

**Chen Tuan:
Discussions
and Translations**



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CHEN TUAN: DISCUSSIONS AND TRANSLATIONS

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This collection of three essays and five translations on the Song Daoist saint and immortal Chen Tuan goes back to work done over about a decade, from 1978 to 1990. It began with my dissertation (*Leben und Legende des Chen Tuan*, 1981), which focused on questions of legend development and the problem of what “immortality” meant as a religious ideal in the Song dynasty.

Later I supplemented this work with materials on Chen Tuan as a physiognomist. I’d been aware of this role of his while writing my dissertation but could only access it when I went to Taiwan later. There I picked up the physiognomic handbook *Shenxian quanbian*, both in a Ming–dynasty manuscript (from the National Library) and in a modern paperback reprint. I then wrote about both this book and the *Fengjian*, a physiognomic manual closely linked with Chen Tuan, in articles which were published in *Asian Folklore Studies* (1986, 1988)

Following this, I prepared a volume for *Taoist Resources* (2.1) on Chen Tuan, scheduled to coincide with the thousandth anniversary of his “immortal transformation” in 989. It contains an English summary of the results of my dissertation on legend development and a translation of his official *Songshi* biography, as well as Li Yuanguo’s study of Chen Tuan as an *Yijing* philosopher, Terry Russell’s examination of Chen Tuan in Japan, and Teri Takehiro’s translation of a Ming work on inner alchemical soul–travels known as “sleep.”

Working along, I wrote various presentations and made translations of materials that never were integrated into any published work. These materials I would now like to make accessible in digital form on e–Dao. They consist of three discussions and five translations.

The three discussions summarize my dissertation in English and present materials discussed in the article on Chen Tuan as physiognomist. They are not mere reprints, although they pick up the same materials, but add additional reflections and integrate more recent studies into the discussion. They are especially useful for students who wish to know about Chen Tuan’s legends and his role at the Song court but do not read German.

The five translations have, for the most part, not been published previously. The first is the complete and amply annotated rendition of Chen Tuan’s life according to the *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian*, a key source for the dissertation, but not translated there. The second is the literary rendition of Chen Tuan’s vita in the *Taihua xiyi zhi*, which is translated into German as an appendix of the dissertation. The third, the physiognomic treatise *Fengjian*, appears in

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Asian Folklore Studies, 1988. The last two, *Mayi daozhe zhengyi xinfu* and *Yin Zhenjun huandan gezhu*, are poems closely associated with Chen Tuan and appear here for the first time. They are not annotated and may sound quite obscure, especially since they deal with Song-dynasty *Yijing* thought and inner alchemy.

All these translations should be of some use to students interested in Chen Tuan or different aspects of Song culture. They are not polished but may help as a starting or reference point for scholars—and will certainly do more good on E-Dao than they will ever in my files at home.

Discussion 1

The Immortal and his Legend

The Song dynasty was in many ways a new beginning for the Chinese state and culture. The traditional system of the Tang had been destroyed over two centuries, and the ancient social hierarchies and even the customs of daily life had undergone erosion and would never again be the same (see Ebrey and Gregory 1993). Central Asian influence pervaded larger portions of life during the Tang and emerged even more dominant in the Song. The Chinese began to sit on chairs and build furniture (see Kuhn 1987), wear high collars, enact dramas, and engage more in landscape painting. At the same time, the various northern tribes continued to expand their area of power. The flight from Kaifeng to Hangzhou in 1127 and the Mongol conquest of the entire country were long-prepared events whose cultural and societal forebears can be traced back over centuries.

The Song stood at a watershed of Chinese history, witnessing a new beginning in Chinese culture. Instead of turning to Tang models, they looked towards the Han and before, focusing again on the works of the ancients. Neo-Confucianism, the leading school of thought in China since the Song, arose through new interpretations of the *Analects*, *Mencius*, and *Book of Changes*. Newly organized forms of Buddhism and Daoism began to take shape, inspired by collective efforts that led to major comprehensive canons of these traditions. The first integrated histories of China were written, such as the *Zizhi tongjian*, which also had religious counterparts (see Schmidt-Glintzer 1986; Kohn 1998). Similarly literature and art were inspired by old models and the distant past was increasingly recaptured in what might almost be called a possession with history. The Song saw not only enthusiastic collections of ancient objects, but also the first forgeries of antique bronzes and paintings in Chinese history.

There are many dimensions to the Song's relationship with its immediate and more distant past. The key to understanding it lies in the opposing aims of feeling new and at the same time old, of needing models of the past and yet doing something that has no direct forerunner anywhere. One solution was to go back ever farther into the depths of history; another, maybe more fascinating, involves the creation of new patriarchs and new models. The early Song and the tenth century in particular was a great time for new developments, new visions, and new organization. But even as early as the late tenth and early eleventh century, the need for justification of all this newness began to be felt. People who had helped establish certain aspects of Song culture, whether in fact newly created or actually based on earlier models, became patriarchs and founders to be venerated over the ages. The transformation of a creative person into a worthy sage in many instances took the shape of the development of a

legend or, to be more precise, a personal or saints–legend.

Saints and Saints–Legends

A saint in the most general terms is a person who embodies certain ideals of a religion or philosophy. The saints–legend is the story that tells of this embodiment and usually consists of a heavy mixture of motifs taken from myths and folktales with legends in a narrower sense. Folklorists define the difference between the two by pointing out that myth and folktales contain a great distance in time and in rank between the teller and the story, while legends are always close to the narrator (Dundes 1971: 23).

To narrow the definition further, all legends develop around a definite kernel or nucleus which tends to be present in the minds of the listeners as, for example, a certain place or a specific person. The origin of a legend is found in a personal experience which is memorized and transmitted orally. After a few generations the story becomes a legend of memory. Once embellished with traditional or newly found popular motifs, the story becomes a *fabulate*, now including certain beliefs and references to other parts of folk culture (Sydow 1969: 71; Dorson 1977: 17).

Beyond that legends, especially religious legends, are nourished in a “network of living belief and practical needs” (Degh 1969: 379). In this respect they are similar to the rumor, alive only as long as are the wishes and fears that cause it to come into being in the first place. While religious legends usually relate a supernatural event, such as miraculous healings or encounters with ghosts, saints–legends are always tied closely to a specific person.

In many cases saints–legends, since they tend to be fixated in typology and are solidly anchored in the belief structure of the religion, are studied separately from legends in general. One may say that the study of saints–legends is of concern to a variety of fields: folklore, religious studies, theology, and literature all have their share in the discussion (Rosenfeld 1972: 8). Although there is a general consensus that saints–legends in terms of their origin are related to legends in general and therefore can be considered as one specific form of legend, there is no unity of opinion as regards the question whether saints–legends are necessarily bound to one or another literary format. Instead of giving a formal, literary definition of saints–legends, the tendency is to characterize them in terms of their religious constitution and relevancy in the religious context. In Western scholarship, however, these theoretical efforts have been largely limited to Christian materials.

The origin of saints–legends begins with the veneration of the major deity of the religion and the personal actualization of episodes taken from the sacred life (Rosenfeld 1972: 5). In Christianity, the prototype of a saints–legend is the life of Christ. The function of the

narrative is then to reveal mundane existence as a part of an overall transcendent world, to show the mutual interrelation between the individual life of the saint and the overall sacred cosmos. The gradual process of legendary growth around the remembered nucleus leads first to a “short-term” legend, which is a story told shortly after the death of the individual and largely in terms of actual memory, and later to a “long-term” legend, that is to say, a story embellished with typical motifs at certain decisive points through which process the original memory, the historical nucleus, becomes secondary to a more widely acceptable general story which enforces the underlying belief structure of the religion (Rosenfeld 1972: 12). The two phases of legend development are also described as the “saint’s vita,” an account of the person’s life strictly limited to facts, and as the actual “saints-legend” which includes classical motifs and miraculous incidents (Rosenfeld 1972: 25).

The decisive part of the definition is that the saints-legend presents the sacred as an actualized reality of life, that it describes human life as an active part of a specific underlying belief structure. A typical saints-legend cannot be properly understood without this background in religious worldview. “The world order of the saints-legend is identical with the order of the religious belief” (Kayser 1936: 122). Despite this cultural delimitation, numerous motifs typical for Christian legends are also found in ancient Greece and Rome and can be detected in other religions too (see Günter 1949). In the descriptions of the lives of religious founders one finds similar characteristics, as for instance homelessness, supernatural occurrences at birth and death, as well as various natural phenomena used to emphasize the particular meaning of the person’s life (Mensching 1955: 315). Nevertheless, the particular way in which the life of the saint is described and embellished always remains solidly embedded in the peculiarities of the respective underlying religion.

Sage, Immortal, Founder, Patriarch

The Chinese case presents the problem that various traditions within Chinese history use the raw material of a saintly life in their own specific way. There is no one organized and unified religion of China, although there is an integrated “religious system of China,” to use DeGroot’s fortunate description, rather than several “religions” (DeGroot 1892). Yet for the study of legends, the problem arises that there is no one founder after whom all saintly lives are shaped, there is no one creation myth that is reenacted in the stories about the extraordinary man, there is no one unified church organization that judges what is properly saintly and what is not. The Chinese have no formal beatification process, no—however strange it may sound—official bureaucratic procedure to certify the qualities of a pan-Chinese saint, although there certainly are ways and means to officially recognize persons of valuable example within given traditions.^[1]

The result of this is that any exemplary life, such as Chen Tuan’s, is used and developed to various purposes by all major Chinese traditions, the official or Confucian, the organized

religious or Daoist and Buddhist, and the popular or folkloristic. Certain professional groups or philosophical schools, moreover, have their own interests in a powerful patriarch and lay claim to the sacred life. They each have particular ideas what saintly qualities should look like and shape their model accordingly. The result is not one type of saint that would be valid for all Chinese, but a number of different models of saintliness: the Confucian sage, the Daoist immortal, the Buddhist patriarch, the founder of certain schools, the hero of the popular tale, the patron of various arts and crafts. In their own ways they are all saints and do all undergo the process of transformation from a real living person to an embodiment of the relevant belief structure. Yet in their concrete definitions, in their shaped personalities, the various saintly stylizations are all different, if not actually incompatible.

In all cases a heavy dose of religious conviction is needed to effect a successful transformation. This conviction in the various stages of legend development takes the form of selected pieces of Chinese mythology, themes that underlie the myth-making process in China, as well as distinct motifs that help illustrate and clarify the specific myth intended.^[2] The saint, in whatever guise, becomes the living example of a mythological theme. Various religious and symbolic actions either done to him or by him become motifs for the creation of a full-fledged myth, the conglomerate of the stylization, moreover, expresses the specific needs and concerns of the period and the interest group in question.

On this background, the situation concerning the Song dynasty saint Chen Tuan is most complex. Born at a time when the search for models and new patriarchs was about to begin, his secluded and yet active life was turned into various forms of saintliness by different traditions. As founding sage he helped to legitimate the beginning dynasty and was cast after the mythological theme of the imperial adviser by the Confucian tradition. This theme, studied extensively by Chan Hok-lam,^[3] in turn is closely related to the theme of the transformations of Laozi, who appeared again and again as the “teacher of dynasties” in the early stages of human history (see Seidel 1969; Yoshioka 1959). Chen Tuan as guest of the emperors of the mid-tenth century therefore serves the role of Confucian imperial adviser and fulfills the Daoist ideal of the descending sage who helps the dynasty.

Beyond that, Chen Tuan is a highly trained practitioner of inner alchemical meditation and ecstatic excursions. In descriptions of his so-called “sleep exercises,” he therefore is shown as attaining oneness with the Dao itself and thus turned into an archetypal Daoist mystic and immortal. As *Yijing* (Book of Changes) philosopher and creator of various cosmic charts, he is moreover venerated as the original founder of certain aspects of Neo-Confucianism. As active physiognomist and possible author of an early fortune-telling manual, he is then considered the patriarch of modern standard physiognomy and author of its major textbook, the *Shenxiang quanbian*, still quite actively in use all over East Asia.

Going beyond the Song dynasty and its search for origins, Chen Tuan was also highly

stylized in the popular tradition, where he appeared as the creator of certain lullabies and as a paragon of perfected sleep. During the Ming dynasty, he was even venerated as a popular deity. Famous as a spirit residing in heaven, he would be invited to give his comments via the planchette.^[4] In this function he instructed the monks of the Buddhist school of Mt. Huang-bo (Ôbaku Zen) that the year 1651 would be most auspicious for introducing their faith to Japan. They followed his instructions with great success (see Russell 1989; 1990). In addition, Chen Tuan revealed his own likeness through the planchette, an act related to popular deities' concern for the accuracy of their pictures in temples on this earth (Hansen 1990: 68). In the following he was the subject of artistic depiction many times, mentioned in practically all illustrated collections of immortals' lives. In our own century the Japanese painter Tomioka Tessai and the American-Japanese artist Clifton Karhu have honored him with portraits.^[5] Stretching from the early Song well into the twentieth century, Chen Tuan is thus a multi-faceted figure with an enormous impact on Chinese culture. Although he remains somewhat elusive in strict historical terms, his legends have flourished through the ages and continue to fascinate the teller of tales, the artist and the scholar.

The present work looks at the complex figure of Chen Tuan. Other than my earlier thesis, *Leben und Legende des Ch'en T'uan* (Knaul 1981), this collection does not make use of Chen Tuan stories to explore the structure of legend development and the interaction of different traditions in Chinese history. Rather, it begins with the theoretical distinction between mythological themes, motifs and symbols, and historical figures and situations, and shows how Chen Tuan emerges as a different person in each cultural context. Beyond that, the study accepts that the conglomerate image of Chen Tuan will always be a mixture of authentic events and mythological stylization, "mythological" defined as "aiming to embody a specific credo" in the life and work of a given figure.

The discussion of the different aspects of Chen Tuan analyzes the structure of his stylization as saint and immortal, and outlines the borderlines between history and legend, yet does not judge the legendary as less true or valuable than the historical. One immediate result of this attitude is that the study includes texts like the "Twelve Sleep Exercises," "The Hempclad Daoist's Method of the Mind," or the "Songs on Reverting the Cinnabar," which date from later centuries and have nothing to do with Chen Tuan historically. Rather than focusing on history, the study prefers completeness. This will facilitate our understanding not only of the development of one specific legend but also of the inherent complexities of mythology as actively created in all ages of Chinese culture and carried to ever new dimensions in the interaction of the various traditions.

Chen Tuan in Song Sources

Strictly historical information on Chen Tuan, alias Tunan or Fuyaozi is rather scarce.^[6] He was born in the later half of the ninth century in Henan.^[7] Already these basic facts of name

and home include a highly mythological stylization. His birthplace in Zhenyuan, for example, is identical with the birthplace of Laozi, the Lord Lao of the Daoist religion.^[8] His first name Tuan, moreover, comes from the first chapter of the *Zhuangzi*, where it is immediately followed by the combination *fuyao* of his other name. Taken together with his further appellation Tunan, a powerful picture emerges: The huge Peng bird, “beating the whirlwind” or “ascending on the whirlwind” (*tuan fuyao*), rises up ninety thousand miles, stretches across the skies and “sets its eyes to the south” (*tunan*; Watson 1968: 20). Through his place of birth as much as through the image of the mighty bird, representing the immortal at one with the Dao who uses the inherent power of the universe to ascend to greater heights, Chen Tuan is from the beginning placed in the very heart of Daoist mythology.

Back to history. Between the years 900 and 930 he spent much time wandering around famous mountains, presumably seeking instructions in various Daoist and other arts from withdrawn and learned masters. During this period he stayed for a longer while on Mount Wudang in Hunan, where he practiced Daoist techniques of meditation and gymnastics, as well as dietetics and breathing exercises. He may or may not have been instructed in practices that were later to become famous as the Wudang school of martial arts.

In 937 Chen Tuan apparently was in Sichuan where he left behind an inscription praising the Daoist meditation and breathing methods he learned from a master there. It may be assumed that he then resumed his migrations to settle eventually, probably in the early 940s, on Mount Hua in Shensi. Here he took care to restore an ancient Daoist settlement which had fallen into disrepair during the restless and destructive last years of the Tang dynasty. The Yuntai guan (Cloudterrace Monastery) due to his efforts became a flourishing center again. It was here that he spent the rest of his life—a considerable span, since he died only in 989, at the alleged age of 118 *sui*.

Between the 940s and his death in 989 he visited the imperial court three times, although, according to the legends, he met with various emperors quite a number of times: once in 956 under Zhou Shizong, then again in 976 and in 984 under Song Taizong. At the first occasion, Zhou Shizong asked him about the practice of alchemy, presumably to help increase the funds available in the imperial treasury. He replied that he knew nothing of such matters. For the year 976, only a short mention of a visit at court is made, but for 984 the sources give plenty of detail. That year Chen Tuan was awarded the official honorary title *Xiyi xiansheng*, “Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible,” a reference to chapter 14 of the *Daode jing*. Besides these two incidents which are solidly recorded in the official dynastic records, a few other meetings with high officials can be considered strictly historical.

For example, he once gave a prophesy for Qian Ruoshui (960–1003), author of the *Taizong huangdi shilu* (Chronological Record of Emperor Taizong), stating that this high-ranking official would end his career prematurely and a long time before he expected to do so. More

than that, he recognized that Zhang Yong (946–1015), although he had failed the imperial examination several times and was ready to give it all up, would succeed in his efforts eventually and in the long run do invaluable service to the state as a civil official and subduer of rebellions.

His methods of prognostication and worldview were first of all based on his oneness with the Dao, but when he formulated them, he took frequent recourse to the philosophy of the *Yijing*. In this connection he is supposed to have formulated the famous *Taiji tu* (Diagram of the Great Ultimate) for the first time. He passed his philosophy down to Chong Fang, from whom it was transmitted to Shao Yong and later to Zhou Dunyi, entering right into the heart of Neo-Confucianism.^[9]

More on the legendary side is his position within the Daoist tradition. He was allegedly taught by the notoriously elusive Lü Dongbin and a similarly shady character only known as the Hemp-clad Daoist or *Mayi daoze*. The former is a popular figure in the Song, but little is known to him any earlier, he is more a hero of merchants and inn-keepers and gained popularity with the aristocracy mainly on the basis of poems with—more or less—blatant sexual allusions.^[10] The Hemp-clad Daoist, on the other hand, occurs in a role quite similar to that of Chen Tuan: he predicts (usually correctly) various private or public occurrences and he writes on prognostication and cosmology through the medium of *Yijing* philosophy. A work entitled *Xinfa* (Mind Methods) has been transmitted under his name. It is available in a *Jindai bishu* edition and consists of altogether forty-two poems which combine *Yijing* philosophy, physiognomy, and Daoist thought.

The legends surrounding Chen Tuan consist, at least in the early stages, of many single anecdotes which probably began to circulate already during his lifetime in the tenth century. They were written down in the course of the eleventh century, partly isolated in *biji* reports, partly as coherent biographies purporting to tell all about the master. One may thus assume that, to start with, legends concerning Chen Tuan were heterogeneous and known to different groups of people in different places.

These various stories are then increasingly integrated into larger chronicles in the course of the following centuries. By the year 1300 a point of satiation is reached: there we have the lengthy account in Zhao Daoyi's *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* (A Comprehensive Mirror on Successive Generations of Spirit Immortals and Those Who Embody the Dao; DZ 296, fasc. 138–148; see Boltz 1987: 56–59)^[11] and Zhang Lu's *Taihua xiyi zhi* (Record of Master Xiyi of the Great Hua; DZ 306, fasc. 160), dated to the year 1314. After this, little new is added to the basic corpus of legends. On the other hand, after 1300 one finds a tendency for the stories to fan out again, a trend of various traditions to put the fame of Master Chen Tuan to good use for their own ends. Among the latter, we find a number of popular dramas and folk tales, meditation instructions describing inner alchemical sleep practices, textbooks of

physiognomy, as well as the Obaku monks who follow Chen Tuan’s spiritual advice.

But let us go back to the tenth century. The earliest account of Chen Tuan’s life is the *Lequan ji* (Collected Works of the Recluse Lequan) by Zhang Fangping (1007–1091) of the year 1078 (see Hervouet 1978: 385–86). This work integrates historical notes on Chen Tuan’s visits to the Song court contained in the *Taizong huangdi shilu* dated to the year 998 (Hervouet 1978: 84), as well as a number of local anecdotes told about him in the Huashan area. The life of Chen Tuan as it is recorded here is to a large extent identical with what can be said historically about him. However, even in the *Lequan ji* the story of his life is embellished and elaborated by supernatural occurrences.^[12] The text of the *Lequan ji* is later taken over almost literally by the authors of the *Songshi* (History of the Song Dynasty), published in 1345. The account here (457.13420; translated in *Taoist Resources* 2.1) is then copied in later works such as the *Shizhi* (Historical Materials) of the sixteenth, the *Songshi xinbian* (New Edition of the Song History) of the seventeenth, and the *Yunyang fuzhi* (Prefectural Gazetteer of Yunyang) of the nineteenth centuries.

TABLE 1

The Biography of Chen Tuan

Date		
Historical		<i>Lequan ji, Songshi</i>
late 9th c.	born in Henan	
same		
		meets goddess
900–930	wanderings	
	same	
		Mount Wudang
930–934		
		fails examination

937	Sichuan inscription
Huashan	same
	master of “sleep”
	and physiognomy
956	Zhou Shizong
	same
–984	fortune for Qian Ruoshui
979–989	<i>Yijing</i> to Chong Fang
984	Song Taizong
	same
	Title Xiyi
	fortune for Zhang Yong
988	prepares “transformation”
989	death on Mt. Hua
	same
1011	Zhenzong on Mt. Hua
same	
1051	Daoist report
	same

Another early source for the *Songshi* is the *Dongdu shilue* (Summary of Events in the Eastern Capital) by Wang Cheng, dated to the year 1186 (Hervouet 1978: 89–90). The account here follows the same basic pattern as that of the *Lequan ji*, but the stories quoted to illustrate Chen Tuan’s special powers are different. For the first time, this source integrates his prognostications concerning the founding of the Song dynasty and his role in the nomination of Zhenzong as heir-apparent. Both stories are already present in earlier

biji literature, notably in the *Dongxuan bilu* (Notes from the Eastern Pavilion) by Wei Tai of about the year 1090 (Hervouet 1978: 102–3).

The same stories are also recorded in Shao Bowen's (1057–1134) biography of Chen Tuan which he included in two of his works: the *Wenjian qianlu* (First Record of Things Heard and Seen; Hervouet 1978:103) and the *Yixue bianhuo* (Examining Doubts Concerning the Study of the Book of Changes). Since his father, Shao Yong, the author of the famous *Huangji jingshi shu* (Supreme Principles Governing the World; Hervouet 1978: 262) stood in direct philosophical lineage of Chen Tuan, he was able to transmit stories and anecdotes otherwise unknown. There are especially his philosophical discussions and prognosticatory talks with other hermits and high officials, reports on incidents that have not made their way into his standard biography, but which seem historically plausible. Examples are his meetings with Chong Fang and Qian Ruoshui.

Chong Fang is already mentioned as a disciple of Chen Tuan in the *Yuhu qinghua* (Elegant Sayings in Yuhu), a text written by the Buddhist Wen Ying and published in 1078 (Hervouet 1978: 101). The same author reports on Chen Tuan's meeting with the military official Zhang Yong in another work: the *Xiangshan yelu* (Record of the Wilderness of Mount Xiang), dated to the year 1057. The latter anecdote can also be considered historical. Here, in addition, we have yet another story on the founding of the Song dynasty.

The *Shengshui yantan lu* (Compilation of Banquet Conversations on the River Sheng) by Wang Pizhi of approximately the year 1090 tells about Chen's meeting with the official Wang Shize and his prognostication of the latter's future for the first time (see Hervouet 1978: 102). The same source already embellishes Chen Tuan's audience with Emperor Taizong. While the authors of the *biji* merely retell attractive stories that they heard at one time or another, Daoist chroniclers tend to emphasize the supernatural aspects of Chen's life. The oldest source of this type, already integrated in the *Lequan ji*, is the report of a Daoist monk from Chen Tuan's monastery, submitted to the throne in 1051. His amazing powers of sleep meditation and the intensity of his withdrawal from the world are described and embellished in this source.

The *Shihua zonggui* (Collection of Magic Phrases from Critics on Poetry) by Ruan Yue of the year 1123 is the earliest organized record of Chen Tuan's poems (Hervouet 1978: 449). Whereas in most biographical accounts poems are recorded as the standard way in which prognostications and polite exchanges were formulated, here for the first time Chen Tuan is credited specifically with literary fame. To the already known wealth of his literary achievement the text adds the poems on the immortal lady Maonü and on the beauty of Mount Hua.

So far the various isolated parts of the Chen Tuan legend. Before the integrated and

standardized biographies around the year 1300 mentioned above, there are five additional sources:

First, a text called *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan* (Biography of Master Xiyi), attributed to Pangjue. The identity of this person is not clear. The name sounds Buddhist, it might also be a pen name of the emperor Zhenzong. The text is contained in various editions, including a copy in the great Chinese encyclopedia *Gujin tushu jicheng*. It can be dated to before 1300, because Zhao Daoyi makes use of it, but would be our earliest source, should it indeed go back to Zhenzong. It summarizes a number of historical data, anecdotes and supernatural occurrences

Next there are two Daoist hagiographies contained in collections of Lives of the Immortals: first the *Sandong qunxian lu* (Records Regarding the Host of the Immortals of the Three Caves; DZ 1248, fasc. 992–995) by Chen Baoguang of the year 1154; and again the *Xuanpin lu* (Record of the Ranks of the Sublime; DZ 781, fasc. 558–559) by Zhang Yu, dated 1335 (Boltz 1987: 60).

Then there are two general biographies of Chen Tuan which both assemble various stories and occurrences connected with his name. These, however, do not attempt to organize the materials into a systematized whole. Here we have first of all the venerable Zhu Xi's (1130–1200) *Zhuzi wuchao mingchen yanxing lu* (Master Zhu's Collected Anecdotes of Eminent Statesmen of the Five Dynasties) as well as the *Gui'erji* (Collection of Matters Elevating the Ears) by Zhang Duanyi, dated to 1241–1248 (see Hervouet 1978: 126 and 313).

Later Legend Lineages

After the heyday of integration is reached with Zhao Daoyi and Zhang Lu, one can pursue different and again more isolated strands of the legend. There is, to begin with, a strong Daoist line of texts which take up and reorganize the assembled information on Master Chen. Among these, the *Xiaoyao xu jing* (Scripture of Rambling Through the Barrens; DZ 1465, fasc. 1081) by Hong Zicheng of the early Ming and the *Liexian quanzhuan* (Complete Immortals' Biographies) by Wang Shizhen of the year 1652 are of special interest. This lineage culminates in the *Huayue zhi* (Gazetteer of Mount Hua) by Li Rong of the year 1831. This text combines the traditional Daoist account with literary quotations from the official sources in the lineage of the *Songshi*.

A completely different lineage is associated especially with Sichuan in southwest China.^[13] Not mentioned in any of the comprehensive biographies, there is a tradition that Chen Tuan left behind an inscription in a Daoist establishment near Chengdu in the year 937. His presence in this part of China is first recorded by Wen Tong in his *Danyuan ji* (Collection from Danyuan) of the year 1051 (Hervouet 1978: 390). The story is taken up in the *Laoxue an biji* (Jottings from an Old Scholar's Cottage; Hervouet 1978: 308–309)

by the famous Song poet Lu You (1125–1210), among the foremost authorities on Sichuan of his time. He quotes the inscription in full, but it is only with the *Songshi jishi* (chronicle of Song Dynasty Poetry) by Li E of the sixteenth century that the southwestern strand is integrated into the overall picture. Still, since the inscription is recorded as early as it is and since Lu You seems to have seen it personally, there is no reason to doubt Chen Tuan's actual presence in Sichuan in the 930s.

Another independent, and yet somewhat interconnected and probably historical tradition is the lineage of physiognomy, *xiangshu*, the “art to read the mind's construction in the face,” a prognostication method which uses the shape and appearance of a person's body and face to foretell his or her future. Chen Tuan is the grand master of this method, at least in modern times. He has been credited with the ultimate authorship of the *Shenxiang quanbian* (Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy), a book still in use in Taiwan and Japan which was edited in the early Ming dynasty by Yuan Gong (1335–1410) and his son Yuan Zhongche (1367–1458).[\[14\]](#)

Within this larger collection, Chen Tuan is quoted frequently and especially connected with a text called *Fengjian* (Mirror of Auras). This is first found in a text dated to the early Song: the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* (Jade Office Instructions on How to Clarify Spirit), allegedly by Song Qiqiu of the Southern Tang. Besides this early reference, Chen Tuan and his *Fengjian* are also mentioned in the *Taiqing shenjian* (Great Clarity Mirror of Spirit) of the late Song and in the *Renlun datong fu* (Comprehensive Rhapsody on Human Relations) of the Jin (see Kohn 1988).

Chen Tuan's *Fengjian* is a direct forerunner of the modern physiognomic tradition in the system and methods it proposes. It is systematic in its structure, but not complete in its examples, so that the reader glimpses the oral tradition, if not actual lectures, that lie behind its compilation. Chen Tuan's role in modern physiognomy is so central, the earliest quotations of his physiognomic works are so early, and he is so famous as a prognosticator in the various legends associated with him that his link with this method of form-analysis can be considered quite historical. It is interesting, however, to note that his more formal and rather technical role in this tradition was never linked up with his other legends. He was famous as a Daoist who intuitively knew from the forms and the energies what was to come, but as a master and teacher of physiognomy he was known only within the tradition.

There are also popular stories about Chen Tuan, found in certain popular dramas such as *Sanxing zhao* (Three Stars Are Shining), *Bieyou tian* (There Is As Yet Another World), and *Pantao hui* (Peach Gathering of Immortals). In the first of these he occurs as a soothsayer who knows everything about the “Three Stars,” i.e., wealth, official position, and happiness. In the second, Chen Tuan helps the protagonist who has fled into the mountains and teaches him the secrets of Daoism. In the third, finally, he is already in heaven, a position from

where he can take good care of his son and grandson—imaginary characters, since he never had any offspring in real life.

The most detailed drama featuring Chen Tuan is *Chen Tuan gaowo* (The Lofty Sleep of Chen Tuan) by the famous dramatist Ma Zhiyuan. Here he is first a common soothsayer who, however, has the good fortune to correctly predict the rise of the Song dynasty. In the second act, he is seen in a Daoist monastery on Mount Hua, from where he is invited to be the guest of the emperor. Later, in the imperial palace, he is presented with the honorary title Xiyi xiansheng. At night, when he is about to retire to his room, a young lady wishes to keep him company. Both persisting, she in her wish to share his bed, he in his desire to go to sleep in a more meditative fashion, they spend the night in animated discussion, to be later joined by a general who happens to pass by. Only after a long exposition on the Dao and its qualities does he finally get his rest. He hastens to return to the solitude of his mountain in the following morning.

