* yanjiu," 559.

of the *Book of Changes*" and the apocrypha. There is, however, no trace of any direct textual precursor belonging to either tradition; the relation is likely to be one of shared perspectives, language, and imagery, rather than one of direct textual filiation. As for Yu Fan's gloss on the character *yi* ("change"), it does not seem to be sufficiently reliable to date the *Cantong qi* to the Han dynasty. More substantial evidence concerning Yu Fan suggests, on the contrary, that the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* were written, or at least completed, after the end of the Han period.

Relation to Alchemy

Whether the alchemical portions of the *Cantong qi* are concerned with Waidan or with other forms of alchemy is an important question that will be addressed later in the present Introduction. For our present purposes, it suffices to consider how the alchemical model of the *Cantong qi* compares to the model of alchemical texts that share its traditional date.

Among the large number of Chinese scholars who have expressed their views about the date of the *Cantong qi*, the opinions of Chen Guofu (1914–2000) are especially worthy of attention. While not all those who have discussed this subject have been familiar with the alchemical sources—in particular, with the sources of Waidan, the only form in which alchemy is documented during the Han period—Chen Guofu was for several decades the main Chinese expert in this field, and could not fail to notice a major detail: no extant alchemical work dating from the Han period is based on the doctrinal principles of the *Cantong qi*, or uses its cosmological model and its language.[26]

The importance of this remark cannot be underestimated. As we have seen, the portions of the *Cantong qi* concerned with cosmology are rooted in the Han-dynasty traditions centered on the *Book of Changes*, and share the perspectives and language of those traditions. The portions concerned with alchemy, instead, are remarkably different from the methods described in the earliest Waidan texts. In fact, the scope of Chen Guofu's remark may be broadened to include two further points. First, neither the *Cantong qi* nor its cosmological and alchemical models play any visible influence on extant Waidan

[26] See Chen Guofu, "*Zhouyi cantong qi*," 352–54.

texts dating not only from the Han period, but also from the whole Six Dynasties (i.e., until the sixth century inclusive). These texts are based on an alchemical model that is quite different from the one illustrated in the *Cantong qi* (see below, § 8). Second, the same can be said with even more confidence about Neidan, since no text belonging to this branch of Chinese alchemy has existed—or has left traces of its existence—until the eighth century.

Ge Hong, the Baopu zi*, and the* Shenxian zhuan

One of the texts that do not display any influence of the *Cantong qi* and its alchemical views is Ge Hong's major work, the *Baopu zi* (Book of the Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature), which was composed around 320 and contains two chapters entirely devoted to alchemy. Even so, the question of whether Ge Hong knew Wei Boyang and the *Cantong qi* requires attention, because Ge Hong is also the reputed author of the *Shenxian zhuan*, the work that contains Wei Boyang's earliest hagiographic account. Since the evidence in this regard is ambiguous, if not contradictory, I will first outline the main points.

First, in his *Baopu zi*, Ge Hong cites a *Wei Boyang neijing*, or *Inner Scripture of Wei Boyang*, among the texts that belonged to his master.[27] While this work, according to some scholars, can only be the *Cantong qi*, its contents are unknown, and even its title is not recorded elsewhere. Whether the *Wei Boyang neijing* was the *Cantong qi*, or was somehow related to it, is therefore impossible either to demonstrate or to refute. However, Ge Hong's citation provides a first undeniable hint that Ge Hong knew of a Wei Boyang, who gave his name to a text possibly dealing with alchemy.[28]

Second, three distinct passages of the *Baopu zi* mention a court

[27] *Baopu zi neipian*, 19.334. In titles of Taoist texts, *nei* ("inner") usually denotes works that, at least in principle, were not intended for open circulation.

[28] The only clue about the possible alchemical nature of this work is the fact that Ge Hong lists its title immediately after those of two alchemical texts, the *Danhu jing* (Scripture of the Cinnabar Pot, or Scripture of the Elixir's Pot) and the *Minshan jing* (Scripture of Mount Min). While the first text is otherwise unknown, an alchemical method found in the second one is quoted in *Baopu zi neipian*, 4.78 (Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion*, 83–84).

archivist named Boyang, whose son served as a general in the kingdom of Wei, and whose advice was sought by Confucius.[29] These passages do not refer to Wei Boyang, but to Laozi: one of Laozi's names was Boyang—a significant detail to which we shall return later—and his accounts recorded in many sources include all three details mentioned above.[30] Elsewhere in the *Baopu zi*, instead, Boyang is depicted as the model sage of those who retire on a mountain to pursue self-cultivation:

> . . . And when those who peer at life through a pipe, forming personal opinions and expounding mindless speeches, hear that there is someone dwelling in mountains and forests who takes the doings of Boyang as his ideal, they slander and poke fun at him saying, "That is a minor path, not worth bothering with." (*Baopu zi neipian*, 10.185)[31]

It is unlikely that the Boyang mentioned in this passage is Laozi, whose hagiography does not mention his "dwelling in mountains and forests." He might, instead, be Wei Boyang who, as we have seen, retired on a mountain with his disciples in order to compound an elixir.[32]

The third, and main, possible piece of evidence on Ge Hong's knowledge of the *Cantong qi* is the tale of Wei Boyang in the *Shenxian zhuan* (Biographies of the Divine Immortals). This account, already discussed above, has been cited in several later works and many modern studies to confirm the traditional attribution of the *Cantong*

[29] "Boyang was an archivist. . . . Among those who have obtained the Dao, no one is higher than Boyang. He had a son named Zong, who became a general in [the kingdom of] Wei. . . . After paying his respects to Boyang, Confucius wanted to compare himself with Pengzu." *Baopu zi neipian*, 8.148, 3.52, and 7.138; see Ware, 137, 64, and 129, respectively. Pengzu is one of the paragons of the Taoist immortal sage.

[30] On Boyang as a name of Laozi see Kaltenmark, *Le Lie-sien tchouan*, 60–62, and Seidel, *La divinisation de Lao Tseu*, 29- 30 and passim.

[31] See Ware, 167.

[32] It should be added that the passage quoted above bears some similarities with these verses of the *Cantong qi*, which criticize those who practice incorrect alchemical methods: "Relying on *opinion* and *written words* (lit., written speeches), / they *foolishly* act as they like . . . / As if *peering through a pipe*, unable to see broadly, / they can hardly assess what impends" (36:5–6 and 25–26). I am unable to say whether the correspondence is due to chance alone, or the *Cantong qi* verses were composed on the basis of written lore concerning Wei Boyang.

qi to Wei Boyang. The nature and history of the *Shenxian zhuan*—a collection of short tales surviving only in quotations or reconstructed editions, both of which are much later than its supposed date—are not the only factors that raise doubts on the value of this evidence. Taking for granted that Ge Hong did write that anecdote (the first source to report it in full dates only from the year 978), there are good reasons to question the authenticity of the final paragraph that names Wei Boyang the author of the *Cantong qi*: except for this passage, nothing in the tale of the *Shenxian zhuan* would suggest that its subject is the author of the *Cantong q*i.[33]

We shall return to the last point presently. For the moment, it suffices to summarize the evidence seen above. Ge Hong knew of a Wei Boyang, whom he mentions in his *Baopu zi* first as the author of a *Wei Boyang neijing*, a text that may have been concerned with alchemy, and possibly again as a sage who lived secluded among the mountains. Wei Boyang is also the subject of one of the hagiographies found in the *Shenxian zhuan*, another work attributed to Ge Hong. This tale depicts him as an alchemist, and contains a final passage that mentions his authorship of the *Cantong qi*. On the other hand, it is unlikely—at the very least—that Ge Hong knew of a *Cantong qi* written by Wei Boyang. His *Baopu zi*, in fact, does not yield any testimony to the fact that Ge Hong knew the *Cantong qi* at all.

Since Ge Hong knew Wei Boyang, why does he ignore a text of such importance as the *Cantong qi* in the *Baopu zi*? One answer could be that the *Wei Boyang neijing* is the *Cantong qi*; Ge Hong knew of its existence, but did not receive it from his master. This would imply, however, that the *Cantong qi* and its alchemical model originated in the Han period, and were disregarded by the Chinese alchemical tradition for a half millennium. In light of what we have seen about the authorship of the *Cantong qi*, there is another way to find coherence in the apparently inconsistent evidence summarized above. Just like Tao Hongjing, two centuries later, cites the *Cantong qi* without mentioning Wei Boyang, the Wei Boyang known to Ge Hong was not yet acknowledged as the author of the *Cantong qi*. This, however, leaves one question unanswered: Why does Ge Hong cites Wei Boyang

[33] The *Shenxian zhuan* account of Wei Boyang is first found in the *Taiping guangji* (Extended Collection of Records of the Taiping xingguo Reign Period; 978), 2.11–12. Earlier, Liu Zhigu had cited only the final passage in his *Riyue xuanshu lun*, 26.1a.

as the author of the *Cantong qi* in the *Shenxian zhuan*?

The Cantong qi *in Jiangnan*

The last important point to clarify with regard to Ge Hong concerns the final paragraph of Wei Boyang's biography in the *Shenxian zhuan*. This paragraph not only attributes the *Cantong qi* to Wei Boyang, but also criticizes the "scholars" (*ru*) who read the text as a work concerned with cosmology. Since this criticism is expressed in the biography of an alchemist, it should be appraised, once again, in light of the different views about the authorship of the *Cantong qi*.

The first unequivocal mentions of the *Cantong qi* date from around 500 CE. Writing at the very end of the fifth century, Tao Hongjing (456–536) refers, as we saw above, to the *Cantong qi* in connection with Chunyu Shutong. Around the same years, his older contemporary Jiang Yan (444–505) mentions the *Cantong qi* in a poem devoted to an immortal named Qin Gao. The relevant lines of this poem read, in Arthur Waley's translation:[34]

> He proved the truth of the *Cantong qi*;
> in a golden furnace he melted the Holy Drug.
> (*Jiang Wentong jihui zhu*, 3.111)

About one century later, Yan Zhitui (531–91) reports the cryptogram found in one of the final sections the *Cantong qi*.[35]

Although the citations of the *Cantong qi* during the Six Dynasties are few and are dispersed in sources of diverse nature, they provide important details on the history of the text in this period. Jiang Yan was from Jiankang (present-day Nanjing); Tao Hongjing was born and lived in the same area; and Yan Zhitui came from Shandong in the north, but spent part of his life at the court of the southern Liang dynasty in Jiankang. All those who mention the *Cantong qi* during the Six Dynasties were closely related to Jiangnan, showing that the *Cantong qi*, at that time, was transmitted in southeastern China. Jiang Yan's poem attests, moreover, that the *Cantong qi* was used in

[34] See Waley, "Notes on Chinese Alchemy," 8.

[35] *Yanshi jiaxun* (Family Instructions for the Yan Clan), 2.20a; trans. Teng Ssu-yü, *Family Instructions for the Yan Clan*, 185. Note that Yan Zhitui reports only the combination of characters that form the word *zao* ("composed by"), and not those that form the name "Wei Boyang."

association with alchemy by the end of the fifth century.

In the common sense of the term, the history of the *Cantong qi* begins with these citations. The events that followed are best described individually, even though they occurred in parallel to one another. The first point to consider is that the transmission of the *Cantong qi* in Jiangnan is likely to have originated with the milieux that handed down the Han-dynasty "Studies of the *Book of Changes*" and the lore of the apocryphal texts. These milieux included the lineage represented by Yu Fan, who not only came from Jiangnan, but was himself a native of Shangyu, like Wei Boyang and apparently Chunyu Shutong. It is by no means certain that Yu Fan's lineage was directly involved in the transmission of the *Cantong qi*, but several hints seen above—in the first place, his being ascribed with a commentary to the *Cantong qi*—allow this assumption. Whether this and other lineages transmitted a Han-dynasty *Cantong qi*, or a slightly later *Cantong qi* written on the basis of one or more unidentified Han-dynasty writings, is only marginally important. The main point is that these lineages, which were related to the *Book of Changes*, attributed the composition of the *Cantong qi* to representatives of cosmological tradition, namely Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong.

In the early fourth century, Ge Hong (a native of Jiangnan) was familiar with lore about an earlier alchemist named Wei Boyang, but does not seem to have known the *Cantong qi* in any of its forms. About two hundred years later, Tao Hongjing (who came from the same area) cites a *Cantong qi*, but does not mention Wei Boyang as its author. His account, instead, refers to the *Cantong qi* as a source on Chunyu Shutong, and testifies to Chunyu's integration into the southern traditions. The diviner who had learned the "arts of the numbers" from a master in Shandong is said to be a native of Shangyu, like Wei Boyang; he is turned into an alchemist, having received a text on the elixirs from an immortal; and he is appointed as an officer of the otherworldly bureaucracy, in the shape that by that time had been constructed by the Taoist traditions of Jiangnan.

When we try to consider the details seen above in relation to one another, they suggest that the alchemical portions of the *Cantong qi* were composed in Jiangnan after Ge Hong's time. The representatives of the southern alchemical lineages created a new alchemical model that was directly based on the doctrines of the *Book of Changes* and its cosmology, and differed in this and other essential

respects from the one documented by the earlier and contemporary Waidan texts, and by the alchemical chapters in Ge Hong's *Baopu zi*. As we learn from Jiang Yan's poem, this process was essentially achieved by the end of the fifth century, when the *Cantong qi* was used in association with alchemy. We have no evidence that the alchemical portions of the text were already written at that time. Nevertheless, it was certainly as part of these events that Wei Boyang, an exemplary master of the southeastern alchemical traditions, began to be named as the author of the entire *Cantong qi*. As we have seen, several centuries would elapse before this role became widely accepted; in fact, other lineages—not only cosmological, but also alchemical—continued to ascribe the *Cantong qi* to Xu Congshi and Chunyu Shutong even during the Tang dynasty.[36] Wei Boyang was fully accredited with the authorship of the whole *Cantong qi* only around the turn of the first millennium.

Seen under this light, the purpose of the additional final paragraph in the *Shenxian zhuan* biography of Wei Boyang becomes clear: the representatives of the alchemical lineages intended to show that the *Cantong qi* describes the foundations of their own doctrines and practices. This explains why that paragraph not only mentions the alchemist Wei Boyang, but also denounces the "scholars" who, "knowing nothing about the divine Elixir . . . have written several commentaries based on Yin and Yang." Clearly the allusion here is to those who interpreted the *Cantong qi* as a work on cosmology.[37] Under the same light, it is almost impossible to escape the assumption that Wei Boyang's putative disciple "whose surname was Yu," quite oddly mentioned in the *Shenxian zhuan* without his first name, is none other than Yu Fan, the cosmologist, who is now portrayed as a faithful follower of Wei Boyang, the alchemist. Whether or not this assumption is correct, it is hardly conceivable that the final paragraph of the *Shenxian zhuan* biography of Wei Boyang was written by Ge Hong.

[36] We have seen a clear example of this in note 14 above, where the Waidan commentary attributes the *Cantong qi* to Chunyu Shutong.

[37] And not, as is assumed in Schipper and Verellen, *The Taoist Canon: A Historical Companion to the Daozang*, 324, to those who interpreted the text "in sexual terms," who would hardly be called "scholars" (*ru*) in a work like the *Shenxian zhuan*.

Taoism and the "Unity of the Three"

We shall now approach the last and most important historical question that surround the *Cantong qi*: Who wrote the text in its present form? Leaving aside the fact that whoever wrote the *Cantong qi* mastered the art of poetry, any answer to this question can only proceed from consideration of its doctrines. It should also be clear, by now, that the answer cannot consist in naming an author, but a tradition whose representatives are, by definition, anonymous.[38]

One remark is essential but sufficient to answer this question. The distinction between the paths of "superior virtue" and "inferior virtue"—the paths of non-doing (*wuwei*) and of alchemy, respectively—is drawn from the perspective of the former path, and conforms to principles set forth in the *Daode jing* and elaborated on in the *Zhuangzi* (see § 7). From this perspective, the practice of alchemy—performed in accordance with the principles formulated in the *Cantong qi*—represents the preparatory, gradual practice that, if entirely accomplished, grants access to the highest realized state (see *Cantong qi*, section 20, and its notes). This perspective lies at the core of the Taoist portions of the *Cantong qi*, but invests the whole text and gives unity to its three main subjects. If this point is taken into account, it is evident that those who gave the *Cantong qi* its present shape could only be the nameless representatives of the Taoist traditions of Jiangnan, who had essential ties to the doctrines of the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*.

One final point deserves attention. The Taoist portions of the *Cantong qi* contain passages that criticize practices different from the alchemical ones, including the Taoist methods of meditation on the inner deities (see below, § 7 and § 8). Despite this, the *Cantong qi* draws some of its terminology from texts pertaining to Taoist meditation, and in particular from the "Inner" version of the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing*), a work belonging to the Shangqing revelations of 364–70.[39] Since the shared terms are evenly distributed among the

[38] By "present form" I mean a shape substantially similar to the present one, with the likely exception of Book 3 which, as we shall see, is later than the other two Books. I do not mean, in any case, the redaction of the *Cantong qi* that is at the basis of the present translation.

[39] For one of the main examples, see the note to sentence 24:11. See also Pregadio, *Great Clarity*, p. 230 note 31.

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

Conclusion

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

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

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

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

§ 4. THE THREE BOOKS AND THE "ANCIENT TEXT"

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

(1) In all redactions until the one produced by Chen Zhixu in ca. 1330, and in most of the later ones, the *Cantong qi* is divided into three main parts, or "Books" (*pian*).

(2) The last part, or Book 3, contains three distinct compositions, which in certain redactions are followed by an additional "postface."

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

Books 1 and 2: The Main Text

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

On the other hand, one of the most evident, but also most enigmatic, features of Books 1 and 2 is the fact that several sections written in different meters mirror one another. Some of the main correspondences include those between sections 1 and 43, on the representation of change by trigrams and hexagrams; 3 and 45, on the sixty-hexagram cycle; 10 and 48, on the joining of the Sun and Moon;

13 and 49, on the cycle of trigrams; and 39–40 and 62, on the alchemical conjunction of Lead and Mercury. Several scholars have drawn attention to this feature and have discussed the possible historical priorities among these portions of the text. One point, however, does not seem to have been considered. The *Cantong qi* describes three main cosmological cycles: those of the sixty hexagrams during the days, of the eight trigrams during the month, and of the twelve "sovereign hexagrams" (*bigua*) during the year (see below, pp. 41 ff.). The first cycle is described once in four-character verses and once in five-character verses (sections 45 and 3, respectively); the second cycle also is described once in four-character verses and once in five-character verses (sections 49 and 13); but the third cycle is described only in four-character verses (section 51). In the extent to which the twelve-hexagram cycle is integral to the doctrines of the *Cantong qi*, its description may be deemed to be part of the original core of the text; and as long as this assumption is correct, the original core would consist of the portions in four-character verses. Whether and how this may be related to the view that the *Cantong qi* includes a "Canon" and a "Commentary" remains unclear. Nevertheless, the mirrored sections suggest that, in addition to the separate composition of the portions on cosmology, Taoism, and alchemy, the individual sections that form Books 1 and 2 were written in different times.

Book 3: Additional Writings

Book 3 contains three distinct additional compositions:

(1) "Epilogue" ("Luanci," sections 75–81), mostly written according to the *saoti* prosody, so called after the *Lisao* (Encountering Sorrow) piece in the *Songs of Chu* (*Chuci*).[40]

(2) "Song of the Tripod" ("Dingqi ge," section 82), a poem in three-character verses, another prosodic form not found in the first two Books.

(3) "Filling Lacunae" ("Busai yituo," sections 83–88), consisting in a statement that the teachings of the *Cantong qi* are based on the *Book of Changes*, Taoism, and alchemy; a poem on the instant

[40] In some of the *Songs of Chu*, the "Epilogue" is the portion appended to a poem in order to summarize its essential points.

between the end of a time cycle and the beginning of the next one; and a final portion in which the author describes himself and his work. The final portion contains the sentence, "The name of my book is *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*," showing that it concerns the entire text, and not only "Filling Lacunae."[41]

Several commentators have suggested that either the whole Book 3, or only "Filling Lacunae," corresponds to *The Five Categories*, the second work attributed to Wei Boyang in the *Shenxian zhuan*. In certain redactions, moreover, Book 3 is concluded by an anonymous postface entitled "Eulogium" ("Zanxu," not included in the present translation).[42]

The best-known and most important composition of Book 3 is the "Song of the Tripod." This poem can be read a synopsis of the alchemical content of the *Cantong qi*, but one detail shows that its views do not fully match those of Books 1 and 2. Section 51 of the *Cantong qi* describes the cycle of the Sun during the year, saying that the Yang principle rises during the first six months, and declines during the last six months. This cycle, and its description, became the main models for the practice of the "fire times" (*huohou*) in both Waidan and Neidan. According to the "Song," instead, the fire should be strong at the beginning of the heating, mild at the middle,

[41] This section is entitled "Filling Lacunae" by Peng Xiao; "The Five Categories" ("Wu xianglei") by Zhu Xi; and "Postface" ("Xu") by Yu Yan. Chen Zhixu divides it into two parts, respectively entitled "Filling Lacunae" ("Busai yituo," sections 83–85) and "Author's Postface: My Bequest" ("Zixu qihou," sections 86–88).

[42] Yu Yan does not refer to the "Postface" as consisting of "The Five Categories," but of "The Three Categories" ("San xianglei"). In his view, this title refers to the three main subjects of the *Cantong qi*. Several later commentators, including those of the "Ancient Text," have followed Yu Yan's view and have adopted the title "Three Categories" instead of "Five Categories" for the final portion of the text. Yu Yan also suggests that, as a title, "Three Categories" is synonymous with "Seal of the Unity of the Three": *can* 參 corresponds to *san* 三 (both words mean "three"); *tong* 同 ("to join") corresponds to *xiang* 相 ("reciprocal, mutual"); and *qi* 契 (here understood as "token, tally") corresponds to *lei* 類 ('category," but as a verb also meaning "to agree with, to match," like the two parts of a tally). According to this explanation, the title "San xianglei" should be translated "The Mutual Correspondences of the Three." See *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui*, 10.13b-14a, and *Zhouyi cantong qi shiyi*, 23b-24a.

and then again strong at the end; these three stages respectively should last 70, 260, and 30 days. With other details, this shows that the "Song" was composed separately from Books 1 and 2.[43]

The "Ancient Text"

In the early sixteenth century, a new version of the *Cantong qi*, anachronistically called *Guwen cantong qi*, or *Ancient Text of the Cantong qi*, was created on the basis of a complete rearrangement of the scripture. This version divides the sections in verses of four characters from those in verses of five characters, following a suggestion that was first given by Yu Yan in 1284. Its origins can be traced back to Du Yicheng, who came from Suzhou (like Yu Yan) and wrote a now-lost commentary on it in 1517.[44]

Several authors of commentaries to the standard version of the *Cantong qi* have regarded the Ancient Text as spurious, and similar criticism has also been voiced by Chinese scholars from the Qing period onward. This view has been partly influenced by the controversial personality of Yang Shen (1488–1559), who, about three decades after Du Yicheng, claimed to have found the Ancient Text in a stone casket, and published it under his own name. Nevertheless, the prestige enjoyed by the Ancient Text within Ming, Qing, and present-day lineages of Neidan suggests that the verdict of non-authenticity is inaccurate. Not only does the text, despite the different arrangement, include the whole *Cantong qi*, without any addition

[43] Meng Naichang, *Zhouyi cantong qi kaobian*, 47–48, has suggested that the "Song" was included in the *Cantong qi* on the basis of an early record of a different version, entitled "Song of Lord Lao" ("Laojun ge"), which is now included in the biography of Laozi's disciple, Yin Xi, found in *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, 8.5b-6a.

[44] Yu Yan's remarks on this subject are found at the very end of his commentary (*Zhouyi cantong qi fahui*, 9.19b-21a). He refers to this as a sudden realization that he had after he finished to write his work: "Suddenly one evening, while I was in complete quietude, I heard something like a whisper saying: 'Wei Boyang wrote the *Cantong qi*, and Xu Congshi made a commentary. The sequence of the bamboo slips was disrupted; this is why the portions in four-character verses, those in five-character verses, and those in prose are in disorder.' . . . I wish I could subdivide the text into three parts, respectively made of four-character verses, five-character verses, and prose, so that text and commentary are not confused, in order to facilitate the inquiries of future students. However, my book is complete, and I cannot change it."

and with the omission of only a few verses; but no one without a solid knowledge of the standard version of the *Cantong qi*, and of its doctrinal principles, could have fabricated a work of this nature. In the arrangement of the Ancient Text, the four- and five-character verses are not reproduced in the same sequence as in the standard version; and in the new arrangement, the discourse of *Cantong qi* reveals a much clearer pattern.

The account of the composition of the Ancient Text includes all three authors traditionally deemed to have been involved in the creation of the standard version—and this is the main reason why several commentators, for whom Wei Boyang could only be the single author of the whole *Cantong qi*, rejected the Ancient Text altogether.[45] According to the new version, Wei Boyang wrote the "Canon" in verses of four characters; Xu Congshi (whom the Ancient Text exegetes regularly identify as Xu Jingxiu) contributed a "Commentary" in verses of five characters; and Chunyu Shutong added a final section, entitled "The Three Categories." In the Ancient Text, both the "Canon" and the "Commentary" are divided into three chapters, respectively devoted to cosmology, Taoism, and alchemy.

The Ancient Text exists, in its turn, in versions that differ in significant or minor ways from one another in the sequence of their sections. Two of them deserve note, for opposite reasons. One of the best-known versions was edited and commented by Qiu Zhao'ao (1704). Disagreeing with the view that "Canon" and "Commentary" are divided into three main parts respectively devoted to cosmology, Taoism, and alchemy, this commentator reads the whole *Cantong qi* as a Neidan text; and since the arrangement into three parts is irrelevant to his views, he merely subdivides both the "Canon" and the "Commentary" into 18 sections, essentially disrupting the very *raison d'être* of the Ancient Text.[46] On the other hand, the equally well-known commentary written by Liu Yiming in 1799 (entitled *Cantong zhizhi*, or *Straightforward Directions on the Cantong qi*) represents a major revision of the Ancient Text based on its own principles. In

[45] Despite their criticism, the Ancient Text inspired the new, inventive formats of the standard version of the *Cantong qi* contained in the commentaries by Xu Wei (ca. 1570), Li Guangdi (ca. 1700), and Li Shixu (1823). The views of Zhu Yuanyu (1669) and Dong Dening (1787) on the three main subjects of the *Cantong qi* are also clearly inspired by those of the Ancient Text.

