

# A SYNOPSIS OF THE EIGHT VESSELS IN THE CHINESE LITERATURE OF INTERNAL CULTIVATION<sup>1</sup>

Charles Chace 2018

## Spontaneity/Self-so (自然)

### IN LAOZI

Humanity relies on Earth	人法地
Earth relies on Heaven	地法天
Heaven relies on the Way	天法道
The Way relies on <i>Zi Ran</i>	道法自然

Lao zi 25

### IN NEIDAN

The primal mystery is the unitary qi. Within that mystery is a mystery that is our mandate, within that mandate is a mandate that is our form. within that form there is a a form that is our essence, within that essence there is an essence that is our qi within that qi there is a qi that is are spirit, and within that spirit there is a spirit that is our self-so nature.

玄元者，一炁也。玄中有玄是我命，命中有命是我形，形中有形是我精，精中有精是我炁，炁中有炁是我神，神中有神是我自然

The Discussion on the Essential Subtleties of Embryonic Breathing.  
(*Taixi jingwei lun* 胎息精微論 (CH0308))

### IN ZEN

The seed has no idea of being some particular plant, but it has its own form and is in perfect harmony with the ground, with its surroundings,.... And there is no trouble. This is what we mean by naturalness.

Shunryu Suzuki<sup>i</sup>

## Stillness (jing 靜)

---

<sup>1</sup> With Reference to Pregadio, Fabrizio, 2009, Chinese Alchemy: An Annotated Bibliography, Golden Elixir Press. [www/goldenelixir.com](http://www.goldenelixir.com)

IN MEDICINE

“The movement in the dynamic is not separate from its empty spaces; the dynamic at the center of this empty space is clear, still, and, subtle.”

機之動不離其空 空中之機, 清靜 微

Ling Shu -1<sup>ii</sup>

IN NEIDAN

“Qi is difficult to control. Swift, like a galloping horse, only in Stillness can it be altered [eased].”

炁之難御。迅若奔馬, 唯靜者為易。

Ma Danyang 馬丹陽 (1123---1184)<sup>iii</sup>

“The Supreme Ultimate is still and pure, and yet seems to stir, the transcendent dynamic of this divine aperture is unsurpassed’

太極靜純如有動, 仙機靈竅在無前”。

Wu Chongxu 伍冲虛 (1574---1644)<sup>iv</sup>

“[By means of] utmost emptiness and utmost stillness, in following the way and emulating what is spontaneously so, one will fly up and become transcendent.”

至虛至靜道法自然飛升而仙

Zhang Boduan 張伯端 (983---1082)<sup>v</sup>

## Opening (tong 通)

IN MEDICINE

“For this reason, they were able to live long and open themselves to heaven and earth, and so they lacked any end. This was their Way of living.”

故能壽敝天地。無有終時。此其道生。

Su Wen ---1

“The Yellow Emperor said: Now, there are those who since ancient times were open to heaven. The root of their lives was rooted in yin and yang, between heaven and within the six directions.”

黃帝曰,夫自古通天者,生之本,本于陰陽天地之間, 六合之方

Su Wen ---3

“Their qi was [resonant with] the nine prefectures, the nine apertures [of the body], the five viscera, and the twelve articulations, all of which was penetrated by heavenly qi.”

其氣九州九竅五臟十二節。皆通乎天氣

Su Wen---3

#### IN NEIDAN

“My elder brother Kui Yizi said: When the eight vessels are open, disease is cured. Completely rely on concentrating on this in performing your practice.”

胞長兄魁一子曰：八脈開通卻病無，全憑心意用功夫。

Zhao Bichen 趙避塵 (1933)

## The Intersection of Medicine and Internal Cultivation

For this reason, those who practice medicine and know of the eight vessels comprehend the great purpose of the 12 channels and 15 networks. Those who practice transcendence and know of the eight vessels miraculously attain the ascent and descent of the tiger and dragon, and the subtle aperture of the Mysterious Female. 是故醫而知乎八脈則十二經十五絡之大旨得矣仙而知乎八脈則虎龍升降玄牝幽微之竅妙得矣

Li Shizhen 李時珍 (1576)

## Collectanea

*The Daoist Canon (Patrology) of the Zheng Tong Reign (Zheng tang daoze 正統道藏, 1445)*

*Essentials of the Daoist Canon (Daoze jiyao 道藏輯要, c. 1700)*

*Essential Blossoms of the Daoist Canon (Daoze jinghua 道藏精華 1963---present)*

*Daoist Texts Outside the Canon (Zangwai daoshu 藏外道書, 1922/1995)*

*Daoist Canon of China (Zhonghua daoze 中華道藏, 2003)*

#### SECONDARY COLLECTIONS WITH AN EMPHASIS ON NEIDAN

*Overview of the Daoist Nourishment of Life (Daojia yangshengxue gaiyao 道家養生學概要, 1963)*