Integrating the Strands

What is amazing about this drama of the Yuan dynasty is not only that it shows the extent to which Chen Tuan was known and popular during that period. Rather, it presents an amazingly accurate view of how he came to be so famous and popular. He was first and foremost a fortune teller, a successful prognosticator of people's characters and destinies, but also of the fortunes of the state. His recognition of the success of the Song dynasty first caused him to be known outside of his immediate surroundings. Thereby his name was entered in the official court records, and in due course he became the object of a number of eulogies and poems of praise by famous high officials of the late tenth and early eleventh centuries.

It is safe to say that he was only known locally in the area around Mount Hua in the beginning. Due to his accurate predictions and deep insights into the workings of nature he came to be increasingly popular not only among the local people but also among higher officials from the capital. He correctly predicted the future of Qian Ruoshui, Zhang Yong, and a number of others who were obviously deeply impressed by his knowledge.

More than that, he also reacted very positively to the founding of the Song dynasty and, upon hearing that the first Song emperor had ascended the throne, proclaimed his assurance that there would be peace in the empire from now on. This position toward the newly founded dynasty was very helpful in legitimizing its take-over of the Heavenly Mandate. He was duly invited to court and given an honorary title. Since, as a Daoist saint, his actions were considered the direct outcome of his oneness with the Dao he was thought of as the representative of the course of the universe. His acceptance of the imperial invitation consequently meant the cosmic sanction of Song rule.

While actually at court, he did the emperor honor by expressing his approval of the way he handled the empire. The Daoist, associated both with the role of the imperial adviser and Laozi as the “teacher of dynasties,” is supposed to stand above the regular affairs of government and yet ultimately hold the fate of the empire in his hands. Fulfilling these roles, Chen Tuan in this situation declined the emperor’s request for advice. He thereby showed that this ruler was truly like Yao or Shun and in his person combined worldly rule and cosmic harmony.

The emperor, as may be expected, deeply appreciated this attitude and encouraged his officials to meet Chen Tuan with all possible honors. His fame spread, courtiers and bureaucrats came to ask his advice and composed eulogies for him. The foundation for his entry into the “Anecdotes of Eminent Statesmen” and, in due course, into the “History of the Song Dynasty” was laid.

At the same time, in his more immediate surroundings he came to be known for mainly three different things:

First, again, his prognosticatory abilities which he expressed in the language and systems of physiognomy. At this point in Chinese history, physiognomy was primarily face and body analysis, but not only this. It was more generally the systematization of cosmic processes and phases into a universal whole, the recognition of patterns underlying actual, concrete situations and events. Chen Tuan recognized the *qi*, the cosmic energy, of the future Song emperor, he made relevant predictions about the future destiny of various officials and transmitted his insights into the structure of body and mind to certain local disciples. He therefore did not merely sense these things in a vague manner but expressed them in words and gestures and taught their basic rules to others. The modern tradition of physiognomy sees its beginnings in his teaching.

Second, he formulated his insights in the workings of the universe in a more philosophical and cosmological manner. Here he used mainly the concepts of the *Yijing* as they were transmitted and developed over the centuries. He integrated the principles and terminology of alchemy, employed a great deal of numerical speculation, and drew up diagrams to facilitate understanding. His thought model is typical for the conceptualizations of inner alchemy, which had just begun its development in the tenth century. The same model was later continued in the speculation of Shao Yong, one of the early thinkers of Neo-Confucianism.

A third area of renown is his meditation technique. Generally described as “sleep” in the Daoist texts, he practiced a form of inner alchemy which is undertaken while reclining on the back or on one side. Among the earliest stories we find, for example, a report that he was once lying like dead in his hermitage in the mountains. Upon being brought back to life by a

badly frightened wood gatherer, he glared at him with exasperation and rasped: “Why do you disturb me in my marvelous sleep?” According to later accounts, Chen Tuan composed songs of praise for the numinosity and high quality of the “sleep” state, in the *Taihua xiyi zhi* he even explained to the emperor that no palace in the world could compare with his heavenly visions. The excursions of his soul during “sleep” are detailed by Zhao Daoyi, a lengthy series of meditational exercises is named after him, and—last not least—the melody of a popular lullaby is traced back to the snoring of Chen Tuan.

These three special abilities of Chen Tuan were therefore transmitted side by side the official version of his life: among physiognomists, philosophers, and Daoists. Soon the strands were integrated. To his fame as fortune teller and legitimizer of the dynasty, the Daoist strand was added first when the monks of the Yuntai guan submitted an official memorandum in 1051. The earliest biography of Chen Tuan in the *Lequan ji* of 1078, then, could already draw on both traditions. Next, philosophy entered the picture and Shao Bowen’s reports on Chen’s life and *Yijing* speculations published around the middle of the twelfth century added to his fame. Lastly, it was his renown as a master of physiognomy that helped to maintain his popularity to the present day.

In sum, Chen Tuan first attracted the attention of the Song court with his skill in prognostication. This was then politically exploited to furnish a motif of legitimation for the newly-founded dynasty. Beyond that, his abilities as a physiognomist made him a favorite aim of pilgrimages for officials who wished to know more about the likely development of their careers. Later stylized as the founder of the modern form of Chinese physiognomy, this skill first makes his name known among official circles.

In due course the more Daoist embellishments of his life are accepted as part of the general picture. Not only is his life described as being guided by various divine forces but his sleep exercises—ultimately a form of inner alchemy—are stylized to as yet unknown heights of accomplishment. He becomes famous for his ability to remain in deep sleep for several months at a stretch, while his spirit goes off frolicking around the heavens and pays cheerful visits to all sorts of immortals.

In a different strand, then, his interpretation of the *Yijing*, which goes together well with his practice of both physiognomy and inner alchemy, is transmitted to the more established philosophers of the dynasty, and Chen Tuan becomes the father of the *Taiji tu* of Neo-Confucianism.

Common to all these aspects of Chen Tuan’s image is his function as the founder, the ancestor, the patriarch of a new and lasting development of Chinese culture. The Song dynasty, newly founded, derives its cosmic sanction from him. Physiognomists to the present day regard him as the patron of their art as practiced now. Neo-Confucians value him as the

ultimate creator of the *Taiji tu*, and Daoist practitioners see in him the ancestor of the sleep form of inner alchemical elixir production. The figure of Chen Tuan thus represents in a tangible manner the Song search for a father, a founding figure, a heavenly appointed ancestor.

To all the different interest groups who participated in developing his legend, he is someone to look back to, a person who incorporates the spirit of the ancients and at the same time makes it accessible and acceptable for the new era of the Song. The deeply experienced loss of continuity so keenly felt after the downfall of the Tang, which—among other things—sparked off the first organized collection and publication of Buddhist as well as Daoist canons, thus may be said to express itself in the stylization of a Daoist practitioner to the role of founding representative and patriarch of a number of different things. It results ultimately in the popularization of the originally rather reclusive and esoteric figure of Chen Tuan. More than that, the heterodox nature of the legends surrounding him and the sheer number of the tales told about him through the ages reveal the deep vitality hidden in this age-old need for a parent-figure, new yet tradition-bound, benevolent yet authoritative. Chen Tuan becomes popular as a representative of a world still intact, of a tradition not unbroken yet strong in continuity.

Discussion Two

Physiognomy and Legitimation

In the period of the Five Dynasties, there was a sage called Chen Tuan. Emperor Taizong of the Song honored him with the title Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible. He followed the Hempclad Daoist as his teacher.

They agreed to meet for a teaching session at the hearth of the Hempclad Daoist in mid-winter. Chen Tuan arrived as expected and entered deep into the stone cavern on Mount Hua.

The Hempclad Daoist used neither words nor language to transmit the teaching to his student. He gave it to him in complete secrecy. It runs as follows: . . .

So begins the *Shenyi fu* (Rhapsody on the Marvels of Spirit), a physiognomic manual of the late Song or Jin dynasty. The commentary explains that the transmission of the teaching was in fact completed “by using glowing sticks of wood and by writing characters in the ashes of the fire” (Liang 1980: 125). It also supplies additional information on Chen Tuan, such as his early recognition of the first Song emperor and his later knowledge that the empire would be at peace when Taizu ascended the throne. A probably fictitious audience with Taizu is mentioned.

The *Shenyi fu* consists of these instructions which were first given to Chen Tuan in so much secrecy. It has 250 lines of about sixteen characters each and contains a short commentary. The work deals with general principles and methods of traditional Chinese physiognomy. These, as Lessa has pointed out, are found in the laws of coordinate or correlative thinking and formulated in the concept of the interrelation between macrocosm and microcosm, yin and yang, the five phases, and the eight trigrams of the *Yijing*. Beyond that, physiognomy typically also resorts to systems of analysis according to animal morphology, numerology, and the overall harmony of things (Lessa 1968: 16–33).

According to the oldest documentation available, the original system of physiognomy or body analysis was based on the identification of certain parts of the face with specific periods of one’s life. A large chin section, for example, indicated numerous descendants. As a characteristic story in the *Zuozhuan* has it,

Gongsun Ao had heard that Shu Fu was a master of physiognomy and introduced his two sons to him. Shu Fu said: “Gu will feed you, No will bury you. The lower part of Gu’s face

is large, he will have posterity in the state of Lu. (Wen 1; Legge 1960: 229)

Single features were isolated, analyzed in terms of their similarity to the looks of animals, and interpreted according to the quality most commonly associated with the creature. Dragon and phoenix features, representing the countenance of an emperor, were considered most outstanding, [15] while wolf and tiger characteristics showed a cruel and dangerous disposition. An example for the latter case we find already in the *Zuozhuan*.

Ziliang had a son. When Ziwen [his elder brother] saw him, he said: “You must put him to death. He has the appearance of a bear or tiger and the voice of a wolf. If you do not kill him, he will cause the extinction of the whole family. (Xuan 4; Legge 1960: 296)

After the Han dynasty, the five phases became the predominant system of physiognomic analysis. Linked in Chinese medical theory with the five orbs or inner organs of the body, the five phases with their multiple framework of reference soon became the most sophisticated and intricate method of analysis. Thus individual bodies were immediately related not only to cosmic phases, geographical directions, colors, and seasons, but also to inner organs, emotions, senses, and spiritual forces:

wood	east	green	spring	liver	anger	eyes	spirit
soul							
fire	south	red	summer	heart	joy	tongue	
spirit							
metal	west	white	fall	lungs	sadness	nose	
mat. soul							
water	north	black	winter	kidneys	fear	ears	
essence							
earth	center	yellow	September	spleen	worry	lips	
	will						

Beyond that body types were not merely associated with single phases, but the development and dynamics of the body within its composition and/or over time were associated with phases either producing or overcoming each other:

Producing: water – wood – fire – earth – metal

Overcoming: earth – wood – metal – fire – wood

In later centuries and especially since the Song dynasty, the various systems were integrated into an increasingly coherent if multilayered whole. Nowadays physiognomers begin their analysis by studying a client's obvious patterns of bone structure, interpreted as the visible manifestation of his essence(*jing*). Judging then the general "aura"(*feng*) in terms of the five phases, the physiognomist goes on to look at the client's energy(*qi*) as it is apparent in his complexion(*se*), and diagnoses the quality of spirit(*shen*) from the client's eyes. The way the various forces interact ultimately determines the long-term as well as the immediate fate of any given person.

Manuals of physiognomy since the Song, such as the *Shenyi fu*, are commonly organized according to a standard structure imitating this typical procedure. They tend to begin with the definition of basic terms, usually including the fundamental physical constituents of the human body together with the more specific forces of mind, essence, energy, and spirit. After explaining the theory of body-spirit interaction, these texts proceed to analyze the visual manifestations of human character with the help of the five phases as well as by associating the appearance of the entire human body and of specifically outstanding parts with animals' looks and characteristics. Treating certain types in great detail, they typically continue with sections on the appearance of women and children and end by discussing types of facial complexion.

The *Shenyi fu* is only one among several textbooks of physiognomy found since the Song. As are many of its fellows, it is contained in the standard textbook of modern physiognomy, the *Shenxiang quanbian* of the early Ming. This is ascribed to Chen Tuan, as is the *Fengjian*, the earliest among all the manuals still in use today, the text of which is translated below. Traditionally venerated as the patriarch of modern standard physiognomy, Chen Tuan was not only renowned for his powers of body and energy analysis in his day but his fame among the various traditions of ancient China ultimately can be traced back to his accomplishments in this field.

What exactly did he do? How did he express his analysis of people and situations? What did his theoretical system consist of? And how was it transmitted through the ages? Let us begin by looking at actual practice situations as reported in Chen Tuan legends.

Practical Application

Chen Tuan as a practicing physiognomist stars quite a number of times in the literature. There are many anecdotes telling how he skillfully predicted a person's fate by merely

looking at his or her physical features. Usually, though not always, the people benefitted were of high rank or even the emperor's family.^[16] The most famous and best documented anecdote of this kind already places Chen Tuan's skill in an imperial context. First mentioned in the *Taizong huangdi shilu*, the story goes that he recognized the future Zhenzong as the best choice for heir-apparent, thus influencing Taizong's decision on a suitable successor.

Although Taizong had already thought of the later Zhenzong as a good candidate for heir apparent, he yet wanted Chen Tuan to have a look at all the princes. He therefore went to the various residences of the princes and upon returning submitted the following memorandum:

“Shouwang is truly the future ruler of the empire! When I first approached his residence, I saw two men at the gate. I asked their names which they gave as Zhang Qi and Yang Chongxun. Both were in the service of the prince. As far as I can judge these two, they will both become prime ministers eventually. Thus I had no problems judging the qualities of their master.”

Taizong was very happy. At this time the future Zhenzong was given the title Shouwang. Later Zhang Qi became imperial adviser and Yang Zhongxun was titular adviser. In both cases this corresponded with the physiognomic judgment of Chen Tuan.^[17]

Although not entirely consistent with the historical chronology,^[18] the story reveals Chen Tuan's basic techniques and their practical application. He confronts the people in question and just takes in their general appearance, absorbs their auras, and from that can immediately tell their future developments.

While he is very straightforward with the emperor in expressing his judgment, with ordinary mortals he tends to be more oblique. A case in point is his analysis of Zhang Yong's outstanding administrative talents. He predicted that Zhang would have plenty of future chances to be of eminent service of the empire, despite the fact that he had failed to pass the official examination:^[19]

When Zhang Yong was still a commoner he once visited Chen Tuan and asked his permission to come and study with him on Mount Hua. Chen refused this steadfastly, but when Zhang departed he gave him a slip of paper to explain his intentions.

He said to him: “Your wish to study with me would entangle me too much in secular duties.” Then he handed him the following poem:

Go to Wu, make war in Shu, set up order for your sire!

Save us when we sing and feast, save us from the fire!

Liking southern regions best, you will wish to go there,

In the end so you will do, grateful for a tumor.

Needless to say, Zhang Yong was very successful in his career and very much involved in the world. He was sent to pacify various parts of the empire and in the end was excused from official service due to a head tumor he developed (see Franke 1976: 48–50).

Here Chen Tuan sees the potential powers of a man so far unsuccessful and correctly predicts his future career. He even knows that the sickness later in life will be welcomed as a refuge from the political involvement now so desperately sought out. The form his prediction takes is a poem, a rather oblique but easily memorized way of indicating future occurrences.

Along the same lines yet slightly subtler is a prediction made by one of Chen's friends, the immortal Zhongli Quan.^[20] He meets Chen Yaoze, a young official,^[21] during a visit with Chen Tuan and just mumbles the words "Southern Hermitage." Refused a clarification, Chen Yaoze only by chance and much later comes across the grave of a Buddhist monk whose death coincided with his own birth date (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.7ab). Just as Zhang Yong is recognized for his true inner potentation, Chen Yaoze is revealed as the reincarnation of a former abbot. Both are told of their true identities with the help of coded language, put forth only reluctantly by the masters.

According to several other anecdotes, Chen Tuan also identified the true inner nature of people by seating them within a specific ranking order. For example, the candidate Wang Shize came to him in the guise of a humble servant.^[22] But Chen recognized him immediately for his true position and asked him to occupy the seat of honor to the right of everybody else. He told him: "In the future you will be higher than all the others!" Only a year after this incident Wang Shize did indeed pass the official examination ahead of everyone else (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.7b).

The same method is also prominent in another episode:

When Song Taizu and Taizong were not yet emperors, they once went to the market of Chang'an in the company of Zhao Pu [later prime minister]. Chen Tuan met them and together they visited a winehouse. Zhao unintentionally seated himself on the mat to the right.

Chen Tuan reproved him: "You are merely a minor star in the constellation of the Emperor of Purple Tenuity. How dare you take the seat of honor?" (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.6a)

The poor man dutifully slouched to a more appropriate place at the table, while history took its course and made him a star, albeit a minor one when compared to his illustrious companions.

Chen Tuan in Physiognomic Texts

In the *Shenxiang quanbian*, besides the introduction to the *Shenyi fu* quoted above, there is only one anecdote concerning the skill of Chen Tuan. It runs as follows:

Formerly Wang Kezheng died without a male heir. The family were devout Buddhists and at the time of his funeral his only daughter—then about ten years old—knelt before his image presenting the incense burner.

Chen Tuan entered the hall to mourn the dead man and upon coming out again he said to the other guests: “I could not see the face of Mr. Wang’s daughter, but only had a glance at her hands holding up the incense burner. Their physiognomy reveals outstanding nobility. If she were a man she would certainly earn the white robe and enter the Hanlin Academy. As it is, she will marry to be the first lady of a region.”

Later Chen Jingong was appointed second privy councilor. He was as yet unmarried. Taizong told him: “There is the old Jiangnan family of Wang Kezheng. His only daughter is pure and virtuous, she would be the right match for you.”

When Taizong repeated his advice, Chen made her his wife. A few days later she was given the title Lady of a Prefecture. *Shenxiang quanbian* 8; Liang 1980: 239. Little is known about the characters mentioned in the story; Wang Kezheng occurs in *Songshi* 250[23].

Chen Tuan cannot even see the lady’s face but has to base his entire judgment on one small glimpse of her hands. The nobility of a person is expressed not only in his or her face and overall bone structure but can be reliably judged from parts alone. One little section of a body gives sufficient clue to the experienced physiognomist to deliver a precise prediction. This, though basically one for both sexes, is then modified because she is a woman for whom high rank and success meant an eminent marriage rather than a career of her own.

Yet another story found among Chen Tuan legends integrates his practical skills with the transmission legend in the *Shenyi fu* which documents his standing as the patriarch of modern physiognomy. The client is Qian Ruoshui, a future official of high rank.[24] At this point he is doubtful about his career prospects and Chen Tuan, not quite sure himself, consults his teacher, the Hempclad Daoist, who mysteriously writes into the fire and gives a curt prediction.

When he was an examination candidate, Qian Ruoshui once visited Chen Xiyi on Mount Hua. Xiyi told him to come back on the next day. When Ruoshui arrived at the appointed time, he saw an old monk had joined Xiyi. They were sitting close to the fire set up in a raised mound of earth. The monk stared intensely at Ruoshui, but he did not speak for a long time.

Finally he used a glowing stick of wood and wrote into the ashes of the fire. But before he had written three characters when he said abruptly: “He will withdraw from the most rapid flow of events, from the excitement at the center of affairs.” Ruoshui bade farewell and left Xiyi never to stay with him again. Later he climbed the official ladder and reached the position of an assistant commissioner of military affairs. But he withdrew from official service at the early age of forty.

Xiyi had originally thought that Ruoshui possessed the radiance of immortality and the bones of the Dao. At that time his fate had not yet been decided by his conscious intentions.

But then the old monk had looked at Ruoshui and told him that a Daoist career was impossible. It was because of this that Ruoshui had never come back to Xiyi again. Yet, withdrawing from involvement in society in the midst of ongoing activities is quite close to being a spirit immortal.

The old monk was the Hemp-clad Daoist. Chen Tuan is supposed to have been his disciple.[\[25\]](#)

In three points this anecdote is very similar to the transmission legend of the *Shenyi fu* cited above.

1. Chen Tuan is closely related to the Hempclad Daoist, who is his senior and his teacher.
2. The story takes place in a cavern on Mount Hua where a fire is glowing on a mound of earth.
3. Higher insights dealing with the theory and practice of physiognomy are communicated non-verbally by using parts of the fire.

The isomorphic nature of the two stories, told and transmitted in the different environments of court officials and professional physiognomists, strongly indicates that the root of Chen Tuan’s renown is indeed found in his physiognomic and prognosticatory abilities. Judging the quality of people and situations by taking them in completely, piercing through the

surface and grasping their essential qualities, their auras and energies, the Daoist reveals his oneness with the course of the universe at large and puts it to the good use of his fellow men. Knowing what is right at any given point, not only are ordinary people helped, but significant matters of state are decided in the best possible way. The usefulness of such skills for good government and for the legitimation of imperial measures is obvious. Similarly clear is the impact a growing fame, which in addition is supported by the government, has on the heirs of the trade. Physiognomists profit from Chen's positive political involvement just as much as politicians benefit from his encouraging physiognomic evaluations. It is thus no accident that later textbooks of physiognomy rely heavily on Chen's work and trace their authorship back to him.

Traditional Textbooks

The leading standard textbook of modern East Asian physiognomy is the *Shenxiang quanbian* (Complete Guide to Spirit Physiognomy). It claims to go back to Chen Tuan, but was in fact compiled by Yuan Zhongche, alias Gongda or Jingsi, of the early Ming dynasty (1367–1458). He received the teaching from his father, Yuan Gong, also known as Liuzhuang (1335–1410). Both Yuans were well-known physiognomists of their day who influenced imperial politics with their predictions and had a hand in selecting the heirs-apparent (Goodrich and Feng 1976: 1629 and 1638). The book is now extant in a late Ming edition preserved in the National Central Library in Taipei, Taiwan. In addition, it has been reprinted in the encyclopedia *Gujin tushu jicheng* (chaps. 631–644) and in a modern pocketbook edition by Liang Xiangrun (Liang 1980).

The fact that the principles of the *Shenxiang quanbian* are still applied today is apparent in William Lessa's work on Chinese physiognomy or rather "body divination" or "somatomancy," as he prefers to call it (Lessa 1968). An anthropologist, himself with only a basic working knowledge of Chinese, Lessa gained his insights through the active cooperation of prominent practicing physiognomists of Taiwan. They supplied him with ample material, mostly based on the *Shenxiang quanbian*, with the result that his book, *Chinese Body Divination*, can almost count as a translation of the old Chinese text. Beyond the borders of China, the *Shenxiang quanbian* is also the standard textbook for physiognomists in Japan. Edited by the Tokyo Shrine Administration, *Ninsô no hanashi* is in fact an abridged Japanese translation of the old Chinese text (Jingûkan 1982).

The book itself divides into twelve chapters in the old Ming edition and into fourteen in the reprint made of the basis of the *Gujin tushu jicheng*. The material and its order, however, are quite the same. It deals with five distinct areas of physiognomy. First, there are general expositions usually attributed to masters of old (chaps. 1, 2, 5, 6, and 7 of the old edition). Next, there are analyses of physiognomic details, such as face, hair, eyes, eyebrows, nose, ears, and so on (chaps. 3 and 4). Third, there are special indicators, such as the lines on

hands and feet (chap. 9). Fourth, the special case of women and children is discussed (chap. 10). Fifth, the complexion of the face is analyzed in great detail (chaps. 11–12).

The *Shenyi fu*, cited in the beginning of this chapter, is contained in chapter 5 of this comprehensive volume (Liang 1980: 125–153). Another important manual reprinted here is the *Renlun datong fu* (Comprehensive Rhapsody on Human Relations) of the Jin dynasty. Contained in chapter 6 of the *Shenxiang quanbian* (Liang 1980: 161–178), it was originally compiled by Zhang Xingjian, alias Jingfu, an official in the Ministry of Rites at the Jin court. He graduated to the civil service in 1179 and was well known for his proficiency in various divinatory sciences, such as astrology and numerological speculation (*Jinshu* 106). The text was edited and commentated by Xue Yannian, an official of the Yuan dynasty. His preface dates to the year 1313 (*Siku tiyao* 3.2265).

The *Renlun datong fu* is a short treatise of no more than 3,000 characters; it follows the common pattern of physiognomic manuals. First it gives a general exposition on the interrelatedness of body and spirit, then it recounts detailed methods of analysis of the human body based on the system of the five phases. Toward the end, it discusses color and complexion.

A similar structure is also found in yet another early manual, considerable parts of which have made their way into the *Shenxiang quanbian*: the *Taiqing shenjian* (Great Clarity Mirror of Spirit) in 6 juan. Allegedly by Wang Pu, a high official under Shizong of the Later Zhou dynasty, this text is not mentioned by any of the bibliographical sources of the Song period. Since moreover Wang Pu's connection with physiognomy is rather spurious, a later date of compilation appears likely.^[26]

Structured again along the same lines as the modern standard textbook, the *Taiqing shenjian* is our first source for detailed analyses of complexion, of bodily postures, of lines and spots on the feet, as well as of the good and bad points in a woman's physique.

Before the *Taiqing shenjian*, one more manual has made its impact on the tradition: the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* (Jade Office Instructions on How to Clarify Spirit). Allegedly compiled by Song Qiqiu of the Southern Tang dynasty, a high official versed in various forms of divination, the text was found in several libraries of the Song (*Siku tiyao* 3.2263). Since it quotes Chen Tuan, but never mentions him by his honorific title, it may be dated to before 984. Also, it was possibly compiled by a student of Song Qiqiu who attributed the work to his teacher. Among the three chapters of the book, the first contains theoretical treatises, the second deals with details of body analysis, and the third describes the appearance of different types of energy in the complexion. Again, the basic structure of the manual is the same as that of the standard textbook. Two major sections of the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* were integrated in full into the *Shenxiang quanbian*. These sections are of special interest as our oldest

sources for an illustrated Chinese palmistry as well as for the detailed identification and interpretation of animal types (Kohn 1986: 245).

Chen Tuan's Authorship

These various manuals constitute the textual tradition of contemporary Chinese physiognomy back to the early Song. Before that time, only two physiognomic manuals are known: the *Xiangshu* (On Physiognomy), a manuscript found in Dunhuang and ascribed to Xu Fu of the Han dynasty, which surveys the human body from top to bottom and explains the significance of its features; and the *Yuebo dong zhongji* (Record of Events in Moonwave Cavern), a rather obscure text of a strong Daoist bent which cannot have been edited much before the Song, but in its outlook and structure does not form part of the modern tradition (Kohn 1986: 249–51).

Chen Tuan, besides being praised by the tradition as the founder of modern standard physiognomy, is cited as an author of physiognomic texts in practically all the manuals to a greater or lesser extent. He is credited with various physiognomic texts, but many of these attributions lack historical or even legendary conviction. In the *Gujin tushu jicheng* edition of the *Shenxiang quanbian*, for example, he is named as the author of the *Dongxuan jing* (Scripture of Pervading Mystery; Liang 1980: 257–59). In the Ming edition of the text, however, this text is cited without any author's name under the title *Dongxuan jing xing you qixiang* (Seven Types of Bodies according to the Scripture of Pervading Mystery). Under the title *Dongxuan jing zaduan ge* (Song Containing Miscellaneous Fragments of the Scripture of Pervading Mystery), a completely different text is found in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* (1.11b–12b). This is not ascribed to anyone.

In addition, the *Shenxiang quanbian* contains a text entitled *Qise lun* (On Energy and Complexion) attributed to a certain Xiyizi (Liang 1980: 325–26). Chen Tuan might be intended by this name, as he was commonly known as Xiyi xiansheng, the title given to him by Song Taizong in 984. However, as the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* does not contain any similar text, the ascription to Xiyizi might also intend a different author. But it cites Chen Tuan as the author of two other texts which are not contained in any of the later collections: the *Xiuli jin* (Gold Up the Sleeve; 1.9a–11a) and the *Xiang ge* (Song on Physiognomy; 1.11ab). Not dissimilar in outlook and structure to the other texts of the modern tradition, these two texts are hardly ever cited in later materials and seem not to be closely associated with Chen Tuan in the literature.

There is, however, a text by which Chen Tuan is cited in practically all the physiognomic manuals since the Song. First found in the earliest manual of all, the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju*. Chen Tuan's *Fengjian* (Mirror of Auras) may in historical fact go back to him. Moreover, in terms of its layout and principles can be considered the first document of the modern

tradition. This gives credit to the traditional view that sees in Chen Tuan the patriarch and founder of contemporary physiognomy. Contained in full in the *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* (1.4b–9b), the text is also found in the *Shenxiang quanbian* under the title *Fengjian ge* (Song of the Mirror of Auras; chap. 6, Liang 1980: 178–81). Before that, this version is contained also in the *Taiqing shenjian* of the Song under the title *Shenbi lun* (On the Secrets of Spirit). In addition, it is quoted frequently in commentary sections of the *Shenxiang quanbian* and other physiognomic texts.

These various editions of the *Fengjian* are not identical. Whereas the older text is in prose, the more recent version is rhymed. Although in content the editions are rather similar, providing a general survey of the theory and practice of physiognomy, they are not at all alike in organization and phrasing. Distinct differences are discussed in the annotation of the translation below. Overall, the *Fengjian* has a historically tenable connection with Chen Tuan as an individual. It reveals in more ways than one his specific system of physiognomic analysis, the integration he proposes not only of the various forms of body divination current in the tradition before his time but also of Daoist spiritual concepts and methods of prognostication.

Physiognomic Theory

The *Fengjian* is fundamentally organized along the same lines as later textbooks on the theory and practice of physiognomy. That is to say, it begins with an outline of the principles of human origination and explains the basic physical and psychological constituents of people. It then goes on to describe the basic principles of analysis, viz. the five phases and animal morphology or theriology. Thereafter the text discusses certain types in detail.

Other than later manuals, it does not attempt an exhaustive survey but limits itself to the elucidation of certain telling examples. The foremost among these is the phase wood. People of the wood type tend to be slim, they have a fresh complexion, and, like trees, are strong within and delicate without. The tree motif occurs throughout the text, and the comparison of human beings to plants and specifically trees is more heavily emphasized here than anywhere in the later manuals. Also, there is an immediacy and directness in the text when the author speaks about the negative qualities of thin people, which is not found in such enlightening openness in later texts. Moreover, the text is unusual in its emphasis of the importance of the mind or spirit over and above all physical appearances. This, a tribute to Daoist doctrine and an ultimately religious perception of the world, in a way goes against the very *raison d'être* of physiognomy: if spirit can cause all analysis of outward features to be invalid, what good is the analysis after all?