[46] See *Guben Zhouyi cantong qi jizhu*, "Liyan ershi tiao," 10a-12a.

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

§ 5. MAIN COMMENTARIES

At least thirty-eight traditional commentaries to the *Cantong qi* are extant, written between ca. 700 and the final years of the Qing dynasty. Different sources—in particular, bibliographies and premodern library catalogues—yield information on about twice as many lost commentaries and closely related works.[47]

Commentaries in the Taoist Canon

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

(1) *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu* (Commentary to the *Cantong qi*). Anonymous, dating from ca. 700, containing the only surviving explication of the *Cantong qi* as a work concerned with Waidan. Only the portion corresponding to Book 1 is extant.[48]

(2) *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Attributed to a venerable Taoist immortal, Yin Changsheng, also dating from ca. 700.

(3) *Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi* (True Meaning of the *Cantong qi*, with a Subdivision into Sections). Peng Xiao (?–955),

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

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

dating from 947. The portion entitled *Zhouyi cantong qi dingqi ge mingjing tu* (The "Song of the Tripod" and the "Chart of the Bright Mirror" of the *Cantong qi*) is printed as a separate work in the Taoist Canon.[49]

(4) *Zhouyi cantong qi kaoyi* (Investigation of Discrepancies in the *Cantong qi*). Zhu Xi (1130–1200), dating from 1197.

(5) *Zhouyi cantong qi*. Chu Yong (also known as Chu Huagu, fl. ca. 1230), dating from ca. 1230.

(6) *Zhouyi cantong qi jie* (Explication of the *Cantong qi*). Chen Xianwei (?–after 1254), dating from 1234.

(7) *Zhouyi cantong qi fahui* (Elucidation of the *Cantong qi*). Yu Yan (1258–1314), dating from 1284. The portion entitled *Shiyi* (Explication of Doubtful Points) is printed as a separate work in the Taoist Canon.

(8) *Zhouyi cantong qi zhu* (Commentary to the *Cantong qi*). Anonymous Neidan commentary, dating from after 1208.

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

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

[49] The "Chart" is Peng Xiao's own work. It illustrates several sets of cosmological emblems used in the *Cantong qi*, with explanatory notes.

the Taoist Canon are those by Chen Xianwei, whose text derives from Peng Xiao; and by Yu Yan, who based his work on Zhu Xi's text, but eliminated many of the archaisms and the peculiar readings that had been introduced by Zhu Xi. Yu Yan's learned commentary contains quotations from about one hundred different texts, and is accompanied by philological notes on variants found in earlier editions.

Later Commentaries

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

With the exception of Zhu Xi's work, all extant commentaries to the *Cantong qi* written through the Yuan period (1279–1368) are related to the Taoist alchemical traditions. During the Ming (1368–1644) and the Qing (1644–1912) dynasties, the *Cantong qi* continued to exert its prestige on Neidan, but its influence also extended to other fields. Zhu Xi's commentary, in particular, inspired many literati to read the text and write about it. The commentaries by Xu Wei (ca. 1570) and Wang Wenlu (1582) during the Ming period, and those by Li Guangdi (ca. 1700), Wang Fu (ca. 1750), and Li Shixu (1823) during the Qing period, are representative of this trend. The redaction by Chen Zhixu was, either on its own or in a substantial way, at the basis of the commentaries by Xu Wei, Wang Wenlu, Li Guangdi, and Wang Fu, as well as those by Zhang Wenlong (1566), Zhen Shu (1636), and Dong Dening (1787). Other commentators, including Lu Xixing (1569, revised in 1573) and Zhu Yuanyu (1669), based their texts on other redactions.[50]

[50] These details are provided on the basis of major textual variants found

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

§ 6. DAO, COSMOS, AND MAN

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

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

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

1. Qian and Kun, Kan and Li: 1, 4–5, 43
2. Sun and Moon: 7, 8, 10, 48
3. Day (60 hexagrams): 3, 45
4. Month (8 trigrams): 13, 49
5. Year (12 hexagrams): 51–52

in different redactions of the *Cantong qi*, which can serve as main indicators of textual filiation. See my work cited in note 47 above.

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

Qian, Kun, Kan, Li

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The Five Agents

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

The agents are generated in the first place by the division of original Unity into Yin and Yang, and by the further subdivision of Yin and Yang into four states. These four states are defined by two distinct series of terms. The first series emphasizes stages of cyclical change, respectively called "minor Yang" (Wood), "great Yang" (Fire), "minor Yin" (Metal), and "great Yin" (Water). The second series, instead, emphasizes the different states of the two polar

principles. Here Water and Fire are Yin and Yang, and Wood and Metal are True Yin and True Yang (*zhenyin* and *zhenyang*), respectively. The second series is especially important in alchemy.

Soil, the fifth agent, is positioned at the center and has both a Yang and a Yin aspect, respectively represented by the celestial stems *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己. Being at the center, Soil stands for the source from which the other four agents derive. It partakes of all of them, and therefore guarantees the conjunction of the world of multiplicity to the original state of Unity (see section 7).

The five agents can be arranged into different sequences. The *Cantong qi* refers to four of these sequences:

(1) The "cosmogonic" sequence is the order in which the agents are generated as part of the cosmogonic process. The sequence is Water 水 → Fire 火 → Wood 木 → Metal 金 → Soil 土. The *Cantong qi* refers to this sequence, in particular, in verses 22:5–6 ("Water is the axis of the Dao: its number is 1") and 72:14 ("the son is at the origin of the five agents," where Water is the first "child" of the One, or Unity).

(2) The "generation" sequence (*xiangsheng*) is the order in which the agents give birth to one another. The sequence is Wood 木 → Fire 火 → Soil 土 → Metal 金 → Water 水 (at the end of the cycle, Water generates Wood). In the *Cantong qi*, whose alchemical model is based on the "conquest" and the "inversion" sequences (see below), the "generation" sequence is virtually ignored. It is incidentally mentioned only in sections 32 and 71 to point out that Soil (which is generated by Fire and generates Metal) conquers Water (which is generated by Metal and generates Wood).

(3) The "conquest" sequence (*xiangke*) is the order in which the agents overcome or displace one another. The sequence is Water 水 → Fire 火 → Metal 金 → Wood 木 → Soil 土 (to be read as "Water conquers Fire; Fire conquers Metal," etc.; at the end of the cycle, Soil conquers Water). This is one of the two main sequences referred to in the *Cantong qi* and in the alchemical traditions based on its doctrines. To give one example of several possible configurations, the two ingredients of the Elixir correspond to Water and Fire; first Water (containing True Lead) conquers Fire (containing True Mercury); then Soil (the agent representing the Elixir) conquers Water (see, e.g., 32:13–14: "When Water flourish-

es, Fire is extinguished, and both die, together returning to generous Soil").

(4) The "inversion" sequence consists in the inversion of the "generation" sequence. This is the second main arrangement of the agents referred to in the alchemical portions of the *Cantong qi*. The inversion concerns two pairs of agents. While in the "generation" sequence Wood generates Fire, and Metal generates Water, in the alchemical process it is Fire (native cinnabar) that generates Wood (True Mercury), and Water (black lead) that generates Metal (True Lead). In other words, Yang generates True Yin, and Yin generates True Yang. This pattern is explicitly mentioned, e.g., in verses 23:1–2 ("Metal is the mother of Water — [but] the mother is hidden in the embryo of her son") and 72:1–4 ("When the Wooden essence of cinnabar finds Metal, they pair with each other: Metal and Water dwell in conjunction, Wood and Fire are companions").

Other Emblems

The other main sets of cosmological emblems used in the *Cantong qi* are the following:

*Celestial Stems (*tiangan*) and Earthly Branches (*dizhi*)*. These two series of emblems, respectively made of ten and twelve items, serve to mark directions of space as well as units of time. Each series is associated with the five agents and, through them, with all other sets of entities and phenomena categorized according to the quinary pattern (see tables 12 and 13). In the *Cantong qi*, the two main stems are *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己; they are associated with the agent Soil and represent the Yang and Yin aspects of Unity, respectively (see sections 7, 32, and 72). The branches are mainly used to represent the individual segments of temporal cycles based on the duodenary pattern, namely the day with its twelve "double hours" and the year with its twelve months (see especially sections 3, 45, and 51).

*Pitch-pipes (*lü*), or "Bells and Pitch-pipes" (*zhonglü*)*. This series of twelve emblems (see table 11) performs a function virtually identical to the twelve earthly branches (see especially section 51).

*Lunar Lodges (*xiu*)*. The twenty-eight lodges (see table 16) are con-

stellations that the Sun crosses in its apparent journey through the sky during the year. Like the two previous sets, their function in the *Cantong qi* is purely emblematic: being divided into four groups of seven, they represent the four quarters of space, and therefore are associated with the four external agents (see sections 49 and 73).

Time Cycles

As was mentioned above, the cosmological portions of the *Cantong qi* give emphasis to three emblematic time cycles: the day, the month, and the year. These cycles manifest the presence of the One Breath of the Dao in the cosmos. All of them—but especially the third one—became models of the "fire times" (*huohou*) in alchemy, which determine the process needed to heat the Elixir.

Sixty Hexagrams: The Diurnal Cycle. The first pattern concerns the thirty days of the lunar month (see sections 3 and 45). During each day, the Yang, active principle prevails at daytime, from dawn to dusk, and the Yin, passive principle prevails at nighttime, from dusk to dawn. The two parts of the day are ruled by a pair of hexagrams: a Yang hexagram presides over the first, "outward" half, and a Yin hexagram presides over the second, "inward" half.

Accordingly, sixty of the sixty-four hexagrams are distributed among the thirty days of the month (see table 7). The remaining four hexagrams, namely Qian ䷀, Kun ䷁, Kan ䷜, and Li ䷝, reside at the Center; they enable the time cycles to occur, but are not part of their operation. The sixty hexagrams follow one another in the order in which they are arranged in the *Book of Changes* and are described in its appendix entitled "Hexagrams in Sequence." In this appendix, the hexagrams are sorted into pairs, formed either by inverting the solid and broken lines of the first hexagram (e.g., Qian ䷀ is followed by Kun ䷁) or by turning the first hexagram upside down (e.g., Zhun ䷂ is followed by Meng ䷃). Zhun ䷂ and Meng ䷃, the first and second hexagrams after Qian and Kun, respectively correspond to daytime and nighttime of the month's first day. Jiji ䷾ and Weiji ䷿, the next-to-last and last hexagrams, respectively correspond to daytime and nighttime of the month's last day.

Therefore the rise and decline of Yin and Yang during the day is marked and measured by the twelve individual lines of the ruling pair of hexagrams. Each line is associated with one of the twelve "double

hours." The twelve lines, moreover, are related to the twelve earthly branches (see fig. 4): the rise of the Yang principle along the six lines of the first hexagram is represented by the first six branches (*zi* 子, *chou* 丑, *yin* 寅, *mao* 卯, *chen* 辰, and *si* 巳), and the rise of the Yin principle along the six lines of the second hexagram is represented by the last six branches (*wu* 午, *wei* 未, *shen* 申, *you* 酉, *xu* 戌, and *hai* 亥). (Section 45 uses a different, more complex set of associations with the branches; see the note to table 8.)

"Matching Stems": The Monthly Cycle. The second main cosmological cycle described in the *Cantong qi* concerns the thirty days of the lunar month. This cycle, described by the device known as *najia*, or Matching Stems, is the subject of sections 13 and 49.[51]

As we saw above, the version of the *najia* device used in the *Cantong qi* is ascribed to Yu Fan. In this version, the month is divided into six parts of five days each: 1–5, 6–10, 11–15, 16–20, 21–25, and 26–30 (compare *Cantong qi*, 3:1: "In one month there are six nodes of five days"). Six trigrams, namely, Zhen ☳, Dui ☱, Qian ☰, Xun ☴, Gen ☶, and Kun ☷, are matched, with the corresponding stems, to nodal days in the waxing and waning of the Moon (see table 10): the 3rd (middle day of the first node), the 8th (middle day of the second node), the 15th (last day of the third node), the 16th (first day of the fourth node), the 23rd (middle day of the fifth node), and the 30th (last day of the sixth node). The six trigrams represent the growth and the decline of the Yang principle (the solid line ⚊), from its birth at the beginning of the month to its complete obscuration at the end of the month.

The most significant aspect of the Matching Stems is the event that happens between the end of a lunar cycle and the beginning of the next one. Yu Fan describes this event saying that, during the night of the thirtieth day, the Moon "flows to *wu* 戊," the Yang celestial stem that is associated with Soil and the Center and represents the Moon's own inner brilliance (True Yang within Yin). There the Moon joins with the Sun, whose inner light is represented by *ji* 己, the Yin stem associated with Soil and the Center (True Yin within Yang):

[51] In the name *najia*, the term *jia* literally denotes the first celestial stem, but refers by extension to all ten stems, which are matched with (*na*, lit. "received by") the trigrams or the hexagrams.

> Between the night of the month's last day and the dawn of next month's first day, the Moon flows to *wu* 戊. The center of the Sun is Li ☲; being an image of Li, the Sun accords with *ji* 己. *Wu* and *ji* are the positions of the agent Soil: their images appear in the Center. (*Zhouyi jijie*, 14.350)

This event is the subject of sections 10 and 48 of the *Cantong qi*. The monthly conjunction of the Sun (日) and the Moon (月) regenerates the light (明) after the darkness of the month's last night. At the end of the month, Kun ☷, pure Yin, stands for the complete obscuration of the Yang principle, and now dominates over the entire cosmos. However, being the mother, Kun gives birth to her first son, Zhen ☳, the initial trigram in the new lunar cycle, whose lower Yang line represents the rebirth of light. After an instant of suspension, time again begins to flow, and the next month begins.

"Twelve-Stage Ebb and Flow": The Yearly Cycle. The third main cosmological cycle, known as Twelve-stage Ebb and Flow (*shi'er xiaoxi*), represents cyclical change by the twelve so-called "sovereign hexagrams" (*bigua*). In a way similar to the Matching Stems pattern, here too the solid and broken lines flow first upwards and then downwards; however, while the Matching Stems device takes the month as a time unit, the "sovereign hexagrams" reproduce the rise and fall of Yin and Yang during the year (see table 11).

This cycle is the subject of section 51 of the *Cantong qi*. Beginning with Fu ䷗, which represents the first stage of the growth of Yang, each hexagram represents one lunar month. The twelve-stage sequence makes it possible to establish correspondences with other duodenary series: the earthly branches, the pitch-pipes, and the watches of the day (*shi*, often referred to as "double hours"). More details on this pattern will be found in the notes to section 51.

The Artisan and the Charioteer

One of the initial passages of the *Cantong qi* establishes a similitude between "the Way of Yin and Yang" and the crafts of the artisan and the charioteer, who "level the marking-cord and the plumb-line, hold the bit and the bridle, align the compass and the square, and follow the tracks and the ruts" (2:3–6). These images should be given much more attention than they can receive here. I will point out a few of

their main values and associations.

Compass, square, plumb-line, and marking-cord. These tools stand—in this order—for Heaven and Earth (respectively said in the Chinese tradition to be "round" and "square"), the vertical axis and the horizontal plane (respectively pertaining, in their turn, to Heaven and Earth). The symbolic functions of these tools are to fathom the patterns of Heaven and Earth, and to reproduce those patterns in different microcosmic settings: the kingdom, the alchemical laboratory, the human being.

The four tools, as well as other implements that perform analogous functions (the level,[52] the scale, and the weight) are mentioned together in several early Chinese texts belonging to different traditions or schools of thought. At the center of these descriptions is the king. In this context, the artisan's tools refer to the principles that serve as a basis for governance; they signify, in particular, the laws and ordinances issued by the sage ruler in accordance with the patterns of Heaven and Earth, and the "rites" (*li*, i.e., the fundamental social institutions and traditions), which should comply with the same patterns. One of many relevant passages found in those texts states:

> Laws and ordinances are the compass, the square, the marking-cord, and the plumb-line to administer the people. If the square is not aligned, it cannot make things squared; if the marking-cord is not reliable, it cannot make things straight. The laws are established jointly by the lord and his ministers; the power is held only by the ruler. (*Guanzi*, 17.1/123/27)[53]

The most significant point to note is that these tools are often cited in the *Zhuangzi*, where their image, however, becomes unquestionably negative. In this work we read, for example:

> Huizi said to Zhuangzi: "I have a big tree of the kind men call *shu*. Its trunk is too gnarled and bumpy to apply a marking-cord or a plumb-line to, its branches too bent and twisty to match up to a compass or square." . . . Zhuangzi said: "Axes will never

[52] Note that the word "level," *zhun*, is used as a verb in the *Cantong qi* passage quoted above.

[53] See Rickett, *Guanzi*, 2:210.

> shorten its life, nothing can ever harm it. If there's no use for it, how can it come to grief or pain?" (*Zhuangzi*, 1.39)[54]

The same negative view is expressed in this passage::

> The potter says, "I'm good at handling clay! To round it, I apply the compass; to square it, I apply the square." The carpenter says, "I'm good at handling wood! To arc it, I apply the curve; to make it straight, I apply the marking-cord." But as far as inborn nature is concerned, the clay and the wood surely have no wish to be subjected to compass and square, curve and plumb-line. (*Zhuangzi*, 9.330)[55]

These passages might appear to expose a major conflict between the views of the *Zhuangzi* and those of the *Cantong qi*. It is not difficult, however, to note that the artisan's tools perform their essential functions in the context of the cosmological sciences (the art of government, the alchemical arts), which correspond to what the *Cantong qi* calls the way of "inferior virtue." Both passages of the *Zhuangzi* quoted above contrast the use of those tools to the operation of non-doing (the *shu* tree, which preserves itself by its being "useless" and therefore "not used") and to the cultivation of the "inborn nature," which correspond to what the *Cantong qi* calls the way of "superior virtue."

Bit, bridle, tracks, and ruts. The other terms mentioned in the passage of the *Cantong qi* quoted above evoke the art of charioteering. The images of the chariot and its parts are among the most recurrent ones in the *Cantong qi*.[56] They pertain to three main contexts, each of which is related to the others.

The first context is the Taoist vision of the cosmos: the chariot, and particularly its wheels, is a metaphor of the cosmos' constitution and functioning. The wheel represents the circular compass of space and the cyclical movement of time; the hub that is placed at its center—an image of the emptiness that gives birth to existence—

[54] Trans. Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 35, slightly modified.

[55] Trans. Watson, 104, slightly modified.

[56] For references, see the Index of Main Subjects at the end of this book, under the entries "chariot"; "bit and bridle"; "hub and axle"; and "wheel and spokes."

holds the axle, which is made by Qian and Kun joined to one another (see *Cantong qi*, section 1).

The second context is the art of rulership—an association immediately shown by the word *yu* 御, whose meanings include "driving a chariot," "mastering a subject," and "governing a country." On high, the chariot of the supreme Emperor of Heaven is the Northern Dipper, which is placed at the center of the cosmos and rules on the sectors of space and the sequences of the time (see the notes to section 15). Below, analogously, the human ruler drives a chariot that is led by a dragon and a mare (two traditional images of Qian and Kun), and bears the emblems of the *Book of Changes* that represent the different states of the unfolding of space and time (see section 43).

Third, and most important, the art of charioteering is a traditional analogy for the operation of the Taoist saint, as described, for example, in this passage of the *Liezi*:

> If you respond with the bridle to what you feel in the bit, with the hand to what you feel in the bridle, with the mind to what you feel in the hand, then you will see without eyes and urge without a goad; relaxed in mind and straight in posture, holding six bridles without confusing them, you will place the twenty-four hooves exactly where you want them, and swing around, advance and withdraw with perfect precision. (*Liezi*, 5.185–86)[57]

All three contexts and functions described above are unified in one of the passages that describe the saintly man in the *Huainan zi*:

> The great man is tranquil and has no thoughts. Heaven is his canopy, Earth is his chariot, the four seasons are his steeds, and Yin and Yang are his charioteers. By riding the clouds and traveling in the mist, he is one with the creation and transformation of things. . . . Because Heaven is his canopy, there is nothing that he does not encompass; because the Earth is his chariot, there is nothing that he does not carry; because the four seasons are his steeds, there is nothing that he does not lead; because Yin and

[57] Trans. Graham, *The Book of Lieh-tzu*, 114. A passage immediately preceding this one is translated below in the note to verse 58:5. — Considering the symbology of the chariot, it is impossible to disregard the analogy between the six horses of the *Liezi* and the six dragons that represent the stages of the lunar cycle. See the notes to section 49 of the *Cantong qi*.

> Yang are his charioteers, there is nothing that he does manage. (*Huainan zi*, 1.18, 22)[58]

§ 7. THE WAY OF "NON-DOING"

Either as a direct reflection of its historical origins, or to assert in an explicit way its roots in Han-dynasty legacies, the *Cantong qi* refers to Taoism as "Huang-Lao" (26:27, 84:3, and 87:10), one of the names by which the Taoist tradition was known during the Han period.[59] By this term, however, the *Cantong qi* means the foundational principles expressed in the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, two works that are repeatedly quoted in the Taoist portions of the text.[60] The foremost of these principles, for the *Cantong qi*, is "non-doing" (*wuwei*), which defines the operation of the Taoist saint in the world. In relation to this theme, the *Cantong qi* also defines the scope of the only form of practice that it upholds—the alchemical conjunction of Lead and Mercury—and sharply criticizes other methods or pursuits.

The main subjects of the Taoist portions of the *Cantong qi* are the following:

1. Distinction between "superior virtue" and "inferior virtue": 20–21
2. "Superior virtue": 18–19, 58–60
3. "Inferior virtue": 22–25
4. The origins of existence: 53–56
5. The natural course of things: 57
6. Criticism of other practices: 26–27

[58] See Le Blanc and Mathieu, *Huainan zi*, 18.

[59] The term "Huang-Lao" derives from the names of the Yellow Emperor (Huangdi) and Laozi. From a historical point of view, the contours of this branch of Taoism are not entirely clear; it seems to have been based on the teachings of the *Daode jing* combined with the techniques of the *fangshi* (the above-mentioned "masters of the methods"), and to have placed emphasis on the application of those teachings and techniques to the art of government. The Yellow Emperor, one of the mythical sovereigns and founders of the Chinese civilization, was the patron deity of the *fangshi*, an early recipient of alchemical revelations, and—most important—the model ruler who applies Laozi's teachings to his governance.

[60] I have used above, and will continue to use in the rest of this book, the word "Taoism" to refer to these portions and themes of the *Cantong qi*. The present section clarifies how this term is relevant to the *Cantong qi*.

Superior Virtue, Inferior Virtue

Section 20 of the *Cantong qi* states:

> "Superior virtue has no doing":
> it does not use examining and seeking.
> "Inferior virtue does":
> its operation does not rest.

These verses are directly based on a passage of the *Daode jing*:

> Superior virtue has no doing:
> there is nothing whereby it does.
> Inferior virtue does:
> there is something whereby it does.
> (*Daode jing*, 38)

In both the *Daode jing* and the *Cantong qi*, the subject of these verses is the distinction between non-doing (*wuwei*) and doing (*youwei*), referred to as the ways of "superior virtue" (*shangde*) and "inferior virtue" (*xiade*), respectively. This point, which is essential to understand the doctrinal perspectives of the *Cantong qi*, will be discussed here mainly by means of quotations from the commentaries by Chen Zhixu and Liu Yiming.

To explicate the way of superior virtue, Chen Zhixu refers to another well-known statement of the *Daode jing*, which describes the operation of non-doing saying: "Decrease and then again decrease until there is no doing: there is no doing, but nothing is not done" (*Daode jing*, 48). Chen Zhixu writes:

> Superior virtue refers to the one who embodies complete virtue, to the person for whom "nothing is not done." . . . This is the transformation operated by the saintly man who performs non-doing, the function of the great man who achieves non-doing. . . . In superior virtue "there is no doing, but nothing is not done." . . . Therefore the *Cantong qi* says, "it does not use examining and seeking."

Chen Zhixu then continues by describing the way of inferior virtue:

> Inferior virtue refers to the one who "steals the creation and transformation [of things]," to the person who "thieves the ten

> thousand things." . . . This is the way of the saintly man who "is in accordance with his inner nature," the function of the man of spirit who "does." . . . In inferior virtue there is doing and something whereby it does. . . . Therefore the *Cantong qi* says, "its operation does not rest." (*Zhouyi cantong qi zhujie*, commentary to *zhang* 7)[61]

According to Chen Zhixu, therefore, in the way of superior virtue the state prior to the separation of the One into the two is spontaneously attained. The distinction between "one" and "two" does not even arise, and the unity of the precelestial and the postcelestial domains is immediately realized. There is no need to seek the One Breath, and therefore no support (no "whereby," *yi* 以) is necessary to find it. Inferior virtue, instead, focuses on seeking; its unceasing search of the One Breath needs supports, and the postcelestial domain is "used" (*yi* 以) to find the precelestial state hidden within it.

The explanation given by Liu Yiming is analogous, but more elaborate. First, Liu Yiming says that, in the way of superior virtue, "one embraces the Origin and guards Unity, and performs the way of non-doing; thus one can exhaust all pursuits." In the way of inferior virtue, instead, "one begins from effort and ends with stability, and performs the way of doing; then one is able to revert to the Origin." Next, Liu Yiming gives a clear explanation of the differences between the two paths:

> The reason why superior virtue "does not use examining and seeking" is that in the person of superior virtue, Celestial Reality has never been damaged and extraneous breaths have never

[61] The phrases "stealing the creation and transformation" and "thieving the ten thousand things" allude to the man who seeks and finds the secret of Nature, the One Breath underlying and giving birth to multiplicity. Both expressions derive from texts that played a major influence within the Neidan tradition. The *Yinfu jing* (Scripture of the Hidden Response) says: "Heaven and Earth are the thieves of the ten thousand things, the ten thousand things are the thieves of man, and man is the thief of the ten thousand things." The *Ruyao jing* (Mirror for Compounding the Medicine) says: "Thieve Heaven and Earth, seize creation and transformation!" "Being in accordance with one's inner nature" derives, instead, from the opening sentences of the *Zhongyong* (The Middle Course), a Confucian work sometimes quoted by Neidan authors: "What Heaven has conferred is the inner nature; being in accordance with inner nature is the Way; cultivating the Way is the teaching."

