A stairway to heaven : Daoist self-cultivation in early modern China

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1
An Immortal in the Family

We are fortunate to have a wide range of sources on the life of Wu Shouyang, which makes him unique for an inner alchemist or for any Daoist for that matter. We even have a family genealogy, detailing his life and that of his family members. Besides this genealogy, we have an autobiography as well as biographies written by his own family members. We have, in other words, an exceptionally good idea of the circumstances of this important inner alchemy master. However, a fabricated biography in the official Longmen historiography has led to a distorted picture. In this chapter, we will sort out this picture as we examine the available sources.

These sources show Wu Shouyang as the son of a local gentry family, a member of the late Ming literate elite. Wu was initiated in the Longmen lineage by a local master and Wu and his masters to the third degree all formed a single master-disciple relationship or a small fellowship of a master, disciples, and patrons. They were married, most of them had children, and they maintained sexual abstinence during the process of cultivation. They were not connected with larger religious networks and they identified with the ideal of the early Quanzhen masters who focused on ascetic self-cultivation in the context of loosely organized communities of fellow cultivators. Figures like Wu do not find a self-evident fit in our conventional socio-religious categories. He was not a monk, nor a priest, and he was neither a recluse. He was a householder but spend most of his time away from his family. He was more dedicated to religious practice than the term "lay" suggest. But, unconventional as all of this seems, it was in fact a common model of the inner alchemy master.

This chapter consists of four sections. In the first section, I introduce the available biographical sources. In the second section, I provide a biographical narrative of Wu's life along with a discussion of major issues and themes in his biography. I have divided this narrative in three periods: the early years (1574–1593); the twenty-year period of initiation (1593–1612); and the last period, when Wu instructs a group of disciples and writes his books (1612–1644). In the first period, I also discuss the basic issues of Wu's names and the dates and locations of birth and death. The second period contains the largest part of the biographical narrative, since Wu's autobiography is mainly focused on this period in which he underwent his initiation. The third period focuses on the three main themes of this period in Wu's life; his relation with a prince, his studio in Nanjing, and the process of writing. In the third section, I examine the three main figures of Wu's direct lineage: Zhang Jingxu, Li Xu'an, and Cao Huanyang. I translate and examine all relevant passages in Wu's writings and other sources, discuss basic data of their life, and examine their relationships. In the fourth and last section, I examine a few miscellaneous themes of Wu's life. I discuss his family life and that of his fellow adepts and try to relate this to their theory of religious practice. I discuss the theme of the "recluse in the marketplace," a famous literary and religious trope that appears to have inspired people like Wu and the way in which they saw themselves. I also examine the role of the Jingming dao in Wu's writings and zoom in on the role of a prophesy that can be found in the myths of the local saint Xu Xun that was appropriated by Wu and by others who wrote about Wu.

Sources

Song on Cultivating Immortality

We are fortunate to have an extensive, detailed, and colorful autobiography of Wu Shouyang.[63] There are two extant editions of this text. The best-preserved version is to be found in the *Daozang jiyao* and is titled *Perfected Man Wu's Song on Cultivating Immortality*.[64] The main text is written in heptasyllabic verse and is provided with annotations.[65] In line with the title of this work, it is an annotated poem describing the process of the cultivation of immortality, both as an account of Wu's personal history as well as a generalized account of such a process. The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* is not dated but the latest date we find in it is late 1640 or early 1641, when he mentions the death of his mother. It must have been finished in 1641, because it was included in a manuscript dated to that year. In another version, this text is titled *Song on Cultivating Immortality Through the Ages*.[66] In what follows, unless otherwise indicated, I refer to the *Daozang jiyao* edition.

The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* is the story of Wu Shouyang coming of age as an "immortal." After shortly introducing his parents and the circumstances of his birth, he relates a few important issues of his youth: the death of his father, his early education, and his budding interest in the cultivation of immortality. After this, he relates his transformative years, when he experiences a major disaster in his home area, definitively loses all interest in an official career, and consolidates his ambitions of immortality. He sees these ambitions confirmed by various signs as well as by eventually encountering his instructor-to-be Cao Huanyang. From there on, the story focusses on the years of instruction by Cao—between 1593 and 1612—ending with the suggestion he had reached the final stages of cultivation. In between, we find some rather long anecdotes about various events. There is basically no information about the period from 1612 to 1641. Near the end, he briefly remarks on some circumstances in later life when he mentions his mother and his return from Nanjing to fulfill his filial duties. Otherwise, the years after his instruction with Cao (ending in 1612) are not dealt with and consequently we find no mention of the fact that, at some point, he took over Cao's position as senior instructor and started to be a teacher in his own right. Regrettably, we are not informed about the circumstances of his relation with a local prince, Zhu Taihe, and his stay in Changsha as this prince's tutor. Nor are we told in any detail about the fact that he went to Nanjing, operated a studio, engaged with the local elite, and published his writings.

Wu Family Genealogy

An equally important source is the *Wu Family Genealogy*.[67] It provides us with several previously unknown details about Wu's life as well as otherwise unknown information about his close relatives.[68] Wu's kin are not only important to understand the circumstances of the Wu clan from Bixie Village, or of Wu's parental household, but also because some relatives were directly involved in his legacy as a teacher and writer. The *Wu Family Genealogy* includes several prefaces for each edition of this work, texts on the family history and some renowned family members, family regulations, maps of Bixie, information about the family grave, and the poem from which family members took the first character of their name.[69] Especially noteworthy is the addition of a hitherto considered lost text, a postscript to the revised edition of 1669 of the *Straightforward*

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[63] Wu Shouyang also has a biography and entries for his writings in the local gazetteers, but these offer no additional information. See *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 44.11b and 53.18a-b; *Nanchang fuzhi* (1873), 62.19a and 63.29b-30a; *Jiangxi tongzhi* (1881), 106.32b.

[64] The *Wu zhenren Xiuxiange* 伍真人修仙歌, which is included as an addendum (*fulu* 附錄) in the *Recorded Sayings*.

[65] With a main text of 1288 characters and a commentary of 3184 characters the total text of 4472 characters is a substantial biography and unique for any inner alchemy master. As with the other texts, the commentary might have been written by Wu Shouyang himself as well as by his cousin Wu Shouxu, but this is not fully clear.

[66] The *Wangu Xiuxiange* 萬古修仙歌, classified under a heading titled *Chronicle of the Original Acts* (*Benxingji lei* 本行紀類), can be found in the *Zangwai daoshu* (V 24; 458–461), as the last part of the *Tianxian lunyu xianfo hezong*. Unfortunately, this edition is incomplete and large parts are barely legible. From what is legible, it seems this text is roughly the same as the *Daozang jiyao* edition, with an occasional different character. The heading alludes to other hagiographic texts with similar titles, the phrasing "original acts" (*benxing* 本行) describing the deeds of a Buddha or bodhisattva.

[67] *Wushi zupu* 伍氏族譜. The Wu family in Bixie was kind enough to let me copy relevant portions of their *Wu Family Genealogy*. Here, I want to thank them again, especially misters Wu Donggen 伍冬根 and Wu Jingeng 伍金庚. The *Wu Family Genealogy* used here is a revised (and updated) edition of 1993. It is based on an edition from 1690 that was revised again in 1720 and 1898. It was printed in an ancestral hall of the Wu family called the Mingfu tang 明輔堂.

[68] The *Wu Family Genealogy* clarifies, for example, Wu's genealogical name, his exact date of birth, and even the location of his grave.

[69] The *Zipaige* 字派歌.

Essays written by Wu's cousin once removed Wu Daxing 伍達行.[70]

Prefaces and Postscripts for the 1669 Reprint

Biographical data are also found in the earliest prefaces and postscripts. Two of these should be introduced here as they were the primary sources for Wu's biography by Shen Zhaoding in 1764. They were written for the first reprinting of the *Straightforward Essays* in 1669. One postscript was written by Wu Daxing, the son of Wu's cousin and co-author Wu Shouxu.[71] One preface was written by the prominent scholar-official from Jiangxi, Li Yuankuan 黎元寬 (1596–1675).[72] When Shen Zhaoding wrote his own postscript and a short biography for the 1764 edition of this text, he discarded these earlier examples and it appears that since this time they were considered lost. They were not included in later editions nor are they discussed in the literature on Wu Shouyang. However, both of these texts have now been retrieved and they offer some additional information on Wu Shouyang's biography.[73] In Li's preface, we get a first glimpse of the earliest reception of Wu's works by somebody from outside his family or direct circle of students. Especially noteworthy herein is the reference to the Jingming school and its myth of the Longsha prophecy, examined in this chapter.

Shen Zhaoding's Biography

In 1764, Shen Zhaoding 申兆定 (fl. 1760-64)[74] wrote a short biography on the occasion of the fourth

[70] *Chongke Tianxian zhengli zhilun houxu* 重刻天仙正理直論後序.

[71] Wu Daxing 伍達行 (*zi* Jike 際可, Tuogong 拓公) was an initiated student of Wu Shouyang, with the ordination name Taiyi 太一 (in some editions written as Taiyi 太乙), who features with nineteen dialogues in the *Recorded Sayings*. He also wrote several prefaces for the first printing of Wu's writings. In 1639, he obtained the provincial *juren* 舉人 degree; there is no indication that he tried for the metropolitan exams. After three years of serving as educational instructor (*jiaoyu* 教諭) in Ruijin County 瑞金縣 (now part of Jiangxi, Ganzhou 贛州 city), from 1655 to 1658, he was promoted to become county magistrate (*zhixian* 知縣) of Songxi 松溪 county (a mountainous area in northern Fujian) where he served between 1658 and 1660. For Wu Daxing's biography, see *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 22.13b; *Nanchang xianzhi* (1794), 23.21a.; *Ruijin xianzhi* (1683), 6:16a; *Ruijin xianzhi* (1753), 4.31a; and *Songxi xianzhi* (Kangxi), 7:34a. He also has a short biographical entry in the *liezhuan* 列傳 section of Qian Haiyue's *History of the Southern Ming* (*Nan Ming shi* 南明史), 2317.

[72] Li Yuankuan 黎元寬 (1596–1675; *hao* Boan 博庵; *jinshi* 1628), another native of Nanchang county, served in several official positions. His collected writings were published as the *Jinxian tang gao* 進賢堂稿. As a Ming loyalist, he refused to take office after 1644 citing his filial duty to his old mother as a reason. During the Qianlong reign, the *Jinxian tang gao* ended up on the *Siku jinshu* 四庫禁書, the index of books rejected for the *Siku quanshu* project. The books on this index were designated for destruction. It was however republished in the modern era and is included in the *Siku jinhuishu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊 (Vols. 145–146). For Li's biography, see *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 33.23a-b for a detailed biography written by his son Li Zugong 黎祖功 and 21.9b and 22.13b for his degrees; also *Jiangxi tongzhi* (1881), 138.37b. See also Lian Bindai's "Li Mingrui's Private Troupe and its Spectators (1644–62)" for a study of the spectatorship of vernacular plays during the Ming-Qing transition and how people like Li, as a Ming loyalist, interpreted such plays as evidenced in their poetry. Interesting to note in this study is how people like Li, involved in some way in a self-cultivation tradition which requires total sexual abstinence and general control of all sensory input, were simultaneously fervent spectators of these plays aiming to bring sensual pleasure with, apparently, extremely beautiful actresses. According to Lian, Li even suggests that "one should seize every opportunity to enjoy women and song" in the hope that he would thus "be released from the dilemmas caused by life under the Manchus." (pp. 96–97).

[73] Wu Daxing's *Chongke Tianxian zhengli zhilun houxu* 重刻天仙正理直論後序 has been preserved in the *Wu Family Genealogy*. Li's *Tianxian zhengli zhilun xu* 天仙正理直論序, written by Li for the 1669 reprint of this work, can be found in *Siku jinhuishu congkan* 四庫禁燬書叢刊 (Vols. 145–146).

[74] Shen Zhaoding 申兆定 (*zi* Yuannan 圓南; *hao* Tiechan 鐵蟾, Shengzhai 繩齋) hailed from Yangqu 陽曲 county (Shanxi). He obtained a *juren* degree in 1760 and served as County Magistrate (*zhixian* 知縣) of Hengyang 衡陽 (Hunan). Shen refers to himself as an "indirect disciple" (*sishu dizi* 私淑弟子) of Wu Shouyang. He mentions how, in his thirties, he had read many scriptures on alchemy (*danjing* 丹經) which made him feel "no different from walking through thistles and thorns" (無異荊棘中行). In 1764, however, he visited a friend who showed him the *Straightforward Essays* and he immediately realized this work would sweep away all unclarities. He prepared a reprint and added a postscript and biographical sketch. These were preserved in most later reprints and hence had a considerable influence (also see the annotated bibliography in the appendices). Shen has a biography in *Huhai shizhuan xiaozhuan* 湖海詩傳小傳, written by Wang Chang 王昶 (1725–1806). Rania Huntington's *Alien Kind* contains an interesting episode in Shen's life. She has examined, amongst others, the *Yuewei caotang biji* 閱微草堂筆記, a compendium of five collections of supernatural tales, written by the Qing scholar Ji Yun 紀昀 (1724–1805; a 1754 *jinshi* and Hanlin scholar, one of two chief editors of the *Siku quanshu*) and published in 1800. According to Ji, Shen lived in his house and, since his middle years, had become obsessed with immortality. Ji characterizes him as a "talented and broad-minded man" (Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 318–319). While the cultivation of immortality of the type promoted by Wu Shouyang required total sexual abstinence, Shen apparently indulged in

printing of the *Straightforward Essays*.[75] In a postscript, which Shen also wrote on that occasion, he mentions the preface and postcript of Wu Daxing and Li Yuankuan.[76] In the biography he mentions retaining one-tenth of the information from the original prefaces. Shen's "sketch" is indeed a summary of Wu Daxing's postscript.

The Longmen Biography

In the early Qing, the diffuse Longmen movement, that took up the inheritance of the Daoist Quanzhen tradition, became institutionalized through the efforts of Wang Changyue 王常月 (?–1680; *hao* Kunyangzi 崑陽子) who became abbot of the Baiyun guan 白雲觀 (Abbey of the White Clouds) in 1655. Under his leadership, the Longmen school obtained control of many monastic institutes, established a patriarchal lineage, and started to perform public ordinations. To this day, Longmen is the dominant Daoist lineage, sometimes compared with the Linji lineage of Chan Buddhism. Wang is further credited with the authorship of the *Examination of the Bowl* (*Bojian* 缽鑑). This work is regarded as the fundamental source of the history of the Longmen lineage, but it is only known from quotations in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* and Monica Esposito has argued it is possibly a fictitious work attributed to Wang.[77] Our actual primary source for the history of the Longmen lineage is this *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* (*Jin'gai xindeng* 金蓋心燈), written by eleventh-generation Longmen patriarch Min Yide 閔一得 (1758–1836) and published in 1821.[78] Part of this work consist of biographies of the Longmen masters.[79]

The *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* includes a *Biography of Ordination Master Wu Chongxu*.[80] The content of this biography contradicts the information from the autobiography, Wu's other writings, the *Wu Family Genealogy*, and the postscripts written by Wu's relatives and disciples. Monica Esposito, in her important study of Longmen hagiography, uses Wu's biography in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* as a case-study demonstrating the unreliability of this work as a source of lineage history. From her research we can conclude that the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* was a conscious attempt to build a genealogical structure which puts Wang Changyue in the center of the Longmen history and which establishes an orthodox patriarchal lineage modelled after Chan example.

1574–1593

The Parental Household and The Wu Family in Bixie Village

Wu Shouyang was born as Wu Liangqian 伍良遷 in the first month of 1574, as the son of a mid-level scholar-official from a gentry family in Nanchang county and his second wife. The Wu family had lived in Bixie 辟邪 village for some twelve generations before Wu's time and they continue to live there to this day.[81] Just like every other Wu family, they trace their ancestry to the legendary general of the state of Wu

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erotic literature and experienced sexual hallucinations identified by Ji as demonic obstructions (*mozhang* 魔障). Apparently, this condition progressively worsened until his death, when Shen showed clear signs of madness. Huntington speculates that Shen's hallucinations resemble those caused by a brain tumor, given shape by the fiction he had read (*YWCT*, 8.397–98, story 111; Huntington, *Alien Kind*, 318–19). These kinds of hallucinations must have been a not uncommon phenomenon among the more fanatic adepts as Wu spends many words on this issue and he was not the first to do so; in fact, it is a common theme in the genre. Wu suggests that such phenomena increase along with the advancement in cultivation, or in the words of a saying he cites, "The Dao is one foot but demons are ten feet tall 道高一尺魔高一丈."

[75] *Wu zhenren shishi ji shoushou yuanliu lüe* 伍真人事實及授受源流略. It is available in the *Daozang jiyao* edition as well as in most other editions of Wu's works.

[76] *Chongxiu Tianxian zhengli shuhou* 重修天仙正理書後.

[77] Esposito, "The Longmen School."

[78] This "Mind-Lamp" (or "Heart-Lamp") refers to a genre of biography typical for the Chan tradition, also known as "transmission of the lamp" (*chuandeng* 傳燈). Hence, we also find this title translated more elaborately as *Transmission of the Mind-Lamp from Mount Jin'gai*.

[79] These biographies are provided with commentaries by scholars Bao Tingbo 鮑廷博 (1728–1814) and Bao Kun 鮑錕 (fl. 1814). The *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* also contains an index listing fifty-two works which were consulted for producing the biographies, among which prominently feature the possibly fictitious *Examination of the Bowl* as well as a sequel titled *Supplement to the Examination of the Bowl* (*Bojian xu* 缽鑑續) by ninth-generation Longmen master Fan Qingyun 范清雲 (1606–1748?; lineage name: Taiqing 太清).

[80] *Wu Chongxu lüshi zhuan* 伍沖虛律師傳.

[81] In Wu's time, this small community was one of the main communities of Nanchang where the Wu family lived, but they did not

吳 during the Spring and Autumn Period (722–481 BCE) Wu Zixu 伍子胥 (d. 484). Besides the descriptions of highly successful people in an undated distant past, the geneaology shows that Wu's father belonged to the third generation of scholars produced by this family. They were specialist in either the *Book of Odes* (*shijing* 詩經) or the *Book of Changes* (*yijing* 易經), they received an education at local schools (*junxiang* 郡庠 or *yixiang* 邑庠), and some of them were recommended several times for office. Most of these, however, did not even obtain a provincial (*juren* 舉人) degree and they did not serve in office. One of Wu Shouyang's uncles obtained a provincial degree. But the most successful one and the first one to be called to office was Wu's father Wu Xide.

Wu Xide 伍希德 (1516–1579; *hao* Jianzhai 健齋; *zi* Rumao 汝懋), was the eldest of three children of Wu Chongke 伍崇軻 (1491–1567).[82] In 1532, he entered a prefectural school (*junxiang* 郡庠) and obtained a licentiate (*shengyuan* 生員) degree.[83] More than twenty years later, in 1555, Wu senior tried for the provincial exams of Jiangxi and obtained the Provincial Graduate (*juren* 舉人) degree.[84] In 1562, he took part in the metropolitan exams (*huishi* 會試) and, so we are told in the *Wu Family Genealogy*, obtained a "Presented Scholar degree of the supplementary list" (*jinshi fubang* 進士副榜). Wu Shouyang even mentions in the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* that he ranked first (*huiyuan* 會元) in these exams, were it not for some influential official who robbed him from this distinction.[85] The local gazetteer of Nanchang finally refers to him as a Clear and Penetrating Presented Scholar (*mingtong jinshi* 明通進士), which suggests he was selected on account of the clarity of his writing and put on the "clear and penetrating list" (*mingtong bang* 明通榜). All of this suggests that he did not take part in the palace exams but was directly selected from the graduates of the metropolitan exam.[86]

In 1565, fifty years of age by now, he started his first teaching job in Xianghe 香河 County, Hebei province, near Beijing. From here, he was transferred to the prefecture of Qingzhou 青州, Shandong province, where he became instructor (*jiaoshou* 教授) at the prefectural school (*fuxue* 府學). After two years of teaching, he was promoted to his first administrative job as County Magistrate (*zhixian* 知縣) of Fengrun 豐潤 county, Hebei province, in 1567.[87] Six years later, in 1573, he went to Zhejiang to take up the office of Associate Examiner (*tong kaoshi guan* 同考試官) of the second office (*di'er fang* 第二房). Two years later, in 1575, he was promoted again, this time to the prefecture of Shaoxing 紹興 (also in Zhejiang) to become Prefectural Magistrate (*zhifu* 知府) in charge of water control (治水), i.e., the regulation of waterways and the prevention of floods. According to Wu Shouyang's autobiography, Wu senior worked in the government office (*ya'nei* 衙內) of the First-Class Assistant Department Magistrate (*biejia* 別駕) occupied with grain tax and salt control (*liangchu yanfa* 糧儲鹽法). The genealogy proudly mentions that, "on account of his meritorious service and conscientiousness he got the favor of having a shrine for the living erected by the

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live there exclusively. In the 21st century, the small rural community of Bixie is classified as a "villagers group" (*cunmin xiaozu* 村民小組) and it is, according to the villagers I spoke, a single-surname community. Bixie is administered, from small to large, by Jiaohu village 蕉湖村, Wuyang town 武陽鎮 (where Cao Huanyang came from), and Nanchang county. The Republican period gazetteer mentions the Wu family living in several locations in Nanchang county; see *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 29.3b.

