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Introduction

What this Book is About

Inner Alchemy

“Inner alchemy” is the term now most frequently used, by Westerners as well as by Chinese scholars, to describe a tradition of meditation and self-cultivation that forms the main form of individual practice in the religious tradition of Daoism since the Song period (960–1276). But what is inner alchemy? In this study I try to formulate some answers to that question. Let me begin this introduction with a short and simple description that will give us a starting point for a detailed examination. “Inner alchemy” is the English translation for *neidan* 内丹, a term that literally means “inner cinnabar” or “inner elixir.” The “elixir” refers to the practice of alchemy, hence the translation inner alchemy. It contrasts with *waidan* 外丹, which can be translated as “outer alchemy.” This outer alchemy refers to what we usually simply call alchemy: the use of minerals and herbs and other ingredients to create an elixir of immortality or the melting of base metals to transform them into noble metals (gold and silver). Inner alchemy is a tradition of meditation and self-cultivation that uses the alchemical terminology as metaphors for the transformative processes that are thought to occur in bodies and minds during meditation. This name may have originated in the Tang or even earlier but only became current in the Song period.¹

Inner alchemy does not refer to a distinctive school in a sociological sense. It is an abstract entity, used as a term of categorization to group together and single out a variety of actual communities, persons, texts, doctrines, and practices among the larger category of Daoist self-cultivation. This category has no absolute boundaries nor a precise definition but is obviously based on the shared characteristic of the use of alchemical terminology. This absence of sharp definitions did not prevent the inner alchemists from having some sense of a shared tradition. But, lacking an overarching structure, the various lineages grouped under the rubric of “inner alchemy” each had their own interpretations of what this shared tradition really was. For insiders, their own interpretation would represent the univocal “true” interpretation. From the perspective as outside observers of these traditions, we cannot simply take one account of “inner alchemy” as the standard account if we want to avoid reproducing the inter-sectarian biases of these competing lineages.

In this study, we put the spotlight on one interpretation of inner alchemy, which can be found in the writings of the Ming dynasty Longmen master Wu Shouyang, who will be introduced next. These views are not “inner alchemy” but only one specific textual representation of inner alchemy. They represent Wu Shouyang’s view of what the whole tradition of inner alchemy was. Or, at least, they represent this author’s selection and interpretation of textual fragments of his explicitly stated views on inner alchemy. In the last fifty years or so, scholars have proposed to understand categorization as a process of grouping things based on prototypes.² This means that instead of searching for clear boundaries and essential features, we look for prototypes and family resemblances. Wu Shouyang’s interpretation of inner alchemy is generally regarded as a more prototypical interpretation of inner alchemy than other interpretations. Its broad synthesis, its comprehensive, systematic, and detailed exposition of theory and practice, and its relatively accessible language seem to have assured that, during the eighteenth and nineteenth century, Wu’s texts became best-sellers in the genre and hence played an important role in the formulation of the standard account of inner

¹ See Baldrian Hussein, “Inner Alchemy: Notes on the Origin and Use of the Term Neidan.” Those who we now call inner alchemists appear to have referred to themselves mostly in terms that point to their specific lineage (for example, Longmen), terms that suggested their soteriological objective (way of immortality), or indeed some variations on the alchemical theme such as “Great Way of the Golden Elixir.”

² For the application of prototype theory to religion, see Saler, *Conceptualizing Religion*. For the application of these theories to inner alchemy, see Hudson, “Spreading the Dao.”

alchemy in the early modern period.

Wu Shouyang

Wu Shouyang 伍守陽 (1574–after 1641) has been widely recognized as one of the most influential inner alchemists of the early modern period, playing a central role in the formulation of a standard account of inner alchemy. Born in the late Ming as the third son of a mid-level administrator from Jiangxi province, Wu Liangqian 伍良遷 received the religious name “Shouyang” when, instead of following his father’s footsteps and pursuing a career in government, he chose to become part of a religious family. That is to say, at age nineteen, having lost his father at age five and having lived through three years of death and destruction when his home region was struck by severe floods and famines, he encountered Cao Huanyang who would initiate him into a local Longmen lineage. After about twenty years of gradual initiation, Wu became a Longmen master in his own right. He appears to have become the instructor of a local prince-to-be, a scion of the imperial Zhu family that had its descendants act as local nobility without any real administrative power. Wu later moved to Nanjing—at that point in time perhaps the second biggest city in the world after what is now called Beijing—where he operated a studio to instruct his students. From 1613 onwards, when he started to instruct the Prince of Ji, Wu also started to write. Written answers to the questions of the prince and Wu’s other students were gradually developed into essays on the basic aspects of inner alchemy. Between 1613 and 1641, he would write and publish essays, dialogues, verses, jottings, and an autobiography. These writings were printed and reprinted with some regularity since 1622 until today.

In the early nineteenth century, Wu Shouyang was incorporated in the newly created official version of Longmen history. His new biography presented Wu as a direct student of Wang Changyue, the patriarch who institutionalized the Longmen school after 1656. Wu’s writings were at that time also incorporated into the *Daozang jiyao*, originally a collection of Daoist writings associated with a local lineage, which developed into the main canonical collection of the late imperial period. Also in the early nineteenth century, former Buddhist monk Liu Huayang turned to inner alchemy and wrote two treatises on the subject. He claimed to have been instructed by Wu Shouyang. Just before the end of the nineteenth century, a group of local self-cultivation enthusiasts had Liu Huayang’s writings reprinted together with those of Wu Shouyang. They called this collection the *Wu-Liu Lineage of Immortality*. Reprinted numerous times since its first appearance, it is especially this anthology that assured the wide renown of Wu’s account of inner alchemy.³

Wu Shouyang is now remembered as an inner alchemy master, a Longmen master, or as the founder of a Wu-Liu branch of the Longmen lineage. His writings are among the most reprinted of this genre. They are generally considered to be a relatively straightforward and easy to understand formulation of the esoteric and difficult to understand tradition. They are also generally considered to be representative of the mature formulation of inner alchemy, the “standard account” of modern inner alchemy, and thus, we could say, of Daoist self-cultivation. It was Wu Shouyang’s stated ambition to write a straightforward and comprehensive account of inner alchemy. He appears to have succeeded in this ambition. This is the first book-length study in English of Wu Shouyang’s life, writings, and ideas.