> entered. Since one immediately awakens to one's fundamental nature, there is nothing to cultivate and nothing to verify. One goes directly to the "other shore" (*bi'an*, *nirvāṇa*), and the function of examining and seeking does not operate.
>
> The reason why the operation of inferior virtue "does not rest" is that Celestial Reality is lacking, and cognition has begun. Although one could immediately awaken to one's fundamental nature, one cannot follow it as it is. One must use the way of gradual cultivation and the function of "augmenting and decreasing": by augmenting and then again augmenting, by decreasing and then again decreasing, one comes to what cannot be augmented or decreased. When Righteousness is pure and Humanity is ripe, one reaches the point of cessation. This is why the unceasing use [of inferior virtue] is valuable.

In its literal meaning, "augmenting and decreasing" (*zengjian*) is a Neidan term that refers to "augmenting Mercury" and "decreasing Lead" when, after the Elixir has been compounded, one should terminate "doing" and enter the state of "non-doing." At that time, Lead, which represents the One Breath—and the very search of the One Breath—decreases, and Mercury, which represents one's own fundamentally pure consciousness, free from any flaws, increases.

Despite the significant differences between superior and inferior virtue, Liu Yiming emphasizes that the two paths lead to same goal:

> Superior virtue and inferior virtue are different and are not the same. Therefore their uses are dissimilar. However, when inferior virtue comes to the state in which Righteousness is pure and Humanity is ripe, it leads to the same goal as superior virtue.[62]

Liu Yiming concludes his explication by saying:

> To tentatively illustrate the meaning of "its operation does not rest" with regard to inferior virtue, it consists in the way of revert-

[62] "Righteousness is pure and Humanity is ripe" is a Neo-Confucian expression. To understand the use that Liu Yiming makes of this expression, it should be remembered that the *Daode jing* passage (section 38) quoted above continues by describing the rise of Humanity (*ren*) and Righteousness (*yi*)—the two main "Confucian" virtues—as due to the loss of the Dao and of "superior virtue." "Righteousness is pure and Humanity is ripe" describes, in Liu Yiming's usage, the state in which these virtues return to their perfect condition, so that they also become expressions of "superior virtue."

> ing to the state prior to Heaven within the state posterior to Heaven. Reverting to the state prior to Heaven within the state posterior to Heaven is the way of "knowing the white and keeping to the black." (*Cantong zhizhi*, "Jingwen," "Zhongpian")

The verse "Know the white, keep to the black" (derived from the *Daode jing*, 28) introduces the description of the main principles of alchemy in the *Cantong qi* (see section 22). In other words, as Liu Yiming points out, the way of "inferior virtue" is the way of alchemy. Performing a practice—either "internal" or "external"—is a form of "doing": the alchemical process is conducted in order to (*yi* 以) attain the realized state; its purpose is to prepare one to enter the state of "non doing," and is fulfilled only when this happens. This process—which is gradual, and differs in this respect from immediate realization, the prerogative of superior virtue—is at the core of alchemy, in all of its forms. Later Neidan texts will continue to express the same view in similar terms.[63]

At the same time, the distinction between "superior virtue" and "inferior virtue" refers to the difference between the doctrine and its application to a particular cosmological science—in this case, alchemy.[64] This distinction is analogous to the one made in the Western esoteric tradition between the "great mysteries" and the "small mysteries." With regard to this point, the *Cantong qi* presents a general exposition of the doctrine, defines the difference between the two related types of realization, and describes the main features of both.

[63] To give one example, *Awakening to Reality* (*Wuzhen pian*), the text at the basis of several Neidan traditions, states: "It begins with *doing*, and hardly can one see a thing, / when it comes to *non-doing*, all begin to understand. / But if you only see *non-doing* as the essential marvel, / how can you know that *doing* is the foundation?" ("Jueju," poem 42).

[64] The three main cosmological sciences in the Chinese tradition are the "art of government," which seeks the balance of Heaven, Earth, and Man, in order to guarantee their conformity and alignment to the Dao; ritual, which is performed for larger or smaller communities, in order to renew their "alliance with the Dao"; and alchemy, which is performed by the individual in order to "return to the Dao." The first of these sciences is discussed in the *Daode jing* itself; the second and the third ones were developed within the Taoist tradition.

The True Man

The realized being is called True Man (*zhenren*) in the *Cantong qi* (33:18, 58:3, 82:58).[65] There is no need to spend too many words in order to define his inner condition. Suffice it to remark that its descriptions in the *Cantong qi* are based on passages of the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*, the two main texts that define the state of complete realization according to the principles and the discourse of Taoism (see especially the notes to section 18).

As much care as possible should be taken to avoid reading these portions of the *Cantong qi* as descriptions of "alchemical" or other practices. This applies, for example, to section 60, which is concerned with the breathing of the realized person. Breath, says this passage, "will stream from the head to the toes; on reaching the end, it will rise once again" (60:5–6). Just like the True Man in the *Zhuangzi*, who "breathes through his heels," the form of breathing described in the *Cantong qi* occurs spontaneously to those who operate in the world taking the Dao as their model.[66]

Criticism of Other Practices

The *Cantong qi* devotes much attention to practices deemed to be inadequate for true realization. These practices are of two kinds. The first consists of non-alchemical practices, including breathing, meditation on the inner gods, sexual practices, and worship of spirits and minor deities (see especially section 26). All these practices and methods were current during the Han period and the Six Dynasties. The *Cantong qi* follows here a trend that had begun in earlier Taoist works, the first of which is the *Zhuangzi* with its disapproval of breathing methods and *daoyin* ("guiding and pulling," a practice based on sets of bodily postures).[67] Similar warnings about the perfor-

[65] *Zhenren* is also translated as Perfected and in other ways. My use of the word "man" here and elsewhere in this book is conventional. Note that *ren* in Chinese means "person," and the premodern sense of "man" is "human being."

[66] For the sentence referred to above cf. *Zhuangzi*, 6.228: "The True Man breathes through the heels, the common man breathes through the throat." See Watson, 78.

[67] "Inspiring and expiring while emitting the sounds *chui* and *xu*, exhaling

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

The second kind of criticism is addressed to alchemical practices that are not based on the principle of "being of the same kind" (or "category," *tonglei*), a principle that receives one of its first enunciations in the *Zhuangzi*.[68] Section 36 of the *Cantong qi* reproves several Waidan methods. It is enough to read that section with attention to notice that the criticism is not addressed to Waidan per se, but to the Waidan methods that are not based on the conjunction of lead and mercury. Only lead and mercury, according to the *Cantong qi*, are of the "same kind" as Qian and Kun, and can represent and enable their conjunction.

§ 8. ALCHEMY IN THE *CANTONG QI*

For its own nature, the alchemical language lends itself to two main functions. The first is the description of alchemical ideas and practices in the strict sense. The second is the illustration of metaphysical and cosmological doctrines, many of whose features can be expressed by means of alchemical symbolism and vocabulary. When the symbolic usage of the language prevails over the literal one (as it does in the *Cantong qi*), the alchemical terms connote in the first place formless principles, and the material entities or phenomena literally denoted by those terms are seen as instances of those principles. A particular alchemical term, in this way, essentially becomes another name of the principle that it connotes; as such, it can also be used to refer to any entity or phenomenon that, in the alchemical discourse, is

the old and inhaling the new [breath], hanging like a bear and stretching like a bird—these are only methods for longevity. Masters of *daoyin*, people who 'nourish their form' (the physical body), and those who pursue a longevity like Pengzu's are fond of this. However . . . being longevous without practicing *daoyin* means forgetting everything but possessing everything. Calmly residing in the Ultimateless, where all good things come to attend—this is the Way of Heaven and Earth, and is the virtue of the sage" (*Zhuangzi*, 15.237–38; see Watson, pp. 167–68).

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

seen as an instance of that principle. To give one example, the alchemical term "true lead" denotes refined lead, but connotes the principle of True Yang. "True Lead" thus becomes another name of True Yang, and in this function refers not only to refined lead, but also to other instances of the same principle. Analogously, any other term or image that literally denotes an instance of True Yang can connote "true lead": for instance, Metal, the White Tiger, the color white, Kan ☵, the earthly branches *geng* 庚 and *xin* 辛, and so forth.

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

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

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

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

To point out the main differences between the alchemical model of the *Cantong qi* and the earlier Waidan model, this section will be introduced by a brief description of the main features of early alchemy.

Main Features of Early Alchemy

The first identifiable tradition in the history of Chinese alchemy, known as Taiqing (Great Clarity), developed between the third and the sixth centuries in Jiangnan, not far from Wei Boyang's putative birthplace. In this tradition, compounding the elixirs constitutes the central part of a larger process that consists of several stages, each of which is marked by the performance of rites. Receiving the scriptures and the oral instructions, building the laboratory, kindling the fire, and ingesting the elixirs require offering pledges to one's master and to the gods, observing rules on seclusion and purification, performing ceremonies to delimit and protect the ritual area, and making invocations to the highest deities asking that they favor the success of the alchemical work.

Within this ritual framework, the cosmological and alchemical model used in the *Cantong qi* plays no role. Not only are the emblems of the *Book of Changes*, which represent sequences of cosmological configurations and become fundamental in the later tradition, entirely ignored; but more importantly, no attempt is made to reproduce those sequences by means of the elixir ingredients.

In this respect, one of the most relevant features of the Taiqing and other early alchemical texts is the subordinate role attributed to lead and mercury, which are never used together as the only ingredients of any elixir. A lead-mercury compound is sometimes used as the lower and higher layers in the tripod, with the main ingredients of the elixirs; its function is to symbolically incorporate Heaven and Earth into the vessel. The compound, however, is not an elixir in itself.[69] The *Cantong qi*, instead, proposes a model of alchemical doctrine and practice in which the two metals are given prominence. This model came to influence virtually the entire later history of Chinese alchemy.[70]

[69] See Pregadio, *Great Clarity*, pp. 75–76.

[70] On the influence of the cosmological model of the *Cantong qi* on Waidan, see Sivin, "The Theoretical Background of Elixir Alchemy." There

The Alchemical Model of the Cantong qi

The alchemical discourse of the *Cantong qi* revolves around Lead and Mercury. Its basic principles are simple and straightforward, and proceed directly from its views on the relation between the Dao and the "ten thousand things" (*wanwu*). As in the whole of Taoism, this relation is explained by means of a sequence of stages. The absolute principle establishes itself as Unity, which divides itself into the active and the passive principles—namely, Qian and Kun, respectively equivalent to original Yang and Yin, or True Yang and True Yin. The re-conjunction of these principles gives birth to all entities and phenomena in the world. All these "stages" occur simultaneously.

From its own perspective, dominated by duality, the cosmos is a reflection of the absolute principle; and like all reflections, it is an inverted image of that principle. In the cosmos, True Yang is concealed within Yin, and True Yin is concealed within Yang. Each Yang entity, therefore, harbors True Yin, and vice versa. In the terminology of the *Book of Changes*, the Yang and Yin prior to the generation of the world correspond to Qian and Kun, and the Yin and Yang posterior to the generation of the cosmos correspond to Kan and Li, respectively. The trigrams of the *Book of Changes* clearly represent this configuration: Qian ☰ (True Yang) is the solid line within Kan ☵ (Yin), and Kun ☷ (True Yin) is the broken line within Li ☲ (Yang).[71]

First and foremost among the entities that reflect the absolute principle is the cosmos itself. The world is Yin in relation to the Dao, but conceals its One Breath, which is True Yang. The alchemical process, therefore, consists in tracing the stages of the generative process of the cosmos in a reverse sequence, in order to recover the hidden One Breath and return to it. In alchemical language, True Lead (☰) and True Mercury (☷) respectively represent True Yang and True Yin. The Yin and Yang entities that respectively contain

are no studies on the historical origins of Neidan; for some relevant issues, see Pregadio, "Early Daoist Meditation and the Origins of Inner Alchemy."

[71] True Yin is also called "Yin within Yang," and True Yang, "Yang within Yin." Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are equivalent to the black and white halves of the well-known Yin-Yang emblem: the black half contains a white dot (equal to the inner line within Kan ☵, "Yang within Yin"), and the white half contains a black dot (equal to the inner line within Li ☲, "Yin within Yang").

these authentic principles are represented by "black lead" (i.e., native lead ☵) and cinnabar (☲). In the strict sense of the term, alchemy consists in extracting True Lead from "black lead" and True Mercury from cinnabar, and in joining them to one another.

A crucial point to consider, which directly derives from the principles outlined above, is that True Yang is the counterpart of True Yin, but—being the One Breath of the Dao—it is also the state of Unity prior to its subdivision into Yin and Yang (this aspect of True Yang is often referred to as Pure Yang, *chunyang*). This explains the priority given to True Yang in the alchemical process.[72] As a consequence, "Lead" has three meanings in alchemy. From the higher to the lower one, these meanings are: (1) The state of Unity before its separation into Yin and Yang; (2) The True Yang of the precelestial state (True Lead), which is a counterpart of True Yin (True Mercury); (3) The Yin of the postcelestial state ("black lead"), which is a counterpart of postcelestial Yang (cinnabar).

When the five agents (*wuxing*) are used to represent the alchemical process, the basic configuration is equivalent to the one seen above. "Black lead" and cinnabar are Water and Fire, and True Lead and True Mercury are Metal and Wood. As we saw earlier, in the inverted sequence of the five agents, which is one of those active in the alchemical process, Water ("black lead") generates Metal (True Lead), and Fire (cinnabar) generates Wood (True Mercury).

Soil, the fifth agent, allows the entire alchemical process to unfold, and also represent its completion. Positioned at the center of the other agents, Soil is emblematic of Unity containing True Yin and True Yang. Its Yang half corresponds to the inner line of Kan ☵ (True Lead), and is typically represented by the celestial stem *wu* 戊. Its Yin half corresponds to the inner line of Li ☲ (True Mercury), and is represented by the celestial stem *ji* 己. Being found within both

[72] This, too, ultimately reflects the perspectives of the relative domain, which is the starting point of alchemy. As long as it may be named, the pure, absolute, undifferentiated state of Non-Being is Pure Yin. Alchemically, this state is Mercury; but few authors of alchemical texts are inclined to provide details on this point. The *Wuzhen pian* (Awakening to Reality) refers to it saying: "When you use Lead, you should not use ordinary lead—but even True Lead is discarded after you have used it. These are the wondrous instructions on using Lead. Use Lead and do not use Lead: these are trustworthy words" ("Jueju," poem 9).

ingredients of the Elixir, Soil stands for their fundamental unity, and enables them to conjoin.

§ 9. FROM THE EXTERNAL ELIXIR TO THE INTERNAL ELIXIR

Whether the *Cantong qi* is read as the first Neidan text or as the text that gave rise to Neidan, it played a pivotal function in the shift from "external" to "internal" alchemical practices. This shift, which occurred during the Tang period (seventh-ninth centuries), has sometimes been understood as a transposition of "external" practices to an inner plane, and has often been described as owed to the increase of cases of elixir poisoning (which even affected the Tang imperial court: at least two Tang emperors died after they ingested an elixir). Leaving aside the fact that, according to this view, Chinese alchemists would have needed several centuries to become aware that many of their ingredients were deadly, there are clear indications that the transition from Waidan to Neidan was a much more complex phenomenon.

Alchemical Images in Early Meditation Practices

To look at the first main element that played a role in the shift from the External to the Internal Elixir, we should consider certain aspects of the early Taoist meditation practices.

The influence of these practices in the transition from Waidan to Neidan has been noted by several scholars, who in this context have emphasized the important role played by the Shangqing (Highest Clarity) tradition of Taoism, where meditation is the main form of practice. In this respect, however, Shangqing did not innovate, but rather developed and re-codified earlier traditions. In fact, the first clear instances of the use of images and vocabulary that would later be inherited by Neidan are found in the two main early texts on Taoist meditation, the *Central Scripture of Laozi* (*Laozi zhongjing*) and the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing*). Both works are concerned with meditation on the inner gods, and both antedate the Shangqing revelations of 364–70 by about one and half centuries.

The images of the "embryo" and the "infant" found in these works are the direct precursors of the "embryo" and the "infant" that Neidan adepts generate and nourish by means of their practices. I will

give here only the main example. In the *Central Scripture*, the Red Child (Chizi) is the innermost deity of the human being, and is said to represents one's own "true self" (*zhenwu*):

> He resides exactly in the ducts of the stomach. He sits facing due south on a couch of jade and pearls, and a flowery canopy of yellow clouds covers him. He is clothed in garments with pearls of five hues. His mother resides above on his right, embracing and nourishing him, and his father resides above on his left, instructing and defending him. . . . He feeds on the Yellow Essence and the Red Breath, drinking and ingesting the Fount of Nectar. (*Laozi zhongjing*, section 12)

To ensure that this and the other inner gods are maintained in their residences, adepts should provide nourishment to them and their dwellings. Accordingly, meditation practices involve the visualization of nutritive essences and breaths delivered to the gods that inhabit one's body. In particular, as shown by the passage just quoted, the *Central Scripture* instructs adepts to circulate a "yellow essence" (*huangjing*) and a "red breath" (*chiqi*) within their bodies, which respectively represent the Moon and the Sun. The following description concerns the provisions supplied to the Red Child:

> Constantly think that below your nipples are the Sun and the Moon. Within the Sun and the Moon are a Yellow Essence and a Red Breath that enter the Crimson Palace (the heart). Then again they enter the Yellow Court (the spleen) and the Purple Chamber (the gallbladder). [Finally] the Yellow Essence and the Red Breath thoroughly fill the Great Granary (the stomach). The Red Child is within the ducts of the stomach. (*Laozi zhongjing*, section 11)

There are clear analogies between the essences and the breaths of the Sun and the Moon that are mentioned in this passage, and the Yin and Yang essences and breaths by which, centuries later, Neidan adepts would generate and nourish their own inner "embryos." These associations become explicit in another passage of the *Central Scripture*:

> The heart is the Sun, the kidneys are the Moon, the spleen is the Dipper. The breath of the heart descends, the breath of the kidneys rises. They join and become one, and are unceasingly distributed to the four limbs. (*Laozi zhongjing*, sec. 51)

An analogous practice is performed by Neidan adepts when they join

the Fire of the heart and the Water of the kidneys with one another.[73]

Two other features of the *Central Scripture* require attention. First, besides the inner essences and breaths, another source of nourishment of the gods is the practitioner's own salivary juices. These juices have the function of "irrigating" (*guan*) the inner organs in which the gods reside. In addition to Fount of Nectar (*liquan*), mentioned in the first passage quoted above, the *Central Scripture* and the *Yellow Court* define the salivary juices with terms derived from Waidan or having alchemical connotations, including Mysterious Pearl (*xuanzhu*), Jade Sap (*yujiang*), Jade Blossom (*yuying*), Jade Pond (*yuchi*), Jade Liquor (*yuye*), Golden Nectar (*jinli*), and even Golden Liquor (*jinye*). Second, the meditation practices of the *Central Scripture* include invocations addressed to the inner gods, in which the practitioner asks the gods to dispense him an elixir. If the term "internal elixir" was not already charged with other meanings, it could be an appropriate definition for the nourishment that the inner gods are invited to provide.

The other main text on early Taoist meditation, the *Scripture of the Yellow Court*, contains a brief mention of the "inner embryo," one of the most distinctive notions of Neidan:

> By coagulating the essence and nurturing the womb,
> you will generate a living being (*shen*);
> preserve the embryo, stop the flow of the essence,
> and you will live a long life.
>
> (*Huangting neijing jing*, sec. 20)

Whereas this example is isolated in the *Yellow Court*, the creation of an immortal body, or an immortal self, by means of a return to a self-generated inner embryo is repeatedly mentioned in the Shangqing sources. With a remarkable use of alchemical imagery, one of these sources applies a classical Waidan term, Nine Elixirs (*jiudan*), to the breaths of the Nine Heavens received by the human being during its embryonic development. In the Shangqing view, however, gestation also accounts for the creation of "knots" and "nodes" that serve to support the five viscera, but ultimately are responsible for one's death. To "untie the knots" (*jiejie*), an adept is instructed to re-experience his embryonic development in meditation. Beginning on the anniversary of his conception, he receives again the Nine Elixirs from month to month, and each

[73] On the corresponding Neidan practice, see Despeux, *Taoïsme et corps humain*, pp. 152–58.

time, one of his inner organs is turned into gold or jade. In the remaining three months, he visualizes the Original Father within his upper Cinnabar Field, and the Original Mother within his lower Cinnabar Field. They issue a green and a yellow breath, respectively, that join in the middle Cinnabar Field and generate an immortal infant.[74]

These examples, chosen among several others, show that certain fundamental ideas, images, and practices that characterize Neidan existed several centuries before the beginning of its documented history. One essential feature of the Neidan practice, however, is missing in the *Central Scripture* and the *Yellow Court*: the use of a cosmology that serves to explain the generative process of the cosmos from the Dao, and to frame a practice that reverses that process and leads to the generation of the Elixir or the "embryo."

Two Alchemical Models

This cosmology and the related alchemical model—the second main element that influenced the shift from the External to the Internal Elixir—are expounded in *Cantong qi*. Among the alchemical methods that are criticized in the *Cantong qi* is the one based on cinnabar and mercury (see 36:11–12, and the note on these verses). This detail is significant. Although lead and mercury are the two emblematic substances at the heart of the *Cantong qi*, they are not the only pair of ingredients employed in Chinese alchemy. Another major representation, typical of Waidan, is centered on cinnabar and mercury. In some respects, the two pairs of substances perform analogous functions. The cyclical extraction of mercury (Yin) from cinnabar (Yang) and its addition to sulphur (Yang), which is typically repeated nine times, yields an essence that is deemed to represent Pure Yang (*chunyang*). The conjunction of True Mercury (Yin) and True Lead (Yang) produces an Elixir endowed with the same properties: Pure Yang denotes the state prior to the separation of the One into the Two.

The analogies between these two processes should not conceal a key event in the development of alchemy in China. From the early Tang period (seventh/eighth centuries) onward, lead and mercury become the main substances in Waidan, both as ingredients of the Elixir and as emblems of cosmological principles. Several Tang-dynasty works provide evidence of this shift through their advocacy of

[74] On this practice see Robinet, *Taoist Meditation*, pp. 139–43.

lead and mercury and their explicit rejection of cinnabar, with the usual rationale that Yang (cinnabar) alone cannot produce the Elixir.[75] In the new, ultimately successful model, cinnabar is retained only as the substance that incorporates True Mercury, or as an emblem of Yang containing True Yin. The corresponding ingredient that represents Yin containing True Yang is native lead, which holds True Lead.

These works document the stage in the history of Chinese alchemy in which an earlier dominant model, based on the extraction of mercury from cinnabar, was being replaced with a new model based on the conjunction of lead and mercury—the model described in the *Cantong qi*. The shift was crucial in the history of Chinese alchemy for two reasons. First, the Waidan alchemists began to use a symbolic system that affords a clear way to describe a metaphysics (the nonduality of Dao and cosmos), a cosmogony (the birth of the cosmos from the Dao), and a cosmology (the functioning of the cosmos as the operation of the Absolute in the relative) by means of Yin and Yang, the five agents, the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, and other sets of emblems. Correlating the Waidan process to this system was impossible for methods based on cinnabar and mercury (let alone for those based on other ingredients). Second, the adoption of this system paved the way for the emergence of Neidan, which adopts the same views, and emphasizes their relevance to the human being. True Lead and True Mercury are retained as emblems of True Yang and True Yin, respectively, but become purely symbolic terms that define the prime constituents—both physical and non-physical—of the human being at the basis of the Neidan practices.

New Forms of Practice

The primary purport of the *Cantong qi* is to explicate the bond that exists between the Dao and the cosmos, the Absolute and the relative: change is the operation of the constant and formless Dao in the world of form. Alchemy comes into play when the *Cantong qi* expounds its way to "return to the Dao." But although the *Cantong qi* allusively describes a Waidan process (sections 39–40, 62, 78) and clarifies many of its facets (22–25, 32–35, 41, 63–64, etc.), the task of providing details on the alchemical practices is left to commentaries and other

[75] For some examples, see Pregadio, *Great Clarity*, 220–23.

works, which focus on the application of its doctrines to the compounding of the External or the Internal Elixir.

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

It does not surprise, therefore, that the *Cantong qi* explicitly advises against meditation on the inner gods (26:1–2). Certain clusters of terms that recur in the *Cantong qi* show that the focus is a different one. Now the adept examines, investigates, searches, inquires, quests, and inspects; he gauges and measures; he reflects, ponders, infers, and assesses.[76] This is not mere intellectual activity in the modern sense of the term: it relies on the intellect as the knowing faculty of Spirit, and takes place through "contemplation" (*guan*; 11:8, 14:5) and the cessation of the flow of thoughts (59:4).

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

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

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

Translation

This translation is based on the text found in Chen Zhixu's *Zhouyi cantong qi zhujie* (Commentary and Explication of the *Cantong qi*), composed in ca. 1330. At an early stage of my work, I have subdivided the text into sections. These subdivisions are based on the following criteria, listed in order of importance: (a) Changes in the number of characters in rhymed lines; (b) Major changes of rhyme patterns; (c) Major changes of subject matter. Beyond these criteria, I have not followed any particular model to determine the extent of each section.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

The verse notes contain references to quotations from earlier sources; translations of closely related passages found in earlier texts; references to comparable sentences found elsewhere in the *Cantong qi;* and additional remarks on certain terms or passages.

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

Cosmology

Qian and Kun, Kan and Li (I) [sec. 1]

1–6 "Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ are the door and the gate of change,"
the father and the mother of all hexagrams.
Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are the inner and the outer walls,
they spin the hub and align the axle.
Female and male, these four trigrams
function as a bellows and its nozzles.

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

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

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

brings about existence by saying: "The space between Heaven and Earth — is it not like a bellows? As empty, it is never exhausted; as it moves, it continues to pour" (*Daode jing*, 5).

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

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

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

Qian and Kun, Kan and Li (II) [sec. 43]

1–6 Qian ☰ the firm and Kun ☷ the yielding
join and embrace one another;
Yang endows, Yin receives,
the masculine and the feminine attend one to the other.
Attending, they create and transform,
unfolding their Essence and Breath.

7–12 Kan ☵ and Li ☲ are at the fore:
their radiance and glow come down and spread out.
Mysterious and obscure, this can hardly be fathomed
and cannot be pictured or charted.
The sages gauged its depth;

one with it, they set forth its foundation.