Not despite, but rather because of these individual peculiarities of the *Fengjian*, it allows a deeper insight into the underlying principles and worldview of Chinese physiognomists in

general and Chen Tuan in particular. Human beings were thought of as “assemblances of energy” already in ancient China (*Zhuangzi*, chap. 22), here they are more specifically described as consisting of spirit, essence, and energy. They come to life only through the positive interaction of fire and water, symbolized by the trigrams Li and Kan of the *Yijing*. These two trigrams and the three basic forces, energy, essence, and spirit, represent essential concepts in the worldview of inner alchemy. They constitute the human body and mind, all ultimately consisting of a combination of the basic forces yin and yang. Given their final shape and fate through the coming together of spirit and physical form, people are animated shapes borrowed in all their essentials from heaven and earth.

Though common to Chinese thinking in general, the concepts found in the physiognomy of Chen Tuan are closely related to Daoist doctrine. Du Guangting (850–933), almost Chen Tuan’s contemporary, formulates them in his *Yongcheng jixian lu* (Record of the Host of Immortals of the Walled City).

All human life comes from spirit. When spirit assembles there is life, when it disperses there is death. Concentrated energy turns into essence. Concentrated essence turns into spirit. Only when spirit is concentrated will there be long life. (DZ 783, fasc. 560; 1.6a)

The interest that Daoists have in the physical and psychological development of human beings, however, is fundamentally different from that of physiognomists. They do not want to find out why people are what they are or what they should be in the world according to their heaven-given inner nature and destiny. Rather, they strive to understand how they can get out of worldly defilements, how they can become what they should be as part of the Dao, originally pure and energetic, long-lived and utterly at one with the universe. In this context, then, Daoists warn against developments that would lead in the opposite direction, against tendencies that cause human beings to get deeper into mundane strive and lose purity forever.

When one hankers after life and loathes death, resisting the natural transformations, one’s spirit-consciousness will be confused and led into error. It will consequently lose its proper role.

The result is that when one is entrusted to life again [after death] and receives the constituting energy, one will not lean toward the pure and refined, but end up with much turbid and coarse energy. Generally all the stupid and dull, the dumb and greedy come into being like this. (*Zuowang lun*; DZ 1036, fasc. 704, 11ab)

In addition, the Daoists provide a typology of character so that people know what they are up against in the struggle for the purity of the Dao.

Human beings are born between heaven and earth. Therefore they are endowed with these

natural characteristics, every being receives his or her inner nature.

A person of pure energy is clever, alert, wise, and intelligent.

A person of turbid energy is unlucky, harsh, dumb, and foolish.

A person of hard energy is haughty, strong, vigorous, and violent.

A person of soft energy is compassionate, benevolent, honest, and magnanimous.

In the same sense,

A character of the wood-type tends to be energetic and impulsive.

A character of the earth-type tends to be benevolent and harmonious.

A character of the water-type tends to be modest and cautious.

A character of the fire-type tends to be fierce and violent.

A character of the metal-type tends to be severe and abrupt.

Thus everyone's character is shaped according to the forces he receives.

(Yongcheng jixian lu 1.5b)

The Daoist text continues to say that “an intelligent person will restrain and suppress these inborn characteristics and thereby prolong his life.” Physiognomists, on the other hand, though in general agreement with the basic characterization of human types, try to find out what people can and should do in accordance with—and not suppression of—their inner natures. People cannot help being what they are, but while the Daoists claim that they are originally and fundamentally at one with the Dao, the physiognomists hold that they are determined by destiny. Combining the two positions, Chen Tuan emphasizes the importance of the mind and allows for the possibility of the individual to go beyond his heaven-given fate. Everyone can overrule adverse circumstances apparent in his physical appearance through the power of the spiritual force within. Chen Tuan reveals his ultimately Daoist position by saying explicitly that, independent of all outward evidence to the contrary, “those whose spirit and energy are at peace and tranquil within are unconcerned and enjoy freedom at heart” (section 15).

Bone Structure and Complexion

Within this general theoretical framework, the character of an individual body is then determined by the quality of his constituents, spirit, essence, and energy. The bones develop directly from pure essence, whereas the blood consists basically of energy.> Thus one can judge the quality of a person's essence from the structure and shape of the bones. Likewise, one can recognize the nature of someone's energy from the complexion, which represents the outside counterpart of the blood. In the analysis of the bones, the five fundamental types of pure wood, metal, fire, water, and earth can be distinguished together with the various mixtures of the five phases.

One can also describe the body structure by applying an analogy to animal-types, the most noble of which are the phoenix, dragon, tiger, and rhinoceros, but which also include a large variety of household animals, wild beasts and birds (see Lessa 1968: 59). More subtly, the bones of the face will reveal the length of one's life, one's position, and one's material wealth. Here the three major bones are the forehead, the part of heaven, the cheeks and the nose, the part of humanity, and the jaws and the chin, the part of earth. The forms which these bones take to the right and the left are also called the *liufu*, six departments. A well-developed forehead reveals nobility, a straight nose and high, knob-like cheekbones show a long and successful life, and a broad, even lower jaw indicates wealth.

Complexion is more dependent on outward circumstance than the bone structure of the body. Although general types tend to be influenced by the local climate, everyone's outward appearance is so individual that one can judge character and destiny quite reliably. Other than the bones, complexion tends to change more rapidly with time. It is therefore an indicator of specific tendencies in a given period and does not provide such profound insights into the destiny of a lifetime. Yet even complexion can be categorized according to basic types, and again the system of the five phases is applied frequently (Hou 1979). For Chen Tuan, the major types are that of resting, withheld, dead, and prospering complexion, but he also distinguishes between young and old, full and transparent, intense and scattered types.

Analysis of complexion is the subject of the final chapters of the *Shenxian quanbian*, but it does not rely specifically on categories mentioned in the *Fengjian*. Rather, the standards of evaluation are the five phases, the four seasons, and the months of the year. Chapter 11 of the *Shenxiang quanbian* yet quotes Chen Tuan.

A complexion without radiance cannot properly be called complexion. Rather, it is an "empty complexion." Calamities and joys are not yet developed, yet no one can avoid them.

So first check complexion according to the major types of resting, withheld, dead, or prospering. Then go on to analyze all the different positions according to good or bad fortune and good or evil attitude.

They can be clearly told, you will not be wrong even once in ten thousand times. The sky itself will show you the proper complexion in the clouds and the mists.

People's lives and bodies are as predestined as heaven and earth themselves. Whatever energy an individual receives it will move and change. Whatever complexion arises thus will have a definite structure.(Liang 1980: 310)]

The Voice and the Eyes

Human energy can also be judged by the sound of the voice. In this, the more generic meaning of energy as breath or wind is still obvious. The concept that all life is wind and makes sound is very old in Chinese history. Already the *Daode jing* (chap. 5) compares heaven and earth to a bellows, and in the *Zhuangzi* (chap. 2) it is stated "the Great Clod [the world] belches out breath and its name is wind. So long as it doesn't come forth, nothing happens. But when it does, then ten thousand hollows begin crying wildly." The text moreover distinguishes the piping of earth, the sound of the hollows, from the piping of human beings, which is produced by respiration as well as by musical instruments, and both these from the piping of heaven, the way in which the cosmic energy "blows on the ten thousand things so that each can be itself"(Zhuangzi 2; Watson 1968: 36).

In ancient China, sound was one of the most common means of divination, the energy of the earth was judged by the means of pitch-pipes (Bodde 1959), just as the voice of a person revealed the nature of his energy. More than that, "armies were appraised by the sound of their approach. . . bird calls were analyzed for their prognosticatory import. . . and pitches were used to determine surnames" (DeWoskin 1982: 37). The energy of the earth was thought to be responsible for sicknesses in man, as the *Huangdi neijing* (Inner Classic of the Yellow Emperor) has it, "Wind enters the body and exhausts man's energy" (chap. 3). So it is not surprising that we find the analysis of the voice as one of the basic methods to examine energy in the *Fengjian*. As a rule, the harsher and more extreme the voice, the more violent or crooked the disposition behind it. Voices should be full and melodious, neither too high nor too deep. The inner qualities of harmony and peace express themselves thus for all to hear.

Going beyond the outward manifestations of physical energy in complexion and the voice, physiognomists then turn to the strongest and most primordial of all constituents of humanity, the spirit. It is understood as light or radiance (section 7), a notion which goes back far in Chinese antiquity. Originally the idea of light was closely associated with the ancestral cult, the word for ancestral spirits meaning “blossom of radiance.” Among the moral principles of early Confucian thought, moreover, virtue was defined as “the light of inner vision which directs outer behavior toward the good” (Vandermeersch 1985). Spirit as a human constituent is thus the light of the ancestors, the light active within people as virtue, the pure energy of yang, the force of heaven and the sun. The personal light of inner vision is thus the same as the light of the ancestral spirits, it is one with the yang energy of the cosmos. The more these different aspects of the light of the universe radiate in harmony, the stronger they become. The more the adept of Daoism strengthens his inner light, the more he unifies with the Dao. Accordingly, descriptions of higher Daoist realization abound in light imagery, among which it is most common to describe practitioners as “radiating a heavenly light” (*Zhuangzi* 23; *Zuowang lun* 12a).

The radiance of the light of heaven, of the spirit within human beings is compared to the light that is brought forth from a lamp. As the *Neiguan jing* (Scripture on Inner Observation; DZ 641, fasc. 400) describes it:

Light arises from fire, fire arises from burning. Burning in turn arises because of the oil, and the oil needs the wick and the body of the lamp to be contained. . . .

The same pattern holds true for spirit radiating through the fate of people. Spirit is only present when it rests in the mind. The mind exists only within the body, and the body is only complete through the Dao. Thus we say that spirit is like a light. (5b).

The light of the spirit is outwardly visible in the eyes, thus the examination of the eyes reveals more of a person’s inner character than the bones, the complexion, or the voice. Spirited eyes, as Chen Tuan has it, are fascinating or awe-inspiring (section 7); unsteady eyes reveal a failure in society or even a criminal disposition (section 14). For physiognomists, the eyes are the direct link to the mind of the individual—a notion emphasized again and again in Daoist texts as well.^[27] When human beings are in harmony with the spirit, when the mind is at peace, the eyes will radiate the qualities of heaven, purity, joy, and brilliance. The analysis of a person’s glance, of his or her vision in life is thus the deepest and most important part of the physiognomist’s task.

But whereas the professional physiognomist goes to the very depth of a person’s being, ordinary people—criticized many times in the *Fengjian*—know only popular prejudices. They rely on an easy typology which can be summarized by the statement that all nicely rounded forms are auspicious and reveal good character, while all sharp and pointed shapes

are indicators of an evil disposition and therefore unlucky. Adam's apple and prominent teeth, for example, are extremely inauspicious signs. Thin people cannot be trusted: they boast and cheat, maltreat their kin, and take advantage of others. Women who look or behave like men go against nature and will experience many misfortunes. In all these cases, popular notions see only a limited part of the truth, they apply common judgments of only the most obvious outer characteristics and do not inquire into the deeper levels of the personality. The power of spirit, superseding all other handicaps of physiognomy, usually escapes them completely.

The comprehensive system of physiognomy presented in the *Fengjian* is only one among many. The understanding of the basic constituents energy, essence, and spirit and the interpretation of their respective appearances in human beings vary greatly from text to text. Yet from Song times onward all texts follow the same basic scheme, which is first found in the *Fengjian*. This supports the claim that Chen Tuan is the father of modern Chinese physiognomy.

Chen Tuan's conceptions are deeply rooted in the Chinese tradition, they tally frequently with the notions expressed in the texts of organized Daoism. He does not limit the factors of mundane success and longevity to the physical indicators of physiognomy, but in his own unique way allows for the influence of spirit and the power of humans to rise above themselves.

Discussion Three

The Official Face of Chen Tuan

Chen Tuan owes a large portion of his fame in later generations to his appearances in the official world of his time. He was useful to the ruling and they were lavish in their praise, both in song and deed. A Daoist, his embodiment of the underlying principles of the universe helped to support the government. His simple agreement to come to court meant that the course of the cosmos accepted the present ruler. His various prognosticatory and meditational abilities, moreover, assisted the state in procuring further prosperity for the world. Offered, though never successfully, a position as counseling minister at several occasions, he fulfilled the old mythical ideal of the imperial adviser. He was the sage who—like Confucius himself but also like the ever transforming Laozi—comes to give all his human and heavenly insights to make the world a better place.

Under the second Song emperor, Chen Tuan furnished support by legitimizing the newly founded dynasty. He provided a sense of security and cosmic approval for the emperor, a feature of public relations which the latter could certainly have done without and which was yet too good to snub. By giving all the right answers in a most untypically Daoist fashion, Chen Tuan ensured a place among the elect for himself. Not only he but the monastery he resided in received special honors, enthusiastic courtiers composed encomia and grateful monks produced the records of his deeds. The official biography contained in the *Songshi* echoes the earliest Daoist record of the *Lequan ji* very closely. Yet not even the *Lequan ji* account would ever have been compiled had not Zhenzong exempted the monastery from taxation (in 1011) and Renzong received Chen's successors in audience (in 1050)—both acts the immediate result of Taizong's gratitude for the Daoist's compliant and supportive attitude to the state.

Is Chen Tuan less a Daoist for his compliance? Surely not, since he had no interest in social advancement and never wished to get involved in the administrative drag of the empire. Rather, he represents a type of Daoist that has eluded specific definition: the well educated, personally independent, yet politically detached literatus, who spends his time pursuing the subjects and arts he finds most pleasing.

Educated in the Confucian classics, these people never denied the advantages of an integrated and well-oiled political machinery. Yet they found their individual inclinations were put to better use outside of the immediate bureaucracy and in their own way fulfilled the ideal of the Confucian minister at a time of withdrawal. Never entirely opposed to the society of their day, they provided an important counterpart to the orthodox political thinkers

and writers, a stimulant for new ideas and ever intriguing if slightly odd points of view. In the case of Chen Tuan, one of the most fruitful stimulations given was his *Diagram of the Great Ultimate*, which in due course became an important part of Neo-Confucian world-view. Here the stimulant not only worked but even was acknowledged.

Chen Tuan, through his interaction with the imperial court and various officials, was an accepted member of the educated elite of early Song China. Beyond his actual presence and activity in their circle, however, the literati stylized him in accordance with the age-old myth of the imperial adviser, a myth which happily links up with the Daoist myth of the transformations of Laozi. Before we look at Chen's appearances at court in some detail, let us therefore understand the mythological patterns through which his actions were interpreted.

The Myth of the Imperial Adviser

The technique of invoking traditional stereotypes and filling them with persons actually living at any given time is nothing new under the Song. Rather, whenever a dynasty is newly founded, it is seen to fulfil age-old patterns of decline and emergence, destruction and renewal.

New dynastic unifications of the empire are always preceded by a period of segregation, characterized by chaos and unrest, rebellion and civil war. The emergence of a new order out of the boiling upheavals throughout the land is an event of major proportions. It moves the entire world. The contrast of established order to all-pervasive chaos, the opposition between peace and war, the development of tranquility and stability out of a seething sea of destruction is enough to fill even the most hard-hearted with joy and exultation. Whenever this happens, people laugh and sing, praise and rejoice in the newly found harmony. The feeling prevails that a new cosmic era has commenced, that the cycles of rise and fall are beginning anew, that heaven truly has rewarded a fresh mandate over the empire.

The overwhelming sense of peace is, of course, not everywhere realized in the same degree. It takes several years to defeat all opposing forces, to consolidate power, to establish a functioning new administration. But once this has happened, people begin to see the new quality of their time, feel the fresh breeze that is blowing to everyone's benefit. Accordingly, in all the major dynasties of Chinese history, Han, Tang, Song, and Ming, we find numerous stories and legends that emphasize the cosmic power of the newly founded reign. They illustrate the divine sanction of its rule and show its ultimate predestination.

The heavenly fate that leads a certain general to victory and eventual unification of a badly torn and battered country very often is visibly and tangibly expressed in the figure of a "founding saint," a wondrous imperial adviser. Meeting the future emperor before his rise to power and recognizing in him the man who will bring peace to the world, this saint then

helps complete the good work by giving advice or by indicating when the right time for decisive action has come. As the Confucian philosopher Xunzi already put it: “Finding the right man, one can win the empire”(7.19a; Allan 1972: 97).

More often than not these founding saints are Daoist immortals. Their intuitive oneness with the Dao, the fact that they stand outside the reciprocal relationships of the human and the spirit world, as well as their unpredictability and spontaneity become politically relevant as and when they appear to support the ascending first ruler of a new dynasty. Usually immortals chosen for this role are characterized by well-founded traditional learning. They have a deep concern for the well-being of the entire world. They are neither tricksters nor masters of magical hocus-pocus who primarily live to amuse themselves and the world. Emulating the role of the god Laozi who appears again and again as the “teacher of the dynasty,” Daoist founding saints are benevolent god-like figures who give their best for the benefit of all.

The earliest founding figure to whom Chen Tuan is compared in the literature is Zhang Liang, known also as the Marquis of Liu. An alleged ancestor of the first Celestial Master Zhang Daoling, who received the Covenant of Great Unity in 142 A.D., he lived about 250–189 B.C. and served as one of the closest advisers of Han Gaozu.^[28] Originally an ascetic practitioner of various longevity techniques, he wandered around the mountains of China. Once he met an old man, known in the literature as Huangshi gong, the Master of the Yellow Stone Ordered without preamble to retrieve and put on his shoe for him, Zhang Liang complies without question and is rewarded with a scripture on warfare and a prediction that he will become the teacher of an emperor.

The book, *Taigong bingfa* (Strategic Methods of Lord Tai), in due course became the decisive element in the victory over Xiang Yu and the establishment of the Han dynasty. A major breakthrough occurred only after Zhang Liang appeared as a follower and close adviser of the first Han emperor in 218 B.C. The legend surrounding him initially indicates the cosmic sanction of Han rule. Later it also demonstrates which element rules the newly established dynasty. Overcoming the agent water under which the Qin governed the world, the rising house must belong to the agent earth, as symbolized in the emblem of the old men, the yellow stone. Continuing discussions of the structure and order of phases in dynastic cycles had appropriate consequences for the legend. As scholars and diviners insisted that water was overcome not by earth but by fire, the Master of the Yellow Stone was duly equipped with a red staff and red shoes (see Bauer 1956).

Zhang Liang in due course was stylized as an ideal imperial adviser and cosmic saint. Several later figures who appeared in the same function were expressly compared to him. In the Chen Tuan legends, he is specifically named in the *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan* and the *Taihua xiyi zhi*. Other than most later founding saints, Zhang Liang did indeed play an important

political role in the establishment of the Han dynasty. In his case, legendary emphasis is placed primarily on the successful combination of political power and immortal influence. His successors like Chen Tuan, on the other hand, are more stylized as people who live for the Dao alone and whose political role grows naturally from their immortal stature. They do, as a rule, not come to bear active political power.

The next founding saint after Zhang Liang is Wang Yuanzhi, Shangqing patriarch and imperial adviser of the beginning Tang dynasty. He transformed his shape in 636 at the alleged age of 126 years. His legend shows many traditional traits. Before he was born, his mother dreamed of a phoenix; while still very young, he read widely and could memorize it all instantaneously. He left the world and retired to Maoshan, the headquarters of Shangqing Daoism, to later meet with different emperors: Xuandi of the Northern Zhou, Yangdi of the Sui, Taizong of the Tang. The latter he recognized despite his common appearance and predicted a fruitful reign for him and his successor. Taizong of the Tang wished to install him as counseling official, but he refused and only accepted “a court rank, a golden crown, and an auroral cloak of purple threads”(Schafer 1977: 126). As most accomplished Daoists, he knew of his coming transformation well in advance and, after instructing his disciples to prepare for the occasion, burnt ritual incense and passed on in peace.[\[29\]](#)

According to the majority of his legends, Wang Yuanzhi is a paradigmatic example for the orientation of a Daoist patriarch and immortal toward legitimizing predictions for a newly established dynasty. Even his name, “Far-knowing,” points in this direction. His meetings with the founding emperor and with his predecessors are indications of the future of the empire, but unlike Zhang Liang he refuses to play a more active part in the establishment of a peaceful rule. Political involvement and Daoist impact are separated in this figure, it is enough that he is around and conveys the right signs. The immortal is imperial adviser only in name, in image, no longer in deed.

Another, later example for the stylization of a Daoist in accordance with the myth of the imperial adviser is Zhang Zhong who assisted Zhu Yuanzhang, later Emperor Taizu, in the founding of the Ming dynasty.[\[30\]](#) Zhang Zhong came originally from Jiangxi, but his early years are shrouded in darkness. He first appears on the scene near Nanjing around the year 1360 when he meets Zhu Yuanzhang. In 1362 he predicted his final victory, later he activated the wind to ensure the successful outcome of the battle on Boyang Lake. He continued to correctly predict the future of individuals and the state until he died by drowning. He was, however, still seen alive after this event. His writings include a series of poems, the *Shaobing ge* (Fried Cake Songs), which foretell the fate of the empire for centuries to come.[\[31\]](#)

His legends are full of various popular motifs which stylize him as a magician, not only as the wise founding saint. Similarly his contribution to the establishment of the dynasty is not

merley by knowing and giving the right signs, but by actively changing the circumstances with the help of magic. His legendary personality is strongly characterized by the founding of the dynasty, but does not ultimately depend on it. As Chan points out, Zhang Zhong's extraordinary powers in the various divinatory sciences are the nucleus for all that is known about him. Later legendary developments, on the other hand, only begin when Zhu Yuanzhang intentionally spreads stories about correct predictions and active immortal intervention, thus "vulgarizing the historical records" of his reign (Chan 1973: 73, 100).

In all these cases, the founding saint represents the effort of the newly established dynasty to legitimize their take-over of the heavenly mandate. Freshly baked emperors frequently face the psychological as well as political need to overcome lingering doubts in the power, strength, and rightfulness of their rule. They fear that a sudden turn of the wheel of fate could reduce them to their former state, that loyal friends and trusted advisers might wish to cut themselves a larger share of the pie, that the populace would not accept them as absolute monarchs (see Wright 1960: 49). It is therefore clearly in the interest of dynastic founders and their successors to spread and popularize accounts which document and illustrate the heaven-given nature of their rule. Daoist immortals who allow themselves be cast according to the classical myth of the imperial adviser thus fulfill an important role in the legitimation of dynasties. Their fame, in turn, to a large extent depends on the imperial sponsorship they receive for their services.

Chen Tuan and the Imperial Court

According to Chen Tuan legends, the first connection he ever had with the imperial government was in the 930s when he attempted and failed in the official examination.^[32]

Later he withdrew to the mountains but continued to be deeply concerned with the fate of the empire. During the Five Dynasties, he frequently despaired over the constant upheaval and chaos in the political world, a despair most actively expressed by knitting his brows and giving off dark clouds of anger every time he learned about a new change in political fortune. A poem describes his attitude at the time.

For ten long years I plodded through the vale of lust and strive,

Then through my dreams there flashed a ray of the old sweet peaceful life.

No scarlet-tasselled hat of state can vie with soft repose,

Grand mansions do not taste the joys the poor man's cabin knows.

I hate the threatening clash of arms when fierce retainers throng,

I loathe the drunkard's revels and the sound of fife and song.

But I love to seek a quiet nook and some old volume bring

Where I can see wild flowers bloom and hear the birds in spring.[\[33\]](#)

This rather stereotyped Daoist attitude of withdrawal and resentment of governmental activities changes rapidly when the establishment of the Song dynasty becomes historical reality. Chen Tuan, true to the standard image of the founding saint, knows of this delightful new development well in advance and reveals it in his unique Daoist way. Even before Zhao Kuangyin accepts the throne from his soldiers, the sage recognizes his future greatness.

Once Zhou Shizong and the later Song Taizu were travelling together. The master said: "Outside of the city there is the energy of three emperors." (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.6b)

This story about Chen Tuan appears only in the *Zhenxiang tongjian* and does not appear to make too much sense. Where is the third emperor in the place? And which place are they talking about? The anecdote becomes clear when explained with a very similar story told about Mayi daozhe, the Hempclad Daoist.

Zhou Taizu himself led the campaign against the area in the center of the Yellow River [Hezhong]. Accompanying him were Zhou Shizong and the later Song Taizong. The three generals led the attack against the city.

Mayi, together with Zhao Pu, observed them from afar. He said: "The city cannot withstand for long!"

"How so?" asked Pu.

"Outside the city, there is the energy of three emperors!"

Soon after, the city surrendered.

(*Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji*, 3.4b)

Another, related prediction of the future power of the Song dynasty, again told about Mayi, takes up the theme of positive new energy emanating from later emperors.

Once the later Song Taizu and Taizong visited the Hempclad Daoist. They asked him: "When will the empire finally be stable?"

“Well,” he said, “the red energy is already very strong. Around the date *chenshen*, a true ruler will appear. At the same time, the Buddhist religion will come to flourish greatly.”

Note: Taizu ascended the throne in the first month of the year *gengshen*, on a *jiachen* day. This fulfills this prophesy. (*Fozu tongji* 43.394)

In these anecdotes, Chen Tuan and/or the Hempclad Daoist, his teacher of the Dao of physiognomy and a figure closely associated with the elusive Lü Dongbin, correctly perceive the energy of the various rulers. The auspicious nature of their individual energies is clearly visible to the trained physiognomist, at one with the Dao, who not only judges people’s faces and their immediate personal future but can also identify their general aura and thereby the impact they will have on the world at large. Later sources use these skills to their best advantage. Not only imperial legitimation is won, but different interest groups, in this case the Buddhists whose rise is prophesied, find cosmic sanction for their rise in power.

More in line with precise physiognomic skills is Chen Tuan’s recognition of the future successful Song emperors, Taizu and Taizong, during a chance meeting in Chang’an, already discussed above. Immediately recognizing the impending greatness of the later rulers, Chen orders their prime minister, Zhao Pu, to take a seat of lesser honor.

Once the Song dynasty is actually established, Chen Tuan in a most vivid manner expresses his certain knowledge that a new era of internal stability has begun, the age of Great Peace has begun.

Chen Tuan often climbed on his white donkey and rode around various places near Mount Hua. He was followed by a large crowd of people. Once he was on his way to Bianzhou, when he heard on the road that the first Song emperor had ascended the throne. He immediately began to laugh. He laughed so hard that he fell off his donkey.

“From now on there will be stability in All Under Heaven,” he exclaimed.

After this event, he retired to Mount Hua and remained in seclusion. (*Wenjian qianlu* 7.10b)

This story, found in several variants,[\[34\]](#) implies that Chen Tuan was actually so concerned with the fate of his country that he was on his way to Bianzhou, the then capital now known as Kaifeng, to do whatever he could.

The implication is that the Dao of a new development was already stirring in his bones. As a true supporter of the state, he thus felt compelled to leave his mountain retreat and ride into the world on his white donkey.[\[35\]](#) The stereotyped motivation of the ideal imperial adviser is expressed more clearly in the later *Taihua xiyi zhi*.

The master once looked at himself in a mirror and said: “If I am not an immortal, I certainly am an emperor!”

He judged that he had an important responsibility. (1.2a)

Thus driven to serve his ruler, Chen Tuan sets out from his mountain retreat. On his way to the capital, he then learns that his more active involvement is not needed, since Zhao Kuangyin has ascended the throne. His laughter, so hard and intense that it throws him off his mount, expresses not only the joy of an individual at the beginning of what is hoped to be a more stable reign. Rather, it reveals the founding saint’s insights in the flow of the Dao. Showing the truth of heaven in the immediate physical action of the saint, Chen Tuan’s laughter is the direct expression of the joy of Heaven about the new stability of the world.

The more the saint knits his brows, as during the Five Dynasties, the worse the shape the world is in. The harder he laughs, on the other hand, the greater Heaven’s delight in the affairs of humanity. In either case, grimaces and laughter alone do not suffice to make the situation clear. For unenlightened bystanders and later readers, the upcoming immortal therefore also formulates his knowledge in the language of ordinary human beings. The power of inner insight into the workings of heaven is the result of Chen Tuans oneness with the Dao and his skills as a physiognomist. He serves as the carrier of omens to better enlighten the current state of affairs. Historical reality, through his influence, is transformed into cosmic predestination, subject in all its ramifications to divine planning.

Natural signs together with stories like the above thus come to serve as causal explanations for the success of the Song dynasty. They relate to events not through logic but through coincidence. A full hermeneutic circle is created: because the Daoist sage recognized the dynasty it must be the right one, because the dynasty actually rules and unifies the empire, the sage really embodies the Dao and the legendary events must have happened as described. The argument is circular, one end proves the other. Yet it has power and influence on the contemporary understanding of Song rule. Chen Tuan, known as an immediate representative of the Dao and as a successful fortune-teller, consequently was much sought after for more formal sanction and legitimation of the imperial rule.

Historical Encounters

According to official and historically creditable sources, Chen Tuan visited the imperial court three times altogether. His first sojourn was under Emperor Shizong of the Later Zhou dynasty in 956. Well known as a destroyer of Buddhist statues,^[36] this ruler seems to have been in chronic need of financial assistance. Intrigued by the various stories about the eccentric Daoist master, he called him to court to question him about the possibility to produce synthetic gold from coarser metals (*Fozu tongji* 43.394; Makita 1971: 188).

However, Chen Tuan turned out to be not very interested either in alchemy or its material uses.

Your Majesty is the ruler of all within the four seas. You should concern yourself most of all with governing. Why waste attention on such secondary skills?(*Zhenxian tongjian* 3a)

This answer, which is recorded in practically every Chen Tuan biography, is first documented in the *Taizong huangdi shilu* and has been accepted as historical fact by the *Zhizhi tongjian* and its successors. Shizong, though certainly not very delighted to see his efforts go waste, remained polite to his guest and even offered him a job as policy counselor. When Chen Tuan insisted on returning to his seclusion, the emperor honored him with various gifts and ordered the local subprefect to inquire about his wellbeing at regular intervals.

Chen Tuan's second appearance in imperial quarters occurred sometime in the beginning of Taizong's reign, that is to say, around the year 976. Although mentioned in the historical accounts, nothing special seems to have happened at this occasion, and his obviously short visit left no major traces.[\[37\]](#)

Very well documented, on the other hand, is his major audience with Taizong in November 984. At this time, the emperor had various conversations with him and was very pleased with the positive attitude the visiting Daoist master exhibited toward his way of handling the government. Was he not indeed a modern Yao and Shun? And was it not in fact the best possible thing for him to spend all his efforts for the benefit of his subjects? Chen Tuan, contrary to stereotypes, endorsed the ruling ideology of the time and excused himself from talking about Daoist arts. They were of no immediate use for the world. He said,

I do not know the principles of expelling the old and inhaling the new or any arts of nourishing life. Nor am I familiar with things concerning spirit immortality or alchemy. I have no techniques to teach. If I ascended to heaven in broad daylight, what use would I be for the world?

