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**A stairway to heaven : Daoist self-cultivation in early modern China**  
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## 4

# A Stairway to Heaven

Inner alchemy describes a gradual process of cultivation. An adept progresses through a step-by-step process and with each step, the adept attains higher levels of salvation. Thus, in such a gradual process, salvation, by definition, comes in degrees. In the previous chapter, I have outlined the steps of this cultivation process. In the last chapter, we will examine the idea of ultimate salvation, the highest attainment of inner alchemy. In this chapter, we examine the idea of gradual salvation by looking at the various levels of attainment. There is a variety of factors that influence one's progress, but here I distinguish between progress through cultivation and progress through rebirth. The idea is that, during one's current lifetime, an adept can gradually climb the ladder of salvation through a process of cultivation. If an adept should not succeed in obtaining salvation during his lifetime, he will be reborn. Then, the level of cultivation and his accumulated merit will determine the path of rebirth and his starting position for cultivation in the next life.

This chapter consist of four parts. In the first part, we will examine the two main models of immortality that can be found in Daoist texts. The earliest model was created by Ge Hong 葛洪 (283–343) who mentions two threefold divisions of attainment. By the Song dynasty, the most influential model can be traced to the Zhong-Lü texts. In the *Transmission of the Dao*, we find a model that distinguishes five levels of immortality. Although other models of immortality can be found in Daoist and Buddhist scriptures, this five-level model appears to have become the standard. Wu Shouyang's model of immortality is based on this Zhong-Lü model, in which he integrates some of Ge Hong's terms.

In the second part, we will examine the main Buddhist categories of gradual salvation which Wu integrates in his writings. First, he refers to a five-level model of Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841) which corresponds, says Wu, with the five-level Zhong-Lü model. Second, Wu regularly refers to the different Buddhist "Vehicles" associated with schools and practices and he associates each vehicle with its Daoist counterpart. Third, Wu refers to the notion of the "levels" (*bhumi*) of practice of the bodhisattva path and associates these levels with the inner alchemy process. Fourth, Wu refers to the idea of the three realms of samsara and associates the sequential transcendence of these realms with the stages of inner alchemy.

In the third part, we will examine Wu's description of gradual progress as a result of cultivation during one lifetime. Wu's basic framework is based on the five-level Zhong-Lü model. In this framework, he integrates elements from other models. Some of the terms from Ge Hong's model are associated with specific aspects of the five-level model. Further, he integrates the five-level model of Guifeng Zongmi, the "vehicles," the "levels," and the "realms."

In the fourth and last part, we will examine how rebirth interferes with the idea of cultivation. In Buddhist studies, we encounter models of progress that understand this progress to take place during one's lifetime or that consider progress to take place as a result of a favorable rebirth. These ideas are not mutually exclusive. Either one attains ultimate salvation in one's lifetime or one requires several lifetimes to progress to the point of ultimate salvation. This is also a matter of perspective. The biography of the Buddha starts from his final lifetime during which he attained buddhahood, but that was thought to have followed upon a long chain of previous lives leading up to this final life as the prince Siddhartha Gautama who would become the Buddha. Most studies of inner alchemy focus on the cultivation process leading to celestial immortality, with the implicit understanding that this is understood to take place during one lifetime. But, as a matter of fact, we can find the same idea of a current life and multiple rebirths in inner alchemy texts. Wu Shouyang's writings provide us with a number of interesting passages to examine how these ideas were applied in the framework of inner alchemy. We will examine Wu's descriptions of the scenarios of rebirth, and the description of the Buddhist idea of the four fruits of recluship and Wu's formulation of the Daoist equivalent of these four fruits.

## Daoist Models

The inner alchemy cultivation method consists of a gradual process during which the adept progresses through various stages, at each step attaining progressively more advanced states of realization. Thus, salvation, by definition, comes in degrees. At the end, the adept supposedly attains ultimate salvation, the final objective of the cultivation process. It is not self-evident that every adept would actually reach the state of ultimate salvation or even that he would aim for it. At various passages, the texts suggest that an adept may be satisfied to reach an intermediate state of salvation. Alternatively, an adept may be incapable of reaching the higher states of attainment. It is also possible that an adept reaches a certain level but is unable to hold on to it, only to retrogress to an earlier state of being. The cultivation process may also be interrupted in the event of death as a result of insufficient practice or a calamity. The afterlife scenarios depend on the course of rebirth as determined by karma or on actions the adept undertakes in the intermediate state between death and rebirth. The two main models of immortality encountered in the texts are derived from the *Inner Chapters* of the *Book of the Master Who Embraces Simplicity* (from here on *Inner Chapters*) and the *Anthology of Zhongli Quan's Transmission of the Dao to Lü Dongbin* (from here on *Transmission of the Dao*).<sup>461</sup>

### Ge Hong's Model

The earliest text that provides a model of gradual salvation is Ge Hong's *Inner Chapters*, dating from the fourth century.<sup>462</sup> Ge distinguishes the “celestial immortal” (*tianxian* 天仙), the “terrestrial immortal” (*dixian* 地仙), and the “corpse-liberated immortal” (*shijie xian* 尸解仙). The last category is further divided in “agents beneath the earth” (*dixia zhu* 地下主), “agents above the earth” (*dishang zhu* 地上主), and “lords who control the earth” (*zhidi jun* 制地君).<sup>463</sup> Elsewhere, Ge discusses another hierarchical model that does not mention the immortals but also clearly differentiates the levels of accomplishment of an adept of the way. In this model, he distinguishes the “highest scholars” (*shangshi* 上士), “middle scholars” (*zhongshi* 中士), and “lower scholars” (*xiashi* 下士):

That scripture says: When the highest scholars obtain the way, they ascend to become celestial officials; when the mediocre scholars obtain the way, they dwell and gather at the Kunlun; when the lower scholars obtain the way, they live a long life in the ordinary world.

其經曰，上士得道，昇為天官；中士得道，棲集崑崙，下士得道，長生世間。<sup>464</sup>

Ge does not appear to connect these models. This model suggests a highest level in the heavens, the most modest level remaining on earth, and the middle level dwelling in Kunlun. Elements of Ge Hong's model remain influential, especially the notion of “corpse-liberated” immortal, but as a general model it appears to have been superseded in inner alchemy texts by the model found in the Zhong-Lü texts.

### The Zhong-Lü Model

The model of immortality that appears to be cited most widely in inner alchemy texts and that is the one used by Wu is the model found in the *Transmission of the Dao*.<sup>465</sup> In this dialogical text, Lü Dongbin questions his master Zhongli Quan on the way to avoid disease, aging, and death. In the first chapter, called “On True

<sup>461</sup> *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (DZ 1185) and *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* 鍾呂傳道集 (DZ 263).

<sup>462</sup> See *Baopuzi neipian* 抱朴子內篇 (DZ 1185). Ge Hong's ideas on immortality are examined in Robert Ford Campany, *To Live as Long as Heaven and Earth*. A translation can be found in James R. Ware, *Alchemy, Medicine and Religion in the China of A.D. 320*.

<sup>463</sup> Just like Wu Shouyang, Ge Hong organized the existing concepts of his time in a hierarchical model.

<sup>464</sup> *Baopuzi neipian*, 4.9a. Ge is quoting the *Taiqing guantian jing* 太清觀天經. For a study of these Taiqing scriptures, see Pregadio, *Great Clarity*.

<sup>465</sup> *Zhong-Lü chuandao ji* 鍾呂傳道集 (DZ 263). There are alternative models which I do not discuss here because they are not mentioned in Wu Shouyang's writings. One such model can be found in the *Chongyang zhenren Jinguan yusuo jue* 重陽真人金關玉鎖訣 (DZ 1156), ascribed to Wang Chongyang, who cites the Zhong-Lü model but specifies it as ghost immortal, terrestrial immortal, sword immortal (*jianxian* 劍仙), spirit immortal, and celestial immortal. On this text, see Komjathy, *Cultivating Perfection*. Yet another model can be found in the *Surangama Sutra* (*Lengyanjing* 楞嚴經; T. 945). This Buddhist scripture lists ten types of immortals. See Benn, “Another Look at the Pseudo-Sūrangama sutra,” 73–77. Benn explains that this sutra situates immortals between devas and human beings, where we usually find asuras (ibid., 73–74).

Immortality” (*Lun zhenxian* 論真仙), Zhongli explains that the goal of cultivation is to become an immortal and he makes some propositions about the nature of immortality and its associations with the stages of practice. Let us briefly paraphrase Zhongli’s claims.

First, humans are conceived from the *qi* of their parents and “intelligent radiance” (*lingguang* 靈光) enters their bodies. Through sexual activity, they lose their *qi*, are afflicted by disease, and die. Through the process of rebirth, their spirit is unable to find liberation (*jietuo* 解脫; S. *mokṣa*). Second, when a person dies, he becomes a “ghost” (*gui* 鬼) and when he cultivates the way (Dao) he can become an immortal. To attain liberation from rebirth, one must seek to avoid becoming a ghost and seek to become an immortal. Third, a ghost is pure yin, an immortal is pure yang, and a human person is a mixture of yin and yang. Therefore, only humans can become either a ghost or an immortal. Fourth, there are five degrees or “ranks” (*deng* 等) of immortality:

1. “ghost immortal” (*guixian* 鬼仙)
2. “human immortal” (*renxian* 人仙)
3. “terrestrial immortal” (*dixian* 地仙)
4. “spirit immortal” (*shenxian* 神仙)
5. “celestial immortal” (*tianxian* 天仙)

Only the “ghost immortal” is a pure yin entity and the other four ranks of immortality are progressively more advanced types of yang immortals. In this hierarchy of immortality, the ghosts are included as a rank of immortal. But Zhongli adds that “although we say “immortal,” they are actually ghosts.”<sup>466</sup> Contrary to the other ranks, the pure yin ghost is not a type of immortality and one should never actively strive to attain it. Besides this five-level model of immortality, the same chapter also discusses a model that divides the method (*fa* 法), or we could say the cultivation process, into three major stages called the “three accomplishments” (*sancheng* 三成). These three stages are provided with descriptions and, most importantly here, associated with the levels of immortality:

1. “small accomplishment” (*xiaocheng* 小成) associated with the attainment of “human immortality”
2. “middle accomplishment” (*zhongcheng* 中成) associated with the attainment of “terrestrial immortality”
3. “great accomplishment” (*dacheng* 大成) associated with the attainment of “spirit immortality”

As we can see, this model of three stages only distinguishes three levels of accomplishment. Lü says, “ghost immortality is definitely something one cannot strive for and celestial immortality is likewise something one cannot dare to hope for.”<sup>467</sup> Thus, we could say that, concerning the five levels of immortality, the first one was not really relevant as it was something to avoid. The highest objective was presented as a probably unobtainable ideal. The actual method of cultivation concentrated on the three accomplishments.