13–18 These four, in indistinction,
are right within Empty Non-Being.
Sixty hexagrams revolve around them,
outspread like a chariot.
Harnessing a dragon and a mare,
the bright noble man holds the reins of time.

19–22 In harmony there are following and compliance:
the path is level and begets no evil.
Evil ways obstruct and hamper:
they endanger the kingdom.

The images of Qian and Kun are Heaven and Earth; those of Kan and Li are the Moon and the Sun. Just like Heaven and Earth are unchanging and in constant conjunction, so do Qian and Kun "join and embrace one another." As they join, the active and the passive principles respectively give and receive. Thus the Essence of Qian and the Breath of Kun are distributed, and creatures and phenomena are generated.

Qian ☰ in the act of bestowing its essence upon Kun is Li ☲; Kun ☷ in the act of receiving the essence of Qian is Kan ☵. Kan and Li are the counterparts of Qian and Kun within the cosmos. They follow one another like the Sun and the Moon, and nourish all beings with their light, which actually is the light of Qian and Kun. This function of Kan and Li is mysterious and unfathomable, but the sages have provided a way to comprehend it by means of images and emblems.

Although Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li, from our perspective, appear to differ from one another, they all reside within the Center, indistinct and not separated from each other. The other emblems of the *Book of Changes* represent the operation of this motionless Prime Mover within time and space. They arrange themselves like a carriage around the Center. The saintly ruler is its driver, and uses those emblems to manage and respond to change.

Earth brings the generative faculty of Heaven to accomplishment; without the Earth, Heaven would not fulfill its power, and without

Heaven, the Earth would be fruitless. The "bright noble man" embodies and makes manifest the creative action of Heaven within the human world: what the Earth is for Heaven is the world for the saint, and is the kingdom for the ruler. When the ruler conducts government according to the principles set forth by the saintly men, he brings harmony to his kingdom.

1. *Qian the firm and Kun the yielding*. Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "Qian is something Yang, Kun is something Yin. When Yin and Yang join their virtues, the firm and the yielding take form" (B.5; see Wilhelm, 343–44).

5. *Attending, they create and transform*. Compare the "Appended Sayings": "The firm and the yielding follow one another and generate change and transformation" (A.2; see Wilhelm, 288); and "The firm and the yielding follow one another, and therein occur the transformations" (B.1; see Wilhelm, 325).

6. *Unfolding their Essence and Breath*. Compare the "Appended Sayings": "Essence and Breath become the creatures" (A.4; see Wilhelm, 294). Essence refers to Qian, and Breath to Kun.

17. *Harnessing a dragon and a mare*. Dragon and mare are associated with Qian and Kun, respectively; see *Book of Changes*, hexagrams no. 1 and no. 2.

19. *In harmony there are following and compliance*. This verse refers to the "noble man" who drives his carriage by following the right path (compare section 2; the word *sui*, "to follow," is used in both passages). It also refers to the ruler who leads the kingdom in accordance with the principles of humanity and righteousness, and thus obtains the compliance of his people. Compare *Book of Changes*, "Commentary on the Judgement" on the hexagram Xian ䷞ (no. 31): "The sage stimulates the hearts of men, and the world attains harmony and peace" (see Wilhelm, 541).

20. *The path is level and begets no evil*. *Ping*, "level," also connotes "equality" and "peace," and thus applies not only to driving a carriage, but also to governing a kingdom. The simile of the "path" (or "road") is also found in section 2, where the "noble man" is urged to "follow the tracks and the ruts."

Kan and Li, the functions of Qian and Kun [sec. 4]

1–2 "Heaven and Earth establish their positions, and change occurs within them."

3–6 "Heaven and Earth" are the images of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷. "Establish their positions" means that they arrange themselves in the positions for the joining of Yin and Yang. "Change" means Kan ☵ and Li ☲; Kan and Li are the two functions of Qian and Kun.

7–10 The two functions have no fixed positions in the lines:
"flowing in cycles they go through the six empty spaces."
As their coming and going are not determinate,
so too "their ascent and descent are not constant."

This section consists of a short commentary on the statement "Heaven and Earth establish their positions, and change occurs within them," found in the "Appended Sayings" of the *Book of Changes*. The Dao generates the world through Qian and Kun, and Qian and Kun operate in it through Kan and Li. These four modes are illustrated by different images. Heaven and Earth represent Qian and Kun; respectively placed above and below, they are immutably joined as one in the precosmic domain. The Moon and Sun are the main images of Kan and Li; they attest to cyclical alternation and change in the cosmic domain.

In the first place, Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li reside together in the center, undistinguished from one another (see 43:13–14). Their differentiation pertains to the perspective of the world of change. Here Qian and Kun are the substantive basis (*ti*) of Kan and Li, and Kan and Li are the function or operation (*yong*) of Qian and Kun.

The emblems of the *Book of Changes* illustrate these notions: the solid Yang line within Kan ☵ and the broken Yin line within Li ☲ represent the operation of Qian ☰ and Kun ☷, respectively, in the domain of space and time. The same Yin and Yang lines that belong in the first place to Qian and Kun also form the sixty-four hexagrams (see 1:1–2, where Qian and Kun are called "the father and the mother

of all hexagrams"). Each hexagram consists of "six empty spaces" that are filled by lines of either sort to represent the nature and qualities of a particular state of change. Just as the solid and broken lines within the hexagrams are not fixed, but "flow in cycles" through the sixty-four emblems, so too are the states of the cosmos "not constant," and change occurs cyclically throughout space and time.

1–2. "*Heaven and Earth establish their positions, and change occurs within them.*" This sentence is quoted from the "Appended Sayings" of the *Book of Changes* (A.5; see Wilhelm, 303).

8. *"Flowing in cycles they go through the six empty spaces."* Compare the "Appended Sayings": "Transformation and movement have no pause: they flow in cycles through the six empty spaces. Ascent and descent are not constant: the firm and the yielding change into each other" (B.7; see Wilhelm, 348).

9. *As their coming and going are not determinate.* The expression "coming and going" derives from the "Appended Sayings," where it refers to the Yin and Yang principles: "Their coming and going without being exhausted is called 'being pervasive'" (A.10; see Wilhelm, 318).

10. *So too "their ascent and descent are not constant."* See the passage of the "Appended Sayings" quoted in the note to verse 8 above.

Sun and Moon make change [sec. 7]

1–4 *Wu* in Kan ☵ is the essence of the Moon,
ji in Li ☲ is the radiance of the Sun.
Sun and Moon make change,
the firm and the yielding match one another.

5–10 Soil rules over the four seasons,
entwining beginning and end;
green, red, black, and white
each dwells in one direction.

All are endowed by the Central Palace
through the efficacy of *wu* and *ji*.

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

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

In addition to being associated with True Yang (Qian) and True Yin (Kun), the celestial stems *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己 are also emblems of the central agent Soil, which, like the One, comprises Yin and Yang halves. Soil transmits the One Breath to the four directions and the four seasons—i.e., to space and time—which correspond to the agents Wood, Fire, Water, and Metal, referred to here by the colors green, red, black, and white. In reiterating the unity of Qian and Kun, Kan and Li, and *wu* and *ji*, Soil guarantees the conjunction of the world of multiplicity to the Absolute.

The joining of the Sun and the Moon [sec. 10]

1–5 Between the month's last day and dawn on next month's first day, Zhen ☳ comes to receive the token. At that

moment, Heaven and Earth merge their essences, and the Sun and the Moon reach out for one another and hold onto one another.

6–9 The masculine Yang spreads his mysterious emanation,
the feminine Yin transforms her yellow wrap.
In indistinction they conjoin;
at this incipient time, the root is planted.

10–13 Steadily and orderly the seed is nourished;
from the coagulation of Spirit the corporeal frame is formed.
This is how living beings come forth:
even the wriggling worms all proceed from this.

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

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

The trigram Zhen ☳ (Thunder) symbolizes the first stage of the rebirth of luminous Yang after the obscurity of Yin. Its Yang line at the bottom (the position of the initial line) is an image of regeneration after stagnation, represented in the *Book of Changes* by the crack of

thunder produced by the conjunction of Yin and Yang. At the beginning of the month, Heaven assigns Zhen the task of ruling over the first stage of the newly-born time cycle (the initial five days) and the corresponding sector of space (East). Having been reborn, the Yang principle begins a new cycle of ascent and descent. Section 13 describes this cycle.

4. *Heaven and Earth merge their essences*. Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "Heaven and Earth mesh together, and the ten thousand things proliferate by transformation. Male and female join their essences, and the ten thousand things are born by transformation" (B.4; see Wilhelm, 342–43).

The monthly cycle of the hexagrams [sec. 3]

1–4 In one month there are six nodes of five days;
warp and weft abide by the command of the Sun.
Altogether they are sixty:
the firm is external, the yielding internal.

5–8 At dawn of the month's first day, Zhun ䷂ is on duty;
when sunset comes, Meng ䷃ duly takes charge.
One hexagram for each day and each night:
their operation follows the Sequence.

9–12 With Jiji ䷾ and Weiji ䷿ comes the clear light of the month's last day;
after the end there is another beginning.
The Sun and the Moon set periods and measures;
movement precedes, quiescence follows.

13–16 Spring and summer accord with the inner core,
from *zi* to *chen* and *si*;

autumn and winter match the outer function,
from *wu* to *xu* and *hai*.

17–20 Reward and punishment respond to spring and autumn;
dimness and light comply with cold and heat.
The Statements on the Lines contain humanity and righteousness,
and issue joy or anger in accordance with the time.

21–22 Thus by responding to the four seasons,
the five agents attain their principle.

The first major cosmological cycle described in the *Cantong qi* concerns the thirty days of the lunar month. The alternation ("warp and weft") of Sun and Moon during the month occurs under the authority of the Sun: its light is reflected by the Moon along the course of the six "nodes" (or "sectors," *jie*) of five days in which the month is divided, and its rise and fall divides each day into its two main parts, daytime and nighttime. The movements of the Sun and Moon correspond to the stages of ascent and descent of Yin and Yang; they "set periods and measures" with respect to the terms of time (*qi*) and the spans of space (*du*), because each day on the scale of time corresponds to one degree in the compass of space.

Since the Yang and Yin principles respectively prevail at daytime and at nighttime, a Yang hexagram, called the "inner core," rules on the first part of the day, and a Yin hexagram, called the "outer function," rules on the second part (Yang is movement and Yin is quiescence, thus "movement precedes, quiescence follows"). Therefore altogether sixty hexagrams govern the thirty days of the lunar month, beginning with Zhun ䷂ and Meng ䷃ in the first day, and ending with Jiji ䷾ and Weiji ䷿ in the last day (see table 7). Moreover, the twelve lines of each pair of hexagrams are associated with the twelve earthly branches (*dizhi*; see fig. 4); the first six branches, going "from *zi* 子 to *chen* 辰 and *si* 巳," represent the rise of the Yang principle in the first part of the day, while the other six branches, going "from *wu* 午 to *xu* 戌 and *hai* 亥," represent the rise of the Yin principle in the second part of the day.

The cycle of the sixty hexagrams also establishes correspondences

between each day, the four seasons, and the associated qualities in the human realm. In particular, daytime corresponds to spring, which is the time of "reward" (*shang*, when the Yang principles gives life), and to humanity (*ren*); nighttime corresponds to autumn, which is the time of "punishment" (*fa*, when the Yin principle takes life), and to righteousness (*yi*).

Just like space and time express the qualities of Qian and Kun in the cosmos, so do humanity and righteousness, "punishment" and "reward" express them in the human realm. Therefore the patterns of time and space provide models for the operation of the sage ruler. The emblems and the statements of the *Book of Changes* embody those patterns and suggest proper ways of responding to the different states of change: firmness, benevolence, and other qualities respectively related to Yin and Yang.

The four directions of space and the four seasons of time are related in turn to the five agents (*wuxing*; see tables 1 and 2). By conforming himself to the properties and the qualities of space and time, the ruler allows the five agents to function in accordance with their own principles.

1. *In one month there are six nodes of five days. Jie* ("node" or "sector") denotes a segment or subdivision of any temporal cycle. The five-day "nodes" are often called "periods" (*hou*). See, for instance, *Huangdi neijing*, *Suwen*, sec. 9: "Five days are called a period. Three periods are called a breath (i.e., the fortnightly "nodal breaths," *jieqi*). Six breaths are called a season. Four seasons are called a year."

4. *The firm is external, the yielding internal.* In this verse, "external and internal" denotes the first and the second hexagrams that rule on each day.

19. *The Statements on the Lines contain humanity and righteousness.* In the *Book of Changes*, the "Statements on the Lines" explain the meaning of the Yin and Yang lines in each hexagram. — Compare *Book of Changes*, "Explanation of the Trigrams": "In ancient times, the sages who made the *Changes* complied with the principles of nature (*xing*) and life (*ming*). Therefore they established the Way of Heaven, and spoke of Yin and Yang; they established the Way of Earth, and spoke of the yielding and the firm; and they established the Way of man, and spoke of humanity and righteousness" (sec. 2; see Wilhelm, 264).

The cycle of the Moon [sec. 13]

1–6 On the third day, it comes forth with its clear light,
when Zhen ☳ and *geng* match the western direction.
On the eighth day, when Dui ☱ matches *ding*,
the waxing quarter is level as a string.
On the fifteenth, with the body of Qian ☰ attained,
it is full at *jia* in the eastern direction.

7–12 The toad is with the hare and its lightless soul,
and the Breaths of Sun and Moon shine together:
the toad beholds the trigram nodes,
the hare exhales the radiance of life.
On the fifteenth, when the course is completed,
it bends downward and declines.

13–18 When the sixteenth, in turn, acquires control,
it appears at dawn at Xun ☴ and *xin*.
When Gen ☶ aligns with *bing* in the south,
it is the twenty-third, the waning quarter.
When Kun ☷ is at *yi* on the thirtieth day,
"forego your friends in the northeast."

19–23 When the nodes are complete, each having given way to another,
they inherit the body and regenerate the dragon.
Ren and *gui* match *jia* and *yi*,
Qian and Kun enclose beginning and end.

23–26 As 7 and 8 make 15,
9 and 6 correspond to them.
These four altogether make 30:
the Yang Breath, worn out, is extinguished and hidden.

In this section, the *Cantong qi* describes the second main cosmological pattern. The cosmological device known as *najia*, or Matching

Stems, divides the lunar month into six parts of five days. Each of the six stages is associated with a trigram and with one of the ten celestial stems. The six trigrams illustrate the rise and the fall of Yin (the broken line) and Yang (the solid line) during the thirty days of the month:

☳	☱	☰	☴	☶	☷
震	兑	乾	巽	艮	坤
Zhen	Dui	Qian	Xun	Gen	Kun

In the present section, verses 1–6 describe the rise of the Yang principle during the former half of the month, and verses 13–18 the rise of the Yin principle during the latter half of the month. (The *Cantong qi* describes the lunar cycle again in section 49.)

At dusk on the third day of the lunar month, the crescent Moon appears in the West, associated with the stem *geng* 庚; its clear light is an image of the beginning of the rise of Yang and is represented by Zhen ☳. On the eighth day, the Moon at dusk appears in the South, associated with the stem *ding* 丁; being in its first quarter, its light is "level as a string" and is represented by Dui ☱. At dusk on the fifteenth day, the full Moon appears in the East, associated with the stem *jia* 甲; it is an emblem of Pure Yang and is represented by Qian ☰. Now "the Breaths of Sun and Moon shine together," because Yang is at the peak of its growth and Yin is at its lowest: the Moon is entirely exposed to the light of the Sun, and thus appears as full. While the toad, which represents the Essence (*jing*) of the Moon, ensures that the cycle progresses without error, the hare, which represents its Breath (*qi*), exhales the Moon's radiance.

After Yang has reached its highest point, it begins to wane, and Yin begins to rise. At dawn on the sixteenth day, the Moon appears in the West, associated with the stem *xin* 辛; its decreasing light illustrates the emergent Yin and is represented by the trigram Xun ☴. At dawn on the twenty-third day, the Moon appears in the South, associated with the stem *bing* 丙; now in its last quarter, it is represented by Gen ☶. Finally, at dawn on the thirtieth day, the Moon is lightless in the East, associated with the stem *yi* 乙; it is now an emblem of Pure Yin and is represented by Kun ☷.

The trigrams Li ☲ and Kan ☵ are not part of the lunar cycle, because they represent the Center; but precisely for this reason, they

constitute a major feature of the Matching Stems device. In the night of novilune, between the end of one month and the beginning of the next one, the Sun (日) and the Moon (月) move to the center of space. They join their essences to regenerate the light (明) of the Yang principle, and give birth to the next cycle of change (易). At that time, the trigram Zhen ☳ "inherits" the body of Qian ☰, its father, as its the lower Yang line, and "regenerates the dragon." (Zhen corresponds to the East and thus has the "green dragon," *qinglong*, as its emblem. The ascent of this dragon through the six stages of the lunar month is one of the subjects of section 49.)

Since Kan and Li represent the operation of Qian and Kun within the cosmos, the unfolding of all time cycles is ultimately governed by Qian and Kun. The final verses refer to this by means of the celestial stems (see table 9). Qian corresponds to the stems *jia* 甲 and *ren* 壬, and Kun to the stems *yi* 乙 and *gui* 癸; therefore "*ren* and *gui* match *jia* and *yi*." Moreover, since *jia* 甲 and *ren* 壬 are the last two stems and *yi* 乙 and *gui* 癸 are the first two stems, Qian and Kun "enclose beginning and end."

Even though they do not take part in the lunar cycle, Qian, Kun, Kan, and Li determine its development. The *Cantong qi* sees a confirmation of this in the numerical values associated with the celestial stems. Qian is associated with number 9 (the number of "great Yang," *taiyang*) and Kun with number 6 ("great Yin," *taiyin*); Li is associated with number 7 ("minor Yang," *shaoyang*) and Kan with number 8 ("minor Yin," *shaoyin*). The sum of these numbers is 30, corresponding to the number of days in the lunar month.

7. *The toad is with the hare and its lightless soul.* The hare is referred to in this passage as *tupo*. *Po* here denotes the lightless side of the Moon, i.e., its Yin "soul."

9–10. *The toad beholds the trigram nodes, the hare exhales the radiance of life.* The "trigram nodes" are the time segments associated with the individual trigrams, each of which rules over six days during the lunar month. For example, the first "node" is associated with Zhen ☳ (see table 10).

18. *"Forego your friends in the northeast."* This sentence is quoted from the *Book of Changes*, "Judgement" on the hexagram Kun ䷁ (no. 2; see Wilhelm, 11). According to several commentaries to the *Cantong qi*, however, *peng* 朋, "friends," is used in this verse to mean *ming* 明,

"light," with reference to the obscuration of the Yang principle at the end of the lunar cycle.

The cycle of the Sun [sec. 51]

1–8 The dawn of the month's first day is Fu ䷗ (Return):
the Yang Breath begins to spread throughout.
"Going out and coming in without error,"
the shadow of the gnomon is tenuous but firm.
At the time of Yellow Bell, the Dipper points at *zi*:
the seedlings thrive,
a tender warmth spreads over,
and one and all regain constancy.

9–14 At Lin ䷒ (Approach), the furnace issues strips of light,
opening the way for proper radiance.
Radiance and shine gradually advance,
and daylight thus grows longer.
Great Regulator is at *chou*,
binding and aligning what is above and what is below.

15–20 Looking upward, it forms Tai ䷊ (Peace):
the firm and the yielding both come to hold sway.
As Yin and Yang conjoin,
"the small departs, the great approaches."
The spokes converge on *yin*:
they spin concurring with the time.

21–26 Gradually comes the turn of Dazhuang ䷡ (Great Strength),
when the knights array themselves at the gates of *mao*.
The elm seeds fall to the ground,

returning to their roots.
Punishment and virtue are opposed one to the other,
daytime and nighttime are now unequal to each other.

27–30 At Guai ䷪ (Parting) the time has come for Yin to move into retreat,
for Yang has risen and has come to the fore.
Washing and cleansing its feathers and its quills,
it clears away the dust of ages.

31–34 Qian ䷀ (The Creative) is strong, flourishing, and bright,
and lays itself over the four neighborhoods.
Yang terminates at *si*;
residing in the Center, it has a share in everything.

35–40 At Gou ䷫ (Encounter) a new epoch comes to pass:
for the first time "there is hoarfrost underfoot."
"In the well there is a clear, cold spring,"
and at Luxuriant there is *wu*.
The guest has been subdued by Yin,
and Yin has now become the host.

41–44 At Dun ䷠ (Withdrawal) it leaves its worldly place,
gathering its Essence to store it up.
Cherishing its virtue, it awaits its time,
resting at leisure in the dark.

45–48 At Pi ䷋ (Obstruction) there are stagnation and blockade,
and no new buds are generated.
Yin stretches and Yang bends:
the surname and forename of Yang have been erased.

49–54 Guan ䷓ (Contemplation), with its equity and its balance,
examines the temper of autumn's middle month.
It nourishes the tender and the young,
the old and withered bloom again.
Shepherd's purse and wheat sprout and shoot anew,

through their bravery they are able to survive.

55–58 Bo ䷖ (Splitting Apart) tears its limbs and trunk,
extinguishing its form.
The vital Breath is drained,
the supreme Spirit is forgotten and is lost.

59–62 The course comes to its end and turns around,
returning to its origin in Kun ䷁ (The Receptive).
Ever complying with the patterns of the Earth,
she receives Heaven in herself, allowing it to unfold.

63–66 Mysterious and obscure! Subtle and remote!
Separate are they, and yet they are bound.
In due measure they nurture the seed
that is the origin of Yin and Yang.

67–70 Vast and broad! Vague and indistinct!
No one knows its beginnings.
"Going ahead of it brings on delusion" and you lose your track,
"go behind it," and you are a ruler and a lord.

After the descriptions of the ascent and descent of Yin and Yang during the day (sections 3 and 45) and the month (sections 13 and 49), the present section is concerned with the third major cosmological pattern described in the *Cantong qi*: the cycle of the Sun during the twelve months of the year.

Each stage of the cycle—which begins with the eleventh lunar month—is associated with one of twelve hexagrams of the *Book of Changes*, one of the twelve pitch-pipes, and one of the twelve earthly branches (see also the Introduction, § 6). The hexagrams chosen to represent the months are the so-called "sovereign hexagrams" (*bigua*). Analogously to the six trigrams that represent the lunar phases (see sections 13 and 49), they illustrate the ascent and descent of Yin and Yang during the twelve months:

復	臨	泰	大壯	夬	乾	姤	遯	否	觀	剝	坤
fu	lin	tai	dazhuang	guai	qian	gou	dun	pi	guan	bo	kun

In the eleventh month, with Fu ䷗ (Return), the Yang principle is reborn and begins its new cycle of ascent and descent during the year. Lin ䷒ (Approach) rules on the twelfth and last month, which connects the current year ("what is above") to the upcoming year ("what is below"). In the first month of the new year, the Yang principle continues to grow ("looks upward") and reaches a correct state of balance with the Yin principle, represented by Tai ䷊ (Peace). In the second month, with Dazhuang ䷡ (Great Strength), Yang prevails over Yin: the days begin to grow longer and the nights to grow shorter. The Yin principle has retired but is still powerful; the elm seeds that "fall to the ground" represent the strength of Yin within Yang, and prepare its rebirth in the second half of the year. In the third month, corresponding to Guai ䷪ (Parting), the Yin principle has almost entirely vanished, and thus "the time has come for Yin to move into retreat." The fourth month is the sixth stage of the solar cycle; Yang reaches its culmination and is represented by Qian ䷀ (The Creative), the hexagram that depicts pure Yang.

Then the second half of the cycle starts. In the fifth month, with Gou ䷫ (Encounter), the Yang principle begins its descent, and the Yin principle begins its ascent; since Yin will overcome Yang, Yin is the "host" and Yang is the "guest." In the sixth month, ruled by Dun ䷠ (Withdrawal), the Yang principle, aware of its eventual obliteration, "leaves its worldly place." With Pi ䷋ (Obstruction), in the seventh month, the Yin principle continues to increase; for the Yang principle, this month marks the actual time of defeat, symbolized by the hexagram that represents the inversion of the correct relation between Yin and Yang. Guan ䷓ (Contemplation) rules on the eighth month, when Yin prevails over Yang. The Yang principle has retired, but paves the way for its rebirth and puts forth new sprouts, representing the strength of Yang within Yin. In the ninth month, corresponding to Bo ䷖ (Splitting Apart), Yang is vanquished. In the tenth and last month, at the end of the solar cycle, Yin reigns alone and is represented by Kun ䷁ (The Receptive), the hexagram that symbolizes pure Yin. Kun, however, fulfills her motherly function: "she receives Heaven in herself," and once again gives birth to the Yang principle.

3. *"Going out and coming in without error."* This sentence is quoted from the *Book of Changes*, "Judgement" on the hexagram Fu ䷗ (no. 24): "Return: Success. Going out and coming in without error" (see Wilhelm, 97).

17. *As Yin and Yang conjoin.* Compare the "Image" on the hexagram Tai ䷊ (no. 11) in the *Book of Changes*: "Heaven and Earth are conjoined: Peace" (see Wilhelm, 49).

18. *"The small departs, the great approaches."* This sentence is quoted from the *Book of Changes*, "Judgement" on the hexagram Tai: "Peace. The small departs, the great approaches. Good fortune and success" (see Wilhelm, 48). The "small" is the Yin principle, which is decreasing, and the "great" is the Yang principle, which is increasing.

25–26. *Punishment and virtue are opposed one to the other.* "Punishment" corresponds to Yin, the time of "taking life"; "virtue" corresponds to Yang, the time of "giving life." Since at this time Yin and Yang are still contending for supremacy, they are "opposed one to the other."

31. *Qian (The Creative) is strong, flourishing, and bright.* Compare the "Commentary on the Words of the Text" on the hexagram Qian ䷀ (no. 1) in the *Book of Changes*: "Great indeed is Qian, the Origin! He is firm, strong, central, and upright; he is pure, incorrupt, and uncontaminated" (see Wilhelm, 378).

32. *And lays itself over the four neighborhoods.* "Four neighborhoods" (*silin*) connotes the four quarters of the world.

33. *Yang terminates at* si. In the cycle of the twelve "sovereign hexagrams," Qian represent the end of the ascent of the Yang principle, which occurs in the month marked by the earthly branch *si* 巳.