[82] *Wu Family Genealogy*: "Born between 5 am to 7 am on the 13th day of the sixth month of the *bingzi* year of the Zhengde reign of the Ming 生於明正德丙子年六月十三日卯時," corresponding with July 12, 1516; "Died between 3 pm and 5 pm on the 15th day of the 2nd month of the *yimao* year of the Wanli reign of the Ming 歿於明萬曆己卯年二月十五日申時," corresponding with March 11, 1579. On Wu Xide, see biography in the *Wu Family Genealogy* (appendix); further see *Nanchang xianzhi* (1794), 16.14b; *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 22.8a; *Nanchang juncheng* (1663), 22.44a.; *Jiangxi tongzhi* (1683), 22.34a; *Xianghe xianzhi* (1936), 7:4 and 10:5; *Fengrun xianzhi* (1570), 7.4b; *Fengrun xianzhi* (1891), 4.5a; *Shaoxing fuzhi* (Wanli), 27.7a.

[83] The type of *shengyuan* degree awarded to him was that of an "additional student" (*zengsheng* 增生), i.e., the second class of the *shengyuan* 生員 degree, who were equal to the first class, except for a monthly allowance (*buzeng* 補增).

[84] The *juren* 舉人 degree, literally a presented or recommended man, is commonly transated as "candidate." Having obtained the provincial degree, such a student is now a candidate for the metropolitan exams. In the *Song on Cultivating Immortality*, Wu Shouyang uses the alternative name *gongju* 貢舉 degree (presented in tribute).

[85] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.45b, 7533: "robbed by an influential official 為權貴所奪."

[86] On the "supplementary/secondary list" (*fubang* 副榜), see Elman, *Civil Examinations and Meritocracy in Late Imperial China*, 108, 144. Graduates from this list qualified for local educational posts.

[87] In that same year, on the 24th day of the 5th month in 1567 (隆慶丁卯), Wu Xide's father passed away. We can read this in Wu Chongke's entry in the *Wu Family Genealogy*. In Wu Xide's entry, we read that "his father died and, when he ended the mourning (after three years), he was in Zhejiang 丁外艱服闋分省浙江;" "*ding wai jian* 丁外艱" refers to the death of one's father and "*fuque* 服闋" refers to taking off the mourning clothes after the period of mourning has ended.

common people, officials, and intellectuals."[88] Finally, in 1578, he was transferred to Weimo 維摩 Subprefecture (*zhou* 州), Yunnan province, to become Subprefectural Magistrate (*zhizhou* 知州).[89] He died while in office in Weimo and was buried in a family grave in Chicheng 赤城.[90]

Probably in the early 1540's, in his twenties and still preparing for the provincial exams, Wu Xide married his first wife, Miss Liu 劉 (1519–1586), who hailed from Huangtai 黃台, a nearby village in Nanchang county. They had two sons, Wu Liangsui 良遂 (1543–1573; *zi* Cunyuan 存元) and Wu Liangxuan 良選 (1549–1639; *zi* Rensuo 仁所) who, like the genealogy proudly mentions, reached the old age of ninety. They also had one daughter.[91] Probably some thirty years later, when Wu senior was in his late fifties, he married his second wife, *née* Wang 王 (1552–1640/41), the daughter of a certain commander (*zhihui* 指揮) Wang.

According to Wu's autobiography, his mother died on the twentieth day of the eleventh month of the *gengchen* year during the Chongzhen reign, but according to the *Wu Family Genealogy* she died on the fifth day of that month. This puts her day of death, in the Gregorian calendar, either on January 1st of 1641 (according to Wu) or on December 17th of 1640 (according to the *Wu Family Genealogy*).[92] About her death, Wu says that she "transformed while sitting (i.e., during meditation) and released herself from her corpse" adding that "this belongs to the category which is called 'the true release from the corpse during broad daylight to ascend to heaven and be reborn in heaven'."[93] Taken at face value, this could be read as suggesting that she was a practitioner of Daoist or Buddhist self-cultivation. Wu, however, makes no further comments to suggest this and we should probably read it as a figure of speech implying that he admired his mother as a woman of virtue.[94] In 1574, they had their only child, Wu Liangqian.

Names

One of the novel facts that can be gleaned from the *Wu Family Genealogy* is that Wu's personal name was Liangqian 良遷, the first character being his generation name shared with his two elder brothers as well as his cousins, and the second his given name. Wu never mentions this name in his works, nor is it mentioned in his biographies. When he was iniated into the Longmen lineage by his teacher Cao Huanyang, he obtained the ordination name (*faming* 法名 or *paiming* 派名) Shouyang 守陽 (Guarding Yang), indicating his position as an eighth-generation Longmen master.[95] Changing his name was one aspect of leaving the lineage of the family and entering the religious lineage of Longmen masters.

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[88] *Wu Family Geneology*: "有功一介不苟澤被閭閻士民建立生祠." About such shrines, see Neskar, *Politics and prayer*.

[89] The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* has "prefect" (*zhoumu* 州牧). In the late imperial period, "prefect," along with "prefectural governor" (*cishi* 刺史), were used loosely to refer to what was officially the Subprefectural Magistrate (*zhizhou* 知州). Weimo was established as a subprefecture (*zhou* 州) during the Yuan, when it belonged to the Guangxi circuit (廣西路). During the Ming, it belonged to Guangxi prefecture (廣西府) and in the beginning of the Qing (Kangxi 8, 1669), Weimo was abolished as an administrative unit. The area of Weimo is situated northwest of Yanshan 硯山 county, in Wenshan 文山 municipality, in what is now southeastern Yunnan.

[90] The *Wu Family Genealogy* refers to the location of the grave as Mt. Ma in Chicheng 赤城麻山, which should be located some 10 kilometers to the south of Bixie village.

[91] This sister of Wu Shouyang married a certain mister Zhang from Zhangfang (assuming that Zhangfang 張坊 refers to one of several places in Jiangxi with this name).

[92] *Wu Family Genealogy*: "明崇禎庚辰年十一月初五日巳時" (emending [正] into [禎]) and *Song on Cultivating Immortality*: "崇禎庚辰年十一月二十日酉時" Also note the different time of death.

[93] *Song on Cultivating Immortality*: "無疾而坐化尸解，所謂白日為真尸解，乃升天及生天之類." "Transforming while sitting" (*zuohua* 坐化) is a technical Buddhist term for a phenomenon whereby advanced monks are understood to voluntarily die while in a state of meditation by reducing their breath to the point of asphyxiation. "Release from the corpse" or "release by means of a corpse" (*shijie* 尸解) is a technical term of Daoist origin which suggests that a person somehow transcends death and ascends to heaven, usually without leaving a corpse behind. In stories where the protagonist uses this method, it usually turns out that after "death" and burial, after opening the coffin, the body has disappeared or has been replaced by, or transformed into, another object. The term "reborn in heaven" (*shengtian* 生天) is again a term of Buddhist origin, referring to one of the six paths of rebirth (*liudao lunhui* 六道輪廻; or simply *liudao* 六道). The path that leads to rebirth in heaven is considered the highest of the six scenarios of rebirth, but it also complicates the route of advancement to bodhisattva-hood for which humans are best situated.

[94] In a similar vein, I have personally heard people in Taiwan speaking about the death of their parents as the moment when they "obtained the Dao and ascended to heaven" (*dedao shengtian* 得道升天).

[95] The Longmen generational poem: 道德通玄靜，真常守太清。一陽來復本，合教永圓明。For an introduction and translation of this poem, see Pregadio, "The Longmen 'Lineage Poem'."

Wu Shouyang is probably best known under this lineage name, but he also used the sobriquet (*biehao* 別號) Chongxuzi 沖虛子, or the "Master who Ascends to the Void."[96] He is further referred to in the texts simply as "master Wu" (Wuzi 伍子). In his elaborate signature, finally, he describes himself as "recluse of the three teachings from Yuzhang 豫章三教逸民."[97] The biography in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* mentions Shouyang as his given name (*ming* 名) and Duanyang 端陽 as his courtesy name (*zi* 字), while simply Yang 陽 would be his original name (*yuanming* 原名). This is repeated in several studies and reference works, but is only found in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* and should be considered baseless.

Date and Place of Birth

According to his autobiography, Wu Shouyang was born on the first day of the new year (*zhengdan* 正旦) in the second year of the Wanli reign, just before noon.[98] In the *Wu Family Genealogy*, however, the time and date of his birth is specified as the fourth day of the first month of the *jiaxu* year during the Wanli reign, which would be three days later. As for the hour of birth, the *Wu Family Genealogy* writes "*jia* double-hour" (*jiashi* 甲時).[99] As there is no such thing, this seems to be a copying mistake for the "*shen* double-hour" (*shenshi* 申時), which would be between three and five in the afternoon. Perhaps, Wu allowed himself the poetic license in his autobiography to put his date of birth on New Year's Day; it better fits the rhythm and meter of his "song" and perhaps it has more auspicious connotations as well. In any case, his year of birth was 1574, probably on the first or fourth day of the first month.[100]

Wu's place of birth is nowhere explicitly stated as, in the Chinese context, the native place—i.e., the hometown of one's ancestors—is far more important as an aspect of individual and communal identity. One's native place is usually the first thing stated about a person in a biography and accordingly Wu is a "person from Bixie." The narrative of the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* suggests he was born in Qingzhou while his father was in office there. When we examine the chronology of the *Wu Family Genealogy*, however, it seems that Wu Shouyang must have been born while his parents lived in Zhejiang.

Date and Place of Death

The *Wu Family Genealogy*, which normally records a date of birth and a date of death for each biographical entry, does not provide a date of death for Wu Shouyang. At the same time, the same *Wu Family Genealogy* does mention about Wu and his wife that they were "both buried in Chicheng" (*juzang chicheng* 俱葬赤城) and it even contains a map depicting the gravesite of Wu and his father. It also informs us how Wu was supposed to have spent his last years and how his story ended:

> Because his mother was still alive, he instructed students to provide for her. When his mother died, he became an immortal recluse.
> 為母在故。訓徒奉養。母終仙隱。[101]

In Wu Daxing's preface, we probably find the original wording on which this *Wu Family Genealogy* biography was based. After discussing Wu's early life and his ambitions, it mentions:

> However, in order to provide for his mother, he still had to instruct students so as to support his mother. His intention was to definitely take care of his mother until the end. Thereafter, he was determined to enter the

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[96] Farzeen Baldrian-Hussein translates this sobriquet as "Master of the Unfathomable Emptiness," an alias shared with Zhang Zhengchang 張正常 (1335–78), the forty-second Celestial Master. See EOT, 1046. The term *chongxu* famously appears in the title of the work commonly known as the *Liezi* when it is also usually translated as "Unfathomable Emptiness." Another interpretation would be to read it as a verb-object combination instead of adjective-noun, *chong* meaning to "dash" through something and *xu* being a common designation for the "void" in the sense of "space." *Chongxu* then means to rise to, or through, the heavens and is suggestive of the event of becoming an immortal. In an earlier chapter, I have translated this name as "Master Who Pervades the Void." See van Enckevort, "Quanzhen and Longmen Identities in the Works of Wu Shouyang," 141.

[97] Yuzhang 豫章 is the name of the ancient commandery (*jun* 郡) that administrated modern-day Nanchang county.

[98] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.46a, 7533: "二年正旦朝將午."

[99] *Wu Family Genealogy*: "明萬歷甲戌年正月初四日甲時."

[100] In the Gregorian calendar, introduced by Pope Gregory XIII when Wu was eight years old, this would correspond with, respectively January 23rd or 26th of the year 1574.

[101] *Wu Family Genealogy*.

> mountains and finish the great work of his own body. But his mother was over ninety years old before she passed away and the teacher was seventy years old. He then became an immortal recluse.
> 然猶以奉母故。教授生徒館穀以養母。其意以必待母養終。然後決志入山畢己身大事。然母壽竟九十餘。母方終。而先生世壽七十。亦隨仙隱矣。[102]

Shen Zhaoding summarized Wu Daxing's narrative in 1764:

> His nature was utterly pious and because his mother was still alive, for years he instructed students to gain board and lodging. His mother passed away when she was over ninety years old and the teacher was then seventy years old. He then concealed his tracks and departed as an immortal.
> 性至孝，以母在故，歲授生徒博館穀。母九十餘而卒，而先生世壽亦七十矣，遂隱跡仙去。[103]

Wu's mother turned ninety *sui* in the first months of 1641 and she passed away in the eleventh month of the *gengchen* year during the Chongzhen reign, i.e., the end of 1640 or the beginning of 1641. In his autobiography written after her death in 1641, Wu mentions that, while in Nanjing, he recalls his mother soon turning ninety and "the fatherless son from Jinling (i.e., Nanjing) quickly returned home [to Bixie Village]," adding "My mother cried out from biting her fingers [because of her deep longing for her son] and I was afraid to disobey her wish [that I would] obey the celestial teachings and precepts and complete the Dao of filiality."[104] The final editions of Wu's works are dated between 1639 and 1641 and placed in Nanjing.

All of this suggests that Wu could not have visited his mother after finishing his writings in Nanjing, because she had already passed away by then. Besides, he mentions returning to Bixie in his writings so they must have been finished afterwards. If he meant to suggest, however, that he visited her sometime before 1639—i.e., before starting on the final edition of his writings—then this would be well before she turned ninety. He could of course have intended the word "soon" to signify a period of a few years, or he might have written this biography in several stages over a course of multiple years, or perhaps it was again a case of making the facts fit the story and the rhyme and rhythm of the verse that was his autobiography. In any case, after finishing his filial obligations, Wu was released from his societal duties and became a recluse in an undisclosed location somewhere in the mountains to finish the last stages of cultivation.

What exactly was meant by the term *xianyin* 仙隱 (lit.: immortal-recluse or immortal-going into reclusivity) that Wu Daxing used to describe Wu's last deeds? The exact same term is used in Wu's texts to describe the end of the life of Wu's teachers, Li Xu'an and Cao Huanyang. About Cao, Wu says that, in the end, he retired to the nearby Western Hills to practice the last stage of "facing a wall and returning to the void" in order to "issue the yang spirit." The last stage of cultivation, the finishing of the great affair of one's own life, necessitated a complete redrawal into reclusivity. There, the last task could be performed: a long and continuous state of meditation, the end result of which was understood to be the departure of the spirit and thus the end of the physical body. The act of *xianyin* thus marks both the end of physical life and the beginning of spiritual immortality.

The Last Years According to the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp*

The biography in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* tells us a different story. According to this text, while being a tutor to the Prince of Ji, Wu fled to Mt. Tiantai (in Zhejiang). There, he met Zhao Zhensong 趙真嵩 and, via Zhao, Wang Changyue. On Mt. Wangwu, Wang then transmitted the oral formulas of inner alchemy to Wu. We are told that Wu died in 1644—on the first day of the first month of the *jiashen* 甲申 year—in a place called Wuling 武陵.[105] "Wuling" has been the name of various locations. Esposito reads it as Hangzhou, which is probably a mix-up with Wulin 武林, which was indeed an alternative name for Hangzhou. In any case, there is no evidence for either this date of death or the place besides this biography in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* and that text, as discussed above, has been shown to be unreliable.

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[102] *Wu Family Genealogy*.
[103] *Wu zhenren shishi ji shoushou yuanliu lüe*, *biji*, 4.3a, 7542.
[104] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.58b, 7539: "母有囓指之呼不敢違所欲奉天教誡而全孝道也."
[105] *Zangwai daoshu* 31:186: "甲申正月朔日，忽沐浴辭眾而逝，地曰武陵."

The Early Years

The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* tells us Wu showed various signs of being predestined to become an immortal throughout his life, starting from the very beginning. While his mother was expecting, she had two prognosticative dreams. In her first dream, she dreamt about the pomegranate trees in front of a Confucius temple (*wenmiao* 文廟). The fruits of the trees, a traditional symbol of fertility, resembled cinnabar and fire, both unmistakingly symbols of alchemy, and when she swallowed one of them, it transformed into a human being. Since he mentions being born ten months later, this dream can be assumed to signify his conception. In the next dream, still pregnant, she saw nine phoenixes flying in circles around the embryo. Wu interprets these dreams as an omen of his coming immortality.

Soon after Wu's birth, the family—presumably Wu senior with his second wife and their child—moved to Shaoxing in Zhejiang. A few years later, when Wu was five years old, his father left them to take up office in Weimo where he died in the same year. At this point, Wu Shouyang and his mother lived in their family home in Bixie.[106] Wu mentions that he had already started his education. His wording is ambiguous, but it seems he was educated at home by one or more uncles as well as his older brothers.[107] He mentions that at ten *sui*, he was determined to study "the explication of the classics" (*mingjing* 明經). This suggests his education was directed at studying and memorizing the *Thirteen Classics* in order to pass the "explication of the classics" exams, a less prestigious alternative for the Presented Scholar exams. This could be explained as a sign that young Wu was expected to quickly finish his education and ensure a position in order to provide for the family now that his father's income had stopped.

During the next ten years, Wu's lifepath would be diverted from the conventional career of a scholar–official towards a livelihood as an instructor of inner alchemy. The autobiography suggests a gradual disenchantment with the idea of a conventional career until, at nineteen, he finally "quickly and completely discarded his Confucian robes as a pair of worn-out shoes."[108] The *Wu Family Genealogy* mentions the misuse of power by the eunuchs during the late Ming as a motivation to prefer self-cultivation to becoming part of the bureaucracy.[109] Simultaneously, he gradually developed this idea of an alternative careerpath. We are told that uncle Wu Lizhai 伍立齋 (1517–1551), who had participated in the civil service examinations, also had "aspirations to study the Dao 志於學道" and that Wu found inspiration in his books.[110] He specifically mentions reading some of Wang Chongyang's works. In his own words, at twelve he started to "develop the unconventional ambition to study the Dao."[111] The fact that he met Cao Huanyang when he was nineteen and that he became convinced that Cao could be his teacher was the final inducement in a long process.

Two events in these early years in particular doubtlessly influenced his outlook on life. First, his father's death meant a gradual impoverishment of the household as the income stopped and reserves had to be used. Later, Wu would even have to gradually sell of plots of land and eventually he and his mother would rely on his paying students for an income. Second, in his teenage years he experienced the catastrophic results of severe floods in his hometown. Between 1588 and 1589, northern Jiangxi was hit by what was probably

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106 We are not told when exactly Wu Shouyang and his mother moved back to Bixie, but it seems likely that they returned there from Shaoxing when Wu senior left for Yunnan as Wu does not mention following him to Yunnan and literally says that his father "left them to depart to" (*bie* 別) Yunnan.

107 Wu Xide had three younger brothers, one of which was given for adoption to a younger brother of his father. His second younger brother was the father of Wu Shouxu and Wu Taichu. What Wu literally says about his education is: "at that year, the lad (referring to himself) attended the teacher's bamboo mat; uncles and older brothers repeatedly disciplined [me for my] faults 當年童子侍師筵，叔兄兄叔疊繩愆." (*Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.46b, 7533).

108 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.47a, 7534: "儒衣敝履幡然棄."

109 Perhaps this should be read as a frame on the side of the editors of the *Wu Family Genealogy*, seeing that a self-concious choice to refuse to work with a corrupt government would probably be seen as a better justification for the pursuit of self-cultivation than purely personal religious concerns. On the other hand, the editors of the *Wu Family Genealogy* appear to be proud to have "an immortal in the family" and it would of course not be out of the ordinary when Wu Shouyang would indeed have been concerned with government corruption.

110 Wu Lizhai 伍立齋 (1517–1551; lineage name Xizhong 希中, *zi* Ruji 汝極; Lizhai was a *hao*) was an *Yijing* expert and obtained a *juren* degree in 1543. See *Nanchang xianzhi* (1588), 17.49b; *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 22.8b. The *Wu Family Genealogy* nor the *Nanchang xianzhi* mentions him having held an office. Wu calls him "uncle-gentleman" (*shuweng* 叔翁), which normally means a younger brother of one's grandfather. Lizhai actually shared a great-grandfather with Wu Xide. The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* seems to suggest he was still alive, but he died at 43 years of age more than twenty years before the time Wu is speaking about.

111 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.46b, 7533: "生學道之異志."

a tornado.[112] Heavy rainfall must have caused Poyang Lake to flood the surrounding low-lying alluvial plains—as it still regularly does—including the area between two arms of the Fu River 撫河 (historically also known as Wuyang River 武陽水) where Bixie village is located. Such a flood could indeed be expected to cause "extensive agricultural losses, damage to several cities and many agricultural villages, and massive population relocation."[113]

Wu tells us that the floods devastated the harvests for three consecutive years, resulting in widespread famine. In his later self-narration, he frames his hardship during this episode as an ascetic practice, an opportunity to trade wealth for blessings (減祿求增福), and as testimony to the kind of ethical character that forms the right disposition to cultivate immortality. He describes it as a childlike ignorance, benefiting others whilst denying oneself. The actual impact of these events on Wu's formative years must have been substantial and he spends a few paragraphs on it in his autobiography. Several times he was reduced to eating the roots of smartweed that grew on the shoals of the river banks. We are further told that the Wu family lent out grain from their storage rooms to the starving and that Wu himself waded through the water to help out his neighbours. He later recalls that part of his father's financial reserves was lost during this time.