## Buddhist Models

Wu Shouyang refers to a variety of Buddhist terms to describe the stages of the gradual cultivation process. In his comparison of Daoist and Buddhist terms, he explicitly mentions two models. First, he associates the Zhong-Lü model of the five ranks of immortality with Guifeng Zongmi’s model of five types of Chan practitioners. Second, he associates stages of immortality with Buddhist notion of “vehicles” and its associated terms. Further, throughout his writings, he refers to the Buddhist ideas that a cultivator gradually progresses through “levels” and successively exits the realms of ordinary existence. Let us review each of these models.

### The Five Types of Chan

Wu refers to a model that appears to derive from the texts of the Chan master and fifth patriarch of the

<sup>466</sup> *Chuandao ji*, 1.3b: 雖曰仙，其實鬼也。

<sup>467</sup> *Chuandao ji*, 1.5b: 鬼仙固不可求矣，天仙亦未敢望矣。

Huayan lineage Guifeng Zongmi 圭峰宗密 (780–841).<sup>468</sup> Zongmi’s texts represent an attempt to categorize and classify the doctrines and practices of his time. He is best known for “positing the fundamental harmony between the scriptural teachings of Buddhism and Chan practice.”<sup>469</sup> He wrote an extensive history of the Chan school of which only the preface (written between 828–835; usually referred to as the *Chan Prolegomenon*) survives. In this preface, he proposes a hierarchical classification of five types of Chan:<sup>470</sup>

1. “Chan outside the way” (*waidao chan* 外道禪)
2. “Chan of the common person” (*fanfu chan* 凡夫禪)
3. “Chan of the Small Vehicle” (*xiaosheng chan* 小乘禪)
4. “Chan of the Great Vehicle” (*dasheng chan* 大乘禪)
5. “Chan of the Highest Vehicle” (*zuishangsheng chan* 最上乘禪)

From Zongmi’s preface we can ascertain some features of the non-extant main part of his history. In it, he collected a huge amount of texts selected from the eight Tang period Chan schools.<sup>471</sup> He apparently sought to harmonize the doctrines of these Chan schools on the one hand and the Chan schools and other Buddhist schools on the other hand. Therefore, he devised his own classification scheme of Buddhist teachings. In the period when Buddhist texts were gradually introduced, exegetes of the various schools associated with these texts used such classification schemes to deal with the enormous variety in interpretations of Buddhism, situating themselves and others in a hierarchical ranking of their own making. Thus, by claiming their own superiority, categorizing was also an important tool in sectarian polemics. Zongmi’s scheme was the background for his own soteriological program that started with sudden awakening followed by gradual cultivation (*dunwu jianxiu* 頓悟漸修).<sup>472</sup>

Wu compares the five ranks of immortality with these five types of Buddhists. He further equates the “Chan of the Great Vehicle” with a Bodhisattva and the “Chan of the Highest Vehicle” with a Buddha; see the following table:

“ghost immortal” ( <i>guixian</i> 鬼仙)	“Chan outside the way” ( <i>waidao chan</i> 外道禪)
“human immortal” ( <i>renxian</i> 人仙)	“Chan of the common person” ( <i>fanfu chan</i> 凡夫禪)
“terrestrial immortal” ( <i>dixian</i> 地仙)	“Chan of the Small Vehicle” ( <i>xiaosheng chan</i> 小乘禪)
“spirit immortal” ( <i>shenxian</i> 神仙)	“Chan of the Great Vehicle” is “Bodhisattva” ( <i>dasheng chan</i> 大乘禪) ( <i>pusa</i> 菩薩)
“celestial immortal” ( <i>tianxian</i> 天仙)	“Chan of the Highest Vehicle” is “Buddha” ( <i>zuishangsheng chan</i> 最上乘禪) ( <i>fo</i> 佛)

## Vehicles

The different types of immortality and of Chan are also associated with “vehicles” (*sheng* 乘; S. *yāna*). The

<sup>468</sup> Zongmi was a patriarch in the Heze branch (Heze *zong* 菏泽宗) of the Chan lineage. On Zongmi, see Peter N. Gregory, *Tsung-mi and the Sinification of Buddhism*. For a translation of the *Chan Prolegomenon*, see Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*.

<sup>469</sup> PDB, 335.

<sup>470</sup> Broughton, *Zongmi on Chan*, 103. Broughton translates this concept as “five grades of dhyana:” outsider dhyana, common-person dhyana, inferior-vehicle dhyana, great-vehicle dhyana, and dhyana of the highest vehicle.

<sup>471</sup> These schools or lineages are: Jingzhong, Bei[zong] (Northern School), Baotang, Nanshan nianfo menchan, Shitou (evolves into Caodong and Yunmen), Niutou, Heze, and Hongzhou.

<sup>472</sup> In brief, a Chan adept begins with “seeing one’s nature” (*jianxing* 見性), which describes the first awakening to the fact that one already is a buddha. This is called “understanding-awakening” (*jienu* 解悟). But after this first awakening one still has to gradually remove the “habituations” (*xunxi* 薰習 or *xiqi* 習氣; S. *vasana*) that are engrained in the mind. In the end, one attains “realization-awakening” (*zhengwu* 證悟), when the knowledge that one is a buddha completely conforms with one’s actual behavior. This then conforms with actual buddhahood.

vehicle is a common metaphor in Buddhism to designate different methods or schools. Particularly the Mahayana tradition used this metaphor as a way to classify teachings and as a tool in intersectorian polemics. A famous story in the *Lotus Sutra*, for example, distinguishes three preliminary vehicles and one ultimate vehicle. The most common distinctions are: (1) the Great Vehicle (*dasheng* 大乘; S. *Mahāyāna*) versus the Small Vehicle (*xiaosheng* 小乘; S. *Hīnayāna*); (2) the Two Vehicles (*ersheng* 二乘) as another name for the Small Vehicle; (3) the Two Vehicles as specifically referring to the Śrāvaka Vehicle (*shengwen sheng* 聲聞乘) and the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle (*yuanjue sheng* 緣覺乘); (4) the Bodhisattva Vehicle (*pusa sheng* 菩薩乘; S. *bodhisattvayāna*); the (5) Three Vehicles (*sansheng* 三乘; S. *trīyāna*) referring to the Śrāvaka Vehicle, Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, and Bodhisattva Vehicle; and the (6) One Vehicle (*yisheng* 一乘; *ekayāna*) which is contrasted in the *Lotus Sutra* with the Three Vehicles.<sup>473</sup> As seen above, Zongmi distinguished the Small Vehicle, Great Vehicle, and Supreme Vehicle. Wu Shouyang gives his own descriptions of these terms, associating them with levels of attainment recognized in inner alchemy and providing some descriptions of his own. Let us briefly review his comments on these terms.

### *The Śrāvaka Vehicle*

The *śrāvaka* (*shengwenfo* 聲聞佛), usually translated as the “listener,” literally refers to someone who directly heard the teachings from the Buddha but this term is used to describe those who seek liberation by following a teacher. In mainstream Buddhist schools, it can be used to describe a disciple. In Mahayana texts, the term *śrāvaka* is mostly used pejoratively to describe the followers of non-Mahayana schools. Wu characterizes the *śrāvaka* and the Śrāvaka Vehicle (*shengwen sheng* 聲聞乘) as follows:

There are the so-called “śrāvaka” Buddhists: The *Huayanjing* says, “The śrāvaka vehicle follows the explanations of the words of others and their wisdom is narrow and inferior.” He hears the way because of the sound of a teacher transmitting the way. He can advance in cultivation by himself and he can initiate people to advance in cultivation. He knows the way of the Buddha and is able to complete the way of the Buddha and thus he is also called a buddha. That is like a person in the lineage of immortals who encounters a genuine teacher, is initiated in the orthodox way and who has not yet practiced the laying of a foundation in the way. If he is willing to practice and do it also thoroughly, he will have some verification.

有所謂聲聞佛者：《華嚴經》云：“聲聞乘隨他語解，智慧狹劣。”是因師傳道之聲而聞道，可自進修，亦可度人進修；知佛道而能成佛道，故亦曰佛；即仙宗中之遇真師，得度正道，而未行道築基之人也。若肯行亦徹底，有所證。<sup>474</sup>

Here he appears to suggest that a *śrāvaka* has not yet finished the first stage of cultivation.<sup>475</sup>

### *The Pratyekabuddhas*

The *pratyekabuddha* (*yuanjuefo* 緣覺佛), or “solitary enlightened buddha,” is “an arhat who becomes enlightened through his own efforts without receiving instruction from a buddha in his final lifetime.”<sup>476</sup> He does not teach others. The path towards pratyekabuddha-hood is deemed to be longer than that of the *śrāvaka* because he cannot rely on the instructions of a teacher and must himself accumulate merit. His name, “awaken through conditions” (*yuanjue* 緣覺), refers to the idea that he achieves liberation through contemplating the notion of “dependent origination,” the idea that phenomena arise in dependence on causes.<sup>477</sup> Wu says:

<sup>473</sup> There are more categorizations, referring to one, two, three, four, or five vehicles, in various combinations and with a variety of further subdivisions. See the entry for *sheng* 乘 in the DDB.

<sup>474</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.36b-37a, 7482–7483.

<sup>475</sup> In the passage translated here, Wu does not explicitly compare the *śrāvaka* with a level of immortality. In the sentences following this passage, he describes the *pratyekabuddhas* and associates them explicitly with human immortals. In another short passage, Wu appears to be suggesting that the *śrāvaka* are equal to the rank of human immortality. *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.40a, 7484: “Such as the two-vehicle categories of the *śrāvaka*, *pratyekabuddhas*, and four-dhyana bodhisattva are the same as the three categories of spirit immortal, terrestrial immortal, and human immortal. 如聲聞緣覺，四禪菩薩二乘等，與神仙、地仙、人仙三者同”

<sup>476</sup> PDB, 673.

<sup>477</sup> The term “dependent origination” (*yuanqi* 緣起; S. *pratityasamutpada*) refers to one of the basic concepts of Buddhist doctrine. It has a general and a specific meaning. In a general sense, it suggests that “everything comes into existence in dependence on something else.” (PDB, 670). In a specific sense, it refers to the “twelvefold chain” (*nidana*) which describes a sequence of causation and can be examined in forward and reverse order. (PDB, 669–670).

