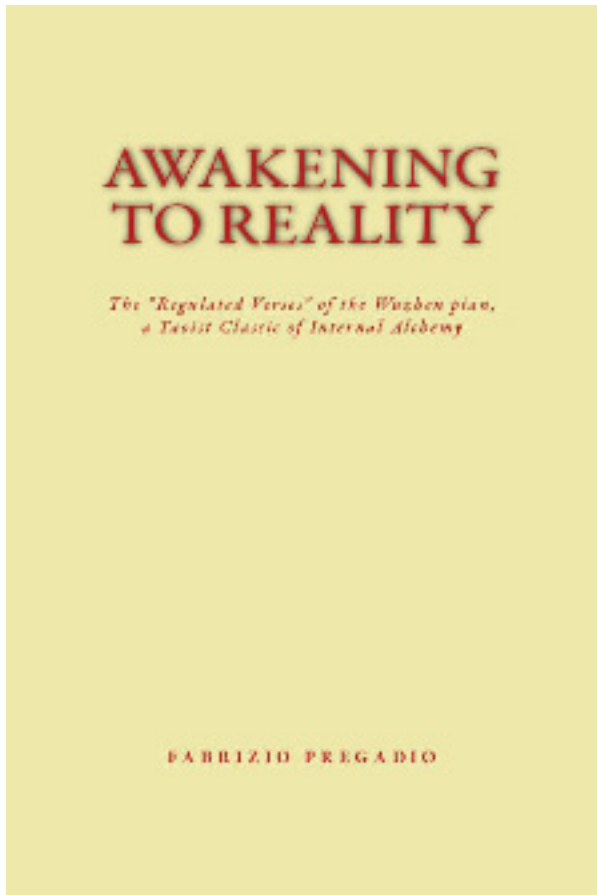


This is the introduction to Fabrizio Pregadio, *Awakening to Reality: The "Regulated Verses" of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy* (Golden Elixir Press, 2009). Page numbers correspond to those of the printed version.

A preview the book is available at www.goldenelixir.com.

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Introduction

Awakening to Reality (*Wuzhen pian*) is one of the most important and best-known Taoist alchemical texts. Written in the eleventh century, it describes in a poetical form, and in a typically cryptic and allusive language, several facets of Neidan, or internal alchemy. The present book presents the first part of the text, consisting of sixteen poems, which contain a concise but comprehensive exposition of Neidan. In addition to notes that intend to clarify the meaning of the more obscure points, the book also contains selections from a commentary dating from the late eighteenth century, which is distinguished by the use of a lucid and plain language.

ZHANG BODUAN AND HIS WORK

The author of *Awakening to Reality* is Zhang Boduan, also known as True Man of Purple Yang (*Ziyang zhenren*). As is common with many Taoist adepts, his biography combines fact and legend, and the dates of the main events in his life are not entirely certain. He was born in Tiantai, a district in the present-day southeastern province of Zhejiang, probably in 987. Having concluded his education with the highest degree, he undertook a career as an administrative officer in his district. Soon, however, he was accused of committing a major infraction in his duties and was punished with banishment to the remote south, in the Guangdong province. Around 1065 he moved to Sichuan, in the southwestern part of China, with an army commander that had hired him as advisor. While he was in Sichuan he met a master who transmitted alchemical teachings to him, and a few years later he wrote his work. Later he moved to the southern Yunnan province, where, having made sure that his work would survive him, he died in 1082.¹

¹ This account of Zhang Boduan's life is based on Baldrian-Hussein, "Zhang Boduan."

In addition to *Awakening to Reality*, three other alchemical texts are attributed to Zhang Boduan:

- 1 *Wuzhen pian shiyi* (Supplement to *Awakening to Reality*)
- 2 *Yuqing jinsi Qinghua biwen jinbao neilian danjue* (Alchemical Instructions on the Inner Refinement of the Golden Treasure, a Secret Text from the Golden Casket of the Jade Clarity Transmitted by the Immortal of Green Florescence)
- 3 *Jindan sibai zi* (Four Hundred Words on the Golden Elixir)

Although doubts have been cast on Zhang Boduan's authorship of these works, at least one of them, the *Jindan sibai zi*, bears a visible affinity to *Awakening to Reality* in content and language.²

The *Awakening* is divided into three main parts, all of which consist of poems written in different meters. The first part, which is translated here, contains sixteen poems written in "regulated verses" (eight-line heptasyllabic poems, known as *lüshi*). The second part contains sixty-four poems written in "cut-off lines" (four-line heptasyllabic poems, *jueju*). The third part contains eighteen poems, written in different meters and divided into three sets: one pentasyllabic poem, twelve "lyrics" (*ci*) of irregular length, and five more poems in "cut-off lines." The number of poems in each part of the work has a symbolic value. The sixteen poems in the first part represent the principle of the "two eights," which refers to the state of balance of the Yin and Yang components of the Elixir (see the note to Poem 7, lines 7-8). The sixty-four poems in the second part represent the hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*; they are not, however, concerned with the hexagrams themselves). In the third part, the single pentasyllabic poem represents the original state of Unity; the twelve lyrics represent the twelve stages of the "fire times" (the heating of the Elixir; see Poem 5, lines 5-6); and the final five poems represent the five agents (*wuxing*).