1593–1612

The period of nineteen years between 1593 and 1612 is mainly characterized by Wu's long episode of instruction. At age nineteen, he met his first and only teacher Cao Huanyang. In the next year, Cao would initiate Wu in the first stages of cultivation. In 1612, Wu would receive the last transmission and in the following year Wu would take on his own students and become a master in his own right. He repeatedly describes this period as one of continuous hardship, arduous training, financial difficulties, and the added concern of supporting Cao. To be able to do this, he apparently had to exhaust the largest part of the family resources left after the death of his father and the years of famine. He says:

> From 1593 to 1612, for (almost) twenty years, I consulted and supported the teacher, sold the fields and houses, dissolved the family estate and, through rigorous and ascetic practice, obtained realization.
> 我自癸巳至壬子，二十年參師護師，賣田舍，破家計，苦心苦行而得悟。[114]

A few times he specifically notes three important moments: the first encounter with Cao in 1593, the first initiation and transmission in 1594, and the final initiation and transmission in 1612. These initiations into, and transmissions of, the theoretical and practical knowledge of self-cultivation were accompanied by rituals. Although described in little detail, they give us some idea of the circumstances of transmission. We also find likewise sketchy descriptions of rituals of thanksgiving and exorcism as well as prayers for blessings performed at various occasions. Another biographical theme of this period is the recurring concern of procuring the necessary funds to finance the practice and, especially, to support Cao and thus secure his preparedness to share the methods. A last topic is Wu's introduction to alchemy, which he says to have learnt in 1593 but first put into practice in 1612. Considering the marginal role alchemy plays in the remainder of his works, it takes up relatively much space in the autobiography.

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[112] Wu talks about three years of "floods and famine" (*shui huang* 水荒) and also says "In the years between 1588 and 1589, Jiangxi yearly experienced a great famine. 萬歷戊子己丑年間江西歲大饑." (*Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.47a, 7534). Also see *Nanchang xianzhi* (1935), 55.3b. As a matter of fact, the local events described by Wu were part of a series of natural disasters and epidemics that raged in large parts of China during the late Ming. See Dunstan, "The Late Ming Epidemics."

[113] See Shankman, Keim, and Song, "Flood Frequency in China's Poyang Lake Region." This article mentions how Poyang lake, the largest freshwater lake in China, is "historically a region of significant floods." The area surrounding the lake consist of low-lying plains prone to floods and five major rivers flow from the mountains surrounding Jiangxi into the lake, which in turn drains through a narrow outlet in the Yangzi. The difference in surface area between the dry- and the wet season averages to about 1000km². One of the findings of this article is that severe floods of Poyang lake are clearly associated with El Niño conditions (periodic development of a band of warm ocean water off the Pacific coast of South America having global effects). Lists of what have been reconstructed to be dates of likely historical El Niño events also include the years 1587 to 1589. See Couper-Johnston, *El Nino: The Weather Phenomenon that Changed the World.*

[114] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.93b, 7595.

Encountering Cao Huanyang

In the fifth month of 1593, when Wu had just turned nineteen, he first met his only teacher.[115] Cao Huanyang 曹還陽 (1563–1622; *hao* Huanyang 還陽, *faming* Changhua 常化) was a fellow native of Nanchang county, living in the town of Wuyang 武陽, located a few miles from Bixie village. Wu describes him as "a son of relatives" (*qi zhi er* 戚之兒), so it seems they were somehow related. We are further told that Cao came from a family that had been wealthy for a few generations. He had learned the Dao of celestial immortality from Li Xu'an, who had been instructed by Zhang Jingxu. I examine this lineage in more detail later in this chapter.

When they first came across, Wu tells us, they immediately started to discuss "the highest principles of celestial immortality" after which Cao occasionally started to invite Wu to his home. After a few of such meetings, Wu was apparently convinced that he had met a true "immortal" who could teach him the Way of Immortality. He thus speaks about meeting Cao as "encountering an immortal" (*fengxian* 逢仙). Cao told Wu he thought Wu was the reincarnation of a Buddhist monk and, at this point in the autobiography, Wu recalls that a "diviner" had called him the reincarnation of a Chan monk when he was just a few months old.

A few months after meeting, in the eighth month of 1593 during the Mid-Autumn festival, Wu and Cao "entered a room" (*rushi* 入室). Wu's descriptions of this term suggest that "entering a room" means that they selected a location for practice where they could live together to support each other in cultivation. This could be a simple house, ideally situated in a Blissful Land (*fudi* 福地) but practically at least at the right distance from a city, far enough to live undisturbed and close enough for supplies.

At this point in the biography, the issue of funding the practice comes to the fore. Serious practice of inner alchemy required considerable amounts of money. Self-cultivation was a fulltime occupation and thus there was no time to procure an income. On the other hand, there were high costs for sustaining a practice site, for living expenses (possibly including expensive medicines) and provisions for the family, for alchemical experiments, and for travel or any other practicalities. While Wu was Cao's disciple, he also acted as his patron. Wu Xide's reserves had however already been exhausted during the years of famine and to raise the necessary funds to "protect the teacher" (*hushi* 護師), Wu had to start selling plots of land from the family property. Eventually he would even have to sell some of his wife's jewelry.

The Transmission and Practice of Alchemy

In that first year in 1593, Wu was instructed in the method of alchemy. It was the first thing instructed to him by Cao. Wu is clear about the fact that he is talking about alchemy in the sense of making artificial gold and silver. Wu's view on the use of this method is not so easy to pinpoint, although there are elobarate discussions on this and closely related topics in the dialogues. The occasion for considering practicing alchemy at this point is actually stated to be a lack of funds, which the artificial precious metals presumably were to replenish. At the same time, the ingredients for such experiments were expensive and Wu and Cao did not have enough funds to actually put the alchemical theory into practice. The conventional wisdom that you need money to make money apparently also applies to alchemy.

Wu tells us he was unable to put the method he learned from Cao into practice until 1612.[116] In the spring of that year, he and Cao went to a riverbank in the Western Hills and apparently performed some alchemical experiments.[117] In the autobiography he describes these formulas in verse but we are not told in clear terms what the results were of their experiments. With all his references to alchemy I believe Wu intends to convey a few things to his readers. First, he informs us that he knew the theory and practice of making precious metals and could pratice it if he would choose to do so. He is, in other words, showing us his cultural capital in selling himself as a teacher. Second, this and other passages in Wu's works make clear that the art of making precious metals had been part of the lineage since Zhang Jingxu and it was considered,

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[115] In the *Song on Cultivating Immortality*, Wu says fifth month while in another passage he mentions the third month of 1593; see *Tianxian zhengli zhilun zengzhu*, *biji*, 4.62b, 7579. I believe he might be using third month in this passage to preserve the parallelism with the third month that signifies the end of his discipleship, thus counting *exactly* twenty years.

[116] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.51a, 7536.

[117] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.49b, 7535: "In the spring of the *renzi* year, I then went with the teacher to refine together at the bank of a river in the valley behind the Western Hills West of Yuzhang municipality [i.e., Nanchang city] 壬子春遂與師同煉於豫章城西西山之後溪水涯次."

under the right conditions, a legitimate means of procuring funds for the practice of inner cultivation. Third, Wu's reluctance to practice this kind of alchemy—on account of his professed disregard of wealth and his determination to transcend the mundane world—was exactly the confirmation Cao needed of Wu's morality. Paradoxically, Wu's disdain of alchemy was precisely what convinced Cao he was the only one worthy to receive it.

The First Transmission and Rituals

During the first months of 1594, Wu followed Cao to Ningzhou 甯州 (northern Jiangxi) to continue his instruction.[118] His funds were exhausted again, so he tells us he had to sell some plots of land. He does not clarify why exactly they went to Ningzhou, merely mentioning, "in Ningzhou we took up lodgings in an inn at Xujia."[119] Although "Xujia" could mean that they stayed at an otherwise unidentified "Xu family," it probably refers here to one of several villages by that name in the Ningzhou region.[120] It is not until the end of the episode concerning the first transmission in the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* that Wu explicitly mentions living in Bixie village again "from that time onward" (從今), so it seems that Wu and Cao spend several months in 1594 in Xujia before returning to Bixie.[121] In this period, Wu repeatedly pleaded with Cao to be instructed:

> One year after meeting the teacher, there had not been one day or one hour when I did not inquire about the Dao. From this he understood my intentions and knew my ambition and only then he proceeded to memorialize the Celestial Court and the Central Palace of Purple Tenuity requesting Heaven to decide by mandate if he could transmit [the methods] or not. If he was allowed to transmit, then he would transmit. If he was not allowed to transmit then he would stop. The most important prohibition of the Dao of transcendence is that it is not allowed to transmit [the teaching] to other people without permission.
> 遇師一年之後，無一日一時不問道，此而知心識志，方行表奏天庭，及紫微中宮，請天命而決可傳與否。許傳則傳，不許則止。仙道禁戒至重，不得私授於人也。[122]

Thus, after following Cao to Xujia, Wu continuously questioned him about the way of immortality demonstrating his determination. After a year, Cao had been sufficiently convinced of Wu's intentions and decided to perform the prerequisite rituals in order for the Celestial Court to mandate him to transmit the way of immortality. This transmission was the first initiation and, although described in mere hints, there are suggestions of at least three types of rituals. The first ritual is described in the passage above. In 1594, on the 22nd day of the fifth month, a petition was presented (*biaozou* 表奏) to the Central Palace of Purple Tenuity (*ziwei zhonggong* 紫微中宮), requesting the Celestial Court (*tianting* 天庭) to issue a Celestial Mandate (*tianming* 天命) on whether to transmit the way of immortality to Wu. Then, Wu describes a ritual he refers to as the "deliverance of a declaration" (*touci* 投詞). The content of this declaration is described as an oath (*shi* 誓) and this document is burned to be received by the Highest Emperor (*shangdi* 上帝). The purpose of this ritual is again a request for a heavenly mandate, this time specifically for the transmission of a talisman (*fujie* 符節).[123] Wu compares this ritual to those performed by the first students of Wang Chongyang, the earliest Quanzhen adepts. He contrasts this oath to the Highest Emperor with the kind of oath according to him mostly sworn by his contemporaries to their teachers.

The Blood Covenant

In the line following the reference to the talisman, Wu suggests in one sentence the performance of another ritual (or another part of the same elaborate initiation ritual) right after the presentation of the petition. He says, "the pricking of blood was confirmed by Numinous Officer Wang 刺血靈官王證之." The

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[118] Ningzhou is an older name for Xiushui 修水 county, Jiangxi.

[119] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.51b, 7536: "甯州旅邸投徐家."

[120] There are several villages called Xujia 徐家 in this area. Ningzhou is located in the present-day Xiushui county, in the mountainous area of Northwestern Jiangxi near Wuningxiang River (武寧鄉水; a tributary of Xiushui 修水 River).

[121] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.54a, 7537: "From now on I live in seclusion in the marketplace Bixie 從今隱處辟邪市."

[122] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.53a, 7537.

[123] It is not clear from Wu's writings whether this concerns one talisman or a set of talismans. I will translate *fujie* here as talisman. This talisman is discussed in chapter six.

annotations clarify that the "pricking of blood" (*cixue* 刺血) is in order to perform the ritual "smearing of blood" (*shaxue* 歃血), that is, the practice of swearing a blood oath.[124] This was an ancient oath-making ritual in which a blood covenant was typically used to form an allegiance or display loyalty.[125] The smearing of the blood goes together with the swearing of an "oath of alliance" (*mengshi* 盟誓), the alliance being directed towards Heaven. Numinous Officer Wang (Wang lingguan 王靈官) refers to the terrifying deity that guards the entrance of many temples. Here, he apparently supervises Wu's swearing of an oath. Presumably, his role is to witness the performance of the ritual as well as to exact punishment in case the terms of the covenant would be violated. There is another interesting passage in a dialogue with Wu Taiyi that mentions such oaths. It actually gives a summary description of several aspects of the ritual process of initiation:

> Gu Yutao asked: "what is the explanation of swearing a covenant?" Answer: From ancient times, when immortal perfected ones transmitted the true Dao, they had to practice abstinence, perform an Offering, they had to prepare pledges according to the rules, swear a blood covenant with Heaven, and petition the Highest Emperor, the Three Terraces and the Northern Dipper, the Three Officials of the Southern Polestar and the Four Sages and Five Emperors and the Administrator of Life and plead for your life and if they send their consent downwards [the true Dao] can be transmitted. Every time [the Dao] is transmitted to a person, each and every holy spirit in the whole universe is informed. If there would be those who are evil, casually resorting to bribery and cunning to illicitly receive a transmission, that would surely be a serious matter! That should surely be proscribed! Therefore, the *Illustrious Code of the Four Poles* says, "The formulae to transcend one's fate and return one's years, can be transmitted when one encounters a perfected one. In accordance with the covenant, eight taels of superior silver,[126] silk in each of the five colors, each ninety foot, and five pairs of golden rings; the teacher and his disciple face each other for ninety days and inform the Sun and Moon. The Officers of the Left and of the Right inspect violation of the codes and betrayal of the covenants of the transmission." It also says, "Methods for making gold or elixir all require the swearing of an oath, superior silver and white silk, so as to swear the pledge of not divulging for nine days." It also says, "When there is a case of initiating without a covenant, the teacher and the recipient will both be inspected by the two officers." It further says, "When there is a case of initiating without pledges, this is called a transgression of the Celestial Dao in the scriptures. When there is a case of transmission without a covenant, this is called disclosure of the celestial treasures in the scriptures." Then there is the *Highest Rules and Commands*, which says, "Disciples who are being initiated ought to take pains to hold a Pure Offering before the transmission. If you do not investigate such a person and the transmission takes place without a Fast, the teacher ought to die and the recipient [ought to] lose both eyes. If the Fast is not austere and fervent, the teacher ought to fall ill and the recipient loses his mouth." The *Highest True Scripture of the Three Ones and Five Qi* says, "The true celestial immortals possess the elixir of Nine Cycles of the Dragon Embryo and Golden Liquid [and they possess] longevity and enduring vision, they have a pact to only teach one student in forty years (?). All of them cannot violate the codes and recklessly disclose. Those without credentials of immortality, are not allowed to find out about this." If you have trust in a person, confer silver [to demonstrate] your trust and silk [to demonstrate] your sincerity and put it to the test without withdrawal (?), and transmit the Dharma.[127] If you hesitate or harbor any suspicions, keep it secret and do not impart it.
> 顧與弢問：誓盟之說？答曰：自古仙真授受真道，必清淨齋醮。如科條具信贄，刺血盟誓於天，奏告於上帝、三台北斗、南辰三官、四聖五帝司命各位下請命，降允而後可傳。凡一傳人，遍天地間聖神無不告知者。倘有惡類，妄自行財，及以詭詐私相授受，師弟子同受考掠，可不重哉？可不戒哉？故《四極明科略》 云："度命回年之訣，遇真便傳。依盟上金八兩，五色之羅各九十尺，金環五雙，師弟子對為九十日，告日月。傳違科負盟，被左右二官所考。"又云："金方丹方悉盟誓，上金白絹，以誓九天不泄之信。"又 云："不盟而度，師與得者，同被二官所

[124] According to Richard Wang, *shaxue* 歃血 means smearing blood of an animal sacrificial victim on the lips. See Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 210. Paul Katz likewise explains this term as "daubing their lips with its blood." See Katz, "Trial by Power," 68. Ter Haar, however, notes that the verb "to smear" (*sha* 歃) "had lost its original meaning by the Han period (if it ever had this meaning in the first place)." To "smear blood" simply refers to this ritual of a blood covenant and, in reality, the usual practice was to drink the blood in combination with liquor. See Ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads*, 177–179.

[125] For a study of oath-making rituals, including blood covenants, in the context of the history of Chinese legal culture and the role of religion and ritual in its development, see Katz, *Divine Justice* (esp. 63ff.). See also Ter Haar, *Ritual and Mythology of the Chinese Triads*, 1998 (pp. 163, 178, 181); and Mark Edward Lewis, *Sanctioned Violence in Early China*, 1990.

[126] In this study, I translate *jin* 金 sometimes as "gold" and sometimes as "silver," depending on the context. This particular passage includes both these translations. In the context of alchemy and in the context of jewelry, I interpret it as gold. But when it is used in a ritual or monetary context, I translate as "silver."

[127] Depending on the context and my interpretation, I translate the term *fa* 法 (law, standard, method, et cetera) sometimes as "dharma" and sometimes as "method." The term can mean both and, in some cases, both translations can make sense.

> 考。”又云：“無信而度，經謂之越天道。無盟而傳，經謂之泄天寶。”又《太上科令》云：“傳授弟子當苦清齋，而相傳授受。不審其人，無齋而傳付者，師當死，受者失兩目。齋不苦切，師當病，受者失口焉。”《太上三一五炁真經》 云：“天仙之真，有龍胎金液九轉之丹,長生久視，有四十年一出之約,皆不得背科而妄泄也。無仙籍者，不得聞知也。”若信人，賚信金誠素，試之無退，將法付之。若猶豫猜疑，秘而莫與。[128]

Nineteen Years of Cultivation

After being initiated in the Longmen lineage and receiving the first transmission from Cao, Wu describes a period of nineteen years, from 1593 to 1612, in which he puts in to practice what he has learnt, receives further daily instruction, and takes care of Cao Huanyang and his family. During this period, Wu tells us he lived in seclusion in Bixie village, approximately five miles from Cao Huanyang's home who presumably still lived in Wuyang. He describes an average day. While living in seclusion, Wu visited Cao almost daily to consult with him. After his breakfast he would hasten to Cao's home. He would stay there all day, returning after nightfall. He invariably came home late. At Cao's home, Wu received instruction, questioning Cao about the Dao (*wendao* 問道).

During this period, Wu financially supported himself, his family (his mother and his wife), and Cao Huanyang and his family. Besides financially supporting Cao, he also served him and helped him out in other ways. While in his home, during the day, Wu would see Cao eat two meals while not eating anything at all himself, he tells us. He provided Cao and his family with food and clothes. Without an income, Wu gradually ate into the family budget. He mentions his mother faulting him for consuming their reserves and letting the circumstances of the family deteriorate. At one point, Wu urgently needed money for Cao and had to implore on his wife to give him her jewelry; he mentions golden earrings and a silver hairpin. He further mentions using the rings and buttons of his own headscarf (*wangjin* 網巾). In this instance, the payment of "protection money" (*hucai* 護財) was evidently directly related to the transmission of know-how. At the end of the first stage of cultivation, Wu receives instructions for the second stage and has to pay for it.

An aspect Wu clearly intends to emphasize in his autohagiography is the hardship he experienced during this period and, related to this, the physical and mental suffering. The suggestion is that such hardship is unavoidable when one wants to gain results in self-cultivation and hence it serves as a demonstration of Wu's determination. He mentions that, during the day, when questioning Cao, he would not eat a meal the whole day, obviously becoming very hungry to the point that his bowels started to hurt, for which he refused to seek medical help. As a matter of fact, he presents such pain as a testament to his determination and as a self-conscious emulation of earlier examples.[129]

Related to this is the theme of self-healing. He mentions having suffered from a bad health since childhood, having to endure various conditions including "asthma" (*xiaochuan* 哮喘) and "rheumatism" (*fengshi* 風濕). During the flood episode, the constant wading through the water had caused sores (*chuang* 瘡) on his feet and hands and pain in his whole body. During the years of self-cultivation, these illnesses gradually disappeared. This again is read as verification of efficacious cultivation. Wu says:

> I say: When a Daoist has an illness, no one else can cure him and self-healing is sufficient. When he cultivates the most valuable treasures (i.e., the Three Treasures) in his body, his illness will disappear by itself.
> 予謂道家有病，他人莫能醫，自治足矣。修煉身中至寶，厥疾自瘳。[130]

Yet another theme in Wu's self-narration is the fact that he was criticized and mocked for his determination to cultivate immortality while neglecting his social responsibilities and the idea that this kind of behavior is to be expected, as confirmed by the examples of earlier saints. It seems as if he wants to say that it is not only to be expected but even to be read as a sign of being on the right track. Wu sacrificed everything for the cultivation of immortality. He neglected his duties as a husband and his mother blamed him for reducing the family to poverty. He was, apparently, regarded by most as a fool. We are told that he was condemned for his behavior by his own family, while the neighbours gossiped and ridiculed him. This was apparently

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[128] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.13a-14a, 7471.
[129] The commentary of the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* has, "it was also out of a wish to emulate those who are so eager that they forget to eat that I was like that 亦願效發憤忘食者，故如此"
[130] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.55a, 7538.

no subtle affair. It even went so far that he was scolded, insulted, and even beaten. Wu takes it all as evidence of his determination. He finds support and solace in Wang Chongyang's biography:

> All the common people called me an insane madman. But, if you do not forsake the affairs of society, how can you obtain an ambition to cultivate like this? As for the perfected man Wang Chongyang, the whole village said he was insane and called his renouncement of the family property without due consideration deranged insanity. The Perfected Man then also called himself Wang the Madman and did not refuse it.
> 俗人莫不謂予為狂惑之疾。然不廢人間之務，何得修如此之志？王重陽真人，一鄉皆說為害風，謂其輕棄家業，為狂惑害風。真人亦自呼王害風而不辭。[131]

Interestingly, adopting the right way of dealing with such hardship is also presented as a skill and an aspect of self-cultivation (*lianji* 煉己). Wu alludes to a saying that expresses what is considered an extreme degree of self-control in the face of abuse: to be spat in the face and letting it dry by itself (*tuomian zigan* 唾面自乾; i.e., without wiping it off, thus without reacting to the abuse). He explains that, when confronted with insult or abuse, one should learn to ignore it. This is expressed in the same formula we see everytime when the functions of the senses are discussed: one should "hear without hearing" (*wen er buwen* 聞而不聞). In this way, the "demon of hearing" (*wenmo* 聞魔) will "disappear by itself" (*zixiao* 自消). Further on, he tells us he escaped a beating by "not returning it" (*buhuan* 不還). All of this is explained as belonging to "the method of correct self-cultivation" (*zheng lianji fa* 正煉己法).