There are those who are called “pratyekabuddha”: who, when they cultivate, awaken to the emptiness of conditions and forms; hence they are called “awakened through conditions.” That is like the human immortal in the lineage of immortals who eradicate the root of lust during the Pass of Hundred Days by refining essence and transforming it into *qi*, making empty the conditions of form and obtaining pure *qi* and living a long life without dying.

有所謂緣覺佛者：於修行時，緣色便覺空，故曰緣覺；即仙宗百日關中除淫根，以煉精化炁，空卻色緣而得純炁，長生不死之人仙也。<sup>478</sup>

The pratyekabuddha is suggested to be equivalent to human immortality.<sup>479</sup>

### *The Two Vehicles*

The term “Two Vehicles” (*ersheng* 二乘; S. *yānadvaya*) is commonly used in Mahayana texts to describe the śrāvaka and the pratyekabuddha vehicles or to what they call the Hinayana or the “lesser vehicle” (*xiaosheng* 小乘).<sup>480</sup> As such, it does not necessarily refer to these two vehicles but is used in a general sense of “two-vehicle adherents” to be contrasted with the adherents of Mahayana or the Bodhisattva Vehicle. Wu mentions the Two-Vehicle Buddhas (*ersheng fo* 二乘佛) which he describes as follows:

There are what is called “two-vehicle buddhas” whose mind has production-and-cessation and, because there is production, they strive for cessation. Their respiration has exit-and-entrance and because it exists, it is returned to non-being; because of the cycle of being and non-being, production-and-cessation, they are called “two-vehicles.” From halting the thoughts, halting the respiration, and halting the pulses, they tend towards attaining the sea of silent extinction of the Tathagata. That is like the spirit immortal in the lineage of immortals who during the Pass of Ten Months return the jade liquor to the cinnabar field, connect the joints, take from lead and add to mercury, exhaust the yin and purify the yang, refine the *qi* until it is gone, and become a spirit immortal who has transformed the spirit.

有謂二乘佛者：心有生滅，以生而趨滅；息有出入，以有而歸無；以有無生滅二者循環，故曰二乘。自念住、息住、脈住，而趨至於如來寂滅海；即同仙宗十月關中，玉液還丹，關節相通，抽鉛添汞，陰盡純陽，煉炁至無，而得化神之神仙也。<sup>481</sup>

Here, Wu gives a technical definition of “Two-Vehicle Buddhas.” He suggests that they are described as “two-vehicle” because they are still characterized by the cycle of being and non-being of the mind and the respiration. In other passages, Wu appears to use the term Two Vehicles as a collective name for the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and what he calls “four-dhyana bodhisattva.”

Such as the ranks of the Two Vehicles of the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and the four-dhyana bodhisattva, which are the same as the three ranks of the spirit immortal, the terrestrial immortal, and the human immortal. 如聲聞緣覺，四禪菩薩二乘等，與神仙、地仙、人仙三者同。<sup>482</sup>

Here, he appears to suggest that the “four-dhyana bodhisattva” is equivalent to the spirit immortal, the pratyekabuddha to the terrestrial immortal, and the śrāvaka to the human immortal. Later on in this passage, they are contrasted with the Supreme Vehicle (*zuishang sheng* 最上乘) of buddhas and celestial immortals.

### *The Arbat*

Later in this chapter, we examine the idea of the “four fruits of recluseship” (*shamen siguo* 沙門四果), which describes a model of attainment in early Buddhism that describes progress through rebirth. In this model, the highest level is the arhat (*aluohan* 阿羅漢; “worthy one”), which was also the qualification of the Buddha. In the Mahayana tradition, the bodhisattva and buddha occupied the highest position while the arhat was

<sup>478</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.37a, 7483.

<sup>479</sup> Another passage suggests that the *pratyekabuddha* should be equated with the terrestrial immortal. *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.40a, 7484. See note above.

<sup>480</sup> The Hinayana or the “Small Vehicle” (*xiaosheng* 小乘) is sometimes taken to be a different name for the Theravāda tradition. More accurately, it is considered a pejorative term coined and used by those Buddhist traditions that see themselves as the “Great Vehicle” or Mahayana. They use this term to refer to the non-Mahayana Buddhists or, more specifically, to the *śrāvakas* and *pratyekabuddhas*, who in their view lack the compassion to follow the bodhisattva path of the Great Vehicle.

<sup>481</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.37a, 7483.

<sup>482</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.40a, 7484.

maintained as a less advanced attainment. Wu Shouyang describes the arhat as an adept who has attained the sixth power of terminated outflow. He is contrasted with the “five power ghosts” (*wutong gui* 五通鬼) who neglect the practice of abstention and merely cultivate a yin spirit. The arhat is equivalent to a human immortal by having attained the “small fruit” (*xiaoguo* 小果) of an immortal body.<sup>483</sup>

#### *The Three Vehicles*

The “Three Vehicles” (*sansheng* 三乘; S. *triyāna*) usually refers to the three different paths of the śrāvakas, the pratyekabuddhas, and the bodhisattva. The first two are supposed to result in arhat-hood and the third in buddhahood.<sup>484</sup> Wu says:

If you are not in constant samadhi, you will retrogress to [the state of] exit-and-entrance [of the breath] and production-and-cessation [of thoughts] and hence the Buddha said, when he spoke the *Mahāparinirvāṇasūtra*, “Do all the dharmas within the true suchness have the characteristics of the distinctions of the three vehicles?” This refers to those who retrogress to the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, those who retrogress to the Śrāvaka Vehicle, and those who verify the Supreme Vehicle.  
若不常定，則退於出入生滅，所以佛言《大涅槃經》云：“一切法，真如中，為有三乘差別相否？”謂有退住聲聞乘者；或有退處獨覺乘者；或有證得無上乘者；是也。<sup>485</sup>

Here, Wu indeed describes these Three Vehicles as the Pratyekabuddha Vehicle, the Śrāvaka Vehicle, and the Supreme Vehicle (*wushang sheng* 無上乘). This passage explains the notion of retrogression from the state of spirit immortality or bodhisattva-hood. The Three Vehicles describe the retrogression to the Two Vehicles of pratyekabuddha and the śrāvaka and progression from bodhisattva to the Supreme Vehicle of buddhahood.

#### *The Great Vehicle and Bodhisattva-hood*

Mahayana, or Great Vehicle (*dasheng* 大乘), is the name for a doctrinal tradition in Indic Buddhism that produced texts a few centuries after the Buddha’s lifetime.<sup>486</sup> It appears to have been of minor importance in India, but it became the dominant form of Buddhism in East Asia and Tibet. In terms of doctrine, the Mahayana Great Vehicle is usually described as promoting the ideal of the path of the bodhisattva leading to buddhahood.<sup>487</sup> Wu associates the Great Vehicle with Zongmi’s “Chan of the Great Vehicle,” with the attainment of bodhisattva-hood, and, in Daoist terms, with the spirit immortal. It is situated in the progression: Small Vehicle, Great Vehicle, Supreme Vehicle.

#### *The Supreme Vehicle*

At the pinnacle of attainment, Wu places the “Supreme Vehicle Chan” (*zuishangsheng Chan* 最上乘禪) and buddhahood (*fo* 佛) which he equates with celestial immortality. In some passages, the same level is called “Supreme One Vehicle” (*zuishang yisheng* 最上一乘). Zongmi defined Supreme Vehicle Chan as the highest of his five types of practices, transmitted by Bodhidharma, and associated it with practices relying on “sudden awakening” (*dunwu*), the sudden flash of insight that one actually already is a buddha. Wu says the following about this Supreme Vehicle:

What are called buddhas of the supreme vehicle do involve themselves in effort (i.e., effortful practice), they do not lower themselves to give verbal explanations, they are without name and without characteristics,

<sup>483</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.3b, 7466.

<sup>484</sup> The *Lotus Sutra* explains these “vehicles” as skillful means (*upāya*) developed by the Buddha to instruct people with different capabilities of understanding. The Three Vehicles of the śrāvaka, pratyekabuddha, and bodhisattva are contrasted with the One Vehicle (*yisheng* 一乘; S. *ekayāna*) of the buddha. Another explanation of the Three Vehicles is Mahayana, Hinayana, and Vajrayāna.

<sup>485</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.3a, 7466.

<sup>486</sup> Commonly described by earlier scholars as a “school,” the nature of early Mahayana is now very much a matter of debate and many scholars carefully speak of a “movement” not corresponding with a separate institutional structure. For more insight in the relevant issues, see Silk, “What, If Anything, Is Mahāyāna Buddhism?” Here, we are not concerned with the actual history of Mahayana but with the meaning attached to this term by Wu Shouyang and the way in which he associated this term with Daoist concepts. In that context, we should consider Mahayana a term describing a level of practice and attainment associated with the idea of bodhisattvahood.

<sup>487</sup> In the earliest Buddhist texts, “bodhisattva” (PDB, 134: being [*sattva*] intent on achieving enlightenment [*bodhi*]) was one of the names the Buddha used for himself.

there is no buddha and no dharma, (only) silent mysterious clarity, and the yin and yang of heaven and earth are unable to let it die or be reborn, its longevity is unlimited, surpassing heaven and earth; it is the same as the celestial immortal from the immortal lineage, who practices nine years of facing a wall, refining the spirit and returning to emptiness, then going beyond to what came before heaven and earth, thus not being destroyed in what came after there were heaven and earth.

有所謂最上乘佛者：不涉有為，不落言詮，無名無相，非佛非法，寂然妙明，天地陰陽不能死之生之，壽命無量，過於天地；即同仙宗九年面壁，煉神還虛，以後超出於天地之先，不壞於天地之後之天仙也。<sup>488</sup>

The buddhas of the Supreme Vehicle are the same as celestial immortals. In terms of practice, the attainment of buddhahood or celestial immortality is a fully effortless constant samadhi and cannot be described in any further detail. In terms of attainment, buddhas and celestial immortals have returned to the emptiness of the pre-heaven state and hence will not be destroyed at the end of a kalpa.