Our sagely emperor has extensive insight into past and present, he deeply understands the laws of order and disorder that govern the world. He truly possesses the Dao and is a benevolent and enlightened ruler. Our age is one of the perfection of principles, when ruler and minister are harmonious in their virtue. Diligently practicing all sorts of techniques and refining oneself do not contribute to this.(*Zhenxian tongjian* 4b)

The delight of the emperor in having found not only a representative of the Dao who could

legitimate his rule by cosmic approval but also a friendly and well-wishing partner for conversations at court expressed itself in various ways. The most reliably historical source of Taizong's evaluation of Chen Tuan, the *Taizong huangdi shilu*, reports his words to his prime minister Song Qi.

Chen Tuan is concerned with himself alone, he does never worry about outer circumstances and personal profit. He is what we call a master of the supernatural.

For forty years already he has lived on Mount Hua, so his years must come close to a hundred. Since people everywhere agree that the empire is now governed peacefully, he has come to court for a visit. His intention is memorable indeed. (31.7b)

Beyond that, Taizong honored him with the title "Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible," based on a passage of the *Daode jing* where the Dao is described in these terms (chap. 14). At this occasion Taizong again expressed his deep appreciation.

Chen Tuan of Mount Hua nourishes his simplicity among hills and meadows and covers his radiance among rocks and caverns. But now, following the tendency of the times, he has accepted an invitation to court. This will increase his radiance, however small and subtle. He honors our perfect transformation of the land and has come to greet us with proper formality. So far he has no honorary name at this court. How will his exemplary conduct become known?

We therefore bestow upon him the title "Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible." (31.7ab)

At the same time, the emperor presented him with a purple robe and various other items, such as tea and drugs. Chen Tuan stayed with him for several weeks but eventually insisted on his return to the mountain.

Both the legendary and the historically verifiable connections Chen Tuan has with the imperial court serve the same purpose. The Daoist immortal is stylized as the founding saint of the dynasty, he supports the imperial rule, he gives his advice freely and with complete confidence in the abilities of the new emperor. At the root of these stories and events there are two historical circumstances: the founding of the dynasty and the prophesying power of the recluse. The emergence of the Daoist at court as well as in official chronicles only develops as a first growth of these roots in accordance with the myth of the imperial adviser. While Chen Tuan's sojourns at court were certainly historical fact, they would never have come about nor been reported in official documents had there not been a valid need for legitimation of the dynasty. The fame of the Daoist, however religious and popular in its later development, thus rests first and foremost on his powers and their imperial recognition, preconditioned by the historical need of the time.

The historical need, in turn, is conditioned by the understanding of statecraft in traditional China. Dynasties are established by taking over the mandate of heaven, they must by all means act in strict alignment with the cycles of the universe. The agreement and approval of the cosmos has to be tangible and made clear to all, best realized by the appearance of an imperial adviser, a teacher of the dynasty. Like Laozi representing the Dao, like Zhang Liang particular to the wisdom of immortals, like Xu You (adviser to Yao), Yi Yin (adviser to Tang of Shang), and all the other classical Confucian counselors, Chen Tuan is reluctant to follow the imperial summons. Only after the invitation is issued several times over, he finally arrives to express his delight and support. The dynasty is stabilized, the government legitimate, the saint serves as adviser, the world has Great Peace.

Later Evaluations and Embellishments

Chen Tuan's support of the ruling dynasty has led to various embellishments in the literature. Speeches tend to get longer and more flowery over the years, flowery details regarding his apparel, guest quarters, and behavior are added. Anecdotes abound. One of these, found in several sources, has it that upon arrival at court, before even meeting with the emperor, he first gave an example of his powers of sleep meditation, one of the most obvious indications of his oneness with the Dao.

When he arrived at the imperial palace, his first wish was a chamber of quiet to take rest. Lodged in the Residence of Establishing Prosperity, he promptly locked the doors and entered into a deep sleep. He awoke only well after one month. (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.3b)

After his death in 989, Chen Tuan duly became the subject of encomia by numerous high officials. The first we know of is a poem by prime minister Fan Zhongyan.^[38] The work is recorded by Fan's grandson, Fan Gongcheng in his *Guoting lu* (Record of Guoting) and dated to the fifth day of the twelfth month of the year 1027, i.e., 4 January 1028. The first two lines are unfortunately lost.

Once he met the Hairy Lady, but what might he have said,

Facing the majestic mountain, numinous power full erect?

In deep sleep he misses spring, the flowers of the earth,

In dark woods the moon alone guards the nightly pass.

Soft and friendly ruler's call, till he came out east,

Emptiness sends a quiet cart, soothing him after the feast. (*Guoting lu* 9b).

Han Qi, another prime minister and loyal servant to three successive emperors, wrote Chen Tuan's praise.^[39] He describes him as a person of the beyond, a heavenly official banished temporarily to this earth. He will eventually cast off his cicada skin and ascend back to where he truly belongs (see *Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.3b).

Wen Tong, well-known painter and official, emphasizes his skills as a poet.^[40]

Chen's songs and poems dealt with the world, he would even impress deaf people and blind. He produced descriptions of landscape and treatises on the *Changes*, but whatever it was every single one of his works entered this world of dust. People in the towns never tired to intone and recite them, yet the true essence of his works remained closed to them. (*Danyuan ji*, App. 2.2b)

The political evaluation is summarized by Zhu Xi (1130–1200):

Why now does Sima Guang in his *Zizhi tongjian* describe how a hermit, so far entirely unknown, is called to the imperial court? . . . Because he thought highly of him.

Why did he think highly of him? Because he answered Shizong's question about the arts of the immortals and of Yellow and White by pointing out the importance of imperial government.

Tuan was not a fake hermit, he was not merely interested in a certain general fame. He served the state with prudence and straightforwardness. (*Tongjian gangmu* 59.15b)

Here we have the open admission that the reason for Chen's various official invitations and the honors and gifts bestowed on him ultimately lay in his usefulness to the state, in his political conviction that rulers should do what rulers do and do it well, but not meddle with the arts of the Dao or any otherworldly pursuits. Just as Chen Tuan from the point of view of the Neo-Confucians occupies a mediating position between their own ideas and the more Daoist traditions of the immediate past, he stands between the radical withdrawal from the world and the active political involvement of the individual. However much he realizes himself "among hills and meadows" he is always a subject of the emperor and as such obliged to do all he can to help the age. He acquits himself in exemplary fashion of this double obligation, representing the spirit of the time in his sensible attitude, his support for the state, and his concern with abstract philosophical problems.

Chen's impact in this respect has also been noted by Zhu Xi.

Shao Yong's numerology goes back to Chen Tuan. In tranquility and withdrawal from the world he continued to expand his vision and thereby succeeded to penetrate the principle of

heaven and earth and the myriad beings. (*Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.4b)

Shao Yong himself, the numerologist who received Chen Tuan's teachings as handed down by a number of successive thinkers, is also the author of an encomium for the master. Known also as Kangjie, this member of the five masters of Song philosophy lived from 1011 to 1077. [41] For the most part fond of maintaining the lifestyle of a recluse he compiled his major work, the *Huangji jingshi shu*, around the year 1050, a highly technical compendium that develops the cosmological speculation of the *Yijing* (see Hervouet 1978: 262). He says about Chen Tuan:

I hadn't yet seen the truth of Xiyi,
I hadn't yet glimpsed his traces,
I stopped in my tracks when I heard of his fame,
Yet his heart was forever beyond me.

Then, when I glimpsed the trace of Xiyi,
And also saw deep in his truth,
Then only I knew that today as of old
There are wonderful men in the world.

One can reflect on the truth of Xiyi,
One can transmit all his writings,
Yet his heart is forever complete in itself
And can neither be grasped nor be named.

(*Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.4b)

In addition, Shao Yong was very fond of a saying he had once heard attributed to the master.

He repeated it several times and it is recorded in the works of his son.

Any good thing is reached only once,

A truly fine spot is never discovered again.

Thus

Drop a good thing to go on to a new, good of itself

(*Wenjian qianlu* 7.10b).

The practical judgment of all life situations which have to remain unique and fleeting in time well suits the image of the reclusive Daoist who thinks of universal patterns in his mountain retreat yet never loses touch with the ongoing reality around him. His insights into the course of the world establish a dynamic relationship between the outer flow of events and the inner thoughts and actions of the Daoist. Acting in the world from a position of the Dao, without an active impact yet sanctioning and supporting the life's natural way, is the proper mode of being for a politically relevant recluse.

The “Record of Master Xiyi of the Great Hua”

The most literary and formally Confucian biography of Chen Tuan is Zhang Yi's *Taihua xiyi zhi*. The text is divided into two chapters. The first deals with Chen Tuan's relationship to the imperial court, the second recounts his meetings with officials, philosophers, disciples, and the like.

The first chapter is structured according to three major sections:

1. Invitation of the imperial court;
2. Sojourn at court and conversations with the emperor;
3. Applications for and final permission to return.

The first section repeats the classical scheme according to which any saint of eminence will only respond to an invitation when it is issued at least three times. The text thus presents a rather repetitive scenario of the following typical scenes: The emperor decides to invite the saint; he selects a messenger; he composes a formal invitation consisting of a letter and a poem; the messenger arrives and presents the invitation; the master rejects it off-hand; the master writes a formal apology consisting of a letter and a poem; the messenger returns to

the capital. A typical scene reads as follows:

On the third day of the sixth month, the emperor presided in the Zhuigong Hall. He summoned the Supervisor of Imperial Palaces who recommended the official Zhang Suzhen to go and present yet another imperial summons to the master.

On the eighth day of the sixth month he arrived in the Cloud Terrace Monastery on Mount Hua. Seeing Yong Yunzhou, a young man from the mountain serving in the monastery, he stopped to question him.

“Where is the sagely master?”

“At present the master is deep in sleep in his hermitage.”

“How can I wake him up?”

“He will wake upon hearing the metal gong next to his head.”

Someone duly sounded the gong and the master awoke. When he realized that yet another imperial envoy had arrived, he got up hastily, straightened his robe and faced him.

“Why have you come again?”

“Our Imperial Majesty is desperate since you have refused to comply with the invitation brought by Chen Zongyan. Therefore he sent me on this special mission to invite you to the capital once again.”

They then proceeded to burn incense and complete the proper formalities of receiving a visitor. The master listened the imperial proclamation.

“We deeply bow to you, oh Recluse of the White Clouds, Eminent Scholar of the Jade Cavern. You have awakened to the mysterious gate of the Great Dao and attained the obscure principles of the Invisible and Inaudible. . . .

“We cannot sleep and forget to eat, thinking only of you, wise master! You are the only way to quench our thirst! We beg you to leave your grotto realm for just a little. Please, climb on your crane or phoenix and come swiftly flying here! We will stand at the palace gate looking for you, to receive you with the imperial family as your guard of honor.”

After the master had received this formal summons, he answered the envoy: “This poor Daoist belongs to the wilderness of the mountains, like deer or a boar. I climb up to high

places and look far into the distance, rinsing my mouth in the creek nearby. My friends are immortals like the Master Redpine and Old Man Cassia. I wander about on cloudy peaks and mountains of mist, how could I strive for the impermanent gains of wealth and nobility?"

He then begged the imperial envoy to stay his horses for a while. He should rest a couple of days in the hermitage, while the master proceeded to write a formal answer including another poem. . . .

"The vain glory of this world is not for me, I wish to avoid misfortune. Even if Yao or Shun came calling me today, I would only react with apologies as did Father Nestling and Xu You. My happiness is complete when I live out my remaining years, with humble respect admiring Your Sagely Majesty from afar."

He also added a poem.

Here I sit and meet Mylord, as if you were great Yao.

Dumb I live in grass and marsh, yet take from you a bow.

I've only laughter for myself, my body's without care,

My talents raw, how could I face the sage's imperial glare?

Mixing seasons' energies, immortal drug cooks best,

Cleansing all ways of the world, I find my inner rest.

I wish not any eminence to find in your high court,

In scenic beauty I lean back, this is my true lord.

The envoy accepted the official reply and the poem. Even with intense persuasion he had not been able to move the master.

On the sixteenth day of the sixth month he arrived back in the capital. He submitted his report to the emperor in the Wende Hall. When Taizong had finished reading the master's answer, he realized that the master would again not come. His dragon countenance showed extreme displeasure. (*Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.4a–5b)

Only at the third attempt is the pattern interrupted. After the master rejects the invitation off-hand, the messenger takes the initiative and presents him with a plea and a poem of his

own making. This tips the scales. The master agrees to come and together they travel back to the capital.

The second section is separated from the first by two minor occurrences: the master takes his formal leave from the mountains and from his teacher, the Hempclad Daoist; and he composes several poems when he first arrives in the capital and meets with the impressions of a bustling city. He has compassionate thoughts at the slow soothing of the busy evening sounds.

A thousand gates, ten thousand doors, they are all tightly locked,

Stars in the sky are well arranged and in deep silence blocked.

All right and wrong, all world's affairs are lying down to rest,

The booming drum of the six streets is giving night its best.

The Milky Way appears and fades as night is growing late,

On their pillows people's minds still move with love and hate.

Anxious sighs pervade the town of those with fame and gain,

They toss and turn, their souls fly off in dreams that are but vain.

Taihua xiyi zhi 1.7b.

His interaction with the emperor takes place in altogether twelve single episodes. Two thirds of these are taken from earlier source, usually literally. The added parts reveal Taizong as Chen Tuan's submissive admirer and emphasize the informal nature of their interaction.

On one of his free days, Taizong took the master for a walk up to the Tower of the Eastern Quarter. Leisurely they glanced across the busy markets of the city. They saw a man beneath the Tower just getting up. He stretched and washed, although it was already quite late in the day. The emperor asked his attendants whose house it was. Someone explained that it was the residence of a rich and powerful man from the Eastern Capital.

With a sigh, the emperor expressed his feelings:

People here rise with the sun, yet I'm up long before,

Dawn will see me dealing with an endless pile of chores.

I feel envy for the rich man coming from the east,

Who can sleep late in the day, as if life was a feast.

The master answered him with a poem of his own.

Last night, around the third watch, I was startled in my sleep,

A gong beat, and a huge crowd thronged like a flock of sheep.

They went up to the palace to serve deep in the night,

I alone am free of work and sleep while the sun shines bright.

Taizong received the master's reply and was greatly delighted. (*Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.10a).

The third section again abounds in episodes already found in earlier literature. Many times Chen Tuan submits his request for leave, and the text continues to repeat that the emperor now finally understood that he would not be able to retain the master at court. Over and over again, the two arrive at the same position, and the author uses this dead end situation to integrate more and more anecdotes and stories in a kind of retrospective. The emperor becomes increasingly helpless, his encomia and speeches of praise become longer and more convoluted, he is losing his Daoist partner and wishes to postpone the final good bye.

The emperor ordered all sorts of craftsmen to assemble with their wares in front of the five gates to the imperial palace. The sang and made merry, praising the prosperity and increasing numbers of the population.

To keep the master from leaving him for his freedom, the emperor then asked him: "As you can see, the capital is flourishing and overflowing in its prosperity. How could it survive losing me? As it certainly would, if you returned to the mountain and not joined me in my rule?"

The master answered, "Wild animals, running and flying, live in woods and in mountains. Fish, big and small, swim in rivers and lakes. Each has where it is happiest."

Taizong thereupon pointed at the thick of the city. Chimneys smoked, wheels crowded. He

turned to the master.

“See that?” — “Yes, I see.” — “What do you see?” — “I see the rich covet more good life, and the poor fight for survival.”

Taizong was silent for a moment. Then he turned away from the gates and went back into the hall.

Before the assembled court, the master steadfastly refused all proposition. He insisted to return to the mountain. (*Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.12ab)

Overall, the *Taihua xiyi zhi* characterizes the Daoist master as a very self-confident and highly critical observer of the realm. His first obligation is toward his own world, the world of the mountain, of birds and beasts, of the Dao. He supports the current government as far as he can and as long as it is in harmony with the principles of the cosmos. His fundamental ideals, however much he may contribute to the political success of the dynasty, are opposed to the aims of the world. All those riches and honors, those high positions and universal acclamations, those palaces and ornate robes are not for him. He is on the side of the suffering and the poor, he wishes to see a more harmonious and more just world. The Daoist here fulfills the function of the social critic, the hermit has the bird's eye view of the world at large. He can point out the problems, yet at the same time asserts that it is not up to him to solve them. Government to those who govern. But for the saint, the rule is advice yes, active participation no.

Taizong, on the other hand, is represented as an exemplary emperor of peace. He has succeeded to bring order and prosperity to the realm, there is no more fighting on the borders, the citizens live well and in peace. Nevertheless, these successes do not satisfy him. He wishes to realize himself more fully, searches peace on a higher plane than arms and food. He yearns for the Dao, for the inner truth found only in retirement from affairs and withdrawal to the solitude of nature. The emperor sees in the Daoist a quality of life that has eluded him so far, he envies his freedom and independence, he wishes to follow his path. Yet, again, he is emperor to the very last, stays true to his historical calling and remains with his work. Sacrificing individual realization for the larger good of the community, the emperor is the real hero of the *Taihua xiyi zhi*. He accepts the advice of the hermit, sees the world through his eyes for while, follows his suggestions in certain important matters (the pacification of Hedong, the selection of the heir-apparent), but however little he likes is, in the end has to understand that he ultimately stands on his own.

Both, Chen Tuan and Taizong fulfill historical and universal missions of their own kind. The hermit comes to advise and support, he is the critic adviser who stands beyond personal reward and punishment and thus can honestly point to problems in the state and give the best

advice possible. But however disinterested in political matters, even a hermit's viewpoint is not objective. He has his own ax to grind, his own aims to pursue. For these he again leaves the court to its own devices and returns to his solitary hut. The emperor sacrifices his individual realization for the good of the empire at large. His main purpose in life is to rule well, to become a modern Yao or Shun. He is successful because he is humble and sees his limitations. He wins cosmic approval yet cannot himself make the jump into a more cosmic mode of being.

[1] There is, for example, a well-mapped process of establishing the rank and official title of popular deities (see Hansen 1990). Also, the Daoist tradition has undertaken quite organized efforts to integrate and delimitate their model patriarchs (see Reiter 1988).

[2] For a proposal to analyze Chinese myths according to the five distinct categories of mythological themes, motifs and symbols, historical figures, specific situations and concerns, as well as message of the story in question, see Kohn 1990.

[3] See especially Chan 1968; also Chan 1961, 1973, 1974.

[4] On the use of the planchette in Chinese religion see Chao 1942 and Jordan and Overmyer 1986.

[5] Tessai's painting, entitled "Den of the Daoist immortal Chen Xiyi," is a hanging scroll, color on paper. Dated to the year 1920, it is now in the Kiyoshi-Kojin Seichōji Temple, in Hyōgo Prefecture, Japan.

[6] For recent studies see the works of Li Yuanguo, Terence Russell and myself in the bibliography below.

[7] Li Yuanguo has it that Chen Tuan came originally from Sichuan, where he in fact left an inscription behind and where various traces of his stay can still be found (see Li 1984 and 1985). On the other hand, about 95% of all sources, even the most historically reliable ones, insist on Henan as his origin.

[8] For a study of the early sources on Laozi and his stylization see Seidel 1969; Kohn 1998.

The development of his legend in the Six Dynasties is discussed in Kohn 1990.

[9] For a discussion of this part of Neo–Confucian philosophy and Chen Tuan’s role see Fung and Bodde 1953: II/440.

[10] For a detailed study of his renown under the Northern Song see Baldrian–Hussein 1986. For a discussion of his historicity see Ono 1968. A more recent discussion is found in Katz 2000.

[11] Texts in the Daoist Canon (*Daozang*, hereafter abbreviated DZ) are given according to the number of the reduced sixty–volume edition published in Taipei and Kyoto. These numbers coincide with those found in Schipper 1975. “Fasc.” stands for “fascicle” and refers to the volume number of the 1925 Shanghai reprint of the original canon of 1445 (*Zhengtong Daozang*).

[12] For a tabulated comparison between the historically known facts of Chen Tuan’s life and his biography in the *Lequan ji* and the *Songshi* see Table 1.

[13] The Sichuan connection has been discussed especially in the works of Li Yuanguo.

[14] Biographical details on these two famous physiognomists are found in the biography of Qing personages by Goodrich and Feng (1976: 1638 , 1629). For further discussion of the *Shenxian quanbian* see Kohn 1986.

[15] A telling example is the early recognition of Empress Wu by the great Tang physiognomist Yuan Tiangang. Looking at her in her cradle, he exclaims, “The young lord has dragon eyes and a phoenix neck, the highest possible indicators of nobility!” See *Jiu Tangshu*, biogr. 61, 5093; *Tangshu*, biogr. 95, 5801; *Taiping guangji* 221.1694. For more details on the Empress see Fitzgerald 1955. He mentions the story in his prologue.

[16] Other instances include the occasion when he gave a magical drug to a local magistrate and thereby saved him from death by drowning; once he warned a youngster serving at his hermitage that his mother was seriously ill and got him to save her in time. In yet a different case he knew from his appearance that a visitor had come to him not for company’s sake, but only because he desired Chen’s huge gourd. He graciously let him have it (*Zhenxian tongjian* 47.7b–8b).

[17] *Dongxuan bilu* 3.1a. In an abbreviated version, the story is also found in *Fozu tongji* 43.401, *Xuanpin lu* 5.11b, *Dongdu shilue* 118.1b, *Wenjian qianlu* 7.11a, and *Guier ji* 29. As the text indicates, both men mentioned rose to high office later. Their biographies are contained in *Songshi* 290.

[18] Chen Tuan was at court in 984, but Zhenzong did not become a desirable candidate for heir-apparent until 995. Also, he only received the title Shouwang in 994 (see *Songshi* 8.103; Chan 1968: 41).

[19] Zhang Yong (946–1015) passed the imperial examination in 980 and in due course became famous for his adroit handling of various rebellions in southwestern China, both in the 990s and in the early years of the eleventh century. In 1006 he excused himself from duty on grounds of a tumor in his head and moved to the south. His biography is contained in *Songshi* 293. See Franke 1976: 48–50.

20 Originally a general under the Han, this personage reappeared during the Tang dynasty as a Daoist who sold herbs and drugs. One of the most senior members of the famous Eight Immortals, he converted Lü Dongbin in the well-known episode of the “Yellow Millet Dream.” He has lengthy biographies in *Zhenxian tongjian* 31.1a and *Xiaoyao xu jing* 1.15b. For English discussions see Yetts 1916, 1922; Ling 1918; Giles 1948: 122–23; Yang 1958.

[21] A career official under Zhenzong, who passed the imperial examination between 998 and 1104. He has a biography in *Songshi* 294.

[22] Another illustrious official of the early Song. He passed the examination in 976–984 and has his biography in *Songshi* 488.

[23] Another illustrious official of the early Song. He passed the examination in 976–984 and has his biography in *Songshi* 488.

[24] After passing the examination around the year 980, Qian rose to high minister of the realm. He is the author of the *Taizong huangdi shilu*, but withdrew from a successful career at a relatively young age. His biography is found in *Songshi* 266.

[25] *Wenjian qianlu* 7.11a. Shorter versions are found in *Fozu tongji* 43.369, *Taihua xiyi*

zhi 2.1b–2b, and *Guier ji* 29. The story is corroborated by Qian’s official biography in *Songshi* 266.

[26] The introduction to the text claims that Wang Pu compiled it in a grotto on Mount Linwu in Jiangsu, but his biographies in *Jiu Wudai shi* 128 and *Wudai shi* 31 show that he never went south of the Yangze. Also, they make it clear that all connection of Wang Pu with the arts of prognostication belongs into the realm of legend. See Kohn 1986:137–38.

[27] See for example Wu Yun’s *Xinmu lun* (On Mind and Eyes), DZ 1038, fasc. 727.

[28] For a biography see *Shiji* 55, *Hanshu* 40. See also Bauer 1956.

[29] For a biography of Wang Yuanzhi, see *Tangshu* 205, *Jiu Tangshu* 192. Hagiographic accounts of his life are found in *Zhenxian tongjian* 25.1a, *Yunji qiqian* 5.11a, *Maoshan zhi* 10.15a, *Xuanpin lu* 4.5a, and *Sandong qunxian lu* 11.3a. For a Western summary of his life see Schafer 1980: 45–46; Strickmann 1981: 32.

[30] Zhu Yuanzhang, who lived 1328–1398 and ruled the empire from 1368, was frequently object of popular stories and semi-religious legends. For a discussion see Chan 1975.

[31] Zhang Zhong’s first biography, by Song Lian, was written in the 1370’s. Besides that, he is mentioned in the *Taizu shilu*, the official chronicle of the first Ming emperor. A more legendary account, the *Gengsi bian* was published in 1520 by Lu Can. See also *Qixiu leigao* 2.764. For a discussion in Western sources, see Chan 1973 and Seidel 1970: 488.

[32] See *Lequan ji* 33.11b, *Dongdu shilue* 118.1b, *Xuanpin lu* 5.1a, *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 10.1a, *Songshi* 457.13420, *Songshi xinbian* 177.1, *Songshi jishi* 5.21b, *Sandong qunxian lu* 13.10b.

[33] *Zhenxian tongjian* 3b. The translation follows Herbert G. Giles (1977: 233).

[34] The same version is also cited in *Dongdu shilue* 118.1b, *Song Yuan xue’an buyi* 9.1a, and *Huayue zhi* 2.6b. He laughs hard but does not fall off his donkey according to *Fozu tongji* 43.394, *Xuanpin lu* 5.10a, and *Xizhen zhi* 4.1. A mere summary of events is found in *Wudang fudi congzhen ji* 3.23a and *Songshi xinbian* 177.1.

[35] The white donkey is a favorite mount of immortals at the time. The best-known example is Zhang Guolao, one of the Eight Immortals, who used to stride on it facing back and who could make it shrink to pocket-size by blowing on it. No parking problems, except that the donkey in his sleeve would get hungry after a while and start kicking. To resume his journey, Zhang would simply blow on his miniature steed again to make it grow back to regular size. See Dore 1915: II/50, Ling 1918, Yang 1958, Yetts 1916 and 1921.

[36] There are various stories surrounding the death of Shizong in 960. He died from infected boils on his back, a disease that Buddhists interpreted as direct retribution for his breaking the back of many Buddhists images (Franke 1949: 72).

[37] The major indication of this earlier visit is that his sojourn in 984 is commonly described as his second appearance at the Song court. See *Lequan ji* 33.12a, *Yixue bianhuo* 5a, *Shengshui yantan lu* 1.1b, *Xuanpin lu* 5.10b, *Zhenxian tongjian* 47.3b, *Songshi* 457.13420, *Xizhen zhi* 4.1, and *Xiaoyao xu jing* 3.30a.

Historical sources that mention a visit to Taizu's court include *Taizong huangdi shilu* 31.7b, *Xu Zizhi tongjian* 12.11b–12a, *Xu Zizhi tongjian changbian* 25.15b, and *Fozu tongji* 43.401.

[38] Fan Zhongyan lived from 989 to 1052. He was a well-known prime minister under Renzong. Biographies in *Songshi* 314, *Song Yuan xue'an* 2. See also Franke 1976: 321–30.

[39] Han Qi is a colleague and close associate of Fan Zhongyan. He passed the imperial examination 1023–1032. Biographies in *Songshi* 312, *Songshi xinbian* 98, *Dongdu shilue* 69.

[40] Wen Tong lived 1018–1079; he passed the examination in 1049 and went on to occupy a series of administrative posts. He is especially famous for his ink paintings of bamboos. His biography is recorded in *Songshi* 443. See Franke 1976: 150–51, Hervouet 1978: 390).

[41] For a biography see *Songshi* 427, *Dongdu shilue* 118, and Franke 1976: 849. A discussion of his philosophy is found in Wyatt 1984.

Translation One

Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian 47.1a–14b

Origins and Youth^[1]

[1a] The name of the master was Chen, his first name Tuan. He was also called Tunan or Fuyaozi. He came originally from Zhenyuan in Bozhou.^[2] This is the same place from which Laozi came. (Note: One source gives Chongkan in Puzhou.^[3] I'm afraid that this is only one of the places where he later lived as a recluse.)

After he was born, he could not speak. When he was four or five years old, one day he played on the bank of the river Huo. A lady dressed in green called to him and gave him her breast.^[4] From this time he could not only speak, but his intelligence surpassed that of others. When he grew up he could memorize the classics and histories after having read them only once. (Note: One source mentions that from this time onward he would tie up his hair and indulge in childish play no longer.)^[5] When he was fifteen, he had penetrated all the classics of poetry, rites, history, and calculation; he even understood the books on the myriad plants and drugs. When his parents died, the master said to himself: “All I have studied so far is merely sufficient to ensure me a remaining fame in official life. I shall give it all up. I will go to Mount Tai and, [1b] sitting under tall pine trees, will discuss the methods of leaving the world with the immortals Anqi Sheng^[6] and the Master of the Yellow Stone.^[7] I will then prepare the drug of no-death. How could I stay in the company of common people, weakly arising and passing, coming and going with life and death, never leaving the ever-turning wheel?”

Thus he dissolved his family's business by bequeathing it to other relatives. The only thing he kept for himself was an old stone vessel. Thereupon he left.^[8]

Early Involvement with the Imperial Court

Some officials at the Tang court had heard of his pure aura and wanted to make his acquaintance. His face was like a luminant star emerging from behind multi-colored clouds. The officials competed who would see him first, but he made friends with no one.

Thereafter he gave up all connections with people and, dressed in the cap of the wilderness and a robe of grass, he wandered about singing and sat around happily. On some days he would enter a village or a market town, on others he would go into uninhabited areas.

Sometimes he would stay in a tavern, then again he would spend his nights in the wilderness. He travelled all over the country.[\[9\]](#)

Mingzong, the emperor of the Later Tang [926–934], heard of him and sent him a personal invitation to come to court. The master arrived and bowed with respect to the ruler of humankind. The emperor treated him with extensive care and gave him the title Recluse of Pure Emptiness. In addition, he made him a present of three court ladies. In expression of his gratitude the master addressed the emperor as follows:

[2a] “The famous ladies of Zhao, the pure women of Han, are gracious in their movement and excellent in their beauty. Their mere presence in the inner residence makes the house shine with radiance. They bring wealth and honor. Before they were residents of heaven. Only now have they descended to live among people.

“I do not dare to receive them in my humble dwelling. Respectfully I pray they be given a more worthy residence. My nature is like that of the deer, my movements are like grass and reeds, I float along like clouds blown along by the wind, like a boat not properly secured. Therefore I respectfully send the ladies back to the Forbidden Palace.”