*Mystery and Subtlety of the Ocean of the Way (Daohai xuanwei 道海玄微, 1974)*

*Essentials of the Minor Arts of the Heterodox Schools, (Zuodao pangmen xiaoshu jiyao 左道旁門小術輯要, 1958)*

All collected by Xiao Tianshi 蕭天石

## Primary Ba Mai Texts in the Neidan Literature

#### A PRECURSOR TO THE CENTRAL VESSEL?

*Jade Pendant Inscription on Circulating the Qi*

*(Xing Qi Pei Feng Ming 行氣玉佩銘, (475-221BCE) Anon.*

OPENING THE REN, DU, AND THE EIGHT VESSELS.

*Token for the Agreement of the Three According to the Changes of Zhou (Zhou Zhou yi can tong qi 周易參同契, probably Han Dynasty)*

Attr. Wei Boyang 魏伯陽, (2<sup>rd</sup> Century BCE)

*Yu Yan's Annotations to the Token for the Agreement of the three*

(*Yu Yan zhu can tong qi 俞琰註參同契*) Yu Yan 俞琰 (1258—1314)

“The medical texts consist of the two vessels of the *du* and the *ren*. If a person can open these two vessels, then all the hundreds of vessels can be open.”

醫書有住督二脈人能通此二脈則百脈皆通

*The Scriptures of the Landscape of Yellow Court*

(*Huang ting jing jing 黃黃庭景經*) Attr. Yang Xi 楊羲, (330---86)

“The Scripture of the Yellow Court states: “Whoever circulates these heavenly channels within one’s mind, actualizing them within oneself day and night, will extend one’s life.”

黃黃庭經言言皆在心心內運天經晝夜存之自自長長生生

SUN SIMIAO'S ARTICULATION OF THE RELATIONSHIP  
BETWEEN QUIESCENCE AND PRIMAL QI

*The Inscription on the Actualization of the Spirit and the Refinement of the Qi*

(*Cun shen lian qi ming 存神煉氣銘*), Attr. Sun Simiao (孫思邈, 581---682).

“If you want to calm your spirit, you must refine your primal qi.”

若欲安神須煉元氣

“When the qi resides within the body, the spirit is calm in the sea of qi.

氣在身內神安氣海

FURTHER ARTICULATION OF OPENING AND CLOSING THE  
REN AND THE DU

*Reverend Cui's Mirror for the Collection of Medicine (Cui gong ru yao jing 崔  
公入藥鏡)* Attr. Cui Xifang 崔希范, ca. 880-940,)

There is an Upper Magpie Bridge and a Lower Magpie Bridge. Heaven resonates with the stars [above], and the earth resonates with the tides [below]. One must restore the root aperture and return to the Life Barrier, pass through the End Gate and penetrate the Mud Ball. 崔希范太元入藥鏡雲上鵲橋鵲橋天應星地應潮當地竅復命關貫尾閭通泥丸

EARLIEST EXTANT VERSION OF ZHANG BODUAN'S EIGHT  
VESSEL SCRIPTURE

Preserved in *Exposition on the Eight Extraordinary Vessels*

(*Qijing bamai kao* 奇經八脈考, 1577) Li Shizhen 李時珍

“The eight vessels are the root of the great way of former heaven and the ancestor of the Unitary qi.”

八脈者先天大道之根一氣之祖

Also a general summary of the *ba mai* in the *neidan* literature up through the Ming.

DETAILED DISCUSSIONS OF INTERNAL RESPIRATION AND  
THE WATER WHEEL

*Principles of the Balanced Cultivation of Innate Disposition and Potential*

(*Xing Ming Gui Zhi* 性命圭旨, 1615)

attr. Yin Zhenren 尹真人 (*Perfected Person Yin*),

ARTICULATION OF THE INTERRELATIONSHIP BETWEEN  
EIGHT VESSELS AND QUIESCENCE

*The Scripture on Wisdom and Potential* (*Hui Ming Jing* 慧命

經, 1794) Liu Huayang 柳華陽

Also

General statements regarding the life giving properties of the eight vessels

The eight vessels propagate and transform essence

The water wheel as a form of dharma

practice A later version of the *Eight*

*Vessel Scripture* Explicit discussion of the

Yin Heel Vessel

SPECIFIC INSTRUCTIONS ON OPENING THE EIGHT VESSELS,  
AND THE HEEL VESSEL.