Since the time of its creation, *Awakening to Reality* has enjoyed a wide circulation that has continued to the present day. In the thirteenth century, Zhang Boduan was placed at the origin of Nanzong, the Southern Lineage of Neidan, and his work became the main textual source of that lineage. Nanzong consists of a series of five masters whose works describe forms of Neidan closely related to one another (in addition to

² The *Jindan sibai zi* has been translated by Davis and Chao, "Four Hundred Word Chin Tan of Chang Po-tuan," and by Cleary, *The Inner Teachings of Taoism*, 1-32.

displaying similar formal features, such as the use of poetry). After Zhang Boduan, the lineage continues with Shi Tai (?-1158), the author of the *Huanyuan pian* (Reverting to the Source); Xue Daoguang (1078?-1191), the author of the *Huandan fuming pian* (Returning to Life through the Reverted Elixir); Chen Nan (?-1213), the author of the *Cuixu pian* (The Emerald Emptiness); and finally Bai Yuchan (1194-1229?), to whom is ascribed authorship of a large number of works and who is also known as a specialist of the Taoist Thunder Rites (*leifa*).³

While transmission among the latter four masters is historical, Shi Tai was not Zhang Boduan's direct disciple. It is now understood that the Southern Lineage had, in its beginnings, no conventionally recognized form or structure, and was formally established as a lineage only at a later time, possibly by Bai Yuchan himself. The nomination of its five masters as the Five Patriarchs (*wuzu*) was inspired by the identical designation used within the Northern Lineage (Beizong), better known as Quanzhen or Complete Reality. Later, Li Daochun (fl. 1288-92) and Chen Zhixu (1290-after 1335), both of whom are among the greatest representatives of the Neidan tradition, took up the task of integrating Nanzong within Quanzhen. By their time, it was held that the anonymous master who gave alchemical teachings to Zhang Boduan in Sichuan was no other than Liu Haichan, the fourth (or fifth, according to different lists) patriarch of Quanzhen. Liu Haichan, in turn, was said to have received those teachings from Zhongli Quan and Lü Dongbin, both of whom were also included among the Quanzhen patriarchs. As a result of this conflation, Nanzong ceased to exist as an independent lineage and became part of Quanzhen. Its five masters and their texts, nevertheless, are still seen as representing one of the most important forms of Taoist internal alchemy.

DOCTRINES

Internal alchemy is not a "school" of Taoism, but rather one of its major traditions, and as such it has existed in forms that differ, sometimes considerably, from one another. Certain forms of internal alchemy give priority to its purely spiritual aspect, while others emphasize the performance of practices. Like all traditional doctrines, moreover, internal alchemy defies attempts of systematization. For these reasons, a full

³ On these authors and their works see Boltz, *A Survey of Taoist Literature*, 173-79, and the relevant entries in Pregadio, ed., *The Encyclopedia of Taoism*.

description of Taoist internal alchemy is beyond the scope of this introduction. The following pages intend only to provide a few basic tools that should make the understanding of *Awakening to Reality* easier.⁴

Doctrinal sources

Texts of internal alchemy contain repeated references or allusions—for example, by the use of certain distinctive terms—to the major sources of Taoist thought, namely the *Daode jing* (Book of the Way and its Virtue) and the *Zhuangzi* (Book of Master Zhuang). In particular, the *Daode jing*—which virtually all Taoists in China have considered to be the fountain-head of the entire Taoist tradition—has provided alchemy with essential doctrinal foundations: the view of the Dao (the Way), the notion that the generation of the world by the Dao is best described as a sequence of stages, and the basic principle of “returning to the Dao” (*fandao*). The above-mentioned Chen Zhixu says in his major work, the *Jindan dayao* (Great Essentials of the Golden Elixir, chapter 2): “The Way of Laozi is the great Way of the Golden Elixir.”⁵

In the “Regulated Verses” of his *Awakening to Reality*, Zhang Boduan refers several times to the *Daode jing* (see especially Poem 4, lines 1-2; Poem 6, line 3; and Poem 12, line 5). The same is true of the *Zhuangzi*, a work that has provided countless Taoist authors with both poetical inspiration and technical terms (examples of both are found in Poem 5, line 2, and Poem 6, lines 5-6). Even though these references might appear to be occasional, or even superficial, they reflect a distinctive aspect of Chinese literature, especially philosophical or religious: it is often by means of short and apparently casual allusions that authors signal their bonds to specific doctrines or teachings.

Zhang Boduan is said to have devoted himself to Chan (Zen) Buddhism late in life, and one of the works that are ascribed to him, the *Wuzhen pian shiyi* (Supplement to *Awakening to Reality*), has a strong

⁴ The scholarly work that reflects the deepest understanding of Neidan is Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste*. Shorter accounts are available in Robinet, “Original Contributions of Neidan to Taoism and Chinese Thought,” and in Pregadio and Skar, “Inner Alchemy (Neidan).”

⁵ It should be clear that what Chen Zhixu calls the Way of Laozi does not necessarily need the Way of the Golden Elixir, which—generally speaking—is one of several ways that make it possible to approach the doctrines of the *Daode jing*. On the contrary, instead, the Way of the Golden Elixir does need the Way of Laozi, which provides alchemy with its indispensable doctrinal basis.

Buddhist background. Like many other Neidan texts, the *Awakening* also contains Buddhist expressions, for example in the first poem.⁶ Connections between Taoism and Buddhism are, in fact, indicated in a most explicit way by the title of Zhang Boduan's work, which combines a typically Buddhist term, *wu* or "awakening," with a typically Taoist term, *zhen* or "reality, truth, perfection." (The term *wu* is better known in the West in its Japanese pronunciation, *satori*, which denotes the "awakening" in the Chan/Zen Buddhist tradition.)⁷ These connections are perhaps best explained by the fact that Neidan is ultimately a way of seeing, and therefore recognizes the validity of any formulation of doctrinal points that are analogous to its own doctrines, often crossing the border between established traditions. Buddhism is one of the traditions—in fact, the most important one—from which Neidan has acquired concepts and vocabulary.