Some Notes on Semantics

Immortals

A very brief history of the concept of the “immortals” could look like this. Before the Han dynasty, the character *xian* 仙 (also 僊 and very rarely 仙) is first found in a few scattered passages where it is used as the name for a fabulous being, a flying superhuman, that is presented in a mythological context. It appears in stories and is perhaps best compared with mythical beings from other folklore; think of the English fairies or the German elves. Between the Han and the fourth century, this *xian* starts to appear in systematic descriptions, in collections of hagiographies on these beings,⁴ in dictionaries,⁵ and, importantly, in manuals

³ We might say the renown of the “Wu-Liu” account of inner alchemy. I do not examine the ideas of Liu Huayang in this study. We can say, however, that they are based in large part on Wu Shouyang’s writings.

⁴ The two most important early hagiographical collections of *xian* are the *Lixian zhuàn*, attributed to Liu Xiang 劉向 (77–8 or 6 BCE) and the *Shenxian zhuàn* (early fourth century), traditionally ascribed to Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343).

⁵ The *Shuowen jiezi* (121 CE) defines *xian* 僊 as “live long and move away 長生僊去” and *xian* 仙 as “appearance of a person on a

describing how ordinary humans can become *xian* themselves.⁶ In the fourth century, Ge Hong argued that people can definitely attain *xian*-hood and he presented a typology of *xian*-hood and a discussion of the various methods and their relative merits to attain *xian*-hood. From then on, the idea was never generally accepted but always the subject of discussion, as demonstrated by the continuous appearance of *xian* apologetics.⁷ After Ge Hong, new texts continued to redefine *xian*-hood, offering new typologies and adding new connotations. The Zhong-Lü texts seem to have had the most impact as their typology appears to be the most common from the Song onwards. As we will see (in chapter four), Wu Shouyang's own typology was based on this Zhong-Lü typology.

The conventional translation of *xian* used to be “immortal,” but since the 1960s the translation “transcendent” has gradually been gaining currency among some scholars.⁸ The main arguments for not using “immortal” are that the graph does not literally mean “immortal” and that these *xian* are also not necessarily attributed with the quality of “immortality.” The term “transcendent” is supposed to suggest the upward movement “in space or, metaphorically, in station.” As for the etymology, it depends on which graph we are using. The most common graph suggests a man and a mountain while the next most common graph, seen above, suggests a man in movement. But looking for the “true meaning” in a character's etymology is a flawed strategy. When we survey the actual usage of *xian* we can only conclude that it was used to describe a variety of phenomena. A *xian* can be physically immortal and a *xian* can be a spirit in the heavens. A *xian* can also be a ghost that dwells in the realm of darkness. A *xian* can be an animal, as in the case of immortal foxes or the monkey Sun Wukong. The term *xian* was also used to translate some of the concepts in the Buddhist scriptures. It was used to translate the saintly figure of the *rishi* that appears in Vedic texts. But it is also used in ways that effectively suggest that a *xian* is the same as a buddha.

For the second argument, that the *xian* were not necessarily thought to be “physically” immortal, we need to unpack the assumptions about “mortality.” To be “immortal” literally means “not dying.” In the Chinese context, the basic understanding of “death” (*si* 死) was the exhaustion or the disintegration of *qi*.¹⁰ There were different views of what happened to the spirit or soul after death. For anyone who accepted the doctrine of rebirth, death was a stage between one life and the next. We usually refer to this doctrine as the “cycle of rebirth” but the Chinese literally means cycle of “birth and death.” In the context of religious self-cultivation, basing my remarks primarily on Wu Shouyang's writings, the cultivators tried to avoid both death and rebirth. In other words, their goal was to transcend the cycle of birth and death. In the final stage, as we will examine in detail, they left their bodies, leaving behind a corpse. But they certainly would not refer to this as “death.”

As we will see, *xian* is a general term for those who are successful in their cultivation and there is a hierarchy of specific types of *xian* that corresponds with the stages of cultivation. When we divide the whole cultivation process in two stages, the first stage involves conserving the *qi* in order to prevent the end of the lifespan (*ming*) or physical death. This then corresponds with the common English understanding of literal

mountaintop.” The *Shiming* (ca. 200 CE) defines *xian* 仙 as “to get old and not die 老而不死[曰仙].” It further explains that a *xian* 仙 “moves into the mountains 遷入山也.”

⁶ Ge Hong's *Baopu zi* 抱朴子 (early fourth century) is the first work to systematically describe how an ordinary human being was thought to be able to attain *xian*-hood.

⁷ The Tang period Daoist Wu Yun 吳筠 (?–778), for example, wrote a text called “On the Possibility of Learning to be a Spirit Immortal” (*Shenxian kexue lun* 神仙可學論). But many texts on cultivation include apologetic features, arguing for the existence of immortals against disbelievers.

⁸ One of the earliest publications (perhaps the earliest?) using this translation appears to be Schafer, “Thoughts about a Students' Dictionary of Classical Chinese.” Later scholars occasionally followed Schafer's example, but the translation appears to have gained traction in the beginning of this century. Bokenkamp, and following him Campany, argued for the translation “transcendent” while also cautioning for the potential misapprehensions invited by this term. See Bokenkamp, *Early Daoist Scriptures*, 21–23; Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*, 4–5. While Campany in this earlier study only suggested the translation “ascendant” as an alternative, he maintains in a later study that this translation would be “the most literal and philologically accurate translation” but actually seems to leave the term about as much times untranslated as translating it as “transcendent.” See Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 33–34. Scholars who have objected to “transcendent” include Zhang Ji and Thomas Michael. See Zhang Ji, *One and Many*, 115–117; Michael, *In the Shadows of the Dao*, 119ff. The reasons they give include: (1) the metaphysical suggestions of this term; (2) the fact that there are different types of *xian*; (3) the fact that there are definitely beings called *xian* which are not adequately described as “transcendent.” I have gone back and forth on this issue between immortal, *xian*, and transcendent, during the years of writing this study and also settled on “immortal” because pages full of transcription make for tedious reading.

⁹ Campany, *Making Transcendents*, 34.

¹⁰ The *Zhuangzi* already defines life as a concentration of *qi* and death as a disintegration of this *qi*: “Man's life is a coming together of breath. If it comes together, there is life; if it scatters, there is death. 人之生，氣之聚也。聚則為生，散則為死。” See Watson, *The Complete Works of Chuang Tzu*, 235.

“immortality.” This first stage is a means to buy time to work on the inner nature (*xing*) in order to ultimately be able to leave the body and enjoy spiritual immortality. The second stage consists of transforming the spirit so that it can exist independently from the body without being susceptible to the cycle of rebirth. When the spirit finally leaves the body, it leaves behind a corpse but it does not experience “death,” as it was understood by these cultivators, and neither is it reborn. It just continues to exist in a different form.

