

ROBINET, ISABELLE. *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste: De l'unité et de la multiplicité*. Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 1995. 276 pages. 195 F; ISBN 2-204-04937-9.

This new volume on inner alchemy (*neidan* 內丹), the dominant mode of Taoist thought and practice since the Song dynasty, successfully collates and integrates the author's earlier studies. It consists of seven chapters and an appendix containing a full translation of Zhang Boduan's 張伯端 *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 [Verses of enlightenment and truth], with detailed annotation by the author.

The main part of the book begins with a general introduction (9–28) that discusses the creation of the world and the deconstruction of linear, rational thinking in the inner alchemical system. It explains the uses of the key trigrams Li 離 and Kan 坎 (water and fire) and supplies ample examples from the literature on the intricacies of the inner alchemical worldview.

The second chapter, “Historical Survey” (29–50), describes the beginnings of inner alchemy in the mid-Tang and its various schools throughout the Song and Yuan, pointing out major similarities and differences. This chapter is most useful in that it gives a first navigation chart through the deceptive waters of inner alchemical texts and authors. According to this chapter, inner alchemy has its foundations in *Yijing* 易經 [Book of changes] exegesis and traditional alchemical texts like the *Cantong qi* 參同契 [Tally to the Book of changes] (DZ 999 [Daozang texts after SCHIPPER 1975]). It is first apparent in the eighth-century works of Taoists like Ye Fashan 葉法善, who merge technical *Yijing* interpretation with Highest Clarity (*Shangqing* 上清) ecstatic visions. During the Song dynasty inner alchemy developed distinct northern and southern schools.

The northern school, tracing itself back to the legendary patriarchs Zhongli Quan 鍾離權 and Lu Dongbin 呂洞賓 (and thus also called the Zhong-Lu 鍾呂 school), was closely associated with Complete Perfection (Quanzhen 全真) Taoism. It is documented predominantly in the *Lingbao bifa* 靈寶畢法 [Ultimate methods of numinous treasure] (DZ 1191; see BALDRIAN-HUSSEIN 1984) and the *Zhong-lu chuandao ji* 鍾呂傳道記 [Record of Zhong and Lu's transmission of the Tao] (DZ 1017, ch. 39–41; see BOLTZ 1987, 139). Its teaching is strictly ascetic, eschewing sexual practices and favoring poverty in a primarily monastic setting. It places foremost emphasis on meditative and psychological transformation, favoring the cultivation of *xing* 性, inner nature, over that of *ming* 命, physical life.

The southern school shows a contrary predilection, not demanding a strictly monastic discipline. Its most famous representatives are Zhang Boduan (984–1082), Liu Cao 劉操 (c. 1134–1229), Bai Yuchan 白玉蟾 (c. 1209–1224), Chen Nan 陳楠 (d. 1213), and Li Daochun 李道純 (c. 1290). Major works include the *Wuzhen pian* (DZ 263, 27.1a; translated in the appendix) and the *Zhonghe ji* 中和記 [Collection of balance and harmony] (DZ 249; see CLEARY 1989). In the fourteenth century the two schools underwent a process of integration, documented most clearly in the works of Chen Chixu 陳致虛 (better known as Shangyangzi 上陽子; c. 1330), such as his *Jindan dayao* 金丹大要 [Great principles of the golden elixir] (DZ 1067; see BOLTZ 1987, 185). In this form inner alchemy has remained dominant in Taoist thought to the present day, unfolding in new variants and influencing both the literati and popular practice.

The historical discussion in this chapter is well founded and gives a much-needed survey of the different schools and tendencies. Regrettably there are no characters for relevant names and titles, and essential information—such as available editions and secondary discussions of the material—is often not provided. The reader is strongly advised to keep Judith BOLTZ's exemplary survey work (1987) at hand for reference to characters and more compact

descriptions of individual works and authors.

Chapter 3, "The Transcendent Unity of the Three Teachings" (51–74), discusses the inherent similarities and overarching concerns of Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism as conceived by Song writers. Agreeing that the three teachings are fundamentally one, they find the ideal mind of the sage in Confucian sincerity or reverence, Buddhist samādhi, and Taoist purity and tranquility. All traditions, moreover, practice self-cultivation, the Confucians studying to perfect the person, the Buddhists meditating to realize Buddha-nature, and the Taoists undertaking physical practices to realize their full life span or destiny. In addition, they all share the notion that every human being has its share in the One, often described as the person's *xing* 性, or inner nature, and agree that the ultimate goal is a state of utter spontaneity or nonpractice, when the self is naturally one with the underlying One—be it defined as the Great Ultimate, emptiness, or the Tao.