### Outline

As we saw in this brief survey of “vehicles,” some passages are not fully clear or appear to be inconsistent. But if we try to put all these associations together, we obtain the following outline:

Table 10: Outline of ranks, fruits, and vehicles

Zhong-Lü	Guifeng Zongmi	four fruits	Other
ghost immortal	Chan outside the way		
human immortal	Chan of the common person	Arhat	Two Vehicles (śrāvaka and pratyekabuddha)
terrestrial immortal	Chan of the Small Vehicle		
spirit immortal	Chan of the Great Vehicle of the Bodhisattva	(Bodhisattva)	Great Vehicle
celestial immortal	Chan of the Supreme Vehicle of the Buddha	(Buddha)	Supreme Vehicle

### Eleven Levels

Another model distinguishes “levels” (*di* 地; S. *bhūmis*) that identify several distinct stages on the path of the bodhisattva towards buddhahood. The most common formulation is based on the *Ten Bhūmis Sutra* that describes ten levels.<sup>489</sup> These ten levels are associated with the major doctrines of mainstream Buddhism. This concept was taken up in the *Flower Garland Sutra*, which incorporated the *Ten bhūmis sutra*. The *Lankavatara sutra* added the notion of an eleventh bhūmi, the Tathagata Bhūmi, as the ultimate level of buddhahood.<sup>490</sup> In the following passage, Wu is comparing each of the stages of inner alchemy with what he considers the equivalent stages in Buddhist teachings. As part of this, he describes a sequence of eleven levels.

What the Daoists refer to as “refining the spirit and returning it to emptiness” is what the Buddhists refer to as “a bodhisattva who has attained the seventh foundation, who cultivates to reach the eighth foundation, until the Tathagata appears, and has already become a buddha, practices empowerment until the ninth and tenth foundation, and practices empowerment until the rank of enlightenment of the eleventh foundation, so as to transcend above the realm of the formless.”

仙言“煉神還虛”，即佛言“七地菩薩，修上八地，如來出現，已成佛時，加持至九地十地，更加持上至十一地等覺，以超出無色界之上”者也。<sup>491</sup>

The Buddhist notion of “empowerment” (*jiachi* 加持; S. *adhiṣṭhāna*) describes ritual methods for an adept to be empowered by the buddhas. This empowerment helps the bodhisattva to persevere in his practice. In

<sup>488</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.37a-37b, 7483.

<sup>489</sup> This *Ten bhūmis sutra* (*Shidijing* 十地經; S. *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*) is incorporated in the *Avatamsaka Sutra* and was also available as an independent text. The ten levels are: (1) “joyful” (歡喜地; S. *pramuditā*); (2) “immaculate” (離垢地; S. *vimalā*); (3) “luminous” (發光地; S. *prabhākari*); (4) “radiance” (焰慧地; S. *arciṣmatī*); (5) “invincibility” (難勝地; S. *sudurjaya*); (6) “immediacy” (現前地; S. *abhimukhi*); (7) “transcendent” (遠行地; S. *dūraṅgamā*); (8) “steadfast” (不動地; S. *acalā*); (9) “eminence” (善慧地; S. *sādhumatī*); (10) “cloud of dharma” (法雲地; S. *dharmameghā*). Wu Shouyang does not mention these levels by name. He merely appropriates the concept of levels.

<sup>490</sup> Tathagatabhūmi (*rulai di* 如來地).

<sup>491</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.104b, 7454.

mainstream Buddhist texts, this term also refers to the power of the Buddha to project endless “mind-made bodies” (*yisheng shen* 意生身; S. *manomayakāya*) outside. Further, this term also refers to the determination to extend the duration of dhyana. Wu equates “empowerment” with the practice of nursing the yang spirit. It is easy to see how the connotations of “empowerment” could have been taken to refer to the same practice. During the three years of nursing, the inner alchemy adept continues to develop his ability to remain in samadhi while he practices letting his yang spirit exit and enter the body and manifest itself as a body. To summarize the associations, the bodhisattva is associated with the creation of the yang spirit at the end of the second stage and in Buddhist terms with the eighth level. Hereafter, an adept continues with “empowerment” or “nursing” until the eleventh level when he attains perfect enlightenment (*samyaksambodhi*).

### Three Realms

Wu Shouyang associates the stages of cultivation with the successive transcendence of the three realms of existence. The “three realms” (*sanjie* 三界; S. *trāidhātuka*) are the “realm of desire” (*yujie* 欲界; S. *kāmadhātu*), the “realm of form” (*sejie* 色界; S. *rūpadhātu*), and the “realm of formlessness” (*wusejie* 無色界; S. *arūpyadhātu*). In conventional Buddhist doctrine, these three realms are the realms of existence that together form the totality of the universe. Ordinary sentient beings are subject to the cycle of rebirth, called samsara (*shengsi lunhui* 生死輪迴), and this rebirth occurs along six scenarios called the six paths. Ordinary humans, demigods (*asura*), ghosts (*preta*), animals (*tiryak*), and hell beings (*naraka*) are reborn in the “realm of desire.” Those who practice dhyana may be reborn in the “realm of form.” Those who practice the four formlessness stages may be reborn in the “realm of formlessness.”

Wu describes the three realms in some passages as three sectors in a system of heavens. He cites the *Scripture on Salvation*, describing its system of heavens as consisting of thirty-six heavens divided in three major divisions.<sup>492</sup> The highest heaven is the Great Canopy Heaven (*daluotian* 大羅天). Beneath are the three heavens of the Three Clarities (*sangling* 三清). These two sectors are said to be “outside of the three realms” (*sanjie zhi wai* 三界之外). The third sector are the Four Heavens of the Seed-People (*si zhongmin tian* 四種民天) which are said to be “above” the three realms. Then follow the heavens which are “within the three realms” (*sanjie zhi nei* 三界之內). The four heavens of the realm of formlessness, the eighteen heavens of the realm of form, and the six heavens of the realm of desire. Each of these thirty-six heavens is ruled by an “emperor” (*di* 帝). He further cites a scripture as saying that the Great Canopy Heaven is the highest heaven of five hundred million and fifty-five thousand five hundred and fifty-five heavens!<sup>493</sup> He then cites the Buddhist scriptures:

Further, according to the scriptures of the Buddhist Canon it is said that thirty-three heavens are all within the three realms and beyond these are no names of heavens. But the Buddhist scriptures are collected and recorded by Ananda<sup>494</sup> and are the words of an ordinary scholar while the [words of the scriptures of the] Daoist Canon are spoken by the celestial worthies and by the highest emperor.

又按，《佛藏》經言：三十三天皆在三界之內，而以外則無天之名。但佛經由阿難所集記，是凡夫學者之言，《道藏》則由天尊上帝所說者耳！<sup>495</sup>

The three realms are locations of rebirth and a sentient being can relocate with rebirth in accordance with the accounting of one’s good and bad deeds. At the same time, the three realms are also psychological states. During one lifetime, an adept can move between those realms in accordance with one’s level of attainment. In Wu Shouyang’s model, the terrestrial immortal leaves the “realm of desire” to enter the “realm of form,” the spirit immortal leaves the “realm of form” to enter the “realm of formlessness,” and the celestial immortal leaves these three realms all together to dwell beyond them.

<sup>492</sup> *Duren shangpin miaojing* 度人上品妙經; DZ 1.

<sup>493</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 1.63a-b, 7434. Wu cites the *Zhutian lingshu duming miaojing* 諸天靈書度命妙經 (DZ 23).

<sup>494</sup> Ananda (阿難陀 or 阿難) was a cousin of the Buddha as well as one of his main disciples. Wu Shouyu, Wu’s cousin (*tangdi* 堂弟) and disciple, compared himself in a preface with Ananda and Wu Shouyang with the Buddha. See Jingxuzi, *Wu-Liu tianxian famai*, Rev. ed., 3: “The youngest son of my father’s elder brother, the former official, is called Chongxu and in my view it resembles how Ananda encountered the World-Honored One. 先大夫伯父季子，曰冲虛，余視若阿難之遇世尊也”

<sup>495</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 1.63b, 7434.

## Wu Shouyang's Model of Progress through Cultivation

Now we will examine how Wu Shouyang tried to bring these various models together in his own teachings. His basic model was the five-level model from the *Transmission of the Dao* which I call the Zhong-Lü model. The following examination will take these five levels as a framework. When we examine Wu's descriptions, we will see that he develops this model in a few ways. First, he associates the five levels with terms from the *Inner Chapters*, thus affirming these earlier terms and fitting them into his own classification. Second, he identifies several sub-categories. Third, he associates each Daoist term with a Buddhist term, suggesting that these are merely different names for what is essentially the same state of being, the same level of accomplishment. Fourth, he associates each level of accomplishment with the method that leads to this level. Fifth, he describes the results or the characteristics of each level of accomplishment.

### Ghost Immortals

The ghost immortal (*guixian* 鬼仙) is described as a completely yin spirit or “yin intelligence” (*yinling* 陰靈) of a deceased person. Wu says:

Humans die because their yang is exhausted and they become completely yin. Their yin nature, although it has intelligence, is in the end a completely yin ghost.

人死由陽盡而純陰，其陰性雖有靈，終是純陰之鬼也。<sup>496</sup>

An ordinary person dies when the yang *qi* in his body is exhausted and his yin spirit leaves the deceased corpse. As the *Transmission of the Dao* states, only human beings are endowed with yang *qi* and a yin spirit and can become either a ghost or an immortal and to avoid becoming a ghost one must cultivate immortality. Although these ghosts are called immortals, they are actually just ghosts.<sup>497</sup> To avoid physical death, and ultimately to avoid rebirth, an adept must first practice sexual abstinence, replenish his supply of yang *qi* and then use it to yangify his yin spirit so that this yang spirit can avoid rebirth. Hence, a true adept only strives to create the four types of yang spirit. The state of ghost immortality, unlike the other ranks, is not something one would normally actively seek after. As Lü Dongbin says, “ghost immortality is something one definitely cannot seek.”<sup>498</sup> Nevertheless, the texts also describe those who do cultivate a yin spirit:

That which they cultivate is only the yin-ness of their whole spirit. This is what is called “those who have not refined the reverted elixir yet and [only practice] inner observation-illumination.” Although their spirit is silent and inactive and does not move rashly into the delusional, [realizes] true emptiness in an instant, without giving rise to a thought that would create the seeds of samsara, and does not follow the objects to enter into the usual mold of samsara, [they merely] exit a yin spirit. Like this, they exhaust the *qi* of the physique (the “form”) they are endowed with and only die this once and they do not come to the human world again to undergo birth and death and they will for a long time be numinous ghosts.