The same is fundamentally true of Confucian ideas, even though the "Regulated Verses" do not contain examples of their use; in fact, an allusion to Confucianism found at the beginning of the text (Poem 1, line 2) is distinctly negative. This allusion, however, concerns the definition of the highest ideal for the human being, a subject on which Confucianism and Taoism definitely differ. In other contexts, alchemical texts do contain Confucian terminology and even short quotations from Confucian texts for reasons analogous to those mentioned above with regard to Buddhism. Examples will be found in the translations of passages from Liu Yiming's commentary, where the author freely uses Confucian vocabulary (for example, "innate knowledge," or *liangzhi*, and "innate capacity, or *liangneng*).

As far as alchemical texts are concerned, Zhang Boduan's main source is, beyond any doubt, the *Zhouyi cantong qi* (Token for Joining the Three, in Accordance with the *Book of Changes*). This work, traditionally dated to the second century CE, but in fact written—or at least completed—a few centuries later, has supplied the entire Neidan tradition with doctrines, imagery, and terminology, and with the basic models of its practices. *Awakening to Reality* has even been called a commentary on the *Cantong qi*. This definition is probably an overstatement, but it is a fact

⁶ In addition to stating that "The Way of Laozi is the great Way of the Golden Elixir," the above-mentioned Chen Zhixu also writes in his *Jindan dayao* (chapter 14): "The Way of Bodhidharma is the Way of the Golden Elixir." Bodhidharma is traditionally considered to be the originator of Chan Buddhism.

⁷ The third word in the Chinese title of the *Awakening*, *pian*, generically designates a "piece of writing."

that the “Regulated Verses” contain many allusions to the *Cantong qi*, and that at least one passage of the text (Poem 5, lines 5-6) would be hardly comprehensible without reading a parallel passage in the *Cantong qi*.⁸

The Elixir

Precelestial and postcelestial domains. At the basis of alchemy, and of other spiritual teachings, is the perception that the world exists in two fundamental states, the unconditioned and the conditioned ones. Whether this distinction “truly” exists is a question that internal alchemy approaches at an advanced stage (in particular, as we shall see, at the very last stage of its practice); the initial awareness of this distinction constitutes, nevertheless, the beginning of its path.

Using two traditional Chinese terms, the unconditioned and conditioned domains are respectively defined as precelestial (or prior to Heaven, *xiantian*, lit. “before Heaven”) and postcelestial (or posterior to Heaven, *houtian*, lit. “after Heaven”).⁹ The postcelestial domain is distinguished by multiplicity and relativity; it is the state that features transitory events and phenomena that succeed one another within space and time. The precelestial domain, in one of the approximations that might be used to describe it, is the constant and omnipresent original state of Oneness, which contains all events and phenomena independently of whether they do or do not occur, and with no distinctions of space and time, here and there, before and after.

In this view, the cosmos as we know it is the self-manifestation of the Dao, which first determines itself as Oneness. Primal Oneness contains Yin and Yang in their pristine state; the joining of Yin and Yang generates the world. To appreciate the details of this view, it is convenient to follow the example of the alchemical texts and describe it through the emblems of the *Book of Changes*. Qian ☰ (pristine Yang) and Kun ☷ (pristine Yin) are constantly joined to one another in the state of Unity. Being joined,

⁸ The best English translation of the *Cantong qi* is found in Bertschinger, *The Secret of Everlasting Life*. Unfortunately, however, this book does not offer the tools that are necessary to comprehend the extremely difficult imagery and terminology of the text.

⁹ *Xiantian* and *houtian* are often translated as “former Heaven” and “later Heaven.” Both terms are related to the phrase *xian tiandi sheng* (“born before Heaven and Earth”) found in the *Daode jing*, the *Zhuangzi*, and other early texts. The *Daode jing*, for example, says (chapter 25): “There is something inchoate and yet accomplished, born before Heaven and Earth. . . . I do not know its name, but call it Dao.”

Qian unceasingly bestows its essence to Kun, and Kun brings it to achievement; thus the world with its countless events and phenomena is generated. However, due to the very fact of being continuously joined with one another, Qian becomes Li ☲ (Yang), and Kun becomes Kan ☵ (Yin). Therefore the essence of the Yang principle in its pure state is now found within Kan. That principle, which is the One Breath of the Dao (the state of Unity represented by the undivided line), is what an alchemist seeks to recover.

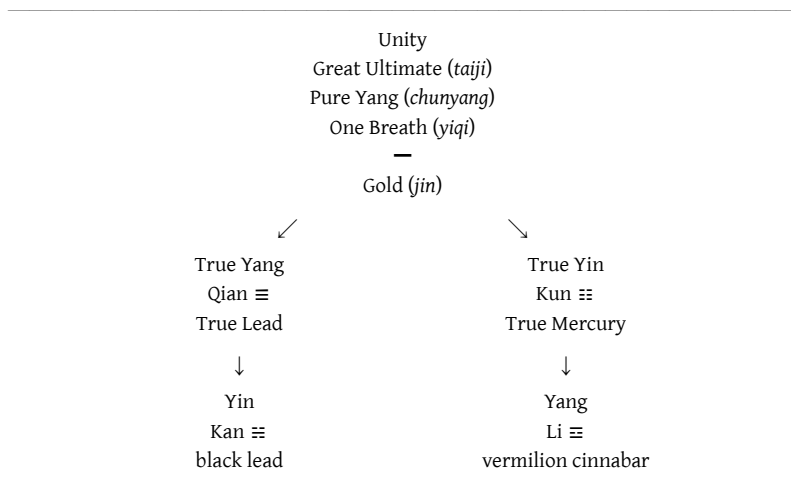


Table 1. Schematic representation of the precelestial and postcelestial states, with cosmological and alchemical terms and emblems used to describe them.