Together with this he submitted a poem. After the emperor had listened to the letter, he read the poem. It went:

My flesh and body are of snow, my muscles made from jade,

With gratitude I receive the present my lord made.

Yet far away from all the world, of women I not dream,

Nor do the game of wind and rain, a betrayal that I'd deem.

When Chen had given this letter as a petition to an imperial messenger, he hastily fled into the seclusion of mountains and rivers.[\[10\]](#)

Spiritual Development

he said of himself that he once met the immortal Sun Junfang and the Deerskin Recluse, Lupi gong,[\[11\]](#) who advised him that he could live in proper seclusion on the Cliff of Nine Chambers on Mount Wudang in Hunan. Thus it came that he went to Mount Wudang and stayed there. He nourished himself on breath, abstained from cereals, and practiced serene meditations in absolute solitude for over twenty years.[\[12\]](#)

[2b] He wrote the *Zhixuan pian* (Pointing to the Mystery) in eighty-one sections, fifty poems entitled *Rushi huandan shi* (Entering the Chamber and Reverting the Cinnabar) as well as the *Goutan ji* (Plumbing the Depths) in more than ten thousand words.[13] All these works deal with the marvels of the Dao and the embrace of utmost truth.

Once when he stood in the courtyard at night he had a vision of a metal statue with a sword. The figure spoke to him:

“Your Dao is now complete. You must return to the place of your completion.”

The master pondered over this and concluded: “The divine statue speaks of the place of return and completion. This cannot but refer to the place where the myriad beings assemble in their fall to return to the origin. It therefore appears that I should retire to the west.”

When this occurred he was already over seventy years old. Without further hesitation he left Mount Wudang and went west to settle on Mount Hua. There he obtained the abandoned Cloudterrace Monastery, cleared the grounds from brambles and overgrowth and made it his residence. In this way he heeded the admonition to “return to his place of completion.”[14] Around this time there was a man-eating tiger in the vicinity. When the master arrived he yelled at the tiger to go away. After this nobody was ever harmed again.[15]

Li Qi of the Kaiyuan era [713–742] lived as a recluse on the south side of Mount Hua. He looked like a very young man and made several hundred miles in one moment. He used to wander about with the master. They shared their wine and songs.[16]

The master frequently closed his door and lay down for sleep meditation. In this state he would remain for several months on end. [3a] In the reign period Xiande [954–960], under the rule of Shizong of the Zhou, a visitor once came to see him. He looked inside the hut of the master, but found nothing but the traces of wild beasts and the cries of wild birds.

Another time, a fuel gatherer from the foot of the mountain approached the hermitage of the master. He only saw a heap of bones and dust lying about. Intrigued, he drew closer and discovered that this was in fact the master. He felt his heart and found it still warm, but his efforts of resuscitation took effect only after quite some time. Then the life energy returned and the master woke up, only to scold him saying:

“Why do you disturb me in the depth of my sleep?” [17]

With Zhou Shizong

The prefect of the area, Luo Chanwei, reported his wonderful feats to Emperor Shizong who promptly summoned him to the imperial palace. Here again he fell into a deep trance from which he awoke only after one month had passed. The emperor then asked him about matters of yellow and white [alchemy]. The master replied:

“Your Majesty is the ruler of all within the four seas. You should concern yourself most of all with governing. Why waste attention on such secondary skills?”[\[18\]](#) (Note: The *Zizhi tongjian* reports his words as follows: “Your majesty are the Son of Heaven. Your first duty is to govern the empire. What use would you have for such things?”)

Shizong did not consider this reply disobedient, but offered him an office as an adviser in matters of policy.[\[19\]](#) The master declined this honor and only accepted the honorific title Master of the White Clouds.[\[20\]](#) He was then formally escorted back to the mountain. Local officials were advised to inquire regularly after his well-being.

The Beginning of the Song Dynasty

The master was very shrewd in judging the affairs of the world. Under the reign of the Five Dynasties, whenever a new ruling house established its mandate, he would be very depressed and knit [3b] his brows for several days.> Once he even composed a poem:

For ten long years I plodded through the vale of lust and strive,

Then through my dreams there flashed a ray of the old sweet peaceful life.

No scarlet-tasselled hat of state can vie with soft repose,

Grand mansions do not taste the joys the poor man's cabin knows.

I hate the threatening clash of arms when fierce retainers throng,

I loathe the drunkard's revels and the sound of fife and song.

But I love to seek a quiet nook and some old volume bring

Where I can see wild flowers bloom and hear the birds in spring.[\[21\]](#)

One day he mounted his donkey and went to Huayin. There he heard that Emperor Taizu of the Song dynasty had ascended the throne. Thereupon he laughed out loud and exclaimed:

“From now on the empire will be at peace!”

Only then did he enter the mountains and was not seen any more. [\[22\]](#)

With Song Taizong

Taizu invited him to the capital, but he did not come. In the first year of the reign Taiping xingguo [976], Taizong issued an imperial summons for him including the following poem:

White Cloud came out some time ago, in ages now long past,

Then there were only traces seen, and nothing else was cast.

Today you should by all means come and visit me at court,

I will present you with three peaks and honor you a lord.[\[23\]](#)

Receiving this, the master accepted the invitation. When he arrived at the imperial palace, his first wish was a meditation chamber to take rest. Lodged in the Residence of Establishing Prosperity, he promptly locked the doors and entered into deep sleep. He awoke only well after one month.

Summoned to the imperial presence, he wore the Huayang cap on his head, [4a] straw sandals on his feet, and a hanging sash around his waist. Thus attired he performed the ceremony proper for a formal guest. The audience with the emperor took place in the Hall of Extensive Splendor. The emperor graciously asked him to sit down and talked with him for a long time.

Around that time, the emperor was about to pacify the area east of the Yellow River. The master, however, advised him to postpone the campaign. As the army had already been mobilized, the emperor was not happy about the words of the master and ordered him to go back to his meditations in the imperial garden. When the army returned later, its efforts had indeed not met with success. After remaining in deep sleep for over a hundred days, the master begged for permission to return to his mountain.

In the fourth year of the same reign period [979] he came forward once again. This time he pronounced that the area east of the Yellow River could be successfully pacified. The emperor promptly sent out another army and this time they indeed succeeded in capturing Liu Jiyuan and pacifying the entire region.[\[24\]](#)

The emperor thereupon said to his prime minister Song Qi : “Chen Tuan is truly a master of the supernatural. He has by now lived on Mount Hua for forty years. He must be well over a hundred. His words are very lofty indeed.”

An envoy was sent to escort the master to the capital. Upon arrival he was asked by Song Qi and some other high officials:

“Sir, you have attained the Dao of mystery and serenity. Can you teach it to others?”

The master, however, replied: “I do not know the principles of expelling the old and inhaling the new or any arts of nourishing life. Nor am I familiar with things concerning spirit immortality or alchemy. I have no techniques to teach. If I ascended to heaven in broad daylight, [4b] what use would I be for the world?”

“Our sagely emperor has extensive insight into past and present, he deeply understands the laws of order and disorder that govern the world. He truly possesses the Dao and is a benevolent and enlightened ruler. Our age is one of the perfection of principles, when ruler and minister are harmonious in their virtue. Diligently practicing all sorts of techniques and refining oneself do not contribute to this.”[\[25\]](#) Qi and the others praised these words and reported them to the emperor. The emperor thereupon esteemed him even higher. He issued an imperial edict in his favor:

“Chen Tuan, recluse of Mount Hua, hides his traces between hills and meadows and lives withdrawn among rocks and caves. Without any restraint he wanders even beyond this world, fully relishing the richness of the Dao. Under the Northern Zhou dynasty he would not appear to the world, only once did he follow an imperial invitation, his intention being to remain obscure. Since then many years have passed and he has travelled to many places.

“Now he has again uttered profound words and revealed his lofty traces. He has come to pay respect to this court. All excellent words, all brilliant expressions of language, all subtle forms of speech will not suffice to sing his praise. We therefore merely bestow an honorary title upon him: Master of the Invisible and the Inaudible.”[\[26\]](#)

The emperor frequently spent time with Chen Tuan making poems and talking about all kinds of things. Once he asked him:

“Is it possible today to achieve the kind of government of Yao and Shun?”

The master answered: “The foundations of the halls of Yao and Shun were three feet high with three steps of earth leading up. Their halls were roofed with untrimmed thatch. Their deeds seem unattainable, [5a] yet by governing with purity and in tranquility one can verily be a Yao and Shun of today.”[\[27\]](#)

The emperor appreciated this answer very much. [\[28\]](#)

He then bade all the princes to come so that the master could take a look at them. The master was in secret alignment with the will of Heaven so that he discovered the future emperor in the later Zhenzong.[\[29\]](#)

The emperor also wanted him to become his policy critic–adviser, but he steadfastly refused and asked for permission to return to his cloister in the mountains. To this end he submitted a poem:

I’m summoned by the meadows wild, the marshes give me fame,

“Striving for the South” I am called, with Chen my father’s name.

I am among the ten score guests of the three high peaks of Han,

Yet in my time and the four seas I count as only one.

Never all too much concerned with high affairs of state,

I find my truth in nature and make poetry as my mate.

The only thing I now wish for is to work in my coarse way,

Yet where I go, Your Majesty will always have last say.

The emperor then realized that he could not retain him. Therefore he gave him a big feast to which he invited the prime minister and a large number of high state officials. They all made poems pleading with him to stay.

In the end, the emperor bestowed on him a saddled horse with crane and turtle insignia as well as several rolls of silk and damask. In addition, he ordered the local magistrate of Huayin, Wang Za , to inquire after his well–being now and then. After that, those who took to bench and staff and waited to learn from him could hardly be counted.

Imperial Messengers

Later the emperor again dispatched a messenger to the mountain with a summons for the master.

He responded: “Your servant is very grateful for the imperial grace. But I only wish to be permitted to continue my life on Mount Hua.”

[5b] The master was strongly determined to persist in his intention, so the messenger returned empty-handed and reported the course of his mission to the emperor.

After some time had passed, the emperor dispatched yet another imperial envoy delivering his personal invitation together with tea, herbs, and other imperial gifts. The emperor also ordered the local magistrate and district overseer to honor the master with the proper etiquette. They were to bestow upon him a carriage with specially silenced wheels. The master expressed his gratitude in the following letter:

“Your servant received the imperial dispatch containing Your Majesty’s gracious and warm personal invitation. More than that, Your Majesty benevolently bestowed upon His humble servant wonderful drugs worth a myriad gold coins. I look up to Your Majesty’s grace and bow down low in deepest gratitude.

“Always Your servant, I am a leisurely guest of this brilliant age, as I was a student under the House of Tang. Yao was perfect in his Dao. Yet he asked the great Xu You to advise him. The emperors of our great Han dynasty were very powerful. Yet they considered themselves fortunate to be able to consult the Four Whitebeards. Gentlemen like these, fond of seclusion, have always been there throughout the long history of our empire.

“Your servant, I humbly dare to remind Your Majesty that my body is like a withered tree, my mind is like dead ashes. I do not know whether benevolence and righteousness are profound or shallow. How could I be counted upon to understand the correct procedures of advance and withdrawal at court?

“I tear off lotus leaves to use for a robe, I cut down reeds to make a cap. My body is covered with gray hair, on my feet I do not even wear straw sandals. By approaching the Imperial Countenance in this outfit I would only make myself everyone’s laughing stock.

[6a] “Turning thus away from your Imperial Grace, I only wish to be permitted to live in seclusion on this mountain. Your Majesty is of excellent abilities and outstanding wisdom. You are in no way inferior to the generations of yore. I have received your cinnabar-colored invitation, the glittering summons to court, several times. I regret to say that you troubled

yourself in vain. My leisurely mind is held fast by the company of the white clouds.

“For my thirst I drink the water of the old creek, once satisfied I listen to the wind in the shade of the pines. In recitation I taste the clarity of the sun and the moon, in laughter I feel along with the patterns of clouds and mist. With my whole being I follow what my inner nature desires, I realize my deepest intention—how can I explain it clearly?

“In essence and spirit I rise beyond mundane things, in flesh and body I float on the cloudy vapors. Although the beginning and outcome of the perfect Dao are hidden, yet it is what gave shape to the rivers and the earth of the empire. Thus I venture to ask for Your Imperial protection of my secluded life.

“Bowling with deepest respect and begging for Your Imperial empathy with my ignorance, I present this to Your gracious hearing.”[\[30\]](#)

Feats of Prognostication

The master was very well-read in the classics and histories, but his particular specialty was the study of the *Yijing*. He analyzed people’s physical shapes and examined the forms of beings, judging with precision whether they were sagely or ordinary.

When Song Taizu and Taizong were not yet emperors, they once went to the market of Chang’an in the company of Zhao Pu.[\[31\]](#) The master met them and together they visited a winehouse. Zhao unintentionally seated himself on the mat to the right.

The master reproved him: “You are merely a minor star in the constellation of the Emperor of Purple Tenuity. How dare you take the seat of honor?”[\[32\]](#) [6b] Once Zhou Shizong and Song Taizu were travelling together. The master said: “Outside of the city there is the energy of three emperors.”[\[33\]](#) When Chong Fang followed the master,[\[34\]](#) he told him: “You will meet an enlightened ruler, and your fame will move the imperial court. Fame is the worthy vessel of past and present. Those who actively create things are afraid of it. Your fame will be destroyed.” In the end everything was exactly as he had predicted.[\[35\]](#) When Zhang Yong, also known as Zhang Zhongjing,[\[36\]](#) was still a commoner, he once visited the master and asked his permission to come and study with him on Mount Hua. The master refused this steadfastly, but when Zhang departed he gave him a slip of paper to explain his intentions. He said to him:

“Your wish to study with me would entangle me too much in secular duties.” Then he handed him the following poem:

Go to Wu, make war in Shu, set up order for your sire!

Save us when we sing and feast, save us from the fire!

Liking southern regions best, you will wish to go there,

In the end so you will do, grateful for a tumor.

Later he did in fact pass the official examination and became famous all over the empire.^[37] Once when he was on his way to Jiannan [in the southwest], he set the following poem to the master:

Dull by nature, I'd just like to live near spring and wood,

[7a] Down to Qinglin I must go, wish call on you I could.

Yet again the stars to Qiannan make me rush,

Looking to the clouds of Hua, I feel how hot I blush!

On his way back, he sent the master another poem:

Men strive to serve in noble cause as long as they will live,

Returning east, I now come back my service too to give.

Laugh at me, you wondrous sage, Daoist of the mountain!

As I give up the deeper truth and nip from fame's short fountain.

When Chen Yaoze, also called Kangsu, had just passed the official examination, he visited the master.^[38] He found another Daoist sitting with him who was wearing a conspicuous top-knot. His appearance and bearing were generally very lofty and proud. He eyed Kangsu closely and mumbled something about a "Southern Hermitage." Having finished the words he took his leave.

Kangsu was intrigued and asked the master who the gentleman had been.

The master said: "Oh that, that was Zhongli Quan." ^[39]

Hesitating at first, Kangsu soon decided that he wished to follow Zhongli.

But the master, sensing his restlessness, told him with a smile: “He is already gone a couple of thousand miles by now!”

Kangsu then inquired: “What did he mean by ‘Southern Hermitage’?”

The master replied: “You will know that for yourself soon enough.”

[7b] Later Kangsu transported tributary grain from Fujian and passed through a deserted village. He heard a mother call to her son: “Go the Southern Hermitage and tell your father to come home quickly!”

Kangsu was intrigued and asked the exact location of this Southern Hermitage. He went there and found a ruined Buddhist monastery. There was, however, a stele with an inscription:

“On that and that day, month, year, the abbot of the Southern Hermitage died. His true body should be worshiped here.”

The date corresponded exactly to Kangsu’s birth date. [\[40\]](#)

Wang Shize, also known as Wang Qingyuan, visited the master together with Han Jiansu and Zhao Dongyi.[\[41\]](#) Shize pretended to be their servant. He bowed deeply before the master who reproached him: “To ridicule others is to make a laughing-stock of oneself!”

He raised Shize up and made him sit on the right mat, the seat of honor.

“In future you will be higher than all the others.”

This turned out to be true. A year later Shize did in fact pass as the first in the imperial examinations. All others were ranked beneath him.[\[42\]](#) The master recognized others’ intentions in advance. In his hermitage, a huge gourd was hanging on the wall. The Daoist Jia Xiufu desired this gourd in his heart, but did not make his wish known. The master said to him:

“You have only come to visit me [8a] because you wish to obtain my gourd!”

He called an attendant. Xiufu received the gourd. [\[43\]](#) Guo Chen lived in Huayin in his childhood. He once stayed overnight in the monastery when, in the middle of the night, the master called him and ordered him to hurry back home.

Guo Chen dreaded the distance and darkness of the way. The master went with him for a

couple of miles. On the road they met a man who called out to them that Chen's mother had died.

Only now did he understand the master's words and actions. The master gave him some medicine and urged him to hurry home. His mother could still be saved, he said. When Chen reached home, she was dead. He poured some of the medicine into her mouth. She promptly rose to life again.[\[44\]](#)

Xu Zhongxuan was governor in Chengdu. [\[45\]](#) He sent the master a letter and some money and asked to be told his fortune. The master ordered his attendant Jia Desheng to write the following in reply:> “After the matter at hand is accomplished, you will not be active any more.” The governor died shortly afterward.[\[46\]](#) Later the master rarely went to see people.

Once, however, he took a walk to Huayin. Wang Mu, the local subprefect, had heard that he was on his way. He stood ready at his door and invited the master in for a drink. They sat down together.

The master said: “I haven't had any wine for a long time. I guess I should like a drop.”

Mu replied, “It just happens I have some nice sweet wine here. I had heard you would come, [8b] so I took the liberty to have cups and bowls rinsed for our use.”

They drank together. Mu asked the master: “Your residence is located on the cliff near the creek. When you sleep or at occasions leave your place, who takes care of it?”

The master smiled, took up the brush and composed the following poem:

Mount Hua so high is my palatial lair,

Leaving it, I step on wind and rise up in the air.

No need is there to lock my terrace and my hall,

Upon return, I find white clouds have formed a wall.

Mu accepted the poem and shamefacedly thanked the master.

The master said: “Next year a dangerous accident will befall you. I have come here today because I wanted to save you, to make it possible for you to stay in office. Though you will face vicissitudes of life, with my help you are certain to overcome any difficulties. You have always conducted your official duties honestly and treated the people without corruption. If

you have now to withstand apparently unbearable blows of fate, this is due to a brightening and strengthening process of your inner nature.”

The master took out a grain of medicine and gave it to Mu. “With this, you will withstand the ill fortune of next year.”

Mu got up at once and fell on his knees. Knocking his head several times, he humbly received the medicine. They continued to drink together amicably through half the night. Then the master went out as if to avail himself of the facilities and never came back.

Mu later had to undertake the perilous journey to the capital. Drawing near to the Bian river, his horse shied. [9a] He fell into the water. A proficient swimmer, close at hand, pulled him out just in time. He was saved from death by drowning.[\[47\]](#)

Sleep]

From time to time the master walked around the mountain and down into the villages. To this day, there are people who have met him. Also there still are the monastery and residence of the master in the western part of the Hua range. In the old days, the master used to hike around much with a villager by the name of Cui Gu. Once a young monk by the name of Jin Li, who also spent his time hiking around sacred mountains, came to see Cui Gu.

“I would like to come along when you go to see Master Xiyi one of these days.”

Gu answered, “Please be patient for a little while. The master is currently deep in sleep. You can meet him as soon as he comes out of it.”

“When will this be?”

“There is no way of telling, maybe in half a year, maybe in three or four months. The master hasn’t even rested for a single month yet. So, if you have anything else to do in the meanwhile or any other places to visit, please do so and come back here later.”

Thereupon Li left and only returned to Mount Hua after more than a year. He went to see Gu and was admitted to join him in a visit of the master. Entering together, they bowed deeply. Li greeted the master with utmost reverence.

He then addressed him: “I have ventured before to come to Mount Hua. My heart ached to meet you. But at that time you were deep in sleep and had not yet woken up. May I ask: Does the sleep also have Dao? [9b] If you would please be so kind as to instruct me in this matter and illuminate me in matters unfathomable to my poor brain!”

The master made a noise that sounded like laughter, squared his shoulders, pulled up his legs into a cross-legged posture, and let his dignified countenance relax.

“There is no need for you to be anxious or worried. It is like this. In the rhythm of activity and rest that governs our everyday life one cannot but know desires.[\[48\]](#) It is very difficult to be liberated from life and death, to step outside of the wheel of rebirth.

“An ordinary person eats to satiation and then takes plenty of rest. He or she is mainly worried that the food should not be too rich, eating when he feels hungry and sleeping when he feels tired. His snore is audible all over the place. Yet, then, at night, when he should be sound asleep, he wakes up unaccountably. This is because fame and gain, sounds and sights agitate his spirit and consciousness, sweet wine and fried mutton muddle his mind and will. This is the sleep of ordinary folk.

I sleep the sleep that the perfected use,

Hold in my energy of gold and drink the jade juice.

Locked is the metal gate within,[\[49\]](#) never to unscrew,

Just as the door of earth is closed, never to go through.

Green dragon is the Eastern Palace’s ward,

White tiger now the Western Hall does guard.

Perfected power is mutated in cinnabar pond.[\[50\]](#)

And spirit water moves around my inner organs’ fond.

I call the spirits of the time to keep track of my way,

I summon all directions’ guards to hold danger at bay.

[10a] My spirit up! Now is the time! Get ready you to rise.

Ascending into Heaven’s spheres, Nine Palaces your prize.[\[51\]](#)

In radiant azureness I frolic all around,

I step on emptiness as if on solid ground,

I rise up just as if I was in downward fall,
And hardly feel the wind's persistent haul.
Madly I whirl, appear and vanish with the clouds alight,
Sitting quiet, I well reach the purple Kunlun height.
With ease I pass through Heaven's caves and power spots of Earth,
Inhale the flowery essence the sun and moon disperse.
Sporting in the wondrous scenery of vapors and of haze,
I visit sylphs and talk about the marvels of our days.
I join immortals in their visits to strange lands,
And get to see the green sea turning into strands.[\[52\]](#)
I point at yin and yang and screech with exultation,
I cease to care about all rules and worldly limitation.
Like stepping on clear wind my feet rise high and bright,
As my body floats along with the falling rays of light.

“This indeed is the sleep of the perfected. Not knowing the movements of the year star and the moon, how can one be saddened by the changes and alterations of the affairs of this world?[\[53\]](#) Since you so politely asked me, I will summarize the gist of perfected sleep in a poem:

In eternal sleep

The world is breath.

The soul all gone,

No movement in the body.

Coming back to consciousness—where is there a self?

I wish my mind to wander once again

and laugh about the grimy world of dust.

How can I ever know that I am really there?

“Another good way of putting it is as follows [10b]:

Perfected beings do not dream,

They sport with the immortals.

Realized ones never sleep,

They float up with the clouds.

A cauldron full of drugs brings eternal being,

A hollow gourd contains a whole new world.

You want to know what is in sleep and dream?

It’s well the highest mystery among men!

Thus, from great dreams you awaken great,

From small dreams arise small.

Sleep the sleep of all that is perfection,

Dream the dreams of wide eternity --

None are there at all that would be of this world!”

Concluding his instruction, the master said, “I will sleep again shortly. If you do not have any other plans, why don’t you come by again in a couple of days and I’ll show you a practical example.”

Thereupon the master left. Li was dumbfounded like a block of wood, he felt as if he was

waking from a state of deep intoxication. He had no idea how he managed to finally stumble out of the door.

Ultimately he returned to his lodgings and in due course came back to see the master again. This time the master discussed the secret ways of nourishing life with him and expounded the concepts of perfect wonder. He thereby clarified the profound principles of Great Mystery.

He ended by saying: “On that and that day, I will sleep again. Please come to see me then.”

Li came on the appointed day. When he arrived he found the master already asleep. He noticed that he slept while lying flat on his back, no inhalation or exhalation of breath was perceptible, and yet his face showed a rosy and radiantly healthy complexion. [11a] Li paid respects before the bedstead and left.

Some other day during one of the sleep periods a stranger visited the hermitage of the master. He happened to encounter an immortal sitting at his side. He listened carefully to the sound of the master’s breath, took up a brush, moistened it with ink, and in a split-second covered an entire sheet of paper. He did this several times over again until the paper was utterly black with ink. No one understood the strange behavior of the venerable immortal, so they asked him for an explanation.

He said, “That over there is the melody *Huaxu*, composed by the master, this here in front of you is the tune *Hundun*.”[\[54\]](#)

When he had leisure the master took much pleasure in hiking around the mountains. He would then sing songs praising the beauty of the area. Once he made the following poem about Mount Hua:

To Western Peak my heart with love does cling,
I raise my head to greet the sun and sing:
Flowers bloom bright red in rows on scraggly cliffs,
Water gushes down its course through thunderous riffs.
A few nights left and it will be new moon,
Along the river, evening light fades soon.

A few words I exchange with a friendly gnome,

This verily is the true immortal's home.[\[55\]](#)

Again, he composed the following song:

More than half a night and almost a whole day

Fragrances flow in, west of this rocky way,

From the mighty summit: they come in valiant blast.

Lotus petals flutter to leave traces on my palm,

I enter deep azureness, meet none, and feel all calm.

Looking back I can but sigh: the spirit is so vast.

Occasionally he would also meet other immortals, such as the Hairy Lady, Maonü.[\[56\]](#) Once he made the following poem for her [11b]:

Sprouts and herbs never fill the basket,

Again she climbs the summit, dangerously high.

She turns back, points down to the way home,

Soon enters swirling mists of azure haze.

Another poem ran:

Breaking off a pine branch she makes herself a comb,

From oak leaves she creates a fine new robe.

Asked what's up in Qin's palatial world,

She laughs and plays with flowers, looks into the void.[\[57\]](#)

The recluse of the pass, Lü Dongbin, possessed the arts of the Dao. A distance of several hundred miles he would cover in an instant. Everyone considered him a spirit immortal.

Occasionally he would come to the master's hut and they would drink together like old friends.

Once in the first moon of spring, the master took a leisurely walk on the stones of the creek that flows down from the mountain. There he saw the Gourdmaster, Master Redpine, and Lü Dongbin arriving together for a visit.[\[58\]](#)

The four immortals conversed. After some time, an earth spirit appeared with a plate of fruit and a pitcher of wine. The four of them drank and were merry, slowly getting drunk. Then each of them composed a poem celebrating the occasion.

The master began:

Warm is spring and all the flowers on their way to bloom,

Slow I pace back and forth through my stony room.

Long ago I came on jade from the Golden Tower,

Now I step on sand so pure and moss a subtle flower.

[12a] In my cave I sleep for many a long year,

Alone I drink a thousand cups of floating dew so clear.

Meeting folk, I never speak of ordinary things,

Laughing loud I only point to the white clouds' wings.[\[59\]](#)

Next, the Gourdmaster:

The gourd is where I have my terrace and my house,

Here flowers bloom all year around, they are my dearest spouse.

At leisure I relax and drink the juice of jade,

Drunk I then lie where green moss my bed has made.

Wandering free and easy I don't think of fame and gain,

Free of all intention I am beyond all worldly pain.

Meeting folk, I never speak of ordinary things,

Laughing loud I only point to the white clouds' wings

Then Master Redpine:

I leave my bamboo study in the Southern Peak,

By the old Secluded Terrace of Heaven I then sneak.

Coming to this cave, I find the wine still hot,

All along my way, blooming flowers clot.

My bones are not the bones of ordinary man,

In fact I can well do what all immortal's can.

Meeting folk, I never speak of ordinary things,

Laughing loud I only point to the white clouds' wings

Finally, Lü Dongbin:

Free of all intention I came here straightaway,

Almost passed by, with blooming flowers leading me astray.

Nought to do, I often go and sell some wine for cash,

A thousand or ten thousand cups—to me it's just a splash.

I wander free and easy through all the heavens' Dao,

Full of wine I even climb the Terrace of Lord Mao.

Meeting folk, I never speak of ordinary things,

Laughing loud I only point to the white clouds' wings

[12b] One day the master said to Jia Desheng : “Today an eminent visitor will come. Tell me at once when he arrives.”

After a little while a man did indeed enter the cloister. He was clad in a short robe and wore a gray head scarf. When he knocked on the door, Jia at once went to report his arrival to the master, but he had not yet finished doing so when the visitor had suddenly left again.

The master thereupon ordered him to follow the stranger. After he had run along for more than one mile, Jia met an old man clad in a deer-skin.

He asked him: “Would you be able to tell me how far the gentleman has gone who passed by here just now?”

The old man answered: “Oh, you mean the man just now? He was the spirit immortal Li Eighthundred. Whenever he moves, he is at once gone 800 miles.”

With these words, the old man vanished.

Jia realized that Old Deerskin was in fact Li Yuan, also known as Master White Deer, exalted among those who attain the Dao of Great Clarity.[\[60\]](#)

Transformation and Ultimate Return

The master said: “Oh, that I will ultimately be unable to attain great fame in the world!”

In the first year of the reign period Duanhong [988] he said to his followers: “Next year after the Festival of the Middle Prime, I will go to [the realm of the immortals on] Mount Emei .”

In the following year he sent his disciples to the Zhangzhao Valley to carve a chamber out of the rock. When it was finished, the master went there.

[13a] He said: “A chamber chiseled in the stone of the great Mount Hua! The atmosphere and scenery of this place are really breathtaking! Here I shall complete my return!”

Thereafter he sat down to write a few lines, designating his legacy: “My years are numbered. It is hard to serve the court. This year, on the 22nd of the tenth month I shall transform in the Zhangzhao Valley at the foot of the Lotus Peak .”

In addition, he drafted a memorial to the emperor, but nobody got to see it. He left his crane and turtle insignia to his disciple Jia Desheng to take them back to court.

The emperor contemplated them for a long time and finally bestowed them upon on Jia Desheng as Chen's successor. In addition, he gave him a purple robe and endowed him with the honorific title Awakened to Perfection. More than that, he presented him with five million cash so that he could redecorate the Hall to the North Culmen and thereby fulfill the master's last wish.

The master had wanted to show his transformation to his disciples. Therefore he had ordered candles to be burnt in the rock chamber all night long. When the moment came, he supported his chin with his left hand and thus he passed on. For complete seven days, his face remained white without change and his body warm. A five-colored cloud came and hovered over the entrance to the valley. It did not disperse for a whole month. At the time of his transformation the master was 118 years old.[\[61\]](#)

[13b] He left all monastery business in the hands of Jia Desheng. (Note: The master was an erudite scholar of the *Book of Changes* and passed his knowledge on to Mu Xiu; Mu Xiu transmitted it to Chong Fang; Chong Fang gave it to Xu Jian from Lujiang; he in turn taught it to Fan Wei. From Fan Wei onward, the *Yijing* lore of the master was continued in the south.)