More Rituals

The initiation into the Longmen lineage and the subsequent transmission of instructions were surrounded by rituals. Besides these specific rituals of transmission, Wu explained there are smaller rituals performed on a regular basis. Although he does not give elaborate descriptions, it is clear there was a broad range of types of rituals. This included prayers for success in the practice, asking for celestial consent for further instruction, thanksgiving rituals, and exorcistic rituals. We are told that twice a month, at the occasion of the new moon and the full moon, Wu presented a Yellow Memorial (*jin huangbiao* 進黃表) to the Highest Emperor (*shangdi* 上帝). The content of this memorial was a prayer to be blessed and to be enabled to complete the results of the Dao (*quan daoguo* 全道果).[132]

In the spring of 1599, Wu performed what he refers to as a Pure Offering (*qingjiao* 清醮). The intention was to give thanks to Heaven and Earth (*tiandi* 天地), as well as to the holy teachers (*shengshi* 聖師) that have transmitted the Dao through the generations.[133] The ritual involved the presentation of a Green Declaration (*qingci* 青詞), a type of document that usually specified the intent of the ritual.

Yet another ritual is referred to by Wu as the "Slaying of [the demons of] Impermanence" (*zhan wuchang* 斬無常). These "demons of impermanence" (*wuchanggui* 無常鬼) are the messengers of death. This ritual involved the use of talismans (*fu* 符), formulas (*jue* 訣), and spells (*zhou* 咒).[134] According to Wu, the Slaying of Impermanence was a method which assured that one would not die for one year. He mentions this ritual right after referring to the Pure Offering in 1599 and says he slayed demons for thirty nights. It is not clear from the wording whether this was a one-time event during one particular month or a recurrent ritual he performed continuously every day of every month. The only other passage which refers to this ritual suggests that it could be performed whenever the need for it was felt and, incidentally, shows that Wu ascribes this method to Qiu Chuji:

> Therefore, ever since our Perfected Man Qiu Changchun transmitted the methods (or the Dharma), everyone has had the method of "Slaying and Repulsing Impermanence." If ever during the serious cultivation of Hundred Days or Ten Months you would see a messenger from the Demon of Impermanence arrive, then use this method to Slay and Repulse it. If it does not yield [to the method] and leave, the two paths of correct and wrongful rebirth will both disappear (i.e., one will escape the cycle of life and death).[135] Therefore, [this method] allows the great adepts to "avoid death when one ought to die." This is also referred to as "my

131 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.56b, 7538.
132 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.54b, 7537.
133 Ibid.
134 Ibid.
135 This sentence seems contradictory. I'm not certain how to understand it.

> destiny is in my own hands."
> 故我邱長春真人，授法已來，皆有斬退無常一法。凡精修百日，十月之間，倘見無常鬼使一到，即用法斬退。不隨以去，則正異兩趣俱無。故令大修行者，當死而不死。亦謂之：我命在我也。[136]

Practicising the First Stage

Many events in the biography and the anecdotes in the remainder of Wu's writings are not dated and there is no way to recreate a detailed chronology of his period of training, or any other period for that matter. The passage translated below is a rare dated description of a specific stage in his own process of cultivation:

> In the spring of the *renyin* year (1602) during the Wanli reign, I first tried the Pass of Hundred Days at home and refined essence to transform it into *qi*. The first month, I adjusted and practiced. The next month, I persisted. When the moment arrives, the spirit becomes aware of it and I revolved one Celestial Orbit. Spinning the handle of the Dipper, I realized in silence that the saying from the World-Honored One, "realizing the Dao upon seeing a bright star," conformed with my subtle application. … From then on, each night I would perform three to five Celestial Orbits, then seven to eight Celestial Orbits and, when I practiced more than ten Celestial Orbits, the practice would extend all through the night, without pause. After the essence was transformed into *qi* and the fire phasing had thus been sufficient, I obtained the conditions to stop the fire and I stopped it. … In somewhat more than two months, all in all one season of three months, I completed the Great Medicine. The old saying "laying a foundation in hundred days" is truly reliable!
> 我於萬曆壬寅春，初試百日關於家，而煉精以化炁。首一月調習，次一月精進，時至神知，運一 周天，斡音斡旋斗柄，默悟世尊所謂"見明星而悟道"之說，契我妙用。…自是以來，一夕行過三五周天，至七八周天，又至十餘周天，則工將徹夜，而無間歇矣。精盡化炁矣，火候斯足矣，遂得止火之景而止之。… 約兩月之餘，總三月之季，而成大藥。古言百日築基者，信哉！[137]

The date of the passage is a bit puzzling. Wu was initiated in 1594 and at that time received his first instruction. Here, we are told that he started the actual practice of the first stage of cultivation eight years later, in 1602. Why did he first try the Pass of Hundred Days after eight years of instruction? What did he do before this time? Had his instruction up until this time only been theoretical? Or were there other preliminary stages to be completed? These questions are not fully clarified in the texts.

The Last Transmission

Earlier in the autobiography, we are told about Wu's extreme determination and great desire to learn the Dao, visiting Cao every day from dawn to dusk. Twice every month, he conveyed his prayers to learn the complete Dao in his petitions to the Highest Emperor. As he says at that point, "Certain celestial immortals urged the teacher three times to transmit 有天仙三催師度." Further on in the autobiography, Wu says:

> **The teacher spoke: "Your determination is known to me; as well as how you painstakingly learn the Dao, this mechanism of immortality. In ten years' time, I was urged three times by celestial immortals, prompting me to complete your initiation."** One day the teacher said to me: "You have already accomplished some of the stages of immortality and for ten years there have been three times when a celestial perfected one mandated me to rapidly tell it completely to you. I also know you [properly] now and I ought to transmit it to you."
> **師言汝志我已知，苦心學道是仙機。十年三受天仙囑，速我將伊畢度之。**一日老師謂予曰：汝

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[136] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.5b-6a, 7467.

[137] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.45b, 7425. Wu recounts this anecdote in the dialogues when asked about the proper time to start practicing the first stage of cultivation. He emphasizes a few points here. First, the adept must know the "time" (*shi* 時) to start acting, which always means the "true time" (*zhenshi* 真時) when *qi* transforms into essence and which—when acted upon—becomes the "*zi* double hour" (*zishi* 子時) in the temporal framework of the cultivation process. Second, we are informed that this "time" occurs during the night, when according to the principle of "activity during the day and inactivity during the night" (*ridong yejing* 日動夜靜), the *qi* is inactive and in anticipation of its reactivation. Third, the whole process of transforming essence into *qi*—i.e., the first stage of cultivation—can take longer or shorter but approximately takes a hundred days as it is codified in the term for this stage: the Pass of Hundred Days (*bairi guan* 百日關). Wu was successful in roughly this period and Cao, so we are told further on in this dialogue, did it in less than fifty days.

> 於仙階已有分者，從十年以來，曾三次有天真命我速速全與你道，我今亦知汝矣，當度與汝也。[138]

This event preceeds the final transmission, which is repeatedly said to have taken place in 1612. The period of ten years Wu mentions here thus seems to refer to the period between his successful completion of the first stage in 1602 and the final transmission in 1612:

> Perfected man Cao met master Wu in the *guiji* year of the Wanli reign (1593). During the fifth month of the summer of the *jiawu* year (1594), he initiated master Wu. … In the *renzi* year (1612), a further nineteen years later, Cao initiated master Wu once more. [This time] in the complete directions of the common lineage of immortals and buddhas, enabling one to escape the Three Realms. He further transmitted the methods to support the Dao, urging [him]: "These are the methods to support the state from perfected man Qiu, who is recorded in the *History of the Yuan*. They are only learnt by heart. In case you need to use them to support the Dao, use them. If not, you can set them aside. Do not [use them to] cause evil in the world, thus committing a great sin." My nineteen years of painstaking determination and practice perhaps slightly resemble the painstaking determination of patriarch Changchun. Having obtained the complete great Dao, how would I dare not to follow the decrees and interdictions?
> 曹真人於萬曆癸巳，與伍子遇。甲午年夏五月，度伍子。… 至壬子又十九年，曹復度伍子仙佛合宗全旨，以出三界之上者。並傳以助道之方，囑之曰："此《元史》所載邱真人助國之方也，唯默記之。倘護道要用則用之，否則閒置之可也，勿為世間作孽，取大罪也！"予之十九年中，苦志苦行，或亦少仿佛於長春祖之苦志者。得全大道，敢不如命戒之哉？[139]

In this passage and a few others, we are told that Wu received the final transmission from Cao in the third month of 1612. This year thus signifies the end of his period of instruction and soon afterwards he starts to have students of his own. His identity changes from a student to a teacher. Wu characterizes this moment of transmission specifically as the second initiation (*du* 度), which suggests that Cao's transmission marked a new level of attainment and that the transmission was accompanied by rituals and possibly objects. Wu mentions that what he was transmitted at this moment was the complete Dao (*quandao* 全道) and he describes this as "the complete directions of the Common Lineage of Immortals and Buddhas" (*xianfo hezong quanzhi* 仙佛合宗全旨).

Further, Wu was transmitted methods to "support the Dao" (*zhudao zhi fang* 助道之方), which are attributed to Qiu Changchun. He does not point out here what these methods exactly were. Apparently, they are particularly secret as Cao notes they are only to be memorized instead of, such is the suggestion, being put in writing. They can be used to support the Dao, but apparently also to support the State. They can, however, also be used to cause great evil. The expression "support the Dao" (*zhudao* 助道), in Wu's writings, is used in two ways. It can refer to what we might call supporting practices, denoting practices which are not discussed as central to the process of cultivation but which can be resorted to when needed. In the dialogues with Wu Shouxu, Wu describes the medicinal recipes meant to stimulate potency as methods to support the Dao. Here, however, Wu most probably refers to alchemical methods to produce artificial precious metals to be used to fund the practice. This interpretation follows for example from his use of the expression "protecting the Dao" (*hudao* 護道), which is usually used in the sense of supporting the cultivation of the Dao financially. This seems at odds however with Wu's earlier statement that he learned the method of alchemy in 1593, but it conforms with the fact that he did not perform any experiments until 1612.

1612–1644

The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* focusses on Wu's youth and the nineteen years of apprenticeship with Cao. In the end, we find some remarks on the last phase of his life. But the roughly thirty years in between are not described in any detail. Therefore, there are some uncertainties about the exact events and dates in this period. We do know, however, from passages in his other writings and from circumstantial evidence, that during this time he instructed several students, operated a school in Nanjing, and wrote his books. Wu's apprenticeship with Cao ended in 1612, after the final transmission. We are not informed about Cao's later

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[138] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.57a, 7539.
[139] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.79b-80a, 7588.

activities, except that, in the end, he retreated to the Western Hills and departed in 1622. According to Wu, he himself resided in Changsha from 1613 onwards to instruct Zhu Taihe 朱太和, the Prince of Ji 吉王—most likely a prince named Zhu Changchun. According to one passage, this instruction took place until 1632. We are however also told that he spent the last period of his life in Nanjing where he operated a studio, received guests, instructed his disciples, and composed his writings. He mentions meeting someone in Nanjing as early as 1627. Moreover, according to official sources, this Prince of Ji died in 1618. There are several possible scenarios to account for these inconsistent data but the exact sequence of events remains unclear. At some time near the end of his life he apparently returned to Bixie village, but again he does not give a firm date. It is of course also possible that he returned to Bixie several times between 1627 and his death around 1644. We are incidentally told, for example, that, while in Nanjing in 1636, he was preparing to go on a long journey. In the autobiography, he mentions returning to Bixie to visit his mother who would soon turn ninety in order to fulfill his filial duties. His mother would turn ninety in early 1641 and passed away in late 1640 or early 1641. He signed the *Straightforward Essays* in the autumn of 1639 in Nanjing. The *Nine Chapters* is signed in the spring of 1640. Again, the dates are difficult to reconcile and the exact sequence remains unclear.[140]

The Prince of Ji

According to a note by Wu (or his cousin and co-author Wu Shouxu), this prince was Zhu Changchun 朱常淳, a "great-grandson" of the sixth emperor of the Ming, Zhu Qizhen 朱祁鎮 (1427–1464).[141] Changchun was his lineage name in the imperial genealogy (*yudie* 玉牒) of the Imperial Clan Court (*zongrenfu* 宗人府).[142] His sobriquet (*hao* 號) was Yunshui 雲水. As a formal disciple of Wu, he obtained the ordination name Taihe 太和, indicating his position in the Longmen lineage as a ninth-generation Longmen master, just like Wu's other students. He is usually referred to simply as the Prince of Ji (Jiwang 吉王).

The *Nine Chapters* is presented as a text that was developed from dialogues between Wu and Zhu Taihe on the occasions of four transmissions. It is preceded by a short note on its origin.[143] This text provides us with dates of these transmissions and thus informs us about the timeframe when Wu purportedly instructed the prince, which was between 1615 and 1632. The first transmission took place in 1615 when Wu imparted the "oral formula for refining essence in hundred days" (*bairi lianjing koujue* 百日煉精口訣). Then, in 1622, Wu transmitted the "oral formula for gathering the great medicine" (*cai dayao koujue* 採大藥口訣). Six years later, in 1628, Wu imparted the "oral formula for the five dragons bearing aloft the saint" (*wulong pengsheng koujue* 五龍捧聖口訣). Finally, in 1632, Wu completed the instruction by imparting the "complete directions to the mysterious wonders of the common lineage of the immortals and buddhas" (*xianfo hezong xuanmiao quanzhi* 仙佛合宗玄妙全旨).

Further, in several places we can find a signature in the text in which Wu refers to himself as "Prince of Ji's Instructor of the State under his excellency Emperor Rui during the Wanli era of the Great Ming 大明萬曆中睿帝閣下吉王國師."[144] The term Instructor of the State (*guoshi* 國師) suggests that Wu was in the service of this prince and presumably residing in his fief or even in his residence.[145] In a short note, Wu indeed says:

> From the *guichou* year of the Wanli era (1613), I stayed in the fief of the Prince of Ji in the prefecture of

[140] Perhaps we should read the fact that his mother was "soon" turning ninety as meaning "in a couple of years" and perhaps his "long journey" in 1636 signifies his return to Bixie. But if he stayed in Bixie until his mother's death in late 1640 at the earliest, it is difficult to see how he could sign his *Tianxian zhengli zhilun zengzhu* in 1639 in Nanjing.

[141] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.1a, 7403. Wu refers to this emperor, probably best known under his era name Zhengtong, with the short form of his posthumous name as Emperor Rui 睿皇帝. The note says "great-grandson" (*chongsun* 重孫), but this should not be read literally as Zhu Changchun was a descendant from Zhu Qizhen in the sixth degree and not the fourth (i.e., he was a great-great-great-grandson).

[142] The Imperial Clan Court was a department controlling all affairs of the imperial family. One of its tasks was to preserve the imperial genealogy (*yudie* 玉牒; lit. Jade Documents), i.e., the genealogical records of the imperial clan. On the imperial genealogy, see Wilkinson, *Chinese History*, 113–116.

[143] The *Yuanqi* 緣起 (On the Origin).

[144] This signature appears in the preface and in the first chapter of the *Tianxian zhengli zhilun zengzhu* and in the preface of the *Dandao jiupian*.

[145] This title is mentioned three times as part of the signature and that is the only textual evidence suggesting Wu obtained this title. The term *guoshi* has historically been used for several types of appointment, hence, it is difficult to evaluate its exact status.

> Changsha. The prince was a great-grandson of the Rui Emperor, a cousin of the Zhen emperor. His lineage name on the Jade Records was Changchun; he was Taihe, successor of the Longmen immortals lineage from patriarch Qiu.
> 從萬歷癸丑歲，館於長沙府之吉王國中。王為睿帝之重孫，貞帝之從兄，玉牒派名常淳，嗣丘祖龍門仙派之太和也。[146]

Besides Zhu Taihe, Wu presents another member of the Zhu family as his student. This was Zhu Xingyuan 朱星垣 (Xingyuan being his sobriquet), a younger cousin (*tangdi* 堂弟) of Zhu Taihe and commandery prince (*junwang* 郡王) of Changsha. Wu usually refers to him as Prince of Changsha (*changshawang* 長沙王).[147] Based on these facts, this must refer to Zhu Changpi 朱常淠 (c. 1565/66–1648) who was designated as the heir in 1576 and who reigned as Prince of Changsha from 1621/23 until his death in 1648.[148] His reign name was Prince Zhaojing 昭靖 of Changsha. The fact that Wu refers to him as "commandery prince" suggests that Wu probably met him when he was in Changsha, when Zhu Changpi was still the heir, between 1613 and 1621. He was not officially initiated in the Longmen lineage.[149] Two dialogues with Zhu Xingyuan are included in the *Recorded Sayings* and he is mentioned a couple of times in the rest of Wu's writings.

Finally, a further suggestion that Wu has indeed spend time in Changsha can be found in a short verse in which Wu praises the longevity of the mother of one of his students. This student is a certain Luo Tingguan 羅廷綸 (ordination name Taixuan 太玄). Wu tells us that this Cultivated Talent (*xiucai*) hailed from Liuyang 瀏陽 county in Changsha Prefecture.[150]

The history of Zhu Changchun in the official sources and local gazetteers presents us with a different story. According to the *History of the Ming*, Zhu Changchun was the eldest son of Zhu Yiluan 朱翊鑾 and one of his concubines.[151] This prince reigned from 1572 until his death in 1618. Zhu Changchun was officially designated as the heir (*shizi* 世子) in 1581. However, this prince also passed away in 1618 before he could follow in his father's footsteps. Some two years later, Zhu Changchun's son Zhu Youlian 朱由棟 inherited the fief of Ji and ruled as Prince of Ji between 1621 to 1636. Local gazetteers basically tell the same story.[152]

If Zhu Changchun died in 1618, he could obviously not have been Wu's student until 1632 and therefore these dates call into question the trustworthiness of the whole story.[153] Scholars who have examined this issue have usually concluded that "the Prince of Ji" was actually someone other than Zhu Changchun. Judith Boltz identifies him as Zhu Youlian 朱由棟, Zhu Changchun's son who reigned from 1621 to 1636.[154] Mori Yuria identifies him as Zhu Cikui 朱慈煃, Zhu Youlian's son who reigned as the last Prince of Ji in the early Qing from 1644 to 1661.[155] Monica Esposito agrees with Mori Yuria and concludes: "Between 1612 and 1618, he was appointed tutor of Prince Ji in Changsha (Hunan). Prince Ji (Zhu Cikui 朱慈煃) became one of his main disciples (lineage name: Taihe 太和) and granted him the title of Guoshi

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146 *Tianxian lunyu xianfo hezong*, 1.1a-b, in ZW 24:349.

147 Wu mentions that this commandery prince received an annual payment in food (presumably grain) of 1200 stone (歲食祿千二百石). One stone (*dan* 石) equals one picul or 100 catty (*jin* 斤), which equals approximately 130 pounds or circa 59 kilo. Hence, this prince received a total of 70.800 kilo of grain per year. Official salaries, according to the original schedule, ranged from 60 piculs to 1.044 piculs of grain annualy (although this theoretical income was often rationed or converted in commodities at times of insufficient budget). See *The Cambridge History of China: Volume 8, The Ming*, 151–152.

148 According to the *Changsha xianzhi*, Zhu Changpi reigned from 1623 (Tianqi 3) to 1639 (Chongzhen 12). He died in 1639 at age seventy-four, suggesting he was born in 1565 or 1566. He was succeeded by his son Zhu Youji 朱由楫; see *Changsha xianzhi* (1810), 15.10a. According to the *Mingshi*, Changpi was designated as the heir in 1576 and started his reign in 1621 (Tianqi 1). See *Mingshi*, 104.2923.

149 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.6b, 7513: "he has not entered the lineage of immortals 未登仙派"

150 *Tianxian lunyu xianfo hezong*, 4.54a-b, in ZW 24:456. I was unable to find this person in the local gazetteers.

151 *Mingshi*, 104.2922.