“Inversion” and the generation of the Elixir. Alchemy offers a way to return to the state of Unity. In its view, the forward movement (*shun*, lit. “continuation”) from the Dao to the ten thousand things can be compensated by a reverse, backward movement (*ni*, “inversion”). The inversion process is represented in internal alchemy in several different ways, each of which uses different images and terms. The most common formulation refers to Essence (*jing*), Breath (*qi*), and Spirit (*shen*). The Dao, which first self-manifests as pure Spirit, issues its Breath, which in turn coalesces into

Essence, the seed that gives birth to the world.¹⁰ Human beings are composed with the same three elements. Accordingly, in its most typical codification, the alchemical process is based on the progressive refining of those components. The refining occurs in an inverted sequence, which reintegrates each component into the previous one:

- (1) Refining Essence into Breath (*lianjing huaqi*)
- (2) Refining Breath into Spirit (*lianqi huashen*)
- (3) Refining Spirit and reverting to Emptiness (*lianshen huanxu*)

The Elixir itself is also described with different terminology: it may be called the One Breath of the Dao, Pure Yang, Gold, Lead, and with literally dozens of other appellations.¹¹ Liu Yiming (1734-1821), in a passage of his commentary to *Awakening to Reality* translated in the present book, writes that “there is no other Golden Elixir outside one’s fundamental nature,” and that “every human being has this Golden Elixir complete in himself.” In his view, the Elixir is the essential, unchanging true nature of the human being; it has, fundamentally, no form and no name. However, one of the most widespread and best-known images used to represent the Elixir, also adopted by *Awakening to Reality*, is that of an embryo, an infant, or a child. When the Elixir is depicted in this way, the three stages mentioned above respectively correspond to the conception, the gestation, and the birth of an immortal infant. Its conception occurs in the lower Cinnabar Field (*dantian*), located in the region of the abdomen; its gestation, in the middle Cinnabar Field, in the region of the heart; and its birth, in the upper Cinnabar Field, in the region of the brain. At the end of the process, the child is described as exiting the individual from the top of his head. Neidan texts refer to this event as the

¹⁰ The word *jing*, which here denotes Essence, also denotes the male sexual semen. This essence is the seed that Qian, the masculine, creative aspect of the Dao, entrusts to Kun, its feminine, accomplishing aspect. Since Qian and Kun are the primary modes that the Dao takes on its self-manifestation, it might be said that the Dao is both the “father” and the “mother” of the world.

¹¹ The denomination of the Elixir as Lead may at first be confusing, but the rationale should be clear by looking at table 1 above. Lead has three values in alchemy: (1) black or native lead, which is the Yin principle in the conditioned state; (2) True Lead, which is the True Yang principle now found within Yin; (3) the One Breath of the Dao, which is described as Pure Yang, the state prior to the subdivision of the One into the Two. All three values of Lead are represented by the undivided line of the *Book of Changes*.

birth of a *shen wai zhi shen*, an expression that can be understood as “a body outside one’s body,” or as “a self outside one’s self.”

Cosmological emblems

Once the world is generated, it is subject to the laws of the cosmic domain. Neidan texts constantly bring this domain to the fore, and explain its features by means of the standard Chinese cosmological system. It would be virtually impossible to understand the language and imagery of *Awakening to Reality*, and of internal alchemy in general, without acquiring a basic familiarity with this system.¹²

At the basis of Chinese cosmology are several sets of emblems, all related to one another. The most important sets are the five agents, the ten celestial stems, the twelve earthly branches, and the eight trigrams and sixty-four hexagrams of the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*. Each set represents a different way of understanding and explicating the main features of the cosmos. However, despite the variety of emblems, the fundamental underlying notion in internal alchemy, and in Taoism as a whole, is that those emblems make it possible to describe the subdivision of the One into the many, and the reverse process that makes it possible to return from multiplicity to Unity. For example, the five agents are used to represent how the original One Breath issued from the Dao takes on five main different modes in the cosmos; but the central agent, Soil, represents the One Breath itself, and the process that occurs in internal alchemy has been described as the reduction of the agents to one, namely, Soil.¹³

The individual items in any set of emblems—for example, the individual agents in the set of the five agents—can be thought of as “categories” to which all phenomena and events in the cosmos can be assigned. The emblems themselves are entirely abstract; they gain meaning only in relation to one another, and in connection with the

¹² The Chinese cosmological system, which was fully developed as early as the third or the second century BCE, is not specifically Taoist. It evolved with contributions from specialists of various traditional sciences, including diviners, astronomers, and physicians, and from thinkers belonging to different currents. Taoism is only one of several traditions that have contributed to, and drawn upon, this system.

¹³ See, for example, the *Cantong qi* (chapter 11 in Chen Zhixu’s redaction): “When Water flourishes, Fire is extinguished, and both die, together returning to generous Soil. Now, the three natures have joined together, for their fundamental natures share an ancestor in common.”

types of entities and phenomena that they represent. This implies that the author of a text can mention any of these emblems, and immediately bring up all of the associated entities. A mention of the agent Wood, for example, evokes the east, the spring, the liver, the Yang principle in its emerging state, and True Yin within Yang. It is the reader's task to understand which of those entities—for example, a segment of a temporal cycle, or an organ of the human body—is relevant, or most relevant, in a particular context. This feature constitutes, on its own, one of the main difficulties in reading and understanding Chinese alchemical texts.

Five agents. As said above, the five agents (*wuxing*; see tables 2 and 3) are five emblematic modes taken on by Original Breath (*yuanqi*) in the cosmos. These modes are represented by Wood, Fire, Soil, Metal, and Water.