所修者，一性之陰而已。所謂未煉還丹，而內觀照者是也。性雖寂靜而不動於妄，當下真空不起念作輪迴種子，不隨境入輪迴窠臼，出得陰神。如此，稟形炁盡，只此一死，不來人世再受生死，久為靈鬼。<sup>499</sup>

This type of adept does not practice the “refinement of the reverted elixir” (*lian huandan* 煉還丹), meaning the first stage of the cultivation process during which the adept practices sexual abstinence and replenishes his supply of yang *qi* by transforming his essence. They skip this stage and immediately start to work on their yin spirit by practicing “inner observation-illumination” (*nei guanzhao* 內觀照). By doing so, they accomplish complete samadhi (or inactivity) of the mind and thus they are liberated from samsara. But when their *qi* is exhausted and their body dies, they exit their yin spirit which continues its bodiless existence as a ghost.

These ghosts are not reborn as a human nor in any of the other six paths of rebirth. They are also not “inscribed in the registers of life and death.”<sup>500</sup> Because of this attainment they are not simply ghosts but

<sup>496</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.14b, 7471.

<sup>497</sup> *Chuandao ji*, 1.3b: 雖曰仙，其實鬼也

<sup>498</sup> *Chuandao ji*, 1.5b: 鬼仙固不可求矣

<sup>499</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.22a, 7475.

<sup>500</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.22a, 7475: 不隸於死生之籍

“ghost immortals.” They have the “five powers” that come with advanced cultivation and this distinguishes them from ordinary people. For a ghost immortal, there are still various scenarios. There are those who dwell on the earth and those who can fly to the heavens. Those who remain on earth are described as “subordinate to the Five Marchmounts.”<sup>501</sup> Those who are able to fly to the sky are similar to the “celestial people” (*tianren* 天人; S. *deva*) who are reborn in the heavenly realms.<sup>502</sup> They are registered at the Celestial Offices (*tiancao* 天曹) but they are not actually part of the “path of heaven.”<sup>503</sup>

The adepts of the yin spirit are associated with the heretics of the “external paths” (*waidao* 外道) and of these there are three types.<sup>504</sup> We could summarize these three types as:

1. Those who practice sexuality and immoral conduct thinking that it is actually good
2. Those who intentionally practice evil methods, intent on deceiving people for profit
3. Those who are satisfied with cultivating only the outward signs of the basic stages, boasting about their skills without actually cultivating their spirits

All of these types of adepts fail to liberate themselves from the cycle of rebirth.

## Human Immortals

The “human immortal” (*renxian* 人仙) is the lowest rank of the yang immortals. In the terminology of Ge Hong, the human immortals are, according to Wu, the “lower gentlemen who obtain the way and live a long life in the world.” In the Zhong-Lü terms, this is the “small accomplishment.” Wu compares them with “ordinary Chan” and also with *pratyekabuddha*.

The human immortal is still a “human” in the sense that he still has a human body (*shen* 身). A human immortal still needs to breathe and still has breath and blood flowing through his body. His blood transforms from “red blood” (*chixue* 赤血) into “white blood” (*baixue* 白血). Importantly, because he has a body, he is still capable of sexuality. Because of his cultivation, he has retransformed his essence into *qi* which he is able to “preserve” (*shou* 守) in his lower elixir field. As long as he can preserve his *qi*, his body will persist. He can keep his *qi* in his body as long as he keeps retransforming essence into *qi* every time his *qi* becomes active. As long as there is *qi* in the lower elixir field, there is lifespan, and as long as there is lifespan in the body, there is a body. A human immortal does not transcend the human body and does not lose the human body. If a human immortal would leak essence after all, he would still be no different from an ordinary human being and he would eventually die when his *qi* is exhausted.

There are three types of human immortal. The highest type cultivates the spirit and *qi* in his body and attains human immortality as the first step in the process of cultivating celestial immortality. The second type practices alchemy and creates a drug made from metal and/or minerals. They can reach an age of 1100 years. The third type creates drugs from mushrooms and herbs. They can only slightly lengthen their lifespans.

## Terrestrial Immortals

The “terrestrial immortal” (*dixian* 地仙) is the next attainment after human immortality and the second rank of the yang immortals. A human immortal has transformed his essence into *qi* and preserves his supply of yang *qi* intact in his abdomen and can therefore extend his life indefinitely. But sexual function is still working and thus he can only maintain his immortality as long as he does not leak any essence. The terrestrial immortal has “ingested” (*fushi* 服食) the “elixir” (*dan* 丹) of yang *qi* that has been created during the first stage. As a result of this, he has made his sexual function inoperative. He has “eradicated” (*chu* 除) or “broken” (*duan* 斷) the “root of sexuality” (*yin’gen* 淫根), his sexual organs have taken the “mark of the retracted horse penis” (*mayin cangxiang* 馬陰藏相), and he has exited the “realm of desire” (*yujie* 欲界).

The terrestrial immortal has “infinite longevity” (*wuliang shou* 無量壽) and “moves about on earth” (*xing*

<sup>501</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.22b, 7475: 隸於五嶽

<sup>502</sup> *Ibid.* Wu explains the celestial people as the “folk who live in the heavens 天上之民人.”

<sup>503</sup> *Ibid.*: “Although they are subordinate to the Celestial Offices, they are unable to join the path of heaven and they are unable to travel the path of heaven. 雖隸於天曹，不能合天道，以行天道也。”

<sup>504</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.24a-b, 7476.

*yu ludi* 行於陸地). Because he still has a body that is made of “heavy and turbid ordinary matter” (*zhongzhuo fanzhi* 重濁凡質), he is incapable of leaving the earth. Further, because he still has this body and hence still depends on respiration, he is still vulnerable for “calamities” (*zai* 災) which can kill him. Water can block his orifices and thus he can drown. Fire can destroy his throat and nose (*hou bi* 喉鼻), the orifices of respiration. Swords or other weapons can cut or pierce his body and make him leak breath.<sup>505</sup>

The terrestrial immortal is capable of performing “release from the corpse” (*shijie* 尸解). Wu explains this term in this context as consisting of the separation of the spirit and *qi*. This separation of the spirit from the body also occurs when an ordinary person dies, as a result of a natural death or of one of the minor calamities.<sup>506</sup> A human immortal or terrestrial immortal can also lose his body as a result of one of the calamities. A great adept (*da xiuxing* 大修行) is able to “transcend his ordinary form” (*chaotuo fanxing* 超脫凡形) and ascend to the heavens as a “perfected” (*zhenren* 真人). Ordinary persons or beginning adepts who die of natural causes or calamities will have a damaged corpse (*shihuai* 屍壞). Advanced adepts who transcend their bodies, leave an intact corpse. Wu says:

When the spirit leaves the form (body) and you see that the form is like that of a living person, this is “release from the corpse.”

當神離形之時，視其形如生人，此尸解也。<sup>507</sup>

The feet of such an intact body should not be black (*zu buqing* 足不青), the skin should not become stiff (*ju* 聚; lit. draw together?), and the radiance of the eyes should not be destroyed (*muguang bubui* 目光不毀).<sup>508</sup>

## Spirit Immortals

The next rank after the terrestrial immortal is the “spirit immortal” (*shenxian* 神仙), the third rank of the yang immortals. Simply put, the spirit immortal is the yang spirit that is able to leave the body. According to Wu, this corresponds with the “middle gentlemen who obtain the way (Dao) and dwell and gather on Kunlun” in Ge Hong’s model. Using the Zhong-Lü terminology, this constitutes the “middle accomplishment.” The spirit immortal is “inseparable from the spirit” (*buli yu shen* 不離於神). In Buddhist terms, Wu says, the spirit immortal is equal to the bodhisattva of the “great vehicle Chan.”<sup>509</sup> It transcends

<sup>505</sup> The “three calamities” (*sanzai* 三災) is a term of Buddhist origin. There is a distinction between minor and major calamities. The minor calamities take place during a decadent world-period. In other words, they are associated with ordinary life. The major calamities take place when the world is destroyed. See Soothill and Hodous, *A Dictionary of Chinese Buddhist Terms*, 69. Wu mentions these “minor three calamities” (*xiao sanzai* 小三災) and “major three calamities” (*da sanzai* 大三災). The minor calamities are floods, fire, and violence (*daobing* 刀兵). The major calamities also consist of floods and fire, along with “wind” (*feng* 風).

<sup>506</sup> Where I interpret “natural death,” the text more literally says “the amount of *qi* is naturally exhausted” (*qishu zijue* 氣數自絕). This refers to the notion that a person is allotted, by birth, with a certain limited amount of *qi*. This stock of *qi* is gradually depleted in the course of one’s life and once this *qi* is exhausted, one’s life ends. Hence, the expression “amount of *qi*” is also synonymous with one’s fate. In many canonical scriptures we can see that it is intimately associated with “destiny” (*mingyun* 命運). The exhaustion of *qi* and its role in one’s fate is of course also one of the main ideas behind inner alchemy.

<sup>507</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.18a, 7473. I have emended the text from 當神形離形之時

<sup>508</sup> As seen in this passage and others, Wu distinguishes between different types of “release from the corpse” (*shijie* 尸解). The general meaning he suggests is the separation (分解) of the spirit and *qi*, or spirit and form (形). More specifically, we can identify three types of *shijie*. The first two types are those who die (死亡) and whose corpse (尸) is destroyed (壞). One type is the release from the corpse of an ordinary man who dies a natural death as a result of exhausted *qi*. Another type is the release from the corpse of a “human immortal” who dies as a result of one of the minor calamities. These first two types are still part of samsara and will experience rebirth. The third type concerns those who do not die and whose corpse is not destroyed. This is the release from the corpse of a perfected man who is able to breakout (超脫) of his form/body. The perfected man leaves a body that is like that of a living person (形如生人). Wu relates how Li Xu’an used “release from the corpse” as a means to feign his death to escape from his troubles with a local official (*Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.18b, 7473).

<sup>509</sup> In some passages, Wu equates a spirit immortal with a buddha (佛) instead of a bodhisattva (菩薩). For example: “Regarding embryonic respiration, when you have nourished the spirit to completeness and pure yangness, the Daoists issue the yang spirit and call it a spirit immortal. Buddhists speak of obtaining great samadhi and exiting samadhi and they call it a buddha; these are the similarities in these explanations. 胎息，養得神全而純陽，仙家出陽神，稱曰神仙。佛言得大定而出定，稱之曰佛，即此說之同者。” (*Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 1.91a, 7448.) The reasoning seems to be as follows. A spirit immortal is someone who has finished the second stage and has created a yang spirit. This yang spirit is able to leave the body and merely requires training to find its way in the void. At the end of the second stage, the adept is in great samadhi (大定) and at that time, when the yang spirit is ready, it leaves the body for the first time. This first “exit of samadhi” marks the attainment of spirit immortality. This spirit immortal

the “realm of form” (*sejie* 色界) to enter the “realm of formlessness” (*wusejie* 無色界). According to Wu, the spirit immortal is also called “water immortal” (*shuixian* 水仙). This is because the spirit immortal does not need to breath anymore and thus it cannot “drown” (*ni* 溺).