In the Chinese texts, these discussions appear to be besides the point. Although it is not explicitly formulated in these terms, I suggest that for the cultivators the main concern was not understood in terms of the body or the spirit but as a matter of the continuous existence of the self. In the first stages, the cultivator would conserve his physical life because an early death meant the demise of the self. When the survival of the self had been guaranteed by securing its physical container, the cultivator could prepare the self, corresponding with the spirit, to exist independently of the body. Ultimately, the survival of the body was always precarious. If not dying a natural death through the exhaustion of *qi*, one would still be vulnerable to accidents or violent attacks and, in any case, the body would not be able to survive the destruction of the cosmos at the end of a *kalpa*. Hence, in order for the self to survive one needed to create an immortal, independent spirit that could exit the cosmos all together. Although there is no perfectly satisfying translation for *xian*, I use the traditional translation “immortal” in this study because it still seems to me to be the next best thing.

Xing and *Ming*

Human life was seen as consisting of two aspects called *xing* and *ming*.¹¹ The character *xing* 性 depicts a “heart” (心 ; i.e., *xin* 心) and “life” (*sheng* 生). The character *ming* 命 is said to depict a “mouth” (*kou* 口) and “giving an order” (*ling* 令), conveying the idea of a spoken command. The word *xing* is often translated as “inner nature” or simply “nature.” The word *ming* is commonly translated in various ways, including destiny, fate, and vital force. Here, we are concerned in the first place with Wu Shouyang’s understanding of these terms and they are best discussed in combination since they are understood by him as a binary pair. I believe we can identify four important connotations. First, the *xing* is associated with the spirit (*shen*) and *ming* is associated with *qi*. Second, the *xing* is associated with the noncorporeal aspects of a person and *ming* with the corporeal aspects; in this sense we might say that *xing* represents spiritual life and *ming* represents physical life. Third, *xing* is associated with yin and *ming* with yang. Fourth, *xing* is associated with Buddhism and *ming* is associated with Daoism. This is because Buddhists are considered, by Wu, to emphasize the cultivation of *xing*, meaning primarily the practice of samadhi and the emptying of the mind. Hence, Buddhism is sometimes referred to as the “lineage of *xing*” (*xingzong* 性宗). Daoism is considered to emphasize the cultivation of *ming*, meaning primarily the practice of the first stages of inner alchemy that involve the immortality of the body. In a table, these connotations can be arranged as follows:

Table 1: Integrated cultivation of *xing* and *ming*

“inner nature” (<i>xing</i> 性)	“lifespan” (<i>ming</i> 命)
spirit	<i>qi</i>
spiritual life	physical life
yin	yang
Buddhism	Daoism

The main principle of Wu’s inner alchemy is the “integrated cultivation of *xing* and *ming*.” This expression covers all these meanings. It means that an adept should first cultivate his physical life and then his spiritual life. He should cultivate both the *qi* and the spirit. He should use the yang *qi* to transform the yin spirit. If he does this, he will cultivate in accordance with the main teachings of Buddhism and Daoism and he will attain buddhahood which is identical to immortality. There are of course no English words with these exact connotations. As approximations, however, I translate *xing* as “inner nature” and *ming* as “lifespan.”¹²

¹¹ The modern compound *xingming* 性命 means “life.”

¹² See Lupke, ed., *The Magnitude of Ming*, for several insightful chapters on the complex concept of *ming*. Also see van Enckevort, “The Three Treasures” for a more detailed discussion of Wu Shouyang’s understanding of *xing* and *ming*.

Jing, Qi, and Shen

Three concepts that will continuously be used in this study are the so-called three treasures: *jing* 精, *qi* 炁, and *shen* 神.¹³ It will be convenient to briefly address these here to facilitate the understanding of what follows. These terms are each used in two meanings. In brief, inner alchemists assumed the existence of two domains of reality they called the “pre-heavenly” and the “post-heavenly;” the first referring to the time before the creation of the cosmos and the second referring to the now existing cosmos. We could also say that the “post-heavenly” refers to ordinary life while the “pre-heavenly” refers to a primordial domain at the beginning of the cosmos. These terms suggest a chronology (first pre-heaven then post-heaven), but they are not understood as strictly chronological states. The pre-heavenly sphere is still thought to exist as a sort of substratum of ordinary reality, the *real* reality that hides behind the curtains of the post-heavenly “ordinary life” scenery. Furthermore, since the coming into existence of a human being during embryogenesis is thought of as analogous to the coming into existence of the cosmos during cosmogenesis, the unborn child is thought of as making a journey from the pre-heavenly to the post-heavenly and thus the same terms also suggest the idea of pre-natal and post-natal. Moreover, since the pre-heaven/pre-natal suggests the original state of being it also suggests “innate” while the post-heaven/post-natal suggests “acquired.”

Now, the terms *jing*, *qi*, and *shen* are used in a pre-heavenly and in a post-heavenly sense. In the post-heavenly sense, in Wu Shouyang’s texts, they refer to the Chinese analogues of semen (*jing*), breath (*qi*), and mind/cognition/consciousness (*shen*). The analogy with semen and breath is pretty straightforward. The analogy of *shen* with similar concepts in modern English is more difficult and I will use a translation that best fits the context: mind, cognition, cognitive spirit. In the pre-heavenly sense, it is more difficult to find analogues in the English language. I will use the conventional “essence” for *jing* and “spirit” for *shen*. Common translations for *qi* include “pneuma” or “energy.” The Greek “pneuma” suggests either breath/air or spirit and neither are the connotations of pre-heavenly *qi*. Energy suggests either a modern concept from physics or a vaguely defined concept used in modern spirituality. But *qi* was differentiated from plain breath or air on the one side and from sentient “spirit” on the other side. It did certainly not conform with the modern physical concept of energy and there are also important differences with common descriptions of spiritual conceptualizations of “energy,” probably most importantly the fact that such usages of “energy” usually define this term in contrast with “matter” while *qi* is described as the basis of all matter. For such reasons, I will use the transcription *qi* instead of a translation.