152 See *Changsha fuzhi* (1748), 10.7b and 10.11a; and *Changsha xianzhi* (1817), 15.9a-b.

153 Chen Zhibin 陳志濱 seems to have been the first to notice but, in a footnote, he merely cites the *History of the Ming* without pointing out the inconsistency. See Chen Zhibin, *Wu-Liu xianzong baihuayi*, 18.

154 Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 200.

155 Mori Yuria, "Zenshinkyō Ryūmonha Keifu Kō," 191. Zhu Cikui 朱慈煃 (?-1661; r. 1644–1661) apparently followed Zhu Youlang 朱由榔—who reigned as the last emperor of the Southern Ming (r. 1646–1662; Yongli 永曆 Emperor)—to Burma where they died; see *Changsha xianzhi* (1871), 17.4a. On Zhu Youlang, see Struve, "The Bitter End: Notes on the Demise of the Yongli Emperor."

國師 (State Instructor)."[156]

The only scholar to closely examine this puzzle and offer a reasoned hypothesis is Richard Wang.[157] He offers a number of interesting insights in the Daoist activities of these Ming princes in general and submits his hypothesis on the identity of the Prince of Ji. Wang dismisses the identifications of Boltz and Mori and identifies the Prince of Ji as Zhu Changchun. Presumably based on the passage quoted above, he says that Wu "stayed in the Prince of Ji's house from 1613 onward."[158] The main part of his argument deserves to be quoted in full:

> Due to his dedication to Daoist learning and cultivation, Zhu Changchun did not want to succeed to the principality. In 1618, when it was time for him to assume the princely title after his father had died the year before, he appears to have faked his own death, thus winning the false posthumous princely title Prince Xian of Ji 吉憲王, and arranged to have his son succeed him in 1621. If we believe the accounts in the *Bojian xu* 鉢鑑續 (Sequel to the Examination of the bowl) and in a biography of Wu Shouyang by Xie Taiyi 謝太易, Wu's disciple, Wu Shouyang fled to the Tiantai mountains from the house of the prince of Ji for fear of the consequences of the trouble he had caused. What kind of trouble could he have caused after 1617, while he was safe before? I propose as a plausible explanation that the imperial court may have discovered that Zhu Changchun had faked his death and taken refuge in Daoism. Wu Shouyang, as the cause of Zhu Changchun's ordination and of his subsequent faked death, would have been endangered because of this. Of course, this explanation depends upon the reliability of the *Bojian xu* and of Xie Taiyi's biography of Wu Shouyang.[159]

In a footnote, Wang further explains:

> It was a common, though illegal, practice that many princely establishments did not faithfully report to the imperial court the death of their princes in order to continue receiving stipends for them. … In the case of Zhu Changchun, he did the opposite: reporting his "death" though he was still alive.[160]

Besides the fact that there is no real evidence for Zhu Changchun faking his death, there are two main problems with this explanation. Most importantly, as Wang notes himself, the idea that Wu fled from the house of Ji to the Tiantai mountains sometime after 1617 depends on the reliability of the *Sequel to the Examination of the Bowl* and Xie Taiyi's biography. Now, the *Sequel to the Examination of the Bowl*, including Xie Taiyi's biography, is only known from quotations in the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp*. In fact, we cannot say for sure if this work ever existed. As discussed above, Esposito, in her study of the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp*, argued exactly that the *Jin'gai Mind-Lamp* is an unreliable work in terms of lineage history. As a matter of fact, she builds this argument primarily on the discrepancies between Wu's biography in that work and biographical facts deriving from Wu's own works. In other words, I think that we should not "believe the accounts in the *Bojian xu*" and all reliable sources indicate that Wu did not flee to the Tiantai mountains.

The other problem is that if Zhu Zhangchun did indeed fake his death and continued as Wu's student until perhaps 1632 as suggested in the passage above, this is difficult to reconcile with the fact that, as I will examine below, Wu stayed in Nanjing where he operated a school from 1627 at the latest. In other words, it is not directly obvious how the scenario of Wu teaching the prince in Changsha is to be reconciled with other data and other locations from Wu's biography. Is the prince supposed to have followed Wu to Nanjing or did Wu occasionally return to Changsha to instruct the prince? Or did Wu indeed instruct the prince in Changsha, but only for a few years and not until 1632?

Probably the strangest fact about Wu's supposed involvement with the Prince of Ji is that he does not mention the whole episode even once in his otherwise quite detailed autobiography written sometime after 1641. How is it possible that such a presumably important event is missing from his autobiography? Furthermore, the prince does not appear at all in what is likely a reprint of Wu's earliest writing produced in 1622.[161] This text was revised by Wu and his cousin in 1639, turning it into the *Straightforward Essays* in which there are many references to the prince. This text is actually presented as originating from Wu's initial answers to the prince's questions on the topic of fire phasing. Could this then be proof of the fact that Wu

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156 Esposito, "The Longmen School," 655.
157 First in an article (2009) and again in a booklenght study (2012). Wang, "Ming Princes and Daoist Ritual;" Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*.
158 Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 46.
159 Ibid., 46–47.
160 Ibid., 210.
161 The *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, aka *Neilian jindan xinfa*.

later inserted all the references to a Prince of Ji as his main student to give his writings more status?

Another fact only adding to the puzzle is a sentence, which in a series of examples mentions: "or such as Zhenyang, who initiated the disciple Taihe who lived within approximately one *li* distance."[162] Zhenyang is the sobriquet of Wu Shouxu and Taihe is the ordination name of the Prince of Ji. Thus, suddenly Wu Shouxu is presented here as Zhu Taihe's teacher instead of Wu Shouyang. Further, they are said to live at only a mile distance which certainly does not conform with the distance between Bixie and Changsha. Is this a copying mistake? Or did Wu Shouxu instruct this prince?

The textual facts as presented here allow for several scenarios, none of which convincing enough to be called a hypothesis. One scenario could be that the statements in the texts regarding the identity of the prince—clearly identifying him as Zhu Changchun from Changsha—are somehow mistaken or later additions. Then we would indeed, like Boltz and Mori did, have to look elsewhere for a Prince of Ji. It seems all but impossible however that Wu, or his co-author Wu Shouxu, would mistake the identity of their student and patron. The scenario proposed by Richard Wang, in which the prince did not die after all in 1618, is certainly intriguing but not without problems. Yet another scenario would be that Wu, or Wu Shouxu, or one of the other people involved in his textual legacy, fabricated the whole story of this prince being Wu's student. Although this scenario can not be ruled out, it does not seem likely either. There are very convincing aspects to the story and many of the details seem much too random to be deliberate.

For this question to be satisfactorily answered, more textual evidence is needed. I believe it is reasonable to assume there is some truth in several of the scenarios. It could be that Wu did indeed stay in Changsha from 1613 onwards as the tutor to the designated heir of Ji, Zhu Changchun. This episode then possibly ended with the death of the prince in 1618. Alternatively, the prince did indeed fake his death and continued as Wu's student. He perhaps did so until Wu went to Nanjing sometime in or before 1627. Perhaps he even followed Wu to Nanjing. It is also possible that Wu Shouxu stayed in Nanchang or in Changsha as Zhu's tutor. In any case, Wu's claim to have had a Ming prince as his patron for a number of years would certainly fit the larger picture of Daoist patronage by Ming princes as described by Richard Wang.

The Studio in Nanjing

The place Wu operated in Nanjing was called the "Studio of the Recluse of the Dao" (*daoyinzhai* 道隱齋). A note explains that it was his "studio" both in the sense of a "study" (*shuzhai* 書齋)—where he presumably wrote and perhaps kept the many books he shows to have read—and also in the sense of a "school," i.e., a physical location where the instruction of his students took place.[163] The final editions of his writings and prefaces written by close disciples were signed here. We are told the studio was located in the area of the lantern market (*dengshi* 燈市).[164] This situates it in the vicinity of what is now the Confucius Temple (*fuzimiao* 夫子廟) and also of the higher institute of learning known in the late Ming as the Yingtian Prefectural School (*yingtian fuxue* 應天府學).[165]

From the dialogues with clearly identified interlocutors as well as from various anecdotes found in Wu's texts, we can get some idea about the vistors and students of Wu's school. It seems that the core of his students consisted of a group which followed him to Nanjing from Nanchang. There were also local

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[162] *Tianxian zhengli qianshuo*, *biji*, 5.41a, 7617: "Such as Zhenyang who saved the disciple Taihe [living at a distance of] about one mile. 如真陽度一里許之徒太和是也." This remark appears in a passage where Wu discusses the difficulties of finding likeminded people to form a fellowship. It is easier when you know such people because they are family members or because they come from the same area. The fellowship of Cao Huanyang and Wu Shouyang was an example of such a fellowship of fellow native place (鄉) and so was this relationship between Wu Shouxu and Taihe. No other person with the lineage name Taihe is mentioned in Wu's writings. It remains unclear why this prince is here described as living one mile distance from Wu Shouxu. Was the prince in Bixie village? Was Wu Shouxu in Changsha? Were they both somewhere else?

[163] *Tianxian lunyu xianfo hezong*, 4.55b, in ZW 24:456.

[164] In Wu's texts, he refers to the "lantern market in the southern capital 南都燈市" as the location of his studio. Shen Zhaoding specifies "western corridor of the lantern market in the southern capital 南都燈市西廊." Shen's phrasing can also be found in the colophon of the earliest edition of the *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*; see appendix, "Research Note Copy 1."

[165] In the early Ming, the Yingtian Prefectural School (*yingtian fuxue* 應天府學) was one of two Imperial Universities (*guozijian* 國子監; lit. "supervisorate of sons of the state"). During the Ming, this institute played an important role in the recruitment of personel for the lower bureaucracy and the students were selected from first-degree holders (*shengyuan*) who passed the examinations in one of the local schools at the prefectural, sub-prefectural, or county level; a percentage of them being recommended as "tribute students" (*gongsheng*). During the Jiajing reign (1522–1566), however, these Imperial Universities (or National Universities) "had become almost empty of students." See Hagman, "Schools and Civil Service in the Ming Dynasty." Also see Ulrich Theobald, "The Academy of Yingtian Prefecture."

students, several of whom were students or former students of the Yingtian Prefectural School. The Nanchang group also included former students of Cao Huanyang who, perhaps after Cao's death, became Wu's students or his junior fellow students. We can distinguish those students who were officially initiated by Wu into the Longmen lineage and received an ordination name and those who remained uninitiated.

The former students of Cao Huanyang and eighth-generation Longmen lineage masters included Wu Shouxu and Luo Shouyi. Wu Shouxu 伍守虛 (1574–1651; sobriquet [*biehao*] Zhenyangzi 真陽子, lineage name in the *Wu Family Genealogy*: Liangzi 良資) was Wu Shouyang's cousin. They studied together under Cao Huanyang and his annotations to part of Wu's writings were included, next to Wu's own annotations, in the final editions. Luo Shouyi 駱守一 (sobriquet Yuxuzi 御虛子) must also have been a native of Nanchang and a fellow student of Cao. Luo does not feature with any questions nor are we given other information about him, but from a short passage we are told that he played a role in the printing of Wu's first manuscript of the *Straightforward Essays* in 1622 and he wrote a preface for the revised edition of 1639.

The initiated students of the ninth generation, i.e., Wu's own students, included first of all two further family members. Wu Taichu 伍太初 (1581–1646; ordination name Taichu, *hao* Jianchu 見初) was a younger brother of Wu Shouxu and thus another cousin of Wu Shouyang.[166] He features as the interlocutor of the third chapter of the *Recorded Sayings*.[167] His questions, contrary to those of Wu Shouxu, indicate a beginner's level. Wu Taiyi 伍太一 (Daxing 達行) was a son of Wu Shouxu. He has already been introduced earlier in this chapter in connection with the prefaces he wrote. The chapter in the *Recorded Sayings* containing his dialogues is, together with that of Zhu Taihe, the most voluminous in the volume as he had no less than nineteen questions.[168]

There are a few passages which feature a certain Shi Taisu 史太素 and Hu Taizhen 胡太真. They both appear separately with a question and a few times together asking one question as if they somehow belonged together. Their names clearly suggest they were also initiated students of Wu, as they feature the character *tai* 太 indicating the ninth generation of the Longmen lineage. There is not enough information to further describe these students but their appearance in the text at least suggests that Wu had more students, including formally initiated students, than those who are explicitly introduced in the texts. It is also one of several facts which makes clear that not all initiated students are featured as interlocutors in the dialogues and also that not all interlocutors were initiated students.

Wu's local students included at least two persons introduced as students or former students of the Yingtian Prefectural School. We are told that in 1627, Wu first met a certain Li Xiren 李羲人 in Nanjing.[169] In the beginning of the next year, Li went to study with the famous Chan master Wuyi who was active on Mt. Boshan.[170] Again a year later, in late autumn 1630, Li apparently intended to formally join Wu's lineage.

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166 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.41a, 7423: "Lineage name Taichu, *hao* Jianchu. He is the son of the fourth uncle and the younger brother of Zhenyang 法名太初，號見初。第四叔父之子也，真陽之親弟也."

167 The *Wu Taichu liuwen* 伍太初六問 (Six questions by Wu Taichu).

168 The *Wu Taiyi shijiuwen* 伍太一十九問 (Nineteen questions by Wu Taiyi).

169 In the gazetteer of Jiangning 江寧, part of Nanjing, we read, "Li Xiren had the name Shangzhi and one of his sobriquets was Heshi. He was known as a talent of statecraft and as for the military, agriculture, law, rituals, as well as the mysteries of the Irregular Gates and Hidden Stem, there was nothing he had not seriously studied and, as expected, he considered himself without equal in the world. But he concealed his brightness and did not reveal it; aloof, profound, and vigourous, he was a rare scholar. He had particularly examined the *Laozi* and the *Book of Changes*. The filial and incorrupt Wang Yilin had once gathered many scholars and started a society at the Zhonglin tang, where they invited Xiren to sit on a tiger pelt to speak about the meaning of the scriptures. Those who came from the four directions to listen to him (were so many that) the shoes crossed each other. 李羲人，名尚志，一字何事。負經濟才，兵農典禮，以及奇門遁甲之秘，無不深究，意不可一世。然韜光不露，冷然沉雄，奇士也。尤究心老、易。孝廉王亦臨嘗集多士開社中林堂，延羲人坐皐比、講經義，四方來聽者，履相錯也." See *Jiangning xianzhi* 江寧縣志 (1683), 10.159b. Although we have no firm dates, this clearly appears to be the same Li Xiren. Wu Shouyang also mentions his expertise in the *Book of Changes* and even his confident character comes across loud and clear in the dialogues. The Irregular Gates and Hidden Stem (*Qimen dunjia* 奇門遁甲) refers to divination techniques.

170 The monk Wuyi 無異 (1575–1630; aka Wuyi Yuanlai 無異元來, Dayi 大艤, Monk Boshan 博山和尚) was a famous master in the Caodong lineage of Chan Buddhism and he was active on Mt. Bo (Boshan 博山) in the late Ming dynasty. He was a student of Wuming Huijing 無明慧經 (1548–1618). His teachings are recorded in *Wuyi Yuanlai chanshi guanglu* 無異元來禪師廣錄 (Xuzangjing Vol. 72, No. 1435). Jimmy Yu, in the preface to a translation of a work by Sheng Yen, notes that Wuyi made much use of the *gong'an* and *huatou* methods of teaching that are usually associated with the Linji lineage; see Sheng Yen, *Attaining the Way*, xiv. The late Ming, with its flourishing printing culture, also saw the widespread circulation of *gong'an* collections (ibid., xiv-xv). The easy accessibility of Chan discourse is said to have caused a phenomenon of persons through their discourse and behavior enacting a state of enlightenment without ever having seriously practiced (ibid., xv). Wu Shouyang himself seems to frequently argue against exactly this particular aspect of Chan in his time. The records of Wuyi's teachings suggest that he intended to clarify such

The text says that he however eventually left to roam the Jiangnan area (esp. Hubei and Zhejiang) in search of instructors.[171] In 1633, during the Double Fifth Festival, Li was in Nanjing and visited Wu's studio. Their interesting dialogue on that occasion is recorded in the *Miscellaneous Dialogues* (*Zawen* 雜問). After six years, in the autumn of 1636, he returned to his family in Nanjing and visited Wu's studio. On that occasion, he asked Wu seven questions, which were included in the *Recorded Sayings*.[172]

Gu Yutao 顧與弢 (*ming* [名] Zhao 昭) was also a county level graduate (*xiangsheng* 庠生; equals *xiucai* 秀才) of the Yingtian Prefectural School. Gu was not an initiated student. He has no ordination name and his dialogues are classified with the non-initiated students. Nevertheless, six of his dialogues with Wu are recorded in a chapter of the *Recorded Sayings*.[173] Further, his questions also appear in several other chapters and so he seems to have been a regular student with some prominence. From one of these anecdotes we are told that Gu also studied with persons from the Daoist Zhengyi 正一 school and even received ritual texts.

Finally, we find mention of a few other visitors of the studio. They were not official students but they interrogated Wu and some of these questions were recorded. The texts mention a certain Zhang Xuemao 張學懋 who is introduced as connected to the Board of Revenue (*hubu* 戶部). Then, there are a certain Zhou Nanyu 周南餘 and Hu Maoyuan 胡茂元 who are mentioned, similar to Shi Taisu and Hu Taizhen, together as if a duo. Zhou is introduced as an "instructor of literature" (*wenxue zhaizhang* 文學齋長), which was a term for a student selected to supervise his fellow students.[174] Hu is introduced as a "Cultivated Talent of military studies" (*wuxue xiucai* 武學秀才). In one passage, Zhou is referred to with the term *xiangyou* 庠友 which is the same term Wu uses for Li Xiren and Gu Yutao as former students of the Yingtian Prefectural School. Zhou and Hu were possibly also students of this school.

Writing

In 1613, after having concluded his apprenticeship with Cao in the preceding year, Wu resided in Changsha as a tutor to the Prince of Ji. In that year, he also started to write.[175] Between 1613 and 1641, he would write a range of texts, some of which were published for general circulation during Wu's life, some only circulated as manuscripts among his students. His writings included verses, jottings, essays, dialogues (recorded sayings), and an autobiography. The majority of these texts dealt with the subject of inner alchemy, but they also contain excursions into other topics, including alchemy, medicine, sexual techniques, dietary precepts, and so on. A large part of these writings was prompted by questions of his students. Even the essays are in part reworkings of what were originally dialogues. The verses are mostly didactic verses, packaging the inner alchemy in terse symbolism. As a matter of fact, even the autobiography is in large part an illustration of the principles of inner alchemy, treating Wu's life story as a religious program.

All of this started in 1613, with a few verses dedicated to the Prince of Ji. In 1615, Wu had written a first essay. This text explained the complex topic of fire phasing and Wu explicitely notes that it started as a collection of answers he gave to the prince. In 1622, Wu had completed nine of such essays, which he combined as the nine chapters of his *Straightforward Essays*. This work—and especially the revised edition—would be the only writing that Wu intended to be circulated among a general audience. It was a foundational work, meant to instruct people in the basic aspects of inner alchemy.

In the meanwhile, Wu kept recording his dialogues with students. We can observe that some of these dialogues deal with questions students had after reading the *Straightforward Essays*. But, at the same time, the *Straightforward Essays* contain cross-references to the dialogues. This suggests that both writings were for a long time a continues work in progress, fundamentally unstable until Wu's final revisions. These final revisions took place in the studio in Nanjing, between 1639 and 1641. First, he revised the *Straightforward Essays* and supplied them with his own as well as his cousin Wu Shouxu's annotations, another introductory essay, and various prefaces and notes. This revised edition of the *Straightforward Essays* was published in 1639.

misconceptions of the Chan tradition (ibid., xv).

[171] The term *jing* 竟 can also mean unexpectedly and hence it might be that Li Xiren suddenly interrupted his instruction with Wu to go and roam the provinces in search for instructors.

[172] *Li Xiren qiwen* 李羲人七問 (Seven questions by Li Xiren).

[173] *Gu Yutao liuwen* 顧與弢六問 (Six questions by Gu Yutao).

[174] Hagman notes, "In each class one student was selected to serve as student prefect (*zhaizhang*) and oversee the work of the other students." See Hagman, "Schools and Civil Service in the Ming Dynasty," 498.

[175] Wu's writings are examined in more detail in the next chapter.

The history of his other writings, which came to us as nineteenth-century printings of several different manuscript traditions, is less clear. At some point, nine dialogues with the Prince of Ji were taken out of a larger collection of dialogues with the prince and reworked into the *Nine Chapters*.[176] This work is dated 1640. The *Song on Cultivating Immortality* is undated, but must have been finished after the death of Wu's mother, since this event is mentioned in the text.[177] A large collection of dialogues and a collection of verses and jottings, written from 1613 until his time in Nanjing, were preserved in at least four different editions with one edition containing prefaces dated to the autumn of 1641.

The Lineage

In this section I look at Wu's "immediate" lineage, that is, the lineage of masters presented in Wu's works as his direct line of teachers. This lineage is presented as a particular branch or sub-lineage of the Longmen lineage, itself of course the sub-lineage of the Quanzhen lineage. This sequence of three teachers, from Zhang Jingxu to Li Xu'an, from Li Xu'an to Cao Huanyang, and from Cao Huanyang to Wu Shouyang is Wu's direct connection to the Longmen school and through it with the larger tradition of the Way of Immortality and Daoism. As such, it plays a significant role in Wu's self-image and his religious identity, and Wu's authority as a Longmen master derives from it. For all three masters, Wu's writings are the primary biographical source. I offer translations of the most interesting passages and summarize the basic biographical data.