*Clear Directions on Methods for Cultivating Innate Disposition and Potential* (*Xing ming fa jue ming zhi* 性命法覺明旨 1933)

Zhao Bichen 趙避

塵

ARTICULATE DISCUSSION OF THE ROLE OF THE EIGHT

VESSELS IN INTERNAL CULTIVATION\_\_

*Awakening to Reality, Foundations of Internal Alchemy* (*Wuzhen pian danfa yaozhi* 悟真篇 丹法要旨, 1982, Wang Mu (王沐)

## On Former and Latter Heaven Qi

*Mirror for Compounding Medicine*

(*Ru Yao Jing* 入藥鏡) Cui Xifan 崔希范 (ca. 880–940)

Former heaven's Qi, and Latter Heaven's Qi, once one attains them one is perpetually as if intoxicated.

先天炁。後天炁。得之者常似醉

## On the **Midline**.

“Move in accord with the *du* 督 *jing* 經。 and you can preserve your body, keep life whole Nourish your innermost viscera, last out your years.”

Zhuangzi 莊子, 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE

## On the Yin Heel **Vessel**

“The perfected person breathes by means of her heels.” 真人之息以踵

Zhuangzi 莊子, 4<sup>th</sup> Century BCE

“Only when the *yin qiao* is selected [for cultivation] first and only once this vessel has been activated, will all the other vessels open.” 惟在陰蹻為先此脈才動諸脈皆通

Attr. Zhang Boduan in *Qijing bamai kao*

“In the Cavity of Qi the *shen* silently abides. Without making the yin heel intersect, it intersects by itself. Without making it meet it meets by itself.”

Attr. Zhang Boduan in *Hui Ming Jing*

“This is regulating the breath. In regulating the breath, regulate and carry the breath of the Yin heel channel across. With the qi inside your heart, unite them inside the Cave of Qi where the *shen* congeals.”

Attr. Zhang Boduan in *Hui Ming Jing*

## On the Relationships Between the Eight Vessels within the Neidan Tradition

“Venerable teacher Liu Yunpu said: ‘protect Life’s Mandate and establish one's body, is the ren and the du, to eliminate disease and prolong one's life open the shu [wei] and the qiao.’” 劉云普老師曰：保命立身是任督，卻病延年通膈蹠，

Zhao Bichen 趙避塵 (1933)

### Great Unity Gives Birth to Water

“The Great Unity gives birth to Water.”

太一生水。

“Water in turn assists the Great Unity, in this way developing Heaven.”

天反輔大一，是以成地。

The *Guodian Laozi*, 郭店老子, late 4<sup>th</sup>  
cent. BCE

## Western Language Resources for the Primary Texts Discussed in this Class<sup>1</sup>

(ARRANGED IN ROUGHLY CHRONOLOGICAL ORDER)

**Neiye** 內業: “Inward Training”: Chapter 16 of the *Guanzi* 管子.

Translated by W. Allyn Rickett. *Guanzi: Political, Economic, and Philosophical Essays from Early China*. 2 vols. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998. (Vol. 1, 39---55)

Translated by Harold D. Roth. *Original Tao: Inward Training and the Foundations of Taoist Mysticism*. New York: Columbia University Press, 1999.

**Xing Qi Pei Feng Ming** 行氣玉佩銘: “Jade Pendant Inscription on Circulating the Qi.” Translated by Donald Harper. *Early Chinese Medical Literature: The Mawangdui Medical Manuscripts*. London and New York: Kegan Paul International, 1998.

**Guodian Laozi** 郭店老子: “The Guodian Laozi”

Translated by Robert G. Henricks. *Lao Tzu’s Tao Te Ching: A Translation of the Startling New Documents Found at Guodian*. New York: Columbia

University Press, 2000.

***Zhouyi cantong qi*** 周易參同契: “Token for the Kinship of the Three According to the Zhouyi”:

---

1 With reference to Komjathy



Appearing with commentary in, for example, DZ 999 and DZ 1004. Abbreviated as Cantong qi 參同契.

Translated by Wu Lu---ch'iang and Tenney L. Davis. "An Ancient Chinese Treatise on

Alchemy

Entitled Ts'an T'ung Ch'i." Isis 18 (1932) : 210---289.

Translated by Zhou Shiyi. The Kinship of the Three, According to the Book of

Changes. Changsha: Hunan jiaoyu, 1988.

Translated by Richard Bertschinger. The Secret of Everlasting Life: The First

Translation of the Ancient Chinese Text on Immortality. Rockport (MA): Element, 1994.