Miscellaneous Semantical Issues

A few more brief notes on semantics. When I mean to refer to “outer alchemy”—in the sense of chemically manipulating material substances to produce elixirs or noble metals—I will simply speak of “alchemy,” unless I suspect that my meaning could be unclear. This should then cause no confusion with “inner alchemy.” The heart (*xin* 心) was recognized as a physical organ in the chest but it was also the location of mental and spiritual activity. The *shen*, resembling our “spirit,” was thought to be located in the heart. For this reason, I will often translate *xin* directly as “mind,” rather than heart or heart-mind. I will also regularly use the terms “orthodoxy” and “heterodoxy.” As Michel Strickmann pointed out, these terms could give the false suggestion of “hierarchical authority and papal fulminations” while that would be quite alien to the Chinese context.¹⁴ I use these terms as translations for the Chinese *zheng* 正 and *xie* 邪 as well as some other terms with the same connotation. In the context of the debates between inner alchemists or between them and Buddhists or adherents of other traditions, *zheng* and *xie* signified what was considered correct and good as distinguished from what was considered perverse and evil. Since there was no overarching social structure of inner alchemists and Daoists, no central authority to deliver the final say on matters of doctrine to a hierarchy of obedient clergymen, nor an ecumenical council to discuss the correct interpretation of scripture and tradition, there was also no generally agreed upon sense of orthodoxy and its mirror image heterodoxy. The use of these terms should thus be regarded as the polemical labels from one person or group against another, pertaining to a sectarian conflict in which one man’s orthodoxy is another man’s heterodoxy.

¹³ These concepts are examined in van Enckevort, “The Three Treasures.”

¹⁴ Strickmann, “History, Anthropology, and Chinese Religion,” 222ff.

Literature Review

The life and works of Wu Shouyang have been studied by practitioners and scholars—traditional and modern—from a historical and religious perspective. Traditional scholars, such as Chen Yingning, Xiao Tianshi, and Chen Zhibin were especially interested in matters of lineage, details of practice, and a ranking of the teachings.¹⁵ Modern research on Wu started in the 1970s in Western languages and in the 1990s in Chinese.¹⁶ Historians of religion have mentioned Wu Shouyang in connection with the Longmen school. Inner alchemy scholars have tried to analyse Wu’s approach to self-cultivation, in parts or as a whole, in isolation or together with similar works. They have tried to assess its position in the historical development of inner alchemy. Traditional scholars, with the exception of Chen Dunfu, have accepted the traditional Longmen biography. Modern scholars, starting with Liu Ts’un-yan, started to take a critical look at the biographical materials with mixed results. Little has been done in terms of textual criticism and the work that has been done was mostly done without proper documentation.

Biography

As will be examined in chapter one, Wu Shouyang’s life has been the subject of a number of biographies as well as one autobiography. Among these, a biography in the main historiographical source of the Longmen lineage, the *Jin’gai Mind-Lamp*,¹⁷ has had considerable influence on the received view of Wu’s life. However, anyone who has made a comparative study of the available biographical materials must come to the conclusion that this Longmen biography is in many aspects demonstrably inaccurate.¹⁸ A study by Monica Esposito has sufficiently demonstrated that this Longmen biography is fundamentally unreliable.¹⁹ Since almost all studies of Wu’s life have either based their basic data in large part on the Longmen biography or on earlier studies based on this biography, all these studies suffer from the inaccuracies of this Longmen biography. Even after Esposito’s study, scholars still mention these data from the Longmen biography. As a result, we can frankly say that, with a few exceptions, most studies on Wu Shouyang are unreliable in terms of biography.

In brief, these inaccurate data concern the dates and places of birth and death of Wu and his family members, the nature of their relationships, the identities of Wu’s masters and disciples, the texts attributed to Wu, and events in his life story.²⁰ In Western-language studies, additional confusion has been introduced by two early studies, both mentioning inaccurate dates which are repeated to this day.²¹ Valuable

¹⁵ Chen Yingning and Xiao Tianshi wrote influential evaluations of inner alchemy personages and lineages and they are discussed below. Chen Zhibin was part of the Wu-Liu lineage on Taiwan and wrote various works published by this lineage. Most importantly here, he wrote an annotated translation in the modern vernacular. See Chen, *Wu-Liu xianzong baihuayi*. For more on Chen, this lineage, and their publications, see Xiao Jinming, “Quanzhendao.”

¹⁶ Joseph Needham mentions Wu Shouyang a few times, in passing, but he evidently has no clear idea who he is and confuses him with Chen Niwan 陳泥丸 (?–1213; Chen Nan 陳楠). He is primarily interested in one edition of Wu’s works which contains a system of symbols. See SCC 5. Judith Boltz included a brief survey on Wu’s writings in *A Survey of Taoist Literature*. After these early studies by Liu and Boltz in the mid-eighties, Wu Shouyang did not appear in any studies of Daoism until the turn of the millennium. The *Daoism Handbook* (2000) contains two chapters that include discussions of Wu Shouyang: De Bruyn, “Daoism in the Ming (1368–1644)” and Esposito, “Daoism in the Qing (1644–1911).” Elena Valussi mentions Wu Shouyang a few times in her PhD dissertation, most interestingly noting that the writer of one of the main texts on female inner alchemy specifically mentions the writings of Wu Shouyang and Liu Huayang “as the main source of instructions for women who had already progressed past the steps involving the refining of their specifically female elements.” See Valussi, “Beheading the Red Dragon,” 378. Wu is mentioned a number of times in the EOT (2004), most importantly in entries on “Wu Shouyang” and “Wu-Liu pai” by Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein. Xun Liu’s study of Chen Yingning contains a few interesting passages on Wu Shouyang, including a discussion of verses composed by a Republican era adept named Chang Zunxian 常遵先 (1873–?), modelled after the verses of Wu’s masters Li Xu’an and Cao Huanyang. See Liu, *Daoist Modern*.

¹⁷ See chapter one.

¹⁸ Briefly put, because much of the information in this biography does not agree with the information from all other biographies and only appears in this Longmen biography which appears in many respects to be constructed to codify the official version of Longmen history. At the same time, the reliability of the other biographies should be considered much higher since they include the autobiography, a family genealogy, and local gazetteers.

¹⁹ Esposito, “The Longmen School and its Controversial History during the Qing Dynasty.”

²⁰ Details can be found in chapter one.