36. *For the first time "there is hoarfrost underfoot."* Compare *Book of Changes*, hexagram Kun ䷁ (no. 2), first line: "When there is hoarfrost underfoot, solid ice is not far off" (see Wilhelm, 13).

37. *"In the well there is a clear, cold spring."* Compare *Book of Changes*, hexagram Jing ䷯ (The Well, no. 48), fifth line: "In the well there is a clear, cold spring from which one can drink" (see Wilhelm, 188). The well underneath the earth is the lowest Yin line of the hexagram Jing, whose nature is represented by the image of a cold spring.

45. *At Pi (Obstruction) there are stagnation and blockade.* Compare the

"Commentary on the Judgement" on the hexagram Pi ䷋ (no. 12): "The great departs and the small approaches; therefore Heaven and Earth do not conjoin, and the ten thousand things are blocked off from each other" (see Wilhelm, 447).

57. *The vital Breath is drained.* Literally, the "transmuting Breath" or "Breath of transformation" (*huaqi*), the energy that gives birth to all forms of life and nourishes them.

59. *The course comes to its end and turns around.* Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "When change comes to an end, it alters; as it alters, it has continuity; having continuity, it has duration" (B.2; see Wilhelm, 331–332). Compare also *Daode jing*, 40: "Return is the movement of the Dao."

62. *She receives Heaven in herself, allowing it to unfold.* Compare the "Commentary on the Judgement" on the hexagram Kun ䷁ (no. 2): "Perfect indeed is Kun, the Origin! The ten thousand things owe their birth to her, because she receives Heaven with devotion" (see Wilhelm, 386). See also the "Commentary on the Words of the Text" on the same hexagram: "The Way of Kun is following: she receives Heaven with devotion and moves in accordance with the time" (see Wilhelm, 392).

69–70. *"Going ahead of it brings on delusion" and you lose your track, "go behind it," and you are a ruler and a lord.* Compare the "Judgement" on the hexagram Kun: "If the noble man goes somewhere, going ahead brings delusion; going behind he finds guidance and benefit" (see Wilhelm, 11). The "Commentary on the Judgement" adds: "If the noble man goes somewhere, going ahead brings on delusion and he goes astray; going behind and following he finds constancy" (see Wilhelm, 388). See also *Daode jing*, 7: "Thus the saint places himself before by placing himself behind."

Complying with the cycles of Yin and Yang [sec. 47]

1–4 The filial child uses his Heart,
bringing the August Ultimate to move in response.

What comes forth from his mouth anear
flows to little-known regions afar.

5–10 Sometimes it provokes calamities,
at others it brings about happiness;
sometimes it fosters Great Peace,
at others it engenders battles and wars.
The origin of all these four
lies in his own bosom.

11–14 "Movement and quiescence have constancy,"
therefore he abides by the marking-cord and the plumb-line.
Complying with the proprieties of the four seasons,
their breaths does he receive.

15–18 "The firm and the yielding are distinguished,"
and do not impinge upon one another;
the five agents keep to their boundaries,
reaching plenitude and receding without error.

19–20 The course of change flows in cycles —
it bends and it stretches, and goes back and forth.

The patterns of Yin and Yang pervade and unify the domains of Heaven, Earth, and Man. Since the ruler's task is to guarantee and maintain the agreement of Man with Heaven and Earth, this requires that he operates in accordance with those patterns. If he does so, the influence of his words extends throughout and even beyond his own kingdom, bringing about different effects according to the circumstances.

The sage ruler complies with the alternation of Yin and Yang and with the qualities associated with the four seasons. He is active in the times corresponding to spring and summer (Yang), and quiescent in the times corresponding to autumn and winter (Yin). Therefore he ensures that Yin and Yang, the five agents, and all other forces operating within his kingdom keep to their respective places and perform

their respective functions.

2. *Bringing the August Ultimate to move in response*. Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "Words and deeds are the hinge of the noble man. As the hinge moves, it determines honor or disgrace. Through words and deeds the noble man causes Heaven and Earth to move. Must one not, then, be cautious?" (A.6; see Wilhelm, 305). "August Ultimate" (*huangji*) refers to the principle that originates and sustains the cosmos. This principle, which coincides with the Center, is represented in Heaven by the Celestial Emperor (*tiandi*). On Earth, it is represented by the sage king, who rules in accordance with the principles of humanity and righteousness and thereby induces his subjects to follow him.

3–4. *What comes forth from his mouth anear flows to little-known regions afar*. Compare again the "Appended Sayings": "Words go forth from his own person and exert their influence on the people. Deeds are born close at hand and become visible afar" (A.6; see Wilhelm, 305).

5–8. *Sometimes it provokes calamities . . . at others it engenders battles and wars*. Compare the passage of the *Book of Changes* quoted in the note to verse 2 above, according to which the words and deeds of the noble man "determine honor or disgrace."

11. *"Movement and quiescence have constancy."* This sentence is quoted from the "Appended Sayings": "Movement and quiescence have constancy; in accordance with this, the firm and the yielding are distinguished" (A.1; see Wilhelm, 280).

12. *Therefore he abides by the marking-cord and the plumb-line*. On these tools symbolic of rulership see the notes to section 2.

15. *"The firm and the yielding are distinguished."* This sentence is quoted from the passage of the *Book of Changes* translated in the note to verse 11 above.

19–20. *The course of change flows in cycles—it bends and it stretches, and goes back and forth*. For the term *zhouliu* ("flowing in a cycle") compare 3:7–8: "The two functions have no fixed positions in the lines: 'flowing in cycles they go through the six empty spaces.'" — For *qushen* ("bend and stretch") compare the "Appended Sayings": "When the Sun goes, the Moon comes; when the Moon goes, the Sun comes. Sun and Moon follow one another, and light comes into existence. . . . Going means bending, and coming means stretching. Bending and stretching respond to one another, and benefit arises" (B.3; see Wilhelm, 338). —

For *fanfu* ("go back and forth," "go to and fro") see *Book of Changes*, hexagram Qian ䷀ (no. 1), third line, "Commentary on the Images": "All day long [the noble man] is creatively active. He goes back and forth on the path" (see Wilhelm, 374).

Taoism

Superior virtue and inferior virtue [sec. 20]

1–4 "Superior virtue has no doing":
it does not use examining and seeking.
"Inferior virtue does":
its operation does not rest.

Section 20 defines the difference between superior virtue and inferior virtue. The *Cantong qi* upholds two ways of realization. Quoting the *Daode jing*, the present section defines the two ways as "superior virtue" (*shangde*) and "inferior virtue" (*xiade*). In superior virtue, nothing needs to be searched or investigated; the unity of the state "prior to Heaven" (*xiantian*, the Absolute, Emptiness, constancy) and the state "posterior to Heaven" (*houtian*, the relative, the world of change) is immediately realized. Inferior virtue, instead, seeks the One Breath prior to Heaven (*xiantian yiqi*) within the state posterior to Heaven. Superior virtue is the way of "non-doing" (*wuwei*), inferior virtue is the way of "doing" (*youwei*, or *wei zhi*). As a practice, alchemy—in any of its forms, "external" or "internal"—pertains to the way of inferior virtue. (On this subject, see also the Introduction, § 7.)

1–2. *"Superior virtue has no doing": it does not use examining and seeking*. The first sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 38: "Superior virtue has no doing: there is nothing whereby it does."

3–4. *"Inferior virtue does": its operation does not rest*. The first sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 38: "Inferior virtue does: there is something whereby it does."

Nourishing inner nature [sec. 18]

1–4 Innerly nourish yourself,
serene and quiescent in Empty Non-Being.
Going back to the fundament conceal your light,
and innerly illuminate your body.

5–8 "Shut the openings"
and raise and strengthen the Numinous Trunk;
as the three luminaries sink into the ground,
warmly nourish the Pearl.

9–10 "Watching, you do not see it" —
it is nearby and easy to seek.

This is the first of ten sections (18–27) that illustrate the main features of "superior virtue" (*shangde*) and "inferior virtue" (*xiade*). The import of these chapters is made clear in sections 20–21: superior virtue is the way of non-doing (*wuwei*), and consists in the cultivation of inner nature (*xing*); inferior virtue is the way of doing (*youwei*), and focuses on the cultivation of one's existence (or "vital force," *ming*) by means of practices such as the alchemical ones.

The subject of sections 18–19 is the principles of superior virtue. Emptiness is the fundament from which all things arise and to which they return; quiescence is the state required to contemplate Emptiness. The first stanza expresses these principles with allusions to an exemplary passage of the *Daode jing*: "Attain the ultimate of emptiness, guard the utmost of quiescence. The ten thousand things are brought about together: accordingly, I observe their return. . . . Returning to the root means quiescence; being quiescent means reverting to one's destiny; reverting to one's destiny means being constant; knowing the constant means being luminous" (*Daode jing*, 6). The subjects of the present section of the *Cantong qi* are the same as those of this passage: Emptiness, the return to the root, and the luminous quality of those who achieve quiescence.

Attaining the state of Emptiness requires closing the "openings" through which we deal with the world of multiplicity. This principle,

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

For the *Cantong qi*, the openings are the "three luminaries": the eyes, the ears, and the mouth, or the functions of sight, hearing, and speech. When the "three luminaries" do not turn their light toward the external world, they "sink into the ground." This expression, which derives from the *Zhuangzi*, denotes the attitude of the saintly man who conceals his sainthood (see the note to verse 7). Established in quiescence, he does not turn himself toward the external objects, allowing the radiance of the luminaries to illuminate and nourish his true Nature (the "numinous trunk"). Maintaining himself in the state of non-doing, he contemplates the arising of all entities and phenomena from Emptiness and their return to it, and nurtures the Pearl spontaneously generated in him by the One Breath prior to Heaven.

This attitude and nothing else constitutes the way of superior virtue and the realized state according to the *Cantong qi*. As we are reminded with another sentence drawn from the *Daode jing* (see the note to verse 9), no pursuit is necessary: the Dao is invisible, inaudible, and imperceptible, but is "nearby and easy to seek."

4. *And innerly illuminate your body*. In later times, *neizhao* ("to illuminate within") became the name of an inner alchemical practice, as seen, for instance, in the expression *huiguang neizhao*, "circulating the light to illuminate within." From the perspective of the *Cantong qi*, however, this term does not refer to a practice, or at least not to a practice in the ordinary sense: *neizhao* describes the state of the realized person, whose inner being is constantly illuminated.

5. *"Shut the openings."* Compare 58:1–2, which refers to the "three luminaries" as the "three treasures" (*sanbao*), saying: "Ears, eyes, and mouth are the three treasures: shut them, and let nothing pass through."

7. *As the three luminaries sink into the ground*. The term *luchen* ("sinking into the ground") derives from this passage of the *Zhuangzi*: "[The saint] has buried himself among the people, hidden himself among the fields. . . . Perhaps he finds himself at odds with the age and in his heart disdains to go along with it. This is called 'sinking into the ground'" (25.895; see Watson, 285–86).

9. *"Watching, you do not see it."* This verse is quoted from *Daode jing*,

14, where it refers to the Dao: "Watching, you do not see it: it is called invisible. Listening, you do not hear it: it is called inaudible. Grasping, you do not get it: it is called imperceptible."

The Yellow Center [sec. 19]

1–2 "From the Yellow Center" it gradually "spreads through the veining":
moistening and impregnating, it reaches the flesh and the skin.

3–6 When the beginning is correct, the end will be flawless;
when the trunk is firm, the branches can hold.
The One, through cover and concealment,
is known by no one in the world.

The One Breath of the Dao is invisible and unknown to all, but embraces all things. This Breath is distributed from the Yellow Center (*huangzhong*), the spaceless point that ensures the conjunction of the cosmos and the human being with the absolute principle. In the cosmos, that point is the Heart of Heaven (*tianxin*); in the human being, it is the Heart (*xin*).

1. *"From the Yellow Center" it gradually "spreads through the veining."* This verse is an almost literal quotation from the "Commentary on the Words of the Text" on the hexagram Kun ䷁ (no. 2) in the *Book of Changes*. *Tongli* can mean both "to comprehend the principle(s)" and "to spread through (*or*: pervade) the veining." In the original context of the *Book of Changes*, the sentence refers to the operation of the sage in the world, and the first meaning of *tongli* applies: "The noble man from the Yellow Center comprehends the principles [of things]." Several other translations of this sentence are possible, but the main point is that the central position occupied by the "noble man" enables him to comprehend the principles of constancy and change. The *Cantong qi* uses part of this

sentence to refer to the One Breath; in this context, the second meaning of *tongli* applies. — In several Taoist traditions, Yellow Center (*huangzhong*) is a name of the central Cinnabar Field (*dantian*), which is located in the region of the heart. It is, moreover, a name of the spleen, the organ that represents the Center when the framework of reference is not the three Cinnabar Fields, but the five viscera.

The three treasures [sec. 58]

1–4 Ears, eyes, and mouth are the three treasures:
shut them, and let nothing pass through.
The True Man withdraws in the depths of the abyss;
drifting and roaming, he keeps to the compass.

5–8 Watch and listen while wheeling around,
and opening and closing will always accord.
Take this as your lynchpin,
and movement and quiescence will never be exhausted.

9–12 The Breath of Li ☲ strengthens and guards you within,
and Kan ☵ is not employed for listening.
Dui ☱ is closed and not used for talking:
you follow the boundless with inaudible words.

The "three treasures" spoken of here are the "three luminaries" of section 18: the ears, the eyes, and the mouth, respectively corresponding to the functions of hearing, seeing, and speaking. These treasures should be guarded and cherished, and their light should be turned within.

The mention of Breath (*qi*) in conjunction with Li ☲, the trigram that represents the eyes, shows that this passage refers to certain fundamental correspondences that pertain to the Taoist view of the

human being:

(1) The ears are represented by Kan ☵ (Water, Yin), which is placed below (in correspondence with the lower Cinnabar Field) and holds the Original Essence (*yuanjing*).

(2) The eyes are represented by Li ☲ (Fire, Yang), which is placed above (in correspondence with the upper Cinnabar Field) and holds the Original Breath (*yuanqi*).

(3) The mouth is represented by Dui ☱ (Metal), which is placed in the center (in correspondence with the middle Cinnabar Field) and holds the Original Spirit (*yuanshen*).

When the "three treasures" are secured, Essence does not flow downward, as water does, but instead ascends; Breath does not rise upward, as fire does, but instead descends; and one's individual traits (*qing*, i.e., attitudes, temperament, personality, and other features related to one's individual existence) do not spring forth as emotions or passions, but emerge as qualities that enable Spirit, or one's own true nature (*xing*), to operate.

The true nature is referred to in this passage as the True Man. Withdrawn "in the depths of the abyss" (compare the expression "sinking into the ground" in section 18), the True Man leads his carriage (see sections 2 and 43) and meets no obstructions. Quiescence and activity are equivalent for him, and he enters and exits the world without distinction. Seeing, hearing, and speaking are turned inward: he watches and listens to the boundless, and communicates with it in words that no one can hear.

2. *Shut them, and let nothing pass through*. Compare 18:5: "Shut the openings," and the passage of *Daode jing*, 52, quoted in the notes to section 18.

3–4. *The True Man withdraws in the depths of the abyss; drifting and roaming, he keeps to the compass*. Compare 24:1–4: "The True Man is supremely wondrous: sometimes he is, sometimes he is not. Barely perceptible within the great abyss, now he sinks, now he wafts." For "keeping to the compass," see the note to the next verse.

5. *Watch and listen while wheeling around*. The images of the carriage and its driver occur again in this section. For the expressions "wheeling around" (*xuanqu*) in this verse and "keeping to the compass" (*shou guizhong*) in the previous verse, compare this passage of the *Liezi* that

describes the art of charioteering as a metaphor of the state of the True Man: "What you sense within in your innermost heart will accord outside with the horse's temper. In this way you will be able to drive back and forth as straight as a stretched cord, and *wheel around as exactly as a compass*" (5.185; see Graham, 114).

6. *And opening and closing will always accord.* According to the explications given by Liu Yiming, this verse means that the two phases of activity and inactivity are fulfilled in a non-dual state. In his commentary, Liu Yiming defines this state as follows: "'One's mind (*xin*) is dead and one's Spirit lives; one severs evil and preserves sincerity; one neither forgets nor assists." In his commentary to the *Awakening to Reality* (*Wuzhen pian*), Liu Yiming also makes clear that the two movements of "opening and closing" are parallel to, or even synonymous of, movement and quiescence: "Opening and closing are timely; movement and quiescence are spontaneous" (commentary to "Qiyan jueju," poem no. 33) Here Liu Yiming certainly alludes to the present section of the *Cantong qi*, which mentions "opening and closing" in verse 6, and "movement and quiescence" in verse 8.

The breathing of the True Man [sec. 60]

1–4 Cultivate this unceasingly,
and your plentiful breath will course like rain from the clouds,
overflowing like a marsh in the spring,
pouring forth like ice that has melted.

5–8 It will stream from the head to the toes;
on reaching the end, it will rise once again.
In its coming and going, it will spread limitless,
pervading throughout and extending all around.

9–14 Return is the attestation of the Dao,
weakness is "the handle of virtue."

When the long gathered filth is removed,
the fine and tenuous are attuned and laid forth.
The turbid is the path of the clear:
after a long dusk, the gleaming light.

This section describes the way of breathing of the True Man. His breath is joined with the One Breath, and circulates within his entire person. This is not a description of a practice: it happens spontaneously to the realized beings who take the operation of the Dao as a model for their operation in the world.

5. *It will stream from the head to the toes*. Compare the *Zhuangzi*: "The True Man breathes through the heels" (6.228; trans. Watson, 78).

9–10. *Return is the attestation of the Dao, weakness is "the handle of virtue."* For these verses, compare *Daode jing*, 40: "Return is the movement of the Dao, weakness is the operation of the Dao"; and the *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "The hexagram Modesty (Qian ䷎, no. 15) is the handle of virtue; the hexagram Return (Fu ䷗, no. 24) is the fundament of virtue" (B.6; see Wilhelm, 345).

Incorrect practices [sec. 26]

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

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

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

17–20 Demonic creatures reveal their shapes,
at whose sight in your dreams you sigh with emotion.
Rejoiced in your heart, pleased in your thoughts,
you tell yourself, surely, your life will grow long.

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

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

The *Cantong qi* repeatedly warns against the performance of practices deemed to be incorrect or unproductive for true realization. This section rejects meditation methods, breathing practices, sexual techniques, and the worship of minor deities and spirits. "Passing through the viscera" (*lizang*) is an early term that refers to visualizing in succession the gods residing within the five viscera. "Inner contemplation" (or "inner observation," *neishi*, the reading found in other redactions of the *Cantong qi*) also refers to meditation on the inner

deities. "Treading the Dipper and pacing the asterisms" denotes the meditation methods of "pacing the celestial net" (*bugang*). "Six *jia*" alludes to protective calendrical deities, and in particular to those associated with the talismans of the "six decades," each of which begins on a day marked by the celestial stem *jia* 甲. "Way of Yin" indicates the sexual techniques, and the expression "nine-and-one" hints to the phrase *jiuqian yishen* ("nine shallow and one deep" penetrations in intercourse). "Ingesting breath" designates the breathing practices.

Not only does the *Cantong qi* reject these methods; it also refers to them with irony. "Exhaling the old and inhaling the new [breath]" (*tugu naxin*), a common designation of the breathing practices, becomes "exhaling the pure and inhaling the evil without" (from the perspective of the *Cantong qi*, the "pure" is to be found in the first place within). Breath is ingested "till it chirps in your stomach." The adept who devotes himself to these practices is "vague and indistinct," an image that in the *Daode jing* denotes the Dao itself, but here quite literally refers to the practitioner who "looks like a fool." Apart from this, the rejected practices, says the *Cantong qi*, are ineffective because they focus on the body and on the hope of extending one's lifetime. For this reason, they go against the true Taoist teaching, which the *Cantong qi* associates with the Yellow Emperor and with Laozi, the Old Master.

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

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

25. *The arts are so many*. *Shu*, here translated as "art," refers to various cosmological sciences and techniques—for instance, divination, physio-

logical techniques, and alchemy—including both their doctrinal foundations and their specific methods.

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

The Great One sends forth his summons [sec. 27]

1–4 "Assiduously practice it"
from sunrise to nightfall, without taking rest.
For three years preserve and ingest,
and lightly will you ascend, roaming afar.

5–8 "Stepping across the fire you will not be scorched,
entering the water you will not get wet."
You will be able to retain your life or depart from this world,
forever content and undistraught.

9–12 With the Way completed and virtue fulfilled,
withdraw, stay concealed, and wait for your time.
The Great One will send forth his summons,
and you move your abode to the Central Land.

13–14 Your work concluded, you ascend on high

to obtain the Register and receive the Chart.

Having rejected several methods that it deems to be erroneous, the *Cantong qi* portrays the attainment of those who devote themselves to alchemy, the only practice that it regards as correct if performed according to its own principles.

For the adept who performs both stages of the alchemical path—those that lead him first to ascend to the Dao and then to realize the non-duality between the Dao and the world—existence and non-existence are one. He maintains himself in the world as long as the conditions to do so persist, hiding his state and giving benefit to his surroundings by his mere presence, until God, the Great One, summons him to Heaven.

1. *"Assiduously practice it."* This sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 41: "A superior gentleman hears of the Dao, and assiduously practices it."

5–6. *"Stepping across the fire you will not be scorched, entering the water you will not get wet."* Sentences similar to this one are found in many Taoist texts. The earliest instance is in the *Zhuangzi*, which describes the True Man saying: "He enters the water and does not get wet; he enters the fire and is not burned" (6.226; see Watson, 77).

7. *You will be able to retain your life or depart from this world*. Compare the description of the True Man in the *Huainan zi*: "He dwells in what has no shape, he abides in what has no place. He moves in what has no form, he settles in what has no body. *He retains his life but looks as if he had departed this world*, he is alive but looks as if he were dead" (7.526; see Le Blanc and Mathieu, 308).

8. *Forever content and undistraught*. For the term *wuyou* ("undistraught, without grief") compare *Daode jing*, 19: "Appear unadorned and embrace the uncarved block, diminish personal interest and lessens desires, cut off learning and be undistraught."

12. *And you move your abode to the Central Land*. The Central Land (or Continent, or Island, *zhongzhou*) is found in the Eastern Sea, surrounded by three mythical archipelagos each of which consists of three islands. It is the earthly residence of the supreme God, the Great One (Taiyi), correlated with his celestial abode in the Pole Star.

13. *Your work concluded, you ascend on high*. This verse can also be

translated as "your merit completed, you ascend on high."

14. *To obtain the Register and receive the Chart*. On this phrase, which denotes the adept's achieving the highest degree of transcendence, see the Introduction, § 3.

Alchemy

The principles of alchemy [sec. 22]

1–2 "Know the white, keep to the black,"
and the Numinous Light will come of its own.

3–6 White is the essence of Metal,
Black the foundation of Water.
Water is the axis of the Dao:
its number is 1.

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

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

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

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

The opening sentence, borrowed from the *Daode jing*, states that one should "keep to the black" in order to "know the white." Black (Yin) represents the agent Water, the outer Yin lines of Kan ☵, and native lead; it is the world in which we live. White (Yang) represents the agent Metal, the inner Yang line of Kan, and True Lead; it is the

One Breath sought by the alchemist. "Keeping to the black" and "knowing the white" generates the Numinous Light (*shenming*), which in the alchemical metaphor is the Elixir.

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

Water is the "mystery" (*xuan*): it stands for obscurity, the north, and black lead, but it holds light and, being the "axis of the Dao," is intimately connected to the center. In alchemical language, this hidden principle is referred to as the Yellow Sprout (*huangya*), a term that connotes both the essence of Metal (True Yang) found within Water (Yin), and the first intimation of the birth of the Elixir (denoted as "yellow" for its association with Soil, the agent that represents the center). Analogously, lead is black outside, but harbors the white and luminous Golden Flower (*jinhua*) within. Quoting another passage from the *Daode jing*, the *Cantong qi* likens the authentic principle hidden in the darkness of the world to the treasure concealed by the saintly man, who disguises himself as a common mortal.

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

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

3–4. *White is the essence of Metal, Black the foundation of Water.* For several commentators, "white" stands for True Lead; for others, it means either mercury, or silver, or gold. These varying views reflect different configurations of the alchemical emblems, in whose contexts the same principle can be represented by different terms and symbols. "White," in

all cases, alludes to the authentic principle contained within the "black." Being the True Yang within Yin, this authentic principle is the opposite of black lead, and therefore is called True Lead. For the same reason, it may be called "mercury," which in Chinese alchemy stands in a polar relation to lead. Because of its white color, it can also be called "silver," in contrast to black native lead. Finally, since True Yang is the precelestial One Breath, it may be called "gold," the metal that more than any other represents the Elixir.

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

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

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

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

Metal and Water, mother and child [sec. 23]

1–4 Metal is the mother of Water —
the mother is hidden in the embryo of her son.
Water is the child of Metal —
the child is stored in the womb of its mother.

This short section describes two movements. The first is the movement of "ascent" from the postcelestial (*houtian*, the relative) to the precelestial (*xiantian*, the absolute); the second is the movement of "descent" from the precelestial to the postcelestial. The precelestial domain is symbolized by Metal; the postcelestial domain, by Water. In a strict sense, alchemy deals only with the first movement, which is the way of "inferior virtue," but its path is fulfilled when the second movement, the way of "superior virtue," is also performed.

The return from the postcelestial to the precelestial is described as the inversion of the generative sequence of the five agents. In this sequence, Metal (the "mother") generates Water (the "son"), but in the alchemical process it is Water ("black lead") that generates Metal (True Lead). Thus the son generates the mother, and "the mother is hidden in the embryo of her son." The extension of the precelestial into the postcelestial, which occurs after the first movement has been completed, is represented as the common course of the generative sequence of the five agents. In this movement, Metal (the "mother") once again generates Water (the "son"). Thus "the child is stored in the womb of its mother."

After the first, "ascensional" part of the alchemical work is completed, the movement of "descent" does not lead to a new shift from the precelestial to the postcelestial. It realizes, instead, the unity the precelestial and the postcelestial.

Born before Heaven and Earth [sec. 24]

1–4 The True Man is supremely wondrous:
sometimes he is, sometimes he is not.
Barely perceptible within the great abyss,
now he sinks, now he wafts.