Later an envoy came to Mount Emei. He was greeted by a visitor who was dressed very eminently and prided himself on his special knowledge of the eastern light. He spoke much about Mount Hua. It took a couple of days before the envoy understood that this was Master Chen of Mount Hua. The emperor, hearing about this, promptly sent for him, but he had already vanished and nobody knew his whereabouts.

During the reign period *Xiangfu* [1008–1017], Zhenzong completed the earth sacrifice on the Fen river. On his way back to the capital he once again graced the Cloudterrace Monastery with his presence and admired a statue of the master. He then ordered the monastery to be exempt from taxation and summoned the abbot Jia Desheng and several leading Daoists to the capital. Here he granted them an audience and bestowed purple robes on Wu Zihua and the other monks. More than that, he also granted the monastery the new establishment of three halls: one dedicated to the Imperial Founder, Song Taizu, one to his own Life Star, and the third to the god Yuanchen. In addition he ordered a painter draw a likeness of the master on the north wall.[\[62\]](#) At an earlier occasion, during the reign period *Yongxi* [984–988], the master had said to Jia Desheng:

“I have visited the Hall of the Venerable Lord. Later I met a spirit man dressed and capped in black who said he was the North Culmen, of equal rank as the Emperor of Purple Tenuity. [14a] Sooner or later a temple dedicated to him, a Hall to the North Culmen, should be erected.”

He had also said: “In the old days Immortal Lord Jin of the Tang lived here and used this place for his veneration of perfection. Now that I have met the God of the Northpole Star again, this monastery will flourish. You will have to build him a suitable hall.”

This happened about thirty years before Zhenzong graced the monastery with his presence and before Jia Desheng fulfilled the master’s words. The master had known all these future events in advance.

Postscript

Chen Tuan was pure in the Dao and the Virtue and he loved to practice sleep meditation. When a common fuel gatherer rubbed his heart, he woke up and said: “Why do you disturb me in my exhilarating sleep?”

When the queen of the Song emperor summoned him to the palace, he came and slept for more than a month, staying behind locked doors all the time. The title Xiyi in fact points to his true nature in a wonderful way. There must be a deep meaning behind the fact that his major merit was found in sleep meditation.

The *Daode jing* has: “Common folks are indeed brilliant, I alone seem to be in the dark. Common folks see differences and are clear-cut, I alone make no distinctions.” (ch. 20 [14b]) How could this not be the meaning of the sleep of Chen Tuan?

[1] Section divisions and headings are the translator’s.

[2] In Henan. The same place of origin is mentioned in *Lequan ji* 33.11b, *Taizong huangdi shilu* 118.1b, *Songshi* 457.13420, *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 10.1a, *Yixue bianhuo* 4b, *Song Yuan xue’an buyi* 9.1a, *Huayue zhi* 2.6a, *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.12b, *Wudang fudi congzhen ji* 3.23a, *Songshi jishi* 5.21b, *Songshi xinbian* 177.1a, *Shizhi* 82.2, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.29a. This place is very close to Jiaojun, his place of origin according to *Gui’er ji* 29 and *Xuanpin lu* 5.9b.

[3] In Anqiu in Sichuan. Li Yuanguo thinks that this must have been his true place of origin (1985: 1 and 1984). Chen Tuan did definitely leave an inscription in Sichuan. See *Danyuan ji* supplement 2.2a–3a, *Lao xue’an biji* 6.39, *Songshi jishi* 5.23a, and *Qionglai xianzhi* 1.22b.

[4] According to the *Taihua xiyi zhi*, this lady was a celestial deity and represented the essence of a star from above.

[5] This section is also found in *Lequan ji* 33.11b, *Taizong huangdi shilu* 118.1b, *Songshi* 457.13420, *Xuanpin lu* 5.10a, *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.12b, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.29a, *Huayue zhi* 2.6a, *Songshi xinbian* 177.a, *Yunyang fuzhi* 8.11b. According to *Yuhu qinghua* 8.1a, the lady tells him to develop a character free from worldly desires. She is explained as the manifestation of starry essence in *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.1a.

[6] Anqi Sheng, a medicine salesman on the Eastern Sea, was believed to be several hundred years old. The first Qin Emperor attempted to pry the secret of his long life from him by pleading with him for three days and nights. He also tried to bribe him with jades and money, to the avail that Anqi Sheng agreed to look for him in the paradise islands of Penglai. The emperor thereupon equipped an expedition to find these isles of mystery. *Liexian zhuan*; Kaltenmark 1953: 115.

[7] Zhang Liang, the adviser of the first Han emperor, one day during the Qin met a wizened old man who requested that he pick up one of his shoes for him. In return for this favor, the old man handed him a book on strategy with which he well served his master. After thirteen years, the two met again, but this time the old man was in the form of a yellow stone. It was worshiped with great ceremony. *Shiji* 55, *Hanshu* 40. For a detailed study see Bauer 1956.

[8] See also *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.29b, *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.13b, *Xizhen zhi* 4.1, *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan*.

[9] See also *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.29b, *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.13b, and *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan*.

[10] According to the *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan*, to which the account here goes back, these events occurred during the reign of Xizong, 874–889. A complete translation of this version is found in Knaut 1981: 69–74.

[11] The Deerskin Recluse is first mentioned in the *Liexian zhuan* (Kaltenmark 1953: 150). He was a Shandong man who withdrew into the mountains after a short official career. He lived on the miraculous waters of a mountain spring, dressed in deerskins and sold wondrous herbs to the populace for hundreds of years. See also *Yunji qiqian* 108.11a and *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 3.23a. The latter text will hereafter be abbreviated *Zhenxian tongjian*.

[12] Again taken from the *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan*. See above.

[13] The same works are mentioned in *Lequan ji* 33.13a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.7a, *Songshi* 457.13421, *Songshi xinbian* 117.1, and *Songshi jishi* 5.22a.

[14] See also *Shengshui yantan lu* 7.15a and 13.10b, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.15a, *Yunyang fuzhi* 8.11b. According to *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.1ab and *Wudang fudi congzhen ji* 3.23a, he reached Mount Hua with the help of five dragons.

[15] This story also occurs in *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.15a.

[16] Li Qi as an immortal of Mount Hua is described in *Lequan ji* 33.13b, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.2b, *Songshi* 457.13421, *Songshi xinbian* 177.1, and *Shizhi* 82.2.

[17] This is first reported in 1051 by Wu Yuanxiang and recorded in *Lequan ji* 33.14a. Other variants include *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.12a and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.14a.

[18] Chen's answer is mentioned also in *Taizong huangdi shilu* 118.1b, *Lequan ji* 33.12a, *Yixue bianhuo* 5a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.1b and 2.6b, *Songshi* 457.13420, *Songshi xinbian* 177.1, *Huayue zhi* 2.6b. It is historically substantiated in *Zizhi tongjian* 293.9561, *Zizhi tongjian gangmu* 59.15b, and *Fozu tongji* 42.392.

[19] For this rank see Kracke 1968: 230.

[20] He received this title according to *Lequan ji* 33.14a, *Shengshui yantan lu* 1.1b, *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 10.1a, *Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.1a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.1b, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.30a, *Songshi jishi* 5.22a, *Lishi zhenxian tidao tongjian* 47.

[21] This translation follows Herbert G. Giles (1977: 233).

[22] This story is first found in *Xuanpin lu* 3.1a, *Yixue bianhuo* 4b, *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 10.2a. Later it appears in *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.30b and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.14a. The poem alone is also found in *Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.3a, *Songshi jishi* 5.22a, and *Huayue zhi* 5.21a.

[23] For this poem see *Lequan ji* 33.14a, *Shengshui yantan lu* 4.6a, *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 10.2b, *Songshi jishi* 1.2ab, *Xuanpin lu* 5.10b, *Fozu tongji* 43.401, and *Huayue zhi* 5.33b.

[24] Hedong, the area east of the Yellow River, in the early Song was still an independent country. Governed by Liu Jiyuan, it had the dynastic title of Northern Han. In 969, Taizu

failed to integrate the area into the Song empire, but Taizong was successful in 979 (see Weiers 1970: 34, Franke 1934: 114). The latter advance in power was thus linked to Chen Tuan.

This version is the only that makes sense in terms of the historical facts. The story as told in *Yixue bianhuo* 5b and *Songren yishi huibian* 5.164 makes no sense, since Chen gave the go-ahead sign for Hedong only in 984. According to *Shengshui yantan lu* 4.6a and *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.8b he made only one remark on Hedong, and that was negative.

[25] See Franke 1976: 121. The same words are reported in *Taizong huangdi shilu* 118.1b, *Lequan ji* 33.12ab, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.9a, *Songshi* 457.13421, *Songshi xinbian* 177.1, 4.1, *Shizhi* 82. For historical corroboration see *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 25.15b and *Fozu tongji* 43.401.

[26] The same text is found in *Lequan ji* 33.12a. According to *Zhuzi mingchen lu* 101.b, *Songshi* 457.13421, and *Songshi xinbian* 177.1, Chen receives a slightly longer encomium. Historical corroboration is found in *Xu zizhi tongjian changbian* 25.15b and *Taihua xiyi zhi* 31.7b.

[27] This description of the government of the sage kings is quoted from Sima Tan's preface to the *Shiji*.

[28] The same remark is reported in *Lequan ji* 33.12b, *Yixue bianhuo* 6a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.8b, and *Song Yuan xue'an buyi* 9.3a.

[29] The original story how he selected the heri-apparent is told in *Xuanpin lu* 3.1a. See above for a full translation. Other variant versions include *Taizong huangdi shilu* 118.1b, *Wenjian qianlu* 7.11a, *Fozu tongji* 43.401, *Xuanpin lu* 5.11b, *Xizhen zhi* 4.1, *Gui'er ji* 30, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.15b.

[30] The same episode is reported in the *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan* as having occurred under Zhenzong.

[31] Zhao Pu served under the early Song emperors as high government official. In 988 he was appointed prime minister. His biography is found in *Songshi* 256.

[32] The most detailed version of this story is found in the *Xu Xiangshan yelu* as quoted in

Tushu jicheng 62.454. It also appears in *Sandong qunxian lu* 20.1b, *Xuanpin lu* 5.11a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.2a, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.3ab, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.14b.

[33] About Chen Tuan, this story is only told here. A very similar and more complete anecdote is found about Mayi daoze, the Hempclad Daoist, in *Chunyang dijun shenhua miaotong ji* (DZ 305, fasc. 159), 3.4b. For another related story, see *Fozu tongji* (43.394).

[34] Chong Fang is the best known of Chen Tuan's students. A hermit in the wild valleys of Mount Hua, he was invited to court several times. In 1001, he complied and, like his teacher, reminded the ruler that his first task was to "love his people." He came back to pay obeisance to Zhenzong in 1009, but lost his high reputation later in life. His biography is contained in *Dongdu shilue* 118, *Shengshui yantan lu* 1, and *Songshi* 457. See also Franke 1976: 297–301.

[35] For variants see *Wenjian qianlu* 7.11a, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.4ab, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.3ab, *Xizhen zhi* 4.1, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.14b.

[36] Zhang Yong (946–1015) passed the imperial examination in 980 and in due course became famous for his adroit handling of various rebellions in southwestern China, both in the 990s and in the early years of the eleventh century. In 1006 he excused himself from duty on grounds of a tumor in his head and moved to the south. His biography is contained in *Songshi* 293. See Franke 1976: 48–50.

[37] This part of the story is found in *Xiangshan yelu* as quoted in *Gujin tushu jicheng* 62.454, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.1ab, and *Songshi jishi* 5.23b. The remainder is Zhao Daoyi's prerogative.

[38] Chen Yaoze passed the imperial examination between 998 and 1004 and went on to an excellent career. For his biography see *Dongdu shilue* 44, *Longping ji* 5, *Songshi* 284, *Songshi xinbian* 86.

[39] Also known as Zhongli of the Han, this immortal was originally a military leader under the Han. Come back to life in the Tang period, he lived in the western mountains of China as a seller of drugs. He is geographically related to Mount Hua, because he ascended into heaven from one of its caves (see *Huayue zhi* 2.21ab).

Extended accounts of his exploits are found, among others, in *Zhenxian tongjian* 31.1a and *Xiaoyao xu jing* 1.15b. For Western descriptions, see Dore 1915: 497, Giles 1948: 122–123, Yetts 1916 and 1922.

[40] The story is not found in earlier sources. It is taken up again in *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.14b.

[41] Wang Shize passed the examination in 976–984. He served as government official, but was later banished into the provinces. His biography is found in *Songshi* 488.

[42] For variant editions see *Shengshui yantan lu* 1.1b and *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.3a.

[43] This story is also told in *Lequan ji* 33.13ab, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.3b, *Songshi* 457.13421, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.15a.

[44] This first occurs in *Lequan ji* 33.13b. It is taken up in *Songshi* 457.13421, *Taihua xiyi zhi* 2.3b, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.15a.

[45] Xu Zhongxuan passed the examination in 948–950 and became counseling minister to Song Taizu. His biography is contained in *Songshi* 270.

[46] The story is also recorded in *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.23b.

[47] Also found in *Xiyi xiansheng zhuan*, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.31a, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 7.15a.

[48] The words chosen for “activity of rest” are commonly used for the daily routine of court life, while the words for “everyday life” literally mean “sleep and stay.”

[49] An inner passage way responsible for the dilution of the pure cosmic energy within. See Maspero 1971: 552.

[50] This indicates the mouth cavity beneath the roots of the teeth. See Maspero 1971: 453.

[51] The nine palaces are found both in the human head and among the constellations of the stars. See Kalinowski 1985.

[52] This indicates the passing of enormously long periods of time and at the same time the transformation and impermanence of all mundane existence. The *locus classicus* for the

image is the biography of the immortal Hemplady, Magu. See *Shenxian zhuan* 7.27b–28a, *Zhenxian tongjian houji* 3.5a, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 1.29a.

[53] The year star is the planet Jupiter who takes twelve years to revolve around the sun. The signs and symbols of the twelve-year cycle in the ancient Chinese calendar are based on his movement. See Needham 1958: 398.

[54] The same story, slightly shorter, occurs also in *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.31a and *Liexian quanzhuan* 248. A more extensive version is presented in *Gui'er ji* 29 and in the *Xianfo qizong*.

Huaxu, originally the mother of Fuxi, one of China's creation sages, stands for the spirit world to which the Yellow Emperor travelled in his sleep. Located far out of this world, it is inhabited by wondrous people who know nothing of earthlings' limitations. See *Liezi* 2, Graham 1960: 34. Kunlun is the center of the universe and highest paradise of Daoist immortals. Glittering and shimmering in its metallic brilliance, it houses the hanging gardens and peach trees of the Queen Mother of the West, immortals and perfected beings throng in its halls and palaces. For a description see *Shizhou ji*, Smith 1990.

[55] For other citations of this poem see *Shihua zonggui* 4.16a, *Songshi jishi* 5.23b, and *Huayue zhi* 5.16b–17a.

[56] Legend has it that the Hairy Lady was originally a court lady of the Qin by the name of Yujiang who withdrew into the mountains after the fall of that dynasty. Her domicile on Mount Hua frequently rings with the most enchanting melodies (*Huayue zhi* 1.22b). For a biography see *Liexian zhuan* 54; Kaltenmark 1953: 159.

[57] These poems are mentioned also in *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.31b, *Huayue zhi* 5.31a, and in *Songren yishi huibian* 5.164 after the *Shihua zonggui*.

[58] Three classical immortals of ancient China. The Gourdmaster, Hugong, usually resides in a calabash that he hangs from his belt when not at home, but he also has a summer retreat on Mount Hua (*Huayue zhi* 1.20a). His earliest mention is in the *Hou Hanshu* (see DeWoskin 1983: 77–81), from which other sources take their clue. *Shenxian zhuan* 5.20b–21b, *Zhenxian tongjian* 20.7a.

Master Redpine, Chisongzi, is the first immortal of the ancient *Liexian zhuan* (Kaltenmark 1953: 35). Rainmaster under Shennong, he could enter fire without burning, flew up and down the Heavens and was cosy with the Queen Mother of the West in her Kunlun palace.

Later sources tend to recapitulate the *Liexian zhuan*. See, for example, *Zhenxian tongjian* 3.1a.

[59] The last two lines recur in every poem. They are very similar to the last lines of Lu You's *ci* to the tune *Zhegu tian*:

Meeting people, they ask where my way returns,

Laughing loud, I show my boat: This alone is home.

The association suggests that our happy immortals find their true home in the white clouds. Since no other source cites these or similar poems in connection with Chen Tuan, Zhao Daoyi may well have taken literary liberties with Lu You's work. I am indebted to Grace Fong for bringing Lu You's poem to my attention. A similar line is also found in *Taihua xiyi zhi* 1.7b, in the response of the Hempclad Daoist to Chen Tuan's farewell poem.

[60] Master Li Eighthundred was originally called Li He. He came from Sichuan and lived under the reign of King Mu of Zhou in the tenth century B.C. His first biography is in *Shenxian zhuan* 2.8b, later he occurs in *Yunji qiqian* 109.8a, *Zhenxian tongjian* 10.1a, and *Xiaoyao xujing* 1.11b.

According to another tradition, his original name was Li Tuo and he lived in a cavern on Mount Hua. Li Tuo was a messianic figure like Zhang Daoling, who healed people and attempted to establish his own realm of the Dao. He was beheaded as a rebel. Li Hong, the famous sage to come, was his student. See Seidel 1969a, Zhou 1974: 204.

Old Deerskin is an altogether different person. Mentioned already in the *Liexian zhuan* (Kaltenmark 1953: 150), he was a Shandong man who withdrew into the mountains after a short official career. He lived on the miraculous waters of a mountain spring, dressed in deerskins and sold wondrous herbs to the populace for hundreds of years. See also *Yunji qiqian* 108.11a, *Zhenxian tongjian* 3.23a.

[61] This report in its essence goes back to *Lequan ji* 33.13a, *Dongdu shilue* 118.1b. In its less embellished form it also occurs in *Xuanpin lu* 5.10a, in *Songshi* 457.13421, and in *Songren yishi huibian* 5.165. For the version found here see also *Yixue bianhuo* 6b, *Xiaoyao xu jing* 2.30ab, and *Liexian quanzhuan* 248.

[62] Zhenzong's visit in 1011 and his gracious deeds to the monastery are also described in *Lequan ji* 33.14b, *Wenjian qianlu* 7.10, *Dongdu shilue* 118.1b, *Songshi* 457.13421, *Taihua*

xiyi zhi 2.7b–8a, and *Huayue zhi* 1.3a. Historical corroboration is afforded by the *Xu zishi tongjian changbian* (75.7a). The establishment of new buildings, however, was not part of Zhenzong's bounty. Rather, Emperor Renzong (1023–1064) had seven halls restored (*Lequan ji* 33.15a). Chen's image in the palace was created in the 1040s. The Daoists duly used the occasion to come to court and renew their ties with the administration. These events, as described in an authentic Daoist report of the year 1051, instigated the first integrated Chen Tuan biography. Report and biography are contained in *Lequan ji* 33.

Translation Two

Taihua xiyi zhi, ch. 1

[1a] The name of the master was Tuan, also known as Tunan. He came from Zhenyuan in Bozhou. In his childhood he used to play on the bank of a dried-up river (others say it was the river Huo), when a lady dressed in green embraced him and gave him her breast.

She said: “From today on you will be completely free from lust and desires, your intelligence and understanding will surpass that of others.” (The Lady in green was the essence of the Yi-star.) As he grew up, he successfully studied the various Confucian subjects.

In the period Changxing of the Later Tang (930–934) he attempted the *jinshi* state examination, but failed. thereupon withdrew to the Cliff of Nine Chambers on Mount Wudang, where he—for more than twenty years—abstained from cereals and refined his energy. According to a variant report, he once sat up during the night reciting the *Yijing* to the burning of incense, when five old men appeared. They had thick eyebrows and white hair, overall looking ancient and strange. They came along regularly to listen to his recitation. After several days of this Tuan decided to inquire who they were.

The old men answered: “We are the dragons from the Sun–Moon–Lake of this mountain. This area is the place that the God Xuanwu has selected for himself. Mount Hua, on the other hand, is where you should go to live as a recluse.” [1b]

On another day when the master practiced silent sitting, the five dragons suddenly appeared before him. They ordered him to close his eyes. They then, with him on their backs, rose up into the air and rode on the wind. Toward the end of the night they reached Mount Hua where they deposited him on top of a flat rock. When he opened his eyes to look around, he did not see anyone. The five old men had already vanished. Some say that he received his method of sleep meditation from these dragons. Dragons are very good at sleeping, thus they instructed him to frequently keep his doors closed and not go outside. He would then sit for more than one hundred days before rising again.

Emperor Shizong of the Zhou Dynasty summoned him to the imperial court. He ordered him to establish himself in a chamber in the forbidden palace and locked the doors behind him to test his qualities. Only after more than a month were the doors unlocked, but the master was as deeply asleep as before. For the first time the emperor truly marveled at him. Thereupon he asked him about the arts of the Yellow and the White.

Tuan said: “Your majesty are the lord over all under heaven. You should concern yourself with the myriad people that live in your realm. How would you have a thought to spare for this sort of thing?”

Shizong was not pleased and gave him permission to return to the mountain. But he did honor him with the title Master White Cloud and he ordered the local commander to inquire about his well-being once a year.

The Master was very shrewd in judging the affairs of the world. Under the reign of the Five Dynasties, from the Jin and Han onward, whenever he heard that a new ruling house had changed the mandate, he would raise his brows for several days. [2a] When people asked him about it he would gaze fixedly at them and say nothing.

The master once looked at himself in a mirror and said: “If I’m not a immortal, I’m certainly an emperor!” He judged that he had an important responsibility.

Once when Song Taizu and Zhao Pu travelled to Chang’an, the master met them. He laughed loud and fell off his donkey, exclaiming: “There are indeed some realized ones left on this earth!”

He then abruptly shook Taizu’s hand and asked him: “Can’t we go drink something in town?”

Taizu replied: “Fine.”

So they went off together, including the company of Zhao Xuejiu.

The master eyed Pu closely and said: “You will do! You will do!”

They then entered a wine house, where Pu seated himself on the left side of the mat.

Tuan angrily pulled him up again with one hand and said to him: “You are merely a lesser star in the constellation around the emperor of Purple Tenuity. How could you occupy the seat of honor?”

Thus scolding him he made him sit on the emperor’s right. At his time he already knew that the emperor would now have the true mandate.

Later the master, at the head of a group of several hundred vagabonds, went to the city of Bianzhou. On the road he heard that Taizu had ascended the throne. He was excited and pleased and laughed out loud.

When people asked him why he laughed again and said: “From now on there will be stability.”

He also wrote a couplet that ran:

Snoring I have been asleep for over forty years, Didn't even
notice the sun was already bright in the East. [2b]

Thereupon the master entered Mount Hua, withdrew from the world and became a Daoist.

Song Taizu summoned him several times, but he did not come. When Taizu died, Taizong ascended the throne. On the tenth day of the fourth month of the first year of Zhidao [995], the emperor sat in the Hall of Free Ruling and rejoiced in the good harvest, the success of his administration, and the prevalence of peace. He had, at that time, already been acquainted with the name of the master for quite a while.

He disliked the world of dissipation and brilliance and greatly enjoyed the teaching of clarity and purity. He summoned the head of the Eastern Hall who recommended the official Chen Zhongyan as an envoy to the master. He was duly ordered to transmit an official summons together with an imperial poem to Master Chen Tuan, resident of the Monastery of the Cloudy Terrace, Mount Hua, Huayin County, Hua Province.

The envoy arrived in Huayin on the fourteenth day of the fourth month and was officially received by the local authorities. Since he had reached the county at nightfall, he decided to spend the night there. At sunrise he continued his journey, so that he arrived the monastery on the day of full moon of the fourth month. Here he was received by the Daoist Zhong Xihui who took him to see the master.

He reported: “His Imperial Majesty has sent a proclamation for His fatherly teacher.”

The master then rinsed his hands and burnt incense. [3a] After the formalities had been taken care of, he listened to the imperial summons:

“Ever since we have ascended the throne, we have subjected the eight directions and sternly controlled the myriad countries. Near and far, all submit to the imperial rule, Chinese as much as barbarians take part in eucumenic peace.

“We know you embrace the Dao in the mountains, purify your mind beyond ordinary things, and nourish your energy of Great Simplicity and the Greatness of Nature. You have your counterpart among the stars of Lesser Tenuity in the upper realm, your harmony and

disharmony accord immediately with the Dao.

“We ourselves also venerate the Yellow Emperor and Our Lord Lao, we cherish the extended records and sacred scriptures and discourses. We invite not so much princes and nobles to court than outstanding gifted people and especially those who have not yet been received in audience.

“You do not bow to the myriad vehicles. Alone you live in hiding among the Three Peaks! Oh, that you would ride on the wind and come to court!”

In addition, there was an imperial poem full of praise.

Much have we heard about the sacred Mount Hua,

We know your name is Chen.

Guest of the Three Cloud Islands,

You're beyond all things.

Cinnabar cauldron cooks your food,

Where green peaks are your neighbors.

Oh, would we love to come to you!

But here we stay, with soil and grain.

After the master had finished listening to the entire summons and the poem, he gave his answer.

“This poor Daoist sojourns in a realm beyond the ordinary, cultivating and refining myself in the mountains. [3b] I have no wish to pursue fame. Rather my mind strongly goes after the Dao. I do not intend to serve.”

He then waited upon the imperial messenger. When all formalities were concluded, he still refused to visit the court. However, he agreed to write an official reply to the summons, including a poem of his own.

“My humble thoughts go out to mounts and wilderness. I come from Wu, but my family is from south of Han. In my youth I studied the Confucian subjects, but later when I was a

young man I spent my time wandering around grottos and sacred spots of power.

“My nature is like monkeys and birds, my mind like dead ashes. I do not know when benevolence and righteousness are profound or shallow. How could I be expected to understand the correct procedures of advance and withdrawal at court?”

“I tear off lotus leaves to use for a robe, cut down bamboo for a hat. My body is covered with fine gray hairs, on my feet I hardly ever wear straw sandals. All my intention is for the Dao of Fu Xi and the Yellow Emperor, I have no mind at all to recite books on proper conduct or courtly music. I read in the works of Laozi and Zhuangzi, but I never even glance at texts dealing with official residences, government schools, or administrative institutions.

“I have received Your Majesty’s repeated summons. The shining phoenix letter you have troubled with in vain. My unbound mind is kept here by the white clouds. To approach before the Imperial Countenance would only make me Your Majesty’s laughing stock.”

Your Majesty descends to me from purple heights with worldly words.

I’m uncouth, live in hiding deep, and love the quiet and the green.

The mountain’s colors are my court, my paintings and gilt screens, [4a]

The sound of pines is thousand fold, my zithers and my lute.

Good money never makes me climb imperial terraces high,

My will is set on the beyond and grotto heavens deep.

I think and worry not for brilliant cap and gown,

My only wish is sleep right here for a thousand years to come.

The imperial envoy realized that the master was determined not to follow the summons. He therefore took the master’s reply and the poem back to the capital. He got there on the 24th of the fourth month and submitted an official report to the emperor in the Zigun Hall. When Taizong had finished reading the reply and the poem he knew that the master would not come. He was very much displeased and continued to think of him with longing.

On the third day of the sixth month of the same year, the emperor presided in the Zhuigong Hall. He summoned the Supervisor of Imperial Palaces who recommended the official Zhang Suzhen to go and present yet another imperial summons to the master.

On the eighth day of the sixth month he arrived in the Cloudterrace on Mount Hua. Seeing Yong Yunzhou, a young man from the mountain serving in the monastery, he stopped to question him.

“Where is the sagely master?”

“At present the master is deep in sleep in his hermitage.”

“How can I wake him up?”

“He will wake upon hearing the metal gong next to his head.”

[4b] Someone duly sounded the gong and the master awoke. When he realized that yet another imperial envoy had arrived, he got up hastily, straightened his robe and faced him.

“Why have you come again?”

“Our Imperial Majesty is desperate since you have refused to comply with the invitation brought by Chen Zongyan. Therefore he sent me on this special mission to invite you to the capital once again.”

They then proceeded to burn incense and complete the proper formalities of receiving a visitor. The master listened the imperial proclamation.

“We deeply bow to you, oh Recluse of the White Clouds, Eminent Scholar of the Jade Cavern. You have awakened to the mysterious gate of the Great Dao and attained the obscure principles of the Invisible and Inaudible.

“We are in deep sorrow for the brilliance and beauty of this world pass so swiftly, the flickering light of life cannot be stayed. Flaring up suddenly, it vanishes and leaves only cold. As time goes on, the complexion grows sullen, the temples turn gray. Although we have reached the highest position of earth, we yet lack full understanding of how to refine our nature.

“We cannot sleep and forget to eat, thinking only of you, wise master! You are the only way to quench our thirst! We beg you to leave your grotto realm for just a little. Please, climb your crane or phoenix and come swiftly flying here! We will stand at the palace gate looking for you, to receive you with the imperial family as your guard of honor.”

After the master had received this formal summons, he answered the envoy.

“This poor Daoist belongs to the wilderness of the mountains, like deer or a boar. I climb up to high places and look far into the distance, rinsing my mouth in the creek nearby. [5a] My friends are immortals like the Master Redpine and Old Man Cassia. I wander about on cloudy peaks and mountains of mist, how could I strive for the impermanent gains of wealth and nobility?”

He then begged the imperial envoy to stay his horses for a while. He should rest a couple of days in the hermitage, while the master proceeded to write a formal answer including another poem. He expressed his deep gratitude for His Majesty’s gracious invitation.

“Your servant bows to the ground. Humbly I submit I only think of foolish and irrelevant things, I hide in the depth of streams and ravines, and cannot but misunderstand and deny Your Majesty’s imperial bounty.

“Your servant, I truly lack any special talents or abilities, while Your Majesty surpasses by far the most eminent

virtue of all the emperors of Han. I have the nature of the mountain deer and the disposition of the wild crane, so I do not pursue official cap and gown, but please myself by wandering about in freedom and ease. The cap and carriage of official life are restraint to me, I find it hard to submit to the discipline of life at court.

“Instead I sleep my lofty sleep on Green Dragon summits and rise up to other worlds in butterfly dreams. Leisurely I gaze into a well of jade and lotus, while my poet’s soul soars aloft. Living on smoke and mist that oozes out from grottos, I pluck ferns and herbs from the darkest woods. My staff and sandals ready for another bout of wandering, my mind and body keep lazy and relaxed. The cinnabar elixir refined in my furnace helps me ascend to distant immortals.