²¹ Liu, “Wu Shou-yan: The Return to the Pure Essence” and Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*. Liu gives Wu dates as c. 1563 to c. 1632 and Boltz as 1552 to 1641. The origin of Liu’s mistake is not clear. Boltz appears to have misread the first lines of Wu’s autobiography as she takes the dates of Wu’s mother as Wu’s dates. Baldrian-Hussein’s article on Wu Shouyang in the EOT is mainly based on the autobiography, although some details from the Longmen biography have still found their way in the entry. Thus, she gives Duanyang as one of Wu’s names, his date of death as 1644, and Wu Shouxu as his “brother.” She concludes,

contributions to the study of Wu's life have been published by Monica Esposito, Stephen Eskildsen, and Richard Wang. Esposito published the above-mentioned chapter on the Longmen school, comparing Wu's Longmen biography with his autobiography concluding the unreliability of the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp*.²² Stephen Eskildsen has provided a mostly accurate summary of Wu's autobiography in one of his articles.²³ Wang has published on Wu's relation with the Prince of Ji, discussed in detail in chapter one.²⁴

In Chinese-language studies, the most important study on Wu's life is Ding Changchun's published PhD thesis.²⁵ Ding mentions the problematic nature of the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* but, without providing reason, still retains some of its details. Hence, some of these details, such as Wu's date of death, lack textual support. Another positive exception is a chapter on Wu Shouyang in Qing Xitai's *History of Chinese Daoism*.²⁶ The authors mention the unreliability of the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* and base the biographical narrative primarily on the autobiography.

Textual Criticism

An actual critical edition of Wu Shouyang's complete writings, based on a systematic collation of textual variants and provided with a critical apparatus, has not been produced. Nevertheless, some scholars (not necessarily in the professional sense) have made great efforts to collect, compare, and emend Wu's writings and even though most of them have unfortunately not properly documented their emendations we may still briefly note their contributions.²⁷

In 1989, Tao Bingfu edited the first new edition of Wu Shouyang's texts in the PRC titled *Punctuated and Annotated Wu-Liu Lineage of Immortality* (*Pingdian Wu-Liu xianzong* 評點伍柳仙宗).²⁸ The text was set in traditional characters and in a vertical script but with modern style punctuation. Tao added his own notes and together with the help of four colleagues produced this new text on the basis of a comparison of three editions. In 1990, a second printing was published but according to Tao this should be considered a new edition. New emendations were made on a comparison with further editions. In the preface, Tao mentions that he received great help in comparing the texts for this second printing from Tan Lisan, whom we will have occasion to mention again below.

In 1991, Tao published yet another new edition with his own commentary, titled *Wu-Liu Lineage of Immortality with Summaries* (*Wu-Liu xianzong ji yaozhi* 伍柳仙宗及要旨).²⁹ This edition is set in simplified characters and a horizontal typography. Further, admitting that his earlier publication was merely a punctuated text and not actually a "critical edition" as its title suggested, this edition includes Tao's comments on the key points of each section (the "summaries").³⁰ So, still not actually a "critical edition" in the philological sense, this was basically a commentary. The text itself is based on the second edition of the *Punctuated and Annotated Wu-Liu Lineage of Immortality*, with again some unspecified emendations. Tao's research was clearly directed at a public of *qigong* practitioners and it is unfortunate that he did not include a critical apparatus documenting his emendations since that would have greatly enhanced the scholarly usefulness of his efforts.

In 2002, a collection of texts from Jiangxi was published as the *Collectanea from Yuzhang* (*Yuzhang congshu* 豫章叢書) and this collection includes a new edition of Wu Shouyang's *Straightforward Essays*.³¹ It is set in traditional characters, using a vertical typesetting and including modern style punctuation. It is based on a comparison of seven editions and, most importantly, provides endnotes, indicating the emendations and the textual evidence. In terms of methodology, this is the best executed critical edition.³²

In 2007, Tan Lisan published the *Wu-Liu Celestial Immortality Lineage* (*Wu-Liu tianxian famai* 伍柳天仙

"Scholars have much debated Wu Shouyang's dates, variously indicating them as 1563–1632, 1565–1644, or 1552–1641."

²² Esposito, "The Longmen School."

²³ Eskildsen, "Wu Shouyang." This is actually a Chinese-language article but I discuss Eskildsen's work here as Western scholarship.

²⁴ Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*.

²⁵ Ding, *Wu Shouyang neidan sixiang yanjiu*.

²⁶ Yang Ming and Tang Dachao, "Lu Xixing."

²⁷ For a complete overview of editions of Wu's works, see the annotated bibliography in the appendix

²⁸ Tao, *Pingdian Wu-Liu xianzong*. Tao was also involved in the editing of the first facsimile edition of the *Wu-Liu xianzong* in the PRC, published in 1987.

²⁹ Tao, *Wu-Liu xianzong ji yaozhi*.

³⁰ Except for Zhu Taihe, the dialogues of the *Xianfo hexong yulu* have no summary. Liu Huayang's *Jinxian zhenglun* also misses summaries.

³¹ This large collection was printed in installments between 2000 and 2012. The volume containing Wu's text was published in 2002.

³² The editing of the text is done by a certain Zou Yi 鄒毅.

法脈) in which this former associate of Tao Bingfu continues the work from the 1990s. Tan is a practitioner of inner alchemy and heads a small community of disciples. Just like the two titles from Tao Bingfu, this publication was a team effort. Tan mentions the help of his disciples, some of whom helped to collect editions and compare the textual variants and some of whom helped to finance the project. This book is a new edition of the texts from the *Wu-Liu Immortality Lineage* based on a variety of editions. Tan does not specify the editions nor does he indicate his emendations, unfortunately again making this not as useful as it could have been. The fact that Tan did indeed use a lot of editions is clear as he not only could avail himself of the earlier work done with Tao but also from his own collection. Tan's private collection of editions of Wu's works appears to be the most complete collection anywhere. In 2012, Tan published a revised edition which has been substantially updated. Importantly, Tan has included even more texts, including a manuscript otherwise not available. This edition therefore contains unique material. Unfortunately, it includes no new preface describing anything about the editing process.

Wu Shouyang's Inner Alchemy

Wu Shouyang's ideas on inner alchemy have been studied in isolation and as part of more general descriptions of inner alchemy, focusing on specific aspects or on the process of cultivation as a whole. The most noteworthy Chinese-language studies in this respect are those published by Ding Changchun, Lu Xiaoying, and Xiao Jinming. Wu's ideas are examined most systematically in Ding's study, who lays out the basic principles, their sources, and the step-by-step process.³³ He also includes a discussion of syncretic aspects and a comparison between the ideas of Wu Shouyang and Liu Huayang. In many respects, Ding's research is much more useful than most other studies because it focusses on Wu's writings without introducing interpretations based on other sources. I will return to this point below.