In internal alchemy, Wood represents True Yin, and Metal represents True Yang. Accordingly, the ingredients of the Elixir are often referred to Wood and Metal. The same, however, is true of Water and Fire, respectively. In addition, internal alchemy assigns a crucial role to Soil. Being placed at the center, Soil stands for the source from which the other four agents derive, and therefore guarantees the conjunction of the world of multiplicity to the original state of Unity. One of the typical representations of the alchemical process (also mentioned in *Awakening to Reality*, see Poem 14) is the reduction of the five agents to three and then to one. The whole process happens by the virtue of Soil, which acts as “mediator” between True Yin and True Yang and makes their conjunction possible (see the note to Poem 3, line 5).

Stems and branches. The ten celestial stems (*tiangan*) and the twelve earthly branches (*dizhi*) are two sets of emblems used to refer to a variety of items (see tables 4 and 5). The stems are primarily related, in pairs, to the five agents and, through them, to all sets of entities associated with the five agents. The branches are used to represent the months of the year, the “double hours” of the day, and other sets consisting of twelve items.¹⁴

¹⁴ The Chinese divided the day into twelve parts, usually referred to as “double hours” in English. The twelve earthly branches are not used in the “Regulated Verses.” They are mentioned in this introduction because of their close association with the ten stems.

Introduction to *Awakening to Reality*

| | WOOD | FIRE | SOIL | METAL | WATER |
|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|---|-------------------------------|------------------------------|
| DIRECTIONS | east | south | center | west | north |
| SEASONS | spring | summer | (midsummer) | autumn | winter |
| COLORS | green (or blue) | red | yellow | white | black |
| EMBLEMATIC ANIMALS | green dragon | vermilion bird | yellow dragon | white tiger | snake and turtle |
| NUMBERS | 3, 8 | 2, 7 | 5, 10 | 4, 9 | 1, 6 |
| YIN-YANG (1) | minor Yang | great Yang | balance | minor Yin | great Yin |
| YIN-YANG (2) | True Yin | Yang | balance | True Yang | Yin |
| NOTES | <i>jiao</i> 角 | <i>zhi</i> 徵 | <i>gong</i> 宫 | <i>shang</i> 商 | <i>yu</i> 羽 |
| STEMS | <i>jia</i> 甲 <i>yi</i> 乙 | <i>bing</i> 丙 <i>ding</i> 丁 | <i>wu</i> 戊 <i>ji</i> 己 | <i>geng</i> 庚 <i>xin</i> 辛 | <i>ren</i> 壬 <i>gui</i> 癸 |
| BRANCHES | <i>yin</i> 寅 <i>mao</i> 卯 | <i>wu</i> 午 <i>si</i> 巳 | <i>xu</i> 戌, <i>chou</i> 丑 <i>wei</i> 未, <i>chen</i> 辰 | <i>you</i> 酉 <i>shen</i> 申 | <i>hai</i> 亥 <i>zi</i> 子 |
| PLANETS | Jupiter | Mars | Saturn | Venus | Mercury |
| VISCERA | liver | heart | spleen | lungs | kidneys |
| RECEPTACLES | gall-bladder | small intestine | stomach | large intestine | urinary bladder |
| BODY ORGAN | eyes | tongue | mouth | nose | ears |
| EMOTIONS | anger | joy | ratiocination | sorrow | apprehension |
| TASTES | sour | bitter | sweet | acrid | salty |
| CLIMATES | wind | hot | moist | dry | cold |
| RELATIONS | father | daughter | ancestors | mother | son |

Table 2. The five agents (*wuxing*) and their associations.

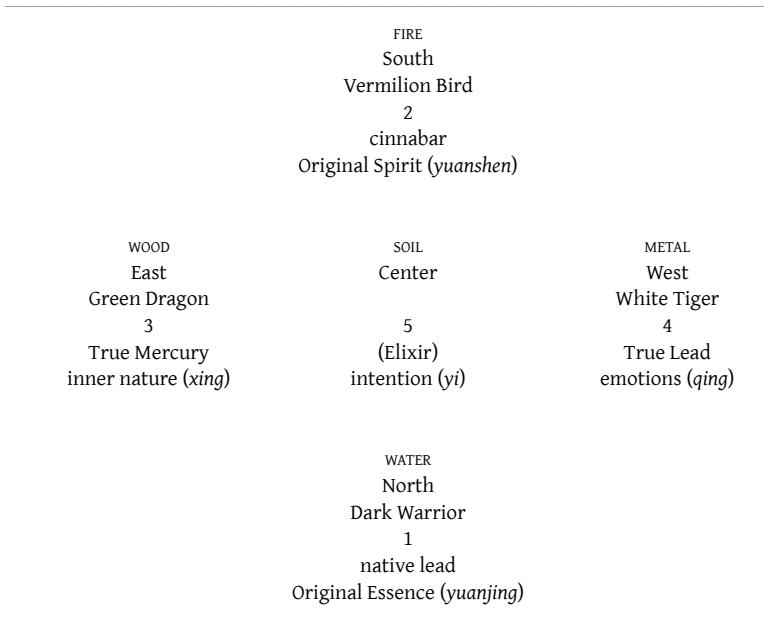


Table 3. Spatial arrangement of the five agents (*wuxing*), with some of the main associations relevant to internal alchemy. In agreement with traditional Chinese conventions, North is shown at the bottom, South at the top, East on the left, and West on the right.