As with the other levels of immortals, we want to examine how spirit immortality fits into the descriptions of the process of cultivation. That is to say, at which point is the adept supposed to attain spirit immortality and at which point does it end? To make these associations we have been comparing what are actually two distinct models; the model of the cultivation process with its stages and the model of levels of attainment with its five levels of immortality. Now, it is my contention that these models do not always neatly match, despite the fact that inner alchemy writings at times appear to claim that they do. To shed light on this issue, we need to briefly recap the steps of the cultivation process.

Terrestrial immortality is in several passages said to be attained when the adept has “ingested” the elixir of yang *qi* and sexual function has become permanently dysfunctional. Although the terrestrial immortal is usually associated with the first stage of cultivation, the ingestion of the great medicine is described as part of the second stage. Thus, when all essence has been transformed into yang *qi*, the first stage ends and the adept attains human immortality and when the second stage begins by transporting this yang *qi* through the body and ingesting it in the middle and lower elixir field, the adept attains terrestrial immortality.

The adept then proceeds with the main task of the second stage by “refining *qi* and transforming it into spirit.” This is realized by performing what is called the “great celestial cycle,” also referred to as “embryonic respiration.” That should take approximately ten months, after which all *qi* has been transformed into spirit. At this point, the spirit has turned into a yang spirit and the “embryo is completed” (*taiyuan* 胎圓). In Wu’s appropriation of Buddhist terms, during the second stage the adept “enters samadhi” (*ruding* 入定). This means that the adept practices concentrative meditation, but it also signifies for Wu that the *qi* and the spirit literally become gradually more and more stable. At the end of this process, at the end of the second stage, the adept attains “great samadhi.”

The completion of the yang spirit ends the second stage. The third stage of practice involves the “refining of the spirit and return to the void.” The yang spirit is relocated from the middle elixir field to the upper elixir field in the head. The adept then continues the practice of samadhi. What should follow then during the beginning of the third stage is the “exit of samadhi” (*chuding* 出定), which signifies the exit of the spirit from the body. Initially, the spirit becomes stable in the middle elixir field, then it exits samadhi from the upper elixir field. The attainment of spirit immortality begins when the spirit leaves the body for the first time and is able to manifest itself as an independent entity outside the body. But this is only the beginning. The yang spirit is now compared to an immature “infant” (*ying'er* 嬰兒) that still needs to be nursed. Thus, what should follow is an approximately three-year period of training the immature yang spirit that is called “three years of nursing.” This is the first task of the third stage. It consists of two practices. First, the adept relocates the yang spirit from the heart to the head and performs “retaining and nourishing.” This means that the adept should constantly keep his attention (or intention) on the upper elixir field. All of this is still part of the practice of samadhi. This should continue until one experiences the “sign to let the spirit exit.” Then, the adept should practice the “method to let the spirit exit and to collect the spirit,” the second task of the three years of nursing. This consists of gradually training the spirit to leave the body for increasingly longer periods of time, traveling over increasingly greater distances. The complete period of creating the spirit immortal extends from the seven days of gathering the great medicine, the ten months of great celestial cycle (a.k.a. embryonic respiration, a.k.a. samadhi), and the three years of nursing.

As long as the spirit has not attained samadhi, it is said to depend on the *qi* and the respiration of the body (post-heaven *qi*). The bodily form (*shenxing* 身形) acts as its “residence” (*zhaishhe* 宅舍). When the *qi* (plural) become stable, the spirit “following it becomes stable.”<sup>510</sup> Then, the *qi* disappear because they have attained samadhi (stability) and the spirit attains “independence” (*duli* 獨立) and it can leave the body and appear as a yang spirit. Then, the spirit is “empty” (*xukong* 虛空) and without obstacle and it can transform. As long as the spirit depends on the body, it will need to remain in the body and since a body is bound to the earth and the ordinary cosmos (heaven and earth) it will only be able to live as long as the cosmos itself.

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is essentially the same as a celestial immortal or buddha, except for the fact that it does not definitively leave the body yet. Therefore, it is compared with the bodhisattva. Further, the immature bodhisattva can still retrogress (*tuiduo* 退墮) to less advanced levels. Only when the spirit leaves the body forever and ascends to the heavens, it attains celestial immortality or buddhahood. But in several contexts, the spirit immortal leaving the body is compared with a buddha.

<sup>510</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.20b, 7474: 炁定則神隨之得定

This suggests that, no matter how long one is able to live as an embodied spirit, it will only be as long as the cosmos until a *kalpa* destroys the current cosmos. When the spirit exits, it is able to manifest (*xian* 顯) itself as (having) a body (*shen* 身). It can produce this body by using its thoughts (*nian* 念). This is called the “body outside the body.” The spirit immortal “emerges from the womb” (*tuotai* 脫胎) of the “heavy and turbid” (*zhongzhuo* 重濁) body, to exist as a “formless” (*wuxing* 無形) spirit. This state is described as “body and spirit both miraculous” (*xingshen jumiao* 形神俱妙):

When there is no breathing, this is called a miraculous body; when the spirit is complete, this is called a miraculous spirit.

無呼吸者，謂之形妙；神全者，謂之神妙。<sup>511</sup>

It is essential that the adept lets the spirit exit his body—or, perhaps better, that the adept exits his body as a spirit—when he experiences the sign that signals he is ready to do this. This sign is a visual experience of “snowflakes coming and going” during the state of samadhi. When he would fail to do so, he would remain merely “a foolish man whose longevity is the same as that of heaven and earth.”<sup>512</sup> Wu explains:

A foolish man, means that it [the spirit?] carries the heavy and turbid form (i.e., the body) as an obstacle and is unable to have power of the spirit and transform, such as a foolish man. You only do not die and are able to live as long as heaven and earth.

愚夫者，帶重濁之形為礙，不能神通變化，如愚夫。但不死可壽同天地也。<sup>513</sup>

The attainment of the second stage is also described as “transcending the profane and entering the sacred” (*chaofan rusheng* 超凡入聖). This “transcendence” is a process which begins at the end of the first stage when the fire is stopped and the beginning of the second when the great medicine is gathered in seven days.<sup>514</sup> It is especially associated with the technique of “five dragons bearing aloft the saint” that was one of the “secret” techniques transmitted through Wu’s lineage. In the metaphor, the saint refers to the Dark Emperor (Xuandi 玄帝) who according to the story was lifted to the heavens by five dragons. In the technique, the saint refers to the great medicine of yang *qi* that is transported along the spine to travel to the spirit in the heart and create the yang spirit. More generally, saintliness or holiness clearly applies to the fact that the spirit itself becomes saintly through the process of yangification. Here, Wu describes this quality of saintliness as immortality, limitless spiritual power, and escape from the cycle of rebirth:

All those who cultivate the way of immortality know this and practice it, obtain this and verify it, and then obtain a long life without death and they are forever without [re-]birth and death, and have limitless spiritual power; this is the verification of saintliness. If you do not know this and do not obtain this, then you are certainly unable to escape from [re-]birth and death and you cannot avoid the cycle of the six paths (of rebirth). This is the junction of the sacred and profane, the most secret heavenly mechanism.

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。<sup>515</sup>

The end result is the “emancipation” (*chaotuo* 超脫) of this saintly spirit from the bodily husk:

Transcending the profane and entering saintliness, discarding the husk and ascending in immortality, this is called “emancipation.”

超凡入聖，棄殼昇仙，而曰超脫。<sup>516</sup>

This holy spirit immortal is characterized by various features it gradually acquires during the ten-month period of its gestation. During this time, the spirit gets ever deeper into samadhi (becomes more and more stable) and becomes more and more yang, while the two *qi* gradually disappear. As a result, the thought

<sup>511</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.19b, 7474.

<sup>512</sup> [*shou tong tiandi yi yufu* 壽同天地一愚夫] The expression “a longevity that is the same as heaven and earth 壽同天地” can be found in numerous scriptures. The exact expression used by Wu appears in some Zhong-Lü texts.

<sup>513</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 2.20a, 7474.

<sup>514</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 1.48a, 7426.

<sup>515</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu, biji*, 1.86a-b, 7445.

<sup>516</sup> *Tianxian zhengli qianshuo, biji*, 5.16b, 7604.

processes come to a halt, the adept does not need sleep or food anymore, and finally the pulses and respiration come to a halt. When the spirit is fully stable and yang, it starts to generate “wisdom” (*hui* 慧) and the six “powers of the spirit.” In Buddhist terms, the adept successively attains the four dhyana.

We already saw that a human immortal could live forever as long as he keeps the supply of yang *qi* in the abdomen intact. But if a human immortal leaks yang *qi* after all, he will revert to the status of an ordinary man. Similarly, an immature spirit immortal can still “retrogress” to an earlier level of accomplishment.<sup>517</sup> This applies to the spirit immortal in the same way as to a bodhisattva and it happens when the spirit is unable to remain in a state of samadhi. If samadhi is somehow lost, the spirit “falls” (*duo* 墮) in the cycle of rebirth of samsara. Only if the spirit can attain constant samadhi he will not retrogress:

The Daoists say, “once you obtain it, you obtain it forever; body and spirit both miraculous.” The Buddhists say, “once you obtain it, you obtain it forever; once you verify it, you verify it forever.”

仙家言：“一得永得，形神俱妙。”佛家人言：“一得永得，一證永證。”<sup>518</sup>

## Celestial Immortals

After spirit immortality, the adept may progress to cultivate “celestial immortality” (*tianxian* 天仙), the highest rank of immortality. Simply put, the celestial immortal is a spirit immortal that ascends to the heavenly realms. Wu does not say this explicitly, but it seems clear enough that he would compare the celestial immortal with Ge Hong’s “highest gentlemen who obtain the way (Dao) and ascend to become immortal officials.” In the three passes of the cultivation process, celestial immortality is associated with the “upper pass.” Using the Zhong-Lü terminology, this constitutes the “major accomplishment.” In Buddhist terms, the celestial immortal corresponds with buddhahood (*fo* 佛), or more specifically with the buddhahood of the “highest vehicle Chan.”<sup>519</sup> Wu also regularly refers to this attainment as equal to that of the “World-Honored Buddha” (*shizun fo* 世尊佛).<sup>520</sup> The celestial immortal transcends the “realm of formlessness” (*wuse jie* 無色界) to become one with “emptiness” (*xukong* 虛空):

Zhenyang said: “Because of the cultivation and verification of the realm of forms, you ascend, going through the cultivation and verification of the realm of formlessness, you go beyond, and forever becoming one substance with emptiness, you verify celestial immortality.”