Lu Xiaoying's research is unique in that it uses Wu's slogan of the "combined lineages of Daoism and Buddhism" (*xianfo hezong* 仙佛合宗) to build an argument about the question of Buddho-Daoist relations in Chinese religious history.³⁴ In brief, she holds that there are natural commonalities or similarities between the philosophical aspects of Daoist and Buddhist cultivation since both traditions were exploring the truths of human life and the universe. Following Wu Shouyang, she explains the differences between the traditions as differences of language and emphasis. But in these differences the two traditions supplement and complete each other. The idea of Buddho-Daoist unity is a further development of the theory of unity of the three teachings and both Chan Buddhism as well as inner alchemy are products of this idea. But Lu thinks that this proposition needs to be extended also to the philosophical (*zhexue sixiang*) aspects of Daoism and Buddhism and she identifies new manifestations of this idea in the modern religious practice in terms of organizations and institutions.

The Taiwanese scholar Xiao Jinming has published a few worthwhile articles on Wu Shouyang. In one of these, he examines a Wu-Liu lineage in contemporary Taiwan.³⁵ Two other articles deal with specific aspects of Wu's ideas on self-cultivation. In an article from 2008, Xiao examines the discussion of breathing methods in inner alchemy based primarily on Wu Shouyang's writings.³⁶ In the other article, Xiao examines the first stage of the inner alchemy method based on the writings of Wu Shouyang.³⁷ According to Xiao, among all inner alchemists Wu has written in the most precise and detailed way about this first stage.³⁸ Besides examining Wu's description of the first stage, Xiao also traces the historical development of these practices. As most of his Taiwanese colleagues, Xiao is also a practitioner and these articles include comments on the practical nature of inner alchemy and the value of Wu's ideas.

With a few exceptions, Western-language studies have focused more on history than religious doctrines. The main argument in Liu Ts'un-yan's chapter is that he situates Wu's writings against the background of a preceding century in which sexual cultivation and alchemical practices were very popular.³⁹ Disregarding a

³³ Ding, *Wu Shouyang neidan sixiang yanjiu*. Ding has also published a number of articles on Wu Shouyang, most of which concern material from his dissertation. See "Wu Shouyang neidan sanyao lun;" "Wu Shouyang de sanjiaoheyi lun;" "Wu Shouyang de fa cai lu di lun;" "Wu Shouyang de shengmingguan tanxi;" "Wu Shouyang de neidanshu tanwei;" and "Liu Huayang yu Wu Shouyang dandao sixiang zhi bijiao." In 2013, he published a study on what he calls the Daoist "study of life" (*xingming xue* 性命學). See Ding, *Daojiao xingmingxue gailun*.

³⁴ Lu Xiaoying, 'Xianfo hezong' xindao sixiang yanjiu.

³⁵ Xiao Jinming, "Quanzhendao."

³⁶ Xiao Jinming, "Fuxi yi rudao."

³⁷ Xiao Jinming, "Daojiao neidan 'lianjing huaqi' de xiuxing gongfu."

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 59.

³⁹ Liu, "Wu Shou-yang: The Return to the Pure Essence."

number of mistakes in interpretation, I believe Liu's general argument is correct in that Wu represents a return to simplicity in cultivation theory, although not to *qi*, as he claims, but to spirit and *qi*. Stephen Eskildsen has published on the appropriation of concepts of Buddhist origin, noting that Wu Shouyang used Buddhist concepts in a novel manner not found in earlier writings of twelfth and thirteenth century Quanzhen masters.⁴⁰ But his detailed examination of several key terms is meant to point out that the interpretations that Wu gave to these terms of Buddhist origin have no relation to the meaning attached to them in the original Buddhist scriptures. While the ideas themselves can be found in earlier Daoist texts, the association with Buddhist terms appears to be new.

The main issue I take with most of the studies on Wu's inner alchemy is of a methodological kind. Inner alchemy is an esoteric tradition and one of the main problems of interpretation is caused by what we could simply refer to as missing information. When dealing with one specific text, and knowing that terms can be interpreted in more than one way, we often have simply no way of determining the intended meaning of the metaphorical language. Scholars usually solve this problem by taking recourse to a method of substitution, searching for explanations in other texts.⁴¹ Moreover, this is usually done without explicitly documenting such substitutions. This appears to be done under the assumption that inner alchemy is at heart a univocal tradition and that the correct interpretation would therefore also be the same interpretation. But this method often leads to inaccurate interpretations and moreover hides doctrinal discussions among inner alchemists from view. In this study, I have tried to avoid this "substitution method" as much as possible. At the same time, when a reasonable interpretation could only be offered by reference to other texts, I have done my best to document these substitutions.⁴²

Ding Changchun's study is the most important of all previous studies on Wu Shouyang and his description of Wu's inner alchemy suffers much less from this substitution method. As a result, Ding notices several specific instances where previous interpretations are not substantiated by the texts. Ding's discussion is complete, systematic, and detailed. Nevertheless, I hope this study can improve on Ding's work in two aspects. First, in terms of analysis, Ding mostly follows Wu's own claims and the traditional viewpoints on inner alchemy and his examination, as is characteristic for many Chinese-language studies, contains extensive quotations without an attempt at interpretation. Writing in English, this study cannot avoid translating, and hence interpreting, the terminology and concepts of inner alchemy. Second, while Ding describes the stages of the cultivation process, he did not use what I believe to be the most suitable arrangement of stages to do so. In this study, I have arranged the discussion of these stages on the basis of the twelve oral instructions that were clearly Wu's own primary way of structuring the cultivation process.⁴³

I also mention here an article I wrote on the concept of the "three treasures."⁴⁴ In this article, I have examined "the concept of the three treasures—essence, *qi* and spirit—in the writings of Wu Shouyang as an example of late imperial discourse on internal alchemy (*neidan* 内丹)." What I have tried to highlight is the fact that these three treasures are presented by Wu as the basic ontological categories behind the metaphors of inner alchemy and, as such, it is these concepts in particular that connect the theory and practice of cultivation with the ideas on ordinary human experience and the broader cosmological perspective. I have tried to analyze the role of essence, *qi*, and spirit in ordinary life and in the cultivation process and particularly how they are thought to interact and transform into each other. This interaction results in the creation of the yang spirit and is one of the main soteriological objectives of inner alchemy.

Evaluation

Scholars generally agree that Wu Shouyang's writings belong to the most influential in the genre of inner

⁴⁰ Eskildsen, "Wu Shouyang."

⁴¹ Louis Komjathy describes this as the "substitution method" in a footnote in his study of the Quanzhen school. See Komjathy, *Cultivating Perfection*, 138: "As the early Quanzhen literature provides few explicit referents for technical terminology, one is left with little recourse for understanding its alchemical methods than what I here refer to as a "substitution method." That is, by taking terminology from other early Quanzhen texts and/or from contemporaneous documents, one "plugs-in" the associated terms to see if the methods in question make sense."