In the “Regulated Verses” of *Awakening to Reality*, four of the ten celestial stems are especially important. *Wu* and *ji* (nos. 5 and 6) are related to the agent Soil. Taken together they represent, therefore, the One, the original state of unity of the five agents that the alchemical process intends to restore. More exactly, *wu* and *ji* represent the Yang and Yin halves of the One, respectively, and it is by means of them that Soil can act as a mediator in joining Yin and Yang (see Poem 3, line 5). Two other stems, *ren* and *gui* (nos. 9 and 10), respectively represent the precelestial and the postcelestial aspects of Water, which gives birth to True Lead, or True Yang (see Poem 7, line 3, and Poem 11, line 4).

Introduction to *Awakening to Reality*

| | STEMS | AGENTS | DIRECTIONS | COLORS | VISCERA | NUMBERS |
|----|---------------|--------|------------|--------|---------|---------|
| 1 | <i>jia</i> 甲 | WOOD | east | green | liver | 3, 8 |
| 2 | <i>yi</i> 乙 | | | | | |
| 3 | <i>bing</i> 丙 | FIRE | south | red | heart | 2, 7 |
| 4 | <i>ding</i> 丁 | | | | | |
| 5 | <i>wu</i> 戊 | SOIL | center | yellow | spleen | 5 |
| 6 | <i>ji</i> 己 | | | | | |
| 7 | <i>geng</i> 庚 | METAL | west | white | lungs | 4, 9 |
| 8 | <i>xin</i> 辛 | | | | | |
| 9 | <i>ren</i> 壬 | WATER | north | black | kidneys | 1, 6 |
| 10 | <i>gui</i> 癸 | | | | | |

Table 4. The ten celestial stems (*tiangan*) and their associations.

| | BRANCHES | AGENTS | DIRECTIONS | HOURS | ANIMALS | NUMBERS |
|----|---------------|--------|------------|-------|---------|---------|
| 1 | <i>zi</i> 子 | WATER | N | 23-1 | rat | 1, 6 |
| 2 | <i>chou</i> 丑 | SOIL | NNE 3/4 E | 1-3 | ox | 5, 10 |
| 3 | <i>yin</i> 寅 | WOOD | ENE 3/4 N | 3-5 | tiger | 3, 8 |
| 4 | <i>mao</i> 卯 | WOOD | E | 5-7 | rabbit | 3, 8 |
| 5 | <i>chen</i> 辰 | SOIL | ESE 3/4 S | 7-9 | dragon | 5, 10 |
| 6 | <i>si</i> 巳 | FIRE | SSE 3/4 E | 9-11 | snake | 2, 7 |
| 7 | <i>wu</i> 午 | FIRE | S | 11-13 | horse | 2, 7 |
| 8 | <i>wei</i> 未 | SOIL | SSW 3/4 W | 13-15 | sheep | 5, 10 |
| 9 | <i>shen</i> 申 | METAL | WSW 3/4 S | 15-17 | monkey | 4, 9 |
| 10 | <i>you</i> 酉 | METAL | W | 17-19 | rooster | 4, 9 |
| 11 | <i>xu</i> 戌 | SOIL | WNW 3/4 N | 19-21 | dog | 5, 10 |
| 12 | <i>hai</i> 亥 | WATER | NNW 3/4 W | 21-23 | pig | 1, 6 |

Table 5. The twelve earthly branches (*dizhi*) and their associations.

Trigrams and hexagrams. The last major set of cosmological emblems used in *Awakening to Reality* consists of the trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* (*Yijing*). Alchemical texts, and Taoist texts in general, are not interested in the *Book of Changes* as a divination manual. Instead, they use its trigrams and hexagrams as cosmological emblems.¹⁵

The eight trigrams are made of different combinations of three lines, which can be either Yin -- (broken) or Yang — (solid). In a most basic way, the trigrams are associated with natural phenomena and with relations among family members (see table 6). In Taoism and in alchemy, however, the trigrams are used as abstract emblems, analogous and related to the other sets of emblems mentioned before. To give one example, the eight trigrams are used to refer to the directions of space: four of them represent the cardinal directions (just like four of the five agents), and the other four represent the intermediate directions.

| | | | | | | | |
|-----------|-------------------|-----------------|------------|-----------------|------------|--------------|-----------|
| ☰ | ☱ | ☲ | ☳ | ☴ | ☵ | ☶ | ☷ |
| 乾 | 兌 | 離 | 震 | 巽 | 坎 | 艮 | 坤 |
| QIAN | DUI | LI | ZHEN | XUN | KAN | GEN | KUN |
| heaven | lake | fire | thunder | wind | water | mountain | earth |
| father | youngest daughter | second daughter | eldest son | eldest daughter | second son | youngest son | mother |
| south | southeast | east | northeast | southwest | west | northwest | north |
| northwest | west | south | east | southeast | north | northeast | southwest |

Table 6. The eight trigrams and their main associations: elements in nature, family relations, and directions in the cosmological configurations “prior to Heaven” (*xiantian*) and “posterior to Heaven” (*houtian*).

¹⁵ The main textual basis for this use of trigrams and hexagrams is one of the appendixes to the *Book of Changes*, entitled “Appended Sayings” (“Xici”). This appendix is translated by Wilhelm, *I Ching or Book of Changes*, 280-355, as “The Great Treatise.”