真陽曰：由色界之修證而上，歷無色界之修證而超出，永與虛空同體，證天仙矣。<sup>521</sup>

In terms of the cultivation process, celestial immortality is associated with the third stage of “refining the spirit and returning to emptiness.” More specifically, as seen above, the first task of this third stage—the three years of nursing the infant—is still concerned with the development of the immature spirit immortal. The conception of celestial immortality really begins with the second task, which is the main and last task, of the third stage: the “nine years of facing a wall” or the “nine years of great samadhi.” We will further consider the notion of celestial immortality in the next chapter when we examine the idea of ultimate salvation in inner alchemy.

<sup>517</sup> The Buddhist term retrogression (*tuiduo* 退墮 or simply *tui* 退; S. *parihāṇi*) refers to the idea that one can retrogress to earlier states of cultivation. There is also the idea that certain attainments are irreversible. This is referred to as nonretrogression (*bu tui zhuan* 不退轉; S. *anāvartika*). There are different ideas about the concrete stages which are reversible or irreversible. According to the *Daśabhūmikāsūtra*, the eighth level (*bhūmi*) is the state of irreversible attainment. Wu associates the risk of retrogression with spirit immortality and involuntary seminal emission (*zoudan* 走丹). This is one of the risks during the cultivation process against which the adept should take precautions, lest he would ruin all previous efforts (referred to as “losing the previous efforts” [*shi qiangong* 失前功] or “wasting the previous efforts” [*fei qiangong* 廢前功]). The opposite idea is expressed by Wu as “once obtained, forever obtained” (一得永得). This is associated with the attainment of “dhyana of complete extinction” (*miejin ding* 滅盡定) and the ability to remain constantly in great samadhi (*chang dading* 常大定).

<sup>518</sup> *Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.43b, 7486.

<sup>519</sup> This is also referred to as the “Highest Vehicle Buddha” (*zuishangsheng fo* 最上乘佛).

<sup>520</sup> Some passages have “Buddha World-Honored One” (*fo shizun* 佛世尊).

<sup>521</sup> *Tianxian zhengli qianshuo*, *biji*, 5.2a, 7597.

## Wu Shouyang's Model of Progress through Rebirth

Discussions of inner alchemy usually focus on the narrative outlined above which explains the progress an adept is supposed to make during one lifetime as a result of cultivation. However, just like Buddhists, inner alchemists assumed the reality of rebirth and this rebirth played into the notion of progress in two ways. First, one's previous lives determine, in part, one's present chances to succeed in cultivation. Second, given that an adept would not necessarily attain the highest level of cultivation in this present life, the level of cultivation and merit in this life, as well as some other factors, determine one's rebirth and the chance of success in his next life. This is a common notion in Buddhist studies. In the study of inner alchemy, this aspect has been largely ignored. Wu Shouyang's writings offer the possibility to outline a few aspects of this issue. First, there are six basic scenarios of rebirth and Wu provides a few descriptions of what are considered the advantages and disadvantages of some of these scenarios. Second, Wu refers to the Buddhist model of the "four fruits of recluship." Third, as with other Daoist and Buddhist terms, Wu describes what he considers to be the Daoist equivalents of the four fruits.

### Scenarios of Rebirth

Wu Shouyang regularly refers to the notion of the six paths of rebirth. In the passages where he specifies these scenarios of rebirth, he mentions three "deviant directions" (*yiqu* 異趣) of rebirth in the hells, as a hungry ghost, or as an animal and the "correct directions" (*zhengqu* 正趣) of rebirth as a human or in the heavens. In one particular dialogue, he provides some more elaborate descriptions of these scenarios, distinguishing the three general options of: (1) a human experiencing rebirth as a human; (2) a human experiencing rebirth in the heavens and again as a human; and (3) a human experiencing rebirth in one of the deviant directions. These scenarios are determined by one's level of cultivation and one's virtue or "good behavior" (*shanxing* 善行). The important variables are described in terms of practising good (*shan* 善) or not good (*bushan* 不善) and being sexually active (*yin* 淫) or practicing abstinence (*jing* 淨). Each scenario is either auspicious (*ji* 吉) or dangerous (*wei* 危).

#### *Rebirth from Human to Human*

A rebirth as a human is considered to be dangerous. The fact that one is not reborn in the deviant path as a non-human (a "horizontal life" *hengsheng* 橫生) is in itself a good result (*shan'guo* 善果). But a human can still be reborn in the deviant path in the next life and thus one must make sure to "practice good deeds" (*xingshan* 行善). The attainments depend on one's moral behavior and one's cultivation, especially sexual abstinence. There are various scenarios. First, one's behavior can be partly good and partly bad. Half of one's deeds are directed towards the benefit of others and thus good and half are selfish and thus bad. One tries to practice sexual abstinence but also still practices sex sometimes to have children and grandchildren, hence "sexuality and abstinence are equally divided." When one is reborn as a human, these "old thoughts" (*jiunian* 舊念) are still equally divided between good and bad, lustful and abstinent. Second, one can have been good and abstinent for a long time. In that case, one will gain a rebirth in the heavens.

#### *Rebirth from Human to the Heavens and from the Heavens to Human*

When a human is first reborn in the heavens and then again as a human, this is considered auspicious. Rebirth in the heavens can occur for one of two reasons. If one has practiced a lot of good deeds one will be reborn as a celestial being (*tianren* 天人; S. *deva*). If one has performed Daoist practice, one will be reborn as a celestial king (*tianwang* 天王; *devarajan*), an "immortal official" (*xianguan* 仙官), or an "immortal gentleman" (*xianshi* 仙士). Being reborn in the heavens is in itself not bad. It is of course better than being reborn along one of the deviant paths. But eventually one is still part of the cycle of rebirth. One must be a human to be able to cultivate immortality or buddhahood and to be able to escape the cycle of rebirth once and for all. Hence, when one is first reborn in the heavens (because of practicing good deeds or cultivation) and then again as a human, this is considered to be auspicious. It allows one a new opportunity to practice good deeds and cultivation.

When one is reborn from the heavens as a human being, there are again two possibilities depending on the specific realm of heaven from which one is reborn: the realm of desire or the realm of form. When one

is reborn from one of the heavens of the realm of desire, this means that one's "sexual desires" (*yinyu* 淫欲) are "not completely extinguished yet" (*wei jingjin* 未淨盡) and one still craves to practice these sexual desires. In that case, if one succeeds in practicing celibacy (*jingsxing* 淨行) and cultivates with dedication it should be easy to obtain results. Two examples of this kind of rebirth are the Buddha and Maitreya (Mile 彌勒) who, like all buddhas, were reborn as a human after having previously been reborn in the Tusita Heaven 兜率陀天, one of the heavens in the realm of desire. Such a rebirth is considered auspicious since it can be your final rebirth.

When one is reborn as a human from the "heavens of the realm of form," this means that one's sexual desires are totally extinguished. One does not practice sex (*yinshi* 淫事) and one has no sexual thoughts (*yinnian* 淫念). As a consequence, one will certainly become an immortal or buddha. Examples of this rebirth scenario are the sixth Indian patriarch of Chan Miccaka (西六祖彌迦遮), and the nineteenth patriarch Kumārata (十九祖鳩摩羅多) who were both reborn as humans from the Brahma Heaven (*fantian* 梵天). Certainly not needing a rebirth, this scenario is also considered auspicious.

#### *Rebirth from Human into the Deviant Paths*

The most dangerous rebirth is through one of the three deviant paths. One is reborn in the hells, as a hungry ghost, or as an animal and far removed from immortality or buddhahood. This happens when a human being indulges in the pleasures of the five desires, but specifically when one constantly practices sex and behaves in an immoral way.<sup>522</sup> A rebirth in the deviant directions is without auspiciousness and always dangerous (*wuji er zhongwei* 無吉而終危).

### The Four Fruits of Recluship

In the non-Mahayana early Buddhist schools, the *arhat* (*aluohan* 阿羅漢; "worthy one") is considered to be the highest attainment. In these schools, the Buddha himself is described as an arhat. The arhat has destroyed the afflictions (*kleśa*) and the causes for rebirth and has attained nirvana.<sup>523</sup> After physical death, the arhat enters final nirvana. The arhat is commonly placed in another model of gradual attainment where it is the highest of the "four fruits of recluship" (*shamen siguo* 沙門四果). These four types are all considered "noble persons" (*xiansheng* 賢聖; S. *āryapudgala*) and as such are contrasted with the common person (*fanfu* 凡夫; S. *prthagjana*) who has not yet embarked on the path of cultivation. Furthermore, these four ranks of attainment are not attained during one's lifetime but over several consecutive rebirths. From the least to the most advanced, they are:

1. "stream-enterer" (S. *srotapanna*; C. *sumihuan* 須彌洹 or *xutuohan* 須陀含; also referred to as *chuguo luohan* 初果羅漢). Seven rebirths in the heavens and seven rebirths in the human world
2. "once-returner" (S. *sakadagāmi*; C. *xutuohan* 須陀含 or *situohan* 斯陀含; also referred to as *erguo luohan* 二果羅漢). One rebirth in the heavens and one rebirth in the human world
3. "non-returner" (S. *anāgāmi*; C. *aluohan* 阿羅含果 or *anaban* 阿那含; also referred to as *sanguo luohan* 三果羅漢). Rebirth in realm of form (*sejie* 色界), no need to be reborn again in realm of desire (*yujie* 欲界)
4. "arhatship" (S. *arhat*; C. *aluohan* 阿羅漢果 also referred to as *siguo luohan* 四果羅漢) No more death or rebirth; the actual *śramaṇa* (*shamen* 沙門); a bodhisattva (*pusa* 菩薩)

In the Mahayana Great Vehicle, this hierarchy is reinterpreted and now the buddha is a superior type of

<sup>522</sup> Wu distinguishes between craving-desires and defilement-desires, "Regarding the five desires, the desire of food, the desire of sex, the desire of wealth, the desire of fame, and the desire for sleep are called the five 'craving-desires.' Further, the five of sights, sounds, scents, flavors, and touch are the five 'defilement-desires.' 五欲者，食欲、色欲、財欲、名欲、睡欲。此名五愛欲也。又色、聲、香、味、觸，五者，為五塵欲也。" (*Xianfo bezong yulu*, *biji*, 2.35a-b, 7482). The term "craving-desire" (*aiyu* 愛欲) suggests desire for craving (*ai* 愛; S. *tṛṣṇā*), with craving being the main cause of suffering; the second of the four noble truths and the eighth link in the twelvefold chain of dependent origination. The term "defilement-desire" (*chenyu* 塵欲) suggests a desire for the six sense objects (*liuchen* 六塵).