Chapter 4, "Alchemical Language or the Attempt to Say the Contradictory" (75–102), begins by stating that the Tao is basically ineffable and beyond form and language. However, just as the outside world is real, so is language, and its use has a specific effect. This is why language cannot just be ignored but must be applied systematically in the alchemical enterprise, where it becomes manifest in a series of changing metaphors that must be deconstructed continuously. Thus, as adepts advance, language as linear statement is replaced by poems, graphics, and charts. Most important among the latter are the *xiang* 象 or symbolic representations, such as the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Yijing* or the dragon and tiger of the alchemical process. Neither primordial nor part of ordinary life, they lie on a level between heaven and earth. Practitioners decipher and animate these symbols, continuously breaking through their obvious meanings and the semilinear, logical thinking they are associated with. Thus words are used in alchemical texts on a variety of different levels, the furnace, for example, referring to the Supreme Unity in which the Work takes place; the yang aspect of the transformation; the pure jade produced in the body; and so on. Multivalence of language encourages a fluidity of thinking that matches the flow of the alchemical powers in body, mind, and world.

Chapter 5, "Various Elements of Practice" (103–45), deals with fusion, fire regulation, and inversion. It describes the alchemical process as it begins with the opening of the Mysterious Pass, the first entryway into the alchemical universe, at the True Moment, the one instant when all energies are in correct constellation, when eternity breaks through to the present. Not definable in ordinary space or time, these two are to be found by the practitioner himself, who through them places himself at the brink of creation where he can reconstruct the unfolding of the universe in himself. Fusing the symbols of the world in his body, he finds the true lead and mercury and, working on a miniature cosmic schedule, controls their revolutions through fire regulation. Gaining ever more power over the process, he then inverts the symbols and the world, changing yin into yang, above into below, and passes through various stages to reach full attainment.

The stages of attainment are the subject of chapter 6, "The Different Levels" (147–64). These levels take the adept from essence to energy, from energy to spirit, and from spirit to emptiness or the Tao, beginning with the transformation of essence (semen in men, menstrual blood in women) to energy, a purer and more primordial life force. Within this energy a pure pearl emerges that is transformed into an immortal embryo through the alchemical fusion of the adept's internal yin and yang. Yang at this point is identified as the heart, the agent fire, the trigram Li, pure lead, and the dragon, while yin is linked with the kidneys, the agent water, the trigram Kan, pure mercury, and the tiger. Over several cycles and through various inversions, the energies revolve and make the embryo grow. Once it is complete, it forms a pure spirit body of immortality, which is a body of pure YANG and pure LIFE (higher forms,

not counterparts of yin and death). Born as an independent entity, it exits the body through the Heavenly Gate at the top of the head and eventually blends its existence with emptiness, granting the adept oneness with the Tao.

Chapter 7, "The Idea of *Xing*" (165–95), focuses on the notion of inner nature as it developed in the different traditions. Consisting of the characters for "heart" and "life," inner nature was defined in Confucianism as the innate quality of a person, the power between heaven and earth that represents the universal principle (*li* 理) in human beings. In Buddhism it was linked with the notion of Buddha-nature, and in ancient Taoism it was described in terms of spontaneity or naturalness (*ziran* 自然). *Xing* became a core concept in the cultivation of inner alchemy, the psychological center of the person as opposed to his physical life or destiny, then called *ming* 命. Only the dual perfection of both, the understanding went, could lead to the highest permanence in immortality.

A complex yet comprehensive description of the entire process and its multilayered symbolism is presented in the appendix (197–254) with its annotated translation of the *Wuzhen pian*. A sequence of ninety-nine four-line stanzas, this text is one of the key classics of inner alchemy and has furnished a model for many of its works. It is both beautiful and highly obscure, and Isabelle Robinet's translation here is clearly one of the high points both of the volume and of her inner-alchemical studies. It not only greatly improves CLEARY's earlier rendering (1987), but also provides an interpretation of the poems and their metaphors that is unmatched in depth and subtlety.

The entire book, then, the result of many years of intensive study, shows to what degree even the obscurity of inner alchemy can be successfully elucidated through continued exploration. It is an excellent synthesis and enlargement of the author's earlier work—indeed, most of the chapters, with the exception of the second chapter on history and the translation in the appendix, are either reprinted or rewritten from articles published previously (ROBINET 1986, 1990, 1992). That this book is not the endpoint of Robinet's research is demonstrated in other, more recent studies that take up further aspects of inner alchemy's worldview and practice (ROBINET 1994, 1994a, 1995).