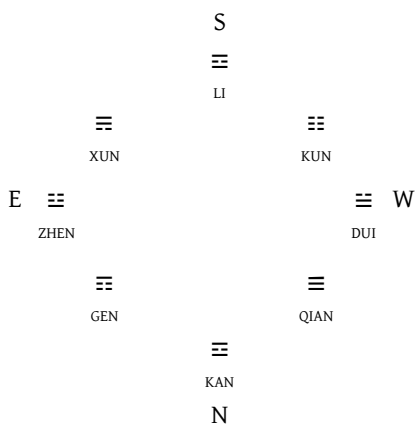
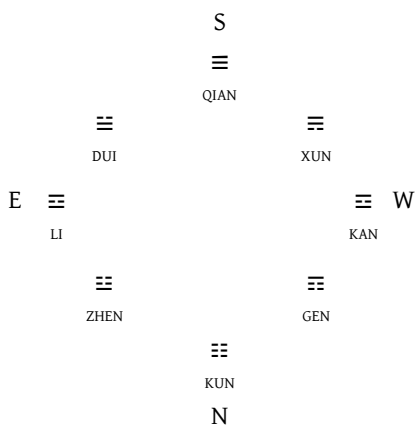


Table 7. Arrangement of the eight trigrams in the cosmological configurations "prior to Heaven" (*xiantian*, top) and "posterior to Heaven" (*houtian*, bottom).

When the eight trigrams are joined to one another in pairs, they form the sixty-four hexagrams, which are emblems made of six lines. The hexagrams represent primary states and circumstances that occur in the cosmos, in human society, or in individual existence, such as “peace,” “conflict,” “return,” “obstruction,” “following,” etc.

The trigrams and hexagrams of the *Book of Changes* are used in alchemy in three main ways. First, and most frequently, four of the eight trigrams are chosen to represent the main states of Yin and Yang:

| | | |
|------|---|-----------------------------|
| Qian | ☰ | True Yang in its pure state |
| Kun | ☷ | True Yin in its pure state |
| Kan | ☵ | Yin containing True Yang |
| Li | ☲ | Yang containing True Yin |

In the postcelestial state, as we have seen, True Yin and True Yang are found within entities of the opposite sign. When it is represented by these emblems, the alchemical process consists in exchanging the inner lines of Kan and Li: as soon as those lines are exchanged, Qian and Kun are restored, and as soon as Qian and Kun are restored, the Elixir is generated.¹⁶

Second, the eight trigrams have been traditionally arranged in two main ways, known as the precelestial (*xiantian*) and the postcelestial (*houtian*) arrangements (see table 7). The precelestial arrangement represents the original state of the cosmos; the postcelestial one, its present state, the world in which we live. In the postcelestial arrangement, the positions originally occupied by Qian ☰ and Kun ☷ have been taken by Kan ☵ and Li ☲, which, once again, harbor and hide True Yin and True Yang. Qian and Kun, instead, have been displaced to the northwest and the southwest, respectively. Since the inner line of Kan ☵ is the True Yang sought by the alchemist, and this line is born within Kun ☷ when it joins with Qian ☰, Poem 7 of the *Awakening* says that “the place where the Medicine is born is just at the southwest.”

Third, twelve of the sixty-four hexagrams are chosen to represent a complete cycle of ascent and descent of Yin and Yang within the main cosmic temporal cycles. These twelve hexagrams are known in Chinese cosmology as the “sovereign hexagrams” (*bigua*; see table 8). The first six hexagrams depict the rise of the Yang principle in the first half of the

¹⁶ This “process” can happen in one instant, as Liu Yiming says in a passage of his commentary to the *Awakening* translated in the present book. It is, instead, gradual in the alchemical practice.

year, or of the day; the last six hexagrams depict the decline of the Yang principle, and the concurrent rise of the Yin principle, in the second half of the year, or of the day.

| | | | | | | | | | | | |
|----|-----|-----|----------|------|------|-----|-----|----|------|----|-----|
| | | | | | | | | | | | |
| 復 | 臨 | 泰 | 大壯 | 夬 | 乾 | 姤 | 遁 | 否 | 觀 | 剝 | 坤 |
| FU | LIN | TAI | DAZHUANG | GUAI | QIAN | GOU | DUN | PI | GUAN | BO | KUN |

Table 8. The twelve “sovereign hexagrams” (*bigua*).

The cycle of the twelve “sovereign hexagrams” has served as a model for the so-called “fire times” (*huohou*) in the practices of both external and internal alchemy. Fire is progressively increased in the first half of the cycle, then progressively decreased in the second half of the cycle. The whole cycle is repeated until the Elixir coalesces in the tripod (external alchemy) or in the lower Cinnabar Field (internal alchemy).

Final remarks

In a strict sense, as we have seen, alchemy consists in the recovery of the One Breath prior to Heaven, symbolized by True Lead. The adept rises through the different states of Being until he reaches the highest point, Non-Being or Emptiness; this is typically done by means of the alchemical practice, in the ways briefly outlined above.

Certain authors of texts of internal alchemy emphasize that this is only the first part of a longer process, and that the alchemical path is fulfilled only when the second part is also performed. Although they are not eager to provide too many details on this subject, they say that the alchemical practice pertains to “doing” (*youwei*): one performs the practice with a purpose in mind, and *in order to* achieve a result. To be entirely fulfilled, the alchemical way requires another inversion: a new movement of descent from “above” to “below,” from Non-Being to Being, from emptiness to existence, that realizes their non-duality. This is done as one enters the state of “non-doing” (*wuwei*).

The alchemical practice prepares one to enter that state: the final stage, “refining Spirit and reverting to Emptiness,” requires non-doing to

be performed (see Poem 13, lines 5-6). At that point, the way of seeing radically changes. The One Breath prior to Heaven has at last been found; not only does it not need to be sought any longer, but continuing to seek it would be harmful. For the first time, the focus shifts from Lead to Mercury: one should decrease Lead and augment Mercury, bestowing the qualities of the newly found Gold to what once appeared as corrupt matter. The world to which one returns is entirely different from the world that had been left behind. The alchemical practice has brought it back to be what it is: one with the One Breath.