“The vain glory of this world is not for me, I wish to avoid misfortune. Even if Yao or Shun came calling me today, I would only react with apologies as did Father Nestling and Xu You. My happiness is complete when I live out my remaining years, with humble respect admiring Your Sagely Majesty from afar.”

[5b] Here I sit and meet Mylord, as if you were great Yao.

Dumb I live in grass and marsh, yet take from you a bow.

I’ve only laughter for myself, my body’s without care,

My talents raw, how could I face the sage’s imperial glare?

Mixing seasons' energies, immortal drug cooks best,

Cleansing all ways of the world, I find my inner rest.

I wish not any eminence to find in your high court,

In scenic beauty I lean back, this is my true lord.

The envoy accepted the official reply and the poem. Even with intense persuasion he had not been able to move the master.

On the sixteenth day of the sixth month he arrived back in the capital. He submitted his report to the emperor in the Wende Hall. When Taizong had finished reading the master's answer to his summons, he realized that the master would again not come. His dragon countenance showed extreme displeasure.

Later, on the twenty-ninth of the sixth month, the emperor presided again in the Shuigong Hall. He summoned the Overseer of the Inner City, a certain Shi Bao.

“Who, among all our various officials, is a skilled orator and good at persuasion?”

“Your servant! There is a certain Ge Shouzhong, a secondary administrator in the Imperial Treasury. He is known as a good speaker.”

Taizong thereupon had this man brought before him. He immediately made him imperial envoy and ordered him to travel to Mount Hua and plead again with the Master of the Invisible and Inaudible.

[6a] Equipped with an official letter of invitation and an imperial poem he went on his mission. He arrived in the Cloudterrace on the seventh of the seventh month.

But here he could not find the master. The local magistrate, a man by the name of Yang Zizun, duly informed him that the master had climbed up to the remote Jadespring Cloister, because he had feared the onslaught of more imperial envoys and proclamations. He was now meditating in total seclusion.

The envoy did not hesitate but made the magistrate lead him to the Jadespring immediately. Over countless sticks and stones, rocks and boulders they climbed deeper and deeper into the wilderness.

Once arrived, the master graciously agreed to meet the imperial envoy and listen to the new

invitation. They burned incense and completed the proper formalities of greeting.

“We have received the mandate of Heaven above and soothe the minds of the people below. As soldiers become fewer, peace reigns throughout the four seas; as pacification continues, upheavals are silenced in all eight directions. We are surrounded by numerous followers, who all obey the sounding of our drum. Trying to embody the Dao, we govern with non-action, while the people of their own accord drill wells, plough the fields, and pursue peaceful crafts.

“We know that there is a great sage alive today. The sea is calm, the rivers clear, but it is you we look to for highest salvation of our time. As the wind blows, the grass bends. Yet imperial power has not been able to move you to leave boulders and ravines behind. Famous all through the land, you still only think of immortals’ isles and frolic your mind in the void.

“A basic knowledge of the Yellow Emperor’s arts we can call our own, [6b] but Guangchengzi’s cultivation of life is beyond us. Your world, however hidden, still belongs to the king. Yi Yin complied with Tang’s summons and went to Shang court at Bo. Mencius responded willingly to his lord’s invitation and served King Hui of Liang.

“A minister’s duty is to obey his ruler’s orders. Excused, he retires and keeps himself ready.”

Thrice invited, you have not yet come.

High or low, the wide land has to work.

Dig the mountain and pure jade is found,

Choose your iron, steel is not yet made.

You look good in purple robes, they are free and wide,

Belted well, with golden seals hanging down like pearls.

All we wish is that you come, come and help the age,

Sadly longing, our folk will not sing and play.

Despite this renewed effort the master had no intention to comply with the summons. Again he expressed his regrets and excused himself. Ke, the envoy, remonstrated with him.

“This is the third time that His Majesty has sent you an imperial invitation. You cannot possibly persist in your rejection. Have you not heard Confucius’s saying, “When the princely order arrived, he left immediately and did not even wait for his carriage to be readied”?”

“How can you properly continue to refuse an imperial summons? Also Mencius said, “To the farthest borders of the land, everyone is the king’s servant!” You certainly cannot refuse to come, not as an invited guest and even less as a loyal subject!

“I lack in talent, but please, Master, listen to the poem I made.”

Sacred Hua’s guest, living in Three Peaks

You have withheld yourself for unrecorded years;

Smoke and haze your livelihood,

You have depended on the clouds and streams.

You sow herbs in soft pavilioned gardens

And plant pines in deep ravinous vales.

Gone just briefly from immortals’ grottos,

You fulfill your duty to your lord.

The master read the envoy’s poem to his great delight and answered likewise.

Crane’s down robe, fluff and faint, like immortal’s flight

Cannot bear gain and fame, however calm and soft its might.

Beloved mountain, my heart tears just to think of leaving

Turning back I see my home and deep sighs come a-heaving.

Our windy wavy world makes travel full of horror,

Free and flighty like a bird, still I feel some sorrow.

Caring just about myself, I wish to stay right here

Yet the future has me tied by my lord's plaisir.

The master in due course departed from the mountain together with the imperial envoy. First, however, he exchanged greetings with his Daoist friend and teacher, the Hempclad One.

Sacred Hua sees parting our ways,

As fated now I leave my straw hut and my plays.

Deaf to your instruction, and never very bright

I have failed to learn about human wrong and right.

The Hempclad Daoist responded in kind. [7b]

Alone I sit and turn away from the world of measure,

Not even robed and without bowl I follow just my pleasure.

Meeting folk I never speak of ordinary things,

Truly free, I take my leave of people and of kings.

When the master received this poem, he silently raised his hands and thus parted from his friend.

None too long after he had gone with the envoy, he reached the capital. The first night they spend in Highsplendor Monastery, where they found very good rest. At night, when the master heard the bells that indicated the closing of the city gates, he composed a poem mourning the sad state of the world's affairs.

A thousand gates, ten thousand doors, they are all tightly locked,

Stars in the sky are well arranged and in deep silence blocked.

All right and wrong, all world's affairs are lying down to rest,

The booming drum of the six streets is giving night its best.

The Milky Way appears and fades as night is growing late,
On their pillows people's minds still move with love and hate.
Anxious sighs pervade the town of those with fame and gain,
They toss and turn, their souls fly off in dreams that are but vain.

The master slept up to the fifth hour and awoke when the morning bell rang. Again he composed a poem for the occasion. [8a]

Leaving dew of jade behind, the moon is slowly setting,
Sounding tones of clarity, the drum destroys the cold.
As the guest of wilderness thinks of his lost matting,
Darkness leaves, and he regrets letting go the old.
Windows hide how eyes now wake facing fame and gain,
On their pillows minds begin to think of wrong and right.
Emperors, kings, and generals all undergo the same,
So it goes on every day, if rise and fall they might.

After the master had finished this poem, he washed himself, cleaned his teeth, got dressed, and did his hair up. At that time it was almost daybreak, so he told the envoy to proceed to the palace. He was to submit an official memorandum to the throne to the effect that the master had accepted the invitation and was now ready to present himself before the emperor.

The emperor eagerly ordered him to the palace where he received him in the Yanying Hall. The master wore a robe of feathers, the Huayang cap, straw sandals, and a hanging belt. Following the official protocol, he was offered a seat. The emperor addressed him with a poem.

For many years now you have been an adept of the Dao,
You live by eating cinnabar, although I don't know how.

Your temples, I'm surprised to say, don't show a bit of gray,
Your face, what's more, is fresh and clear, no shadow anyway.
At night you sleep, but glance in what dimensions?
At day you fast, but climb to wondrous halls?
I wish to learn your magical dispersions,
To follow you and emulate your calls.
The master duly replied in kind:

Your servant has attained the Dao a couple of years back,
Since then I'm eating cinnabar, two mouthfuls from my stack.
My temples' black gets richer the more I drink Dao's wine,
My face's glow, I must admit, is from the peaches fine.
[8b] At night I rest in my old home, the Terrace of the Clouds,
At day I fast and worship there, bow to the scrolls of Laozi.
Your Majesty is keen to learn the long life that I practice.
All I can say, on Huashan's slopes life never gets so hectic.

Taizong read the poetic response of the master and was greatly pleased.

At that time the emperor was just about to pacify the area east of the Yellow River. The master advised against it. However, since the army had already been called to readiness, the campaign could not be stopped and the master's advice was ignored. Instead he was ordered to lie down in the imperial garden and go to sleep. When the army returned, it had indeed not met with success.

The master slept for over a hundred days before he arose again. The emperor was very much astonished to see him sleep for so long. He therefore honored the master with another formal title and treated him with ever increasing formality and grace.

At another occasion, Taizong sat down for a relaxed conversation with the master.

“My older brother, the Emperor Taizu, was of eminent merit and extensive virtue. He also summoned you to court, but you did not come. I, on the other hand, am of low merit and small virtue, yet I could trouble you to descend to the purple throne.”

“Well, Your Majesty, the former emperor did not wait for this poor Daoist to come to him. You, however, did not spare any effort to meet me at least once.”

“Is it possible today to achieve the kind of government of Yao and Shun?”

“The foundations of the halls of Yao and Shun were three feet high with three steps of earth leading up. Their halls were roofed with untrimmed thatch. Their deeds seem unattainable, yet by governing with purity and in tranquility one can verily be a Yao and Shun of today.”

[9a] The emperor appreciated this answer very much.

On numerous occasions and for ever increasing periods, Taizong entered the palace to have a friendly chat with the master. Once he mentioned him to his prime minister, Song Qi.

“Chen Tuan alone is entirely good in whatever he is and does. He does never worry or wonder about outer circumstances and personal profit. He is truly a master of the supernatural.”

Song Qi duly asked him by messenger to come to secretariat. Here he asked him,

“Sir, you have attained the Dao of mystery and serenity. Can you teach it to others?”

“I hide my traces in mountains and fields. I am perfectly useless to the world. I do not know anything about self-cultivation or nourishing life. I have no techniques to teach. If I ascended to heaven in broad daylight, what good would that do to your government?”

“Our sagely emperor has the countenance of a dragon. He is blessed with the highest signs of nobility. He deeply understands the laws of order and disorder that govern the world today and in the past. He truly possesses the Dao and is a benevolent and enlightened ruler. Our age is one of the perfection of principles, when ruler and ministers are harmonious in their virtue. Diligently practicing all sorts of techniques, and refining oneself do not contribute to this.”

Song Qi and his various colleagues reported this little speech to the emperor. He was very

much delighted and rejoiced that the master had accepted his imperial invitation, left the western mountains and come to court.

[9b] Taizong was so fond of him that he had him taken off the registers of ordinary people and treated him with the formality usually only accorded to a minister of state. He had him lodged in the guest quarters next door to himself and received him in a quiet chamber in the western wing of the palace. They never hesitated to wander around the fields and shrubs while they exhaustively discussed various questions of emptiness and identity, different explanations for the eight original forms of being and the nine levels of truth, as well as the mysterious gateways of the four forms of enlightenment and the seven karmic conditions. Nobody was partial to these conversations, and it is not known how the two of them treated these problems and enriched their mutual understanding.

Taizong at one time asked the master to take a look at the future emperor Zhenzong, who at that time was known as Prince Shou. He was the third of Taizong's eight sons. The emperor had the master taken over to Shou's palace, however, the prince was still in bed and so the master had to return without seeing him. The emperor asked him for a report.

“Your Majesty, I did not see your honorable son. I only saw two of his retainers at the gate, but both of them will become prime ministers in the future. Thus I know that he will be emperor.”

The two he had seen were the later prime ministers Zhang Min and Yang Chongxun. He had also recognized the future influence of Marshall Guo Chengyou.

When the master had been summoned to court, Taizong had heard that once a high official had visited his residence in order to listen to words of highest goodness on which he could model himself. Chen had said,

Get what is good and proper, but don't wish for it a second time.

Go where you're pleased and happy, but don't expect to go twice.

Do what is right for you and love it, but don't think you'll find it again.

[10a] The high official had considered and cherished these verses as true words of Perfection. They appeared again in a later poem by Shao Yong.

A truly perfected one once left these words:

To get something good is to lose something good.

On one of his free days, Taizong took the master for a walk up to the Tower of the Eastern Quarter. Leisurely they glanced across the busy markets of the city, when they saw a man beneath the Tower just getting up. He stretched and washed, although it was already quite late in the day. The emperor asked his attendants whose house it was. Someone explained that it was the residence of a rich and powerful man from the Eastern Capital.

With a sigh, the emperor expressed his feelings:

People rising with the sun, yet I am up before,
Dawn will see me dealing with an endless pile of chores.
I feel envy for the rich man coming from the east,
Who can sleep well in the day as if life was a feast.

The master answered him with a poem of his own.

Last night, around the third watch, I was startled in my sleep,
A gong beat, and a huge crowd thronged like a flock of sheep.
They went up to the palace to serve well in the depth of night,
I alone am free of work and sleep until the sun shines bright.

Taizong received the master's reply and was greatly delighted.

On the next day, during the morning audience, the emperor wished to make the master his advising counselor. But the master strictly refused this honor and did not accept the office. Instead he wrote a song and poem dealing with withdrawal from official duty.

[12a] The emperor ordered all sorts of craftsmen to assemble with their wares in front of the five gates to the imperial palace. They sang and made merry, praising the prosperity and increasing numbers of the population.

To keep the master from leaving him for his freedom, the emperor then asked him:

“As you can see, the capital is flourishing and overflowing in its prosperity. How could it survive losing me? As it certainly would, if you returned to the mountain and not joined me in my rule?”

The master answered, “Wild animals, running and flying, live in woods and in mountains. Fish, big and small, swim in rivers and lakes. Each has where it is happiest.”

[12b] Taizong thereupon pointed at the thick of the city. Chimneys smoked, wheels crowded. He turned to the master.

“See that?”

“Yes, I see.”

“What do you see?”

“I see the rich covet more good life, and the poor fight for survival.”

Taizong was silent for a moment. Then he turned away from the gates and went back into the hall.

Before the assembled court, the master steadfastly refused all proposition. He insisted to return to the mountain.

Translation Three

Fengjian[1]

1. Definitions of Main Terms

Human life receives energy from water and is endowed with physical form by fire.[2] In people, water is the essence and also the will; fire is the spirit and also the mind.

When essence is harmonized, spirit is brought forth.

When spirit is brought forth, physical form is complete.

When physical form is complete, complexion be whole.[3]

Thus we know that:

what is apparent on the outside is called physical form;

what is arising in the mind is called spirit;

what is found in blood and flesh is called energy;

what is evident on the skin is called complexion.

2. Physical Appearance According to the Five PHASES

Physical form in human beings follows the different images of metal, wood, water, fire, or earth; it can also be compared to that of birds and beasts.

Metal appearance tends to be angular;

wood appearance tends to be slim;

water appearance tends to be round;

fire appearance tends to be pointed;

earth appearance tends to be coarse. [4]

Resembling metal and realizing metal: this person has deep resolution.

Resembling wood and realizing wood: this person will be rich in material goods.

Resembling water and realizing water: this person will excel in literature.

Resembling fire and realizing fire: this person will be a great warrior.

Resembling earth and realizing earth: this person will have many a storehouse. [5]

[Resembling metal but not realizing metal: this person will meet with suffering and grieve.

Resembling wood but not realizing wood: this person will be orphaned and lonely.

Resembling water but not realizing water: this person will suffer frequent defeat.

Resembling fire but not realizing fire: this person will encounter disasters and misfortunes.

Resembling earth and not realizing earth: this person will feel unhappy and miserable (SX 179, TQ 6a).]

3. Types of Bodies According to Animal Morphology

Those resembling birds are usually slim.

Those resembling beasts are usually stout.

A fat bird cannot fly, a thin beast has no strength. For example, one who resembles the form of the *luan* bird or the phoenix has highly curved eyebrows and elegant eyes. His form and bodily structure will be clear and slim.

One who resembles the rhinoceros or the tiger has high-rising bones of the forehead. His chin and cheeks are round and full.

These types are noble, those of opposite characteristics are low.

[Birds and beasts are many a kind,

Never should one group a bird with a beast.

All slim and long types belong to birds;

All fat and short types belong to beasts.

Those like birds would rather be slim,

For those like beasts it's best to be fat.

If birds are fat they'll never fly,

If beasts were thin, how would they run?

For people like tigers see their necks;

For people like rhinos check their backs;

Phoenix—people have long eyes;

Those like cranes have pointed shapes.

(SX 180, TQ 8a).][[6](#)]

4. The Appearance of the Wood—type

A person with the appearance of wood is basically slim. His complexion is fresh. He should be slim but not skinny and look fresh but not transparent.

[A metal body is angular and upright, its complexion is pale and whitish. It shows neither fullness of flesh nor thinness of bones.

A wood body is slim and erect, its bones and joints are strong. With fresh (greenish) complexion such a one is truly eminent.

A water body is round and thick set, heavy and of darkish complexion. With a hanging belly and a curved-in back he is truly of *po* energy.

A fire body is exquisite and sharp; it looks reddish and always hot. The *fan* bone standing out, all energy dried up, such a one is never well for long.

An earth body is staunch and well formed with a radiant complexion. With buttocks and back standing out a tranquil and happy character is found.^[7] If his physical form is slim and his complexion fresh, he is delicate and full. If his physical form is skinny and his complexion transparent, he is coarse and empty.

When people of the world speak of the appearance of the wood-type, they only know that it should show as slimness in one's physical form. They do not realize that it could yet be coarse as, for instance, in the case of the pine-tree or the cypress.

A tree is considered delicate when its stem is full and its leaves are fresh. Perfect fullness is found in the *wudong* tree (*sterculia platanifolia*). When the stem is empty on the inside and the outside correspondingly is lacking in firmness, we say the tree is coarse. Empty inside and yet having the physical form of a tree, how can one speak of an integrated whole?

5. Impure or Mixed Types

When a wood-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass metal, but it will also contain fire, water, and earth.

When a water-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass earth, but it will also contain metal, fire, and wood.

When a fire-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass water, but it will also contain metal, earth, and wood.

When an earth-type is not entirely pure, it tends to encompass wood, but it will also contain water, fire, and metal.

6. Mixtures According to the Dynamics of Phases

When the major phases that make up man's physical form bring forth one another the combination is auspicious. When they overcome one another it is unlucky.

[If a body of the wood-type is primarily slim and only later fat, this is most auspicious. If, on the other hand, a body is primarily slim and later dried and emaciated, then wood is obstructed by metal and many calamities will arise.

Similarly if a body is basically angular and upright, yet shows signs of being staunch and erect, this is most appropriate. Yet when an angular type develops pointed features and leanness, metal is obstructed by fire and many misfortunes will result. (SX 179, TQ 6b)]

For instance, a person's physical form may at first look slim, that is to say, he is a wood-type. Around the middle, however, he is coarser and appears more like the metal-type.

Again, he may then look fat and resemble the water-type. Or he may look really stout as is typical for an earth-type. First slim, then fat means that water is brought forth from wood. When, in addition, he looks solid and stout we have wood realizing earth.

The first instance going from slim to coarse is an obstruction; the second case going from slim to fat or stout is a development.

As concerns official position and personal wealth, a wood-type slightly obstructed by earth might become a district overseer. But if the obstruction is deep he will be a prefect.

Again, if the face is square and the back stout, we say that there is both wood and earth. Someone with such an appearance entering an official career will be an overseer of troops, when in the military, and an official waiting for appointment, when in the civil service.^[8] Yet, if he was pure wood without any earth he would attain the highest possible rank.

7. Spirit as Deep or Shallow

Within human beings it is desirable for spirit to be deep and not desirable for spirit to be shallow.^[9]

When spirit is deep, wisdom will also be deep.

When spirit is shallow, wisdom will also be shallow.

When spirit functions, it radiates through the eyes.

When spirit rests, it is gathered in the mind.

Looking at spirited eyes closely, one is fascinated. Looking at spirited eyes from afar, one is awed.[\[10\]](#) One with such eyes has a very powerful glance and is easily alerted when asleep. One can compare these eyes to a big lamp. Just as one calls the acting part of the mind “spirit,” so one calls the flame of the lamp “spirit light.” People's spirit light, limited within, is the material soul. The oil corresponds to the essence. When the oil is pure, the lamp is bright. This is what we mean by “shining forth.”[\[11\]](#)

8. Energy as Pure or Turbid

Energy in people should manifest in strong resonance and clear expression, it should not be of robust vigor and sound like a martial yell.

When one is at peace within, the will is sincere. When one is relaxed without, the energy is in harmony.

There are those whose energy is pure.

There are those whose energy is turbid.

There are those whose energy is turbid in purity.

There are those whose energy is pure in turbidity. [\[12\]](#)

Speaking now of the energy of people in the regions of the Zhe or the Huai we find that the energy of the Zhe people is heavy but not bright, whereas that of the Huai people is bright but not heavy. The energy of southern people is clear, but not thick, that of northern people is thick, but not clear.[\[13\]](#)

[A Southerner who looks like he is from the north (big and fat and very dark) will be wealthy and noble. A Northerner who looks as if he stems from the south (slim and light and very sharp) will excel in many ways (SX 180, TQ 7a).]

When yang energy expands, the mountains and rivers are beautiful and luxuriant. When the sun or the moon rise, heaven and earth are bathed in light. This is the evidence of energy.

9. Complexion as Full or Transparent

Complexion in human beings --- though only found on the skin --- should be full, and not transparent. It should be intense and not scattered. Complexion is brought forth from within and without the five orbs. It adorns the whole body with radiance and smoothness.[\[14\]](#)

Lady Tang Ju says: [\[15\]](#) “Anything less than direct sunlight appears as color/complexion. When man participates in the light he reveals joy on the outside of his physical body. When he loses it, depression settles in his mind.”

10. Complexion as Young or Old

There is old and young complexion. “Young” is used to refer to a complexion inappropriate to a person's age.[\[16\]](#) Thus in complexion, “old” is auspicious, “young” is inauspicious.

However, within the methods of physiognomy there are other ways to evaluate complexion. Besides the obstruction of complexion called “young” there are also three kinds of radiance and five sorts of glossiness of the skin. There are moreover three types of dullness and five kinds of dryness.

11. Physical Form and Spirit in Terms of Surplus and Deficiency[\[17\]](#)

Among the combinations of physical form and spirit, there are too much form and insufficient spirit, and too much spirit and insufficient form. In the first case, the person at first sight seems awe-inspiring, but upon longer examination appears rather dull. In the second case, the person at first appears rather dull, but the longer one examines him the more radiant he seems to become.[\[18\]](#)

When someone has a surplus of both, physical form and spirit, one feels delighted at his mere sight, whether he is one's acquaintance or not. When, on the other hand, someone has an insufficiency of both, one need not ask any further: he will be universally disliked.

12. Interaction Patterns of the Various Constituents

Physical form and spirit should radiate in mutual harmony. Energy and complexion should support each other.[\[19\]](#)

When spirit is whole, physical form is also whole.

When energy is full, complexion is also full.

Spirit can make energy stay, but energy cannot make spirit stay.

Energy can make complexion stay, but complexion cannot make energy stay.[\[20\]](#)

Physical form, finally, only supports the other forces.

It may be stout, it may be thin.

Stout is auspicious, thin is unlucky.

13. Thin Appearance

Among the people of the world one often meets some who easily realize their will. They initially attain all that they desire without any problems. But then they encounter some obstacle in their course and in the end die prematurely. This is because their judgment is superficial and narrow-minded and they can never bear things out in patience.

Thin walls easily collapse,

Thin wine easily turns sour,

Thin paper easily tears,

Thin people easily die.

Similarly, when water and earth are thin, they are not strong enough to support the rain-bringing clouds.

Thin people do not account for their own shortcomings and only talk about the bad characteristics of others. They gradually encroach on others, using them for their own

advantage. They say “right” to one's face, but “wrong” behind one's back. They are unkind to their kin and their elders, but serve strangers with great enthusiasm.

Their character is fundamentally frivolous and arbitrary, but they make it look profound and sincere. They change traditions and do away with the old. They don't know kindness and are indifferent to others. Not yet noble, they already give themselves airs. Not even rich, they already parade their pride. Not even graduate, they yet boast of their attainments. This is the typical behavior of the very thin type.

Characters like this not only have a disastrous physique, but they also tend to have shortened life-spans. Worse than that, they pass their misfortune on to their children and grandchildren.

14. Signs of Long Life

The physiognomy of long life is not found in an imposing and powerful physical appearance. Rather, one sees it in the eyes. When the pupils move nervously, early death is indicated. People with an imposing and powerful appearance, if and when they are magnanimous and good-natured, are good examples for the mutual support of physical form and energy. But if they are narrow-minded and prejudiced in their judgments, we say that the mind is not in proper accordance.

Common folk usually only know that a sign of longevity is when hair grows above the eyebrows and inside the ears. They have heard that it shows a ripe old age when the bone of the forehead goes as far as the ear, when the nose is straight and long, and when the proportions of the face are even and clear. But they don't realize how these things come about.[\[21\]](#)

Actually, the bones are nothing but essence and energy solidified within. Only when essence and marrow penetrate to the outside does hair grow above the eyebrows and inside the ears. Only then are the proportions even and clear, and only then can the nose be really straight and long. One can compare this phenomenon to a tree. Its trunk must be strong and solid before any branches or leaves can sprout forth on its surface. It is also comparable to a lamp. A lamp only shines bright when it contains plenty of oil. Similarly the human body is only at peace when it contains sufficient essence.

As Mistress Tang says:

“Everybody knows that tiger's bones and dragon's pupils are auspicious. Everybody knows that an Adam's apple and prominent teeth are unlucky. But the auspicious may not always mean good luck and the unlucky may not always indicate misfortune.”

15. The Importance of the Mind

Though Adam's apple and prominent teeth are indicators of a pointed physique,^[22] yet sometimes there is some auspicious factor in the mind. A person like this might actually be found in a noble position. He will then, however, only think of his personal advantage and have no consideration for his wife and children. So we have quite a number of noble people who belong among the type of threefold pointedness and fivefold prominence.^[23]

If only their spirit and energy are profound and pure, they can yet be accepted. ^[24] People whose spirit and energy is profound and pure are at peace in their bodies and tranquil within themselves. They do not go because someone says so, nor do they desist because someone keeps silent. They do not become agitated because of sexual attraction, nor do they turn away because of it. They are stable and at peace, careful and polite. People like this always know their limits.

Most people these days are very fond of wealth and high position, but they are never content at heart. There are so many who are not happy at all! Yet those whose spirit and energy are at peace and tranquil are usually unconcerned and relaxed in their minds. That is what we call "freedom at heart."^[25]

16. Obstruction

On the other hand, there are many whose physical form, energy, and complexion suffer from obstruction. When physical form is obstructed for eight years, it is completely defiled. When spirit is obstructed for four years, one's personality becomes inflexible and obstinate. When energy is obstructed for three years, the mind suffers a break-down. When complexion is obstructed for one year, the spirit is exhausted and worn out.

[When form is obstructed, the walk is heavy,

When spirit is obstructed, the body is harmed,

When energy is obstructed, the voice is harsh,

When complexion is obstructed, the face is swarthy.

(SX 180, TQ 8a)]

17. Yin and Yang

Moreover, yin and yang are involved in this process. Yang cannot encompass yin, and yin cannot encompass yang. For example, if a man has a female physique, he is weak and cannot maintain his position. If a woman shows male features, she is dominant and will not find a husband.

Women should be soft and obedient; men should be strong and upright. The wife of an honest citizen should have authority and not be seductive. A winehouse girl should be very seductive and not show any authority.

[A man should not have female features, a woman should not look like a man. Yin and yang are opposites — combined wrongly they will reduce one's life.]

Husband and wife belong to different types — women should be soft and obedient, men should be strong and firm. Women are yin, thus basically quiet. To laugh without being spoken to first does not become them. An honest wife should be strong and not seductive, while a winehouse girl needs qualities of seduction and not of authority. (SX 179, TQ 6a)]

But ordinary people usually only examine the faces of others and never go to the roots of their appearance.[\[26\]](#)

18. Noble and Humble

Let us now look at the bones protruding above the eyebrows, the nose and the jaws. Everyone equally has them. In noble persons these bones have grown directly from essence and marrow, thus they are fine and elegant. In lowly and poor people, on the other hand, these bones are rather floating on the surface and thus appear very coarse. Therefore the cheekbone in common people goes as far as the ears. If it does not go any further than that, it indicates long life. If it goes neither beyond nor stands out visibly, it shows future wealth.

In people who will become overseers, these bones go only as far as the whiskers. In those who will serve in a prefecture, they go as far as the temples. In those who will become Grand Prefects, they appear like rounded mounds and end at the corner of the eyes.[\[27\]](#) The lower jawbone indicates the possession of storehouses and slaves. One whose lower portion of the face is well developed and strong will have granaries, servants, and slaves. If the lower portion is undeveloped, however, he will not even have a proper residence for himself. How could he have slaves to drive and granaries to fill?

Who sees far will have far-reaching wisdom.

Who sees high will have high-reaching wisdom. [28]

One who sees low will have limited wisdom.

Who sees slanted will have poisoned wisdom.

One whose pupils keep revolving unsteadily will kill. [29] One who wavers in his glance, is drawn above and below, will never be solidly established in anything.

Those who have strong parts of heaven [forehead] are noble.

Those who have strong parts of earth [chin] are wealthy.

Those who have strong parts of humanity [nose] are long-lived.

But anyone who has strongly developed parts of heaven and earth, yet in dealing with the world does not cultivate himself, will waste his auspicious looks.

[1] The following translation renders the prose version of the *Fengjian* as found in *Yuguan zhaoshen ju* 1.4b–9b. The annotation provides variant readings of the version in verse, found both in the *Taiqing shenjian* 1.5b–8a and in the *Shenxian quanbian* chap. 6, Liang 1980: 179–181. The two latter texts are abbreviated TQ and SX respectively and cited with their corresponding page numbers. Passages found in the variant versions that supply additional information to the basic text have been included in the translation proper. They are marked off by parentheses [].

While the older prose version contains about 1,700 characters, the two more recent editions in verse are made up of about 200 lines of 7 characters each, coming to about 1,400 characters altogether. The two later editions give largely the same text, but differ considerably from the earlier *Yuguan* text. Though many sections are identical in contents, phrasing frequently varies and the same or similar ideas may be found in different sections of the text.

Section numeration and headings are my own; parallel structures of the text have been imitated as closely as possible.

[2] The variant version reads: “Human life is endowed with essence (SX: energy) and spirit” (SX 178, TQ 5b).

[3] This section is found in the variant edition, too, but here essence is located in the kidneys. The text then continues, “Thus we know that complexion arises from physical form while energy appears through the sound and voice” (SX 178, TQ 5b).