<sup>523</sup> The term *kleśa* (*fannaon* 煩惱) refers to "afflictions" or "defilements." These are factors that confuse the mind and lead to unwholesome (*bushan* 不善; S. *akusala*) deeds. There are various different lists of these factors. A typical list includes the three poisons: greed, hatred, and delusion.

attainment that attains “superior complete perfect enlightenment.”<sup>524</sup> The Mahayana retains the arhat as an important figure, but inferior to the bodhisattva and the buddha.

Wu Shouyang’s dialogues contain a few passages in which he describes four types of techniques one can use to influence the direction of one’s rebirth. In one of these passages, he presents these four techniques as the “four fruits” (*siguo* 四果) arguing that these are the Daoist equivalent of the Buddhist concept of the “four fruits of recluship.”<sup>525</sup> These “four fruits” are: (1) “entering a womb” (*toutai* 投胎); “seizing a dwelling” (*duoshe* 奪舍); “moving one’s residence” (*yiju* 移居); and “used accommodation” (*jiuzhu* 舊住).<sup>526</sup> Wu traces this idea back to a line from the *Chapters on Awakening to Perfection*:

Those who enter an embryo, seize a dwelling, change their residence, or dwell in old [lodgings] are called the “four fruits disciples.”

投胎奪舍及移居，舊住名為四果徒。<sup>527</sup>

The first three techniques can be used when an adept should happen to regress from the attainment of the “minor fruit” (*xiaoguo* 小果). This suggests that these techniques are suitable for a cultivator who has practiced the first stage of the cultivation process and has secured the existence of his body by abstaining from seminal loss and keeping the supply of *qi* in the lower elixir field intact. If now for some reason he regresses from this state after all, he can use these methods to secure a new residence for the spirit and continue the cultivation process. The fourth “technique” does not actually refer to a technique but is basically equivalent to completing the first stage of the cultivation process. Let us briefly look at each technique.<sup>528</sup>

<sup>524</sup> The notion of “superior complete perfect enlightenment” (*wushang zhenheng jue* 無上正等覺; S. *anuttarasamyaksambodhi*) refers to the complete transcendence of the two kinds of obstructions: the afflictive obstructions (*fannao zhang* 煩惱障; S. *kleshāvaraṇa*) and the obstructions to omniscience (*suo zhi zhang* 所知障; S. *jñeyāvaraṇa*). This concept is used in Mahayana texts to distinguish the enlightenment of a buddha from that of an arhat.

<sup>525</sup> The term “fruit” (*guo* 果; S. *phala*) signifies the result or effect of something.

<sup>526</sup> Stephen Eskildsen has examined similar ideas in an article. He describes “techniques of emergency death meditation” by which adepts hoped to “enter the womb,” “change the dwelling,” “repel the killer demons,” or “flee the numbers.” He characterizes the mainstream inner alchemy view on such techniques as disdainful. They are techniques that a competent inner alchemist would not require, only suitable for inept practitioners that have failed to cultivate the yang spirit and that have “foolishly” or “inadvertently” let the yin spirit exit the body. Such a view, according to Eskildsen, can be found in the Zhong-Lü texts and in the *Wuzhen pian* and its commentarial tradition. A more approving view can be found in some other inner alchemy texts. Eskildsen particularly mentions the *Taibai huandan pian* 太白還丹篇 and the *Zhen longhu juxian jing* 真龍虎九仙經, both tentatively dated to the late Tang. These texts clearly present the “emergency death meditation” as valid tactics to use when death is unavoidable before one has succeeded in creating the yang spirit. The *Zhen longhu juxian jing* also shows an awareness of potential dangers of using these techniques. As Eskildsen says, they “can be used in ways that are selfish to the point of being evil.” They are “lesser arts” (*xiaoshu* 小術), secondary to the main techniques directly involved in attaining salvation. These texts mention three techniques: (1) “entering a womb” (*toutai* 投胎); (2) “changing one’s dwelling” (*yishe* 移舍); and (3) “repelling the killer demons” (*ju shagui* 拒殺鬼). Briefly put, the idea of “entering a womb” means that, during the intermediate state, an adept tries to influence his rebirth so as to be reborn in a newly conceived body. To “change one’s dwelling” suggests that a deceased spirit tries to enter the body of another recently deceased person, preferably a male child. The “repelling the killer demons” does not fit in the intermediate states but can be considered, as Eskildsen does, as part of a repertoire of “emergency death meditations.” The idea is that an advanced adept, close to the point of attaining ultimate salvation but faced with death, can buy a bit more time to finish his cultivation by “fighting off the demons of death.” See Eskildsen, “Emergency Death Meditations for Internal Alchemists.” The first two techniques conform with Wu’s statements. The idea of “repelling the killer demons” is very similar to Wu’s notion of “slaying impermanence” described in chapter one. Another technique mentioned by Eskildsen is called “fleeing the numbers” (*huanshu* 遁數), but the meaning of this technique is unclear and it only seems to appear in one text.

<sup>527</sup> This stanza continues, “If you are able to subdue the dragon and subjugate the tiger, how many hours will it take before your house build of real gold will decay? 若會降龍並伏虎，真金起屋几時枯。” See *Wuzhen pian* 悟真篇 in *Xin zhen shishu* 修真十書 (DZ 263), 3.21a.

<sup>528</sup> We should note that these ideas appear to presuppose the notion of an intermediate stage between death and rebirth. Some Buddhist scriptures claim to reveal what a sentient being experiences during the intermediate state between death and rebirth. This intermediate state is known in Sanskrit as *antarabhava*, which is translated in Chinese as *zhongyou* 中有 (intermediate existence) or *zhongyin* 中陰 (intermediate yin). In the West, this concept is probably best known under its Tibetan name “bar do.” The existence of this state was a matter of debate among Buddhists, but most Mahayana traditions appear to have accepted this notion. They disagreed on the duration of this state, from instantaneous rebirth, a week, or longer. The idea that one stayed for forty-nine days (seven times seven) in this state before being reborn became the dominant view at a certain point. It was thought that ceremonies performed by the family for the dead could be helpful in securing a better rebirth. It was also thought by some that the spirit of a deceased cultivator—the *gandharva* (*gantapo* 乾闥婆 or *zhongyun youqing* 中蘊有情; “fragrance eaters”)—could itself influence the destination of its rebirth by recognizing the circumstances in the intermediate state and actively searching for a desired location and

To “enter a womb” (*toutai* 投胎), Wu says, means that if one’s body dies and one does not have an abode anymore to house the spirit, one needs to find a living body (*shengshen* 生身) to function as “residence” (*jushu* 居舍). According to Wu, there are three types of “entering a womb:” the “first yin” (*chuyin* 初陰), “middle yin” (*zhongyin* 中陰), and “later yin” (*houyin* 後陰). If one dies simultaneously with a birth (*touchan* 胎產), one can immediately enter (*touru* 投入) this newborn child and one does not need to reside in the embryo. If one dies before the embryo is completed, one needs to “pacify the body in embryonic respiration” (*an shen yu taixi* 安身於胎息) and wait until the birth of the child before one enters it. One can also enter the embryo before birth. If one dies before the parents have copulated (*gou* 媾) and one sees them copulate and “develops lustful thoughts” (*qi yinnian* 起淫念), one will enter the embryo and be born after the normal ten months of gestation.

To “seize a dwelling” (*duoshe* 奪舍) means to let one’s spirit inhabit a recently formed embryo (*tai* 胎). When an embryo has been completed (*cheng* 成) and is capable of containing a life (*xingming* 性命), it can act as a dwelling (*she* 舍) for the spirit to reside in (*ju* 居). One should seize the dwelling before others have a chance to take residence. The idea seems to be that one has a choice to choose a new dwelling after one’s liking. If one wants to have “vast fortune” (*hongfu* 洪福) one can choose the embryo of a “rich and noble” (*fugui* 富貴) family. If, on the other hand, one wants “pure fortune” (*qingfu* 清福), one can choose the embryo of a religious practitioner (*xiuxing* 修行).

To “move one’s residence” (*yiju* 移居) means to move one’s spirit from one body (*shen* 身) to another. If the present body has become uninhabitable, one needs to “move residence.” The reasons for not being able to inhabit one’s own body anymore are several. On the one hand, if one’s power of samadhi is insufficient during meditation and one recklessly exits the spirit, it might get lost outside the body and be unable to return. On the other hand, the body can become uninhabitable as a result of calamities. Weapons of war could harm it, fire could destroy it, or the body may drown. In such cases, one needs to find the unharmed body of a recently deceased person and move the spirit to this body.

The “used accommodation” (*jiuzhu* 舊住) is the highest of these four fruits and is equivalent to “arhatship.” Wu explains the term as “to reside in a used dwelling” (*zhu jiu fangshe* 住舊房舍). This refers to someone who has attained the “minor fruit” (*xiaoguo* 小果) of human immortality and is able to live forever as long as he keeps his lifespan intact by guarding the *qi* in his lower elixir field. Hence, the “used accommodation” refers to one’s own body. Since such an immortal does not die, he is also not reborn and hence he is free from the cycle of rebirth as long as he can maintain this state. From here, it is possible to proceed to higher states of attainment.

It appears that Wu only explicitly associates “entering a womb” with the first fruit of the “stream-enterer” and the most advanced fruit of “used accommodation” with arhatship. The four categories obviously do not match very well. However, the general idea that Wu is comparing here is that if one does not succeed to cultivate to the highest degree in one’s current life, one has to deal with the issue of rebirth. The four fruits discussed by Wu, describe three different ways of dealing with rebirth and one way that represents the escape from rebirth; that is the equivalence between the Buddhist arhat and the Daoist human immortal.

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parents. In the Tibetan Buddhist tradition, these ideas are famously described in scriptures such as *Bar do thos grol chen mo*, which has been known in the West since Walter Evans-Wentz translation in 1927 as *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and gained some influence in various counter-culture movements. See Eskildsen, “Emergency Death Meditations for Internal Alchemists.” and PDB, 49–50.