NOTE ON THE TRANSLATION

This translation of the “Regulated Verses” of *Awakening to Reality* is based on the Daozang (Taoist Canon) edition of the *Ziyang zhenren Wuzhen pian sanzhu* (Three Commentaries to *Awakening to Reality* by the True Man of Purple Yang), composed by Chen Zhixu (1290-after 1335).

In addition to this work, I have consulted the following sources:

- 1 *Wuzhen pian* (*Awakening to Reality*), in *Xiuzhen shishu* (Ten Books for the Cultivation of Reality; late thirteenth or early fourteenth centuries), chapters 26-30. Daozang edition.
- 2 *Ziyang zhenren Wuzhen pian zhushu* (Commentary and Subcommentary to *Awakening to Reality* by the True Man of Purple Yang), by Weng Baoguang (preface dated 1173), edited by Dai Qizong (preface dated 1335). Daozang edition.
- 3 *Wuzhen pian zhushi* (Commentary and Exegesis to *Awakening to Reality*), by Weng Baoguang. Daozang edition.
- 4 *Wuzhen pian xiaoxu* (A Short Introduction to *Awakening to Reality*), by Lu Xixing (1520-1601 or 1606), found in his collected works, *Fanghu waishi* (The External Secretary of Mount Fanghu). Edition of 1915, repr. in *Daozang jinghua* (Essential Splendors of the Taoist Canon), vol. 2:8 (Taipei: Ziyou chubanshe, 1982).
- 5 *Wuzhen zhizhi* (Straightforward Directions on *Awakening to Reality*), by Liu Yiming (1734-1821), found in his collected works, *Daoshu shier zhong* (Twelve Books on the Dao). Jiangdong shuju edition of 1913, repr. Xinwenfeng chubanshe (Taipei, 1975 and 1983).
- 6 *Wuzhen pian jizhu* (Collected Commentaries to *Awakening to Reality*), by Qiu Zhaoao (preface dated 1703). Edition of 1703, repr. in *Qigong*

yangsheng congshu (Collectanea on Qigong and Nourishing Life; Shanghai: Guji chubanshe, 1989).

The main variants found in these additional sources are reported in the Textual Notes. With few exceptions, I do not report different grammatical particles, inversion of graphs in compound words, and other minor variants that have little or no consequence on meaning.

The annotations found in the masterful work by Wang Mu, *Wuzhen pian qianjie* (A Simple Explanation of *Awakening to Reality*; 1990), have been invaluable to understand several passages of the text. In addition to this work, I have also occasionally referred to those by Zhang Zhenguo (2001) and by Liu Guoliang and Lian Yao (2005; see the bibliography at the end of the book).

Previous translations of the *Awakening* that I have consulted include those by Tenney L. Davis and Chao Yün-ts'ung (1939),¹⁷ Thomas Cleary (1987),¹⁸ Isabelle Robinet (1995),¹⁹ and Paul Crowe (2000).²⁰

The selections from Liu Yiming's commentary are translated from source no. 5 above. A complete translation of this commentary is included in Thomas Cleary's translation of the *Awakening*. My translations differ, sometimes considerably, from those given by Cleary.

In translating the text of Zhang Boduan's work, I have tried to preserve the original structure of the verses, which includes a subdivision into two parts (respectively made of 4 and 3 characters) in each line, typical of the "regulated verses." For obvious reasons, reflecting this feature of Zhang Boduan's poetry in English has not always been possible. I have, nevertheless, divided each Chinese line into two parts even when I have been compelled to change the original syntactic structure.

¹⁷ Davis and Chao Yün-ts'ung, "Chang Po-tuan of T'ien-t'ai, his *Wu Chên P'ien*, *Essay on the Understanding of the Truth*" (full translation, based on the *Zhushu* version of Weng Baoguang's text and on Chen Zhixu's text).

¹⁸ Cleary, *Understanding Reality: A Taoist Alchemical Classic* (full translation, based on Liu Yiming's text).

¹⁹ Robinet, *Introduction à l'alchimie intérieure taoïste*, 205-54 (full translation, based on Chen Zhixu's text).

²⁰ Crowe, "Chapters on *Awakening to the Real*" (translation of the "Regulated Verses," based on the *Xiuzhen shishu* text).

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Awakening to Reality: The “Regulated Verses” of the Wuzhen pian, a Taoist Classic of Internal Alchemy, by Fabrizio Pregadio (2009). viii + 102 pp. ISBN 978-0-9843082-1-7.

Awakening to Reality (Wuzhen pian) is one of the most important and best-known Taoist alchemical texts. Written in the eleventh century, it describes in a poetical form, and in a typically cryptic and allusive language, several facets of Neidan, or internal alchemy. This book presents the first part of the text, consisting of sixteen poems, which contain a concise but comprehensive exposition of Neidan.

Chinese Alchemy: An Annotated Bibliography of Works in Western Languages, by Fabrizio Pregadio (2009). 50 pp.

This bibliography contains about 300 titles of books and articles, with short annotations on their contents. It was first published in the journal *Monumenta Serica* in 1996. In addition to minor changes, the present version contains a final section listing books and articles published between 1995 and early 2009.

Index of Zhonghua Daozang (中華道藏書目總錄), by Fabrizio Pregadio (2009). viii + 108 pp. ISBN 978-0-9843082-0-0.

This index is divided into two parts. Part 1 contains a list of texts in the *Zhonghua Daozang* (Taoist Canon of China). Part 2 contains lists of texts used as “base editions” in the *Zhonghua Daozang*. The index also serves as a tool to easily locate texts of the *Zhengtong Daozang* (Taoist Canon of the Zhengtong Reign-Period) in the *Zhonghua Daozang*.