⁴² Similarly, general descriptions of inner alchemy have used Wu's writings as one among a handful of sources to narrate a composite description of inner alchemy theory. Such composite descriptions, by definition, can provide general insights about inner alchemy but are less informative about the particularities of each individual school or text and therefore not relevant or even misleading when used as a source to understand Wu Shouyang and his particular inner alchemy theory.

⁴³ Besides these methodological improvements, this study has brought a lot of new materials to light, including biographical materials and many editions of Wu's writings hitherto not described in any bibliography.

⁴⁴ Van Enkevort, "The Three Treasures: An Enquiry into the Writings of Wu Shouyang"

alchemy, although there are varying opinions about how they should be rated. Western scholars have mostly refrained from such rankings, although several studies have cited some of the Chinese evaluations discussed below.⁴⁵ Clarke Hudson mentions Wu's writings several times as belonging to a group of writings that effectively formulated the "standard account" of inner alchemy in the late imperial era.⁴⁶ For traditional Chinese scholars, a proper evaluation of the teachings was perhaps the main objective. To summarize Chen Yingning's evaluation, Wu's views on inner alchemy are certainly orthodox and of the highest type, but they do not represent the supreme expression of inner alchemy.⁴⁷ In his three-level classification of alchemy, he ranks the Wu-Liu school in the lower ranges of the highest rank. Nevertheless, he repeatedly urges his readers that Wu's texts are very suitable as primers on inner alchemy and that they are in fact obligatory reading. His main general criticism certainly appears to be the Buddhist influence in these texts which he sees as a mistake from post-Song inner alchemists that should not be repeated.⁴⁸

Xiao Tianshi describes the Wu-Liu method as being mainly focused on the cultivation of meridians and the use of the small heavenly cycle, along with using Buddhist principles and Chan meditation practice.⁴⁹ He describes the method as extremely "complicated" (*fansuo* 繁瑣), especially in comparison with the Northern Lineage in general and he considers some aspects, particularly the use of utensils to avoid "leakage of the elixir" (*zoudan* 走丹), as absurd. According to Xiao's judgement, the method of the Wu-Liu lineage does not represent the "highest method of alchemy" (*fei shang danfa* 非上丹法), but it is easy to understand and it provides clear instructions. According to a three-tiered ranking of practices, he ranks it to the "middle vehicle" (*zhongsheng* 中乘). Xiao allows that Wu provides a straightforward, complete, and clear outline of the main elements of the cultivation process. Because of its strict adherence to sexual abstinence, it can be considered an orthodox representation of the Northern Lineage. He considers it suited as a primer to be used for basic cultivation. Some of the ideas maybe deviant (*yi* 異) but they are not heterodox (*xie* 邪).⁵⁰

Modern Chinese scholars have mostly been less concerned with such rankings of teachings and more concerned with characterizing. Xu Zhaoren identifies three characteristics of the Wu-Liu texts: (1) the Wu-Liu theory is experienced as reliable because it includes the best aspects of the various schools; (2) it is easily understood and practiced because of its clarity and systematic description of practice; and (3) its emphasis on practical verification makes it less esoteric and more accessible.⁵¹

Ding Chanchun mentions five characteristics.⁵² First, Wu has succeeded in combining the essence of all previous inner alchemy schools and has in this respect far exceeded the efforts of Li Daochun.⁵³ Second, Wu was the first to write about inner alchemy in such an accessible style while still being very detailed and hence his writings are very practical. He is the first, Ding says, to disclose all oral instructions. Third, Wu's language is easy to understand and he replaces the metaphors and cryptic language of inner alchemy with a focus on the dynamics of spirit and *qi*. Fourth, Wu makes a few theoretical innovations, including the appearance of yang radiance at the end of the first stage and beginning of the second, the work of gathering the great medicine, the signs of the generation of the great medicine, the method of "five dragons bearing aloft the saint," and the fusion of the lower and middle elixir field. Fifth, Wu is the first to provide such a complete, precise, and systematic description of the actual practice of inner alchemy.⁵⁴

The Longmen School, the Wu-Liu School, and the Prince of Ji.

A handful of studies have examined particular aspects of Wu Shouyang's wider role in Chinese religious

⁴⁵ That is not to say that Western scholars have not often implicitly adopted the biases of the inner alchemy texts which they studied.

⁴⁶ Hudson, "Spreading the Dao."

⁴⁷ Chen Yingning's writings are republished in Hu Haiya, *Zhonghua xianxue yangsheng quanshu*. On Chen, see Liu, *Daoist Modern*.

⁴⁸ Chen specifies his criticism of Wu in a few places. One general criticism is that he reads Wu as advocating general rules based on his own experiences. Along the same lines he takes fault with what he sees as Wu's rigid conception of measurable stages of the cultivation process. Also interesting is Chen's view that the method of the Wu-Liu lineage was not the most suited for lay people who are unable to completely uphold sexual abstinence.

⁴⁹ Xiao, *Daojia yangshengxue gaiyao*. On Xiao, see Valussi, "War, Nationalism, and Xiao Tianshi's Transmission of Daoist Scriptures from China to Taiwan."

⁵⁰ Notwithstanding his somewhat ungenerous evaluation, Xiao included the Wu-Liu writings in his reprint series. His characterization and judgement of the Wu-Liu texts has been influential and we can hear echos of his evaluation in many later studies, Chinese and Western alike.

⁵¹ Xu Zhaoren, *Wu-Liu famai*.

⁵² Ding, *Wu Shouyang neidan sixiang yanjiu*.

⁵³ *Ibid.*, 159.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 160.

history, specifically pertaining to his involvement with the Longmen school, his role in the Wu-Liu school, and his connections with the Prince of Ji.⁵⁵ The main work of importance on Wu and the Longmen school is the chapter by Monica Esposito mentioned above.⁵⁶ In this chapter, she uses Wu's biography as the main example to demonstrate the unreliability of the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* as a source on Longmen history. I agree completely with this main argument of her chapter. Unfortunately, though, she makes a few mistakes in her interpretation of Wu's autobiography and, more surprising considering the main thesis of her chapter, she also still retains a few details of the Longmen biography, resulting in the fact that her biographical narrative of Wu is not completely reliable.