5–8 Receding, they part and distribute themselves,
and each keeps to its sector.
When collected, it is of the white kind,
when compounded, it turns to vermilion.

9–12 To refine it make an outer protection,
so that the White lies sheltered within.
"Square and round, one inch is its diameter";
the two are indistinct, each seizes the other.

13–14 "Born before Heaven and Earth,"
it is eminent, venerable, and exalted.

This section is characterized by frequent switches of topics, which additionally are not always explicitly stated. The True Man alludes to Metal, i.e., True Lead, and the "great abyss" alludes to Water. Metal ordinarily is the "mother" of Water, which is its "son." The alchemical process inverts these roles. In the cosmological metaphor, Metal, whose color is white, emerges from Water, whose color is black; in the alchemical metaphor, True Lead emerges from native lead, or "black lead." Placed within the vessel, the white True Lead is compounded with True Mercury and generates the Elixir, whose color is vermilion.

The Elixir is equivalent to the One Breath prior to Heaven. It contains the True Yin and True Yang principles joined together as one, and accordingly it is said to be both "square and round," two traditional attributes of Heaven and Earth. Its size of "one inch" alludes to the Two joined as One.

11. *"Square and round, one inch is its diameter."* Compare the "Inner"

version of the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting neijing jing*, sec. 7): "Each of the Nine True Men in the Muddy Pellet has his room. / Square and round, one inch is its size, and they abide within it." In the *Scripture of the Yellow Court*, these words refer to the upper Cinnabar Field, one of whose names is Muddy Pellet (*niwan*), which is represented as made of nine palaces or nine rooms each of which is inhabited by a divine being. For this reason, several commentators have suggested that the present verse of the *Cantong qi* also refers to the upper Cinnabar Field.

13. *"Born before Heaven and Earth."* This sentence is found in both the *Daode jing* and the *Zhuangzi*. The *Daode jing*, 25, says: "There is something inchoate and yet accomplished, born before Heaven and Earth. Silent! Still! It stands alone and never alters, it goes all around and never ends. One can say that it is the mother of Heaven and Earth. I do not know its name, but call it Dao." The *Zhuangzi* has: "[The Dao] is its own fundament, its own root. Before Heaven and Earth existed it was there, firm from ancient times. . . . It is 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" (6.246–47; see Watson, 81).

The Elixir in the tripod [sec. 25]

1–4 On its sides are ramparts and portals,
and in shape it resembles Penghu;
round and enclosed, shut and sealed off,
it is interwoven at every turn.

5–8 Guarded, defended, solid, and firm,
it reverts all misdoing and evil;
its meanders and towers are intertwined
in order "to prevent the unforeseen."

9–12 You can do this if you are free from all cares,
but hardly you can if you are toiled and distraught:
when Spirit and Breath fill the house,

no one can detain them.

13–16 Those who guard it will shine,
those who neglect it are lost.
In movement and quiescence, in rest and activity,
it constantly stays with you.

The alchemical vessel is compared to one of the mythical mountain-islands that lie in the midst of the ocean, and to a palace with surrounding walls and intricate passageways. Thus the vessel guards and shields the Elixir, making its compounding possible.

The most essential stage of the compounding is the final one, as it consists in entering the state of non-doing (*wuwei*). If this state is attained, the Elixir is accomplished; otherwise, it vanishes. But once the Elixir is obtained, it is never lost.

2. *And in shape it resembles Penghu.* Penghu is another name of Penglai, one of five mythical mountain-islands located in the Eastern Ocean.

4. *It is interwoven at every turn.* "At every turn" approximates the sense of *sitong*, an expression that connotes the four directions, i.e., "everywhere."

8. *In order "to prevent the unforeseen."* Compare the "Outward Demeanor" poem in the *Book of Odes*: "Address what concerns the people, / be careful of your duties as a prince, / to prevent the unforeseen" (*Shijing*, "Yi," no. 256; see Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 301). See also the "Image" on the hexagram Cui ䷬ (no. 45) in the *Book of Changes*: "The noble man renews his weapons to prevent the unforeseen" (see Wilhelm, 175). After these early instances, the same sentence is found in the *Huainan zi* (20.1391; see Le Blanc and Mathieu, 962) and in several other works.

11–12. *When Spirit and Breath fill the house, no one can detain them.* Compare *Daode jing*, 9: "Gold and jade fill your halls, but no one can guard them." While this sentence has a negative import in the *Daode jing* (it is pointless to keep ephemeral possessions under guard), the *Cantong qi* uses it to denote something precious.

Compounding the Elixir (First part) [sec. 39]

1–4 Make dikes and embankments with Metal,
so that Water may enter and effortlessly drift.
Fifteen is the measure of Metal,
the same is the number of Water.

5–10 Tend to the furnace to determine the scruples and ounces:
five parts of Water are more than enough.
In this way the two become True,
and Metal will weigh as at first.
The other three are thus not used,
but Fire, which is 2, is fastened to them.

11–16 The three things join one another:
in their transformations their shapes are divine.
The Breath of Great Yang lies underneath,
within an instant it steams and subdues.
First it liquefies, then coagulates;
it is given the name Yellow Carriage.

17–20 When its time is about to come to an end,
it wrecks its own nature and disrupts its life span.
Its form looks like ashes or soil,
its shape is like dust on a luminous window.

Sections 39–40 contain the main description of the method for compounding the Elixir found in the *Cantong qi*. The description is divided into two parts: the first ends with the compounding of the Yellow Carriage, and the second one, with the compounding of the Reverted Elixir proper. Although most later commentators have explained these verses from the perspective of the tradition to which they belonged, namely Neidan, terminology and images in both sections are explicitly Waidan. Nevertheless, the emblematic functions of the ingredients and the process described here can apply to both Waidan and Neidan.

The Elixir is made of two ingredients, here called Metal and Water. Metal is True Lead, and Water is True Mercury. The two ingredients are placed in the vessel, so that mercury circulates but does not volatilize when it is heated. Each ingredient is assigned a symbolic weight of fifteen ounces. Together, their weights correspond to the number of days in the lunar month.

In addition, the weights have another and more important symbolic connotation: 5 and 10 respectively are the "generation number" and the "accomplishment number" of the central agent Soil (see table 4). This correspondence ties both Lead and Mercury to Soil, an association that is already implicit in the emblematic functions of the two ingredients: the Yang line within Kan ☵ (True Lead) is equivalent to the celestial stem *wu* 戊, which is the active, Yang aspect of Soil, while the Yin line within Li ☲ (True Mercury) is equivalent to the celestial stem *ji* 己, which is its passive, Yin aspect (see section 7). Being comprised within both ingredients, Soil can play a mediating function between them, enabling the Yin and Yang principles to conjoin.

Five parts of Water (Mercury) are suitable—"more than enough"—for compounding the Elixir, together with the same amount of Metal (Lead); at the end, Metal will weigh as it did at the beginning. The agent Fire, whose "generation number" is 2, is used for heating the compound. Through the action of fire, which is placed underneath the open vessel, the "three things"—Metal, Water, and Soil—undergo transmutation, taking at first a liquid form and then a solid form, similar to ashes or dust. The compound obtained at the end of the first part of the method is called Yellow Carriage (*huangyu*). It serves as the basis for making the Elixir in the second part of the method, which is described in the next section.

12. *In their transformations their shapes are divine*. This verse might also be translated as "in their transformations their shapes are like [those of] a spirit." Compare *Huainan zi*: "In its movements, [the Dao] is formless; in its transformations, it is like a spirit" (1.60; see Le Blanc and Mathieu, 33–34).

16. *It is given the name Yellow Carriage*. Yellow is the color associated with the central Soil in the system of the five agents. *Yu* primarily means "carriage," but this word also includes "earth" among its meanings. The term "Yellow Carriage," therefore, alludes to the Center as the unity of Yin and Yang, respectively represented in alchemy by Mercury and Lead.

17–18. *When its time is about to come to an end, it wrecks its own nature and disrupts its life span*. *Suiyue*, here translated as "time," literally means "years and months."

19. *Its form looks like ashes or soil*. Note again the mention of Soil, the agent that represents the conjunction of Lead and Mercury.

Compounding the Elixir (Second part) [sec. 40]

1–4 Pound it and mix it,
and let it enter the Red-colored Gates.
Seal the joints firmly,
striving to make them as tight as you can.

5–8 A blazing fire grows below:
by day and by night its sound is unchanging and steady.
At first make it gentle so that it may be adjusted,
at the end make it fierce and let it spread out.

9–12 Watch over it with heed and caution:
inspect it attentively and regulate the amount of its warmth.
It will rotate through twelve nodes,
and when the nodes are complete, it will again need your care.

13–16 Now its Breath is worn out, and its life is about to be severed;
it pauses and dies, losing its *po* and its *hun*.
Then its color changes to purple:
the Reverted Elixir, radiant and glowing, is attained.

17–18 Minutely powder it and make it into a pellet —

even one knife-point is supremely divine.

The description of the refining of True Lead and True Mercury that had began in the previous section continues here. The compound obtained in the first part of the method is placed in a tripod and is heated in a furnace. The vessel, this time, should be hermetically closed, as even the slightest leakage of Breath (*qi*) would prevent the Elixir from being compounded. The intensity of heat is regulated according to the system of the "fire times" (*huohou*), which subdivides each heating cycle into twelve stages ("twelve nodes") modeled on the growth and decline of the Sun during the year (see section 51). Fire is mild at the beginning, then grows stronger until it reaches the highest intensity, then decreases until it is finally extinguished. After several cycles of heating, Lead and Mercury go through a symbolic death. When Yin and Yang cease to exist as separate entities, the *hun* soul returns to Heaven, the *po* soul returns to the Earth, and the luminous Reverted Elixir (*huandan*) is achieved.

18. *Even one knife-point is supremely divine*. The term *daogui*, translated above as "knife-point," more precisely means "tip of a spatula." According to an interpretation, the word *dao* 刀 ("blade, spatula, knife") alludes to Metal (i.e., Gold, the Elixir); *gui* 圭, instead, stands for the "two Soils 土" (one on top of the other, representing *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己, or Yin and Yang) incorporated into the Elixir. The symbolic "knife-point" of Elixir evokes, therefore, the ingredients that have made its compounding possible.

White Tiger and Green Dragon [sec. 28]

1–2 The Records of Fire are not written in vain; look into the *Changes* to comprehend them.

3–8 The supine Moon is the model of tripod and furnace,

the White Tiger is the hinge of the heating.
The mercurial Sun is the Flowing Pearl,
the Green Dragon is together with it.
Take the East and join it with the West:
hun and *po*, of their own accord, will seize one another.

The Sun and the Moon, the main emblems of the *Book of Changes*, perform multiple roles in the alchemical process. For example, the "fire times" (*huohou*) used for compounding the Elixir are modeled on the yearly cycle of the Sun (see the Introduction, § 6); and the alchemical tripod, shaped as two semicircles—vessel and lid—reproduces the forms of the waxing and waning quarters of the Moon.

The essences of the Sun and Moon, moreover, correspond to the ingredients of the Elixir, True Mercury and True Lead. In this role, Sun and Moon can be referred to by multiple but equivalent sets of emblems, some of which are mentioned in this and the next sections of the *Cantong qi*:

(1) The Moon (Yin) is associated with the agent Water, the direction North, the color black (darkness), the trigram Kan ☵, and "black lead" (native lead). The essence of the Moon (True Yang within Yin) is represented by the White Tiger, which is the emblem of the agent Metal, the direction West, and the trigram Dui ☱.

(2) The Sun (Yang) is associated with the agent Fire, the direction South, the color red (light), the trigram Li ☲, and cinnabar. The radiance of the Sun (True Yin within Yang) is represented by the Green Dragon, which is the emblem of the agent Wood, the direction East, and the trigram Gen ☶.

Therefore the White Tiger signifies the True Lead found within native lead (True Yang within Yin), and the Green Dragon signifies the True Mercury found within cinnabar (True Yin within Yang). The joining of Dragon (East) and Tiger (West) forms the Elixir. The two ingredients are also referred to as the *hun* and the *po* souls, which here are abstract emblems just like those mentioned above: True Lead is the *po*, and True Mercury is the *hun*. With regard to the human being, *hun* stands for one's true nature (*xing*), and *po* for one's true qualities (*qing*).

1. *The Records of Fire are not written in vain.* The expression "records of fire" (*huoji*) designates the alchemical texts.

2. *Look into the* Changes *to comprehend them.* Apart from its explicit meaning—i.e., *Book of Changes*—the word *yi* 易 in this verse also refers to the Sun and the Moon according to the traditional etymology adopted by the *Cantong qi* (see section 7). This allusion is reinforced by the use, in the same verse, of the word *ming* 明 ("light," or, as a verb, "to comprehend"), written with the other graph that is formed by the graphs for "sun" (日) and "moon" (月).

3. *The supine Moon is the model of tripod and furnace.* "Supine Moon" (*yanyue*) is a name of the crescent Moon, also attested outside alchemical sources.

4. *The White Tiger is the hinge of the heating.* The White Tiger is called "the hinge of the heating" with regard not only to its association with the tripod and the furnace, but also to its being the emblem of True Lead, which represents the One Breath of the precelestial world sought by the alchemist in the postcelestial world.

5. *The mercurial Sun is the Flowing Pearl.* "Mercurial Sun" (*hongri*) refers to the Sun as the emblem of Yang containing True Yin, i.e., True Mercury. "Flowing Pearl" (*liuzhu*) is a common alchemical synonym of mercury obtained from the refining of cinnabar. The name alludes to the physical aspect of mercury and to its ability to escape in both a factual and a figurate way, including its tendency to volatilize when it is heated.

The "two eights" [sec. 29]

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

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

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

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

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

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

5. *Two times 8 corresponds to one pound.* In the later alchemical tradition, the expression "two eights" (*erba*, lit., "two times 8") designates by antonomasia the Elixir, which is formed by True Lead and True Mercury joined to one another in equal parts.

The Lovely Maid and the Yellow Sprout [sec. 68]

1–4 The Lovely Maid of the River
is numinous and supremely divine:
when she finds Fire she flies away,
leaving behind not a speck of dust.

5–8 Like a demon she hides, like a dragon she conceals:
nobody knows her whereabouts.
If you want to control her,
the Yellow Sprout is the root.

The Lovely Maid of the River (*heshang chanü*) is True Mercury; she is the Yin line within Li ☲, referred to as the "second daughter" in the terminology of the *Book of Changes*. Aroused by fire, she escapes and flies away. Only the Yellow Sprout (*huangya*), which is True Lead, can hold her. When they meet, they join and generate the Elixir.

The argument poetically expressed in these verses resounds at different levels and can be understood in different ways. From the perspective of the *Cantong qi*, all of them are instances of one and the same principle. In a material sense, the Lovely Maid of the River can be mercury, which escapes (volatilizes) when it is heated by fire. In a spiritual sense, referred to the human being, the Lovely Maid can refer to sentiments and passions. When one's own Fire is used to stimulate those sentiments and passions, they escape and run uncontrolled. When they are presided over by one's own True Nature (Lead, the Yellow Sprout), they turn into qualities—instincts, intuitions, propensities—that express one's Nature.

"The three things are one family" [sec. 72]

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

Wood and Fire are companions.

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

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

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

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

This inversion causes the postcelestial (*houtian*) aspects of Yin and Yang to be reintegrated within their precelestial (*xiantian*) aspects, which are of the opposite signs: the postcelestial Yin (Water) returns to precelestial True Yang (Metal), and the postcelestial Yang (Fire) returns to True Yin (Wood). The precosmic and cosmic aspects of Yin and Yang are now joined again to one another: "Metal and Water dwell in conjunction, Wood and Fire are companions."

Since the four initial elements are merged "in indistinction," they are reduced to two, symbolized by the Yang Dragon (whose numerical emblem is 3) and the Yin Tiger (whose numerical emblem is 4). With the addition of the central Soil, which enables True Yin and True Yang to conjoin, there are three sets, each of which has a nu-

merical value of 5. The first set is made of Water and Metal (1+4); the second, of Fire and Wood (2+3); and the third, only of Soil (5). The main symbolic associations of each element are shown below:

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

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

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

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

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

Water and Fire return to Soil [sec. 32]

1–6 *Zi* and *wu* in value amount to 3,
wu and *ji* in number are 5;
as 3 and 5 harmonize,
the eight minerals set the guiding thread in line.
Exhaling and inhaling, they foster one another,
ardently awaiting becoming husband and wife.

7–12 The yellow Soil is the father of Metal,
the Flowing Pearl is the child of Water.
Water treats Soil as its demon:
when soil invades, water cannot rise.
The Vermilion Sparrow is the essence of Fire:
it keeps the balance, moderating success and failure.

13–16 When Water flourishes, Fire is extinguished,
and both die, together returning to generous Soil.
Now, the three natures have joined together,
for their fundamental natures share an ancestor in common.

Water, Fire, and Soil are the three main components of the Elixir. Water and Fire (Yin and Yang) are referred to by the respective earthly branches and "generation numbers" (see tables 4 and 13): Water is the branch *zi* 子 and its number is 1; Fire is the branch *wu* 午 and its number is 2. The third agent, Soil, whose "generation number" is 5, is referred to by the celestial stems *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己, which respectively stand for its Yang and Yin aspects.

Water and Fire have an inherent bond with Soil, the agent that represents the original unity of Yin and Yang: Water is Kan ☵, Fire is Li ☲, and the Yang and Yin inner lines of these trigrams respectively correspond to *wu* 戊 and *ji* 己 (see section 7). Having come forth from a state of unity, Water and Fire wish to join again one another; Soil is the intermediary element that makes their conjunction possible. Therefore "3 (Water and Fire) and 5 (Soil) harmonize with one another." The agreement among Oneness, Yin, and Yang under-

lies all emblems that represent the vertical and horizontal dimensions of the cosmos (typically represented in the Chinese tradition by the numbers 3 and 5, respectively), as well as its spatial and temporal extensions (the eight directions, *baji*, and the eight "nodal days," *bajie*). (See also the note to verses 3–4.)

The second and third stanzas consider Water, Fire, and Soil from the point of view of the sequences of "generation" and "conquest" that occur among the five agents (see table 3). In the generation sequence, Soil gives birth to Metal (True Lead), and Water gives birth to Wood (True Mercury, referred to here with its alchemical name of Flowing Pearl). In this emblematic context, the Elixir is formed when Metal and Wood join to one another. In the conquest sequence, instead, Water conquests Fire, and Soil conquers Water. Since Fire—whose emblem is the Vermilion Sparrow—in turn generates Soil, it is said to be responsible for the equitable conquest and vanquishment that occur among the five agents.

In the alchemical process, Water conquers Fire, and Soil conquers Water; when Water and Fire return to Soil, the three merge their natures. This happens by virtue of Soil, which represents the original unity of Water and Fire.

3–4. *As 3 and 5 harmonize, the eight minerals set the guiding thread in line.* There are several lists of the eight minerals; one of them includes cinnabar, realgar, malachite, sulphur, mica, salt, saltpetre, and orpiment. The eight minerals, however, are not part of the discourse of the *Cantong qi* either as a group or—with the single exception of cinnabar—individually. In fact, the other mention of the eight minerals, found in 87:19–20, is definitely negative: "Dispose of realgar, discard the eight minerals!" This suggests that in the present passage, the expression "eight minerals" is used in a purely metaphoric way: "eight" is the sum of the numerical values of Water (1), Fire (2), and Soil (5), and "minerals" refers to the subject of the present section, which is obviously alchemical. (Compare 22:9, where, for an analogous reason, the five agents are called "five metals.") — According to another interpretation, instead, the "eight minerals" are the alchemical equivalent of the eight trigrams.

7. *The Yellow Soil is the father of Metal.* Yellow is the color associated with Soil in the system of the five agents.

8. *The Flowing Pearl is the child of Water.* Flowing Pearl (*liuzhu*) is a common alchemical synonym of mercury.

9. *Water treats Soil as its demon.* In the context of the divination techniques, "demon" (*gui*, or *guangui*) denotes an item within a series of emblems that "conquers" another item in the same series. In the present case, which refers to the series of the five agents, Soil conquers Water.

"Things of the same kind follow each other" [sec. 35]

1–4 To achieve transcendence by preserving and ingesting,
you must use things of the same kind:
grains are used for planting crops,
eggs are employed for hatching chicks.

5–8 If you support, by its kind, its being what it is,
a thing reaches completion and is easily moulded or smelt.
Could a fish eye ever turn into a pearl?
And mugwort will never make tea.

9–14 "Things of the same kind follow each other";
if they are at odds, they cannot form the Treasure.
Swallows and sparrows do not give birth to a phoenix,
foxes and hares do not suckle a horse;
water streams and does not blaze by rising up,
fire stirs and does not wet by flowing down.

To compound the Elixir, the ingredients must fulfill the principle of *tonglei*, an expression that literally means "to be of the same kind" or "of the same category." This section illustrates this principle only by means of images.

The principle of *tonglei* requires that the ingredients agree with Qian and Kun. Only then can they join one another and generate the Elixir: if the ingredients do not agree with Qian and Kun, "could they ever will to be joined in one body?" (36:16). In the alchemical path

illustrated in the *Cantong qi*, therefore, the ingredients—whether they are material or immaterial—should not only match one another, but also enable the conjunction of Qian and Kun.

Within the cosmos, Qian ☰ operates through Kan ☵, and Kun ☷ operates through Li ☲. Qian and Kun are the true natures of Kan and Li. Black lead and cinnabar represent this configuration. In the alchemical process, they reveal their true nature: the true nature of black lead (☵) is True Lead (☰), and the true nature of cinnabar (☲) is True Mercury (☷).

9. *"Things of the same kind follow each other."* This sentence is an almost literal quotation from the *Zhuangzi*: "Creatures [*or*: things] of the same kind follow each other, and a voice will answer to the voice that is like itself. This has been the principle of Heaven since time began" (31.1027; see Watson, 346).

13–14. *Water streams and does not blaze by rising up, fire stirs and does not wet by flowing down.* These verses allude to a passage in the "Great Plan" ("Hongfan") chapter of the *Book of Documents* (*Shujing*): "Water is the name given to what wets by flowing down; fire is the name given to what blazes by rising up" (12.76b; see Legge, *The Sacred Books of China*, 3:141).

Erroneous alchemical methods [sec. 36]

1–4 In this world there are many learned men,
eminent, wondrous, and of excellent talent.
Unless they suddenly have the unexpected encounter,
they squander their fire and in vain waste their wealth.

5–8 Relying on opinion and written words,
they foolishly act as they like:
their principles have no foundation,
and their attitude lacks firmness.

9–12 They pound the chalcanthite from Shao,
and mica, and alum, and magnetite;
they roast sulphur above camphor wood,
and refine it with mercury made into a mud.

13–16 Blowing on the fire to melt the five minerals and copper,
they think that this is the key for accomplishment.
But all these things are disparate in nature and different in kind:
could they ever will to be joined in one body?

17–20 With a thousand attempts they are bound to ten thousand failures,
intending to be clever, becoming fools.
Their good luck ends without achievement,
but only the accomplished knows what this means.

21–24 From youth to the greying of hair,
at midway they begin to waver.
They turn their backs to the Way, and keep to delusive tracks;
they leave the right path and enter the wrong.

25–26 As if peering through a pipe, unable to see broadly,
they can hardly assess what impends.

Any alchemical practice that does not involve the conjunction of True Lead and True Mercury is deemed by the *Cantong qi* to be ineffective, because its ingredients do not represent Qian and Kun, or True Yin and True Yang. The present section illustrates this view with examples drawn from Waidan. Adepts of the alchemical arts often hope to make elixirs by refining such minerals as chalcanthite, mica, alum, and magnetite; or by compounding sulphur and mercury with one another (the classical Waidan method in traditions not based on the *Cantong qi*; see the note to verses 11–12); or by making compounds of minerals and metals. These methods do not comply with the

principle of *tonglei*, described in the previous section: their ingredients do not represent the state in which Heaven and Earth, or Qian and Kun, are joined to one another as "one body," and cannot make it possible to revert to that state.

This is not criticism of Waidan per se: even though the *Cantong qi* deems all alchemy to be the way of "inferior virtue" (see section 20), it uses explicit Waidan terminology and imagery to describe the only kind of alchemical practice that it supports (see sections 39–40 and 62). The criticism, instead, is addressed to methods that do not allow the conjunction of Qian and Kun, alchemically represented by the union of True Lead and True Mercury.

3. *Unless they suddenly have the "unexpected encounter."* The term *xiehou* ("unexpected encounter") is first found in "On the Moor is the Creeping Grass," one of the love poems of the *Book of Odes*. The first half of this poem says: "On the moor is the creeping grass, / And how heavily is it loaded with dew! / There was a beautiful man, / Lovely, with clear eyes and fine forehead! / We met together unexpectedly, / And so my desire was satisfied" (*Shijing*, "Ye you mancao," no. 94; see Waley, *The Book of Songs*, 21). Later, *xiehou* was used to denote the "unexpected meeting" with a master.

11–12. *They roast sulphur above camphor wood, and refine it with mercury made into a mud.* These verses allude to the fundamental method in the Waidan traditions not based on the *Cantong qi*. Cinnabar (Yang) is refined to obtain mercury (Yin), which is then compounded with sulphur (Yang) to recompose cinnabar. At the end of several cycles of refining—typically nine, sometimes seven—one obtains an elixir whose properties are entirely Yang. Authors belonging to Waidan traditions based on the *Cantong qi* would later criticize this method for being based only on the refining of Yang, without a corresponding method for the refining of Yin (see the Introduction, § 9).

13. *Blowing on the fire to melt the five minerals and copper.* This verse probably refers to Waidan techniques similar to the one described in the *Baopu zi neipian*: "Let [the crucible] cool, remove the contents, and blow to melt the copper" (16.288; see Ware, 272). — There are several lists of the five minerals. One of them includes cinnabar, realgar, arsenolite, malachite, and magnetite.

16. *Could they ever will to be joined in one body?* Compare *Zhuangzi*: "Heaven and Earth are the father and mother of the ten thousand things. When they join they become one body; when they part they become a

beginning" (19.632; see Watson, 198). According to the *Cantong qi*, only True Yin and True Yang (Heaven and Earth, and what represents them by "being of their kind") can "join in one body."

Song of the Tripod [sec. 82]

1–4 3 and 5 around,
an inch and one part,
4 and 8 the mouth,
the lips a pair of inches.