The book concludes with a glossary of technical terms and an index in two sections: one on authors, the other on general subjects. Unfortunately, neither index is very detailed, and few authors' names and titles of texts are given in characters, making the book hard to use for the specialist. Still, the work is an important milestone in our understanding of inner alchemy, summarizing the sophisticated worldview of this form of Taoist thought in an in-depth historical perspective and presenting a much-needed theoretical analysis of its complexities.

#### REFERENCES CITED

- BALDRIAN-HUSSEIN, Farzeen  
 1984 *Procédés secrets du joyau magique*. Paris: Les Deux Océans.
- BOLTZ, Judith M.  
 1987 *A survey of Taoist literature: Tenth to seventeenth centuries*. China Research Monograph 32. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- CLEARY, Thomas  
 1987 *Understanding reality: A Taoist alchemical classic by Chang Po-tuan*. Honolulu: University of Hawaii Press.  
 1989 *The book of balance and harmony: Chung he chi*. San Francisco: North Point Press.
- ROBINET, Isabelle  
 1986 La notion de hsing dans le taoïsme et son rapport avec celle du Confucianisme. *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106: 183–96.  
 1990 Recherche sur l'alchimie intérieure (*neidan*): L'école Zhengyuan. *Cahiers*

*d'Extrême-Asie* 5: 141–62.

1992 Le monde à l'enverse dans l'alchimie intérieure taoïste. *Revue d'Histoire des Religions* 209/3: 239–57.

1994 Le rôle et le sens des nombres dans la cosmologie et l'alchimie taoïste. *Extrême-Orient, Extrême-Occident* 16: 93–120.

1994a Primus covens et création récurrente. *Taoist Resources* 5/1: 29–69.

1995 Un, deux, trois—les différentes modalités de l'Un et sa dynamique. *Cahiers d'Extrême-Asie* 8: 175–220.

SCHIPPER, Kristofer M.

1975 *Concordance du Tao Tsang: Titres des ouvrages*. Paris: Publications de l'École Française d'Extrême-Orient.

Livia KOHN

Boston University

SHEN CONGWEN. *Imperfect Paradise: Twenty-four Stories*. Edited by Jeffrey Kinkley. Translated by Jeffrey Kinkley and others. Fiction from Modern China. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 1995. 537 pages. Cloth US\$42.00; ISBN 0-8248-1635-8. Paper US\$19.95; ISBN 0-8248-1715-X.

"Welcome the revolution; beware the revolutionaries" might well be the epigraph for this wonderful collection of twenty-four short stories aptly titled *Imperfect Paradise*. Shen Congwen (1902–1988), greatly sympathetic to the sufferings of the common people under the landed rich and petty officials, nevertheless saw the same foibles in both the Nationalist and Communist revolutionaries. Writing stories that tell of his experiences as a child soldier under the old order and that now satirize the Communist ideologues, now criticize those in power for unjustly eliminating Communist supporters, Shen made himself welcome nowhere. He had belled the cat. Having had his say, he stopped writing fiction in 1949. In that same year he also tried to stop living. Over thirty years later his stories came to life again. In 1983 his collected works, with a few revisions for safety's sake, were published in mainland China. In 1987 the ban on his works was lifted in Taiwan.

The title of the collection serves as a reminder that, regardless of how much Shen criticized the rich, the powerful, the citified, and the academic, he was not unaware of the jealousies and evils lurking in the hearts of the rural folk he loved. China, with its long history and marvelous people, is a paradise but an imperfect one, just as the Garden of Eden became an imperfect one. If this Judeo-Christian Biblical image seems out of place in a Daoist, Buddhist universe, it should be noted that Shen's stories show Western literary, philosophical, and religious influences as well as traditional Chinese and ethnic Miao elements. With his rich mind and sympathetic heart Shen wrote lyrical, direct stories that resonate on several levels. When I first read some of the short introductions to the stories (each story is introduced by its translator), I felt that they were claiming too much for Shen. However, as I read the stories I was fascinated by the range of characters, backgrounds, and approaches to life and art. The claims are justified.

The twenty-four stories are arranged into seven groups, with an appendix containing nonfiction work: 1) New and Old; Paradise and Perdition; 2) The Vitality of the Primitive; 3) Military Lives; 4) Country Folk; 5) Revolution and Urban Malaise; 6) Later Elegies and Meditations on the Country; 7) Modernist Works; Appendix: Nonfiction Works. This arrangement helps the reader appreciate the stories in context, as it were, since the stories in