I may also mention here my own chapter in a recent volume on *Quanzhen Daoists in Chinese Society and Culture, 1500—2010*, in which I have written about the various ways in which the Quanzhen and Longmen school appear in Wu's writings.⁵⁷ Some of the arguments and translated passages from this chapter are also used at various places in this study, but the chapter is still relevant for the specific issue of Wu's Quanzhen and Longmen identity. On the basis of an examination of various key terms and passages, I conclude, in brief, that Wu's identity does not conform to a normative or ideal image of a Quanzhen adept, primarily because he is not an ordained, celibate monk.⁵⁸ Wu's Longmen identity is expressed "in some scattered statements about the authenticity of his transmission: the claim that his master in the third degree Zhang was a Longmen disciple, the possession of the oral formulae and a talisman that accompanied the reception of the Dao, and the system of the adoption of religious names formed by taking characters from the so-called Longmen genealogical poem."⁵⁹

There are a few studies on the writings of other figures in the Wu-Liu school but almost nothing has been done on the history of this lineage. An exception is the article by Xiao Jinming, mentioned above, examining a twentieth century religious community in Taiwan that identifies itself as a Wu-Liu lineage.⁶⁰ In this context we may also mention the publications of this community as important primary material on the Wu-Liu lineage and on self-cultivation in Taiwan.⁶¹

Finally, we should mention Richard Wang's research on the Ming period princely institutions and their religious activities in which he has examined the connection between Wu Shouyang and Zhu Taihe, the Prince of Ji.⁶² Wang proposes a theory on the biography of this prince. This study also includes a few discussions of the "Prognostication of the Pine Tree and Sandy Islet," what I refer to here in this study as the "Longsha Prophecy," that are relevant to our subject. Wang's study is discussed in chapter one.

What can be Expected in the Following Chapters

This study aims to accomplish two things. First, it aims to provide a thorough presentation of Wu Shouyang's life and works, filling a gap in the scholarship on this important figure. Second, it aims to use Wu's writings to answer some fundamental questions about the standard account of inner alchemy as it developed in late imperial China. The first two chapters are primarily concerned with the first aim and the latter four chapters with the second aim. **Chapter one** deals with Wu Shouyang's biography. After introducing the available biographical sources, I narrate the main events in Wu's life in three periods. Further, I examine his lineage, discussing all relevant passages that concern the three masters named by Wu as his predecessors in this branch of this local Longmen tradition. This is finally followed by a discussion of three interesting themes in Wu's biography that deserve some further exploration. Making use of hitherto unexplored sources, including the family genealogy and some early prefaces, I clarify some points of continuous confusion concerning Wu's biography. **Chapter two** is a study of Wu Shouyang's writings. First, I introduce the extant editions of Wu's works, as well as the non-extant editions and other titles that were associated with Wu Shouyang. Next, I try to answer a few questions about these writings on the basis of a comparison of the editions as well as Wu's own statements about his writings. Finally, I summarize the

⁵⁵ Wu Shouyang is also mentioned in Chen Bing, "The Revival of the Longmen Branch of the Quanzhen School." Chen also bases his narrative on the Longmen materials in this as well as his other publications including discussions of Wu Shouyang and are therefore not reliable in this aspect.

⁵⁶ Esposito, "The Longmen School and its Controversial History during the Qing Dynasty."

⁵⁷ Van Enkevort, "Quanzhen and Longmen identities in the works of Wu Shouyang."

⁵⁸ In this study, I distinguish "celibacy" in the sense of being unmarried and chastity or abstinence in the sense of practicing abstinence from sexual activity (and thought!).

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 170.

⁶⁰ Xiao Jinming, "Quanzhendao."

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁶² Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*.

history of the writing and publication of these texts.

In chapters three to six, I continue the examination of Wu Shouyang's writings with an eye on better understanding general questions about inner alchemy. In **chapter three**, I examine what the adepts of inner alchemy were actually supposed to be doing. I do this by recognizing that inner alchemy was conceived as a step-based process of gradual cultivation. After surveying the different ways of dividing the inner alchemy process into discrete stages, I present an outline of this process that is based on the twelve oral instructions. Although some aspects are bound to remain open to interpretation, this outline allows the reader to follow the process in great detail. Aiming to address all relevant aspects of each stage, I take the reader from the first preparatory steps to the final steps towards ultimate salvation.

In **chapter four**, I examine the question of what these adepts were supposed to achieve by going through these stages of the inner alchemy process. Recognizing that we can distinguish an ultimate objective and various intermediate objectives, this chapter focuses on the intermediate objectives. As the discussion will show, the typical model of soteriological attainments in inner alchemy was a bricolage of Daoist and Buddhist notions. I distinguish between a model of progress through cultivation and a model of progress through rebirth. The first model is the familiar model of five degrees of immortality that was formulated in the Zhong-Lü texts and we will see how Wu elaborates this model with notions from other Daoist as well as Buddhist texts, lining the immortals up with buddhas, bodhisattvas, and other Buddhist categories of attainment. The second model has been largely ignored in studies of inner alchemy but is clearly described in Wu's texts. The discussion will show that, adapting the Buddhist idea of the six paths of rebirth and the idea of the four stages of enlightenment attained after a series of rebirths, inner alchemists also discussed the different scenarios that were thought to take place when an adept died without having completed his cultivation process in the course of his lifetime.

Inner alchemy texts contain numerous references to notions that can be interpreted as having a sexual meaning. Even Wu's students question him as to how some of these ideas differ from the "arts of the bedchamber." At the same time, inner alchemy texts usually also contain passages ardently rejecting a sexual interpretation of inner alchemy terms. Even though a few Western scholars have rejected this idea, it is well recognized among traditional inner alchemists and Chinese scholars that the term inner alchemy covered lineages that practiced a form of sexual cultivation and lineages that practiced strict sexual abstinence. In **chapter five**, I marshal a range of passages intended to demonstrate that, even for the so-called "pure" inner alchemists who adhered to strict abstinence, sexual function was critical to the attainment of the objectives of inner alchemy.

In **chapter six**, we leave behind the ideas on intermediate objectives and focus on the ultimate objective of inner alchemy. What was it exactly that inner alchemists ultimately aimed to accomplish by their cultivation practices? Inner alchemy texts contain two distinct answers, allowed to exist side by side. First, the model of degrees of immortality, which covers all the intermediate attainments, ultimately leads to "celestial immortality." This "celestial immortal" is described as a spirit that leaves the body, ascends to the heavens, and is appointed as an official in the celestial bureaucracy. Second, the stages of the cultivation process suggest that the adept creates a "yang spirit" which is ultimately to be "returned to emptiness." Furthermore, when we examine the passages on this notion of "emptiness" we come to the conclusion that it was interpreted in both cosmological as well as psychological terms. I argue that neither of these interpretations can be reduced to the other.