5–8 A foot and 2 tenths high,
evenly thick and thin;
its belly on the third day
sits beneath the descending warmth.

9–12 Yin stays above,
Yang rushes below;
fierce are the head and the tail,
gentle in between.

13–16 Seventy at the beginning,
thirty days at the end;
and for two hundred and sixty
the balance well kept.

17–20 The whiteness of the Yin Fire,
the lead of the Yellow Sprout:
the Two Sevens assemble
to support and assist man.

21–24 This suffices to order the brain

and to make steady the ascent to the Mystery:
the infant dwells within,
gaining security and stability.

25–28 Roaming in its coming and going,
it never exits the gates;
gradually does it grow,
until its qualities and nature are pure.

29–32 Then it returns to the One
and reverts to the origin,
as courteously and respectfully
as a minister is to his lord.

33–36 At the end of each cycle,
laboriously and assiduously
protect it with utmost attention
— let there be no lapse.

37–40 Long is the path
to return to the Abyssal Mystery,
but if you do arrive there,
you will comprehend Qian and Kun.

41–44 Moisten one knife-point,
and it will cleanse the *hun* and the *po*;
you will obtain a long life
and find a home in the town of the Immortals.

45–48 Lovers of the Dao
should seek out its root:
look into the five agents
to settle the scruples and mils.

49–52 Think about this carefully;
it need not be discussed.
Hide it deep and guard it,

do not transmit it in writing.

53–56 Riding a white crane,
harnessing a scaly dragon,
you will roam through Great Emptiness
and pay homage to the Lord of the Immortals.

57–58 Your name will be inscribed in the Heavenly Charts,
and you will be called a True Man.

This section contains the "Song of the Tripod" ("Dingqi ge"), the second of the three compositions that form Book 3 of the *Cantong qi*.

The first two quatrains (verses 1–8) refer to the tripod, and even at a literal level can be read in at least two different ways. In the first reading, the tripod has a circumference of one foot and five inches ("3 and 5" means three times five; one Chinese foot contains ten inches) and a thickness of one inch and one tenth. The mouth is twelve inches wide ("4 and 8" means four plus eight), and its "lips" are two inches thick. The height is one foot and two inches. In the second reading, these numbers refer to the two halves of the tripod. The upper half has a circumference of one foot and five inches and a thickness of one inch and one tenth; the lower half has a circumference of three feet and two inches ("4 and 8" means four times eight inches) and a thickness of two inches.

Beyond these different literal readings, the numbers mentioned in these verses have several symbolic associations and pertain to three sets of emblems. The first and second verses refer to the five agents, whose key numbers are 1, 3, and 5; the third and fourth verses refer to the eight trigrams, whose key numbers are 2, 4, and 8; and the fifth and sixth verses refer to the duodecimal cycles. In detail:

(1) The numbers of the circumference, 3 and 5, allude to the Three Fives and therefore refer to the five agents. (The model of this configuration is the *Hetu*, or *Chart of the Yellow River*; see fig. 1.) The verse "an inch and one part" (*cun yi fen* 寸一分), which in a literal sense describes the thickness of the tripod, can be read as meaning "in its inch [of thickness] (*cun* 寸), there is the One (*yi* 一) divided (*fen* 分) [into the Two]."

(2) The numbers of the mouth, 4 and 8, allude to the four main and the four intermediate directions of space and therefore refer to the eight trigrams. (The model of this configuration is the *Luoshu*, or *Writ of the Luo River*; see fig. 2.) The two inches of the lips allude to the "two principles" (*liangyi*), i.e., Yin and Yang, which border on one another.

(3) The numbers of the height, 1 and 2, refer to the twelve earthly branches and the twelve "sovereign hexagrams" (*bigua*; see table 11), which are evenly divided between Yin and Yang and are used to represent the stages of the "fire times" (*huohou*). The verse "evenly thick and thin" refers to the phases of increase ("thickness") and decrease ("thinness") of the heating.

The verse "its belly on the third day sits beneath the descending warmth" alludes to the monthly lunar cycle: on the third day of that cycle, the luminous, "warm" Yang principle begins its ascent (see 13:1 and 49:13).

The next two quatrains (verses 9–16) refer to the "fire times" for compounding the Elixir. The Yin principle is Water, the Yang principle is Fire. In Waidan, this alludes to the Yang fire of the stove placed underneath the Yin water contained in the vessel. In Neidan, Fire is the heart and corresponds to the trigram Li ☲; Water is the kidneys and corresponds to the trigram Kan ☵. Fire by nature rises upward, carrying with it the True Mercury contained within the heart (True Yin, the inner line of Li ☲). Water on the contrary flows downward, carrying with it the True Lead contained within the kidneys (True Yang, the inner line of Kan ☵). True Yin and True Yang therefore are separated from one another. With the "inversion" (*diandao*) that occurs by means of the Neidan practice, the Yang Fire is moved below and the Yin Water is moved above. In this way, Fire continues to rise upward and Water continues to flow downward, but now the True Yin and the True Yang contained within Li ☲ and Kan ☵ can meet and join with one another.

Repeated heating cycles make it possible to compound the Elixir. The beginning ("head") and end ("tail") of each cycle respectively pertain to Yang and Yin and are represented by the branches *zi* 子 and *wu* 午. At these times, a strong fire is used for refining the Elixir (fire is "fierce" at both of these stages because *zi* is the "tail" of Yin and the "head" of Yang, while *wu* is the "tail" of Yang and the "head" of Yin). The two intermediate stages of the cycle (which in

Neidan are referred to "ablutions," *muyu*) correspond to states of balance between Yin and Yang, and are represented by the branches *mao* 卯 and *you* 酉. At these times, a gentle fire is used to "warmly nourish" the Elixir. The strong fire is used for seventy days starting from the winter solstice (*zi* 子) and for thirty days during the month of the summer solstice (*wu* 午); the gentle fire is used in the remaining 260 days, making altogether the 360 days of the twelve lunar months. (See the notes to verses 11–12.)

The next four quatrains (verses 17–32) refer to the nourishment and the growth of the Elixir, which continue to rely on Fire. The Elixir is made of True Mercury and True Lead. "The whiteness of the Yin Fire" alludes to True Mercury (Yin, white) found within Li ☲ (Fire, red). "The lead of the Yellow Sprout" alludes to the True Lead found within Kan ☵ ("yellow sprout" denotes the first stage in the formation of True Lead, or the Elixir). Here Fire is associated with both ingredients: True Mercury is the Yin Fire, True Lead is the Yang Fire. Since Fire is associated with number 7, this passage mentions the "two sevens." (In another interpretation, 2 is the number of Yin Fire, and 7 is the number of Yang Fire; these are respectively the "generation number" and the "accomplishment number" of Fire in the system of the five agents; see table 4.)

In Waidan, the Elixir consists of the essences of the primary ingredients, which rise upward within the tripod and coagulate under the lid (or the upper half of the vessel). In Neidan, the Elixir analogously is generated in the lower Cinnabar Field, and rises in the course of its growth to the upper Cinnabar Field, located in the region of the brain. Here the "Song of the Tripod" uses imagery and language that would later become typical of Neidan, but were already used in the context of the earlier meditation practices on the inner deities: the Elixir is denoted as an "infant," and the upper Cinnabar Field is called the Mystery, a name reminiscent of Mysterious Barrier (*xuanguan*) and Mysterious Palace (*xuangong*), which denote this locus of the human body. Regardless of whether the whole "Song of the Tripod" is read with reference to Waidan or Neidan, however, the main point is that the Elixir grows until its ingredients are brought back to their original state of purity and unity, and this happens by following an ascensional process.

The last seven quatrains and the final two verses (verses 33–58) conclude the poem by admonishing on the attention required to

perform the practice, on its arduousness, and on its secrecy. When the Elixir is achieved, one becomes a True Man. The "Song of the Tripod" depicts this state using classic Taoist imagery: the adepts ascends to Heaven to have audience with the supreme deities, and his name is entered in the "records of the Immortals."

7. *Its belly on the third day*. In this verse, *qi* 齊 (usually meaning "to regulate, equalize") stands for *qi* 臍 ("navel"), and the compound *fuqi* 腹齊 denotes the belly. According to another interpretation, *qi* 齊 here maintains its ordinary meaning ("to regulate, equalize"), and the verse means "its belly equalizes the three," namely Original Breath (*yuanqi*), Original Essence (*yuanjing*), and Original Spirit (*yuanshen*). In a third interpretation, the verse alludes to the lower Cinnabar Field, which is sometimes said to be located three inches below the navel.

11–12. *Fierce are the head and the tail, gentle in between*. Compare verses 40:7–8, which also refer to the fire placed underneath the vessel: "At first make it gentle so that it may be adjusted, at the end make it fierce and let it spread out." As was noted in the Introduction, § 4, the present passage of the "Song of the Tripod" does not match the method of the "fire times" based on the solar cycle described in section 51.

20. *To support and assist man*. According to several commentaries, "man" in this verse refers to the True Man (*zhenren*) or to Spirit (*shen*).

33–36. *At the end of each cycle . . . let there be no lapse*. Compare 40:11–12: "It will rotate through twelve nodes, and when the nodes are complete, it will again need your care."

41. *Moisten one knife-point*. On the term *daogui* see the note to 40:18.

46. *Should seek out its root*. Compare *Daode jing*, 16: "Things are abounding and overflowing, but each of them goes back to its root."

57–58. *Your name will be inscribed in the Heavenly Charts, and you will be called a True Man*. Compare 27:13–14: "Your work concluded, you ascend on high to obtain the Register and receive the Chart."

Wei Boyang and the Cantong qi [sec. 86]

1–4 A lowly man born in Kuaiji,
I rust my life away in an obscure valley.
I cherish plainness and simplicity,
and find no joy in power or fame.

5–8 At leisure in a secluded place,
unconcerned with profit or name;
upholding calm and tranquility,
I seek quietness and serenity alone.

9–14 Unhurried, dwelling at ease,
I wrote this book
to sing and tell of the great *Book of Changes*
and of the words that the three sages handed down.
I have examined their import and meaning
and the principle that runs through them all.

At the end of his work, Wei Boyang finally introduces himself in this and the next two sections. Having renounced the ordinary ways of humanity, he retired on a mountain to lead a solitary life, and composed the *Cantong qi* on the basis of the *Book of Changes*. (*)

(*) The mention of Wei Boyang's place of origin in this section requires a brief comment. While Kuaiji is Wei Boyang's traditional birthplace, other redactions of the *Cantong qi* read either Luguo, in present-day Shandong, or Kuaiguo, in present-day central Henan. The former name deserves notice, as it seems to preserve a trace of earlier traditions that attributed the authorship of the *Cantong qi* to Xu Congshi (see the Introduction, § 2).

1. *A lowly man born in Kuaiji*. On Kuaiji see the Introduction, p. 6, note 8.

3. *I cherish plainness and simplicity*. For the expression "plainness and simplicity" (*pusu*) see the *Zhuangzi*: "In quiescence you will be a saint, in movement a king. Resting in non-doing, you will be honored; in plainness and simplicity, your beauty will be such that no one in the world may vie with you" (13.458; see Watson, 143).

7. *Upholding calm and tranquility*. For the expression "calm and tranquility" (*tiandan*) see *Daode jing*, 31: "Calm and tranquility are the best"; and *Zhuangzi*: "Calm and tranquility, silence, emptiness, non-doing—these are the level of Heaven and Earth, the substance of the Way and its Virtue" (15.538; see Watson, 168).

9–10. *Unhurried, dwelling at ease, I wrote this book*. Compare *Zhuangzi*: "The saint, unhurried, embodies change and so comes to his end" (20.694; see Watson, 218). — This verses, moreover, hint to a parallel between Laozi who, in his deified aspect, composed the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* (*Huangting jing*) and Wei Boyang, the immortal who composed the *Cantong qi*. The opening verses of the *Yellow Court* say: "In the purple aurora of the Highest Clarity, in front of the Sovereign of the Void, the Lord of Jade Dawn of the Most High Great Dao, *dwelling at ease* in the Stamen-Pearl Palace, wrote seven-word verses . . ." (*Huangting neijing jing*, sec. 1).

The three ways stem from one source [sec. 87]

1–4 Abide by these norms without fail,
let their essence and spirit shine far and wide:
when the divine transformations flow and pervade all things,
the Four Seas are in harmony and at peace.

5–8 Use them outwardly as a calendar,
with which ten thousand generations can comply.
Pursue them in carrying out governance,
and its practice will be uncomplicated.

9–12 Draw them within to nourish your nature:
this is the Dao of the Yellow Emperor and the Old Master, just as it is.
"Hold the fullness of virtue,"

and you will go back to the root and return to the origin.

13–16 It is there, near, in your Heart
and not separate from yourself:
embracing Unity without neglect,
"you will be able to maintain yourself for long."

17–22 Accord with it by preserving and ingesting,
so that male and female may be established.
Dispose of realgar,
discard the eight minerals!
Attentively use what you produce;
this is what is treasured by the world.

23–26 I have tendered three twigs,
but their branches and stalks are bound to one another:
"They come forth together but have different names,"
as they all stem from one gate.

27–32 These are not sentences merely strung together
in order to embroider my writing.
In them there is only the Truth,
as solid as stone to be seen.
Had I spoken falsely,
I would bear the fault.

33–36 The name of my book is *The Seal of the Unity of the Three*;
examine its principles in detail.
"Its words are few," but its intent is great:
all future generations should abide by it.

Wei Boyang now describes the three main subjects of the *Cantong qi*, adding more details. Cosmology (verses 5–8) bears on the "outward," in order to adjust and adapt to change. Taoism (verses 9–12) concerns the "inward," in order to cultivate one's inner nature. Alchemy

(verses 13–22) provides the method, in order to realize the conjunction of Qian and Kun, or Yin and Yang. Wei Boyang traced the common origin of these three ways, and joined them into one.

4. *The Four Seas are in harmony and at peace*. "Four Seas" (*sihai*) is a common designation of the whole world.

5. *Use them outwardly as a calendar*. Compare 2:7–8: "Abide in the Center to control the outside; the numbers are found in the system of the pitch-pipes and the calendar." As it does in that passage, here too the *Cantong qi* mentions the calendar as the ideal application of the cosmological principles in the "outward" world: it allows the ruler to model his government in agreement with the changes that occur in Heaven.

11. *"Hold the fullness of Virtue."* This sentence is quoted from *Daode jing*, 55: "Holding the fullness of Virtue is being similar to an infant."

12. *And you will go back to the root and return to the origin*. For the term *guigen* ("going back to the root") compare *Daode jing*, 16: "Things are abounding and overflowing, but each of them goes back to its root. Going back to the root is called being quiescent."

15. *Embracing Unity without neglect*. For the term *baoyi* ("embracing Unity") compare *Daode jing*, 10: "In carrying and maintaining your Yin soul (*po*) and in embracing Unity, can you not separate from them?"; and *Daode jing*, 22: "Thus the saint embraces Unity and is a mold for the world."

16. *"You will be able to maintain yourself for long."* This sentence is an almost literal quotation from *Daode jing*, 44: "Know what is sufficient and you will not be disgraced, know where to stop and you will not be in danger — you will be able to last for long"; and *Daode jing*, 59: "If no one knows his limit, he can possess the kingdom; if he possesses the Mother of the kingdom, he will be able to last for long."

19–20. *Dispose of realgar, discard eight minerals!* Realgar in this verse is designated as "Wudu," its well-known, classical place of production in present-day Gansu. On the eight minerals see the note to 32:3–4.

25. *"They come forth together but have different names."* This sentence is an almost literal quotation from *Daode jing*, 1: "These two come forth together but have different names."

30. *As solid as stone to be seen*. For the expression *luoluo*, compare *Daode jing*, 39: "Do not desire what is as cherished as jade, but what is as

solid as stone."

35. *"Its words are few," but its intent is great.* Compare *Book of Changes*, "Appended Sayings": "The words of good-natured men are few" (B.9; see Wilhelm, 355). Note that the term "good-natured men" (*jiren*) is found below in the next section, verse 88:15.

Wei Boyang's final words [sec. 88]

1–6 Forsaking the times, avoiding harm,
I have entrusted myself to mountains and hills.
I have wandered and roamed through the Unbounded,
with demons as my neighbors.
Transmuting my form, transcending the world,
I have entered the depths of the Inaudible.

7–10 Once in a hundred generations I descend
to roam in the human world;
spreading my wings,
I bend east, west, and south.

11–16 In times of adversity like those met by Tang,
when flood is compounded by drought,
when the stems and leaves shrivel and fade,
losing their luster and glow,
the good-natured man braves and endures the turn of events:
steady and serene, and ready to live a long life.

To end his work, Wei Boyang concludes the self-portrait that had begun in section 86. He visited the dangerous boundaries of the known world, and went further, obtaining transcendence. Like the deities and the immortals of his land, who periodically descend to

earth in order to grant teachings to humanity, he returns to our world now and again to reveal his doctrines. This time, he has bestowed his *Cantong qi* upon us. Those who follow its teachings, in this or another form, belong to the same unnamed, perennial doctrine. They lead a stable life, and provide support to one another.

3. *I have wondered and roamed through the Unbounded.* The term *liaokuo*, rendered here as "the Unbounded," is also found in 51:67, where it is an adjective and is translated as "vast and broad."

5. *Transmuting my form, transcending the world. Xian* ("transcending the world") can also be translated as "becoming immortal."

6. *I have entered the depths of the Inaudible.* Compare *Zhuangzi*: "To him there is no north or south—in utter freedom he dissolves himself in the four directions and enters the depths of the unfathomable" (17.601; see Watson, 187).

10. *I bend to the east, the west, and the south.* These words indicate that Wei Boyang comes from the north, the direction symbolic of the origin and of the center of Heaven. See also the passage of the *Zhuangzi* quoted in the note to verse 6 above.

11–12. *In times of adversity like those met by Tang, when flood and drought confront one another.* These verses refer to Tang, or Cheng Tang, the first ruler of the Shang dynasty whose reign began, according to one of the traditional chronologies, in 1558 BCE. The myths recorded in several sources mention only a drought that took place at the beginning of his dynasty and lasted five or more years. A flood is said to have occurred, instead, at the beginning of the previous dynasty, the Yin.

15–16. *The good-natured man braves and endures the turn of events: steady and serene, and ready to live a long life.* These two final verses have also been understood as meaning "The good-natured men support one another: steady and serene, he can live a long life." For the term "good-natured men" (*jiren*) compare the sentence of the "Appended Sayings" of the *Book of Changes* quoted in the note to 87:35.

Tables and Figures

Table 1

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

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

Table 2

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

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

Table 3

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

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

Table 4

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

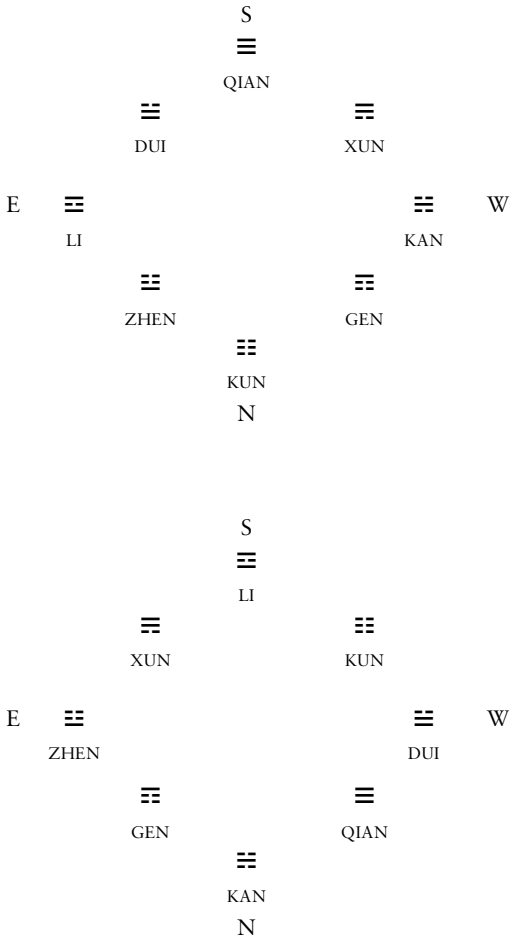
"Generation numbers" (*shengshu* 生數)
and "accomplishment numbers" (*chengshu* 成數)
of the five agents.

Table 5

☰	☱	☲	☳	☴	☵	☶	☷
乾	兑	離	震	巽	坎	艮	坤
QIAN	DUI	LI	ZHEN	XUN	KAN	GEN	KUN
heaven	lake	fire	thunder	wind	water	mountain	earth
father	youngest daughter	second daughter	eldest son	eldest daughter	second son	youngest son	mother
south	southeast	east	northeast	southwest	west	northwest	north
northwest	west	south	east	southeast	north	northeast	southwest

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

Table 6



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

Table 7

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

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

Table 8

	䷀ QIAN	䷁ KUN	䷲ ZHEN	䷸ SUN	䷜ KAN	䷝ LI	䷳ GEN	䷹ DUI
6th	壬戌 renxu	癸酉 guiyou	庚戌 gengxu	辛卯 xinmao	戊子 wuzi	己巳 jisi	丙寅 bingyin	丁未 dingwei
5th	壬申 renshen	癸亥 guihai	庚申 gengshen	辛巳 xinsi	戊戌 wuxu	己未 jiwei	丙子 bingzi	丁酉 dingyou
4th	壬午 renwu	癸丑 guichou	庚午 gengwu	辛未 xinwei	戊申 wushen	己酉 jiyou	丙戌 bingxu	丁亥 dinghai
3rd	甲辰 jiachen	乙卯 yimao	庚辰 gengchen	辛酉 xinyou	戊午 wuwu	己亥 jihai	丙申 bingshen	丁丑 dingchou
2nd	甲寅 jiayin	乙巳 yisi	庚寅 gengyin	辛亥 xinhai	戊辰 wuchen	己丑 jichou	丙午 bingwu	丁卯 dingmao
1st	甲子 jiazi	乙未 yiwei	庚子 gengzi	辛丑 xinchou	戊寅 wuyin	己卯 jimao	丙辰 bingchen	丁巳 dingsi

Celestial stems (*tiangan* 天干) and earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支) associated with the six lines of the "eight pure hexagrams" (*ba chungua* 八純卦). These associations are used in verses 45:1–2 of the *Cantong qi* ("Zhun ䷂ uses *zi* and *shen*, Meng ䷃ employs *yin* and *xu*").

NOTE. Each hexagram is formed by an "inner" (lower) trigram and an "outer" (upper) trigram. In the "eight pure hexagrams," the two component trigrams are identical, and each of their lines is associated with one celestial stem and one earthly branch, as shown in this table. In the *Cantong qi* verses quoted above, the branches that represent each hexagram are those associated with the first line of its "inner" trigram and the first line of its "outer" trigram, which correspond to the first and the fourth lines of the respective "pure hexagrams." In particular, Zhun ䷂ is formed by Zhen ☳ and Kan ☵, and Meng ䷃ is formed by Kan ☵ and Gen ☶. With regard to Zhun ䷂, the branches associated with the first line of its inner trigram Zhen ☳ (corresponding to the first line of the hexagram Zhen ䷲) and with the first line of its outer trigram Kan ☵ (corresponding to the fourth line of the hexagram Kan ䷜) are *zi* 子 and *shen* 申, respectively. With regard to Meng ䷃, the branches associated with the first line of its inner trigram Kan ☵ (corresponding to the first line of the hexagram Kan ䷜) and with the first line of its outer trigram Gen ☶ (corresponding to the fourth line of the hexagram Gen ䷳) are *yin* 寅 and *xu* 戌, respectively.

Table 9

HEXAGRAMS			CELESTIAL STEMS	
Qian	乾	䷀	*jia*, *ren*	甲, 壬
Kun	坤	䷁	*yi*, *gui*	乙, 癸
Gen	艮	䷳	*bing*	丙
Dui	兑	䷹	*ding*	丁
Kan	坎	䷜	*wu*	戊
Li	離	䷝	*ji*	己
Zhen	震	䷲	*geng*	庚
Xun	巽	䷸	*xin*	辛

Correspondences between hexagrams and celestial stems in Jing Fang's 京方 (77–37 BCE) *bagua najia* 八卦納甲 (Matching Stems of the Eight Trigrams) device.

Table 10

NODE	DAY	PHASE	TRIGRAM		STEM AND DIRECTION		
(1–5)	3	beginning of waxing (*shuo* 朔)	Zhen 震	☳	*geng*	庚	W
(6–10)	8	first quarter (*shangxian* 上弦)	Dui 兑	☱	*ding*	丁	S
(11–15)	15	full moon (*wang* 望)	Qian 乾	☰	*jia*	甲	E
(16–20)	16	beginning of waning (*jiwang* 既望)	Xun 巽	☴	*xin*	辛	W
(21–25)	23	last quarter (*xiaxian* 下弦)	Gen 艮	☶	*bing*	丙	S
(26–30)	30	end of cycle (*hui* 晦)	Kun 坤	☷	*yi*	乙	E

The *yueti najia* 月體納甲 (Matching Stems of the Moons) device as developed by Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233) and applied in the *Cantong qi*.

Table 11

復	臨	泰	大壯	夬	乾	姤	遯	否	觀	剝	坤
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
黃鐘	大呂	太蔟	夾鐘	姑洗	仲呂	蕤賓	林鐘	夷則	南呂	無射	應鐘
huangzhong	dalü	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).

Table 12

STEMS		AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	COLORS	VISCERA	NUMBERS
1 *jia* 甲	2 *yi* 乙	WOOD	east	green	liver	3, 8
3 *bing* 丙	4 *ding* 丁	FIRE	south	red	heart	2, 7
5 *wu* 戊	6 *ji* 己	SOIL	center	yellow	spleen	5
7 *geng* 庚	8 *xin* 辛	METAL	west	white	lungs	4, 9
9 *ren* 壬	10 *gui* 癸	WATER	north	black	kidneys	1, 6

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

Table 13

	BRANCHES		AGENTS	DIRECTIONS	HOURS	NUMBERS
1	*zi*	子	WATER	N	23–1	1, 6
2	*chou*	丑	SOIL	NNE 3/4 E	1–3	5, 10
3	*yin*	寅	WOOD	ENE 3/4 N	3–5	3, 8
4	*mao*	卯	WOOD	E	5–7	3, 8
5	*chen*	辰	SOIL	ESE 3/4 S	7–9	5, 10
6	*si*	巳	FIRE	SSE 3/4 E	9–11	2, 7
7	*wu*	午	FIRE	S	11–13	2, 7
8	*wei*	未	SOIL	SSW 3/4 W	13–15	5, 10
9	*shen*	申	METAL	WSW 3/4 S	15–17	4, 9
10	*you*	酉	METAL	W	17–19	4, 9
11	*xu*	戌	SOIL	WNW 3/4 N	19–21	5, 10
12	*hai*	亥	WATER	NNW 3/4 W	21–23	1, 6

The twelve earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支) and their associations.