Selections translated by Eva Wong. Teachings of the Tao. Boston: Shambhala, 1997. (80---86)

Translated By Fabrizio Pregadio Mountain View Ca. Golden ELixr Press )???)@)

***Taishang huangting neijing yujing*** 太上黃庭內景玉經: "Most High Jade Scripture on the Internal View of the Yellow Court: DZ 331." Abbreviated as Huangting neijing jing 黃庭內景經.

Selections translated by Rolf Homann. Die wichtigsten Körpergottheiten im Huang---

t'ing---ching. Göppingen: Alfred Kümmerle, 1971.

Translated by Jane Huang. The Primordial Breath: An Ancient Chinese Way of

Prolonging Life through Breath Control. Volume 2. Torrance, Calif.: Original Books,

1990. (231---54)

Selections translated by Eva Wong. The Teachings of the Tao. Boston: Shambhala,

1997.

(68-72

Selections translated by Paul W. Kroll. "Body Gods and Inner Vision: The Scripture of the Yellow Court." In Religions of China in Practice, edited by Donald S. Lopez, Jr.,

149---55. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1996.

Translated by Patrick Carré. Le Livre de la Cour Jaune. N.p.: Éditions du Seuil, 1999.

***Ru Yao Jing*** 入藥鏡 Mirror of Compounding Medicine.

Translation by Fabrizio Pregadio, Commentary on the *Mirror for Compounding the Medicine* A Fourteenth-Century Work on Taoist Internal Alchemy, By Wang Jie (?-

ca. 1380), Golden Elixir Press, 2013.

***Wu zhen pian*** 悟真篇 “Awakening to Reality “

Translated by Fabrizio Pregadio. Awakening to Reality. Mountain View Ca. Golden Elixir Press, 2011.

***Qijing bamai kao*** 氣經八脈考, “Exposition on the Eight Extraordinary

Vessels.” Translated by Charles Chace and Miki Shima. An exposition on the eight extraordinary vessels : acupuncture, alchemy, and herbal medicine. Seattle, Eastland Press, 2010.

***Xing ming gui zhi*** 性命圭旨, “Principles of the Innate Disposition and the Lifespan” Partial Translation by Daniel Burton Rose. Integrating Inner Alchemy into Late

Ming Cultural History: A Contextualization and Annotated Translation of Principles of the Innate Disposition and the Lifespan (*Xingming guizhi* 性命圭旨) (1615), Master’s thesis, Department of Chinese Studies, Boulder, University of Colorado, 2009.

***Hui ming jing*** 慧明經, “Scripture on Wisdom and Potential” .

Translation by James Michael Nicholson. The Hui Ming Jing: A Translation and Discussion, Master’s thesis, Department of Asian Studies, Vancouver, University of British Columbia, 2000.

***Xingming fajue mingzhi*** 性命法訣明旨: “Illuminating Pointers to the Methods and

Instructions of Innate Nature and Life---Destiny” Zhao Bichen

Translated by Lu K’uan Yü (Charles Luk). Taoist Yoga: Alchemy and Immortality.

York Beach (ME): Samuel Weiser, Inc., 1973/1970.

***Weisheng shengli xue mingzhi*** 衛生生理學明指: “Clear Explanations of Hygiene and Physiology.” A related text by Zhao Bichen in French Translated by Catherine Despeux. Zhao Bichen: Traité d’alchimie et de physiologie taoïste.

Paris: Les Deux Océans, 1979.

***Wu Zhen Pian, Danfa yaozhi*** 悟真篇丹法要旨: “The Folio on Awakening to Reality

Essentials of its Alchemical Methods”

Translated by Fabrizio Pregadio. Foundations of Internal Alchemy; The Taoist

Practice of Neidan.” Mountain View Ca. , Golden Elixir Press, 2011.

Spreading the Dao, Managing Mastership and Performing Salvation: The Life and Alchemical Teachings of Chen Zhixi,

Clark Hudson, Doctoral Dissertation , Department of Religious Studies,  
Indiana University, December 2007

**For a more comprehensive list of Daoist texts available in Western  
Languages see:**

*Daoist Texts in Translation*, Louis Komjathy/Kang Siqu 康思奇, available online at  
Center for Daoist Studies

---

<sup>i</sup> Suzuki, Shunryu (1973) *Zen Mind, Beginners Mind*, Tokyo; p:108

<sup>ii</sup> Chace and Bensky ??????

<sup>iii</sup> 丹陽真人語錄 **CH04**

<sup>iv</sup>

<sup>v</sup> Chace and Shima