Zhang Jingxu

The earliest identified figure in the line of transmission is Zhang Jingxu. According to Wu's notes, Zhang Jingxu 張靜虛 (1432-?; ordination name Jingxu[178]) hailed from Pizhou 邳州, in present-day Jiangsu province. At some point, he journeyed to Sichuan (Shu 蜀), where he received the Dao in Biyang Grotto 碧陽洞. His teacher is simply referred to as an "immortal teacher" or "teacher of immortality" (*xianshi* 仙師). He cultivated for a few years in Sichuan and was then ordered by his teacher to go out and open up the teaching. We are told that Zhang went to the Western Regions (*xiyu* 西域), traversed through the lands of the Northern Tribes (*beiyi* 北夷), before returning to the Middle Kingdom (*zhongguo* 中國). Zhang is also said to have spent time at Mt. Wudang where he practiced in a cave in Tiger Ear Cliff (*huerya* 虎耳崖). Since he commonly sat on a tiger's pelt, people called him "Tiger Pelt Zhang" (Hupi Zhang 虎皮張).[179] In 1579, Zhang met Li Xu'an who would be his only disciple. He initiated Li in the Horse God Temple (*mashenmiao* 馬神廟) in Lu'an 六安 subprefecture (*zhou* 州), in present-day Anhui province.[180] In 1582, Zhang visited Li again and helped to finance his cultivation practice.

Zhang's life story comes to us in a few passages. The first passage appears in the *Origin of the Straightforward Essays* (*Zhilun qiyou*). Wu explains that in these essays he discloses the celestial secrets (*xie tianji* 泄天機), thereby risking heavenly retribution (*maogan tianqian* 冒干天譴). He tells us that by doing so he is complying with Zhang's instruction to open up the teaching:

> **This is also because I obey the immortal decree spoken by my old patriarch the perfected man Zhang Jingxu after receiving the Dao: "In today's Four Great Continents there is not even half a guy who knows the Dao. Now we should widely open our religion."** Perfected Man Zhang's ordination name is Jingxu and because he always took along a tiger's pelt to sit on everybody at that time used to call him Tiger Pelt Zhang. When he first went about searching for the Dao of immortality with three companions, at midnight they [he?] saw a faint white light in the West dashing through the sky. The following day they went in a western direction and, when they lodged at night, they saw it again and, in the daytime, they chased it again. The three companions left and [Zhang] went alone and alone he could see the location of the radiance;

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[176] This is the text titled *Dandao jiupian* 丹道九篇 in the *Daozang jiyao* but titled *Xianfo hezong yulu* 仙佛合宗語錄 in other editions. Wu himself also referred to this text as *Xianfo hezong yulu* in his internal cross-references. The preface is dated to the spring of 1640.

[177] It was included in several editions of the manuscripts; see the next chapter. Wu's mother died in late 1640 or early 1641.

[178] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.85a, 7445: "[Zhang] was of the Jing-section of the immortals lineage of Longmen from the Northern School of perfected man Qiu [Changchun] 為邱真人北宗龍門靜字仙派也."

[179] Meditating on a rug of tiger pelt had a long history in Indic as well as Tibetan Buddhism and Zhang's use of such a rug suggests that Zhang was influenced by the Tibetan Vajrayana (Tantra) traditions.

[180] Because of the pronunciation of this character in the local dialect, 六 is written as "lu" instead of the usual "liu."

> it was [coming from] Piyang Grotto in Shu (Sichuan). Upon entering he saw an immortal teacher and urgently beseeched him to be delivered. The teacher thereupon transmitted the Dao and ordered him to cultivate. Only after several years when [Zhang] had completed it, [the immortal teacher] ordered [Zhang] to go forth, saying: "Today, on the Four Great Continents, there is absolutely not even half a human child who knows the Dao. You and I [will] open a school." Old man Zhang then carried it out. The Four Great Continents are what are called the Dongshengshen Continent [Pūrvavideha], the Xiniuhe Continent [Godānīya], the Nanshanbu Continent [Jambūdvīpa] and the Beiqulu Continent [Uttarakuru] in the Buddhist Sutras. The immortal old man Zhang then left the Western borders and converted the Northern barbarians. He returned to the Middle Kingdom and saw that the two continents already did not have any people anymore. Then he truly started to think about delivering people, but he merely delivered Li Xu'an.
> **亦緣我老祖師張靜虛真人得道後曰："今日四大部洲，全無半個人兒知道，今當廣開教門。"奉此仙旨故也！**張真人法派名靜虛，常攜虎皮為座，故當時皆稱虎皮張。初與三友尋訪仙道，夜半見白毫光於西而沖天，次日西行，夜宿又見，日又趨之。三友去，而獨行，獨見得光處在蜀之碧陽洞也。入見仙師，而求度甚切。師遂授之道，命之修數年成而始命出。曰："今日四大部洲，絕無半個人兒知道，你與我廣開教門。"張翁遂行。（按：四大部洲者，東勝神洲、西牛賀洲、南贍部洲、北衢廬洲。佛經所說者是也。）張仙翁遂出西域，轉北夷，還中國，見二大洲已無人矣。實起度人之念，止度得李虛庵一人而已。[181]

The second passage appears in the fifth dialogue with Wu Taiyi in the *Recorded Sayings*. The question has been asked where the metaphor of the "five dragons bearing aloft the saint" (*wulong pengsheng* 五龍捧聖) comes from. Wu explains how this metaphor (and the technique implied by it) is orally transmitted in his lineage, starting with Zhang who picked it up on Mt. Wudang. It is in this context that we are told Zhang spend time on that mountain:

> **Once, my patriarch the Perfected Man Tiger Pelt Seat Zhang,** Zhang is the perfected man's family name and Jingxu is his ordination name. He was born in Pizhou in the *renzi* year during the Xuande reign. He belonged to the Longmen Immortal's Branch of the *jing* character generation of the Northern lineage, of Perfected Man Qiu. He received the Dao in the Biyang Grotto and he received his teacher's immortal decree to widely open up the religion. He travelled through the Four Continents, going through the Western Tribes, wandering through the Northern Tribes, before returning to China. Although there were repeated requests for an invite from the Jiajing emperor of the great Ming, he was unwilling to appear to answer the demand. He always used a Tiger Pelt as a seat and therefore all in the ten directions at that time called him Tiger Pelt Zhang. **frequently lived in seclusion on Mt. Wudang,** He sat in a rock cavern in Mt. Wudang's Tiger Ear Cliff and did not have any contact with common people. He only revealed himself to scholars who know how to live as a recluse. **[where he] gained a profound understanding of this term and the principle [it designates] enabling him to reveal this secret mechanism. Thereafter, he orally transmitted it to Li Xu'an from Lujiang county.**
> **昔我祖師虎皮座張真人，**真人，張，其姓；靜虛，其法名。宣德壬子年，生於邳州，為邱真人北宗龍門靜字仙派也。得道於蜀之碧陽洞，受師仙旨，以廣教門，周行四部洲，歷西番轉北番，還中華。雖有大明嘉靖皇帝遍求請，而不肯出以復命。常以虎皮為座具，故當時十方皆稱曰：虎皮張。**常幽棲於武當山。**坐於武當山之虎耳崖石竅中，不與世人相接，唯顯示學人，知當避世。**深得此名理，以吐露秘機。其後，口授於盧江縣之李虛庵。**[182]

In Wu's account, Zhang's fame had even reached the court. As we are told in the passage above, he was repeatedly summoned for an audience during the reign of emperor Shizong (r. 1521–1567; the Jiajing emperor), but refused to reply to this order. The next passage further develops this anecdote and tells us the request for an audience must have first come in 1563. It appears in the postscript of the *Straightforward Essays*, in a passage where Wu explains that the Dao is something rarely seen. One of the reasons for its rarity is that it is often transmitted in secret and one of the examples of this is the transmission of Zhang to Li Xu'an:

> Or [as in the case of] perfected man Tiger Pelt Seat Zhang not reacting when being urgently requested [for an audience] by the Jiajing emperor. It was blamed on the prefect of Pizhou. The request was procrastinated for three years and then he went to the capital. [The audience was] postponed [so long] until [the emperor] passed away and [Zhang thus] did not react to the order. He returned to Lu'an subprefecture, called upon Li

[181] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.79a-b, 7588.
[182] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.85a-b, 7445.

> Xu'an from Lujiang county and initiated him. Thrice he let him recite and memorize his words and after three days he left. Li would eventually become perfected and the [people from the] county and the neighbouring fiefs all called him a bodhisattva in the flesh. Thus, patriarch Zhang was unwilling to see the emperor and deliver him, so he called on Li and delivered him. This then is the case of patriarch Zhang secretly delivering.
> 如虎皮座張真人以嘉靖帝強請之不起，罪邳州守，請曼及三年而後至京，延及徂落而不復命。還至六安州，召盧江縣李虛庵而度之。令三誦三背其言，三日而別，李竟成真。縣及鄰封，皆稱肉身菩薩。然張祖不肯見帝而度，乃召李而度之，此亦張祖密度之案也。[183]

Zhang is the most shadowy figure in the lineage and the stories about his life—having come to Wu as third-hand information—are purely anecdotal. To begin with, his date of birth demonstrates the fictional character of his life story. Would Zhang really have been born in 1432, he would have been about 147 years of age when he first met Li Xu'an. Basic data such as his date of death or his original name are missing. We are not told anything about Zhang that seems coincidental and everything seems to have a deliberate place in the narrative. Zhang is the necessary patriarch of the sub-lineage and the link to the Longmen lineage. He is also the link to a Wudang tradition. Finally, the story of Zhang who laments the fact that nobody knows the Dao anymore and who orders Li to "widely open-up" the school serves as justification for Wu to indeed put these formerly only orally transmitted doctrines into writing and to open a school in the heart of Nanjing. Put in a different way, this story of Zhang reinforces Wu's assertion—as part of his esoteric marketing strategy—that his writings, for the first time in history, reveal the hitherto utmost secret techniques of immortality.

Li Xu'an

Li Xu'an 李虛庵 (1525–1615; ordination name Zhenyuan 真元) hailed from Lujiang 盧江 county, in Anhui province.[184] Again, Wu's writings are the primary source for Li's biography. He is also mentioned in the local gazetteers of Lujiang county and Luzhou prefecture, but those entries are based on these passages from the *Straightforward Essays*. According to Wu, Li started out "to save the world with medical practice" (*yiyi jishi* 以醫濟世) and had a hermitage (*an* 庵) build outside of the city. From the time he was eighteen until he was fifty-four, he sought instruction in self-cultivation from various masters. One of his early instructors was a certain Liu Baozhu 劉寶珠 from Shandong who instructed him in a "method of inner illumination" (*nei guanzhao zhi fa* 內觀照之法) which allowed him to develop his "light of wisdom" (*huiguang* 慧光).[185] We are not told how they met, but in 1579 Li was initiated by Zhang Jingxu in the Horse God Temple in Lu'an subprefecture. In the passage on Zhang Jingxu translated above, we saw that Zhang stayed for three days letting Li memorize his words before he left. Zhang visited Li again in 1582 and helped him finance his cultivation practice.

In 1587, Cao Huanyang first visited Li with a request for instruction by him and the two met several times during 1587 and 1588. Cao and three friends supported Li financially at least two times. There are a couple of undated anecdotes about Li. After his successful completion of the cultivation process he was apparently known as a man of great power and he performed rituals for the local people. One story has him summoned by a local magistrate, whom he refuses to see. We are told that, in order to avoid the magistrate's revenge, he used the method of "release from the corpse" (*shijie* 尸解). When the magistrate was fooled into thinking he was dead, he continued to live with his family-in-law, but, apparently, in a state of immortality with "a frame and a spirit both rarified" (*xingshen jumiao* 形神俱妙). In 1615, Li became an "immortal recluse" (*xianyin* 仙隱), which is generally taken to mean that he passed away. According to Wu, Li was considered in the area as a "bodhisattva in the flesh" (*roushen pusa* 肉身菩薩), which suggests that his corpse was mummified, presumably to be worshipped.[186] The next passage is from the dialogue with Wu Taiyi about the transmission of the formula of the "five dragons" and it continues from where I left off above:

> **Thereafter, he orally transmitted it to Li Xu'an from Lujiang county.** His family name was Li, his sobriquet was Xu'an and his ordination name was Zhenyuan. He was born in a *yiyou* year (1525) during the Jiajing reign in Lujiang county, in the west of the city. In the beginning, he practiced medicine to save the

[183] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.85b, 7591.
[184] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.85b, 7445.
[185] I have not found this person in the local gazetteers.
[186] On such mummification practices in China, see Ritzinger and Bingheimer, "Whole Body Relics in Chinese Buddhism."

world. He had a hermitage build outside the city and sought advice from immortal teachers. [This was] from nineteen *sui* until fifty-five—in the *jimao* year (1579) during the Wanli reign—when he first obtained the complete transmission of Perfected Man Zhang of the Inner and Outer Golden Elixir and the Great Dao of Celestial Immortality. He lifted the saint and transcended the mundane and, when he successfully completed his practice, he displayed saintliness. **Perfected Man Xu'an orally transmitted it to Cao Huanyang from Wuyang village in the south of Nanchang county.**
其後，口授於廬江縣之李虛庵。姓李，號虛庵，法派名真元也。嘉靖乙酉年，生於廬江縣城西。初以醫濟世，乃結庵於城外，延訪仙師，自十九歲至五十五，萬曆己卯也，始得張真人盡傳內外金丹、天仙大道，捧聖超凡，功成顯聖。**虛庵真人，口授於南昌縣南，武陽里之曹還陽。**[187]

This passage continues a bit further on in the same text:

After [Li] Xu'an obtained knowledge of this (i.e., the method of the five dragons bearing the saint aloft) and verified the Dao, he displayed great spiritual power and he [used this to] save the world and relieve the people. One day there was a great drought and there was nothing to regulate the agrarian business. All [divinities] that were prayed too did not respond. Numerous officials and other people implored perfected man Li to pray in order to help the people. The perfected man then scribbled on the center of his palm with black ink and silently spoke a few sentences in the direction of the sun. Immediately a black cloud covered the sun, which then filled the sky and within fifteen minutes heavy rainfall poured down. Even the six counties in the nearby territories all had autumn. With one hand he could lift a stone of 5 to 6 thousand *jin* (2500 to 3000 kg) as lightly as if playing with a small ball. Ultimately it was not known how much his strength could lift. His spiritual powers were the most plentiful. I have no time to list them here. **He became an immortal recluse in the *yimao* year (1615) during the Wanli reign.** At the time, the county magistrate had a measureless love for cruelty. He asked to see the perfected man [Li Xu'an] and wanted to ask him for ingestion and transformation. The perfected man did not care to see him. Thereupon, because he disobeyed the order, [the magistrate] cherished a resentment which even led to his family-in-laws being placed under custody. [The magistrate] vowed to definitely pursue and capture [Li] and disgrace him to reduce [his own] fury. This is ridiculous and despicable. … The perfected man relied on the method (form) of release from the corpse to avoid it. The magistrate thought he was really dead and released his anger, and the perfected man went into the coffin as if he was dead. After seven days the coffin was empty! His form and spirit were completely rarified. He still lived with the family-in-laws. His son is called Li Nengpei and was a first-degree licentiate and was eventually not bereaved of his parents. The succeeding magistrate deeply admired him as an incarnated bodhisattva. His fame then spread in the ten directions and his spirit refined his return to the void. This is then a case of having magical powers (penetrating spirit), but not necessarily manifesting them. So why would great ascetics be willing to let the people of the world know this?
虛庵得聞此以證道，大顯神通，濟世救民。一日大旱，無以治農事，諸祈禱者，皆無應，眾官民哀求李真人，禱以救民。真人乃以墨塗掌心，向日默言數句。即有黑雲蔽日，遂致彌天。不數刻，而大雨如傾，及鄰封六邑，皆得有秋。一手舉五六千斤之石，如弄丸之輕，竟不知其力之能舉多少，其神通最多，此不暇數。**仙隱於萬曆乙卯歲。**時縣宰，貪酷無度，求見真人，欲求服食點化，真人不屑與之見。遂以違命懷仇，連及姻家被禁，誓必追捕辱之以泄忿。此亦可笑可鄙也！… 真人，由是托尸解之狀，以避之。宰以為真死，遂解其忿。而真人似死入棺者，七日棺即空矣。其形神俱妙，仍居於姻家。其子，名李能培，充生員，竟不丁憂。後繼宰者，深羨其肉身菩薩，名遂播於十方，神遂煉其還虛。此亦有神通不必顯之一案也。所以大修行者，安肯令世人知之？[188]

And again, a bit further on in the text:

Within the passing of fifteen years, it was transmitted again and the words were passed to me. Fifteen years refers to the following. Perfected Man Zhang initiated Li Xu'an in the *jimao* year (1579) during the Wanli reign. In the *renwu* year (1582), he went to Li's home again and supported Li with silver to practice the Dao. Perfected Man Li received Cao Huanyang's request to go to his home in the *dinghai* year (1587) during the Wanli reign. Cao and three friends each provided six pieces of silver as gifts to support him with the Dao, but it was insufficient. In the *wuzi* year (1588), Cao and his three friends supported their teacher with thirty pieces of silver and [his] cultivation resulted in the verification of results.
歷十五年間，再傳而遞言於予。十五年間者，張真人於萬曆己卯年度李虛庵。至壬午復至李家，助李銀為行道之資。李真人於萬曆丁亥，受曹還陽請，至其家。曹與三友各具贊六金助道，不

187 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.85.b-86a, 7445.
188 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.86.b-87b, 7445–7446.

足。戊子，曹三友又助師三十金，而修成證果矣！[189]

The next passage appears in another dialogue with Wu Taiyi where Wu explains the differences between a yin spirit and a yang spirit:

> **Therefore, the words spoken by my patriarch immortal the perfected man Tiger Pelt Seat Zhang that "a male flower does not bear fruit" are insufficient to express the real "fruit" of the verification of the yang spirit.** In the beginning, Perfected Man Li Xu'an obtained the method of inner vision and illumination from Liu Baozhu of Shandong. When the inner vision and illumination got to seven times seven days, the light of wisdom appeared and he was able to see through the city walls what people were doing. The city walls were penetrated by light as if they were glass. He himself said that, as soon as he had [succeeded in making his] mind and respiration interdependent, he obtained this wonderfulness and verified these results. [But] when he would leave his quiet room, he would still be an ordinary person unable to see [through walls]. Therefore, Perfected Man Zhang said, "a fake flower does not bear fruit."[190]
> **故我祖先虎皮座張真人謂之"謊花兒不結果"者，言不及陽神之實證果也。**初李虛庵真人，得山東劉寶珠內觀照之法，遂內觀照至七七日，即有慧光發現，隔城牆能見人所為，城牆如琉璃，透徹明亮。自謂一心息相依，而得此妙，證此果。及出靜室，依舊是凡夫無能見。故張真人云："謊花兒不結果。"[191]

Then, there are a few interesting passages, in the first and the seventh dialogue with Wu Taiyi, which mention Li Xu'an as an example of illegitimate transmission to people who were for some reason unqualified to receive the Dao. In the first passage, we learn about the horrifying consequences of such transgressions. In the second passage, we read about two cases of how both Zhang and Li used their spiritual power (*shentong* 神通) to manipulate cosmic affairs. First, Zhang uses a method to offer Li some respite from his celestial punishment for his illegitimate transmission. Then, Li himself uses his magic to produce rain for the local farmers in another version of the anecdote seen above:

> The Perfected Man Li Xu'an casually told it to two wrong persons [named] Ye 葉 and Mo 莫. Thereafter, they were punished for three years with having blood in their stool when defecating and Ye and Mo both died from dysentery.
> 李虛庵真人輕言於葉、莫、二人之非者，遂有大便嗣血三年之責，而葉、莫、皆以痢死。[192]

> Or as in the case of Perfected Man Tiger Pelt Seat Zhang who said to Li Xu'an: "Your transmission of the Dao has reached the wrong persons and your days are numbered. But in the Northern Dipper reside the Star Lords of Natal Destiny who register birth and death. For you, I have directed and commanded them to increase your lifespan with twelve years so that you can seriously cultivate." When you see its star, although it is shaped like a little bean you can enlarge it to the size of a five foot circumference, make it gush like it is boiling wildly, rays of light shining brightly from the white tufts, and then gradually returning to its little shape. This is the performance of the fighting method of the immortalists.[193] Or as in the case of Perfected Man Li Xu'an. When he was at home in Lujiang county, there was a vicious drought and the farmers could not sow. [Li] answered the peoples request for prayer and smeared some ink in his palm to conceal the sun. Black clouds followed his hand to cover the sun and a timely rain started, thus resolving the disaster of the county and the adjacent six territories. These are all clear cases of turning around Qian and Kun like the handle of the Dipper.
> 如虎皮座張真人，謂李虛庵曰："汝傳道及於非人，汝大數及盡。但北斗中有本命星君， 註生死，我為汝指而救之，添壽一紀十二年以便精修。"見其星雖形如小豆，能化大如五尺圍，湧如浪沸，

[189] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.79b, 7588.
[190] A "fake flower" is a flower that does not bear fruit, that is, a male flower. This passage appears in a dialogue on the yang spirit and Zhang's remark is explained as meaning that Li's practice did not have the "real verifying fruit" (*shi zhengguo* 實證果) of a yang spirit. The term *guo* 果 literally means fruit and is a metaphor for effects or results. It is also used to translate the Sanskrit term *phala* which means fruit or effect/result in various Buddhist concepts where cause and effect play a role. Zhang's saying is a play on the double meaning of *guo* as fruit and result.
[191] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.95a-b, 7450.
[192] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.66b, 7435. In another passage, Wu says, "Then there were those who heard it casually, the three Ye, Mo, and Xu, and all of them quickly died of dysentery. The one who casually leaked it had blood in his stool for three years and that is how we know it. 遂至有得輕聞者，葉莫徐三人，皆即以痢速死；而輕泄者，亦嗣血三年；以是而知." (*Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.63b-64a, 7434). Hence, here he identifies three people Ye 葉, Mo 莫, and Xu 徐.
[193] I'm not sure what *yandoufa* 演鬥法 means.