[4] The same categories are found in the variant version, but only after the first quarter of the text (SX 179, TQ 6a). The passage is also quoted as from the *Fengjian* in the commentary part of SX 1; Liang 1980: 21. The five phases are the most important foundation of physiognomy and many different categorizations are based on them. See SX 4; Liang 1980: 116.

[5] This is also found in the other version with minor changes. For *bingji da* it reads *weiwu da* (SX 179, TQ 6a).

[6] The latter part of this passage runs in the SX variant:

For tigers see the jaws,

for rhinos check the horn.

For phoenixes the eyes;

and for cranes the body's form.

The “horn” that likens a person to a rhinoceros is the vertical bone in the center of the forehead (TQ 1,16a). Further details in the description of these types are found:

Tiger — SX 9, p. 261; *Yuguan* 3.3b–4a.

Rhinoceros — SX 9, p. 270; *Yuguan* 3.4b–5a.

Phoenix — SX 9, p. 266; Lessa 1968: 35.

Crane — SX 9, p. 266.

[7] This description is quoted under the name of Chen Tunan in the commentary of chapter 1 of the SX (Liang 1980: 15).

[8] According to the variants, someone with a square face and a stout back would look “vulgar and ordinary and his back would not be erect” (SX 180, TQ 7b).

[9] Here the variants state that a strong spirit will be obvious in strong and clear bones, whereas a shallow spirit will make the bones look like they were sticking out (SX 179, TQ 7b).

[10] This is also found in SX 179, TQ 6b and continued with, “Looking at them for a long time one will find the first dark traces in their brightness.

[11] ”The comparison of spirit or essence in man to the oil in the lamp is mentioned again later (section 14). The variant version reads,

Spirit and energy are like the oil, people are like the lamp. When spirit [SX: the person] is tranquil, essence [SX: the spirit] is full. When the oil is clear, the lamp will shine bright. At night it rests in the mind in complete quiet. During the day it sparkles through the eyes. (SX 178, TQ 5b)

[12] The variants cite this passage directly after what is section 9 in the older edition. “Sometimes it is turbid in purity; sometimes it is pure in turbidity.” See SX 178; TQ 5b–6a.

Following the image of the lamp and the oil, reference here is made to an occasional phenomenon rather than to a specific type.

[13] The typology of people according to their country of origin is already found in chapter 4 of the *Huainanzi*.

[14] The variants here have,

Energy and complexion should be in harmony, because complexion shows on the skin when there is energy in the blood. It comes to the surface like a silk thread spun in a cocoon, it leaves again like a horse-tail suddenly stopped. (SX 180, TQ 7b)

[15] Tang Ju was one of the most famous physiognomists under the Han. She lived in the third century B.C. and is reported to have made a prediction for Li Tuo, prime minister to the first emperor, Qin Shihuang. See *Shiji* 79; *Qianfu lun* 27.

[16] The variant found in SX 179, TQ 6a reads: “An old person with a young complexion will decline rapidly.” TQ 6b has: “. . . his star of long life will soon set.” These versions emphasize also in a more general way that “old people should not look like youngsters. Yet, it is quite auspicious for a young person to look older.”

[17] These categories have been taken up independently by the TQ where we find sections on the surplus and insufficiency of spirit (3.4ab) as well as on the surplus and insufficiency of physical form (4.3ab). The text has then found its way into the SX 1 (Liang 1980: 42).

[18] This is also found in SX 180, TQ 7b.

[19] The *Shenxiang quan bian* edition has, “energy and complexion should be in harmony, because complexion shows on the skin where energy is in the blood. (SX 180)

[20] In the later editions (SX 178, TQ 5b), the interaction of the different forces is described in the very beginning of the text:

After spirit has risen, energy is complete, After physical form has been completed, complexion will arise. Thus we know that complexion arises from spirit. It makes it visible. The power of energy can be judged from the sound of the voice.

Examining physical form is not as good as analyzing the bones, but the bones provide as much information as the spirit itself. Still better than examining spirit, look at energy. When spirit is in harmony with energy, it blossoms like spring.

[21] The *Shenxiang quanbian* edition has, “You should know that appearance comes from heaven. Whatever I look like, it's not mere polish on the surface” (SX 180).

[22] These signs are mentioned in TQ 7b as indicating trouble with one's family.

[23] SX 181 and TQ 7b describe these signs are very unlucky.

[24] This is also mentioned in SX 180, but not in the TQ.

[25] The variants do not grant man such freedom from circumstance.

“Talking of physiognomy without regarding the mind is like looking at the affairs of man with disrespect to the rhythm of heaven. Just as heaven's rhythm and the affairs of man go together, so the physique will reflect the mind in its true form” (SX 181, TQ 7a).

[26] This complaint is also voiced in SX 180, TQ 8a.

[27] The same evaluation is also found in SX 179, TQ 7a.

[28] SX 180, TQ 7a have: “One who sees far will have far-reaching ambition, one who sees high will have a strong will.”

[29] SX 180 describes the criminal type as one whose eyes are heavily bloodshot.

Translation Four

Mayi daozhe zhengyi xinfa

PREFACE

[2a] It has been a long time now that the learning of the *Book of Changes* has ailed or even been lost. The local governor of Guji, Li Gongchu, also known as the Hempclad One, once came to Guan Ziming with a request.

“I have received two books which I do not dare to keep to myself. So I have decided to make them accessible to the general public. I would therefore like to ask you to help me correct whatever wrong characters there may be in the text. Humbly I beg you in your capacity as His Majesty's favorite official.”

Guan thereupon looked the text. He did not dare refuse the request and agreed to meet with the Hempclad Daoist morning and evening. When the text began to radiate with an auspicious brilliance that illuminated the whole house, they realized they were on to something really spiritual.

After the Hemclad Daoist had received the text, he put its instruction into practice. Also, he made it known to a wider audience, because he wished to remedy the ailments from which the teaching of the *Book of Changes* had been suffering from so long. How could mere recitation and chanting of the text be sufficient? It needed practice and the benevolence of the mind of someone like the Hempclad Daoist.

The Day of the Tiger, Third Month, Sixth Year of the Reign Period Genuine Prosperity [1179].

You Gonglang from Pujiang District in Xinwu Prefecture.

POEM 1 [3a]

The Way of Changes of the Fuxi Emperor
Embraces and encloses the myriad images.
Only when one knows the place of all its symbols
Can they be put to practical human use.

POEM 2 [3b]

The arrangement of the six lines
Is not based on some weird idea.
It follows the cycle of yin/yang,
The course of blood and *qi*.

POEM 3 [4a]

The images of hexagrams directly speak to people,
They don't originally have texts or explanations.
They cause all men to live and act
Calmly in accordance with their fortunes on this earth.

POEM 4

The Dao of Change had never been transmitted

Until the Duke of Zhou and Confucius came along.

These two worked on it for themselves,

Yet couldn't help it being lost again.

POEM 5 [4b]

The Sixty-four hexagrams

Are full of wondrous meaning.

It can be gathered from the lines

As they are joined in nature.

POEM 6

Commenting on the single lines

One must not stop with words.

Beyond words see intention deep,

Then glimpse the Dao of Change.

POEM 7 [5a]

Heaven, earth, and all there is

Are not clear in their law.

Looking now at hexagrams

Their principle shines forth.

POEM 8 [5b]

Hexagrams in change or motionless,
In separation or joined into one,
Vertical or horizontal in their structure,
None of them is without principle.

POEM 9 [6a]

Heaven and Earth, when they break up and separate,
Bring forth all of six children.
These six then are none other than
their parent's broken structure.

POEM 10

Heaven joins with Earth in mystery,
Then they are yin and yang.
Completely fused and mixed in harmony,
They represent an even energy.

POEM 11 [6b]

The six children develop then,
And they again are yin and yang.
Yet they go wild and run astray,
to form uneven energy.

POEM 12 [7a]

They build, they follow, move, and enter,
They pass, depend, they stop and even leave.
Not undertaken ever by Earth or by Heaven,
These things are done by their six kids alone.

POEM 13

Water and Lake are both kids of water,
and can be both seen from their breaking point.
Water will enrich all, Lake develops all,
Yet how the way they do it is not a bit alike.

POEM 14 [8a]

Drilling wood and digging wells,
Makes human water, human fire.
Yet the water and fire of Heaven and Earth

Know very well how to go along the ways of nature.

POEM 15 [9b]

The Eight Trigrams do not stop

With Heaven, Earth, or Wind and Thunder.

Every single being, every single man

Are all their product, do all come from them.

POEM 16

The trigrams have their opposites, they do reverse each other,

Fit together like a key slides smoothly in a lock.

Reversing them one finds them deep and wondrous,

Yet it's their opposites where real marvels lie.

POEM 17 [10a]

All hexagrams, all sixty-four of them,

Have their specific images.

The way these are described and analyzed

They all can be opposed, can be reversed.

FIRST POSTSCRIPT

[26a] Fuxi's *Method of the Mind* as transmitted by the Hempclad Daoist is a text I recently received from a stranger on Mount Lu. (Some say this stranger was none other than Xu Jian.)

Due to these circumstances someone may well doubt the authenticity of the text. However, I counter:

“Why worry about authenticity? Much better think about the contents and the arguments of the text!”

Even venerated texts of old such as the *Simple Questions of the Yellow Emperor* and the *Great Appendix* to the *Book of Changes* of Confucius have had their authenticity questioned in their day. The reaction in their case is typical.

“Well, there certainly was someone at some point in history to write the *Simple Questions*. There also certainly was someone some time who wrote the *Great Appendix*. If the author wasn't the Yellow Emperor of the Great Confucius himself, well, so what? The author was one of their numerous disciples or followers.”

In the same way I wish to argue for the *Method of the Mind*. Someone at some time in history was certainly able to write the text, and if it wasn't the Hempclad Daoist himself, then it was one of his disciples.

How could one ever disregard the quality of the material, its contents, and the soundness of its arguments? The text is like a drop of pure gold produced by Heaven in an instant — with no antecedents before and no descendants after. [26b] It is as eloquent as the writing of the ancient Fu Xi, and despite the tendency of people to rush off and get lost in the things of the world, this book is truly of the immortals.

I have by now studied it for about ten years and only gradually have I come to understand how it seeps into everything and touches upon a large variety of things. So I now know that the way of the Changes is great indeed!

I pass it on to the world. If you, a serious reader, in turn meet someone worthy of it you must share it with him by all means.

The Ninth Day, Third Month, Third Year of the Reign Period Elevating Peace [1104]

Li Qianji, Recluse of Mount Lu

SECOND POSTSCRIPT

During the Five Dynasties, Li Shouzheng revolted in the area in the bend of the Yellow River [Hezhong]. Zhou Taizu [951–954] himself went out to squash the revolt. The Hempclad Daoist at this occasion addressed Zhao Hanwang.

“How can Li Shouzhong withstand for long? Near the city is the cosmic energy of three emperors!”

Soon after this the town fell. There had indeed been three emperors on the battlefield: Zhou Taizu and the two later Son emperors Taizu and Taizong.

Lord Wenxi, Qian Ruoshui, was a frequent visitor of Chen Tuan, the Master of the Invisible and Inaudible. He analyzed his appearance and found him clear and pure to such a degree that he even might attain immortality. In any case he would go far in life. [27a] At the time of this analysis, however, it had not yet been decided direction Qian's life would take.

He therefore consulted the Hempclad Daoist.

“Yours are not immortals' bones. But you can become a noble lord and high minister on this earth.”

Generally speaking the physical signs of immortality and imperial or feudal nobility are quite similar. But the Hempclad Daoist could tell them apart with no problem and decided the matter with one single glance. His knowledge was absolute incomparable!

A person like this, whose eyes can recognize immortals, emperors, and kings, and who in addition has left us a discussion of the *Book of Changes*, only appears once in ten thousand years! Never must his words be treated frivolously!

The Seventh Day, Eleventh Month, First Year of the Reign Period Heavens Way [1165].

Tai Shiyu, also known as Gongwen, from Yuji.

Translation Five

Yin Zhenjun huandan gezhu (DZ 134, fasc. 59)

1 THE PROPER ENERGY OF THE NORTH IS THE RIVER CHARIOT [MERCURY]

The North is the Black Emperor. He is the Ultimate Worthy. Among people, this corresponds to the Yin of the lower prime [lower cinnabar field]. Its proper energy belongs to the phase water. In people this is the blood. As concerns the river chariot, the energy of the North in its flow returns to the South. When fire refines water, dust is created. Transforming further, this becomes the water chariot. It is the essence of the lower prime.

The North with its color black and its phase water corresponds to the kidney–orb within human beings. The kidney–orb is the root and origin of human life. The two kidneys are divided into the essence of the sun and the moon, the energies of emptiness and non–being. The ruler of the kidneys once transformed becomes the human embryo.

2 THE FIRST POSITION, IN THE EAST, IS CALLED GOLD DUST

The East is the Green Emperor. He presides over the liver–orb. The first position [*jia* and *yi*] is brought about through the phase water from the North and the phase fire from the South.

Fire is born through wood. Nourished by water, wood grows intensely into green lushness. Therefore the songs speak of the first position. In human beings wood presides over the cinnabar field.

As to the production of gold dust, the rivers of the empire carry a fair amount of mud. Examples are the Han, the Jiang [Yangtse], and the rivers of Jialing. All these bring forth gold dust. Workers rinse the gold particles out of the mud and refine it to yellow gold.

The same method is used in the refinement [of energy] in the human body. In the upper cinnabar field, there is a chamber known as the Jade Spring Cavern. In this cavern one finds a Jade Spring River, also called the Pure Clear Source. The effort to isolate it is called the great Work.

The spirit water knows no limit or shore. Collect it and guide it to the lower cinnabar field. As the days pass it will naturally coagulate and form grains of dust.

3 BOTH PURE FORCES EMBRACE AND NOURISH EACH OTHER, THEY BELONG TO ONE STRUCTURE

The two forces are yin and yang. Heaven is yang, Earth is yin. Left is yang, right is yin. Yin and yang are husband and wife. Within the human body, the upper cinnabar field is yang, the lower is yin.

As to embracing and nourishing, the four seasons continue to revolve, the five phases and heaven and earth mingle and interact. Thus the myriad beings are naturally born. When the sun embraces the moon, there naturally is radiant brightness. When the moon embraces the sun, stars and constellations are brought forth naturally. Husband and wife unite in harmony and duly bring forth sons and daughters.

We now use the same method to isolate the spirit water of the upper cinnabar field. This is the great Work. Refining it carefully, we guide it to the jade chamber in the lower prime. Thus embracing all, it revolves.

4 THE RED BIRD HARMONIZES AND NURTURES THEM, THEY BRING FORTH THE GOLDEN FLOWER

The red bird is the phase fire. On earth it corresponds to the south and to the second position [*bing* and *ding*]. In the sky, it relates to the planet Mars. On earth it is fire, in human beings it is the heart-and-mind. This fire is produced and destroyed by people themselves.

It greatly encompasses heaven and earth, it minutely reaches into the smallest nook and cranny. Control it and it will cease, let it go free and it will run wild. In the scriptures it is called the bright fire.

To harmonize means to refine. For instance one takes clay and fires it to produce pottery. It won't decay even after ten million years. Or one takes wood and burns it to charcoal. It will remain in the earth for ten million years.

To harmonize, human beings isolate the water from the Jade Spring in the upper cinnabar field. With the fire of the mind-and-heart they refine it until it enters the lower cinnabar

field. Here they secure it behind the Jade Prison Pass. Once locked in, it is further treated with yin alchemy. Naturally a new spirit soul and a separate sun and moon are brought forth. After nourishing them for a long time, their color will turn brilliant. They combine to form a new entity, called the Golden Pond.

The *Great Cinnabar Formula* says:

“Metal is the father, wood the mother. They are true lead and mercury. Lead embraces the five colors, it belongs to water and the North. There is metal [gold] in the water. This gold turns solid. It is then called the Golden Flower.”

5 THE GOLDEN FLOWER IS BROUGHT FORTH, THE TREASURE OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

The Golden Flower is like the gold dust found in the waters of the Han and the Jiang. It is brought forth naturally. One isolates cinnabar from the water found in the Chamber of Essence [kidney orb, storehouse of semen, womb] in the abdomen. After a few days the essence in this water turns to gold dust. Naturally it forms into a solid pearl. This process is called: the fire emerges from the water.

According to another method, one revolves the abdominal essence [semen, menstrual blood] by means of the fire of the mind–and–heart. Settling in the upper prime, it coagulates into a pearl which is found in the Niwan Palace. This method is called: the water emerges from the fire.

Thus the *Scripture of the Yellow Court* says: “The water from the Pond of Jade Clarity is poured over the numinous root.”[\[1\]](#)

Certainly, whoever manages to practice this will live long.

6 WHO AMONG PEOPLE IS ABLE TO COMPREHEND THESE WORDS HAS FOUND THE TRUE DAO OF PERFECTION

Whoever is able is not an ordinary person, because most people do not have any faith in the Dao.

The Dao is called emptiness and non–being. The *Scripture* says: “The great Dao is not the

ordinary Dao.”^[2] The Dao is like utter void and emptiness, it has nothing to depend or rely on.

The *Explanation* adds: “Like fish who live in water do not see it as water, so people living in the Dao do not see it as the Dao. In the same way dragons do not see the rocks and mountains they live in as rocks and mountains, nor demons the earth as earth.

How could these words be wrong? The true Dao of Perfection refers to the Flower of Essence in human beings. Many men lose this essence by wasting it on their women who accordingly give birth to sons and daughters. They in turn closely resemble their parents in countenance, appearance, and temperament. Their fundamental dispositions are alike.

On the other hand, a seeker keeps his essence in his own body. He isolates the water of the upper prime and refines it in the lower cinnabar field. Soon it turns into cinnabar. This is called a valuable treasure.

The *Yinfu jing* says: “Yin and yang incite each other. They join in natural harmony.”

Who among people is able to comprehend these words has completed the true Dao of Perfection.

7 AT MIDNIGHT CALL FORTH THE TIGER, IN THE EARLY MORNING THE DRAGON

8 DRAGON AND TIGER PRODUCE EACH OTHER, THEY ARE NATURALLY JOINED

These two lines have to do with the two stems [of time calculation]. Midnight and tiger belong to yin. Yin in turn belongs to the female, the female has the disposition of water. Thus it is associated with the north and the third position [*ren* and *gui*]. This is the position of water.

The *Explanation of the Yellow Emperor* says: “[The position of water] is called the black. Lead can subdue mercury and turn it into dust.”

People who work on attaining the Dao of Perfection enter this yin into the cinnabar field of yang. They practice it between midnight and noon [in accordance with the third position].

The dragon belongs to the phase wood. Wood is associated with the east. The *Explanation*

of Wood says: “It is mercury. Mercury belongs to the phase fire.”

It is also known as quicksilver or as basic quicksilver. With the help of a drug that can subdue and control fire one can turn it into a treasure among men. Within the human body this is the Flower of Essence.

The *Explanation* says: “Refine yang with the help of yin. Who knows how to do this can truly live forever.”

This method [of subduing fire] must be practiced at hours that belong to yin. The *Cinnabar Discourse* says: “When Yang is active, it cannot be subdued. When yin is dead, it cannot be subdued.”

In order to nourish the process along properly you must carefully watch for periods during which yin is on the rise and yang is dead. What is brought forth thereby is something like quicksilver. Apply fire to it, and it will turn into a human treasure.

Yang–mercury, on the other hand, can only be worked on when yin is inactive. Once solidified it turns into a bodily treasure.

The *Scripture* says: “Proceed to nourish the numinous stalk so that it will wither never again. Block the Gate of Life and guard the Jade Capital. Isolate the substance above the tongue and refine it between midnight and noon.]

The water of the Jade Spring is also called as yang–mercury. It should be refined when yin is embraced [inactive]. Then lead–water is isolated. It is called the double dragon and tiger.

Thus the *Fufeng shangjing* says: “In the first beginning of the color green [spring] the sun and the moon unite in harmony and merge into one.”

They come out of the Jade Pond [mouth, Niwan] and enter the Golden Chamber [lower cinnabar field]. Everybody has these.

Take good care not to lose track of time. Attain this Perfection and the myriad affairs will be done for you. How could it be found anywhere on the outside?

9 WITH THE DRAGON IN THE CHEN TRIGRAM, THE CYCLE IS COMPLETE

10 THE TIGER IS AGAIN AT ITS STARTING POINT, IN THE FIRST HOUSE

This means that if one practices the above methods between new moon and full moon it will strengthen one's spirit soul. If one practices it between full moon and new moon, it will strengthen one's material soul.

In boys teeth grow when they are eight years old, their central power is reached at sixteen. So they should be acquainted with the method after they have reached the age of ten. The primary aim is to cultivate Perfection, then one may be able to attain at least deliverance from the corpse.

11 ISOLATE IT ON AN APPROPRIATE DAY, ASSEMBLE IT DURING A SUITABLE HOUR

To practice the higher methods avoid the days of the full, declining, and new moon. For the lesser methods adapt to the constellations' movements.

At full moon, the gods in the body are actively present. Isolate it then. The movements of the sun and the moon determine time. Between midnight and noon, the hour of the early morning [and of rising yang] is best. Then isolate yin energy and make it return upwards to the Niwan Palace.

The *Scripture* says: ““Proceed to nourish the numinous stalk so that it will wither never again.”

You may not get pure Essence, yet this will help you to revert to more beautiful days. The sun is in the pearl. There is always a great void. In this void, there is nothing unfulfilled, nothing left undone. The primordial state of all beings is found there. This void is pure yin energy. Revolve it upward and it returns to the Niwan Palace.

Isolate the water from the Jade Pond and pour it into the lower cinnabar field, into the Golden Chamber. This is where everything begins. Ordinary people don't usually know this place of the beginning and end of all life. Once all positions are arranged properly, the spiritual transformation takes place right there. After some days the primordial energy there will naturally turn into the precious pearl. This is how people avoid death.

The *Scripture* says: “The Great Dao has no shape.”

12 ORDINARY FOLK MAY USE THESE THINGS, BUT THEY DON'T TRULY KNOW

13 THEY MAKE MISTAKES IN THE ISOLATION OF ENERGY AND ITS
REGULATION

14 EVEN A MYRIAD DIFFERENT EFFORTS ARE UNDERTAKEN IN VAIN

Some people meet the prohibitions of heaven and earth in setting things up but they don't know where to go from there. To others it happens that the yin gate will not open. They try to force it and suffer great harm. Nowadays people swiftly turn weak and old. Thus it is said: "Realize the One after going to Kunlun" [after death].

Though all adepts have been warned to hold their tongue and not act carelessly with the Dao, yet foolish words have been transmitted to wordly folks. By all means, the laws of Before Heaven that activate human blood and body should never be told to ordinary people.

These laws are only transmitted through the Palace of the Great One. The scriptures say: "The Great One has a Lord." They all agree that he resides in the radiant palace of the heart-and-mind. He cannot be fathomed. Who manages to see him is beyond ordinary standards.

In human beings the head is Kunlun, the highest palatial residence. The gods of spirit light live there peacefully, each in his own residence. From the top of the skull throughout the head, there are nine major palaces. The gods residing there each have a specific name. They each have their major scripture, such as the *Highest Scripture of the Great One* or the *Central Scripture of Immaculate Numen*.

In the chamber near the navel [lower cinnabar field] contains three separate offices. These correspond to the twelve departments of old [constellations in the sky, hours of the day]. Each of them has a multi-storied building of its own. Thus the *Yellow Court Scripture of Inner Luminants* says: "In the body there are twelve multi-storied buildings."

This is meant here. The cinnabar field contains twelve buildings. They correspond to the twelve double-hours of the day. Energy is revolved accordingly.

15 PERFECT SPIRITUALITY, PERFECT SAINTLINESS IS EXTREMELY SIMPLE

Wise people isolate two kinds of medicine in the body. They may not know their workings and limitations, yet the body gods will know.

But commonly people only pay attention to the fleeting joys of life and do not realize how everything is changing. Thus it is said: “The knowledge of the Dao of long life is hindered by ten thousand mountains.” This means that it is a knowledge unattainable to ordinary people.

A seeker of the powers contained in the body palaces is one who venerates the twelve departments. One who searches and eventually learns about the cauldron and utensils of the Great Dao has perfect spirituality, perfect saintliness.

16 FIRST VENERATE THE POWERS IN THEIR BODY PALACES, THEN SEEK CAULDRON AND UTENSILS

This method is not transmitted and may not be revealed to the public. It represents the pattern of heaven. Thus the *Scripture of the Dao* says: “Halls full of gold and jade nobody can guard. Wealth, honor, and pride bring about their own destruction.”

This means that people's lives are deeply involved with the karmic mechanisms of heaven and earth. They inevitably are drawn to pride and luxury, wealth and honor. They do not search for the Great Dao.

17 NURTURE THE REGULATION OF THE FIRE WITH WARMTH AND IN ACCORDANCE WITH YIN AND YANG

To nurture with warmth means that one should not feel joy or anger. The regulation of the fire refers to the increase and decrease of the fire of the mind/heart in accordance with the months.

One alternates according to yin and yang. The exact procedure is only transmitted orally. Nurturing in accordance with yin and yang means that one must separately know the true yin and the true yang. Within human beings these two life-forces should be isolated and harmonized to create the thread and network of life. As the *Songs* say: “The two beings are joined into one body.”

18 SET UP THE FURNACE CHAMBER AND BE CAREFUL TO SELECT A PROPER SPOT

To set up means to isolate the liquid of perfect energy above and settle it in the lower prime. Then isolate the liquid of yin energy below and revolve it toward the upper prime.

Setting up a proper furnace chamber will make the work of divine transformation go along smoothly. Setting things up improperly and losing one's foothold, one will physically suffer. As concerns the furnace chamber, its most wonderful method uses females, another way is to use yin alchemy.

According to another explanation, the furnace chamber used in the higher methods of cinnabar is the mouth of the human body. It is the furnace. The stove in this case is the palace chamber.

Once a furnace has been broken, it cannot be used. If it has been used too much, it is spoiled. Its power is not centered.

Those who, in sexual practice, are below the fifth level should avoid using extremely fat or extremely thin female partners. For those who have already attained threefold harmonization and the fifth level it is best to employ partners between the ages of fifteen and twenty. This age corresponds to the high point of human energy. Partners over the age of twenty cannot be used.

Among those who can be properly employed make sure to make good use of their energy. If you attempt to harmonize mercury, always be alert and let it not be stolen by demonic spirits.

The phrase "select a proper spot" above means that one must know the location of the body palaces and the times of the regulation of the fire.

19 BEFORE YOU HAVE THE PROPER SPOT, DON'T DO ANYTHING FOOLISH

All those who wish to refine their yin will only succeed in perfecting the treasure when they follow the above instructions regarding the age limit of usable partners and the things fit as cauldron and utensils of the work.

Using the borrowed energy from partners not of the right age will bring about success only for a short time. Those practitioners will then have the advantage of being able to rid

themselves of ailments and expel pathogenic energy. While engaged in the process, never lose count. After a couple of cycles the resulting treasure will follow in a few years.

Yet, who only wants to fulfill some selfish desire by practicing it will not realize it even once in ten thousand times.

20 BUT MAKE SURE TO WITHDRAW TO SECRECY AND TAKE GOOD CARE WITH PROTECTION AND SUPPORT

Anyone wishing to practice the Dao should live in tranquility and seclusion. Such people should practice gymnastics, grind their teeth, assemble the body gods, clench their fists [to not leak energy], and sit in meditation. They should pursue the practice in secrecy. The expression “protection and support” means to eat little, speak less, and never be moved by joy and anger.

21 GUARD AND PROTECT IT WELL, NEVER LET LEAK OUT THE MECHANISM OF HEAVEN AND EARTH

“Guard and protect” means to use the entire body in one's practice. If one practices it for ten years, one will be all mind/heart from head to toes. If one continues even longer, one gradually will change to a state where one is all head and no more toes. To practice absorption in emptiness [like the Buddhists] is a waste of effort. One will not reach one's aim in a million years.

22 THIS DRUG WILL CHANGE AND TRANSFORM IN AN UNBELIEVABLE WAY

23To achieve the proper drug one must not slacken in the regulation of the fire for nine years. Increase and decrease within the range of the numbers ten and six. When the work is complete, 3000 cycles should yield 800 pills. At that point attainment will have become easy

People who take the drug cannot be killed by heaven nor be buried by earth. Their merit cannot be fathomed. As the *Commentary* says: “Heaven and earth may go on changing and transforming, but the bodies of such people are stable and strong.” Their merit comes in three forms: The higher ones ascend to be Higher Immortals, the medium and lesser ones attain deliverance from the corpse.

23 YANG IS PERFECT CINNABAR, IS PERFECT MERCURY

The method to refine the yin essence in the lower prime consists in coagulating it into cinnabar dust. Then isolate the yin of the upper prime in due time, soak it, and let it turn to dust as well. It is yang energy.

The energy of the upper prime coagulates into the treasure. The energy of the lower prime penetrates the Kunlun and the Niwan. As it gradually drips in there it turns into a pearl. This radiates throughout the three thousand and greater thousand worlds.

24 OUR CONTEMPORARIES WHO SEEK IT ONLY DO SO FOOLISHLY

Many people of the world collect five kinds of metals, eight kinds of minerals, and all sorts of herbs and plants in their wish to refine them into great reverted cinnabar. How would this be anything but foolish?

25 TO PRODUCE SUBSTANCE FROM NON-SUBSTANCE; THIS IS HOW ONE REVERTS THE CINNABAR

From non-being enter being, from being enter non-being. Substanceless energy coagulates into yin energy through mutual contact and stimulation. The great cinnabar ultimately is not a drug. It is the true energy of the five phases.

26 ORDINARY MERCURY, ORDINARY CINNABAR DUST WON'T DO FOR THE WORK AT ALL

Common people collect cinnabar dust and silver and transmute it into mercury. Likewise they use red copper and iron to make cinnabar dust. Searching the Dao by such means will never lead anywhere.

27 ENCOUNTER THESE EXPLANATIONS AND COMPREHEND THESE WORDS

28 REFINE THE DRUG IT, EAT IT, AND BECOME A PERFECT IMMORTAL

Whoever comes in contact with these verses should avoid all foolishness and properly follow instructions. Silence the mind, cultivate yourself, and calm your thoughts. Hold on to the rules and never go back. Have your mind diligently proceed as the will determines. Thus you refine it! Thus you take it! Thus you become a perfect immortal!

[1] *Huangting waijing jing* A 6, *Yunji qiqian* 12.29b. The commentary notes that the numinous root is the tongue. It should always be watered well with saliva. Another reading identifies the numinous root with the basis of human sexual energy.

[2] *Daode jing* 1.

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