Table 14

S
wu 午
FIRE

E
mao 卯
WOOD

W
you 酉
METAL

N
zi 子
WATER

Spatial arrangement of the four cardinal earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支).

Table 15

1	jiazi	甲子	13	bingzi	丙子	25	wuzi	戊子	37	gengzi	庚子	49	renzi	壬子
2	yichou	乙丑	14	dingchou	丁丑	26	jichou	己丑	38	xinchou	辛丑	50	guichou	癸丑
3	bingyin	丙寅	15	wuyin	戊寅	27	gengyin	庚寅	39	renyin	壬寅	51	jiayin	甲寅
4	dingmao	丁卯	16	jimao	己卯	28	xinmao	辛卯	40	guimao	癸卯	52	yimao	乙卯
5	wuchen	戊辰	17	gengchen	庚辰	29	renchen	壬辰	41	jiachen	甲辰	53	bingchen	丙辰
6	jisi	己巳	18	xinsi	辛巳	30	guisi	癸巳	42	yisi	乙巳	54	dingsi	丁巳
7	gengwu	庚午	19	renwu	壬午	31	jiawu	甲午	43	bingwu	丙午	55	wuwu	戊午
8	xinwei	辛未	20	guiwei	癸未	32	yiwei	乙未	44	dingwei	丁未	56	jiwei	己未
9	renshen	壬申	21	jiashen	甲申	33	bingshen	丙申	45	wushen	戊申	57	gengshen	庚申
10	guiyou	癸酉	22	yiyou	乙酉	34	dingyou	丁酉	46	jiyou	己酉	58	xinyou	辛酉
11	jiaxu	甲戌	23	bingxu	丙戌	35	wuxu	戊戌	47	gengxu	庚戌	59	renxu	壬戌
12	yihai	乙亥	24	dinghai	丁亥	36	jihai	己亥	48	xinhai	辛亥	60	guihai	癸亥

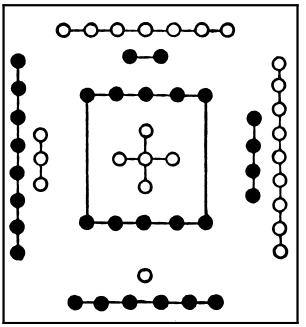
Sexagesimal cycle of the celestial stems (*tiangan* 天干) and the earthly branches (*dizhi* 地支).

Table 16

EAST				
	1	*jiao*	角	Horn
	2	*kang*	亢	Neck
	3	*di*	氐	Root
	4	*fang*	房	Room
	5	*xin*	心	Heart
	6	*wei*	尾	Tail
	7	*ji*	箕	Winnowing Basket
NORTH				
	8	*dou*	斗	Dipper
	9	*niu* (*qianniu*)	牛（牽牛）	Ox (*or* Ox Leader)
	10	*nü* (*shunnü*)	女（須女）	Maid (*or* Serving Maid)
	11	*xu*	虛	Emptiness
	12	*wei*	危	Rooftop
	13	*shi* (*yingshi*)	室（營室）	Encampment
	14	*bi*	壁	Wall
WEST				
	15	*kui*	奎	Stride
	16	*lou*	婁	Bond
	17	*wei*	胃	Stomach
	18	*mao*	昴	Pleiades
	19	*bi*	畢	Net
	20	*zi*	觜	Turtle Beak
	21	*shen*	參	Alignment
SOUTH				
	22	*jing*	井	Well
	23	*gui* (*yugui*)	鬼（輿鬼）	Spirit (*or* Spirit Bearer)
	24	*liu*	柳	Willow
	25	*xing* (*qixing*)	星（七星）	[Seven] Stars
	26	*zhang*	張	Extension
	27	*yi*	翼	Wings
	28	*zhen*	軫	Chariot Platform

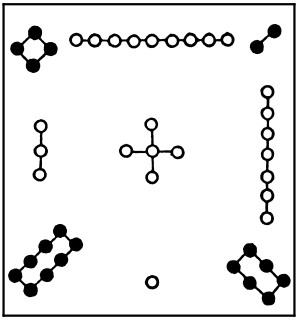
The twenty-eight lunar lodges (*xiu* 宿). Translations based on Major, *Heaven and Earth in Early Han Thought*, 127.

Figure 1



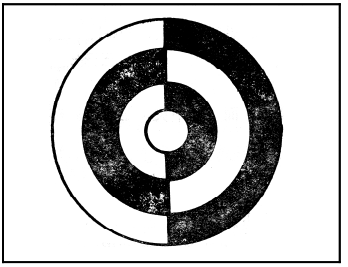
Hetu 河圖 (Chart of the Yellow River).

Figure 2



Luoshu 洛書 (Writ of the Luo River).

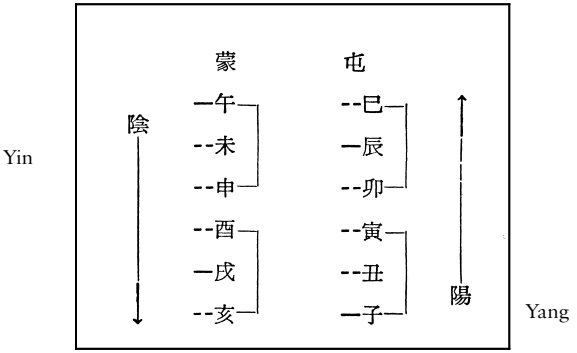
Figure 3



"Kan and Li are the inner and the outer walls" (1.3)

Kan ☵ and Li ☲ represented as two joined semicircles.

Figure 4



The twelve lines of the first pair of hexagrams
(Zhun ䷂ on the right, Meng ䷃ on the left)
and their associations with the twelve earthly branches.

Glossary of Chinese Characters

Bagong 八公
baji 八極 (eight directions)
bajie 八節 (eight "nodal days")
Bao Xi 包犧
Baopu zi 抱朴子 (Book of the Master Who Embraces Spontaneous Nature)
baoyi 抱一 ("embracing Unity")
bi 畢 ("Net")
biao 杓 (or 標) ("Ladle," of the Northern Dipper)
bigua 辟卦 ("sovereign hexagrams")
bing 柄 ("Handle," of the Northern Dipper)
bishu 祕書 ("secret writings")
bugang 步罡 ("pacing the celestial net")
"Busai yituo" 補塞遺脫 ("Filling Lacunae")
cang 蒼 (hue of green)
Cantong qi 參同契 (The Seal of the Unity of the Three)
Cantong qi Lüli zhi 參同契律曆志 (? "Monograph on the Pitch-pipes and the Calendar according to the *Cantong qi*")
Cantong zhizhi 參同直指 (Straightforward Directions on the *Cantong qi*)
Caodong 曹洞
Chen Xianwei 陳顯微 (?–after 1254)
Chen Zhixu 陳致虛 (1290–ca. 1368)
Cheng Tang 成湯
chengshu 成數 ("accomplishment numbers")
chi 齒 (tooth)
chiqi 赤氣 ("red breath")
Chizi 赤子 (Red Child)
Chu Huagu 儲華谷 (i.e., Chu Yong)
Chu Yong 儲泳 (fl. ca. 1230)
Chuci 楚辭 (Songs of Chu)
chunyang 純陽 (Pure Yang)
Chunyu Shutong 淳于叔通
Chunyu Zhen 淳于斟 (i.e., Chunyu Shutong)
congshi 從事 ("retainer")
Danhu jing 丹壺經 (Scripture of the Cinnabar Pot; or Scripture of the Elixir's Pot)
dansha 丹砂 ("cinnabar sand")
dantian 丹田 (Cinnabar Field)
dao 刀 ("blade, spatula")
Daode jing 道德經 (Book of the Way and Its Virtue)
daogui 刀圭 ("knife-point")
daren 大人 ("great man")
dashu 大暑 ("Great Heat")
daxue 大雪 ("Great Snow")
diandao 顛倒 ("inversion")
"Dingqi ge" 鼎器歌 ("Song of the Tripod")
dizhi 地支 (earthly branches)
Dong Dening 董德寧 (fl. 1787–88)
dongxu 洞虛 ("cavernous emptiness")
Du Yicheng 杜一誠 (fl. 1517)
du 度 (spans of space)
duliang 度量 ("attitude")
dumai 督脈 (Control vessel)
erba 二八 ("two eights," lit., "two times 8")
fa 罰 ("punishment")

fanfu 反覆 (“to go back and forth,” “to go to and fro”)
fang 房 (“Room”)
fangshi 方士 (“master of the methods”)
fen 分 (“inch”)
Fengdu 酆都
Fenghui 豐惠
fenzhu 分銖 (“inches and scruples”)
fu 符 (“symbolon, tally, token”)
fu 輔 (Assistant)
Fu Xi 伏羲
fushi 伏食 (“‘preserving and ingesting’”)
gangji 綱紀 (“guiding thread”)
gangniu 綱紐 (“strings”)
Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–243)
guan 灌 (“to irrigate”)
guan 觀 (“contemplation”)
guang 光 (“radiance”)
guangui 官鬼 (“demon”)
gui 圭 (the “two Soils”)
gui 鬼 (“demon”)
guigen 歸根 (“going back to the root”)
guiju 規矩 (“compass and square,” “rules”)
Guwen cantong qi 古文參同契 (Ancient Text of the *Cantong qi*)
Guwen longhu jing 古文龍虎經 (Ancient Text of the Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger)
Guwen longhu jing 古文龍虎經 (Ancient Text of the Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger)
Han Wei congshu 漢魏叢書 (Collected Works of the Han and the Wei Dynasties)
hantu 含吐 (“inhale and exhale”; “nurture”; “harmonize”)
heche 河車 (River Chariot)
hemei 合媒 (“interceder”)
heng 橫 (“horizontal”)
heng 衡 (Scale)
heshang chanü 河上姹女 (Lovely Maid of the River)
Hetu 河圖 (Chart of the Yellow River)
“Hongfan” 洪範 (“Great Plan”)
hongmeng 鴻濛 (“boundless”)
hongri 汞日 (“Mercurial Sun”)
hou 候 (“periods”)
hou 後 (“after”)
houmo 後末 “end”)
houtian 後天 (“posterior to Heaven,” “postcelestial”)
hua 化 (“to transform”; “to generate”)
Huainan zi 淮南子 (Master of Huainan)
Huan, Emperor 桓帝 (r. 146–167)
huandan 還丹 (Reverted Elixir)
huangji 皇極 (“August Ultimate”)
huangjing 黃精 (“yellow essence”)
Huangting jing 黃庭經 (Scripture of the Yellow Court)
huangya 黃芽 (Yellow Sprout)
huangyu 黃輿 (Yellow Carriage)
huangzhong 黃中 (Yellow Center)
huaqi 化氣 (“transmuting Breath”)
hufen 胡粉 (white lead, ceruse)
Huiche zi 慧車子
huiguang neizhao 迴光內照 (“circulating the light to illuminate within”)
hun 魂 (celestial soul)
huohou 火候 (“fire times”)
huoji 火記 (“records of fire”)
huyi 狐疑 (lit., “to doubt like a fox”)
ji 璣 (Armil)
Jiang Yan 江淹 (444–505)
Jiangnan 江南
jie 節 (“node” or “sector”)
jiejie 解結 (“untie the knots”)
jieqi 節氣 (“nodal breaths”)
jin 斤 (pound)
jin 金 (Metal; Gold)
Jinbi jing 金碧經 (Scripture on Gold and Jade)
Jindan jinbi qiantong jue 金丹金碧潛通訣 (Instructions on Gold and

Jade for Piercing the Unseen by the Golden Elixir)
jindan zhi dao 金丹之道 (Way of the Golden Elixir)
Jing Fang 京方 (77–37 BCE)
jing 精 (essence)
jing 經 ("warp")
"Jing" 經 ("Canon")
jinhua 金華 (Golden Flower)
jinjing 金精 ("essence of Metal")
jinli 金醴 (Golden Nectar)
jinmen 禁門 ("Forbidden gates")
jinsha 金砂 ("Golden Sand," or "Metal Sand")
jinye 金液 (Golden Liquor)
jiren 吉人 ("good-natured men")
jiudan 九丹 (Nine Elixirs)
jiuding dan 九鼎丹 (Elixirs of the Nine Tripods)
jiudu 九都 ("nine capitals")
jiufu 九府 (Nine Palaces)
jiuqian yishen 九淺一深 ("nine shallow and one deep")
jiuzhong 九重 ("nine layers")
ke 刻 ("notches")
Kuaiguo 鄶國
Kuaiji 會稽
kuangguo 匡郭 ("inner and outer walls")
kui 魁 ("Head," of the Northern Dipper)
langgan 琅玕 (a precious stone)
langgan 闌干 ("crosswise, diagonal")
"Laojun ge" 老君歌 ("Song of Lord Lao")
Laozi zhongjing 老子中經 (Central Scripture of Laozi)
lei 類 ("kind, category")
Li Dingzuo 李鼎祚 (Tang dynasty)
Li Guangdi 李光地 (1642–1718)
Li Shixu 黎世序 (1773–1824)
li 禮 ("rites")
liang 兩 (ounce)
liangyi 兩儀 ("two principles")
liaokuo 寥廓 ("vast and broad," "the Unbounded")
libiao 立表 (gnomon)
Ling, Emperor 靈帝 (r. 168–189)
Longhu jing 龍虎經 (Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger)
Lingbao 靈寶 (Numinous Treasure)
liquan 醴泉 (Fount of Nectar)
Lisao 離騷 (Encountering Sorrow)
Liu An 劉安 (179?–122)
liu jia 六甲 (six *jia*)
Liu Yan 劉演 (Six Dynasties?)
Liu Yiming 劉一明 (1734–1821)
Liu Zhigu 劉知古 (fl. ca. 750)
liuxing 流形 ("flowing into the form")
liuzhu 流珠 (Flowing Pearl)
lizang 歷臟 ("passing through the viscera")
Longhu jing 龍虎經 (Scripture of the Dragon and Tiger)
Lu Xixing 陸西星 (1520–1601 or 1606)
lü 律 (pitch-pipes)
"Luanci" 亂辭 ("Epilogue")
luchen 陸沈 ("sinking into the ground")
Luguo 魯國
lüli 律曆 ("pitch-pipes and calendar")
luoluo 磊硌 ("solid as stone")
Luoshu 洛書 (Writ of the Luo River)
mao 昴 (Pleiades)
ming 命 ("existence"; "vital force")
mingtang 明堂 (Hall of Light)
Minshan jing 岷山經 (Scripture of Mount Min)
muyu 沐浴 ("ablutions")
najia 納甲 (Matching Stems)
nei 內 ("inner")
neishi 內視 ("inner observation")
neizhao 內照 ("to illuminate within")
ni 擬 ("observe")
ning 凝 ("coagulation")
niwan 泥丸 (Muddy Pellet)
Pan Gu 盤古

Peng Haogu 彭好古 (fl. 1586–99)
Peng Xiao 彭曉 (?–955)
Penghu 蓬壺
Penglai 蓬萊
pian 篇 (a piece of writing)
ping 平 ("level")
po 魄 (earthly soul)
pusu 樸素 ("plainness and simplicity")
qi 器 ("instrument")
qi 契 ("token, pledge seal"; "contract")
qi 期 (terms of time)
qi 氣 (Breath)
Qian zuodu 乾鑿度 (Opening the Way to the Understanding of Qian ䷀)
Qin Gao 琴高
qing 情 (individual "qualities"; temperament, feelings, emotions, etc.)
qinglong 青龍 ("green dragon")
Qingzhou 青州
Qiu Zhao'ao 仇兆鰲 (1638–1713)
qiushi 秋石 (Autumn Stone)
qushen 屈伸 ("bend and stretch")
quzhe 曲折 ("winding courses," "crouchings and bendings")
ren 仁 (humanity)
renmai 任脈 (Function vessel)
renwu 人物 ("people," "people and things")
richen 日辰 ("markers of time")
ru 儒 ("scholars")
Ruan Dengbing 阮登炳 (fl. 1284)
"San xianglei" 三相類 ("The Three Categories")
sanbao 三寶 ("three treasures")
santai 三台 (Three Terraces)
sanwu 三五 ("3 and 5," "three fives")
saoti 騷體 (a prosodic style)
sha 砂 ("sand")
shang 上 ("above")
shang 賞 ("reward")
shangde 上德 ("superior virtue")
Shangqing 上清 (Highest Clarity)
Shangshu zhonghou 尚書中候 (Prognostications Based on the *Book of Documents*)
Shangyu 上虞
shaoyang 少陽 ("minor Yang")
shaoyao 招搖 (Rising Glimmer)
shaoyin 少陰 ("minor Yin")
shaqi 殺氣 ("life-taking breath")
shen 審 ("to examine")
shen 神 (Spirit)
shen 身 ("living being")
shengqi 生氣 ("life-giving breath")
shengshu 生數 ("generation numbers")
shenming 神明 (Numinous Light)
Shenxian zhuan 神仙傳 (Biographies of the Divine Immortals)
shi 施 ("giving forth")
shi 時 ("double hours")
shi'er xiaoxi 十二消息 (Twelve-stage Ebb and Flow)
Shitou Xiqian 石頭希遷 (700–91)
Shiyi 釋疑 (Explication of Doubtful Points)
"Shiyi" 十翼 (Ten Wings; or Ten Appendixes)
shou guizhong 守規中 ("keeping to the compass")
shoufu 受符 ("receive the tally")
shu 術 ("art")
shuangjiang 霜降 (Descent of Frost)
shuiqi 水氣 (Breath of Water)
shuiyin 水銀 (quicksilver, lit., "water silver")
shuji 樞機 ("pivot, mainspring, vital point")
"Shuogua" 說卦 (Explanation of the Trigrams)
Shuowen jiezi 說文解字 (Elucidations on the Signs and Explications of the Graphs)
shushu 數術 ("arts of the numbers")
sifu 四輔 (Four Assistants)
sihai 四海 ("Four Seas")

silin 四鄰 (“four neighborhoods”)
siming 司命 (Controller of Destinies)
siqi 四七, “four [times] seven”
sitong 四通 (“everywhere”)
sui 隨 (“to follow”)
suiyue 歲月 (“years and months”)
tai 台 (Terrace)
taibai 太白 (Great White)
Taiping guangji 太平廣記 (Extended Collection of Records of the Taiping xingguo Reign Period)
Taiqing 太清 (Great Clarity)
taixuan 太玄 (Great Mystery)
taiyang 太陽 (“great Yang”)
taiyin 太陰 (“great Yin”)
tanghuo 湯鑊 (“boiling pot”)
Tao Hongjing 陶弘景 (456–536)
ti 體 (“body”; “substantive basis”)
tiandan 恬淡 (“calm and tranquility”)
tiandi 天帝 (Celestial Emperor)
tianfu 天符 (“tally of Heaven”)
tiangan 天干 (celestial stems)
tiangang 天罡 (Celestial Net)
tiangu 天鼓 (Heaven’s Drum)
tianxin 天心 (Heart of Heaven)
tonglei 同類 (“to be of the same kind”)
tongli 通理 (“to comprehend the principle(s)“, “to spread through the veining”)
tongyan 通言 (“mediator”)
“Tuan” 彖 (Judgements)
“Tuanzhuan” 彖傳 (Commentary on the Judgements)
tugu naxin 吐古納新 (“exhaling the old and inhaling the new [breath]”)
tuidu 推度 (“inferring the rules”)
tupo 兔魄 (“hare”)
Wang Fu 汪紱 (1692–1759)
Wang Jiachun 王家春 (fl. 1591?)
Wang Jie 王吉 (Han dynasty)
Wang Wenlu 王文祿 (1503–86)
wanwu 萬物 (“ten thousand things”)
Wei Boyang 魏伯陽
Wei Boyang neijing 魏伯陽內經 (Inner Scripture of Wei Boyang)
wei zhi 為之 (“doing”)
wei 緯 (“horizontal”)
weihou 緯候 (“weft” and prognostication texts)
weishu 緯書 (“weft texts,” apocrypha)
wenchang 文昌 (Literary Glory)
wenhuo 文火 (“civil fire”)
“Wenyan zhuan” 文言傳 (Commentary on the Words of the Text)
Wu 吳
Wu Xian 巫咸
Wu xianglei 五相類 (The Five Categories)
Wudu 武都
wuhuo 武火 (“martial fire”)
wuwei 無為 (“non-doing”)
wuxing 五行 (five agents)
Wuxing xianglei 五行相類 (The Categories of the Five Agents)
wuyou 無憂 (“undistraught, without grief”)
wuzang 五臟 (five viscera)
Wuzhen pian 悟真篇 (Awakening to Reality)
xiade 下德 (“inferior virtue”)
xian 仙 (“to become immortal,” “to transcend”))
xian 先 (“before”)
xianchang 先唱 (“to be the first to sing,” “to take the lead”)
xiang 象 (“image,” “symbolic form”)
xiangke 相剋 (“conquest” sequence)
xiangsheng 相生 (“generation” sequence)
“Xiangzhuan” 象傳 (Commentary on the Images)
xiantian 先天 (“prior to Heaven,” “precelestial”)
xiantian yiqi 先天一氣 (One Breath prior to Heaven)
xiaoshu 小術 (“minor arts”)
xiaoxue 小雪 (“Great Heat”)

"Xici" 繫辭 (Appended Sayings)
xiehou 邂逅 ("unexpected encounter")
xin 心 (Heart; mind)
xing 性 (inner nature)
xingji 星紀 (Stellar Sequence)
xiu 宿 (lunar lodges)
"Xu" 序 ("Postface")
Xu Congshi 徐從事
Xu Jingxiu 徐景休
Xu Wei 徐渭 (1521–93)
xuan 玄 ("mystery, mysterious")
xuan 璇 (Jade-cog)
xuangong 玄宮 (Mysterious Palace)
xuangou 玄溝 (Dark Ditch)
xuanguan 玄關 (Mysterious Barrier)
xuanqu 旋曲 ("wheeling around")
xuanzhu 玄珠 (Mysterious Pearl)
"Xugua" 序卦 (Hexagrams in Sequence)
Xuzhou 徐州
ya 牙 ("tooth")
Yan Zhitui 顏之推 (531–91)
Yang Canwei (*or* Sanwei) 羊參微 (三微) (Tang dynasty)
Yang Shen 楊慎 (1488–1559)
yangxing 養性 ("nourishing one's Nature")
Yanshi jiaxun 顏氏家訓 (Family Instructions for the Yan Clan)
yanyue 偃月 ("Supine Moon")
yaodao 要道 ("essential course")
yaoguang 搖光 (Glimmering Radiance)
yi 億 ("one million," "one hundred thousand")
yi 意 ("attention"; "intention")
yi 易 ("change")
yi 義 (righteousness)
Yin Changsheng 陰長生
Yin Xi 尹喜
yin 銀 (silver)
ying 應 ("response")
yinghuo 熒惑 (Sparkling Wonderer)
yinxing 隱形 ("hiding one's form")
Yixue 易學 ("Studies of the Book of Changes")
yong jiu 用九 ("all nines")
yong 用 ("function, operation")
you 郵 ("mark")
youwei 有為 ("doing")
yu 御 ("to drive," "to master," "to govern")
yu 輿 ("carriage," "carriage body")
Yu Fan 虞翻 (164–233)
Yu Yan 俞琰 (1258–1314)
Yuan Renlin 袁仁林 (fl. 1732)
yuanhuang 元皇 ("original sovereign")
yuanjing 元精 (Original Essence)
yuanqi 元氣 (Original Breath)
yuanshen 元神 (Original Spirit)
Yuanshen qi 援神契 (Seal of the Verification of Spirit)
yuchi 玉池 (Jade Pond)
yujiang 玉漿 (Jade Sap)
yushi 御史 (Censor)
yuye 玉液 (Jade Liquor)
yuying 玉英 (Jade Blossom)
yuzheng 御政 ("government")
"Zagua" 雜卦 (Hexagrams in Irregular Order)
"Zanxu" 讚序 ("Eulogium")
zaofeng 遭逢 ("blessed encounter")
ze 澤 ("marshes")
zeng 甑 (a pot for steaming food)
zhang 張 (Extension)
Zhang Wenlong 張文龍 (fl. 1546–66)
Zhen Shu 甄淑 (fl. 1636)
zheng 正 ("pure," "correct," etc.)
Zhengao 真誥 (True Revelations)
zhengyang 正陽 (Correct Yang, Pure Yang)
zhenren 真人 (True Man)
zhenwu 真吾 ("true self")
zhenyang 真陽 (True Yang)
zhenyin 真陰 (True Yin)
zhifa 執法 (Upholder of the Law)

zhonglü 鍾律 (bells and pitch-pipes)
zhongzhou 中洲 (Central Land)
zhouliu 周流 ("flowing in a cycle")
Zhouyi cantong qi 周易參同契 (The Seal of the Unity of the Three, in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*)
Zhouyi cantong qi dingqi ge mingjing tu 周易參同契鼎器歌明鏡圖 (The "Song of the Tripod" and the "Chart of the Bright Mirror" of the *Cantong qi*)
Zhouyi cantong qi fahui 周易參同契發揮 (Elucidation of the *Cantong qi*)
Zhouyi cantong qi fenzhang tong zhenyi 周易參同契分章通真義 (True Meaning of the *Cantong qi*, with a Subdivision into Sections)
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Zhouyi jijie 周易集解 (Collected Explications of the *Book of Changes*)
zhu 銖 ("scruple")
"Zhu" 注 ("Commentary ")
Zhu Xi 朱熹 (1130–1200)
Zhu Yuanyu 朱元育 (fl. 1657–69)
zhun 準 ("level")
zhunni 準擬 ("abide by, conform to")
zhusha 朱砂 ("vermilion sand")
"Zixu qihou" 自敍啟後 ("Author's Postface: My Bequest")
zong 縱 ("vertical")
zongheng jia 縱橫家 (School of the Strategists)

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