> 白毫光燦爛；既而漸復小形。此仙家之演鬥法也。如李虛庵真人，在廬江縣家中時，苦旱，農不下種，應眾請禱，塗墨於掌以蔽日，黑雲隨手掩日而澍雨，救本縣及鄰封六邑之災。此皆斡乾坤之顯案也！[194]

In the last passage translated here, we read again about how the cultivation process requires serious funds and how in some cases it can also be the master who acts as the patron of the disciple, such as in the case of Zhang and Li. This passage goes on to inform us that "alchemy," in the sense of making artificial silver, was an acceptable method to procure such needed funds and Zhang and Li learned this method:

> I furthermore state: When immortal teachers transmit the Dao, they must select those who are able to cultivate the Dao with single-mindedness and sincereness. Therefore, money and goods are directly conferred in order to support the disciple in providing for his daily expenses and [be able to] leave the mundane world behind to cultivate in secret. Such as Perfected Man Tiger Pelt Seat Zhang supporting Perfected Man Li Xu'an with funds to practice the Dao. When he further conferred to him the already prepared elixirs and medicines, he also conferred the immortal art of refining silver. Therefore, there are also very many of those who are secretly transmitted the immortal art to refine silver and refine it in secret in order to support the Dao.
> 吾又論之：仙師之傳道，必擇心專念篤，能修道者，故有直授財物，助弟子得以供日用，而遺世絕俗以密修。虎皮座張真人，助李虛庵真人以行道之資是也。而又授以已成之丹藥，兼授煉銀之仙術。故秘授成銀仙術、得以潛煉助道者，… 亦甚多人。[195]

Lastly, we should mention that Wu's writings include a total of eight instructional verses attributed to Cao Huanyang and Li Xu'an. They consist of two quatrains (*jieju* 截句) and three eight-line regulated verses (*lüshi* 律詩) by Li and three quatrains by Cao Huanyang. Wu mentions that Li left many verses behind in Lujiang.[196] The verses included by Wu were left behind in Nanchang when Li instructed Cao. Wu cites Li's and Cao's verses to demonstrate what is, according to Wu, the main secret essential (*miyao* 秘要) of the Longmen lineage and of his direct teachers, namely the gathering of pre-heaven yang essence to refine it into the "golden elixir."

Cao Huanyang

Cao Huanyang 曹還陽 (1563–1622; *hao* Huanyang 還陽, *faming* Changhua 常化) was a fellow native of Nanchang county, born in the town of Wuyang 武陽, located a few miles from Bixie village.[197] Wu notes in the autobiography that Cao was "a son of relatives," but he does not specify the nature of the relationship. Like Wu himself, Cao was a scion of the local elite, his family having come to wealth for at least two generations. Living in walking distance, their families would surely be aware of each other's existence although Wu mentions meeting Cao for the first time when he was nineteen. Cao was married and had at least one son, Cao Xihuan 曹希還 (*faming* Shouxuan 守玄, sobriquet Xihuan) who would become one of Cao's disciples.[198]

We are told that Cao somehow heard about Li Xu'an and the fact that he was a skilled Daoist. In 1587, in his twenties, Cao and three friends visited Li. At this point, Li was still lacking the funds to complete his own cultivation and as part of their own initiation Cao and his friends supported Li with six pieces of silver each. This was insufficient for Li and in 1588, Cao and the three friends lumped thirty pieces of silver together to support Li. This time, it was sufficient and Li completed his cultivation.

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194 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.100b, 7452.
195 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.85a-b, 7507.
196 *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.7a, 7468.
197 Wuyang is now a "town" (*zhen* 鎮) that administers two neighbourhood committees (*jumin weiyuan hui* 居民委員會) and sixteen administrative villages (*xingzheng cun* 行政村; i.e., several natural villages grouped together for administrative purposes), among which a Wuyang "village" (*wuyang cun* 武陽村) and Jiaohu village (*jiaohu cun* 蕉湖村). This Jiaohu village includes the "villagers group" (*cunmin xiaozu* 村民小組) Bixie. Wu describes Wuyang as an "excellent spot to cross over" (精渡處), presumably referring to Wuyang as a place to cross over the Fu river 撫河.
198 The inner alchemist Liu Mingrui 劉名瑞 (1839–1931) attributes Cao Huanyang with the authorship of a text titled *Jindan zhilun jiupian* 金丹直論九篇 and he attributes Zhang Jingxu with the authorship of a *Jindan huohou yibu* 金丹火候一部. See Liu, *Daoyuan jingwei ge* 道源精微歌, 323. These references appear in a bibliography of important inner alchemy texts which he included at the end of his book. However, these titles appear to be fabrications of Liu himself. No such texts are to be found and these titles are only mentioned in Liu's book. This raises questions about the rest of Liu's claims.

The local gazetteer of Xinjian mentions that, at some point during the long Wanli period (1572–1620), presumably sometime after his initiation in 1588 and before becoming a teacher at the latest in 1593, Cao resided in a cloister called the Changchun Hermitage (Changchun an 長春庵) in Libu 禮步 village, located in Xinjian county, right next to the city of Nanchang, a few hours walking from his hometown.[199] The gazetteer describes it as a "quiet room" (*jingshi* 淨室). All of this suggests that this was a somewhat secluded practice location where Cao stayed for a few years to complete his own cultivation process. The cloister was presumably named after Qiu Chuji (Changchun), the patriarch of Cao's Longmen lineage. It was probably a small hermitage where he stayed by himself.[200]

Presumably, Cao had started his own "school" sometime between 1588 and 1593. In any case, we are told he had at least five students, including Wu Shouyang and Wu Shouxu, his son Cao Xihuan, a certain Xiong Xiu'an 熊秀庵 (*faming* Shouxu 守虛), and a certain Deng Shaoyuan 鄧紹元 (*faming* Shoukong 守空). These are the students specifically mentioned in the translated passage below as those who obtained the formula of the "five dragons bearing the saint aloft" by transmission from Cao, but probably the group of Cao's students included others since Wu also mentions a certain Luo Shouyi 駱守一 (sobriquet Yuxuzi 御虛子) who, considering his ordination name, must have been a fellow student of Cao belonging to the eighth generation. Five years after his own initiation, in 1593, Cao and Wu met for the first time and soon entered into a master-disciple relationship that would last until 1612. Finally, in 1622 Cao went to the Western Hills where he completed the final stage of cultivation and, by "egesting his yang spirit," he passed away at fifty-eight years of age as an "immortal recluse."

The funding of the practice is a recurrent theme in Wu's own biography as well as in these biographical notes on Li and Cao. As said, Cao was also an heir to a wealthy family. He is said to have spend his wealth in pursuit of the Dao and as a result to have become impoverished. Certainly, the flood disaster of 1588–89 that hit northern Jiangxi must have impacted Cao's life as well. From the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* we learn that during the tutorship, Cao lived in Wuyang and was visited every day by Wu from morning to evening. We also learn that Wu completely supported Cao and his family with food, clothes, and money, in the process squandering what remained of his own family wealth. First, Wu sold his lands, plot by plot, and finally he even had to sell his wife's jewelry in order to support Cao. In return, Cao initiated Wu in the secret transmissions of his lineage.

The first passage continues the dialogue with Wu Taiyi where Wu explains the history of the transmission of the formula of the "five dragons bearing the saint aloft."

> **Perfected Man Xu'an orally transmitted it to Cao Huanyang from Wuyang village in the south of Nanchang county.** Huanyang was his sobriquet, Changhua was his ordination name and Cao his family name. His date of birth was on the twenty-eight day [of the twelfth month], three days before New Year's Day, in the *renxu* year (1562–63) during the Jiajing reign. He ruined [his] wealthy family to study the Dao. Content with his poverty and dignified in his hardship, he seriously cultivated. He obtained [the formula of] the "five dragons bearing the saint aloft" and revolved his spirit, entering into samadhi, so as to "conceive the [holy] embryo." On the twelfth day of the sixth month of the *renxu* year (1622) during the Tianqi reign, he issued his yang spirit. He entered the Western Hills, in the west of Xinjian county, and [practiced] "facing a wall to return to emptiness" so as to become a great recluse. **Perfected Man Huanyang came and orally transmitted it to me and your father Zhenyang who entered the immortals lineage and was named Shouxu. [We] all are among those who learned this.** If all those who cultivate the Dao of immortality understand this and practice it, obtain it and verify it, then they will obtain a long life without death, they will eternally be free from birth and death, and their spiritual power will be limitless. This is the verification of holiness. If [they] do not understand this and do not obtain this, they will certainly not be able to escape from birth and death and they will not avoid the cycle of the six paths. This is the junction of the route to holiness or profaneness; the utmost secret celestial mechanism. **Those who obtained and learned [this] are Xiong Xiu'an, who was also called Shouxu and Deng Shaoyuan who was called Shoukong. These two were immortal types from the Western Hills in Xinjian county. Furthermore, there was teacher Cao's son with the sobriquet Xihuan and the name Shouxuan.**
> **虛庵真人，口授於南昌縣南，武陽里之曹還陽。**還陽為號，常化為法名，曹為姓。嘉靖壬戌年，元旦前三日二十八為生辰。廢盡千金家而學道，甘貧清苦為精修，得五龍捧聖，轉神入定為懷

[199] Libu village is located approximately twenty-five kilometers, as the crow flies, from Wuyang and right next to Nanchang city. It has a Libu lake. The cloister was located in the township of Hongya 洪崖鄉. See *Xinjian xianzhi* (1871), 70.16a.

[200] It is also possible that this was the place where Cao and Wu cultivated together, but the gazetteer does not mention Wu and Wu himself never mentions the name of the hermitage or the place name Libu 禮步.

胎，至天啟壬戌六月十二，為出陽神，入新建縣西之西山，面壁還虛為大隱。**還陽真人來，口授於我及汝父真陽，登仙派，名守虛也，皆得聞此者。**凡修仙道者，知此而行，得此而證，則得長生不死，而永無生死，神通無極，是為證聖矣。若不知此，不得此，則必不能脫了生死，不免六道輪迴。此聖凡分路，至秘天機。**得與聞者，有熊秀庵，亦名守虛。鄧紹元，名守空。二者，新建縣之西山仙種也。並曹老師之子，號希還，命名守玄者數人。**[201]

This passage continues a few lines further with the description of Cao's attainment and the completion of his life. The last lines of annotation describe how Cao wrote a final note to Wu including the name of the formula under discussion. The remainder of this particular dialogue tells us how Wu thinks he is justified in disclosing this secret formula for the first time in writing because, among other reasons, Cao had already written down the name:

Huanyang obtained and learned this and became an immortal. He harboured radiance of the Great Emptiness and his wonderful enlightenment was limitless. He issued his yang spirit, entered continuous samadhi, and achieved calmness and extinction (i.e., nirvana) into the Ultimate Nonbeing. **He also became an immortal recluse in the summer of the *renxu* year (1622) during the Tianqi reign. When he was about to hide his tracks in the Western Hills, he had already formed the term "five dragons" with his brush.** When teacher Cao was about to become immortal, he told his son to look for some paper and a brush and he left a note for [me], master Wu, saying: "You have already received the secret mechanism of the "five dragons bearing aloft the saint" that is worth ten-thousand pieces of silver after fasting and abstaining and burning an oath. My long-cherished wish is that you can ingeniously apply it in the coming time. All the perfected ones have used this to ascend the stairway to heaven." From then onwards the term "five dragons bearing the saint aloft" existed in writing.

還陽得聞此以成仙，含光太虛，妙覺無極。出陽神，入常定，寂滅於無極。**亦仙隱於天啟壬戌夏。當此欲藏跡西山之時，已形其五龍之名於筆矣。**曹老師將仙去之時，謂其子索紙筆，留記於伍子云："五龍捧聖萬金機，齋戒焚盟已受之。初願臨期能妙用，真真皆此上天梯。"從此始有五龍捧聖之名，在紙筆矣。[202]

Finally, there is Cao's short introduction in Wu's autobiography. Apparently, there was another Cao Huanyang in Zhenjiang 鎮江 prefecture (Jiangsu province) who gained enough fame with what seem to have been writings on sexual alchemy that Wu found it necessary to remind his students and his readers not to confuse the two:

In the fifth month of the second decade I encountered the teacher; In the beginning of the year I turned twenty *sui*. **Huanyang, surnamed Cao, was a son of relatives.** His family name was Cao, his sobriquet Huanyang and his ordination name in the lineage of Perfected Man Qiu was Changhua. He was born near the excellent crossing spot of the Wuyang [river] in Nanchang. His grandfather and father had been wealthy. He had learned that Perfected Man Li Xu'an from Lujiang county had Daoist skills, so he prepared his luggage and went [to Lujiang to see him]. He said he obtained the Dao of celestial immortality. Previously, there had been another person who was also named Cao Huanyang, who lived in Zhenjiang prefecture and who annotated the alchemical scriptures [reading them as if] they discussed exterior things and heterodox arts. He is not the same as this one. Later students must not confuse him for this [Cao] and recklessly believe his talk of externals. **The area of Wuyang in the same county of Nanchang; Neighbours by three miles, I was slow to meet him.**

二旬五月得逢師，生年初至二十歲。**還陽曹姓戚之兒。**姓曹號還陽，邱真人派下，法名常化。生於南昌武陽之精渡處。祖、父皆富。聞廬江縣李虛庵真人有道行，治裝往，謂得天仙之道。前此別有一人亦號曹還陽，住鎮江府， 註丹經談外事邪術者，與此不同。後學不可誤以為此，而妄信其言外者。**南昌同縣武陽地，三里鄰居遇個遲。**[203]

Thus, in the summer of 1593, a couple of years after the devastating floods, the young Wu Shouyang first met Cao Huanyang. Cao was now in his thirties and had spend the previous six years learning and practising the teachings of Li Xu'an. He had a couple of disciples and Wu and his cousin became two of them. Since we only know about Cao through Wu's account, it appears as if Wu Shouyang was his main disciple but presumably all initiated students obtained the same teachings and there is no explicit mention of Wu

[201] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.86a-b, 7445.
[202] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.87b, 7446.
[203] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.48a, 7534.

Shouyang having a special position within Cao's fellowship. Possibly, however, Wu was Cao's primary patron. Wu recounts their meeting as the encounter with an immortal. In the autumn of that year, they "entered a room" and Wu's discipleship (and patronship!) would last for almost twenty years. After Wu became a master in his own right, they appear to have stayed in contact since Wu tells us how Cao, ten years later, retreated to the mountains and finished his last practice.

Miscellaneous Biographical Themes

Family Life

It would be easy to read Wu's works and glance over the fact that he was a married man. He happens to mention his wife two times in his autobiography. Both these instances in the *Song on Cultivating Immortality* appear in the context of explaining his dedication to his cultivation practice and the hardships he had to endure. They were such, we are told, that he even had to sell his wife's jewelry to assemble funds to support Cao. The *Wu Family Genealogy* removes all doubt. Wu was married to a certain Ms. Xiong 熊 (1574-?) from Dongtan 東壇, a village in Nanchang county, just a few hours walking from Bixie village. She was likely related to the wife of Wu's eldest brother, Wu Liangsui, also a Ms. Xiong (1546–1589) from Dongtan.[204] As a matter of fact, the *Wu Family Genealogy* shows that the Wu family had been intermarrying with this Xiong family for a few generations. They did not have any children and eventually Wu and his wife were buried in the same family grave in Chicheng. We do not know for sure, but, in all likelihood, they were married in their teens before Wu became Cao's student. The autobiographical narrative suggests she stayed in Bixie—while Wu was far away to, perhaps, Changsha and then Nanjing—presumably living in the family house and taking care of Wu's widowed mother.

Among his fellow adepts Wu was no exception in being married and, on the contrary, he was rather the exception in remaining childless. Cao Huanyang had a family and one of his sons was also one of his initiated students. Li Xu'an also had a family and at least one son. Wu Shouxu married twice and had five sons. Wu Taichu was married and had one son. The pattern continued at least in some strands of the lineage's legacy. About Zhao Bichen, for example, we also know he was married with children. For Wang Chongyang, marital life and cultivation had definitely been incompatible. He himself had abandoned his wife and children and he famously convinced his disciples the married couple Ma Danyang and Sun Bu'er to separate; a story encapsulated in the *Anthology of the Ten Stages of Pear-Slicing* as well as in many other stories of popular fiction.[205]

The reason for this perceived incompatibility of marital life and cultivation was of course the requirement of celibacy and the eradication of desire and affection that serious self-cultivation demanded. Complete celibacy and the eradication of desire and purification of the self were fundamental requirements for Wu Shouyang no less. Numerous passages could be cited to show the fundamental importance of the perseverance in sexual abstinence, the avoidance of loss of semen and, even more importantly, the avoidance of transformation of *qi* into semen which is implied by the loss of semen. Besides the issue of the loss of *qi* and essence through sexual activity, the next passage illustrates that also the love and affection for wife and children are considered obstacles to a refined self. From the chapter in the *Straightforward Essays* on the "self-refinement" (*lianji* 煉己):

> **Cutting off all desire and letting no affection remain; that is also called "refining."** Every desire for wealth and rank, fame and gain, wife and children, treasures and rarities, land and houses must be completely parted with leaving not a shred behind. Only then it can be called "not being concerned about the myriad causes." If there is one concern left, you will become absorbed in it instead of in the way. Therefore, it must be cut and cut again, severed and severed again, until all affairs and thoughts are completely eliminated and after that one can call it true refining.
> **割絕貪愛而不留餘愛，亦曰煉**；凡一切貪愛富貴、名利、妻子、珍寶異物、田宅，割捨盡絕，不留絲毫，方名萬緣不掛。若有一件掛心，便入此一件，不入於道；故必割而又割，絕而又絕，

[204] Possibly she was also related to a fellow student of Cao Huanyang, a certain Xiong Xiu'an 熊秀庵 (*faming* Shouxu 守虛).

[205] *Anthology of the Ten Stages of Pear-Slicing Fenli shihua ji* (*Fenli shihua ji* 分梨十化集; DZ 1155). Wu mentions the marriage of Ma Danyang and Sun Bu'er in a note, including the fact that they had three sons and that they cultivated together under Wang Chongyang, but he does not mention the issue of their marriage as such or their eventual separation.

事與念割絕盡，而後可稱真煉。[206]

A passage in Wu's autobiography illustrates some of his own considerations about the issue:

> **My wife was distressed over the fact that I was too far away for the tray to reach the eyebrows.** To "lift the tray to the [level of] the eyebrows" is the great desire of all married couples in the world.[207] Before adepts succeed in their practice they leave their family to cultivate and as soon as they have succeeded, they do not have any considerations about their family anymore. So how could my wife not be distressed over my distance?
> **荊布愁予遠案眉。**舉案齊眉，凡世夫婦之大願。修行者，未成時，離家以修之；已成後，無家之念慮，荊布焉得不愁予遠。[208]

During the period of cultivation, love and sexual desires were an obstacle and one would leave the family to overcome it. After success in cultivation, one could in principle return to the family but they would literally not be the "loved ones" anymore since the desire of love had been successfully eradicated from the self.

Recluse in the Marketplace

Which socio-religious classifications are applicable to Wu Shouyang and his lineage? The conventional image of Quanzhen and Longmen adepts is that of a celibate monk living in a monastic community adhering to the codes of the religious order. Wu Shouyang, his masters, and his students were no monks and Wu was not even connected to the institutional Quanzhen/Longmen order. In that sense, he was a layperson. But "ordained" in the sense of being initiated into a secretly transmitted tradition. Li Xu'an, Cao Huanyang, and Wu Shouyang, as well as most of Wu's students, as far as we can tell, were married and most also had children. At no point did they make a radical break with their families, which would have justified the common label for monastics of "leaving the family" (*chujia* 出家). Although I have not found him referring as such to himself, we may classify him as a householder (*zaijia* 在家) and a layperson (*sushi* 俗士 or *jushi* 居士); although he did not actually seem to spend a lot of time "at home," he did maintain a household.

Wu uses a variety of terminology that suggests he saw himself as some type of recluse or hermit. The clearest example is perhaps his "autograph" which features the phrase "recluse of the three religions from Yuzhang."[209] Then, there is the name of his studio: the "Studio of the Recluse of the Dao." In one passage he says, "I merely live as a recluse in a tiny studio of the recluse of the Dao, that is all."[210] When Cao and Li make their final retreat to the mountains to meditate and let their yang spirit depart from their bodies, they are said to become an "immortal recluse" (*xianyin* 仙隱). He refers to his teacher Cao as a "great recluse" (*dayin* 大隱).

Wu was however certainly no typical recluse if one thinks of this classification as someone who spends his life in complete and continuous isolation from the world. As said, he was married and throughout his life he provided for his mother and his wife—in fact, he still visited his old mother when he himself was almost in his seventies. For more than ten years, he operated a school in what was probably the busiest part of Nanjing, maintaining relationships with the elite circles of metropolitan scholar-officials.[211] His studio must have been located a stone's throw away from the famous entertainment district in what was one of the biggest cities in the world.[212] It was quite the opposite of the typical location for a recluse. His ideal, however, was probably that of the "great recluse" who cultivates in the "marketplace." This is a famous trope originating from a verse by the poet Wang Kangju 王康琚 (fourth century) which suggests that it is a "lesser" recluse that needs to retreat to the mountains to cultivate in isolation in fear of disturbance while it is a

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[206] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.53b, 7575.
[207] To lift a serving tray to the level of the eyebrows indicates great respect. This idiom is explained as husband and wife treating each other with great respect.
[208] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 3.56a, 7538.
[209] *yuzhang sanjiao yimin* 豫章三教逸民. Yuzhang was another name for Jiangxi.
[210] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.89b, 7593: "不過隱處一小小道隱齋而已."
[211] Even recluses need an income and urban Nanjing would have been a good place to find paying students, in contrast with the countryside around Bixie village.
[212] Wu's studio must have been located near the Qinhuai River 秦淮河 that flows through the city center and was famous in the late Ming for its beautiful courtisans.

"great" recluse that is able to cultivate even in the middle of a busy marketplace presumably since he can remain undisturbed even in circumstances where his senses are triggered the most.[213] This is exactly what Wu seems to suggest when he refers to his reclusivity in the middle of Nanjing. The suggestion is even more literal when he mentions in his autobiography that he was "living as a recluse" (*yinchu* 隱處) in the "marketplace of Bixie" (*bixieshi* 辟邪市).

The Jingming Dao and the Longsha Prophecy

The Western Hills, and more generally the area of northern Jiangxi, was the center of the cult of the legendary immortal Xu Xun and the related Jingming traditions.[214] According to tradition, the Jingming dao was founded by the legendary immortal Xu Xun 許遜 (trad. 239–374; *zi* Jingzhi 敬之, also known as Xu Jingyang 許旌陽). Xu supposedly studied with another legendary figure, Wu Meng 吳猛 (?–374?). Initially, Xu went to the Western Hills to practice cultivation on the basis of Wu Meng's instructions, but in 280 CE he was called upon to become Magistrate of Jingyang 旌陽 (Hubei or Sichuan). In the wake of the fall of the Western Jin (265–316), Xu returned to the Western Hills. There are a number of temples in northern Jiangxi dedicated to or associated with the lore of Xu Xun, most importantly the Palace of the Ten-thousand-fold Longevity of Jade Beneficence (Yulong wanshou gong 玉隆萬壽宮) in Xinjian county.

The Japanese scholar Akizuki Kan'ei has distinguished four periods in the history of the Jingming dao traditions.[215] The first period is characterized by a simple local deity cult centered on the Abbey of the Flying Curtain (Youwei guan 遊帷觀; later known as the Palace of the Ten-thousand-fold Longevity of Jade Beneficence). During the second period, approximately the Sui, Tang, and Northern Song periods, this tradition was revived and its doctrine reformed on the basis of the "Confucian" doctrine of filial piety, or the Way of Filiality (*xiaodao* 孝道). The celestial master Hu Huichao 胡惠超 (?-703) started to perform the ritual tradition of the Pure and Bright Lingbao Way of Loyalty and Filiality (Jingming Lingbao zhongxiao zhi dao 淨明靈寶忠孝之道) at the Abbey of the Flying Curtain. During the Song, in 1112, Xu Xun was deified as Perfected Lord of Divine Merit and Wondrous Deliverance (Shengong miaoji zhenjun 神功妙濟真君) by Song Huizong (r. 1100–1125).

A third period can be discerned during the Jin period (1115–1234), in which the discourse changes from a focus on "filiality" (*xiao* 孝) to "loyalty and filiality" (*zhongxiao* 忠孝). The fourth period starts in the Yuan dynasty (1272–1368) when Liu Yu 劉玉 (1257–1308) revives the tradition again under the name Pure and Bright Way of Loyalty and Filiality (Jingming zhongxiao dao 淨明忠孝道). His main disciple Huang Yuanji 黃元吉 (1271–1326) compiled the *Complete Writings of the Pure and Bright [Way of] Loyalty and Filiality*, "the most comprehensive resource on the Jingming dao in the Taoist Canon."[216] By the late Ming, the cult of Xu Jingyang was widespread in Jiangxi province.

I have not found any explicit references to the institutionalized Jingming traditions in Wu's writings, but they contain many references to Xu Xun and the writings attributed to him. The most noteworthy sign

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[213] Wang Kangju's "Poem against visiting [lit. summoning] the recluse" (*fan zhaoyin shi* 反招隱詩) can be found in chapter twenty-two of the *Selections of Refined Literature* (*Wenxuan* 文選). The relevant part reads, "Only the small [alt. "lesser," "inferior"] recluse is hiding in the mountains or marches; The great [alt. "greater," "superior"] recluse hides at court or in the marketplace 小隱隱陵藪大隱隱朝市;" see the translation in Schmidt-Glintzer, "On the Relationship Between Man and Nature in China," 533. Schmidt-Glintzer counts this poem as the best-known example of an attitude, within recluse poetry of the 3rd and 4th centuries, which is against "the praise of eremitism." He says, "This attitude remained in the long run prevalent and the combination—or more appropriate: reconciliation of execution of office and living as a recluse—remained the model for members of the literati class in late imperial China." (ibid.). Wang Kangju was also a representative of the earlier trend to praise eremitism. Such poems are known as "visiting the recluse" (*zhaoyin* 招隱) poems (ibid). Tao Yuanming (365?–427) wrote, in the translation by Arthur Waley, "I built my hut in a zone of human habitation, Yet near me there sounds no noise of horse or coach. Would you know how that is possible? A heart that is distant creates a wilderness round it. 結廬在人境，而無車馬喧。問君何能爾，心遠地自偏。" See Waley, *A Hundred and Seventy Chinese Poems*, 111. Also see Ping Wang, *The Age of Courtly Writing*, 207–208.

[214] I use the term Jingming traditions to refer to what actually were several distinct traditions with different names, but with a common focus on the legacy of Xu Xun.

[215] Akizuki Kan'ei, *Chūgoku kinsei dōkyō no keisei*. Other studies on the Jingming tradition include Boltz, *A survey of Taoist literature,* 70–78; Richard Shek, "Daoism and Orthodoxy;" and Brokaw, *The Ledgers of Merit and Demerit*, 43–52. Richard Wang's *The Ming Prince and Daoism* also contains some passages on the Jingming dao. There are several studies in Chinese and Japanese. There is also an excellent summary written by Judith Boltz in the EOT.

[216] *Jingming zhongxiao quanshu* 淨明忠孝全書 (DZ 1110). Judith M. Boltz, EOT, 567.

of influence of the Jingming school on Wu Shouyang's legacy, however, can be found in his reference to a specific myth. This myth states that Xu Xun had prophesized that 1240 years after his own ascension, eight hundered immortals would appear in northern Jiangxi. These immortals would have a teacher who would promote the teachings of Xu Xun. At the same time that all of this would be happening, a pine tree (*song* 松) and a sandy islet (*sha* 沙) would appear as verification of the event. This would be called the Dragon Sandy Islet (*longsha* 龍沙). Later biographies put Xu's ascension in 374 and thus the prognosticated event would take place in 1614, although, as will be seen, there were different calculations.[217] I will refer to this myth as the Longsha Prophecy.[218]

Wu makes a few references to this prophecy. In these passages, there is definitely a suggestion that Wu is one of the eight hundred immortals or even their leader. The first reference appears as part of Wu's complex signature at the end of the fourth chapter of the *Straightforward Essays*. It ends by saying, "written in the bright era 1242 years after the prophetic record (*chenji* 讖記) of Jingyang, in the spring of the *yimao* year during the Wanli reign."[219] This *yimao* year conforms with 1615. Hence, the first thing to note is the method of calculation of the number of years between two dates. If we start counting from the year 374 in the same manner as we would calculate somebodies age and add 1240 years (375 marking the first year), it yields 1614. But if we count in the manner as we would calculate, for example, regnal dates (374 marking the first year), then the 1240th year would be in 1613. The year 1615, when Wu dated his text, would then indeed be the 1242nd year of the prophecy. In 1612, Wu had finished his discipleship. In 1613, he became a master himself and also started to write. Wu puts his reference to Xu Xun's prophecy in a very prominent place and he clearly suggests there is some relevance in the fact that his writing took place on this date.

The next reference is found in one of the verses Wu dedicated to the Prince of Ji and it leaves little doubt about what is meant to be suggested. The first annotated lines of this heptasyllabic verse read:

> **Jingyang (Xu Xun) once came to behead a Jiao (a flood dragon);** During the Jin era the Perfected Lord Xu Jingyang went to Changsha Prefecture to behead a Jiao Sprite. **One strike of the sword with divine skill and then he immediately returned.** After he beheaded the Jiao, he returned to Nanchang. **After 1200 years, I arrived in turn;** More than 1200 years have passed now since Jingyang returned and I arrived here in turn. Although it is not for a Jiao Sprite on the Yangzi, it is indeed that I came to behead a Jiao Sprite (here, sprite also has the meaning of semen) in the Waters of the Kidneys. **To reopen the *qi* in one minuscule aperture.** The "one aperture" refers to the One Aperture of the Mysterious Gate. The "reopening of the *qi*" means that the unified pre-heaven *qi*, which is endlessly generated, opens and reopens again. There is a [suitable] moment to gather the medicine and when this time arrives the spirit will be aware of it. This corresponds with my statement, "you sense it and do not sense it; you sense it again and it is truly mysterious."
> **旌陽曾為斬蛟來，**晉時許旌陽真君，斬蛟精至長沙府。**一劍功神逕自回。**斬蛟已，回於南昌。**千二百年吾復至，**旌陽回後，於今又千二百餘年矣，吾復至此，雖非為江上蛟精，卻為斬腎水中蛟精而來也。**幾微一竅炁重開。**一竅者，玄關一竅也。炁重開者，先天一炁，生生不已，開而復開也。採藥有時，時至神知，亦予所謂覺而不覺，復覺真玄之說也。[220]

Wu now refers to a period of more than 1200 years. It is not clear to me how he came up with this number; it does not seem to appear in any version of the Longsha prophecy. Depending on our method of calculation, 1200 years after the prophecy would be in the year of Wu's conception in 1573 or in the year of his birth in 1574. It seems that Wu made such a calculation to imply a significance. In any case, he again clearly suggests a connection between himself and Xu Xun's prophecy. He evokes Xu Xun's myth about the slaying of flood dragons and implies that his own raison d'être echos that of Xu since Wu came to Nanchang to teach people how to slay the inner sexual demons that stand in the way of spiritual cultivation. The next passage, from a preface written by Wu Shouxu in 1639, illustrates again how the suggestion is made that Wu is somehow

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[217] Some early sources variously give 281, 292, 301 as the dates of Xu's ascent. Since Bai Yuchan's biography of Xu, all subsequent biographies have given Bai's date of 374. See Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 211.

[218] The source for this myth appears to be the *Lingjian zi* 靈劍子 (DZ 570), which is attributed to Xu Xun and contains a "Songshaji 松沙記" (14a-b, 20b-21a). This text is variously dated between the tenth and twelfth century. Originally, there was this early myth of the pine tree and sandy islet and a different myth that contained the prophesy of the appearance of immortals 1240 years after Xu Xun's ascent. These myths appear to have been conflated in the early Southern Song (1127–1279), as is evidenced in Chen Daling's 陳達靈 (fl. 1174) *Wuzhen pian zhuxu* 悟真篇註序 in *Ziyang zhenren Wuzhen pian zhushu* (4b), as well as in Bai Yuchan's *Jingyang Xu zhenjun zhuan* 旌陽許真君傳 (33.8b) and Zhao Daoyi's 趙道一 (fl. 1294) *Xu taishi* 許太史 (26.8a/b). See Wang, *The Ming Prince and Daoism*, 211.

[219] *Tianxian zhengli zhilun*, *biji*, 4.52b, 7574: "書於旌陽讖記千二百四十二年之明時萬曆乙卯春日云."

[220] *Xianfo hezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.40a-b, 7422.

connected with the Longsha prophecy:

> **The third son of the elder official and older brother of my father was called Chongxu. I regard him such as Ananda regarded the World-Honored One.[221] His birth matches the record of Jingyang's Dragon Sandy Islet.** Jingyang was Perfected Lord Xu in the Jin dynasty and, after the Jin dynasty, he was the county magistrate of Jingyang. Later, he completed the Dao and ascended with his whole household and he became the Minister of the Left of Shangdi, the Lord of Fortune who governs the world. At the time, he left a prophetic record which said that 1241 years [after Xu's ascent], 800 disciples would appear in the region of Yuzhang, within the Five Hills, and their teacher would (also) appear in Yuzhang, at the occasion of the Dragon Sandy [Islet]; that is the time when white sand in the river covers the wellhead.[222] The wellhead is the place where a small stream emerges from the Western Hills, approximately two miles from the Zhang River (章江; i.e., the Ganjiang River). The stream outlet is [filled with] white sand, which is why it is called the Sand Well. It is on the other bank of the Zhang River Gate in the provincial capital of Jiangxi. The stream outlet is no more than five or six *zhang* wide and it was never known what covering the wellhead meant. In the sixth year of the Tianqi reign (1626), the water of the great Yangzi contained a white sandy islet. It went across the wellhead and covered it. This was known by Xu Jingyang 1242 years ago.
> **先大夫伯父季子，曰沖虛，余視若阿難之遇世尊也。生值旌陽龍沙之記。**旌陽，晉初許真君，在賈後時,為旌陽縣令也，後成道全家拔宅飛升，為上帝之左相，治世之福主也。當時留讖記云：千二百四十一年，豫章之境，五陵之內，出弟子八百，其師出於豫章同際龍沙之會，江中白沙掩過井口，是其時也。井口者，而山有小河流出，近章江二里許。河口皆白沙，其地曰沙井。與江西省城章江門隔岸也，河口不過五七丈，從來不識掩井口何說，天啟六年，親見大江水中擁一白沙洲橫當井口而掩過，此說旌陽千二百四十二年之前知也。[223]

This preface is signed:

> In the time of the twelfth year of Chongzhen reign (1639) during the great Ming, in a *jimao* year, on the day of the ascension of the Perfected Lord Jingyang Xu, the younger cousin Zhenyang.
> 旹在大明崇禎十二年歲次己卯旌陽許真君拔宅上升日堂弟真陽伍守虛題於道隱齋為眾告言 [224]

Although these references to the myth of Xu Jingyang may seem insignificant, brief and marginal as they are, they must have resonated with widespread expectations. Since the middle of the Ming period, approaching the time of the events prophesized, various people started to interpret various signs as the realization or the forthcoming realization of the prophecy and there were occasionaly references to signs which supposedly confirmed the prophesy. During the late Ming, the expectations and hopes based on the prophecy spread geographically from Jiangxi throughout the Jiangnan region, especially the Nanjing metropolis. Socially, belief in the prophecy spread from a few Daoists and "eccentrics" to various groups in society, including the elite literary circles. Xu Jingyang was also the patron saint of merchants and literati from Jiangxi as they sojourned outside their province.[225] The spread of Xu Jingyang's lore was probably in large part a result of the activities of Jiangxi natives away from home, as evidenced by Chen Zhixu, Wu Shouyang, Fu Jinquan, Li Yuankuan, and many others.

A good example is Wang Shizhen 王世貞 (1526–1590), one of the Seven Later Masters (*hou qizi* 後七子) and "China's supreme literary arbiter and critic" between 1570 and 1590.[226] He obtained his Presented Scholar degree in 1547 and held several mid-level to high official posts. But Wang is also known for his intense involvement with the cult of the female mystic Tanyangzi 曇陽子 (1557–1580; Wang Daozhen 王燾貞), a case that has captured the imagination of many and testifies to the permeability of such traditional academic categories as "religion" and "Confucian rationalism."[227] Another instance of this transcending of conventional categories is Wang's belief in the Longsha prophecy and others who shared such beliefs

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[221] Like Wu Shouxu, Ananda (*anan* 阿難) was indeed not just one of the Buddha's main disciples but also a cousin by their fathers.
[222] Here, Wu Shouxu speaks of 1241 years which, using the different methods of calculation, would yield either 1614 or 1615.
[223] Jingxuzi, *Wu-Liu tianxian famai*, Rev. ed., 3. A slightly different version can be found on several websites, but the differences do not change the basic meaning. This version is based on Tan Lisan's (Jingxuzi) book and I have converted the text to traditional characters.
[224] Ibid., 4.
[225] Schipper, "Taoist Ritual and Local Cults of the T'ang Dynasty," 812–34.
[226] Dardess, *Ming China*, 107.
[227] See Waltner, "T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen." Tanyangzi was the daughter of the Chief Grand Secretary Wang Xijue 王錫爵 (1534–1611) during the Wanli reign.

included the likes of Tu Long 屠隆 (1542–1605), Tu's friend and classmate Feng Mengzhen 馮夢禎 (1546–1605) another prominent man of lettres, as well as at one point the chancellor of the Yingtian Prefectural School, and Shen Maoxue 沈懋學 (1539–1582).[228]

There were different responses to the Longsha Prophecy in literati circles from the mid-Ming to the late Ming, including different explanations concerning the correct interpretation of the prophecy in terms of the timing of the events, as well as what the actual events would be.[229] But during the late Ming, it gradually became more and more obvious that the predicted events were failing to materialize.[230] The disappointment caused by this failure was followed by alternative explanations of the prophecy and one of the avenues of interpretation was to re-read the prediction in the light of inner alchemy doctrine. Wu Shouyang, and the examples cited above, are the prime example of this. Before him, Chen Zhixu had also made some references to the prophecy.[231] In the late Qing, Fu Jinquan would refer to it again, in a different version that put the prophesized events two hundred years later.[232] But Wu's lifetime happened to coincide with the heydays of the prophecy and he had chosen to be in Nanjing, one of the hotspots of the Longsha fever. On top of that, he hailed from northern Jiangxi, the heartland of the Xu Xun cult and the location where the eight hundred immortals and their teacher were predicted to appear. In 1669, the retired scholar-official from Nanchang Li Yuankuan wrote a preface for the first reprint of the *Straightforward Essays*.

> Master Wu came from Nanchang, which is actually the location of the religious leader of the Pure and Bright [Way of] Loyalty and Filiality. I definitely know that his name was prophesized in the [prophecy of the] Dragon Sandy Islet and I also know that his books can be revered as the standard for selecting immortals.
> 伍子起南昌，實淨明忠孝之教主所在，余固知其名姓之當讖于龍沙也，而亦知其書之可奉為選僊衡石耳。[233]

This is the clearest evidence I have seen that Wu's claims were echoed by others, besides his cousin. Further, this was more than half a century after the supposed arrival of the new religious leader, demonstrating that the Longsha Prophecy was still a matter of concern. For religious scholars, such data could be interesting as material to examine the psychological and narratival ways of reinterpreting failed prophesies. Regarding Wu Shouyang, these fragments show that the local Jingming lore of Xu Xun and his prophecy were a factor of influence in Wu's self-image or at least the image he wanted to portray of himself.

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[228] All of these famous literary figures obtained their *jinshi* degree in 1577 and were involved with Tanyangzi as well as with the Longsha prophecy. See Waltner, "T'an-yang-tzu and Wang Shih-chen" and Zhang Yixi, "Feisheng chushi de qidai."

[229] See Zhang Yixi, "Feisheng chushi de qidai."

[230] Perhaps Wu Shouyang would argue that the prophecy did materialize.

[231] Chen mentions the prophecy two times in his *Jindan dayao* 金丹大要; see Zhang Yixi, "Feisheng chushi de qidai," 44.

[232] In *Qiaoyangjing* 樵陽經 in ZW 11:662–663. This text includes a section titled "Xu Jingyang zhenjun Songsha ji 許旌陽真君松沙記" and a section titled "Xu Jingyang zhenjun Longshachen ji 許旌陽真君龍沙讖記." Also see Zhang Yixi, "Feisheng chushi de qidai," 6–7.

[233] Li Yuankuan, *Tianxian zhengli zhilun xu* 天仙正理直論序, in *Jinxian tang gao* 進賢堂稿 3:38–40.